Systematic Literature Review of Crosslinguistic Analysis of Stance Markers in EFL Learners' Academic Writing in English

Jinzhu Zhang[1,2], Geok Imm Lee[1] & Mei Yuit Chan[1]

[1] Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

[2] Zhonghua Vocational College, Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, Kunming, China

Correspondence: Geok Imm Lee, Department of English Language, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: gilee@upm.edu.my

Received: September 1, 2023 Accepted: October 26, 2023 Online Published: November 8, 2023

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n1p19 URL: https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n1p19

Abstract

Evaluating the use of stance markers is an important approach to investigate the interactional and persuasive nature of academic writing in English. However, the problems EFL learners' face using of stance markers and its research methodologies in crosslinguistic analysis are uncertain. This systematic literature review examined problems EFL learners' face in using of stance markers and the research methodologies used to identify these problems in crosslinguistic research. The current study employed the PRISMA 2020 paradigm to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) of crosslinguistic analysis of stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing in English. Keywords queries on "stance*", "academic writing*", "metadiscourse*" and "metadiscursive*" were used to retrieve articles from Scopus and Web of Science databases. Following screening, 34 articles were included in the final analysis. EFL learners had problems in using hedges, boosters, self-mentions and attitude markers, and their main challenges were in the overuse of boosters and underuse of hedges. Chinese EFL learners had the most problems in using stance markers. All the 34 articles adopted an empirical approach and most were a corpus-based study. Researchers were fond of argumentative essays, dissertations, and research articles from coursework. In addition, scholars preferred one-way comparisons especially between native language and interlanguage (NL vs IL). Enhancing EFL learners' awareness of stance markers would require more instructions regarding stance markers in academic writing classrooms and future research should use three-way or four-way comparisons in crosslinguistic analysis.

Keywords: academic writing, crosslinguistic analysis, EFL learners, stance markers, systematic literature review

1. Introduction

Academic writing is often seen as a writer-reader interaction in which authors project their authority on a topic and participate in a discussion with their audience. Academic writing, according to Hyland (2004), is not only about presenting objective facts, but also about delivering reliable propositions based on the writers' study and the writers' themselves. In other words, academic writers signal themselves and engage with potential readers to reach solidarity. To achieve this goal, numerous studies have been conducted on the terms such as stance (Biber, 2006), metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005), evaluation (Huston & Thompson, 2000), appraisal (Martin & White, 2005), and attitude (Halliday, 1994). Some studies have shown that advanced academic writing requires an ability to express an appropriate stance (e.g., Chen & Liu, 2019; Hu & Cao, 2011; Wu & Paltridge, 2021). An appropriate stance is vital in EFL learners' academic writing as documented in explicit instructions found in English academic writing courses (Crosthwaite & Jiang, 2017).

Stance is an expression of the epistemic and affective propositions that writers have about knowledge (Biber, 2006) and solidarity with readers (Huston & Thompson, 2000). Stance markers, the linguistic representation of stance, are employed by academic writers to deliberately or unconsciously encode and express attitudes, feelings, as well as to choose positions in a text. Stance markers can be classified into hedges, boosters, self-mentions, and attitude markers based on Hyland's (2005a) model; a model described as clear, brief, and integrated (Abdi, Manoochehr & Tavakoli, 2010).

However, several research studies report that even experienced English as second language (ESL) writers often struggle with the use of stance markers in academic writing in English due to their first language (L1) rhetorical transfer (Alghazo & Alrashdan, 2021; Hu & Cao, 2011). EFL learners are more affected by L1 transfer than ESL learners because ESL learners learnt English in an English-speaking country and enjoyed a high level of immersion in English and consistently used English over time and thus may have overcome the influence of L1 transfer. However, EFL have limited exposure to English outside of English classes. Studies have indicated EFL learners have problems in using appropriate stance markers in academic writing due to L1 transfer, such as overuse of boosters, and underuse of hedges in a Chinese context (e.g. Chen & Liu, 2019), Turkish context (e.g. Çandarli, Bayyurt & Marti, 2015), Arabic context (e.g. Alghazo & Alrashdan, 2021), Thailand's context (e.g. Papangkorn & Phoocharoensil, 2021), Spanish context (e.g. Lee & Casal, 2014), and East Asian context (e.g. Qiu & Ma, 2019). So far, studies on L1 transfer have been mainly conducted in comparative studies of crosslinguistic analysis using of error analysis, contrastive analysis, contrastive rhetoric, and interlanguage analysis. Recently, Granger's

Integrated Contrastive Model (Granger, 1996, 2015), which combines contrastive analysis and contrastive interlanguage analysis, has dominated the crosslinguistic research. Integrated Contrastive Model (ICM) (Granger, 1996, 2015) offers a suitable framework for investigating L1 divergences' impact on L2 production (Vanderbauwhede, 2012). ICM emphasizes transfer (Granger, 1996) and provides conclusive four-way comparisons for interlanguage research (Granger, 1996) including OL vs OL (original language vs. original language), SL vs TL (source language vs. translated language), NL vs IL (native language vs. interlanguage) and IL vs IL (interlanguage vs. interlanguage). Notably, in EFL contexts, OL vs OL contrasts EFL learners' native language with native English, SL vs TL compares their native language with EFL, NL vs IL contrasts native English with EFL, and IL vs IL examines interlanguage variations. However, Vanderbauwhede (2012) states that comparing IL to IL demonstrates a second language acquisition regularity which can be ignored when a study only focuses on one EFL. Jarvis (2010) denotes that three-way comparisons (NL vs IL, OL vs OL/IL vs IL and SL vs TL) also provide conclusive evidence of L1 transfer when it is impossible to collect data from language users with two or more source-language backgrounds.

