HEDGES AND BOOSTERS IN THE ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE UNDERGRADUATE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS AND JOB APPLICATION LETTERS

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Abstrak

Penulisan pemujukan merupakan sejenis penulisan yang sukar bagi pelajar yang mempelajari bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (*EFL*). Pada masa tertentu, pelajar perlu menggunakan penyataan yang berlapik menerusi penggunaan *hedges*, dan pada masa yang lain mereka perlu memperlihatkan penegasan melalui penggunaan *boosters*. Walaupun *hedges* dan *boosters* penting dalam penulisan pemujukan, namun kajian tentang penulisan *EFL* yang meneliti kedua-dua penanda wacana dalam teks yang dihasilkan oleh pelajar *EFL* agak terbatas. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan meneliti *hedges* dan *boosters* dalam teks pemujukan yang ditulis oleh 120 orang pelajar *EFL* Yaman. Setiap pelajar dikehendaki menulis satu esei pemujukan dan sepucuk surat memohon kerja dalam bahasa Inggeris dan juga dalam bahasa Arab. Sejumlah 480 skrip terhasil. Untuk bahagian kajian eksperimen, empat puluh orang peserta daripada sampel kajian telah dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan yang sama besar, iaitu kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan. Kumpulan eksperimen diajar menggunakan *hedges* dan *boosters* melalui pendekatan *genre*. Data yang dianalisis secara kuantitatif dan kualitatif menunjukkan bahawa pelajar *EFL* Yaman cenderung untuk menggunakan *hedges* dan *boosters* yang bercirikan bahasa lisan. Pelajar *EFL* Yaman juga didapati menggunakan lebih banyak *hedges* dalam esei pemujukan bahasa Inggeris berbanding esei bahasa ibunda (*L1*) akibat kekurangan perbendaharaan kata. Penggunaan *boosters* dalam esei pemujukan *L1* dan *EFL* hampir sama, manakala dalam surat memohon kerja *L1* lebih banyak *booster*s digunakan. Dapatan eksperimen menunjukkan impak positif hasil daripada pengajaran *hedges* dan *boosters* melalui pendekatan *genre*. Umumnya, dapatan kajian memberi maklumat yang lebih mendalam tentang penggunaan *hedges* dan *boosters* dalam penulisan *EFL*. Kajian ini memberi sumbangan yang bernilai kepada tenaga pengajar dan penggubal kurikulum dari segi penggunaan *hedges* dan *boosters* dalam teks pemujukan *EFL*.

Kata Kunci: Penulisan pemujukan, *Hedges, Boosters*, Pendekatan genre, Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (*EFL*)

Abstract

Persuasive writing is one of the most difficult types of writing encountered by EFL students where they at times need to soften statements through hedges, and at others they need to indicate certainty through boosters. Although hedges and boosters are vital in the persuasive writing, few studies on EFL writing have examined these two discourse markers in the persuasive texts of EFL students. Existing studies on these discourse markers have largely examined scientific texts written mostly in the Western context. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate hedges and boosters in the persuasive texts written by 120 Yemeni EFL students. Each student wrote a persuasive essay and a job application letter in English and in Arabic. This produced a total of 480 scripts. For the experimental part of the study, forty participants from the sample were divided equally into the experimental group and control group. The participants of the experimental group were taught hedges and boosters through the genre approach. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings reveal that Yemeni EFL students tend to use hedges and boosters largely associated with spoken features. The findings also show that the students tend to use more hedges in their EFL than in their L1 persuasive essays due to lack of vocabulary. In contrast, boosters appear to be almost similar in their L1 and EFL persuasive essays while they appear to be used more in their L1 job application letters. The findings of the experiment indicate positive impact of teaching hedges and boosters through the genre approach. Overall, the findings of the study provide further insights on the use of hedges and boosters in the EFL writing context. Specifically, they provide valuable input to both instructors and curriculum designers on the use of hedges and boosters in EFL persuasive texts.

Keywords: Persuasive writing, Hedges, Boosters, Genre approach, English as a foreign language (EFL)

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List of Abbreviations

ACTFL   American Council on the Training of Foreign Language

CA   Classical Arabic

CG   Control Group

EAP   English for Academic Purposes

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

EG   Experimental Group

ELT   English Language Teaching

ESP   English for Specific Purposes

ESL   English as a Second Language

ILP   Interlanguage Pragmatics

JALs   Job Application Letters

L1   First Language

L2   Second Language/Foreign Language

NESs   Native English Speakers

MSA   Modern Standard Arabic

NNSs   Non-Native Speakers

PEs   Persuasive Essays

SA   Spoken Arabic

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The genre of persuasive writing is perceived to be one of the most difficult types of writing encountered by many if not all students at academic settings where students need to show the ability to state their point of view and defend it (Ferris, 1994). The difficulty of persuasive writing may result from the features of persuasion itself. As Golder and Coirier (1996) state, persuasive writing is an opinion-based discourse in which the writer takes a particular position on a usually controversial topic to persuade the hearer/reader to accept that position. In this respect, persuasion is closely related to negotiation in that the speaker/writer, at times, must point out their certainty while at others they need to leave some space for the readers to decide whether or not to agree with the position. Therefore, the opinion presented in the genre of persuasion is often associated with an indication of the writer's degree of probability (e.g., hedges) and certainty (e.g., boosters) to the claims presented. As Hyland (2004) states, writers may resort to detach from the claim through the use of hedges or express certainty through the use of boosters. Since persuasion is associated with the writer's position, generating persuasive content requires specialized knowledge and appropriate vocabulary. As Crowhurst (1990) explains, writing arguments presents both cognitive difficulties and difficulties associated with lack of experience and knowledge. Along the same line, Knudson (1994) highlights that lack of experience with a task plays a role in students' difficulty with writing arguments and most students need more direct instruction in persuasive writing.

In persuasive writing, writers need to master the skills of voicing their claims with appropriate level of interaction. Such interaction can establish the reader-writer relationship through the mediation of the text (Hyland, 2005). As indicated by Vande Kopple (1985), a text consists of two parts: propositional content and interactional metadiscourse features. Interactional metadiscourse features are those features of a text which provide information about the writer's point of view toward the text content, and engage the reader in the interaction. In this respect, the use of interactional metadiscourse features in the persuasive writing show how such interactions are constructed by the writer, and at the same time, interpreted by the reader (Hyland, 2005). Writers can reach their readers successfully if the claims are constructed with appropriate degree of probability and certainty. To achieve this purpose, hedges and boosters are two essential features used to build writer-reader relationship. Thus, to attain readers' acceptance, writers should balance the use of hedges and boosters in the genre of persuasive writing (Hyland, 1998a). As Williams (1981) points out, hedges and boosters provide a way of talking to the readers to make the text easier to perceive. Hyland (2004) argues that these two major features play a vital role in producing persuasive writing. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to investigate the use of hedges and boosters used by Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in the genre of persuasive writing. The genre of persuasive writing appears to be one of the most important genres in the students' academic life. However, due to its nature, it was considered as the most difficult type of writing (McCann, 1989).

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section provides the cultural background of the setting of this study. The second section provides the linguistic background which

describes the current status of Arabic education and policy in Yemen. It also discusses contrastive rhetorical issues and current status of English at the school and college levels, giving an emphasis to the assessment of EFL writing content. The chapter also discusses teaching approaches, pedagogical issues, and the importance of hedges and boosters in the persuasive writing. It also presents the statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, significance, scope of the study, the key terms, and overview of the study.

1.2 Cultural Background

As a country which belongs to the Arab World, Yemen shares in common many aspects of culture with other Arab countries such as language, religion and other social customs. The Yemeni culture has been classified as high-context (Hofstede, 1991). In a high-context culture, a person, for example, does not get to the point quickly, rather he or she talks around the point and the listener must figure out the cues in order to get the message (Zahrana, 1995). As Haris and Morn (1979) comment, Arabs speakers do not get to the point directly and their responses come in long phrases. Such elaborate style is also confirmed by Almaney (1982) that Arabs, in general, tend to use an elaborate language style which has to be chosen carefully because simple statements would have the opposite meaning. For instance, if an Arab speaker speaks precisely what he/she means, other Arabs may believe that he/she means the opposite. For example, saying *"No"* by a guest to his/her host's request to eat more is not enough. To persuade the host, for example, the guest has to repeat politely several times that he/she is not hungry, accompanied by an affirmative phrase *"by God"* or *"I swear to God."* As Johnstone (1991) points out, Arab writers, and in special circumstances, speakers often repeat a

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claim several times to persuade. Hyperbole, overstatement and exaggeration are also perceived to be persuasive techniques in the Arabic culture (Suchan, 2010).

Another characteristic of the Yemeni culture is the indirect style. As Anderson (1994) and Cohen (1987) state, the Arab culture favors indirect style used as a way to enhance social harmony. Any direct question or answer could make the other lose his/her face. In the Arabic culture, a subordinate may be afraid to express his/her opinion and disagreement on an issue raised by his/her boss and therefore, prefers an indirect verbal style to communicate his/her message. The word, for example, "*No*" is hardly heard from a subordinate to his/her boss because saying "*No*" is normally seen as impolite in the Arabic culture. However, the word "*No*" in its right sense and situation is very necessary from the Islamic point of view. Addressing elderly people in the Yemeni culture is distinguished by using the plural pronoun mode which signifies politeness and respect. A boy, for example, would ask an elderly man in a bus "Could you (plural) please make space for me?" The plural mode is used in oral discourse and the second person pronoun is hardly used in such situations. In the presence of their parents, children behave very strictly according to the religious rules. When communicating with their parents, for example, the word "No" from children to their parents is considered rude and impolite.

As a male-dominated society, women are not allowed to be alone with male strangers. As Nydell (1987) warns, display of relationship between men and women is forbidden by the Arab social code including eye-contact or any gesture of affection. Verbal communication between men and women should be made in public unless it is in the

workplace. Arab female speakers tend to use lower pitch than male speakers. To Arab female speakers, quietness connotes softness and politeness and to Arab male speakers, loudness implies strength and sincerity (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984).

1.3 Linguistic Background

Yemen is mainly a monolingual country in which Arabic, which is the official language, is spoken widely and used for almost all kinds of correspondence within Yemen and the Arab World. Arabic is a Semitic language which has survived for centuries. This unique characteristic can be attributed to the Holy Quran which has preserved the classical Arabic to date. Most Semitic languages have died out except for Arabic and, to some extent, Hebrew.

Arabic is the official language of culture, diplomacy, science, and philosophy. It has maintained its identity throughout its long history. As far as its varieties are concerned, Arabic widely varies from country to country, even within one country. According to Al-Khalil (2005), Arabic can be divided into three types: Classical Arabic (CA), the oldest type of Arabic, used in literary texts such as poetry, prose, Islamic law, theology, history, biography, geography, grammar, medicine, astronomy, and other sciences. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) falls somewhere between CA and Spoken Arabic (SA) which is used in most printed books, newspapers, magazines and official documents. SA refers to many national or regional dialects, which constitutes the everyday spoken language. Arabs from one region can generally understand dialects from other regions, depending on proximity, exposure to other Arab dialects and education. These three varieties of Arabic are closely related in terms of phonetics, lexis, and grammaticality.

1.3.1 Status of Arabic Education Policy in Yemen

Arabic is a compulsory subject from grade one to grade twelve at the school level. It appears every day as a 45-minute period in the school timetable. In elementary education, which is the basic stage covering grade one to grade nine, the Arabic Language aims at providing students with basic skills in reading, conversation and writing. It is expected that junior learners at this stage are able to conduct simple discussions, tell a story, or give a short account of an incident. Recognizing the linguistic background of the learners, the programme of instruction during the six years of the basic education is organized in terms of successive stages in which each stage covers two years. During the first two years, the teaching of Arabic is focused on generalities rather than narrow branches such as conversations, storytelling, songs, recitations, reading, and writing simple words and sentences. In the third and fourth grades, besides the oral aspects of language, the writing skill especially grammar and syntax receives attention. During the last two years of the elementary stage, special periods are assigned for reading, oral and written expressions, grammar and recitation, spelling, and handwriting. Each period has a specialized teacher of various branches of Arabic, especially grammar, reading, and written expression.

The preparatory stage of the basic education, which involves three grades, is equivalent to the junior high school in the Malaysian educational system. The teaching of Arabic at this stage aims at enabling the students to master the language as a tool for oral and written communication. The time allotted for Arabic is distributed among the various branches of compositions, reading, recitation, grammar, and spelling.

One of the most significant challenges facing the Arabic language teaching policy in the Arab World, in general, and Yemen, in particular, is the lack of an academic body for setting educational guidelines and standards (Al-Rajhi, 2006). Most schools and academic institutions are free to adopt what they consider to be a suitable set of standards, guidelines, skills for teaching Arabic, and assessment strategies. According to Tollefson and Osborn (2008), the consequence of not having national standards is the lack of effective instructional planning in most schools when it comes to the Arabic language. The standards, guidelines, and curricula of the Arabic language in schools or ministries of education are mostly derived from a textbook. The textbook is accompanied by a workbook used in the Arabic classroom (Taha-Thomure, 2003). According to Taha-Thomure (2008), most Arabic learning resources are grammar-based, teacher-centered materials that do not help the teachers to teach Arabic in a communicative, research-based, student-centered and differentiated way.

The proficiency level in the Arabic language in the academic institutions is benchmarked by using the American Council on the Training of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The ACTFL assessment has been adopted to measure the proficiency level. It was first applied to European languages in 1985 and later to the Arabic language (Allen, 1985). The holistic assessment in the Arabic language includes four major proficiency levels: Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The latter two levels are further divided into three minor levels: low, intermediate, and advanced. The Advanced level is divided into Advanced and Advanced Plus. The Superior is a single top level that corresponds to a native-speaker language level (Allen, 1985).

1.3.2 Arabic-English Contrastive Rhetorical Issues

Contrastive rhetoric is defined as an area of research in second language acquisition which attempts to identify problems in composition encountered by second language writers (Connor, 1996). Arabic was among the first languages studied in the field of contrastive rhetoric in Kaplan's (1966) seminal study. In the study, Kaplan observed that paragraph development is based on a complex series of parallel constructions. Kaplan (1966) claims that Arab ESL paragraphs are characterized by having a zigzag movement due to high degree of parallelism, repetition, and coordination. Ostler (1987) and Harfmann (2004) extended the work of Kaplan, making basically the same stance about Arabic coordination, repetition and parallelism to achieve cohesion as well as to appeal to the attention of the reader. However, Arab linguists criticized Western linguists that they failed to account for the real reasons for using such apparent structures in written Arabic. Sa'adeddin (1989) and Shaikhulislami and Makhlouf (2000), for example, claim that the Western linguists missed the point by explaining oral traits observed in the written Arabic to be tied to the Holy Quran or the classical Arabic. Sa'adeddin (1989) maintains that the use of such structures signifies closeness and intimacy with the readers which have implications in communicating certain messages that the visual mode would not be able to achieve. Also, Al-Jubouri (1984) justifies that repetition is used as a strategy for making arguments at three levels: the phrase, the clause, and the larger discourse. Sa'adeddin (1989) and Shaikhulislami and Makhlouf (2000) comment that if Arab students were given sufficient time, their writings would be linear and the argument could be clearly found particularly in scientific and formal prose. According to

Sa'adeddin (1989), all Arab linguists disagreed with the Westerners in linking the oral traits found in Arab students' writings to the classical Arabic and/or to the Holy Quran.

Khalil (1989) and Johnstone (1991) observed that when writing in Arabic, Arab writers tend to repeat the same lexical item for persuasion. Some other researchers (e.g. Souby, 1970; Patai, 1973; Ayari, 1992; Connor, 1996; Zahrana, 1995; Suchan, 2010) also observed that Arab writers tend to exaggerate their claims which are often seen as rhetorical devices. This supports the claim that students from different language background prefer a certain type of rhetorical features which may have negative influence on their EFL writing (Kaplan, 1966; Hinkel, 1999).

According to Kaplan (1966), rhetorical features which signal commitment and detachment may be culturally inherent and that is reflected in the EFL students' writing. Therefore, hedges and boosters are some of those rhetorical features which EFL writers use to signal commitment and detachment in one's claim that are acceptable to native speakers of English (Hyland, 2005, 2010; Ignacio, 2009). As rhetorical features, hedges represent a weakening of a claim through explicit qualification of the writer's commitment. This may be to show doubt and indicate that information is presented as an opinion rather than a fact (Myers, 1989; Hyland, 1998a). Boosters, on the other hand, represent a strong claim and they allow writers to express conviction and assert a proposition with confidence (Hyland, 1998a).

As two major rhetorical features, hedges and boosters appear to be problematic for ESL/EFL student writers as statements do not just communicate ideas, but they also convey the writer's attitude to the readers (Halliday, 1978; Hyland, 2000b). Therefore,

the ability to use hedges and boosters appropriately is a difficult task for the EFL writers. This difficulty arises when EFL writers cannot convey statements with an appropriate degree of doubt and certainty (Hyland & Milton, 1997; McCann, 1989). A number of writers have also commented on this difficulty. Skelton (1988b), for example, observed that direct and unqualified writing is more typical of EFL writer students, even of poor adult writers. Along the same line, Holmes (1988) and Hyland (1994) view the difficulty in the fact that the significance of these two devices is largely ignored in ESL textbooks.

Although hedges and boosters have important function in the text, they have not been adequately addressed in the Arabic-English contrastive studies (Ibrahim, Kassabgy & Aydeliott, 2000). Arabic-English contrastive studies have focused on the features of Arabic texts such as lexical, structural parallelism, repetition, and coordination (Khalil, 1989; Johnstone, 1991; Fakhri, 2009). Therefore, it is one of the aims of the present study to fill this gap by contrasting hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

1.3.3 Status of English Education Policy in Yemen

The explosion of knowledge at all levels in the world has made the Arab World seems like a small village with the English language as its lingua franca (El-Sayed, 1993). As Al-Hamzi (1999) states, English has been gaining a prominent status in Yemen and has been generally used in several fields such as business transactions, legal procedures, diplomatic activities, and education. It is now a medium of instruction for subjects like engineering, computer science, mathematics, medicine, and humanities. Private

universities and a few of the government universities have given local students the opportunity to join franchised programmes offered by some overseas universities. This kind of joint education programmes required proficiency in English where English is the medium of instruction. Thus, English occupies an important status and is increasingly used in daily life. Furthermore, the government has privatized some national institutions which, in turn, created job market in which English is highly required.

English is also used in the public media. The news broadcast is delivered in English every day in both TV and the national radio. A huge portion of advertisements are delivered in English as well. Billboards and posters can be seen alongside and above shops and streets. In the field of tourism, Yemen has beautiful historical places which attract thousands of international tourists every year. So, it is natural that English is the main medium of communication used by both tourist guides and foreign tourists. English has also become necessary for international trade, especially since the establishment of the free trade zone (Aden) which has attracted several foreign companies to invest their capitals in several areas.

The government has enacted a new policy for all private and public academic institutions by making English a requirement to join their programmes. As a result, a large number of private English institutes have been established in the major cities and towns in Yemen with the main goals of teaching English. These institutes attract students and businessmen to take their English courses. The employers from both the private and public sectors in the country seek to find high-proficient graduates who are able to communicate in English effectively. Al-Hamzi (1999) asserts that government

privatization policy has created job opportunities within hundreds of foreign companies which are investing in different sectors especially in the gas and oil explorations.

Because English occupies a prominent status in Yemen, the Yemeni government had to train local teaching staff for the public schools. Due to a dearth of well-trained teachers and absence of appropriate environment, English is officially introduced to students at the age of thirteen (Al-Hamzi, 1999). Students receive an average of two contact hours per week. Thus, because the duration of the course is very short, it is difficult for teachers to achieve the expected objectives (Al-Sohbani, 1997). Although English is taught for six years, Yemeni students complete their secondary education with poor knowledge of English. As Al-Sohbani (1997) comments, Yemeni EFL learners are not able to speak or write a correct sentence although they spend six years at school learning English.

Since language and culture are interwoven, Yemeni people have several reservations about the influence of Western culture on the English syllabus (El-Sayed, 1993; Brown, 1994). El-Sayed (1993), for example, argues that the distrust of the Arab students towards Western languages and culture is natural as the Arab World was colonized by Western countries. As a result, English curriculum developers tend to integrate Arabic culture into newly designed textbooks which address the learners' real needs and exclude any elements that may be in conflict with the learners' own faith and values. As Hyde (1994) explains the situation: "we shall use English for our purposes, and not let English uses us for its specific purposes" (p. 296). However, it is impossible to disassociate language from culture as the two elements are interwoven.

1.3.3.1 The English School Syllabus

Since South Yemen gained independence in 1964, English has been chosen to be the first foreign language (Al-Hamzi, 1999). The English syllabus adopted by the Ministry of Education in Yemen was introduced to schools in the early days of independence. The Ministry of Higher Education determines the teaching materials, timetables, and teaching related methods. The teachers, for example, are not free to adopt different teaching materials and have to adhere to the decision made by the authority.

The situation of EFL teaching in Yemen was relatively ineffective due to the paucity of teachers and teaching materials (Al-Sohbani, 1997). Since independence, there had been several English series designed for Yemeni schools such as *The Nile Course* series brought in by Egyptian experts. The series content was based on the Grammar-Translation Method in which the focus was on teaching grammatical rules (Al-Hamzi, 1999). In the late 1960s, another series was brought in from the Gulf States called *The Progressive Living English for the Arab World*. This series was based on the Audio-Lingual Approach (El-Sayed, 1993). In 1979, the Ministry of Education with the help of the British Council in Yemen introduced a new English series called *English for Yemen*, taking into account the cultural identity of the Yemeni learners with emphasis on the grammatical structures. This series continued to be used in schools until the beginning of the 1990s. After the unification in 1990, the government felt that there was a need to enhance language education. To achieve this, a new English series called *Crescent English Course* (CEC) has been adopted for the last two decades. This English series was first published in 1977 and adopted in the Gulf States in the beginning of the 1980s. It consists of six textbooks, three of which are for the preparatory level graded from 7-9

and the other three levels are for the secondary stage graded from 10-12. The following section discusses the writing content in the CEC series.

1.3.3.2 EFL Writing in the School Syllabus

To address the drawbacks of the current (CEC) syllabus at the school level, it is important to throw some light on the writing content of each level of the current adopted series, namely *Crescent English Course*. To begin, the writing content in Textbook 1 for grade 7 of the preparatory level series covers basic elements such as handwriting movement, space layout, size of letters, punctuations, spelling rules, and writing core words. The writing content of Textbook 2 and Textbook 3 for grade 8 and grade 9, respectively concentrates on copying words or phrases already given as clues to fill in the gaps of short isolated sentences or paragraphs. At the sentence level, these activities include gap-filling or completion, sentence matching or joining and sentence re-ordering or correcting. At the paragraph level, the writing activities cover completing gapped paragraphs or short continuous text, writing jumbled paragraphs and parallel writing (See Appendices 1 & 2). In fact, most of these activities are taught through guided practice.

For the secondary stage grades 10, 11, and 12, the CEC series consists of three textbooks and accompanied by three workbooks. The Pupil's Book of each level usually presents long passages or interviews, and at the end of each unit, the main grammatical structures are summarized in tables as revision. The workbooks contain exercises that focus on listening and reading skills. In these exercises, students are asked to listen and answer questions, choose the correct words, complete sentences with correct words, match the

meanings of some words and phrases, and complete dialogues with suitable words. Textbooks 5 and 6 of this stage emphasize the receptive skills. A close scrutiny of the content of the writing components of the secondary school syllabus indicates that grammatical correctness and sentence building occupy a central part in the writing instruction. The writing activities at the sentence level concentrate on writing short sentences, completing sentences with the help of given words or phrases (See Appendices 3 & 4).

1.3.3.3 EFL Writing in the College Syllabus

The teaching of EFL writing is conducted by the Department of English of Sana'a University and its branches in Yemen. The ultimate goal of teaching English in these departments is to prepare and train successful and competent teacher trainees. To achieve this goal, the ELT curriculum was designed to provide students with knowledge in both language skills and language teaching methodology. The curriculum designed for the English Departments, private and public alike, includes a mixture of linguistics and literature components whereby students are exposed to linguistics and literary subjects. For a bachelor degree in English, students have to take a full list of English modules offered over four years and must pass four obligatory writing courses during the first two years (See Appendix 5).

A review of the content of the writing courses offered at the college level shows that the focus seems to be on the formal aspect of language system rather than language use and function. The primary focus of the writing content is on the grammatical structures such as sentence formation and sentence connectives (See Appendix 6).

To conclude, the EFL writing materials appear to emphasize grammar and lexis (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Hinkel, 2004a). The content of the EFL writing shows that the focus is on the formal aspects of language system and writing process rather than the language use and function. In other words, the focus is on the grammatical rules and lexis with some ways of organizing information in a paragraph or essay format such as drafting, planning and taking notes. The next section reviews the methods and the pedagogical issues in teaching EFL writing at the school and college levels.

1.4 Approaches and Pedagogical Issues in Teaching EFL Writing

The teaching of EFL writing has been a challenging skill in all educational systems. There is a wide range of approaches in the teaching of EFL writing. Focus on the form, the process, and the reader are three major perspectives of teaching EFL writing (Raimes, 1993). These approaches are discussed in the following sections.

1.4.1 Product-Based Approach

The Product-based approach has been called the controlled, the guided, and the text approach (Raimes, 1983). Basically, EFL writing in this approach serves to reinforce grammatical and syntactic knowledge (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). The product-based approach favors controlled or guided composition writing and eschews open-ended writing activities and this is reflected in the teaching of EFL writing in Yemen (Al-Hamzi, 2006). Learning to write in EFL in Yemen is simply seen as an exercise of reproducing the information that learners had been taught. The text becomes just a chunk of words and sentence patterns. The teacher's job is to correct the students' final product, and there is a negligible concern for audience or purpose of the text.

The writing exercises in the Crescent English Series (CES) are controlled in the lower grades and they gradually move on to guided writing exercises with some practice in free writing. Students are asked to write some isolated sentences, and describe some pictures with words and phrases given. The content of the message and quality of the ideas are neglected in this approach as students primarily focus on the formal linguistic features.

1.4.2 Process-Based Approach

Process-based approach was introduced by Graves (1978) as a result of dissatisfaction with the product-based approach (Tribble, 1996; White & Arndt, 1991). This approach views writing as a cycle of activities which involves multiple stages such as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing (Zeng, 2005). The teacher's role is to help writers create ideas, compose them, and then revise them in order to generate the text (Zamel, 1983a). They also need to guide students through the writing process and help them develop effective writing strategies (Seow, 2002). The process approach is not widely accepted by writers such as Reid (1984) and Horowitz (1986). They argue that the process approach does not address issues such as the requirements of particular writing tasks for producing written discourse and variation in individual writing situations. Furthermore, Horowitz (1986) questions whether the process approach realistically prepares students for the demands of writing in particular settings. As Ferris et al. (2005) observe, the techniques adopted by the process-based approach are not comfortable activities for many non-native speakers. McKee (1989) comments that the process writing activity in EFL context becomes a set of mechanics rather than communication of a message.

Teaching EFL writing at the college level in Yemen is based on a combination of the product and process approaches (Naif, 2003). In the product approach, students are geared towards the syntactic structures (i.e. grammar and lexis). The process-based approach views writing activities as an imitation of the correct model. The content is often specified in such a way that there is no need for creativity and students are supposed to mechanically follow those specific rules (i.e. pre-writing, brainstorming, mapping etc.). Since it emphasizes the writing stages, the process-based approach regards the writing activity as consisting of the same sets of steps. It gives insufficient importance to the kind of text writers produce and why such text is produced. Emphasizing the development of writing, students' attention shift from what they produce to how they produce. Learners with their teachers spend a lot of time learning the stages of the writing activities such as pre-writing, brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, and editing. The concepts of hedges and boosters as two interactive devices between the writers and readers are, thus, not addressed in the process-based approach.

1.4.3 Genre-Based Approach

The emergence of the genre-based approach, introduced by Swales (1990), draws on the demand for a more balanced approach to teaching EFL writing (Kim & Kim, 2005). Johns (2006) defines genre as socially recognized ways of using language. Along the same line, Hyland (2003) states that genre is socially oriented and focused on the ways in which writers interact with their readers for a communicative purpose. Thus, teaching writing, according to this approach, is not purely an individual act but a social and communicative one (Flower, 1994). As Zeng (2005) states, effective writing implies that writers do not only write of their own choice but also in different contexts, for

different purposes, and in different ways. For example, writers should be aware of the ways individuals use language in particular contexts, and the purpose they write for. As stated by Tribble (1996), writing is essentially viewed as a social activity, and thus the assumption of this approach is that, if the reader cannot recognize the purpose of a text, communication will not be successful. Writers face a variety of writings such as expository, persuasive, descriptive, and narrative tasks, which require a clear understanding of the conventions of the genre and the audience of each task. Structuring these tasks within the genre approach is more socially oriented and focused on readers. It gives particular stress on the ways in which writer and text interact with readers. EFL teachers and students in Yemen have limited knowledge of the genre-specific rules and the situations in which these genres are used. For example, Yemeni learners majoring in English know little about how to write a persuasive writing task, a job application letter, a resume, or an invitation.

The current teaching methods in Yemen views writing skills as a means which arrives at the final product, ignoring that language and social life can shape the relationship between the text form, the writer's role, and the audience's engagement. However, successful writing is not only dependent on what is being conveyed but also how well it is being conveyed. In other words, syntactic accuracy does not guarantee appropriate language use. Vande Kopple (1985), for example, states that we write on two levels: on one level, we supply information about the subject of the text. On this level, we expand propositional content. On the other level, the level of metadiscourse, we do not add propositional materials but help the readers to organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and

react to each material. As an example, the writer signals to the reader about whether he is doubtful or sure about what he is indicating.

The teaching methods adopted in teaching EFL writing in Yemen do not foreground the writer's role, the propositional content, and the reader's engagement. In fact, there is a general neglect of knowledge of the conventional norms of the genre in the EFL writing syllabus. Among these conventions are the interactional metadiscourse markers which seem to be a pedagogic reality that create an interactional gap between the writers and the readers. The teaching materials have failed to include guidance on hedges and boosters as two interactional metadiscourse elements which would be useful for learners to communicate better with their readers. As Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen (1988) point out, if interactional metadiscourse markers are added to the text, the interpersonal function of language will be fulfilled. Such fulfillment will help the writers to communicate better with the readers and have better understanding of the text.

Vande Kopple (1985) regards hedges and boosters as two examples of the ways in which interactional metadiscourse are expressed in the text. Hedges are signals which suggest comparatively low degree of certainty conveyed for several purposes as writer carries over to the text context. In contrast, boosters are signals which indicate a high degree of commitment of the writer which allows him/her to project a credible image of authority, decisiveness in his/her views. Both hedges and boosters cannot be studied outside of pragmatics, the field that has emerged to study the learners' use and acquisition of linguistic features in a second language (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Rose, 2000). The excessive use of these two markers may affect the

preciseness of the proposition in the written text and damage the credibility of the writer accordingly. Cheng and Steffensen (1996) point out that interactional metadiscourse is a critical feature for distinguishing good writing from bad writing.

Studies that have adopted the genre based approach in order to investigate Arabic discourse in specific writing contexts in the Arab World, in general, and Yemen, in particular, have been neglected (Najjar, 1990; Fakhri, 2004). Therefore, this study utilized the genre-based approach in teaching hedges and boosters. The genre-based approach was recommended by many scholars to be used in teaching EFL writing (Martin, 1993a; Dudley-Evans, 1995). The main advantage of the approach is that it emphasizes the notion of genre in writing which promotes the linguistic skills and rhetorical awareness. As stated by Badger and White (2000), the genre approach provides a suitable groundwork for the register of writing which includes the topic, the writer-reader relationship, and the medium of communication. Therefore, the genre-based approach best suits the purpose of this study which attempts to enhance the learners' awareness of using hedges and boosters as two linguistic features and overcome the learners' difficulties in writing in specific contexts.

The previous section reviewed three approaches in the teaching of EFL writing. The first approach is the product-based approach which favors grammar and lexis in the teaching of EFL writing. Teaching writing in Yemen is viewed as an exercise of reproducing information that students had been exposed to during the class meeting (Al-Hamzi, 2006). In the product approach, the text just becomes strings of words and sentence patterns whereas the content of the message and the quality of ideas are neglected in this

approach. The process approach has been introduced to writing teaching as a result of disapproval of the product based approach. This approach considers writing as a cycle of activities which undergoes multiple stages. The role of teachers is to help students to create ideas, compose them and revise them in order to produce the text. For many researchers, the writing activities become a set of stages rather than communication of process. It does not give sufficient importance to the kind of text writers produce and why such text is produced. Students spend much time learning the stages of the writing activities whereas the quality of ideas and the content of the message are not considered. The third approach is the genre-based approach which views writing as a means of connecting people with each other in ways that carry particular meanings. Because genre based approach includes the topic, the writer-reader relationship, and the medium of communication, this study considers the application of the genre based approach in investigating hedges and boosters in the genres of persuasive essay and job application letter.

1.5 Hedges and Boosters in Persuasive Writing

The expression of doubt and certainty is central to the meaning of persuasive writing. The crucial importance of these two features lies in the fact that writers gain acceptance by balancing conviction with caution. These expressions of conviction and caution are collectively known as hedges and boosters (Holmes, 1990). Thus, hedges and boosters are viewed as two sides of the same coin, in the sense that they both contribute to the persuasive import of academic communication (Vázquez & Diana, 2009). They are often regarded as closely related, and sometimes inseparable from each other (Grabe & Kaplan, 1997).

The term "hedge" was first introduced by Lakoff (1972) to refer to words or expressions that make propositions more or less "fuzzy." Linguists generally define hedges as a tool to tone down uncertain or potentially risky claims and to show deference, hesitation, vagueness or doubtfulness through explicit qualification of the writer's commitment (Salager-Meyers, 1994; Hyland, 1998a). This may be to show that the information presented is an opinion rather than a verified fact or certain knowledge. Myers (1989) suggests that writers employ hedges to minimize the potential threat and solicit acceptance from readers.

Unlike hedges, boosters stand at the other end of the extreme whereby the writer expresses his/her confidence and certainty in a claim. Holmes (1982a) and Salager-Meyer (1994) view the term "boosters" as those lexical items by means of which the writer can show strong confidence for a claim. These definitions find support from Hyland (1998a) who views boosters as a tool which serves to strengthen a claim to show the writer's commitment. Hyland also points out that boosters can be used as a means or medium to create interpersonal solidarity with readers.

Hedges and boosters are, therefore, two major features used as a resource for reducing or increasing the force of statements (Hyland, 1996a; Salager-Mayer, 1994). Depending on the context, these two features are used as social "accelerators" or "brakes" (Holmes, 1984). In order for writers to avoid potential objection from readers, writers should carefully present their claims neither overstated nor understated. This made hedges and boosters appear to be problematic for second language student writers as statements do not just communicate ideas but they also convey the writer's attitude to readers (Halliday, 1978; Hyland, 2000b). Therefore, the current study attempts to investigate the

pragmatic functions of various types of hedges and boosters used in the Yemeni EFL undergraduates' persuasive essays and job application letters.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Persuasive writing is considered to be one of the most difficult skills for students to learn as it requires writers to influence peoples' opinion towards the claim being made. In writing persuasive texts, students are expected to present their opinions with a balanced perspective, and support their views with appropriate information to lend these views credibility (Hinkel, 1999). However, research on the EFL writing has demonstrated that EFL writers present their views with inappropriate degree of commitment (Scarcella, 1981). The learners' difficulty with presenting a balanced claim may result from the fact that EFL learners are not aware that writers can write better only when they are aware that texts consist of both the propositional content (e.g., grammar and lexis) and the metadiscourse markers (e.g., hedges and boosters) (Paravaresh & Nemati, 2008). In the Yemeni context, teaching students are geared towards the formal accuracy where grammar and lexis are emphasized (Al-Hazmi, 2006). However, writing involves more than just learning grammar, lexis, sentence patterns, and composition mechanics. In writing, we convey information at two levels: First, we describe the objects and events of the world in a propositional content, and second, through the manner of presenting the proposition, we personalize the discourse through appropriate lexicon to make careful judgment or to show strong conviction (Vande Kopple, 1985). The writer's goal, therefore, is not only supplying information about the subject (i.e. text) but also representing himself/herself and his/her relation to his/her readers, and this is largely accomplished by hedges and boosters as two linguistic features. Any excessive or

misuse of these two markers would result in a distortion of the value of the proposition. Therefore, there is a need for investigating the pragmatic aspects of writing such as hedges and boosters which have not received the attention they deserve in the EFL students' writing. Hyland (2000b) argues that because we know little about their use, hedges and boosters appear to be an area which EFL students find difficult to produce.

