STANCE IN ACADEMIC WRITING[i]

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Abstract:

This corpus-based study investigated authorial stance in research articles; how non-native (Turks) and (Spaniards) and native English speaker academic writers (American) expressed their stance in the research article (RA), published in a refereed international journal. The data for this study originated from 45 research articles, published in *Social Behavior and Personality* between 1993 and 2007. All of the modal verbs and their functions in the Conclusion section of the corpus were identified by Wordsmith Tools, a computer program; statistical analysis was done using Varbrul, a multivariate analysis program. The analyses of the data indicated the existence of both qualitative and quantitative similarities and differences among the groups. The findings demonstrated that both native and non-native English speaking academic writers are well aware of the conventions of their global and local discourse communities.

Keywords: stance, academic writing, discourse community

1. Introduction

In the last three decades or so, the traditional view of academic writing- as a collection of facts, unfolding in a direct and impersonal manner, and eventually leading to an inescapable truth- has been questioned and challenged (Hyland, 1988). This questioning stance has led the widely held view of academic prose as convention-bound monolithic entity involving distant, impersonal prose, devoid of writer involvement, to undergo a fundamental change (Tang & John, 1999). As a result, academic prose has come to be viewed as a persuasive endeavor between writers and readers, involving writer involvement more and more (Hyland, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2005; Recski, 2005). While underscoring the importance of writer-reader relationship and interaction in academic prose on the one hand, Hyland (2002), on the other hand, sees academic writing as an act of identity, conveying not only disciplinary content but also a representation of the

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writer. Elaborating this new change in the conception of the research article, academic prose for that matter, Rezzano (2004, p. 102) underlines the persuasiveness of the research article and writer-reader relationship, saying:

"Many scholars have recognized that research articles, even those reporting experimental research, do not constitute an objective description of a piece of investigation, but rather a very complex persuasive text in which the writer needs to convince other members of the scientific community (particularly, the journals' editors and referees) of the importance of his/her work. ...this phenomenon has frequently been analyzed within pragmatic and social frameworks and emphasis has been placed on the use what is termed "hedging"".

Echoing this shift of focus, Biber (2006) underlines this relatively novel conception that linguists have become interested in the linguistic tools and means used by speakers and writers to convey their personal feelings and assessments. As a result of the growing realization of the importance of the writer's role, an upsurge in the number of research conducted on this particular topic was seen. Such personal feelings and assessments have been carried out under various labels, including "attitude" and 'modality' (Halliday, 1994), 'evaluation' (Hunston, 1994), (Hunston & Thompson 2000), 'intensity' (Labov, 1984), 'affect' (Ochs, 1989), 'evidentiality' (Chafe, 1986), 'hedging' (Holmes, 1988; Hyland, 1998), and 'stance' (Barton, 1993), (Beach & Anson, 1992), (Biber & Finegan, 1988, 1989), (Biber, Johanson, Leech, Condrad, & Finegan, 1999; Biber 2004), (Conrad & Biber, 2000), Charles, 2007).

These seemingly different labels all refer to the same issue: that of the writer/speaker point of view about the state of affairs or the information given. It is at this juncture, where the importance of stance devices comes into play. In underlining this importance, Hunston (1993) and Hyland (1998) state that part of being persuasive and gaining acceptance of one's claims lies in the use of hedges to evaluate the value of information. Hyland's (1998) study on the distribution of hedging devices in research articles confirms his statement in that five of the fifteen most frequent hedging devices used in research articles are modal verbs. What is even interesting about his findings is that, as is clearly seen in Table 3 below, stance devices are the most frequently employed linguistic items used to express feeling and attitudes and serve an indispensable rhetorical function for writers in the RA.

Table 1: Distribution of stance features across different fields

Feature	Phil	Soc	AL	Mk	Phy	Bio	ME	EE	Total
Stance	42.8	31.1 3	7.2	39.5	25.0	23.8	19.8	21.6	30.9
Hedges	18.5	14.7	18	20	9.6	13.6	8.2	9.6	14.5
Attitude mar.	8.9	7	8.6	6.9	3.9	2.9	5.6	5.5	6.4
Boosters	9.7	1	6.2	7.1	6	3.9	5	3.2	5.8
Self-mention	5.7	4.3	4.4	5.5	5.5	3.4	1	3.3	4.2

(From Hyland, 2006, p.29)

Indeed, Mauranen's depiction of academic discourse, academic writing for that matter, illustrates the nature of academic discourse:

"Academic discourse is a world where observations suggest that something might be the case, where states of affairs appear to hold, where it seems reasonable to suggest, and where we might infer; in other words, it is a world of uncertainties, indirectness, and non-finality- in brief, a world where it is natural to cultivate hedges (Italics added)".

