

# Investigating the Use of Grammatical Stance Markers in Discussion Section of English Applied Linguistics Research Articles Written by Indonesian Scholars

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**Abstract** –The use of stance, i.e. linguistic mechanism used by the authors to convey their personal viewpoint in a research article has received considerable attention from researchers in the field of applied linguistics. This is due to the fact that the concept of stance plays a critical role in academic research writing. However, how grammatical stance markers are used in a discussion section of a research article from the field of applied linguistics written in English by Indonesian applied linguistics scholars has been left unexplored. The major aim of the present study was to fill that lacuna by examining the frequency of use of grammatical stance markers. A small specialized corpus consisting of 10 discussion sections of research articles from the field of applied linguistics written by Indonesian scholars published was built for the purposes of the study. It was found that Indonesian scholars used grammatical stance markers sparingly. Since grammatical stance markers are markers of interpersonality and interactivity, this finding suggests that Indonesian applied linguistics scholars do not see academic research writing as a site for interpersonal relation and interaction with the putative readers. Pedagogically, it implies that there is a need for a pedagogical program to introduce Indonesian scholars to the notion that academic research writing is a site where knowledge claim is negotiated with the readers.

**Keywords**—stance, applied linguistics, Indonesian scholars, discussion section, research articles

## I. INTRODUCTION

Stance refers to the linguistic mechanism used by authors to convey their personal attitudes, feelings, emotions, and assessments towards a proposition [1]. In the context of English academic research writing, such a metadiscursive feature plays a critical role [2]. The extent to which a scientific claim is considered seriously and/or accepted as part of knowledge is determined by the use of stance. In this case, stance functions as a rhetorical device which quite often acts as a decisive factor which determines whether or not a paper is accepted to be published in an internationally-accredited, reputable journal [3]. Studies have also shown that there is a positive correlation between the use of stance and readers' perceptions about the quality of academic writing [4, 5].

Given the importance of the concept of stance in the field of applied linguistics [6], together with the critical role it plays in academic research writing, a good number of studies has been conducted to examine its use in a research article (RA). With the exception of the research carried out by Crosthwaite, Cheung, dan Jiang [7], almost all previous studies investigated the use of only one aspect of stance, such as hedges [8, 9], boosters [10, 11], attitude markers [12], and self-mentions [13].

To the best of our knowledge, up to the present time, there has been no study which specifically examined the use of grammatical stance markers in discussion section of English applied linguistics RAs written in English by Indonesian applied linguistics scholars. Discussion section of a RA is the part of the paper "that offers the study's contribution by highlighting the major findings, interpreting them in light of previous research, presenting rational justifications, and deploying the authors original views in form of academically rich arguments" [14]. Thus, such a section is the perfect place where authors have to display their stance. However, the writing of discussion section has been found to be particularly challenging for novice writers, regardless of whether or not their native language is English. One of the authors of the present paper has reviewed quite a good number of applied linguistics RAs written by novice Indonesian scholars for publication in a local journal in Indonesia. An interesting, yet unfortunate phenomenon has emerged that the majority, if not all, of those RAs lack discussion section, notwithstanding the fact that those RAs have the heading Results and Discussion. This can only mean two things. Firstly, apparently those novice Indonesian applied linguists may not be aware that the result(s) of the study being reported on in the paper needs to be elucidated in light of existing theories and/or relevant, previously conducted studies. Alternatively, it could also mean that since those novice scholars find the writing of discussion section challenging and baffling, despite their awareness that the study result(s) somehow needs to be interpreted, they intentionally leave their study result unexplained since they do not know what rhetorical behavior to adopt in that section. Either way, it could be argued, developing a

discussion section in a research article constitute a formidable task for novice Indonesian applied linguists.

The purpose of the present study was to uncover the rhetorical patterns in terms of the use of grammatical stance markers in the discussion section of RAs from applied linguistics written by Indonesian scholars publishing in a top-notch nationally accredited journal. It is hoped that the findings of the present study will provide novice Indonesian scholars from the field of applied linguistics with a fresh insight into how to compose a standard discussion section of a research article publishable in a nationally accredited, hopefully a top-notch, journal. More specifically, the findings of the present study are expected to provide novice Indonesian applied linguistics scholars with information concerning whether or not discussion section should be planted with the author's personal attitudes towards and assessment of the claim being made. The research question which the present study attempted to answer was the following: "What is the frequency of use of grammatical stance markers in the discussion section of RAs written in English by Indonesian applied linguistics scholars"? The concept of RA in the present study was, following the common practice, exclusively used to refer to scholarly paper which reports on empirical research. The present paper is organized as follows: after the presentation of the study method in the next section, the study findings are presented and subsequently discussed. The paper concludes with the implications of the findings, as well as limitation of the study and recommendation for future studies.

