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Metadiscourse Markers in Political Discourse: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Hedges and Boosters in Benazir Bhutto's Speeches

Abstract

Metadiscourse markers play an important role in academic, media, and political discourse. Political leaders use discourse markers to express their ideas and thoughts persuasively and compellingly. The paper identifies the interactive meta-discourse markers in Benazir Bhutto's speech and explains how the use of meta-discourse markers, such as boosters and hedges, can strengthen or weaken the impact of political discourse. The data used for compiling the corpus consists of thirteen randomly selected speeches by Benazir Bhutto delivered between 1989 and 1997 and explained using Hyland's (1996) concept of metadiscourse. The findings show that hedges have been used more frequently than boosters. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the interactional meta-discourse markers used by politicians to shape their messages to enhance the impact of their political narratives. It also helps to understand how rhetorical devices are used by speakers to express doubts or certainty in their speeches.

Key Words: Metadiscourse Markers, Political discourse, Benazir Bhutto, Corpus Assisted

Introduction

This paper discusses the use of hedges and boosters in Benazir Bhutto's political discourse. The basic role of the meta-discourse markers used in political discourses is to earn the trust and confidence of the audience by drawing their attention to the fulfilment of their aspirations and to consolidate their position in the political system. Political leaders, media people, and public speakers, therefore, use meta-discourse markers in their conversations.

The term metadiscourse means discourse about the discourse or discussion about a discussion. Metadiscourse markers refer to Halliday's meta-function of a language. The "textual", "ideational" and "interpersonal" features are referred to here. Metadiscourse is a vast field consisting of many relevant concepts that explore the use of metadiscourse markers in discourse. The primary objective of this field is to provide an insight into language devices used by speakers in a compelling and consequential way to convey their message to the audience. There are a number of linguistic devices used by political leaders in their speeches, including "hedges," "boosters," "self-indicators," etc.

For the study of any text, corpus assisted discourse is also used as a useful technique. Corpus Linguistics' basic task is to determine the frequency of the metaphors and words by identifying and highlighting the patterns of lexical items used in the text (Baker et al. 2008 p. 296). The present research aims to highlight the use of metadiscourse markers in the speeches delivered by Benazir Bhutto, the first female prime minister of Pakistan. Her speeches are regarded as impacting and affecting a large number of audiences, especially those who supported her. She used a number of rhetorical techniques in her speeches to make her speech more convincing and compelling. Metadiscourse markers such as hedges and boosters are analyzed in this study to see how Benazir Bhutto used these tools to make her speeches successful and consequential.

Research Objectives

- To identify the metadiscourse markers (Hedges and Boosters) in Benazir Bhutto's speeches.

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- To calculate the frequency of these metadiscourse markers in Benazir Bhutto's speech
- To understand the effect produced by the use of metadiscourse markers.

Research Questions

- Q1. What type of metadiscourse markers has been used in Benazir Bhutto's selected speech?
- Q2. What is the frequency of the interactional metadiscourse markers in the selected speech?
- Q3. What is the possible impact of hedges and boosters on the political discourse?

Significance of the Study

The present research is important as it focuses on the identification, exploration, and evaluation of the text using the lens of interactional metadiscourse markers (Hedges and Boosters) used in political speeches. Metadiscourse markers are often used by people in authority in both written and oral speeches that reinforce their narratives. This research plays an important role in identifying and analyzing the frequencies of the use of interactional Metadiscourse markers in Benazir Bhutto's speeches. It seeks to illustrate, in particular, the two key metadiscourse markers, Boosters and Hedges, and how their usage impacts their political discourse.

Delimitation

Due to time constraints, this study has only analyzed the hedges and boosters in Benazir Bhutto's thirteen speeches delivered on different occasions between 1989 and 1997. Although the speeches are in an oral presentation, we cannot deny the significance of facial expressions, movements, and pitch of the voice in having an impact on the audience. However, this analysis only analyzes the written text of the speeches, so only the use of Hedges and Boosters is presented and highlighted.

