STANCE AND CULTURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND PERSIAN AUTHORIAL STANCE IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS RESEARCH ARTICLES

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This study tended to investigate the effect of culture, as depicted in language, on the use of stance in the applied linguistics research articles of two groups: native speakers of Persian, and native speakers of English. The two corpora comprising the discussion sections of forty research articles from reliable journals were compared for amounts and types of stance. In order to find the cultural differences between native Persian and English researchers, the subtypes of stance devices adapted from Hyland's (2005b) model were used. Results showed that the groups used stance markers differently; more specifically, they employed hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions differently. Furthermore, culture affects stance features as the meta-discourse devices employed by the researchers in writing the research article genre. The findings have implications for EFL learners and novice non-native writers to know the conventions and patterns as thinking devices for effective writing in academic communities of articles.

Keywords: Stance markers; Applied linguistics; Research articles; Discourse analysis.

Introduction

Academic writing was for some time considered to be an impersonal presentation of information. Nonetheless, this stance about academic writing is no longer supported. It is now rather maintained that academic discourse embodies interaction between writers and readers (Hyland, 2005a). Writing in this regard is considered as engagement between the writer and the reader (Hyland & Tse, 2004). It also represents the writer's voice or identity via employing stance markers as rhetorical devices.

A range of linguistic markers have been recognised as contributions to the writers' stance and the engagement of the reader. Academics do not simply produce texts representing a reality, but they also construct and negotiate social relations employing language. Writers select materials to represent themselves and self- and other-positioning (Jaffe, 2009). Therefore, writing involves interactions which are realised through stance and engagement devices. According to Bakhtin (as cited in Gee, 1999) the rhetorical resources, having a dialogic purpose, are used to incorporate the anticipation of voices and positions of potential readers.

We should also bear in mind that the academic written genre has attracted great attention from certain disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology of sciences, rhetoric and applied linguistics (Hyland, 2000). Interestingly, academic members shape discourse communities via articles, books, notes, emails, seminars, and conferences, among which research articles are of high importance (Hyland, 2009).

In the present study, the genre of research article was selected because it is widely used by scholars; it is assumed to be "the jewel in the crown of academic communication" (Hyland, 2009, p.78). Indeed, the research article as a kind of cultural capital is associated with power in the scholarly life. Moreover, it fosters interpersonality and intertextuality (Hyland, 2004). The other reason for the preeminence of the research article is the non-native writers' attitude and preference to join disciplinary communities through writing and publishing articles (Hyland, 2009). Moreover, several studies (e.g. Gosden, 1993; Hanania & Akhtar 1985, as cited in Hyland, 2008) have revealed that writer intrusion is a feature of introduction and discussion sections where arguments, decisions and claims are written. Importantly, according to Mauranen (1993), in the discussion section writers use the most rhetorical devices. Hence, this section was analysed in terms of stance markers. Due to the writers' specialisation in applied linguistics, stance markers used in this field are the focus of study in this paper.

The issue of the authorial voice or the expression of the writer's attitudes towards a proposition has not been the focus of most previous studies of research articles in discussion sections. Furthermore, the authorial stance is a problem that novice writers experience (Flowerdew, 2001). Therefore, the present study deals

with Persian and English applied linguistics research articles via employing Hyland's model (2005b) to compare the authors' stance in the two cultures.

Research hypotheses

Since culture is of paramount significance and influence in language use, the present study, then, aims to investigate the effects of culture on one aspect of language, writing academic papers. The following research hypotheses are tested:

H1. There is no significant difference between native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English in their use of stance in the discussion sections of their applied linguistics research articles written in Persian and English respectively.

H1.1. There is no significant difference between native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English in their use of hedges in the discussion sections of their applied linguistics research articles written in Persian and English respectively.

H1.2. There is no significant difference between native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English in their use of boosters in the discussion sections of their applied linguistics research articles written in Persian and English respectively.

