Journal of English Language
Teaching and Learning
Year 52 No. 212

Projecting Cultural Identity through Metadiscourse Marking; A Comparison of Persian and English Research Articles*

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Abstract

Writing projects are socially-situated identities. The rhetorically-loaded aspects of writing, like metadiscourse marking, are more prone to carry such identities. Through analyzing metadiscourse strategies employment in Persian and English (as the lingua franca of academic discourse community) research articles, this study makes an attempt to find out whether Persian native writers take on the identity and norms of the discourse community in writing in their own language or preserve the cultural identity and norms of their native language. A comparison of 36 Persian and 36 English research articles showed that, on the whole, the norms of Persian language in the use of metadiscourse were different from that of the academic discourse community. Closer analysis revealed more similarities in the employment of interactive metadiscourse used to guide the readers, and significant differences in the use of interactional metadiscourse that could represent the specific cultural identity of the Persian writers.

Keywords: metadiscourse, culture, identity, discourse community, genre analysis

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* تاریخ وصول: ۸۸/۱۰/۱۳ تأیید نهایی: ۸۹/۱/۲۵-

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1. Introduction

According to Gee (2005), the way we make visible and recognizable who we are, and what we are doing, always involves more than just language. Also, van Dijk et al. (1997) maintain that the social and cultural trends of human societies are realized in language, discourse, and communication and every speech community may have its own norms, values and ways of communication. Moreover, Dahl (2004) observes that academic writers leave traces of themselves in their writing which may be linked to their national culture. It can be concluded that there is a general consensus among scholars that writing projects socially-situated identities (Hyland, 2005). The rhetorically-loaded aspects of discourse are better candidates to carry such identities.

Studies of comparative nature are sometimes carried out to reveal identity differences and the concept of discourse community and genre plays an important role in securing valid contrastive identity studies. Swales (1990: 24-27) characterizes discourse community as, among others, having a broadly agreed set of common public goals; having mechanisms of intercommunication among its members; and utilizing and hence possessing one or more genres in the communicative utterance of its aims.

According to above definition, academic discourse community and disciplinary communities are typical discourse communities. Discourse communities' forms of communications are more or less conventionalized and characterized with multitude of linguistic and non-linguistic sophistication. Inevitably, then, the multilingual members of these communities make an attempt to manifest more or less similar patterns of behavior in order to sustain the membership (Bizzell, 1992).

As mentioned above, every discourse community uses several ritualized ways of communication which gives rise to various genres (Swales, 1990). Genre is a means of achieving a communicative goal that has evolved in response to particular rhetorical needs; and changes and evolves in response to changes on those needs (Dudley-Evans, 1994). The Research article is one of the widely practiced genres of communication among members of academic discourse

community for the introduction of new findings and claims (Koutsantoni, 2006) and receiving peer feedback.

Accordingly, genre analysis provides a useful framework for the analysis of language use for a variety of linguistic and teaching purposes (Bhatia, 2006). Genre analysis is an attempt to extract explicit and implicit conventions in order to contribute to genre theory and also provide a tangible framework for the new members.

Generic analysis of research articles can cover a wide variety of focuses from moves and strategies (Bhatia, 1999) to rhetorical features (Hyland, 2005). As an example Mahzari and Maftoon (2007) compared English and Persian moves in research article introductions and reported similarities and differences. Works followed by the contrastive rhetoric of Kaplan (1966) have tried to compare rhetorical styles of different cultures with English (see Conner, 1996) primarily in order to inform the native speakers of various languages of the rhetorical differences that need to be attended to when trying to communicate with other members of the discourse communities through the lingua franca of English. The plethora of research on this topic signifies that rhetorical options of writers are apparently more identity and culture-sensitive. Although the essential characteristics of research articles and other genres of academic discourse community are ritualized and universal, cross-cultural studies have identified various differences in less visible rhetorical strategies between different national cultures (Peterlin, 2005).

