

## Asserting Authorial Identity through Stance and Voice: Expert vs. Novice Scientific Writers

**Nurul Naimmah Hamdan**

Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia  
Corresponding Author: [naimmah@utm.my](mailto:naimmah@utm.my)

**Ummul K. Ahmad**

Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Received: 02/24/2023

Accepted: 06/23/2023

Published: 06/29/2023

### Abstract

Successful scientific writers make use of various lexico-grammatical features to assert their authorial voice in ways that their target audience finds most convincing. While many studies have focused on the use of stance markers in scientific writing, very few have reported on the voice construction of Malaysian scientific writers. To address this, this paper reports a three-way comparative study of stance-taking made by Malaysian scientific writers, their international counterparts as well as novice writers. Analyses were conducted on a 1.2-million-word corpus of 212 published research articles written by local and international writers and 14 unpublished papers by local writers. Using Hyland's (2005b) taxonomy of authorial stance markers, we found that both Malaysian experts and their international counterparts displayed similar patterns, albeit different approaches to stance-taking. In particular, Malaysian experts were found to prefer boosters the most when establishing their niche, while their international counterparts chose to use first-person plural pronouns and hedges for positioning their results. Novice writers, on the other hand, consistently showed a lack of strategies but tended to take an attitudinal stance in the discussion and conclusion segments. The differences found in novice and expert writers as well as between Malaysian writers and their international counterparts, point towards the complexity of stance-taking and stance-marking in research writing. This study shows that linguistics devices for marking attitudinal commitments towards propositions possibly mark individual aspects of voice and contribute to a broader conception of a writer's self-representation within a text.

*Keywords:* authorial identity, novice vs. experts, scientific writing, stance-taking, voice

**Cite as:** Hamdan, N. N., & Ahmad, U. K. (2023). Asserting Authorial Identity through Stance and Voice: Expert vs. Novice Scientific Writers. *Arab World English Journal*, 14 (2) 360-377. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no2.25>

## Introduction

Research Articles (henceforth RA) is a crucial written academic genre used by many scientific communities to disseminate and ratify new scientific knowledge (Koutsantoni, 2006). RAs are persuasive in nature and a representation “of the writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” (Thompson & Hunston, 2000,p.5). The rhetorical maneuvers of positioning have been reported to be challenging among emerging research writers (Tardy, 2005) and, for English as Additional Language (EAL) writers; the difficulties are compounded by many aspects of research writing at advanced levels are linguistically complex and often occluded to the uninitiated (Charles, 2006; Liu & Zhou, 2014). As writing practices vary across disciplinary areas, this advanced writing skill of negotiating for acceptance of knowledge claims can be best observed in, and better navigated by expert writers, as compared to novice writers. Experts established *learned authority* (Watt, 1982) in their writing based on their degrees of expertise (Yasuda, 2022), where they both demonstrated personal excellence on a branch of knowledge within their discipline and possessed the appropriate textual practices to position their knowledge claims (Paltridge, 2002; Koutsantoni, 2006).

Although extensive research on challenges faced by EAL writers in getting their work published in English has been documented (see for example, Curry & Lillis, 2004; Flowerdew, 2008; Martín, Rey-Rocha, Burgess, & Moreno, 2014), there recently has been a growing number of EAL writers who have successfully navigated these challenges and who have been accepted as full-fledged members of their discourse community. It was reported that the regional growth in South and Asian countries has risen ten-fold within the past decade with Malaysia being one of the major research producers (Adams, Pendlebury, Rogers, & Szomszor, 2019). Successful academic writing, among others, depends on the writers’ ability to appropriate rhetorical conventions and linguistic resource es deemed valuable to the discourse community they are writing for (Groom, 2000; Hyland & Tse, 2005). Skilled research writers use various linguistic devices to strategically negotiate and position their findings; they mark their authorial stance in accordance with their proposition while simultaneously claiming the authorial voice to be acknowledged by their peers, all by adhering to the discourse community standards. Asserting an authorial stance, however, has been proven difficult for emerging writers as it is linked to marking identity as an authoritative voice. Previous studies focusing on inexperienced writers have shown that they employed lesser stance-taking devices compared to more experienced writers (Aull & Lancaster, 2014); they tend to take an inappropriate stance (Hyland & Milton, 1997), and they exhibited difficulty connecting to their discourse community (Beaufort & Williams, 2005). As Hyland (2004) showed, many novice writers simply refrained from asserting authority.

Meanwhile, many higher education institutions around the world are now making international publications in English as a graduating requirement for postgraduate students (Lillis & Curry, 2010; Kwan, 2013) and career advancement requirements of academics. It is then unsurprising that novice writers (and early career academics), especially those who come from non-English speaking backgrounds and may be less experienced with academic discourse practices struggle as they attempt to have their original contributions accepted for publication (Flowerdew, 2015). Ivanič (1998) argued that novice writers often struggle to learn the beliefs and practices of the discourse community that they seek to gain membership in. Despite the many studies conducted on problems faced by EAL writers, there is much about discursal practices of EAL experts and the challenges faced by EAL novice writers in the academy that remain unknown.

This paper aims to highlight the authorial identity construction of expert and novice scientific writers through stance-taking in research article writing. This could provide valuable insights into individual and shared stance practices of Malaysian scientific writers within their discourse community. The research objective set for this study is to compare the strategies of stance-taking and stance-making of Malaysian expert writers with that of their international counterparts as well as to look into similar practices of novice academic writers from the same disciplines using corpus analysis. To satisfy the research objective, this paper will address the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in stance and voice devices in RA segments among three groups of scientific writers (Malaysian experts, international experts, and Malaysian novice writers) in this study?
2. What are the preferred stance-taking strategies used by three groups of scientific writers (Malaysian experts, international experts, and Malaysian novice writers) when asserting their voice and constructing their authorial identity?

To address these questions, this paper will first outline prominent works in the area of authorial identity which covers both stance and voice. It is then followed by the description of the corpus used in this study. Next, the findings are presented and discussed in relation to patterns of preferences that make up the authorial identity of each group of scientific writers in this study. This paper will be concluded with a summary of the findings as well as the implications drawn from the research.

