



A Corpus Assisted Comparative Study of Metadiscourse Markers in Opinion Articles of American and Pakistani Newspapers

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Abstract: *Writers often use metadiscourse markers to express their messages compellingly and persuasively. The current research explores the frequency of metadiscourse markers in Pakistani and American Newspapers using corpus linguistics methods. Opinion articles from both The News and The USA Today were collected, cleaned, and analyzed using the AntConc software. The primary focus of the research was on two interpersonal features: hedges and boosters. The findings of the study suggest that American writers tend to use more metadiscourse markers than Pakistani writers do. The findings also suggest that the frequency of hedges is higher than that of boosters in both Pakistani and American articles. The findings also suggest that writers prefer to use hedges to convey doubt, uncertainty, and lack of confidence. On the other hand, writers prefer to use boosters when writing about facts that make their writing style more confident and assertive.*

Key Words: Metadiscourse Markers, The USA Today, The News, Booster, Hedges

Introduction

This paper investigates the frequency of metadiscourse markers in American and Pakistani Newspapers. Metadiscourse markers have a significant role to play in the failure or success of any message and help the writers to achieve the desired end. The word "discourse" is often used in various fields of research, i.e., debate or dialogue. This term is often used in linguistics as it refers to the functional aspects of language. Language discourse refers to the way language is socially used to communicate more than what is spoken. It implies the coherent use of words. The random collection of sentences does not give complete meaning, so it cannot be considered discourse. Discourse is a language that is above or above the sentence. Metadiscourse markers are

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a key feature of any discourse. In discourse, these markers engage in multiple roles and functions. Metadiscourse is defined in philosophy as discourse about a discourse or discussion about a discussion. Metadiscourse markers have been researched a lot in the last decade. Researchers believe that metadiscourse markers are of pivotal importance as they connect the writers or speakers to the readers or audience. It may be argued that without appropriate and accurate usage of metadiscourse markers in writing, the text may not be interpreted correctly by its readers, and therefore non-native speakers and authors should have the required awareness of the proper use of metadiscourse markers.

They involve and engage the reader in the text. It modifies and sheds light on the aspects of the text and shows the writer's attitude to the text. The current study focuses on hedges and boosters. Authors of opinion articles use distinctive hedges, attitude markers, and boosters to demonstrate their viewpoint and stance on the idea. Hedges indicates the author's reluctance to present the proposed data in a genuine and unquestionable manner ([Hyland & Tse, 2004](#)). Hedges are also used as a means to avoid taking full responsibility for the statement. Booster, on the other hand, claims the author's certainty of his point of view. They achieve this by modifying the force of the statement. Hedges and boosters influence the tone and style of the composition. Hedges help writers soften their voices in their writings. Boosters, on the contrary, clearly demonstrate the author's bold, confident and assertive style.

In a text, corpus linguistics helps to explain the linguistic and thematic patterns. Corpus linguistics aims to look for language variations and language use in large corpora of language compiled for various research purposes. This research study focuses on the written discourse of newspaper opinion articles in Pakistani and American newspapers. Language corpora represent the compilation of language that can assist in evaluating the use of language. It further informs the researchers about how language is used by people in various contexts. The compiled corpus can be analyzed with the help of any appropriate research analysis tools such as Antconc ([Anthony, 2006](#)). The results reflect the language patterns in the corpus and provide the basis for advanced analysis.

Since the development of corpus-based studies in the middle of the 20th century, the focus has been on the study of the syntactic structures, vocabulary elements, and grammatical constructions in corpora. The issues how the Metadiscourse markers can play a role in political discourse published in newspapers is less common in corpus assisted studies. This paper contributes to the existing literature by investigating the differences in the use of Metadiscourse markers by the Pakistani and American English writers. The reason for including contemporary and independent contexts is to examine the diction of native English writers and non-native English writers in their opinion articles, and how the effect of their writings could be strengthened or weakened using Metadiscourse markers. The political ideologies of a particular society are expressed through its language. In other words, in expressing political traditions, perceptions, and practices, language plays a vital part. Writer use Metadiscourse markers to

express their stance on various issues. The Metadiscourse markers that are mostly used are hedges and boosters.

Hedges are used by writers when they are uncertain about what they write. Hedge markers help the writer to imply a careful and lenient behaviour. Boosters, on the other hand, are defined as highlights to express the certainty and the claim of the author to the statement. They are used to boost the statement and to show the author's confidence in writing. Hedges and boosters are devices that are used to signal a difference in the degree of certainty about the authenticity of the statement. In addition, hedges and boosters can also soften or enhance the intensity of criticism, validity, or compliment. These markers also serve the reader to get and interpret what the writer wants to convey.

