

# The Effect of Rhetorical Styles on Metadiscourse Choices of Culturally Diverse Authors

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There is a perception that the influence of culture-specific rhetorical styles means that academic writing can include a great deal of variety. This study aims to test this hypothesis by exploring the role of rhetorical styles in the choice of interactional metadiscourse by academic writers with different cultural backgrounds. Linguistics research article abstracts by L2 writers from Asian and Slavic countries were used in this contrastive study based on Hyland's (2005a) model of metadiscourse. Using quantitative and qualitative analysis methods, the study revealed that English-language academic discourse by Slavic writers contained a larger number of hedges and attitude markers and a smaller number of boosters. In contrast to Slavic writers, Asian scholars left far fewer traces of themselves and took more explicitly involved positions. The paper contributes to intercultural pragmatics and may have some implications for English as a lingua franca in academic settings.

**Keywords:** rhetorical style, metadiscourse, research article abstract, academic discourse, cultural context

## Introduction

The increasing role of English as a lingua franca in global academia has forced scholars from different cultures to publish their findings in English in order to become an integral

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part of international academia. This has given rise to intensive research into prevailing discursive structures and caused writers with different cultural backgrounds to make pragmatic choices. Whilst the use of metadiscourse patterns in L2 academic writing has been explored from a variety of perspectives (Al-Khasawneh, 2017; Alonso Almeida, 2014; Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2023; Bondi, 2014; Gessesse, 2016; Hu & Cao, 2011; Ji, 2015; Işık-Taş, 2018; Khajavy et al., 2012; Kozubíková Šandová, 2021; Maamuujav et al., 2021; Perales-Escudero & Swales, 2011; Stotesbury, 2003; Van Bonn & Swales, 2007), little empirical research appears to have been carried out on metadiscourse in academic texts by culturally varied authors in terms of their rhetorical styles. The comparative analysis presented here aims to shed light on how writers from different cultures who have been exposed to two different rhetorical styles interact with readers and make their claims persuasive or tentative.

Proceeding from previous studies of Asian and Slavic-authored academic writing (Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2022b; Čmejrková, 2007; Dawang, 2006; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2013; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Gu, 2008; Kim & Lim, 2013; Lu, 2000; Mur-Dueñas & Šinkūnienė, 2016; Pisanski Peterlin, 2005; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018), I assumed that research article (RA) abstracts written by Asian and Slavic authors would differ in terms of metadiscourse patterns such as boosters, hedges, attitude markers and self-mentions due to the influence of the rhetorical styles the writers had been exposed to. While Asian-authored writing would feature more indirect and vague claims and fewer personal statements, academic texts produced by Slavic writers would use more certainty devices and self-mentions in order to create an authorial presence predominantly with the use of the authorial *we*. To confirm this assumption, metadiscourse seems to be a valuable tool that offers a broad perspective on how writers from different cultural contexts engage their readers, mark their presence and negotiate knowledge claims.

The present study, therefore, aims to explore rhetorical style-dependent differences in the employment of interactional metadiscourse seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What categories of metadiscourse do Asian and Slavic writers opt for in their RA abstracts?
2. What is the frequency of different metadiscourse features in the two sub-corpora?
3. Are the differences, if any, determined by the impact of rhetorical styles to which the writers have been exposed or by any other factors?

## Literature review

### *Comparative studies on metadiscourse*

Comparative studies on metadiscourse in academic writing have revealed significant differences in various cultural groups (Alonso-Almeida, 2014; Belyakova, 2017; Hryniuk, 2018; Hu & Cao, 2011; Işık-Taş, 2018; Lee & Casal, 2014; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Mikolajchik,

2019; Pisanski Peterlin, 2005; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018). Hu and Cao (2011), for example, explored the use of hedging and boosting devices in RA abstracts collected from Chinese- and English-medium applied linguistics journals and found that English RA abstracts contained more hedges than Chinese ones. Khajavy et al. (2012) examined the metadiscourse features in English and Persian sociological research articles and revealed that English research articles used more overall interactive features. The cross-cultural approach was also adopted in the study by Alonso-Almeida (2014), who compared metadiscourse patterns in RA abstracts written in English and Spanish engineering and humanities journals and revealed that the latter contained more metadiscourse features. Işık-Taş (2018) explored how academic writers create an authorial presence through the first-person pronouns in sociology research articles in Turkish and English journals. The results obtained indicate that the frequencies and metadiscourse functions of the first-person pronouns did not differ significantly. Belyakova (2017) carried out a cross-cultural comparison of RA abstracts by L2 Slavic and L1 academic writers in geoscience to investigate their metadiscourse choices and found that writers from East European academia usually disguise themselves to a greater extent.

The linguistic features of RA abstracts written by L1 and L2 Slavic writers have also been explored in some studies (e.g. Pisanski Peterlin, 2005; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018). Vassileva's (2001) study of commitment and detachment patterns in English and Bulgarian linguistics RAs revealed, for example, differences in hedging and boosting tools that were explained by different rhetorical traditions. Pisanski Peterlin (2005) conducted a contrastive analysis focusing on variation in the use of metadiscourse in English and Slovene research articles and found that metadiscourse devices were more restricted in Slovene academic writing than in English academic prose. Another study of metadiscourse in research articles was conducted by Hryniuk (2018) who explored how British and Polish writers represent themselves in academic discourse and investigated differences in frequencies and functions of the first-person pronouns in applied linguistics RAs. The results showed that Polish scholars employed fewer first-person pronouns and did not assume responsibility for what they stated. According to Walková (2018, p. 101), who explored how English and Slovak writers position themselves in research papers, "Anglophone academic culture is rather individualistic, as indicated by predominance of the reader-inclusive perspective in the collective plural perspective and of the reader-exclusive perspective overall, the use of the first-person singular by single authors, and the use of the third person for unique identification of one of multiple authors".

The same results were obtained by Bogdanović and Mirović (2018), who compared Serbian and English-medium RAs written by Serbian authors.

