# Persuasive Linguistic Elements in NYT and NST Editorials: Discoursal Pragmatic Interpretive Study

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## ABSTRACT

In positioning the stance of the editorials that play a pivotal role in articulating the official position of the newspaper, the editor needs to have the craft of writing in a credible manner. It is important then that persuasive linguistic elements such as hedges and boosters are utilized in the editorials. Hence, this study aims to adopt a content analysis to investigate the use of hedges and boosters in 240 randomized editorials of *The New York Times (NYT:* n=120*) and *New Straits Times (NST:* n=120*). The results reveal that generally editors use more hedges than boosters. Moreover, interestingly, it was found that *NYT* editorials tend to use more boosters while the *NST* editorials exhibit a tendency to hedge more. One possible reason could be the political climate of the time. America being the epitome of democracy provides freedom of speech and this is reflected in the ownerships of newspapers. Unlike Malaysia, owners of *NYT* newspapers are public individuals and not the government. Therefore, writers of *NYT* are bold enough to articulate their views without fear or favor. *NST* editors, in contrast, have to be mindful of what they write as the newspapers are owned by the government of the day.

*Keywords:* Booster, discourse analysis, hedge, newspaper editorial, persuasion

## INTRODUCTION

Editorials due to their goal of influencing a wide readership through a plausible stance are categorized among persuasive and argumentative texts (Van Dijk, 1992). It is thus necessary for editorials to be constructed by considering the expectations of audience in the argumentation from a functional and not just a structural perspective. The concept of metadiscourse provides relevant categories in this regard. Hedges and boosters are two crucial interactional metadiscourse features for writers to clarify their epistemic stance and position related to the writer–reader interaction. Hyland (2005) posited that hedges provided a situation for writers to avoid complete commitment to a proposition. In other words, by presenting information as an opinion rather than a fact, writers embraced a stance that was subjective and open to negotiation. Unlike hedges, boosters clarify the writers' certainty of what they express and show involvement with the content and solidarity with their readers. To put it another way, boosters increase the force of the statement (Jalilifar & Seidian, 2016) and help the writers who have various positions in argumentative writing to narrow this diversity and confront choices by expressing their ideas with certainty and confidence (Hyland, 2005).

Therefore, hedges and boosters are linguistic resources that writers use to persuade their readers in believing the credibility of information and opinion conveyed. Hedges represent the unequivocal truth of writer's views and words which increase the credibility of writer due to his/her integrity and honesty. It seems that the key to an effectively persuasive text is the skillful combination of weakening expressions (i.e. hedges) and strengthening ones (i.e. boosters) with the goal of producing a discourse that is neither too assertive nor too vague (Dafouz, 2008). These features affect the judgment of readers of the writer's character as they reflect how professionally the writer makes a balance between caution and confidence. For instance, a writer's claims in a text without hedges would seem more concise but more aggressive (Williams, 1981). Therefore, exploring the use of hedges and boosters in the editorial to provide a better insight into how these essential features are used and how they influence the readers, seems essential in the field of linguistic explorations and teaching persuasive genre and editorial in particular (ESP).

## Literature Review

Surveying the literature on editorial genre which attracts a very wide readership reveals that editorials have not been given enough attention in applied linguistics studies. The limited number of existent studies have either focused on all the metadiscourse markers, or they have been done only quantitatively without in depth analysis of their functions. For instance, Khabbazi-Oskouei (2011) investigated all *interactional metadiscourse* markers in British and Persian news magazines. The results indicated that, in general, Iranian editors seemed to make wide use of 'certainty markers' while the British editors

seemed to favor the use of 'uncertainty markers'.

In the same vein, Kuhi and Mojood (2014) attempted to find out the effect of cultural factors and generic convention of editorials in using metadiscourse markers in Persian and English newspapers. The findings revealed that *hedges* in English corpus were followed by *boosters*, while *Boosters* occurred more than *hedges* in Persian data. However, this study did not consider the use of metadiscourse markers qualitatively; therefore, it raises the need to seek the use of *hedges* and *boosters* qualitatively in the context. Another comparative study by Yeganeh et al., (2015) revealed the preference of boosters to hedges in both American and Persian newspaper articles.

In addition, Fu and Hyland (2014) analyzed the use of all the *interactional metadiscourse* markers in popular science articles and opinion texts. The findings revealed that hedges were more frequent than boosters in both genres. Furthermore, it was found that *hedges* and *boosters* were more frequent in opinion texts than in popular science texts due to their communicative purposes. Although Fu and Hyland (2014) had done a qualitative analysis, the classification done for hedges is limited to *verbs*, *adverbs* and *modals*. Moreover, it has not prepared a clear classification for categories of boosters and again boosters seem to be a neglected persuasive strategy. Hence, it raises the need for a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis of both *hedges* and *boosters* specifically.

