CULTURE-SPECIFIC WRITING STYLES IN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' RESEARCH PROPOSALS

ESTILOS DE ESCRITURA CULTURALMENTE ESPECÍFICOS EN LAS PROPUESTAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN DE ESTUDIANTES DE POSGRADO

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Abstract

Academic communication occurs in a multicultural world with different culture-specific academic writing standards, intellectual styles and discourse expectations. Yet despite these differences, globalization of scholarship has considerably levelled out the standards on academic writing. The study aims to explore the impact of intellectual styles on choosing metadiscourse resources by non-native English writers from different cultural backgrounds in the context of globalized higher education. The participants were 116 engineering students who were taking a postgraduate course. To investigate hedges and boosters in students' research proposals, the methods of quantitative and contextual analysis were adopted. Research proposals by Asian and East European postgraduate students were taken for the cross-cultural study based on Galtung's and Hind's theories of writing styles. Findings revealed that research proposals by Slavic students exposed to Teutonic writer-responsible culture featured a larger number of hedges. Asian-authored writing that is considered to be influenced by Nipponic reader-responsible culture and often regarded as indirect featured far more boosters than Slavic-authored texts considered to be precise and clear.

Keywords: *writing style; metadiscourse; research proposals; academic discourse; cultural context.*

Resumen

La comunicación académica se produce en un mundo multicultural con diferentes estándares culturales de escritura académica y estilos intelectuales. A pesar de estas diferencias, la globalización de la ciencia ha creado estándares de escritura académica. El estudio analiza el impacto de los estilos intelectuales en la elección de marcadores metadiscursivos por parte de escritores pertenecientes a diferentes culturas. Los participantes fueron 116 estudiantes de ingeniería de posgrado. Para investigar los obstáculos y los refuerzos en sus propuestas de investigación, se utilizaron los métodos de análisis cuantitativo y contextual. Las propuestas de investigación se analizaron con base en las teorías de estilos de escritura de Galtung y Hind. El estudio reveló que las propuestas de investigación de estudiantes eslavos expuestos al estilo teutónico presentaban un mayor número de obstáculos. Los textos de escritores asiáticos que están influenciados por la cultura nipona responsable del lector y considerados como indirectos, presentaban más refuerzos.
Palabras clave: estilo de escritura; metadiscurso; propuestas de investigación; discurso académico; contexto cultural.

1. Introduction

The intent of the present study is to contribute to a better understanding of cultural aspects of non-native English academic writing and to provide an answer to the question of how writing styles manifest themselves in metadiscourse preferences. The globalisation of higher education has caused the rapid implementation of English for Research Publication Purposes programs into university curricula. This has led to intensive research into non-native (L2) English writing with the aim of revealing prevailing rhetorical structures and motivation behind writers' pragmatic choices. Whilst the extensive body of research on L2 writing has significantly contributed to our understanding of how non-native English speakers use rhetorical patterns in their research papers and theses (Al-Khasawneh, 2017; Alonso Almeida, 2014; Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2023a, 2023b; Bondi, 2014; Gessesse, 2016; Hu & Cao, 2011; Ji, 2015; Isık-Tas, 2018; Khajavy & Asadpour, 2012; Kozubíková Šandová, 2021; Maamuujav et al., 2021; Perales-Escudero & Swales, 2011; Stotesbury, 2003; Van Bonn & Swales, 2007), little empirical studies appear to have explored metadiscourse – an explicit set of lexical items that signify writer-reader interactions – in other academic genres.

To fill this gap, the comparative analysis presented here aims to shed light on how postgraduate students with different cultural backgrounds – Asian and Slavic – and exposed to different writing styles interact with readers and make their claims persuasive, categorical or tentative in their research proposals. Conducted from a contrastive perspective, the study aims to explore variation in the employment of hedges and boosters in a corpus of English RPs by Slavic and Asian students which previously did not attract much attention of linguists. The study was based on the assumption that the deployment of hedges and boosters is considerably affected by the writing styles writers are exposed to.

Proceeding from previous studies of Asian and Slavic-authored academic writing (Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2022a, 2022b; Čmejrková, 2007; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2013; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Gu, 2008; Kim & Lim, 2013; Lu, 2000; Pisanski Peterlin, 2005; Pyankova, 1994; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018), it is hypothesized that research proposals (RPs) written by Asian students will contain a number of indirect, uncertain, and vague claims, and academic texts produced by Slavic writers will feature more certainty devices. To confirm this hypothesis, metadiscourse resources such as boosters and hedges (communicative strategies used to acknowledge or suppress alternative viewpoints) seems to be a valuable tool that offers a broad perspective on how L2 novice writers negotiate knowledge claims.