In the Asian context, the same conclusions were drawn by Li and Xu (2020) who analysed metadiscourse in research articles by English and Chinese writers in the field of sociology. They revealed that English sociologists used metadiscourse markers far more than their Chinese counterparts. The contrastive analysis of metadiscourse in English and Chinese academic writing has been conducted in a large number of works (e.g. Li & Wharton, 2012; Liu, 2007; Wu, 2007; Xiong, 2007). Academic texts produced by representatives of other national communities have been explored to a lesser extent. Kobayashi (2016) explored L2 writings by six L1 groups (Chinese,

Malaysian, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Thai) and revealed a substantial difference in the use of metadiscourse markers between East Asian groups (Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese) and Southeast Asian groups (Malaysian and Thai). Kustyasari et al. (2021) compared metadiscourse functions in English-language research articles by L1 and L2 Malaysian writers. Their study revealed that in academic prose written by Indonesian writers, interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers performed similar functions, that is, they were used to indicate a relation between sentences, involve readers in a dialogue, limit commitment to propositions, emphasise certainty, signal their attitudes towards claims and readers. Azar et al. (2022) made an attempt to compare stance features in English and Malaysian research articles, focusing on the *Introduction* sections. They revealed notable differences in the use of stance features which prevailed in the discourse of L1 writers.

The above-mentioned studies have offered some interesting insights into cultural differences in academic writing. However, taking prior research altogether, it seems that English academic texts produced by L2 writers have been mainly analysed only in terms of their distinction from academic discourse by L1 writers, and little attention has been paid to differences in metadiscourse patterns used by writers exposed to different rhetorical styles. It is therefore worthwhile conducting further research into cross-cultural variation in the use of metadiscourse.

### ***Research on culture-specific rhetorical styles***

A great number of studies have shown that “academic discursive traditions are molded by the sociocultural environment, which either creates or removes incentives for a writer to become involved in a dialog with the reader” (Khoutyz, 2015, p. 135). One more contrastive rhetoric study, which fuelled research into this area, was conducted by Kaplan (1966), who attempted to explain differences in academic writing in terms of differences in the cultures and argued that rhetoric is not universal as it varies “from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture” (Kaplan, 1966, p. 2). Kaplan distinguished between several types of paragraph writing including linear development in English, a series of parallel constructions in Arabic, cyclic development in Oriental languages, or digression in French and Russian. He claimed that the rhetorical conventions of L1 often interfere with L2 writing and L1 transfer manifests itself in the deviated L2 writing patterns. In his later work, Kaplan (1972) claimed that it is apparent that paragraph organisation written in English by a L2 writer “will carry the dominant imprint of that individual’s culturally-coded orientation to the phenomenological world in which he lives and which is bound to interpret largely through the avenues available to him in his native language” (Kaplan, 1972, p. 1).

Another study dealing with the impact of culture on the rhetoric was Galtung’s (1981) research on intellectual styles. Galtung distinguished between four types of intellectual style – Gallic (prototype: the French), Teutonic (prototype: the Germans), Saxonian (prototype: the English and the Americans) and the Nipponic (prototype: the Japanese and Far East Asians). According to Galtung, while the Saxonian style fosters and encourages

debate and discourse, the dispersion or diversity of opinion in Gallic and Teuton cultures is likely to be smaller; and in the Nipponic setting, people are not very skilful at debating. Saxons prefer to look for facts and evidence, resulting in an abundance of factual accuracy; for the Teutonic and Gallic cultures, however, data and facts used are to illustrate what is said rather than to demonstrate it. In contrast to the other three cultures, in the Saxon one “to have thoroughly scrutinized all sources, to have put all the data together, concealing nothing, is a key criterion of scholarship” (Galtung, 1981, p. 827). While in the Teutonic culture the aim is for rigour at the expense of elegance, in Gallic culture the goal is elegance, perhaps at the expense of rigour. In the Nipponic culture, absolute, categorical statements are rare; vagueness is favoured. Clear statements are considered immodest. While representatives of the occidental cultures have a fear of inconsistency and ambiguity, in the oriental setting people strive for the opposite, being under the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism or Taoism, which militate against deductive rigidity. Contrary to the three occidental cultures, Nipponic culture is marked by respect for authority, a sense of collectivism and organic solidarity. When Galtung compares these four cultures, he notices that Eastern Europe found itself under the influence of the Teutonic style, “partly because of general cultural influence through centuries, partly because of the influence of a key Teutonic thinker: Karl Marx” (Galtung, 1981, p. 820). Following the Teutonic style, the academic writing practice in Eastern Europe advises writers to state their claims clearly, without allowing for any possible contradictory ideas, which means that the degree of commitment to authorial claims is rather high among Eastern European writers (Vassileva, 2001), and vagueness is not favoured. In the same vein, Bloor (1991) claimed that Slavic languages appear to be direct in academic contexts. Regarding the Asian countries, they are considered to be under the influence of the Nipponic style and are affected by Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist philosophical precepts, with Japan seen as a centre of this type of culture. The Asian rhetorical traditions based on these philosophical precepts operate, as Hinkel (1997) put it, within different paradigms to those accepted in the Anglo-American writing tradition, which is structured around Aristotelian notions of directness, justification and proof.

One more classification of rhetorical styles was suggested by Hinds (1987). He distinguished between reader- and writer-responsible cultures: the former being marked by an inductive, indirect form of argumentation with a less-assertive conclusion that requires a great deal more inferential work on the part of the reader. In contrast, in the latter, typically for Anglophone rhetoric, the failure of a reader to understand what a writer is trying to say is the writer’s fault. Socio-cultural, historical and situational constraints are considered to be the main source of rhetorical differences across languages. Hinds (1987) argues that in English, for example, it is the writer who is primarily responsible for effective communication, while in other cultures, such as Japanese or German, it is the responsibility of the reader to understand what the writer had intended to say as they place the burden on the reader to discern a meaning.