The purpose of this study has evolved from a recurrent problem that hedges and boosters have been neglected in the EFL writing context, in general, and in Yemen, in particular, where students are geared towards formal accuracy (i.e. grammar and lexis) at the expense of appropriate use of language (Salager-Meyer, 1997; Hinkel, 2004b; Hyland, 1994).

An evaluation of the content of the EFL writing syllabus at the Yemeni school level shows that writing has been taught through the product-based approach in that the pedagogical focus has been on correcting forms, rather than appropriate expressions (Naif, 2003; Al-Hazmi, 2006). Writing within this approach emphasizes the grammar and gives no attention to the audience and the writing purpose (Flower, 1994; Zeng, 2005). The text written by the Yemeni EFL student writers indicates that students tend to overuse hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive writing (See Appendix 7). This supports the claim that Arabic culture favors hedges and boosters (Haris & Morn, 1979; Shouby, 1970; Patai, 1973; Cohen, 1987; Anderson, 1994; Suchan, 2010).

Like the school, teaching EFL writing at the college level relies on a combination of product and process-based approaches. In the two approaches, students focus on the syntactic structures (i.e. grammar and lexis) and writing processes (i.e. pre-writing,

brainstorming, mapping etc.). In addition to these pedagogical issues and syllabus flaws, a review of the related studies on hedges and boosters indicate that studies on hedges and boosters appear to be overlooked (Milton, 2001; Hyland, 2000b, 2008a; Yu, 2009). The importance of hedges and boosters appears to be neglected in the EFL textbooks (Holmes, 1988; Hyland, 2004). This neglect has been also acknowledged by Hinkel (2004b) and Huang and Liou (2005) that these two markers are rarely reflected in the EFL writing textbooks.

Previous studies on hedges and boosters that examined research articles and scientific texts were mostly conducted in the Western cultural context (e.g., Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1994, 1996a, 1999, 2005; Varttala, 1999, 2001; Silver, 2003; Hinkel, 2004a; Martin-Martin, 2008). As Yu (2009) states, studies on hedges and boosters focused on scholar-to scholar communication (i.e. analysis of the subsection of research articles) rather than on students in colleges and universities. Similarly, Hinkel (2005) and Lee (2008) point out that studies on hedges and boosters used by the EFL learners or non-native speakers of English (NNSs) focused on the frequency use of hedges and boosters in the NS and NNS written texts (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Nikula, 1997; Hinkel, 2005). In these studies, quantitative analyses of the frequency use of hedges and boosters were not adequately supplemented with contextual interpretation. However, as Kudrnacova (2010) states, studies on hedges and boosters should take into account not only their quantitative analyses but also their functions in the context they are realized. The aim of this study, therefore, is not only identifying and calculating the frequency use of these two features but also offering insights into their possible functions in the context in which they take place.

In the English-Arabic contrastive studies, hedges and boosters have hardly received adequate attention in the persuasive texts written by EFL students of Arab cultural background (Ibrahim et al., 2000). The focus has been on the features such as lexical, structural parallelism, repetition and coordination (Khalil, 1989; Johnstone, 1991; Fakhri, 2009). Recognizing this fact, this study attempts to fill the gap found in the literature regarding the use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive texts written by EFL undergraduate Arab students.

Experimental studies on hedges and boosters in the EFL written context appear to be limited (Hinkel, 2005; Jalilifar & Alipour, 2007). The studies, which investigated the effect of explicit instruction on hedges and boosters in the EFL writing, adopted quasi-experimental, one-group pretest-posttest, and intact group designs (Whisnoff, 2000; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Taghizadeh & Tajabadi, 2013). However, these designs suffer from the lack of control of extraneous factors (e.g., history, maturation), and thus do not provide accurate results (Henrichsen, Smith & Baker, 1997; Rick, 2006; Chawla & Sondhi, 2011). Therefore, for the experimental part of the current study, the pretest-posttest experimental and control group design was chosen to make up for the shortcomings of the designs used in the previous studies. As Prater (1983) states, the pretest-posttest experimental and control group design is regarded as an appropriate design because it enables the researcher to control extraneous variables and show a cause-and-effect relationship.

1.7 Research Objectives

The research objectives include the following:

1. To identify various types of hedges and boosters employed by the Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

2. To determine whether the overall use of hedges and boosters is significantly different between the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and L1 and EFL job application letters.

3. To determine whether there is a significant difference between the male and female student writers and the overall use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

4. To ascertain whether the overall use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters correlates with low, intermediate, and advanced EFL proficiency levels.

5. To determine whether explicit instruction on hedges and boosters has a significant influence on the Yemeni EFL writers' persuasive essays and job application letters.

1.8 Research Questions

There are five fundamental research questions and three hypotheses for this study:

1. What types of hedges and boosters are employed by the Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

2. Are there any significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their L1 and EFL persuasive essays and L1 and EFL job application letters?

3. Are there any significant differences between the male and female student writers and the overall use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

4. Is there any correlation between the EFL proficiency level and the overall use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters?

5. To what extent does explicit instruction affect the use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers' persuasive essays and job application letters in the posttest?

1.9 Hypotheses

Based on the literature review, three hypotheses were generated for Q3, Q4 and Q5. The three hypotheses were derived based on the reviewed literature. For Hypothesis 1, the reviewed literature indicates that female writers tend to use more hedges and boosters than do male writers (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1984; Coates, 1993; Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998; Palander-Collin, 1999; Holmes, 2009). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 has been generated as follows:

H$_0$: There will be no significant differences between male and female undergraduate students in terms of the overall use of hedges and boosters in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

H$_1$: Female Yemeni EFL undergraduate students will use more hedges and boosters in their persuasive essays and job application letters than male Yemeni EFL undergraduate students.

For Hypothesis 2, the reviewed literature indicates that students at lower proficiency levels tend to use more hedges and boosters than do students at higher proficiency levels (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Hinkel, 2005; Hyland, 2008a) while some few studies found that students at higher proficiency levels tend to use more hedges and boosters than do students at lower proficiency levels (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 has been derived as follows:

H$_0$: There will be no significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels.

H$_2$: Advanced proficient students will use fewer hedges and boosters than intermediate and low proficient students in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

For Hypothesis 3, the literature reviewed indicates that hedges were found to be more in the posttest than in the pre-test (Wishnoff, 2000). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 has been derived as follows:

H$_0$: There will be no significant difference between explicit instruction on hedges and boosters and the Yemeni EFL students' posttest performance in their persuasive essays and job application letters**.**

H$_3$: There will be a significant difference between explicit instruction of hedges and boosters and the students' posttest performance in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

1.10 Significance of the Study

Hedges and boosters have been largely investigated in the research articles and scientific texts which were written mostly in Western culture (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1994, 1996a, 1999, 2005; Varttala, 1999, 2001; Silver, 2003; Hinkel, 2004a; Vold, 2006; Yeung, 2007; Martin-Martin, 2008; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Winardi, 2009). As Yu (2009) states, studies on hedges and boosters focused on scholar-to scholar communication (i.e. analysis of the subsection of research articles) rather than on students in colleges and universities.

The significance of this study, therefore, can be drawn from different perspectives. First, this study provides insights on how Arab EFL students, in general, and Yemeni EFL undergraduate students, in particular, use hedges and boosters in the EFL writing context. Hyland (2000b) highlights that there is little knowledge on how hedges and boosters are used by EFL student writers because these two features are largely ignored in the pedagogical materials geared to non-native speakers of English.

Another significance of this study is that it would contribute to knowledge in the field of contrastive studies on hedges and boosters used by Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in their L1 and EFL written persuasive essays and job application letters. Previous English-Arabic contrastive studies have focused on the features of the texts such as lexical, structural parallelism, repetition and coordination (Khalil, 1989; Johnstone, 1991; Fakhri, 2009). The findings of the study, therefore, would give a wider explanation of the use of hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL writing context. In other words, it would help teachers to include hedges and boosters in both L1 and EFL writing.

Since most EFL learning materials fail to include sections on hedges and boosters (Salager-Meyer, 1997; Hyland, 2000b), this study would contribute to knowledge in the EFL writing by providing insights that might help EFL student writers recognize various forms and functions of hedges and boosters in the written texts and, thereby, come close to a native-like writing proficiency. The finding of this study is also expected to provide information to both instructors and curriculum designers, especially in the EFL writing context.

This study attempts to examine the differences between male and female students' writing in relation to the use of hedges and boosters within Arab EFL writers' cultural background. Previous studies on gender related differences have been almost in the English-speaking cultures (Holmes, 2009). The finding of the current study, therefore, would be useful input for students to establish a balanced degree of commitment towards what they are claiming in their texts. In addition, these findings would contribute to

understanding gender aspects of language use through the process of learning and teaching, as well as, future textbooks designed for EFL learners of Arab cultural background. This would help female learners to expand their lexical knowledge on hedges and boosters to make their stance more real and actual.

Another significant contribution of the study is that it offers a practical contribution of teaching hedges and boosters using the genre based approach. The findings of the experimental part of this study would contribute to integrating hedges and boosters into the genre approach in the EFL writing context. This would help students gain control of the genre and the linguistics features it is associated with. Finally, the major findings of the current study can be potentially relevant for other Arab EFL writers, in general.

1.11 Scope of the Study

The present study was chiefly limited to the Yemeni EFL undergraduate students, majoring in English in their third-year of a bachelor degree at three faculties under Sana'a University. In this study, various types of hedges and boosters were identified, compared and discussed in the genres of the persuasive essay and job application letter. The effect of gender and EFL proficiency level were examined as well. The pre-test and posttest experimental and control group design attempted to determine the effect of explicit instruction on the learners' use of hedges and boosters. The present study is considered to be a representation of the EFL writers' population not only in Yemen but also in other Arab countries. Therefore, the findings of this study can be applicable to the writing of Arab EFL learners, in general.

1.12 Operational Definitions

The following terms are restricted to this study and a brief definition for each term is given below to clarify their meanings as they are used in this study.

Pragmatics: Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users especially of the choices of words they make, the constraints they encounter in using language (Crystal, 1997).

Hedges: Hedges are defined as those words or phrases which, in one way or another, reduce the force of the claims that the writers make (Hyland, 1998a).

Boosters: Words or phrases which increase the force of writer's certainty in a proposition and signify strong commitment (Hyland, 2004).

L1: L1 refers to the person's native language or mother tongue (Crystal, 2007). In the case of this study, L1 refers to Arabic as a first language.

L2: L2 refers to both foreign and second language that person knows (Crystal, 2007). In the case of this study, L2 refers to English as a foreign language.

Persuasive Essay: Persuasive essay is a kind of writing which attempts to persuade someone of something (Intaraprawat, 2000).

Job Application Letter: Job application letter is associated with the promotional genre which attempts to promote oneself in a most persuasive manner (Bhatia, 1993).

Genre: Genre is defined as a type of text which is associated with a particular context that members of a community use to interact with each other (Swales, 1990).

Metadiscourse: In its broad definition, metadiscourse is based on a view of writing as social engagement in which writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitudes and commitments (Hyland, 2005).

1.13 Overview of the Study

The thesis of this research is divided into five major chapters. Chapter one provides the general background which is necessary to understand the setting of the study. It discusses the current status of Arabic and English education policy and contrastive rhetorical issues with special focus on EFL writing content at the school and college levels. The chapter reviews the teaching approaches and pedagogical issues of teaching EFL writing in Yemen. The key features of the persuasive writing and the significance of hedges and boosters are highlighted. This chapter also presents the statement of the problem, research objectives, questions and hypotheses. It concludes with the significance and scope of the study, definitions of the key terms and organization of the thesis.

Chapter two reviews the literature related to the study. It attempts to trace the origin and development of the concepts of hedges and boosters. The chapter discusses categorization of hedges and boosters from different perspectives. It provides, in detail, the theoretical and experimental studies that have been conducted on hedges and boosters in different genres. The chapter also reviews English-Arabic contrastive

rhetorical studies and the genres of the persuasive essay and job application letter. Chapter two concludes with a theoretical framework adopted for the study and a preliminary analysis on a small sample of students' writing.

Chapter three presents the methodology of the study which includes the research design, the population, and the sampling of the participants. It also discusses the data collection and the experimental part of the study. A small-scale study is also provided. It includes information about the data collection procedures, inter-rater reliability, coding scheme and the results of the pilot study. The chapter presents the validity, reliability and the coding scheme of hedges and boosters proposed for this study. Chapter three concludes with data analysis, ethical and legal considerations and summary for this chapter.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study. The results are provided in line with the research questions and the hypotheses. Extracts from the students' persuasive essays and job application letters are provided.

Chapter five focuses on the discussion of the study based on the extracts from participants' persuasive essays and job application letters. The findings obtained are then compared with earlier related studies and supported by interpretations and justifications. Pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research are discussed. This chapter concludes with the limitation, strengths and summary of the study.

1.14 Summary

Chapter one has been devoted to give introductory remarks before approaching the other chapters. The geographical and cultural background of the setting in which this study was conducted has been provided. Special attention has been given to the Arabic education policy, the current status of English syllabus, EFL teaching approaches and pedagogical issues of teaching EFL writing at the school and university levels. The importance of hedges and boosters in persuasive writing has been discussed. The statement of the problem, research objectives, questions and hypotheses have been stated. This chapter concludes with the significance and scope of the study, definitions of the key terms and organization of the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to the main area of interest in this study. First, it attempts to trace the origin and development of the concepts of hedges and boosters in the linguistic literature. This chapter discusses categorization of hedges and boosters from different perspectives. Studies on hedges in different genres are reviewed. It also reviews hedges and boosters in the EFL written context. Gender and contrastive rhetoric related studies are discussed, and the theoretical framework for the study is presented.

2.2 Hedges and Boosters: Concept, Origin and Development

The concepts of hedges and boosters have been approached in many different ways in the linguistic literature and have received little agreement among researchers on what these markers denote. Hedges have been defined as devices which denote vagueness, tentativeness, fuzziness, politeness, and indirectness. Boosters, on other hand, refer to those devices which indicate certainty and strong commitment (Lakoff, 1972; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1998d). Due to the nature of these two markers, it can be stated that hedges may have a number of potential functions. They signal arguments as uncertain, mitigate the strength of claims for the sake of politeness, desire not to express commitment categorically and make statement less vague or fuzzy. Conversely, boosters may perform numerous pragmatic functions such as a) express the writer's conviction and confidence in a claim (Hyland, 1998d), b) increase the force of a

claim especially when the writer is aware of the readers' doubt or hesitation about a claim (Holmes, 1984), and c) mark the writer's solidarity with the readers. The sections below provide discussion on hedges and boosters in terms of their origin, and development of these concepts in the linguistic literature.

2.2.1 Hedges

Despite the fact that the concept of hedging has been addressed in the linguistic literature for almost forty years now, no unified description of the concept has been found in the linguistic literature (Varttala, 2001). Previous work has revealed that hedges have been treated under different headings such as stance markers (Atkinson, 1999), understatement (Hüebler, 1983), downtoners (Quirk, Leech & Svartvik, 1985) and downgraders (House & Kasper, 1981). Other studies dealt with hedges under headings such as evidentiality (Chafe, 1986), mitigation (Labove & Fanshel, 1977), indirectness (Tannen, 1982; Hinkel, 1997), tentativeness (Holmes, 1983) and vagueness (Channell, 1994).

The earliest work dealing with the concept of hedging was based on Zadeh's (1965) work on fuzzy logic but Zadeh did not use the term "hedging." Instead, Zadeh called it metalinguistic operators. In Zadeh's work, these linguistic elements are based on the assumption that some objects of the natural world do not easily fit into the linguistic categories available to describe the universe. It was Lakoff (1972) who used the term "hedging" in its real sense to point to "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy." This is illustrated by examples given by Lakoff (1972) as follows:

a. A robin is a bird. (true)

b. A chicken is a bird. (close to false)

c. A chicken is sort of a bird. (true, or very close to true)

d. A cow is a sort of a bird. (false)

As an example of what Lakoff (1972) means, sentence (a) is true; sentence (b) may not be true, rather close to false. However, when we hedge sentence (c) by adding the predicate modifier, *sort of*, this can make the sentence more or less vague because a degree of category membership between robins and chickens depends on a speaker's underlying distinction. Lakoff's observation on hedging is not of communicative value. Lakoff's concern is about the semantics of words and phrases used to either increase or decrease fuzziness within the propositional content.

Following Lakoff's (1972) definition, the notion of fuzziness and vagueness has been discussed in more detail by Prince, Frader and Bosk (1982) on the basis of a study of physician-physician discourse in a large pediatric intensive unit. Prince et al. argue that all hedges can make things fuzzy in two different ways: the first class of hedges (i.e. approximators) introduces "fuzziness within propositional content" while the second class of hedges (i.e. shields) is associated with fuzziness in the relationship between the propositional content and the speakers; that is, in the speaker's commitment to the truth of the proposition conveyed. Examples below are extracted from Prince et al. (1982):

a. His feet were blue. (no hedge)

b. His feet were *sort of* blue. (approximator)

c. *I think* his feet were blue. (shield)

According to Prince et al. (1982), sentence (a) has no hedge. Without hedging, the speaker implicates full personal commitment to the truth of the proposition by simply asserting the intention. Sentences (b) and (c) are hedged in two different ways: The modifier *sort of* in sentence (b) can affect the propositional content, not the speaker's commitment; that is, the statement implies that the patient's feet could be bluish green. The hedge, *I think*, in sentence (c) does not affect the propositional content but implies that the speaker is less than fully committed to the truth of the proposition. The way hedging is viewed by Prince et al. is only restricted to expressing fuzziness.

Later publications provide various definitions for the term "hedging." Brown and Levinson (1987) define hedges as a particle word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase in a sentence. They extend the boundaries of hedging to negative politeness which is used for avoiding threats to the face of the participants. Hedging in their model is still limited to politeness which is mostly applied within the scope of speech act theory. Swales (1990) views hedging as a rhetorical device for projecting modesty, honesty and proper caution in self-report and for diplomatically creating space in areas heavily populated by other researchers. Along the same line, Salager-Meyer (1994) defines hedges as the product of a mental attitude which embraces various dimensional concepts such as purposive fuzziness, vagueness, authors' modesty about their achievements, avoidance of personal involvement and the unwillingness of reaching absolute accuracy.

Hyland (2000a) defines hedges as ways in which authors tone down uncertain or potentially risky claims. The writers, through using hedges, attempt to save face in case

of any possible falsification of their judgments. Through using hedges and attributing the ideas to oneself, writers also invite readers to evaluate the truth value of the proposition as an independent and intelligent individual. Schroder and Zimmer (1997) define hedging as one or more lexico-syntactical elements that are used to modify a proposition, or else, as a strategy that modifies a proposition. Similarly, Burrough-Boenisch (2005) views hedges as those lexical elements that signal caution or uncertainty. In this study, hedges are defined as those words or phrases which, in one way or another, reduce the force of the claims that the writers make.

2.2.2 Boosters

The concept of boosting has been defined by Holmes (1982b) as those expressions which involve degree of commitment or seriousness of attention. Boosters have been investigated together with hedges, but sometimes they have treated separately (Silver, 2003). Boosters signify the writer's degree of commitment to the truth of their statements. Grabe et al. (1997) consider boosters as the same "semantic cline of evidentiality" as hedges but at the other extreme.

Holmes (1982b), on the other hand, used the term *certainty markers* instead of *boosters* to refer to lexical items that the writer can use to show strong conviction for a statement. They strengthen the illocutionary force, which is the opposite of the effect of hedges. In other words, instead of indicating tentativeness or uncertainty, boosters signal the writer's or speaker's confidence regarding the plausibility of his or her utterance. Along the same line, Hyland (1998a) argues that boosters serve to strengthen propositions and show the writer's commitment to his or her statements. He points out that although such

assertion of the writer's conviction can be seen as leaving little room for the reader's own interpretations, boosters also offer writers a medium to engage with their readers and create interpersonal solidarity.

Summary

Hedges and boosters have been discussed in the literature from different perspectives. Hedging has been defined in earlier research as those devices which denote fuzziness or vagueness. Later research provided various definitions for hedges as those words or phrases which modify the degree of the writer's commitment. The pragmatic functions of hedges have been extended to include not only fuzziness and vagueness but also hesitation, uncertainty, politeness, tentativeness, involvement and unwillingness to reach absolute preciseness. Boosters, on the other hand, stand at the other extreme which signal a high degree of commitment or seriousness of attention. Although the two concepts have been investigated together, they are sometimes treated separately.

2.3 Categorization of Hedges and Boosters

Linguistic researchers particularly when referring to hedges and boosters have attempted to define these two markers in terms of a classification of their parts and sub-parts and how they should be categorized. There are several ways in which a writer's claim can be hedged or boosted and this leaves controversial views and personal choices on the researcher's part. Crompton (1997), for example, considers hedging as a vague concept. The notion of "vagueness" has been also recognized by Hyland (1996b) who classified hedges in several subgroups, but not without indicating that there is inevitably some overlap between the groups. Also Salager-Meyer (1994) points out that hedges are

ambiguous and harder to identify correctly and differentiate from other similar forms. The following section outlines some of the ways in which hedging devices can be classified, including the views given by Prince et al. (1982) and Salager-Meyer (1994).

One of the first taxonomies of hedging was produced by Prince et al. (1982) which was based on spoken discourse among physicians. In their analysis, hedges were classified into two major groups with their effect on the truth-value: *approximators* and *shields*. Approximators can be further classified into *adaptors* (*e.g.,* somewhat, almost, sort of) and *rounders* (e.g., about, approximately, essentially). The second type is *shields* which unlike *approximator*s do not affect the truth condition of the proposition, but instead show the amount of commitment that the speaker/writer has to the proposition. Shields can be further divided into two sub-categories: *plausibility shields* (e.g., I think, probably, as far as I can tell, right now) and *attribution shields* (e.g., presumably, according to). The terminology and categorization suggested by Prince et al. (1982) has been criticized in subsequent studies; for example, Salager-Meyer (1994) and Crompton (1997) argue that the way hedging devices is categorized combines both semantic (approximators) and pragmatic (shields) which Prince et al. themselves admit have little in common.

Crompton (1997) categorizes some of hedging devices compiled by several linguists. According to him, copulas other than *be* (e.g., *seem, appear*) are the only category of hedging that most linguists agree upon whereas the lexical agentive verbs (e.g., *think, believe*) and modal verbs (e.g., *may, should*) vary depending on the researcher. Crompton argues that probability adverbs (e.g., *perhaps, probably*) and probability

adjectives (e.g., *possible, probable*), on the other hand, are labeled as hedging devices just by some researchers (e.g., Hyland 1994; Salager-Meyer, 1994).

In her study on hedges in medical English written discourse, Salager-Meyer (1994) focused on the distribution of five hedging categories: *shields* (e.g. could, may); *approximators* (e.g., approximately, about); *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* (e.g., I think, I believe); *emotionally-charged boosters* (e.g., important, extremely) and *compound hedges* (e.g., would seem likely, could be somehow). In spite of the fact that her classification of the five categories seems to be overlapping and not quite distinct, Salager-Meyer's study is quite revealing in showing the different distribution of hedging categories (Crompton, 1997).

Martin-Martin (2008) proposed taxonomy for hedges based on different classifications that can be found in the literature. In his proposed taxonomy, hedges are divided into three categories: *indetermination*, *subjectivization* and *depersonalization*. *Indetermination* includes epistemic modality and approximators. Epistemic modality includes modal auxiliaries (e.g., may, might); semi-auxiliaries (e.g., to seem, to appear); epistemic lexical verbs (e.g., to suggest, to assume); verbs of cognition (e.g., believe, to think); modal adverbs (e.g., perhaps, possibly, probably); modal noun (e.g., possibility, assumption suggestion), and modal adjectives (e.g., possible, possible, probable, likely, probable). Approximators includes words signaling unwillingness to make precise complete commitment (e.g., approximately, about, relatively, frequently, relatively). *Subjectivization* includes the first person pronouns I/we followed by cognitive verbs (e.g., think and believe), or performative verbs (e.g., suggest, assume) and quality-

emphasizing adjectives and adverbial expressions (e.g., interesting, important). *Depersonalization* includes agentless passive and impersonal constructions (e.g., attempt was made to see... it seems/appears that...) and impersonal active construction (e.g., the finding reveals that…)

Quirk et al. (1985) proposed taxonomy for boosters which they called "intensity markers." According to Quirk et al. (1985), boosters are divided into *emphasizers* and *amplifiers*. Emphasizers include adverbs such as *actually, certainly, clearly, definitely, indeed, obviously, plainly,* and *really.* Amplifiers include adverbs such as *absolutely, enormously, strongly, deeply, completely, entirely, extremely,* and the intensifying use of *more.*

Under the taxonomy of hedges, Salager-Meyer (1994) included a category labeled "*emotionally-charged intensifiers."* Salager-Meyer used the term intensifiers instead of boosters. By these, Salager included words that modify the writer's assertions, such as *extremely interesting*, *of particular importance*, and *surprisingly.*

Vassileva (2001) classified boosters into three subcategories: Adjectival and adverbial phrases of high degree of certainty (e.g., *it is clear that*, *clearly*, *obviously*), strong modality (e.g., *must, shall, will, should*), and lexical verbs which signal high level of certainty (e.g., *believe*, *know*, and *show*).

In his study, Hinkel (2005) classified boosters into *emphatics*, *amplifiers,* and *universal* and *negative pronouns*. Universal and negative pronouns mark the extreme of the continuum of the meaning expressed by the indefinite pronouns. Amplifiers modify

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gradable adjectives or verbs and heighten their scalar lexical intensity. Emphatics have the effect of reinforcing the truth of the claim and the strength of the writer's conviction.

2.4 Studies on Hedges and Boosters

Previous research relating to hedges and boosters were initially associated with spoken discourse (Hyland, 1998a). In the preface of his book, "Hedging in Scientific Research Articles," Hyland (1998c) states that academic writing is similar to spoken discourse in which the writers try to persuade their readers that their claims are correct. The majority of the research conducted in the last four decades specifically focused on hedging and boosting roles in scientific discourse (i.e. research articles and scientific texts) which were written mostly in English, French, Spanish, German, Bulgarian, and Chinese (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Varttala, 1999, 2001; Silver, 2003; Vold, 2006; Yeung, 2007; Martin-Martin, 2008; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Winardi, 2009). The key motivation of these studies was to explore, classify, compare, and contrast hedging and boosting variations across the structure of the texts such as *Introduction*, *Discussion*, *Method* and *Result* sections.

2.4.1 Hedges and Boosters in the Research Articles and Scientific Texts

Salager-Meyer (1994) compared the use of hedges in five research papers (RP) and case reports (CR). Salager-Meyer's findings indicate that the *Discussion* section in RPs and CRs were heavily hedged while the *Method* section was the least hedged section. Shields, approximators and compound hedges made up 90% of the total number of hedges used. Salager-Meyer (1994) did not make a distinction between semantics and pragmatics of hedges. For example, the approximator in *"He is sort of tall"* is

semantically conceptualized as vagueness about the truth of the statement. Shields are used to show the writer's commitment towards the truth of the statement as in *"As I can tell,* the result is exaggerated.*"* Salager-Meyer used the term "compound hedges" and did not demonstrate what could be counted as compound hedges. Thus, Salager's taxonomy treated hedges as individual items. As Markkanen and Schroder (2006) point out, there is no clear-cut list of hedges because hedges can inherently acquire their quality depending on the communicative context. Clemen (1997) argues that hedges typically depend on the context and situation. Therefore, researchers do not agree on which lexical items, phrases, or syntactic structures should be classed as hedges. Most researchers have adopted Salager-Meyer's (1994) approach in dealing with hedges and boosters in different contexts.

Following Salager-Meyer (1994), Varttala (1999) examined five pre-established epistemic items, namely modal auxiliaries, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns in research articles. Varttala used Salager-Meyer's taxonomic model (i.e. five pre-established items.) The findings of Varttalla's study show that the "*Introduction"* and "*Discussion"* sections were found to be more hedged than other sections.

In another study to determine whether or not there were differences in the use of hedges between the scientific disciplines, Varttala (2001) compared hedges across three disciplines: economics, medicine and technology. The incidence of hedges in economics was reported the highest while the other two fields were reported one third lower.

Vassileva (2001) examined the similarities and differences in the degree of detachment (i.e. hedges) and commitment (i.e. boosters) in Bulgarian and English academic texts.

Vassileva notes that the linguists' focus on hedges over boosters is somewhat surprising, as the two concepts seem to be equally interesting topics of research both in terms of theory and practice. Vassileva concludes that the entire scale of certainty expressed in her corpus is vital for the correct interpretation of the study results. The findings demonstrate that Bulgarian scholars maintain in their native language the same commitment/detachment level throughout their academic texts, whereas Bulgarians writing in English tends to use a considerable number of boosters in the "*Discussion*" section and end up making rather careful, hedged claims in the *"Conclusion."* Native speakers of English, on the other hand, were observed to do the opposite, i.e. hedge their claims heavily in the *Discussion* part of their articles but use more emphasizing expressions and appearing more confident in the *"Concluding"* section of their texts (Vassileva, 2001).

Yang (2003) conducted a comparative study of hedges in English and Chinese academic discourse. In his study, Yang compared the frequency and distribution of hedges across the two languages and the rhetorical sections of the research articles. The results of his study show that hedges are employed three times more in English than Chinese research articles. Yang also observed that the "*Result*" and "*Discussion*" sections were the most heavily hedged part in the English research articles. The frequency of hedges in all Chinese research articles and rhetorical sections was almost evenly distributed. The epistemic adverbs, adjectives, and nouns were the most frequent epistemic categories in Chinese research articles and the same findings were obtained by Winardi (2009) in his comparative study between American and Chinese research articles.

Martin-Martin (2008) examined hedging devices in 40 articles written in English and Spanish in the field of clinical health. Twenty research articles were written in English and the other twenty were written in Spanish. Hedging devices were divided into three categories: indetermination, subjectivization and depersonalization. The findings show similarities between the two languages regarding the distribution of hedges across the structural units of the research articles. The findings also show that English writers prefer modality and approximators. The "*Discussion*" and "*Conclusion*" units were found to be the most heavily hedged in the research articles.

In a study aimed to trace and analyze the booster *evidently* as an expression of evaluation in a particular standpoint of academic writing, Silver (2003) chose published articles from the fields of economics and history. According to Silver (2003), academic writing involves the making of arguments or knowledge claims. Silver also notes that the writer needs to be well-acquainted with the rules and assumptions of the discipline and genre and should be aware of the audience and its probable reactions to the text. The adverbial *evidently* was chosen for its metadiscourse or interactional nature as it signals the writer's stance and certainty as a booster. Silver's analysis of the adverbial *evidently* reveals that it can function as a hedge or a booster simultaneously and, therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between hedges and boosters as adverbials.

Vold (2006) analyzed three factors (i.e. language, discipline, and gender) that may have an influence on the use of epistemic modality markers which indicate uncertainty in RAs written in English, French and Norwegian. The selection of epistemic modality was based on the frequency of the items in an exploratory corpus of 30 articles. The results

of Vold's study show that English and Norwegian researchers used uncertainty markers more significantly than the French did. Individual variations were reported more among English and Norwegian researchers; yet French researchers were more homogenous in this respect. The variations between disciplines were found to be quite small compared with the variations between languages. The most important factor in regard to the frequency of this type of hedge is associated with language or nationality of the writer.

2.4.2 Hedges and Boosters in the Newspapers and Advertisements

Janina (2008) studied the frequency and distribution of hedges in four leading newspapers, namely The Guardian, The Times, The Herald Tribune and The Independent, focusing on the editorials and news stories. In Janina's study, hedges were recorded, calculated, and quantitatively analyzed to determine the frequency and distribution of hedges in the sections. Janina did not provide a contextual interpretation of hedges. Hedges were treated from a rhetorical point of view. The results obtained show that general hedging frequency per thousand words is higher in editorials than in news stories. The editorial part is characterized as being subjective, and at the same time persuasive in nature. The chief editor tries to express his/her opinion on current issues of general interest and importance. The news story element, on the other hand, is assumed to present facts, events more objectively and, therefore, less hedged than editorials.

Dafouz-Milne (2008) studied how metadiscourse markers contribute toward the overall persuasion of a text. Davouz-Milne's corpus-genre consists of two newspapers: one written in English (*The Times*) and the other written in Spanish (*EL Pais*). Within the category of interpersonal metadiscourse markers, Dafouz divided hedges into three

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categories: epistemic verbs, probability adverbs, and epistemic expressions. The informants participating in the study were instructed to rank each text according to its persuasiveness and then give their explanation for their choice. In addition to this, metadiscourse markers were identified and counted in the texts. The results of the study show that hedges were the most common category of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in both British and Spanish sets of data while boosters were found to favor persuasion, rather than expressing certainty.

Fuertes-Oliver (2001) examined the use of persuasive markers in the field of advertisement in English, focusing on headlines and slogans. As two types of interactional metadiscourse, hedges and boosters were used in the genre of advertisement. Boosters are defined as mitigating the consumers' "moral dilemma."

In a rhetorically oriented study of business promotional genre, Yeung (2007) states that the business promotional genre is typically persuasive in nature and that it is generally associated with the practical issues of the business world. Yeung argues that the value of the applicability of the theoretical concepts can be found in the conceptual structure of the business genre as compared to academic articles. Since business promotional genre is close to real-world problems, it ends with recommendations concerning decision-making, rather than suggestions for further study as in the case with research articles. Yeung (2007) further argues that business letters exploit several methods such as using boosters to reach their persuasive goal and support their general positive tone.

2.4.3 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL Writing Context

While there is a rich literature on the use of hedges and boosters in research articles and scientific texts (e.g. Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1994, 1996a, 1999, 2005; Varttala, 1999, 2001; Silver, 2003; Hinkel, 2004a; Vold, 2006), few studies on hedges and boosters have been conducted on the EFL writing context (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Nikula, 1997; Hinkel, 1997, 2005; Wishnoff, 2000; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Taghizadeh & Tajabadi, 2013). Recognizing this fact, this study aims to investigate various types of hedges and boosters in the EFL undergraduate written context, an area which has been overlooked (Hinkel & Hyland, 2005; Lee, 2008; Yu, 2009). As Hyland (1994) and Salager-Meyer (1997) state, in spite of the widespread use of hedges in academic writing, hedges are largely ignored in pedagogical materials geared to non-native speakers of English. Skelton (1988b) points outs that hedging is a significant communicative resource for L2 student writers at any proficiency level as it plays an important part in demonstrating writer's competence. Hyland (1994, 1998a, 2004), therefore, suggests that EFL learners should be exposed to hedges from the earliest stages of the learning process, and textbook writers and material developers should incorporate hedges into the textbooks even for introductory levels. For this reason, Knoch (2007) urges researchers to examine the use of hedges and boosters and identify the differences between writers of higher and lower proficiency levels. The following discussions review studies conducted on hedges and boosters in the EFL writing context.