Mauranen (1997, p.115)

The tentativeness underlined over and over again in the excerpt above can only be achieved by using hedging and stance devices. Stance devices are "the ways which writers project themselves into their texts to communicate their integrity, credibility, involvement, and a relationship to their subject matter and their readers" (Hyland, 1999b, p.101). Among other things, stance involves 'evidentiality' (the communication of assessments and value judgments concerning the described situation by appeal to evidence), 'epistemic modality' (assessment of the degree of likelihood concerning the described situation), and 'deontic modality' (arguments regarding the necessity or desirability of the situation obtaining) (Biber et al. 1999, pp. 966, 972).

Stance, according to Biber et al. (1999), can be expressed through paralinguistic, non-linguistic, and linguistic devices. Paralinguistic devices are employed mainly in conversation to convey emotive and attitudinal stance meanings, such as pitch, intensity, and duration. Non-linguistic stance devices consist of body posture, facial expressions, and gestures. And modal and semi-modal verbs, adverbial constructions, adjectives, nouns, stance noun + prepositional phrase, and pre-modifying stance adverbs from a structural angle, and stance complement clauses constructions, among others, constitute linguistic features (Keck & Biber, 2004). In addition to this structural classification, they are also classified according to their rhetorical functions: epistemic stance adverbials, attitude adverbials, and style adverbials (Biber et al. 1999; Hunston & Thompson, 2000). Epistemic modality is about speakers' and writer' assumptions and/or assessment of possibilities, and is employed to express certainty, doubt, actuality, precision, limitation, the source of knowledge, or the perspective from which the information is given. Attitude stance markers enable writers to convey personal attitudes and/or feelings. Style stance markers enable speakers and writers to express their comments on the communication itself (Coates, 1983; Precht, 2000). In other words, speakers and writers strategically use stance devices to realize various rhetorical functions from communicating propositional content to expressing feelings, attitudes, values judgments, and/or assessments (Biber et al. 1999).

Numerous studies have been conducted on stance (see, for example, Winter, 1982; Chafe, 1986; Holmes, 1983; Francis, 1986, 1994; Biber et al., 1999; Biber & Finegan 1988, 1989; Ivanic, 1991; Barton, 1993; Mauranen, 1993; Salager-Meyer,1994; Hoye, 1997; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Markannen & Schröder 1997; Meyer 1997; Hunston & Francis, 1999; Hyland, 1999; Varttala 1999; Conrad & Biber, 2000; Hunston & Thompson 2000; Koutsantoni, 2006; Biber, 2006; Farrokhi & Emami, 2008; Behnam, Naeimi, & Darvishzade, 2012; McGrath & Kuteeva, 2012; Kim & Lim, 2015; Takimoto, 2015; Taşpınar, 2017).

What is of more interest to the current study is the use of stance devices by native and non-native English speaker writers. Some recent research has shown that non-native English speaker writers have serious problems related to using stance (see Barton, 1993; Coffin, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2004; Soliday, 2004; Wu, 2007; Feak, 2008; Hyland & Milton, 1997; Tardy, 2009; Chang, 2010; Lancaster, 2011, 2012). Despite the myriad of studies on stance, few studies have been conducted on Turkish writers' employment of them. The extant ones focused not exclusively on stance devices in academic prose; they focused mostly on hedging devices. In one of these studies, Ekoç (2010) investigated Turkish MA students' use of lexical hedging strategies in theses abstracts. Yüksel and Kavanoz (2015) studied university students' use of hedges in expressing claims. In a similar study, Yağız and Demir (2014) looked at native English speaker and Turkish writers' use of hedging strategies in academic wiring. In a similar vein, Uysal (2014) investigated native English and non-native English speaking scholars' employment of hedging devices in conference proposals. The common finding of all these studies is that Turkish writers deployed hedging devices less than their native English speaking counterparts. Doyuran (2009), on the other hand, focused on the use of hedging in Turkish. As seen, no research has focused solely on stance devices in the research article (RA), but Ağçam (2015) and Çakır (2016). In her corpus-based study, she investigated the use of epistemic verbs by native, Turkish-speaking and Spanish-speaking speakers of English in their doctoral dissertations. Similarly, in her study on the use of stance adverbs by native and non-native English speaking academic writers' in research article abstracts, Çakır (2016) found differences between the groups in her study. As has been documented, no study to date has focused on native English and non-native English speaking academic writers' use of stance devices-modal verbs-in the RA. Motivated by this need, this corpus-based study sets out to investigate

    a. the use of stance devices by native English speaking writers (henceforth AWs), and non-native English speaking writers (Spanish writers, henceforth SWs), and non-native English speaking writers (Turkish writers, henceforth TWs) in the Conclusion section of the RA.

    b. the distribution of stance devices across the moves in the Conclusion section.