Based on these theories, a number of contrastive rhetoric studies were conducted with the aim of identifying the effects of culture-specific rhetorical styles on academic writing patterns. Duszak (1994), for example, sought to reveal differences in metadiscourse patterns used in academic prose by L1 and L2 Polish writers and explained

the way they rely on Galtung's (1981) model of intellectual styles. Kim and Lim (2013, p. 140) conducted a study based on Hinds's (1987) theory and demonstrated that Asian writing traditions favour the reader-responsible attitude when "the writer controls the level of personality in a text to establish a more distant relationship between author, text and reader". Lu (2000) revealed that in Chinese culture, reader responsibility might have been affected by a fundamental principle of Confucius's teaching – *Ren* (humanity, love) – in which the presence of others (i.e. readers) should be accepted by establishing relationships with them and giving them room to interpret the text according to their personal knowledge. This implies a lower level of the writer's personality in a text. In the same vein, Qi and Liu (2007, p. 148) argue that "compared to apparent formal links adopted in English, Chinese, in most cases, may have covert structural clues in the author's mind, requiring the reader to explore cohesion in the discourse". Similarly, Gu (2008) claims that Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism strongly affected the heritage of Asian rhetoric, which is a puzzle for Western readers, and Asian scholars feel alien to the Western rhetorical tradition that is rooted in the doctrine of Aristotle. Similarly, Park and Kim (2008), who explored the communication styles of Asian and American communities, revealed that Asian speakers prefer a less open communication style due to their higher level of emotional self-control and tend to suppress emotions by avoiding personal opinions or attitudes.

Thus, despite the relative uniformity of academic papers imposed by the generic requirements in particular disciplines, previous studies have identified a significant intercultural variation in the rhetorical preferences of academic writers, indicating that writing is a cultural object that is very much shaped by culture and the educational system in which the writer has been socialised (Mauranen, 1993). As Hyland & Tse (2004) put it, the rhetorical style and the degree of rhetorical assertiveness or uncertainty of the writer are closely associated with their cultural conventions.

### ***Metadiscourse and metadiscourse markers***

One definition of metadiscourse dates back to Harris (1959), who first coined the term, which refers to the writer's attempts to influence the reader's interpretation of a text. Twenty years later, Schiffrin (1980) defined metadiscourse as the authorial rhetorical manifestation in the text to support the discourse organisation and implications of what is being said. Viewing metadiscourse as an explicit set of language items, Hyland (2005a) described metadiscourse elements from a different perspective – as facets of the text that signify writer-reader interactions.

Hyland (2005a) classified metadiscourse as interactive and interactional. While interactive markers serve to organise information in coherent and convincing ways, interactional devices help build a relationship with the reader by expressing doubt or certainty or various other attitudes towards the proposition. Since the current study focuses only on interactional metadiscourse, Table 1 presents the main types in Hyland's model.

*Table 1:  
Model of interactional metadiscourse*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Function</b>
Hedges	acknowledge alternative viewpoints, withhold commitment
Boosters	suppress alternatives, emphasise certainty
Attitude markers	express attitudes, provide assessment
Self-mentions	manifests the explicitness of authorial presence
Engagement markers	explicitly address readers by focusing their attention or including them as discourse participants

*Source:* Compiled by the author.

Hyland and Zou's (2021) typology of boosting markers was adopted as the initial model for revealing boosters. Hedging devices found in the corpus were analysed using the model from the same authors (Hyland & Zou, 2021) in which they identified three ways of conveying respect for colleagues' views. The taxonomies adopted in the current study are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2:  
Types of hedging and boosting*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Types</b>	<b>Function</b>
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	emphasise the upper edge of a continuum
	Intensity markers	amplify the emotive strength of a statement

*Source:* Compiled by the author.

In an attempt to analyse attitudinal stance, the model proposed by Mur-Dueñas (2010) was used (Table 3). 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.



*Table 3:  
Types of attitudinal stance*

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

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

The types of engagement were analysed using Hyland's (2005b) taxonomy, which includes five ways of involving the reader in a dialogue: reader mentions, directives, knowledge appeals, questions and personal asides (Table 4).

*Table 4:  
Types of engagement markers*

<b>Types</b>	<b>Function</b>
Reader mentions	signal of the writers' awareness of the reader
Directives	instruct the reader to perform an action or view things in a way determined by the writer
Knowledge appeals	to recognise shared knowledge
Questions	to invite the reader to participate in the arguments
Personal asides	to provide the reader with additional information for interpretation

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

The types of self-mention markers were analysed using Hyland's (2002b) taxonomy, which includes two ways of expressing authorial presence in academic discourse (Table 5).

*Table 5:  
Types of self-mention markers*

<b>Types</b>	<b>Function</b>
First-person singular pronouns	to indicate personal responsibility for the claim to indicate subjectivity and assertiveness
First-person plural pronouns	to signal the collective nature of the study to indicate the belonging to the scientific community to avoid personal responsibility

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.



## Current study

### *Corpus design*

The present study was conducted on a corpus of RA abstracts derived from 12 journals which are under the same focus studies ranging from language teaching to linguistics (see Table 6).

*Table 6:  
The size of the corpus*

<b>Academic journals</b>	<b>Number of RA abstracts</b>	<b>Number of words</b>
<i>Sub-corpus 1</i>		
Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics (Indonesia)	34	6,669
3L: Language, Linguistics, Literacy (Malaysia)	34	9,201
SiSal Journal (Japan)	34	6,715
Studies in Chinese Linguistics (China)	34	6,785
Linguistic Research (South Korea)	34	6,180
Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics (China)	34	6,340
Total	204	36,900
<i>Sub-corpus 2</i>		
Časopis pro moderní filologii (Czech Republic)	34	6,970
Slovenski Jezik (Slovenia)	34	6,675
Poradnik Jezykowy (Poland)	34	6,538
Jazykovedný časopis (Slovakia)	34	6,112
Russian Journal of Linguistics (Russia)	34	5,651
Elope: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries	204	38,149
Total		

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

Humanities RA abstracts were chosen for the current study because it was assumed that culture-specific features are more likely to be present in texts produced in humanities than in hard or natural sciences. This assumption relies on Gnutzmann's (1989) theory which says that the deeper the discipline is rooted in primary culture and the more socially oriented it is, the more likely it is that the transfer of scientific content will create culture-specific patterns of discourse.

The motivation behind the selection of RA abstracts by Asian and Slavic scholars for a contrastive analysis was the fact that they are under the influence of different rhetorical styles, which may determine differences in rhetorical traditions. Despite these differences, however, due to the process of globalisation of education, English has been gaining influence in Asian and Slavic countries, which is confirmed by a growing number of English-medium publications by scholars from these regions. Analysing the differences, if any, in the ways writers exposed to different intellectual styles use

rhetorical devices such as metadiscourse resources is therefore of interest. Additionally, the literature review has revealed that the use of metadiscourse markers in Asian and Slavic academic prose has never been investigated from a contrastive perspective.