Statement of the Problem

Although many educational researchers approach the use of metadiscourse markers and interpersonal markers from different perspectives and explore the role of individual characteristics in different writings. The function and use of metadiscourse markers have been studied in many different frames of reference, but this area, i.e., metadiscourse markers, in American and Pakistani newspaper articles, has remained underexplored. In this study, our focus is on Metadiscourse markers used by Pakistani and American authors. The current study aims to show how these markers help writers to show their stance in writing.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To explore and compare how often Pakistani and American writers use metadiscourse markers in their articles.
2. To discuss the functions of Metadiscourse markers used by authors.

Research Questions

What is the frequency of metadiscourse markers that are used in newspaper opinion articles by Pakistani and American writers?

1. How do metadiscourse markers help the writers to express their stance on different political issues convincingly and persuasively?

Significance of the Study

The current study provides an overview of the use of metadiscourse markers and their different functions in the writings of Pakistani and American writers. In addition, the study gives an account of the use and functions of metadiscourse markers in writings that would help learners to draw a line between how differently Americans and Pakistani writers use the same metadiscourse markers and with what intensity they use the markers.

The function and use of metadiscourse markers have been studied in many different frames of reference. However, there is still dearth of literature in this field. The differences between the use of Metadiscourse markers of American and Pakistani newspaper articles, have remained unexplored. In this study, our focus is on metadiscourse markers used by Pakistani and American authors. The current study aims to show how these markers help writers to show their stance in writing.

Delimitation

Due to time constraints, researchers have limited their study to only one Pakistani and one American newspaper. Twenty articles (ten from each) from both newspapers were randomly chosen for the frequency of selected meta-discourse markers: hedges and boosters.

Literature Review

Opinion articles hold a central place in any newspaper and are written by seasoned writers. Metadiscourse markers are used by the speakers and writers to express their position. According to [Lakoff \(1973, p.195\)](#), the ‘words whose job is to make things fuzzy’ are called hedges. Hedges and boosters are employed by a writer or a speaker to serve different purposes. Hedges are used to show the weak position of the author. On the other hand, boosters are used to project an assertive position. [Hyland’s \(2005\)](#) taxonomy of Metadiscourse introduces two categories: textual and interpersonal. Other Textual features include logical connections, endophoric markers, frame markers, evidential and code glosses. Hedges, boosters, self-mentions, engagement markers and attitude markers are included in Interpersonal features.

In a recent study, [Abbas, Shehzad, and Ghalib \(2017\)](#) reported a greater number of hedges in the Joint Investigation Report on the Panama case. However, the frequency of boosters used in the report was higher than hedges. They applied Hyland’s model for this research and corpus tool used for this research was MetaPAk. Similarly, in another study, [Zafar \(2018\)](#) reported that modal auxiliaries are often used as hedges. According to [Trajkova \(2011\)](#), the most used hedges in newspaper editorials are the modal verbs.

Likewise, [Batoool et al. \(2019\)](#) conducted a corpus-based study on the frequency of hedges and boosters in Pakistani opinion articles. The aim was to analyze and investigate the most common hedges and boosters used by writers in opinion articles and to find out the stance of the writer that they projected using hedges and boosters. Results revealed that the most frequently occurring hedges are would and could whereas should is the most frequent booster. After the analysis, the researchers concluded that hedge markers were used by researchers to demonstrate their cautious and careful writing. This shows the uncertainty of the writer. It shows that Pakistani writers do not explicitly project their position. On the other hand, the authors use boosters to show their confidence and a solid point of view. Writers used boosters to convince and persuade their readers of their opinions. Their study shows that hedges and boosters are frequently used in

opinion articles. When writers want to make a commitment to their statements, they use boosters, and when they want to show uncertainty, they use hedges.

The present work deals with the exploration of hedges and boosters in a Pakistani newspaper, *The News*, and one American Newspaper, *The USA Today*. The primary aim of the research is to compare the frequencies of the hedges and boosters in American and Pakistani Newspapers.

Research Methodology

There have been two main goals of this study. The first was to investigate differences in the frequency of Metadiscourse markers between American and Pakistani authors. Second, it decided to shed light on the potential explanations for the lower or higher use of Metadiscourse markers. The research decided to concentrate on two Metadiscourse markers: hedges and boosters. A quantitative method was used for this study. In the first phase, 10 articles from each newspaper were downloaded from their websites. The files were cleaned and filtered of additional information, titles, images, headings, etc. This data obtained from two newspapers was used to develop two corpora, one for each newspaper. The text was converted into plain text format using an online text converter. The articles published between January 2020 and July 2020 were randomly selected for this purpose. The number of words in the Corpus of *The News* was 7460 and in that of *The USA Today*, it was 7350.