H1.3. There is no significant difference between native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English in their use of attitude markers in the discussion sections of their applied linguistics research articles written in Persian and English respectively.

H1.4. There is no significant difference between native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English in their use of self-mentions in the discussion sections of their applied linguistics research articles written in Persian and English respectively.

Theoretical framework

The literature has witnessed a wide range of meanings for the concept of stance. For example, it is associated with the corpus linguistic study of the writers' stance in specific genres. The concept of stance is also viewed in critical discourse analysis to challenge asymmetric power in different cultural contexts (Jaffe, 2009); or it might be seen as an interactional discourse phenomenon (Hyland, 2005b).

Stance

According to Hyland (2005a), stance has been used by researchers with terminologies like "evaluation" (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), attitude (Halliday, 1994), "epistemic modality" (Hyland, 1998), "approval" (White, 2003), "stance" (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 1999), and "metadiscourse" (Crismore, 1990; Hyland & Tse, 2004).

Generally speaking, the stance is defined as "the writer's textual voice or community recognised personality" (Hyland, 2009, p.74). More obviously, the term stance refers to the strategies authors use to present themselves and express their ideas and commitments (Hyland 2005a). Researchers (e.g. Johnstone, 2008; Jaffe, 2009) have studied the way writers/speakers take up their positions in their discourse. Johnston (2008) has mentioned that "people without a voice are often people without a shaping role in the world" (p. 129). Stance expressions can convey various kinds of personal feelings and assessments, including attitudes that a speaker has about certain information, how certain they are, how they have access to the information, and what perspective they are taking (Biber, 2006).

Indeed, the issue of authorial voice deals with "the expression of the writer's judgment or attitudes towards a proposition or an object" (Flowerdew, 2001, p. 235). Thus, the role of power, according to Johnstone (2008), is manifested in writers' voice. Besides, discourse makes human interaction possible. Power is not necessarily the institutional power; rather it is more like an agency defined as people's flowing ability in order to shape the activity.

Stance devices

Interaction in academic writing involves taking a stance: positioning or taking a point of view concerning the case in point and those who maintain some ideas about it. Therefore, successful academic writing depends on the writer's projection of a shared professional context. Hyland's (2005b) well-established model of writer-reader interaction in academic discourse has revealed that knowledge is not constructed in vacuum, but a disciplinary voice is realised via participating in speech communities sharing a set of opinions and assumptions. The writers should be connected with these beliefs and positions which are socially determined to have effective communication in academic genre. In this regard, Hyland (2005b) has highlighted the role of stance and engagement in academic interaction. Indeed, writers anticipate their readers' interest, knowledge, and interpersonal expectations. Thus, the writer indexes linguistic forms having

the dialogic purpose of anticipated voices and positions of readers. He maintains that "effective academic writing depends on rhetorical decisions about interpersonal intrusion" (Hyland, 2005a, p.190). In this connection, he has suggested a model which attempts to show how writers employ and display community-sensitive linguistic resources to represent themselves as well as their positions and readers.

According to Hyland's model, the writers' voice or stance is conveyed and heard through using certain devices: hedges, boosters, attitudes, and self-mention. These devices, as Hyland (2005a) has argued, refer to the different ways "writers bring readers into the discourse to relate to them and anticipate their possible objections" (p. 151) and they are often employed by writers to create a valid representation of themselves.

As far as hedges are concerned, they are defined as devices which show "the writer's decision to recognise alternative voices and viewpoints and so withhold complete commitment to a proposition" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 52). Discourse markers such as possible, may, could, etc. which express the subjectivity of a position are among hedges. Therefore, writers can indicate their degree of confidence and certainty by using these devices. In the same vein, (Vande Kopple, 2002) has argued that hedges index the writer's doubt and introduce fuzziness within the propositional content itself. In other words, these meta-discourse devices allow the readers to dispute interpretation.

