# A Pragmatic Approach: Hedges and Booster Found in the 2024 Final Indonesia Presidential Candidate Debate to Shape the Candidate's Image

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored how the candidates for Indonesia's next president used hedges and boosters to strengthen their image to the public in the YouTube live stream that was released on February 4, 2024. To explain what caused the phenomenon of the Hedges and Booster used in the Indonesia final presidential candidate debate, the researchers of this study used a descriptive qualitative method. The 1987 theory of Brown and Levinson is used as the theoretical framework. The results of this research show that in the final Indonesia presidential debate, the candidates used 842 boosters and 391 hedges. In an attempt to make their points comprehensible to the audience, they employ hedges to help maintain their means of expression. Meanwhile, they use boosters to strengthen the arguments they make and demonstrate their objectivity in making them.

*Keywords*: Hedges; Booster; Debate; Hedges; Indonesia Presidential Candidate; Pragmatic

## INTRODUCTION

An utterance is something that is spoken; a speech; an expression (KBBI, Depdiknas, 2005:1231). In pragmatics, an utterance is understood as the product of a verbal act (not the verbal act itself) (Leech, 1993:20). An utterance is a form of action and not merely something about the world (Austin, in Leech, 1993:280). Indonesia will hold the 2024 General Election, which includes the 2024 Presidential, Legislative, Regional Head Election. There are three presidential candidate pairs this year, namely H. Anies Rasyid Baswedan, Ph.D. as the presidential candidate with Dr. (H.C.) H. A. Muhaimin Iskandar as the vice-presidential candidate, as the number 1. H. Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the number 2, and H. Ganjar Pranowo, S.H., M.I.P. with Prof. Dr. H. M. Mahfud MD as the presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair number 3. Becoming a candidate in an election certainly requires a lot of support and votes from voters, in this case the Indonesian people. Therefore, there are many ways that are done by these candidate pairs, including various online and offline campaigns, blusukan, billboards, and many more. Political campaigns are often carried out in

the form of rhetoric, by making the packaging of issues into a menu that most attracts the public's attention (Muhtadi, 2008: 92). They must take persuasive actions using various strategies. Thus, it can be said that a political campaign is a promotional activity to introduce a candidate leader to the public. One of the series of events every time a general election is held is the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidate debate, which is the focus object of the study.

A debate is an exchange of arguments between individuals or groups with the aim of achieving victory for one side (Hendrikus, 1991). In the context of the presidential election, debates serve as a political communication tool to gain public sympathy and agreement. Debate strategies are not limited to presenting programs, ideas, and visions but also include tactics in argumentation, body gestures, emotional intelligence, and various stage mastery tricks. There are two types of strategies in debates: offensive and defensive strategies. The offensive strategy includes techniques such as the surprise technique, counter-questioning, provocation, interruption, anticipation, exaggeration, contradiction, and denial (Kruger, 1960). Similarly, the defensive strategy employs techniques like evasion, delay, appreciation, elaboration, questioning, and compromise. Each technique is used according to the situation during the debate. The three presidential candidate pairs in Indonesia undoubtedly use different language styles in their defense, attack, and marketing efforts. Scholars such as Humboldt, Saphir, Whorf, and Cassier have attempted to explain the relationship between language and thought, or more specifically, how language influences thought. People in a debate situation will certainly use sentences they believe can convince others of their arguments and opinions. Sentences are used to express ideas and thoughts fully, both orally and in writing. Thus, the term pragmatics is known, which refers to the pragmatic rules in studying and mastering the target language. This paper uses pragmatic linguistics to analyze the language used by the presidential candidates with Hedges and Booster theories.

Hedges are often used to indicate politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Hedges have the ability to soften our speech or utterances while maintaining the essential strength of the idea being conveyed. Boosters, on the other hand, are a communication strategy to enhance the strength of a statement, emphasizing certainty, strong commitment, conviction, and truth (Hyland, 1998). Based on Hyland's definition, it can be said that Boosters play a crucial role in a statement, particularly in strengthening arguments and increasing their persuasive power. During the final presidential candidate debate of 2024, there was a significant use of language containing elements of Hedges and Boosters. Previous research conducted by Surtikanti (2023) titled "Hedges and Boosters in Building the Image of United States Presidential Candidates from the Perspective of Presidential Debate Genre" discusses the portrayal of political figures, particularly presidential candidates, within the context of campaigns. The study focuses on the use of Hedges and Boosters in presidential debates, examining their patterns and usage within the genre of debate texts. The research covers speeches by United States presidential candidates containing Hedges and Boosters during each stage of the debate, categorized into theses and arguments. Thus, the research gap identified from this and previous studies lies in the use of data and

methodologies. This distinction sets apart previous research from the current study, which explores the use of Hedges and Boosters in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Candidate Debates, a current and heated topic compared to debates in previous years.