Hyland and Milton (1997) compared the expressions of doubt (i.e. hedges) and certainty (i.e. boosters) in the examination scripts (essays) of 900 Chinese speaking and British school leavers of similar age and education level. The materials for their study were two examination scripts. The first was a collection of essays totalling 500,000 words written by Hong Kong students for the high school General Certificate of Education (GCE). The second was also a collection of essays totalling 500,000 words written by British school leavers. The researchers first prepared an inventory of hedges and boosters based on literature resources, and then determined the frequency of these expressions employed in the students' scripts. The findings of their study revealed that Chinese EFL writers differ significantly from British native speakers in relying on a more limited range of items, making strong commitments and exhibiting a greater problem in conveying certainty. The Chinese learners appeared to transfer features of more personal involvement (e.g., *I deeply believe that…*) and were far likely to employ the first personal pronoun with epistemic verb (e.g., *I think…*) than native speakers, and this likelihood increased as proficiency declined. The findings of Hyland and Milton (1997) were supported by Stubbs (1986) that EFL learners' use of hedges sounds rude or impolite to native speakers because they do not know or have not acquired how to use hedges appropriately. These findings were also confirmed in Clyne's (1991) study that EFL German writers tend to hedge their statements far more strongly than native speakers of English.

The major drawback of Hyland and Milton's (1997) study is that it made a direct comparison between the British and Chinese school leavers. Obviously, there are possible educational and societal differences between the British and Chinese school

leavers which might prevent a direct comparison between the two groups, and thus may affect the observed results. For example, Chinese school leavers belong to high-context culture while British school leavers belong to low-context culture (Hofstede, 1991). In high-context culture, a person does not get to the point directly, and thus tend to use more hedges than does a person in low-context culture (Zahrana, 1995).

Another weakness in Hyland and Milton's (1997) study is the materials of their study which consist of essays of different topics written by Hong Kong students and British school leavers. The different topics may reflect actual differences when considering the results. As Holmes (1988) states, the types, frequencies, and uses of hedges and boosters are topic-dependent, in that the two features vary as the topic varies. Therefore, the current study takes into account the general equivalence of the genre i.e. persuasive genre and the participants' cultural background i.e. the Arabic culture.

Nikula (1997) compared the use of hedges between non-native speakers (Finnish learners) and native speakers of English (British learners) in order to find if there was a pragmatic transfer. The participants of the study were Finnish university students and native speakers of English who were British university students of similar age. The data obtained consisted of different conversations between Finnish and British university students. Nikula (1997) observed that non-native speakers of English tend to use less hedges than native speakers of English. Nikula (1997) also noticed that native speakers often use shields, approximators and implicit hedges (e.g., agreement or expressions of personal opinions) more than do native speakers. Moreover, non-native speakers sounded more formal and detached than native speakers of English. In terms of

qualitative difference, native speakers used the expression of *I think* in combination with other hedges while non-native speakers used the expression of *I think* in single utterances.

Nikula's (1997) study quantitatively compared hedges used by the Finnish speakers with native speakers of English in informal conversational settings. The data consist of different topics where speakers are free to drift from the topic or change it entirely. The different topics may result in differences in the use of hedges due to the nature of the topic, and thus affect the results. In other words, comparing NS with NNS through different topics made it difficult to compare the frequency use of hedges employed by the two groups. Some researchers emphasize that when comparing or contrasting the linguistic features used by the NNs and NS, researchers should bear in mind that the use of linguistic features is culture-and topic-dependent (Hinkel, 2002). Therefore, one of the purposes of the current study was to compare hedges and boosters as two linguistic features used in the same two topics i.e. persuasive essay and job application letter within a culture i.e. the Arabic culture.

In a comparative study, Hinkel (2005) analyzed various types of hedges and boosters employed in 246 essays written by 745 native and non-native students during a routine placement test in four U.S. universities. All students have a sufficient proficiency level with TOEFL scores ranged from 533 to 620. Hinkel first counted hedges and boosters manually to obtain the median frequency rates of the devices used in the essays of native and non-native students. Then, the number of words marking hedges and boosters was computed to calculate the percentage rate of each feature. An analysis of frequency uses

in the students' texts was carried out. To examine the differences between native and non-native students, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the two sets of data based on the frequency percentage rates. The findings show that L2 writers employ hedges which are largely found in casual spoken interactions. The findings also show that L2 students employ a higher degree of generalizations and boosters than do NSs.

Hinkel's (2005) study focused on quantitative analysis of hedges and boosters employed by the native and non-native speakers of English in their written texts. However, as Varttala (2001) and Kudrnacova (2010) state, studies on hedges and boosters should take into account not only the quantitative analyses but also their functions in the context in which they are realized. The aim of this study, therefore, was not only identifying and calculating the frequency rates of these two features but also offering insights into their possible functions in the context in which they take place. Hyland (1998a) highlights that researchers should be aware of the context in which hedges and boosters take place, and for any quantitative study, hedges and boosters should be supplemented with contextual explanation.

In his quasi- experimental study, Wishnoff (2000) investigated the effect of instruction on the learners' use of hedging devices on both the academic written papers and the computer-mediated communication. Wishnoff (2000) targeted 26 ESL students in order to collect two types of written data: academic research papers and computer mediated discussion. Both groups were exposed to training for one semester. Then, the students' final performance was compared to their pre-test writing. In his study, Wishnoff (2000)

addressed only hedging devices (more specifically verb choice, quantifiers, modifiers, and conditional statements).

The finding of Wishnoff's study showed that in the treatment group there were statistically significant increases in the use of hedging markers in the academic research paper and the computer-mediated discussions. Wishnoff also found that instruction has an actual effect on enhancing students' pragmatic awareness and thus assists in the development of their pragmatic competence. Wishnoff's results also noted that the learner's level of linguistic competency seems to influence whether or not transfer of training will occur.

One of the main weaknesses of Wishnoff's study is in the data of his study as Wishnoff compared hedging devices in the written communication (i.e. academic written paper) with those in the chat room-like discussion (i.e. computer-mediated communication). Since the former is formal communication and the latter is informal-like discussions, they are incomparable. Another weakness in Wishnoff's study is the task type which is not considered in the computer mediated discussions as participants are free to drift from the topic or change it entirely. However, the use of hedging devices varied with the task type (Hinkel, 2002; Holmes, 1988).

Wishnoff's quasi-experimental design appears to have another drawback. The quasi-experimental design lacks random assignment which makes statistical tests invalid (Shadish, Cook & Compbell, 2002). Without random assignment, causal inferences become quite difficult to make (Prater, 1983; Henrichsen et al., 1997).

Since control is lacking in the quasi-experimental design, the current study adopted the pretest-posttest experimental and control group design which is often called the true experiment (Kothari, 2004). As Prater (1983) states, the pretest-posttest experimental and control group design is regarded as the most accurate form of experimental research, in that it tries to control extraneous variables (e.g., history, maturation, and participant selection) and so there can be little argument about the results. Unlike the quasi-experimental design, the subjects in a true experimental design are randomly assigned and this enables the researcher to show a cause- and-effect relationship.

Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) investigated the effect of explicit instruction of the textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers on three levels i.e. advanced, intermediate, and elementary EFL learners. The participants consist of 94 undergraduate students majoring in English Literature at the University of Isfahan in Iran. First, the three groups were given a pretest to check their initial knowledge and unprompted use of metadiscourse markers. Then, all the three groups received explicit instruction on metadiscourse markers for six successive sessions. Then, the three groups were given a posttest to measure their writing ability with metadiscourse markers. The findings indicated that explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers significantly improves EFL learners' writing. The findings also indicated that learners at the intermediate level improved significantly greater than those at the advanced and elementary levels.

One of the main weaknesses of Dastjerdi and Shirzad's (2010) study is that it adopted a one-group pretest-posttest experimental design without a control group. This design makes any causal inferences invalid (Henrichsen et al., 1997). As Chawla and Sondhi

(2011) state, the results obtained from one-group pretest-posttest without control group design could be questionable as the researcher is not able to control extraneous factors. Therefore, due to the limitation and weakness of the one-group pretest-posttest design, the current study adopted the pretest-posttest experimental and control group design in which the effect of extraneous variables could be minimized from both the experimental and control group.

Taghizadeh and Tajabadi (2013) investigated the effect of training on the metadiscourse markers on 32 EFL learners' writing performance, using Hyland's (2000a) model of metadiscourse markers in the essay writing. Two instruments were used in their study: a pre-test and a posttest. The participants were first requested to write an essay on a topic provided. Then, the participants received a four-week instruction on different categories of metadiscourse markers. In order to investigate the impact of metadiscourse instruction on learners' writing, they were given a posttest of writing. The pre-test and posttest were then marked by two raters. The findings of the study revealed instruction on metadiscourse markers was effective in helping the learners perform better in writing test.

One of the limitations of Taghizadeh and Tajabadi's (2013) study is the small number of participants. A study conducted with a small number of participants yield results that cannot be generalized to the rest of the population. Additionally, the participants of the study were not selected randomly as the study followed the intact group design. With this design, the participants are given training and then measured where no additional group is provided for comparison (Rick, 2006).

To conclude, research on hedges and boosters consists of comparative and experimental studies. For comparative studies, the focus was on the frequency use of hedges and boosters employed in NS and NNS written texts (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Nikula, 1997; Hinkel, 2005). In these studies, the quantitative analysis of the number of hedges and boosters was not supplemented with contextual interpretation. However, as Kudrnacova (2010) points out, studies on hedges and boosters should take into account not only their quantitative analyses but also their functions in the context they are realized. The aim of this study, therefore, was not only identifying and calculating the frequency uses of these two features but also offering insights into their possible functions in the context in which they take place. The analysis included three techniques: device identification, frequency computation, and contextual explanation. In the first stage, hedges and boosters were first identified and counted in the texts. In the second stage, frequencies of hedges and boosters were obtained, and in the third stage, contextual interpretation of their use was carried out.

For experimental studies, various types of experimental designs were reviewed in the previous studies. These included quasi-experimental, one-group pretest-posttest, and intact group designs (Whisnoff, 2000; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Taghizadeh & Tajabadi, 2013). However, these designs suffer most from the lack of control of extraneous factors (e.g., history, maturation), and thus do not provide accurate results. Therefore, for the experimental part of the current study, the pretest-posttest experimental and control group design was adopted to makes up for the shortcomings of the designs previously reviewed. The design adopted in this study can be regarded as an

appropriate design, in that it enables the researcher to control extraneous variables and show a cause-and-effect relationship (Henrichsen et al., 1997).

2.5 Hedges and Boosters in Gender Linked Studies

From birth, men and women differ psychologically and physiologically which lead to social differences between them (Coates, 1993; Tannen, 1990). The social difference between men and women was perceived as a result of male dominance over female (Lakoff, 1975; Fishman, 1983). This means that women are a subordinate minority group. Research on men's and women's language use date back to the mid 1970s but these were conducted largely in the English-speaking countries (Holmes, 2009). These studies assume that there are significant differences between men and women's speech in terms of phonology, lexis and discourse patterns. Studies on interactional features have been based on the analysis of spoken language (e.g., Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1993, 1995; Coates, 1993; Cameron, 1998; Eckert & Sally, 2003; Romaine, 2003). As stated by Barron (2004), the study of gender differences pertaining to the interactional features is based on spoken-language behavior which relies largely on direct observations, intuitions, interviews, and transcriptions.

2.5.1 Gender Differences in Spoken Discourse

Gender difference linked studies have originated from Lakoff's (1975) study on spoken discourse. In her book entitled *Language and Woman's Place,* Lakoff (1975) coined the phrase "women's language" to refer to a group of linguistic devices that serve this function, that include hesitations, intensive adverbs, empty adjectives, tag questions, hedges, intensifiers, and compound requests. Hedges form part of this group. According

to Lakoff, women use hedges more because they are socialized to believe that affirming themselves strongly is not polite or ladylike. Moreover, Lakoff suggests that women use intensifiers to express that they feel strongly about something but do not dare to make it clear how strongly. Such claim has also been supported by subsequent research (e.g., Coates, 1993; Holmes, 1993; Holmes, 1995; McMillan, Clifton, McGrath & Gale, 1977).

Since Lakoff's (1975) study relied largely on personal observation and intuition, Dubois and Crouch (1975) launched a critique on Lakoff's claims, arguing that Lakoff's hypothesis might be biased in favor of highly stereotyping beliefs or folk linguistics. Dubois and Crouch (1975) argue that her conclusions were made on uncontrolled and unverifiable observation of others and were based on highly skewed and non-random sample of people.

Subsequent research has appeared to be consistent with some of Lakoff's (1975) claims. An early study by Hirschman (1994) of a small group of American speakers found that women tend to use fillers and affirmative responses in conversation than do men. It has also been observed that women are more likely to use standard and overtly prestigious pronunciation to talk about relationships, to apologize and pay compliments, to be supportive of other speakers, to avoid interrupting males, and to talk less than men in mixed gender conversations.

Holmes (1995) examined the relationship between gender and communication. Although locating few global sex differences in the frequency of hedging, Holmes states that men and women use hedges in distinct ways. Women typically employ them as strategies of

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"positive politeness" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For instance, women generally use the hedge *sort of* to fulfill emotional functions and to soften statements in a way that shows concern for others' feelings (Holmes, 1988). Similarly, they tend to use the hedge *you know* as a facilitative device, a mechanism for drawing others into a conversation (Holmes, 1986). Men's use *of sort of* and *you know,* on the other hand, generally serves goals of an epistemic nature; that is, men hedge in order to register degrees of verbal hesitancy and uncertainty.

2.5.2 Gender Differences in Written Discourse

Studies that examined the effect of gender on EFL writing was reported to be little (Morris, 1998; Sunderland, 2000; Barron, 2003, 2004; Waskita, 2008; Holmes, 2009). The following studies review some of the main gender related differences in relation to the use of hedges and boosters in the written discourse.

Robson, Francis, and Read (2002) analyzed 87 essays written by history undergraduate students. Robson et al. observed that gender differences among history undergraduate writers were limited although men were slightly more likely to use bold constructions than women. This may be because paralinguistic features such as stress and intonation were not present and because higher levels of conventionalization might have overridden deferential behavior elicited by face-to-face contact.

Mulac and Lundell (1994) studied impromptu essays in which college students were asked to describe landscape scenes that were projected onto a large screen. Drawing upon earlier work in the language and gender literature, researchers coded the essays

with respect to 17 linguistic features, including "male language variables" (e.g., references to quantity, judgmental adjectives, elliptical sentences, locatives, and sentence-initial conjunctions or filler words) and "female language variables" (e.g., intensive adverbs, references to emotion, dependent clauses, sentence-initial adverbials, uncertainty verbs, hedges, and long mean-length sentences). Mulac and Lundell note that the analysis of the essays with respect to gender-coded language variables correctly identified the essay-writer's gender 72.5% of the time.

In a related study conducted by Argamon, Koppel, Fine and Shimoni (2005), gender differences were examined in a large corpus of fiction writing from British National Corpus. They examined gender differences in the occurrence of certain keywords such as personal pronouns, deictics and prepositions. Argamon et al. (2005) analyzed the texts of the applied science, arts, commerce, and leisure. The findings suggest generally very modest but statistically significant differences between men and women. Such differences, as the writers suggest, result from a female concern with relationships and a male concern with systems and analysis.

In another related study, Palander-Collin (1999) examined personal letters written by men and women in the 17th century. Focusing on the phrase *I think* which combines the first person pronoun *I* and the cognitive verb *think*, Palander-Collin's result is supported by Biber and Reppen (1998) that personal letters written by women show higher levels of interpersonal involvement than do letters written by men.

The literature reviewed indicates that hedges and boosters were largely conducted in the spoken discourse within the English-speaking countries. In these studies, women were found to use more hedges and boosters than do men. They typically employ hedges and boosters either to show their politeness or express their strong feelings. However, studies on hedges and boosters in relation to gender within EFL context appear to be neglected. Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate hedges and boosters in the gender related differences of Arab cultural background.

2.6 Contrastive Rhetoric Studies

Rhetoric is concerned with the study of the "available means of persuasion" and how the writers/speakers project oral/written discourse for the purpose of making meanings, and affecting audiences (Valero-Garcés, 1996). According to Valero-Garcés, rhetoric refers to "the strategies the writer uses to convince readers of his/her claims." (p. 281). The concept of the contrastive rhetoric was first proposed by Kaplan (1966). Kaplan recognized that culture influences second language writing, believing that different languages have their own specific and rhetorical features. For example, students from different language background prefer a certain type of rhetorical features which may have negative influence on their EFL writing (Hinkel, 1999). For EFL students, rhetorical features transferred to their writing in the EFL do not only occur at the word and sentence level but also at the discourse level (Moran, 1991). As Kaplan (1966) states, when rhetorical features transfer from the native language to the target language, the writing produced fails to convey the message to the intended audience. In other words, Kaplan believes that as children acquire their native language, they also acquire

acceptable forms of rhetorical patterns, which differ from culture to culture and which affect their L2.

Since students' original styles of their L1 language may not be applicable to the task given by the target language teachers, they need to be familiar with the academic writing conventions of the target language which has its own rhetorical features (Jordan, 1997). Therefore, rhetorical strategies are those devices with which ESL/EFL writers use to organize and present their ideas in the form of writing conventions that are acceptable to native speakers of English (Silva, 1990). Hedges and boosters are some of the rhetorical features of persuasion which signal commitment and detachment in one's claim (Hyland, 2005, 2010; Ignacio, 2009). Kaplan (1997), for example, points out that confidence and detachment from one's proposed ideas may be culturally inherent and that is reflected in the EFL/ESL students' writing.

Studies on contrastive rhetoric have focused on the differences and similarities in ESL and EFL writing across languages and cultures encountered by second language writers (Connor, 1996). The field considers language and writing to be cultural phenomena (Kaplan, 1997; Connor, 2004). The first study of contrastive rhetoric began in the 1960's with initial work by Kaplan (1966). Since then, many researchers have studied rhetorical differences across languages.

As Ibrahim et al. (2000) and Ismail (2010) state, Arabic contrastive rhetorical studies have not been adequately examined compared to other languages. Most contrastive studies have focused on salient features of Arabic texts such as lexical repetition, structural parallelism and coordination (Fakhri, 2009).

In their analysis, Khalil (1989) and Johnstone (1991) observed that Arab writers overuse reiteration of the same lexical item, and coordination in Arabic texts is a prime example. Johnstone demonstrates that Arabic discourse heavily relies on coordination at the expense of subordination, and it employs a great deal of repetition and formulaic patterns as illustrated in the following example:

"يكفي ان الامة العربية تملك وحدة اللغة التي تصنع وحدة الفكر والعقل ويكفي ان الامة العربية تملك وحدة التاريخ التي تصنع وحدة الضمير الوجدان ويكفي ان الامة العربية تملك وحدة الامل التي تصنع وحدة المستقبل والمصير."

"It is enough that the Arab nation possesses unity of language which produces *unity* of intellect and mind, *and it is enough that the Arab nation possesses unity of* history, which produces unity of conscience and affect, *and it is enough that the Arab nation possesses unity of* hope which produces unity of future and destiny" *(*Johnstone, 1991: 107).

Al-Jubouri (1984) examined lexical and syntactic repetition. Al-Jubouri found that there is high frequency of strings of two or three words which are repeated with essentially the same meaning. Other studies have investigated the occurrence of particular linguistic structures in written texts and attempted to provide an account for their use. For example, Al-Batal (1990) dealt with the discourse functions of connectives such as *wa* (and), *laakinna* (but), and *fa* (therefore) and suggested that these encode hierarchal relationships among parts of texts and enhance the rhetorical effectiveness of arguments. Khalil (2000) examined the rhetorical use in news discourse of sentence-initial markers such as the particle *qad* (verily) and phrases like *mina alma ruufi anna* (it is known that).

According to Khalil, these elements serve to signal different degrees of importance of the information provided in the texts.

Kamel (1989) studied the persuasive writing of Arabs from a contrastive rhetoric perspective. Kamel compared the English and Arabic persuasive writing of 44 ESL Arab students at various educational levels on two different topics using three quantitative measures, namely, syntactic maturity, audience adaptation, and argumentation strategies. Kamel also investigated how the language proficiency level of the ESL subgroup correlated with their performance. Kamel's goal was to test Kaplan's claim that the English compositions of ESL students show that students transfer composing strategies from their native language to the target language. Kamel also tested Koch's (1981, 1983) claim that Arabs depend heavily on repetition and presentation rather than on logical evidence for persuasion in Arabic. According to Kamel, when writing in Arabic, ESL/EFL learners write longer and more syntactically essays, use more audience adaptation strategies, and produce more balanced arguments than they do when composing in English.

Ayari (1992) examined 31 written samples from Arab student writers to investigate the extent to which their writing reflects the rhetorical conventions of their native language. The writing task involved describing the various stages of the prayer process. The Arab students wrote in both Arabic and English. Ayari (1992) found that the Arabic samples varied considerably in rhetorical structure. This finding is supported by Patai (1973) that the Arabic language is a language that is characterized by rhetoricism, and that leads to exaggeration, over-assertion, and repetition. Similarly, Farghal (1991) observed that

emphasis, which is *takeed* in Arabic written discourse, is characterized by having a high degree of intensification. Such observation is supported by Connor (1996) and Zahrana (1995) who found that the text written by Arab writers is enhanced by emphatic features which are often seen as rhetorical devices to convey the writers' power of conviction.

Al-Khuweileh and Al- Shoumali (2000) investigated the relationship between poor writing in English and Arabic. Data were collected from150 informants at Jordan University of Science and Technology. The findings support the view that poor writing in L1 is usually associated with poor writing in EFL.

Daoud (1998) examined the role of exchange strategies in enhancing Arab EFL learners' writing skills and in changing their attitude towards the target language culture. The subjects of the study were ESP medical students at Damascus University. The subjects were asked to swap essays with their American counterparts. They were asked to write about their personalities, lives, and culture. The experiment was conducted within an ESP framework course that was based on the teaching of the four skills. The findings show that the subjects lack appropriate vocabulary and expressions. In addition, some of them were found to be aggressive in addressing their American counterparts.

Al-Jamhoor (2001) carried out cross-cultural analysis of the writing of Arab-speaking students of English. The study mainly focused on the writing problems faced by Arab EFL students at Imam University, Saudi Arabia. Fifty students were required to write essays in English and Arabic. These essays were, then, compared to essays written by a control group, consisting of fifty American students at Michigan State University. The

researcher found that the Arabic speaking students used fewer conclusions, t-units but more discourse units than did their American counterparts.

As indicated, most contrastive studies have focused on salient features of Arabic texts such as lexical repetition, structural parallelism, and coordination. Hedges and boosters have not been addressed in the English-Arabic contrastive studies. Therefore, it is one of the purposes of the present study to fill this gap by contrasting hedges and boosters in English and Arabic persuasive essays and job application letters.

2.7 Genre of the Persuasive Essay

When students transfer from high school to university as undergraduates, they face new challenges of learning certain conventions in writing persuasive genres such as academic term papers and written examinations. According to Tanko and Tamasi (2008), research on persuasive texts of university students has become a major concern for people in tertiary educational institutions. As Crowhurst (1990) states, the genre of persuasive essay is more demanded in higher educational context as writers work towards entering the discourse community. Along the same lines, Henry and Roseberry (1997) state that the most common place for the genre of persuasive essay is in the higher educational setting.

Intaraprawat (2000) defines the genre of persuasive essay as a kind of writing which attempts to persuade someone of something. This genre entails a controversial issue which the writer attempts to persuade readers to agree or disagree with his/her point of

view. The writer has a goal to change readers' attitude to get them believe the claim made (Gass & Seiter, 2007).

Crowhurst (1990) argues that the educated person is supposed to be able to position himself/herself on important matters so as to persuade members of colleagues, fellow citizens, and government authorities. Thus, the ability to position oneself in a persuasive text is an important skill for general life purposes.

Research into the genre of persuasive essay suggests that students experience difficulty in assembling written arguments in their college years (Stephens, 2003). This raises questions why college students seem to find written arguments harder than other kinds of writing. Kellogg (1991) found that compared to narrative and descriptive writing, the persuasive essay written by college students exhibited the least cohesion and fluency. Evidence suggests that post-secondary students also struggle with the "macro" aspects of writing arguments. Hillock's (1995) examination of 400 arguments written by high school and college students found that many students fail to provide grounds in support of claims even though possible grounds are available to them, explicit statement of warrants is extremely rare, and the consideration of counter-arguments is virtually non-existent. In line with Hillock's study, Anderson, Saden and Hunter (2001) examined the writing of 30 undergraduate psychology students. The findings indicate that participants could make appropriate judgments about some types of evidence, but tended to support their arguments through generalizations.

Thompson (2001) comments that the genre of persuasive essay in English is particularly problematic for non-native speakers who are often both linguistically and rhetorically

inexperienced. This difficulty arises when EFL writers cannot distinguish between opinions from facts (Hyland & Milton, 1997). Thus, writing a task of a persuasive nature requires sound argumentation. Crowhurst (1991) states that arguing a point of view is particularly challenging, even though it is important both for academic success and for general life purposes. Knudson (1994) contends that persuasion is one of the genres which is essential for full participation in society.

Existing studies indicate that the overall quality of students' persuasive essay writing is relatively poor, compared to that of descriptive, narrative, and expository essays (Connor, 1990; Stephens, 2003). According to Connor, the genre of persuasive essay has been ignored by researchers for several reasons: First, there has been confusion concerning the nature of the genre. Second, students, in general, have difficulty generating persuasive content and elaborating their ideas with evidence and points of views. Hale, Bridgman, Carson, and Kantor (1996) state that the ability to generate and organize ideas with examples or evidence for argumentative purpose involves complex functions. Because of its complexity, the genre of persuasive essay has not been satisfactorily analyzed (Galdia, 2009).

While writing at the school level concentrates on supplying the readers with a body of knowledge (e.g., facts) rather than developing arguments, writing at university level relies more on the knowledge of academic conventions such as critical voice, appropriate stance, and successful development in arguing a point of view. Arguing for and against a certain proposition is one of the most frequent and important kinds of assignments at the university level (Crowhurst, 1991). Accordingly, the reason for

examining hedges and boosters in the genre of persuasive essay at the college is that learners in the college have not previously been exposed to the underlying principles of EFL writing (e.g., discourse, metadiscourse, text-type, and other interactional aspects of writing). Learners at the college level have sufficiently good proficiency levels that enable them to produce both the content and metadiscourse components. As Firkin, Forey, and Sengupta (2007) describe it, writing a complete text by low proficient EFL students is burdened with difficulties as these learners tend to be taught in a way that focuses on the sentence level. In the case of teaching EFL writing in the Yemeni context, students are geared towards formal accuracy (i.e. the focus on correcting forms, rather than appropriate use of language). Therefore, it is the aim of the present study to go beyond the sentence level to uncover the underlying metadiscourse features of the Yemeni EFL undergraduates' persuasive writing. As two metadiscourse features, hedges and boosters have been chosen to be investigated in the genre of persuasive essay as these two elements would contribute to the overall persuasion of a text (Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Vázquez; Diana, 2009). Therefore, the genre-based approach best suits the purpose of this study which attempts to enhance the learners' awareness of using hedges and boosters as two linguistic features and overcome the learners' difficulties in writing in specific contexts.

2.8 Genre of the Job Application Letter

The job application letter is associated with the promotional genre. The purpose of the job application letter is to promote oneself in the most persuasive manner; that is, in writing a job application letter, the communicative purpose is to persuade so as to obtain a response from the readers, which is a call for interview. Bhatia (1993) proposes a

number of moves in persuading a prospective employer in writing the job application letter. These moves are "establishing self," "offering self," "enclosing documents," "using pressure tactics," "inviting further action," and "goodwill ending." Previous studies on the genre of job application letter have focused on the functions of the macro linguistics features (Bhatia, 1993; Henry & Roseberry, 2001; Sii, 2004; Wang, 2005; Ding, 2007; Stapa, Darus, Mustaffa & Masum, 2005). Chakorn (2002) argues that Bhatia's (1993) move realizations are based on a description of each move and no micro-linguistic features have been explored. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to go beyond the macro analysis to the micro linguistic features by identifying hedges and boosters as two micro-linguistic features. The following discussion reviews the studies on the job application letter.

In his study, Sii (2004) states that the genre of the job application letter is obligatory in seeking a job. According to Sii, sales promotion and job application letters can be viewed as the same genre, which is called the promotional genre because they share the same communicative purpose, which is to promote something. Sales promotion letters promote a product or service whereas job application letters promote the job applicant. However, they vary from each other in the way that sales promotion letters are generally unsolicited while job application letters are normally written in response to an advertisement (Bhatia, 1993).

In a study conducted by Wang (2005), 40 job application letters written by Chinese were analyzed, using the genre analysis of the job application letters. It was found that 90% of the letters applied "moves" in different rates. Along the same line, Henry and Roseberry

(2001) analyzed 40 job application letters written by native English speakers (NES) using a Wordsmith computer programme to look at the "moves" and "strategies" of job application letters. The results show striking differences between the different levels of analyses. Their study shows that this type of analysis gives language teachers substantial information that would make teaching and learning more effective.

In an article examining application letters written by graduate school candidates, Ding (2007) points out that despite the importance of this genre for the graduate admissions process, there has been little research and instruction in college writing courses. In an overview of previous attempts to analyze the structure of application letters across several different contexts, Ding identified some key communicative purposes of the application letter for different graduate programmes, including reasons for choosing the specific programme of study, relevant experiences, qualifications, goals, and other unique aspects of the applicant.

Based on Bhatia's (1993) genre analysis approach, Stapa et al. (2005) identified the moves of job application letters of Malaysian graduates. The findings revealed that the majority of the applicants were not properly equipped to write impressive and effective job application letters. They need to be trained on how to write job application letters in a persuasive way to meet the communicative purpose of the promotional genre. This training could be given at an early stage in their academic life to better prepare them to meet the demands of effective job application letters for their future endeavor.

In a contrastive study, Al-Ali (2006a) investigated the genre components and pragmatic strategies of job application letters written by Jordanian Arabic-English bilinguals. In the

study, 90 job application letters were written by 90 job applicants. Data were collected and analyzed within the moves proposed by Bhatia (1993) and the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. The findings indicate that politeness strategies are not properly utilized and the genre components are poorly managed in the job application letters. The findings also show that the bilingual writers tend to avoid negative politeness but make frequent inappropriate use of positive politeness strategies due to their lack of knowledge of the social culture.

Abbas (2009) conducted a quasi-experimental study to examine the effect of genre-based instruction on EFL learners' writing performance on a job application letter writing task. Seventy of the participants enrolled in the experimental group were taught how to write a job application letter through the genre-based techniques. The other group of the participants (70) did not take this treatment. The findings of the study show significant changes in the quality of writing as a result of genre-based instruction.

To conclude, studies on the genre of job application letter have focused on the structural organization of the letter while hedges and boosters have not been addressed in the genre of job application letter. Therefore, research into hedges and boosters motivated the researcher to fill this gap by investigating these two features in the students' job application letters.

2.9 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study draws on three theories: the pragmatics theory, the metadiscourse theory, and the genre theory. The pragmatics theory accounts for how EFL writers use hedges and boosters in the genres of the persuasive essays and job application letters. The second theory is the metadiscourse theory which is concerned with how writers project themselves into a text to signal their attitudes and commitments. The third theory is the genre theory under which the genres of the persuasive essays and job application letter exist. Figure 2.1 summarizes these three theories that were drawn on to identify various types and functions of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduates' persuasive essays and job application letters.
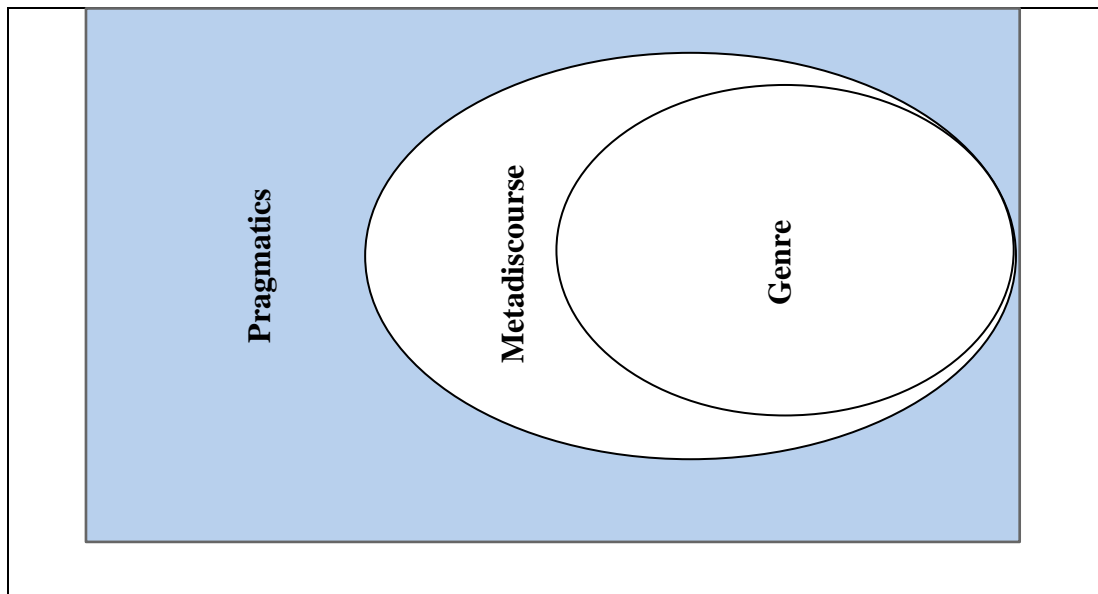
Figure 2. 1 Theoretical framework of the study

2.9.1 Pragmatics Theory

Pragmatics is a young field that dates back to the 1980s (Bou Franch, 1998). The term *pragmatics* is well defined by Levinson (1983) as the field of study in which linguistic features are considered in relation to the use of language. This suggests the study of pragmatics focuses on linguistic features and looks into language use. Thus, pragmatics theory concerns how non-native-speakers of the target language understand and produce linguistic actions and how they acquire EFL pragmatic knowledge especially the choices of words they make, the constraints they encounter in using language (Kasper, 1992; Crystal, 1997). As Bardovi-Harlig (1999) points out, pragmatic discourse features have not been the target of inquiry where hedges and boosters in the EFL students' writing, in general, and in English-Arabic studies, in particular, appeared to be overlooked (Schmidt, 1993; Coffin & Hewings, 2004).

Hedges have been addressed in oral interactions (Beebe, Takahashi & Ullis-Weltz, 1990; Nelson, Al-Batal & Al-Bakary, 2002; Al-Issa, 2003; Kwon, 2004), gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986), apology (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981), complaint (House & Kasper, 1981; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993), disagreement (Beebe & Takahshi, 1989a), and request (Blum-Kulka & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 1997; Yu, 1999). It was Myers (1989) who suggested that the concepts of hedges and boosters can be studied not only in the oral discourse but also in the written discourse. Similarly, Salager-Meyer (1994) views hedges as a threat minimizing strategy in social interactions and negotiations not only between the speakers and listeners but also between the writers and the readers. The writer adopts a particular stance on an arguable topic and attempts to persuade his readers. Therefore, persuasive writing involves the negotiation between the writer and

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the reader. As stated by Hyland (1998a), the opinion made in the genre of persuasion is often associated with the writer's expression of probability (i.e. hedges) and certainty (i.e. boosters).

2.9.2 Metadiscourse Theory

Writing was taught in the past in which the elements and applications of grammatical rules were emphasized (Hedgcock, 2005). Even today, these practices can be noted in academic writing classes. Explicit knowledge of grammatical rules is just one part of academic writing. The other part goes beyond the linguistic surface or subject matter to the metadiscourse level (Mauranen, 1993; Hyland, 1998b). In other words, producing good academic writing requires not only writers' linguistic competency bust also their awareness of metadiscourse features. Vande Kopple (1985), for example, states that we write on two levels. On one level, we supply information about the subject matter of the text. On the other level, which is the metadiscourse level, we help the readers to evaluate, and react to each material. This means academic writing is a social engagement, involving a dialogue between writers and readers to convey the message through the use of hedges and boosters (Hyland, 2005).