## Literature Review

### *Stance and Voice Markers as Indicators of Authorial Identity*

There have been many attempts to define the concept of authorial identity, stance, and voice over the past five decades. Perhaps, the best description of this research's theoretical approach to identity and voice views authorial voice as "the identity of the author reflected in the written discourse" (Mhili, 2023, p. 10) that is displayed through shared use of interactional resources or stance markers (Hyland, 2005a, 2005b) of a particular discourse community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ding, 2008) while also taking into account 'the interplay of cultural and disciplinary factors' (Lores-Sanz, 2011). Indeed, numerous studies have examined how stance is marked through different linguistic means (e.g., Charles, 2006), across disciplines and genres (e.g., Hyland & Guinda, 2012), and between student and expert writers (e.g., Hyland & Tse, 2005). Despite these studies, stance remains an elusive concept—stance generally concerns the way writers express their personal attitudes and assessments (Biber, 2006) and their authoritativeness through what Hyland (2005b) referred to as "writer-oriented features of interaction" (p.178). In line with Biber (2006) and Hyland (2005b), in this study, we see stance as the writer's expression of epistemic assessment, personal attitudes, and self-presence, using hedges and boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions.

Hedges indicate writers' lack of commitment to the certainty of their proposition, while boosters allow writers to express their confidence about the validity of a proposition (Holmes, 1988; Hyland, 2004; Peacock, 2006; Hu & Cao, 2015). Hedges and boosters are crucial in advanced academic discourse as they are seen as resourceful rhetorical devices in scientific discourse to gain discourse community acceptance of knowledge claims and to build interpersonal solidarity with readers (Hyland, 1999; Lancaster, 2016). However, between hedges and boosters,

hedges are found to be the more dominant stance markers in scientific writing (Salager-Meyer, 1994; Hyland, 1999; 2005b) particularly in RA results and discussion sections (Salager-Meyer, 1994) and they mainly function as indicative markers of writers' research findings allowing room for disagreement. Hyland (1999) also found hedges (such as *indicate and suggest*) to be used three times more often compared to boosters (such as *show and find*) as discourse-oriented verbs in his science and engineering sub-corpora.

Attitudinal markers, which express writers' attitudes towards propositional content (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan, 1999; Hyland, 1999), and self-mentions, which project writers' explicit presence (Hyland, 1999) are not highly expected in the scientific discourse which may favor impersonal constructions (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2004; McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012). However, Harwood (2005) has proven that scientific writers used the personal pronoun *we* with an active verb (such as in *we found that...*) rhetorically to indicate their unique procedural choice, describe their work, or as a result of the discursual function of focus. The use of impersonal constructions when asserting a proposition has also been attributed to a sense of collectivism (Kim & Lim, 2013; Scollon, 1994). Hedges, boosters, and attitudinal markers may sometimes refer to shared implicit assumptions based on tacit knowledge between readers and writers (He, 1993; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Soler, 2002), and they are most explicitly signaled by lexical verbs (e.g., *suggest, show*), modal verbs (e.g., *could*), adjectives (e.g., *likely, important*), adverbs (e.g., *surprisingly*), and nouns (e.g., *possibility, advantage*).

Although these four stance markers may help in revealing the ways writers project their authorial stance as to the proposition and readers, it has been generally acknowledged that authors' self-representations are also constrained by social and disciplinary cultures (see Hyland, 1999, 2004; Charles, 2006; Lorès-Sanz, 2011, Hu & Cao, 2015). Yasuda (2022) also found that although writers' evaluatives and attitudinal markers are considered strong markers by experienced Japanese scholars, these experts actually preferred a more objective and neutral authorial stance. Her findings on novice writers also reverberated results from previous studies (Davis, 2013; Crosthwaite, Cheung & Jiang, 2017), where they took a stronger authorial stance, particularly using attitudinal markers.

Comparative studies on stance markers of EAL writers have proven them to be challenging devices to learn and use appropriately. Studies on L1 and Spanish thesis writers by Lee and Casal (2014) have reported that hedges were a dominant feature among L1 thesis writers, while the Spanish writers relied on boosters to express their stance. The variation of hedges and boosters as the main stance markers have indeed been reported to be a discursive characteristic of EAL academic writers from different cultural backgrounds (for example, Bulgarian, Vassileva, 2001); French and Norwegian (Vold, 2006); Spanish (Mur-Dueñas, 2011); Chinese (Hu & Cao, 2011). Hinkel (1997) observed that Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian student writers used far more indirect strategies in their personal opinions than their L1 peers. The results from these comparative studies on stance markers are far from consistent which suggest that stance-taking may not only represent the writer's own individual position and language proficiency but also the epistemological beliefs and values of a community (Crosthwaite, Cheung, & Jiang, 2017; Yasuda, 2022). The present paper, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by conducting a corpus-driven analysis to discover the stance-taking practices of Malaysian expert and novice scientific writers and how they compare to international scientific experts.

## Methods

### *The Corpus*

The data for this study derives from a specialized corpus of approximately 1.2 million words consisting of two equal sub-corpora of 212 research articles in the field of engineering and technology written by expert Malaysian scientific writers and their international counterparts who published in the same journal issue as well as a smaller sub-corpus of 14 unpublished research articles written by Malaysian novice writers working in the same field of the expert writers. All chosen RAs were published in highly ranked indexed journals in the fields of engineering and technology (e.g., chemical engineering, electrical engineering, biomedical engineering, molecular science/engineering, and civil engineering).

An examination of the selected expert writers' list of publications was conducted before including their RA in our corpus. Two criteria were used to determine the international expert writers' status: (i) the institutional affiliations of the writers must be in English-speaking countries when the selected paper was published, and (ii) the articles were written in fluent English with no obvious language errors.

The expert writers' corpus was gathered by first identifying the 12 most cited papers published by Malaysian experts from 2010 to 2018, along with 12 papers that were published by their international colleagues in the same journal issue, giving us a total of 226 RAs. Meanwhile, the novice writer corpus is a completion of 14 yet-to-be-published papers of Malaysian doctoral students or research workers under the apprenticeship of our chosen expert writers. Both novice and expert writers are active members of several scientific laboratories situated in a major research university in Malaysia. Table one summarizes of the total number of words in this study's corpus.

