CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an introductory section of the study. It comprises the background of the study, the statement of the problems, purposes of the study, significances of the study, clarifications of terms and the organizations of the study.

1.1 Research Background

One of the most important features of academic writing is the way that academic writers seek to modify the assertions that they make, toning down uncertain or potentially risky claims, emphasising what they believe to be correct, and conveying appropriately collegial attitudes to readers. These such manners are important as academic writers have to gain acceptance for their work by balancing conviction with caution in order to communicate a precise degree of accuracy in their truth assessments (Holmes, 1990). Therefore, the use of hedging and boosting devices that serve to soften and strengthen claims in the statement are highly essential in academic writing. The crucial importance of hedges and boosters lies in the fact that readers expect claims to bewarranted in terms of the assessments of reliability the writers carry, and appropriateness in terms of the social interactions they appeal to. The misuse of hedges and boosters might contribute negatively to several aspects of academic writing as hedges and boosters are key interactional devices used by writers of research articles to negotiate their credibility, modify the truth-value of the knowledge conveyed, and show different degrees of commitment to opinions and when they engage in a dialogue with the reader (Hyland, 2005)

The issues of hedges and boosters have been broadly studied in different areas and methodologies (Šeškauskienė, 2008) Researchers have also been particularly interested in conducting studies on hedges and boosters in the cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary. Some of them are those who are studied by (Takimoto, 2015), (Farrokhi & Emami, 2008), (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016) and (Yagiz & Demir, 2015). The study conducted by (Takimoto, 2015) found that hedges and boosters

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were found dominantly in humanities and social sciences articles since this disciplines require more opts for subjectivity due to its more interpretative and less abstract characteristics. On the other way around, (Farrokhi & Emami, 2008) reported that the non-native writers tended to produce lower occurrences of hedges and boosters in their academic writing compared with the native writers. This phenomenon was explained by the reason of the unfamiliarity of non-native writers toward academic writing norms and the essential characteristics of forming an appropriate argument, i.e., hedging and boosting. (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016) who conducted the similar cross-cultural study found out that the existing variation of hedges and boosters occurrences is likely to reflect differences in the linguacultural and epistemological tradition of two different cultural communities. Then, the similar study conducted by (Yagiz & Demir, 2015) reports several significant differences in the occurrence of boosters among research articles produced by Turkish, Japanese and Anglophonic writers. They, however, did not necessarily claim that the dominant group had a more authorial stance. It is still questionable whether the Anglophonic, as the dominant group, culturally have a style of assertive writing or they are competent in the language.

Considering all the aforementioned studies above, it is seen that research in recent years have witnessed an upsurge of interest into hedging and boosting devices in terms of its general occurrences in written discourse, particularly in academic articles. Majority of reported researchers in the mentioned above has mainly focused on English. Despite the fact that some of them has successfully conducted cross-linguistic or cross-disciplinary studies (i.e (Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016; Farrokhi & Emami, 2008; Takimoto, 2015; Yagiz & Demir, 2015), there are tendencies of identifying quite similar problems which are descriptively explaining the occurrences of hedges, boosters and its variations as well as comparing them with other distinctive communities/disciplinaries.

Nevertheless, the research examining academic discourse in terms of such expected and accepted norms has mainly been related to what experienced scholars follow in their academic writing (for example, (Koutsantoni, 2004; Vassileva, 2001). In other words, there are studies which have compared the publications of experienced writers with a focus on various interpersonal relations

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in academic texts and this can be quite crucial for helping other members of these discourse communities to find what is generally accepted. There are also other studies which have contrasted professional and inexperienced writers without focusing on the question of genre as what is contrasted are generally two different genres, that is, research articles as opposed to dissertations. However, novice writers have rarely been the main focus so far (*see* Akbas & Hardman, 2017; Andresen & Zinsmeister, 2018; Bogdanović & Mirović, 2018; Gardner & Han, 2018; Ho & Li, 2018; Kawase, 2015; Vergaro, 2011).

Considering the fact that novice writers of any discourse community are both novice with regard to their academic performance and managing authorial strategies to meet the expectations of experienced members of the academic community, that is the examiners, postgraduate writers will definitely need more instruction and guidance on how authorial strategies need to be managed in their particular contexts. Therefore, the fact that postgraduate students are novice writers due to having very little experience in corresponding to the expected academic practices has been the main concern for the present research. With an exploratory and comparative design towards the potential effect of language and culture on the writing of postgraduate students, this study aims to fill the identified gap of modelling postgraduate academic writing by thoroughly investigating the rhetorical choices made by writers from selected contexts for strengthening and weakening the force of propositions.