So far, only Tahririan and Shahzamani's study (2009) focused on the use of *hedges* in editorials of English and Persian newspapers. Based on Varttala's (2001) model, their findings revealed that English editorials were more heavily *hedged* than Persian ones. Therefore, to fill the research gap, this study investigated not only the use of hedges but also the use of boosters in both the *NYT* and *NST* editorials. Additionally, their functions and forms are compared between the two types of editorials. To realise these objectives, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the patterns of frequencies of hedges and boosters in the editorials of the *NYT* and NST?
2. What are the functions and linguistic realizations of hedges and boosters found in NYT and NST newspaper editorials?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The current study was designed as a non-experimental, descriptive research where quantitative analysis was used to investigate the patterns of occurrences of hedges and boosters in the NYT and NST editorials. Additionally, a content analysis was carried out to identify the functions and forms of hedges and boosters in the two types of editorials.

### Data

To support the research objectives, 240 editorials were selected from *The New York*

*Times (NYT)* and *New Straits Times (NST)* based on an online number generator which randomly selected the data from the *NYT* (i.e. www.nytimes.com) and *NST* (i.e., www.nst.com.my) websites. Both, the *NYT* and *NST* cover a wide range of issues that are of public interest besides being among the largest and oldest newspapers in the US and in Malaysia. *The New York Times* believes in objective presentation of news and attempts to maintain ethics of journalistic writing (The New York Times Company, 2008). In contrast, the *NST* is considered a right-wing, pro-government newspaper (Pang, 2006).

A check on the availability of editorial in the newspapers revealed that the *NYT* has three to four daily editorials, while the *NST* publishes an editorial daily. Hence, in the *NYT* the first editorial on each day was selected. Additionally, to avoid the

possibility of changes in the style of writing of the editorial genre diachronically, only editorials published in 2013 were collected (Gillaerts & van de Velde, 2010).

## Analytical Framework

In order to have a reliable discourse analysis, an adapted framework to the data of the current study was developed based on the previous analytic frameworks (Crismore et al., 1993; Dahl, 2004; Hyland, 2005; Khabbazi-Oskouei, 2011; Vande Kopple, 1985). To guarantee the reliability of analysis 20% of the data was analyzed independently by an inter-rater and in case of any discrepancies they came to consensus. A pilot study was carried out to evaluate the feasibility of the framework; the outcome of which was a composite framework as shown below (Table 1 & Table 2).

Table 1

*Framework of* hedges *in editorials*

| Function | Example(s) of forms |
|---|---|
| **Modulating impact of utterances**<br><br>*Determining accuracy of the presented information or claim* | **Approximators**<br>*"Rarely", "almost"," nearly"* |
| **Withdrawing epistemic commitment**<br><br>*decreasing the writer's commitment to the actions and avoiding acceptance of the responsibility for what is written* | i) **Epistemic markers**<br>*"appears", "seem", "assume", "indicate",* **"possibility", "possible", "seemingly"**<br>ii) **Modal auxiliary**<br>*"could", "may", "might"," would", "should"*<br>iii) **Phrases indicating uncertainty**<br>*"it is unclear", "with no certainty"* |
| **Subject avoiding**<br><br>*Not mentioning the subject or agent and hiding the person in charge for the action* | *i*) **Passive structure**<br>*"was indicated", "could be sentenced"*<br>*ii*) **Impersonal pronoun**<br>*"it", "one"*<br>*iii*) **Clausal subject**<br>"It is hardly surprising that…" |

Table 1 *(Continued)*

| Function | Example(s) of forms |
|---|---|
| **Seeking solidarity** | ***i) Rhetoric question*** |
| The editor puts himself/herself at the same level or making them think of themselves but implicitly engage them to be in line with his point of view | "Is there then not a need to discipline those responsible for sloppiness in carrying out their duty; are not escaped criminals a threat to public safety?" |
| **Expressing counter-expectation** | **Concession linking words** <br> **"But", "although", "though", "despite"** |
| showing alternatives or exchange for solidarity and conflict | *"The bureau cannot undo the past, **but** strong rules could at least help to ensure that the past is not repeated"* |
| **Expressing hypothetical situation** | **"If", "Unless"** |
| *Expressing the conditions under which an event may or may not happen* | ***"If** the African Union force, and especially Kenyan and Uganda troops, left Sumalia any time soon, the gains could all be lost"* |