Literature Review

In general terms, politics is defined as strategies and activities conducted by people to highlight the "power and status." ([Oxford Dictionary Online, 2018](#)). This never-ending struggle to gain influence while manipulating people includes not only activities but also language. The proper use of language affects the audience, which allows politicians to build, consolidate, and sustain their control. Language undoubtedly plays a major role in political events, and it is by dialogue that political leaders convince their audiences to endorse and follow them ([See Bayram, 2010](#)).

Political discourse, as described by Graber ([as cited in Ismail, 2012](#)) is a tactful tool used by political figures to influence and impress their audiences. Using a particular language, leaders aim to accomplish their goals by influencing and manipulating the thoughts of their audiences. Media and political figures appear to use a number of meta-discourse markers in their speeches. According to [Kopple \(1985, p.83\)](#), the word 'metadiscourse markers' refers to 'discourse on discourse.' There are two key features of the metadiscourse markers suggested by Hyland. These metadiscourse markers are 'interactional' and 'interactive'.

Hyland (as cited in Yousefi, 2012, 150) shows how the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers function. Interactive metadiscourse markers present writers' understanding of the audience, which help him create a satisfactory message for the audience. This is mainly because of the writer's awareness of his/her audience. On the other hand, the interactional metadiscourse markers refer to the opinion of the speaker and involve the audience to be part of the text. Audience participation is accomplished by the use of specific devices, including hedges, attitude markers, boosters, self-mentions, etc. Since the purpose of this study is to analyze only the "interactional metadiscourse markers," the hedges and boosters in the following paragraphs have been discussed in detail.

Boosters permit a writer to conflict arguments or anticipating alternatives by expressing a clear belief rather than a doubt. Words such as will, must; clearly, etc., fall under boosters ([Gholami, Tajalli, Shokarpour 2014, p.5](#)). By using such boosters, the writer is confident and sure about the facts that are presented by him. On the other hand, hedges that include almost, perhaps, possible, etc. show the writer's doubts instead of facts. These devices are used to avoid the statement that could lead to

conflicts (Hyland, 1996). Hedges makes a writer's argument less authentic and therefore clarifies that the knowledge is simply based on the assumptions of the speaker (Mai, 2016, p.209).

Zellig S Harris (1959) first used the term "metadiscourse" to refer to markers used in political speeches and interviews. An 'intercultural study of meta-discourse indicators' between Chinese and American political speeches was performed by Mai (2016). Sixty speeches that involved both countries were taken for corpus. The findings showed that there was a higher number of metadiscourse markers in American speeches compared to Chinese ones.

A study on articles relating to 9/11 was also performed in English front-page news articles by Yazdani, Sharifi & Elyassi (2014). They wanted to study the use of boosters and hedges by various journalists. The results revealed how in controversial issues such as 9/11, the reporters avoided the use of metadiscourse markers. They preferred an indirect way to convey their ideas than to be direct using hedges and boosters.

McClay (2017) carried out a study of Donald Trump's campaign speeches. The researcher basically examined the contrast in the strategic use of "us and them" in his speeches. Trump, in a very subtle way through the manipulation of language, drew a line between the Americans and other nations. He constructed social realities and persuaded people to believe in them.

In order to examine the use of hedging, Toska (2013) performed research on three of Barack Obama's presidential speeches. His findings show that hedging not only generates a favorable picture of the speaker but also helps to interact more efficiently with the public, making speech more rational and credible for the public to believe in.

Barack Obama's three speeches were taken by Ismail (2012) to explore the various forms of metadiscourse markers used in his speeches and the role these discourse markers perform in such political speeches. He concluded that these metadiscourse markers are key elements for persuading and influencing individuals. They also are a means for interaction with the audience. Similar research was conducted by Kan (2016) in which he explored the use of interactional metadiscourse through a comparison of Turkish language and literature papers. The researcher took 10 articles from each language and literature. A content analysis was conducted to find the results. The results revealed that the use of metadiscourse markers in Turkish language education was higher than in Turkish literature.

All the above research was carried out on other political figures, newspapers, and articles. To the best of our knowledge, not a single relevant study was done to explore the metadiscourse markers in Benazir Bhutto's speeches. This paper, therefore, focuses on this very aspect and fills the research gap by analyzing the use of hedges and boosters used in her speeches.

