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Research Article

Stance Markers of Hedge and Booster to Construct Arguments in IELTS Essay Writings: A Genre Based-Study

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ABSTRACT

Although stance markers of hedge and booster have been studied in academic writings and received growing concerns from linguistic scholars worldwide, studies on this area within essay writings is still limited, and little attention has been paid to these stance markers within the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) essay writings. Understanding the importance of filling this need has encouraged this study to analyze stance markers of hedge and booster within the IELTS essay writings by addressing three research focuses: the roles of these two stance markers in essay writings, the distribution of hedge and booster in essay writings, and the possibilities of these two stance markers appear in the same sentence. To realize this intention, this study used a genre approach by analyzing 30 IELTS essays in bands 7, 8, and 9 as data sets by quantitatively reporting the appearances of hedge and booster and qualitatively identifying the appearances in contexts. The results revealed that stance markers of hedge and booster are important in these data sets to show authorial stances in academic essays. Then, hedge appears more dominantly in band 7, while booster has higher numbers of appearance in band 8 and 9. Last, these two stance markers are possible appearing in the same sentence when the sentence contains multiple clauses. These findings imply that genre is much influenced by discourse communities because the present findings also become evident that the employment of hedge and booster seems to have differences from earlier different academic writings.

Keywords: *Arguments, Genre analysis, IELTS essay writings, Stance markers of hedge and booster*

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the uses of stance markers, such as hedge and booster, is crucial for language learners to make effective communication in academic essays (Escalona, 2024) and to improve authors' credibility in making arguments (Hyland, 2017), and thus, making explicit learning instructions about these two stance markers are urgent to be provided (Syafei et al., 2025). Because of the importance of this urgency, studies that underpinned this research topics also have received increasing concerns from linguistic scholars, such as studies in PhD theses (Jabeen et al., 2023), research articles (Seyyedi, 2025; Triyoko et al., 2021; Yahya & Alyousef, 2022; Zhang, 2023), academic discourses (Vázquez Orta & Giner, 2009), essay writings (Escalona, 2024; Syafei et al., 2025), etc. These concerns suggest that hedge and booster have important roles to convey authors' position in academic writings. However, although hedge and stance have received increasing research numbers worldwide, these stance markers have limited investigation in essay writings, particularly for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

"Understanding the uses of hedge and booster may expand students' comprehension in setting arguments in academic writing"

The uses of hedge and booster have been investigated in 60 minutes of time constrain in hand essay writings using a mix-method by integrating manual and computational analyses (Syafei et al., 2025). The results revealed that students employ hedges for expressing uncertainty indicating weak arguments, and they used boosters for showing their confidence of their arguments. However, due to time constrains, they have issues in lexical sophistication because of over using the same hedge (such as overusing about, maybe), and booster. This finding suggested that preparing and providing students comprehension about these two stance markers are required to improve their awareness when making arguments in essay writings for preparing them tests in time constrains. Thus, linguistic strategies also need to be learned and applied for taking a test.

Besides, in English foreign learnings (EFL) contexts, hedge and booster in persuasive essays also have received an analysis, and the results seem having slightly differences, which indicate that booster appears more dominant than hedge (see Alward, 2014). Then, EFL learners employed more booster than English native learners (L1) (see p. 120). This finding indicates that EFL learners seem to show their arguments more confidently in their essays than those of native English authors.

Furthermore, a comparative study between the uses of these two stance markers have been conducted by comparing female and male students in writing essays (Escalona, 2024). This study used a quantitative approach by focusing on hedge and booster employed by 75 students from two departments: English language and information technology programs. The results revealed that overall both stance markers are employed in essay writings consistently and indicate important to show their stances. However, while female students tend to employ hedge more, male students do the opposite ways; they used more boosters. The findings imply that while female students tend to soften their arguments, male students prefer to show their arguments more confidently.