Numerous crosslinguistic studies on stance markers focus primarily on English language experts' academic writing (e.g., Çandarli et al., 2015; Hu & Cao, 2011) with few delving into challenges faced by EFL learners in using stance challenges. A comprehensive view of crosslinguistic analysis of stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing has not been done. Thus, this study aimed to answer two key research questions:

1) What problems do EFL learners of English academic writing have when using stance markers?

2) What research methodologies are used in crosslinguistic research on EFL learners' use of stance markers in English academic writing?

2. Methods

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted to comprehensively identify problems related to the use of stance markers in EFL learners' English academic writing in crosslinguistic research and researching methodologies used to identify them. SLRs strictly adhere to a set of scientific methodologies that minimize systematic errors and use electronic literature retrieval systems for automated article selection based on prepared keyword queries (Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann & Mulrow, 2021). Therefore, SLRs satisfy the requirements for a rigorous review of current research.

2.1 Resources

SLRs select literature from various databases. The current study used Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) which are primary databases for citation evaluation (Singh, Karmakar, Leta, & Mayr, 2021). Scopus is the most comprehensive collection of abstracts and citations of scholarly publications. WoS has become the de facto standard in the world of scholarly research (Falagas, Pitsouni, Malietzis, & Pappas, 2008). Scopus and WoS records can both be downloaded to an Excel Spreadsheet.

Predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to screen article titles, keywords, and abstracts. Reviewers also referred to full-texts of articles in the event of ambiguity in the eligibility of articles based on their titles, keywords, and abstracts. A search that run on Scopus on April 1, 2023 using the keywords (stance* AND academic writing* OR metadiscourse* OR metadiscursive*) in title, abstract and keywords fields (TITLE-ABS-KEY) with refinement of document type, subject area, source type, language, retrieved 231 articles. After excluding one duplicate, 230 articles were retrieved for further analysis.

Similarly, a search that was run on WoS with the same keywords used in Scopus on April 1, 2023 retrieved 785 articles. Subsequently, 43 articles sourced from books and book series were manually deleted to align with Scopus' selection criteria. A total of 742 articles were retrieved from WoS.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Study inclusion and exclusion criteria were based on keyword query, document type, research field, and research questions.

2.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

1) Articles must include "stance*" and "academic writing*" or "metadiscourse*" or "metadiscursive*" in its title, abstract and keywords.

2) Articles must be full texts of journal papers, conference papers or conference proceedings.

2.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

1) Articles which are not written in English.

2) Articles which are not available online.

3) Articles which are not focused on stance markers.

4) Articles which are not within the scope of academic writing.

5) Articles which are not about EFL learners.

6) Articles which do not focus on crosslinguistic study.

2.3 PRISMA Framework

This research was guided by PRISMA 2020 Framework (Page et al., 2021), a preferred reporting standard for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses. PRISMA offers a methodological framework for conducting research that ranges from selecting pertinent studies, to processing data, to assessing content (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman & The PRISMA Group, 2009).

Figure 1 shows the four stages of conducting a SLR search: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, a total of 972 Scopus and WoS articles were retrieved and extracted. Subsequently, 102 duplicates were excluded based on their titles and the writers' names of the articles leaving 870 articles. In the screening stage, an additional 818 articles were excluded based resulting in 52 articles. Next, in the eligibility stage, 18 irrelevant articles were excluded leaving 34 articles that were included in the final analysis.