Boosters are rhetorical devices that writers employ to express their certainty (Hyland, 2004), such as obviously, it is clear that, definitely, in fact, etc. Writers use such rhetorical devices to narrow down the potentially diverse positions rather than to enlarge it. Put another way, through using boosters, the writer confronts alternatives with a single, confident voice" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 52).

As for attitude markers, they indicate the writer's attitude toward a proposition. In fact, they are devices that mark the author's affective and attitude toward propositions rather than epistemic information (Hyland, 2005a; Hyland, 2009). Examples of these devices are *I agree*, *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*, etc. Similarly, Crismore (1990) has indicated that these devices develop the relationship between the writer and the reader, and provide a situation for the reader to participate in the implicit dialogue between the writer and the reader.

Finally, self-mentions refer to the degree of author's presence in the text marked by the frequency of the first person pronouns and possessive adjectives such as *I*, *we*, *my*, *mine*, *our*, etc. (Hyland, 2004). In this regard, the writer's appearance or absence in a text might create an identity or a voice to present an argument (Hyland, 2002b).

Studies on stance devices

The connection between language and identity has become one of the main concerns of sociolinguist investigation (e.g. Ivanic, 1998 as cited in Hyland, 2011). In his article "community and individuality", Hyland (2010) has underlined identity construction via discourse choices of the authors. He has advocated that there is a close tie between writing and the construction of an author's identity. In the same vein, investigators have claimed that social and cultural trends are realised in discourse (e.g. van Dijk, 1977; Gee, 2005 as cited in Abdi et al., 2010). They have also added that each discourse community has its own norms and values. More importantly, studies on stance markers have revealed that stance is a cultural concept and hence language-specific (Jiajin & Manying, 2008; Pishghadam & Norouz Kermanshahi, 2012).

In this regard, a wealth of studies have manifested that communicative strategies of hedges and boosters are linguistically and culturally relevant in the academic written genre (e.g. Faghih & Rahimpour, 2009; Hosseini Fatemi & Mirshojaee, 2012; Hu & Cao, 2011; Keshavarz et al., 2007; Mirzapour & Mahand, 2012; Jalilifar, 2007). That is, researchers have suggested that considerable cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences are found in the use of hedges and boosters in academic discourse.

Methods

Corpus

The discussion sections of forty applied linguistics research articles were selected. The corpus comprised twenty English texts written by English native scholars and twenty Persian texts written by Iranian authors. The articles were published between 2005 and 2012 in *the TESOL Quarterly*, *Foreign Language Research Journal* (*Pazhuhesh-e Zabanhe-ye-Khareji*; University of Tehran), and *the Journal of Language and Translation Studies*; Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

Procedure

As mentioned before, the discussion sections of the selected articles were chosen for the study and were analysed for the types and amounts of stance used. The typology of (Hyland, 2005b) was used as the analysis model of stance markers, including hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. Approximately 30,000 words were counted (every 700-750 words for each article). The frequency of the linguistic stance

markers was carefully counted in order to compare the English and Persian texts in terms of rhetorical resources which realise the function of stance. To check the reliability of the realisation of the authorial stance, corpus analysis was conducted twice. The correlation was estimated to be 0.75. Then, Chi-square tests were utilised to compare the two corpora to find the probable difference between them in terms of authorial stance.

Results and discussion

In order to investigate the null hypotheses and to compare the frequency of stance markers used in research articles written in Persian and English respectively, Chi-square tests were carried out.

As mentioned before, in order to test the hypothesis, it was divided into four sub-parts, each dealing with one of the four stance devices. Tables 1 and 2 below display the detailed results.