In summary, the reviews suggest that stance markers of hedge and booster have important roles in constructing arguments, claims, and to show authorial stances when writing essays. However, although studies have demonstrated hedge and booster in various academic writings, including essays, EFL students indicate necessary to improve their comprehension about these stance markers for their academic excellences because they are mostly still unaware about their arguments and cannot employ these stance markers properly, particularly those in undergraduate program (Pedida et al., 2025). Besides, while some earlier studies have demonstrated these in essay writings, none of them focuses on analyzing these two stance markers in well proper academic essays, such as IELTS essay writings. Although IELTS essays are also a part of academic writings, they are limited by time constrains and explicit scoring systems, and thus, test takers need strategic linguistic choices to sharp their argumentation. Based on understanding these important gaps and problems, this study intends to analyze these two stance markers of hedge and booster in IELTS essay writings in higher band scores (band 7, 8, and 9) using genre approach because providing understanding of these stance markers from these very well-established essay writings may provide insightful findings for language learners, particularly those intending taking IELTS test. To address this intention, this study formulates the following research questions:

(1) To what extent are stance markers of hedge and booster employed to construct arguments in IELTS essay writings?

(2) How are stance markers of hedge and booster distributed in IELTS essay writings?

(3) In what cases, if any, do these two stance markers appear in the same sentence together?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Genre Analysis in Academic Contexts

In the past, genre had been long and widely employed in various literary works, but then it was developed in academic contexts since Swales proposed a create research spaces (CARS) model based on this theory (Swales, 1990). Then, it has been an approach for analyzing academic texts, with a term of genre analysis. Genre analysis is an approach to examine and discover the convention of a linguistic pattern within texts in a certain discourse community, such as rhetorical patterns in research articles (Warsidi, 2021; Warsidi & Adnan, 2024; Warsidi et al., 2025; Warsidi, Halim, et al., 2025; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024). These studes imply that genre has been becoming applicable approach to discover rhetorical structures of research articles. Besides, genre analysis has been employed for analyzing linguistic features in texts (Ananda et al., 2018; Andika et al., 2018; Hussain et al., 2020; Loan, 2018; Mubarok, 2021), grammatical functions in research publication (Warsidi, 2023b; 2023c), and other more. In the present study, genre analysis is an analytical approach used to discover the convention of linguistic stance markers of hedge and booster within 30 IELTS essay writings. Thus, genre analysis in this study is an approach to discover the convention of stance markers within the corpora.

Stance Markers of Hedge and Booster

Hedge and booster are stance markers that are used in positioning authors' stances. Thus, hedging and boosting are employed as epistemic attitude markers to convey author' stances (Hyland, 2005b), and this study used in concept to set the current study. In this regard, while hedge is used in cautious or uncertain arguments, booster is employed to convey arguments confidently, and thus these stance markers can be used to identify authorial voices in their writings (Alia & Aliia, 2025). In research articles, while hedge is more employed in the introduction and method sections frequently, booster is more frequently found in the results and discussion sections (Nasirizadeh & Paramasivam, 2024). Then, in abstract section, hedge is more frequently employed by Latin American authors, while booster was employed more by Russian authors (Богинская, 2024). Studies on these stance markers suggest that genre in stance markers of hedge and booster is also dependent on discourse communities; different communities have different convention of stance markers. The discourse community in this study is IELTS essay writings, and convention in this regard is pattern that is commonly employed. Besides, these markers have important roles in academic writings because they are not only employed to show authors' stances, positions, claims, and arguments, but these can be used to show certainty or uncertainty of claims and arguments. However, while dominant studies on this area have been carried out widely in the research articles, studies in other academic writings, such as essays have rarely received scholarly attention. Thus, this study aims to contribute studying hedge and booster in essay writings, particularly in IELTS essay writings.

Identifying hedges and boosters

Hyland's framework (Hyland, 1998; 2005a; 2005b) have been employed widely for analyzing stance markers in earlier studies (e.g. Nasirizadeh & Paramasivam, 2024; Богинская, 2024). For identifying authorial stance, signal words are employed for identifying stance markers. More details about signal words or linguistic signals for identifying hedge and booster are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Linguistic signals for identifying hedge and booster in academic writings (Nasirizadeh & Paramasivam, 2024) adopted from Hyland (2005b)