As Hyland and Tse (2004) point out, metadiscourse refers to the ways writers communicate with their readers through certain discourse markers in order to show their stance toward both the content and the audience of the text. Thus, writers can project their personal positions or judgments through the elements of hedges and boosters as two metadiscourse elements. In addition to projecting their positions, writers should carefully bring their potential readers into their text. As Hyland (2005) states, writers can

involve the readers in their writing by making use of one or more of these elements. Therefore, many researchers agree that academic writing is no longer considered as the ability to supply information about the subject matter, rather it is considered as an attempt on the part of writers to establish some interaction with their readers (Hyland, 1998b; 2005; Myers, 1989; Hinkel, 2005). This view is now well-established in academic writing practices, and therefore linguists are gradually shifting from the traditional focus of the ideational content to the metadiscourse level (Hyland, 2004).

As stated by Grabe et al. (1997), hedges and boosters are two sides of the same coin that should be examined together. In academic writing, hedges signify the employment of the lexical means of decreasing the writer's responsibility for the extent and the truth-value of propositions and claims (Hinkel, 1997; Swales & Feak 1994). By contrast, boosters signify the writer's confidence regarding the claims being made. The two markers are associated with the writer-reader relationship, which, in a general sense, refers to how writer interact with his/her readers in written discourse. In a more specific sense, this relationship involves presenting the reader with appropriate expressions of hedges (i.e. lack of commitment or certainty) and boosters (i.e. high degree of certainty). Knowing how to use these two markers appropriately can improve students' writing skills as well as help them avoid any writer/reader communication problems. As stated by Hyland (1994), effective academic writing actually depends on metadiscourse features which supplement propositional information in the text and alert readers to the writer's opinion. Hyland (1994) further comments that hedges and boosters are two significant metadiscourse elements. Their importance lies in the fact that writers can gain

acceptance from their readers only if the writers are cautious of the ways hedges and

boosters modify claims with precise degree of accuracy (Hyland, 1998a; Hinkel, 2005).

Thus, hedges and boosters should be cautiously employed in any academic writing texts

that include claim-making and/or expressing personal position or point of view (Myers,

1989; Hyland, 2000a). Any excessive or inappropriate use of these two elements would

lead to potential rejection from the readers' part.

2.9.3 Genre Theory

During the past two decades, the concept of genre has received considerable attention in

research on second language writing instruction (Tardy, 2006). The genre theory

assumes that writing is not an individual act but it occurs in a social situation for a

particular purpose (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991; Badger & White, 2000). Therefore,

writing is socially approved in that writers show what they know, what they can do, and

what they have learned in a course of study. This led the genre approach to be used as

appropriate framework for writing instruction (Byram, 2004). As stated by Hyland

(2003), the objective of genre pedagogies is to take students toward a conscious

understanding of the target genres and the ways language creates meanings in the

context. When genres are used in writing classes, students can identify the

communicative purposes and the structural features associated with each genre-move.

Thus, the term genre has been considered as a powerful and useful means for classifying

and describing discourse. For example, a persuasive essay, a job application letter, a

novel or a newspaper article each belongs to a genre and each has its own typical

schematic structures. Genre, in this sense, provides us with resources for interpreting and

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participating in communicative events. Bhatia (1993), for example, states that the communicative purpose in job application letters is to persuade and elicit a specific response from its reader(s), which is a call for interview.

Many scholars view persuasive writing as a central component for university students (Grabe, 1987; Mauranen, 1993; Knudson, 1994; Crowhurst, 1991; Paltridge, 1996; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Reid, 2001; Hyland, 2003). The genre of persuasive writing centers on the notion that a writer must convince particular readers through organization of the text and linguistic features that support the writer's position. As stated by Zammuner (1990), the genre of persuasive writing gives the writers the possibility to organize the structure of the text and explain to the audience their attitudes (i.e. beliefs, feelings) through particular persuasive recourses. For instance, in the genres of persuasive essay and job application letter, the writer has a goal to change readers' attitude to get them believe his/her claims being made. In order to succeed in persuading readers, writers should evaluate their claims in persuasive ways to gain readers' acceptance (Hyland & Milton, 1997). According to Bhatia (1993), to gain readers' acceptance, writers are required to add those genre moves associated with particular linguistic features. Therefore, this study considers the application of the genre theory to teaching hedges and boosters in the genres of the persuasive essay and job application letter. Integration of the three theories would facilitate identifying and analyzing hedges and boosters in the EFL students' persuasive essays and job application letters.

The previous section has been devoted to provide the theoretical framework proposed for this study. In this section, three theories were proposed to be applied for the current

study. The first theory is the pragmatics theory which concerns how non-native-speakers of the target language understand and produce linguistic actions and how they acquire EFL pragmatic knowledge especially the choices of words they make and the constraints they encounter in using language. The second theory is the metadiscourse theory which views writing as a social engagement between writer and reader through the use of particular linguistics features. Metadiscourse refers to those linguistics features that writers employ to enable them shape their claims to the needs and expectations of their target readers. The third theory is the genre theory which assumes that writing is not an individual act but it occurs in a social situation for a particaular purpose. Because genre is concerned with the social purpose of using language, writers become aware of the text type they write and the audience they write for. Understanding the genre moves of a text-type and the linguistic features with which they are associated would be of valuable assistance to EFL writers. These three theories aim to investigate how Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers understand and produce hedges and boosters as two linguistics features and what constraints they encounter in using these two markers in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology that is used for this study. It presents the research design, the population, and the sampling of the participants. It also discusses the data collection and the experimental part of the study. This includes a description of the participants, teaching materials, treatment course, and the pre-test and posttest. A small-scale pilot study is also described. It includes information about the data collection procedures, inter-rater reliability, coding scheme and the results of the pilot study. The chapter also discusses the validity, reliability and the coding scheme of hedges and boosters proposed for this study. This chapter concludes with data analysis, ethical and legal considerations and summary.

3.2 Research Design

In order to obtain answers for the research questions, a research design is necessary. As Polit and Hungler (1997) define it, a research design operates as a blueprint or outline for the research to obtain answers for the research questions. Along the same line, Burns and Grove (2001) state that a good research design helps researchers to plan and implement the study in a way that will help them obtain the intended results.

In this study, the research design was based on the positivist paradigm. The key assumption of the positivist paradigm is that measurement is reliable, valid, and generalizable in its clear prediction of cause and effect (Cassell & Symon, 1994).

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According to Stanfield (2006), the positivist paradigm typically relies on the quantitative and experimental designs. It is concerned with discovering facts and causes as quantitatively specified relations among variables. Therefore, in the positivist paradigm, numerical data are collected and statistical calculations are made from which conclusions are drawn (Neuman, 2000).

The present study collected qualitative data from two writing tasks: a persuasive essay and a job application letter written by 120 third-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Sana'a University. Since the quantitative technique is described as belonging to the positivist paradigm, the quantitative correlational technique was chosen in this study as an appropriate technique for analyzing data. As Creswell (2008) states, a quantitative correlational analytical technique uses statistical tests to measure the degree of relationship between two or more variables, thus providing an explanation for the relationship, and allowing a comparison of results between prior predictions and past research findings.

The study also applied the qualitative technique in its analysis so that a better understanding of the use of hedges and boosters in the context could be obtained. As Varttala (2001) and Kudrnacova (2010) point out, studies on hedges and boosters should take into account not only the quantitative analysis, but also the qualitative one. Therefore, the aim of this study is not only to conduct quantitative analyses of the two features but also offer qualitative inquiry of their functions in the context in which they are found. Integration between quantitative and qualitative techniques is described as belonging to the positivistic-quantitative research (Shkedi, 2005). This enables the

researcher both to statistically analyze the data and offer qualitative inquiry of the functions of hedges and boosters in the context. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) highlight that quantitative analyses should be supplemented with qualitative inquiry which involves the attempt to interpret word or phrase meanings as they relate to or are expressed by people. Lakoff (1972) also emphasizes that it is necessary to complement the quantitative analysis with the qualitative one when conducting an adequate study on hedges and/or boosters. Therefore, a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques seeks to provide a better understanding of the use of hedges and boosters in the text.

The analysis of this study, therefore, involves three stages: device identification, frequency computation, and contextual explanation. In the first stage, based on the taxonomies of Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008), five types of hedges and three types of boosters were identified in the students' persuasive essays and job application letters. In the second stage, the frequency of occurrences of hedges and boosters in each script was determined. In the third stage, contextual interpretation of hedges and boosters was examined in the context they are realized.

3.3 Population

The target population for the present study consisted of 172 (80 males and 92 females) undergraduate students enrolled in three faculties under Sana'a University (i.e. Sana'a, Amran, and Arhab). These faculties offer bachelor degrees on literary and scientific specializations such as English, Islamic and Arabic studies, psychology, geography,

history, physics, biology, chemistry and mathematics. These students have finished almost six semesters and they had been exposed to linguistics and literary subjects during their studies (See Appendix 5).

3.4 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting the sample from a population in a way that it represents the population of interest (Brink, 1996; Polit & Hungler, 1999). The selection of the participants of this study was obtained from the entire population on the basis of a stratified random sampling. The stratified random sampling was chosen as an appropriate method for this study as it involves the division of a population into smaller groups or strata (Neuman, 2000). According to Brink (1996) and Burns and Grove (2001), a stratified random sampling ensures that all the participants have an equal chance to be selected and it avoids selection bias and thus typically reflects the characteristics of the population as a whole. Therefore, to achieve the stratified random sampling, Yamane (1973) developed an equation to yield a representative sampling size from the target population. Consequently, the sample of this study was obtained from each faculty using an equation developed by Yamane (1973) as follows:

$$\text{Sana}'\text{a Faculty} = \frac{\text{Size of sample x Size of population of Sana}'\text{a Faculty}}{\text{Size of population}} = \frac{120 \times 70}{172}$$

$$= \mathbf{49} \text{ Partcipants}$$

$$\text{Arahb Faculty} = \frac{\text{Size of sample x Size of population of Arahab Faculty}}{\text{Size of population}} = \frac{120 \times 52}{172}$$

$$= \mathbf{36} \text{ Particpants}$$

$$\text{Amran Faculty} = \frac{\text{Size of sample x Size of population of Amran Faculty}}{\text{Size of population}} = \frac{120 \times 50}{172}$$

$$= \mathbf{35} \text{ Particpants}$$

As Shown in Table 3.1, the sampling size is 120 participants. According to Sekaran (2006), the sampling size larger than 30 and less than 500 can be representative for the target population. Therefore, the sampling size obtained for this study is 120 participants (41 males and 79 females).

Table 3.1

Population and Sampling of Each Faculty

Faculty	Population	Sample
Sana'a	70	49
Arhab	52	36
Amran	50	35
Total	172	120

3.5 Data Collection

Two open ended writing tasks were used to collect data: a persuasive essay and a job application letter. The two assigned tasks were chosen from the students' writing courses (i.e. Written English 123 and Written English 212) as a part of the curriculum of their four years of studies (See Appendix 6). The two assigned tasks were modeled on almost

similar writing tasks administered by the English Department, or those found in many writing textbooks (See Appendix 8). The participants were first asked to write a persuasive essay and a job application letter in English. On the following day, they were asked to write about the same two topics but in Arabic. The time given for the persuasive essay was one hour and the time given for the job application letter was half an hour. The procedures carried out with the Arabic writing task were the same as the procedures of the English writing task. Therefore, a total of 240 scripts (120 essays and 120 letters) were collected. The two sets of English and Arabic writing tasks are given below:

Writing Task in English: Persuasive Essay

Write a persuasive essay of not more than 250 words in which you support your view that considers the Internet as a blessing or a curse. You should organize, demonstrate, and express your ideas in a persuasive manner so that others will agree with you. Imagine that your essay will be posted in an international website. (Time allowed: 1 hour.)

Writing Task in English: Job Application Letter

You have seen an advertisement in the newspaper for the position of teaching of English as a Foreign Language at a popular local institute. Write a letter of application giving information about yourself, your qualifications, and previous experience, as well as explaining persuasively why you would be suitable for the job. (Time: ½ an hour.)

Writing Tasks in Arabic: Persuasive Essay

الموضوع الاول : المقال الاقناعي

اكتب مقالا **اقناعيا** فيما لا يقل عن 250 كلمة عن فوائد ومساوئ الانترنت بحيث تعبر فيه عن وجهة نظرك بطريقة اقناعية تجعل الاخرين يتفقون مع وجهة نظرك. (الوقت المسموح: ساعة واحدة.)

Writing Tasks in Arabic: Job Application Letter

الموضوع الثاني : رسالة طلب وظيفة

أثناء مطالعتك للصحف الاخبارية وجدت اعلانا عن وظيفة شاغرة تتناسب مع مؤهلك التعليمي وخبرتك السابقة كمدرسا للغة الانجليزية في احدى مراكز اللغة المشهورة في المدينة. قم بكتابة رسالة طلب بالتوظيف توضح فيها مؤهلك التعليمي وخبرتك السابقة وكذا رغبتك في التدريس في هذا المجال لتناسب هذه الوظيفة مع مؤهلك وخبرتك السابقة. (الوقت المسموح: نصف ساعة.)

3.6 The Pre-test-Posttest Experimental Design

The experimental part of the study was conducted at the International College (IC), University of Science and Technology, Yemen (USTY). First, the researcher got permission from the International College to conduct the main study from 8th to 15th May 2010. IC agreed to provide transportation, venue, stationery and certificates of attendance for the participants. Incentives encouraged students to attend the course. To avoid any potential clash with their lectures at the university, the treatment course was scheduled during the evening period (from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm). The treatment course of

the main study was documented and officially posted on the website of the International College (See Appendix 9).

3.6.1 Participants

On 8 May 2010, 40 participants (22 males and 18 females) were randomly selected from the sampling size and were divided into two groups: 20 students in the experimental group and the other 20 in the control group. A total of 40 essays and 40 letters were collected. To control extraneous characteristics that might pose a threat to the experiment, the researcher ensured the internal and external validity for various aspects of the study. As noted by Seliger and Shohamy (1989), the internal and external validity of the study could be affected by various factors such as *history*, *maturation*, and *participant selection*. The *history* refers to the possible negative effects of the extended duration of the study. As Perry (2005) states, any study that takes place for a long of period time may be affected if care is not taken. The current study was conducted over a period of 8 days which included 16 contact hours, and therefore the threat due to the history factor could be minimized.

The threat related to the *maturation* of the participants is similar to that posed by the *history*, but deals with biological and psychological operating within the participants as a result of the passage of time (Hiradhar, 2012). As Chawla and Sondhi (2011) state, *maturation* occurs due to unexpected changes which include people becoming more experienced, tired, or uninterested. Therefore, studies that take place over longer periods of time are potentially subject to this interference (Perry, 2005). In this study, this

potential threat was avoided because it spanned a period of 8 days only, and therefore the threat due to the maturation factor was minimized.

Another threat to both the internal and external validity is the selection of participants which occurs whenever a researcher does not randomly select the samples (Perry, 2005). As pointed out by Seliger and Shohamy (1989), the participants of the experimental study should be carefully selected so that variables can be controlled and manipulated. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the more representative the sample is, the larger confidence is in the statistical results. In the context of the current study, the researcher used the random sampling technique to ensure that every member has an equal opportunity for being chosen. As Perry (2005) describes it, the random sampling technique can control extraneous characteristics, in that it dissipates their effect throughout the sample. Since this study used randomly selected participants from the population, the issue about pre-existing differences among different groups of participants did not arise.

3.6.2 Teaching Materials

Teaching materials on hedges and boosters appear to be little in the ESL/EFL textbooks (Hyland, 1994; Hyland & Milton, 1997). As Holmes (1988) and Hyland (2004) argue, the importance of hedges and boosters is rarely reflected in the EFL textbooks and EFL writing textbooks are often unhelpful in terms of teaching materials. However, Holmes (1988) suggests that selecting appropriate materials on hedges and boosters for EFL learners should be based on two major criteria: simplicity and naturalness. For "simplicity," instructors should include the easiest items of hedges and boosters that can

be acquired by EFL learners. The principle of "naturalness" should be based on real or natural constructions of the language use that enable students to capture their real use in particular contexts (Holmes, 1988). In this study, the teaching materials designed for the course treatment were based on the two criteria proposed by Holmes (1988) in that learners were exposed to items marking hedges and boosters in simple constructions so that learners can easily recognize the actual use in the contexts they occur. Consequently, the teaching materials on hedges and boosters were adopted from different resources such as *Academic writing for graduate students: A course for non-native speakers of English* (Swales & Feak, 1994), *Teaching academic EFL writing* (Hinkel, 2004b), *English for academic purposes* (Jordan, 1997), and *Study writing: A course in writing skills for academic purposes* (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006). These textbooks include substantial sections explaining qualifications and strength of claim that could be taught to EFL learners at any level of proficiency (See Appendix 10).

3.6.3 Treatment Course

The experimental group received 16 contact hours on hedges and boosters (See Appendix 11). The treatment course was designed on the basis of teaching-learning cycle proposed by Hyland (2003). As shown in Figure 3.1, teaching materials on hedges and boosters took students through three stages integrated in the genre-based lesson plan designed for the two tasks (See Appendices 12 & 13). First, in the presentation stage, the lecturer defined the genres of the persuasive essay and job application letter using the genre moves proposed by Hyland (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Then, the concepts of hedges and boosters were defined with illustrative examples. In the practice stage that follows, the lecturer provided model texts and asked students to locate hedges and

boosters and determine to which category they belong. In the last stage, the production

stage, the students practice what they had learned in the class.
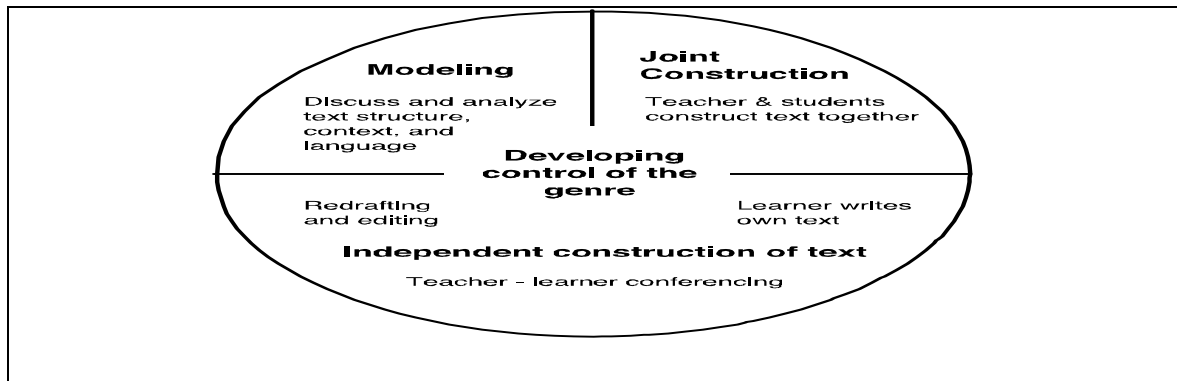
Figure 3. 1 The teaching learning cycle (Hyland, 2003)

3.6.4 The Posttest

After explicit instruction on hedges and boosters to the EG using the same sets of the

writing tasks, both the EG and the CG took the posttest on 15 May 2010. The

participants were asked to do the two tasks (i.e. writing persuasive essay and job

application letter). The instructions and procedures were the same as those given for the

pre-test session. All the participants were able to write on the two tasks within the time

allowed and seemed to have understood the task requirements. A total of 40 essays and

40 letters written in English were collected. The pre- and posttests of the experimental

group and control groups were then given to EFL instructors to evaluate. Finally, the

pre-test and posttest results of the two groups were compared using test of statistical

significance.

3.7 The Pilot Study

Before the main study was carried out, a small-scale study was carried out at Sana'a University during the fall semester, 2010. The purpose of the pilot study was to familiarize the researcher with the data collection and analysis procedures and to ensure that the instrument could be used properly (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001). The participants of the pilot study consisted of 40 (26 males and 14 females) third-year college students who were majoring in English as a foreign language. First, the researcher went to the English Department, Sana'a University and obtained verbal agreement from the Head of the Department to conduct the pilot study. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the students and its procedures. All students verbally agreed to take part in the pilot study.

3.7.1 Data Collection

Two open ended writing tasks were used to collect data: a persuasive essay and a job application letter. The participants were first asked to write a persuasive essay and a job application letter in English. On the following day, they were asked to write the same two tasks but in their L1 (Arabic). The time given for the persuasive essay was one hour and the time given for the job application letter was half an hour. The procedures carried out with the L1 writing tasks were the same as the procedures of the English writing tasks.

For the experimental part of the study, 40 participants were divided into two groups: 20 students in the experimental group (EG) and the other 20 in the control group (CG). Both the EG and the CG took the pre-test. The EG received two sessions on hedges and

boosters whereas the CG did not receive any training. To avoid teaching clash, sessions were scheduled from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. The lecturer, who is the researcher, provided the EG with explicit instruction on hedges and boosters. In the first session, the researcher defined the genres of the persuasive essay and the job application letter. The participants of the EG were shown how to distinguish between facts and opinions and support their claims with examples. They were given explanation for five types of hedges and three types of boosters drawn from Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008). Following Hyland (2003), three stages were followed for teaching hedges and boosters. In the first stage, the concepts of hedges and boosters were first defined with examples and this is called the presentation stage. In the second stage, the researcher provided model texts and asked students to locate hedges and boosters and determine to which category they belong. This is called the production stage. In the third stage, the participants were given an assignment to write, utilizing what they had learned in the class and this is called the practice stage. After explicit instruction to the EG, both the EG and the CG were asked to take the posttest. The instructions and procedures carried out with the posttest session were the same as the instructions and procedures of the pre-test session. A total of 40 essays and 40 job application letters were collected.

3.7.2 Inter-rater Reliability

Inter-rater reliability refers to the consistency with which two (or more) raters evaluate the same data using the same rating scale at a particular time (Bailey, 1998). In this study, the scripts of the pre-test and posttest were marked by three raters using the rating scale developed by Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel & Hughey (1981) (See

Appendix 14). Jacobs et al.'s (1981) rating scale was chosen as it is used specifically in evaluating the writing proficiency levels of ESL/EFL students (Weigle, 2002). The mean scores obtained by the participants in their posttests using Jacobs's et al. (1981) rating scale were used as a measure of the students' proficiency levels (See Appendices 15A and 15B). Mean scores of 65-79 were considered 'low,' mean scores of 80-89 were considered 'intermediate,' while mean scores of 90-100 were considered 'advanced'. Thus, three proficiency levels were obtained i.e. low, intermediate, and advanced.

Although the English Department at Sana'a University adopts an admission English test called the English College Admission Test (ECAT), the writing test was considered a more appropriate test of the students' proficiency level for the study compared to the ECAT because it is specific to gauging students' writing ability. The ECAT, which consists of items covering grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, is designed to provide an indication of general proficiency. To determine the consistency of the scores, Table 3.2 shows an inter-rater reliability of 0.94.

Table 3.2

Inter-rater Reliability of the Pilot Study

No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Cronbach's Alpha
3	.94	0.94

3.7.3 Coding Scheme

Following Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008), five types of hedges and three types of boosters were identified in the persuasive essays (henceforth referred to as PEs) and job application letters (henceforth referred to as JALs). Hedges identified included *shields* (e.g., can, could, may, might), *approximators* (e.g., about, roughly, approximately), *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* (e.g., I believe, I think, my point of view), *if-clause constructions* (e.g., if anything… if true), and *impersonalization (*e.g., it was made*).* Boosters, on the other hand, included *emphatics* (e.g., actually, really, sure, definitely), *amplifiers* (e.g., a lot, much, great(-ly), strong(-ly), very, very much), and *universal and negative pronouns* (e.g., all, each, everybody, everyone, everything, every, no one, nothing.)

To distinguish between hedges and boosters in the written texts, two different colours were used. The researcher first read the text word by word and marked hedges and boosters in different colours (i.e. hedges were highlighted in green colour and boosters were highlighted in red colour). For the purpose of analysis, "hedges" were coded (h) and "boosters" were coded (b). The three proficiency levels (i.e. low, intermediate, and advanced) were coded "1," "2," and "3," respectively. Males and females were coded "1" and "2," respectively.

3.7.4 Results of the Pilot Study

This section provides the findings of the pilot study which are relevant to the research questions. The pilot study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What types of hedges and boosters are employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

Table 3.3

Distribution and Percentage of Hedges in the EFL PEs

Category	Sub-category	PEs (4500 words)	JALs (2512 words)
		Frequency %	Frequency %
Hedges	Shields	6%	4%
	Approximators	4%	2%
	Writer's personal doubt and direct involvement	3%	2%
	If-clause constructions	3%	2%
	Impersonalization	3%	2%
Total		19%	12%
Boosters	Emphatics	5%	4%
	Amplifiers	6%	3%
	Universal and neg. Pron.	4%	2%
Total		15%	9%

As shown in Table 3.3, the results of the pilot study indicate that hedges and boosters identified in the persuasive essays and job application letters were *shields* (6%, 4%), *approximators* (4%, 2%), *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* (3%, 2%), *if clause constructions* (3%, 2%), and *impersonalization* (3%, 2%). Boosters identified in the persuasive essays and job application letters were *emphatics* (5%, 4%), *amplifiers* (6%, 3%), and *universal and negative pronouns* (4%, 2%). The extracts below show examples of hedges and boosters used in the students' persuasive essays and job application letters.

Ex. 1: Despite what some *might* say, *I believe* that the internet is a *very* useful tool *if it is only used well*. Otherwise, mistreatment of the internet *would* lead to disastrous consequences.

Ex. 2: Meeting your friends and families is not a far reaching hope anymore; with only a click *anyone* can talk and see not only one person but even *many more* in *any* other country.

Ex. 3: *If one of those users were asked about internet*, he or she *would* say that it brings the whole world closer.

Ex. 4: We are living today in a *very* rapid world in which the inventions of *many important* technological devices are *increasingly* growing.

2. Are there any significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their L1 and EFL persuasive essays and L1 and EFL job application letters?

Table 3.4

Comparison between the L1 and EFL persuasive essay and job application letters

	Hedges and Boosters in the EFL	Hedges and Boosters in the L1
Total	2186	1084

Another finding of the pilot study was that students tend to use less hedges and boosters in their L1 than they do in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. As shown in Table 3.4, the use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters appear to be more than those in the L1 writing tasks. Extracts (5) and (6) show examples of hedges and boosters used in the EFL and L1 writing tasks.

Hedges and boosters in the EFL PEs:

Ex.5: Although internet has given us *all more* and *more* and has made our big world looks as a small village. However, it *could* be dangerous *if we misuse it* as there are *so many* sexual websites.

Hedges and boosters in the L1 PEs:

اعتقد ان الانترنت نعمة *عظيمة* لهذه البشرية و في نفس الوقت نقمة. فهو يقدم لنا خدمات رائعة من خلال *أشياء كثيرة* .

Translation: *I believe* that internet can be a *great* bless for human beings and at the same time can be a curse. It provides us *great* advantages through *so many things.*

Hedges and boosters in the EFL JALs:

Ex.6: *I hope* that you accept me to work with your team because I heard *a lot* about your excellent group and work. I will wait for your calling at *any* time. I will be able to come for your meeting at *any* time. I will be *much* lucky *if I can work in your institute*.

Hedges and boosters in the L1 JALs:

في الختام اتمنى ان اكون الشخص المناسب والكفؤ لهذه الوظيفة التي *أظن* انني سابدع فيها حيث ولدي مؤهلات *كثيرة جدا* في مجال التدريس ولا سيما في المحادثة. انتظر منكم ردا قريبا باذن الله.

Translation: In sum, I wish to be the suitable and qualified person for this job which *I think* I will be creative as I have *so many* qualifications in teaching, particularly in the speaking skills. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

3. Are there any significant differences between the male and female student writers and the overall use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

Table 3.5

Hedges and Boosters Used by Male and Female Writers

Writing Task	Frequency of hedges and boosters	
	Male	Female
Persuasive essay	615	679
Job application letter	201	220

The results of the pilot study indicate that female writers tend to use more hedges and boosters than do male writers. As shown in Table 3.5, the frequency of hedges and boosters used by male and female writers in the persuasive essays was 615 and 679, respectively. On the other hand, the frequency of hedges and boosters used by male and female writers in the job application letters accounted for 201 and 220, respectively. The extracts below show examples of hedges and boosters used by male and female student writers in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

> Ex. 7 (Male): Our life always goes with *something* new we discovered day after day. *I think* that we can use it in our life to make our life easy to go like the other country. For example, we can use it for *something* that we need for life.

> Ex. 8 (Female): Nowadays, Internet is an *important thing* in our life. We can get *anything* we want from internet. Internet is a *great thing* which can help us by a *lot of* ways to improve our life.

> Ex. 9 (Male): I am *so* excited about the job you advertised. *I believe* I will be *very* creative and I am optimistic to win the job.

> Ex. 10 (Female): Finally, I am *very* interested in teaching. I enjoy teaching *a lot.* This is not an easy *thing*. *If you like your job,* you will create success.

4. Is there any correlation between the EFL proficiency level and the overall use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters?
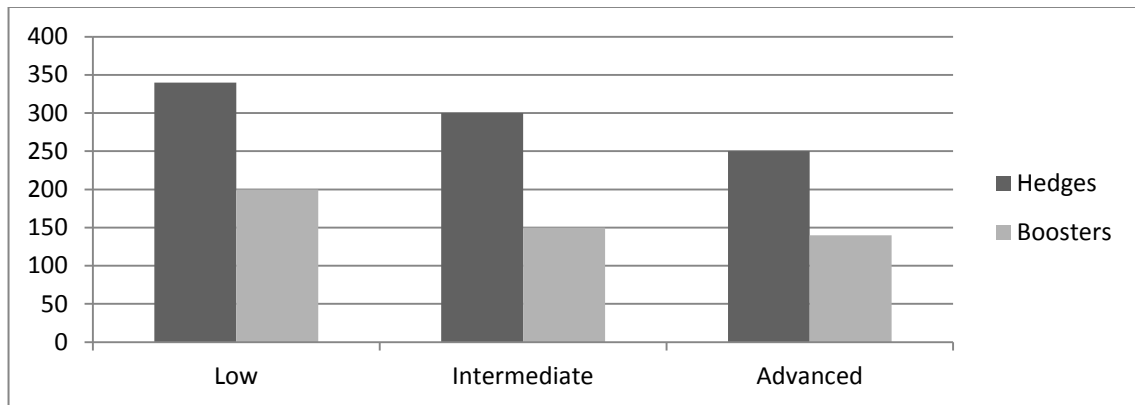
Figure 3.2 Hedges and boosters across proficiency level

The results of the pilot study show that students with a lower proficiency level used more hedges and boosters than did those with a higher proficiency level. As shown in Figure 3.2, the frequency of hedges and boosters decreases as the students' proficiency level increases. In other words, the more proficient students are the less frequent hedges and boosters are used. The extracts below show examples of hedges and boosters used by student writers across three EFL proficiency levels.

Persuasive Essay:

Ex. 11 (Low): *I think* you do not know *if you are addicted to the internet* and you cannot give up this habit. As a result, you *may* lose *a lot of* things like your job and *maybe* your family.

Ex. 12 (Intermediate): *Some people* can use this invention to do *something* bad like chatting between boys and girls. Also, *some people* use this to look for others' plans. *I think* they can make plans for kidnapping or killing.

Ex. 13 (Advanced): The advantages are incomparable with the disadvantages. For example, internet has become the most *important* access for information that we need in our daily life. By only one click, students can easily find information they need for their projects or research.

Job Application letter:

Ex. 14 (Low): I can speak English *very* well and I can understand French. I will be lucky, *if you will accept me to work with your staff.*

Ex. 15 (Intermediate): *I believe* that I will be suitable person for this job. I *would* like to hear from you and show my qualifications and my experience in the interview.

Ex. 16 (Advanced): I am one of the toppers during my study. After graduation, I taught English at the same department. Now I am ready to quit my current job and teach in the same field of my interest.

5. To what extent does explicit instruction affect the use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters in the posttest?

Table 3.6

Hedges and Boosters Used in the Pre and Posttest Writings

Writing Task	Frequency of Hedges and Boosters	
	Pre-test	Posttest
Persuasive essay	910	803
Job application letter	501	413

The result indicates that hedges and boosters employed in the persuasive essays and job application letters were found to be more frequent in the pre-tests than in the posttests. As shown in Table 3.6, the number of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters decreased in the favor of the posttests. Expressions of shields such as modal auxiliary verbs expressing possibility (*could, may, might*), and the writer's

personal doubt and direct involvement such as *I/we think*, *I/we believe, my point of view* appear to be less frequent in the posttests. The two meeting sessions seem to have led students to use less hedges and boosters in the students' posttest writing. The following extracts show examples of hedges and boosters used in the students' pre- and posttests.

Pre-test:`

Ex. 17: *I think* Internet has created a *great* invention in societies *even* in our conservative ones. Therefore, there are *many* people thinking of it as a *very* useful *thing* while some others believe that it *might* affect our lives *badly.*

Posttest:

Ex. 18: Today's world has undergone *many* changes in different fields as a result of technological revolution which is still in progress. The technological changes have created problems and at the same time have solved some others.

3.8 Validity

Validity can be defined as the appropriateness of a given test or any component part as a measure of what is intended to measure (Henning, 1987; Polit & Hungler, 1999). Validity is best defined by the American Psychological Association (1985) as the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences made from test scores. As Hughes (2003) states, a test is said to be valid if it really measures what it is supposed to measure. According to Bachman (1990) and Hyland (2003), the instrument can be validated via two major ways: face-validity and content validity.

Face validity refers to the surface credibility of the test which is concerned with what teachers and students think of the test (Harrison, 1983). As Sekaran (2006) points out, face validity indicates that the items that are intended to measure a concept do, on the

face of it, look like they measure the concept. For face validity in this study, the persuasive essay and job application letter are considered to be appropriate instruments for measuring persuasion. The two writing tasks are both persuasive in nature as their communicative purpose is to persuade readers (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Intaraprawat, 2000; Henry & Roseberry, 2001; Sii, 2004; Ding, 2007). Therefore, the two assigned topics can allow writers to express their own thoughts, points of view, and attitudes to the surface of the text which enable the degree of claims in the data to be identified (Sekaran, 2006; Dornyei, 2007).

Moreover, Hyland (2003) argues that the test is not valid if it asks participants to write on a genre they have not studied or requires knowledge they do not have. In this study, the two assigned tasks were modeled on almost similar writing tasks administered by the English Department and the participants have sufficient knowledge on these two tasks as they had already written similar tasks during their previous writing courses (See Written English Courses 123 and 212 in Appendix 6). Hyland (2003) also argues that an open-ended test is not valid if it allows insufficient time to develop a topic. In this study, the time given for the persuasive essay was one hour and the time given for the job application letter was half an hour which seems to be sufficient.

For content validity, Kothari (2004) defines it as the extent to which a measuring instrument provides adequate coverage of the topic under study. To put it differently, content validity is a function of how well the elements of a concept have been delineated (Sekaran, 2006). In this study, the persuasive essay and job application letter are considered to be appropriate instruments to measure hedges and boosters (Hyland,

1998d; Dafou-Milne, 2008; Silver, 2003; Yeung, 2007). As Holmes (1990) and Vazques and Diana (2009) point out, hedges and boosters are central to the meaning of persuasive writing as their importance lie in the fact that writers can gain acceptance by balancing conviction with caution. Along the same line, Crismore et al. (1988) and Hyland (1998a) view hedges and boosters as two essential elements of persuasive writing. Therefore, the two assigned topics can allow the researcher to measure hedges and boosters as two essential features of persuasive writing (Silver, 2003; Hyland, 1998a).