Table 1. Summary of the subtypes of stance markers

Stance group cross tabulation

			Group	
			Persian	English
Stance	Self-mentions	Count	18	82
		% within status	18.0	82.0
		% within group	12.1	30.4
		% of Total	4.3	19.6
	Attitude markers	Count	54	46
		% within status	54.0	46.0
		% within group	36.2	17.0
		% of Total	12.9	11.0
	Hedges	Count	29	66
		% within status	30.5	69.5
		% within group	19.5	24.4
		% of Total	6.9	15.8
	Boosters	Count	48	76
		% within status	38.7	61.3
		% within group	32.2	28.1
		% of Total	11.5	18.1
Total		Count	149	270
		% within status	35.6	64.4
		% within group	100.0	100.0
		% of Total	35.6	64.4

Table 2. Results of Chi-square tests of native English and Iranian authors using stance markers

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	29.882[a]	3	0.000
Likelihood ratio	30.722	3	0.000
Linear-by-linear association	3.354	1	0.067
N of valid cases	419		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 33.78.

As Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, the value of observed Chi-square was significant at the 5% level with the degree of 3 (df = 3) indicating that there is a significant difference between these two groups in their use of stance markers. Therefore, the null hypothesis was safely rejected. Accordingly, the null hypotheses 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 were rejected. Indeed, statistically, the two groups of researchers employed subtypes of stance-taking differently. In other words, hedges, boosters, self-mention, and attitude markers used by the two groups of writers were significantly different.

The results also indicate that English authors used much more stance devices (64.4%) than Persian writers (35.6%). More interestingly, self-mention used in the English written texts was the most frequent stance marker (82.0%). All in all, the results indicate that the use of stance devices by the two groups was significantly different. The different usage of stance markers between these two groups is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 indicates that Persian writers have utilised attitude markers and boosters more than English researchers did. However, English writers employed more self-mention and hedges.
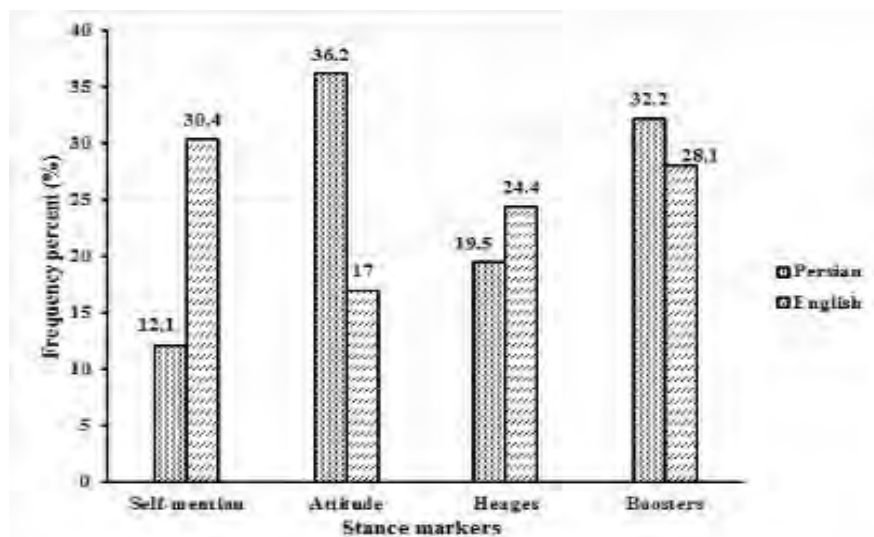
Figure 1. Use of stance markers by native English and Iranian authors