2. Methodology

2.1. The corpus

This corpus-based qualitative and quantitative study aims to investigate the use of stance devices in academic prose by native and non-native English speaking academic writers. It also seeks to investigate the distribution of stance devices across the moves and sub-moves of the conclusion section of the RA. The data for this study originate from an internationally published refereed journal, *Social Behavior and Personality*. This journal, which focuses on issues ranging from psychological to educational ones, was deliberately chosen for practical reasons, such as on-line availability and vast coverage of articles by writers from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The corpus includes 45 research articles: 15 articles by AAWs, and 15 articles by TAWs, and 15

articles by SAWs. The articles by TAWs and AAWs were published between 2000 and 2006. Yet the articles by SAWs had to consist of articles published between 1993 and 2007, for not enough articles were found in the same time span. The native speaker status of American writers was ensured using the biographical information provided on their personal websites and in their articles. The same holds true for the Spanish Academic writers. Only one article per person was chosen to increase the comprehensiveness of the data.

2.2. Data coding

The modal verbs in the corpus were identified by a computer program, Wordsmith Tools, and manually checked by the researcher himself to double-check. The modal verbs and their functions were analyzed by two different judges; one native English speaking American academic with a background in TEFL and the second, the researcher himself independently of each other. A second coding was carried out to identify the moves and the steps in each move as suggested by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988, p. 118) were carried out. Then the reliability between the two raters was ensured, running Spearman Correlation Coefficient test for each modal verb, moves and steps. The interrater agreement for the moves and steps were higher than 96%. Yet it was a bit lower, it was 83%, though high enough for the accepted level. Disagreements were resolved consulting an expert in linguistics.

2.2.1 Variables coded for the analysis

Modal Verbs (can, could, may, might, will, would, should, must) 'Ought to' and 'be going to' were excluded from the analysis for the pilot project revealed that the corpus included neither of them.

A. Independent variables

- native English speaking academic writers   (AAWS)
- non-native English speaking academic writers   (TAWs)
- non-native English speaking academic writers   (SAWs)

B. Functions of the modal verbs

(ability, expectation impossibility meta discourse obligation possibility prediction suggestions)

Some other functions such as 'advice', 'deduction', 'hypothetical', 'permission', 'probability', and 'volition' were also included in the coding. Yet they were excluded from the analysis for they were inadequate for statistical analysis.

The distribution of the modal verbs across the moves and steps in the conclusion section of the RAs was identified, using on a modified version of the model outlined by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988, p. 118) for natural sciences in order to have a deeper insight into modal verb use in the conclusion sections of the research articles.

C. Conclusion moves
- Background information;
- Statement of Results;
- (Un) expected outcome;
- Reference to previous research;
- Explanation of the Results;
- Exemplification;
- Deduction/hypotheses;
- Limitation;
- Suggestion/recommendation;
- Suggestions for further research;
- Pragmatic suggestions.

In this study, a move was taken as a segment of a text which is shaped and constrained by a specific communicative function as defined by (Nwogu, 1991, p.114): By the term "move" is meant a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features (lexical meanings, propositional meanings, illocutionary forces, etc.) which give the segment a uniform orientation and signal the contend of the discourse in it. Each "move" is taken to embody a number of "Constituent Elements" or sub-moves which combine to constitute information in the move. In the majority of the cases, the unit of analysis was the sentence. However, where a sentence included two moves, the more salient one was considered. Yet, in few cases, it was impossible to decide the move clearly. In such cases, it was coded as containing two moves, which was necessary for only two sentences in the entire data.

2.3. Data analysis

After the coding process, VARBRUL-a software packet program commonly used in Applied Linguistics to analyze variable linguistic phenomena- was run to carry out variable rule analysis. Data analysis has indicated qualitative and quantitative differences in the use if stance devices in the Conclusion section of the RA between native and non-native speaker writers, though these differences are significantly unimportant.