Having identified the target journals based on criteria such as the origin of the publisher (Asian or Slavic countries), discipline (language teaching and linguistics) and Scimago impact factor (Q1/Q2), 408 RA abstracts (N = 408) were randomly selected to ensure a good degree of objectivity and comparability of texts. To eliminate the impact of publication period, only the RA abstracts from the most recent issues of each journal, published between 2018 and 2023 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 control the influence of an individual writing style.

One important consideration in the current study was the identification of the authors' L1 status. For while many researchers have an international educational background, I wanted to reduce the influence of other cultures on the two groups of academic writers. For this reason, names connoting Asian or Slavic origin were first identified, and then affiliations were thoroughly studied for their biodata as available on their institutional websites. All the Asian-authored RA abstracts chosen for the present study had been written by academics who had studied for their PhDs in Asian countries and who were working in Asia, according to the institutional website information. Having selected Asian-authored RA abstracts, I searched for Slavic RA abstracts following the same procedure, examining the authors' backgrounds to confirm that they had studied for their PhDs in East European countries and were working there. RA abstracts written by authors who had ever been affiliated with universities outside East Europe or Asia were not included in the corpus. RA abstracts written by authors whose names or affiliations appeared to be vague in determining L1 status were also excluded from the corpus. Although this procedure may seem imperfect, I was confident about the distinction established between the two sub-corpora of RA abstracts. The corpus was thus built so as to ensure comparability in terms of genre (RA abstracts), authors' origin (Asian and Slavic nations), field (linguistics and language teaching) and currency (2018–2023).

## **Methods**

Since the study aims to compare the use of metadiscourse markers in English-medium RA abstracts written by writers exposed to two different rhetorical styles, the methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis were applied. The RA abstracts were downloaded from the journals' websites, converted to the Microsoft DOCS format and analysed to calculate the number of metadiscourse devices in each abstract. All the abstracts were divided into two sub-corpora – SC1 for Asian-writers' RA abstracts and SC2 for Slavic writers' texts. Hyland's (2005a) list of metadiscourse devices was used in the search. The quantitative analysis followed two stages. First, the texts were scrutinised for metadiscourse markers using Wordsmith Tools (version 5). Every occurrence of a metadiscourse feature was manually double checked in context to verify that it was serving the metadiscourse function. This was done by comparing every occurrence

with the definition of metadiscourse provided by Hyland (2005b). Examples that did not match the definition were excluded from the count. Each type of metadiscourse (boosting, hedging, attitude and self-mention) was then analysed to determine its frequency for each corpus. As far as the raw frequencies can be misleading when comparing two corpora of different sizes, normalised frequencies, which allow for a more accurate comparison between the two corpora, were calculated to facilitate a comparison. The frequencies were calculated per 1,000 words. In addition, the shares of each marker in the total number of metadiscourse features found in each sub-corpus were calculated. The results of the quantitative analysis were summarised in a table format. The quantitative analysis was thus combined with a manual qualitative analysis of the examples which was conducted to interpret the findings of the quantitative analysis. To ensure in-depth exploration into the use of metadiscourse, examples were taken from the corpus being studied and explanations were provided to describe the rhetorical functions of metadiscourse markers found in the two sub-corpora.

## Results

The outcome of the quantitative analysis shows differences in the use of metadiscourse by Asian and Slavic writers in terms of categories and frequencies. In absolute terms, the differences between the total number of metadiscourse markers were quite significant, with hedging markers representing the majority of features in the Slavic sub-corpus and boosters in the Asian one. The details are shown in Table 7, where SC1 stands for Asian-authored texts and SC2 for Slavic-authored abstracts.

*Table 7:  
Interactional metadiscourse in the two sub-corpora  
(per 1,000 words and in % of the total number per sub-corpus)*

<b>Interactional metadiscourse markers</b>	<b>SC1</b>	<b>SC2</b>
Hedges	33.7 (30.6)	112.1 (49.4)
Boosters	48.1 (43.7)	33.8 (14.9)
Attitude markers	27.1 (24.6)	71 (31.3)
Self-mention	0 (0)	8.9 (3.9)
Engagement markers	1.29 (1.17)	1.2 (0.5)
Total	110.19 (100)	227 (100)

*Source:* Compiled by the authors.

Overall, I found 22,647 metadiscourse markers in the two sub-corpora. Hedges were the most frequent metadiscourse resources in the Slavic writers' texts. Their share in the total number of occurrences in this sub-corpus was 49.4%. In the Asian sub-corpus, their share was significantly smaller (30.6%). The frequency of occurrence of hedges per 1,000 words also differed significantly. The smaller rate of hedges (33.7% per

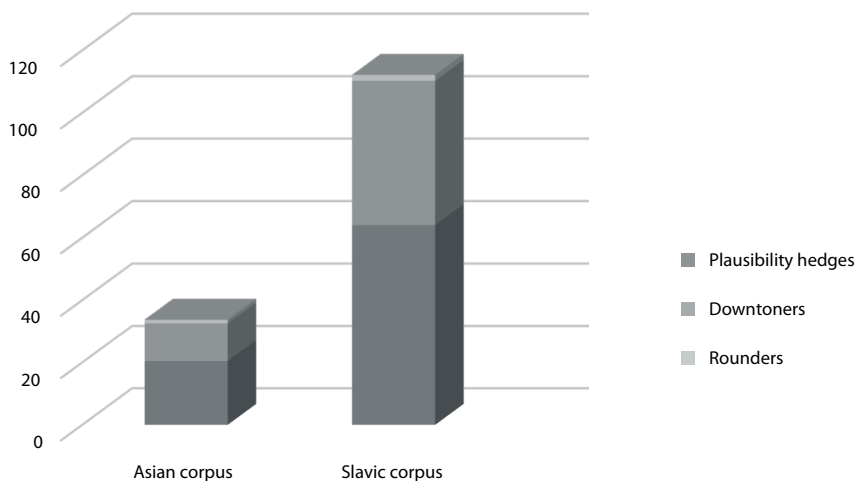
1,000 words) was observed in the Asian sub-corpus. Boosters also exhibited differences in the two sub-corpora: in the Asian-authored texts, they were more frequent than other metadiscourse features (43.7% of the total number). Attitude markers ranked second in the Slavic sub-corpus with 31.3%. When normalised to frequencies per 1,000 words, the difference in the use of attitude markers was more striking: 27.1 in SC1 and 71 in SC2. Engagement markers were less apparent in both sub-corpora. Self-mention markers were found only in SC2 and their share was rather small (3.9%).

