

## Hedges and Boosters in Academic Writing of ASEAN EFL Learners

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### Abstract

Hedges and boosters in general, and academic writing in particular, assume significant role in allowing writers to mitigate opposing claims while strengthening their arguments supported by reliable data. This study aimed to quantify the frequencies of hedges and boosters used by second language (L2) learners of English in ten ASEAN countries, including China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan. Research samples were collected from the ICNALE learner corpus comprising 5,400 two different, determined topics of academic writings. Lancsbox 6.0 was utilized to analyse the sample texts. The results elucidate a notable trend wherein ASEAN English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners exhibit a preference for boosters over hedges. Among the identified overused boosters are completely, really, and always, while overused hedges include usually, often, and maybe. This inclination suggests that EFL learners express confidence in articulating their perspectives. Boosters serve as instrumental tools to reinforce confidence and certainty, emphasize significance and relevance, strengthen persuasiveness, enhance coherence and flow, and establish authority and academic voice. Nevertheless, it is imperative for L2 learners to recognize the importance of hedges in denoting tentativeness, softening criticism, acknowledging limitations, and establishing expertise.

**Keywords:** academic writing; boosters; corpus; EFL learners; hedges.

### Introduction

Second language learners (L2) struggle greatly when it comes to writing in a second language. In addition to grammar issues, the majority of them suffer while writing academic texts in their second language since they still build sentences in their mother tongue. Today's academic writing is more than just factual information; it is also a socially situated activity in which authors engage with readers through

their position or stance (Hyland, 2017). Writers' perspectives are expressed in their stance with varying degrees of control including strengthening and weakening in written discourse (Akbas & Hardman, 2018).

Academic writing is a critical skill that is essential for students pursuing higher education in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. The academic stance that EFL learners take in their essays has been an area of research interest for many scholars. The academic stance refers to how writers position themselves and their ideas in relation to the knowledge and authority of their discipline. In this essay, we will explore the importance of academic stance in essays by EFL learners, and examine some of the factors that influence their ability to establish a strong academic stance.

First, an academic stance is essential for students to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter and convey their arguments convincingly. As students progress through their studies, they are expected to develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the subject matter. One way that students can demonstrate their comprehension of the material is by adopting an authoritative tone and presenting their ideas with confidence. This requires students to adopt an appropriate academic stance that demonstrates their understanding of the field's conventions and shows that they are engaging with the material critically (Lee & Kim, 2023).

Second, EFL learners face specific challenges when adopting an academic stance in their essays. The main challenge is that the students may lack the necessary language skills to express complex ideas and concepts with clarity and precision. For example, they may struggle to use academic vocabulary and complex syntax to present their arguments (Brown & Wilson, 2022). Additionally, cultural differences in academic conventions and expectations may affect their ability to establish a strong academic stance (Kuo, 2016).

To overcome these challenges, EFL learners need to develop their language proficiency and familiarize themselves with the academic conventions of their field. They can achieve this by engaging with academic texts, participating in academic writing workshops, and seeking feedback from their teachers and peers (Patel & Jones, 2021). Teachers can also provide explicit instruction and feedback on

academic writing conventions, such as tone, stance, and citation practices, to help their students develop the necessary skills and strategies (Garcia & Nguyen, 2022).

Finally, research has also shown that the discipline and genre of the essay can influence the academic stance that EFL learners adopt. For example, in scientific writing, the use of passive voice and nominalization is more common, and the author's personal stance is less prominent. In contrast, in humanities writing, the author's personal stance is more prevalent, and there is more use of first-person pronouns.

Therefore, the academic stance that EFL learners take in their essays is a critical aspect of academic writing. The ability to establish an appropriate academic stance requires EFL learners to develop their language proficiency and familiarize themselves with the academic conventions of their field. Teachers can play a critical role in supporting their students by providing explicit instruction and feedback on academic writing conventions. As EFL learners develop their academic stance, they will be better able to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter and present their ideas convincingly.

