

## Stance and Engagement Use in a Timed Argumentative Essay by Asian First-Year University Students Studying English as a Foreign Language

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### Abstract

This paper documents the use of stance and engagement in improvised and timed argumentative essays among 12 Asian first-year university students studying English as a foreign language at an international university in Thailand. A metadiscourse (stance and engagement) model was adopted to analyze 12 papers composed by students from six different nationalities. The findings indicated that the most frequently used stance and engagement markers among these multinational students were hedges, self-mention, and reader mention. The analysis also revealed that students with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds used these interactional markers disproportionately in timed argumentative essays on similar topics. Implications drawn from such results for second language writing instructions are discussed briefly.

**Keywords:** *Stance and engagement, argumentative writing, English as a foreign language learners*

### Introduction

One of the most difficult challenges for second language (L2) writers at the tertiary level of education is to produce a quality academic essay, since writing requires constant practice and oftentimes must satisfy explicit and formal instructions (Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011). Writers also need to demonstrate a variety of syntactic structures, semantic forms, and great judgment (Halliday, 1989). Academic writing is categorized by a formality that involves standardization, parallel structure, as well as sentence organization (Sanczyk, 2010). One of the most rigorous forms of writing imposed on college students is argumentation. The argumentative essay becomes the most common genre that tertiary students have to produce (Mei, 2006; Zhao, 2017). However, such a writing genre is controversial for L2 learners as it requires high-order thinking skills with rational, compelling arguments (Hyland, 1990). The term 'argument' is defined as "a process of argumentation, a connected series of statements intended to establish a position and implying response to another or more than one position" (Andrews, 1995, p. 3). Toulmin, Reike, and Janik (as cited in Wingate, 2012, p. 146) defined argument as "the sequence of interlinked claims and reasons that, between them, establish content and force of the position for which a particular speaker is arguing." Such a writing genre needs a logical and sequential pattern of organization with an appropriate writing style (Pramoolsook & Qian, 2013). Argumentative essay writers need to address their rational viewpoint with a defensible claim and supporting evidence, including facts or opinions to convince readers. Thus, a significant element of argumentative writing is the ability of the writer to establish and convey messages with a clear stance on a topic, and to directly engage the reader in the text (Hyland, 2005; Wingate, 2012; Lee & Deakin, 2016). These stance and engagement elements are referred to as "interactional metadiscourse" (Hyland, 2004, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004). According to Hyland (2005), stance refers to the way writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments, whereas engagement is defined as the way writers relate to their readers with respect to the positions advanced in the text. Through the attentive use of stance and engagement, writers are able to explicitly convey their affective position toward the content and reader, establish writer-reader rapport, and ultimately construct a text that is regarded as effectively persuasive (Lee & Deakin, 2016). In order to become successful in academic writing, including argumentative essay, writers need to demonstrate a competence as disciplinary insiders by making choices from the interpersonal systems of stance and engagement. Their textual voice must be compelling, thought-provoking, and they must express their position, commitment, and represent

themselves and persuade their audience of the rationale and justification of what is being claimed (Hyland, 2008).