Theoretical Framework

The study explores the various forms of interactional metadiscourse markers used in Benazir Bhutto's speeches. According to Hyland (2005), metadiscourse markers assist the author in designing a clear message, and they also assist the writer in involving the reader by predicting his hostilities and reactions to the text. This model has been used by many other researchers in the fields related to academic discourse to extract metadiscourse strategies. These metadiscourse markers include the attitude markers which show us the speaker's attitude, mood and his stance. Hedges are used by a writer to show doubt and uncertainty, whereas boosters show certainty about the subject. The use of these boosting devices shows the confidence and the surety of the facts presented by a writer. Hyland's (2005) stances include four categories that are Hedges, Boosters, Self-mention, and Attitude markers. The term 'stance' deals with the 'personal voice' of the speaker and this 'voice' projects the attitude of the speaker to whatsoever he states. The attitude can be judgmental, committed, disguised, uncertain, and authoritative or lacks authenticity.

Research Methodology

This research is a corpus-based study and follows both quantitative and qualitative methods. A corpus of 13 speeches was developed and analyzed using Antconc, a corpus analysis tool developed by Anthony Lawrence (Anthony, 2014). After the corpus analysis, Hyland's theoretical framework related to metadiscourse markers relevant to hedges and boosters was applied. Hence this research used both corpus linguistics and discourse analysis techniques.

The corpus, selected as data for the current study, consists of thirteen speeches of Benazir Bhutto delivered between 1989 and 1997. These speeches were collected from the internet and were used for the development of the corpus. The data was cleaned and filtered to delete the headings, dates, and figures. The total number of word token was 21604.

Corpus tools have been quite useful in the analysis of different long texts. Anthony (Anthony, 2014) was used to search for the hedges and boosters, and the concordance function was used to see the hedges and boosters in the context. First of all, the hedges and boosters were searched and identified through the concordance table. Then, their frequencies were calculated.

Data Analysis

The politicians, through the manipulation of language, are generally successful in making their audience believe in their narratives and claims. They achieve this by the judicious use of words which sound compelling and persuasive to the audience. They use their words in such a manner that the audience feels involved in the conversation. The Hedges and Boosters in a piece of writing or speech play a very significant role in achieving the writers' or speakers' goals. In the present study, first, the metadiscourse markers are searched and identified. Then their frequency was measured and calculated to see the number of times they were used. After that, their possible impact on the effectiveness the message is discussed.

Hedges in Bhutto's Speeches

The graph given below shows the words and their frequency used as hedges. The hedges that occur most commonly are 'should', 'need', 'could', 'most' and 'believe'.

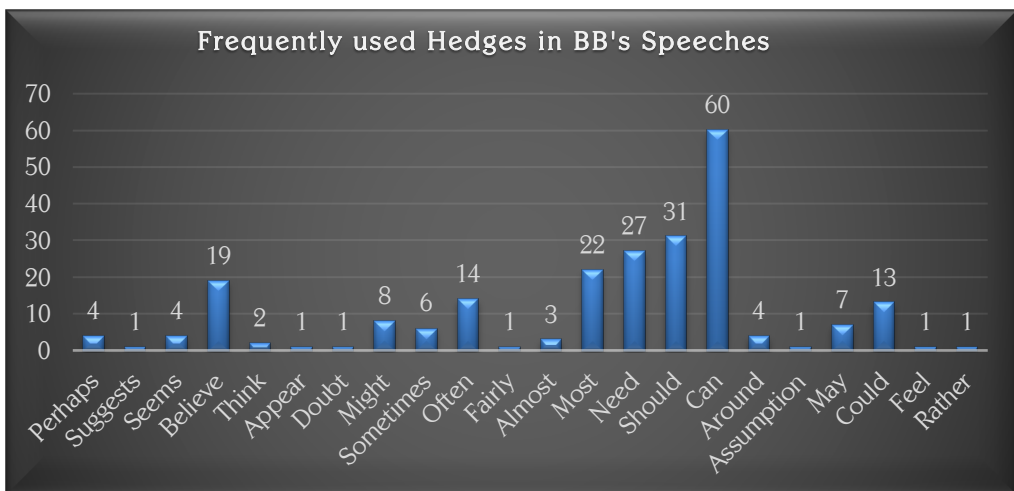


Figure 1: Frequency of Hedges in Benazir Bhutto's Speeches

The table given below presents the concordance lines which are being used to show how the words were used as hedges in the context by the speaker. The text given in the tables has been taken from Benazir Bhutto's speeches to show how she employed hedges and boosters.