In the following section, the functions of interactional metadiscourse features in the two sub-corpora will be explained.

### *Hedges*

In both sub-corpora, hedges were used to downplay writers' commitments to propositional content, modifying its relevance or certainty and helping to acknowledge alternative viewpoints. They helped the writers withhold commitment to the presented proposition and to steer the reader to the conclusion or reasoning of the writer's choice.

The analysis revealed that both Asian and Slavic writers employed three types of hedging such as plausibility markers, downtoners and rounders but to a different extent. Plausibility hedges that protect the author from having to take full responsibility for the propositional content prevailed in both sub-corpora, but were more frequently employed by the Slavic authors (20.4 vs. 64% per 1,000 words in SC1 and SC2 respectively) predominantly to recognise the limitations of the claims. Figure 1 shows the use of hedges by the Asian and Slavic authors.



*Figure 1:*  
*Comparative use of hedging markers*  
*Source: Compiled by the authors.*

Here is an example of the plausibility hedge from the Slavic corpus that indicates that the statement is based on an assumption rather than facts and implicates that the author is uncertain about the proposition.

1. *Similarities of languages as calculated based on the typological database of WALS **can** provide information on the history of languages both in terms of genealogical descent and contact with other languages. (SC2)*

Downtoners ranked second in both sub-corpora. However, like the plausibility hedges, they were also employed to a different extent – 12.1 downtoners per 1,000 words in SC1 and 46.2 downtoners per 1,000 words in SC2 – which indicates that the Slavic authors tended to show much more modesty and soften their claims to sound polite. In 2, the downtowner used by the Slavic author protects the writer against inaccuracy of research results and thus helps in saving face.

2. *Additionally, it explores the **possible** interference effects of L1. 88 English L2 learners and 9 native speakers heard sentences in which a new activity was described with a novel word. (SC2)*

Rounders indicating an approximation – were rather scarce in both sub-corpora (1.2 vs. 1.9 in SC1 and SC2 respectively), which can be explained by the nature of social sciences, which deal with numbers less frequently than hard sciences. Here is a rare example from SC1:

3. *The material for the present study comes from **approximately** 80 articles published in Magyar Orvosi Nyelv. (SC1)*

By making the number a little fuzzy, the adverb employed by the Asian author as a rounder expresses approximation, thereby making the claim less persuasive.

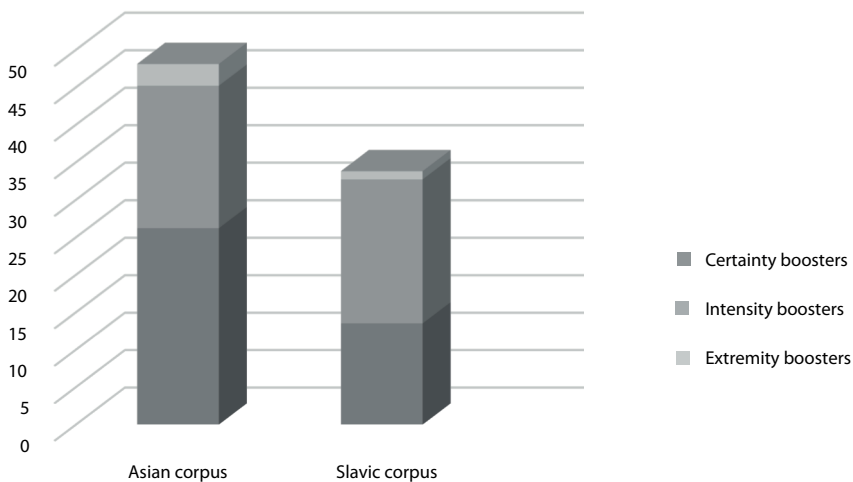
### **Boosters**

Boosters were used by the authors to present “the proposition with conviction while marking involvement, solidarity and engagement with readers” (Hyland, 2005a, p. 145). An analysis revealed the higher frequency of these devices in SC1, which indicates that the Asian writers tended to occupy a stronger stance and were keener to express their conviction and highlight the significance of their work, which is not typical of the Oriental indirection and vagueness emphasised by Galtung (1981). Instead of presenting their claims in an affirmative manner, the Asian writers preferred to hedge them to make them sound more tentative.

4. *Across all universities, it is **evident** the use of writing as a tool to evaluate students' knowledge, but the opportunity is missed to use feedback to learn writing itself. [sic!] (SC1)*

The booster used in the above example from the Asian corpus helps remove any doubts about the claim closing down potential opposition, which indicates the author's desire to enhance the degree of commitment to the claim rather than to appear indirect.

In the two sub-corpora, boosters differed both numerically and functionally. While certainty boosters were used more frequently by Asian writers (26.2% per 1,000 words), in the Slavic sub-corpus intensity boosters prevailed (19.2% per 1,000 words). Extremity boosters were rarely employed by both groups (2.9% vs. 1.1% in SC1 and SC2 respectively). Figure 2 shows the use of boosters by the Asian and Slavic authors.



*Figure 2:*  
*Comparative use of boosters*  
*Source: Compiled by the authors.*

In both sub-corpora, certainty markers were the most frequent type of boosting devices used to indicate the writer's epistemic conviction, to claim the accuracy of research results, to emphasise the importance of the study, and to exclude alternative views from readers as follows. Here are two examples from SC1 and SC2:

5. ***Findings show** that there were broadly eight types of obstacles reported by the participants, with language difficulties, affect and motivation most frequently mentioned. (SC1)*

6. This **demonstrates**, firstly, the significance of diplomatic documents created in tsar's and khan's chanceries for the history of translation of Russian and Oriental official written documents. [sic!] (SC2)

In the above examples, the authors anticipate possible responses from the reader but choose to prevent them. The boosting verbs *to show* and *to demonstrate* and the boosting noun *findings* are used to express the authors' certainty in research results obtained or claims presented.