This paper aims to do three things: (1) to explain the functions of Hedges and Boosters used by the presidential candidates in the final presidential debate of Indonesia in 2024; (2) to explain the realization of the functions of Hedges and Boosters used by the presidential candidates in the final presidential debate of Indonesia in 2024; (3) and to identify the differences in the functions of Hedges and Boosters used by the three presidential candidates of Indonesia in the final presidential debate of 2024. This research reveals the hidden or implicit meanings in the utterances of presidential candidates during their final debate. This is important because the messages conveyed are not always directly manifested, and understanding these implicit meanings can provide a more complete picture of the candidates' goals and messages. The author identifies communication patterns that emerge in the presidential debates, including word choice, speech structure, and the use of specific language styles. These findings offer valuable insights into the communication strategies used by the candidates and how they can influence public perception.

**METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive research method aimed at depicting the language phenomena used by Indonesian presidential candidates during the 2024 presidential debates. Qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena such as behaviors, perceptions, motivations, actions, and others holistically, through descriptive means in the form of words and language, within a naturalistic context, utilizing various natural methods (Moleong, 2010). The study utilizes the theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) to categorize the functions of Hedges and Boosters used by speakers. Therefore, the research location for this study is the social media platform YouTube. The Data are derived from transcripts of conversations in the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidates' final debate, while informants participate in focus group discussions (FGD) related to the classification of Hedges and Boosters data. In analyzing the data, the researcher utilizes data analysis theory developed by Miles and Huberman (1992), applying three stages of analysis: (1) data reduction; (2) data display; (3) conclusion drawing. The implementation of this research was carried out through several stages arranged to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the use of Hedges and Boosters in the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidate debate. Each stage was carried out systematically and focused to achieve the research objective, namely to reveal how the two linguistic elements are used by the candidates to build their image. The research variables used in this PKM-RSH research are clauses in the final debate of the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidates expressed by the candidate candidates to improve their image, and analyze the clauses that contain elements of Hedges and Boosters.

**RESULT**

1. ) Hedges (Politeness)

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Hedges are often used to indicate politeness. Hedges have the ability to make our speech more nuanced while maintaining the essence of the ideas being conveyed. They are tentative expressions and possibilities. The use of Hedges is an action taken by speakers to demonstrate communicative wisdom or as a politeness strategy. The purpose of using Hedges is to signify that the information conveyed is not entirely certain or to mitigate the strength of meaning in a statement. The following is the result of the analysis of Hedges (politeness) in the analysis of Hedges in the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidates' final debate:

Table 1. Analysis of Hedges

| No | Type of Hedges | Sub Type of Hedges | | Findings | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Propositional Hedges* | *Modulation* | | 10 | *2,40%* |
| | | *Evasion* | | 6 | *1,44%* |
| 2. | *Illocutionary Force Hedges Content Oriented Hedegs* | *Speaker Oriented* | *Attenuating Epistemic Commitment* | 140 | *33,65%* |
| | | | *Hesitation* | 110 | *26,44%* |
| | | | *Covering Up* | 1 | *0,24%* |
| | | | *De-empahasizing* | 9 | *2,16%* |
| | | *Content Oriented Hedges* | *Expressing Condition* | 93 | *22,36%* |
| | | | *Counter Expectation* | 3 | *0,72%* |
| | | | *Bounding Downtoner* | 16 | *3,85%* |
| | | | *Expressing Possibility* | 3 | *0,72%* |
| | | | *Agent Avoiding* | 1 | *0,24%* |
| | | | *Source Tagging* | 13 | *3,13%* |
| | | | *Limiting Generalizability* | 6 | *1,44%* |
| | | *Hearer Oriented Hedges* | *Seeking Solidarity* | 5 | *1,20%* |
| | | *Miscellaneous Hedges* | | 0 | *0,00%* |
| **Total** | | | | 416 | *100,00%* |