Hedges	Boosters
"About, almost, apparent, apparently, appear, appeared, appears, approximately, argue, argued, argues, around, assume, assumed, broadly, certain amount, claimed, could, couldn't, doubt, doubtful, estimate, estimated, fairly, feel, feels, felt, frequently, from my perspective, from our , from this perspective, generally, guess, indicate, indicated, indicates, in general, in most cases, in most instances, in my opinion, in my view, in this view, in our opinion, in our view, likely,	"Believe, believed, believes, beyond doubt, certain, certainly, clear, clearly, conclusively, decidedly, definite, definitely, demonstrate, demonstrated, demonstrates, doubtless, establish, established, evidently, find, finds, found, in fact, incontestable, incontestably, incontrovertible, incontrovertibly, indeed, indisputable, indisputably, know, known, must, never, no doubt, obvious, of course, prove, proved, proves, realize, realized, realizes, really, show, showed, shown, shows, sure,

mainly, may, maybe, might, mostly, often, on the whole, ought, perhaps, plausible, plausibly, possible, probable, probably, quite, rather, relatively, roughly, seems, etc. (p.119)"	surely, think, thinks, thought, truly, true, undeniable, undeniably, undisputedly, undoubtedly, etc. (p.119)"

However, although linguistic signals for identifying hedge and booster as shown in Table 1 have been provided, the framework needs further developed regarding its application in the analytical procedures. Thus, this study develops a framework as presented in Table 2 within the method section as the novelty of this study. The development is based on lexical identification, example of linguistics signals, examples in sentence forms, and the meaning of sentences (see Table 2).

METHOD

Research Design

This study used genre approach (Swales, 1990; Warsidi, 2022; 2025; Warsidi et al., 2024) for analyzing data of essay writings because this approach has been employed in various academic texts, including in stance studies (Alıa & Jomaa, 2023; Alramadan, 2020; Bilal & Shehzad, 2019; Cheng & Unsworth, 2016; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024). Then, it employed mix method, combining a simple quantitative and qualitative approach, to report the analysis results because employing these two approaches may support each other and the findings may become more convincing than one single approach alone. In this regard, while the quantitative approach may compare the analysis across band levels, the qualitative approach may discover how stance choices are employed within writing contexts.

Data sources and data collection procedures

As a part of genre studies, this study used 30 IELTS essay writings task 2 getting band score 7, band score 8, and band score 9. The reason of employing these numbers is that they may have represented others. Then, the reason for choosing these band scores is that IELTS essay writings accepting these band scores are acceptable in top universities in English speaking countries. Thus, applying these criteria may figure out important findings for both learning writings theoretically and practically, both in the classrooms and out of classrooms. Furthermore, to select these 30 essay writing numbers, the researcher randomly selected 10 essays from each band score as shown in the links above, and thus, the total numbers of selected essays became 30 IELTS essay writings. Each essay contains 255-399 words in length. These selected essays are then used as data sets and analyzed using procedures in described in details in the following sub-section.

Data Analysis Procedures

This study used genre approach (Swales, 1990) by analyzing the 30 IELTS essays using a top-down approach (Warsidi, 2024a; 2024b). It was conducted by reading every single essay writing for four times. The purposes are: the first reading is to discover and code hedges

within the essay; the second reading aims to ensure as it is; the third reading is to identify and code boosters within the essay; the fourth reading is to validate the findings of boosters in the essays. To diver coding hedge and booster, they were colored differently; while hedges were highlighted in yellow, boosters were highlighted in green. Then, to discover both hedge and booster within the essays, earlier studies of stance markers of hedge and booster were employed in this study (Nasirizadeh & Paramasivam, 2024; Ningrum et al., 2024; Triyoko et al., 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2018). These stance markers of hedge and booster were then identified lexically by following approaches and examples presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Classification for identifying stance markers of hedge and booster

Stance markers	Lexical identification	Lexical signals	Examples found in corpus	Meanings
Hedge	Modal verbs	may, might, could, can, etc.	Additionally, zoos often give animals little space, restrict natural life, cause stress, and **may** involve poor care; some breeding and capture hurt animals; this **can** be seen as cruelty.	Weak arguments
	Adverbs	possibly, probably, generally, usually, seemingly, etc.	Overall, finding more about the outer world **can** alter our view and will **possibly** solve some of our problems.	
	Verbs of cognition	seem, appear, suggest, indicate, etc.	It **seems** technology contributes to the expansion and availability of more social contact opportunities	
	Quantifiers	some, many, a few, several, etc.	**Some** wild places save animals from danger…	
Booster	Modal verbs	must, will, should	To mitigate this problem, governments, businesses, and individuals **must** act collectively	Strong arguments
	Adverbs	clearly, definitely, certainly, undoubtedly, of course, etc.	**Clearly**, being financially prepared is crucial in a rapidly changing market	
	Verbs of cognition	prove, demonstrate, show, reveal,	In fact, studies **show** that social communication like family gatherings and participating in local events are still popular.	
	Quantifiers	all, every, always, never	**Everyone** is obligated to participate in saving the Earth.	