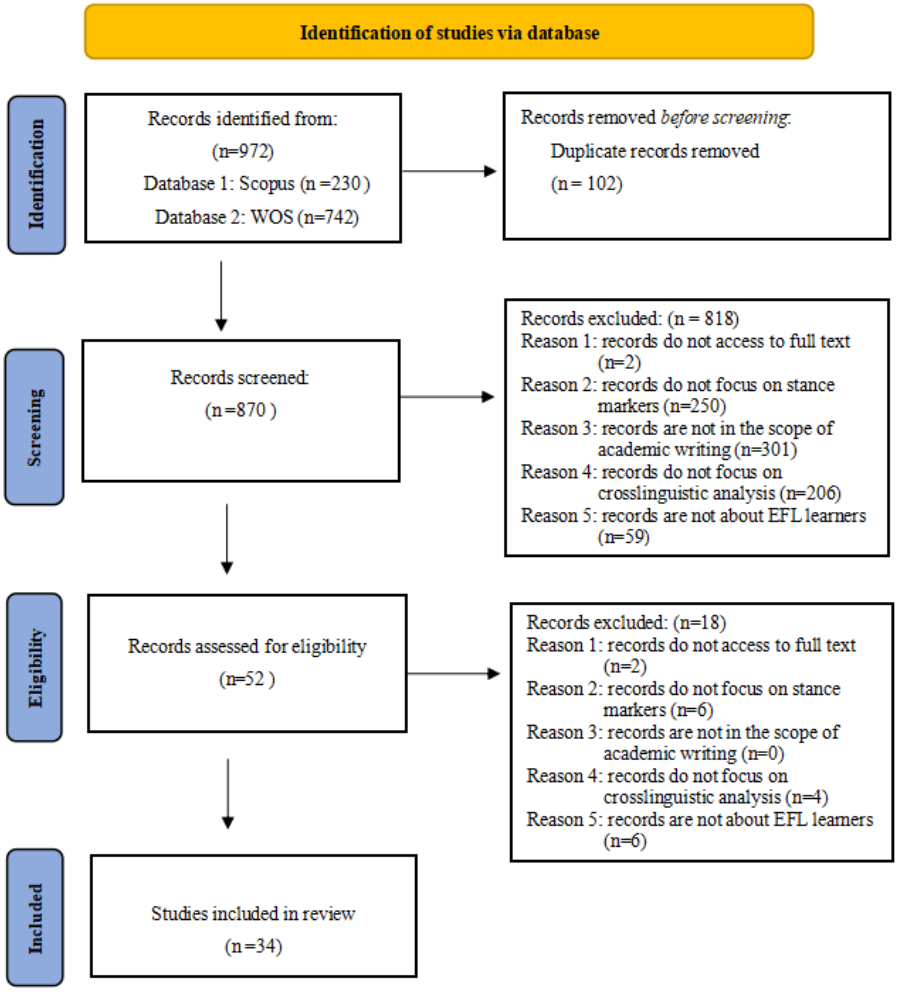

Figure 1. Conducting a SLR search based on PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021)

2.4 Research Instrument and Procedure

This current study used Microsoft Excel to store data and generate illustrations. Microsoft Excel (ME), a piece of software developed by Microsoft, displays line graphs, histograms, and charts based on information in its spreadsheets.

We entered all the 972 articles retrieved from Scopus and WoS on a ME spreadsheet and deleted 99 duplicates through the 'Remove Duplicates' option under the 'Data' option in the toolbar of the ME sheet. Three duplicates were manually excluded are reviewing titles and the authors' names. Afterwards, we screened abstracts of the 870 articles based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, or the full-text articles in the event the abstract was missing or did not provide sufficient information. Additionally, we extracted unique information regarding the L1 of EFL learners, country and continent where EFL learners were from, research type, research design, data collection methods, and the way in which comparisons were made from each article. We then transferred the 34 articles and the extracted data to a new ME sheet to produce figures and tables. The first author invited an external scholar, who was not part of the research team, to serve as the second coder. The second coder, an experienced professor in academic writing and had a track of record publications in international journals, underwent a two-hour training session on stance markers' definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria and the coding scheme. Subsequently, the first author and the invited coder independently coded 5% of the data, achieving an inter-coder reliability of 92%. After discrepancies were discussed, the two coders independently coded another 5% of the data and attained an inter-code reliability of 95.5%.

The first author then proceeded to code the remaining dataset alone.

2.5 Identifying Problems in Using Stance Markers

We identified problems pertaining to the use of stance markers discussed within each article of the 34 articles through a meticulous analysis. The frequency of the problems was described as the occurrence of each problem in a single article. For instance, if one study conducted in Chinese context examined the problems of underuse of hedges, overuse of boosters and avoidance of self-mentions, each type of problem was counted once. Detailed information on the problems in using stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing and the research methodologies in crosslinguistic research were recorded in Microsoft Excel and transformed into tables and figures.

3. Results

3.1 The Research Context

Table 1 displays the research contexts where the studies were conducted, and the country and the types of L1 contexts of the EFL learners. The 34 articles were published between 2000 and 2022.

Table 1. Research contexts where the studies were conducted (year range: 2000-2022, total number of articles=34)

Number of L1 contexts	L1 of EFL learners	Country of the EFL learners	Total Number of Studies	The native languages of EFL learners and proportion of studies that focused on them	Publication year
1	Chinese	China	6	One native language (28 studies) (82%)	2018, 2019, 2020, 2021(2), 2022
2	Turkish	Turkey	6		2012, 2014(2), 2015, 2018, 2019
3	Persian	Iran	3		2012, 2017, 2019
4	Korean	South Korean	2		2013,2017
5	Thai	Thailand	1		2021
6	Indonesian	Indonesia	1		2014
7	Urdu	Pakistan	1		2018
8	Arabic	Iraq	1		2018
		Saudi Arabic	1		2020
		Egypt	1		2000
9	French	France	1		2010
10	Polish	Poland	1		2022
11	Spanish	Spain	2		2009, 2015
12	Catalan	Spain & Mexico	1		2014
13	Catalan & Spanish	Spain	1	Two native languages (3 studies) (9%)	2018
14	Turkish & Spanish	Turkey & Spain	2		2015(2)
15	Chinese, Japanese & Korean	China, Japan & South Korean	2	Three native languages (3 studies) (9%)	2019,2021
16	Chinese, Spanish & Polish	China, Spain & Poland	1		2014

Table 1 illustrates widespread crosslinguistic studies of stance markers in EFL learners' English academic writing from diverse L1 contexts. Most studies (28) explored stance markers in EFL learners who had a sole native language (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Thai, etc.); they covered 12 languages spoken across 13 countries. Three studies focused on EFL learners with two native languages (Turkish &Spanish; Catalan & Spanish) and another three studies examined EFL learners with three native languages (Chinese, Japanese & Korean; Chinese, Spanish & Polish). Overall, 82% of studies (28 out of 34 studies) focused on single-native-language contexts, with six dedicated studies in Chinese contexts, six dedicated studies in Turkish contexts, and 16 studies in other contexts.

