A corpus-based analysis of stance adverbials as hedges and boosters in English argumentative essays of American university students and Turkish non-native university students

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Abstract

This article focuses on stance adverbials as hedges and boosters employed by Turkish non-native EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and American university students in their argumentative essays. The data of this study consist of the argumentative essays of the American university students (LOCNESS corpus) and of the Turkish non-native students from the corpus of argumentative essays written by first-year Turkish students at the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department. Simple random sampling is used in order to choose 200 argumentative essays (100 from each student group) and native corpus consists of 84,851 words, whereas non-native corpus consists of 86,554 words. In order to analyze the data, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used: percentages, mean frequencies per 10,000 words and Log-likelihood results for each item are calculated and interpreted. All occurrences of stance adverbials as hedges and boosters are identified in both corpora by using a concordance program, Ant. Conc. 3.3.4. and each occurrence is analyzed in its local and wider context to distinguish stance expressions. The results of the quantitative analyses show that the frequencies and percentages of individual

items in hedging and boosting devices differ in native and non-native students' essays. Argumentative essays of students are characterized by extensive use of boosters, and less by the use of hedges. Functional uses of each adverbial are explained within their own contexts and examples from each corpus are also presented and interpreted.

Keywords: argumentative writing, hedges and boosters, stance adverbials, Turkish students, American students

1. Introduction

This study examines the use of hedges and boosters in the genre of the argumentative essays written by native English and non-native Turkish university students from a comparative perspective. Argumentative writing, defined as "a kind of writing which attempts to persuade someone of something" (Intraprawat, 2002), aims at presenting a viewpoint to the reader, explaining, clarifying, and illustrating that viewpoint, and convincing the reader of the validity of the viewpoint (Reid, 1982). Stance, being an indispensable component of argumentative writing, concerns writer-oriented features of interaction and every successful academic text displays the writer's awareness of its readers and its consequences (Hyland, 2008). Writers need to construct their claims with appropriate degree of stance devices such as hedges and boosters to make their readers accept what they believe in (Alward, Mooi, & Bidin, 2012). Stance devices allow the writer(s) to "intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement" (Hyland, 2005, p. 176). In this regard, hedges help the writers to mitigate his/her claim or evaluation, boosters help them to emphasize the certainty and confidence about a proposition (Hyland, 2005). To attain the readers' persuasion and acceptance, writers should make a balance between hedges and boosters (Hyland, 1998). To achieve this purpose and to write a good argumentative essay, if they are appropriately employed, hedges and boosters are essential features which support the writer's opinion and build writer-reader relationship (Alward et al., 2012). The capacity to develop a clear stance on a topic and to engage the reader in the text is a key component of argumentative writing (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Hyland, 2005; Wingate, 2012). As cultural features are reflected in writing, it is necessary to focus on students' writing through the lens of cross-cultural research (Hatzitheodorou & Mattheoudakis, 2011). This view leads us to consider Hofstede's (1980) model with its four dimensions, which are power-distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity. More specifically, cultural background

of the issue should be taken into consideration in examining the contextual preferences of the learners in the presentation of a stance.

Considering the fact that different communities and discourse contexts offer varying writing instructions, an in-depth analysis is needed to shed light on how these differences relate to the employment of stance expressions by members of different communities and educational contexts (i.e., Turkish and American university students). In second language writing instruction, there has been a tendency to view voice as a peripheral construct that can be easily excluded from the list of objectives in writing instruction (Yoon, 2017). In the context of the US, on the other hand, voice is regarded as an important construct and it has been deeply rooted in writing assessment practices (Matsuda & Jeffery, 2012). Additionally, voice is involved in state standards and learning objectives as a target construct (Llosa, Beck & Zhao, 2011) and voice is used as an evaluation trait in approximately 50% of the first language writing rubrics in the U.S. context (Jeffery, 2009). Another aspect of authorial voice is that it is based on individualistic ideology and it does not fit the L2 learners with collectively-oriented cultural backgrounds (Matsuda, 2001). Instead of following rhetorical styles in their native culture, the L2 learners may be primed by English culture and try to adopt English rhetorical patterns (Kim, 2017). Especially East-Asian ESL writers' problems in academic writing are closely related to the issues of authorship and voice or positioning in their writing (Lee, 2006). Explicit instruction about how to present authorial stance is neglected in advanced writing classes or informational aspects of writing is prioritized (Hyland, 2005, p. 364). One of the underlying motivations behind conducting this study is that the students are provided with contradictory messages and instructions. Another problem is that students are not even provided with any instruction or guideline about how to engage the reader(s), how to take an authorial stance in order to convince the potential reader(s), to support their claim(s), and how to show commitment to their arguments. In this respect, scholars focusing on this issue indicated that novice writers have problems such as presenting an inappropriately and monotonously subjective persona in their academic argument, most likely due to their less effective deployment of concessive and tentative claims (Hyland 2004, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2004; Wu, 2007), not carrying a consistent evaluation to strengthen their argument (Hood, 2006), and tending to present descriptive narrative more than the critical evaluation academic argumentative writing requires (Hyland, 2004; Woodward-Kron, 2002).