Table 2

*Framework of boosters in editorials*

| Function | Example(s) of forms |
|---|---|
| **Enhancing epistemic commitment** | **i) Epistemic markers** <br> *"obvious", "strongly", "of course";* Emphatic *"do"/"does"* |
| *Emphasizing the truth or certainty of what is written and accepting the responsibility for what is written* | **ii) Modal auxiliary** <br> " *must"* |
| | **iii)Phrases indicating certainty** <br> *"There is no doubt", "it is clear"* |
| **Providing evidence and strengthening credibility** | **Attribution** |
| *referring to authority's or some scientific researchers' statement to show the credibility and reliability of its statements* | ***"According to** global Muslim travel consultancy Crescent rating's Halal-Friendly Travel Ranking".* |
| **Seeking solidarity** | **Clauses Seeking Solidarity** |
| *referring to the hearer's knowledge, or assumed shared background information to provide a solidarity with the reader and give strength to its statement* | *"Like many people, we had questions…"* |

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### The Use of Hedges and Boosters in the *NYT* and *NST* Editorials

The overall use of hedges and boosters in the *NYT* and *NST* editorials is demonstrated in Table 3.

Comparing the editorials of the *NYT* and *NST* regarding the use of hedges revealed that the number of hedges in the *NYT* editorials (i.e., 20.23 ptw) was less frequent than their Malaysian counterpart, with the *NST* having a frequency count of 20.49 ptw. On the other hand, boosters in the *NYT* (12.46 ptw) were more frequently used than in the *NST* (11.28 ptw). Despite this difference between the *NYT* and *NST* regarding the use of hedges and boosters,

a similarity between these two newspapers was found as they both used more hedges than boosters. This finding agrees with that of Kuhi and Mojood (2014), Khabbazi-Oskouei's (2011) study. This could possibly be attributed to the convention of the English editorial genre to be more tentative in expressing their ideas and not to express their authority explicitly (Kuhi & Mojood, 2014).

### The Distribution of Linguistic Expressions of Hedges in the *NYT* and *NST* Editorials

The findings of this study revealed 11 types of linguistic realizations of hedges in both the *NYT* and *NST* editorials (Table 4).

Table 3

*The overall frequency of the use of* hedges *and* boosters *in the NYT and NST editorials*

| *NYT* (n=60005 words) | Number of hedges/boosters *NYT* | Freq. (ptw) | *NST* (n=63334 words) | Number of hedges/boosters *NST* | Freq. (ptw) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hedges** | 1214 | 20.23 | **Hedges** | 1298 | 20.49 |
| **Boosters** | 748 | 12.46 | **Boosters** | 715 | 11.28 |
| **Total** | 1962 | 32.69 | **Total** | 2013 | 31.77 |

Table 4

*Frequency of various linguistic realizations of* hedges *in the NYT and NST editorials*

| *NST* = 63334 words | | | | *NYT* = 60005 words | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Linguistic categories of hedges N=1426 | Raw number | Freq. (ptw) | Percent | Linguistic categories of hedges N=1245 | Raw number | Freq. (ptw) | Percent |
| **Passive structure** | 315 | 4.97 | 22.09 | **Modal auxiliary** | 429 | 7.14 | 34.45 |

Table 4 *(Continued)*

| NST = 63334 words | | | | NYT= 60005 words | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Linguistic categories of hedges N=1426 | Raw number | Freq. (ptw) | Percent | Linguistic categories of hedges N=1245 | Raw number | Freq. (ptw) | Percent |
| Modal auxiliary | 269 | 4.27 | 18.86 | Passive structure | 209 | 5.08 | 16.78 |
| Approximators | 218 | 3.44 | 15.28 | Approximators | 184 | 3.06 | 14.78 |
| Epistemic modality markers | 147 | 2.32 | 10.30 | Hypothetical expression | 134 | 2.23 | 10.76 |
| Hypothetical expression | 136 | 2.14 | 9.53 | Epistemic modality markers | 96 | 1.59 | 7.72 |
| Personal pronoun | 128 | 2.02 | 8.97 | Expressing counter expectation | 93 | 1.54 | 7.46 |
| Expressing counter expectation | 88 | 1.38 | 6.17 | Personal pronoun | 31 | 0.51 | 2.49 |
| Rhetoric question | 87 | 1.37 | 6.10 | Rhetoric question | 28 | 0.46 | 2.25 |
| Impersonal pronoun | 17 | 0.26 | 1.19 | Clausal subject | 17 | 0.28 | 1.36 |
| Clausal subject | 16 | 0.25 | 1.12 | phrases indicating uncertainty | 14 | 0.23 | 1.12 |
| Phrases indicating uncertainty | 5 | 0.07 | 0.35 | Impersonal pronoun | 10 | 0.16 | 0.80 |
| Total | 1426 | 22.51 | 100 | Total | 1245 | 20.74 | 100 |

As demonstrated in Table 4, *Modal auxiliary, Passive structure* and *Approximators* are the most frequent structures of realizing hedges in the editorials of both the *NYT* and *NST*. On the other hand, as shown in Table 4, *Impersonal pronoun* (*NYT*=0.16, *NST*=0.26 ptw), *Clausal subject* (*NYT*=0.28, *NST*=0.25 ptw) and *Phrases indicating uncertainty* (*NYT*=0.23 and *NST*=0.07 ptw) did not have

a significant frequency (less than 1 ptw) and were the least frequent linguistic categories. The function of each of these linguistic categories is described in the next section.

