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# Evaluative Stancetaking in English-Medium Academic Prose: A Study of Research Article Abstracts by Russian and Chinese L2 Writers

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Globalization has created the academic community's need to learn English in order to publish internationally and caused intensive research into academic prose by non-native writers with the aim of revealing prevailing culture-and discipline-specific rhetoric structures and suggesting ways of improving academic writing skills.

**Purpose:** This contrastive study explored preferences in the employment of stance features in English-medium research article abstracts by second language writers from two different cultural backgrounds (Russia and China) assuming that variations in stancetaking are culturally shaped.

**Method:** Hyland's (2005b) taxonomy of stance resources was adopted for the current study as the most comprehensive one including a wide range of writer-oriented features. This taxonomy can help identify pragmatic functions of linguistic markers used for stancetaking in academic prose. The methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis were applied.

**Results:** A contrastive analysis of the findings showed that the Russian and Chinese academic communities manifest different stancetaking preferences. The quantitative analysis revealed that Chinese-authored RA abstracts contained considerably more stance features than those written by their Russian counterparts. Most quantitative differences between the application of stance features by Russian and Chinese authors were statistically significant. It was also revealed that while the Chinese academic writers seemed to be more careful in making claims, anticipating and acknowledging, the Russian scholars chose to create an impression of certainty and assurance, instilling confidence in their readers. The differences in the employment of stance features identified in the study are likely to reflect culture-specific writing peculiarities of the Chinese and Russian academic communities which favour slightly different discursive strategies.

**Conclusion:** The findings carry pedagogical implications for academic writing course designers and can enhance L2 writers' familiarity with the culture-specific academic writing conventions in the knowledge domain.

## KEYWORDS

stance, research article abstract, academic discourse, cross-cultural variation

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has created the need to learn academic English in order to teach disciplines or to communicate research results on the global academic arena. Many scholars from non-Anglophone countries are required to publish their research papers for promotion as universities rely on Science Citation Index indicators for their ranking. Over the past 15

years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of published English-language research articles by second language (L2) academic writers. This movement has caused intensive research into L2 English academic texts with the aim of revealing prevailing culture-specific rhetorical structures.

The motivation behind the selection of RA abstracts by Russian and Chinese



scholars for a contrastive analysis was significant cultural differences on the one hand and similarities in the academic contexts in which the Russian and Chinese academic communities have been developing in the early twenty first century on the other one. In both cultures, English was not used as a language of science and education. However, due to the process of globalization of education and science, English has been gaining influence there which is confirmed by the expansion of English language education, the initiation of the policy of using English as a medium of instruction and a growing number of English-medium publications by Russian and Chinese scholars supported by government and university policies (Boginskaya, 2024; Korotkina, 2018; He, 2017; Lei & Jiang, 2019). To enhance their research productivities, both Russian and Chinese universities are putting pressure on their scholars to publish their papers in international journals. This study may therefore shed light on how L2 academic writers from two culturally different academic communities increasingly favoring English as a medium of instruction and publication present their research results, acknowledge findings of other scholars and construct a dialogue with readers.

In addition, whilst the use of rhetorical patterns in RA abstracts has received much attention, little empirical research appears to have compared stance features in academic texts by L2 writers from a cross-cultural perspective. The literature review revealed that English-medium academic texts produced by L2 writers have mostly been analysed in terms of their distinctions from L1 academic prose. Differences in stance features in English academic texts by L2 writers with different cultural backgrounds have not received their deserved attention. It is possible that this analysis can reveal stance features in Chinese- and Russian-authored academic prose which has never been explored to date in terms of differences. It is assumed that despite a relative uniformity of RA abstracts imposed by generic requirements, there is significant intercultural variation in the stancetaking preferences of Chinese and Russian L2 writers influenced by culture-specific writing conventions. The present study focuses therefore on Russian- and Chinese-authored RA abstracts, in particular on variation in the employment of stance features in this academic genre, and seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) Are there any cross-cultural differences between Russian- and Chinese-authored RA abstracts in terms of the categories of stance the authors opt for?
- (2) Are there any cross-cultural differences between Russian- and Chinese-authored RA abstracts in terms of the frequency of occurrence of the stancetaking categories and their types?

The following section describes previous studies on cultural preferences in the use of stance features in academic dis-

course and proceeds to discuss the concept of stancetaking as a rhetorical strategy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Previous Studies on Cultural Preferences in the Use of Stance Features in Academic Prose

Comparative studies on stance in L1 and L2 academic writing have revealed significant differences in various cultural groups, highlighting the complex interplay between language, culture, and academic discourse. These differences are not simply about individual variations but rather reflect broader cultural norms regarding the role of the writer, the relationship between writer and reader, and the nature of knowledge itself.