In the Turkish contexts, students struggle with writing essays in L2 as they have difficulties in producing claims of their own, which is probably related to the lack of voice (Alagözlü, 2007). Considering the fact that the English language is writer-responsible (i.e., the writer is responsible for making meaning clear and easily understood for readers) (Hinds, 1987), gaining an understanding of the L2

learners from different educational and cultural backgrounds is necessary to present a picture of learner profiles in terms of their written products. This research is also necessary to unveil the characteristics of interlanguage in terms of the employment of stance devices as the learners' background educational context, L2 writing proficiency and their writing experience have an influence on their writing (Uysal, 2008). These elements are crucial in the Turkish context as writing instruction is limited to a genre based syllabus and as instructors focus comprehensively on cohesive devices and provide lists of the devices rather than presenting them in context, examining the presence of stance devices in prospective English language teachers' essays is fundamental.

In light of the aforementioned issues, the present study aims at investigating the types, frequencies and functions of stance adverbials as hedges and boosters in the English argumentative essays of Turkish non-native students and American university students. With this scope in mind, the following research question is addressed:

How do the Turkish and American university students form their arguments through employing stance adverbials as hedges and boosters in their argumentative essays?

2. Corpus and Methodology

The present study adopted a corpus-based analysis, which is described as "empirical, analyzing the actual patterns of use in natural texts; utilizes a large and principled collection of natural texts, known as a "corpus", as the basis for analysis; makes extensive use of computers for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques; depends on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques" (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1998, p. 4). The corpora used in this study were the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS) compiled at the Université Catholique de Louvain and the Turkish non-native student essays compiled at a state university in Turkey. The participants of the present study consisted of American university students studying in a number of different universities in the United States and Turkish non-native university students at the English Language Teaching Department, Anadolu University. The data of the study consisted of the argumentative essays of both groups of students. The students' essays were selected by simple random sampling and each corpus comprised 100 argumentative essays. After the random sampling procedure, the number of words for each corpus were as follows:
- 84,851 words of American university student essays,
- 86,554 words of Turkish student essays.

The topics of the argumentative essays were as follows:
- the use of drama in lessons,
- facebook is /not the beginning of a new era,
- facebook is/not the end of privacy,
- the necessity of art lessons in university education,
- government should/not use surveillance mechanisms in society,
- sex equality,
- controversy in the classroom,
- teenagers,
- capital punishment,
- animal testing, etc.

This corpus-based study was two-dimensional: the corpora were analyzed both quantitatively by finding out the frequency of stance adverbials as hedges and boosters and qualitatively by identifying the functions of these adverbials in their own contexts. In order to decide on the types and functions of hedges and boosters, Hyland's (2005) model of interactional metadiscourse in the academic texts was used and stance devices functioning as adverbials were figured out. The data were analyzed using a corpus software tool, Ant. Conc 3.3.4 (Anthony, 2014). By using the concordance lines and wordlist function of this tool, the types and frequencies of the stance devices were found out and the functions of these devices were identified manually by examining these expressions in their own contexts. Manual checking of these expressions in use through concordance function of the corpora might be a potential way of ensuring validation (Yoon, 2017). Examples were selected from both corpora to serve as the functional patterns and the features and functions of hedges and boosters were elaborated in their immediate and wider contexts. The rationale behind conducting an analysis based on the contextual features of these devices was that interactional voice markers have the potential of being multifunctional (Holmes, 1988), thus, all expressions need to be examined in terms of their functions in context (Yoon, 2017). As shown in the example below, *of* is used as a preposition modifying the collocation '*course work*' rather than a stance device (i.e., *of course*), thus, we excluded such occurrences:

