



# Gender Differences in the Use of Boosters in the Pakistani Opinion Columns: A Corpus-Based Study

## Research Article

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## Abstract

Prior research has extensively explored gender differences in linguistic strategies across various genres; however, the specific use of boosters in opinion columns by different genders remains under-examined. This corpus-based study investigates whether Pakistani male and female authors exhibit distinct patterns in the utilization of boosters within opinion texts. Analyzing a corpus of 500 opinion columns authored by Pakistani writers of both genders, this study employs Hyland's (2005) framework to identify boosting devices and adopts quantitative methods for data analysis. The analysis is facilitated by the use of MetaPak (2017), a specialized tool for textual analysis. Contrary to expectations, the findings reveal no significant differences in booster usage between male and female opinion writers, suggesting that the prevalence and distribution of boosters are influenced more by genre conventions than by gender. This study contributes to the understanding of linguistic choices in gendered writing within the specific context of Pakistani opinion columns.

**Keywords:** gender, boosters, Hyland's (2004) interpersonal model, Pakistani English opinion columns, metadiscourse, corpus analysis



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Significance**

The concept of metadiscourse, first termed by Harris in 1959, has been extensively elaborated by subsequent scholars such as Williams (1989), Crismore (1989), and Hyland (2005). Defined broadly as "writing about writing" (Kopple, 1985, p. 83) and "language about language" (Lyons, 1977), metadiscourse encompasses various linguistic tools that writers use to organize their text and engage with readers. Despite its widespread use, metadiscourse remains a somewhat nebulous concept, described variously as "non-topical linguistic material" (Lautamatti, 1978), "text about text" (Enkvist, 1978), and "signposting" (Crismore, 2004). This variety of definitions reflects the complexity and multifaceted nature of metadiscourse, highlighting its role not only in structuring text but also in facilitating a communicative act between the text producers and consumers (Hyland, 2005).

### **1.2 Gender Differences in Media Discourse**

Since the 1970s, the intersection of gender and media has garnered significant academic interest, with researchers exploring how media representations shape and reflect gender identities. Studies have investigated various aspects of gender in media, including representation, biases, and stereotypes. The media's role in shaping societal perceptions of gender cannot be understated, as it plays a critical part in both reflecting and constructing gender norms.

### **1.3 Focus of the Current Study**

Building on the existing literature on metadiscourse and gender in media, this study narrows its focus to the specific use of boosters—a key metadiscursive tool—in Pakistani opinion columns. Despite the rich body of research on gender linguistic strategies, the differential use of boosters by male and female writers in Pakistani opinion journalism remains underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Pakistani male and female authors employ boosters to strengthen their arguments in opinion columns. Utilizing a corpus of 500 opinion pieces and employing Hyland's (2005) model for identifying metadiscursive elements, this study provides insights into whether gender influences the use of linguistic strategies within this genre. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of both metadiscourse and gender dynamics in media discourse, particularly within the unique cultural context of Pakistan.

### **1.4 Aim of the Study**

Building on the existing research on metadiscourse and gender dynamics, this study aims to investigate the use of boosting devices—a key component of metadiscourse that intensifies the force of statements—within opinion columns written by Pakistani male and female writers. This research seeks to understand if gender influences the use of such linguistic strategies in this particular genre.

## **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are twofold:

- To determine the frequency of booster devices used by Pakistani male columnists in opinion columns.
- To determine the frequency of booster devices used by Pakistani female columnists in opinion columns.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How frequently do Pakistani male columnists use boosting devices in their opinion columns?
2. How frequently do Pakistani female columnists use boosting devices in their opinion columns?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview of Gender and Linguistic Practices**

The examination of gender differences in language usage within various media forms has attracted considerable scholarly attention, revealing significant insights into how gender influences communication styles. Prior studies have variously explored the impact of gender on the use of metadiscourse markers, with findings suggesting differing utilization patterns among male and female writers (Ädel, 2006; Francis, Robson & Read, 2001; Tse & Hyland, 2008). These studies have highlighted the nuanced ways in which gender can shape linguistic choices in academic and media texts, pointing to broader implications for understanding gendered communication strategies.