The literature review indicated a large number of studies conducted by Chinese scholars, contrasting rhetorical features in Chinese-authored academic texts and those written by L1 English writers. Xiong's (2007) study, for example, made a structure comparison of metadiscourse patterns in English- and Chinese-authored papers and identified significant differences in the metadiscourse choices made by L1 and L2 Chinese writers. Hu and Cao (2011) made an attempt to contrast hedges and boosters in RA abstracts published in Chinese and English journals and revealed the predominance of boosters in Chinese-authored abstracts and a larger number of hedges in academic prose by L1 writers. In contrast, Hu & Wang's (2014) research into metadiscourse in Chinese- and Anglophone-authored RAs revealed that the Chinese scholars are more indirect than their Anglophone counterparts. They attribute this rhetorical feature to a Chinese culture-specific emphasis on harmonious relationships and desire to avoid face-threatening acts. It is interesting that the authors of these two studies which yielded totally different results explained variations in the use of hedges and boosters by Chinese and English authors by the influences of culture-specific rhetorical practices. Hu and Cao (2011) claimed that Chinese rhetorical norms encourage the framing of ideas in non-polemical terms and rely more on experiential knowledge in giving less attention to possible counterarguments, while Hu & Wang (2014) argued that due to a tendency to maintain interpersonal harmony that is highly valued in China, Chinese authors tend to avoid using boosters and confronting another person directly. Xu and Nesi (2019), who explored differences in evaluative style in RA introductions written by Chinese and British scholars, revealed that Chinese writers make more categorical assertions using more boosters, while British ones tend to acknowledge alternative views and are more explicit about their own attitudes towards the research issue and previous studies giving preference to hedging devices.

In addition to hedges and boosters, self-mention markers were also a focus of attention in a number of studies. For example, Wu & Zhu's (2015) contrastive study (2015) based on a corpus of English-medium research articles by English and Chinese scholars yielded different results and showed that English writers are more ready to present their self by taking on the role of discourse constructor, arguer and evaluator, whereas their Chinese counterparts were inclined to show their collective self and take on the role of researcher. Xia (2018) investigated research articles by English and Chinese writers across the four disciplines and revealed no consistent frequency differences in the self-mention usage.

With this profusion of studies into rhetorical features of Chinese-authored research articles, English-language academic prose by Russian writers has been explored in a scarce number of studies (Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2022; Krapivkina, 2014; Pyankova, 1994; Zanina, 2016). Pyankova (1994) studied differences between English and Russian academic texts and found that Russian scholars underuse self-mention markers and overuse passive and impersonal structures. Zanina (2016) analysed English- and Russian-medium RAs and revealed differences between the two sub-corpora in terms of the frequencies of occurrence of hedges and their subtypes. Zanina found that the overall frequency of hedges is significantly higher in the English RAs, and there are differences between the shares of the types of hedges in two sub-corpora. Belyakova (2017) carried out a cross-cultural comparison of English-medium RA abstracts by L2 (Russian) and L1 academic writers in the field of geoscience to investigate their metadiscourse features and found that writers from Russian academia disguise themselves to a larger extent, which was evident from the lower frequency of self-mention markers.

Taking prior research altogether, it seems differences in stance features in English-medium academic texts by L2 writers with different cultural backgrounds have not received their deserved attention. I assume that despite a relative uniformity of RA abstracts imposed by generic requirements, there is significant intercultural variation in the metadiscourse preferences of writers influenced by the culture-specific academic writing conventions or having adopted the Anglophone academic writing style. To fill the gap in the research into L2 academic writing, the present study focuses on Russian- and Chinese-authored RA abstracts, in particular on variation in the employment of stance features in this academic genre.

## Stancetaking as a Rhetorical Strategy in Academic Discourse

Previous research has confirmed that stance is a crucial feature of academic discourse, and writers make choices on using stancetaking rhetorical devices to interact with an audience in different academic genres. Crismore and Farnsworth (1990) claimed that the employment of stance features such

as hedges and boosters increase the persuasiveness of academic texts. Abdi (2002) argued that stance features help establish credibility. The same conclusions were made by Hyland (1998) who revealed that stance serves the persuasive function. According to Çiftçi and Akbaş (2021), expressing stance in academic discourse is crucial for constructing authorial identities and negotiating with readers.