(1) Students confront problems with teacher-student relationships, grading scales, course difficulty, lack of preparation, and many other aspects <u>*of course*</u> work. (NC)

Once the stance adverbials as hedges and boosters were identified, the similarities and differences between both corpora were examined in terms of

the frequencies and occurrences in context. The frequencies of the items were calculated and interpreted through the analysis of occurrences per 10,000 words for standardization of two corpora to a common basis. In addition, Log-likelihood calculator (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html) was used in order to compare the relative frequencies between the two corpora to detect the overuse and underuse of adverbials in each corpus. In the following step, the expressions were checked by another researcher in order to get more reliable results. Peer debriefing was carried out in order to improve the credibility and reliability of the qualitative analyses conducted in the current study (Barber &Walczak, 2009).

3. Results

The results of the study are explained in two sections. In the first section (i.e., 3.1), frequencies of hedges and boosters in native and non-native student essays are provided. In the second section (i.e., 3.2.), the functions of hedging and boosting expressions in both learner corpora are presented by providing example sentences.

3.1. Frequencies of hedges and boosters in the native and non-native corpora

The results of the study revealed that boosters are more frequently employed in both non-native and native corpus, whereas hedges are comparatively less frequently employed stance expressions. It was seen that there is nearly no variation in the employment of hedges in both of the learner groups, whereas non-native students employ boosters more frequently than native students (see Table 1).

Table 1 Overall mean frequency (per 10,000) and Log-likelihood results of hedges and boosters in both learner corpora

Category	Non-native corpus (O1)		Native corpus (O2)		LL Ratio
	Total	Occurrence (per 10.000)	Total	Occurrence (per 10.000)	
Hedges	112	12.93	109	12.84	+ 0.00
Boosters	233	26.91	193	22.74	+ 3.01

Note. O1 is observed frequency in Corpus 1, O2 is observed frequency in Corpus 2, + indicates overuse in O1 relative to O2, - indicates underuse in O1 relative to O2

The results of the quantitative analyses show that the frequencies and percentages of individual items in hedging and boosting devices differ in native and non-native students' essays. More specifically, we found out that a*lmost* (33%) is the top most frequently used hedging device in the non-native corpus, whereas *maybe* (25%) and *probably* (25%) are the most frequently used hedges in the native corpus. When the occurrences of individual items in both corpora were analyzed, it is seen that the

most frequent hedging devices are *almost, mostly, maybe, probably*, and *nearly* in the non-native corpus, whereas they are successively *maybe, probably, almost, perhaps*, and *nearly* in the native corpus (see Table 2).

Table 2 Stance adverbials as hedges in the native and non-native corpora

Item	Non-native corpus		Native corpus	
	Raw no	%	Raw no	%
almost	37	33	21	19.2
mostly	18	16	4	3.6
maybe	15	13.3	25	22.9
probably	13	11.6	25	22.9
nearly	13	11.6	8	7.3
perhaps	7	6.2	17	15.5
approximately	5	4.4	2	1.8
apparently	4	3.5	4	3.6
hypothetically	-	-	2	1.8
in a way	-	-	1	0.9
Total	112	100	109	100

Table 3 Stance adverbials as boosters in the native and non-native corpora

Item	Non-native corpus		Native corpus	
	Raw no.	%	Raw no.	%
especially	55	23.6	20	10.3
really	43	18.4	40	20.7
actually	30	12.8	22	11.3
of course	28	12	15	7.7
unfortunately	12	5.1	10	5.1
absolutely	10	4.2	3	1.5
definitely	9	3.8	11	5.6
in fact	8	3.4	16	8.2
totally	7	3	6	3.1
surely	6	2.5	-	-
indeed	5	2.1	6	3.1
certainly	5	2.1	10	5.1
without doubt	4	1.7	1	0.5
importantly	2	0.8	6	3.1
naturally	2	0.8	3	1.5
specifically	2	0.8	3	1.5
clearly	1	0.4	2	1
obviously	1	0.4	8	4.1
undoubtedly	1	0.4	1	0.5
broadly (speaking)	1	0.4	-	-
Total	233	100	193	100