## II. METHOD

### A. Study Design

The present study adopted a corpus-driven approach [15]. It should be borne in mind that the present study did not intend to uncover the systematic patterns of variation of grammatical stance use across different genres or register. Rather, the study was aimed at exploring new grammatical stance markers deployed by Indonesian applied linguists in their RA discussion section. Therefore, the analysis was not driven by a priori determined grammatical stance features, but rather it proceeded inductively.

### B. Corpus

The corpus for the present study is a specialized corpus [16] consisting of a set of 10 discussion sections drawn from 10 applied linguistics RAs written in English by Indonesian applied linguistics scholars. A relatively small corpus is more suitable for the analysis of high frequency items than a large corpus [17]. Recall that the present study closely examined the use of grammatical stance, a salient and pervasive rhetorical feature in discussion section, given the fact that in that part of the RA the author has to comment on the findings of the research being reported on, and to argue for the significance the research findings and the contribution of the research [14, 18, 19]. Therefore, given the importance of the expressions of stance in research articles [20], a large corpus is not necessitated in the analysis of such metadiscursive feature. Moreover, more importantly, the small size of the corpus analyzed in the present study

enabled us to conduct a detailed and nuanced analysis of each occurrence of grammatical stance, not just a random sample, and hence can provide better insights into patterns of use of grammatical stance in the discussion section of a RA [16, 17].

The RAs from which the discussion sections analyzed in the present study were drawn were published in a top-notch nationally accredited journal, TEFLIN Journal, which is an English-medium journal. The journal has recently been accredited "A" by the Directorate General of Research Enhancement and Development, Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education. The "A" accreditation level being highest level of scholarly journal accreditation can be considered as the hallmark of excellence in journal quality and management. It is to be noted that the contributors to the journal are not only local (Indonesian) researchers, but those coming from other foreign countries as well. TEFLIN Journal is published biannually in January and July, and each issue contains seven to eight articles.

The size of the corpus analyzed in the present study was 11,019 words, with a mean length of 1,102 words and standard deviation of 617.98 words. The magnitude of the standard deviation compared to the mean indicated that there was no homogeneity in terms of the length of each discussion section included in the corpus analyzed in the present study. In other words, there was a large variation in terms of the length of paper included in the corpus. The following is the information about the length of each discussion section in the corpus: Text 01 (967 words), Text 02 (643 words), Text 03 (654 words), Text 04 (830 words), Text 05 (1,443 words), Text 06 (1,150 words), Text 07 (816 words), Text 08 (2,723 words), Text 09 (999 words), Text 10 (794 words).

All the articles included in the corpus are single-authored and, as has been mentioned above, were written by Indonesian applied linguists (nine females and one male). Nine were affiliated with an Indonesian higher education institution, while one female author included an Australian university as her institutional affiliation. As regards the publication year, three articles were published in 2018, four articles in 2015, and one article each in 2017, 2016, and 2014. The ten articles were collected following three selection criteria: (i) the article should be written by a native speaker of Indonesian which can be judged from the author's name, (ii) it should have a separate heading named Discussion, and (iii) it should be a single-authored article. The article collection started from the most recent issue available online at the time the study was conducted (issue 2, year 2018) moving backward strictly following the three aforementioned selection criteria until 10 articles could be collected.

### C. Data Analysis

The identification of grammatical stance markers in the present study strictly followed the model of grammatical stance put forth by Douglas Biber [1, 21]. Therefore, for the purposes of the present study, grammatical stance was given operational definition as linguistic features used to encode the author's personal views on some proposition.

Accordingly, included in the analysis were such expressions as *it is important to highlight, seems, might* as used in the following three constructions:

- (1) *It is important to highlight that unclear arrangement on medium of instruction has been linked with lack of success in implementing the program (Hamid et al., 2013; Hu & Lei, 2014).*
- (2) *This informal arrangement seems to be a common practice among some policy makers in the university, even in a broader context, Indonesia (Nasir, 2015).*
- (3) *Higher education institutions might not be involved in making decisions on the arrangement of University curriculum, in particular regarding EMI.*

However, stance expressions used by the author to convey his or her personal opinion with regard to some entity, such as (4) and (5) below, were excluded from the analysis.

- (4) *Thus, the internet has an important part in building teachers' creativity ...*
- (5) *Both studies noticed that the use of technology provides refreshing and varied context to make meaningful and enjoyable learning.*

Qualitative and descriptive quantitative analyses were conducted on the gathered data.