3.2 Problems Using Stance Markers

Table 2 summarizes the frequency of the problems using stance markers, types of L1 contexts and the proportion of studies with problems in using English stance markers by EFL learners based on the number of occurrences of each specific problem in each article. For instance, in the first line of Table 2, 'Chinese (4)' in 'L1 Contexts' means that the 'underuse of hedges' was mentioned in four articles from Chinese contexts; details pertaining to the four articles are presented in Table 3. Among EFL learners, problems in using stance markers manifest in the use of hedges (31 times), boosters (33 times), self-mentions (25 times) and attitude markers (12 times). Their most frequent problem was underuse of hedges that was mentioned 20 times in distinct L1 contexts such as Chinese (4), Turkish (3), Spanish (3), Arabic (2), Korean (2), Thai (1), Persian (1), French (1), Indonesian (1), Polish (1), and Japanese (1).

Table 2. Overview of the problems of using stance markers in English

	Types	Problems	Frequency of the problems	L1 Contexts	Percentage
Stance Markers	Hedges	Underuse	20	Chinese (4), Turkish (3), Spanish (3), Arabic (2), Korean(2) Thai, Persian, French, Indonesian, Polish, Japanese	65%
		Misuse	5	Chinese (3), Arabic, Catalan	16%
		Overuse	6	Persian, Chinese, Turkish, Spanish, Japanese, Korean	19%
		Total	31		
	Boosters	Underuse	13	Chinese (3), Turkish (3), Spanish (2), Korean (2), Arabic, Polish, Indonesian	39%
		Misuse	4	Chinese (2), Catalan, Arabic	12%
		Overuse	16	Chinese (4), Turkish (3), Korean (2), Spanish (2), Japanese, Polish, Persian, Arabic, Thai	48%
		Total	33		
	Self-mentions	Underuse	11	Turkish (4), Chinese (2), Korean (2), Japanese, Spanish, Polish	44%
		Misuse	2	Chinese, French	8%
		Overuse	9	Chinese (2), Persian (2), Spanish (2), Catalan, Thai, Urdu	36%
		Avoidance	3	Chinese, Turkish (2)	12%
		Total	25		
	Attitude Markers	Underuse	4	Turkish (2), Spanish, Arabic	33%
		Misuse	2	Chinese, Arabic	17%
		Overuse	6	Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Turkish, Catalan, Thai	50%
		Total	12		

Table 3 shows detailed information regarding problems of using stance markers in EFL learners' English academic writing in crosslinguistic research. There were 13 types of problems in all the four types of stance markers. EFL learners either, underused hedges, misused boosters, and overused attitude markers. Additionally, these learners had a problems of underuse, misuse, or overuse of self-mentions to the extent of avoiding the use of self-mentions.

Table 3. Problems in using stance markers written by EFL learners

Studies	**L1 of EFL learners**	**Stance Markers**												
		Hedges			**Boosters**		**Self-mentions**					**Attitude Markers**		
		Underuse	**Misuse**	**Overuse**	**Underuse**	**Misuse**	**Overuse**	**Underuse**	**Misuse**	**Overuse**	**Avoidance**	**Underuse**	**Misuse**	**Overuse**
1. Dong et al. (2022)	Chinese	√	√		√	√								
2. Wu & Paltridge (2021)	Chinese						√							
3. Wang & Zeng (2021)	Chinese					√			√					
4. Papangkorn & Phoocharoensil (2021)	Thai	√					√			√				√
5. El-Dakhs et al. (2020)	Arabic		√			√							√	
6. Can &	Turkish							√			√			

Cangır (2019)														
7. Abdollahzadeh (2019)	Persian	√		√										
8. Qiu & Ma (2019)	Chinese, Japanese and Korean			√			√	√						√
9. Çandarli et al. (2015)	Turkish						√	√						√
10. Dahme & Sastre (2015)	Catalan (one dialect of Spanish)		√			√								√
11. Akbas (2014)	Turkish	√			√			√				√		
12. Akbas (2012)	Turkish						√	√						
13. Henderson & Barr (2010)	French	√							√					
14. Lehman et al. (2022)	Polish	√					√							
15. Ağçam (2015a)	Turkish and Spanish	√ (T &S)			√(S)		√(T)							
16. Yoon (2021)	Chinese, Japanese, Korean	√ (C, J & K)					√ (C, J & K)	√(C)						
17. Ağçam (2015b)	Turkish and Spanish	√ (T & S)			√(T)		√(S)							
18. Ruan (2020)	Chinese		√				√				√			
19. Ozdemir & Longo (2014)	Turkish				√						√	√		
20. Rustipa (2014)	Indonesian	√			√									