As can be seen in Table 3, among the most frequently occurring stance devices, namely boosters, *especially, really, actually, of course, unfortunately*, and *absolutely*

are successively the most frequently occurring items within the non-native corpus, whereas *really, actually, especially, in fact, certainly, definitely, unfortunately,* and *of course* are the most commonly employed boosters. The greatest discrepancy in each individual item exists in the employment of *of course, especially, certainly, obviously, in fact, absolutely* (see Table 3). The most salient boosting expressions in the non-native corpus are *especially* (23.6%), *of course* (12%), *absolutely* (4.2%), *surely* (2.5%), and *without doubt* (1.7%), whereas these expressions in the native corpus are *in fact* (8.2%), *importantly* (3.1%), *certainly* (5.1%), and *obviously* (4.1%).

3.2. Functions of hedges and boosters in the native and non-native corpora

In addition to the quantitative aspect of this research study, functions of hedges and boosters are analyzed within the context of each occurrence in the non-native (NNC) and native (LOCNESS) corpora. These contextual features are explained in terms of their use and functions in both local (i.e., their collocational occurrences) and wider context, and example sentences are provided below. The results show that *almost* has a tendency to collocate with the words *every* (i.e., *almost everyone/every day/everything*, etc.) and *all* (i.e., *almost all the students/all parts*). It is used to downgrade the writer's proposition and claim as shown in the examples below:

(1) *Almost* every year education system changes and students catch up with that system; hence it is not a big difference for students. Also, it is impossible to learn everything within the class, therefore there should be additional support and the music is perfect for this. (NNC)
(2) Abortion is a controversial topic in today's society. *Almost* everyone has an opinion on the subject. Many people believe it should be illegal. Many others believe the government should not interfere; it should remain the choice of the individual. (LOCNESS)

Mostly is a hedging device commonly employed by non-native students compared to their native counterparts. This device is used to mitigate the writer's description of the case and downgrade the assertion.

(3) The purpose of the lessons often enhance the creativity of students, they try to emerge something artistic such as painting, sculpture, pottery and etc. *Mostly*, education is done by teachers or the assistants with different tools, goods or the things that are used in the arts. (NNC)
(4) Therefore, it is only right that she be returned to her biological parents who want to raise her. This argument is *mostly* based on the legal aspects of adoption. While there are many more issues dealing with adoption, the proponents of biological parents seem to rely on legality and morality. (LOCNESS)

Maybe is employed to express possibility, to lower the authorial commitment, to avoid taking the responsibility for the proposition, and to mitigate the writers' evaluation. This expression is mostly used with modal auxiliary verbs such as *will, can, could,* and *should* in both learner corpora.

(5) Although they are dangerous, they have private lives and they can speak with their wives or friends some classified things like everyone. Government can use more effective ways to pursue these groups. *Maybe,* a police can change himself/herself and enter these groups to pursue them. More effective information can be known by this way. (NNC)

(6) The topic of suicide will somehow affect every person on earth in one way or another. There is no escape from involvement with suicide. If we can learn to be objective about suicide, then *maybe* we can understand why people do this. Right now, many of us feel that suicide is horrid and completely, morally inexcusable, but eventually we must realize that suicide will never cease to exist and the best that we can do is try to understand it. (LOCNESS)

In the non-native corpus, *probably* is mostly employed to express the possible reasons for/results of an event. *Probably* is used with modal auxiliary verbs such as *may* and *can* in native corpus, whereas it is mostly used with *will* in the non-native corpus.