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Findings

The following tables (Tables I and II) show the rates of use of grammatical stance markers in the discussion sections included in the corpus analyzed in the present study and the descriptive statistics.

TABLE I. FREQUENCY OF USE OF GRAMMATICAL STANCE

Text	Frequency	Per 1,000 words
01	7	7.24
02	1	1.56
03	9	13.76
04	2	2.41
05	5	3.47
06	11	9.57
07	12	14.71
08	9	3.31
09	15	15.02
10	7	8.82

TABLE II. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Min	Max	Mean		Std Deviation
		Statistic	Std Error	
1	15	7.80	1.38	4.37

Table I above readily shows that there was a considerable variation in terms of frequency of use of grammatical stance markers in the ten discussion sections included in the corpus. The minimum number of grammatical stance markers found in the corpus was 1 or 1.56 per 1,000 words (Text 02), while the maximum number was 15 or 15.02 per 1,000 words (Text 09). As can be seen in Table I, three texts were particularly outstanding in terms of their frequency of use of grammatical stance markers, namely Texts 06, 07,

and 09. The use of grammatical stance markers in Texts 01, 03, 05, 08, and 10 can be considered as moderate. Finally, Texts 02 and 04 were extreme in terms of their frequency of use of grammatical stance markers.

Table II shows the descriptive statistics of the frequency of use of grammatical stance markers in the corpus of ten discussion sections analyzed in the present study. As the table shows, the average frequency of use of grammatical stance markers found was 7.80 devices. Apparently, this seemingly high rate of use was contributed by only three texts in the corpus (see Table I above). Table II also shows that the standard deviation was 5.23. The magnitude of the standard deviation of the frequency of use of grammatical stance markers (when compared to the mean value) strongly indicated that there was a great variation in terms of the frequency of use of grammatical stance markers among the ten authors whose RA discussion sections were included in the corpus analyzed in the present study.

A standard deviation value of 5.23 means that on average each discussion section deviated from the mean value (7.98) by 5.23 devices. A standard deviation value which approaches 0 can be considered as an indication of homogeneity. Obviously, a value of 5.23 is far from 0 considering the mean value of 7.98. Finally, Table II shows that the standard error of the mean of frequency rate of use of grammatical stance markers in the corpus analyzed in the present study was 1.65. Such a relatively small value (i.e. a value which approaches the value of 0) gives us confidence that the sample of the discussion section included in the corpus for the present study was to some extent representative. The standard error value of 1.65 indicated that the magnitude of deviation among the means derived from different sample sets (should we decide to collect different sample sets from the same population from which the sample used in the present study was collected) was, on average, 1.65 devices. Less technically speaking, the rhetorical behavior (i.e. the use of grammatical stance markers) of the authors whose RA discussion sections were included in the present corpus can be considered to represent that of the rest of the authors publishing in the same scholarly journal (i.e. TEFLIN Journal).

The grammatical stance markers found in the corpus were further subdivided into two broad categories, namely epistemic and affective. The following pie chart presents graphically the distribution of the two grammatical stance categories.

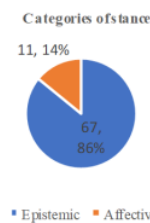


Fig. 1. Grammatical stance categories.

As the pie chart above (see figure 1) vividly shows, the majority of the grammatical stance markers were of

epistemic category. Out of the 78 devices of grammatical stance markers used in the corpus 67 (86%) were epistemic stance, while the rest, 11 (14%) were affective stance. It should be borne in mind that while all discussion sections in the corpus contained epistemic grammatical stance markers, there were four discussion sections which contained no affective grammatical stance markers at all. Table III below presents this information.

TABLE III. USE OF AFFECTIVE AND EPISTEMIC GRAMMATICAL STANCE

Text	Affective	Epistemic
01	1	6
02	0	1
03	2	7
04	0	2
05	0	5
06	1	10
07	4	8
08	0	9
09	2	13
10	1	6

### B. Discussion

The major aim of the present study was to investigate the use of grammatical stance markers in RA discussion sections from the field of applied linguistics written by Indonesian-speaking scholars. To this end, a small specialized corpus was built out of 10 discussion section sections taken from RAs published in a top-notch nationally accredited journal in the field of applied linguistics and foreign language teaching. One of the major findings was that Indonesian scholars from the field of applied linguistics deployed grammatical stance markers sparingly in their RA discussion sections. This finding suggests that the Indonesian applied linguistics scholars perceive academic research writing, particularly discussion section of RAs, as objective, where emphasis, according to them, should be put more on presenting factual information than expressing personal viewpoints. To put it differently, they view academic writing not as a persuasive endeavor in an attempt to persuade readers of the veracity of their claims, but rather as representation of objective reality.