Persuasion, as part of the rhetorical structure of research articles, is partly achieved by employing metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is defined as self-reflective linguistic expressions referring to communication triangle; the evolving text, the writer(s), and the imagined readers of that text (Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 2004). It is based on a view of writing as a social engagement and, in academic contexts, reveals the ways writers project themselves into their discourse to engage readers, signal their guiding and organizing attempts, commitments, and attitudes (Hyland and Tse, 2004).

The significance of metadiscourse, as part of the rhetorical structure of written communication and as linguistic resources closely associated with identities of the writers, was demonstrated by several studies. Crismore et al. (1993) compared Finnish and English native

writers' texts in terms of metadiscourse and explained the differences through sociocultural motivations. Crismore and Farnsworth (1990) compared two genres of communication for the same topic and found that the genre makes a difference in the use of metadiscourse. Mauranen (1993) compared Finnish and English academic texts in an attempt to find cross-cultural differences in the use of metatextual features and found significant differences between the speakers of the two languages. Vassileva (2001) compared Bulgarian and English research articles and found considerable difference between two languages in terms of the use of metadiscourse. Finally, Abdi (2002) compared the use of interpersonal metadiscourse in social and natural sciences and found different disciplinary and generic identities.

According to Bourdieu (1984, as cited in Dressen-Hammouda, 2008), one's *habitus* unconsciously incorporates the patterns, norms and regularities that structure a community and, accordingly, builds the identity. It is generally accepted that the putatively different identities from speech communities tend to converge in ritualized communications (like writing research articles) among members of academic discourse communities, even when communicating in different languages.

It can be feasible to argue that the assimilation to discourse community identity begins with formal and concrete norms and proceeds, if at all, to abstract and less visible norms (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008). Consequently, the differences between the predominant trends of discourse communities and native cultures can be justified in two ways. In the first place, some norms might be so deeply rooted in the native cultural thought patterns that they do not easily lend themselves to discursive and disciplinary acculturations. Secondly, the norms of the discourse community, that are not attended to, might be too abstract to be easily captured.

This study compares employment of metadiscourse in English and Persian research articles in order to find out whether Persian writers follow the norms of academic discourse community or preserve their own native norms which represent their cultural identity.

2. Method

This study reviewed 72 recently published research articles selected randomly (36 Persian and 36 English) from six disciplines. The Persian articles were selected from SID database (http://www.sid.ir) and the English ones were taken from sciencedirect (http://www.sciencedirect.com). Three disciplines were selected from hard sciences and the other three from soft sciences. We included hard and soft sciences since the two branches are allegedly associated with different research paradigms (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). We thought that a sort of paradigmatic identity could prompt different rhetorical choices and, hence, different ways of metadiscourse marking. An attempt was made to choose articles that had at least one native-speaker author (judged by name and affiliation). The corpus detail appears in Table 1.

Table 1: The corpus detail

	Soft Sciences										Hard Sciences										T
	Sociology			Education			Psychology			T	Physics			Chemistry			Medicine			T	
	J1	J2	J3	J1	J2	J3	J1	J2	J3		J1	J2	J3	J1	J2	J3	J1	J2	J3		
English	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	18	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	18	36
Persian	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	18	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	18	36
T	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	36	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	36	72

Several metadiscourse models have been introduced since the inception of the concept. All of the models, in one way or another, are recognitions of a belief that the use of language for communication is not just an attempt to transfer information and knowledge; rather it is also normally accompanied by cooperative efforts like organization, evaluations, feelings, engagement, etc.

Table 2: An interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland and Tse, 2004: 169; Hyland, 2005: 49)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	**Help to guide the reader through the text**	**Resources**
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	in addition; but; thus; and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally; to conclude; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above; see figure; in section 2
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	according to X; Z states
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meaning	namely; e.g.; such as; in other words
Interactional	**Involve the reader in the text**	**Resources**
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps; possible; about
Boosters	emphasize certainty and close dialogue	in fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	expresses writers' attitude to proposition	unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
Self mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; note; you can see that

For the purpose of this study, a recent metadiscourse classification formulated by Hyland and Tse (2004) and Hyland (2005) was taken as the model (Table 2).