21. Sattar et al. (2018)	Urdu									√				
22. Kim (2017)	Korean	√			√			√						
23. Hussein et al. (2018)	Arabic	√			√									
24. Hong & Cao (2014)	Chinese, Spanish, Polish	√(C)			√(C, S&P)			√(S&P)					√(C)	
25. Behnam & Roohi (2012)	Persian									√				
26. Lee & Casal (2014)	Spanish						√					√		
27. Connor et al. (2022)	Chinese	√			√					√				
28. Sheikhani & Abdollahi-Guilani (2017)	Persian			√			√			√				
29. Salazar & Verdaguer (2009)	Spanish	√		√						√				
30. El-Seidi (2000)	Arabic	√					√					√		
31. Akbas & Hardman (2018)	Turkish			√										
32. Oh & Kang (2013)	Korean				√(BL & IL)									
33. Martín-Laguna & Alcón-Soler (2018)	Catalan and Spanish									√				
34. Wang &	Chinese		√							√				

Jiang (2018)														
(C)=Chinese	**(T)**=Turkish	**(S)**= Spanish	**(P)**=Polish											
(T & S)=Turkish and Spanish	**(C, J & K)**= Chinese, Japanese and Korean	**(BL &IL)**= beginner level and intermediate level												

The 'underuse of hedges' had the highest frequency (20 out of 34; 58%) in 11 different L1 contexts. Therefore, 58% of the studies showed that EFL learners underused hedges in their academic writing. Example 1 displays the use of 'may' in discussion section in MA dissertations written by Turkish students of English (Study 11 in Table 3).

Example 1

"(S3). 'This finding ***may*** well be an indication of the importance ….'"

(Akbas, 2014, p.125) (Study 11 in Table 3)

Akbas (2014) pointed out that Turkish EFL learners underused hedges due to L1 transfer. English hedges such as 'may', 'might', 'can' and 'could' can be represented by the same suffix ('-ebilir/-abilir') in Turkish. When Turkish students were asked what the equivalent word of '-ebilir/-abilir' was in English, they only replied 'can'. Chinese EFL contexts had the highest frequency of underused hedges due to their limited lexical access as indicated by the presence of four studies (study 1, 16, 24, 27 in Table 3). Example 2 shows that Chinese PhD students highly depend on the use of 'about' in their research articles (Study 1 in Table 3).

Example 2

"(24) the grain size increased ***about*** 100% and the voids became larger, consistent with the density decreasing from ***about*** 5.5 g/cm3 for samples sinter at 673 K to ***about*** 5.3 g/cm3 for that at 703 K."

(Dong, Wang & Jiang., 2022, p.14) (Study 1 in Table 3)

Dong et al., (2022) showed that Chinese PhD students used fewer hedges in their research papers in an academic course than experts' research articles in four disciplines (physics, life science, material science and computer science). Similarly, Yoon (2021) demonstrated that Chinese EFL undergraduates' argumentative writing contained fewer hedges than argumentative essays of native speakers (study 16 in Table 3). Hong and Cao (2014) showed that Chinese EFL tenth-grade learners had a limited choice of hedges, and they preferred modal auxiliaries such as *could,* and *may*. They also seldom used lexical hedges in their essays (Study 24 in Table 3). Conner et al. (2022) demonstrated that Chinese EFL undergraduates used about half the hedges their American counterparts did and employed a limited set of use of hedges, mainly using the modal auxiliary-*may (not)* in contest winners' papers (Study 27 in Table 3). Therefore, EFL learners, particularly Chinese EFL learners, underused hedges.

Boosters were more overused (48%) than underused (39%) or misused (12%). The overuse of boosters was seen in Chinese contexts as exemplified by four studies (study 2, 8, 16, 18 in Table 3). Example 3 shows the overuse of the booster 'clearly' in Chinese MA students' graduation dissertation due to the influence of Chinese writing conventions to show certainty (Study 2 in Table 3).

Example 3

"***Clearly***, more information is needed on the effectiveness of listening study in the WSLE in developing

and improving students' autonomous learning ability [MA11.txt]."

(Wu & Paltridge, 2021, p.9) (Study 2 in Table 3)

The current study may indicate that the overuse of boosters could result from unfamiliarity with other appropriate rhetoric devices or insufficient exposure to reading materials and limited practice (Wu & Paltridge, 2021).

In the same vein, Example 4 shows the use of boosters ('completely', 'all', 'especially', 'really') in Chinese MA students' argumentative essays on the topic of *smoking* ((Yoon, 2021).

Example 4

"So it's necessary to ban smoking ***completely*** at ***all*** the restaurants in the country. In my opinion, smoking in the public, ***especially*** places like restaurant, is an immoral behavior. It's ***really*** a bad experience […]."

(Yoon, 2021, p.13) (Study 16 in Table 3)

Yoon (2021) demonstrated that Chinese MA learners overused boosters more than the native experts (Study 16 in Table 3). Chinese EFL learners tend to present stronger and straightforward statements (Chen & Liu, 2019). In addition, Qiu and Ma (2019) demonstrated that EFL MA students used more boosters, for instance emphatics such as 'really,' when compared to experts (Study 8 in Table 3). Ruan (2019) showed that Chinese EFL undergraduates strikingly used more than three times as many boosters as Chinese EMI undergraduates in their essays (Study 18 in Table 3)

Self-mentions were mainly underused (44%) and less commonly overused (36%), avoided (12%) or misused (8%). Among the 11 studies that illustrated underused self-mentions, learners in the Turkish context had problems in the use of self-mentions in the four studies (study 6, 9, 11, 12 in Table 3). Example 5 shows the use of singular first pronoun in Turkish students' English essays in Study 9 (Çandarli et. al, 2015).