The term 'stance' was introduced by Biber and Finegan (1988) who defined it as the linguistic expression of commitment to the proposition. In their later study, they referred personal feelings, attitudes, value judgments, and assessments to this category (Biber et al., 1999, p. 966). Since then, stance has been interpreted from diverse perspectives. Gray and Biber (2012) described it as the tool used for encoding opinions and assessments. Hyland (2005b) described stance as a type of evaluation, conceptualizing it as an attitudinal dimension that includes features used by writers to present themselves and convey their judgements and opinions. The engagement, one more type of evaluation, was referred to a dimension where the writer acknowledges others, recognizes the presence of his/her readers, focuses their attention, includes them as discourse participants, and guides them to interpretations (Hyland, 2005b). Hyland distinguished between three components of stance: evidentiality, affect, and presence. Evidentiality, as Hyland (2005b) put it, refers to the writer's expressed commitment to the reliability of the proposition and its potential impact on the reader; affect involves a wide range of attitudes towards what is said; and presence concerns the extent to which the writer projects him/herself into the text. These three components are realized in the four stance features: (1) hedges used to withhold complete commitment to a proposition, (2) boosters that help express certainty in what is being said and mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with an audience, (3) attitude markers used to indicate the writer's affective attitude to propositions, and (4) self-mentions that manifest the explicitness of an authorial presence. Hyland's taxonomy of stance resources was adopted for the current study as the most comprehensive one including a wide range of writer-oriented features. In addition, this taxonomy can help identify pragmatic functions of linguistic markers used to construct stance in RA abstracts by culturally diverse authors. The types of boosting were identified based on Hyland and Zou's (2021) typology. For the purposes of this study, I slightly modified this model to reflect the rhetorical peculiarities of the genre under discussion. Specifically, I added one more type of boosting – solidarity markers (e.g., *well-known*, *widely-known*, *common*, *as we know*) which also seem to enhance the degree of commitment to the propositional content, as they create a sense of solidarity with readers, thus building credibility and imparting confidence. These markers were referred to boosting devices due to their strong ability to enhance persuasiveness of proposition and suppress alternative views which can exist beyond well-known facts. Hedging devices found in the corpus were analysed 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.

In an attempt to analyse attitudinal stance, the model proposed by Dueñas (2010) was used (Table 2). This model is a simplified version of Swales and Burke’s (2003) taxonomy that includes seven categories of evaluative adjectives: acuity, aesthetic appeal, assessment, deviance, relevance, size, and strength.

METHOD

Corpus Design

The present study was conducted on a corpus of RA abstracts derived from six Scopus-indexed journals in the field of engineering: *Energies*, *Metal Powder Report*, *Renewable Energy*, *Symmetry*, *Materials Today*, and *npj 2D Materials and Applications*.

Having identified the target journals, 234 research article abstracts (117 Chinese-authored and 117 Russian-authored) were randomly selected to ensure a good degree of objectivity and comparability of texts. The RA abstracts were distributed between the two sub-corpora: sub-corpus 1 (SC1) includes Chinese-authored RA abstracts and sub-corpus 2 (SC2) includes Russian-authored RA abstracts. The number of words in each sub-corpus is 12,875 and 11,574, which makes 24,449 words altogether. The corpus is considered large enough to provide sufficient examples of the target

rhetorical features. To eliminate the impact of a publication period, only RA abstracts from the most recent issues of each journal published between 2017 and 2022 were selected in order to exhibit the linguistic characteristics of present-day academic discourse. Only one RA abstract from every author was selected in order to avoid the influence of an individual

writing style. The origin of the authors was judged by their names and affiliations. The first author of each article with a Russian name and an affiliation with a Russian university was taken to be a Russian author, and the first author of each article with a Chinese name and an affiliation with a Chinese university was taken to be a Chinese author. It is assumed that only the persons listed as authors are responsible for the language used in the RA abstracts. Copyeditors’ contribution is disregarded since it is difficult to separate it from that of the authors. All the journals selected to build the corpus have a large readership and rather high prestige in their fields (Q1-Q2 in Scopus). They impose strict requirements on the quality of English used in research articles. This was the motive of selecting these journals for the current study.

The corpus was built to ensure comparability in terms of genre (RA abstracts), authors’ origin (Russia and China), field (engineering sciences), and currency. This methodological equivalence, as Hu & Wang (2014, p. 18) put it, allows the researcher “to establish a common platform for making meaningful comparisons and drawing reliable and valid conclusions about cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic differences/similarities”.

Table 1  
Types of hedges and boosters

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
	Solidarity markers	Signal well-known facts and values

Table 2  
Types of attitudinal stance

Types	Function
Assessment markers	signal the writer’s evaluation of the study (novelty, usefulness, validity)
Significance markers	signal relevance or importance of the study
Emotion markers	refer to the writer’s affective position and generate the same sentiment in readers

## Procedure

Since the study aimed to compare the use of stance in English-medium RA abstracts written by L2 English writers from two different academic cultures, the methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis were applied. The quantitative analysis assisted with WordSmith Tools 5 was conducted to reveal the frequency of stance features in RA abstracts selected to build the corpus. First, stance features were identified using this text analysis software, which provides details about the text and can ensure the accuracy of research results. Hyland's (2005b) framework of stance features (hedging, boosting, attitude, and self-mention) was adopted as the initial model for revealing stance features. Second, the markers found in the corpus were manually analyzed in context to determine their pragmatic functions and to ensure that they serve as stance features. Finally, the occurrences of stance markers were classified and combined. The inter-group (Russian versus Chinese authors) contrastive analysis was conducted to find potential similarities and differences between the groups. After classifying stance features and calculating their frequencies, Rayson's (2008) Log Likelihood Calculator<sup>1</sup> was used to find out whether the differences stance features are significant.

A careful analysis of the context was conducted to classify stance features by their categories and types within each category and interpret differences revealed. The identification of stance features seems to be a complicated procedure as it is necessary to decode context-dependent lexical items to interpret how the stancetaking strategy is realized. To ensure in-depth exploration into the use of stance, examples were taken from the corpus being studied and explanations were provided to describe the rhetorical functions of stance features found in the corpus.