Research focusing specifically on Pakistani contexts has further enriched this discourse. For instance, Siddique et al. (2020) analyzed the use of framing features in Pakistani English newspapers, employing Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model to evaluate editorial choices, which underscored genre-specific linguistic practices. Similarly, Memon et al. (2021) compared the use of interactive metadiscursive categories between Pakistani and British engineering articles, revealing distinct differences in the preference for certain metadiscursive elements, which may be influenced by cultural and educational contexts.

### **2.2 Gender and Boosting Devices**

Specific to the use of boosting devices—a key focus of this study—literature has indicated varied patterns among different demographics. Rafi (2008) and Mirzapour (2016) have both explored gender distinctions in textual discourse, with findings suggesting different preferences for linguistic elements such as pronouns and hedging devices between male and female writers. These studies

provide a foundational understanding that informs the current investigation into the use of boosters in opinion columns by Pakistani authors.

Additionally, Parasibu (2017) and Pakzadian and Tootkaboni (2018) examined discursive techniques and conversational roles by gender, further highlighting the intricate ways in which gender can influence communicative behavior. These insights are crucial for contextualizing the findings related to booster usage in the present study, suggesting that gender may play a role in shaping not only the content but also the style of written communication.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework and Metadiscourse Classification

This study employs Hyland's (2005) classification of metadiscourse, which distinguishes between textual and interpersonal dimensions. Hyland's model is particularly apt for analyzing opinion columns as it allows for a detailed examination of how writers engage with their readers through linguistic strategies. This framework has been chosen due to its comprehensive approach and its widespread acceptance in analyses of academic and professional writing, making it a robust tool for exploring the interactional dynamics within texts.

Table 1. Hyland's (2004) Interpersonal metadiscourse model

Category	Examples	Function
<b>Interactive metadiscourse</b>		
Transitions	but, in addition	Express relations between main Clauses
Frame markers	to conclude, finally	Refer to discourse acts
Endophoric markers	see fig. noted above	Refer to information in other Parts of the text
Evidential	Z states that, according to x	Refer to information from other texts
Code glosses	such as, namely	Elaborate propositional meaning
<b>Interactional Metadiscourse</b>		
Hedges	perhaps, might	Withhold commitment and open dialogue
Boosters	definitely, in fact	Emphasize certainty or close Dialogue
Attitude markers	I agree, unfortunately	Express writer's attitude to Proposition
Self-mentions	I, we	Explicit reference to author
Engagement makers	you can see that	Explicitly build relationship with reader

### 2.4 Relevance to Current Study

This section underscores the complexity of gender interactions within linguistic practices and sets the stage for a focused examination of how Pakistani male and female columnists use boosters. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing nuanced insights into gender-

based differences in the use of boosting devices within the specific genre of opinion columns, a relatively underexplored area in gender and language studies.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Corpus Compilation**

This study involved compiling a corpus of Pakistani opinion columns to investigate gender differences in the use of boosters. The corpus comprised 500 opinion columns evenly split between male and female Pakistani writers, sourced from their official online platforms. Each gender category included 250 columns, contributing to a total of approximately 500,000 words. The columns were selected from publications between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, ensuring recent and relevant data.

The data collection was meticulous, excluding ancillary content such as advertisements, author names, publication dates, and letters to the editor to maintain focus on the opinion texts. Initially, columns were downloaded and stored as text files. Subsequent phases involved organizing these files in a metadata format using Excel, which included details like author gender, publication year, and column count. This was followed by data cleansing to remove any irrelevant textual elements and finally, the columns were segregated into two distinct datasets for male and female authors, prepared for analysis.