After that, the corpora were uploaded to AntConc software ([Anthony, 2007](#)) for data exploration and analysis. The Metadiscourse markers were searched for and their frequencies were calculated. The frequencies for hedges and boosters for each newspaper were presented in the form of graphs and explained in the data analysis section.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on the well-known [Hyland \(2005\)](#) model of meta-discourse taxonomy. It consists of two categories: textual and interpersonal features. The interpersonal features are Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self-mentions, and Engagement markers. Interpersonal features engage the readers and show the stance of the writer towards the statements. The current research analyzes the interpersonal meta-discourse markers used in papers written by Pakistani and American authors. The study only focuses on two interpersonal features: hedges and boosters. Hedges are used for making the statements less forceful and assertive. The hedges include words like *may*, *might*, *would*, *could*, *possible*, *perhaps*, etc. On the other hand, boosters make a statement more assertive and forceful. Some of the examples of boosters are *must*, *definitely*, *never*, *obviously*, *undoubtedly*, etc. These Metadiscourse markers project the role of the author, the uncertainty, the conviction, and the certainty of the author's writings. This approach is well matched to the present research, as the study also focuses on the interpersonal characteristics of the text and examines hedges and boosters.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the analysis are presented in this section. The data is presented in the form of graphs in this section to highlight the differences between Pakistani and American writers in the use of Metadiscourse markers. The quantitative results of current research are discussed in depth in this section. There are two types of Metadiscourse markers that are focused in this research. These Metadiscourse markers are hedges and boosters. For convenience purposes, Hedges and Boosters are presented separately on different pages. These metadiscourse markers demonstrate how the general stance is projected through the use of metadiscourse markers. The frequency of metadiscourse markers is analyzed in the first section. A comparison of Pakistani and American writers with respect to their use of metadiscourse markers is also given.

Frequency of Metadiscourse Markers in American Articles

The frequency of the occurrence of hedges and boosters used by the American authors is presented in the form of graphs. Figure 1 shows that the most used hedge is *could* with a frequency of 16. The second most used hedge is *can* which is 15 times. The third most used hedge in the American articles is *about* which is 12 times. May and might have been used seven and eight times, respectively. Some other hedges with low occurrence are likely, often, believe, tend, assume, roughly, perhaps, and seem. The details have been given in the graph below. The total number of hedges found in the corpus of American articles is 108.

An interesting thing to note here is that modal verbs are the most used hedges found in the corpus.

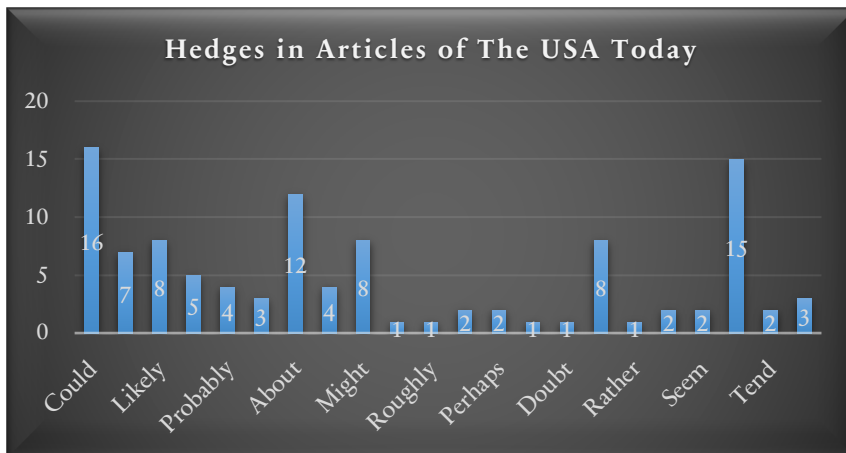


Figure 1: Frequency of Hedges in American Articles

Now we discuss the most found boosters in the corpus compiled of American articles. The total number of boosters is 43. The most frequently used booster is *should* with a frequency of 13. The second most commonly used booster is *never* which appeared 12 times in the corpus. The

other boosters found in the corpus are *certainly*, *in fact*, *definitely*, *essential*, *obvious*, and *indeed*. Please refer to figure 2 for details.