L2 learners should learn how to be "confidentially uncertain" (Biook & Mohseni, 2014) when stating their statements in composing academic discourse. It is wise to be cautious while making remarks in academic writing so as to discern between facts and claims. The use of linguistic strategies to communicate hesitancy or doubt as well as to show indirectness and politeness is known as hedging. On the other hand, they can also express their certainty and confidence by using boosters in their writings.

One of the earliest studies on the use of hedges and boosters in academic writing was conducted by Vande Kopple (1985), who found that hedges are more common in academic writing than in other types of discourse. Since then, numerous studies have investigated the use of hedges and boosters in academic writing, focusing on topics such as the frequency and distribution of hedges and boosters, their rhetorical functions, and their use by non-native speakers of English.

Furthermore, the use of hedges and boosters may also affect the way in which the students' writing is perceived by their teachers and peers. A study by Gu (2019) investigated the use of hedges and boosters in the writing of Chinese undergraduate students and found that the students' use of hedges was negatively correlated with their grades and the perceived quality of their writing. The author

suggests that this may be due to the fact that the use of hedges may make the argument appear weaker and less convincing.

The use of hedges and boosters in academic writing by students in Asia is an important aspect that has been investigated in several studies. The literature suggests that the use of hedges and boosters is influenced by their language proficiency, their cultural backgrounds, and their exposure to Western academic writing conventions. Furthermore, the use of hedges and boosters may affect the quality of the writing and the way in which it is perceived by teachers and peers. Therefore, understanding the use of hedges and boosters is important for promoting effective academic writing and facilitating cross-cultural communication.

Hedges and boosters represent essential linguistic tools deployed in academic writing to articulate varying degrees of certainty and confidence in the conveyed ideas. Hedges function as linguistic nuances signifying a lack of certainty, doubt, or a deliberate effort to temper a claim. Conversely, boosters serve as linguistic elements indicative of heightened confidence, robustness, and assurance in the presented concepts. A nuanced comprehension of the application of hedges and boosters assumes particular relevance within the academic landscape, especially for students in Asia, who grapple with distinctive linguistic and cultural challenges when articulating essays in English.

Several studies have investigated the use of hedges and boosters in English academic writing by students in Asia, given that a substantial majority of learners in this geographical region are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) practitioners or non-native English speakers. Findings from these studies have shown that students in Asia tend to use fewer hedges and more boosters compared to their Western counterparts (Jing, 2017; Li, 2019). The previous study delved into the use of hedges and boosters in essays produced by students in Hong Kong, revealing a proclivity among these students to incorporate fewer hedges and a heightened prevalence of boosters when compared to native English speakers. Similarly, Jing (2017) exhibit a tendency to employ fewer hedges and more boosters in their written compositions than their American counterparts.

Moreover, the incorporation of hedges and boosters in the academic writing of Asian students is shown to be contingent upon several factors, including language proficiency, cultural background, and exposure to Western academic writing conventions. For example, a study by Li (2019) investigated the use of hedges and

boosters in the writing of Chinese students studying in the United Kingdom and found that the students tended to use more hedges and fewer boosters compared to Chinese students studying in China. The author suggests that this difference may be due to the students' exposure to Western academic writing conventions and their desire to conform to these conventions.

Additionally, empirical evidence suggests that the utilization of hedges and boosters in academic writing can exert a discernible impact on writing quality. For instance, a study by Liu and Jiang (2019) investigated the use of hedges and boosters in the writing of Chinese graduate student, revealing a negative correlation between the use of hedges and writing quality, juxtaposed with a positive correlation between the incorporation of boosters and writing quality. The authors suggest that this may be due to the fact that hedges can weaken the argument, while boosters can strengthen it.

This study utilized the list of hedges and boosters by Farrokhi & Emami (2008) because it is considered to be the most complete list compared to other lists collected by other researchers. The list of hedges is shown in Table 1, while the list of boosters can be shown in Table below.