#### **3.2 Sampling Techniques**

The sampling strategy employed was a combination of random and purposive sampling. Random sampling was utilized to ensure a representative selection of columns across various newspapers, mitigating any bias towards particular topics or styles associated with specific publications. Purposive sampling was crucial for aligning the selection with the study's goals, specifically focusing on gender-based distinctions in linguistic strategies.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

The analysis focused on identifying and comparing the frequency and use of booster devices by male and female writers in the Pakistani opinion column corpus. The MetaPak software (2017), a specialized tool for metadiscourse analysis, was employed to scrutinize the textual data. This software facilitated a detailed examination of how gender influences the use of boosters, which are critical components of interactive metadiscourse. Data were then systematically coded and categorized, and findings were tabulated in Excel for ease of interpretation and reporting.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section presents the findings from the analysis of the use of transition markers and boosters in opinion columns written by Pakistani male and female columnists. The data were subjected to frequency analysis and statistical methods to address the research questions posed in the study.

## 4.1 Boosters

### 4.1.1 Pakistani Male and Female Column Writers

Boosters are linguistic devices used by authors to express certainty and reinforce the strength of their arguments, effectively limiting the scope for alternative interpretations (Bhatia et al., 2012). According to Hyland (2005a), the strategic use of boosters not only underscores the author's confidence but also plays a pivotal role in persuading readers by emphasizing shared understandings necessary for aligning them with the author's conclusions. The analysis focused on how these devices were employed differently by male and female Pakistani columnists in their opinion writing.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution in the use of Boosters by Pakistani Male and Female Column Writers

Boosters word	Categories	Pakistani male	Stat.	Pakistani female	Stat.
Never	Intensifying adverb	99	1.58	137	2.19
Always		70	1.12	78	1.25
Actually		46	0.74	47	0.75
Really		40	0.64	32	0.51
Certainly		38	0.61	20	0.32
Clearly		35	0.56	25	0.40
In fact		15	0.24	5	0.08
Surely		14	0.22	9	0.14
Truly		12	0.19	16	0.26
Of course		11	0.18	18	0.29
Definitely		8	0.13	11	0.18
No doubt		7	0.11	3	0.05
Indeed		4	0.06	18	0.29
Obviously		3	0.05	14	0.22
Undoubtedly		2	0.03	6	0.10
Evidently		2	0.03	1	0.02
Without doubt		0	0.02	0	0.00
Incontrovertibly		0	0.02	0	0.00
Decidedly		0	0.00	1	0.02
Indisputably		0	0.00	0	0.00
Incontestably	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Conclusively	0	0.00	0	0.00	
<b>Total</b>		<b>406</b>	<b>6.52</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>7.06</b>
Know	Intensifying verb	90	1.44	61	0.98
Think		66	1.06	65	1.04
Find		62	0.99	60	0.96
Believe		46	0.74	39	0.62
Known		39	0.62	39	0.62
Show		33	0.53	46	0.74
Found		30	0.48	61	0.98

Shown		29	0.46	20	0.32
Thought		28	0.45	37	0.59
Established		25	0.40	21	0.34
Proved		25	0.40	27	0.43
Shows		21	0.34	35	0.56
Believed		21	0.34	13	0.21
Believes		16	0.26	13	0.21
Showed		14	0.22	34	0.54
Establish		13	0.21	18	0.29
Demonstrate		10	0.16	7	0.11
Finds		9	0.14	11	0.18
Demonstrated		8	0.13	8	0.13
Thinks		5	0.08	6	0.10
Realize		5	0.08	3	0.05
Prove		3	0.05	28	0.45
Proves		2	0.03	6	0.10
Demonstrates		1	0.02	1	0.02
Should		315	5.04	290	4.64
Must		168	2.69	163	2.61
Realized		1	0.02	2	0.03
Realizes		1	0.02	1	0.02
<b>Total</b>		<b>1086</b>	<b>17.36</b>	<b>1115</b>	<b>17.84</b>
Clear	Intensifying adjective	70	1.12	43	0.69
TRUE		35	0.56	37	0.59
Certain		26	0.42	53	0.85
Sure		14	0.22	20	0.32
Obvious		12	0.19	21	0.34
Evident		4	0.06	13	0.21
Incontrovertible		1	0.02	0	0.00
Undeniable		1	0.02	2	0.03
Indisputable		0	0.02	1	0.02
Definite		0	0.00	2	0.03
Incontestable		0	0.00	0	0.00
Doubtless		0	0.00	0	0.00
Beyond doubt		0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>163</b>	<b>2.62</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>3.07</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>1655</b>	<b>26.51</b>	<b>1748</b>	<b>27.96</b>