### The Function of Hedges and Their Linguistic Categories in the *NYT* and *NST* Editorials

The functions and linguistic categories of hedges are discussed below.

### Modulating the Impact of Utterances.

Modulation through the use of hedges realizes when it introduces fuzziness into the propositional content by expressing a lower accuracy of the presented information (Jalilifar & Alavinia, 2012). This function of hedges in the editorials occurred in the use of modifiers like approximators which indicate their uncertainty about the information and avoid specifics (Fu & Hyland, 2014) as there is no verification of the exact number involved.

*(1) Myanmar's democratic aspirations can never be fully realized if Muslims, who make up **about** 5 percent of the population, continue to be attacked and marginalized by Buddhists, the majority of the population. (**NYT**, May 30, 2013).*

*(2) **NEARLY** a week after the Kuala Besut by-election, the Election Commission must have a huge sigh of relief that there so far appears to be no complaints about the quality of the indelible ink it used during this most recent election. (**NST**, July 30, 2013).*

### Withdrawing Epistemic Commitment.

One of the main functions of hedges is to decrease the writer's commitment to the actions and to avoid the acceptance of responsibility for what is written. This function of hedges is realized in the use of modal auxiliary that expresses the writer's uncertainty toward the truth of the proposition. Modal auxiliaries sometimes have epistemic function that shows tentativeness of the writer, while in other cases, they have a non-epistemic function with a deontic meaning to convey permission and obligation (Lyons, 1977). What is included in this study as hedges is epistemic modal verbs that express the writer's judgment and tentativeness about the possibility of the proposition (Hyland, 1998).

The analysis revealed that "*would*" is the most dominant *modal auxiliary* in both the *NYT* and *NST*. According to Biber et al. (2002), the logical meaning of "*would*" mostly expresses the likelihood or probability of occurrence or happening of a particular action in the future time. Besides, Lock (1996) believed that "*would*" was at the high (certainly) level of likelihood, while "*could*", "*may*" and "*might*" were at the low (possibly) level. Comparing the *NYT* and *NST* regarding the use of "*would*" reveals that it is more frequent in the *NYT* (70.86%) than in *NST* (53.53%). Hence, it is possible that the *NYT* editorials have the tendency to voice their stances with a higher degree of likelihood and certainty than *NST* editorials.

*(3) Letting the Treasury run out of borrowing authority **would** mean a default*

*on the nation's credit, a catastrophic prospect for holders of government bonds around the world. (NYT, January 2, 2013).*

*(4) And yet, while most parents **would** take care to ensure that their children are not run down by cars on the road to school, many fail to ensure that when these children become adults, they are able to negotiate the financial highway safely. (NST, September 19, 2013).*

In addition to modal auxiliaries, epistemic markers also withdraw the commitment and qualify the truth value of a propositional content (Catenaccio et al., 2011). Using epistemic modality, the editor conveys his/her state of knowledge and belief concerning the information. The findings of this study revealed that in both the *NYT* (51.04%) and *NST* (46.25%) *epistemic verbs* are the most dominant forms of realization of epistemic markers. The analysis of data revealed the existence of epistemic adverbs like "*probably*" (42.42%) and "*perhaps*" (24.24%) and epistemic adjectives such as "*likely*" (*NYT*=48.27%, *NST*=25.8%) and "*possible*" (*NYT*=37.93%, *NST*=54.83%) as well. Among all the epistemic markers, epistemic nouns (e.g. *possibility*, *likelihood*, *probability*, and *uncertainty*) were the least frequent features in both the *NYT* (6.25%) and *NST* (9.52%) editorials.

Epistemic verbs are those verbs that reduce assertiveness by expressing the writer's speculation (Hyland, 1998; Varttala, 2001). The analysis of the data in this study shows that "*seem*" (*NYT*=28.57%,

*NST*=39.7%), in line with Fu and Hyland's (2014) research is the most dominant *Epistemic verb* in both the *NYT* and *NST*.

*(5) While either side could undermine the November interim agreement, and with it the best chance in 30 years for a genuine thaw in Iranian-American relations, the more serious threat **seems** to be on the American side. (NYT, December 9, 2014).*

*(6) For another, in the true vein of the activist, the 16-year-old **appears** to care less about whether people supported or liked her; what was important was that they supported the cause for education. (NST, October 13, 2013).*

**Subject Avoiding.** Subject avoiding is a facilitator for the editor to make claims without the risk of being rejected or threaten the face of anyone. Among different linguistic realizations of subject avoiding, passive structure was one of the most dominant categories in both the *NYT* (5.08 ptw) and *NST* (4.97 ptw) editorials.