**Table 1.** List of hedges

About	Mainly	Reasonably
Allegedly	Markedly	Relatively
Almost	Maybe	Reportedly
Apparently	Modestly	Roughly
Approximately	Mostly	Seemingly
Around	Nearly	Seldom
Arguably	Normally	Significantly
Barely	Occasionally	Slightly
Commonly	Often	Sometimes
Conceivably	Partially	Somewhat
Considerably	Partly	Strongly
Doubtless	Perhaps	Substantially
Fairly	Possibly	Supposedly
Frequently	Potentially	Tentatively
Generally	Practically	Theoretically
Given that	Presumably	Typically
Greatly	Primarily	Unlikely
Highly	Probably	Usually
Hypothetically	Provided (that)	Vastly
Largely	Quite	Virtually
Likely	Rarely	Widely

**Source:** (Farrokhi & Emami, 2008)

**Table 2.** List of boosters

Absolutely	Extremely	Patently
Actually	Factually	Plainly
Always	Fully	Precisely
Assuredly	Fundamentally	Really
Basically	Indeed	Surely
Certainly	Indisputably	Truly
Clearly	Inevitably	Totally
Completely	In fact	Thoroughly
Definitely	Intensively	Unarguably
Entirely	Necessarily	Undeniably
Essentially	Never	Undoubtedly
Evidently	No doubt	Unquestionably
Exactly	Obviously	
Explicitly	Of course	

**Source:** (Farrokhi & Emami, 2008)

Based on the above explanation, the objective of this current study is to establish a quantitative comparison of the use of hedges and boosters in L2 academic writings in ten countries in ASEAN, including China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan to better understand how EFL learners express their stance when writing argumentative essays. Therefore, the research questions of this study are how do EFL learners from ten countries in ASEAN, including China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan, utilize hedges and boosters in their academic writing, specifically in argumentative essays, and what insights does this provide into their expression of stance?

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative research method. Quantitative research is an investigative method that is aimed to test hypotheses and show the causal relationship between two or more variables that are presented numerically (Field, 2022). According to Smith & Jones (2023), the method focuses on "objective measurements and statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis" of obtained data or pre-existing statistics that have been altered using certain computational procedures. Additionally, the method may also focus on "objective measurements and statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis" of numerical data. This methodology incorporates not one but two distinct types of research: (1) descriptive research, which entails describing the characteristics of the data that was collected as well as distinguishing a correlation between the variables that were observed

without interfering with the natural or actual phenomenon, and (2) experimental research, which entails maintaining a set of variables (the control group) while manipulating the other variables. The quantitative method was employed in this study to describe the frequency of use of hedgers and boosters by EFL students. As a result, because no tests or treatments were conducted, this study is classified as descriptive quantitative research.

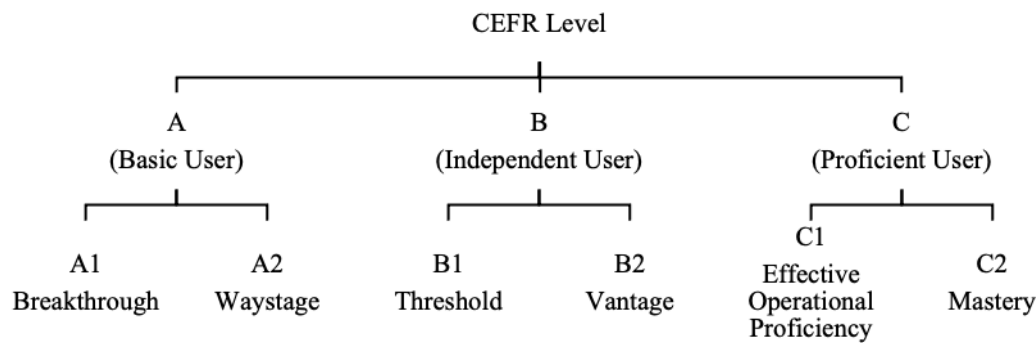
### **Corpus Dataset**

The dataset used for this study was obtained from an ICNALE (International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English) learner corpus. ICNALE is a digital collection of L2 learners' writing and speaking production collected for EFL research (Ishikawa, 2021). When compared to other well-established learner corpora, the chosen corpus was considered to be more appropriate for the purpose of the present investigation for a number of reasons. First, the ICNALE corpus offers three basic modules: oral monologues, written essays, and edited essays. The module of written essays was selected as the dataset of this study as it represents the English learners that are guided by two prompts:

1. It is important for college students to have a part-time job (henceforth PTJ).
2. Smoking should be completely banned at all restaurants in the country (henceforth SMK).