The present comparative study of academic texts written by postgraduate students with Asian and Slavic backgrounds could complement the existing scarce body of RP research, and contribute to the current practice in EAP teaching.

2. Literature review

2.1. Metadiscourse studies on academic writing

Previous studies on metadiscourse in academic writing (Alonso-Almeida, 2014; Belyakova, 2017; Cmejrkova, 1996; Hryniuk, 2018; Hu & Cao, 2011; Isık-Tas, 2018 Lee & Casal, 2014; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Mikolaychik, 2019; Pisanski Peterlin, 2005; Pyankova, 1994; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018) have offered some interesting insights into cultural differences in academic writing. However, taking prior research altogether, it seems that English academic texts produced by L2 writers have been mainly analysed only in terms of their distinction from L1 academic discourse, and little attention has been paid to differences in metadiscourse features used by L2 writers exposed to different writing styles.

Pyankova (1994), for example, who explored differences between English and Russian academic texts, found that Russian scholars underuse self-mentions and overuse passive and impersonal structures. The article by Duszak (1994, p. 291), that concerned with the attempts to reveal differences in metadiscourse patterns used in academic prose by L1 and L2 (Polish) writers, explained these differences by «a history of socialization of academics to different discourse communities». In the same vein, Cmejrkova (1996, p. 137) revealed that Czech linguists writing in English were more «reluctant to commit themselves early to an announcement of the research purpose and preferred indirect declarations or rhetorical questions». Another study conducted by Vassileva (2001) on commitment and detachment patterns in English and Bulgarian linguistics research articles revealed differences in hedging and boosting tools that were explained by different rhetorical traditions.

Pisanski Peterlin (2005) conducted a contrastive analysis focusing on variation in the use of metadiscourse in English and Slovene research articles and found that metadiscourse devices were more restricted in Slovene academic writing than in English academic prose. Belyakova (2017) carried out a cross-cultural comparison of RA abstracts by L2 (Slavic) and L1 academic writers in geoscience to investigate their metadiscourse choices and found that writers from East European academia usually disguise themselves to a larger extent. One more study of metadiscourse in research

articles was conducted by Hryniuk (2018) who explored how British and Polish writers represent themselves in academic discourse and investigated differences in frequencies and functions of the first person pronouns in applied linguistics RAs. The results showed that Polish scholars employed less first person pronouns and did not assume responsibility for what is stated. According to Walková (2018), who explored how L1 and L2 (Slovak) writers position themselves in research papers, Anglophone academic culture is rather individualistic with a predominance of the reader-inclusive perspective and the use of the first-person singular by single authors. The same results were obtained by Bogdanović and Mirović (2018) who compared Serbian and English-medium RAs written by Serbian authors.

In the Asian context, the same conclusions were drawn by Hu and Cao (2011), who explored the use of hedging and boosting devices in RA abstracts collected from Chinese- and English-medium applied linguistics journals. They found that English RA abstracts contained more hedges than Chinese ones. Li and Xu (2020), who analysed metadiscourse in sociology articles by and L1 and L2 (Chinese) writers, revealed that English writers used metadiscourse markers far more than their Chinese counterparts. Kustyasari et al. (2021) compared metadiscourse functions in research articles by native English and Malay writers. What is interesting, they revealed that in Indonesian-authored academic prose interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers performed similar functions, i.e. they were used to indicate a relation between sentences, involve readers in a dialogue, limit commitment to propositions, emphasize certainty, signal their attitudes towards claims and readers. Azar et al. (2022) made an attempt to compare hedges and boosters in L1 and L2 (Malay) research articles focusing on the «Introduction» section. They established notable differences in the use of these features which prevailed in L1 writers' discourse. All these studies considered cultural backgrounds as the main factor influencing the choice of metadiscourse devices and ignored the role of English language proficiency.

2.2. Research proposal as an emerging academic genre

In the context of globalization of science and education, new academic genres that penetrate into local educational contexts play a crucial role. One of these genres is research proposal (RP) which is a concise comprehensive description of future research including justification of the chosen research project, description of the current state of knowledge on the research issue, analysis of relevant literature, formulation of the hypothesis, definition of the research methodology, and formulation of expected results. RPs are written

by students when applying to degree programs or for research funding, or they can serve as an educational task intended to assess the student's ability to construct a research project in a discipline additionally providing an idea of student's research interests and intent. RP writing is therefore an important task which can help in assessing the degree of development of both the linguistic and research competences in postgraduate students.

Despite the crucial role of this genre in English for Academic Purposes teaching, studies conducted on RPs are scarce, and mainly focus on grant proposals (Connor, 2000; Connor & Mauranen, 1999; Fazel & Shi, 2015; Feng, 2006; Feng & Shi, 2004; Flowerdew, 2016; Matzler, 2021; Pascual & Unger, 2010; Tardy, 2003; Tseng, 2011).