(7) The student who see his/her performance effective in drama activities and understand that the experience is really beneficial, *probably* will try to be creative in lessons especially in language ones in order to learn new things by acting at the same time. *Most probably*, this will make students study more because they need to speak fluently, study information a lot and make group works as a necessity of drama activities. (NNC)

(8) Better mathematical education is needed for everyone who uses a computer other than a simple calculator. Also, curtailing some theoretical programming could eliminate alarming predictions or erroneous results. The key is *probably* in the classroom. People should learn more about the ramifications about what they are doing. (LOCNESS)

It was seen that *almost* and *nearly* are used in similar contexts with similar collocations as shown in the following examples. In its local context, *nearly* collocates with the expressions such as *nearly impossible, nearly an hour*, etc. In both learner corpora, *nearly* is employed to mitigate a view/idea or to express the writer's lack of certainty about the quantity and possibility of something as shown in the examples below:

(9) *Nearly* all of us have a facebook account and generally each day we are going into it. In this site we are following and sharing many things. (NNC)

(10) Females growing up in their teenage years were treated like little girls, it was *nearly* impossible for them to get permission to do anything. An example of this is when a female wanted to go out on a date with a young man, she usually got grilled for information about his family, and so on. (LOCNESS)

In both native and non-native data, *perhaps* is used to downgrade the strength of the author's claim. In example 11, the writer argues about the possible reasons for the necessity to forbid wire-tapping, whereas in example 12, the writer discusses the ineffectiveness of death penalty and states the most important reason for this ineffectiveness by downgrading the claim as there might be other important reasons.

(11) *Perhaps*, the most important reason why phone should not be tapped is that it menaces our liberty. There are many countries that have stronger technology than Turkey has. (NNC)
(12) *Perhaps* the most obvious statistic for the ineffectiveness of the death penalty lies in the noticeably higher crime rate in sates that employ it. Many people believe that it actually places a lower value on human life. (LOCNESS)

In terms of the functions of boosters in the non-native corpus, *especially* is found to be used with prepositions such as *in, for,* and *by* (i.e., especially in Turkey/ for teachers/by private citizens). This boosting device is used to foreground the writers' arguments and claims. Another function of this expression is that Turkish students employ it in order to bring alternative views and examples to support their claim(s).

(13) But when people think logically, they can clearly say that students should be familiarizing the fine arts. *Especially* in Turkey, students don't pay attention these lessons unless they get grade. (NNC)
(14) Pink is almost always worn by baby girls. When mothers bring their baby girls from the hospital, the baby girls are usually dressed in pink. *Especially,* when the babies are a few weeks old, baby girls are usually dressed in pink or other soft colors such as mint green or yellow. Once a baby has developed its looks, there is no problem with the baby girl wearing blue. (LOCNESS)

In majority of the occurrences in non-native data, *really* collocates with a number of adjectives such as *necessary, important, beneficial, essential, huge* and this boosting device is employed to highlight the degree of the assertion and emphasize the truth of the proposition.

(15) Last of all a person has to look back on the past events to evaluate and understand the situation he/she is in. This is *really important* for a person to see the differences between the times those events happened and the time he/she lives in and act accordingly to avoid similar consequences. (NNC)

Different from the employment of *really* by non-native students, it modifies verbs (i.e., *really know/get/feel/care/see,* etc.) rather than modifying adjectives and it is also used to convince the reader of the truth of the writer's proposition in majority of the occurrences. Other than that, a*ctually* is employed to express actuality, reality, stressing a different aspect of the aforementioned examples/claims within the context, and emphasize the level of accuracy. In other words, *actually* is used to single out an assertion for highlighting in contrast to other claims. In the non-native corpus, it is mostly used in initial position. For example, in the extract below, the writer indicates a misbelief about the unreliability of surveillance cameras and by using this boosting device, another point of view is highlighted with regard to the writer's evaluation.

> (16) They also claim that even if thieves are being watched with cameras, they can lose trace of themselves. For this reason, they regard this cameras as an unreliable devices. However, we have nothing to worry about this issue because they are wrong about the use of surveillance cameras. *Actually,* surveillance cameras are very effective in preventing crimes when they are implemented accordingly. Facial recognition can help a police officer identify a criminal caught on tape. (NNC)

Contrary to the non-native corpus, *actually* is not commonly used in sentence initial position, it is mostly used between the subject and the verb in the native corpus. In this very corpus, in addition to denoting actuality and reality, *actually* is used to present a counterargument and a different aspect to the flow of main arguments established in the essay.

