In the Name of God

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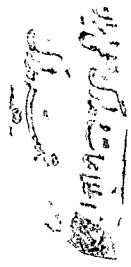

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Supervisor: Dr. F. Farrokhi

Co-Supervisor: Dr. A. Ansarin

Student: Safoora Emami

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استاد مشاور

دکتر علی اکبر انصارین

پژوهشگر

صفورا امامی

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English Language Department

We hereby recommend that the thesis by

Safoora Emami

Entitled:

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Supervisor: Dr. F. Farrokhi F. Farrokhi

Co-Supervisor: Dr. A. Ansarin A. Ansarin

Examiner: Dr. P. Azhideh P. Azhideh

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Supervisor: **Dr. Farahman Farrokhi**

Advisor: **Dr. Ali Akbar Ansarin**

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Abstract: The expression of doubt and certainty is crucial in academic writing where the authors have to distinguish opinion from fact and evaluate their assertions in acceptable and persuasive ways. Hedges and boosters are two strategies used for this purpose. Despite their importance in academic writing, we know little about how they are used in different disciplines and genres and how foreign language writers present assertions in their writing. This study explores the use of hedges and boosters in research articles of two disciplines of Electrical Engineering and Applied Linguistics. These two disciplines were chosen as representatives of the two broad disciplines of Engineering and Social Sciences. It further examines the similarities and differences between the native and non-native writers of English in the use of hedges and boosters in the research articles of these two disciplines. Based on a corpus of twenty research articles, the frequency of hedges and boosters was calculated per 1,000 words. Then, the overall, rhetorical, and categorical distribution of hedges and boosters in research articles of two disciplines and in the articles of native and non-native writers were compared. The analysis showed that the overall distribution of hedges and boosters in Applied Linguistics articles is higher than Electrical Engineering articles. Moreover, the results indicated that there are significant differences between native and non-native writers in the use of hedges and boosters. Also, some differences were found in the rhetorical distribution of hedges and boosters in the articles of native and non-native writers. These findings may have some implications for the teaching of academic writing especially to foreign language learners of English.

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List of Abbreviations

A = Abstract

AL = Applied Linguistics

B = Booster

C = Conclusion

D = Discussion

EAP = English for Academic Purposes

EE = Electrical Engineering

ESP = English for Specific Purposes

F = Frequency

H = Hedge

I = Introduction

N = Native

NN = Non-Native

NW = Native Writer

NNW = Non-Native Writer

W = Words

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Background and Need for the Study

From the late 1980s, there has been a continuing and increasing interest in genre-based approach to specialized language teaching and in the development of professional communication skills (Swales, 2004). One of the important professional communication skills is the expression of doubt and certainty in academic writing. This is because according to Hyland (1998) the expression of doubt and certainty is central to the rhetorical and interactive character of academic writing. Its importance lies in the fact that academics gain acceptance for their research claims by balancing conviction with caution, either investing statements with the confidence of reliable knowledge, or with tentativeness to reflect uncertainty or appropriate social interactions. These expressions of doubt and certainty are known in the literature as hedges and boosters (Holmes, 1984, 1990).

Hedges and boosters are communicative strategies for increasing or reducing the force of statements. They convey both epistemic and affective meaning in academic discourse. That is, they not only carry the writer's degree of confidence in the truth of a proposition, but also an attitude to the audience. While the literature emphasizes the importance of hedging in academic contexts (Hyland, 1996a, 1996b; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Skelton, 1997), Hyland (1998) has stressed that we know little about its use, frequency, and distribution in different disciplines or genres. Hedging has received most attention in the context of casual and oral discourse (Coates, 1983; Stubbs, 1986). The neglect of the study on hedging in the past years is also reported by Crystal (1995, p. 120) who attempted to shed light on the areas in English language studies which have not received enough attention. On the other hand, the study on boosters shows their important

role in creating conversational solidarity (Holmes, 1984, 1990). However, they have received little attention in academic writing.

There have not been many studies on hedging and boosting in research articles of different disciplines and across their rhetorical sections. The limited number of studies which are conducted in this area have shown that there are some variations in the use of hedges and boosters across disciplines (Hyland, 1998; Varttala, 2001) and research articles rhetorical sections (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Vassileva, 2001).

Academic writing becomes especially challenging when the text is to be written in a foreign language. English has become the lingua franca of academic discourse, and novices as well as established researchers must be able to express themselves in that language if they want to be fully accepted members of the international academic community. According to Swales (2004), the "Englishization" of the academic world and increasing number of non-native speakers of English requires special attention to academic style. A number of studies (Holmes, 1982, 1988; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Hyland, 2000) have emphasized the importance of learning to express doubt and certainty for learners of English as a second or foreign language. Since cultural differences in argumentation strategies and rhetorical means are embodied in language use, it is essential to have some knowledge of these differences while writing in a foreign language.

1.1. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

The role of hedges and boosters is critical in academic writing, but we know little about their use in research articles of different disciplines and across their rhetorical sections. In addition, non-native writers of English often have difficulties in expressing their commitment to and detachment from their propositions in their academic writing. And as Hyland and

Milton (1997) state we do not know how second language writers present their assertions in their writing.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of hedges and boosters in four rhetorical sections (Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion) of Electrical Engineering (henceforth EE) and Applied Linguistics (henceforth AL) research articles. It further examines the use of these devices by native and Iranian non-native writers of English in research articles of these two disciplines.

1.2. Research Questions

To achieve the purposes of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the differences between EE and AL research articles in the use of hedges in four rhetorical sections namely, Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion?
2. What are the differences between EE and AL research articles in the use of boosters in four rhetorical sections namely, Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion?
3. What are the differences between native and non-native writers of English in the use of hedges in four rhetorical sections (Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion) of EE articles?
4. What are the differences between native and non-native writers of English in the use of boosters in four rhetorical sections (Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion) of EE articles?
5. What are the differences between native and non-native writers of English in the use of hedges in four rhetorical sections (Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion) of AL articles?

6. What are the differences between native and non-native writers of English in the use of boosters in four rhetorical sections (Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion) of AL articles?

1.3. Research Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between EE and AL research articles in the use of hedges in four rhetorical sections.

Substantive Hypothesis 1: There are significant differences between EE and AL research articles in the use of hedges in four rhetorical sections.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between EE and AL research articles in the use of boosters in four rhetorical sections.

Substantive Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences between EE and AL research articles in the use of boosters in four rhetorical sections.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using hedges in four rhetorical sections of EE research articles.

Substantive Hypothesis 3: There are significant differences between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using hedges in four rhetorical sections of EE research articles.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using boosters in four rhetorical sections of EE research articles.

Substantive Hypothesis 4: There are significant differences between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using boosters in four rhetorical sections of EE research articles.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using hedges in four rhetorical sections of AL research articles.

Substantive Hypothesis 5: There are significant differences between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using hedges in four rhetorical sections of AL research articles.

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no significant difference between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using boosters in four rhetorical sections of AL research articles.

Substantive Hypothesis 6: There are significant differences between native and Iranian non-native writers of English in using boosters in four rhetorical sections of AL research articles.

1.4. Significance of the study

Expressing doubt and certainty is critical to successful academic writing. To be effective, writers need to make claims and assertions which academic readers judge to be warranted and which reflect appropriate social interactions. Statements must not only indicate the extent of the writer's conviction in their truth, but also convey a suitable degree of deference and modesty to the audience.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that genre-based approaches to analyzing texts and exploration of the use of textual strategies such as hedges and boosters in different disciplines and between