

A Review of Research on Authorial Stance in Academic Discourse

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Abstract: The past decades have witnessed a mounting research attention on the authorial stance in academic discourse. Examining the use of stance features has become a key focus to explore the interactive and persuasive nature of academic writing. This review article aims to sort out the research development of authorial stance to figure out the important factors in stance making, which has some academic reference value for future research on how EFL writers project themselves in academic writing.

Keywords: Authorial stance; Factors; Review; Academic writing.

1. Introduction

With the deepening of the communicative cognition of academic writing, the increasing attention has been paid to the interactional nature of academic writing. The use of stance is a key focus to achieve the interaction between writers and readers. Stance generally refers to how writers express their feelings, levels of certainty and assessments concerning others' and their own propositions or claims (Biber, 2006). It is through the use of stance resources that writers stamp themselves on their claims and propositions, and express the attitude they hold toward content and ideas expressed in their academic writing. Biber (2006) and Hyland(2005b) have provided the analytical framework of stance resources available to writers which have been used in automated annotation that have been employed in a number of previous research (Croathwaite and Jiang, 2017). The proper use of stance expressions indicating authorial stance contributes substantially to the success of a text, especially the text

written by EFL writers. Little research has given to systematically overview the previous studies of authorial stance in academic discourse to clear out the essence of academic discourses and related impact factors. This study will fill in the gap.

2. The Stance System of Hyland

Hyland(2005b) has consolidated his previous work to advance the Interaction Model in which writer-reader interaction is conceptualized. The stance system intends to center on how writers present themselves and express their attitude, judgement on proposition, and engagement system focuses on how the writers invite readers to engage in the negotiation of arguments raised in academic texts.

Hyland(2005b)'s Interaction Model, as shown in the Figure 1 has been widely adopted as the theoretical framework to examine authorial stance in academic discourse. The system of stance advanced in the framework offers a comprehensive classification and accurate interpretation of stance resources.

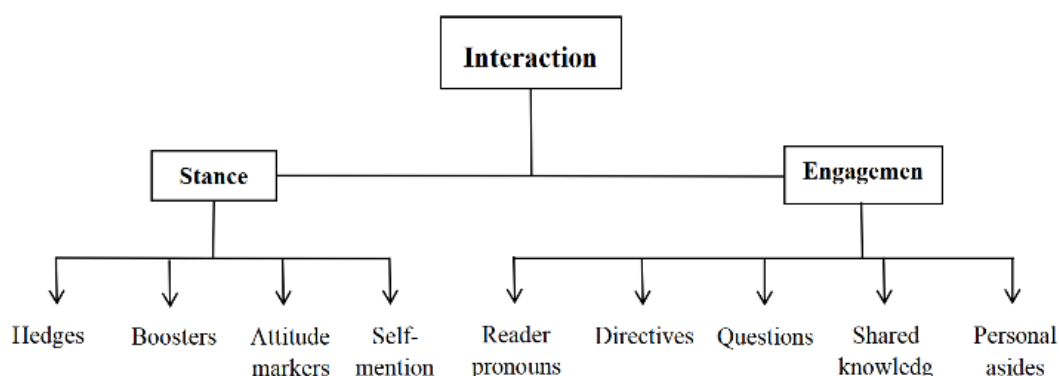


Figure 1. Hyland's Interaction Model (2005b)

The stance system of the interaction model, according to Hyland (2005b), is comprised of four elements, namely, hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. Hedges indicate the writer's decision to avoid full complete commitment to a statement by using stance expressions like may, could, probably. By contrast, boosters' express writers' certainty towards propositions using items like show, find, always (Hyland, 2005b). Attitude markers indicate the writers' affective attitude in what they say instead of epistemic attitude as reflected in their use of hedges and boosters such as agree, prefer, unfortunately (Hyland, 2005b). Self-mentions refer to

the use of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives to project writers' explicit presence and identity and present propositional and affective attitude with visibility (Hyland, 2001).

3. Previous Studies on Authorial Stance

Over the past decades, a considerable amount of research has been conducted into the question of how authors present themselves in academic writing. Corpus-based empirical

studies of authorial stance have been carried out with different focuses, including on variation across cultures and languages, on differences across discipline, on discrepancies across different sections of academic writing.

3.1. Studies on Variation across Languages and Cultural Background

This type of research aims to explore the influence of culture/languages on the use feature of authorial stance (Vassileva, 1998; Vold, 2006; Hu & Cao, 2011; Çandarlı, 2015). Vassileva (1998) investigated the use of the first person singular “I” perspective and the first person plural “we” perspective in academic discourse presentation based on five corpora of research articles in English, German, French, Russian, and Bulgarian, revealing the cross-language and cross-cultural differences. Vold (2006) found that English and Norwegian researchers used significantly more hedges than their French colleagues did.

Comparative studies between L1 writing and L2 writing have also conducted to explore the influence of culture/languages on the use of stance resources. To begin with, some scholars have obtained interesting findings by comparing English data produced by native and non-native speakers (Hinkle, 1995; 1997; 2002). Hinkle argues that there are certain recurrent patterns of “non-native” use of English are caused by the influence of characteristics of the writers’ first language. Specifically, Asian writers (including Chinese writers) exhibit a higher frequency of certain indirectness devices, such as hedges (Hinkle, 1997). Çandarlı (2015) analyzed the L1 and L2 essays by Turkish learners of English, and selected a set of argumentative essays written by monolingual American students as the reference corpus. Corpus-based approach has been used for the quantitative analysis of boosters, attitude markers and self-mention the three categories of markers, revealing that Turkish essays (L1 essays) include significantly more stance resources than English essays (L2 essays) by Turkish students and American students. The similarity in the use of boosters and attitude markers in Turkish and American students’ English essays suggests that non-native students could acquire the rhetorical conventions in L2 through academic writing instruction. This tendency could reveal that the L2 writers have register awareness while expressing the authorial stance, and the L2 writing instruction would operate at the same time as local L1 environment throughout the production of L academic writing. This trait also explained the perceived under-use of first person singular pronouns (Hyland, 2002; Li & Wharton, 2012).