Intensity boosters ranked second in both sub-corpora and were used to amplify the emotive strength of statements. In contrast to certainty boosters, they helped the writers add affective colour to claims rather than concerned epistemic assurance (Hyland & Zou, 2021).

7. Owing to their versatile nature, borrowings are **mostly used** in colloquial speech and slang. (SC1)  
 8. We applied this verticalization theory in a **very interesting** area. (SC2)

These two intensity boosters function by enhancing persuasion through an involved attitude.

Regarding the extremity boosters, they were more commonly used in SC1 to emphasise the upper edge of a continuum (Hyland & Zou, 2021, p. 8), as here:

9. The study also revealed that the teachers' understandings of technical skills and language pedagogy were among **the highest** compared to their knowledge of theories and principles on language assessments. (SC1)

By upgrading the proposition, the writer emphasises the level of teachers' understandings of technical skills (10) without the need for elaboration.

## Attitude markers

Attitude markers were used to express the writers' attitudes to what they are discussing and the influence on the information presented. They also signalled that the writer shares disciplinary values. The findings show that the Asian and Slavic writers used attitude markers differently in terms of frequencies and types. The Asian writers used attitude markers with half the frequency of their Slavic peers, who established their claims and evaluated the novelty, importance and usefulness of their research findings more explicitly, which indicates their orientation to the writer-responsible style of writing.

With regard to the types of attitude, the analysis revealed the preponderance of assessment over significance in the Slavic sub-corpus (49.2% per 1,000 words), and significance over assessment in the Asian one (17.2% per 1,000 words) with emotion markers absent from both sub-corpora (see Figure 3).



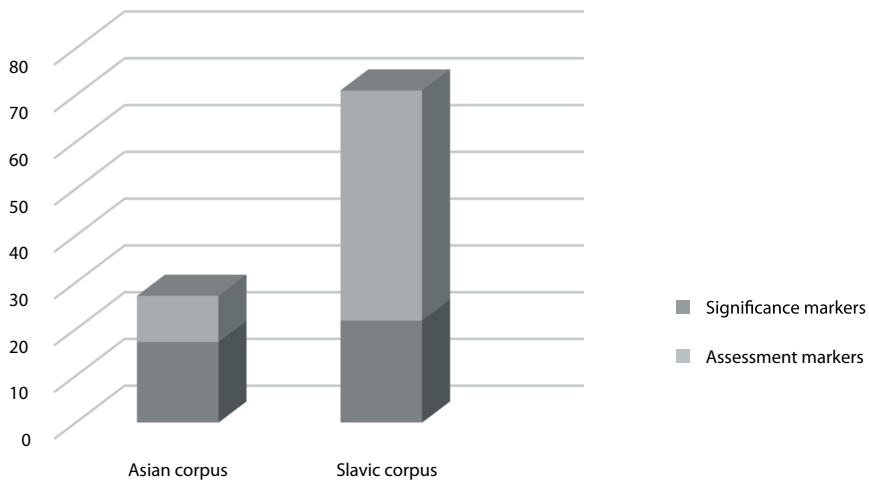


Figure 3:  
Comparative use of attitude markers  
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Here are two examples that demonstrate the use of assessment markers in SC1 and SC2.

10. *Although the success of information rendition in simultaneous interpreting (SI) is susceptible to many factors, the speed of the source speech (SS) is perceived as one of the **most challenging** problem triggers.* (SC1)
11. *The article addresses the **urgent** need of semantic-motivational reconstruction of folk toponym. [sic!]* (SC2)

In SC1, the assessment marker *the most challenging* signals the writer's evaluation of the study emphasising some debatable findings. This rhetorical strategy helps promote and evaluate research. In 11, the Slavic author uses the assessment marker *urgent* to emphasise the need to explore the issue.

In both sub-corpora, significance markers were used to show the role of research results and present a valid argument, as in the examples below.

12. *This study presents the **significance** of performing needs analysis and suggests that language teachers should consider it for their professional development and growth in higher education.* (SC1)
13. *The article is a **contribution** to theoretical research into contemporary directions in the development of translation lexicography.* (SC2)

The *significance* type of attitude is used here to evaluate the research results. The authors highlight the importance of their studies for the body of disciplinary knowledge. It can be said that this type of attitude was predominant in SC1: the Asian authors referred to

the significance of the study, research results, or methods applied in the study more than twice as frequently as the Slavic writers.

Emotion markers were not found in either sub-corpora, which can be explained by the generic characteristics of the texts rather than the authors belonging to reader-responsible cultures.

### ***Self-mention markers***

Self-mention indicates the perspective from which the statement should be interpreted by the reader and “contributes to manifesting author stance in the texts and to projecting a positive image, which can affect the authors’ persuasiveness in their argumentation and presentation of research results” (Mur-Dueñas & Šinkūnienė, 2016). Interestingly, these markers were found only in the Slavic sub-corpus. The Asian sub-corpus featured impersonal constructions such as inanimate subject structures, which are helpful in attempts to avoid personal responsibility for any claims and in concealing an authorial self.

Here are two examples from SC2, in which the first-person pronouns were found.

14. *In this text, **we** seek to discuss issues on a topic a little debated in Applied Linguistics – the emotions of black English teachers. (SC2)*
15. ***We** take a different tack from Kim’s, proposing that the preference for demonstratives rather than bare NPs as a continuing topic is attributed to the fact that NUN as a topic marker increases the discourse salience of the NP with it. (SC2)*

In 14, the pronoun *we* helps the authors outline the aim of the study, that is, affect the rhetorical function of explaining why the research was conducted. In 15, *we* helps the writers express their position which differs from one proposed by another researcher. The pronouns used in these examples seem to be exclusive rather than inclusive, that is, the authors speak on their own behalf. It is worth noting that example 14 was taken from the single-authored RA abstract, while example 15 was derived from an article written by two authors. The analysis also revealed that *we* pronouns were predominantly used to organise the abstract and create a path for the reader. *I* pronouns were not found in the corpus.

### ***Engagement markers***

Engagement markers were used to explicitly bring readers into dialogue with the writer, to focus the readers’ attention and to guide them to a particular interpretation. 17 engagement features were found in the whole corpus (10 items in SC1 and 7 items in SC2). When normed for text length, the Asian sub-corpus showed the slightly greater number of engagement markers. The proportion of the types of engagement was different across the sub-corpora. Shared knowledge markers were dominant in both sub-corpora. They were followed by directives in SC2 and reader-mention markers in SC1. Figure 4 shows the use of engagement markers by the Asian and Slavic authors.