Boosters allow authors to express their confidence in their arguments, highlighting their engagement with the topic and fostering a sense of unity with their audience (Hyland, 2005a). Additionally, they serve to underscore the significance of shared knowledge and collective involvement, as we are more inclined to endorse ideas that are likely to gain widespread acceptance (Hyland, 2009, p. 75).

Table 3. Overall frequency distribution in the use of boosters by Pakistani male and female column writers

<b>Boosters</b>	<b>Pakistani male</b>	<b>Stat.</b>	<b>Pakistani female</b>	<b>Stat.</b>
Intensifying adverb	406	6.52	441	7.06
Intensifying verb	1086	17.36	1115	17.84
Intensifying adjective	163	2.62	192	3.07
<b>Total</b>	<b>1655</b>	<b>26.51</b>	<b>1748</b>	<b>27.96</b>

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that both Pakistani male and female column writers utilize boosters, with female writers using them slightly more frequently than their male counterparts across all categories (intensifying adverbs, verbs, and adjectives). Specifically, the frequency of use for intensifying verbs is highest among both genders, followed by adverbs and adjectives.

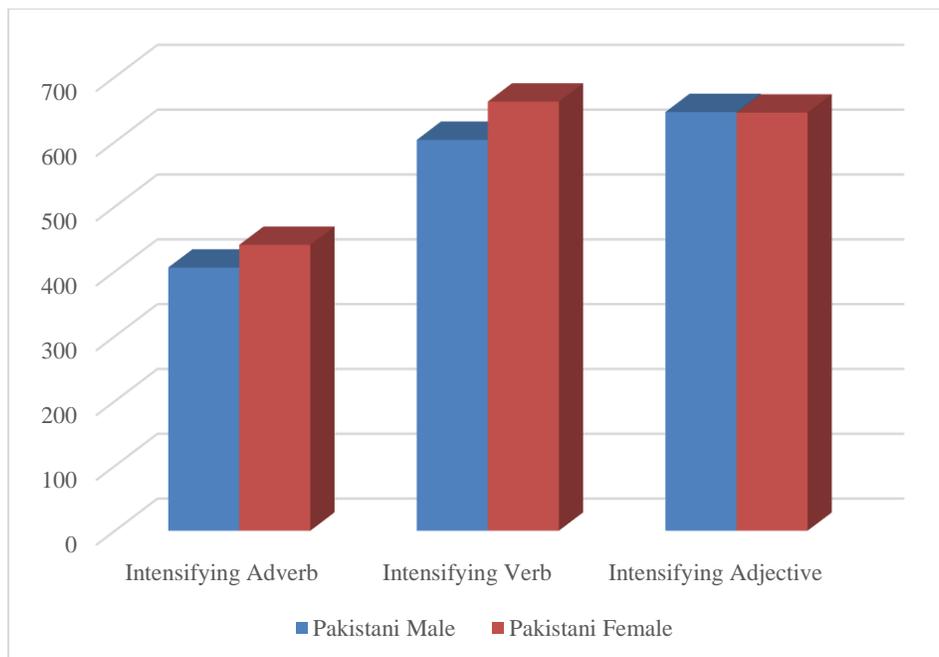
The findings show that Pakistani female writers use boosters more frequently than male writers, with a total frequency percentage of 27.96% compared to 26.51% for males. This suggests a modest but notable difference in how male and female writers construct their arguments and assert their positions in opinion columns.