One of the first grant proposal studies was Connor and Mauranen's research conducted on move-structures (Connor & Mauranen, 1999). For the research purpose, Connor and Mauranen analyzed English grant proposals written by Finnish researchers and identified ten rhetorical moves. In Connor's (2000) further study on research grant proposals, she explored the transferability of this move-structure framework to grant proposals written by US researchers and found that different requirements of the US grant system caused structural variations in her corpus. Also focusing on the move structure, Feng and Shi (2004) analyzed English grant proposals submitted by Chinese researchers to a Canadian research agency and found that they lack the Compliance Claim move identified by Connor and Mauranen, but include the Communication of Results move that had not been identified in previous research. Another Feng's (2006) study offered a generic description of Hong Kong Competitive Earmarked grant proposals by integrating lexical and pragmatic analyses with rhetorical move analysis. The study identified the most frequently occurring hedges and boosters, among which the modals *may* and *will*. Additionally, she found the frequent use of other hedges such as approximators – *about*, *approximately* and *around*; probability markers – *likely*; and words expressing usuality – *typically, usually*. In another study, Pascual and Unger (2010) investigated how Argentinian research grant proposal writers in chemistry and physics position themselves in relation to other researchers. The results indicated that the corpus featured a variety of metadiscourse devices used to invite rather than challenge colleagues' views. Fazel and Shi's (2015) study explored grant proposals from a different perspective making an attempt to reveal how L2 doctoral students use citations and what citation strategies help project their emerging scholarly identities.

From a cross-disciplinary approach, Nuzha et al.'s (2020) study intended to contrast data on the frequency of rhetorical moves used in proposals from two disciplines revealed significant variations in the moves and steps. Another proposals study was conducted

by Yin (2016) who identified rhetorical structures used by Singaporean researchers in terms of their communicative purposes, institutional expectations and disciplinary culture. Dang (2023) scrutinized the employment of metadiscourse in RPs written by Vietnamese postgraduate students in Applied Linguistics and found that self-mentions were most frequent in the corpus, while attitude markers were least utilized. Nuttall (2021) explored grant proposal from a different angle focusing on lexical frame use. Adopting the frame-first approach to analyse frequently occurring four-word lexical frames, the study revealed that (1) many of the frames exhibit fixed variability in addition to being either unpredictable or highly unpredictable, and (2) the majority of frames are functionally referential while there are very few discourse organizing frames.

2.3. Hedging and boosting as metadiscourse categories

The term *metadiscourse* was created by Harris in 1959 to indicate the ways in which the writer/speaker conduces the receiver's perception of a text through the use of language. Since then, the concept of metadiscourse has been further developed in a number of studies. Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore and Farnsworth (1990), for instance, included into the metadiscourse category rhetorical features such as hedges, connectives and commentaries used to influence the reader's perception of the text. Hyland (2005a) defined metadiscourse as «self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community» (Hyland, 2005a, p. 37). These linguistic resources help «relate a text to its context by assisting readers to connect, organise, and interpret material in a way preferred by the writer and with regard to the understandings and values of a particular discourse community» (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 157).

A wide range of taxonomies of metadiscourse has been developed in the last decades (Beauvais, 1989; Hyland, 2005b; Vande Kopple 1985). The present study adopted a more recent taxonomy proposed by Hyland (2005b) that eliminated overlapping functions and metadiscourse categories identified by formal, rather than functional, characteristics. The taxonomy encompasses the interactional aspects of discourse, using the criteria of external and internal relations and seems to more clearly identify rhetorical functions and reduce overlapping functions. Hyland distinguished between two types of metadiscourse – interactive and interactional. While the interactive metadiscourse helps organize a text coherently by linking sentences to each other so that the reader can understand it better, interactional metadiscourse is employed to interact with the reader, explicitly convey views and attitudes, and involve the audience by allowing them to respond to the unfolding text and anticipating their objections (Hyland, 2005a,

p. 49-50). Interactional metadiscourse involves five elements – hedging, boosting, attitude stance, self-mention, and engagement – that «help realize the rational, credible, and affective appeals that contribute to the persuasiveness of a text» (Hyland, 1998, p. 226). Since the focus of the current study is boosting and hedging, consider these categories more closely.