3.9 Reliability

Reliability strives to ensure that if future researchers conduct the same study all over again, these researchers should be able to obtain similar results (Yin, 2003). In other words, there is consistency in the data results. This is supported by Brown (2004) who argues that poorly written test items that are ambiguous may be a further source of unreliability. According to Coombe, Folse and Hubley (2007), the test format, the content of the question, and the time given for the test takers may affect the reliability of the data. In this study, the format, the content, and the time given for the participants were given extra care to achieve the reliability requirements. To achieve the inter-reliability of the pre- and posttests, Hughes (2003) states that the pre- and posttests are reliable when the scores of the two administrations are correspondent, or there is just a little difference. Therefore, the scripts of the pre- and posttests were marked by three raters using the rating scale developed by Jacobs' et al. (1981). Weigle (2002) indicates that the rating scale created by Jacobs et al. (1981) is a reliable scale. However, rating these two tasks may vary from one rater to another because there is a possible difference in judgments (Gamaroff, 2000). To overcome such different judgments, three raters

were assigned to rate the participants' writing tasks. The first rater is a Ph D qualified researcher in ELT who has been teaching writing at the International College for more than 10 years. The second rater has been teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the International College for almost 8 years. The third rater is the researcher of the current study who has been teaching English for almost 10 years. Before rating, a rating training session was held to discuss the rating process using Jacobs et al.'s rating scale. The scores of the pre- and posttests were collected from each rater and the mean scores were calculated for each rater. To determine the inter-rater reliability for the ratings, Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure the level of agreement between the raters. Following the rating process, students' scores were averaged to obtain a single score. (i.e. the mean scores of the three raters). Based on the participants' scores, three proficiency levels were obtained (i.e. low, intermediate, and advanced). For example, the scripts scored 65-79 were considered 'low' and the scripts scored 80-90 were considered 'intermediate,' while the scripts scored 90-100 were considered 'advanced'.

3.10 Coding Scheme of Main Study

There are several taxonomies of hedges and boosters proposed by different researchers in the literature (e.g., Salager-Meyer, 1994, 1997; Hyland, 1998a, 2005; Hinkel, 2005; Martin-Martin, 2008). However, there is no agreement among researchers as to the establishment of a unified taxonomy or closed set of hedges and boosters (Crompton, 1997; Salager-Meyer, 1997). As Crompton (1997) points out, researchers are still far away from developing a unified taxonomy of hedges and boosters. Similarly, Yu (2009) argues that there are no unified criteria for the classification of hedges and the taxonomy of hedges is rather arbitrary. The diversity in taxonomies reflects the lack of unified

criteria, and thus gives researchers much freedom (Yu, 2009). Since there is little agreement among researchers on a unified taxonomy of hedges and boosters, Hyland (1998a, 2004) and Salager-Meyer (1998, 2000) suggest that hedges and boosters can be left to the researcher to choose. The taxonomy of hedges and boosters proposed for this study was adapted from the taxonomies developed by Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008) (These taxonomies are outlined in Appendix 16). Therefore, the taxonomy proposed for this study is outlined in Table 3.7 below. As shown, hedges include *shields* (e.g., could, may, might, to appear, to seem, possible, probable), *approximators* (e.g., about, roughly, approximately), *writer'*s *personal doubt and direct involvement* which consists of the first personal pronouns (I/we) followed by cognitive verbs (e.g., believe, think) and expressions such as 'in my point of view', 'to our knowledge), *if clauses* (e.g., if anything… if true…), and *impersonalization* (it was made… it has been said...). Boosters, on the other hand, include *emphatics* (e.g., a lot, much, great(-ly), strong(-ly), too + adj., very and very much…), *amplifiers* (e.g., a lot + noun/adj., certainly, clear(-ly), for sure, indeed, real(-ly)…), and *universal and negative pronouns* (e.g., all, each, everybody, everyone, everything, every, none, no one, nothing).

To distinguish between hedges and boosters in the written texts, two different colours were used. The researcher first read the text word by word and marked hedges and boosters in different colours (i.e. hedges were highlighted in green colour and boosters were highlighted in red colour). For the purpose of analysis, "hedges" were coded (h) and "boosters" were coded (b). The three proficiency levels (i.e. low, intermediate and

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advanced) were coded "1," "2," and "3," respectively. Males and females were coded "1" and "2," respectively.

Table 3.7

Taxonomy of Hedges and Boosters of this Study [Adapted from Salager-Meyer (1994 & 1997), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008)]

Category	Type	Examples
Hedges	Shields	modal verbs (e.g., could, may, might), semi-auxiliary verbs (e.g., to appear, to seem), modal adjectives (e.g., possible, probable, likely), modal adverbs (e.g., perhaps, probably, possibly), modal nouns (e.g., possibility, probability)
	Approximators	approximately, roughly, about, around, often, somehow, kind of, almost
	Writer's personal doubt and direct involvement	I think, I believe, my point of view, to our knowledge…
	If-clause constructions	if anything… if true…
	Impersonalization	it was made… it has been said…
Boosters	Emphatics	a lot + noun, certain(ly), clear(-ly), indeed, definite(-ly), complete(-ly), exact(-ly), for sure, real(-ly), actual(-ly)
	Amplifiers	always, never, amazingly, extremely, greatly, strongly, hugely, totally, much + adj., very, very much
	Universal and negative pronouns	all, each, everybody, everyone, everything, every, none, no one, nothing

3.11 Data Analysis

This section describes the data analysis techniques used in the study. The data obtained consisted of 120 scripts written in English and another 120 written in the students' L1 (i.e. Arabic). Therefore, a total of 240 essays (120 EFL and 120 L1) and 240 letters (120 EFL and 120 L1) were analyzed. Hedges and boosters in the students' written texts were first identified and quantified. Their functions were also identified in the contexts of

their occurrences. The following procedures were carried out to answer the research questions.

To begin, the first objective aims to identify five types of hedges and three types of boosters employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. The analysis entailed three techniques: device identification, frequency computation, and contextual explanation. In the first stage, the researcher carefully read the text word by word, highlighting these two features in the text using green colour for hedges and red colour for boosters. The second stage was to establish the frequency computation of each type in the persuasive essays and job application letters. In the final stage, the function of each type was identified in the context of its occurrence. This involved a certain amount of contextual interpretation.

The second objective aims to determine whether the overall use of hedges and boosters is significantly different between the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. To achieve this objective, the paired sample t-test was chosen as an appropriate test to determine the significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letter.

The third objective aims to determine whether there are significant differences between the male and female student writers and the overall use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. To achieve this objective, the frequencies of hedges and boosters in the male and female persuasive essays and job application letters were calculated separately. The independent t-test was applied to find

out whether the overall use of hedges and boosters was significantly different in the scripts of male and female writers.

The fourth objective aims to ascertain whether there are significant differences between the overall use of hedges and boosters and EFL proficiency levels. To fulfill this objective, the participants' scripts were first rated using Jacobs et al.'s (1981) rating scale and the scores were then divided into three proficiency levels (i.e. low, intermediate, and advanced). The one-way ANOVA analysis was applied to determine if there was a significant relationship between the use of hedges and boosters and the three EFL proficiency levels.

The fifth objective aims to determine whether explicit instruction on hedges and boosters has a significant relationship on the Yemeni EFL writers' achievements in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. To achieve this objective, the scores of the posttest of the EG and the CG were compared with the scores of the pre-test using the paired sample t-test. To examine if there was significant relationship between the total number of hedges and boosters and the students' scores, the paired sample t-test was again applied.

Three hypotheses relevant to questions 3, 4, and 5 were tested. Hypothesis 1 assumes that there will be no significant difference between male and female Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in terms of the overall use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters. To test Hypothesis 1, the independent sample t-test was applied.

Hypothesis 2 assumes that there will be no significant difference in the overall use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels. To test Hypothesis 2, the one-way ANOVA was applied.

Hypothesis 3 assumes that there will be no significant difference between explicit instruction on hedges and boosters and the Yemeni EFL students' posttest performance in the persuasive essay and job application letter. To test Hypothesis 3, the paired sample t-test was applied.

3.12 Ethical and Legal Considerations

Ethics is a crucial issue in research as the nature of research can be intrusive or it can manipulate participants' feelings or behavior (Burns & Grove, 2001). As Polit and Hungler (1999) state, ethics is a system of moral values. Since this study was carried out in a real teaching context, a number of ethical issues were considered so that no subject was put at a disadvantage.

Permission was obtained from the study site (i.e. International College). All the participants were informed of the general purpose of the study and they willingly agreed to take part in this study. The International College agreed to provide transportation, venue and certificates of attendance for the participants (See Appendix 17). In the process of data collection, the participants were informed of the procedures that would be used to collect the data, and assured that there were no potential costs or risks. They were also informed that participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time. Moreover, the participants were furnished with contact information so that

they can contact the researcher or the college in the event of further questions, comments or complaints.

3.13 Summary

Chapter three describes the methodology which includes the research design. The population and sampling size of the participants are described. This chapter also discusses the data collection procedures including the experiment and the pilot study. In addition, it discusses the validity, reliability, coding scheme, data analysis and ethical and legal considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings. The data were derived from 120 EFL persuasive essays and job application letters and another 120 L1 persuasive essays and job application letters. This chapter also presents the findings of the experimental part of the study. Forty EFL persuasive essays and another 40 EFL job application letters were collected and analyzed using the SPSS 11.0.

4.2 Hedges and Boosters in the PEs

This section presents the findings for Research Question 1. What types of hedges and boosters are employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters? First, this section presents the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays.

4.2.1 Hedges in the EFL PEs

Table 4.1

Distribution and Percentage of Hedges in the EFL PEs

Category	Sub-category	Text totalling 26,400 words	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hedges	Shields	1601	6%
	Approximators	788	3%
	Writer's personal doubt and direct involvement	622	3%
	If-clause constructions	490	2%
	Impersonalization	595	2%
Total		4096	16%

Hedges are those words or phrases which, in one way or another, reduce the force of the claims that the writers make. Table 4.1 shows the overall distribution of hedges in the EFL persuasive essays. Hedges identified in the 120 EFL persuasive essays accounted for 16% of the text totalling 26,400 words.

4.2.2 Boosters in the EFL PEs

Table 4.2

Distribution and Percentage of Boosters in the EFL PEs

Category	Sub-category	Text totalling 26,400 words	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Boosters	Emphatics	1680	6%
	Amplifiers	1307	5%
	Universal and neg. pronouns	1230	5%
Total		4217	16%

Boosters are those devices which make strong and confident claims in the value of statements or claims being made. The overall distribution of boosters in the EFL persuasive essays is presented in Table 4.2. As shown, boosters identified accounted for 16% of the text totalling 26,400 words.

4.3 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL JALs

This section presents the findings on the use of hedges and boosters identified in the EFL job application letters.

4.3.1 Hedges in the EFL JALs

Table 4.3

Distribution and Percentage of Hedges in the EFL JALs

category	Sub-category	Text totalling 14,600 words	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hedges	Shields	760	5%
	Approximators	285	2%
	Writer's personal doubt and direct involvement	245	2%
	If-clause constructions	123	1%
	Impersonalization	159	1%
Total		1572	11%

The five types of hedges found in the EFL persuasive essays were also found in the EFL job application letters. The overall distribution and percentage of hedges in the job application letters are presented in Table 4.3. Hedges identified in the 120 job application letters accounted for almost 11% of the text totalling 14,600 words.

4.3.2 Boosters in the EFL JALs

Table 4.4

Distribution and Percentage of Boosters in the EFL JALs

Category	Sub-category	Text totalling 14,600 words	
		Frequency	percentage (%)
Boosters	Emphatics	643	4%
	Amplifiers	322	2%
	Universal and neg. pronouns	234	2%
Total		1199	8%

As Table 4.4 shows, boosters identified in the EFL job application letters made up 8% of the text totaling 14,600 words.

4.4 Hedges and Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs and JALs

This section presents the findings for Research Question 2. Are there any significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their L1 and EFL persuasive essays and L1 and EFL job application letters?

In order to find out whether the overall use of hedges and boosters is different or similar in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters, a total of 240 L1 essays and letters with another 240 EFL essays and letters were analyzed. The results are presented in Tables 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8.

4.4.1 Hedges and Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

This section presents the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays.

Hedges in the L1 and EFL PEs

Table 4.5

Total Number of Hedges in the L1 and EFL PEs

Hedges in the L1 PEs	Hedges in the EFL PEs
4005	4796

Hedges used in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays are presented in Table 4.5. As shown, hedges in the EFL persuasive essays appear to be more than hedges used in the L1 persuasive essays. To determine whether hedges are significantly different between the

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L1 and EFL persuasive essays, the T-test was carried out. Table 4.6 indicates the average number of hedges found in the 120 L1 and 120 EFL persuasive essays are 33 and 39, respectively, and that this difference is significant (M=33, 39, SD=9), t (8), $p<0.05$. As is seen in Table 4.6, the two means are 33 and 39, that the standard deviation is 9, and that the t-value is 8. It shows a statistically significant difference in favor of hedges in the EFL PEs at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that students tend to use more hedges in their EFL than in their L1 PEs.

Table 4.6

T-test of Hedges in the L1 and EFL PEs

	Mean	Std. deviation	*t*	Sig.(2-tailed)
Hedges in L1	33			
Hedges in EFL	39	9	8	.000

Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

Table 4.7

Total Number of Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

Boosters in the L1 PEs	Boosters in the EFL PEs
4206	4217

Boosters used in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays are presented in Table 4.7. As shown, boosters in the EFL persuasive essays appear to be more than boosters used in the L1 persuasive essays. To determine whether boosters are significantly different between the L1 and EFL persuasive essays, the T-test was carried out. Table 4.8

indicates that the average number of boosters found in the 120 L1 and 120 EFL persuasive essays are 32 and 31, respectively, and that this difference is not significant (M= 32, 31, SD= 13), t (0.785), p>.05.

As noted in Table 4.8, the two means are 32 and 31, that the standard deviation is 13, and that the t-value is 0.785. This shows no statistical significance at .434. This finding indicates that students used almost the same number of boosters in their L1 and EFL PEs.

Table 4.8

T-test of Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

	Mean	Std. deviation	*t*	Sig.(2-tailed)
Boosters in L1	32			
Boosters in EFL	31	13	0.785	.434

4.4.2 Hedges and Boosters in the L1 and EFL JALs

This section presents the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL job application letters.

Hedges in the L1 and EFL JALs

Table 4.9

Total Number of Hedges in the L1 and EFL JALs

Hedges in the L1 JALs	Hedges in the EFL JALs
1057	1397

Hedges used in the L1 and EFL job application letters are presented in Table 4.9. As shown, hedges in the EFL job application letters are more than hedges used in the L1 job application letters. To determine whether hedges are significantly different between the L1 and EFL job application letters, the T-test was carried out. Table 4.10 indicates that the average number of hedges found in the 120 L1 and 120 EFL job application letters are 8 and 11, respectively and that this difference is significant (M= 8, 11, SD= 4), t (7), $p<.05$. As Table 4.10 indicates, the two means are 8 and 11, that the standard deviation is 4, and that the t-value is 7. It shows a statistically significant difference at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that students tend to use more hedges in their EFL than in their L1 JALs.

Table 4.10

T-test of Hedges in the L1 and EFL JALs

	Mean	Std. deviation	*t*	Sig.(2-tailed)
Hedges in L1	8			
Hedges in EFL	11	4	7	.000

Boosters in the L1 and EFL JALs

Table 4.11

Total Number of Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

Boosters in the L1 JALs	Boosters in the EFL JALs
2640	1991

Boosters used in the L1 and EFL job application letters are presented in Table 4.11. As shown, the number of boosters used in the L1 job application letters is more than boosters used in the EFL job application letters. To determine whether boosters are significantly different between the L1 and EFL job application letters, the T-test was carried out. Table 4.12 indicates that the average number of boosters found in the 120 L1 and 120 EFL job application letters are 12 and 9, respectively, and this difference is significant (M= 12, 9, SD= 4), t (8), p<.05.

As Table 4.12 indicates, the two means are 12 and 9, that the standard deviation is 4, and that the t-value is 8. It shows a statistically significant difference at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that students tend to use more boosters in their L1 than in their EFL JALs.

Table 4.12

T-test of Boosters in the L1 and EFL JALs

	Mean	Std. deviation	*t*	Sig.(2-tailed)
Boosters in L1	12	4	8	.003
Boosters in EFL	9			

4.5 Hedges and Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs and JALs

This section presents the findings for Research Question 3 and Hypothesis 1. Are there any significant differences between the male and female student writers and the overall use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

Hypothesis 1:

H$_0$: There will be no significant differences between the male and female Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in terms of the overall use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

H$_1$: Female Yemeni EFL undergraduate students will use more hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters than male Yemeni EFL undergraduate students.

One of the research objectives was to determine whether there were significant differences between the male and female Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in relation to the use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. The findings on the use of hedges and boosters used by the male and female students are presented in Tables 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, and 4.16.

4.5.1 Hedges and Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs

This section presents the findings of male and female students' use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays.

Hedges in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs

Table 4.13

Hedges in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs

Gender	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	*t*	Sig.
Male	41	29	10		
				3	.010
Female	79	34	11		

Table 4.13 indicates that the average number of hedges used in the male and female students' EFL persuasive essays are 29 and 34, respectively, and that the difference is significant (M= 29, 34, SD= 10, 11), t (3), p<.05. As Table 4.13 indicates, the two means are 29 and 34, that the standard deviations are 10 and 11, and that the t-value is 3, indicating a statistically significant difference at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that female student writers tend to use more hedges in their EFL PEs than do male student writers.

Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs

Table 4.14

Boosters in the Male and Female Students' PEs

Gender	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	*t*	Sig.
Male	41	19	9		
				3	.008
Female	79	24	9		

Table 4.14 indicates that the average number of boosters used in the male and female students' EFL persuasive essays are 19 and 24, respectively, and that the difference is

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significant (M= 19, 24, SD= 9), t (3), p<.05. As Table 4.14 indicates, the two means are 19 and 24, that the standard deviations is 9, and that the t-value is 3, indicating a statistically significant difference at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that female student writers tend to use more boosters in their EFL PEs than do male student writers.

4.5.2 Hedges and Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

This section presents the findings of the male and female students' use of hedges and boosters in their EFL job application letters.

Hedges in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

Table 4.15

Hedges in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

Gender	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	*t*	Sig.
Male	41	12	3		
				2	.019
Female	79	15	5		

Table 4.15 indicates that the average number of hedges used in the male and female students' EFL job application letters are 12 and 15, respectively, and that the difference is significant (M= 12, 15, SD= 3, 5), t(2), p<.05. As Table 4.15 indicates, the two means are 12 and 15, that the standard deviations are 3 and 5, and that the t-value is 2, indicating a statistically significant difference at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that female student writers tend to use more hedges in their EFL JALs than do male student writers.

Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

Table 4.16

Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

Gender	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	*t*	Sig.
Male	41	7	4		
				5	.000
Female	79	12	5		

Table 4.16 indicates that the average number of boosters used in the male and female students' job application letters are 7 and 12, respectively, and that the difference is significant (M=7, 12, SD= 4, 5), t (5), p<.05. As Table 4.16 indicates, the two means are 7 and 12, that the standard deviations are 4 and 5, and that the t-value is 5, indicating a statistically significant difference at less than 0.05. This finding indicates that female student writers tend to use more boosters in their EFL JALs than do male student writers.

Since the differences between the male and female students in relation to the overall use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters are significant, the null hypothesis (H$_0$) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H$_1$) is supported.

4.6 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs and JALs across Proficiency Levels

This section presents the findings for Research Question 4 and Hypothesis 2. Is there any correlation between the EFL proficiency level and the overall use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters?

Hypothesis 2:

H$_0$: There will be no significant difference in the overall use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels.

H$_2$: Advanced proficient students will use fewer hedges and boosters than intermediate and low proficient students in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

4.6.1 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs across Proficiency Level

This section presents the findings on the use of hedges and boosters identified in the EFL persuasive essays across EFL proficiency level.

Hedges in the PEs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

Table 4.17

The One-way ANOVA of Hedges in the PEs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Hedges between three levels	3983	2	1991		
Hedges within three levels	11585	117	99	20	.000
Total	15569	119			

Table 4.17 provides the One-way ANOVA statistics. The One-way ANOVA was used to test the differences on the use of hedges in the EFL persuasive essays across three EFL proficiency of low, intermediate, and advanced levels. It indicates that the use of hedges is significantly different across three EFL proficiency levels, F (2, 117) = 20,

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p=.000. To determine where the differences among the three levels occur, the One-Way

Post hoc test was conducted. Table 4.18 indicates that the low proficient students used

the most number of hedges in their persuasive essays followed by the intermediate, and

advanced proficient students (39, 31, and 23, respectively.)

Table 4.18

The One-way Post hoc test of Hedges in the PEs across Three Proficiency Levels

Level	N	Subset for alpha=.05		
		1	2	3
Low	45			**39**
Intermediate	50		**31**	
Advanced	24	**23**		
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000

Boosters in the PEs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

Table 4.19

The One-way ANOVA of Boosters in the PEs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Boosters between three levels	1922	2	916	10	.002
Boosters within three levels	8119	117	69.3		
Total	10042	119			

Table 4.19 provides the One-way ANOVA statistics. The One-way ANOVA was used

to test the differences on the use of boosters in the persuasive essays across three EFL

proficiency of low, intermediate, and advanced levels. It indicates that the use of

boosters is significantly different across three EFL proficiency levels, $F_{(2, 117)} = 10$,

p=.002. To determine where the differences among the three levels occur, the One-Way

Post hoc test was again conducted. Table 4.20 indicates that the low proficient students used the most number of boosters in their EFL persuasive essays, followed by the intermediate, and advanced proficient students (48, 40 and 34, respectively.)

Table 4.20

The One-way Post hoc Test of Boosters in the PEs across Three Proficiency Levels

Level	N	Subset for alpha=.05		
		1	2	3
Low	45			**48**
Intermediate	50		**40**	
Advanced	24	**34**		
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000

4.6.2 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL JALs across Proficiency Level

This section presents the findings on the use of hedges and boosters identified in the EFL job application letters across proficiency level.

Hedges in the JALs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels.

Table 4.21

The One-way ANOVA of Hedges in the JALs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Hedges between three levels	104	2	52	12	.000
Hedges within three levels	470	117	4		
Total	575	119			

Table 4.21 provides the One-way ANOVA statistics. The One-way ANOVA was used to test the differences in the use of hedges in the job application letters across three EFL

proficiency of low, intermediate, and advanced levels. It indicates that the use of hedges is significantly different across the three EFL proficiency levels, $F(2, 117) = 12$, $p=.000$. To determine where the differences among the three levels occur, the One-Way Post hoc test was conducted. Table 4.22 indicates that the low proficient students used the most number of hedges in their job application letters, followed by the intermediate, and advanced proficient students (11, 9, and 8, respectively.)

Table 4.22

The One-way Post hoc Test of Hedges in the JALs across Three Proficiency Levels

Level	N	Subset for alpha=.05		
		1	2	3
Low	45			**11**
Intermediate	50		**9**	
Advanced	24	**8**		
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000

Boosters in the JALs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

Table 4.23

The One-way ANOVA of Boosters in the JALs across Three EFL Proficiency Levels

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Boosters between three levels	1262	2	631	7	.001
Boosters within three levels	5333	117	45		
Total	6596	119			

Table 4.23 provides the One-way ANOVA statistics. The One-way ANOVA was used to test the differences in the use of boosters in the job application letters across three EFL proficiency of low, intermediate, and advanced levels. It indicates that the use of

boosters is significantly different across three EFL proficiency levels, F (2, 117) = 7, p=.001. To determine where the differences among the three levels occur, the One-Way Post hoc test was again conducted. Table 4.24 indicates that the low proficient students used the most number of boosters in their job application letters, followed by the intermediate, and advanced proficient students (27, 21 and 17, respectively.)

Table 4.24

The One-way Post hoc Test of Boosters in the JALs across Three Proficiency Levels

Level	N	Subset for alpha=.05		
		1	2	3
Low	45			27
Intermediate	50		21	
Advanced	24	17		
Sig.		1.000	1.000	1.000

Since the findings indicate that there are significant differences in the use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels, the null Hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_2) is supported.

4.7 Explicit Instruction and Use of Hedges and Boosters in the PEs and JALs

This section presents the findings for Research Question 5 and Hypothesis 3. To what extent does explicit instruction affect the use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters in the posttest?

Hypothesis 3:

H₀: There will be no significant differences between explicit instruction of hedges and boosters and the students' posttest performance in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

H₃: There will be a significant differences between explicit instruction of hedges and boosters and the students' posttest performance in the persuasive essays and job application letters.

In the experimental part of the study, 40 students were divided into two groups: twenty in the experimental group and another 20 in the control group. Both groups took the pre-test and posttest with the exception that the control group did not take the treatment course. During the course, the participants of the experimental group were given explanation for various types of hedges and boosters. They were also shown how to use hedges and boosters across the genre moves of the persuasive essay and job application letter. The following sections provide the findings for the control and experimental groups.

4.7.1 The Control Group

Table 4.25

Inter-rater Reliability of the Scores of the PEs and JALs

No. of raters			No. of cases	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items
Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3		
1.00	.762	.846	20	0.93

The persuasive essays and job application letters were assessed by three raters using Jacob et al.'s (1981) rating scale. The total score for each of the persuasive essay and job application letter is 100 marks. To test the consistency of the ratings of the persuasive essays and job application letters, Cronbach's Alpha was computed. Table 4.25 shows an inter-rater reliability of 0.93 for the persuasive essays and job application letters.

4.7.1.1 Rating EFL PEs

Table 4.26

T-test of the Mean Scores of the CG's Pre-and Posttest of the PEs

Test	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	20	67			
			4	0.60	0.55
Posttest	20	67			

The mean score obtained for the persuasive essays is given in Table 4.26. It indicates that the mean score of the persuasive essays in the pre-test and the posttest is 67, and that is not significant (M= 67, 67, SD= 4, 4), t (0.60), p>.05.

As is seen in Table 4.26, the two means are 67, the standard deviation is 4, and that the t-value is 0.60, indicating no statistical significance at 0.55. This means that the essays produced in the posttest are not different from the essays in the pre-test.

4.7.1.2 Rating EFL JALs

Table 4.27

T-test of the Mean Scores of the CG's Pre-and Posttest of the JALs

Test	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	20	64			
			14	2	.045
Posttest	20	65			

The mean score obtained for the job application letters is presented in Table 4.27. It indicates that the mean score of the job application letters in the pre-test is 64 while the mean score for the posttest is 65, and that is not significant (M= 64, 65, SD= 14, 14), t (2), p>.05. As is seen in Table 4.27, the two means are 64 and 65, the standard deviation is 14, and that the t-value is 2, indicating no statistical significance at .045. This means that the letters produced in the posttest are not different from the letters in the pre-test.

4.7.1.3 Hedges and Boosters in the PEs and JALs of the Control Group

The sections present the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters.

Hedges and Boosters in the PEs

Table 4.28

T-test of Hedges and Boosters in the PEs of the CG

Test	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Pre-test	20	65	12		
Posttest	20	67	13	.579	.563

To determine whether the use of hedges and boosters are significantly different between the pre- and posttest, the T-test was carried out. The mean of frequency of hedges and boosters used in the persuasive essays of the control group are presented in Table 4.28. It indicates that hedges and boosters used in the pre- and posttest are not significantly different (M= 65, 67, SD= 12, 13), t (579), p>.05. As is seen in Table 4.28, the two means are 65 and 67, the standard deviation is 12 and 13, and that the t-value is .579, indicating no statistical significance at .563. This means that the participants of the control group used almost the same number of hedges and boosters in their pre-test and posttest.

Hedges and Boosters in the JALs

Table 4.29

T-test of Hedges and Boosters in the JALs of the CG

Test	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Pre-test	20	13			
Posttest	20	14	3	2	.131

To determine whether the use of hedges and boosters are significantly different between the pre- and posttests, the T-test was carried out. The mean of frequency of hedges and boosters used in the job application letters of the control group are presented in Table 4.29. It indicates that hedges and boosters used in the pre- and posttest are not significantly different (M= 13, 14, SD= 3), t (2), p>.05. As is seen in Table 4.29, the two means are 13 and 14, that the standard deviation is 3, and that the t-value is 2, indicating

no statistical significance at .131. This means that the participants of the control group used almost the same number of hedges and boosters in their pre-test and posttest.

4.7.2 The Experimental Group

Table 4.30

Inter-rater Reliability of the Scores of PEs and JALs

No. of raters			No. of Cases	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items
Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3		
1.00	.762	.846	20	0.93

This section presents the findings of the experimental group. The persuasive essays and job application letters were rated using the scale created by Jacobs et al. (1981). To test the consistency of the ratings of the persuasive essays and job application letters, Cronbach's Alpha again was computed. As shown in Table 4.30, inter-rater reliability of 0.93 was obtained for both the persuasive essays and job application letters. The sections below present the results obtained for both the persuasive essays and job application letters.

4.7.2.1 Rating EFL PEs

Table 4.31

T-test of the Mean Scores of the EG's Pre-and Posttest of the PEs

Test	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	20	70			
			9	6	.000
Posttest	20	73			

Table 4.31 indicates that the mean score of the persuasive essays in the pre-test is 70 whereas the mean score for the posttest is 73, and that the difference is significant (M= 70, 73, SD= 9), t (6), p<.05. As is seen in Table 4.31, the two means are 70 and 73, the standard deviation is 9, and that the t-value is 6, indicating a significant difference at less than .05. This means that the essays produced in the posttest are different from the essays in the pre-test.

4.7.2.2 Rating EFL JALs

Table 4.32

T-test of the Mean Scores of the EG's Pre-and Posttest of the JALs

Test	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Pre-test	20	69			
			10	4	.001
Posttest	20	72			

The results of the mean scores of the job application letters are given in Table 4.32. It indicates that the mean scores of the job application letters in the pre- and posttests are

69 and 72, respectively, and that the difference is significant (M= 69, 72, SD= 10), t (4), p<.05. As is seen in Table 4.32, the two means are 69 and 72, the standard deviation is 10, and that the t-value is 4, indicating a significant difference at less than .05. This means that the letters produced in the posttest are different from the letters in the pre-test.

4.7.2.3 Hedges and Boosters in the PEs and JALs of the Experimental Group

The sections below present the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters.

Hedges and Boosters in the PEs

Table 4.33

T-test of Hedges and Boosters in the PEs of the EG

Test	No. of participants	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Pretest	20	62			
			13	2	.040
Posttest	20	60			

Table 4.33 provides the overall mean of frequency of hedges and boosters used in the pre-test and posttest of the persuasive essays. It indicates that the mean of frequency of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays are 62 and 60, respectively, and that the difference is significant (M= 62, 60, SD= 13), t (2), p<.05. As is seen in Table 4.33, the two means are 62 and 60, the standard deviation is 13, and that the t-value is 2, indicating a significant difference at less than .05. This means that the participants of the

experimental group made significant improvement on the use of hedges and boosters in their persuasive essay posttest.

Hedges and Boosters in the JALs

Table 4.34

T-test of Hedges and Boosters in the JALs of the EG

Test	No. of Participants	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Pretest	20	18			
			4	4	.002
Posttest	20	17			

Table 4.34 provides the overall mean of frequency of hedges and boosters used in the pre- and posttest of the job application letters. It indicates that the mean of frequency of hedges and boosters in the job application letters are 18 and 17, respectively, and that the difference is significant (M= 18, 17, SD= 4), t (4), p<.05. As is seen in Table 4.34, the two means are 18 and 17, the standard deviation is 4, and that the t-value is 4, indicating a significant difference at less than .05. This means that the participants of the experimental group made significant improvement on the use of hedges and boosters in their job application letter posttest.

The findings of the experimental group indicate that the differences between the pre-and posttests of the persuasive essays and job application letters are significant which means the null hypothesis (H_0), which assumes that there will be no significant difference between explicit instruction and the Yemeni EFL students' use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters, is rejected. Therefore, the alternative

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hypothesis (H₃), which suggests that there will be a significant difference between explicit instruction of hedges and boosters and the students' posttest performance in the persuasive essays and job application letters, is supported.

4.8 Summary

Chapter four has presented the findings for the research questions and hypotheses. The chapter entails analyses on hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and the job application letters. The first objective of the study was to identify various types of hedges and boosters. Hedges identified in the persuasive essays accounted for 16% of the text totalling 26,400 words. Five types of hedges have been further identified in the students' EFL persuasive essays. These include *shields 6%, approximators* 3%, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement 3%*, *if-clause constructions* 2%, and *impersonalization* 2%. Boosters identified in the students' EFL persuasive essays accounted for 16% of the text totalling 26,400 words. Three types of boosters have been identified in the students' EFL persuasive essays. These include *emphatics* 6%, *amplifiers 5%,* and *universal and negative pronouns* 5%. Hedges identified in the EFL job application letters, on the other hand, accounted for 11% of the text totalling 14,600 words. Further analyses of hedges in the EFL students' job application letters include *shields 5%, approximators* 2%, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement 2%*, *if-clause constructions* 1%, and *impersonalization* 1%. Three boosters identified in the students' EFL job application letters accounted for 8% of the text totalling 14,600 words. These include *emphatics* 4%, *amplifiers* and *universal and negative pronouns* 2% each.

The second objective of the study was to determine if there were significant differences between the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters in relation to the use of hedges and boosters. The findings show that students tend to use more hedges in their EFL than do in their L1 persuasive essays and job application letters. However, students tend to use almost the same number of boosters in their EFL and L1 persuasive essays. In contrast, students tend to use more boosters in the L1 than do in the EFL job application letters.

The third objective was to examine whether there were significant differences between the male and female students in relation to the overall use of hedges and boosters. The findings indicate that there were significant differences between the male and female writers in relation to the overall use of hedges and boosters. The t-test shows that female writers used hedges and boosters slightly more than did the male writers.

The fourth objective was to determine whether students of different proficiency levels vary in their use of hedges and boosters. The findings show that the more proficient the writers are, the less frequent hedges and boosters are used.

The final objective was to examine the effect of explicit instruction on the use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers' posttest persuasive essays and job application letters. The findings indicate that the participants of the experimental group performed significantly better in the posttests than did in their pre-tests

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter five discusses the findings of the study. Hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters are discussed, using extracts from their persuasive essays and job application letters. The strengths and limitation of the study are provided. This chapter also discusses the pedagogical implications and provides suggestions for future research. The conclusion of the study and the summary are also provided.

To recap, hedges are defined in this study as those words or phrases which, in one way or another, reduce or mitigate the force of the claims that the writers make. They allow the writers to express their reservations about the truth value of the propositional content. Boosters, on the other hand, are defined as those items which indicate certainty and emphasis of a claim being presented. In other words, hedges and boosters express the writer's commitment to the truth of the propositional content. These two features provide an indication of the writers' commitment and intention i.e. they indicate what the writers believe, what they know, and what they assume.

5.2 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs and JALs

This section discusses the findings for Research Question 1. What types of hedges and boosters are employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

5.2.1 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs

This section discusses hedges and boosters used in the EFL persuasive essays.

5.2.1.1 Hedges in the EFL PEs

The following section provides a discussion on various types of hedges found in the EFL persuasive essays. Hedges in the EFL persuasive essays constituted 16% of the text totalling 26,400 words. Hedges identified in the EFL persuasive essays included *shields* 6%, *approximators* 3%, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* 3%, if-*clause construction* and *impersonalization* 2% each.