The following are the steps of the analysis as it appears in the paper:

- (1) Deriving RA abstracts from the electronic versions of the selected journals and exporting them to two Microsoft Word files by the names and affiliations of the authors.
- (2) Compiling two sub-corpora containing Chinese-authored RA abstracts and Russian-authored RA abstracts.
- (3) Examining each sub-corpus for presence of stance features.
- (4) Labeling each instance as a stance feature based on contextual analysis in order to be certain about its function as stancetaking.
- (5) Arranging the stance features into groups based on the above-mentioned taxonomies of stance and its types.
- (6) Counting the raw numbers of stance features for each group in each sub-corpus.

- (7) Normalizing the occurrences of the stancetaking categories and their types found in each sub-corpus to 1000 words.
- (8) Summarizing the results in a table format.
- (9) Interpreting the rhetorical functions of the stance features found in the two corpora.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Analysis of Stance Features in RA Abstracts by Chinese and Russian Writers

The outcome of the quantitative analysis shows similarities and differences in the use of stance features by Russian and Chinese authors in terms of frequencies.

Overall, I found 718 stance features in SC1 and 550 ones in SC2. Hedges were the most frequent stance resources in the Chinese-authored texts. Attitude markers ranked second in SC1 and first in SC2. Boosters exhibited the greatest difference with nearly twice as many cases in the Russian sub-corpus. Self-mention markers ranked third in SC1 and were the least frequently used in SC2. The results suggest that researchers from both cultural backgrounds are conscious of the need to engage with the content and readers in a different way. The difference was significant for almost all stance features (log Likelihood = 41,87 for hedges, 33,95 – for boosters, 7,48 – for self-mention markers,  $p < 0.01$ ). The difference between the corpora was statistically insignificant only for the total number of attitude markers (log Likelihood = 0,01). The raw and normalized frequencies of stance features for SC1 and SC2 are shown in Table 3.

The types of stance features were also analysed within each stance category. The results are presented in Tables 4-7.

Table 4 manifests that hedging devices found in the two sub-corpora differ both in terms of frequencies and types. The difference between the total use of hedges was statistically significant (log Likelihood = 41,87,  $p < 0.01$ ). The table also shows that the general trends in the ranking of the types of hedging are similar: while plausibility hedges clearly prevail in both sub-corpora, rounders rank third. The difference between the two subcorpora in terms of the types of hedging was statistically significant for plausibility hedges (log Likelihood = 26,83,  $p < 0.01$ ) and downtoners (log Likelihood = 19,07,  $p < 0.01$ ). For rounders it was 0,22.

Similar to hedges, boosters differed both numerically with a statistically significant difference (log Likelihood = 33,95) and functionally. The difference was statistically significant for certainty markers (log Likelihood = 7,29,  $p < 0.01$ ) and intensity markers (log Likelihood = 32,03). For extremity and

<sup>1</sup> Rayson's Log Likelihood Calculator. <https://ucrel-api.lancaster.ac.uk/>

solidarity markers, no statistically significant difference was revealed between the two subcorpora (log Likelihood values were 0,78 and 0,91, respectively). Table 5 illustrates that all the four types of boosting are used more frequently by the Russian authors. The distribution of these types within each sub-corpus is also different. In the Russian sub-corpus, intensity boosters rank first followed by certainty, extremity and solidarity markers. In the Chinese sub-corpus, certainty markers prevail. Intensity markers rank second followed by

extremity and solidarity markers. In both sub-corpora, the solidarity markers are infrequent.

The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in the total application of attitude markers by the Chinese and Russian authors (log Likelihood = 0,01). However, the difference was statistically significant for the types of attitudes: for assessment markers, log Likelihood = 40,6 and for significance markers log Likelihood = 35,47,  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3**

*Stance features in the two sub-corpora (raw and normalized frequencies).*

Stance features	SC1	SC2
Hedges	355 (31.1)	179 (15.1)
Boosters	59 (5.2)	128 (10.8)
Attitude markers	209 (18.3)	189 (16)
Self-mention markers	95 (8.2)	54 (4.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>718 (62.8)</b>	<b>550 (46.4)</b>

**Table 4**

*Types of hedging in the two sub-corpora (raw and normalized frequencies).*

Hedges	SC1	SC2
Plausibility hedges	219 (19.2)	109 (9.2)
Downtoners	123 (10.8)	56 (4.7)
Rounders	13 (1.1)	14 (1.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>355 (31.1)</b>	<b>179 (15.1)</b>

**Table 5**

*Types of boosting in the two sub-corpora (raw and normalized frequencies).*

Boosters	SC1	SC2
Certainty markers	31 (2.7)	51 (4.3)
Extremity markers	10 (0.9)	13 (1.1)
Intensity markers	16 (1.4)	60 (5.1)
Solidarity markers	2 (0.2)	4 (0.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>59 (5.2)</b>	<b>128 (10.8)</b>

**Table 6**

*Types of attitudes in the two sub-corpora (raw and normalized frequencies).*

Attitude markers	SC1	SC2
Assessment markers	55 (4.8)	131 (11.1)
Significance markers	154 (13.5)	58 (5.9)
<b>Total</b>	<b>209 (18.3)</b>	<b>189 (16)</b>

The types of self-mention markers are presented in Table 7.