Hedges and boosters are described as «communicative strategies for recognizing contingency and indicating the room the writer is willing to offer for negotiation» (Hyland, 2005b, p. 144). Hedges are employed to acknowledge alternative viewpoints and withhold commitment to the proposition. According to Hyland (2005b, p. 145), using a hedge the author expresses willingness to negotiate a claim thereby reducing commitment and conveying respect for alternative views. In contrast, boosters are used to «suppress alternatives, presenting the proposition with conviction while marking involvement, solidarity and engagement with readers» (Hyland, 2005b, p. 145). They are also used to strengthen an argument by suggesting the reader draw the same conclusions as the writer. As Hyland (2005a) claims, «the balance of hedges and boosters in a text thus indicates to what extent the writer is willing to entertain alternatives and so plays an important role in conveying commitment to text content and respect for readers» (p. 53).

2.4. Previous studies on culture-specific writing styles

A large number of works have demonstrated that «academic discourse is representative of shared cultural understandings about how discourses are constructed, through which communicative choices» (Khoutyz, 2015, p. 135). Kaplan (1966), for example, explained differences in academic writing in terms of differences in cultural backgrounds of the authors and claimed that writing style is not universal and varies «from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture» (p. 2). Kaplan distinguished between four types of writing such as linear paragraph development, a series of parallel constructions, cyclic paragraph development, and digression. Kaplan (1966) argued that it is apparent that paragraph organisation written in English by a L2 writer «will carry the dominant imprint of that individual's culturally-coded orientation to the phenomenological world in which he lives and which is bound to interpret largely through the avenues available to him in his native language» (p. 1).

One more study on writing styles was conducted by Galtung, who also distinguished between four types – Gallic (prototype: the French), Teutonic (prototype: the Germans), Saxonic (prototype: the English and the Americans), and the Nipponic (prototype: the Japanese and Far East Asians). Here are some features of these styles that are relevant for the present study.

- While the Saxonic style fosters and encourages debate and discourse, the dispersion or diversity of opinion in Gallic and Teuton cultures is likely to be smaller, and in the Nipponic setting, people are not very skilful at debating.
- While Saxons prefer to look for facts and evidence which results in factual accuracy in abundance, for the Teutonic and Gallic cultures data and facts are to illustrate what is said rather than to demonstrate it.
- In contrast to other three cultures, in the Saxonic one «to have thoroughly scrutinized all sources, to have put all the data together, concealing nothing, is a key criterion of scholarship» (Galtung, 1981, p. 827).
- While in the Teutonic culture, one aims for rigour at the expense of elegance, in the Gallic culture the goal is elegance, perhaps at the expense of rigour. In the Nipponic culture, absolute, categorical statements are rare; vagueness is favoured. Clear statements are considered immodest.
- While representatives of the occidental cultures have a fear of inconsistency and ambiguity, the oriental setting strives for the opposite being under the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism which militate against the deductive rigidity.
- Contrary to the three occidental cultures, the Nipponic one is marked by the respect for authority, the sense of collectivism, and organic solidarity; oriental scholars are not good at academic debate because of their anxiety of hurting others' feelings.

When Galtung compares these four cultures, he notices that Eastern Europe found itself under the influence of the Teutonic style, «partly because of general cultural influence through centuries, partly because of the influence of a key Teutonic thinker: Karl Marx» (Galtung, 1981, p. 820). The development of Russian and Ukrainian scholarship features, therefore, as an illustration of Teutonic influence. In addition, these languages are typologically disposed to tolerate similar textual patterns as those that are typical of German. The Asian countries are considered to be under the influence of the Nipponic style affected by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophical precepts with Japan seen as a centre of this type of culture.

Another taxonomy of writing styles was developed by Hinds (1987). It is based on reader- and writer-responsible cultures: in contrast to writer-responsible writing style, reader-responsible one is characterized by an indirect form of argumentation with a less-assertive conclusion and requires a great deal of inferential work on the part of the reader. According to Hinds (1987), in writer-responsible culture (Anglophone countries), it is the writer who is primarily responsible for effective communication, while in reader-responsible one (e.g., Japan or German), it is the responsibility of the

reader to understand what the writer had intended to say as they place the burden on the reader to discern a meaning.

Based on these theories, Duszak (1994) revealed differences in metadiscourse patterns used in academic prose by native and non-native (Polish) speakers of English and explained them in terms of Galtung's (1981) model. Kim and Lim's (2013) study based on Hinds' (1987) theory proved that Asian rhetorical traditions favour the reader-responsible attitude when «the writer controls the level of personality in a text to establish a more distant relationship between author, text and reader» (p. 140). Similarly, Qi and Liu (2007) argue that «compared to apparent formal links adopted in English, Chinese, in most cases, may have covert structural clues in the author's mind, requiring the reader to explore cohesion in the discourse» (p. 148). In the same vein, Park and Kim (2008), who explored the communication styles of Asian and American communities, revealed that Asian speakers prefer a less open communication style due to their higher level of emotional self-control and tend to suppress emotions by avoiding personal opinions or attitudes.