For Indonesian scholars, knowledge claim is not something which needs to be negotiated through interaction with the readers. Rather, it is something to be conveyed objectively. Such faceless characterization of academic research writing is indeed not new. The avoidance of personal stamps on the academic research writing has been considered an ideal of scientific objectivity, and hence has been prevalent among scientists [22]. Such conceptualization of academic writing as indicated by the infrequent use of grammatical stance markers contrasts starkly with the current conception of academic writing prevalent among Anglophone scholars that academic research writing is far from being impersonal and faceless [23]. The virtual absence of interactivity and interpersonality elements in the academic research writing by Indonesian scholars may be the byproduct of the sociocultural context in which they live. Living in a predominantly collectivistic

culture, Indonesian scholars might not feel the pressure to persuade readers of the validity of their claims or the significance of their research findings, as scholars are typically considered experts in their own scholarly field [11]. This is evident from the nature of the grammatical stance markers they used, as indicated in the following examples.

- (6) *This should be seen as an indicator that the students really communicate using authentic language as they usually use in social media.*
- (7) *It is believed that this social interaction can better foster students' learning.*
- (8) *I emphasized that the main goal of writing a journal is to foster a writing habit and that grammatical accuracy is not the main priority.*

The second finding of the present study was that the majority of grammatical stance markers found in the corpus was of epistemic category; only 14% of the total grammatical stance markers which could be identified were of affective category. This suggests strongly that personal feelings and emotions do not get any place in academic research writing. It could also be argued that for Indonesian scholars, academic research writing is a serious genre, and thus should be devoid of personal and/or subjective traces of the author. It should be noted that the affective grammatical stance markers found in the corpus were mainly used as markers of authority, as shown by the following example.

- (9) *To maximize students' language production during the material and system and skill modes, Non-IRF (Modify F-move) patterns should be employed.*
- (10) *Teachers should help students to elaborate their ideas into full sentences with correct structure and terms through scaffolding students' responses ...*
- (11) *Teachers also need to pay attention to students' unclear utterances and use appropriate negotiation moves.*

Examples (9) through (11) above further indicate that interactivity and interpersonality are not considered critical in the academic research writing in the Indonesian context. Although they (Indonesian applied linguistics scholars) were found to use epistemic grammatical stance markers of low probability level (e.g. *may*, *might*) to comment on their research finding, they quite often used grammatical stance markers which belong to the category of high probability level (i.e. markers indicating certainty). The following are some of the sentences containing such certainty markers.

- (12) *Based on the result of the FLCAS, it was evident that students were already anxious with the fact that they had to speak in front of the class individually.*
- (13) *Thus it was evident that they experienced foreign language anxiety.*
- (14) *It was, therefore, clear that the reflective practice the students had done was beneficial and fruitful.*

Again, the use of such certainty markers provides further evidence that interactivity and interpersonality (materialized in academic research writing through the use of grammatical stance markers) are not particularly valued by Indonesian scholars.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The scarcity of grammatical stance markers found in the RA discussion sections indicates the Indonesian scholars' view of academic research writing. For them, academic research writing constitutes an objective representation of reality, and therefore linguistic features indicating personal touch of the authors should be kept to a minimum. Since this viewpoint contradicts sharply that espoused by Anglophone scholars being the gatekeepers in internationally-accredited journals, attempts by the Indonesian scholars to publish their research in international, let alone top-ranked, reputable, journals might meet with difficulties, assuming that they will use the same rhetorical strategy as the one they use when publishing in nationally-accredited journals. This is because of the differential ideologies embraced by Indonesian scholars and their Anglophone counterparts. What the findings of the present study imply is that Indonesian scholars might need to change their rhetorical behavior when writing for international publication. Pedagogically, the findings of the present study point to a need to design a program which specifically caters to helping Indonesian scholars to adapt to the rhetorical behavior valued in internationally-accredited journals.

Admittedly, the findings of the present study should be treated with caution. This is because the number of texts analyzed in the present study was relatively small. Thus, the generalizability of the findings of the present study might be questioned. For this reason, future studies should analyze a larger corpus containing not a single discipline, but more than one. Moreover, comparison should also be made between the writing of Indonesian scholars and that of international authors, that is those authors who have been successful in publishing their research in internationally-accredited journals, preferably top-ranked journals. By doing so, more valid conclusion can be reached with regard to whether or not Indonesian scholars' research writing is faceless.

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