> (17) Even though the pharmaceutical industry argues that medical pricing boards would raise prices and eliminate competition between companies, *actually* the opposite seems to be true. (LOCNESS)

Actually and *in fact* are also employed to elaborate recently asserted argument(s) as shown in the following example. In example 18, the writer's commitment to the proposition is achieved by saying that in reality role models are very important for children and adults. In example 19, *in fact* is used to indicate the writer's certainty and to draw attention to the profound effect of the improvement in communication on people's lives. In both corpora, *in fact* is used in sentence-initial position in nearly all occurrences.

> (18) I see some points in there, but it doesn't mean that they don't have private lifes or they must share all things about them. *In fact*, role models are very important to children and adults. For them, finding a role model helps them gain a sense of behaviour, morals and character. (NNC)

(19) One of the most significant inventions of the 20th century has to do with the speed at which information is now communicated throughout the globe. *In fact,* all improvements in communication have had a profound effect upon the way in which people live their lives. If I were to choose the most frequently used and influential invention of the field, it would have to be the television. (LOCNESS)

As a boosting device, *of course* is used to emphasize the truth of the proposition and foreground an argument. This boosting device denotes a very high degree of certainty towards the propositional content of the statement as shown in the examples below:

(20) The first point is teenagers' dependence on money and seeing the money as everything in life. *Of course,* we all know that money is an indispensable part of our lives and we need necessary money to go on living. (NNC)

(21) Madonna made it big because of her hard work and determination just as Charles Barkley made it big through the years of hard work. *Of course* it is important to understand that these individuals have natural talents. (LOCNESS)

In the learner essays, *absolutely* is commonly used with adjectives (i.e. *absolutely wrong/true/normal*) and its function is to emphasize and highlight the strength of the claim(s), and to further elaborate their idea(s) in the non-native corpus. In the native corpus, it collocates with adjectives such as *ridiculous* and *unacceptable* and it denotes a strong opinion.

(22) Governments can learn whatever is planning to be done and if it is hazardous for citizens they can prevent it. *Absolutely,* sometimes even governments cannot prevent some attempts but this doesn't mean that surveillance mechanisms are unnecessary. (NNC)

(23) Now the end of the 1994 college football season was *absolutely* ridiculous. I think that this season alone speaks enough to say that college football should have a playoff system. (LOCNESS)

As a boosting device, *without doubt* is used to indicate the writer's absolute judgments and certainty towards the proposition s/he expresses. In example 24, it is used to emphasize the writer's certainty about the statement that facebook is the most commonly used social networking site. In the extract 25, the writer introduces and emphasizes their argument about the most important invention on twentieth century and supports their claim by providing example utilization areas for contact lenses and emphasizes their crucial role in our daily life.

(24) People who want to communicate with other people, such as their family members and friends, generally use social networking sites. *Without doubt,* the most common is Facebook. Facebook allows its members to keep in touch with others. (NNC)

(25) *Without a doubt,* one of the most important inventions of the 20ᵗʰ century has been contact lenses. If glasses were my only form of seeing better, I'd be blind most of the time! How would I be able to see while swimming, waterskiing, or participating in other sports? Contact lenses are a part of my everyday life; something that I take for granted, yet on the other hand, something that I'd be lost without. (LOCNESS)

As shown in the example below, *surely* is used to emphasize the speaker's firm belief that what he is saying is true, it denotes the writer's assurance certainty and confidence. This boosting device has no occurrence in the native corpus.

(26) As people tend to enjoy their time instead of studying significant subjects, they relate the statement of not studying to these objects with the aim of feeling themselves relieved. But *surely* there are more important reasons which they can't admit to themselves. Such as laziness, unwillingness, and supineness. (NNC)

Other salient boosting devices in the native corpus are *importantly, certainly,* and *obviously.* These boosting expressions are employed to express writers' strong opinion, foreground a proposition as shown in the following examples:

(27) A playoff system will generate more revenue, create more excitement for the fans because they will be able to see some of their dream match-ups, and *most importantly*, it will determine a true champion and a true number 1 for college football. (LOCNESS)

(28) Women could not do the jobs a man could do, because they weren't strong enough or intelligent enough. Well, I think women were *certainly* strong enough to weather male attitudes of that day, and definitely smart enough to fool their husbands into thinking they were being obeyed. (LOCNESS)