Thus, previous studies have identified a significant intercultural variation in the rhetorical preferences of academic writers, indicating that writing is a cultural object shaped by culture. As Hyland (2005a) put it, the rhetorical style and the degree of writer's rhetorical assertiveness are closely associated with cultural conventions.

3. Current study

3.1. Research questions

The present study aims to explore writing style-dependent differences in the employment of hedges and boosters seeking to answer the following questions:

- What categories of metadiscourse – hedges or boosters – do Asian and Slavic novice writers mainly opt for in their RPs?
- What is the frequency of hedges and boosters in the two sub-corpora?
- Can the differences, if any, be explained by the impact of writing styles which the students are exposed to?

3.2. Participants and procedure

To answer the research questions, a mixed methods research design was adopted. The following subsection will provide details concerning participants, instruments, procedure, and methods used in the present study.

3.2.1. Participants

The participants of the present study were 116 engineering students who were taking a Russian-language postgraduate course in a Russian university. Only students with a high level of English language proficiency were selected for the purpose of the study. The proficiency level was assessed using the Oxford Quick Placement Test which includes 60 multiple-choice questions and assesses reading and listening skills, vocabulary knowledge and structural competence. The test consists of two sections: Language Use and Listening. The English Section includes grammar, lexis and listening questions, the test design focuses on meaning beyond the sentence. The total number of participants who got more than 50 scores was 116. The participants were divided into two groups – Asian-origin and Slavic origin.

3.2.2. Instruments

Two instruments were employed in the study. The Oxford Quick Placement Test reporting at Pre-A1, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was given to 212 postgraduate engineering students to determine whether they have similar English language proficiency levels. The second instrument, a research proposal writing task, was given to the students to compare metadiscourse employment in their writings based on Hyland's (2005a) list of hedges and boosters and Hyland and Zou's (2021) typologies of boosting and hedging.

3.2.3. Procedure

The participants from both groups were asked to write a 2000-word English-language research proposal to compare the use of hedges and boosters in their texts. For this purpose, the list of hedges and boosters compiled by Hyland (2005a) was used. It should be mentioned that the task of writing RPs as an English language exam eligibility criterion has been performed by the postgraduate students of the university under study since 2021. RPs submitted by students at the end of the first year are a concise comprehensive description of their future research including seven rhetorical moves (Territory, Gap, Purpose, Means, Report on previous research, Achievements, Significance Claim) which serve a number of communicative purposes such as establishing a territory, establishing and occupying a niche, stating the research purpose, providing background information on the topic, presenting the methodology, describing achievements and excepted results. Structurally and meaningfully, these RPs are similar to RPs written by students when applying to degree programs or for research funding. In my case, however, the RP is an

English language examination task intended to assess both student's academic English language proficiency and ability to construct a research project in a discipline.

3.3. Corpus

116 RPs were selected and divided into two parts. The number of tokens in each subcorpus was 118 123 and 124 569, which makes 243 692 tokens altogether. Due to the small corpus, the present study does not seek to allow generalizations about the employment of metadiscourse markers in RPs by postgraduate students exposed to different writing styles.

The first subcorpus consisted of 58 English RPs written by postgraduate students from Vietnam and China. The second sub-corpus also consisted of 58 English RPs written by Russian native students. The examples quoted in this paper are coded by indicating the number of the subcorpus: subcorpus (SC) 1– for the Asian subcorpus and subcorpus (SC) 2 – for the Slavic subcorpus.

3.4. Methods

To investigate hedges and boosters in RPs written by the students exposed to different writing styles thus achieving the goal of the study, the methods of quantitative and contextual analysis were adopted.

Hyland and Zou's (2021) typology of boosting markers was adopted as the initial model for revealing boosters. Hedging devices found in the corpus were analyzed using the model by the same authors (Hyland & Zou, 2021) who identified three ways of conveying respect for colleagues' views. The taxonomies adopted in the current study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of hedging and boosting

Categories	Types	Function
Hedges	Plausibility hedges	signal that a claim is based on assumptions
	Downtoners	mitigate the intensity of a statement
	Rounders	indicate an approximation
Boosters	Certainty markers	indicate the writer's epistemic conviction
	Extremity markers	emphasize the upper edge of a continuum
	Intensity markers	amplify the emotive strength of a statement

Frequencies of each category of boosters and hedges presented in Table 1 were used to determine their dominance in each subcorpus. Afterward, contextual analysis was adopted to elaborate on the results from the quantitative analysis. This study also employed a comparative approach as it sought the realization of hedging and boosting in RPs written by the postgraduate students exposed to different writing styles.