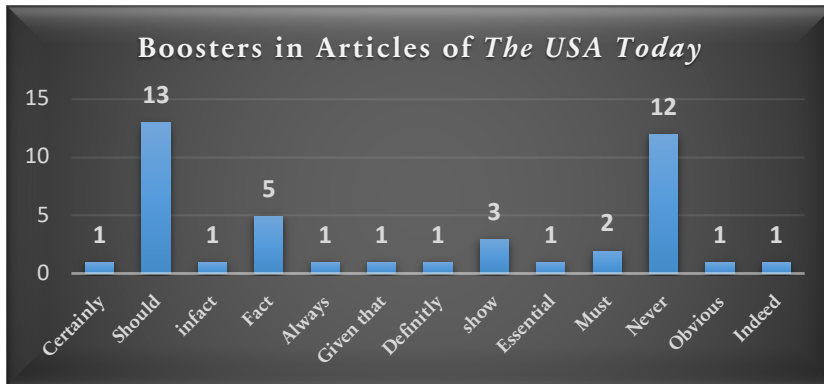


Figure 2: Frequency of Boosters in American Articles

Findings suggest that American authors use more hedges than boosters. The graphs given above reflect this variation. The most widely used metadiscourse marker for native writers is Hedges and its frequency is also higher than other markers. It indicates that authors are careful of what they say. They avoid making strong claims and voicing their own belief in the articles. By using hedges, they are not taking full responsibility for what has been said. Boosters are also sometimes used by authors, although they are less than hedge markers, but cannot be ignored. The use of boosters indicates that writers sometimes make a solid claim to the statement. When they want to express their full commitment to what they say, they use boosters. In general, the interpersonal features of the text are effectively used by American writers to project their position.

Frequency of Discourse Markers in Pakistani Articles

The use of the interpersonal features of the discourse markers used by the Pakistani writers in the opinion articles of newspapers is presented in the graphs below. As we can see in figure 4, the most commonly found hedge is *could* which is 15 times followed by *would* which is 14 times.

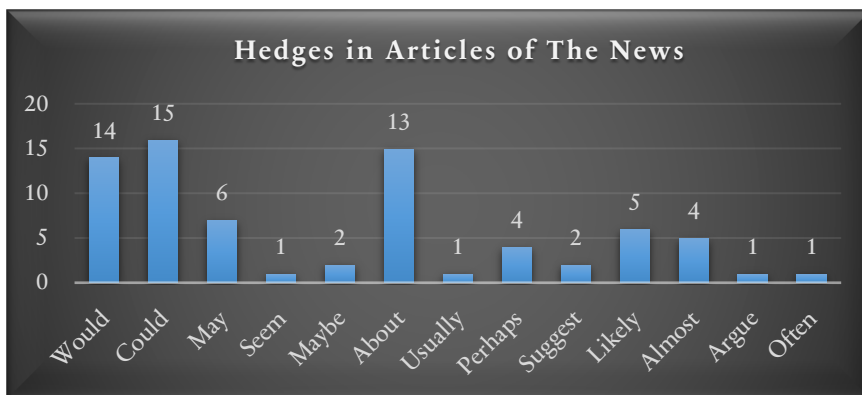


Figure 3: Frequency of Hedges in Pakistani Newspaper Articles

The third frequently found article is about which is 13 times. The fourth most commonly seen hedge is in the above graph is “*may*” followed by *likely* which is 5 times. Some other hedges with low occurrence are *likely*, *often*, *believe*, *tend*, *usually*, *suggest*, *almost*, *perhaps*, and *seem*. The total number of hedges in the Pakistani corpus is 75.

Figure 5 given below presents the boosters found in the corpus of Pakistani articles. The number of boosters found in the Pakistani corpus is 40. The most frequently used booster is *should* with a frequency of 11. The second most commonly used booster is *never* which appeared 8 times in the corpus. The other boosters found in the corpus are *fact*, *certainly*, *in fact*, *definitely*, *essential*, *obvious*, and *indeed*. Please refer to figure 2 for details.