3. Results and discussion

Preliminary findings of this study draw our attention to an important issue; that the three groups showed slight quantitative differences in the overall number of modal verb use in their RAs. Off all the 1044 tokens of modal verbs identified in the corpus, SAWs used 314 (28%), TAWs used 330 (33%), while AAWs had a higher percentage with 401 (38%) in their RAs. Though beyond the scope of this study, these numbers still indicate that both SAWs and TAWs had a tendency to employ less stance devices than AAWs.

Table 2: The distribution of modal verbs across the Conclusion section

	SAWs	TAWs	AAWs
Overall No of Model verb use in the RA	314 (28%)	330 (33%)	401 (38%)
Overall No of Model verb use in the Conclusion section	42 %	44%	52%

Interestingly enough, we see a similar distribution of modal verb use in the Conclusion section of the RA. While the two non-native groups used less than half of their total number of modal verbs in the Conclusion section, AAWs employed more than half of their total number of modal verbs. This finding is in accord with earlier research in that the Introduction and Conclusion sections of the RA are the most heavily modalized sections (see Swales, 1987, 1990; Yearley, 1981; Salager-Meyer, 1994; and Vartala, 1999). Swales' (2004) description of the RA can explain the reasons. Swales likens the RA like to an hourglass, with the 'Introduction', which starts broadly and then narrows down, whereas 'Conclusion' section moves incrementally outward. Given the rhetorical functions of this section such as providing background information, stating results, expressing (un)expected outcomes, referring to previous research, explaining and exemplifying, making deductions/hypotheses, stating limitations, making recommendations, the 'Conclusion' section lends itself to be general and tentative rather than particular and precise (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988, Swales, 2004). These rhetorical functions necessitate a tentative language, which the three groups used to varying degrees as seen in Table 2. The percentages indicate the groups' preferences of some modal verbs, such as 'may', 'can', 'will', and 'would' to express possibility over the others. Yet, this inclination bears its own subtle differences. The two non-native groups used 'can' and 'could' more to express epistemic possibility, whereas AAWs preferred 'may' and 'might' more to serve the same function. Another dissimilarity lies in the two non-native groups' employment of deontic modality, which is quite few in AAWs' corpus.

Table 3: The distribution of modal verbs and their share in the Conclusion section

	can	could	may	might	will	would	should	must
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
SAWs	16	16	18	9	11	11	19	--
TAWs	20	12	37	6	3	5	16	1
AAWs	11	5	30	15	4	23	7	5

Despite these slight differences in the overall number of modal verb use, their distribution across the moves in the Conclusion section indicates that all of the groups are aware of the rhetorical function of the moves and expectations of their discourse community.

Table 4: Distribution of modal verbs across the moves in the Conclusion section

	Points to consolidate	Limitations	Suggestions
	%	%	%
SAWs	73	5	22
TAWs	65	4	31
AAWs	71	6	23

The distribution of modal verb across the moves points to a common pattern: a very similar ranking. The groups used modal verbs by far the most to 'consolidate important points', then to 'make suggestions' and finally to 'state limitations' of their studies respectively. Writers perform numerous rhetorical functions, such as giving background information and/or stating results, and/or stating (un)expected outcomes, and/or referring to previous research, and/or making explanations, and/or making exemplifications in order to consolidate important points (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988, p.118; Swales, 2004, p. 234). Relatively the large number of the rhetorical functions of the Conclusion section of the RA require more modal verb compared to the two other moves of this section. In other words, the moves, by their nature, specify the grounds for modal verb use. (Ex. 1):

> *"…Women were more likely than were men to perceive intelligence as a source of social power. This gender difference may be reflecting social changes that have placed a higher priority on education, especially for women. The finding that men were more likely than were women to report sexuality as a source of power may be indicative of a cultural shift with men experiencing more emphasis on their being sexually desirable…"*
>
> (Powers & Reiser, 2005, p. 564)

In this example, the writers adopted a tentative tone in explaining and commenting on their findings by using 'may' with an epistemic possibility meaning.

Table 5: Percentages of the distribution of modal verbs across the moves in the Conclusion section

		can	could	may	might	will	would	should	must
SAWs	Points to consolidate	77	67	92	92	57	33	50	50
	Limitations	15	7	--	--	--	--	17	--
	Suggestions	8	26	8	8	43	67	33	50
TAWs	Points to consolidate	75	62	84	82	34	33	24	--
	Limitations	--	5	1	9	33	--	7	50
	Suggestions	25	23	15	9	33	67	69	50
AAWs	Points to consolidate	88	88	71	73	71	71	33	75
	Limitations	--	--	1	--	--	5	7	13
	Suggestions	12	12	28	27	29	24	60	12