(29) The most pertinent aspect of the conflict theory to homelessness is the belief by them that the ownership of property is a definite source of power. *Obviously*, the people without homes have no chance. One way this theory can be used to educate people on ways to ease the problem of homelessness is to recognize the validity of property being a means of power. (LOCNESS)

4. Discussion and conclusion

The main findings of the study show that the non-native students employ hedges and boosters more frequently compared to the native students. Stance adverbials as boosters are salient in both learner corpora. There are hedges more frequently employed by the non-native students such *almost* and *mostly*, and by the native students such as *maybe, probably, almost, perhaps,* and *nearly.* There are a number of boosters which are mostly preferred by the native students, such as *in fact, importantly, certainly,* and *obviously* and by the non-native students such as *especially, of course, absolutely, surely,* and *without doubt.* These stance devices are

explained in terms of their use and functions in both local (i.e., their collocational occurrences) and wider context in the native and non-native student essays.

Among the expressions *of course* is an expression commonly used in spoken English, that is there are 48,644 occurrences in spoken genre, whereas there are 14,215 occurrences in academic genre in Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). In this regard, Leech (2000) indicates that personal stance markers such as adverbials (e.g., *of course*), matrix clauses (e.g., *I guess*) are particularly common in conversation, however, *of course* as a boosting device is salient in argumentative essays of Turkish students. In addition to this expression, other boosting devices frequently employed by Turkish students are *really, actually, absolutely*, which are much more salient in spoken genre compared to academic genre in COCA. One of the reasons for the frequent occurrence of boosters in the non-native corpus may be that expressing a moderate position may be a challenge for the L2 writer. Similar to the findings of this study, showing that boosters are more frequently employed than hedges, in their study of modal verbs and adverbs, Hyland and Milton (1997) found that non-native students had a more limited ability to manipulate degrees of certainty, often making stronger claims than are made by native speakers' (NS) writing. Yang (2013) points out that Chinese authors tend to be more assertive in scientific writing than native English speakers and employ fewer hedges and the use of hedges involves a complicated process of thinking and selecting. One of the underlying reasons for the frequent employment of boosters by non-native students compared to native students may be attributed to cross-cultural differences in the functions of hyperboles in written argumentation, as well as what it is called 'over-zealousness attributes' (Lorenz, 1998). According to the author, many L2 writers are "anxious to make an impression and conscious of the limitations of their linguistic repertoire ... might feel a greater need than native speakers to stress the importance' of what they have to say" (p. 59). This need to emphasize the importance of their claims and propositions may also lead the students to frequently employ boosters in their essays. As for the preference of employing hedges less frequently than boosters in both native and non-native corpora in the present study, the reason may be the textbooks and other materials presented to the students. In this regard, Hinkel (2005) points out that despite the prominent role of hedges in research and materials for teachers of the L2 academic learners, most student textbooks for composition and writing mention hedges very briefly or not at all. This may be another reason why non-native and native students employ hedges less frequently than boosters in their essays.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, another reason behind the preference of boosters especially by non-native students compared to native students may be the tips for argumentative essays provided in Turkish EFL students'

course packs. Turkish students who participated in this study are provided with a number of lists of sentence connectors to emphasize and particularize such as "*in fact, definitely, surprisingly, certainly, indeed, extremely, unquestionably, surely, as a matter of fact, absolutely, without doubt,* and *undoubtedly, in particular, particularly, specifically,*" besides the connectors used for giving an example, summarizing/concluding, showing time, expressing transition, etc. (https://zenithacademyjsr. files.wordpress.com/2015/08/connectors.pdf). These students are also provided with instructions including the following:

- avoid strong feelings (don't say nobody does this, or it is impossible to disagree with them);
- don't use strong personal expressions (e.g., I think);
- use linking words (e.g., therefore, although, however, etc.).

One of the most remarkable points in these instructions is that the students are guided to avoid indicating personal thoughts and strong personal expressions. Presumably, these tips also play a crucial role in shaping their arguments, expressing their claims and taking a stance. Instead of providing lists of expressions to be used in their writings, students may be provided with these expressions in their own contexts. Academic writing instruction should raise students' awareness of the importance of stance construction in argumentation (Işık-Taş, 2018). Furher, as Bayyurt (2010) suggests, academic curricula should emphasize students' awareness towards becoming more expressive and clear when they write in Turkish and in English.