Linguistic realizations of metadiscourse strategies were recognized according to the criteria of the model before and while analyzing. The propositions containing metadiscourse markers were identified functionally and manually throughout the small corpus since there is a common belief among scholars that metadiscourse is inherently a fuzzy and a functional category and that the metadiscursive expressions can be multifunctional and context dependent (Ädel, 2006).

3. Results and Discussion

The Persian research articles were notably shorter than English articles and there were also differences among many articles in terms of the word count. As such, an average of 40000 words for every six articles from each discipline, estimated from English articles average length, was taken as the criterion length. Then, the raw frequency counts of all metadiscourse strategies from both languages were adjusted to the criterion length. The result appears in Table 3 (the percentages were rounded up except for the last row).

Table 3: Distribution of metadiscourse markers in Persian and English research articles

			Interactive						Interactional						
			Transitions	Frame markers	Endophoric markers	Evidentials	Code Glosses	T	Hedges	Boosters	Attitude markers	Self-mentions	Engagement markers	T	GT
Persian	Soft	F	991	878	444	1345	249	3907	245	432	66	2	59	704	4711
		%	53%	62%	40%	48%	50%	51%	41%	47 %	37%	4%	55%	38%	49%
	Hard	F	873	540	661	1454	251	3779	350	482	111	49	48	1040	4819
		%	47%	38%	60%	52%	50%	49%	59%	53 %	63%	96%	45%	62%	51%
	T		1864	1418	1105	2799	500	7686	595	914	177	51	107	1844	9530
	% Of strategy		50%	56%	53%	50%	31%	49%	26%	56 %	42%	5%	42%	33%	45%
English	Soft	F	950	800	315	1299	527	3891	824	313	119	522	91	1869	5760
		%	52%	71%	32%	47%	47%	50%	50%	44%	48%	57%	62%	51%	50%
	Hard	F	879	327	676	1482	593	3957	837	395	128	392	55	1807	5764
		%	48%	29%	68%	53%	53%	50%	50%	56%	52%	43%	38%	49%	50%
	T		1829	1127	991	2781	1120	7848	1661	708	247	914	146	3676	11524
	% Of strategy		50%	44%	47%	50%	69%	51%	74%	44%	58%	95%	58%	67%	55%
GT			3693	2545	2096	5580	1620	15534	2256	1622	424	965	253	5520	21054
% Of metadiscourse			17.5%	12.1%	10%	26.5%	7.7%	73.8%	10.7%	7.7%	2%	4.6%	1.2%	26.2%	100%

The chi-square formula was applied five times for each metadiscourse strategy to compare languages and sciences to find significant differences. The result appears in Table 4.

Table 4: Chi-square values

		Interactive						Interactional						
		Transitions	Frame markers	Endophoric markers	Evidentials	Code Glosses	T	Hedges	Boosters	Attitude markers	Self-mentions	Engagement markers	T	GT
X^2	PS/ES	0.86	3.62	21.92	0.80	99.59	0.03	313.60	19.00	15.18	516.03	6.82	527.49	105.15
	PH/EH	0.02	52.32	0.17	0.27	138.58	3.22	199.80	8.63	1.21	266.68	0.48	206.63	84.38
	PS/PH	7.47	80.57	42.61	4.24	0.01	2.13	18.53	2.73	11.44	43.31	1.13	30.20	1.22
	ES/EH	2.76	198.52	131.50	12.04	3.89	0.55	0.10	9.50	0.33	18.49	8.87	1.04	0.00
	PT/ET	0.33	33.27	6.20	0.01	237.28	1.69	503.70	26.16	11.56	771.78	6.01	608.01	188.85

d.f.: 1 level of significance: 0.01 X^2 critical value: 6.63
PS: Persian Soft ES: English Soft
PH: Persian Hard EH: English Hard
P T: Persian Total ET: English Total

A rough look at the total frequency of metadiscourse markers of Persian and English writers and the $\chi 2$ value (188.85) suggests that the writers of the two languages employ metadiscourse significantly differently. The findings are in line with the results reported by Zarei and Mansoori (2007). Nonetheless, the difference in nature of the above ten metadiscourse strategies signifies that such a holistic assessment of the concept of metadiscourse could be misleading.