The results also revealed a statistically significant difference between the total use of self-mention markers (log Likelihood = 7,48,  $p < 0.01$ ) by Russian and Chinese authors

Quantitative results do not fully explicate the ways in which culturally diverse academic writers deploy the stance features. Thus, a detailed qualitative analysis of their functions is presented below.

Qualitative Analysis of Stance Features in RA Abstracts by Chinese and Russian Writers

Hedges

Hedges downplay a writer’s commitment to a proposition, modifying its certainty, helping to acknowledge alternative viewpoints, and steering the reader to the conclusion or reasoning of the writer’s choice. Here is an example of the plausibility hedge derived from the Chinese sub-corpus that indicates that the statement is based on an assumption rather than facts.

- 1. Our results **suggest** that population-specific assemblies are necessary for genetic and medical analysis. (SC1)

The humility-indicating hedge signals an awareness of alternative viewpoints and seeks to avoid potential criticism. In (2) and (3), the plausibility hedges also signal that the claims are based on author’s assumptions rather than facts:

- 2. *Determining the maximally economically efficient HP capacity **may** be the key limiting factor for the potential range of solutions* (SC2)
- 3. *Nickel (Ni) is ubiquitous in the environment and evidence **has suggested** that Ni **can** cause ocular surface inflammation.* (SC1)

In interpreting their research results, the authors draw conclusions using speculative language to avoid commitment to their claims. This approach to reasoning is helpful in achieving this rhetorical purpose.

Discrepancies in the use of downtoners by the Russian and Chinese authors indicates that they tend to show some professional modesty and soften claims in a different way. In (4), the downtowner *often* protects the writer against inaccuracy of research results. In (5), *quite* as a downtoner mitigates the intensity of the statement and lessens the certainty of the authorial claim.

- 4. *However, its efficacy is **often** limited by the immunosuppressive tumor microenvironment (TME) in solid tumors.* (SC1)
- 5. *The stable operation is **quite** important to the safety of the engine.* (SC2)

In (6), the downtoners *usually* and *almost* might convey a certain qualification with regard to the degree of accuracy of the conclusions demonstrating that the statement might be inaccurate (Hyland, 1998).

- 6. *The main problem of fluid sampling is due to the fact that even a small pressure drawdown **usually** leads to the formation of a two-phase mixture in the bottom hole area, and it is **almost** impossible to take representative samples with downhole samplers or a formation tester* (SC1).

One more type of hedging distinguished by Hyland and Zou (2021) – rounders indicating an approximation – was surprisingly rather scarce in both sub-corpora. In hard sciences, which present a large amount of statistical data, rounders are considered to be more common than in soft sciences which deal with verbal rather than numeric data (Hyland & Zou, 2021). However, the corpus features the authors’ tendency to present precise numerical data without approximating it. Here is an example of the rounder found in the Chinese-authored RA abstract:

- 7. In the middle of fatigue, the reinforcement material can reduce the deterioration value of the bridge deck by **approximately** 50%. (SC1)

By making the number a little fuzzy, the adverb employed as a rounder expresses approximation, thereby reducing accuracy of the claim.

Tale 7

Types of self-mention in the two sub-corpora (raw and normalized frequencies).

Self-mention markers	SC1	SC2
First-person plural pronoun (we)	66 (5.8)	35 (3)
Possessive adjectives (our)	29 (2.4)	19 (1.5)
Total	95 (8.2)	54 (4.5)



### 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 normalized frequency of these devices in SC2, which indicates that Russian writers tend to occupy a stronger stance and are keener to express their convictions and highlight the significance of their work. Here are two examples from the corpus.

8. *It was **evident** from the study's findings that the pilot tunnels excavation and the arches installation accounted for 67% and 23.1% of the total surface settlement, respectively.* (SC1)
9. *Despite their priority, molecular and genetic aspects of diabetes pathogenesis are poorly understood; however, the involvement of oxidative stress in this process is **undoubted**.* (SC2)

The certainty markers used in the above examples help remove any doubts about the claims closing down potential opposition. They help authors build a strong voice and indicate the writer's epistemic conviction. In addition to conveying an authorial assertive stance, these devices play a crucial role in realizing the fact-based approach to reasoning.

10. *The calculations **demonstrate** that the developed algorithms have high speed and high performance in detecting deviations of the electrical power quality.* (SC2)
11. *This work **proves** that the adding of an integrated catalyst layer is a promising strategy to directly utilize methanol for Ni-YSZ anode-supported SOFCs.* (SC1)

In the above examples, the authors anticipate possible responses from the reader but choose to prevent them. The boosting verb *demonstrate* is used to indicate that the claims are based on accurate data rather than on authors' assumptions. The verb *prove* expresses conviction with which the authors communicate their research results obtained through the experiment.