According to Buitkienė (2008), newspaper editors avoid taking responsibility for what they claim and attempt to be objective. Hiding agency in relation to the object of criticism (Blas-Arroyo, 2003) is what happens when one wants to exercise a degree of mitigation. This is possible by the use of passive structure and not mentioning exact information to save the face of the readers and the government members as the criticism maybe pointed at them.

*(7) Now that the C.I.A.* **payments have been exposed***, it will be harder to make that argument. (***NYT***, April 30, 2013).*

*(8) For, in some places, the land laws are such that people stakeout more than they can handle. To hang on to it,* **they are forced to resort to open burning in the dry season***. (***NST***, July 17, 2013).*

Besides to the passive structure, in both the *NYT* and *NST*, *impersonal pronoun* (*NYT*=0.16, *NST*=0.26 ptw) and *clausal subject* (*NYT*=0.28, *NST*=0.25 ptw) were used to avoid the agent which did not have significant frequency (less than 1 ptw). Therefore, this study does not describe them in detail.

**Seeking Solidarity.** Another function of hedges is to provide solidarity with the reader in a way that it assists the editor to hide himself/herself behind them in order not to be questioned or criticized for his/her stance. *Rhetoric question* is a linguistic realization that performs the function of seeking solidarity to achieve two communicative purposes in the editorial genre: (i) engaging with the reader and conveying the editor's stance inductively, and (ii) decreasing the possibility of criticism.

Engaging with the reader is the dominant communicative purpose of rhetoric questions in both the *NYT* (93.54%) and *NST* (73.56%). In other words, rhetoric questions provide writers and readers with a mutual context and assist writers to use assumed beliefs particular to their

specific discourse community. Using this strategy, the editor considers the reader as an intelligent participant who is interested in the same area, and by employing question and good sense, the reader follows the writer's implicit response to it (Fu & Hyland, 2014). By reducing the pressure of the argument and making readers themselves evaluate the proposition, the editor intends to provide the text with a sense of reasonableness and possibly more effectively maneuver readers into agreement (Fu & Hyland, 2014).

*(9) The proposal could have unfortunate unintended consequences.* **Would a needy student be punished who, for personal or travel reasons, has no choice but to attend a college that is low in the government rankings? (***NYT***, August 22, 2013).*

*(10)* **But does it not stand to reason that with peace and prosperity, violence will be rejected? (***NST***, September 30, 2013).*

On the other hand, *rhetoric questions* provide editors with an invaluable strategy to interact with their readers effectively along with mitigating the possibility of criticism (Hyland, 1996). This criticism is due to the writer's stance regarding the issue and evaluation of behavior or actions of residents. This function of rhetoric questions is more frequent in the *NST* (26.43%) than in the *NYT* (6.45%) which is possibly because the *NST* due to its politeness or close ties with the government attempts to decrease the pressure of criticism on the readers.

*(11)* **Will Congress finally raise the federal minimum wage this year?** *It would be the least that lawmakers could do. (**NYT,** January 4, 2013).*

**Expressing Counter-expectation.** According to Jalilifar and Alavinia (2012), expressing an idea which countered with the previous stance occurs as a counter-expectation clause as it unexpectedly expresses an idea that is opposite to the main part of the sentence.

The analysis revealed that in both the *NYT* (92.39%) and *NST* (77.27%), "*but*" is the most dominant counter expectation feature. With the use of "*but*", "*although*", "*despite*", "*in spite of*", etc., the writer tends to mitigate the pressure on the addresser due to the rejection of a particular idea or action. It could be considered as a shift from conflict to solidarity of ideas.

*(12) These differences were huge,* **but** *they were ignorable, because it was only an electoral pact to get them through the elections against Barisan Nasional. (**NST**, April 25, 2013).*

*(13)* **Although** *the severe recessions in Greece and elsewhere seem to be bottoming out and deficit projections are starting to improve, unemployment rates of more than 25 percent in Greece and Spain are disastrous. (**NYT**, September 23, 2013).*

**Expressing Hypothetical Situation.** Hedges under this functional category assist the editor to express the conditions under which an event may or may not happen (Martin & Rose, 2003). The editor attempts to decrease his/her commitment to the expressed idea by considering that the future happening of an event depends on accomplishment of a particular condition. This function is seen in the use of *hypothetical expressions* by the use of which editors state their stance with cautious and tentativeness.

*(14)* **If these promising results are confirmed next year**, *the N.I.M.H. and leading psychiatric organizations ought to consider ways to bring this cheap and highly effective sleep therapy into widespread clinical use. (**NYT**, November 23, 2013).*

*(15)* **If the government intends for the majority of hardworking citizens to have a fair chance at homeownership,** *it must put a cap on how many residential properties a person can own. (**NST**, August 29, 2013).*

**The Distribution of Linguistic Expressions of Boosters in the *NYT* and *NST* Editorials.** Similar to hedges that have different functions and linguistic realizations described earlier, the frequency of the linguistic realizations of boosters varied between the *NYT* and *NST* editorials (Table 5).

