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.

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