Further, while the existing literatures have emphasized the importances of using hedging and boosting devices beyond dispute, many of those strictly explore hedges and boosters in terms of its' frequencies, varieties and distibutions only. Almost no work found to have explored the matter of how hedges and boosters function as a mitigating device that improve the quality of academic discourse as well enhance the rethorical validity of the things written. In particular, the researchers need to pay a greater attention at how hedging represents the writers' attitude within a particular context, investigating how mitigating devices such as hedges and boosters can facilitate the writer to negotiate meaning which seeks to gain an accreditation for knowledge claims. Seeing the existing gaps in this matter, thus, the present study is intended to

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explore the occurrence of hedges and boosters produced by Indonesian ELT learners' academic written discourses and well as investigating how the use of hedges and boosters can improve the quality of the arguments as well as enhancing the rethorical validity of the ELT learners academic written discourses.

1.2 Statements of the Problems

Based on the aforementioned problems, several research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. How is the occurrences of hedges employed by ELT learners in their thesis?
2. How is the occurrences of boosters employed by ELT learners in their thesis?
3. How does the use of hedges and booster impact the quality and rethorical validity of the arguments in the ELT learners' thesis?

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this research can be seen as below:

1. To find out the occurrences of hedges employed by ELT learners in their thesis.
2. To find out the occurrences of hedges employed by ELT learners in their thesis.
3. To explore the impacts made by the use of hedges and booster towards the quality of the arguments in the ELT learners' thesis

1.4 Significance of the Research

The result of this research is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge by adding more insights and pieces of literature to the field of written discourse analysis particularly in terms of their understanding of hedges and boosters as well as its application in written discourse. Besides contributing to the body of knowledge, the result of this study is also expected to be beneficial in giving a new perceptivity for students toward the importance of hedges and boosters as

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part of interactional metadiscourse device which is beneficial to represent their stance in written discourse. By understanding the importance of using hedges and boosters in written discourse, teachers are also expected to emphasize the utilization of hedges by introducing these two metadiscourse devices to the novice students researchers so that they will be able to produce high-quality writings that consist of a well-proportioned information.

As recognition is the primary key points of accomodating hedges and boosters in academic writings effectively, students as academic writers are expected to be able to focus on the key differences between types of lexical hedges and boosters that differentiate between formal written and informal coversational registers . Teachers, who play the significant role in teaching L2 writing are also expected to help writers to expand their vocabulary and accessible ranges of lexicon that can provide them means of expressing ideas by accomodating hedges and boosters effectively and appropriately. In practical terms, the implications drawn in the present study are expected to give valuable insights to academic practicians to accomodate the most appropriate teaching writing strategies to apply once they become a novice teachers.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to two areas which are first, to the statistical inclusion of hedges and boosters in terms of it variants and frequencies in which will be found from analyzing the corpora containing 10 theses written by the students of English Language Teaching. Besides drawing the frequencies in terms of statistical inclusion, the data regarding the variants of hedges and boosters will also be drawn to see the general preferences of the students. After collecting the data quantitatively, the second area which will be given attention is the matter of how hedges and boosters used by the students of English Language Teaching in their academic written discourse will impact the quality of their academic writings itself. In this academic context, the tendency and preferences of ELT students as the non-native speakers of English in using hedging and boosting devices in their written works will be the main quest of this study. Systematically, the main body parts of thesis as academic writing in the research site are typically divided into

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titles, acknowledgment, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion/analysis and conclusion. The body parts which will be analyzed in this study are limited to the discussions section only. The reason of choosing this chapter 4 is based on Vartalla's (2001), Serholt (2012) and Getkham (2016) studies in which it was found that hedging are used more frequently in result or discussion sections. It is reasonable since the argumentation is generated from these sections. Another rationale behind limiting the study to discussion sections is also strongly linked to a few factors. Discussion sections, in the traditional dissertation format, are significant in the sense that the stance and voice of the author are unique, given the communicative purpose of the section. Other parts of the dissertations are generally designed with a role more of giving information and reporting. To illustrate, introduction sections are structured to introduce the research and the topic in a brief way; literature sections generally review and report what is already in the literature in a critical manner, whereas the writers are expected to exhibit the interpretation of the results and present potential links critically to the available literature to discuss the findings. This essentially requires a relatively more persuasive and communicative style on the way to justifying claims before a writer finalizes his/her study with a proper conclusion section.