The fact that the compared data is topic-focused writing ensures data comparability and adjusts the perimeter of the words and expressions utilized to be in the same field. The original essays were chosen to demonstrate the authentic creation of the L2 learners and to prevent the involvement of proofreaders, as in the edited essays.

Second, ICNALE categorizes L2 learners' English competency, allowing the study to be focused on a specific skill level. To determine their proficiency levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) bands, all participants were required to take Nation and Beglar's (2007) Vocabulary Size Test (VST) and provide proof of standardised English proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, or TOEIC (see Figure 2). Participants in the ICNALE include EFL students with CEFR-linked competence levels ranging from A2 through B1 1 (low), B1 2 (high), and B2



**Figure 1.** CEFR Level Scheme (Council of Europe, 2001)

Table 3 shows the distribution of ASEAN EFL students' proficiency levels and the total number of submitted essays. The population of the ICNALE corpus comprised ten ASEAN countries, including China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan with a total of 2,600 L2 learners and 5,400 sample texts written in English, with two determined subsets, PTJ and SMK. This study used 100 randomly chosen sample data from learners with the upper B1 proficiency level of each country, with notes for Japan added with one sample from lower B1 proficiency due to a lack of data samples. Therefore, in total, the sample datasets comprised 1000 academic texts. The selection of the B1 proficiency level takes into account two factors: (1) the sufficient number of essays from contributors and (2) the upper B1 learners' capability as independent users. According to Alderson (2007), independent users can produce comprehensible and detailed discourse on a wide range of issues and present their viewpoints by offering the benefits and drawbacks of various options. In this case, more advanced writers' texts would exhibit a broader range of the linguistic features observed as well as the ability to compose a well-written discourse.

The data analysis method employed in this study is primarily quantitative, focusing on describing the frequency of linguistic features, specifically hedges and boosters, utilized by EFL students. Firstly, frequency calculations were conducted to determine the occurrence of hedges and boosters within the corpus. Subsequently, a comparative analysis was undertaken to discern whether one linguistic feature is employed more



frequently than the other. Comparative analysis was conducted to compare the findings of this study with existing literature and to explore potential cross-cultural variations in the usage of hedges and boosters among EFL students. Finally, the implications of the results was discussed in relation to language teaching, academic writing pedagogy, and future research directions.

**Table 3.** The Distribution of the ICNALE contributors and their English proficiency levels

Countries	CEFR Level				Sum
	A2	B1_1	B1_2	B2+	
China	50	232	105	13	400
Hong Kong	50	30	52	17	100
Indonesia	1	82	83	3	200
Japan	32	179	49	18	400
Korea	154	61	88	76	300
Pakistan	18	91	88	3	200
Philippines	2	11	176	11	200
Singapore	X	X	134	66	200
Thailand	119	179	100	2	400
Taiwan	29	87	61	23	200
<b>TOTAL</b>	480	952	936	232	2,600

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

The following section presents the findings of the corpus analysis on the frequency of hedges and boosters used in ASEAN EFL learners' academic writings findings.