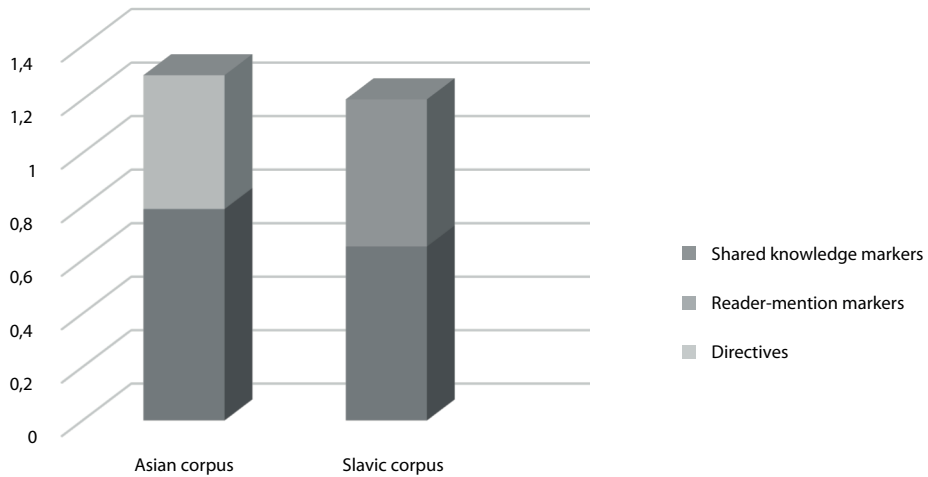


Figure 4:  
Comparative use of engagement markers  
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Reader mention markers, the most explicit ways of bringing readers into a discourse, were found only in SC1 to directly refer to the reader.

16. *When **we** are looking at the books displayed in the window of a bookshop, what first catches the eye is the title.* (SC2)

*We* is used as a reader pronoun rather than to express the writer's self. The authors use these to tell readers to interpret the text in a particular way. In contrast to the self-mentions described above, the first-person plural pronoun in this example is inclusive, the function of which is to enhance dialogicity. While exclusive *we* refers only to the authors, inclusive *we* – both to the author and the reader, giving the latter a sense of membership with similar understandings as the writer.

Directives, another engagement tool, were extremely rare in the corpus. I found only two occurrences of this type of engagement in SC2 alone, encourage readers to see things in a certain way, thus managing the readers' understanding and modifying writer-reader relations (Hyland, 2002a). Here is one of the two examples from the corpus where the author uses *should* to require readers to see the theory in the way determined by the writer.

17. *The author proposes a new East European term (*laická jazykověda*) and suggests that the theory **should** be seen as dynamic (e.g. changing over time and during speakers' lives) and structured (e.g. consisting of a centre and peripheries and containing several "layers" of shared sub-theories).* (SC2)

Shared knowledge markers were the most frequent type of engagement in both sub-corpora (six occurrences in SC1 and five occurrences in SC2). They were used “to position readers within the boundaries of disciplinary understandings” (Zou & Hyland, 2020, p. 276). Here are two examples from the corpus:

18. *On the one hand, there was an **obvious** bias towards NES norms and accents and a strong bias against Chinese-accented English and other NNES accents. (SC1)*
19. *Finally, the paper argues against the **widely accepted** view that absolutes represent structurally case-marked DPs and provides evidence for their case-less DP status. (SC2)*

The above appeals to shared knowledge refer to an awareness of discourse community views. In these examples, writers use these markers to support their claims by emphasising the take-for-granted facts or to bring the readers into agreement with themselves.

Other types of engagement such as questions and personal asides were not found in the corpus.

## Discussion

The intent of the present study was to contribute to a better understanding of cultural aspects of academic writing and to provide an answer to the question of whether rhetorical styles manifest themselves in metadiscourse preferences. Conducted from a contrastive perspective, the study aimed to explore a variation in the employment of metadiscourse markers in a corpus of English-language RA abstracts by L2 Slavic and Asian writers, which previously had not attracted much attention from linguists. The study was based on the assumption that the deployment of metadiscourse markers is considerably affected by the rhetorical styles the writers are exposed to. This assumption relied on previous studies of rhetorical traditions by Kaplan (1966), Galtung (1981), Hinds (1987), and some recent studies in the field of contrastive rhetoric (Alonso-Almeida, 2014; Belyakova, 2017; Boginskaya, 2022a; Dawang, 2006; Hryniuk, 2018; Hu & Cao, 2011; Işık-Taş, 2018; Lee & Casal, 2014; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Mikolaychik, 2019; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018; Wu & Zhu, 2015, etc.).

The corpus-based study has shown that the rhetorical patterns in RA abstracts written by Asian and Slavic authors were slightly different from those expected based on previous studies and significantly different in the two sub-corpora. Slavic writers left more traces of themselves and took far less explicitly involved positions. Slavic-authored RA abstracts contained twice as many interactional metadiscourse elements in 1,000 words than those written by their Asian counterparts. The finding that Asian writers are reserved in the use of metadiscourse markers in academic writing has confirmed Hinds's (1987) assumption about the reader-responsible nature of Asian academic discourse. However, this finding does not corroborate the view presented

in previous studies about the nature of Slavic academic discourse, which is also regarded as reader-responsible, and Slavic writers, who are considered to be reluctant to use metadiscourse devices in presenting their contributions to the academic field (Paradiž, 2020; Walková, 2019). The present study showed that Slavic writers seem to have mastered a more active way of interacting with readers than their Asian peers.

The Asian- and Slavic-authored texts also differed in terms of the frequencies of some metadiscourse categories. While hedges were the most frequent metadiscourse resource in the Slavic-authored texts (33.7% vs. 112.1% per 1,000 words), boosters were more common in the Asian sub-corpus (48.1% vs. 33.8% per 1,000 words). This finding contradicts the view about uncertainty, indirectness and vagueness of claims in Asian-authored texts and the high degree of commitment to authorial claims in Slavic writing. In an effort to be more confident and direct, the Asian writers chose to suppress alternative views and left little room to other interpretations, thus creating an impression of certainty and assurance that instils confidence in the reader. This finding challenges Galtung's (1981) suggestion about an Asian preference for rhetorical strategies of indirectness. The Slavic writers took a more tentative approach, seemed to be much more careful in making claims and presenting findings, thus securing their academic credibility.