Example 5

"(1) To sum up even if ***I*** agree with some of the claims about mobile phones' bad effects partially… (ET-6)"

(Çandarli et. al, 2015, p.197) (Study 9 in Table 3)

Çandarli et al., (2015) found significantly fewer first singular pronouns 'I' in Turkish students' English essays than in American students' essays. Example 6 demonstrates Turkish students' preference of the use of exclusive 'we' instead of 'I' to make conclusion which reflects the influence of their instructors.

Example 6

"(1) They have great impact on people. If ***we*** specifically discuss one item which is computer, ***we*** can clearly see the effect of it on people's lives. (ET-44)"

(Çandarli et. al, 2015, p.197) (Study 9 in Table 3)

Turkish instructors suggest the avoidance of using 'I' in academic writing. However, Çandarli et al., (2015) pointed out that 'we' was the least used marker in the corpus because of a reluctance of proposing individual ideas in Turkish context. Additionally, Can and Cangir (2019) illustrated the significant underuse of self-mentions, particularly the underuse of 'I, we, our, my' in Turkish doctoral dissertations when compared to British doctoral dissertations of literacy studies in English (Study 6 in Table 3). Akbas (2014) found markedly fewer use of self-mentions with only one instance of exclusive 'we' and no instance of 'I' in Turkish MA dissertation discussion sections when compared to the same genre of writing from native English MA students (Study 11 in Table 3). Akbas (2012) a preference of 'the researcher' to self-mentions such as 'I' when juxtaposing Turkish students' MA dissertation abstracts to native speakers of English (Study 12 in Table 3).

Attitude markers were more overused (50%) than underused (33%) or misused (17%). The problem of overuse of attitude markers was seen in six different L1 contexts (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Turkish, Catalan, and Thai). Example 7 shows EFL MA students' preference of using attitude markers in literature review section to show their positive feelings.

Example 7

"(7) Goal setting is ***important*** because, as proposed in goal theories... (Master 07; Literature Review)"

(Qiu & Ma, 2019, p.342) (Study 8 in Table 3)

The current study illustrated the overuse of attitude verbs 'agree' and attitude adjective 'important' in master students' dissertations (mixture of Chinese, Japanese and Korean EFL learners' writing) when compared to the academic writing from doctoral candidates, and expert writers (Qiu & Ma, 2019). Example 8 exhibits the use of attitude markers 'unfortunately' in English essays written by Turkish students (Çandarli et. al., 2015).

Example 8

"(1) Even though, these inventions have numerous benefits for people, ***unfortunately***, they do not supply always good results. (ET-22)"

(Çandarli et al., 2015, p.199) (Study 9 in Table 3)

In their study, Çandarli et al., (2015) report that Turkish students significantly used more attitude markers in their English academic writing than American students (Study 9 in Table 3) due to the influence of the exquisite Turkish writing style (Çandarli et. al, 2015).

Chinese EFL learners experienced 12 types of problems in deploying stance markers encompassing the underuse, overuse and misuse of hedges, boosters, self-mentions and attitude markers. They also had the problem of avoidance in self-mentions due to the instruction of avoiding the use of self-mentions from lecturers (Can & Cangir, 2019). Chinese EFL learners encountered the most difficulty in using stance makers compared with EFL learners from other contexts.

3.3 Research Methodology

This section has three subsections on research methodologies including research type and data collection methods, research genres and comparison methods.

3.3.1 Research Type and Data Collection Methods

There are three research types namely, mixed, theoretical, and empirical research. Mixed research is composed of theoretical and empirical research. Theoretical research creates and tests ideas, models, or hypotheses concerning the relationships between variables. Empirical research entails collecting data through direct or indirect observation and experimental approaches, and analyzing that data to derive conclusions. All the 34 studies were empirical studies.

During the review, 32 out of 34 studies were corpus studies. Corpus studies are divided into corpus-driven and corpus-based approaches (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). A corpus-driven study takes the corpus as a reservoir to support or extend existing theories or systems (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). Corpus-based studies, however, use corpus data to prove or disprove a theory or system (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). In addition, a corpus-assisted study uses corpus as a supplementary resource to support the analysis of language in a specific context. Out of the 32 corpus studies, 29 were corpus-based studies, two studies (study 4, 27 in Table 3) were data-driven studies, and one study (study 6 in Table 3) was a corpus-assisted study. The remaining two studies (Study 20, 23) collected data using discourse analysis (Hussein et al., 2018; Rustipa, 2014). Thus scholars preferred corpus-based studies.

3.3.2 Research Genres

Research genre refers to the type of research in academic writing that is used to convey research findings in a specific field. Table 4 displays the six types of research genres used by the 34 studies. Twenty seven studies conducted the comparative crosslinguistic analysis used one-genre context, namely, argumentative essay (8), MA dissertation (7), research article (6), PhD thesis (3), persuasive essay (2), contest winners' paper (1). Six studies were carried out in two-genre contexts, specifically, argumentative essay and descriptive essay (2), MA dissertation and research article (2), MA dissertation and PhD thesis (1), EAP essays and argumentative essays (1). One study was conducted in three-genre contexts, viz., MA dissertation, PhD thesis and research article. Hence scholars preferred the same genre to conduct crosslinguistic analysis (79%, 27 out of 34 studies) and made immense efforts to understand how university students used stance markers in argumentative writing, MA dissertations and research articles.