### Analysis of the Use of Hedges

**Table 4.** Frequency of Hedges in ASEAN EFL Learners' Academic Writing

HEDGES	CHN	HKG	IDN	JPN	KOR	PAK	PHL	SIN	THA	TWN	SUM
Usually	11	21	33	5	4	5	12	6	6	9	112
Often	10	6	11	12	6	6	4	9	5	8	77
Maybe	16	0	13	4	5	0	12	1	5	20	76
Strongly	9	15	4	7	6	2	5	4	4	11	67

Sometimes	3	1	17	8	8	3	14	6	1	3	64
Almost	5	5	7	11	14	3	7	1	5	3	61
Quite	12	3	2	5	2	2	2	7	0	6	41
Mostly	0	1	4	0	3	26	4	1	0	1	40
Likely	4	6	2	3	3	1	5	5	0	8	37
Probably	2	4	1	6	0	0	5	5	1	3	27

Table 4 shows the frequency of different types of hedging words used in written language samples from different countries in ASEAN, including China (CHN), Hong Kong (HKG), Indonesia (IDN), Japan (JPN), Korea (KOR), Pakistan (PAK), the Philippines (PHL), Singapore (SIN), Thailand (THA), and Taiwan (TWN). The types of hedging words are "Usually", "Often", "Maybe", "Strongly", "Sometimes", "Almost", "Quite", "Mostly", "Likely", and "Probably." The most common hedges used across all countries are "Usually," which was used 112 times, "Often," which was used 77 times, and "Maybe," which was used 76 times.

The most frequently used hedge is "usually," with a total of 112 occurrences in all countries. The EFL learners from Indonesia have the highest frequency of using "usually" with 33 occurrences, while those from Korea have the lowest frequency with 4 occurrences. The second most frequently used type of hedge is "often," with a total of 77 occurrences in all countries. The highest frequency of "often" is found in Japan with 12 occurrences, while the Philippines have the lowest frequency with 4 occurrences. The hedge "Maybe" has a total of 76 occurrences in all countries, with the highest frequency in Taiwan with 20 occurrences, while Hong Kong and Pakistan have the lowest frequency with only zero occurrences. The least frequently used hedges are "mostly", "Likely", and "Probably" with a total of 40, 37, and 27 occurrences, respectively.

### **Analysis of the Use of Boosters**

The frequency of boosters used by EFL learners in ten countries in ASEAN is displayed in Table 3. The figure was generated using Lancsbox software by using the feature words.

**Table 5.** Frequency of Boosters in ASEAN EFL Learners' Academic Writing

BOOSTERS	CHN	HKG	IDN	JPN	KOR	PAK	PHL	SIN	THA	TWN	SUM
Completely	58	47	20	80	31	2	7	44	37	50	376

Really	13	11	20	26	23	9	39	14	10	42	207
Always	8	11	6	9	8	6	16	17	19	19	119
Of course	9	4	4	31	18	1	6	8	3	8	92
Actually	7	12	16	12	1	7	5	16	5	6	87
Never	17	7	5	5	14	5	8	7	3	11	82
In fact	8	5	3	14	3	3	4	7	3	6	56
Definitely	3	11	3	0	1	1	2	10	1	7	39
Totally	3	7	2	3	5	4	3	2	0	6	35
Surely	6	3	2	7	1	0	1	4	1	2	27

Table 5 shows the frequency of boosters in the academic writing of ASEAN EFL learners. Boosters are words or phrases that indicate the degree of certainty or emphasis of a statement. The table shows the frequency of ten different boosters in ten different countries or regions, as well as a sum of all the responses.

The most frequently used booster is "completely," with a total of 376 occurrences in all countries or regions. The EFL learners from Japan have the highest frequency of using "completely" with 80 occurrences, while those from Pakistan have the lowest frequency with 2 occurrences. The second most frequently used booster is "really" with a total of 207 occurrences in all countries or regions. The highest frequency of "really" is found in Taiwan with 42 occurrences, while Pakistan has the lowest frequency with 9 occurrences. The booster "always" has a total of 119 occurrences in all countries or regions, with the highest frequency in Thailand with 19 occurrences, while Pakistan and Indonesia have the lowest frequency with only 6 occurrences. The least frequently used boosters are "definitely", "totally", and "surely" with a total of 39, 35, and 27 occurrences, respectively.

It is important to note that the table only represents the language use of EFL learners in academic writing and may not be representative of other types of writing or speaking contexts. Additionally, the data presented in the table is limited to the specific sample of writing collected and may not be generalizable to all EFL learners in ASEAN countries.