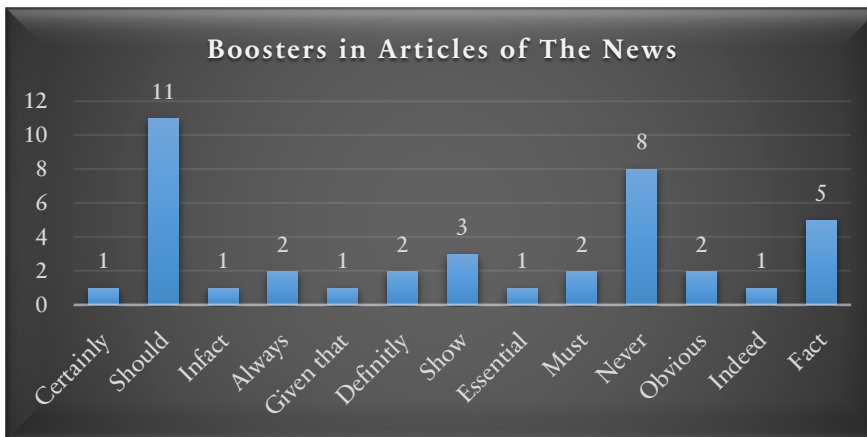


Figure 4: Frequency of Boosters in Pakistani Newspaper Articles

Above, the graphs representing the findings indicate that Pakistani writers also use metadiscourse markers, but less than American writers. Pakistani writers, like American writers, use hedges more frequently than boosters. Hedges is the most frequent metadiscourse marker used by Pakistani writers. It shows that Pakistani and American writers have chosen a cautious and thoughtful tone to express their point of view. There have been two main goals of this study. The first was to investigate differences in the frequency of Metadiscourse markers between American and Pakistani authors. Second, it decided to shed light on the potential explanations for the lower or higher use of Metadiscourse markers. The research decided to concentrate on two Metadiscourse markers: hedges and boosters.

The findings of the research show that Pakistani and American writers use more hedges in the articles than boosters. American writers tend to use a higher number of hedges than Pakistani writers do. Based on this statistical evidence, it can be argued that American writers are more careful in their writings than Pakistani writers. The primary function of hedges as we know to tone down the stance of the writer. In other words, with the help of hedges, the writers render their writing style more careful by choice of soft words. On the other hand, boosters are employed to display confidence and certainty.

Hedges are devices used by the writer to avoid taking responsibility for what has been said (Hyland, 2005). To soften the tone, writers use hedges. It may not be wrong to say that the use of Hedges shows the uncertainty of the speakers. Boosters, on the other hand, are used by writers to display trust and assurance in the argument. Boosters are the lexical items that the writer uses to project his profound conviction.

Discussion

There were two primary aims of this research. First, it aimed at exploring the variations in the frequencies of Metadiscourse markers between American and Pakistani writers. Secondly, it wanted to shed light on the possible reasons for the lower or higher use of Metadiscourse markers. The study chose to focus on two Metadiscourse markers: hedges and boosters. Hedges as explained above are the type of metadiscourse of markers that are show the writers' hesitation or uncertainty about certain topic (Lakoff, 1973). On the other, hand boosters are employed to show the confidence of the author about the things being said. The use of boosters makes the style of writer more assertive and confident (Hyland, 2005).

Study results reveal that Pakistani and American authors use more hedges than boosters in their writings. American writers prefer to use more hedges than Pakistani writers do. On the basis of this statistical data, it can be argued that American writers are more cautious than Pakistani writers in their writings. The primary role of the hedges, as we know, is to tone down the writer's position. In other words, with the assistance of hedges, writers make their writing style more cautious by using soft words. In the other side, boosters are used to demonstrate trust and certainty. Hedges are tools that the writer uses to avoid taking responsibility for what has been said (Hyland, 2005). Writers use hedges to smooth the tone. It might not be incorrect to say that the use of Hedges reflects the ambiguity of the speakers. Booster, on the other hand, is used by authors to illustrate confidence and certainty in the claim. American and Pakistani authors use hedges in their works to make their position less forceful. Some of the hedges, as mentioned above, are used more, while others are used less. Likewise, American and Pakistani authors use several words in their opinion pieces as boosters render confidence and assurance to their style.

Conclusion

The current study was carried out using a corpus-based approach to explore the use of metadiscourse markers by Pakistani and American writers in their newspaper articles. The findings of the study indicate that Pakistani and American authors use more hedges than boosters in the articles. American authors appear to use a larger number of hedges than do Pakistani authors. It can be argued, based on this statistical evidence, that American writers are more cautious than Pakistani writers in their writings. The sue of hedges help the American writers to say things without taking responsibility of the things being said. Moreover, the use of hedges helps the writers to adopt an indirect style of style of writing.

As we know, the key role of hedges is to tone down the writer's stance. In other words, the writers make their writing style more cautious by the choice of soft words with the support of hedges. Boosters, on the other hand, are used to show confidence and certainty. Hedges are mechanisms used by the writer to prevent liability for what they write. Writers use hedges to soften their tone and position. It might not be wrong to claim that Hedges' presence reflects the speakers' ambiguity. On the other side, boosters are used by writers to show trust and assurance in the claim.

To sum up, it is to say that American and Pakistani writers use hedges frequently in their writings to make their stance less forceful. Some of the hedges, as mentioned above, are used more, and others are used less. Likewise, American and Pakistani writers use boosters in their opinion articles with some variations. We can conclude that Pakistani and American writers use hedges and boosters to show their stance persuasively and engagingly.

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