Consistent with previous research such as that by Hyland (2005a and 2009), the use of boosters is indicative of authors' confidence in their arguments and their desire to engage the audience and emphasize shared knowledge. The higher use of boosters among female writers might reflect a strategic emphasis on creating a sense of community and agreement, which Hyland suggests enhances the persuasiveness of texts.

The slightly higher use of boosters by female columnists could also be interpreted within the broader context of gender and language. Previous studies have indicated that female writers often employ linguistic strategies that promote inclusivity and agreement (Mirzapour, 2016; Parasibu, 2017). The current findings support the notion that female writers may be more inclined towards using language that strengthens their rhetorical appeals, possibly to navigate the traditionally male-dominated field of opinion writing.

The predominance of intensifying verbs over adverbs and adjectives among both genders underscores their critical role in bolstering the persuasiveness of assertions. This aligns with the functional perspective on metadiscourse, where such devices are crucial for enhancing writer-reader interaction and bolstering the communicative impact of the text (Hyland, 2005).

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of boosters in Pakistani Male and Female columnists



In terms of the usage of boosting devices, both male and female writers employed them frequently in their articles. Quantitative analysis reveals that male writers used boosters 1,665 times, while female writers used them 1,748 times in their texts. The most commonly used boosting verbs by both genders were "know," "think," and "find," while the most frequently used boosting adverbs were "never" and "always." It is noteworthy that both male and female writers utilized boosters with nearly identical frequencies, indicating no significant differences between the two. This lack of significant variation is further supported by the results of the Chi Square test.

Table 4. Chi Square test analysis in the use of boosters by Pakistani male and female column writers

	<b>P</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Test statistic</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	0.05	2	1.6571	0.436
No. of valid cases	3403			
Not significant difference				

A Chi Square test of independence was conducted to assess the differences in the usage of boosters between male and female Pakistani writers. The test yielded a Chi Square value of 1.657, with one degree of freedom and a p-value of 0.436. Given these results, at the alpha level of 0.05, there is no statistically significant difference in booster usage between the two groups.

## 4.2 Discussion

Writers employ boosters to emphasize their propositions more emphatically, expressing certainty and confidence, as noted by Hyland (2000). These devices strengthen the claims of the writers and engage readers within the text. This study's findings reveal that there is no significant difference in booster usage between Pakistani male and female writers, with both groups using fewer boosters in their opinion pieces. The results suggest that Pakistani writers tend to use more hedges and fewer boosters, possibly to obscure their authorial identity and shirk social responsibility. The restrained use of boosting devices by both male and female Pakistani writers could be attributed to the social, cultural, political, and religious conditions in Pakistan, where freedom of expression is often limited. It is possible that the subdued voice of Pakistani women, striving to project confidence and certainty, is a factor, while male columnists' voices are influenced by political pressures.

In contrast to previous findings by Alsubhi (2017), which suggested that female writers prefer using more boosters than male writers, this study does not support the assertions of Crismore et al. (1993), Francis et al. (2001), Tse and Hyland (2008), and Chipeta (2021) that male authors use more boosters. The dominant use of certain markers by males could be related to journalism being a male-dominated field where men often hold more elevated positions.

Despite these gender nuances, the research indicates that Pakistani opinion columnists overall employed high frequencies of boosters. This aligns with Batool, Majeed, and Zahra (2019), who argue that writers use boosters to project confidence in their statements. The prevalent use of boosters among both genders suggests adherence to the conventions of the genre rather than individual expression of confidence. This study's quantitative analysis underscores that the genre of the text, rather than the gender of the writer, predominantly determines the use and distribution of boosting devices. Therefore, it can be concluded that the high ratio of boosters in opinion articles is a characteristic of the genre and community, rather than a direct reflection of the writers' personal conviction and confidence.