As shown in Table 5, the *NYT* (12.46 ptw) exceeded *NST* (11.28 ptw) in employing boosters. It seemed that in contrast to *NST* editorials' tentativeness in expressing their claims through hedges, the *NYT* editorials used a bold stance by the use of more boosters. In comparison with the *NST* editorials, the *NYT* editorials' comparative

boldness of stance, showed the role that they adopted for themselves which is as an independent daily newspaper authorized to comment with full commitment and with little doubt. This finding is supported by Masroor and Ahmad (2017) who found out that *NST* in comparison with *NYT* was using fewer number of directives as persuasive elements. They discussed that it was a signal of tentativeness of the Malaysian newspaper due to the context and policy of the country and the newspaper.

As revealed in Table 5, there are varieties in the distribution of different linguistic uses of boosters. Among different types of linguistic uses of boosters, in both the *NYT* and *NST* editorials, *Epistemic modality marker* (*NYT*=7.08, *NST*=6.82), *Modal auxiliary (NYT*=3.06, *NST*=3.52), and *Attribution* (*NYT*=1.94, *NST*=0.48) are the most frequent linguistic expressions of boosters found in the editorials. In contrast, *Clauses seeking solidarity* were the least frequent linguistic use of boosters in both the *NYT* and *NST* editorials. The following sections express the function and description of the use of different linguistic categories of boosters.

Table 5

*Distribution of various subcategories of* boosters *in the NYT and NST editorials*

| Categories of Boosters | NYT | | | NST | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Raw number | Freq. (ptw) | Percent | Raw number | Freq. (ptw) | Percent |
| **Epistemic modality markers** | 425 | 7.08 | 56.81 | 432 | 6.82 | 60.41 |
| **Modal auxiliary** | 184 | 3.06 | 24.59 | 223 | 3.52 | 31.18 |
| **Attribution** | 117 | 1.94 | 15.67 | 31 | 0.48 | 4.33 |
| **phrases indicating certainty** | 20 | 0.33 | 2.67 | 21 | 0.33 | 2.93 |
| **Clauses seeking solidarity** | 2 | 0.03 | 0.26 | 8 | 0.12 | 1.11 |
| **Total** | 748 | 12.46 | 100 | 715 | 11.28 | 100 |

**The Function of Boosters and Their Linguistic Categories in the *NYT* and *NST* Editorials**

The function of each of the linguistic categories of boosters in examples from the *NYT* and *NST* editorials are described in the following sections.

**Enhancing Epistemic Commitment.** Increasing the writer's commitment to the actions is seen in the use of epistemic markers that perform the function of enhancing epistemic commitment in two different ways that are expressing certainty and expressing emphasis which are explained in the following sections.

*Epistemic markers expressing certainty.* The findings revealed that 58.35 % of all *epistemic markers* in the *NYT* and 48.37% in *NST* are *epistemic adjectives and adverbs* that are used to express the qualification of a proposition regarding certainty of a particular event's occurrence (Fetzer, 2008). It consequently increases the significance of the editor's claims and evaluation regarding the addressed issue.

The findings show that "*clear*" and "*obvious*" are the most dominant adjectives in the *NYT* (39.28% and 17.85%) and *NST* (56.25% and 37.5%). In addition, "e*specially*" is similarly the most dominant adverb in both the *NYT* (5.9%) and *NST* (14.5%) editorials. These boosters allow writers to express conviction and assert a proposition with confidence, representing a strong claim about a state of affairs (Hyland, 1998). With the use of these

devices, the editor offers a strong support to the argument, strengthens his/her position, and leaves readers in no doubt as to his/her stance. Therefore, it plays an essential role in enhancing the impact of the editor on the reader's ideology and position regarding the issue as in the following examples.

*(16) Those earlier mergers are **precisely** [Adv.] the reason this consolidation is a problem. Fares and fees have increased across the industry and **especially** [Adv.] on routes where mergers reduced competition in the last five years. (**NYT**, August 13, 2013).*

*(17) It is **entirely** [Adv.] possible that some of the people that preventive detention laws would detain are the sort of people who would not give us the same chances that we would them, but that is what distinguishes them as the bad guys.(**NST**, August 6, 2013).*

*Epistemic markers expressing emphasis.* The analysis of data revealed that in both the *NYT* (41.64%) and *NST* (51.62%) the editors by the use of *epistemic* markers such as *only, just, even, never, emphatic do, always,* and *of course* attempt to intensify a particular part of information or a specific stance regarding the issue. However, "*only*" was the most dominant linguistic form in the *NYT* (31.82%) and *NST* (31.43%).