Previous studies have investigated the use of stance and engagement resources in high- and low-rated undergraduate essays (Mei, 2007); voice in academic writing (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007); organization and stance in persuasive writing of high school students (Uccelli, Dobbs, & Scott, 2013); exploring valued patterns of stance in upper-level student writing in the disciplines (Lancaster, 2014); linguistic markers of stance in early and advanced academic writing (Aull & Lancaster, 2014); metadiscourse use in persuasive writing of undergraduate students (Tan & Eng, 2014); the use of stance in undergraduate writing (Lancaster, 2016); voice features in academic texts (Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016); interactions in first language (L1) and L2 undergraduate student writing with the use of interactional metadiscourse in successful and less-successful argumentative essays (Lee & Deakin, 2016); and recently, the use of metadiscourse and persuasion of first-year university students' timed argumentative essays (Ho & Li, 2018). Most of these studies investigated stance and engagement, known as "interactional metadiscourse" when used in academic settings (Hyland, 2004, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004) in both L1 and L2 university students' writing. Few studies have explored intergroup heterogeneity among mixed L2 learners in terms of their interactional metadiscoursal use in argumentative essays (e.g., Zheng, 2013; Hong & Cao, 2014). Hong and Cao (2014) examined how young learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), who spoke Chinese, Spanish, and Polish as their first languages, employed interactional metadiscourse in composing argumentative English essays. Their study revealed that the three groups of EFL learners employed boosters, attitude markers, self-mention, and engagement markers differently in their argumentative essays. Their use of hedges and self-mention in the descriptive essays are also different from the argumentative essays. The difference in the use of interactional metadiscourse was influenced by their L1 and cultural differences. Zheng (2013) examined, by structure analysis, the English argumentative writings produced by Chinese and Korean EFL learners and compared them with the English native speakers' writing. This researcher discovered that there were no significant differences in the essay structure among the three groups. A deductive approach (stating an opinion in the first paragraph) was used by both native and non-native English speakers. However, the findings revealed that learners' cultural and social backgrounds influenced their use of rational and affective appeals in the essay structure. In the study, the Chinese and Korean students tended to employ more logical explanation – instead of example illustration – than their native peers. These afore-mentioned studies indicated that learners' first language (L1) and cultural backgrounds influence their use of interactional metadiscourse when they compose an argumentative essay in English, which is a foreign language to them. To reaffirm such findings of learners' first language and cultural influence on the writing genre, more studies are required to investigate the use of stance and engagement markers among undergraduate students with different L1 backgrounds in producing academic writing such as argumentative essays (Hong & Cao, 2014). What is barely explored in the previous studies is an analysis of stance and engagement markers used in improvised and timed argumentative essays of first-year undergraduate students who are freshly enrolled in an English composition course in a multilingual EFL classroom setting.

The aim of the current study was to analyze the use of stance and engagement, as introduced by Hyland (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005, 2008) in argumentative essays on identical topics, composed by Asian EFL first-year university students who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Understanding the use of stance and engagement elements among heterogeneous L2 writers would shed light on L2 writing instructions, and assist the English teachers to focus on expressions of individual stance in writing. With this in mind, teachers could train students to express ideas confidently, integrate themselves into the writing content, and cultivate their independence as well as their critical thinking to enhance their academic writing skills and fit in with the writing norms. The study was driven by the two following research questions:

1. What are the types of stance and engagement used by the Asian EFL first year university students?

2. What are the similarities and differences in the use of stance and engagement in argumentative essays among these Asian EFL first year university students?

## **Research Methods**

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

The data for this study was collected from 12 argumentative essays written by EFL first-year university students who come from six different nations in Asia, namely, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. These students differed in their study majors. They were enrolled in ENGL 111 English Composition I at Asia-Pacific International University in the 2017-2018 Academic Year, semester II. Their English language proficiency levels ranged from intermediate (IELTS band scores from 5–5.5, which is equivalent to B1) to upper-intermediate (IELTS band scores from 6–6.5 or B2), based on the Common European Framework of References for Language (CEFR standard) as shown in their English proficiency test (EPT) results. The procedure for obtaining data for this case study started with 42 essays that were individually composed by students in the English Composition class. However, the subsequent step focused only on the essays that met two requirements defined in the study: (a) the essay must be composed by an Asian student in the correct format of an argumentative essay with an approximate word length of 500–700 words, and (b) the essays must argue on an identical topic. The 42 first-year university students were scheduled to sit for a writing test for two hours conducted in the language laboratory, with no Internet or learning resources accessibility while performing the argument writing test. Two topics were provided for students to choose: (1) “Should cellphones be allowed in the classroom?” and (2) “Should smoking on campus be banned?” Once the writing test was completed, the researchers screened the data stored in the learning management system (LMS) and selected the essays which conformed to the specified criteria. From the 42 essays, 25 essays met the requirements. The 25 essays were subsequently categorized according to the nationalities of the authors (four from Cambodia, five from China, three from Indonesia, four from Malaysia, six from Thailand, and three from Vietnam). The 12 essays then were selected randomly. However, to ensure equality and fairness in the selection process, only two argumentative papers from each representative country were selected from the small corpus for this case study.