### Example 1

“Actually, it’s private companies invoking their own First Amendment right to bar things they don’t like. But even Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey called it “a failure.” That’s also true of Parler’s decapitation. Never mind that these actions seem partisan and hypocritical; the bans will continue until morale improves.” (Online Speech Wars Are Here to Stay by Andy Kesselr)

In the provided text, the use of intensifying adverbs, verbs, and adjectives plays a crucial role in reinforcing the author's argument. The adverb "Actually" is employed to correct or contradict a previous notion, highlighting a common misunderstanding regarding the role of private companies in censorship. This sets the stage for a more authoritative tone in the discussion. Similarly, the adverb "Never mind" is used to dismiss or downplay opposing viewpoints, which serves to underscore the

inevitability or acceptability of the actions being discussed. On the other hand, the verb "called" is utilized in a way that might not typically be recognized as a booster. However, in this context, it attributes a significant evaluation from Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, thus amplifying the importance of his statement about the situation being a "failure." This strategic use of language strengthens the narrative's impact. Moreover, the adjectives "partisan" and "hypocritical" intensify the criticism of the actions by labeling them as biased and deceitful, respectively. These linguistic choices effectively bolster the author's critique and engage the reader by providing a strong, clear stance on the issue.

In the context of metadiscourse, boosters are utilized to assert certainty, underscore clarity, and intensify the engagement with the reader. According to Hyland (2005a), boosters help "project an image of confidence and knowledgeability" and foster a shared understanding, which is crucial in persuasive texts. The use of "actually" and "never mind" aligns with this function by guiding the reader toward accepting the author's framing of the narrative.

Past studies, such as those by Tse and Hyland (2008) and Bhatia et al. (2012), have shown similar uses of boosters across different forms of discourse. These studies suggest that the strategic use of linguistic devices like boosters can significantly influence reader perception by constructing a confident authorial presence and minimizing ambiguity.

### Example 2

“Physicists have often said that nobody understands quantum mechanics, that must be true, because before we could know what it actually means, it has branched into several branches that have made the comprehension of the ideas within it even more cumbersome as if the more physicists try to find simpler solutions, the more they are entangled deeper in the paradoxical world of the quantum!”

The sentence exemplifies the use of boosters as metadiscourse features, effectively intensifying the discussion of quantum mechanics. The intensifying adverb "actually" is strategically employed to emphasize the complexity and elusive nature of understanding quantum mechanics, correcting or stressing the real implications beyond common misconceptions. The verb "have said" and "try to find" act subtly as boosters by highlighting the ongoing and active efforts of physicists, which lends authority and weight to the narrative about their endeavors and struggles. Moreover, the adjective "cumbersome" strongly qualifies the nature of the ideas within quantum mechanics, intensifying the description of their complexity and the challenging nature of their comprehension. This usage aligns with findings from previous studies, such as those by Hyland (2005), which illustrate how boosters are used to amplify the certainty and intensity of claims to persuade or engage readers more deeply. In this context, the boosters work together to construct a narrative that is not just informative but also emotionally engaging, highlighting the paradoxical and profound nature of the subject, which reflects the broader scientific discourse where similar strategies are employed to discuss complex and abstract concepts.

## 5. Conclusion

Interactional metadiscourse markers play a crucial role in facilitating engagement between writers and their readers. This study has demonstrated that there are no significant differences in the use of boosters between Pakistani male and female authors. Both groups exhibit similar frequencies of booster usage in their opinion columns. Therefore, it can be concluded that the genre of the text plays a more significant role than the gender of the writer in determining the use of boosting devices. This finding underscores the importance of genre conventions over gender distinctions in shaping linguistic practices within the context of Pakistani opinion discourse.

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