Shields

Shields refer to those linguistic features which signal the writer's attitude and are widespread in the informal discourse style (Biber, 1988; Nikula, 1996; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Shaw & Liu, 1998; Hinkel, 2002). In this study, shields constitute 6% in the text of the persuasive essays. They may express "possibility" as in Extract (1) "People *could* do their jobs easily*,"* or "probability" as in Extract (2) "…and then *maybe* he finds it or *maybe* not," and Extract (3) "…interne*t may* affect us in the opposite way…The users *may* find the internet useful…"

> Ex. 1: People *could* do their jobs easily through the internet.
>
> Ex. 2: If someone wants to search about something, he does not look for it in the books which take long time and then *maybe* he finds it or *maybe* not.
>
> Ex. 3: In the other side, internet *may* affect us in the opposite way. The users *may* find the internet useful when they find information they look for.

However, shields in the form of lexical adverbs which signal "probability" (e.g., *probably, likely)* were found to be less common in the persuasive essays. An instance of this is illustrated in Extract (4) "…there are cases that internet *probably* harms other people."

> Ex. 4: Although internet has many benefits, there are cases that internet *probably* harms other people.

The modal adjective '*possible'* was found to be preferred by students as in Extract (5) "Internet will be *possible* for everyone in the world," and Extract (6) "It is *possible* that people can do their jobs from home and they do not need to go to office."

> Ex. 5: Internet will be *possible* for everyone in the world.

> Ex. 6: It is *possible* that people can do their jobs from home.

The epistemic modal verb *could* appears to be frequently used in the persuasive essays. The use of *could* implies that the writer's attitude towards the claim is uncertain as in Extract (7) "It *could* be a curse if it misused by browsing bad websites," and Extract (8) "…it *could* be dangerous if we misuse it as there are so many sexual websites."

> Ex. 7: It has made studying at university in the World easier. It *could* be a curse if it misused by browsing bad websites.

> Ex. 8: It has made our big world as a small village. However, it *could* be dangerous if we misuse it as there are so many sexual websites.

Approximators

Approximators are considered as explicit hedges which introduce fuzziness or vagueness (Nikula, 1996; Chanell, 1994). They made up 3% of the text. Words such as *about, around, almost, approximately,* and *kind of* are some common approximators (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Prince et al., 1982). In this study, students' use of approximators appears to demonstrate that they do not have enough information about the subject matter as in Extract (9) "… we can easily find any *kind of* information that we may look for and just by one click," and in Extract (10) " Internet contains *almost* everything we need for our life. For example, we can find anything about any country in the world."

> Ex. 9: By internet, we can easily find any *kind of* information that we may look for and just by one click.

> Ex. 10: Internet contains *almost* everything we need for our life. For example, we can find anything about any country in the world.

The vague words *something* and *thing* appears to be preferred by students. The use of *something* and *thing* indicates that students do not have the exact vocabulary to construct their claims as in Extract (11) "Internet is like *something* that makes our world very close," and Extract (12) " … internet is very important *thing* in our life… if you found *something* wrong in it, it is still very important *thing*." As Salager Meyer (1994) points out, writers may resort to use vague expressions as an indication that they do not have the precise vocabulary.

Ex. 11: Internet is like *something* that makes our world very close. We can search for any information in any field in our life.

Ex. 12: All in all, internet is very important *thing* in our life while if you found *something* wrong in it, it is still is a very important *thing*.

Another observation is that students tend to use the approximators *about* and *around* more than other approximators of the same meaning such as *approximately* and *roughly*. One possible explanation might be that the approximators *about* and *around* stand out in spoken discourse while the approximators *roughly* and *approximately* stand out in written discourse. Examples of these spoken approximators are illustrated in Extracts 13-15 below:

Ex. 13: Internet has spread widely *around* the world.

Ex. 14: We can find information *about* anything we look for.

Ex. 15: But many people are concerned *about* the negative effects of internet.

Writer's Personal Doubt and Direct Involvement

This category of hedges consists of the use of the first personal pronouns *I/we* followed by the cognitive verbs *think* and *believe* and expressions such as *my point of view*, *in my opinion*, *to our knowledge* (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Martin-Martin, 2008). In this way, the writers signal that what they say is simply their personal or subjective opinion, and thus show respect for the reader's alternative opinion and invite the reader to become involved in the communicative situation (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Martin-Martin, 2008). In this study, the first personal pronouns *I/we* followed by the cognitive verbs *think* and *believe* were found to be frequently used in the persuasive essays. The cognitive verbs indicate that the writer's claim is based on the writer's personal point of view as in

Extract (16) "…*I believe* that the internet is a very useful tool…*I think* that we have to be conscious with the use of internet…" As Carlson (1988) and Aijmer (1997) point out, the expressions of *I think* and *I believe* are spoken markers used to mitigate face threat and weaken the writer's commitment towards the claim, that is, what the writers say is simply their subjective opinion. Previous studies state that novice English learners typically contain a higher degree of direct personal involvement which is frequent in spoken language and learners' writing (Hvitfeldt, 1992; Gilquin, Granger & Paquot, 2007).

> Ex. 16: Despite what some people might say, *I believe* that the internet is a very useful tool nowadays only if it is used well. In fact, *I think* that we have to be conscious with the use of internet and teach children how to use it.

It was found that the use of *I think* was frequently used in the "conclusion" part of the essays as in Extract (17) "At last *I think* that internet is a weapon that has two edges…," and Extract (18) "…*I think* the advantages are more than disadvantages," and Extract (19) "As *I think,* the internet is considered to be a blessing for human kind." The expression of *I think* is used to mitigate the force of the claim as if the writers again remind their readers that the claim is simply based on their points of view (Aijmer, 1997). As Nikula (1996) states, non-native speakers of English tend to overuse the expression *I think* in their EFL writing to project their subjective judgment.

> Ex. 17: At last *I think* that internet is a weapon that has two edges. So we can use it in right way, and it will benefit us or use it in wrong way and it will confuse us.

> Ex. 18: To conclude, the internet has many advantages and disadvantages, but *I think* the advantages are more than disadvantages.

Ex. 19: As *I think*, the internet is considered to be blessing for human kind.

However, the use of the expression of *I believe* appears to be frequently used in the "body" paragraph. As Milton (1999) states, the use of expression of *I believe* indicates that the writers get involved in the claim they make, which is more than just being subjective or a point of view. An instance of this is illustrated in Extract (20) "*I believe* internet has many advantages and disadvantages in our life."

> Ex. 20: *I believe* internet has many advantages and disadvantages in our life. As weapon of two edges, we have to be careful of its harmful use. We should focus only on its useful service.

Expressions marking "opinion involvement" such as '*in my opinion,*' and '*in my point of view*' appear to be common in the persuasive essays as in Extract (21) "*In my opinion*, I find internet is very important for wise people," and Extract (22) "*In my point of view*, if we use internet rationally …" These expressions indicate that the writers' claims are based on their opinion and that the readers may or may not have the same opinion with the writers (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Martin-Martin, 2008). As Arnaudet and Barrett (1984) point out, writers are advised to avoid personal opinions and their ideas should be presented objectively.

> Ex. 21: *In my opinion*, I find internet is very important for wise people. It is really important if we used it properly.
>
> Ex. 22: *In my point of view*, if we use internet rationally, it can help us in many ways in our life.

If-Clause Constructions

If-clause constructions function as hedging devices (Huebler, 1983), although they are more frequent in spoken than in written discourse (Biber, 1988). They constitute 2% of the text. If-clause constructions involve a tone of uncertainty which indicates that there is a possibility that the presumed knowledge might be uncertain as in Extract (23) "…*if you use it wisely,* it will be blessing for you*,* and *if you not,* it will be the opposite…" Ford (1993) views if-clause constructions as a structure mostly found in conversational discourse, and states that the use of if-clause constructions signals the claim as problematic or questionable. In this case, if-clause constructions refer to the hypothetical situation and mark the writer's uncertainty. Further examples of if-clause constructions are illustrated in Extracts 24-27.

> Ex. 23: In my opinion, *if you use it wisely*, it will be blessing for you, and *if you not*, it will be the opposite and you are the one who judge.

> Ex. 24: For example, he will open bad websites that will affect his culture, his studying especially *if his parents do not keep eyes on him. If his parents observe him*, he will not be able to open these bad websites.

> Ex. 25: The third advantage is that it lets people contact even *if they are in another country*.

> Ex. 26: *If you have research in any field*, you can get information from internet in any subject of your interest.

> Ex. 27: *If we only realize the benefits of the internet*, then no one will use it wrongly. But it is because we do not realize the benefits so we use it for no purpose.

Writers also use if-clause constructions to hedge their claims as they believe that their claims may not be accepted (Brown & Levinson, 1987) as in Extract (28) "…*if we do not have internet*, our life will be difficult," and Extract (29) "*If people use it correctly,* it

is a big advantage." The writers resort to use if-clause constructions in order to signal their politeness because they feel that their claims do not sound logical, and subsequently may receive objection from their readers (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Ex. 28: Internet made our life meaningful *if we do not have internet*, our life will be difficult.

Ex. 29: Advantages of internet are more than disadvantages. *If people use it correctly*, it is a big advantage.

Impersonalization

Impersonalization refers to those expressions used to avoid reference to the writers' personal involvement when commenting on their claims (Luukka & Markkanen, 1997). Impersonalization constituted 2% in the persuasive essays which involves expressions such as "passive voice constructions*"* as in Extract (30) "Although *it may be considered* as a curse to many*...* The children and adults *should be observed by their parents...,"* "introductory phrases" as in Extract (31) *"It is* known that information technology is stepping fast...," and "existential subjects" as in Extract (32) *"...There is* no one who can say that we can live without internet," and Extract (33) "*...there are* many disadvantages of the internet." These expressions can be seen as hedges whose contextual functions are to project a degree of detachment (Hinkel, 2004b).

Ex. 30: Although *it may be considered* as a curse to many, it is a blessing for others which make communication much easier. The children and adults *should be observed* by their parents when they use Internet.

Ex. 31: *It is* known that information technology is stepping fast especially in the track of internet.

Ex. 32: *There is* no one who can say that we can live without internet.

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Ex. 33: In addition to the advantages, *there are* many disadvantages of the Internet.

It was found that non-native English speakers tend to detach from their claims in their writing (Hinkel, 1997; Myers, 1989; Biber, 1988; Master, 1991). In the case of this study, students tend to use more existential and introductory phrases than passive constructions, and this has the effect of distancing themselves from the claim they make. The students' preference for more existential subjects and introductory phrases may be due to the simplicity of the introductory and existential constructions compared to the passive voice construction which requires correct knowledge of the passive verb forms and the auxiliary verbs.

Summary

This section has discussed hedges and boosters used in the students' EFL persuasive essays. Hedges identified in the persuasive essays were discussed and elaborated with extracts from the students' persuasive essays. They included *shields* 6%, *approximators* 3%, writer's personal doubt and direct involvement 3%, *if-clause constructions* and *impersonalization* 2% each.

Shields refer to the writer's attitude and uncertainty towards the claim being made. They made up 6% of the text. Shields identified in the EFL persuasive essays mark "possibility," or "probability." Other shields such as lexical verbs and adverbs of probability (e.g., *probably, likely*) appear to be less common. Approximators are another type of hedges which introduce fuzziness or vagueness. Approximators such as *about, around,* and *kind of* are some of the common approximators found in the persuasive

essays. Vague expressions such as *something* and *thing/things* appear to be frequently used. These words signal that writers do not have enough information about the subject matter or they are not sure of the claim they make.

Another category of hedges is the writer's personal doubt and direct involvement which consists of the use of the first personal pronouns I/we followed by the cognitive verbs (e.g., *think, believe*) and expressions of opinion involvement (e.g., *my point of view, in my opinion, to our knowledge*). The first personal pronouns *I/we* followed by the cognitive verbs *think* and *believe* were found to be frequently used in the persuasive essays. The cognitive verbs indicate that the writer's claim is based on the writer's personal point of view. Expressions such as '*in my opinion*' and '*in my point of view*' were found to be common in the persuasive essays. They indicate that the writers' claims are based on their opinion and that the readers may or may not have the same opinions with the writers.

As a hedging device, if-clause constructions are more frequent in spoken than in written discourse. The use of if-clause constructions in written discourse involves a tone of uncertainty which indicates that there is a possibility that the presumed knowledge might be uncertain. Impersonalization is another type of hedges that writers would use to detach themselves from being involved in the claim they raise. Students tend to use "existential subjects" and "introductory phrases" more frequently as they seem to be easier than "passive voice constructions."

5.2.1.2 Boosters in the EFL PEs

The following section discusses the three types of boosters found in the EFL persuasive essays. They include *emphatics* 6%, *amplifiers* 5%, and *universal and negative pronouns* 5% of the text totalling 26,400 words.

Emphatics

Emphatics mark a high degree of confidence and have the effect of strengthening the reliability of a claim being made but reduce the writer's objectivity (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber, 1988). Emphatics constitute the largest percentage of boosters in the students' EFL persuasive essays 6% of the text. The use of emphatics indicates that the writers are certain and the arguments they make are true (Bybee & Pagliuca, 1994). Previous studies found that non-native speakers of English rely much on emphatics to boost their arguments (Koch, 1983; Hinkel, 1999; Maynard, 1997; Smoke, 1992). Smoke, for example, observes that emphatics are often used in NNS students' writing, which makes the text appear to be colloquial and less academic. As Hinkel (2004a) states, emphatics should be sparingly used in academic writing and any excessive use may weaken the validity of the claim. In this study, emphatics appear to be frequently used in the persuasive essays as in Extract (34) "*Actually*, internet is really a good way to talk to people," and Extract (35) "*In fact,* internet makes life so easy and exciting." Other examples of emphatics are illustrated in Extracts 36-37.

Ex. 34: *Actually*, internet is really a good way to talk to people.

Ex. 35: *In fact,* internet makes life so easy and exciting. We can do shopping and investment through it.

Ex. 36: *As a matter of facts*, so many people who have some of their family members outside the country they live in, they are getting contacted by many different ways, and *of course* the internet is the most appropriate way to contact with each other.

Ex. 37: Internet is an *important* thing in our life. We can get *a lot of* benefits from internet. Internet is a *great* thing which can help us by *a lot of* ways. In addition to that, I am *sure* that *the most important* bad thing is chatting.

Repeating words is a form of emphatics used in the Yemeni EFL students' in the persuasive essays. As Macline (1996) points out, repetition is based on a repeated occurrence of one and the same word or idea for emphasis or for a special effect. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) observed that repetition is often used in spoken discourse to intensify the force of the message. In this study, repetition appears to be frequently used in the students' persuasive essays. Extracts 38-40 are some examples of repetition.

Ex. 38: *Internet* can be used for many purposes. *Internet*, for example can be used for making chat, playing games, and many other things. The advantages of the *internet* are endless and no one can live these days without it.

Ex. 39: *Email* is one the most important service for us. It is used in the companies, universities all over the world. *Email* brought us together to share knowledge, love, and *many* other things. Through *email*, we can solve *many problems* and provide solutions for any *problem* we face.

Ex. 40: Companies cannot do business without *computers* because of the big accuracy it provides. We must mention that *computers* will save our history in an electronic form, which will be very easy and probably very easy to retrieve and display. The internet gave us freedom of ideas and information. *Computers* can also be used for fun purposes, we can play games, chat on the internet and many other aspects. *Computers* are really revolutionary invention that changed the face of our earth.

Amplifiers

Amplifiers refer to those expressions used to modify gradable adjectives or verbs and heighten their scalar intensity (Quirk et al., 1985). Amplifiers made up 5% of the text. The function of amplifiers is to mark high degree of exaggerations and overstatements that may not be appropriate in propositional content (Quirk et al., 1985; Holmes, 1984). As Somke (1992) points out, ESL composition texts often advise against the use of amplifiers because they may decrease the writer's objectivity and credibility. Because amplifiers are generally viewed as inappropriate means in formal written text, instructional textbooks on writing and composition advise against their use and recommend other more appropriate means of expressing the degree of writer's conviction, such as detailed supporting information and specific factual descriptions (Smoke, 1992). In this study, amplifiers such as *a lot of, very (much), great,* were common in the students' persuasive essays as in Extract (41) "There are *a lot of* problems resulting from the internet misuse," and Extract (42) "Technology brought us *great* inventions which made our life *very* easy." As Hinkel (2002) states, university-level essays are characterized by frequent uses of amplifiers which are associated with colloquial style and exaggerated tone that is often considered to be inappropriate in formal texts, which rely on authorial objectivity and distance.

> Ex. 41*:* There are *a lot of* problems resulting from the internet misuse. For examples, sexual websites have caused *a lot of* problems for our society.

> Ex. 42*:* Technology brought us *great* inventions which made our life *very* easy.

The amplifying word *very* was found common with adjectives such as *important, high, large*, and *big.* The function of the word *very* is to increase the scalar lexical intensity of gradable adjectives (Quirk et al., 1985) as in Extract (43) "I find internet *very important…* It is *very important* if we used it properly. Internet is *very big* invention *…so* easy."

Ex. 43*:* In my opinion, I find internet is *very important* for wise people. It is *very important* if we used it properly. Internet is *very big* invention that amazed people and made their lives *so* easy.

Universal and Negative Pronouns

Universal and negative pronouns involve expressions such as *everyone, everything, everywhere, no one,* and *nothing.* These expressions made up 5% of the text. Universal and negative pronouns are considered to be inappropriate and are rarely ever found in academic writing in English (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). It was found that non-native English writers tend to use universal and negative pronouns in order to add the power of conviction to their stance (Cherry, 1988; Connor, 1996; Yum, 1987). Extracts 44-46 are examples of the universal and negative pronouns.

Ex. 44: Students who need information that support their research, they can only press one click and *everything* will be ready. *Everyone* is benefited from internet like students, doctors, farmers, and every professionalist.

Ex. 45: So, there is *no one* who can say that we can live without it because it becomes as an important thing that we can live without it.

Ex. 46: *No one* can say internet is bad and the same time *no one* can say internet is good. So, internet can be good and bad at the same time. But it depends on the user's intention.

The universal and negative pronouns are used to indicate that the claim being made is true as in Extracts 47-49.

> Ex. 47: Internet is now available for *everyone* in the world. We can use it for *everything* from anywhere and talk to anyone we want.
>
> Ex. 48: The internet has changed the world to a small village on which everyone can contact others in *everywhere* and *every time*.
>
> Ex. 49: *Everything* we need is now based on information within these big and huge calculators.

Summary

Three types of boosters were identified in the students' EFL persuasive essays. These include emphatics, amplifiers and universal and negative pronouns. Emphatics were found to be the most frequently used in the persuasive essays. Yemeni EFL students tend to use emphatics such as *important*, *actually*, *really*, *in fact*, *a lot of*, and *great,* or repeat the same words several times such as *internet*, *email*, *problem*, and *computer*. Another category of boosters found in the persuasive essays was the amplifiers which made up 5%. However, amplifiers are spoken features and should be used sparingly in academic writing. The third category of boosters identified in the persuasive essays was the universal and negative pronouns which made up 5%, and included words such as *everything*, *everywhere*, *no one*, and *nothing*. They signal exaggeration and give power to the conviction of the truth. However, using these markers would distort the validity of the proposition truth.

5.2.2 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL JALs

The sections provide discussions on hedges and boosters identified in the job application letters.

5.2.2.1 Hedges in the EFL JALs

The job application letter belongs to the promotional genre in which the job applicants promote themselves in a persuasive manner (Bhatia, 1993). In the case of this study, hedges in the job application letters constituted 11% of the text totalling 14,600 words. Hedges identified in the job application letters included *shields* 5%, *approximators* 2%, writer's personal doubt and direct involvement 2%, *if-clause constructions* 1%, and *impersonalization* 1%. The following sections discuss these types of hedges in the students' job application letters.

Shields

Shields appear to be frequently used in the job application letters 5%. Modal verbs such as *could, may,* and *might* and lexical verbs such as *mean, believe,* and *think* are some of the common shield expressions used in the job application letters. The modal verb *could* which expresses "possibility" as in Extract (50) "I believe I *could be* excellent teacher...,"or "probability" as in Extract *(51)* "I *might* postpone my study for one year."

> Ex. 50: I believe I *could* be excellent teacher as a candidate in this position.
>
> Ex. 51: I am now at the third level. If I get this job, I *might* postpone my study for one year.

Verbs of cognition (e.g., *think, believe, mean*) appear to be frequently used in the conclusion parts of the letter as in Extract (52) "I *mean,* it depends on your needs if you *think* I can work part time,*"* and Extract (53) "I *believe* I could be excellent teacher."

Ex. 52: I *mean*, it depends on your needs if you *think* I can work part time.

Ex. 53: I *believe* I could be excellent teacher as a candidate in this position.

Approximators

Approximators were not common in the students' job application letters 2%. They include expressions of approximations such as *almost, about, kind of* as in Extracts 54-57 below:

Ex. 54: I have more skills and experience in teaching English. I have *almost* taught English for two years.

Ex. 55: Teaching English for me is *kind of* fun that I am very much interested.

Ex. 56: I was thinking that the institute I want to apply in that like the one you advertised because of its popularity of many *things.*

Ex. 57: I had taught English *about* two semesters in MALI and got some awards as one of the teachers who have been chosen the best.

According to Chanell (1994), approximators signal vagueness and fuzziness as writers are not sure of the claims they make probably due to the lack of information about the subject matter. It was found that the Yemeni EFL students tend to use expressions that are vague in themselves as in Extract (58) "I learned different *things...*," and Extract (59) "We will discuss my CV and other *things…*" These expressions do not clearly specify the proposition; rather they add more vagueness to the proposition of the content.

Ex. 58: I joined many workshops in teaching methods. I learned different *thing*s on how to deal the students in the classroom.

Ex. 59: We will discuss my CV and other *things* during the interview.

The use of the vague expressions might be due to the students' low proficiency level as they do not have the specific or precise word to use. As Webber (2005) observes, approximators are often used to report claims that writer considers unimportant or may not have the precise word.

Writer's Personal Doubt and Direct Involvement

This category of hedges refer to the use of the first and plural personal pronouns *I/we* followed by the cognitive verbs (i.e. *think, believe*). In the job application letters, the two cognitive verbs appear to be commonly used particularly in the conclusion parts. As Yu (2009) states, the function of the expressions of *I think* is based on tentative epistemic judgment and the writer does not want to be too categorical in the claim being presented. Thus, the applicants tend to use the expression of *I think* due to their lack of certainty of wining the job being advertised as in Extract (60) "*I think* I am quite suitable for this job," and Extract (61) "*I think* I have all the qualities that are very suitable for your job." However, the expression of *I believe* indicate that the applicants presents their claims more than just being epistemic judgment as in Extract (62) "*I believe* this job suits me very well."

Ex. 60: Referring to your advertisement in the newspaper**,** I would like to apply for this job because *I think* I am quite suitable for this job.

Ex. 61: According to what I said before. *I think* I have all the qualities that are very suitable for your job.

Ex. 62: *I believe* this job suits me very well because I have enough skills and qualifications.

The use of the first person pronoun *I* followed by the cognitive verbs may reflect the nature of the genre of job application letters, in that, it is associated with the individual (i.e. applicant), rather than the collective (Chang & Swales, 1999).

If-Clause Constructions

Generally, if-clauses perform the role of hedges (Huebler, 1983) and are often used in spoken discourse (Hinkel, 2004b). They involve hesitation which indicates that the writer is uncertain about the claim presented. The use of if-clauses normally weakens the force of the argument. The findings of this study indicate that if-clause constructions are less frequent in the job application letters. The scarcity of if-clause constructions reflects the nature of the genre of job application letter which requires the applicants to be more certain in making arguments in order to win the job.

It was found that the certainty marker *will* appear to be followed by the if-clause constructions within the same claim as in Extract (63) "I *will* be lucky *if you accept me in this job…,"* and Extracts (64) and (65), respectively *"I will* be glad *if I work at your wonderful institute,"* "I *will* be ready *if you arrange an interview with me."* Using the certainty marker *will* with the if-clause constructions indicates that the writer is unsure about the claim they write and, thus, supply assurance to their prospective employer.

Ex. 63: I *will* be lucky *if you accept me in this job* because I think it is my chance to improve my capability independently.

Ex. 64: I *will* be glad *if I work at your wonderful institute*.

Ex. 65: I *will* be ready *if you arrange an interview with me*.

Impersonalization

Impersonalized expressions are used in most cases when writers want to detach themselves from the information they provide (Hinkel, 2004b). In this study, impersonalized expressions constitute 1% of the text, and that is probably due to the nature of the job application letter which requires applicants to establish and offer themselves confidently (Bhatia, 1993). Impersonalized expressions were found in the form of "passive voice*"* as in Extract (66) "*…*my speech *can be proved*," "introductory phrases*"* as in Extract (67) "*It will make* me lucky*…,"*or *"*existential subjects" as in Extract (68) "*There are* a few numbers of institutes*…*"

> Ex. 66: Regardless of this, you can determine and my speech *can be proved*.
>
> Ex. 67: *It will make* me lucky if I win the job I applied.
>
> Ex. 68: *There are* a few numbers of institutes that have a good reputation.

In EFL writing, students are often advised to avoid the existential subjects because they create wordy and weak statements (Baker, 1979). In the case of the students' job application letters, Yemeni EFL students' use of the existential subjects weakens their claims as in Extracts 69-70.

> Ex. 69: I think *there will be* a good chance for me to improve my capability independently by each good in your institute.
>
> Ex.70: We know that *there are* a lot of institutes in the city but your institute is one of the best which offers intensive English course with excellent quality.
>
> Ex.71: *There are* many courses and workshops that I attended before.

Summary

Hedges identified in the students' EFL job application letters included *shields* 5%, *approximators* 2%, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* 2%, i*f-clause construction* 1%, and *impersonalization* 1%. Shields identified in the students' job application letters include "epistemic modals" such as *could, may, might* and lexical verbs such as *believe* and *think* mainly used in the "conclusion" parts of the letters.

Another type of hedges identified in the students' job application letters was the approximators. Approximators were found to be also less frequently used in the students' job application letters. They signal expressions that are vague as writers are not sure of the information they supply. Words such as *about, around, kind of, something,* and *things* were found common in the job application letters.

As hedges, writer's personal doubt and direct involvement were found to be in the form of the first singular *I* followed by the cognitive verbs (i.e. *think, believe*). The expressions of *I think* is based on tentative epistemic judgment as the applicants do not want to be too categorical in the claim being presented. Thus, the applicants tend to use the expression of *I think* due to the lack of certainty of wining the job being advertised. On the other hand, the expression of *I believe* indicate that the applicants' claim is more than just being epistemic judgment.

Another type of hedges which signal hesitation and uncertainty is the if-clause constructions. The findings indicate that if-clause constructions were found to be less frequent in the students' job application letters as this genre requires a persuasive tone. Impersonalization expressions were also found to be less common. They were found in

the form of passive voice constructions (e.g., *can be proved…*), introductory phrases (e.g., *it will make me…),* and existential subjects (e.g., *there is/are…)*

5.2.2.2 Boosters in the EFL JALs

Boosters in the job application letters made up 8% of the text. They include emphatics 4%, *amplifiers* 2%, and *universal and negative pronouns* 2%. These types are discussed below and illustrated by extracts from the students' job application letters.

Emphatics

Emphatics express full commitment to the claim presented such as *sure, actually, of course, indeed, definitely*, and *in fact*. However, emphatics are recommended to be used sparingly in the written discourse and any excessive use may create distortion in the validity of the claim (Hinkel, 2004a). The job application letters contained the most number of emphatics 4%. Extracts 72-77 show examples of the most frequent emphatics used in the students' job application letters.

> Ex. 72: I am *sure* that I will do well at this job.
>
> Ex. 73: I am *sure* that you will not be regretful after you accept me in your institute.
>
> Ex. 74: The CV which includes my experience documents and certificates are *actually* excellent.
>
> Ex. 75: I am *sure* that I will do well at this job because I want this job very much.
>
> Ex. 76: All of my qualifications and experiences will *definitely* bring benefit to your institute.
>
> Ex. 77: *In fact*, I believe in myself that I will be perfect in the field.

Amplifiers

Amplifiers are viewed as a means of persuasion and their pragmatic functions are to increase the force of the claim but make the text appears to be colloquial (Biber, 1988). As Smoke (1992) states, amplifiers are considered to be spoken features and their use is to exaggerate the actual state of the matter in the perception of the writer. Although amplifiers are spoken features in the job application letters, Yemeni EFL students tend to use amplifiers to gain the prospective employer's acceptance as in Extract (78) "I want this job *very much…* I have *many* other skills… I have *many* other skills," and Extract (79) "For *many* years, I am one those teachers." Other examples of amplifiers used in the students' job application letters are given in Extracts 80 and 81.

> Ex. 78: I want this job *very much*. I am very patient and I can teach. I have *many* other skills that I can teach. I have *many* other skills that can help me doing my job.

> Ex. 79: For *many* years, I am one of those teachers who have taught English.

> Ex. 80: I am *very* interested in teaching and I enjoy teaching *a lot.*

> Ex. 81: My experience in teaching English had made me feel that we should develop and enhance our institutes *very* professionally.

Amplifiers were often found to be common in the "enclosed material move" of the letters as writers want to highlight their qualifications and experience as in Extract (82) "I have *many* practical teaching courses in English from *many* centers and institutes," and Extract (83) "I have *much* experience in teaching...I am responsible of *many* English and French forums…"

Ex. 82: I have *many* practical teaching courses in English from *many* centers and institutes.

Ex. 83: Furthermore, I have *much* experience in teaching English because I am responsible of *many* English and French forums. I am a member of Yemeni students' union.

Universal and Negative Pronouns

Universal and negative pronouns include expressions such as *all*, *each*, *everyone,* and *no one*. They made up 2% of the text. In this study, students tend to use the universal and negative pronouns to add the power of persuasion to the claims they construct. Extracts 84-90 show examples of the universal and negative pronouns used in the students' job application letters.

Ex. 84: I will be a good leader, and reliable in *every* member's team.

Ex. 85: I have been trained by British trainers. I am still connecting with them in *every* summer.

Ex. 86: I have taught English as a foreign language for more than two years. *Every* student I taught speaks well about me.

Ex. 67: I would like to inform you that I got good grades in *every* subject of my degree in university.

Ex. 88: *Everyone* speaks well about my qualification.

Ex. 89: As you know *no one* can get the job without long experience.

Ex. 90: I do not use my mother tongue at home. It is just English for everything.

Summary

Boosters in the students' job application letters made up 8% of the text totalling 14,600 words. They include emphatics 4%, amplifiers, and universal and negative pronouns 2% each. The three types of boosters are viewed as a means of persuasion and their pragmatic function is to increase the force of the claim in the text.

5.3 Hedges and Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs and JALs

This section discusses the findings for Research Question 2. Are there any significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters employed by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their L1 and EFL persuasive essays and L1 and EFL job application letters?

5.3.1 Hedges and Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

This section discusses the findings of hedges and boosters identified in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays.

Hedges in the L1 and EFL PEs

In contrastive rhetoric research, it was assumed that EFL students organize their EFL texts in the same way they do in their L1 writing influenced by the L1 conventions (Kaplan, 1972; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Kubota, 1998). The findings of this study show that students' use of hedges in their L1 is significantly different from the use of hedges in their EFL persuasive essays, and that this difference was significant (M= 33, 39, SD= 9), t (8), p<.05. Some factors may have played an important role such as L2 proficiency or the difficulties of writing in the EFL context. As Wu and Donald (2000) state, using

hedges in the L2 texts may be due to a combination of lower proficiency level and confidence.

Previous studies show that L1 writing varies in several aspects related to the writer's use of lexical choices (e.g., Raimes, 1985; Silva, 1992; Scott, Crossley & McNamara, 2009). For example, Leki, Cumming and Silva (2008) found that L2 writing is rhetorically and linguistically different from L1 writing. Aljamhoor (2001) argues that students do not perform similarly across their L1 and L2 writing. This means writing in the L1 may vary from writing in the L2 due to linguistic and/or rhetorical differences.

It was found that there is a tendency for students to use impersonalized hedges in the form of "introductory phrases" in their EFL essays as in Extract (91) "… *it has made* the communication between people easier and *it has made* studying at university in the World easier. *It could be* a curse if *it is misused* by browsing bad websites." As Swales and Feak (1994) state, writers sometimes hedge their claims to express the probability of the claim they make. Moreover, the simplicity of the introductory phrases may have also led students to use them in their claims.

> Ex. 91: In short, Internet is a very blessing service for humanity since *it has made* the communication between people easier and *it has made* studying at university in the World easier. *It could be a curse if it is misused* by browsing bad websites.

However, the same participants show tendency for using hedges of impersonalized nature (e.g., passive voice constructions) in the L1 persuasive essays as in Extract (92) "Internet *is considered to be* effective means… *It is also considered* the modernist device in the world."

يعتبر الانترنت وسيلة فعالة في نقل المعلومات من شخص الى اخر كمايعتبر احدث وسيلة للتواصل بين

الشعوب.

> Ex. 92: Translation: Internet *is considered to be* an effective means in terms of transferring information from person to person. *It is* also *considered to be* the modernist device in the world.

In addition, Yemeni EFL students seem to have difficulty in constructing passive voice construction correctly in the EFL persuasive essays as in Extract (93) "It *still considers* the fastest means which everyone can contact in the world…," and Extract (94) "Technology *is made* progress nowadays…" The concept of passive voice construction in English can be difficult for many learners, as students struggle with the idea of an object, and an object turning into a subject when changing the active voice into passive voice. Research into L2 learning indicates that English passive is difficult for NNSs (Hinkel, 2002; Master, 1991).

> Ex. 93: Internet opened the door for people in the world to contact with each other. *It still considers* the fastest means which everyone can contact in the world at any time.

> Ex. 94: *Technology is made* progress nowadays. Computer is one of the technologies which made internet used everywhere.

Another difference between the L1 and EFL persuasive essays is that students show a tendency for making direct questions in their EFL persuasive essays. One possible explanation might be the reason of hesitation of the claims they make as in Extract (95) "*Do you think people are able to send information in seconds without internet?*"

According to Swales and Feak (1994), using direct question in the text is viewed as personal and subjective which mark detachment and, thus, may weaken the validity of the writer's claim. Extract 95-97 are also instances of direct questions in the students' EFL persuasive essays.

> Ex. 95: *Do you think people are able to send information in seconds without internet*? Of course no. quick communication with each can be made by internet which is cheap, fast and effective.

> Ex. 96: Many internet cafes spread quickly in our cities without monitoring. We ask ourselves, *what we should do to protect our children from bad sites*!

> Ex. 97: Computer is really revolutionary invention. *You can ask me how*? Satellite that we can see from the outer space is powered by computers.

As approximators, vagueness is another feature found in the EFL essays due to the students' limited vocabulary. In this case, students may not have the precise vocabulary to express their claims, and therefore resort to use vague words such *thing*, *things,* and *something* as in Extract (98) "… we would know that internet is important *thing* if we used it for good *things…*If internet is only used for bad *things,* it will harm us…" and Extract (99) "… The most important *thing* is internet. Internet is *something* important for everyone…"

> Ex. 98: In brief, we should know that internet is important *thing* if we used it for good *things*. If internet is only used for bad *things*, it will harm us and make us disadvantage persons.

> Ex. 99: Internet improves day after day. The most important *thing* is internet. Internet became *something* important for everyone in different stages of age. Although, it helps us in many aspects, it affects us in many others.

Boosters in the L1 and EFL PEs

In contrast with hedges, the findings showed that students' use of boosters in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays is not significantly different (M= 32, 31, SD= 13), *t* (.434), p>.05. Previous studies suggest that boosters are a rhetorical characteristic of Arabic discourse (Shouby, 1970; Patai, 1973; Hinkel, 1997, 2002; Ostler, 1987; Sa'addeddin, 1989). Therefore, Yemeni EFL students' tendency to use boosters in their EFL writing might reflect cultural influence on the way language is used in presenting their claims. As Hinkel (2002) states, in many rhetorical traditions other than Anglo-American, emphatics are seen as appropriate and effective means of persuasion, conveying the writer's commitment to his or her statements. However, boosters are disapproved by English culture which prefers a simple and straightforward language (Kaplan, 1966).