According to Jalilifar and Alavinia (2012), editors use these devices to reinforce or emphasize the speech act it introduces. This type of booster paves the way for the

writer to highlight specific parts of his/her statements in a way that the reader easily notices its importance.

(18) *A liberal arts college should not be penalized* **simply** *because a history degree doesn't lead to the same earnings as a computer science degree. (***NYT***, August 22, 2013).*

(19) *But this does not mean that the populace cannot institute a culture of transparency and accountability, by* **always** *asking questions,* **always** *insisting on clear honest answers and* **never** *giving an inch more than what has been earned. (***NST***, November 29, 2013).*

Moreover, enhancing epistemic commitment function was also realized in the use of *modal auxiliaries* like "*will*" and "*must*" that were used whenever the editor intended to predict an event in future with certainty of expected outcome (Hyland, 1998). The editor, with the use of "*must*" and "*will*", shows a high and strong possibility of the occurrence of a particular event (Hu & Cao, 2011).

(20) *But, in so publicly rejecting Pas, Fernandez* **must** *surely have realised that DAP's road to Putrajaya* **will** *fail if voters take his advice. (***NST***, April 30, 2013).*

(21) *National regulators will continue to have some responsibilities, like ensuring consumer protection and policing money laundering, but the E.C.B.* **will** *be in charge of overall safety and soundness, which should give depositors and investors more confidence in the banking system. (***NYT***, October 19, 2013).*

Besides the epistemic markers and modal auxiliaries, there are some phrases that do not follow a specific grammatical rule and generally have a booster function (e.g., "*It's increasingly clear*," "*The fact is that*", "*Without doubt*") to enhance the epistemic commitment of the editor. However, due to their insignificant frequency, they have not been explained in more detail.

**Providing Evidence and Strengthening Credibility.** In the case of newspaper genres, the chief trust of attributing ideas to sources appears to build a case for evidence, which strengthens the credibility of the arguments, and thus, the evaluation offered by the newspaper (Hulteng, 1973). *Attribution* as a linguistic realization of boosters is the presentation of the truth of a proposition by indicating or referring to the source as evidence for the writer's claim (Perrin, 2012). According to Pak (2010), attributed statements utilize this device of argumentation to convince readers with evidence and authority. *Attribution*, more than all the other linguistic uses of boosters, expresses conviction, commitment and certainty indirectly (Khabbazi-Oskouei, 2011). Findings of this study regarding the high frequency of *Attributions* in the native newspaper is in accordance with Khabbazi-

Oskouei's study (2011) that revealed British magazine editorials exceeded Iranian magazine editorials in the use of *Attribution*.

(22) **As Thomas Campbell, the chief executive and director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, said**, *public art must be "a permanent, rather than a liquid, community asset". (**NYT**, July 26, 2013).*

(23) **According to the prime minister**, *when that happens there is no doubting the willingness of the authorities to enforce existing laws. (**NST**, June 14, 2013).*

**Seeking Solidarity.** Writers typically plan to involve both supporters and opponents in the agreement with their position by using strategies that employ a degree of conventional intimacy. One way of creating this sense of solidarity is by using boosters to appeal to the reader as an intelligent co-player in a close-knit group (Hyland, 1998). According to Hyland (2005), boosters function as features that can also be seen as engaging readers and establishing rapport by marking involvement with the text.

The analysis of editorials revealed clauses by the use of which the editor seeks solidarity with the reader to booster his/her claims and stance. According to Holmes (1984), these lexical devices boost the force of the statement through explicit or implicit reference to the audience's knowledge, or assumed shared background information, e.g. "*naturally", "it goes without saying*". By including readers in this way, the writer

credits them with possessing both in-group understandings and the intelligence to make the same reasonable inferences. The argument is, thereby, strengthened by claiming solidarity with the community, and the mutual experiences needed to draw the same conclusions as the writer (Hyland, 1998).

(24) *The news that the Central Intelligence Agency has been spending lavishly in Afghanistan* **should come as no surprise**. *(**NYT**, April 30, 2013).*

(25) **NATURALLY it is difficult for many**, *and possibly the person himself, to believe that an elected senator of a country can be an undesirable and refused entry by the immigration authorities of an independent, sovereign nation like Malaysia. (**NST**, February 18, 2013).*

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study reveal that editorials in the *NYT* have slightly lower frequency of hedges, but higher frequency of boosters when compared to *NST* editorials. This generally shows the greater authorial certainty, commitment, and assertiveness of the *NYT* editorials. On the other hand, higher occurrence of hedges and lower occurrence of boosters in *NST* when compared with its American counterpart, demonstrates the tentative stance of the editors regarding the issues raised (Masroor & Ahmad, 2017). It also indicates the opposite style of persuasion of these two newspapers. The *NYT* editorials

were found to be more authoritative and confident in expressing their claims, as well as evaluation of the issues. On the other hand, the *NST* was considered as a newspaper that is more informative and less evaluative. According to Crismore et al. (1993), certainty is related to strength, assertiveness, and self-confidence; while hedging is related to weakness. Therefore, even when *NST* editorials intended to express their attitude toward certain issues, hedges were employed to avoid face threatening statements. In contrast, the *NYT* editorials attempted to show their authority as an independent newspaper with worldwide readership by using a higher number of boosters than their Malaysian counterpart.