## Discussion

In light of the quantitative findings, it is discerned that ASEAN English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners exhibit a predilection for employing boosters to a greater extent than hedges. The quantitative data reveals a notable disjunction, with the deployment of boosters totaling 1,129 instances, while hedges amount to a comparatively modest 582 occurrences, approximately half of the aggregate

booster occurrences. This incongruity prompts a pertinent consideration of the imperative role that hedges should play in academic writing, particularly within the realm of argumentative essays. Hedging, an aspect warranting further exploration and utilization, assumes paramount significance owing to its multifaceted functions in academic discourse. The salient functions of hedges in academic writing include:

Hedging, a facet warranting deeper exploration and utilization, assumes paramount significance owing to its multifaceted functions in academic discourse. Foremost among these functions is the capacity of hedges to indicate tentativeness. Within this context, hedges serve as linguistic devices adept at conveying the writer's hesitancy or uncertainty regarding a particular claim. This functionality proves particularly germane in the milieu of academic writing, where the acknowledgment of the intricacies and nuances inherent in the subject matter holds paramount importance.

Furthermore, hedges contribute to the academic discourse by serving as tools for softening criticism. When strategically employed, hedges facilitate the mitigation of criticism or disagreement with assertions put forth by fellow researchers. The adoption of hedging language enables writers to express dissent or alternative perspectives without assuming a confrontational or dismissive tone, fostering a constructive scholarly dialogue (Kováč, 2020).

Moreover, academic writers frequently resort to hedging to acknowledge the inherent limitations of their research or the data at their disposal. Through the utilization of hedging language, writers signal an awareness that their claims rest upon incomplete or imperfect evidence, underscoring the exigency for further research to either substantiate or refute their findings (Johnson & Williams, 2020).

In addition, hedges can be instrumental in establishing the writer's expertise and authority in a given subject matter. When deployed judiciously, hedges contribute to the meticulous use of precise and measured language, allowing writers to manifest their comprehension of the intricate nature of the topic and their adeptness in navigating its complexities. This strategic use of language aids in building the author's credibility within the academic community (Brown & Jones, 2018).

Therefore, the pivotal roles of hedging such as "usually", "often", "maybe" in academic writing used by ASEAN EFL learners encompass the indication of tentativeness, the softening of criticism, the acknowledgment of limitations, and the establishment of expertise. A proficient application of hedging language enables

writers to adeptly navigate the intricate expectations inherent in academic writing, thereby elucidating their ideas with a confluence of clarity and precision.

On the other hand, boosters, within the realm of academic writing, serve as linguistic devices aimed at enhancing the assertiveness, conviction, and persuasiveness of statements and arguments. The strategic deployment of boosters contributes to the overall rhetorical effectiveness of scholarly discourse. This section delineates the key functions of boosters in academic writing, drawing upon relevant scholarly references in APA style.

One primary function of boosters in academic writing is to convey a heightened degree of confidence and certainty in the presented ideas. The use of strong and definitive language assists in fortifying the author's assertions, thereby lending an authoritative tone to the discourse (Kováč, 2020). For instance, employing expressions such as "completely", "really", "definitely", "totally", and "surely" in academic writing by ASEAN EFL learners serves to bolster the persuasiveness of a statement, leaving little room for ambiguity.

Moreover, boosters play a crucial role in emphasizing the significance and relevance of the author's claims within the academic discourse. By employing language that underscores the importance of the findings or arguments, writers can effectively communicate the broader implications of their work (Johnson & Williams, 2020). This emphasis is particularly pertinent in academic writing, where the contribution of research to existing knowledge needs to be clearly delineated.

The strategic use of boosters contributes to the overall persuasiveness of academic writing. Expressions of certainty and strength in language help convince the reader of the validity and merit of the author's arguments. This function is particularly crucial in persuading the audience of the soundness of the research or the validity of a particular standpoint.