As an emphatic technique, repetition was found to be common in the students' L1 and EFL persuasive essays. Students tend to repeat certain words or phrases several times in their L1 and EFL persuasive essays as in Extract (100) "It is considered as one of *the most important* means...which provides us *the important* books... it provides us with *the most important* means of entertainment,*"* and Extract (101) "I find internet is very *important* for wise people...it is really *important* if we use it properly. So, internet helps us in *many* times and it is *important* to us especially in our education." In Arabic, writers pragmatically think that repetition is a way of making oneself clearer in their arguments and of persuading others of one's view (Johnstone, 1991). As Holes (1995b) states, Arabic writers tend to use repetition to give statements an emphasis that the proposition or argument is true. This seems to have influenced students' EFL writing.

L1:

<div dir="rtl">

لا نستطيع *ان* نستغني عن الانترنت لان له فوائد *كثيرة جدا* . فالانترنت يعتبر *اهم* وسيلة في البحث العلمي حيث يوفر *لنا/هم* الكتب والمصادر التعليمية بالاضافة الى كونه يوفر *اهم* الوسائل الترفيهية.

</div>

Ex. 100 (Translation): We can dispense with internet because it has a lot of advantages. It is considered as one of *the most important means* in the scientific research which provide us the *important* books and educational resources. In addition, it provides us with the *most important means* of entertainment.

EFL:

Ex. 101: In my opinion, I find internet is very *important* for wise people. It is really *important* if we used it properly. So, the internet helps us in *many* times and it is *important* to us especially in our education to see what is new in English. Indeed, we cannot stop using it at all.

It was found that students start their claims in the L1 persuasive essays with exaggerative expressions as in Extract (102) "*Internet is really something bigger than our imagination… something that brings everything to you is called internet! Yes, internet, the spider's web*," and Extract (103) "*Internet became an important part in our life that we can't live without it at all… it became important like food and drink.*" This finding supports the claim that Arabic speakers or writers rely on exaggerative style to persuade when writing or speaking (Feghali, 1997; Zahrana, 1995; Suchan, 2010).

L1:

<div dir="rtl">

شئ اكبر من الخيال، عندما تجد شيئا يجلب لك *شئ تجد فيه كل شئ. انه الانترنت! نعم الانترنت! تلك الشبكة العنكبوتية*.

</div>

Ex. 102 (Translation): *Internet is really something bigger than our imagination. Something that brings everything to you in seconds is called internet! Yes, internet! That is the spider's web.*

<div dir="rtl">

اصبح الانترنت جزاء من *حياتنا الذي لا يمكن ان نستغني عنه ابدا* في حياتنا. لقد اصبح الانترنت ملازما لنا بل *صار اهم من الطعام والشراب* .في كل شؤون حياتنا.

</div>

EFL:

Ex. 103 (Translation): *Internet became an important part in our life that we can't live without it at all*. It became very close to us in all matters of our life. Moreover, *it became important like food and drink.*

In terms of a possible transfer from L1 to EFL persuasive essays, the use of the certainty marker "inna" which means "*indeed*" or "*truly*" seems to be reflected in the EFL persuasive essays as illustrated in Extracts (104) and (105).

L1:

إن*ها* سلاح ذو حدين: قد تكون ذو نفع للانسان وقد تكون عكس ذلك.

Ex. 104 (Translation): *Indeed*, internet is like two edged weapon: it may be useful for people and it may have reverse uses.

EFL:

Ex. 105: *In fact*, I think that we have to be conscious with the use of internet and teach children how to use it.

The L1 persuasive essays seem to be charged with emphatics (e.g., *no doubt*, *as a matter of fact)* as in Extract (106) "*No doubt* that internet has *really* made the means of communications much easier…," and Extract (107) "*A matter of facts*, so many people who have some of their family members outside ..." However, the EFL persuasive essays seem to be charged with emphatics of spoken nature (*e.g., really, of course*) as in Extract (108) "it is *really* very important thing…" and Extract (109) " *Of course*, quick communication with each can be made by internet."

L1:

لاشك ان الانترنت قد قامت بتقديم احدث وسائل الاتصال وتقنية ليستفيد منه كل البشرية في جميع انحاء العالم. قد نجد *فيه كل* ما نريد وبجهد بسيط ، ولذلك تعتبر نعمة *لكل* انسان.

Ex. 106 (Translation): *No doubt* that internet has made the means of communications much easier so that all people benefit from it all over the world.

Ex. 107: *A matter of fact*, so many people who have some of their family members outside the country they live in, they are getting contacted by many different ways.

EFL:

Ex. 108: Internet is very necessary thing in our life. Although it has disadvantages, it is *really* very important thing which can help us do our job excellently.

Ex. 109: *Of course*, quick communication with each can be made by internet which is cheap, fast and effective.

It was found that Yemeni EFL students encounter difficulties in using modality in their EFL persuasive essays. This difficulty can be attributed to a number of factors, one of which is the lack of a modal system in Arabic. As Aziz (1989) states, modality does not exist in Arabic as a clear-cut category and, therefore, Arabic-speaking students of English are likely to have difficulty in distinguishing modals from each other in the texts. For example, the pairs that have more or less related meanings (*e.g., should, must*) appear to be confusing for students as in Extract (110) "we *must* be careful for these things…" and Extract (111) "We *must* mention that computers will save our history in an electronic form."

Ex. 110: Some of us used to benefit ourselves and some of us used to the opposite so we *must* be careful for these things...

Ex. 111: We *must* mention that computers will save our history in an electronic form, which will be very easy and probably very easy to retrieve and display.

As shown in the two extracts above, the modal verb *must* conveys a stronger assertion than *should*, and that is not what the context calls for. The overlap between *must* and *should* might have transferred from the students' L1. As Scarcella and Brunak (1981) note, Arab students tend to use a high level of modality of assertion.

5.3.2 Hedges and Boosters in the L1 and EFL JALs

This section discusses the findings on the use of hedges and boosters identified in the L1 and EFL job application letters.

Hedges in the L1 and EFL JALs

The findings indicate that Yemeni EFL students' use of hedges in their L1 and EFL job application letters are significantly different (M= 8, 11, SD= 4), *t* (7), p<.05. In their L1 letters, Yemeni EFL students often start their letters with religious introduction. They feel the necessity to write something before getting to the point. For example, the participant below opens his letter with a religious statement as in Extract (112) "*To the dignified manager, may God protect you….*" This style is a common feature in the introduction of Arabic letters, in general, as writers first have to establish solidarity with readers before stating the purpose. This may have an influence on students' writing EFL job application letters as in Extract (113) "*To the manager of YALI Institute. With warm greetings…*"

    L1:

الاخ مدير المعهد حفظـــه الله تعالى ... وبعد... في البداية يسرني ان اتقدم اليكم للوظيفة المعلن عنها في صحيفة يمن تايمز.

Ex. 112 (Translation): *To the dignified manager of the institute may God protect you.* I would like to apply for the job you advertised about in Yemen Times.

EFL:

Ex. 113: *To the manager of YALI Institute.* With warm greetings, I am glad to apply for the job announced in Yemen Times.

Boosters in the L1 and EFL JALs

The findings indicate that Yemeni EFL students' use of boosters in their L1 and EFL job application letters are significantly different (M= 12, 9, SD= 4), *t* (8), p<.05. A possible explanation for the differences between the employment of boosters in the L1 and EFL might be that students' competency in their L1 may have led them to emphasize their claims more strongly than they do in their EFL. These findings confirm previous studies which found that Arabic Language is characterized by boosters used as a means of persuasion (Shouby, 1977; El-Shiyab, 1990).

Furthermore, the genre of job application letter is a promotional genre in which the applicant's goal is to persuade the prospective employer that the he or she is the best candidate for the job. As Yeung (2007) states, promotional genre, in general, is typically persuasive in nature in that writers employ persuasive means such as boosters to reach their persuasive goals.

It was found that students tend to charge their statements with emphatics, especially in the "body" part of the L1 and EFL letters. They believe that this would gain the employer's approval as in Extract (114) "I have *many* qualifications...I worked for *many*

institutes and receive *several* certificates…," and Extract (115) "I attended *many* workshops…I got *many* certificates… I think this job is *very* suitable for me."

L1**:**

احمل كثير من المؤهلات التي تؤهلني للحصول على هذا العمل حيث لدي *العديد* من الشهادت والدورات في مجال تدريس اللغة الانجليزية.

Ex. 114 (Translation): I have *many* qualifications which qualify me to get this job. I worked for *many* institutes and receive *several* certificates in English language teaching.

EFL:

Ex. 115: I attended *many* workshops in teaching English for non-native speakers. I got *many* certificates and awards from different institutes. So I think this job is *very* suitable for me.

Emphatics (e.g., no *doubt, in fact)* are another type of boosters used in the L1 job application letters as in Extract (116) *"No doubt* that English institutes are many…there are only few ones which teach English …*In fact*, I consider your institute YALI as one of those excellent institutes." However, emphatics of spoken nature (e.g., *of course, really)* were found to be used in the EFL job application letters. The pragmatic use of emphatics is to persuade the prospective employer that they have enough qualifications and experience for the job. This strategy, however, does not achieve the purpose for which the letter is written. As Bhatia (1993) argues, using the genre moves of the job application letter would create good impression in the prospective employer's mind.

L1:

<div dir="rtl">

لا شك ان معاهد اللغات كثيرة جدا في بلادنا غير ان القليل منها هي تلك المعهاد الي تدرس فعلا اللغة بطريقة فاعلة . لذا فانني اعتبر معهدكم يالي هو احدى تلك المعاهد المتميزة.

</div>

EFL:

Ex. 116 (Translation): *No doubt* that English institutes are many in our country. Yet, there are only few ones which teach English efficiently. Therefore, *in fact,* I *consider* your institute YALI- as one of those excellent institutes.

The use of if-clause construction was found to be used with the modal verb *will* in the same claim in the EFL job application letters as in Extract (117) and (118), respectively "*If you give me a chance to work in your good institute, be sure that I will do my best in your institute,*" "*If you like your job a lot, you will create success.*" The if-clause construction is often associated with hypothetical assumption whereas the modal verb *will* is associated with certainty. A possible explanation for this disparity could be that the students are not aware of the "closing" move of the job application letter.

Ex. 117: *If you give me a chance to work* in your good institute, be sure that I *will* do my best in your institute.

Ex. 118: I enjoy teaching a *lot*. This is not an easy thing. *If you like your job you will create success.*

However, the use of the modal verb *will* was found to be used in the L1 job application letters without if-clause construction as in Extract (119) "…I *will* do my best…" and Extract (120) "…I *will* be waiting for the interview to discuss my qualifications…"

<div dir="rtl">

في الختام اتمنا ان قبولي للعمل لديكم وسابذل غاية جهدي في التدريس لديكم.

</div>

Ex. 119 (Translation): At last, I hope that you accept me to work with and I *will* do my best to teach in your institute.

<div dir="rtl">اتمنى ان تاخذ مؤهلاتي و خبرتي بعين الاعتبار لديكم وانتظر للمقابلة لمناقشة مؤهلاتي وخبرتي معكم.</div>

> Ex. 120 (Translation): I hope that you consider my qualifications and experience. I *will* be waiting for the interview to discuss my qualifications and experience with you.

Summary

This section has discussed hedges and boosters in the students' L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. Further analyses of the L1 and EFL essays indicate that "introductory phrases" appear to be frequently used by Yemeni EFL students in their EFL persuasive essays. However, passive voice constructions appear to be frequently used in the L1 persuasive essays. A possible explanation for this disparity could be due to the reason that introductory phrases seem to be easy for students to use in their EFL essays unlike passive voice construction which requires knowledge of the auxiliary verbs, verb forms, and structure.

In addition, EFL Yemeni students tend to use direct questions in their EFL persuasive essays. Using direct question in the text is considered to be subjective that may weaken the validity of the claim. As impersonalized form of hedges, vagueness was another type of hedges found in the EFL essays. Students may not have the precise vocabulary to express their claims, and therefore tend to use vague words such *thing, things,* or *something.*

As regard boosters in the EFL persuasive essays, there is a tendency for students to use boosters in both the L1 and EFL persuasive essays. Yemeni EFL students tend to charge their claims with emphatics and repeated words and/or phrases in their L1 and EFL essays as a means of persuasion. In Arabic culture, writers think that repetition and

exaggeration are appropriate means of making oneself clearer in their arguments and of persuading others of one's view. This seems to have influenced students' EFL writing.

Emphatic expressions such as *no doubt*, *as a matter of fact, in fact* were found to be frequently used in the L1 persuasive essays whereas emphatic expressions of spoken nature such as *really, of course* were found to be frequently used in the EFL persuasive essays. A possible explanation for such disparity could be that writing in EFL is characterized by spoken features.

Modality in the EFL persuasive essays has been found to be difficult for Yemeni EFL writers especially those modals which have related meanings such as *must* and *should*. This difficulty might be due to the absence of modality system in Arabic and, therefore, Arabic-speaking students of English may have difficulties in distinguishing modals from each other.

The findings of the job application letters indicate that the use of hedges is significantly different. Religious statements are another feature in the L1 job application letters that may have influenced students' writing in their EFL job application letters. Writers feel that there is a necessity to say something before they get to the purpose they write for.

The findings of the L1 and EFL job application letters indicate that the use of boosters is significantly different. A possible explanation for the differences between the employment of boosters in the L1 and EFL might be that students' competency in the L1 may have led them to emphasize their claims more in their EFL job application letters. Previous studies found that Arabic Language is characterized by boosters used as a

means of persuasion. Another possible reason may be that the job application letter, which is a persuasive genre, requires applicants to use persuasive techniques to reach their prospective employer's acceptance.

Since students are not aware of the genre moves of the job application letters, both of the L1 and EFL job application letters appear to be charged with emphatics especially in the "body" parts of the L1 and EFL letters. It is important to note that in Arabic culture, emphatics are viewed as appropriate techniques of persuasion, and that may be reflected in the students' EFL job application letters. Emphatics such as *no doubt* and *in fact* appear to be used in the L1 job application letters while emphatics of spoken nature such as *of course,* and *really* appear to be used in the EFL job application letters. If-clause construction was found to be associated with the modal verb *will* in in the EFL job application letters. However, the modal verb *will* was found to be used in the L1 job application letters without if-clause construction.

5.4 Hedges and Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs and JALs

This section discusses the findings for Research Question 3. Are there any significant differences between the male and female student writers and the overall use of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters?

Hypothesis 1:

H$_0$: There will be no significant difference between male and female Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in terms of the overall use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

H₁: The female undergraduate students will use more hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters than male undergraduate students.

5.4.1 Hedges and Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL PEs

This section discusses the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the male and female students' EFL persuasive essays.

Hedges in the Male and Female EFL PEs

The findings on the use of hedges in the male and female student writers' EFL persuasive essays are significantly different (M= 29, 34, SD= 10, 11), t (3), p<.05. In the light of these findings, the null hypothesis, which assumes that there will be no significant difference between male and female students in relation to the use of hedges, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (**H₁**) is accepted. These findings seem to support earlier studies that women tend to hedge more than do men (Lakoff, 1975; Carli, 1990; Aries, 1996; Holmes, 2001; Baron, 2004). As Holmes (2001) states, women are obliged to show the feminine qualities of weakness toward men and, therefore, hedge to signal a lack of confidence and uncertainty. In the case of this study, Yemeni female writers' use of hedges may reflect the women's status as subordinate to men in educational, social, and professional settings. As Al-Haj (1987) points out, Yemeni society is a male-dominated society in which women are perceived as powerless, obedient, and submissive to men. The difference between male and female student writers is also supported by Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly (1998) who found that there are particular linguistic expressions in Arabic that women use when addressing men, and vice versa owing to cultural and religious values.

One of the differences between male and female student writers in the EFL persuasive essays is the writer's personal doubt and direct involvement. It was found that male writers tend to use the first plural pronoun *we* with the cognitive verb *know* as in Extract (121) "*We know* that internet makes our world closer," and Extract (122) "As *we know*, technology is progressing very fast." The use of the first person plural pronoun *we* with the cognitive verbs *know* in men's writing signals power and majesty.

Ex. 121: *We know* that without internet, the information will be difficult to get.

Ex. 122: As *we know*, technology is progressing very fast.

Female student writers tend to use features which indicate uncertainty and tentativeness such as if-clause expressions as in Extracts (123) and (124), respectively "Internet is a miracle invention *if we use it in a good way. If we do not use in a good way*, it will be a curse for us," "…internet is important thing *if we used it for good things. If internet is only used for bad things*, it will harm us…" The use of if-clause constructions in writing implies hypothetical assumptions that are often associated with vagueness and indirectness (Hinkel, 1997).

Ex. 123: Internet is a miracle invention *if we use it in a good way. If we do not use in a good way*, it will be a curse for us.

Ex. 124: *We know* that internet is important thing *if we used it for good things. If internet is only used for bad things*, it will harm us and make us disadvantage persons.

It is interesting to note that female writers tend to use the expression of *I think* as in Extract (125) "*I think* you do not know if you are addicted for the internet…*" While male writers tend to use the expression of i*n my opinion* as in Extract (126) "*In my*

opinion, internet adds something special to our mind." The expression of *I think* is a mental verb showing the writer's thinking, and often associated with spoken discourse while the expression of *in my opinion* is more formal which indicates that the claim is just based on the writer's personal opinion and may or may not be true. This finding supports the belief that female language is regarded as more polite and formal than men (Lakoff, 1975; Brend, 1975).

> Ex. 125: *I think* you do not know if you are addicted for the internet and you cannot give up this habit as a result for that you lose a lot of things.

> Ex. 126: *In my opinion*, internet adds something special to our mind that discovering what happening around you and develops yourself.

Boosters in the Male and Female EFL PEs

The findings on the use of boosters in the male and female student writers' EFL persuasive essays are significantly different (M= 19, 24, SD= 9, 9), t (3), p<.05. In the light of the findings of this study, the null hypothesis, which states that there will be no significant difference in relation to the use of boosters between male and female students, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. These findings show that women tend to use more boosters compared with men, and this may reflect women's certainty that the addressees may remain unconvinced (Lakoff, 1975). As Holmes (2001) points out, women use boosters so as to be taken more seriously as addressees may not pay enough attention to them.

Although emphatics and universal pronouns are regarded as inappropriate features in academic writing (Biber, 1988; Connor, 1996), there is a tendency for female students to charge their claims with emphatics and universal pronouns such as *most, many, very,*

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important, everything, everywhere, and *everyone* as in Extract (127) *"… most of* people are using the internet and they think that it is *very* good for *everyone* and has *many* positive things. Internet is *important* in our life,"* and Extract (128) "…they can only press on click and *everything* will be ready. *Everyone* is benefited from internet like students, doctors, farmer, and *every* professionalist." Both of emphatics and universal pronouns are used when writers or speakers want to emphasize the claims they make. As persuasive means, emphatics and universal pronouns were suggested to be a characteristic of female writing (Holmes, 2001).

> Ex. 127: In these days, *most of* people are using the internet and they think that it is *very* good for *everyone* and has *many* positive things. Internet is an *important* in our life. We can get benefits from internet.

> Ex. 128: Students who need information that support their research, they can only press one click and *everything* will be ready. *Everyone* is benefited from internet like students, doctors, farmers, and *every* professionalist.

It was found female student writers show a tendency for using strong modals such as *must* and *have to* as in Extract (129) "…So, parents *must* know what their children do. Government *has to* control the internet cafes," and Extract (130) "…we *must* be careful when we use it." However, male student writers tend to use less assertive modals such as *should*, *can*, and *may* as in Extract (131) "…We *should* educate families of the internet danger," and Extract (132) "…So, they *may* use it for a wrong way."

> Ex. 129: They watch bad sites which harm themselves. So, parents *must* know what their children do and what they browse. Government *has to* control the internet cafes.

> Ex. 130: Internet is very useful, but we *must* be careful when we use it.

Ex. 131: It is important to know the disadvantages of the internet. If we know that, we will be careful of its bad use. We *should* educate families of the internet danger.

Ex. 132: The other problem is when the children use it; they do not know how to use it. So, they *may* use it for a wrong way.

5.4.2 Hedges and Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

This section discusses the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the male and female students' EFL job application letters.

Hedges in the Male and Female Students' JALs

The findings on the use of hedges in the male and female student writers' EFL job application letters are significantly different (M= 12, 15, SD= 3, 5), t (2), p<.05. In the light of these findings, the null hypothesis, which assumes that there will be no significant difference in relation to the use of hedges between male and female students, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H₁) is accepted.

 Further analyses of the job application letters show that the expressions of *I think* and *I believe* appear to be frequently used especially in the "conclusion" part of the male students' job application letters as in Extract (133) "As my CV shows*, I think* I am appropriate for the job..,*"* and Extract (134) "*I believe* I can be suitable for this job."

Ex. 133: As my CV shows, *I think* I am appropriate for this job because I have the qualifications and the experience.

Ex. 134: *I believe* I can be suitable for this job.

Boosters in the Male and Female Students' EFL JALs

The findings on the use of boosters in the male and female student writers' EFL job application letters are significantly different (M= 7, 12, SD= 4, 5), t (5), p<.05. In the light of these findings, the null hypothesis, which states that there will be no significant difference between male and female students in relation to the use of boosters, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H$_1$) is accepted. The findings show that female student writers tend to use more boosters compared with the male student writers. These findings support previous studies which suggest that boosters are distinctive features of women's writing (Lakoff, 1975; Biber, 1995; Holmes, 2001; Palander-Collin, 1999; Barron, 2004).

The use of boosters by female student writers may reflect the women's status in the Yemeni traditional society where women are viewed as subordinate who perform only house-wife duties. In the job application letters, the female applicants anticipate that their prospective employers might not be convinced of the claims they make and, therefore, boost their claims to get a favorable response. Lakoff (1975) puts forward that boosters are used by women because of insecurity, and this is illustrated in the way the female students use boosters in their job application letters as in Extract (135) "*As a matter of fact*, I have excellent experience…*be sure* that I will do my best in your institute."

> Ex. 135: Female: *As a matter of fact*, I have excellent experience in teaching English language. So, I will be happy if you give me a chance to work in your good institute and be *sure* that I will do my best in your institute.

It was noted that female students tend to overuse a single booster within a particular category (e.g., amplifiers and emphatics) as in Extract (136) and (137), respectively "Because I taught English in *many* centers I have received *many* awards…I will be responsible for teaching… I will be ready for interview," "I am *sure* that I will do well…I want this job *very much*. I am *very* patient…I have *many* other skills…I have *many* other skills that can help me doing my job."

> Ex. 136: Because I taught English in *many* centers. I have received *many* awards. So I will be responsible for teaching at your institute. I hope you will accept me to work with you and I will be ready for interview.
>
> Ex. 137: I am *sure* that I will do well at this job because I want this job *very much*. I am *very* patient and I can teach. I have *many* other skills that I can teach. I have *many* other skills that can help me doing my job.

Summary

The findings indicate that female student writers tend to use more hedges in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters compared with the male student writers. As a male-dominated society, Yemeni women are perceived as powerless, obedient and subordinate to men in educational, social, and professional settings. On the other hand, the male students writers tend to use the first plural pronouns *we* with the cognitive verb *know* to signal power and this may reflect men's dominance over women in the Yemeni society.

Female student writers were also found to hedge their claims using if-clause constructions in their EFL persuasive essays as if they would be denied by their readers. Using if-clause constructions are often associated with vagueness and indirectness. In addition, female student writers tend to use the expression of *in my opinion* in their EFL

essays which indicates that the claim being made is just the writer's opinion that may or may not be true. However, the male student writers prefer the expression of *I think* which is often found in spoken discourse.

Boosters, on the other hand, seem to be another distinctive feature in the female students' EFL persuasive essays. Although emphatics and universal pronouns are inappropriate features in academic writing, there is a tendency for female students to charge their claims with devices such as *most, many, very, important, everything, everywhere,* and *everyone*.

Another feature found in the EFL persuasive essays is that female students tend to use strong modals such as *must* and *have to* while male student writers tend to use less assertive modals such as *should* and *may*. The difference between male and female in terms of the use of modals seems to support the claim that emphasis is a distinctive feature in women's writing (Biber, 1995; Holmes, 2001; Barron, 2004).

The findings on the use of hedges in the male and female student writers' job application letters indicate that female students tend to use more hedges compared with the male students.

The expressions of *I think* and *I believe* appear to be frequently used by the male student writers. As regard boosters in the EFL job application letters, the findings show that female students tend to use more boosters compared with male students. Here, the use of boosters by female students may reflect the women's status in the Yemeni traditional society. Women find it difficult to get a job as they are assigned to perform only house-

wife duties. The female applicants expect that their prospective employer might not be convinced of the claims they make and, therefore, tend to use boosters for a favorable response.

5.5 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs and JALs across Proficiency Levels

This section discusses the findings for Research Question 4. Is there any correlation between the EFL proficiency level and the overall use of hedges and boosters in Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters?

Hypothesis 2:

H_0: There will be no significant differences in the overall use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels.

H_2: Advanced students will use fewer hedges and boosters than intermediate and low proficient students in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters.

5.5.1 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs across Proficiency Levels

This section discusses the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays across three proficiency levels of low, intermediate, and advanced students.

Hedges in the EFL PEs across Three Proficiency Levels

The findings on the use of hedges in the EFL students' persuasive essays across three proficiency levels show significant differences $F (2, 117) = 20$, *p=.000*. In the light of these findings, the null hypothesis (H_0), which assumes that there will be no significant difference in the overall use of hedges across three proficiency levels, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_2) is accepted. Students at lower proficiency levels appear to rely more on hedges compared with those at higher proficiency levels. These findings seem to be different from Oxford and Nyikos's findings (1989) that EFL learners at higher proficiency levels tend to rely more on hedges compared with those at lower proficiency levels. This finding is supported by earlier studies. For example, Hinkel (2005) argues that EFL writers at lower proficiency levels tend to repeat the same hedges in their writing. This means competent students may not rely on hedges as much as those at lower proficiency levels. As Chinnawong (2002) states, writers at higher proficiency levels may develop their ideas more successfully than do writers at lower levels. This is also supported by Hyland and Milton (1997) who found that NNSs students are far more likely to rely on hedges than native speakers and this likelihood increases as proficiency declines.

Vague expressions such as *thing/things* and *something* seem to be distinctive features in the low proficient students' persuasive essays as in Extract (138) "…The most important *thing* is internet. Internet became *something* important…Although it helps us in many *things, it* affects us in many other *things."* Approximators that signal vagueness are hedging devices used when novice writers do not have enough vocabulary or knowledge

of the subject matter and, thus, resort to hedge their claims (Nikula, 1996; Hinkel, 2004b, 2005).

> Ex.138: Internet improves day after day. The most important *thing* is internet. Internet became *something* important for everyone in different stages of age. Although, it helps us in many *things*, it affects us in many other *things*.

In addition, students at lower proficiency levels appear to charge their claims with hedges in longer sentences with less developed ideas as in Extract (139) "Internet has gave us all what we have talked about it previously and more and more that *it has made our* big world as a small village…*it could be* dangerous *if we misuse it* as *there are* so many sexual websites." However, claims generated by students at higher proficiency levels appear to have a clear thesis statement supported by examples as in Extract (140) "*Internet can be harmful. For example, browsers by only one click can easily find unethical sites.*" As stated by Hyland (2008a), learners at higher proficiency levels tend to use fewer items of lexical bundles while learners at lower proficiency levels tend to overuse lexical bundles or clusters.

> Ex. 139 (Low): Internet has gave us all what we have talked about it previously and more and more that *it has made* our big world as a small village. However, *it could be* dangerous if *we misuse it* as *there are* so many sexual websites.

> Ex. 140 (Intermediate): Internet can be harmful. *For example, browsers by only one click can easily find unethical sites*. So, browsers should be careful when they find such bad sites and find ways of getting them blocked.

Boosters in the EFL PEs across Three Proficiency Levels

The findings on the use of boosters in the students' EFL persuasive essays across three proficiency levels show significant differences F (2, 117) = 10, $p=.002$. In the light of

these findings, the null hypothesis (H_0), which assumes that there will be no significant difference in the overall use of boosters across three proficiency levels, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_2) is accepted. Students at lower proficiency levels appear to rely more on boosters compared with those at higher proficiency levels. These findings seem to be different from those found in Oxford and Nyikos'(1989) study that learners at higher levels tend to rely more on boosters compared with learners at lower levels.

In this study, boosters used by low, intermediate, and advanced students in the EFL persuasive essays indicate that low proficient students tend to use boosters of the same category (e.g., emphatics) as in Extract (141) "…*the most important* thing is internet. Internet became something *important …* Although it helps us in *many* other things*,* it affects us in *many* other things*."* However, boosters used by intermediate and advanced levels appear to belong to different categories (e.g., amplifiers, emphatics) as in Extract (142) "…*most of* the people depend on the internet ... browsers *should be* careful…*,*" and Extract (143) "*...*technology is playing *very important* role… The World has become *really* like a small village thank to the Internet. The intermediate and advanced levels seem to have enough vocabulary which would help them to generate their ideas more appropriately than those at lower proficiency levels. Hinkel (2005) notes that writers of low proficiency levels often resort to repeat words and phrases as they lack the precise vocabulary to express their ideas.

> Ex.141 (Low): Internet improves day after day. The *most important* thing is internet. Internet became something *important for everyone* in different stages of age. Although, it helps us in *many* things, it affects us in *many* other things.

> Ex. 142 (Intermediate): In our daily life *most of* the people depend on the internet in various fields such as chatting, shopping. The internet can be harmful. For

example, browsers by only one click can easily find unethical sites. So, browsers *should be* careful when they find such bad sites and find ways of getting them blocked.

Ex. 143 (Advanced): Nowadays, technology is playing *very important* role in people's life. The World has become *really* like a small village thank to the Internet which has made the World closer.

Differences are also notable in the use of boosters by low, intermediate, and advanced students. Boosters of spoken nature, for examples, seem to be a distinctive feature in the low students' writing as in Extract (144) "Internet is *important* thing …We can get *a lot of* benefits… *Actually* internet is *great* thing…it helps us in *man*y time." As Hinkel (2003) observes, emphatics, which are common in informal conversations, are frequently used in NNS writing. However, advanced students tend to use boosters of compound nature as in Extract (145) "…*Most importantly*, businessmen can sell their products online… Companies can now reach their customers *quite easily*…"

Ex. 144 (Low): Internet is an *important* thing in our life. We can get *a lot of* benefits from internet. *Actually*, internet is *great* thing if we used properly, it help us in *many* time, especially in my education and my study. I use it *everyday* to see what the news in English.

Ex. 145 (Advanced): Shopping online can be possible for anyone who is busy. *Most importantly,* businessmen can sell their products online. There are several companies which use internet for commercial and marketing purposes. Companies can now reach their customers *quite easily* through internet.

5.5.2 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL JALs across Proficiency Levels

This section discusses the findings on the use of hedges and boosters in the EFL job application letters across three proficiency levels of low, intermediate, and advanced students.

Hedges in the EFL JALs across Three Proficiency Levels

The findings on the use of hedges in the students' EFL job application letters across three proficiency levels show significant differences F (2, 117) = 12, $p=.000$. In the light of these findings, the null hypothesis (H$_0$), which assumes that there will be no significant difference in the overall use of hedges in the EFL job application letters across three proficiency levels, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H$_2$) is supported. These findings indicate that students at lower proficiency levels appear to use more hedges compared with those at higher proficiency levels. One of the differences between the low, intermediate, and advanced students is that low students tend to use the first singular and plural pronouns *I/we* followed by the cognitive verbs *think* and *believe* in their job application letters. The reason behind that might be that they lack knowledge of the genre of job application letter as in Extract (146) "*I believe* in my skills and ability to make me a great candidate." However, students at higher proficiency levels seem to show awareness of the genre of job application letter, and appear to use the first personal pronouns with the cognitive verbs appropriately as in Extracts (147) "I am writing this letter in response to your advertisement dated 10th May. As far as my qualifications, I graduated in 2005… I had been in different positions."

> Ex. 146 (Low): I am writing to your advertisement in Yemen Times for English teacher. *I believe* in my skills and ability to make me a great candidate.

> Ex. 147 (Advanced): I am writing this letter in response to your advertisement dated 10th May, 2010. As far as my qualifications, I graduated in 2005 from the Oxford Institute of Communication. Since graduation, I had been in different positions mostly assigned as teacher of English.

Another instance illustrating unawareness of the low proficient students of the genre moves of the job application letter is related to the "closing move" of the letter. It was noted that low proficient students close their letters with inappropriate ending as in Extract (148) "*I would like to work with your* institute *and I am ready to start from now*." On the contrary, intermediate and advanced students appear to close their letters with conventionalized expressions as in Extract (149) "*I am looking forward to hearing from you*," and Extract (150) *"I am waiting for your reply."*

> Ex. 148 *(Low)*: I *would like* to work with your institute and I am ready to start from now.

> Ex. 149 (Intermediate): I hope that my application to this job will be taken into your consideration and *I am looking forward to hearing from you.*

> Ex. 150 *(Advanced)*: Finally, enclosed is my resume which provides more details about my qualifications and experience. *I am waiting for your reply.*

Boosters in the EFL JALs across Three Proficiency Levels

The findings on the use of boosters in the students' EFL job application letters across three proficiency levels show significant differences *F* (2, 117) = 7, *p=.001*. In the light of these findings, the null hypothesis (H$_0$), which assumes that there will be no significant difference in the overall use of boosters in the EFL job application letters across three proficiency levels, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H$_2$) is accepted. These findings indicate that students at lower proficiency levels appear to use more boosters compared with those at higher proficiency levels. Some researchers (Hyland & Milton, 1997; Hinkel, 2005) have come to the conclusion that low proficient learners tend to rely more on boosters compared with learners at higher levels. One of the possible explanations for low proficient students' use of boosters may be they lack

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vocabulary and knowledge of the genre moves unlike students at higher proficiency levels who seem to have awareness of the genre moves of the letter.

A comparison of the boosters used by low, intermediate, and advanced students indicate that low proficient students tend to use spoken-like boosters as in Extract (151) "I am *sure* that I will do well at this job… I want this job *very much*. I am *very* patient…I have *many* other skills… I have *many* other skills that can help me doing my job." A possible explanation for this inappropriate use of boosters may be the perception among the low proficient students that letters are characterized by informal or casual language.

> Ex. 151 (Low): I am *sure* that I will do well at this job because I want this job *very much*. I am *very* patient and I can teach. I have *many* other skills that I can teach. I have *many* other skills that can help me doing my job.

In addition, low proficient students failed to show politeness at the end of their letters as in Extract (152) "I *will be very* glad…if you desire for any interview or making any test with me, I *will* be ready..," and Extract (153) "*If you are interested in my CV, I am ready for the interview at anytime*." However, intermediate and advanced proficient students tend to use words that show politeness as in Extract (154) "*Please let me know if you need further information about my qualifications and experience.*"

> Ex. 152 (Low): I *will* be *very* glad if you accepted me at your institute and if you desire for any interview or making any test with me, I *will* be ready.
>
> Ex. 153: (Intermediate): *If you are interested in my CV, I am ready for the interview at anytime.*
>
> Ex. 154 (Advanced): Please let me if you need further information about my qualifications and experience.

Summary

This section has discussed the overall use of hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels of low, intermediate and advanced students. The findings show significant variations in terms of the use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays and job application letters across three EFL proficiency levels. Compared with intermediate and advanced students, low proficient students appear to use more hedges in their EFL persuasive essays. Hedges of approximators and impersonalization appear to be frequently used by low proficient students as they lack vocabulary and knowledge of the subject matter. Unlike those students at higher proficiency levels, claims generated by low proficient students appear to lack a clear thesis statement and are less developed.