The analysis process went through several steps. Quantitative analysis was applied to all cases of hedges and boosters in the two subcorpora so as to analyze the socio-pragmatic context in which linguistic means are used to identify whether they act as metadiscourse markers.

First, hedges and boosters were identified manually in 116 RPs. Second, the markers found in the corpus were manually analyzed in context. Since the sizes of the two sub-corpora were not equal, the raw frequencies of occurrence of stance markers and normalized frequencies of the number of occurrences per 1000 words were determined. The occurrences were processed automatically with a freeware, multiplatform tool for carrying out corpus linguistics research AntConc 3.4 Windows, an advanced text analysis application which provides details about the text and can ensure the accuracy of research results. Then, all the examples found in the corpus were analyzed in context to describe the rhetorical functions of hedges and boosters.

4. Results

The outcome of the quantitative analysis shows differences in the use of hedges and boosters by the Asian and Slavic students. In absolute terms, the differences between the normalized frequencies were quite significant, with hedging markers representing the majority of features in the Slavic sub-corpus and boosters in the Asian one. The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Hedges and boosters in the corpus (per 1000 words)

Category	SC1	SC2
Hedges	98.1	312.2
Boosters	145.2	97.3
Total	243.3	409.5

As can be seen from Table 2, hedges were the most frequent metadiscourse resources in the Slavic-authored texts. In the Asian sub-corpus their number was significantly smaller. Boosters also exhibited differences in the two sub-corpora: in the Asian-authored

texts they were more frequent. Table 3 summarizes the results of the quantitative analysis of hedges occurring in the two subcorpora.

Table 3. Types of hedging in the corpus (per 1000 words)

Hedges	S1	S2
Plausibility markers	53.2	197.9
Rounders	15	22.6
Downtoners	29.9	91.7
Total	98.1	312.2

The frequencies indicate differences between the three types of hedging markers in the subcorpora. As can be seen, plausibility markers predominate in both subcorpora, accounting for almost 64 and 63% in SC1 and SC2, respectively. Downtoners rank second both in SC1 and SC2. The least frequently used hedges were rounders, which account for 15 and 7% of the total number of hedges in SC1 and S2, respectively. Table 4 summarizes the results of the quantitative analysis of boosting markers occurring in the two subcorpora.

Table 4. Types of boosting in the corpus (per 1000 words)

Boosters	S1	S2
Certainty markers	101.2	27.5
Intensity markers	36.1	58.1
Extremity markers	7.9	11.7
Total	145.2	97.3

The quantitative analysis revealed considerable differences between the three types of boosting in the two subcorpora. As can be seen in Table 4, certainty markers predominate in S1, accounting for almost 70% of all boosting devices found in the subcorpus. Intensity markers are less important in SC2. They rank first in the Slavic-authored RPs. The least frequently used boosters in both subcorpora are extremity markers which account for 5.4 and 1.2% of the total number of boosters in SC1 and S2, respectively.

In the following section, the functions of boosters and hedges in the analysed texts will be explained.

4.1. Hedges

Hedges downplay writers' commitments to propositional content, modifying its relevance or certainty and helping to acknowledge alternative viewpoints. They

withhold commitment to the presented proposition and are used to steer the reader to the conclusion or reasoning of the writer's choice (Boginskaya, 2022c).

The analysis revealed that both Asian and Slavic writers employed all three types of hedges. Plausibility hedges more frequently used by Slavic students (53.2 vs 197.9 per 1000 words) serve to protect the author from having to take full responsibility for the propositional content and to recognize the limitations of claims. Here is an example of the plausibility hedge used by the Asian student to indicate that the statement is based on an assumption rather than facts and to implicate that the author is uncertain about the proposition.

(1)   It is *suggested* that climate *might* be an especially important factor affecting the changes, but further analysis relying on more advanced methods is needed. (SC1)

Downtoners help protect the writer against inaccuracy of research results, as illustrated in example 2.

(2)   Additionally, it explores the *potential* impacts of these factors on the research results. (SC2)

In example 3, the downtoner *usually* might convey certain qualification with regard to the degree of accuracy of the conclusion, demonstrating that the statement might be inaccurate.

(3)   Attempts to use inert electrodes *usually* result in failed wettability of the cathodes. (SC2)

The analysis revealed that downtoners were also more frequently used by Slavic students mainly to protect themselves from inaccuracies.
Rounders indicating an approximation – were rather scarce in both sub-corpora. Here is an example from SC1:

(4)   The material for the present study comes from *approximately* 80 companies that have used renewable energy sources. (SC1)

By making the number a little fuzzy, the adverb employed as a rounder expresses approximation, thereby making the claim less persuasive. In addition, the authors can

use this type of hedging when they do not know precise terms or numbers or they are no relevant.