Table 1. Examples of Hedges from Bhutto's Speeches with their Linguistic Context

Hedges	Linguistic Context
Believe	I <i>believe</i> Pakistan today faces a grave crisis.
Seems	The world <i>seems</i> to be increasingly looking at the values.
Almost	A woman sensitive to the obstacle to justice and full participation still stands before women in <i>almost</i> every society.

Hedges	Linguistic Context
Around	<i>Around</i> the world, democracy is on the march.
Sometimes	As you go out in the world, <i>perhaps</i> you will <i>sometimes</i> find things a little upside down.

Words such as 'belief,' 'seems,' 'almost' 'around' and 'perhaps' are used to show uncertainty about the statements. The use of such words demonstrates that she was not sure of the validity of the facts she was presenting. What she was talking about, it seems, was based on her assumptions and intuitions.

Table 2. Examples of Hedges from Bhutto's speeches with their linguistic context

Hedges	Linguistic Context
May	The prospects for democracy <i>may</i> depend on it.
Feel	I <i>feel</i> a special responsibility for women's issue.
Feel	I <i>feel</i> honored to have been asked to make this commencement address to the class of 1989.
Might	This is not written for Pakistan, but it <i>might</i> as well be.

Words like 'may' and 'feel' show the speaker's own perceptions and assumptions. The use of such words does not state the obvious but instead creates an image of what the speaker thinks in the minds of the audience. These words inform the listeners of the opinions of the speakers, and the listeners may have different points of view.

Table 3. Examples of Hedges from Bhutto's Speeches with their Linguistic Context

Hedges	Linguistic Context
Could	In the old days, the press <i>could</i> not report on subjudice matters.
Should	This informal matter of democracy <i>can</i> and <i>should</i> be strengthened.
Perhaps	History, the rush of events, <i>perhaps</i> even destiny, has brought me here today.
Think	Many in the west would like to <i>think</i> of us as terrorist and fanatics.

'Perhaps' and 'think' again indicate the lack of belief and certainty of the speakers. Using these words tone down the message that the speakers aim to express. Speakers achieve this by inviting the audience to different viewpoints and possibilities.

As discussed above, hedges are the devices used in discourse to express assumptions, doubts and intuitions. In her speeches, Mrs Bhutto also used several hedges, while presenting certain facts about which she herself is not certain. She used words like possible, suggests, thinks, could, should, can, etc. These assisted her in persuasively and credibly arranging statements while expressing the appropriate degree of uncertainty of the claims she made.

Boosters in Bhutto's Speeches

The graph given below shows the words employed as boosters in her speeches. "Always", "fact", "will", "must", "true", "know", "proved" etc. are the most commonly used boosters. In the speeches, "Will" is the most frequently used booster and helped Bhutto intensify the facts. But the other boosters, such as "clearly", "sure", and "admit" are the least used. In addition, while presenting the facts, the words indicate the faith and confidence of the speaker. The second most used "must" booster also helps to intensify Benazir Bhutto's statements. Whereas the remaining ones are used where necessary, twice, or thrice.