12. *For the same design parameters, the creep damage was **evidently** greater than the fatigue damage.* (SC1)

The adverb 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 mechanics.

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

13. *The structure–property relationships are **particularly** emphasized.* (SC1)
14. *When released to the environment, the rocket fuel unsymmetrical dimethylhydrazine (UDMH) undergoes oxidative transformations, resulting in the formation of an **extremely** large number of nitrogen-containing transformation products.* (SC2)

The writers consider the issues they are going to discuss fundamental and make attempts to encourage their audiences to perceive them in the same vein.

Extremity markers, that rank third in both sub-corpora, “emphasize the upper edge of a continuum” (Hyland & Zou, 2021, p. 8), as in here:

15. *Human error is **the most common** accident in industrial systems.* (SC1)
16. *Energetic materials constitute one of **the most important** subtypes of functional materials used for various applications.* (SC1)

By upgrading the propositions, the writers emphasize the frequency of human errors (15) and the importance of the subtypes of materials under study (16) without the need for elaboration.

Finally, solidarity markers, which were the least frequent boosting items in both sub-corpora, contribute to the persuasiveness of authorial claims through the appeal to shared knowledge. These devices are used to argue that knowledge claims are widely accepted or known in academia and demonstrate that the authors expect their readers to be familiar with certain facts and feel solidarity thus taking the audience's knowledge for granted. The following example illustrates the case.

17. *As it is **widely known**, along with the manufacturer and the consumer, the authorities that implement the state policy on ensuring the safety of products put into circulation in the country.* (SC2)

### Attitude Markers

Assessment markers signal the writer's evaluation of the study emphasizing interesting, crucial or debatable findings. This rhetorical strategy helps promote and evaluate research. Here are two examples from the Chinese sub-corpus.

18. *This study provides not only the first systematic understanding about the physics of CE, but also demonstrates that the triboelectric nanogenerator (TENG) is an **effective** method for studying the nature of CE between any materials.* (SC1)



19. *Our work not only provides a **new effective** way to re-program TME in vivo, but also shed light on the design of novel bioorthogonal nanozymes for cancer immunotherapy.* (SC1)

Assessing the efficiency and novelty of the methods are key features of research, particularly among engineering scholars whose studies are typically aimed at revealing innovative ways of solving practical problems.

Significance attitude markers are used to show the role of research results and present a valid argument, as in the examples below.

20. *Well test equipment setup becomes much more compact and less weight; the costs of drilling time are reduced, which is **viably important** for well testing on the Arctic conditions.* (SC2).
21. *Thus, the theoretical and practical **significance** of the study lies in revealing the features and problems of the Iraq oil industry infrastructure.* (SC2)

The significant type of attitudes markers is used here to evaluate the research results. The authors highlight the importance of their studies for the body of disciplinary knowledge.

Finally, it is not surprising that the emotional type of attitude, which refers to how the writer feels rather than evaluate the research, does not appear in the corpus. The RA abstract acts as a time-saving tool intended to represent the content as accurately and concisely as possible. Due to its length being limited to 200-250 words, the writer has no space to build an emotive stance. Therefore, the absence of emotion attitude markers in both sub-corpora might be due to the generic features of the texts under consideration rather than culturally shaped differences.

### Self-Mention Markers

Self-mention sends an indication to the reader of the perspective from which the statement should be interpreted (Hyland, 2005a). Although it is often taught to avoid personal pronouns in RA articles, an analysis shows a regular use of self-mentions to emphasize the importance that should be given to authorial claims or choices. Graff and Birkenstein (2010), for example, advise to abandon the perceived prohibition about the use of personal pronouns, because they will not eliminate the subjective opinions and may hurt writers' abilities to distinguish their views from other people's perspectives. In the same vein, Hyland (2005a) argues that self-mention markers are important to emphasize the writer's contribution. In my present corpus, however, in contrast to some other studies (Fløttum, 2012; Hyland, 2001), self-mentions are not frequent stance features. The analysis revealed that engineering writers tend to avoid creating an

authorial presence. Here are rare examples from the corpus that feature the use of self-mentions to present a discursive self.

22. ***Our** conclusion is that electron transfer is the dominant mechanism for CE between solid-solid pairs.* (SC1)
23. *In this paper, **we** present the results of dispersion of thermodynamically immiscible polypropylene (PP).* (SC2)

In (22), the possessive adjective *our* helps the authors to outline their conclusion, i.e. to express their knowledge claim about the topic. In (23), *we*-pronoun is used for creating an identity of the author as an architect of the text who shows how the text is organized, i.e. for effecting the rhetorical function of presenting the findings.

Interestingly, the first-person plural pronouns appeared only in the co-authored texts in both sub-corpora. In those 10 single-authored articles selected to build the corpus, there were no occurrences of these pronouns. This finding suggests that both Russian and Chinese authors tend to avoid expressing their collective identities, indicating they are members of a larger community, which is a typical function of *Pluralis Majestatis*. In the Russian academic community, for example, *we* often signals the author's desire to enhance the significance of the work presenting his/her claims as the opinion of a scientific school (Krapivkina, 2014).