4.2. Boosters

In contrast to hedges, boosters function by «presenting the proposition with conviction while marking involvement, solidarity and engagement with readers» (Hyland, 2005a, p. 145). An analysis has revealed the higher frequency of these devices per 1000 words in SC1, which indicates that the Asian writers tended to occupy a far stronger stance and were more keen to express their convictions and highlight the significance of their work:

(5)   (5) It is *evident* that chemical inhomogeneity nullifies all attempts to stabilise the process. (SC1)

The booster used in the above example helps remove any doubts about the claim closing down potential opposition.

In the two sub-corpora, boosters differed both numerically and functionally. While certainty boosters were used more frequently by Asian writers, in the Slavic sub-corpus intensity boosters prevailed. Extremity boosters were rarely employed by both groups.

Certainty boosters were used to indicate the writer's epistemic conviction, to claim the accuracy of research results, to emphasize the importance of the study, and to exclude alternative views from readers as follows:

(6)   These findings *confirm* the importance of solar panel protection for maintaining the nominal values of solar power generation in the given regions. (SC1)

(7)   The calculation results *demonstrate* a rather small error which makes it possible to apply the oscillation method for the optimal design of the gas turbine blades. (SC2)

In the above examples, the authors anticipate possible responses from the reader but choose to prevent them. The boosting verbs *to confirm* and *to demonstrate* and the boosting noun *findings* are used to express authors' certainty in research results obtained or claims presented.

(8)   The cyanidation results show that the initial flotation concentrate is *evidently* resistant to cyanidation. (SC1)

The adverb *evidently* is used here to signal accepted truth – that is, it downplays the author's involvement by implying that the claim is one that is already generally accepted in chemical engineering.

Intensity boosters function by amplifying the emotive strength of a statement. In contrast to certainty boosters, they add affective color to claims rather than concern epistemic assurance (Hyland & Zou, 2021).

(9)   (9) We applied this the theory in a *very interesting* area. (SC2)

(10)   (10) Calcium and aluminum are present in the slag *mostly* in the form of oxides. (SC1)

These intensity boosters function by enhancing persuasion through an involved attitude. Regarding the extremity boosters, they «emphasize the upper edge of a continuum» (Hyland & Zou, 2021, p. 8), as in here:

(11)   (11) The process is marked by *the highest* stability when grinding steel parts. (SC1)

(12)   (12) *The most significant* features were determined by calculating the correlation coefficients. (SC2)

By upgrading the propositions, the writers emphasize the level of parts' stability, as seen in example 11, and the significance of features, as seen in example 12, without the need for elaboration.

5. Discussion

The intent of the present study was to contribute to a better understanding of cultural aspects of L2 academic writing and to provide an answer to the question of how culture-specific writing styles manifest themselves in metadiscourse preferences. The study aimed to explore variation in the employment of hedges and boosters in a corpus of English RPs by Slavic and Asian students which previously did not attract much attention of linguists. The study was based on the assumption that the deployment of hedges and boosters is considerably affected by the rhetorical styles writers are exposed to.

This assumption relied on previous studies of Asian and Slavic rhetorical traditions. As mentioned above, Galtung (1981) labelled the writing style characteristic of the Asiatic region as Nipponic marked by strict observance of the rules prescribing not to harm pre-established social relations, to show respect for authority, and to exhibit the sense of collectivism rather than individual voice. Following these rules, Asian scholars are believed to avoid categorical statements, favour vagueness, and prefer collectivist ways of expressing opinion, avoiding self-mention to disguise the direct involvement. The Asian rhetorical traditions based on Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophical precepts operate, as Hinkel (1997) put it, within paradigms different from those accepted in the Anglo-American writing tradition which is structured around Aristotelian notions of directness, justification and proof. In line with Hinkel (1997), Gu (2008) claimed that Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism strongly affected the heritage of Asian rhetoric which is a puzzle for Western readers, and Asian scholars feel alien to the Western rhetorical tradition that owes to the doctrine of Aristotle.

As Duszak (1994) put it, oriental cultures tend to emphasize collective values and «their members, rather than speaking unambiguously, engage in an affective style of communication, trying to defend themselves by vague expressions» (p. 294). Developing Hinds' (1987) concept of writer/reader responsibility and Galtung's (1981) theory, Kim and Lim (2013, p. 140) argue that Asian writing traditions are considered to favour the reader-responsible attitude when «the writer controls the level of personality in a text to establish a more distant relationship between author, text and reader». In Chinese culture, for instance, as Lu (2000) put it, reader responsibility might have been affected by the fundamental principle of Confucius's teaching – *Ren* (humanity, love), which should accept the presence of others (i.e. readers) by establishing relationships with readers and giving them room to interpret the text according to their personal knowledge. This implies a lower level of writer's personality in the text. In the same vein, Qi and Liu (2007, p. 148) argue that «compared to apparent formal links adopted in English, Chinese, in most cases, may have covert structural clues in the author's mind, requiring the reader to explore cohesion in the discourse».