Table 4. Distributions of research genres (N=34)

Context of genres	Types of genres	Number of studies	Sum of the studies	Proportion of the total (n=34)
One-genre context	argumentative essay	8	27	79%
	MA dissertation	7		
	research article	6		
	PhD thesis	3		
	persuasive essay	2		
	contest winners' paper	1		
Two-genre context	argumentative essay and descriptive essay	2	6	18%
	MA dissertation and research article	2		
	MA dissertation and PhD thesis	1		
	EAP essay and argumentative essay	1		
Three-genre context	MA dissertation and PhD thesis and research article	1	1	3%
		34	34	100%

3.3.3 Comparison Methods

Figure 2 summarizes the different ways in which comparisons were made based on ICM in detecting language transfer in crosslinguistic analysis. One-way comparison was mainly in 25 studies covering all the four types of comparisons: OL vs OL (1 study) SL vs TL (2 studies), IL vs IL (3 studies) and NL vs IL (19 studies). Two-way comparisons were employed in six studies with combination of NL vs IL, IL vs IL (3 studies) and NL vs IL, OL vs OL (3 studies). Additionally, three studies used the same three-way comparison, viz. NL vs IL, SL vs TL and OL vs OL (Akbas, 2012; Akbas & Hardman, 2018; Çandarli et al., 2015). No four-way comparisons were made. Thus, researchers preferred one-way comparisons especially comparing the English of native speakers to that of EFL learners (NL vs IL) that was observed in 19 of 25 studies.

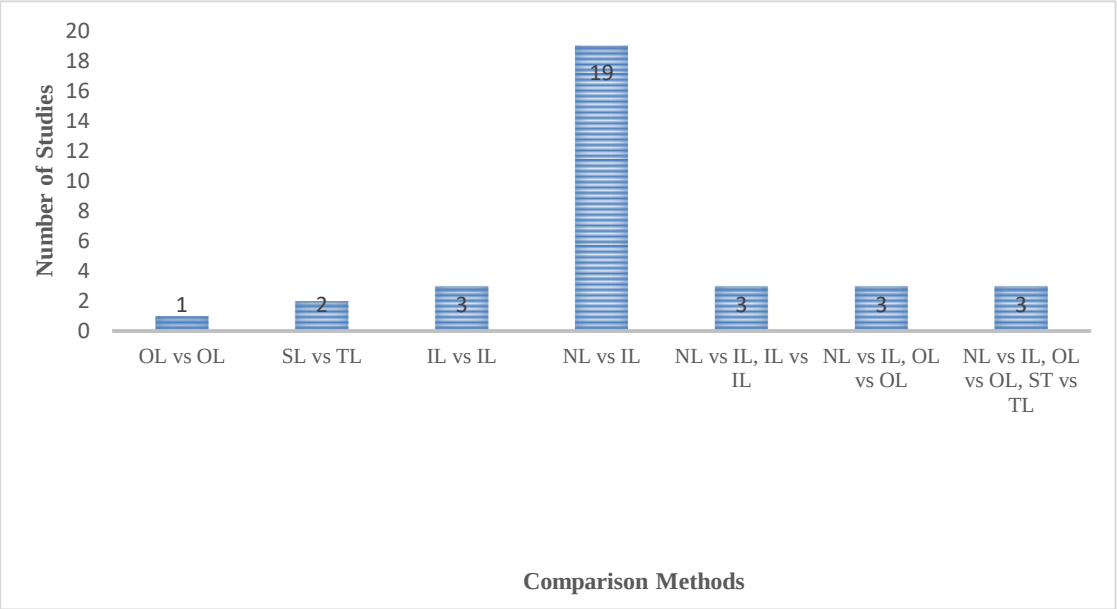

Figure 2. Comparison methods (Granger, 1996, 2015) (N=34)

4. Discussion

This section discusses the problems of using stance markers, the preferred research types, data collection methods, and ways in which comparisons were made in 34 articles on EFL learners' academic writing in English.

EFL learners mainly had difficulties in appropriately using boosters and hedges in academic writing in line with the findings of studies on EFL learners' academic writing on overusing boosters (Chen & Liu, 2019) and underusing hedges (Sun & Hu, 2023). In fact, EFL learners had difficulties in using all the four sub-types of stance markers: hedges, boosters, self-mentions, and attitude markers; problems that could be attributed to three reasons. Firstly, EFL learners were unaware of stance markers in the target language due to their limited exposure to academic writing materials in English (e.g., Abdollahzadeh, 2019; Behnam & Roohi, 2012). Secondly, the poor language proficiency of EFL learners in using stance markers could have resulted from suboptimal instruction from instructors and individual learners' limited efforts to learn English (e.g. Martín-Lagun & Alcón-Soler, 2018; Wang & Zeng, 2021). Thirdly, EFL L1 rhetorical transfer may also be a contributing factor to their problems in using stance markers as mentioned by Alghazo and Alrashdan (2021) and Wu and Paltridge (2021). Therefore, English language instructors should integrate explicit instructions of stance markers into academic writing courses (Crosthwaite & Jiang, 2017) to raise EFL learners' awareness of using stance markers. Furthermore, EFL learners should regularly practice using the appropriate stance markers in academic writing to enhance their proficiency in this aspect of language. Additionally, explicit instruction on stance markers would increase EFL learners' exposure to authentic English academic writing and limit the influence of L l transfer.