Although the editors in the two languages might have different strategies in using hedges and boosters, possibly due to their cultural differences, they somewhat follow the same disciplinary culture and write within a conventional framework identified by the genre (Kuhi & Mojood, 2014). In agreement with other researchers (e.g., Golebiowski & Liddicoat, 2002; Taylor & Chen, 1991), culturally-based rhetorical conventions and styles of persuasion features could be considered as a possible reason for these observed differences between American (the *NYT*) and Malaysian (*NST*) newspapers. For instance, in Malaysia, perhaps the Islamic instructions and beliefs influence the social and cultural factors, as well as context models, which lead writers to indirectness, conservatism, and cautious style when expressing ideas, and attitudes

(Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Therefore, *NST* editorials, by using more hedges, attempted to take a cautious stance and to avoid face threatening expressions.

Additionally, according to Ansary and Babaii (2009), the rhetorical structure of editorial texts might be affected by the editorial policy of the newspaper, in which the editorials appeared. Therefore, there is a possibility that the reason for this indirectness of *NST* editorials is a part of the newspaper's policy to reduce the boldness of its claim to readers of diverse backgrounds. Moreover, the use of more hedges in *NST* editorials could probably indicate its expression of respect for the government and the structure of society in which there is a diverse racial mix. In this line, Keeble (2001) cited the importance of ethics in journalism. He indicated that a journalist must avoid derogatory remarks on skin color, and religion of any ethnicity. Therefore, in multi-racial Malaysia news related to ethnicity, skin color, and religion are very sensitive, so journalists have to use hedges to express their voice. In this way, the news written will be more acceptable to the various ethnic groups.

Furthermore, according to Hinkel (2002), native English speakers have a direct style of writing when providing justification and proof. Their education systems attempt to instill in their learner with a sense of individualism, self-confidence, and self-respect (Hyland, 2002). Therefore, the *NYT* editorials' boldness in their use of boosters also shows the clarity of their stance. Hence, this high level of stance clarity reflects

a specific sense of self-confidence in the editorials of the American newspaper. It could be related to their socio-cultural norms and conventions for interaction. It assists them to secure acceptability and credibility of their writing and to generate successful communication with their readers. This endeavor persuades the readers to think and act in a particular manner and for a specific purpose.

## Limitations and Implications of the Study

The findings of the current study could be a catalyst to popularize the newspaper genre in general and the editorial subgenre in particular. It could familiarize the readers with the structure of editorials and pave the way for them to more easily understand editorials and in the process appreciate their value and importance. In addition, this study shows the possibility of analyzing editorials and motivates more researchers to look for its rhetoric structure, and different linguistic elements (e.g., hedges and boosters), which are effective in achieving its communicative purposes. Consequently, filling the gaps will bring about improvement and progress to the editorial genre. Moreover, the growth in the popularity of editorials might create careers in future for ambitious writers and turn editorial writing in to an industry (Fartousi, 2012).

Using genre knowledge assists writing teachers to look beyond the content, linguistic forms and processes of writing. Consequently, they can enable the learners to communicate with the readers through their writing. This study indicates the advantages of using the editorial to help students write argumentative essays, as there are so many similarities in their lexis, structure and linguistic features such as modality, connectives for reasoning and involvement strategies (So, 2005). In light of the findings of the current study, ESP students may be able to write a kind of persuasive article that is properly organized, informative and persuasive to the audience. So, providing curriculum involving subcategories of hedges and boosters, as persuasive devices, could be useful for non-native speakers and writers to equip them with basic tools of stating various levels of commitment.

Due to limitations of time and distance constraints, it was not possible for the researcher to interview the editors of the American newspaper as the native English writers of editorials that could be considered as exporters of this genre to other countries. Therefore, conducting a study in which includes interviews with the native English editors. Moreover, the current study has only focused on the use of hedges and boosters in editorials. Hence, there is a need to compare the structure of editorials as well as their use of hedges and boosters with other newspaper sub-genres to find out whether it could be considered as an independent genre. It can also provide the readers with the possible similarities and differences of various newspapers sub-genres. Additionally, studying interactional metadiscourse devices in spoken news could also be an interesting area of investigation.

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