Table 1. *Number of words in each sub-corpora*

<i>Malaysian experts</i>	<i>International experts</i>	<i>Novice writers (unpublished)</i>	<i>Total no. of words</i>
577836	583117	56038	1216991

### *Analytical Framework*

To study the stance features representing scientific writers' authorial voice in their RA, this study adopted a functional framework of Hyland's (2005b) interactional stance (see Appendix A) as the main analytical framework. For the unit of analysis used in this study, reporting clauses that are attributed to the writers' self or work (*c.f.* Charles, 2006; Thompson, 2001) were used. Reporting clauses that comment on the writer's own research offer an important opportunity for writers to position themselves within their discourse community by presenting their research in a way that will make it most likely to be accepted (Charles, 2006).

A three-way comparison of stance devices for each category used by each group of writers was conducted via generating wordlists using Wordsmith 7.0 (Scott, 2016) for each sub-corpora, and the items were then coded for the relevant stance category. Identified stance devices were then examined for the accuracy of the stance function using the concordance feature in Wordsmith 7.0 (Scott, 2016).

## Results

The overall density of stance devices found in each sub-corpora is presented in Figure one, and the distribution of stance devices used by each group of writers across all RA sections can be seen in Figure Two.

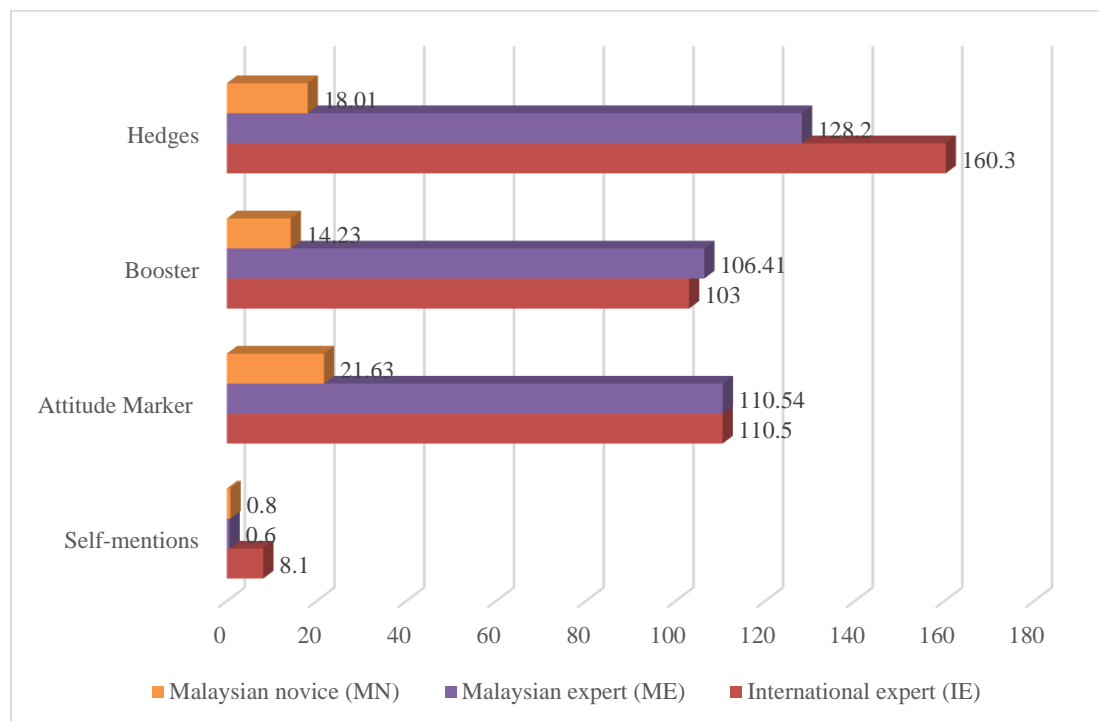


Figure 1. Overall density (per 10000 words) of stance markers found in each sub-corpora

As can be seen, the practices of expert writers are clearly different from those of novice writers. Malaysian and international expert writers show almost similar preferences in stance marking, with hedges being the most preferred stance marker and self-mention being the least. Similar to reports on RAs across disciplines, including engineering (see Hyland, 1999; Koutsantoni, 2006), hedges are the most frequently used stance markers by our writers. Note the pattern of stance markers in Malaysian novice sub-corpus. There is noticeably low use of all features compared to expert writers, even though they exhibited a slight preference for using attitude markers. Earlier studies on novice writers, however, have reported preferences for hedges (Koutsantoni, 2006) and boosters (Lee & Casal, 2014). Another noticeable difference between Malaysian writers and international writers is the use of self-mentions—international writers can be seen to use self-mentions eight times more often than Malaysian writers. However, similar reports of lower use of self-mentions among EAL writers have attributed this phenomenon to a culture of collectivism (Kim & Lim, 2013; Scollon, 1994); there is also the argument of EAL writers for not being fully exposed to the individual variations and stylistic idiosyncrasies of the English language and how they serve as a rhetorical strategy in writing (Zhao, 2019).

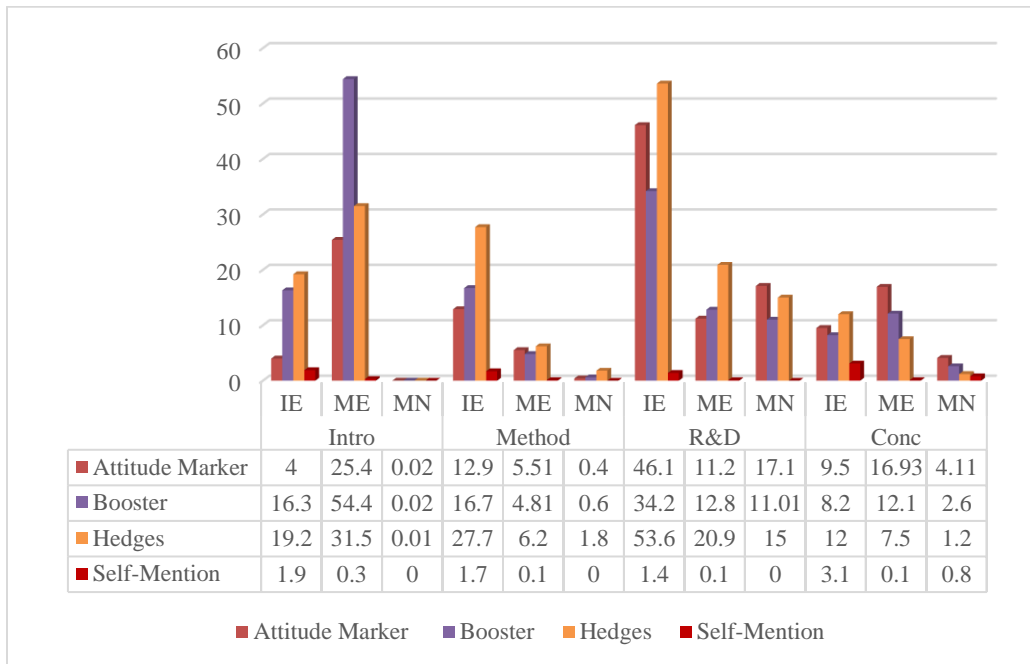


Figure 2. Density (per 10000 words) of stance markers use found across RA segments