Another move the groups realized to varying degrees is stating limitations of their research. As seen in Table 4, the groups displayed differing tendencies in their

choice of modal verbs to state limitations of their research. In example 2 below, for example, the writers used 'should' to draw attention to a limitation of their research (Ex. 2):

"…Finally, we should stress that analysis with structural equations does not guarantee that the factor structure identified is correct, nor does it establish the relative importance of the different traits identified. The confirmatory factor analysis should be complemented with a structural analysis using other measures of the extraversion construct…"

(Oviedo-Garcia, M., A., 2007, p. 687)

The final move of the conclusion section is 'making suggestions', which the groups realized using modal verbs with varying percentages. AAWs, for example, realized this move less than the other two groups. As such, both SAWs and TAWs used more modal verbs more to make pedagogical suggestions. It seems that the non-native English speaking academic writers' use of modal verbs to make pedagogical suggestions may result from a perceived need to respond to the needs and concerns of their own local discourse communities with effective application of their research findings. As seen in example 3, the writer used 'should' to make suggestions for further research. The writer's preference for the modal verb 'should' seems to be a reflection of her/his awareness of power-relations in her field. The writers could have preferred another modal verb with a stronger meaning to make pedagogical suggestions. (Ex. 3)

"…Future studies should be conducted with extensive and random sampling of participants and different samples such as distressed and nondistressed married couples or married and divorced individuals. In future studies, clinical diagnostic interviews should be used to assess psychopathology such as depression and anxiety symptoms before administering the scales, or alternatively, some scales such as the BDI could be given to participants…"

(Hamamcı, Z., 2005, p. 324)

4. Conclusion

This corpus-based study has sought to examine the use of stance devices in the Conclusion section of the RA by writers from three different cultural and language backgrounds, that of American, Spanish, and Turkish writers. It aimed to explore the distribution of stance devices across the moves and sub-moves in the Conclusion section. Overall, the results have indicated three important conclusions: For one thing, the three groups displayed their awareness of the importance of the rhetorical functions of the moves and sub-moves in the Conclusion section of the RA by attributing adequate importance to them. The groups used stance devices to consolidate important points the most, followed by making suggestions and expressing limitations. This finding underlines the fact that, regardless of their background, they closely follow the conventions of their global discourse community. In addition to adhering to global

discourse community conventions, the groups have shown that they closely follow their respective local discourse community conventions. They differed from one another, especially the two non-native groups from the native group, in using the modal verb 'might' and 'should' qualitatively and quantitatively differently. What seems to be behind these apparent discrepancies are the different backgrounds; cultural and L1 backgrounds. These different backgrounds apparently had an impact on stance device use, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Briefly, we can safely say that academic writers adhere to their global discourse community conventions, while displaying their commitment to their local discourse community conventions. The results have also indicated a strong correlation between the number of moves used and modal verb use. Last but not least, the study has confirmed the conception that academic writing does indeed involve writer involvement and features of impersonal prose.

4.1. Pedagogical implications

Considering the importance of stance both for a "writer's argument and for a disciplinary context as they seek to bring writer and readers into a text as participants in an unfolding dialogue" (Hyland, 2005, p. 191), it looks imperative this issue be given due importance in advanced writing, academic writing, and EAP courses both at undergraduate and graduate levels. As is rightly depicted by Sword (2012), those interested in academic writing in Turkey have, if fortunate enough, three sources of guidance: their memories, what their dissertation supervisors told them about good writing, and occasional feedback. Yet "they all tend to be forces of conservatism" (Sword, 2012, p. 24). Given the common practice that issues like this are hardly touched on in passing in BA, MA, and even in PhD courses, young academics' needs should be given due consideration. In these courses, consciousness on the use and impact of stance devices could be raised through pedagogical tasks. In such tasks, learners are encouraged to explore and reflect on their own writing and the writing practices of others, so that they can make informed choices. It is hoped that the present study can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the use of stance devices in academic prose, knowledge of which can, for example, be useful for EAP students as well as novice writers, and PhD candidates. It also has implications both for materials designers and policy makers. Writing instructors, materials designers, and policy makers have the responsibility to underline what Sword rightly underlines: "A convention is not a compulsion; a trend is not a law. The signature research styles of our disciplines influence and define us, but they need not crush and confine us" (Sword, 2012, p. 22).

While the present study has investigated the use of stance devices in the Conclusion section of the RA, it remains for future investigations to focus on the use of stance devices in the other sections of the RA. Avenues for future research also include investigations of influence of L1 and how writers use the same devices in their L1.

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