What is more, no occurrences of first-person singular pronouns were found in the corpus, which might be explained by the fact that almost all the RAs selected to build the corpus are co-authored. Only nine RAs in SC2 and one RA in SC1 are single authored, but the pronouns *I* and *me* were not found in these texts. This finding contracts the results obtained by some other scholars. For example, Seone (2013) traced an increase in the use of first-person singular pronouns in hard science articles. The same trend towards informality was emphasized by Hyland and Jiang (2017). However, like the present study, Harwood's (2005) research revealed that the hard sciences show a preference for the first plural pronoun.

Summing up the similarities and differences in the use of self-mentions in the two sub-corpora (no occurrences of first-person singular pronouns and the heavier use of first-person plural pronouns by Chinese authors), it seems that Chinese authors are more aware of the role of these devices in persuading readers to accept their claims. The lower frequency of self-mentions in SC2 shows that Russian engineering scholars tend to be more objective in their academic writing and hide their personality behind impersonal constructions emphasizing research results rather than an authorial stance

## DISCUSSION

Conducted from a cross-cultural perspective, this study aimed to explore culturally shaped variations in the employment of stance features in a corpus of English-medium RA abstracts written by Russian and Chinese engineering authors which previously did not attract much attention of linguists. The study was based on the assumption that variations in stancetaking are culturally shaped. This assumption relied on previous studies in the field of contrastive rhetoric (Alonso-Almeida, 2014; Belyakova, 2017; Hryniuk, 2018; Isik-Tas, 2017; Mikolaychik, 2019; Walková, 2018; Wu & Zhu, 2015, etc.), which emphasized that despite internationally recognized generic requirements, there is significant intercultural variation in the rhetorical preferences of non-native writers influenced by culture-specific writing conventions.

A comparison of the RA abstracts has showed that the Russian and Chinese engineering communities manifest different stancetaking preferences. The research questions guiding this study asked about cross-cultural differences between Russian- and Chinese-authored RA abstracts in terms of the categories of stance the authors opt for and their frequencies. The study revealed significant differences between the two sub-corpora, both quantitative and qualitative. While the Chinese authors seemed to be much more careful in making claims and presenting findings thus securing their academic credibility, the Russian ones preferred to suppress alternatives and leave little room to the reader's own interpretations thus creating an impression of certainty and assurance and instilling confidence in the academic audience. Regarding the attitude markers, the differences were also significant. The Russian writers used attitude markers to assess the efficiency and novelty of the methods developed while their Chinese counterparts exploit evaluative features to highlight the significance of their studies. The higher share of significance attitude markers found in the Chinese sub-corpus might be explained taking into account the very competitive nature of the Chinese academic community in which it seems necessary to promote one's research as regards its contribution to the body of disciplinary knowledge in order to be published. The use of self-mentions was also different in the two sub-corpora. They were more frequent in the Chinese sub-corpus, which signals that the Russian scholars opted for an impersonal style of writing favored by the Russian academic writing conventions.

The differences in the employment of stance features identified in the study allow me to suggest that the Chinese and Russian academic communities favour slightly different writing strategies. This conclusion is in line with the results obtained by other scholars, who emphasize the role of culture in academic writing (AlGhamdi & Suleiman Alyousef, 2022; Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2023; Isik-Tas, 2017; Mikolaychik, 2019; Shchemeleva, 2015; Walková, 2018).

The role played by the disciplinary writing culture in engineering RA abstracts published in English is outweighed by the culturally shaped conventions, and the disciplinary beliefs and understandings do not predominate over the cultural ones. This conclusion has been already made by Hyland (2013), according to whom writing is bound up with culture since it makes available certain taken-for-granted ways of organizing our understanding. The analysis revealed that in an effort to be more confident, impersonal and objective, engineering researchers from Russian academia avoid using hedging devices which can reduce assertiveness of the argument and precision of research results. The ability to present arguments as established facts and make assertive knowledge claims is encouraged. This finding is in line with the conclusion made by Prokhorov (2006) who described Russian academic discourse as uncompromising, categorical, and featuring assertions. For Russian writers, it is therefore a tricky facet to find a balance between the disciplinary objectivity and impersonality requirements and the need to demonstrate the writer's personality and mitigate claims favored by the international academic writing conventions.

Regarding the Chinese writers, despite the fact that Chinese academia valorizes objectivity and impersonality and tends to downplay "measured uncertainty, guarded commitment, tentativeness, subjectivity, and possibility of multiple interpretations" (Hu & Cao, 2011, p. 2805), Chinese authors seemed to be less overtly critical than their Russian counterparts, taking a more tentative approach which is in line with the Confucian beliefs and dogmas (Lee, 2015). In addition, in Chinese-authored academic prose an awareness of the Anglophone academic writing conventions is more evident than in the Russian-authored ones. It seems that Chinese engineering scholars have mastered the Anglophone standards of academic writing better than their Russian counterparts.