1.6 Clarifications of Terms

a. Hedges

Hedging expression is essential to carry the writer's/speaker's degree of confidence in the truth of a proposition in academic discourse, either written or spoken, and his/her attitude to the readers or listeners (Seskauskiene ,2008). The function of hedging so as to mitigate the truthfulness of statement is one of reason why Hallidayan includes hedging into epistemic modality, the area of meaning that lies between yes or no. However, hedging cannot be confused with booster/intensifier that has similar ability to modify the modality of statement. Fraser (2010) includes this booster as reinforcement, and differentiates between reinforcement and hedging. Hedging reduces the truthfulness of statement, while booster/intensifier increases the grade of truthfulness of statement.

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b. Boosters

Boosting devices intensify or emphasize the force of the commitment by expressing conviction and asserting a proposition with confidence (Hyland, 2000). Mur (2007), then, specifies the terminology of *boosters* to describe those lexical items in which the writer can use to emphasize a strong conviction for a statement, it mainly functions to persuade and convince the audience with arguments generally backed up with the data.

c. Modality

Modality is the concept for language used by speakers or writers to express opinion (Halliday, 1994). Other similar terms are stance (Biber & Finegan, 1999), evaluation (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), and appraisal (White, 2001). The concept of modality, similar to stance, is categorized under interpersonal metadiscourse and can be realized by various language options that convey speakers' or writers' attitudes. The two sub-groups that realize modality markers are ‗hedges' and ‗emphatics,' also known as ‗certainty markers,' which are used ―to show writers wish to express of the probability or truth of some propositional content and to indicate how committed they are to that assessment‖ (Ädel, 2006).

d. Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality, or extrinsic modality, refers to the logical status of events or states, usually relating to assessments of likelihood including possibility, necessity or prediction (Biber et al, 1999, p. 485). As proposed by Hyland and Milton (1997, p. 192), epistemic modality refers to ―different degrees of certainty concerning the validity of the information asserted through epistemic devices. For example, obviously conveys greater certainty than may‖. Epistemic modality can be realized by various linguistic elements including modal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns.

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e. Deontic Modality

Deontic modality or intrinsic modality, refers to actions and events that human or other agents directly control, usually relating to the meaning of permission, obligation, or volition/intention (Biber et al, 1999, p. 485). For example, should in ―You should drive under the speed limit‖ expresses deontic necessity or obligation. Can in ―The teacher has said, they can go to the bathroom‖ conveys deontic possibility or permission.

f. Rethorical Validity

Validity is the principle that if all the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true. However, argumentative discourse is a reason-giving activity. Except in rare instances, the reasons advanced do not provide absolute proof of the truth or rightness implied by the claim. In order that an advocate can accurately assess the efficacy of his discourse, a logic compatible with the requisites of such non-analytic activity is required. In more general terms, contemporary rhetorical theory requires a working logic compatible with the exigencies, constraints, and uncertainties governing situations defined as rhetorical (Crismore and Kopple, 2016).

g. Academic Writing

A thesis is a document presenting scientific research submitted in purpose of fulfilling professional qualifications for an academic degree candidate. In some context, the term of ―thesis‖ refers to those made by bachelor's and master's course students, while dissertation is normally used to refer to the doctorate students' writings. (Breimer, Damen, Freedman, Hofstede, Katgert, Noordermeer and Weijers, 2005)

1.7 Organization of the Study

The primary focus of this study is on identifying the hedges and boosters expressing epistemic modality from the compilled from a corpus of ten thesis of ELT learners studied in one of the public universities in Indonesia.

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The chapter one contains the background of the study, the theoretical framework, a statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definitions of terms, and organization of the study.

Then, in the chapter two, frameworks underlying the study and relevant literature from empirical studies are carefully reviewed and elaborated in rigorous accounts. The elaborations are divided into numerous subtitled comprising the notion of academic writings, the concepts of hedges and boosters, the categorizations of hedges and boosters, previous studies on the matter of hedges and boosters used in written discourse and used by non-native English speakers.

Meanwhile, in the chapter three, the details regarding the methodologies of the present study are carefully explained. The elaboration pertaining the methodology are divided into three distinctive parts which are data sources, data collection and the data analysis.

Further, in the chapter four, findings compiled from the analysis of the corpus are explained and interpreted systematically to answer the three proposed research questions. The discussion in the chapter four comprises the matter of the occurrences of the hedging and boosting devices found in the corpus as well as discussing the matter of how those hedging and boosting devices impacts the quality and the rethorical validity of the arguments built in the thesis.

Lastly, chapter five summarizes and concludes the results in relation to each research question, and finally provides pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research.