### ***Patterns for Organizing Argumentative Essays***

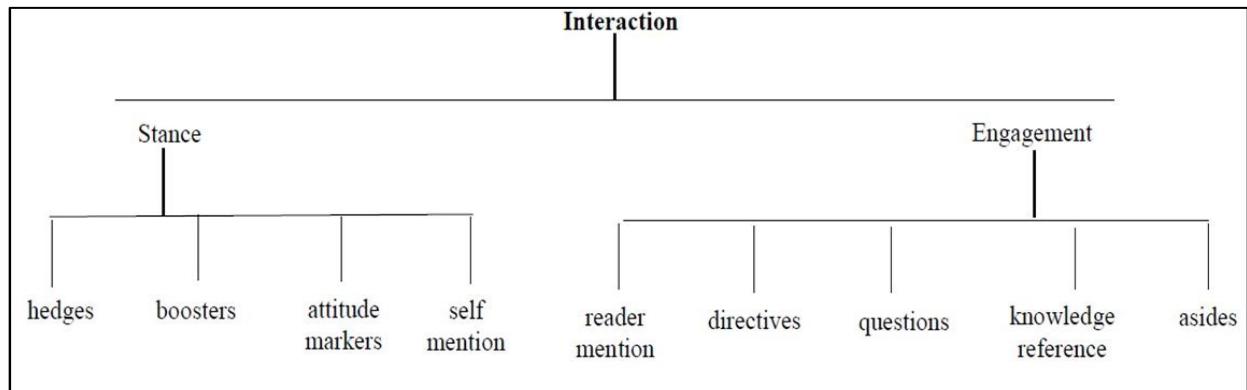
Three basic organizational plans for argumentative essays, proposed by Reid (2000), were used as criteria to select the samples for the study as they were introduced by the course instructor. Each basic organizational plan for a five-paragraph argumentative essay consisted mainly of a thesis statement of intent (introduction), pro-argument#1 or counterargument and refutation#1 (body paragraph), pro-argument# 2 or counterargument and refutation#2 (body paragraph), solution to the problem (body paragraph), and conclusion or summary (Reid, 2000). In order to select the essays with the total number of words required, all the essays written in Word documents were stored in a computer and the number of words in each essay was counted. The 12 argumentative essays were used for the analysis and represented six Asian student nationalities, generating a total of 6,380 words in the mini corpus.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Analytical Framework***

To analyze the 12 selected argumentative essays composed by 12 Asian students in this study, Hyland's (2008) revised model of metadiscourse (stance and engagement) was adopted. Hyland's framework (Figure 1) was chosen because it overcomes many of the limitations of other models and is seen as the most comprehensive and pragmatically grounded means of investigating the interpersonal resources in texts. The 12 essays were first read and reread carefully by two researchers to identify stance and engagement markers used by each writer based on the guidelines proposed by Hyland (2004, 2005, 2008). With the help of the concordance program for Windows—

the AntConc, the initial lists of stance and engagement from two researchers were generated and then compared to produce the final list of these linguistic devices. The frequency counts of stance and engagement (Table 1) used by the Asian students were made on the AntConc. The holistic result was compared with that of each nation to see the use of stance and engagement, and the similarities or differences in the argumentative essays were noticed.



**Figure 1.** Stance and Engagement (Based on Hyland, 2008, p. 6)

Stance and engagement markers along with their functions and samples of words are illustrated in Table 1. There are four different types of stance markers, which are hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention, whereas engagement features consist of reader mention, directives, question, and knowledge reference.

**Table 1.** Stance and Engagement (Based on Hyland, 2008)

Category	Function	Examples
<b>Stance</b>		
Hedges	withhold complete commitment to a proposition	might, may, about, appear, should, possible, quite, apparently, seems, likely, tend to, slightly, maybe, believe, doubt
Boosters	emphasize certainty and mark involvement with the topic and solidarity	actually, sure, definitely, clearly, of course, always, will
Attitude Markers	express the writer's attitude to proposition	agree, surprised, really, personally, interesting, important, have to
Self-mention	explicit reference to the writer	I, my, we, our, us, me
<b>Engagement</b>		
Reader Mention	offer the explicit ways of bringing readers into a discourse	we, our, you, your
Directives	direct the readers to engage in three kinds of activities-textual, physical, and cognitive acts	all imperatives and obligation modals
Questions	bring the interlocutors into an area where they can be led to writer's viewpoint	rhetorical questions
Knowledge References	ask readers to recognize something as familiar or accepted	well known, obviously
Asides	writers address readers directly by briefly interrupting the arguments to offer a comment	short sentences which briefly interrupt the argument