To ensure the level of importance, this study used earlier approach to discover whether the roles of hedge and booster are obligatory, quasi-obligatory, conventional, or optional in the data sets (Warsidi, 2022; 2023a; Warsidi & Adnan, 2024; Warsidi, Halim, et

al., 2025). By employing these classifications, the levels of importance of hedge and booster can be determined in this study.

Reliabilities

To ensure reliabilities of data analysis results, this study used intra-coder reliability (self-coding). In this regard, the first analysis was conducted by following the above procedures, as described in earlier sub-section. Then, the analysis results were put and leaved for two weeks. After two weeks, the data were analyzed again to ensure whether the analyses results are consistent and on the right track. The results of the re-analysis showed more than 90% consistencies. In this regard, knowing methodological congruent is the key quality markings (Braun & Clarke, 2024), and thus, although this study used self-coding analysis, by using these serial procedures, this study may add its reliability of its data analysis results.

FINDINGS

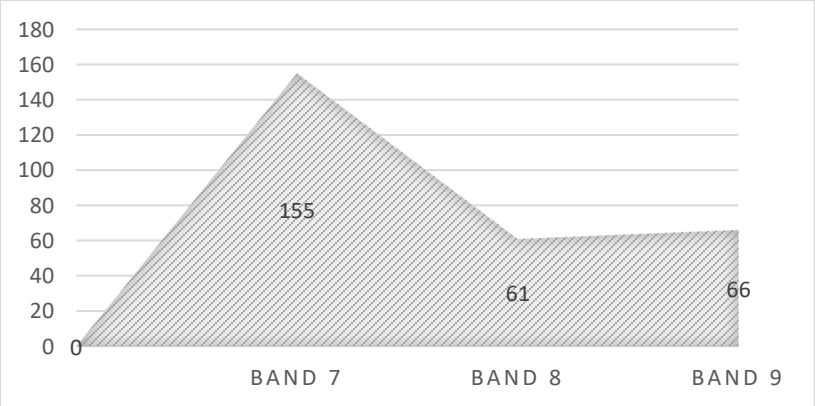
This section reports data analysis results regarding stance markers of hedge and booster employed to construct arguments, their distribution across bands, and their uses in the same sentences. These are to respond the three research questions in this study.

Stance Markers of Hedge and Booster to Construct Arguments

Data analysis results showed that both stance markers of hedge and boosters are obligatory in the IELTS essay writings because all IELTS essay writings band 7, 8, and 9 employed them when test takers construct arguments in their essays. This finding implies that stance markers of hedge and booster have important roles for constructing arguments. More details about stance markers of hedge and booster appearances in IELTS essay writings are presented quantitatively in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The uses of stance markers of hedge and booster in IELTS essay writings band 7, 8 and 9



As presented in Figure 1, IELTS essay writings band 7 contains more stance markers than those in band 8 and 9. This finding indicates that essay writings band 7 put reliance more on stance markers, while those in band 8 and 9 reduces more explicit stance markers

to construct arguments. Then, the distribution of the stance markers is reported further in the following sub-section.

The Distribution of Stance Markers of Hedge and Booster

The analysis results revealed that the stance markers are distributed in hedge and booster. While essay writings band 7 employed more hedge, higher bands (band 8 and 9) used more booster. More details about the appearances of hedge and booster are presented quantitatively in findings within Table 3.