The results of this study lend some support to the idea of the universality of using meta-discourse, and particularly stance devices. In other words, all writers used all subtypes of stance markers. The results of the present study also imply that there is a relationship between the different ways the groups use hedges and self-mentions. Apparently, English writers rely more on their personal opinions than on citations, but instead, they hedge or use non-committed statements. On the other hand, Iranian writers seem to refer more to others in their writing rather than presenting their personal ideas. English authors' explicit appearance in a text creates an identity or a stance with which to present propositions. Hence, the writer's voice or footing in texts written in English is "author-saturated" (Hyland, 2009). In contrast, Persian writers preferred to employ the other people's view. Accordingly, creating such a stance or expressing oneself directly seems difficult for Iranian students learning English as a foreign language. This is presumably due to differences in their cultures. Thus, Iranian EFL students need literacies about not only syntactic and semantic rules but also disciplinary conventions called "Grammar two" by Gee (1999, p. 29). There is a need to guide them how to present themselves in academic writing. The results of the study also reveal that the two groups used attitude markers and boosters in different ways. Persian authors utilised attitude markers and boosters more frequently than English writers did. Persian writers seem to be more affective and emotional. According to Wang (2003), Asian cultures tend to be centred on social relationships; by contrast, American and Western cultures focus on independence and self.

This study is in line with Faghih and Rahimpour's findings (2009) regarding the different frequency of using meta-discourse markers of self-mentions, hedges, and boosters by native Persian and English authors. The fact is that the two groups used these stance markers differently. Comparing the results obtained by Faghih and Rahimpour (2009), attitude markers in this study were used by Persian researchers more than English writers. Additionally, it supports Pishghadam and Norouz Kermanshahi's findings (2012). Examining the stance features adapted from Jiajin and Manying (2008), they have revealed that Iranian and English writers utilised these devices differently. It might also provide evidence for the view that stance is a cross-cultural concept (Jiajin & Manying, 2008; Cooper, 1982). As far as hedges and boosters are concerned, this study is also in line with the findings of studies by Yagiz and Demir (2015), Hu and Cao (2011), Jalilifar (2007), Keshavarz et al. (2007), and Vassivela (2001). Similarly, it highlights the interdisciplinary perspective proposed by scholars such as Fairclough, van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak "who examine language as a form of cultural and social practice" (Woods, 2006, p. 7). More to the point, some scholars have reported no significant differences related to the use of discourse particles (Yazdani, Sharifi, & Elyassi, 2014; Hinkel, 1997).

The results of this study are applicable to EFL students who might be aware of the fact that academic writing is not impersonal and they should relinquish the myth of impersonality in their writing. Traditionally, they viewed academic writing as a face of literacy designed to cover the author and directly discuss facts (Hyland, 2002a). But, they have to know academic writing such as the research article is far more than simply communicating propositions. It can also convey the culture and attitude of the writers towards the propositions. In other words, authors can uncover their voice and identity in their writings. Thus, students need to know explicit conventions of academic writing; since, they are thinking devices that guide them towards "the very voice or identity (who's) of people who write" (Gee, 1999, p. 30). As Curran and

Stelluto (2005) have asserted "crucial for learners is finding opportunities to enter new speech communities. Instructors often find it difficult to offer the learners these opportunities because doing so requires that they move outside the comfort zone of traditional teaching" (p. 781). Consciousness-raising is a need to identify and to know the rhetorical features of English to gain the discourse community of scholars.

Conclusions

This study examined the use of stance markers in the discussion sections of academic writings of native Persian writers and native English writers. The purpose of the study was to discover whether the stance is a universal feature of academic discourse and whether culture can affect the use of stance markers.

The data analysis revealed that both groups used all stance features in their writing; however, subtypes were used differently. More specifically, attitude markers and boosters were used more by Persian writers than by English writers; hedges and self- mentions were used more by English writers than by Persian authors.

Although globalisation has increased inter-cultural and inter-lingual communication, Persian writers might face problems of socialising into an English culture in terms of using and learning rhetorical devices such as stance features. They may find it difficult to write the academic genre in English. Due to the differences between the two cultures, the contribution of this investigation to the education policy makers is to take the importance of teaching meta-discourse devices as stance markers into account and offers adequate space in the education. Similarly, EFL/ESL teachers need to be aware of the differences between the accepted rhetorical norms of English and those of their students' native languages. It is worth mentioning that more studies can be conducted in other genres and disciplines to compare the stance markers in the cultures.

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