As mentioned above, the Slavic rhetorical tradition is under the influence of the Teutonic writing style and has developed in contact with German thought. Following the Teutonic style, the academic writing practice in Eastern Europe advises writers to state their claims clearly, without allowing for any possible contradictory ideas, meaning that the degree of commitment to authorial claims is rather high with the Slavic writers (Vassileva, 2001), and vagueness is not favoured. Bloor (1991) claimed that Slavic languages appear to be more direct than English in academic contexts. As

Galtung (1981) put it, the lack of ambiguity, the clarity of the teutonically shaped theory is incompatible with basic Buddhist and Daoist approaches.

Similar to Asian writing, Slavic discourse is regarded as reader-friendly: it is the reader who has to make an effort to understand the content, and texts are influenced by the idea that the meaning should not be explicitly formulated. Slavic writing is also considered, therefore, as mainly reproductive, focusing on the content rather than interaction with the reader. As Yakhontova (1997) put it, Slavic academic discourse tends to «tell» rather than «to sell», which implies that the reader is expected to invest effort in following the writer's line of argumentation.

The corpus-based study has shown that the rhetorical patterns in RPs written by Asian and Slavic students were slightly different from those expected and significantly different in the two subcorpora. Slavic-authored RPs contained far more interactional metadiscourse elements in 1000 words than those written by their Asian counterparts. While hedges were the most frequent metadiscourse resource in the Slavic-authored texts, boosters were more frequently used in the Asian sub-corpus. Some of the Asian students have over-boosted their propositions in an attempt to put forward convincing claims.

This finding contradicts my hypothesis about uncertainty and vagueness of claims in Asian-authored texts and a high degree of commitment to authorial claims in Slavic writing. In an effort to be more confident and direct, the Asian writers chose to suppress alternative views and left little room to other interpretations thus creating an impression of certainty and assurance and instilling confidence in the reader. This finding challenges the suggestion about an Asian preference for rhetorical strategies of indirectness. The Slavic writers took a more tentative approach, seemed to be much more careful in making claims and presenting findings thus securing their academic credibility.

6. Conclusion

Through quantitative and contextual analyses of RPs written by engineering students, this study has revealed that the ways Asian and Slavic novice writers seek to relate to their texts, acknowledge alternative opinions or block alternative interpretations are significantly different, but they do not always reflect writing patterns typical of the writing styles they are exposed to. In particular, by bringing together the concept of metadiscourse and the theory of writing styles, the study has provided insights into culture-specific metadiscourse features of academic writing that were not apparent by either approach individually.

In general, the writing styles appeared not to be only determinants of academic writers' rhetorical behaviour affecting the ways they express the commitment to their

claims and interact with the reader. Due to the stronger influence of the international academic writing traditions based on the Saxonic writing style and being more open to new cultures and traditions, Slavic authors seemed to be more tentative in making claims and presenting new knowledge than I had expected. Yet despite the intensive participation of Asian, particularly Chinese, scholars in academic communication, being representative of more reserved cultures, they are less prone to abandon their own cultural traditions of academic writing and tend to transmit discourse patterns typical of their own academic writing culture but alien to English. It is therefore important to teach L2 students how to organize their academic texts in English by comparing culture-specific and internationally accepted standards and encouraging them to follow the latter in their writing for successful communication.

Although the possible reasons for the above differences in the ways Asian and Slavic writers hedge or boost their claims, these reasons are merely a speculation based on my expertise. The writers' genuine intentions behind their metadiscourse choices need to be further investigated.

It should be admitted here that to confirm the findings presented here, a larger corpus of RPs and more support from other cultural contexts are required. Conducted on a corpus of 116 RPs written by representatives of a limited number of cultural communities, the research might not fully reflect the effects of the writing styles on metadiscourse preferences of L2 novice writers. Additionally, I acknowledge that the grouping of academic writings by Asian or Slavic authors from different countries is rough, and there may be some differences in the rhetorical patterns among related cultures such as Vietnamese and Chinese or Russian and Ukrainian developing in different historical contexts.

As for venues for further studies, it would be of interest to continue this research using data from other disciplines and involving participants exposed to other writing styles. It might be interesting, for example, to study how academic writers with different cultural backgrounds know when to use metadiscourse devices in their English-medium texts.

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