2. ) Booster

Booster is utilized to clarify and enhance the quality of the speaker's discourse towards the interlocutor. The function of Booster itself emphasizes shared information, community, and listener participation. Boosters indicate and emphasize crucial parts of speech that can build a coherent

discussion (Holmes, 1995). The use of Boosters is intriguing as they appear during conversations. Boosters do not naturally arise but are carefully employed by speakers and interlocutors for a purpose. Their goal is to convey meaning to the interlocutor, strengthening their arguments. Thus, the application of Boosters in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Candidates' Final Debate is apt to demonstrate how each pair of candidates articulate their arguments, considering significant aspects that bolster their discourse and provide perspectives to the public regarding their leadership suitability. The following presents the results of the analysis of Boosters (politeness) in the analysis of Boosters in the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidates' final debate:

Table 2. Analysis of Boosters

| No | Types of Booster | Sub Type *Booster* | | Findings | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Propositional Oriented Boosters* | *Intensifying* | | 62 | 8,88% |
| | | *Personal Involvement* | | 30 | 4,30% |
| 2. | *Illocutionary Force Boosters* | *Speaker Oriented Boosters* | *Boosting Epistemic* | 158 | 22,64% |
| | | | *Force Indication* | 17 | 2,44% |
| | | | *Expressing Emphasis* | 17 | 2,44% |
| | | | *Source Tagging* | 282 | 40,40% |
| | | *Content Oriented Boosters* | *Bounding Empathics* | 36 | 5,16% |
| | | | *Accentuating* | 16 | 2,29% |
| | | | *Source Tagging* | 35 | 5,01% |
| | | *Hearer Oriented Boosters* | *Seeking Solidarity* | 10 | 1,43% |
| | | | *Presupposing verification* | 35 | 5,01% |
| | | *Miscellaneous Boosters* | | 0 | 0,00% |
| **Total** | | | | 698 | 100,00% |

**DISCUSSION**

From the research conducted on Hedges and Boosters in the Presidential Candidate Debate to build the candidate's image, the researcher has come to several conclusions that will then be able to answer the problem formulation of this research. First, the Hedges function has a total of 416 findings throughout the Final Presidential Candidate Debate, which is almost only half of the Booster findings contained in the Final Presidential Candidate Debate, namely the Booster findings are 698 findings. These Hedges and Booster functions can be found in the narratives and dialogues delivered by the candidates.

Furthermore, the findings of Hedges and Boosters in the Final Debate of Presidential Candidates obtained through this research have different percentages based on their types. For Hedges, the marker Attenuating Epistemic Commitment or AEC appears to be the marker that appears the most,

namely 140 times or 33.65% of 100%. This shows that Indonesian presidential candidates often use sentences that indicate the possibility or probability that exists. As for the Booster function, the most common marker is the Speaker Orienter Source Tagging Booster marker, which is usually characterized by the third person singular pronoun 1 (me) and the third person pronoun 'we'. This variant of Booster marker has 282 clauses or 40.40% of 100% data. This Booster function is used to emphasize themselves or their group in their speech, the candidates, although they present their own arguments, often use the word 'we' or 'us' so that they emphasize their group through the speech given so that the listeners are influenced and pay attention to the candidates.

Align with the research conducted by Surtikanti (2023) entitled 'Hedges and Boosters in Building the Image of United States Candidates Reviewed from the Perspective of the Presidential Candidate Debate Genre' which discusses the political image of a person, especially a presidential candidate in the context of a campaign. This study has revealed several things, namely 1) the two presidential candidates tend to use hedges that function as weakening commitment at both stages of the debate; 2) the two KPs choose boosters that function as intensifying and force indication in both stages of the debate; 3a) the pattern of using hedges of the two presidential candidates tends to be the same, namely weakening speech for commitment in the thesis stage. While at the argument stage, both of them tend to seek listener solidarity. Meanwhile the difference between the study and this study is only because of the most dominant type of Booster and Heges that were used.

**CONCLUSION**

From the research that has been conducted and the data obtained, it can be concluded that the Hedges and Boosters functions have a very significant appearance, function, and influence for and in the speech of each candidate. The Hedges function often appears in the delivery of arguments, this is due to the need for careful speech so as not to cause a conflict or problem in the future. While the Booster function itself is necessary because candidates need to strengthen their speech to improve their image and also lead the listeners or audience to trust and vote for them more.

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