Figure two above details the employment of stance markers by each group of writers across all RA segments. Here, a more interesting observation can be seen in each group of writers’ preferences in each RA segment. For example, in the RA introduction segment, Malaysian expert writers can be seen to employ stance markers three times more often than other groups. In particular, the Malaysian experts' use of boosting devices was found to have the highest density, with 54.4 times occurring every 10000 words, followed by hedges and attitude markers. In contrast, international expert writers interacted more in their RA results and discussion segment. As shown in Figure two, international experts used hedges 53.6 times in every 10000 words, attitude markers 46.1 times, and boosters 34.2 times, which overall counts far more significantly frequent than other groups of writers. Another noticeable difference in the use of stance markers between Malaysian experts and their international counterparts can be seen in the RA methodology segment. Here, international experts can be seen to employ four times more hedges and boosters and more than twice the number of attitude markers.

Figure two also reveals the actual distribution of stance markers used by Malaysian novice writers across RA segments. As established earlier, Malaysian novices employed an extremely low number of stance markers in general, particularly in the introduction segment. Interestingly, however, the novice writers showed similar employment patterns with their mentors, albeit in lower numbers in RA methodology and conclusion segments. A closer look into the Malaysian novice sub-corpora revealed that the length of their RA introductions was fairly brief compared to expert writers’ and they focused more on describing the materials used in their research. Although Malaysian novice writers did show almost the same average overall density as Malaysian experts in RA results and discussion (MN=43.11 vs. ME=45 per 10000 words), the novices showed a slight preference for attitude markers when justifying their findings. In the following segments, we detail the employment of each resource as found in our corpus.

**Hedges**

Myers (1989) points out that features such as hedging, which are considered conventional in scientific discourse, can be reinterpreted as negative politeness devices when they reflect the appropriate attitude for offering a claim to the discourse community. Hedging devices, when used to mark claims or other statements in academic writing normally place the proposition as being “provisional, pending acceptance” by the discourse community members and by journal readers in general (Myers, 1989, p.12). Figure three below shows the lexical categories of hedges employed by writers in our corpus across all RA segments.

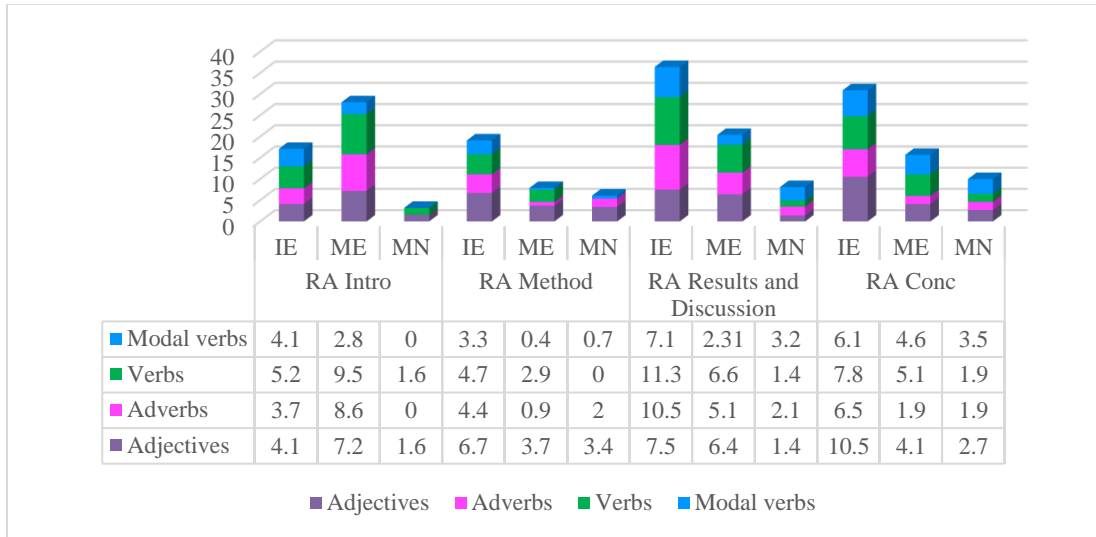


Figure 3. Density (per 10000 words) of lexical categories of hedges found across RA sections. As can be seen in Figure three, hedges are employed differently by both groups of expert writers. On the one hand, international experts employed modal verbs (e.g., *can, would*) as the main hedging device followed by adverbs (e.g., *any*), adjectives (e.g., *possible*), and lexical verbs (e.g., *indicate, appear*). Malaysian experts, on the other, can be seen to employ adverbs the most (e.g., *generally, several*) and followed by lexical verbs (e.g., *indicate, suggest*), modal verbs (e.g., *can, could*), and adjectives (e.g., *potential, possible*).

Both expert writers in this study used hedges the most when positioning their research claims in RA results and discussion (refer also to Figure one) with international experts showing a higher frequency. They used hedges mostly to garner readers’ acceptance of their claims, particularly when advancing propositions of greater precision (see example one); hedges are also used to mitigate the strength of their proposition and avert possible negative consequences (as in example two). Expert writers were also observed to hedge while making a personal opinion, explicitly referring to themselves as the source of the claim, showing their respect, and asking for readers’ ratification of their claims (see example three). This last maneuver, however, was found only in the international experts’ sub-corpora.