Table 3
The distribution of stance markers to construct arguments in essay writings

Essay writings	Total stance markers	Distributed in hedges		Distributed in boosters	
		Numbers	Percent	Numbers	Percent
Band 7	155	90	58.06%	65	41.94%
Band 8	61	25	41%	36	59%
Band 9	66	23	34.85%	43	65.15%

As presented in Table 3, essays band 7 quantitatively contain more stance markers than those in band 8 and 9. Band 7 employs higher percentages of hedge rather than boosters. Then, those in band 8 and 9 contain more numbers of boosters rather than hedges. These findings suggest that IELTS test takers band 7 tend to soften their claims and avoiding strong claims, while those in band 8 and 9 sound more careful to make claims, and thus, they reduce using stance markers. Examples about the uses of hedge and booster are presented and exemplified as follows:

Hedges

Hedges seem to be more favorable in a majority of arguments in essay writing band 7. The employments of hedge in constructing arguments are exemplified as found in the data sets as follows:

> Example 1: "Additionally, zoos often give animals little space, restrict natural life, cause stress, and **may involve** poor care; some breeding and capture hurt animals; **this can be seen** as cruelty". Band7-01

> Example 2: "Learning about other planets and what they consist of **can affect** our lives in many ways. Furthermore, humans have always wanted to explore the vast universe, and this chance **can potentially make it** more profitable. As a result, **I can say** that this work is worth doing and should be considered to be done sooner". Band7-02

> Example 3: "Moreover, some jobs, such as cyber security analysts, **may demand** certifications, training, or experience in related fields". Band9-06

As exemplified in Example 1, 2, and 3 above, more particularly in the bolded texts, test takers use hedges in their essay writings. Their purposes may be qualitatively to soften their arguments or they were not quite sure about the strength of their arguments, and thus, they prefer employing hedge to construct the arguments.

Boosters

Although the uses of booster are not frequent in band 7, test takers who get band 8 and 9 in this study preferred more employing boosters than hedge to construct their arguments in their essay writings. This means that they seem confident with their arguments, and thus, they strengthen their arguments by employing boosters. The uses of boosters as found in the data sets are exemplified as follows:

> Example 4: "Thus, **I believe zoos should exist** only if they meet high welfare standards and contribute to animal protection and education; otherwise, they should close or reform". Band7-01

> Example 5: "For example, gold and diamonds are so expensive, and it is due to the fact that they are rare compared to other stones. Consequently, by finding more of their resource and transferring them, the problem of the shortage will be solved. Thus, this will lower their price and make them more affordable". Band7-02

> Example 6: "In conclusion, even though strict punishment prevents people from breaking road laws, I am of the opinion that better traffic infrastructure and using of technologies play a pivotal role in alleviating accidents". Band9-07

Examples 4, 5, and 6 are the ways test takers employed boosters (particularly in the bolded texts) in their essay writings. In this regard, they qualitatively seem to convey strong confidence about their arguments, and thus, they emphasize them.

The Uses of Hedge and Booster in the Same Sentence

The analysis revealed that hedge and booster can appear in the same sentence, but it is rarely found in the IELTS essay writings in this study. It may happen when the sentence is a complex or compound sentences. This finding means that hedge and booster can appear together in the same sentence when the sentence contain multiple clauses. Examples found the data sets are described as follows:

> Example 7: "In conclusion, from my perspective, I strongly agree that both approaches can help reduce the demand on public transportation while providing convenience and satisfaction to people". Band7-3

> Example 8: "While some claim that the credit goes to technological advancements, I firmly disagree with them, as social and economic factors are the main deterrents to lawbreakers". Band7-04

In the two examples above, test takers use both hedge and boosters in the same sentence. In example 7, the test taker firstly uses a booster (strongly) in the first clause, and he then employs a hedge (can) in the second clause. In example 8, the test taker utilizes a hedge (some) in the first clause, and then he uses booster (firmly) in the second clause. These two examples suggest that hedge and booster can appear together in one sentence when the sentence has multiple clauses.

In short, both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that stance markers of hedge and booster can help IELTS test takers to construct arguments and to determine the levels of argument strength. The present study revealed that stance markers are obligatory in each essay and indicates important to construct arguments. In this regard, while hedge

appears more in IELTS essay writings band 7, booster has more appearances in IELTS essay writings band 8 and 9. Then, these two stance markers can appear in the same sentence when the sentence contains multiple clauses. However, the appearance in the same sentence is limited and hardly found in the present study.