## Results and Discussion

In response to our first question of what types of stance and engagement are used by the Asian EFL first-year university students, we first looked at the use of stance markers—hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. The results are shown in Table 2. Hedges (30.9%) and self-mention (30.5%) were used most frequently among other interpersonal devices in the improvised argumentative essay. Hedges were used most by the Asian EFL first-year university students in the study when they worked on an argumentative topic, such as should cellphones be allowed in the classroom? This finding is congruent with that indicated by previous studies (e.g., Hyland, 2008; Tan & Eng, 2014; Sayah & Hashemi, 2014; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Lancaster, 2016), in which the researchers found that L1 and L2 undergraduate students used hedging devices more frequently than other stance markers in academic writing or argumentative essays to modify the assertions they make, or tone down their claims with plausible reasoning and give space for readers to go along with or dispute interpretations (Hyland, 2008). However, the frequent use of self-mention in the present study contradicts the previous work carried out by Lee and Deakin (2016), who found that university students used self-mention markers the least among other interactional markers when they composed argumentative English essays. This might be due to the fact that the improvised and timed argumentative essays in the present study disallowed the students to access any sources, including dictionaries. Aside from that, Lee and Deakin's (2016) study used a much larger corpus size containing 75 argumentative essays composed by 50 US-based Chinese ESL learners, and 25 advanced L1 English undergraduate students in an American university. The students in Lee and Deakin's study were required to write longer papers covering a wide range of topics, and they were allowed to access online resources. On the contrary, students in our case study were prevented from consulting online resources, so they merely depended on their metacognition and accumulated knowledge from long-term memory, which resulted in the overuse of self-mention in the writing to meet the requirement of completing the task in a restricted time, while ignoring the overall quality of the writing product. The absence of resources or evidence can hinder both learners with low and high English language proficiency levels to employ action words or dynamic expressions that are more compelling or authoritative to readers. Such an approach causes inexperienced writers (the first-year undergraduates, in this case) who show lack of initiative to adopt writing conventions (Tan & Eng, 2014). Table 2 illustrates the main categories of stance and engagement and the interactional markers under each category in the first column, and their frequency of use in the second column.

**Table 2.** Frequency of Stance and Engagement Used by Asian EFL First-year University Students in Improvised Argumentative Essays

Category	Frequency		Student Nationalities				
	CA	CH	IND	MA	TH	VN	
<b>Stance</b>							
Hedges	96(30.9%)	18(18.8%)	20(20.8%)	17(17.7%)	15(15.6%)	11(11.5%)	15(15.6%)
Boosters	70(22.5%)	4(4.2%)	18(18.8%)	9(9.4%)	29(30.2%)	6(6.3%)	4(4.2%)
Attitude Markers	50(16.1%)	9(9.4%)	5(5.2%)	8(8.3%)	15(15.6%)	8(8.3%)	5(5.2%)
Self-mention	95(30.5%)	22(22.9%)	4(4.2%)	43(44.8%)	14(14.6%)	5(5.2%)	7(7.3%)
<b>Total</b>	311	53(17.0%)	47(15.1%)	77(24.8%)	73(23.5%)	30(9.6%)	31(10.0%)
<b>Engagement</b>							
Reader Mention	71(50.7%)	11(15.5%)	7(9.9%)	16(22.5%)	7(9.9%)	5(7.0%)	25(35.2%)
Directives	46(32.9%)	9(19.6%)	3(6.5%)	8(17.4%)	3(6.5%)	11(23.9%)	12(26.1%)
Questions	2(1.4%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(50.0%)	1(50.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Knowledge	16(11.4%)	2(12.5%)	6(37.5%)	0(0.0%)	4(25.0%)	0(0.0%)	4(25.0%)
References							
Personal Asides	5(3.6%)	0(0.0%)	2(40.0%)	1(20.0%)	1(20.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(20.0%)
<b>Total</b>	140	22(15.7%)	8(12.9%)	26 (18.6%)	16(11.4%)	16(11.4%)	42(30.0%)

The following excerpt illustrates the use of self-mention.