- (1) The *most likely* explanation for the discrepancy is the presence of convection in the liquid tin in the experiments in this work. [ITNL2013\_NHABS\_RND]
- (2) Scenario three *can be considered* the optimal scenario, with the *acceptable* performance of energy potential and GHG emission and the best economically beneficial result. [MAL2013\_NHT\_RND]



- (3) We believe UVG-CC treatment is *likely* more effective in a region such as Southern Florida, with high cooling latent loads and *possibly* more robust and persistent biofilms than in a region such as Alaska with *little to no* cooling days annually [17]. [ITNL2016\_HEA\_RND]

A closer examination into the Malaysian novice sub-corpora, on the other hand, revealed that hedges were used rather restrictively. Our novice writers generally used two types of strategic hedges in their propositions: to show agreement with other research (example four) and to show the limitation of the study (example five).

- (4) *This result was similar to Deitzel et al. [2001]* that stated there is a non-linear relationship between polymer concentration and fiber diameter. [NOV4\_NHPRD\_RND]
- (5) *In this work, the mixture of 70% nmp and 30% distilled water is the weakest coagulant* compared to distilled water and ethanol (Wang & Lai, 2012). [NOV9\_NHPRD\_RND]

Compared to the expert writers, our novice writers expressed tentativeness by seeking support from external sources while displaying familiarity in the research area at the same time. Given that English is a remarkably hedging culture (Hyland, 1999), it is not surprising then that EAL novice writers find academic English to be perplexing as they struggle to acquire its written conventions, especially when trying to get their work published (Casanave & Vandrick, 2003).

### Boosters

While hedges indicate uncertainty, boosters, in contrast, are referred to as emphatics or certainty markers, demonstrating writers' confidence in a claim and effectively marking involvement and solidarity at the same time. The activity verb *show* was the most frequently occurring booster found in our corpus (*c.f.* Peacock, 2006; McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012; Akinci, 2016)

Example six typifies the common occurrences in Malaysian expert writers' sub-corpora; the activity verb *showed* is used as 'evidential or implicit truth' as means of minimizing the writers' personal involvement, appearing more objective, and attributing authority to their work.

- (6) The results presented in this figure also *showed* that the combination of active learning with self-training helped to obtain better performance. [MAL2015\_NHPRD\_RND]

Interestingly, Malaysian expert writers can be seen to deploy boosting devices the highest in RA introduction (54.4 per 10000 words) and followed by an RA conclusion (12.1 per 10000 words) compared to the other groups of writers (see Figure two). In the Malaysian expert sub-corpora, writers were found to subsume their authority in their work by using noun phrases. Example (7) demonstrates the use of a noun phrase referring to the research product with the use of direct and elaborate boosters (italicized) in the forms of adjectives/adjective phrases, and adverbs.

- (7) *These appropriate image processing methods can provide a reliable, simple, robust, very low cost and user-friendly* approach for exploration geologists to identify hydrothermal alteration mineral assemblages. [MAL2012\_NHPRD\_CONC]

In example eight, Malaysian experts were found to use text references (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), this + *work* accompanied by the adjectives *imperative* to construct an authoritative presence with a confident and strong voice of their propositions (*c.f.* He, 1993).

- (8) *This work is imperative* to answer the general concern about the potential health effects induced by this novel nanocomposite membrane. [MAL2017\_NHTXT\_INT]

Malaysian experts can also generally be seen to incorporate boosters to express certainty and authority towards their propositions. A particular boosting feature that is unique to the Malaysian expert sub-corpora can be seen in example eight where the adjectives are stacked as this increases the persuasive force of their propositions.

### *Attitude Markers*

Attitude markers are classified as stance markers that encapsulate writers' feelings, attitudes, and value judgments (Hyland, 2005a; Abdollahzadeh, 2011). Figure two also shows international experts used double the number of attitude markers in RA results and discussion compared to Malaysian experts. Evaluative adjectives appear to be the most frequently occurring attitude marker in this study. Adjectives that show writers' attitudes such as *improved* in example (12) was used to make propositions more subjective as they add judgments to the modified noun (see Soler, 2002).

(12) These results confirmed that nickel provides more stability to TIO<sub>2</sub> than copper metal and *improved* productivity. [MAL2015\_NHPRD\_RND]

Attitude markers can also be used to indicate epistemic stance to reveal writers' relationship with the information detailed in the proposition (Biber et al., 1999). Here, in examples (13) and (14) taken from expert writers' sub-corpora, attitudinal stance markers were used to show discursal functions of highlighting research novelty (13) and indicating the precision of procedures and findings (14), which are all part of writers' interactional strategy of achieving authorial voice in writing.

(13) The strategy *uniquely* considers the flow of the harmonics in terms of the HS that discerns nodal similarity based on the harmonic magnitudes and harmonic phases. [ITNL2012\_NHPRD\_CONC]

(14) This preliminary result is *convincing* and a more *thorough* evaluation (involving more QAP instances) will be conducted in the future to further validate the performance of GenANT. [MAL2010\_NHA\_RND]

In RA conclusion, both Malaysian expert and novice writers, in particular, were seen to employ attitude markers as their stance markers, with Malaysian experts showing a higher preference (16.93 times per 10000 words). A closer examination of the corpus revealed a preferred use of adjectives and adverbs as explicit attitude markers, while attitude verbs were rarely found in the corpus (*c.f.* Koutsantoni, 2006; Mur-Duenas, 2016).

(15) This study has shown that foam-filled conical tubes appear to be *advantageous* in impact applications where an oblique impact load is expected. [MAL2010\_NHT\_CONC]

(16) In this study, asymmetric bauxite hollow fiber membrane (BHF<sub>M</sub>) was *successfully* developed through phase inversion using raw bauxite powders as starting material. [NOV2\_NHPRD\_CONC]

The examples above demonstrate the use of adjectives and adverbs to express a more effective, personal stance through a positive evaluation of the claim, particularly in the conclusion segment of the RA.

As mentioned earlier, novice writers in this study can be seen to employ a more attitudinal stance in their when discussing their results and concluding their papers. However, some of the use of attitude markers by Malaysian novice could appear inappropriately strong (example 17) or linguistically awkward (example 18).