DISCUSSION

By employing genre approach (Swales, 1990) and stance markers of hedge and booster (Hyland, 2005b), this study finally found three important findings. The first finding of this study revealed that stance markers of hedge and booster are obligatory in the present study because all essay writings in the three band levels employed them. This finding implies that the uses of stance markers are important to construct arguments in writing essays for the IELTS. The reason for this finding is possibly that stance markers of hedge and booster can help test takers making either softer or stronger arguments. This finding supports earlier literature that the roles of these two stance markers are important in both essay writings and other academic writings (Alward, 2014; Escalona, 2024; Hürcan & Duruk, 2025), and the reason in showing either certainty or uncertainty in academic writing is crucial (Ekoç, 2020). When academic authors intend to reduce risks in an argument, they used a hedge.

In contrast, when they truly trusted their argument, possibly supported with data, they used a booster (Ekoç, 2020). Thus, this finding suggests that paying attention about the uses of hedge and booster when writing academic texts, either writing for publication, essays, or other types of academic writings, is crucial for ensuring argumentation, for showing authorial presence (Wang & Jiang, 2018), and for effective communication with accurate ideational and interpersonal meanings (Shen, 2023). For teaching these stance markers to targeted students in the classroom, teachers must consider their students' characteristics because earlier study revealed that their roles, voices, and competences are important for successful language learning, and thus, they need to understand their students' language backgrounds and their ethnocentric behaviors (Anas et al., 2025).

The second finding, however, showed that while hedge appears in more essay writings band 7, booster occurs more in essay writings bands 8 and 9. It implies that while test takers getting band 7 tend to soften their arguments in their essay writings, those achieving higher scores (band 8 and 9) tend to be more carefully using stance markers in creating arguments. The reason is that although they employ higher numbers of boosters, they employed much fewer stance markers in their essays. For example, those getting band 7 employed stance markers twice more than those in higher bands. The reason is probably that test takers getting higher scores are more carefully employing stance markers. This finding seems to support that EFL learners exhibit boosters more than hedge and ensure their confidence and certainty in arguments (Ningrum et al., 2024).

However, the present finding is not sure whether test takers are more female or male. In relation to this, earlier research showed that female and male authors seem to have different confidence. While female authors used more hedges, male authors were in the opposite findings, they preferred employing boosters more. Thus, female authors often

express uncertainty while male authors express greater confidence (Seyyedi, 2025). In contrast, female authors used more boosters in writing essays than male authors of Swedish English learners (Serholt, 2012). Unfortunately, the present study did not classify female and male authors because it focused on identifying the uses of these two stance markers in higher band scores. The reason is clear that it intends to contribute on providing understandings of how to construct arguments in essay writing getting higher band scores, and thus, it can be used for teaching and learning purposes.

The last finding is that both hedge and booster are possible to appear in the same sentence. However, it may happen when the sentence contains multiple clauses. Thus, the sentence is either in compound or complex sentences. However, their appearances in the same sentence are rarely found in the present study. This finding implies that test takers rarely use both hedge and booster in the same sentence. The reason is possibly that sentence academic writings are more in simple form rather than in compound and complex forms (Warsidi, 2021; 2023b). Thus, the appearances of these two stance markers together in the sentence are limited.

In short, the discussion of this study implies that stance markers of hedge and booster have important roles to show authorial presence when creating arguments. In this regard, hedge is to soften arguments and it can be used to avoid risk. In contrast, booster is to show strong arguments, either based on data or other supporting claims, and it is to authors' confidence. However, the discussion also suggests that there is no guarantee that either female or male authors employed more either hedge or booster. Thus, it implies that the uses of these two stance markers are much influenced by contexts, which different contexts have different uses.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data and discussing the results, this study finally concludes three important findings in responding the research questions. First, stance markers of hedge and booster are obligatory in the essay writings in the present study because all data sets employed these two stance markers in their essays. Then, hedge is more distributed in essays band 7, while booster appeared more in essays band 8 and 9. Last, both stance markers of hedge and boosters are possibly appearing at the same sentence when it contains multiple clauses. These findings may contribute to learning theories and practices in academic texts. It theoretically may put insights to the literature about hedge and booster to show the levels of arguments or claims when writing academically. Practically, the present findings may be used to create students' awareness and design teaching materials in academic writing classes. However, this study has some limitations as it neglects how the application of learning stance markers in classroom practices and how genre-based practiced is employed in classroom activities. Thus, this study recommends future research to investigate how practically designing teaching strategies, teaching methods, and teaching materials using genre approach in learning hedge and booster for the IELTS writings.

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