Taking into consideration the fact that each metadiscourse strategy fulfills a conceptually different function and the employment of each of them could be assumed independent, the comparisons are made independently. So, in each cell of Table 4, only two numbers are examined; hence the degree of freedom and χ^2 critical value is the same for all calculations. The χ^2 values exceeding critical value are bold-faced in Table 4 (note that the correction factor was not considered since it wouldn't make a notable difference). In the following sections, we look at the metadiscourse strategies in more detail.

3.1. Interactive metadiscourse

As can be seen in Table 3, unlike the findings of Zarei and Mansoori (2007), Persian and English writers almost equally took advantage of interactive metadiscourse (49% and 51%, respectively). The χ^2 value in Table 4 also supports the same conclusion. A closer look at Table 3 and the χ^2 values in Table 4 indicates that except for code glosses and frame markers, other strategies are employed quite similarly.

The main function of interactive metadiscourse is to guide the reader through the text (Thompson and Thetela, 1995) and the writers in both languages were apparently aware of the readers' likely reactions and needs. So, it can be said that both groups of writers assumed generic and discursive identity (or may be the cultural norms conformed to discursive norms!) in interactive metadiscourse marking and followed the norms of the research article genre in academic discourse community.

However, it should be noted that we can assume a quite close relationship between some strategies of interactive metadiscourse and nature of the immediate propositions. That is, in some research articles lists, tables and diagrams abound requiring more frame and endophoric markers. Higher use of these markers in such articles as compared to other articles could not signify identity variations. Of course, in studies investigating a larger corpus, a closer pattern could emerge as it is the case in the present study.

Accordingly, the relatively notable difference in the use of code glosses by Persian and English research article writers (39% and 61%, respectively and significant χ^2 value) and the significant difference in frame markers can be accounted for through above explanation. That is, when there are a plethora of ambiguous concepts and propositions, more code glosses are needed to clarify, and when there are more lists, etc., more frame markers would be employed. Perhaps, in still larger corpora, this difference can also disappear.

It is not surprising to see that evidentials form the most frequent metadiscourse strategy in our corpus. They are used 5580 times throughout the corpus which constitutes 26.5% of total metadiscourse strategies employed. Approximately similar distribution of evidentials across Persian and English languages and soft and hard sciences

(except for a small difference in English soft and hard corpus) shows that all writers are fully aware that evidentials bestow credibility and quality to their propositions and that without them a research articles could be seriously questioned, if not immediately rejected.

On the whole, the writers employed interactive metadiscourse three times more than interactional metadiscourse (73.8% and 26.2%, respectively) which indicates that in the process of persuasion it is vitally important to clarify your steps, signpost your arguments and disclaim any untenable interpretations of ambiguous concepts in order to make sure that the communication is successful.

3.2. Interactional metadiscourse

The employment of interactional metadiscourse is an attempt to bring in the readers' voice (Thompson, 2001) and is apparently more closely associated with identity variable on the grounds that its options are allegedly culturally-motivated.

As Table 3 and 4 show, Persian and English writers' use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers is strikingly different. On the whole, English writers used them two times more than Persian writers (67% compared to 33%). Therefore, it can be argued that Persian writers preserved their national identity (Vassileva, 2001) in communications within a discourse community. Perhaps, they were aware of the fact that their research article was targeted to a limited group (Persian speakers) of the disciplinary community, and did not make an attempt to fine tune the rhetorical structure of their text. Nonetheless, it is evident that the more tangible conventions of the discourse and disciplinary community, like the format, scientific methodology, etc., were thoroughly compatible with the universal norms while only more abstract rhetorical features were not convergent.