- (17) Meanwhile, this study produced grha/zif-8 nanocomposites with betssa of 1632.1 m<sup>2</sup>/which has *definitely proven* that our nanocomposites have an even more enhanced surface area. [NOV6F\_NHPRD\_RND]
- (18) While bioconversion offers faster production and a *cheaper* way of hydrogen, glycerol reforming also offers *a great length* of technology, especially because the application itself has been long used and established. [NOV3\_NHPR\_CONC]

Clearly, communicating new knowledge in research writing that meets the requirements of the disciplinary discourse and its readership is a complex task for all novice writers, especially for those whose English is not their first language (Swales, 1990; Curry & Lillis, 2004). Often the case is that novice writer who may be inexperienced are unaware of the impression conveyed in their writing (de Magalhães, Cotterall & Mideros, 2018).

### **Self-Mentions**

In this study, self-mentions that represent authorial voice refer to the use of the first-person pronoun, particularly the pronoun *we*. International expert writers in this study used the first-person pronoun *we* eight times more often than Malaysian experts and novice writers, and in RA conclusion *we* occurred 3.1 times in every 10000 words. In contrast, our Malaysian writers hardly employed first-person pronouns in their RA (refer to Figure two).

The use of the first-person pronoun *we* may be partly due to that all papers in our corpus are multi-authored, as commonly practiced in the hard sciences. However, the use of *we* was also observed to bring about an immediate claim for authority to writers as they defend their work (Pennycook, 1994). Perhaps making writers' role visible suggest the desire to identify themselves with a particular argument while seeking the reputation of being "novelty producers" (Whitley, 2000, p. 11). This move can be predominantly observed in the international experts' sub-corpora as typified in example (19).

- (19) *We* have proposed a novel science-based, goal-driven, equitable, comparable, and actionable framework for measuring and reporting emissions that enables the cascading of GHGE targets. [ITNL2018\_HEA\_CONC]

A common reporting structure found in our corpus is essentially *we* + lexical verb (e.g., *we* + *have proposed*), *we* + mental verbs (e.g., *we* + *hope*), and activity verb (e.g., *we* + *formulate*, *study*, *utilized*) (see Biber et.al., 1999).

In general, writers were observed to use the first-person pronoun *we* to state results and claims, which is the most assertive strategy and may also be face-threatening. This assertive claim staking can be found mostly in expert writers' sub-corpora.

Based on the discerned discourse functions, all three groups of scientific writers chose to appear in their text when explaining their research procedures. However, the international experts can be seen to show a more dynamic use of self-mentions in both the RA introduction and conclusion segments. The minimal use of self-mentions by Malaysian writers, both in novice and expert writings alike, can possibly be attributed to a preconceived notion that academic writing, particularly in the hard disciplines, should be distant and impersonal (Tang & John, 1999) which may be misguided as not all discourse communities employ the same conventions nor do they have similar reader expectations (Hyland, 2004). Among the preconceived notions held by novice writers found by Chang and Swales (1999) was that the use of self-mentions was thought to be a trait reserved exclusively for senior scholars.

The different distribution of self-mentions between the expert writers in this study may indicate a varied interpretation of authorial presence. Our Malaysian experts write from a peripheral discourse community, and their geo-location may perhaps be a complicating factor in shaping their communicative practices in a significant way and in influencing their preferences for structuring information, including how they establish relationships with their readers, and the extent of asserting author visibility in their writing (see Hyland, 2004).

## Discussion

Two research questions were posed at the beginning of this paper. The first question has been satisfied with a detailed description of the corpus findings in the previous section. In this section of the paper, we will attempt to address the second and perhaps the more perplexing question posed in this research. To recap, the corpus findings demonstrate the use of stance markers as representative of writers' authorial voice present in Malaysian and international expert writers as well as Malaysian novice writers. The overall findings seem to reveal a similarity in the use of stance markers by Malaysian and international expert writers indicating their legitimate membership in their discourse community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Malaysian novice writers, on the other hand, showed lesser variation and uneven distribution in the use of stance markers compared to their more experienced seniors. Their inclination for a more attitudinal stance resonates with what has been reported in the literature (Davis, 2013; Crosthwaite, Cheung & Jiang, 2017; Yasuda, 2022) and perhaps reflects a common problem among EAL novice writers in appropriating suitable linguistic resources of the argument genre (Davis, 2013). Apart from possible linguistic deficiencies, novice EAL writers writing from the periphery, such as the ones in our novice sub-corpora, may be underprepared to meet the expected writing requirements of international publication.

While Malaysian scholars have made great strides in the international publication scene, our study has shown their unique strategic preference for asserting authorial identity. Malaysian experts showed a greater propensity for using boosters as means of projecting a strong commitment toward their propositions which also minimizes their role as authors. Boosters were also used to display shared their expert disciplinary knowledge while engaging with the readers in the RA introduction segment. In contrast, international experts generally preferred hedges when persuading their readers of the validity of their claims in results and discussion segments of their RAs and used the first-person personal pronoun *we* as a solidarity marker with their audience, a strategy rarely found in the Malaysian expert sub-corpora. The differences in rhetorical preferences within the same discourse community indicate both groups of expert writers are positioning themselves in different ways. Future research would be more revealing if the actual reasons behind the decision made by the writers are included.

Authorial identity is not a fixed construct in writing (Flowerdew & Wang, 2015). Successful academic writers learn to respond to the expectation of their readership in different ways while remaining true to their disciplinary convention. Previously, most established linguistic frameworks could only account for limited aspects of the individuality of voice (see Mhili, 2023), and they end up limiting writers' repertoire; however, through a social constructivist perspective, authorial voice is seen to be related to self-representation and authorial presence, and their realization must take into account the social milieu for and out of which the text is produced (Tardy, 2012). Our Malaysian authors, both expert and novice writers, write from a peripheral discourse community and clearly attempted to position themselves as competent research workers

of the discipline. This is consistent with findings on L2 writers from previous studies (Hinkel, 1997; Lee & Casal, 2014). While the established Malaysian experts have a clear presence as authors following what they perceived to be the convention of the discipline, their ‘discoursal self’ appeared somewhat distant and indirect compared to their international counterparts who interacted more (c.f. Ivanič, 1998). The international expert writers consistently showed clear authorial presence throughout the RAs and demonstrated visible strategic discursive maneuvers while persuading their readers to accept their research claims. This evidence of stance makers by both groups of expert writers when staking their claims correlates to Yasuda’s (2022) findings where authorial voice is not only a discipline-specific discourse (Lave & Wenger, 1991) but also a highly contextual, and diverse while the same time, complex meaning-making process.