Rhetorical writing conventions in the majority of EFL contexts demonstrate conformity to the academic community. EFL writers therefore implicitly position their ideas, for instance, in the Chinese context (Wu & Paltridge, 2021), Persian context (Abdollahzadeh, 2019), and Spanish context (Lee & Casal, 2014). However, in English-native culture, academic writers favor questioning others' ideas by showing negative politeness (Hu & Cao, 2011) and tend to explicitly present themselves (Can & Cangır, 2019). Hence, English-native writers use more hedges and self-mentions, fewer boosters and the appropriate amount of attitude markers. In this study, 20 out of 34 studies attributed the difficulty in using stance markers to the L1 transfer (e.g., Ağçam, 2015b; Wang & Jiang, 2018). Chinese EFL learners in this study faced significant challenges in using stance markers because of L1 transfer; their L1 is distinctly different from native-English culture and writing conventions. L1 transfer is caused by culturally grounded rhetorical norms and persuasive techniques as indicated by overused boosters and underused hedges in English research articles by Chinese writers (Wang & Zeng, 2021). Growing up in the cultural influence of Confucius and Taoist, the Chinese are raised on the ideas of modesty and not questioning the thoughts of others in line with previous findings (e.g., Dong et al., 2022; Qiu & Ma, 2019). In addition, with the effect of Chinese rhetoric writing emphasizing less logic and more knowledge construction in writing (Gong et al., 2021), Chinese writers are reluctant to position themselves and express attitudes. Hence, understanding how the Chinese language influence the Chinese EFL learners' use of stance markers is essential to improve students' ability to appropriately use stance markers in English academic writing.

All the 34 studies were empirical research and mainly corpus-based studies. Corpus-based investigations hold a prominent position in examining stance features (Hyland, 2009). Three types of research genres were favored by scholars, in specific, argumentative essays written by undergraduates, MA dissertations composed by master students and research articles written by PhD students. Therefore, university students are expected to appropriately deploy stance markers in academic writing especially postgraduate students who are expected to conduct research and publish research articles (RAs) as a graduation requirement (Zheng and Gao, 2016). However, the same

postgraduate students had the most challenges in using stance markers (Hyland, 2005; Wu & Paltridge, 2021). Therefore, more research studies on the genres of dissertations and research articles written by postgraduate students are needed.

One-way comparisons (25 out of 34 studies) were most commonly used especially between NL and IL (19 out of 25 studies) comparing English of native speakers to English as foreign language learners: a finding that reflects the fact that academic writing written by native English speakers has served as the model for EFL learners to learn and imitate ever since English was globally promoted (Akbas, 2014). Nevertheless, one-way comparisons are not sufficient for investigating the language transfer as they only show the differences in using stance markers from one perspective, for instance, either from native English users, L1 of EFL learners, or other L1 of EFL learners. Crosslinguistic research should adopt either three-way or four-way comparison to comprehensively understand the problems of using stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing (Jarvis, 2010; Vanderbauwhede, 2012).

5. Conclusion

This current study conducted a systematical literature review on the crosslinguistic analysis of stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing in English to obtain a comprehensive understanding of EFL learners' problems' use of stance markers and the type of research methodologies utilized.

EFL learners had problems in using English stance markers such as hedges, boosters, self-mentions, and attitude markers; their main challenges were the underuse of hedges and overuse of boosters. Chinese EFL learners faced the most problems in the use of stance markers. Thus, these findings provide an insight into addressing problems in using stance markers caused by L1 transfer. Academic writing courses should include more instructions on the appropriate use of stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing in English. Most scholars laid emphasis on one-way comparisons. Nonetheless, fewer studies conducted two-way and three-way comparisons and no study adopted a four-way comparison. Three-way or four-way comparison studies should be conducted to gain an understanding of how L1 transfer influences the use of stance markers in English.

Researchers should conduct more studies on the crosslinguistic analysis of EFL learners' academic writing in English in Chinese contexts because Chinese EFL learners had the most problems in using stance markers. Moreover, more s research using rarely employed genres should to be carried out in EFL learners' academic writing in English (e.g., course assignments) to facilitate the understanding of EFL learners' problems in using stance markers. Also, multiple-way comparisons (such as, three-way and four-way comparison) in crosslinguistic research would provide conclusive evidence on the problems in using stance markers due to L1 transfer in different language contexts. Furthermore, empirical study on whether there is a crosslinguistic influence and the extent of it in the use of stance markers in EFL learners' academic writing in English is required since the previous studies only focused on L1 transfer.

This study only retrieved literature from Scopus and WoS databases. Future studies should include other databases like Google Scholar and CNKI to cover more articles. The study restricted stance markers to the perspective of metadiscourse; further study can expand to other perspectives such as appraisal theory from SFL. Moreover, the current study only examined English-language articles; articles written in other languages can be explored in the future.

Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the valuable contributions of every team member.

Authors contributions

Dr. Lee and Dr. Chan were responsible for study design. Jinzhu Zhang was responsible for data collection. Jinzhu Zhang drafted the manuscript and Dr. Lee revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available

due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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