In the Name of God

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Reader Engagement in Scientific Articles: A Contrastive Study of English and Persian Applied Linguistics Articles

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To my parents

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Abstract

Reader involvement or bringing the reader into the written discourse has recently begun to receive attention. For a successful writer-reader interaction to take place, readers should be given active and constitutive roles since all writing is dialogic. One explicit way by means of which readers are brought into written discourse is the use of *reader engagement markers*. There are some cross-disciplinary studies which have investigated the presence of readers in written discourse across different disciplines. However, there is only one contrastive study (Hinkel, 2002) which has examined how writers from different language backgrounds and writing cultures have brought their readers into their texts and engaged them. No contrastive study has ever been reported to examine the way academic writers from Persian and English writing cultures address their readers in their texts. Drawing on 60 applied linguistics articles (20 English articles written by native English applied linguists, 20 English articles written by native Persian applied linguists and 20 Persian articles written by native Persian applied linguists), this study aimed at seeing whether these writers differ in representing their readers. Hyland's (2005a) interactional model of stance and engagement was used as an analytical framework to identify the type and frequency of reader engagement markers. The result of Independent Samples T-Tests indicated differences in the type and frequency of reader engagement markers employed by native English and Persian writers. Also, significant differences were observed in categorical than rhetorical distribution. The results of this study can have pedagogical implications for prospective academic writers.

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Abstract:

Reader involvement or bringing the reader into the written discourse has recently begun to receive attention. For a successful writer-reader interaction to take place, readers should be given active and constitutive roles since all writing is dialogic. One explicit way by means of which readers are brought into written discourse is the use of *reader engagement markers*. There are some cross-disciplinary studies which have investigated the presence of readers in written discourse across different disciplines. However, there is only one contrastive study (Hinkel, 2002) which has examined how writers from different language backgrounds and writing cultures have brought their readers into their texts and engaged them. No contrastive study has ever been reported to examine the way academic writers from Persian and English writing cultures address their readers in their texts. Drawing on 60 applied linguistics articles (20 English articles written by native English applied linguists, 20 English articles written by native Persian applied linguists and 20 Persian articles written by native Persian applied linguists), this study aimed at seeing whether these writers differ in representing their readers. Hyland's (2005a) interactional model of stance and engagement was used as an analytical framework to identify the type and frequency of reader engagement markers. The result of Independent Samples T-Tests indicated differences in the type an frequency of reader engagement markers employed by native English and Persian writers. Also, significant differences were observed in categorical than rhetorical distribution. The results of this study can have pedagogical implications for prospective academic writers.

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List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

G1: English articles written by native English writers

G2: English articles written by native Persian writers

G3: Persian articles written by native Persian writers

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

REMs: Reader Engagement Markers

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background and Need for the Study

Reader involvement or bringing the reader into the written discourse has recently begun to receive attention. For a persuasive writer-reader interaction to take place, readers should be given active and constitutive roles since all writing is dialogic. In academic writing this means that "the process of writing involves creating a text that we assume the reader will recognise and expect and the process of reading involves drawing on assumptions about what the writer is trying to do" (Hyland, 2010, p. 117). This requires writers' full assessment of readers' needs, awareness and their cognitive, affective, and social anticipations (Atkinson and Ramanathan, 1995). In Duszak's (1994) terms, anticipations in discourse are believed to "stem from a number of sources and underlie various aspects of discourse processing, such as appropriacy of topics (content schemata) and of rhetorical form (formal schemata), the general knowledge and cultural suppositions (systems of shared norms, beliefs, values, and stereotypes)" (pp. 292-3).

Drawing on experiences with prior texts which writers encounter, writers should anticipate what readers are to find at any point in a discourse, what difficulties they are likely to have in interpreting the text and what help they may enlist from writers. Hoey (2001) likens readers and writers to dancers following each other's steps, each making sense from a text by anticipating what the other is likely to do by making connections to prior texts. Also, writers should be able to guess what readers find to be persuasive in the argument. This reader evaluation invokes Ramanathan and Kaplan's (1996) such basic questions as: "How informed is my audience? How much knowledge do we share? Which terms and concepts need defining? What can I assume

my audience will know?" (p. 28) and leads the writer to take account of all cultural, social, and disciplinary factors that are likely to influence the ways writers use language.