Another reason may be the students' lack of practice in writing argumentative essays. They do not have the necessary knowledge or experience about argumentative genre since argumentative writing requires the learners to develop their abilities to argue, support their ideas and refute the opposing ideas (Özhan, 2012). The other point of view about the difficulty of the argumentative texts is that language learners lack sufficient practice in this type of writing and they are not familiar with the Western discourse community (Lee, 2006). According to Uysal (2008), Turkish students' argumentative writing exhibits both English and Turkish rhetorical patterns and bidirectional transfer of rhetorical patterns. She further suggested that background educational context explains many of their rhetorical patterns, whereas other factors such as their L2 writing proficiency and their writing experience in both L1 and L2 may have an influence on their writing. Presenting personal voice should be discussed considering small culture factors and context-sensitive elements such as writers' personal background, previous writing experience (Liu & McCabe, 2018).

One of the major components of argumentation is presenting critical thinking (Rottenberg, 1991). Turkish students have difficulties in producing claims, which

is probably related to lack of voice (Alagözlü, 2007). Turkish students also hesitate to write what they really think and beyond their limited knowledge in English, this problem may be associated with critical thinking skills (Alagözlü, 2007). In this respect, Western and Eastern education differ from each other with respect to critical thinking and voice; presenting individualized voice is peculiar to western culture (Alagözlü, 2007). Thus, as Işık-Taş (2018) also suggested, students may compare their use of stance adverbials with native and advanced university essays obtained from different corpora.

Projecting an appropriately authoritative stance in student academic writing is a challenging task (Hyland & Milton, 1997). In the Anglophone university context, the use of interactional resources significantly impacts student success in argumentative writing (Wingate, 2012). However, in the Turkish educational context, students lack practice in writing argumentative essays. Writing this essay type is particularly problematic for non-native speakers who are often both linguistically and rhetorically inexperienced (Thompson, 2001). In a recent study, Kim (2017) found out that US students employ significantly more interactive and interactional metadiscourse compared to Korean students. The current study has opposite result with respect to the frequent employment of boosters by non-native students. The reasons for this difference may be that through boosters, the learners may create some opportunities to express both their certainty in what they say and their solidarity with the audience (Taki & Jafarpour, 2012). Presumably, other reasons are the nature of argumentative essays (i.e., the writers are expected to convince the readers of the truth of their proposition), the lists and instructions they are provided with in their academic writing course, their personal preferences, idiosyncratic uses, or a transfer from their mother tongue. In parallel to the results of our study, Kim (2017) indicated that frequent use of hedging by US students may be related to their temporary, strategic, intentional humility in order to enhance their credibility and ethos. Another reason for differences between native and non-native students may be their writing conventions; thus, different essay types may be analyzed in order to shed light on salient features of different text types. Additionally, sociocultural context may have an influence on the learners' tendency to pay little attention to the audience in argumentative writing (Kim, 2017). Previous research suggested that the high-rated essays tend to include more hedges, attitude markers, and engagement markers compared to low-rated essays (e.g., Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995; Wu, 2006), thus, further research may examine the use of hedges and boosters in high-rated and low-rated essays.

The results of this study provide a number of pedagogical implications in terms of taking effective measures by employing stance expressions such as hedges and boosters. Considering the crucial role of argumentative essays in

academic discourse, novice writers should be provided with more training in supporting claims, refuting their ideas, mitigating a claim or emphasizing a viewpoint in their argumentative essays through examples extracted from different corpora. The problem about the syllabuses lies in the fact that particularly Turkish non-native students do not write argumentative essays before the undergraduate level. Considering the crucial role of argumentative essays in academic discourse, the syllabus should be revised by providing these novice writers with more training in supporting claims, refuting their ideas, mitigating a claim or emphasizing a viewpoint in their argumentative essays. Taking an effective stance and explaining authorial voice have a crucial importance in raising awareness of the students who are prospective teachers and ELT researchers. As a pedagogical implication, we suggest that authorial stance should also be involved in writing rubrics in Turkey and students should be guided to express their voice, support their argument(s).

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