Therefore, the study fully confirmed the assumption made in this and previous studies and revealed that the Russian and Chinese academic communities manifest different stancetaking preferences.

It should be recognized that the research results presented here are limited due to a small number of RA abstracts collected to build the corpus. Due to this limitation, the research results can be interpreted only as trends in the discipline which may be confirmed or rejected by comparative research based on a larger corpus.

## Implications

The findings suggest that it is necessary to teach stance building strategies to L2 writers and raise their awareness of cultural, disciplinary and generic differences in the use of interactional devices in academic prose. Stancetaking conventions are not always easily understood by L2 writers due

to a lack of explicit practice. These points make stancetaking deserve a prominent place in EAP courses.

The need for teaching stance features emphasized in the current study supports the findings of previous research which revealed that L2 academic writers find it difficult to give a credible representation of themselves through the use of stance resources (Hyland, 2005). As Vande Kopple (2021) suggests, meanings conveyed by stance can be nuanced and L2 writers must carefully examine linguistic elements, meanings, and probable effects of those meanings within a particular context. It is advisable to help students to understand both cultural, genre-specific and disciplinary stancetaking variations through a systemic instruction.

Firstly, when teaching stance, EAP teachers should use common stance features. Secondly, more examples of how to use stance devices in different academic genres should be introduced by EAP teachers. They should be taken from academic prose by L1 academic writers in the discipline. Thirdly, it seems that explicit teaching of stance in different academic genres can help raise awareness of their interactional aspect among students and increase their ability to interact with the targeted audience and make their claims more persuasive.

The following exercises can be used to develop stancetaking competence in novice L2 academic writers.

- (1) Underline the stance feature used in the excerpt.
- (2) Identify the purpose of using the hedges in the excerpt.
- (3) Produce the more persuasive argument using the boosting device.
- (4) Reduce the degree of commitment in the following statement using the hedging device.
- (5) Rewrite the following sentence using appropriate stance feature.

In EAP classes with students majoring in different disciplinary fields, the findings of the present study may be highlighted through consciousness-raising classroom activities. There are examples of these activities in various disciplines that can be implemented. EAP teachers might encourage their students to compare the use of stance features in different disciplines and draw students' attention to differences between them. The teacher may ask students to read two or three academic texts from different disciplines and compare stance use. The students may be tasked to report their findings during classroom sessions.

EAP teachers may also guide students to write their academic texts with a greater sense of responsibility, for example, by using stance features intentionally in their writing.

Explicit instruction of linguistic features, including how to use stance devices appropriately, by evaluating academic texts written by other students can also help improve the academic writing skills.

## CONCLUSION

In a globalized world, nations with greater academic power such as the USA and the UK are located at the center of academic knowledge production controlling high-impact academic journals and prescribing communication rules. This is one of the reasons why most international journals require authors to submit only English-medium manuscripts thus ensuring an academic monopoly for Anglophone writers. In most non-Anglophone countries, including China and Russia, the universities have imposed policies to promote publications in international academic journals with the aim to increase the country's share of global research output. To be efficient, researchers should publish their findings in English, which requires high English language proficiency and knowledge of the academic writing conventions to conform to the expectations of global academia and successfully integrate into it.

The aim of the present study was to contribute to a better understanding of stance as a crucial feature academic writing through a contrastive analysis of L2-authored academic texts and to provide an answer to the question of how culture manifests itself in academic communication. The materials for the study were derived from six Scopus-indexed journals in the field of engineering.

The results confirmed the assumption about the reflection of cultural contexts in academic prose by L2 writers. A comparison of the RA abstracts has showed that the Chinese and Russian academic communities manifest different stancetaking preferences. Cultural values appear to be determinants of academic writers' rhetorical behaviour affecting the ways they express the commitment to their claims and interact with the reader.

The significance of the present research lies in showing how and to what extent Russian and Chinese L2 writers use stance features in their academic writing. It also demonstrates that L2 writers realize that in order to interact successfully with an audience and to promote their research results, they need to follow the international writing conventions. I hope that this study brings some pedagogical implications both for novice writers and EAP teachers. Apart from pointing to the crucial role of writer-reader interaction, it could help to raise novice writers' awareness of how stance features contribute to the pragmatic effect of academic prose. The study could also be useful to EAP teachers by providing them with some valuable insights into culture-specific L2 academic writing and indicating those areas which deserve more attention in EAP course.

Through a study of interactional preferences of writers from a larger number of disciplines, we will learn more about rhetorical practices and values which would help novice writers learn academic style features typically used in a disciplinary community to produce knowledge in an accepted way. This analysis was limited to written academic discourse. It will be of interest to see if disciplinary differences in stancetaking can also be observed in oral presentations of research results. This will be pedagogically useful for students as it will draw their attention to the stancetaking discrepancies between oral academic genres and make them sensitive to

the nuances of oral academic discourse. Diachronic variation in the use of stance features in L2 academic prose could be also of interest.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared

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