*Because I study in a foreign country, I need my phone every time to make sure that I can know emergency, news, and information from my family, such as someone is sick or passes away. Phone is very important to me, so I can always update about the condition of my family. (IND-2)*

Analyzing this excerpt, self-mention, such as *I*, *me*, and *my*, were used eight times out of 52 words by an Indonesian student. This implies that the student used one personal pronoun (self-mention) in every six to seven words. These findings correspond with those of Rahayu (2014), who showed that first-person pronouns were one of the top five tenor markers often used by Indonesian students in argumentative texts to engage readers and influence them with subjective opinions. The frequent use of self-mention in argumentative writing reflects cultural differences in academic writing conventions.

Boosters (22.5%) were more frequently used by Malaysian (30.2%) and Chinese students (18.8%), whereas students from the four other nations used this interpersonal marker in nearly equal portions. Similar results were also observed in a study by Tan and Eng (2014), who found that boosters were used more frequently than other interactional markers among average and low English proficiency Malaysian undergraduate students in persuasive writing. The following is an example of the interactional marker of boosters used by a Malaysian student in our study.

*I am sure we can all agree that technology is great. Technology certainly makes our lives less miserable. It allows us to discover and share information at unimaginable speeds. The cellphone, arguable one of the most important devices in todays modern society. (MA-1)*

From the excerpt, three boosters are used in a total text of 42 words, which indicates that in every 14 words, one booster was used. The frequent use of boosters could be attributed to the fact that this student wanted to emphasize certainty on the issue being discussed (technology, in this case), or to convince the reader of the presumed benefit of technology used to enhance learning in the classroom.

In the study, attitude markers (16.1%) were used least among other stance markers. The results are consistent with those of Li and Wharton (2012) and Lee and Deakin (2016). They found that attitude markers were among the least frequently used stance marker in academic writing conventions. This might be due to the fact that these students may have perceived that making overt insertions of their assertive stance in argumentation could devalue the quality of writing, or they were unsure about it. In other words, they used it unconsciously without knowing its significance or role in the sentences. An example of an attitude marker is illustrated in the following excerpt.

*I do agree that it helps, but I also believe, with no self-control, the phone is unfortunately more of a distraction than a useful tool. Yes, a student can go to the internet to search up definitions and etcetera, but temptations surrounds them.*

Moving onto engagement markers, we found that the Asian university students in our study used reader mention most frequently (50.7%). This was followed by directives (32.9%) and knowledge references (11.4%). The engagement marker used least were questions (1.4%) and personal asides (3.6%). The findings are in line with those discovered by Hyland (2008) in academic writing. Likewise, Lee and Deakin (2016) pointed out that reader pronouns were the most frequently utilized markers by university students among the five subcategories of engagement markers available. This might indicate that students in our study, irrespective of academic levels, may have noticed the social nature of writing, and the importance of engaging the reader in the text. Examples of reader mention are given below.

*Students need to be studying not playing phone while studying. When **we** fall in study, **our** life can be down. (TH-1)*

*Then, cell phones are good teacher that can teach us about how to control **our self**. It is hard to control **our self** in some condition, especially about **our** phone using. (INDO-1)*

*This is especially useful when **we** are having a group work and **we** need to inform **our** teammate what to do and what their mission was. (VN-1)*

From these excerpts, it can be noted that reader mention are commonly used across nationalities. Few differences could be identified about the utilization of reader mention, which may prove that students in Asian countries could adequately address readers as participants in their argumentation.

Interestingly, directives were the second most used marker, which is dissimilar to the results found in Hyland's (2002, 2005) studies, but they are consistent with Lee and Deakin's (2016) findings. Examples from students' writings are illustrated below.

*Using cellphone in class is very useful but user **should** consider and keep themselves from such usefulness **should** it affect your study. (VN-1)*

*The reasons that cell phones **should** be permitted in class is because it distracted students, tend student to cheat, and disturb others. (TH-1)*

According to Hyland (2002), imperatives are the "most imposing" and "risky" directive type, as these lexical verbs explicitly direct readers to perform some action. He further noted that student writers seldom use them, and they are more frequently found in the hard sciences. However, our finding is contradictory on this point. One possible explanation is that argumentative essays are accompanied with persuasive elements, by which the writer is seeking to direct readers to take some actions or abide by the instructions given.