Attitude markers ranked second in the Slavic sub-corpus, while in the Asian-authored texts they followed boosters and hedges. The low frequency of this metadiscourse category in the Asian sub-corpus (27.1% per 1,000 words) has confirmed Hinds's (1987) assumption about the reader-responsible nature of Asian discourse as the use of attitude markers indicates the writer's level of involvement in the text. The low frequency of attitude markers in SC1 showed that Asian writers exhibited a distant rhetorical style of interaction with the reader. Regarding Slavic academic discourse, also regarded as reader-responsible, unexpectedly frequent signals of affect might indicate the orientation towards stepping into the discussion with the reader.

Engagement markers were, however, rarely used in both sub-corpora and the reasons for this infrequency are twofold. First, both Slavic and Asian writing proved to be reproductive, focusing on the content rather than interaction with the reader. As Yakhontova (1997) put it, this type of writing style tends to *tell* rather than to *sell*, which implies that the reader is expected to invest effort in following the writer's line of argumentation. The fact that readers were expected to make an effort to draw themselves into the dialogue may indicate that both Asian and Slavic authors were prone to producing a reader-responsible type of discourse. Second, in the context of the present study, the low frequency of engagement markers in both sub-corpora can be explained by the generic features of the abstract, which aims at providing concise information about the study presented in the article.

Self-mention markers were found only in the Slavic sub-corpus (3.2% per 1,000 words) and represented by exclusive first-person plural pronouns. The analysis revealed that the Asian writers tended to disguise their voice in discourse and avoided emphasising their role in research, which confirmed the assumption made in the previous research about Asian writers' preference for an objective and impersonal style to downplay their presence (Dawang, 2006; Wu & Zhu, 2015). Avoiding self-mention, the

Asian writers hedged their commitment to the claims and prevented possible objections from the reader. In contrast, Slavic researchers tended to intrude into their discourse predominantly as text organisers projecting their persona through the use of the exclusive 'we', which can be explained with Clyne's (1987) concept of collective cultural orientation. Based on Clyne's theory, Vassileva (1998) suggested that Slavic cultures follow the collective approach that resulted from communist ideology, which aims to suppress the individual in favour of the community. In the Slavic academic context, the use of the *we* pronoun, even in single-authored articles, is considered to be a sign of the author's membership in a disciplinary community, a manifestation of collectivism or authorial modesty (Boginskaya, 2022a; Čmejková, 2007; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2013; Vassileva, 2001; Walková, 2018). Dontcheva-Navratilova (2013), for example, found that Czech authors tend to use authorial *we* when writing in English. Walková (2018) found that Slovak single authors often use the authorial *we* due to the collectivist nature of Slovak academic culture, which is a remnant of the communist past of the Slavic countries. Similarly, due to the influence of the communist regime that deprived scholars of any incentive to express personal involvement, Russian academic discourse abounds with the authorial *we* that creates an authorial presence in the text (Khoutyz, 2015).

Therefore, the study only partly confirmed the assumptions made in previous studies and revealed that:

1. Slavic discourse contained far fewer features of the reader-responsible style of writing, demonstrating authorial attempts to interact with the reader predominantly through the use of attitude markers; Asian RA abstracts also featured some markers of the writer-responsible culture such as attitude and engagement markers, but their share was significantly lower.
2. Asian authors demonstrated a high degree of commitment to authorial claims seeking to suppress alternative views and creating an impression of certainty and Slavic authors seemed to be more careful in presenting findings.
3. While the Asian authors tended to disguise their presence in the texts, the Slavic ones left traces of themselves through the use of first-person plural pronouns.

## Conclusions

The present study aimed to verify assumptions about the role of rhetorical styles in choosing interactional metadiscourse markers by academic writers with Asian and Slavic cultural backgrounds. Using the methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study revealed significant differences in the use of metadiscourse: English-language academic discourse by Slavic writers contained a larger number of hedges and attitude markers and a smaller number of boosters. In contrast to Slavic writers, Asian scholars left far fewer traces of themselves and took more explicitly involved positions.

A comparison of the RA abstracts by L2 writers has shown that the Asian and Slavic academic communities manifest different metadiscourse preferences, but they do not always reflect the writing patterns of the rhetorical style they are exposed to.

In general, the rhetorical styles appeared not to be the only determinants of academic writers' rhetorical behaviour, affecting the ways they express the commitment to their claims and interact with the reader. Due to the stronger influence of the international academic writing traditions, Slavic authors seemed to be much more involved in the discussion, building a relationship with readers through the use of hedges and attitude markers. The research results thus suggest that a great deal of attention needs to be paid to the discipline- or genre-specific rhetoric, rather than to broad generalisations about culture-bound rhetorical styles.

It should be admitted here that in order to confirm the findings presented here, a larger corpus of RA abstracts and more support from other cultural contexts are required. Conducted on a corpus of 408 RA abstracts written by representatives from a limited number of cultural communities, the research might not fully reflect the effects of the rhetorical styles on metadiscourse preferences of L2 writers. Additionally, I acknowledge that the grouping of academic writings by Asian or Slavic authors from different countries is rough, and there may be some differences in the rhetorical patterns among related languages such as Czech and Polish or Korean and Chinese. One more limitation that should be mentioned here is the choice of genre for the analysis. The study analyses RA abstracts, which might have impacted the results. For instance, due to its generic nature, the abstract has fewer engagement markers than RAs.

As for venues for further studies, it would be of interest to continue this research using data from other disciplines. Diachronic variation in the employment of metadiscourse patterns in RA abstracts by culturally diverse academic writers could also be of interest. It might be interesting to study how expert academic writers with different cultural backgrounds know when to use metadiscourse devices in their English-medium texts or how metadiscourse in L2 writers' prose affects editors and reviewers of international journals. Further empirical research could look into other types of metadiscourse features in academic prose. Yet despite the above-mentioned limitations, this research could be taken as a starting point for future studies of metadiscourse in L2 academic writing in terms of the rhetorical styles.

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