3.2. Studies on Variation across Disciplines

Another focus is committed to examining the use of stance resources across disciplines and reveals the disciplinary influences (Vassileva, 2001; Abdi, 2002; Harwood, 2005; Hu & Cao, 2015; Hyland, 2005b; Hyland & Jiang, 2016). Many of the studies deal with the disciplinary differences between the “soft” disciplines (the humanities and social science) and the “hard disciplines” (natural sciences). Hyland (1998a) found that the writers tended to use more hedges and boosters in “soft” disciplines than in “hard” disciplines. Similarly, Hyland (2005b) compared the use of stance resource features in research articles across eight disciplines and found that soft disciplines (i.e. applied linguistics, sociology) used far more stance features than engineering and science subjects.

In view of higher frequency in soft disciplines, Hu & Cao

(2015) further explored variation in stance making among three social science disciplines (i.e. applied linguistics, education and psychology). The results indicated that applied linguistics and education research articles exhibited a higher deployment of boosters and a lower incidence of self-mentions than in the psychology ones. As Hu & Cao (2015) argued, these cross-disciplinary differences can be plausibly attributed to the knowledge-knower structures dominating the discipline. Claims to knowledge tend to be legitimated by appealing to knowers’ personal voice, expertise, experience, and authority. Harwood (2005) examined the use of first-person in English articles of economics, business administration, physics and computer sciences, finding that the inclusive we deployed less frequently in physics and computer science articles than business management and economics.

The disciplinary variation of stance resources can be also tracked in students’ academic writing by investigating how students in different majors express stance in their research articles. Lancaster (2016) has performed a comparative analysis on the graduation thesis between the students majoring in economy and those who major in politics. The results suggest that students majoring economy uses hedges, boosters and self-mentions with significantly greater frequency than students who major in politics, who tend to employ more attitude markers.

In terms of disciplinary background, compared with soft disciplines, the writers in hard disciplines express stance with significantly less frequency (Hyland, 2004), but have shown substantial diachronic increase over the past 50 years (Hyland & Jiang 2016, 2018). Specifically, as for the use of attitude markers, Hyland and Jiang (2016) found that there is a diachronic decrease in academic writing, while a growing welcome in hard disciplines to incorporate more deployment of epistemic markers and self-mentions over the past five decades.

3.3. Studies of Different Sections of Academic Writing

The different sections of academic writing has been an important focus in the empirical research on stance making. As the different part of research articles undertake specific discourse function which could decide the selection of stance resources, writers adopt a range of rhetorical strategies to communicative with readers and to construct their authorial identity (Ivanic, 1998). Salager Meyer (1994) has revealed that the realization of various linguistic resources is affected by the communicative purpose of different sections of research articles.

An accumulating body of research has concentrated on the examination of stance-taking in a certain section of research papers (Hyland & Tse, 2005; Gillaerts & Ven de Velde, 2010; Basturkmen, 2012; Loi & Lim, 2013). Hyland & Tse (2005) have made further exploration on the students’ deployment of stance resources, revealing that the importance of stance resources not only lies in its securing the proposition, but its underlying rhetorical dynamics which uncover rhetorical and social distinctiveness of discourse communities. Loi & Lim (2013) have examines the use of stance features in English and Chinese research article introductions in the field of educational psychology and provided some implications into the teaching of academic English writing for Chinese ESL students. Pishghadam & Kermanshahi (2012) have examined the discussion section of 90 English and Persian research

articles, finding that Persian writers employ attitudinal and epistemic markers with higher frequency than English ones. In a similar way, Abdollahzadeh (2011) have examined the employment of hedges, emphatics and attitude markers in conclusion sections of applied linguistic articles, and contextual analysis indicates that compared to the Iranian writers, American authors would like to deploy emphatics and attitudinal markers with greater higher frequency.

The abstract section of research articles has been paid much more attention when stance-taking is studied, as it has become a crucial sub-genre which summarize the whole research paper and the writers attempts to promote his propositions and findings in it to gain more assurance and navigation. In this sense, abstract is by nature a social response intended to orient readers in navigating through the exponentially growing output of academic publications, and replete with subjective material, expressed by interactional elements (Gillaerts & Van de Velde, 2010). Lindeberg (2004) explores how boosters and hedges are used as strategies of promotion in the abstracts as well as other sections of journal articles. Gillaerts & Van de Velde (2010) investigate the evolution in the distribution of three stance resources in Hyland's model (2005a), namely, hedges, boosters, and attitude markers in the past thirty years in the applied linguistics, and the results suggest that research articles and research article abstracts show the differences in the use of various subcategories of stance resources.

4. Conclusion

Stance making in academic writing is a extremely important for the success of a text. The rhetorical use of stance resources in academic discourse has been influenced by cultural, linguistic disciplinary differences, as well as the different sections of articles. These important factors, in particular, exert great influence on EFL students' deployment of stance resources. However, previous research also indicated that register and instruction should also considered in rhetorical differences in stance making. It is expected that future research on authorial stance in academic writing will concentrate on diachronic approach to reveal the development trajectory. Also, the instruction of foreign languages should be added as an important factor to be investigated.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by grants from the Postgraduate Scientific Research Innovation Project of Hunan Province (No. CX20221036), the Scientific Research Project of Hunan Provincial Department of Education (No. 20C1583) and the Project of Social Science Foundation of Hunan Province (No. 18WLH33).

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