### Conclusion

This study was set to demonstrate the authorial voice construction of Malaysian scientific writers and compare them to that of their international colleagues in research article writing. The findings revealed overall similarities between Malaysian and international expert writers, but at the same time, each group of experts employed preference for different rhetorical approaches in presenting their propositions across different sections of the RA. Malaysian novice writers, on the other hand, were found struggling with positioning their work strategically, as seen with the consistently low use of stance markers. We believe the difficulties shown by our novice writers are not unique to our institution—similar circumstances could perhaps be drawn from novice research writers from other institutions across the region, if not the world. Even though our novice writers work closely with the experts in their scientific endeavors, the transfer of disciplinary writing practices is not guaranteed nor it is automatic. As Ding (2008) pointed out, imitating the works of experts in the field is only part of a novice writer’s apprenticeship experience; emerging writers still need to be made aware of the complex multi-layered linguistic maneuvers in advanced academic writing. Their difficulties thus, raise a great concern for linguistic support to be made available for emerging EAL research writers. There remain many linguistically sophisticated aspects of advanced research writing which are less apparent to the untrained eyes that could only be extracted from the textual practices of the experts, and subsequently be taught explicitly to help emerging writers become successful authors. Our current paper has only shown analyses of textual practices from outsiders’ perspectives; future studies will be able to offer more layered and richer emic perspectives if the selected writers’ insights are included.

### About the Authors:

**Nurul Naimmah Hamdan** is an English language instructor in Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Her research interests include academic/scientific discourse, corpus-based analyses and computer assisted language learning. This research paper is a partial requirement for obtaining a PhD from the same research university. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5816-0347>

**Dr. Ummul Khair Ahmad** is an Associate Professor at Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Her main research areas are second language writers, academic/scientific discourse and corpus-based analyses. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9362-0975>

## References

- Abdollahzadeh, E. (2011). Poring over the findings: Interpersonal authorial engagement in applied linguistics papers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(1), 288–297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.07.019>
- Adams, J., Pendlebury, D., Rogers, G., & Szomszor, M. (2019). *Global Research Report – South and East Asia*. Institute of Scientific Information.
- Akinci, S. (2016). *A cross-disciplinary study of stance markers in research articles written by students and experts*, (Unpublished Graduate Master's thesis). Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa
- Aull, L. L., & Lancaster, Z. (2014). Linguistic markers of stance in early and advanced academic writing: A corpus-based comparison. *Written Communication*, 31(2), 151-183.
- Beaufort, A., & Williams, J. A. (2005). Writing history: Informed or not by genre theory? In A. Herrington, & C. Moran, (Eds.), *Genre across the curriculum* (pp. 44-64), Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Biber, D. (2006). Stance in spoken and written university registers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5, 97-116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2006.05.001>
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Harlow. UK: Pearson Education.
- Casanave, C. P., & Vandrick, S. (2003). Introduction: Issues in writing for publication. In C. P. Casanave & S. Vandrick (eds.), *Writing for scholarly publication* (pp. 19-34). New York: Routledge.
- Chang, Y.-Y., & Swales, J. (1999). Informal elements in English academic writing: Threats or opportunities for advanced non-native speakers? In C. N. Candlin, & K. Hyland, (eds.), *Writing: Texts, processes, and practices* (pp. 145-167). London: Longman.
- Charles, M. (2006). The construction of stance in reporting clauses: A cross-disciplinary study of theses. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(3), 492–518. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml021>
- Crosthwaite, P., Cheung, L., & Jiang, F. (Kevin). (2017). Writing with attitude: Stance expression in learner and professional dentistry research reports. *English for Specific Purposes*, 46, 107–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2017.02.001>
- Curry, M. J., & Lillis, T. M. (2004). Multilingual scholars and the imperative to publish in English: Negotiating interests, demands, and rewards. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 663. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588284>
- Davis, M. (2013). The development of source use by international postgraduate students. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 12(2), 125–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2012.11.008>
- de Magalhães, M. B., Cotterall, S., & Mideros, D. (2019). Identity, voice, and agency in two EAL doctoral writing contexts. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 43, 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2018.05.001>
- Ding, H. (2008). The use of cognitive and social apprenticeship to teach a disciplinary genre: Initiation of graduate students into NIH grant writing. *Written Communication*, 25(1), 3–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088307308660>
- Flowerdew, J. (2008). Scholarly writers, who use English as an Additional Language: What can Goffman's "Stigma" tell us? *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 7(2), 77–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2008.03.002>

- Flowerdew, J. (2015). Some thoughts on English for research publication purposes (ERPP) and related issues. *Language Teaching*, 48(2), 250-262. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000523>
- Flowerdew, J., & Wang, S. H. (2015). Identity in Academic Discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 81–99. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026719051400021X>
- Groom, N. (2000). Attribution and averral revisited. Three perspectives on manifest intertextuality in academic writing. In P. Thompson (Ed.), *Patterns and perspectives: Insights into EAP writing practice* (pp. 14–25). Centre for Applied Language Studies. Reading.
- Harwood, N. (2005). “Nowhere has anyone attempted ... In this article I aim to do just that” A corpus-based study of self-promotional I and we in academic writing across four disciplines. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37(8 SPEC. ISS.), 1207–1231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2005.01.012>
- He, A. W. (1993). Exploring modality in institutional interactions: Cases from academic counselling encounters. *Text*, 13(4), 503-528.
- Hinkel, E. (1997). Indirectness in L1 and L2 academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 27(3), 360-386. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(96\)00040-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(96)00040-9)
- Holmes, J. (1988). Doubt and certainty in ESL textbooks. *Applied Linguistics*, 9(1), 21-44. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/9.1.21>
- Hu, G., & Cao, F. (2011). Hedging and boosting in abstracts of applied linguistics articles: a comparative study of English- and Chinese-medium journals. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, 2795-2809. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.04.007>
- Hu, G., & Cao, F., (2015). Disciplinary and paradigmatic influences on interactional metadiscourse in research articles. *English for Specific Purposes*, 39, 12-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2015.03.002>
- Hunston, S., & Thompson, G. (2000). Evaluation: An introduction. In S. Hunston & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (pp. 1–27). London: Oxford University Press.
- Hyland, K. (1999). Disciplinary discourses: Writer stance in research articles. In C. N. Candlin, & K. Hyland (Eds.), *Writing: Texts, processes and practices* (pp. 99-121). London: Longman.
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. (2005a). *Metadiscourse*. London. Continuum.
- Hyland, K. (2005b). Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies*, 7(2), 173-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365>
- Hyland, K., & Guinda, C. S. (2012). *Stance and voice in written academic genres*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hyland, K., & Milton, J. (1997). Qualification and certainty in L1 and L2 students’ writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6(2), 183–205. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(97\)90033-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(97)90033-3)
- Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2005). Hooking the reader: a corpus study of evaluative that in abstracts. *English for Specific Purposes*, 24(2), 123-139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2004.02.002>
- Ivanič, R. (1998). *Writing and identity. The discursive construction of identity in academic writing*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins

- Kim, L. C., & Lim, J. M. H. (2013). Metadiscourse in English and Chinese research article introductions. *Discourse Studies*, 15(2), 129-146.
- Koutsantoni, D. (2006). Rhetorical strategies in engineering research articles and research theses: Advanced academic literacy and relations of power. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5(1), 19–36.
- Kwan, B. S. C. (2013). Facilitating novice researchers in project publishing during the doctoral years and beyond: A Hong Kong-based study. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(2), 207-225.
- Lancaster, Z. (2016). Expressing stance in undergraduate writing: Discipline-specific and general qualities. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 23, 16–30.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge university press.
- Lee, J. J., & Casal, J. E. (2014). Metadiscourse in results and discussion chapters: Across-linguistic analysis of English and Spanish thesis writers in engineering. *System*, 46(1), 39–54.
- Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2010). *Academic writing in a global context. The politics and practices of publishing in English*. London: Routledge.
- Liu, Y., & Zhou, H. (2014). Reporting and stance in second language academic writing. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 483-497.
- Lorès-Sanz, R. (2011). The construction of the author's voice in academic writing: The interplay of cultural and disciplinary factors. *Text & Talk*, 31(2), 173–193
- Martín, P., Rey-Rocha, J., Burgess, S., & Moreno, A. I. (2014). Publishing research in English-language journals: Attitudes, strategies and difficulties of multilingual scholars of medicine. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 16, 57-67.
- McGrath, L., & Kuteeva, M. (2012). Stance and engagement in pure mathematics research articles: Linking discourse features to disciplinary practices. *English for Specific Purposes*, 31(3), 161–173.
- Mhilli, O. (2023). Authorial voice in writing: A literature review. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 8(1), 100550. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100550>
- Mur-Dueñas, P. (2011). An intercultural analysis of metadiscourse features in research articles written in English and in Spanish. *Journal of pragmatics*, 43(12), 3068-3079.
- Myers, G. (1989). The pragmatics of politeness in scientific articles. *Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 1–35.
- Paltridge, B. (2002). Thesis and dissertation writing: An examination of published advice and actual practice. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21, 125–143.
- Peacock, M. (2006). A cross-disciplinary comparison of boosting in research articles. *Corpora*, 1(1), 61-84.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). The politics of pronouns. *ELT Journal*, 48(1), 173–178. DOI
- Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*, 13, 149-170.
- Scollon, R. (1994). As a matter of fact: the changing ideology of authorship and responsibility in discourse. *World Englishes*, 13, 34-46.
- Scott, M. (2016). WordSmith Tools version 7, Stroud: Lexical Analysis Software.



- Soler, V. (2002). Analyzing adjectives in scientific discourse: an exploratory study with implications for Spanish speakers at advanced university level. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21, 145–165.
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tang, R., & John, S. (1999). The ‘I’ in identity: Exploring writer identity in student academic writing through the first-person pronoun. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18, S23–S39.
- Tardy, C. M. (2005). “It’s like a story”: Rhetorical knowledge development in advanced academic literacy. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 4(4), 325–339.
- Tardy, C. M. (2012). Current conceptions of voice. In K. Hyland, & C. S. Guinda (eds.), *Stance and voice in written academic genres* (pp. 34–48). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Thompson, G. (2001). Interaction in academic writing: learning to argue with the reader. *Applied Linguistics*, 22, 58–78.
- Thompson, G., & Hunston, S. (2000). Evaluation: An introduction. In S. Hunston, & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse* (pp. 1–27). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vassileva, I. (2001). Commitment and detachment in English and Bulgarian academic writing. *English for Specific Purposes*, 20(1), 83–102.
- Vold, E. T. (2006). Epistemic modality markers in research articles: A cross-linguistic and cross-disciplinary study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 16(1), 61–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2006.00106.x>
- Watt, E. D. (1982). *Authority*. London: Croom Helm.
- Whitley, R. (2000). *The Intellectual and Social Organization of the Sciences* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Oxford University Press.
- Yasuda, S. (2022). Natural scientists’ perceptions of authorial voice in scientific writing: The influence of disciplinary expertise on revoicing processes. *English for Specific Purposes*, 67, 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2022.03.001>
- Zhao, C. G. (2019). Writer background and voice construction in L2 writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 37, 117–126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.11.004>

## Appendice Appendix A

Table 2. *Interactional stance framework adopted from Hyland (2005b)*

<i>Stance devices</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Description</i>
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue. <i>E.g., can, may, would, proposed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicate the writer’s decision to recognize alternative voices and viewpoints.</li> <li>• Imply that a statement is based on the writer’s plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, indicating the writer’s degree of confidence in their proposition.</li> </ul>

Boosters	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue <i>E.g., shown, showed, significant, revealed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest the writer recognized potentially diverse positions but has chosen to confront alternatives with a single, confident voice.</li> <li>• Construct rapport by marking involvement with the topic, solidarity with an audience, and taking a joint position against other voices.</li> </ul>
Attitude markers	Express the writer's attitude to the proposition <i>E.g., believed, successfully</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicate the writer's affective rather than epistemic, attitude to propositions.</li> </ul>
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to the author(s) <i>E.g., I; we; our</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marked by first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives (<i>I, exclusive we, our</i>).</li> <li>• Its explicit presence or absence is generally a conscious choice made by writers to adopt a particular stance and a contextually situated authorial identity (Hyland, 2004)</li> </ul>