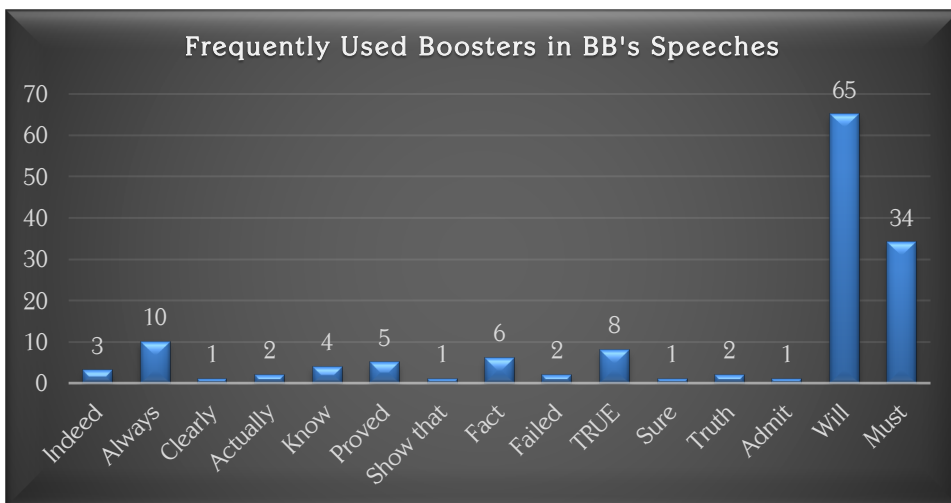


Figure 1: Frequency of Boosters in Benazir Bhutto's Speeches

Boosters are illustrated with their linguistic context in the tables below to illustrate how the boosters have been used to express the certainty of statements.

Table 4. Examples of Boosters from Bhutto's Speeches with their Linguistic Context

Booster	Linguistic Context
Indeed	<i>Indeed</i> , many have to make the supreme sacrifice of their lives.
Clearly	This <i>will clearly</i> show who favor who.
Sure	You can be <i>sure</i> that the jails are filled with good men.
admit	Let us <i>admit</i> , for one reason or another, all of us have failed in giving this to our people.
Always	And change is <i>always</i> resisted by the status quo.

Boosters such as "sure", clearly" and "always" show the confidence and firmness of the speaker. Here, the statements are boldly made along with the full assurance of the statements made by the speaker. There is no room for objection or indictment. The audience is expected to agree with the speaker's claims.

Table 5. Examples of Boosters from Bhutto's Speeches with their Linguistic Context

Booster	Linguistic Context
Shown	I am encouraged by my decision with the President this morning and the understanding that he has <i>shown</i> for Pakistan's position.
Believe	Democracy's doubters have never <i>believed</i> that it could successfully address the problems of developing countries.
Must	We cannot; we <i>must</i> abandon their cause.
Know	I <i>know</i> that there are students who are graduating today.
In fact,	Islam, <i>in fact</i> , has a strong democratic ethos.
True	How <i>true</i> these words ring even today.

Words such as "In fact," "know" and "must" mean authentic views. They are clearly stated by the speaker to express a certainty rather than a possibility. Boosters provide strong evidence of the uttered sentence of the speaker to cover any kind of complaints and concerns.

Boosters are devices that project certainty of the speaker about a subject. These boosting devices tend to show the confidence and the surety of the speaker about the facts that he or she is presenting. Bhutto used many boosters to brag about the achievements that her party has made under her father's administration. She used boosters to organize the facts in a way that there is no place left for doubt or question. They also helped her emphasize or intensify matters of her choice.

Hedges and Boosters produce essential communicative techniques that help to strengthen and suppress the statements that are either strong or lack confidence. They play a very vital role in speeches made especially by political figures. These devices strengthen the message and its impact on the audience. It also shows that the speaker is either confident or lacks clarity in his or her statements. Boosters such as "obviously" and "certainly" assert and reinforce the speaker's veracity that whatever the speaker says is true and accurate. On the other hand, hedges like "perhaps" and "maybe" make the argument of the speaker a little weaker because it does not have concrete clarity. There is a "doubt" factor attached to it ([Hyland, 1996](#)).

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in the speeches made by Benazir Bhutto between 1986 and 1997. The first concern of the study was to find out what kind of interactional metadiscourse markers Bhutto used in her political debates. The next concern was to explore the frequency of hedges and boosters in her speeches. Hedges appeared 229 times, while boosters appeared 145 times in the text. Finally, the study shows how these metadiscourse markers lead to the reinforcement of the overall message. The study shows that hedges and boosters have an important role to play in political discourse. Political figures prefer to use hedges when they do not have substantial evidence or when they are not absolutely sure of the issues they speak about. Political leaders, on the other hand, tend to use boosters to talk about issues they are certain about. This shows that a tactful use of hedges and boosters plays a key role in the success of a political debate.

This study is helpful in presenting the widespread use of metadiscourse markers used in political discourse to provide an insight into how speeches are written that enable political leaders to frame their intended message, resulting in a powerful impact on the audience that enables leaders to achieve their goals.

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