Knowledge reference, which aims to require readers to recognize something as familiar or accepted, is placed third among the use of engagement markers. However, it was scarcely used in our study, possibly because students were not permitted to access any learning resources while performing this writing task. They, therefore, had to use their own experiences, which may be inappropriate in the context. Examples of students' writing are illustrated below.

*It is rather painful but **apparent** that the appearance of a cell phone in class is becoming a proxy of peacockery and wealth. (CH-2)*

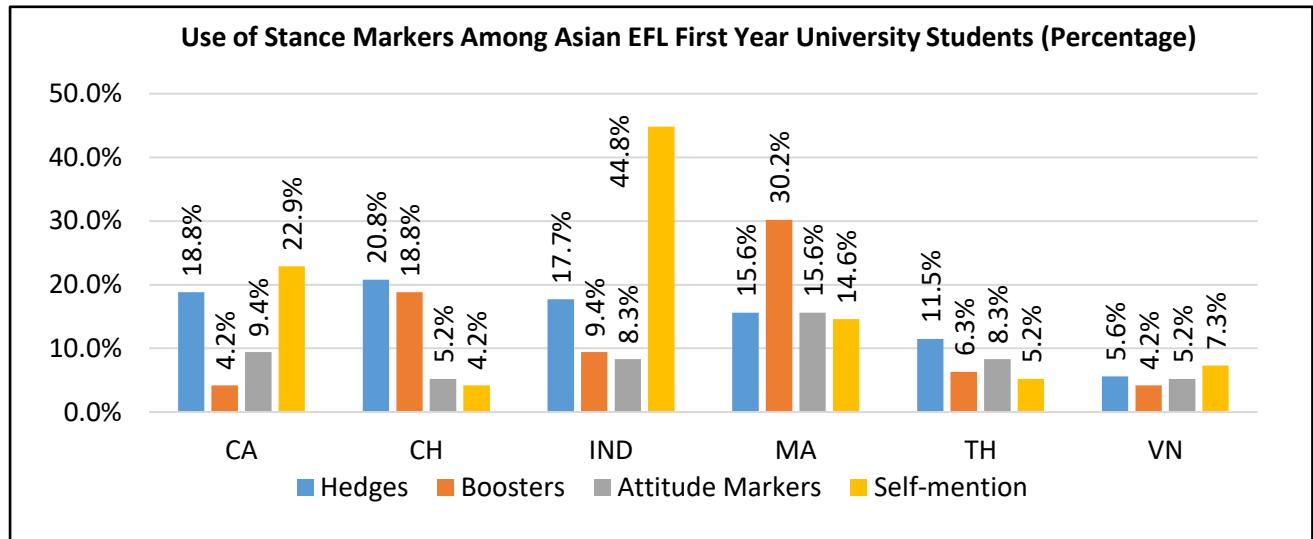
***Obviously**, this era is the time of information and it is important to know the vast knowledge of the information you can obtain for free in the internet. (VN-2)*

The least used engagement markers were questions and personal asides. This may have been because these students were not well-trained to write argumentative essays with such devices to explain their viewpoints.

To answer the second question of this study, which investigated the similarities and differences in the use of stance and engagement in argumentative essays among these Asian EFL first-year university students, the data from Figures 2 and 3 were examined and subsequently compared and contrasted. The results presented in Table 2 show that among the six countries, the Indonesian and Malaysian students used stance markers extensively, whereas the Vietnamese students used engagement markers more frequently than the others. With respect to stance markers, Figure 2 shows that there was a distinct similarity in the employment of hedges among the students from the five countries except for Thai students, who used slightly fewer hedges than their peers. Additionally, the overall use of attitude markers by Cambodian, Chinese, Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese students in this case study was almost identical with the minimum and maximum

percentages of 5.2% and 9.4%, respectively. Malaysian students, on the other hand, used attitude markers over twice as frequently (15.6%).