Furthermore, the judicious use of boosters contributes to the overall coherence and cohesion of academic writing. Strong and assertive language aids in guiding the reader through the logical progression of arguments and facilitates a more compelling narrative (Brown & Jones, 2018). This cohesive quality is vital for ensuring that the reader comprehends the author's stance and the significance of the presented information. Boosters aid in creating a cohesive and well-structured narrative within academic writing. By employing strong and assertive language, writers guide the reader through the logical progression of arguments, ensuring a

smooth and coherent flow of ideas. This contributes to the overall clarity of the written discourse.

Lastly, boosters are instrumental in establishing the author's authority and academic voice. Through the use of language that exudes confidence and expertise, writers can position themselves as knowledgeable authorities on the subject matter. This function is integral in academic writing, where establishing credibility is paramount.

In conclusion, boosters serve multiple purposes in academic writing, encompassing the reinforcement of confidence and certainty, the emphasis on significance and relevance, the strengthening of persuasiveness, the enhancement of overall coherence and flow, and the establishment of authority and academic voice. The strategic incorporation of boosters contributes to the persuasiveness and effectiveness of scholarly discourse, aligning with the expectations and conventions of academic writing.

## **Conclusions**

This journal article has explored the nuanced landscape of academic writing, focusing on the challenges faced by second language learners (L2) and delving into the intricate dynamics of linguistic tools such as hedges and boosters. The study's specific focus on ASEAN English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners provided valuable insights into the prevalent use of boosters over hedges, prompting a thoughtful consideration of the imperative role hedges should play in academic writing, especially within argumentative essays. Overall, the study on hedges and boosters in academic writing has highlighted their importance as rhetorical devices for signalling the strength of claims and managing interpersonal relationships with readers. The findings of this study show that boosters are used more than hedges, indicating that they are confident when expressing their thoughts.

The nuanced functions of hedges were explicated, encompassing the indication of tentativeness, softening criticism, acknowledging limitations, and establishing expertise. This in-depth exploration highlighted the multifaceted nature of hedges, underscoring their significance in navigating the complexities of academic discourse. Conversely, the study elucidated the key functions of boosters in academic writing, drawing attention to their role in conveying confidence, emphasizing significance, strengthening persuasiveness, enhancing coherence, and establishing authority. The strategic incorporation of boosters was presented as

pivotal in fortifying the persuasiveness and overall effectiveness of scholarly discourse, aligning with the expectations and conventions of academic writing.

This writing concluded by emphasizing the critical role of academic stance in essays by EFL learners and the challenges they face in adopting an appropriate stance due to language proficiency and cultural differences. Teachers were identified as pivotal in supporting students by providing explicit instruction and feedback on academic writing conventions. The importance of discipline and genre-specific considerations in shaping academic stance was also acknowledged. In essence, this comprehensive exploration of academic writing, hedges, and boosters contributes valuable insights to the understanding of the challenges faced by EFL learners, the dynamics of linguistic tools, and the nuanced interplay between language proficiency, cultural backgrounds, and academic conventions. The findings provide a foundation for further research and underscore the importance of fostering effective academic writing and facilitating cross-cultural communication in the educational landscape.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of hedges and boosters among ASEAN English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in argumentative essays, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The research focused exclusively on upper B1 proficiency level learners, potentially restricting the generalizability of findings to different proficiency levels. Additionally, the study predominantly examined academic writing within the context of argumentative essays, potentially overlooking variations in language use across different academic genres. The scope of boosters was limited to a specific set, and the study's quantitative approach may not fully capture the nuanced motivations behind learners' choices in employing these linguistic devices.

### **Recommendations**

Future researchers are encouraged to adopt a more diverse approach. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as discourse analysis or interviews, would provide a richer understanding of the contextual nuances influencing the use of hedges and boosters. Exploring language learners at various proficiency levels and investigating a broader range of academic genres could offer a more comprehensive picture of linguistic strategies. Comparative studies across different

cultural and disciplinary contexts would contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted influences on language use. Additionally, examining the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions and conducting longitudinal studies could shed light on the developmental trajectory of learners' use of these linguistic devices over time.

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