Except for engagement marking which was similarly, though minimally (1.2%), employed by both groups, the difference was significant in the use of all interactional strategies. The biggest difference was in self-mentions (χ^2: 771.78). Persian writers followed the positivist's advice to keep their prose dry and impersonal (Hyland, 2002). Actually, the advice can still be found in the 'guide for contributors' section of some Iranian journals. Furthermore, it is

surprising to see that the Persian hard science writers, a branch more closely associated with positivism, used self-mentions significantly more (χ^2: 43.31) than soft science writers. In fact, the lowest frequency in Table 3 belongs to self-mentions of Persian soft science writers. It appears, though somehow oddly, that Persian hard science writers have made a more hurried departure from positivists' norms at least as far as person marking is concerned.

The use of hedges is the area of the next biggest difference between two languages in interactional metadiscourse. Persian writers employed hedges significantly differently in both sciences and on the whole. Hedges are linguistic resources signaling reader-responsibility (Hinds, 1987), deference towards the discourse community (Vassileva, 2001) and doubt and tentativeness (Silver, 2003). English writers extensively used hedges while Persian writers' use of hedges is quite limited (74% versus 26%). It is difficult to argue that Persian writers show a lower degree of deference towards the discourse community or that they are more certain about their propositions, but it can be clearly said that there is a serious identity variation. This cultural thought pattern may interfere when Persian native speakers write in English. A similar line of argument can be posed with regard to the use of boosters which is again employed significantly differently in two languages.

As Table 3 and 4 show, attitude marking is also different. Persian native speakers tend not to equally insert their affective evaluations into their texts. English writers more frequently opt for markers to communicate their emotions presumably aimed at building a more human relationship with the readers possibly because some recent research paradigms, like the critical approach, favor a closer relationship between the writer and the reader. Of course, it is hardly feasible to conclude that building a more human relationship is not a concern for Persian writers; rather it could be said that perhaps, according to Persian culture, there in no need to overtly mark and develop such a relationship.

The use of attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers appear to be a choice dependent on the generic conventions while hedges and boosters are apparently marking a more deeply cultural act of evidence evaluation. That is, if complying with the discursive and generic norms is thought to be followed, it can easily take place in

cases of attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers, but a change in hedges and boosters would be more challenging.

4. Conclusion

We made an attempt to compare Persian and English research articles in the employment of metadiscourse markers and found that their norms were different in some ways. Contrary to interactive metadiscourse marking where the two groups of writers acted more or less similarly, interactional metadiscourse employment was found to vary considerably across the two languages.

The results of this study supports following conclusions. Firstly, in the rhetorical structure of a persuasive text, national culture's norms might prevail. In our study, the conventions of employing interactional metadiscourse were shown to be a function of national culture rather than generic and discursive norms of the broader academic community. We also argued that employing hedges and boosters, which involve evidence evaluation, is an area apparently more severely affected by the mentalities shaped within the framework of national culture.

Secondly, in writing in English, the norms of native culture might alter the normally expected rhetorical structure of the texts. Some studies (e. g. Maier, 1992; Mauranen, 1993; Nickerson, 1993) suggested that even in quite conventionalized types of writing, cultural variations play an important role. Thus, it is not unfeasible to suspect that the identified cultural differences might play a role when writing in another language. It might be useful for writing instructors to incorporate rhetorical and cultural considerations into their syllabus.

Last, but not least, if we can visualize metadiscourse marking on a continuum starting from more (e.g. interactive strategies) to less (e.g. interactional strategies) concrete rhetorical features, then, it can be roughly concluded that the difference between the two groups of writers increases along the continuum. In other words, enculturation into a discourse community normally starts from tangible conventions and gradually develops, if at all, to incorporate more abstract features (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008). Thus, it is quite possible to find some more abstracts norms not attended by non-native writers.

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