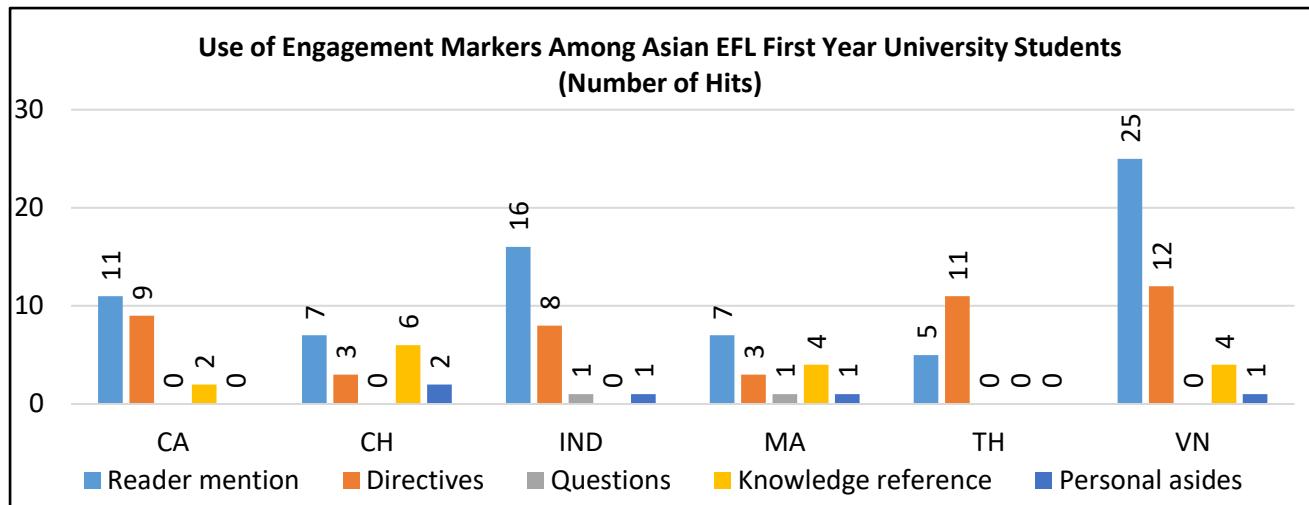
The use of self-mention differed considerably. Participants who used self-mention more frequently were from Indonesia (44.8%), Cambodia (22.9%), and Malaysia (14.6%). Students from Vietnam, Thailand, and China used fewer self-mention. Noticeable, too, were the differences that existed between two groups of students in the use of boosters. Malaysian and Chinese students used boosters more extensively (30.2% and 18.8%, respectively), whereas students from Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam used this marker much less frequently. Figure 2 illustrates the use of stance markers among students in our study.



**Figure 2.** Use of Stance Markers

As seen in Figure 2, self-mention was used extensively by Indonesian students, whereas the Chinese and Thai students used it much less frequently. Likewise, boosters were used more frequently by Malaysian and Chinese students compared to their peers from other countries.

The differences in the use of engagement markers among students in this study might be explained further by considering the rearrangement of data given in Figure 3. The presentation is in the form of the number of hits instead of percentages, due to the limited use of these markers. Obviously, students from the six countries differed moderately in utilizing reader mention, except Vietnamese and Indonesians, and in directives, except for Chinese and Malaysian students. However, there were startlingly similar patterns in the use of questions and personal asides. It is evident that the Vietnamese, Indonesian and Cambodian students used reader mention more frequently than the other three groups (Chinese, Malaysian, and Thai). Furthermore, students from Vietnam and Thailand used directives more frequently than their peers from other nations, whereas Chinese and Malaysian students used this device less. It is worth noting that questions, knowledge references, and personal asides were the least favored among the five engagement markers. Students from all these six countries rarely used questions and personal asides. Students from China, Malaysia, and Vietnam used more knowledge references than those from Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand.



**Figure 3.** Use of Engagement Markers

Students from the six countries showed close similarities in the use of hedges and attitude markers (stance markers), as well as directives, questions, knowledge references, and personal asides (engagement markers). However, they differed markedly in utilizing self-mention, boosters, and reader mention in their argumentation.

#### Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

The study sought to investigate Asian EFL first-year university students' use of stance and engagement in argumentative essays by adopting Hyland's (2008) model. The findings indicated that Asian EFL first-year university students attempted to use stance and engagement markers in their improvised and timed argumentative essay. Notwithstanding, there were some variations of their use of these linguistic markers. The top four markers most frequently used were hedges, self-mention, reader mention, and boosters, whereas the least used markers were questions and personal asides. Stance markers were more commonly used than engagement features, and such findings correspond with previous findings (e.g., Hyland, 2008; Tan & Eng, 2014; Lee & Deakin, 2016). These authors claimed that stance markers, especially hedges and boosters, tended to be more common in academic writing in the humanities and social science, as in this case study. The suggested reason for a greater use of hedges and boosters in the humanities and social science is because the resources of language conform to their contexts, and in that it works to "construe the characteristic structure of knowledge domains and argument forms of the disciplines that create them" (Hyland, 2008, p. 13). In addition, in the "soft knowledge" fields (e.g., language education) writers tend to be more interpretive and less abstract than other academic disciplines (e.g., natural sciences or hard sciences) (Hyland, 2008). On the other hand, the absence of engagement markers, such as questions and personal asides, might be due to the nature of writing called for, which required students to depend solely on their background knowledge and language skills to complete the task in a timely manner imposed in this study. This could lead to the imbalanced use of engagement markers due to time restrictions, which did not permit the students to proofread or revise their produced texts. Besides, these students were newly enrolled in the university program, and they might not have been correctly trained to use academic writing conventions over the years during their high school education. They would, therefore, ideally need an apprenticeship to become more confident and successful writers in academic discourse.

From a pedagogical perspective, it is suggested that language teachers in a multi-cultural EFL classroom might raise awareness of the value of utilizing stance and engagement markers in argumentative essays, and then assist students in constructing arguments with more convincing, engaging, and authoritative voice by employing such interactional devices as acclaimed by researchers in previous studies (e.g., Hyland, 2008; Lee & Deakin, 2016; Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016; Zhao,

2017; Ho & Li, 2018). Furthermore, a better understanding of similarities and differences of stance and engagement markers used by students from different cultural backgrounds will guide writing teachers to calibrate their instruction to students in their argumentative writing. In order to equip students to use academic writing conventions (e.g., argumentative essay), teachers need to provide learning resources, such as a list of metadiscourse markers and samples of their use in academic writing, or language corpora detailing discourse markers, or collocations widely used by successful writers. Extended training of L2 writers to practice academic writing conventions could be provided by incorporating the corpus resources in linguistic software to encourage learners to express their thoughts, and make their writing more compelling and authoritative and better fit into the target writing genre. Needless to say, writing teachers should cherish the cultural diversity individuals bring into a multilingual EFL writing course. The widespread use of English in various academic disciplines is overshadowed by non-native English speakers; clinging to the dichotomous thinking is “hazardous to the intellectual health of the field of L2 writing” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 52). Writing teachers should never assume that only one rhetorical pattern produced by the native English language speakers is superior to the rhetorical writing strategies used by non-native speakers, but the two aspects of dichotomy should be viewed as complementing each other. This will assist L2 learners to improve their academic writing.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Although this study has contributed to previous research on stance and engagement markers used by university students, there are still some limitations that might be addressed in future studies. First, the sample size of the argumentative essays used in the corpus for analysis was very small, so generalization of the findings cannot be made to other settings. In order to generalize the results of this study to a larger population, it is necessary to enlarge the sample by including more participants from each nation. Second, the researchers only examined stance and engagement markers used among Asian first-year university students in their improvised five-paragraph timed argumentative essay as introduced by the course instructor. It would be worth investigating a larger corpus of Asian undergraduate students writing argumentative essays in an unrestricted time, in order to observe more variety of interactional devices and extended use of metadiscursual features among learners with different mother tongue backgrounds in expressing ideas, positioning their identity, and inspiring their audience through the written message. Third, this study compared the similarities and differences in the use of stance and engagement in an argumentative essay among Asian first-year university students within one disciplinary course—English. It would be more useful if essays across several disciplines were compared in terms of writers’ use of stance and engagement features. Fourth, in terms of methodology, this study was limited in that the quality of texts was not rated. Future research might consider investigating the correlation between the use of metadiscourse markers and the quality of the text. Last, the study lacked qualitative input to triangulate the findings of how these students from different cultural backgrounds used stance and engagement markers disproportionately despite writing on the identical topic with about same word length. To enrich the findings of this study, interview or think-aloud protocols could be used to assist the researchers in determining the reasons why certain markers were used more frequently than others.

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