One way by means of which this reader involvement is successfully accomplished is interactional metadiscourse (Thompson, 2001, p. 59) in general and *reader engagement markers* (Hyland, 2005a, p. 154) in particular. Most of the studies have been devoted to how academic writers project themselves into their texts by commenting on the possible accuracy or credibility of a claim, conveying an attitude towards both propositions and readers both across disciplines (Vassileva, 1998; Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 1999, 2001a, 2002a; Ivanic and Camps, 2001; Biber, 2006; Starfield and Ravelli, 2006) and across cultures (Kaplan, 1966; Clyne, 1987; Hinds, 1987; Crisemore, Markkanen, and Steffensen, 1993; Mauranen, 1993; Duszak, 1994; Moreno, 1997; Vassileva, 2001; Dahl, 2004; Martinez, 2005; Mur Dueñas, 2007; Shelden, 2009). However, the ways writers relate to their readers and engage with them have recently begun to receive attention.

There are some studies (Tapper, 1994; Webber, 1994; Swales, Ahmad, Chang, Chavez, Dressen and Seymour, 1998; Hyland 2001b, 2002b, 200bc, 2005a, 2005b; Fortanet, 2004) which have addressed the presence of readers across disciplines in academic discourse. Not only have these studies contributed academic writing gradually lose "its traditional tag as an objective, faceless and impersonal form of discourse and come to be seen as a persuasive endeavor involving interaction between writers and readers" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 173) but also they have been influential in popularising the importance of viewing readers as active participants in constructing

and disseminating knowledge. These studies have indicated that there are considerable variations in the employment of reader engagement markers across different disciplines.

Despite the importance of representing readers in academic discourse, there is only one cross-cultural study (Hinkel, 2002) contrasting the use of reader engagement markers (henceforth, REMs) in disparate writing traditions. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there is no contrastive study investigating the presence of readers in Persian and English texts written by native English and Persian writers. Given this fact, the present study attempts to examine what linguistic resources native English writers writing in English, native Persian writers writing in English and native Persian writers writing in Persian use in order to present their readers in their texts. To do this, I draw on a corpus of 60 applied linguistics articles written by each of the three groups of academic writers to see whether there are any statistically significant differences in the use of REMs. Hyland's (2005a) interactional model of stance and engagement is used as an analytical framework in this study to identify the type and frequency of REMs across the articles analysed.

1.1 Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Since the importance of relating to readers and engaging them in written discourse has been acknowledged, the purpose of the present study is , as mentioned above, to see if there are any differences among three groups of applied linguists in the use of REMs. In other words, this study seeks to find out whether English writers

writing in English, native Persian writers writing in English and native Persian writers writing in Persian acknowledge the presence of their readers to the same extent in their articles.

1. 2 Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

Research Question 1:

1. Is there any significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of English and native writers of Persian (both writing in English) in their research articles about applied linguistics?

Null Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of English and native writers of Persian (both writing in English) in their research articles about applied linguistics.

Alternative Hypothesis 1:

There is a significant difference between the type and amount of reader engagement markers employed by native writers of English and native writers of Persian (both writing in English) in their research articles about applied linguistics.

Research Question 2:

2. Is there any significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of English writing in English and native writers of Persian writing in Persian in their research articles about applied linguistics?

Null Hypothesis 2:

There is no significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of English writing in English and native writers of Persian writing in Persian in their research articles about applied linguistics.

Alternative Hypothesis 2:

There is a significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of English writing in English and native writers of Persian writing in Persian in their research articles about applied linguistics.

Research Question 3:

3. Is there any significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of Persian writing in English and native writers of Persian writing in Persian in their research articles about applied linguistics?

Null Hypothesis 3:

There is no significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of Persian writing in English and native writers of Persian writing in Persian in their research articles about applied linguistics.

Alternative Hypothesis 3:

There is a significant difference between the type and frequency of REMs employed by native writers of Persian writing in English and native writers of Persian writing in Persian in their research articles about applied linguistics.

1.3 Importance of the Study

As mentioned above, despite the importance of representing readers in academic discourse, there is only one cross-cultural study (Hinkel, 2002) contrasting the use of REMs in disparate writing traditions. Given this fact, the present study attempts to investigate how academic writers bring their readers in the written discourse and engage with them in the argument. More specifically, this is a comparative study which attempts to examine what linguistic resources native English writers writing in English, native Persian writers writing in English and native Persian writers writing in Persian use in order to present their readers in their texts.

1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

Research articles: Research articles constitute a "key genre used by scientific communities for the dissemination and ratification of knowledge" (Koutsantoni, 2006, p.19).

Engagement: The term engagement has been used to refer "to the bundle of rhetorical strategies writers use to recognise the presence of their readers to bring them explicitly into their texts" (Hyland, 2005a, p.176).

1.5 Organisation of the Study

To achieve the afore-mentioned objectives, this study sets out to identify the type and frequency of REMs in three groups of applied linguistics articles (20 English articles written by native English applied linguists, 20 English articles written by