As regard boosters in the students' EFL persuasive essays across three EFL proficiency levels, the findings also show significant differences. Students at lower proficiency levels appear to use more boosters compared with those at higher proficiency levels. Since the low proficient students lack vocabulary and knowledge of the subject matter, they resort to repeating the same boosters within the same claim. However, the intermediate and advanced levels seem to have enough vocabulary which would help them to construct their claims appropriately.

Another notable difference on the use of boosters by the low, intermediate, and advanced students is that low proficient students tend to use boosters of spoken features such as *a lot of*, *actually*, *great* and *many*.

The findings on the use of hedges in the students' EFL job application letters across three proficiency levels show that students at lower proficiency levels tend to use more hedges compared with those at higher proficiency levels.

The use of the first singular pronoun *I* associated with cognitive verbs *think* and *believe* appears to be frequently used by the low proficient students which is an indication that they lack knowledge of the genre of job application letter. Another difference is that low proficient students seem to close their letters with inappropriate ending as they lack knowledge of the genre moves of the letters. On the contrary, intermediate and advanced students appear to close their letters with goodwill ending.

The findings on the use of boosters in the students' EFL job application letters across the three proficiency levels show that students at lower proficiency levels appear to use more spoken-like boosters as they may think that letters are characterized by informal or casual language or they lack the knowledge of the letter genre. However, students at higher proficiency levels seem to know the letter genre better as is indicated by their use of polite language in their letter.

5.6 Explicit Instruction and Use of Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs and JALs

This section discusses the findings for Research Question 5. To what extent does explicit instruction affect the use of hedges and boosters in the Yemeni EFL undergraduate persuasive essays and job application letters in the posttest?

Hypothesis 3:

H$_0$: There will be no significant difference between explicit instruction on hedges and boosters and the Yemeni EFL students' posttest performance in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

H$_3$: There will be significant differences between explicit instruction of hedges and boosters and the students' posttest performance in their persuasive essays and job application letters.

Another objective of this study was to examine the effect of explicit instruction on the students' use of hedges and boosters in their persuasive essays and job application letters. Therefore, 40 students participated in this part of this study. Twenty students participated in the control group while another 20 in the experimental group. The experimental group enrolled in the training course of 8 sessions with each lasting two hours. Both groups took the pre-test and posttest with the exception that the control group did not take the treatment course. The following sections discuss the findings of the control and experimental groups.

5.6.1 The Control Group

This section discusses the findings of the pre- and posttest of the control group for the persuasive essays and job application letters. Scores for the persuasive essays and job application letters in the pre- and posttest were compared.

5.6.1.1 Rating EFL PEs

First, the findings of the persuasive essays indicate that the scores of the pre-and posttest of the control group are not significantly different (M= 67, 67, SD= 4, 4), t (0.60), p>05. This means the essays produced in the posttest are not different from the essays produced in the pre-test. Two samples of each of the pre-and the posttest of the persuasive essays of the control group are given in Appendix (18).

5.6.1.2 Rating EFL JALs

The findings obtained for the job application letters indicate that scores of the pre- and posttest are not significantly different (M= 64, 65, SD= 14, 14), t (2), p>05. This means the letters produced in the posttest are not different from the letters produced in the pre-test. Two samples of each of the pre-and the posttest of the job application letters of the control group are given in Appendix (19).

5.6.1.3 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs

The findings revealed that the participants of the control group used almost similar types of hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays (M=65, 67, SD=12, 13), *t* (579), P>.05. For examples, expressions marking epistemic modality *could, may, might* and cognitive verbs *think,* and *believe* and direct involvement such as *in my opinion* appear to be used in the pre-test of the control group as in Extract (155) "*In my opinion*, internet *could* be used for good and bad things," and posttest of the control group as in Extract (156) "*I think* internet has many functions… we *might* harm get a lot of advantages."

Participant 1:

Pre-test:

Ex. 155: *In my opinion*, internet *could* be used for good and bad things and that is of course depending on the user's intention.

Posttest:

Ex. 156: *I think*, Internet has many functions in our life. If we use it for the purpose that it was created for, we *might* get a lot of advantages.

There are similarities between the pre-tests and posttests of the control group in relation to the use of the approximators. For example, the expressions marking vagueness and uncertainty appear to be used in both the pre-test as in Extract (157) "Some people use internet for fun and some people use it for many *things* such as business, education, travel and other *things*," and posttest as in Extract (158) "We can use internet for many *things* and everyone is able to find about anything.."

Participant 2:

Pre-test:

 Ex. 157: Some people use internet for fun and some people use it for many *things* such as business, education, travel and other *things.*

Posttest:

Ex.158: We can use internet for many *things* and everyone is able to find *about anything*.

Boosters appear to be also similar in the pre- and posttests of the control group as in Extract (159) "There are *a lot of* technology appears *every* day…Computer is one of *the most important* technologies. Internet is a *great* achievement that has *many* advantages

and disadvantages," and Extract (160) "*Many* technologies are appeared *everyday*…Computer has *many* inventions…. Internet is *a great* invention which has *a lot of* sides..."

Participant 3:

Pre-test:

Ex. 159: There are *a lot of* technology appears *every* day. Some of them are useful and others are useless. Computer is one of *the most important* technologies. Internet is a *great* achievement that has *many* advantages and disadvantages.

Posttest:

Ex. 160: *Many* technologies are appeared *everyday* and the one of them is computer. Computer has *many* inventions such as Internet. Internet is *a great* invention which has *a lot of* sides, advantages and disadvantages.

5.6.1.4 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL JALs

The findings of the control group show that the participants used almost similar types of hedges and boosters in their pre- and posttests of the job application letters (M=13, 14, SD=3), *t* (2), P>.05. Expressions such as *I think* and *I believe* appear to be used in both the pre-test as in Extract (161) "*I think*, I am qualified to teach in your institute," and posttest as in Extract (162) "As my CV show, *I believe* I can teach in your institute effectively."

Participant 4:

Pre-test:

Ex. 161: *In fact*, I have taught in many institutes for a long time. So, *I think*, I am qualified to teach in your institute.

Posttest:

Ex. 162: I have got awards from *many* institutes for being one of the best teachers. As my CV show, *I believe* I can teach in your institute effectively.

Similar emphatics and amplifiers appear to be used in both the pre-test as in Extract (161) above "*In fact, I* have taught in *many* institutes for a long time," and posttest as in Extract (162) "I have got awards from *many* institutes for being one of the best teachers."

In addition, the participants of the control group tend to close their letters with inappropriate tone in the pre-test as in Extract (163) "*I hope to accept me to work with your team. I will be much lucky if I can work in your institute..,*" and posttest as in Extract (164) "*I wish I work in your institute and I hope you will accept me. Thanks for your advertisement and I wish you call me for the interview.*"

Participant 5:

Pre-test:

Ex. 163: *I hope to accept me to work with your team because…I will be much lucky if I can work in your institute.*

Posttest:

Ex. 164: *I wish I work in your institute and I hope you will accept me. Thanks for your advertisement and I wish you call me for the interview.*

Repetition has been found to be another feature in the pre- and posttest job application letters of the control group. It was found that participants tend to repeat words or phrases within the same claim as in the pre-test Extracts "*I have many other skills…I have many other skills…*" and posttest as in Extract (166) "*I have many skills in teaching …I have*

taught many courses *before.*" As Qaddumi (1995) notes, texts written by Arab students, in general, and Yemeni and Moroccan, in particular, appear to be characterized by repetition. However, repeating words or phrases in the text may affect the overall writing quality (Ferris, 1994).

Participant 6:

Pre-test:

Ex. 165: *I have many other skills* that I can teach. *I have many other skills that can help me doing my job*.

Posttest:

Ex. 166: *I have many skills* in teaching because *I have taught many* course before.

5.6.2 The Experimental Group

This section discusses the findings of the pre- and posttest persuasive essays and job application letters of the experimental group. In the experimental group, the participants were taught hedges and boosters using the genre moves of the persuasive essays proposed by Hyland (1990) which is illustrated in Appendix (20), and the genre moves of the job application letters proposed by Bhatia (1993) as is illustrated in Appendix (21). The scores obtained for the persuasive essays and job application letters in the pre-test and posttest were compared.

5.6.2.1 Rating EFL PEs

First, the finding of the persuasive essays indicates that the scores of the pre-and posttest of the experimental group are significantly different (M= 70, 73, SD= 9), t (6), p<.05. This means the essays produced in the posttest are different from the essays produced in the pre-test. Therefore, the findings of the experimental study provide evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and confirm the alternative hypothesis (H_3) which assumes that explicit instruction on hedges and boosters will have a positive effect on the Yemeni EFL students' posttest performance in their persuasive essays. It can, thus, be concluded from these findings that explicit instruction designed to promote a pragmatic improvement can be beneficial for EFL learners. Two samples of each of the pre-and posttest persuasive essays of the experimental group are given in Appendix (22).

5.6.2.2 Rating EFL JALs

The finding obtained for the job application letters also indicates that the scores of the pre- and posttest are significantly different (M= 69, 72, SD=10), t (4), p<.05. This means the letters produced in the posttest are different from the letters produced in the pre-test. Therefore, the findings of the experimental study provide evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H_0), and confirm the alternative hypothesis (H_3) which assumes that explicit instruction on hedges and boosters will have a positive effect on the Yemeni EFL students' posttest performance in their job application letters. It can, thus, be concluded from these findings that explicit instruction designed to promote a pragmatic improvement can be beneficial for EFL learners. Two samples for the pre-and the posttest of the job application letters of the experimental group are given in Appendix (23).

5.6.2.3 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL PEs

The findings indicate that hedges and boosters used in the pre-and posttest persuasive essays of the experimental group seem to be significantly different (M= 62, 60, SD=13), t (2), p<.05. This means explicit teaching had a significant impact on the participants' use of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays. These findings contrast with Wishnoff's (2000) experimental study. In Wishnoff's study, the participants of the experimental group were found to use more hedges in their posttest essays than in their pre-test essays. However, Jordan (1997) and Hinkel (1997) argue that hedges and boosters should be avoided altogether in academic writing. The different findings in these studies are supported by Archibald (2001) that L2 writing is a complex skill in which the findings may vary from one another depending on the task at hand.

Further analyses of hedges and boosters used in the persuasive essays of the experimental students showed that hedges and boosters used may be an indication of improvement in writing quality. Explicit instruction on the use of hedges and boosters seems to have contributed to a better understanding of how hedges and boosters are used. Moreover, the participants of the experimental group show their understanding of the genre-moves of the persuasive essay proposed by Hyland (1990).

The findings of the experimental group showed that the participants tend to use the first singular and plural pronouns followed by the cognitive verb *think* and *believe* in their pre-tests as in Extract (167) "If we want to live comfortable life, *I think* we must keep the internet. I can use the internet in everything." After receiving explicit instruction, participants show awareness on the use of hedges of direct involvement nature as in the

posttest Extract (168) "Internet has many advantages in our life... we can connect with each other..."

Participant 1:

Pre-test:

Ex. 167: If we want to live comfortable life, *I think* we must keep the internet. I can use the internet in everything.

Posttest:

Ex. 168: Internet has many advantages in our life. For example, we can connect with each other from different places in the world and buy anything online.

It was found that the participants of the experimental group did not only show awareness on the use of hedges and boosters but also show an understanding of the major goal of the genre moves of the persuasive essays. The use of hedges and boosters and development of ideas in the introductory paragraph of the pre-and posttest are contrasted. For example, the pre-test appears to lack the thesis statement, leaving much to the readers' own guesswork as in Extract (169) " In comparison, the thesis statement of the posttest is displayed clearly as in Extract (170) "*Although internet has many advantages, it has many other disadvantages*." As demonstrated, the participant's writing may reflect the usefulness of explicit teaching of hedges and boosters through the genre based approach. This supports the idea that explicit instruction may have a positive effect on the learners' language performance (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Shaw & Liu, 1998). As Hyland (1990) recommends, for effective writing, students are required to be familiar with the genre of the text.

Participant 2:

Pre-test: Thesis Statement

Ex. 169: We are living today in a very rapid world and this high-speed life style has led to the invention of many important technological devices. Internet is on of these technologies. It has created a great revolution in societies, even in our conservative ones. Therefore, there are many people who can use it for different purposes and there other people who use it for bad things.

Posttest: Thesis Statement

Ex. 170: Internet has become *important* and necessary in the world for different areas like education, news, emails and business. *Although internet has many advantages, it has many other disadvantages*. In the past, people used to do *things* by themselves. But when internet came, people *can* be used doing *things* from home.

Another notable outcome of explicit instruction in the use of hedges and boosters can be seen through contrasting the pre-and the posttest in terms of the "body" or "argument" paragraph. As can be seen in Extract (171), the participant in the pre-test appears to rely more on hedges and boosters "*If one of those users were asked about the reason… he would* say that it brings the *whole* world… Meeting your friends and families is not far-reaching hope anymore… anyone can talk and see not only one person but even *many more* in any other countries*."* Although the writing is organized and contains no serious flaw in grammatical accuracy, the widespread use of hedges and boosters in the pre-test may affect the writing quality. Some researchers argue that the reason why EFL students' writing shows difficulty in constructing persuasive arguments is because EFL students simply may not have enough instruction on how to position their claims appropriately (Silva, 1993; Bhatia, 1993; Hyland 1990). However, the same participant seems to have benefited from explicit instruction on hedges and boosters using the genre moves of the persuasive essay proposed by Hyland (1990). The participant appears to

elicit his argument with relevant evidence to endorse the validity of the claim as in

Extract (172) "*Internet makes the world as a small village. For example, one can*

connect with anyone in any part of the world by just one click."

Participant 3:

Pre-test: <u>The Argument</u>

Ex. 171: *If one of those users* were asked about the reason behind his love to the
internet, he *would* say that it brings the *whole* world to him. Meeting your friends
and families is not far reaching hope anymore. With only one click, anyone can
talk and see not only one person but even *many more* in *any other* countries.

Posttest: The Argument

Ex. 172: *Internet makes the world as a small village. For example, one can
connect with anyone in any part of the world by just one click.*

Explicit instruction on the use of hedges and boosters can be also seen in Extract (173).

In this extract, the participant failed to restate the thesis statement he put forward in the

"conclusion" part, and hedges and boosters appear to be frequently used "*I think* that the

internet is *very* useful*... if we used it well...* internet can lead to *many* problem*s.*"

However, the same participant's posttest appear to show awareness of the major goal of

the "conclusion" part which is reminding the reader of the thesis statement he put

forward earlier with his point of view as in Extract (174) "To conclude, Internet can be a

curse if it is used for evil purpose and at the same time it can be bless *if it is used for*

good purpose. So, *from my point of view*, it depends on the user's intention.*"*

Participant 4:

Pre-test:

Ex. 173: *I think* that the internet is *very* useful tool nowadays only is *if we used it well*. Otherwise, misuse of the internet *can* lead to *many* problems.

Posttest:

Ex. 174: To conclude, Internet can be a curse *if it is used for evil purpose* and at the same time it can be bless *if it is used for good purpose*. So, from *my point of view*, it depends on the user's intention.

5.6.2.4 Hedges and Boosters in the EFL JALs

The findings indicate that hedges and boosters used in the pre- and posttest job application letters of the experimental group are significantly different (M= 18, 17, SD= 4), $t(4)$, p<.05. The participants' performance in the posttest was better than their performance in the pres-test. This means explicit teaching on hedges and boosters using the genre moves of the job application letters seems to have a positive impact on the participants' performance.

The use of hedges and boosters in the pre-and posttest job application letters of the experimental group was compared. Since students were not taught the genre moves of the letter, their pre-tests appear to deviate from the norm in which the participants resorted to using their own style that may not meet the employer's expectation. For example, the "establishing" move, according to Bhatia (1993), is the "opening" move used to catch the reader's attention in a business manner. In their pre-tests, the participants appear to be unaware of the "establishing" move. As a result, hedges and boosters appear to be frequently used as in Extract (175) "...I am *sure* that this position

will suit me...*I believe* I am the *most* suitable one for this position at your institute."

These findings support the claim that L2 writers may be disadvantaged because genres are not explicitly taught (Johns & Swales, 2002). The same participant, however, seems to show awareness of the "establishing" move in his posttest letter as in Extract (176) "I am writing this letter in response to your advertisement in Al-Thawrah Newspaper…" The improvement in the use of hedges and boosters and awareness of the genre moves can be an effective technique for improving writing (Cheng & Steffensen, 1996; Bhatia, 1993).

Participant 5:

Pre-test:

Ex. 175: I have read your advertisement in Al-Thowrah Newspaper and I am *sure* that this position will suit me as *I believe* I am the *most* suitable one for this position at your institute.

Posttest:

Ex. 176: I am writing this letter in response to your advertisement in Al-Thawrah Newspaper for English teacher at your institute.

It is also noted that the participants' pre-test letters seem to lack organization of the genre-moves. For example, in Extract (177), the "establishing" move appears to be merged with the "qualification" move without transition "I have seen your advertisement in Al-Thawrah Newspaper and I found that I have the ability to work in your institute..." According to Bhatia (1993), merging more than one move is not acceptable in the genre of job application letter. However, the same participant appears to have benefited from the treatment course and the two moves appear to be structured separately in the posttest letter as in Extract (178) "I am writing in reference to your advertisement and I would

like to apply for the job of teaching English at your institute. My CV has been attached for you.*"*

Participant 6:

Pre-test:

Ex. 177: I have seen your advertisement in Al-Thawrah Newspaper and I found that have the ability to work in your institute. I have worked in MTN Company for many years. Now I hope I can work with you at your institute as English teacher.

Posttest:

Ex. 178: I am writing in reference to your advertisement and I would like to apply for the job of teaching English at your institute. My CV has been attached for you.

In addition, explicit instruction on hedges and boosters using the genre moves of the job application letters seem to help participants to construct their claims convincingly. For example, one of the participants claimed that she has experience in teaching English without disclosing her qualifications as in Extract (179) "*I have experience in the way of teaching English effectively. My ability of teaching with others helped me teaching my students in different levels.*" After eight session of exposure to hedges and boosters using the genre moves of the job application letter, the posttest letter appears to show improvements in terms of constructing the claim with evidence as in Extract (180) "*…I worked for some private schools as a teacher as my CV shows.*" This illustrates that participants have become aware that hedges and boosters are not the only persuasive techniques, but rather persuasion can be accomplished through the genre moves.

Participant 7:

Pre-test: Claiming without establishing qualifications

Ex. 179: *I have experience in the way of teaching effectively.* My ability of teaching with others helped me teaching my students in different levels.

Posttest: Claiming with establishing qualifications

Ex. 180: Regarding my experience, *I worked for some private schools as a teacher as my CV shows.*

It was noted that that participants were found to use inappropriate and undesired tone in the "closing" move of their pre-test letters as in Extract (181) *"So, I hope to be an accepted person and appreciated person to work in your institute I want you to be sure that you will put the good teacher in the right institute."* Such expressions are not acceptable in the genre of job application letter. As Bhatia (1993) states, the applicant has to establish his or her credentials by offering a favorable, positive and relevant description of his/her abilities for the job that he/she has applied. However, the same participant seems to have made improvement as a result of explicit instruction in which the closing move appears to be structured with an appropriate tone as in Extract (182) *"To conclude, I hope I have the opportunity to teach at your institute* and *I am looking forward to seeing you in the interview."*

Participant 8:

Pew-test: Inappropriate Tone

Ex. 181: *So, I hope to be an accepted person and appreciated person to work in your institute*. I want you to be sure that you will put the good teacher in the right institute.

Posttest: Appropriate Tone

Ex. 182: To conclude, I hope I have the opportunity to teach at your institute and *I am looking forward to seeing you in the interview.*

Summary

One of the main objectives of this study was to examine whether explicit instruction had a positive effect on the students' use of hedges and boosters in the genres of the persuasive essay and job application letter. Forty participants were randomly selected and equally divided into experimental and control groups. Both groups took the pre- and the posttests with the exception that the control group did not receive the treatment course. The experimental group was taught hedges and boosters using the genre based approach. The differences in the scores of the pre- and posttests obtained for the control group were not significant, which means the essays and the letters produced in the posttests were not different from the essays and the letters produced in the pre-tests. The findings also show no significant differences between the pre- and the posttests in relation to the average number of hedges and boosters used in the persuasive essays and job application letters.

The findings of the experimental group show that the differences in the scores of the pre-tests and posttests obtained for the persuasive essays and job application letters were significant, and that the essays and letters produced in the posttests were better than the essays and letters produced in the pre-tests in terms of writing quality. The findings indicate that the participants of the experimental group seem to have benefited from instruction on hedges and boosters, and this may have contributed to raising the students' performance in writing better persuasive essays and job application letters.

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The findings indicate that hedges and boosters used in the pre-and posttest persuasive essays of the experimental group seem to be significantly different. Further analyses of hedges and boosters in the persuasive essays seem to be an indication of improvement in writing. The participants' pre-tests appear to rely more on hedges and boosters that may affect their writing. However, the posttests of the same participants appear to elicit their arguments with relevant evidence. Moreover, the participants of the experimental group showed awareness of the major goal of the genre move. For example, the participants failed to restate the thesis statements they put forward in the "conclusion" parts in their pre-tests. After eight session of instruction, the thesis statement appears to be restated successfully with a point of view.

As for the findings of the job application letters, the participants' posttests appear to be better than their pres-tests. Further analyses of hedges and boosters used in the pre-and posttest of the job application letters indicate that explicit teaching on hedges and boosters using the genre approach seems to have contributed positively to participants' performance. The participants show awareness on each move and, thus, use the right move that meet the employer's expectations. Since participants were not taught the genre moves of the letter, their pre-test letters appear to be charged with hedges and boosters and the moves appear to be unrecognizable. This findings support the claim that L2 writers may have difficulties in writing because genres are not explicitly taught.

5.7 Strengths of the Study

Hedges and boosters have been examined in the scientific texts and research articles which were written mostly in European languages. This study attempted to fill the gap in the literature by extending research on hedges and boosters in the EFL written texts. Therefore, this study offers an insight and understanding of how Arab EFL students, in general, and Yemeni EFL undergraduate students, in particular, use hedges and boosters in two sets of writing tasks: a persuasive essay and a job application letter using the genre based approach. The use of the genre approach presents a great benefit for learners and educators alike. Therefore, the incorporation of the genre-based approach with hedges and boosters adds to the strategies of teaching hedges and boosters in EFL writing context.

The most significant strength of this study is that the data analysis was based on empirical evidence in a specific EFL writing setting. It provides valuable information to educators and syllabus developers about the potential effectiveness of integrating hedges and boosters in the EFL learning materials. Hence, the finding drawn from this study is, to some extent, relevant for comparable setting and cultures in similar studies. This study also offers an insight into gender related differences with respect to the use of hedges and boosters by the male and female Arabic native-speaking writers.

This study also attempted to examine EFL students' use of hedges and boosters in a specific Arabic EFL setting. The findings of the present study would contribute to a better understanding of hedges and boosters and would provide a guide to Yemeni school teachers and lecturers at universities. They would also help the textbook writers

and designers of language materials in Yemen to concentrate on the issue of hedges and boosters in teaching EFL writing.

Finally, the study which also involves contrastive analyses of hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters would contribute to the methodology of pragmatic studies of hedges and boosters which have not been examined before in the Arabic speaking environment.

5.8 Limitation of the Study

The present study has certain limitations in terms of generalizability. This study does not claim to be exhaustive. First, the study was carried out in the educational setting (Sanaá University). It is chiefly limited to the Yemeni EFL undergraduate students in their third-year of Bachelor degree majoring in English. The data of the study was elicited from two sets of writing tasks: a persuasive essay and a job application letter. These two tasks were selected as an appropriate instrument of constructing persuasive claims in the higher educational setting. Second, this study is limited to exploring hedges and boosters which are associated with the writer's expressions of certainty and probability. Hedges and boosters are viewed as two sides of the same coin, in that they contribute to the persuasive import of writing quality since the study of hedges without boosters can never make a study complete.

Since there is no agreement among researchers in establishing a unified taxonomy of hedges and boosters, this study is restricted to identify five types of hedges and three

types of boosters as proposed by Salager-Meyer (1994), Hyland (1998a) and Martin-Martin (2008).

Another limitation of the study is that it was based on contrastive analyses of the use of hedges and boosters in the Arabic and English texts written by the same informants. The major limitation of the current study was that it has adopted the pre-test/posttest experimental and control group design to determine the effect of explicit instruction on the students' use of hedges and boosters. Finally, the findings of this study can be generalizable to the writing of all Arab EFL students in the same context of the study and, therefore, of limited value to other contexts.

5.9 Pedagogical Implications

In the light of the findings of the present study, some important pedagogical implications can be drawn. The first implication is related to the EFL writing materials. The findings support the need to include hedges and boosters in the EFL writing materials. These materials should explicitly address hedges and boosters in the form of (written) examples so as to enable EFL learners recognize various types and functions of these two linguistic features. Hedges and boosters in EFL textbooks cannot be avoided at all. Selecting appropriate materials for EFL learners should be based on two major criteria: simplicity and naturalness (Holmes, 1988). For "simplicity," EFL textbook designers should include the easiest items of hedges and boosters that can be acquired by EFL learners. The principle of "naturalness" should be based on real or natural constructions of the language use that enable students to capture their real functions in particular contexts.

The second implication is related to the significance of explicit instruction on hedges and boosters through the use of the genre-based approach. Besides language difficulty, students seem to lack specific knowledge of the genre moves. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to address this issue by offering students explicit explanation of how each genre-move functions and the linguistic features it is associated with. Teaching students the "moves" of the target genre and the linguistic features with which they are associated would help students to write effectively.

Another implication of the study relates to the gender related differences in relation to the use of hedges and boosters. The gender factor is important in teaching EFL writing. Understanding the similarities and differences between male and female writers could help instructors to facilitate the teaching process and also help EFL students to expand their lexical knowledge on hedges and boosters.

A final implication of this study is related to the use of hedges and boosters across EFL proficiency level. The findings revealed that exposure to hedges and boosters should focus more on the lower proficiency than higher proficiency levels since higher proficient learners seem to be more sensitized to the use of hedges and boosters.

5.10 Implications for Future Research

Drawn from the major findings of this study, some recommendations are presented. It is recommended that future research should compare hedges and boosters in the EFL persuasive writing produced by Arab EFL learners with those written by native-speakers of English. Such research would shed more light on whether the use of hedges and

boosters is universal or culture-specific. This study has focused on hedges and boosters in the written discourse and since there is no much literature on the EFL Arab learners' use of hedges and boosters, future studies are needed to investigate these two markers in the spoken discourse produced by Arab EFL learners. Finally, the present study has focused on the persuasive genre as a means for investigating hedges and boosters; future research could be carried out to investigate hedges and boosters in the other genres such as narrative, descriptive or expository.

5.11 Conclusion

This study set out to answer five questions in the investigation of hedges and boosters used by Yemeni EFL undergraduate writers in their persuasive essays and job application letters. The participants randomly selected were the third year Bachelor degree students of the Department of English, Sana'a University. The participants are native speakers of Arabic, and they are relatively homogeneous in terms of their cultural background and education. The data for this study were elicited from two sets of writing tasks: a persuasive essay and a job application letter, both of which were written in English and students' L1 Arabic. A total of 240 essays and 240 letters were collected and analyzed. For the experimental part of the study, another 20 EFL persuasive essays and 20 EFL job application letters were collected from 40 participants who were randomly selected and equally divided into experimental and control groups.

Following Salager-Meyer (1994, 1997), Hinkel (2005), and Martin-Martin (2008), hedges identified in the EFL persuasive essays and job application letters include *shields, approximators*, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement*, *if-clause*

constructions, and *impersonalization*. Boosters, on the other hand, include *emphatics, amplifiers*, and *universal and negative pronouns*.

Overall, hedges and boosters appear to be frequently used in the EFL persuasive essays (16%) each. The types of hedges identified in the EFL persuasive essays included *shields* 6%, *approximators* 3%, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* 3%, *if-clause construction and impersonalization* 2% each. Shields are used to express uncertainty or attitude of the writers. It was found that Yemeni EFL student writers tended to use the shield of "possibility" such as *could* and "probability" such as *may* and *might*. Another type of hedges was the writer's personal doubt and direct involvement in the form of the first singular and plural pronouns *I* and *We* associated with the cognitive verbs *think* and *believe.* The cognitive verbs are used to convey the message as a subjective or personal idea rather than objective or impersonal. Expressions such as *in my opinion*, *from my point of view* were also found be preferred by students. If-clause construction was another type of hedges that indicates that the writer is not certain about the claim being made.

The last type of hedges identified in the persuasive essays was impersonalization used to detach writers from being involved in the claims they make. Impersonalization was found to be in the form of "existential subjects," "introductory phrases," and "passive voice."

Boosters identified in the EFL persuasive essays include *emphatics* 6%, *amplifiers* 5%, and *universal and negative pronouns* 5%. Emphatics and amplifiers constituted the largest percentage of boosters in the texts. The Yemeni EFL student writers tended to

overuse emphatics and amplifiers in their persuasive essays. Emphatic words appeared to be of a spoken nature such as *of course, definitely, certainly, actually,* and *really.* The last category of boosters identified in the persuasive essays was the universal and negative pronouns.

The same type of hedges and boosters found in the persuasive essays were the same identified in the job application letters. Hedges included *shields* 5%, *approximators* 2%, *writer's personal doubt and direct involvement* 2%, *if-clause construction* and *impersonalization*1% each. Shields such as *could* and lexical verbs such as *believe* and *think* were found to be more frequently used in the "conclusion" part of the job application letters. The use of shields indicates that writers lack knowledge of the genre of job application letter and believe that the job application letter is characterized by informal language. Writer's personal doubt and direct involvement was found to be common in the students' EFL job application letters. Since the genre of job application letter belongs to the promotional genre, students tended to use expressions such as *I think, I believe* to promote themselves for the job they applied for.

Approximators which signal vagueness and fuzziness such as *about, around*, and *kind of* appeared to be less frequent in the students' job application letters as these markers would weaken the claims the writers make and, therefore, they may not get the job they applied for. Like approximators, if-clause constructions were found to be also less frequent in the job application letters, and that is due to the nature of the genre which requires applicants to be more certain in making their claims. Impersonalization appears to be less frequent in the job application letters. The two main features of

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impersonalization were found to be in the form of "existential subjects" and "introductory phrases." These two features appear to be easy for students to use.

Boosters identified in the job application letters, on the other hand, included *emphatics* 4%, *amplifiers* 2%, and *universal and negative pronouns* 2%. Students tended to use emphatics as a means of persuasion although they make the texts to be colloquial. Emphatics included words of spoken nature such as *sure, definitely, in fact*. These words indicate that the writers are certain about the claim they make. Amplifiers such as *very much, many, a lot* are another features used in the "enclosed documents" move to highlight their qualifications and experience. Universal and negative pronouns in the job application letters included words such as *everyone*, *everything*, *no one,* and *nothing*. The pragmatic function of these words as they were used in the students' letters is to add the power of persuasion to the claims being made.

This study also compared the use of hedges and boosters in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays and job application letters. Hedges were found to be more frequently used in the EFL than in the L1 persuasive essays. The tendency for the use of hedges in the EFL persuasive essays might be due to a combination of two factors: low proficiency level and confidence.

Boosters, on the other hand, were found to be almost similar in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays. As a means of persuasion, emphatics, amplifiers, repetitions, and exaggerations were found to be used in the L1 and EFL persuasive essays. In Arabic discourse, these features are viewed as appropriate persuasive techniques as writers think that through emphatics, amplifiers, repetition, and exaggeration, they can make

themselves clearer in presenting their claims. Therefore, Yemeni EFL students' tendency for using boosters might be a result of cultural influence on their EFL writing.

It was found that emphatics such as *a matter of fact, no doubt* were used in the L1 persuasive essays while emphatics of spoken nature such as *sure*, *really, of course* were used in the EFL persuasive essays. Strong modal verbs, which have related meanings such as *must, should*, appeared to be difficult for students in their EFL persuasive essays. The difficulty may result from the absence of modality in the Arabic language.

The findings on the use of hedges in the L1 and EFL job application letters were significantly different. Religious expressions were also found to be a feature in the EFL job application letters due to the L1 transfer. The use of boosters in the job application letters indicates that students tended to use more boosters in their L1 than in their EFL job application letters. As boosters, emphatics and amplifiers were found to be frequently used in the L1 job application letters as persuasive techniques. Since the job application letter is persuasive in nature, there was a tendency for writers to use boosters so as to convince their prospective employer that their claims are true.

Another finding of this study is that there were significant gender differences with regard to the use of hedges and boosters in the male and female students' persuasive essays and job application letters. These findings support Lakoff's (1975) proposal that women's language is shaped by uncertainty and lack of confidence. In this study, female writers tended to use more hedges and boosters in their EFL persuasive essays and job application letters than male writers. In a male-dominated society, women are perceived as powerless, obedient, and submissive to men. The unequal power between

male and female in the Yemeni society is reflected in the use of hedges and boosters. An interesting observation of the use of hedges is that there was a tendency for male student writers to use the first plural pronoun *we* with the cognitive verb *know*. The use of the first person plural pronoun *we* with the cognitive verbs *know* in men's writing signal power and majesty.

It was also found that female student writers tended to use if-clause constructions in their persuasive essays as if they would not be accepted. If-clauses signal vagueness and indirectness. Expressions such as *in my opinion,* which implies uncertainty and politeness, were also found to be more frequently used by the female student writers in their persuasive essays. However, the male student writers were found to use the expression of *I think* which is often used in spoken discourse.

With regard to boosters, the findings indicate that female student writers tended to use more boosters in their persuasive essays and job application letters than male writers. This further emphasizes women's powerless position as they have to convince their addressees by resorting to heighten their claims in order to gain their addressees' approval. Boosters were also found to be more frequent in the job application letters written by the female student writers. As a male-dominated society, Yemeni women may find it difficult to get a job, and therefore tend to use more boosters in order to persuade their prospective employer that they are suitable for the job they applied for.

This study has also offered insight into the relationship between the EFL proficiency level and the overall use of hedges and boosters. The findings of this study seem to be different from those found in previous studies. In this current study, the findings indicate

that students at lower proficiency levels tended to use more hedges and boosters than students at higher proficiency levels. A possible explanation might be that students at lower proficiency levels may have limited vocabulary unlike students at higher proficiency levels who seem to have sufficient vocabulary that may help them to express their ideas effectively.

This study also investigated the effect of explicit instruction on the students' use of hedges and boosters in their persuasive essays and job application letters. The study adopted the pre- and the posttest experimental control group design. Forty undergraduate students were randomly chosen from the sampling size and equally divided into the experimental and control groups. The experimental group received treatment for 16 contact hours on the use of hedges and boosters while the control group did not receive treatment. During the treatment, various types of hedges and boosters supported by explanatory notes on their types and functions were presented using the genre-based approach. The pre- and posttests of the experimental and control groups were evaluated by experienced EFL instructors using Jacobs et al.'s (1981) rating scale. Scores obtained for the essays and letters of the pre- and posttest of the control group were insignificant. This means the essays and letters produced in the posttest were not different from the essays and letters produced in the pre-test.

As with the scores of the essays and letters in the pre-and posttest of the control group, the findings indicate that the use of hedges and boosters in the essays and letters produced in the posttest were also not significantly different from the essays and letters produced in the pre-test.

In contrast, the scores obtained for the essays and letters of the pre- and posttest of the experimental group were significantly different. This means the essays and letters produced after the post treatment test appear to be qualitatively better than those produced in the pre- treatment test. Further analyses of the posttest confirmed that the participants of the experimental group show a better understanding of the use of hedges and boosters through the genre moves of the essays and the letters. This proves that teaching hedges and boosters through the genre based approach did not only contribute to understanding hedges and boosters but also contributed to raising participants' ability in using the genre moves properly. Understanding the genre moves of the essay and letter would help learners enrich the content of the text and, thus, construct their claims properly.

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