

Engagement Markers for Addressing Readers as Communicators in Academic Writing: The Zanco Journal as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Showcasing the interpersonal aspect of language nowadays is important for academic writers to establish relationships with their readers, fostering the function of language as a social practice. Engagement is about how the writer explicitly builds relationships with readers through their text. Recently, this area has drawn scholars' attention mostly investigating disciplinary and culturally based variances in the use of engagement markers. However, this field still lacks research on identifying a set of linguistic features that are involved in promoting writer-reader interaction. Therefore, the present study aims to explore the forms and functions of engagement markers used in articles published in the *Zanco journal*. This is a corpus-based quantitative research study in which #Lancsbox 6.0 online software was employed to identify the engagement markers used and count the frequency of each one. The study reveals the need for further research to investigate readers' perceptions of the identified engagement markers and gauge their rhetorical potency. The findings revealed that Appraisal resources (76%) were used significantly more often than Hyland's engagement markers (24%), indicating a strong preference for evaluative and stance-based strategies. Pronouns were the most common resource (101), whereas rhetorical questions were entirely absent. The findings from this study can serve as a benchmark for the pedagogical framework used to improve academic writing skills. The study reveals a need for further studies to investigate readers' perceptions of the identified engagement markers and gauge their rhetorical potency.

KEYWORDS: Engagement Markers, Written Discourse, Writer-Reader Interaction, *Zanco Journal*, Corpus Linguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Engagement refers to how writers present their proposition regarding to what extent they or she allows alternative voice to be present in the discourse. Furthermore, it establishes a reader-writer relationship. Literature reveals the importance of engagement markers such as triggering readers awareness that leads to facilitating perception (Alaghbari, 2023; Fu & Hyland, 2014; Hyland, 2005). However, the use of these markers shows inconsistency affected by cultural differences (Hint et al., 2024; Qiu et al., 2024; Boginskaya, 2023; Chou et al., 2023; Gong et al., 2021; Ädel, 2010).

According to Koutsantoni (2004a), writing is not produced in vacuum, and it always reflects the ideologies and world views of its context. Therefore, in context like

the Kurdistan Region where the idea of rigorous research is associated with objectivity and how writers keep distance from their texts (Müller, 2034), it is crucial to understand how the writers view connection with their reader in texts. Thus, the current study investigates the engagement markers in papers published in *Zanco journal* to uncover how Kurdish writer use linguistic features that promote readers' involvement in discourse. The importance of thinking of readers as active participants started with Bakhtin's dialogism framework. Bakhtin views language as essentially dialogic by which knowledge is constructed through social interaction, following the German philosopher Kant, who claims that thoughts are products of interaction between mind and the world (Holoquist, 2002). Hence, the focus is on the participatory aspect of language in writing, where the

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reader is no longer a passive receiver. Drawing on this view, the current study investigates linguistic features that give space to the voices and viewpoints of others in academic discourse. It is concerned with power dynamics, which value certain voices to be heard (Mackinlay, 2002); whether the writers posit themselves as the only authorized ones or allow alternative viewpoints. Martin and White (2005) deal with voices in the discourse through their Appraisal theory in the subsystem of engagement which is classified as heteroglossic (the writer offers space to reader's perspective) and monoglossic (the writer posits his perspective as undisputable).

Additionally, the connection between writer and reader was also the concern of Hyland (2005) in his comprehensive framework of metadiscourse markers which he divided into interactive elements (for organizing the text for leading the readers throw the flow of the text), which are essential in linking our divergent thoughts in communication (Toska, 2008), and interaction elements (for engaging the reader and demonstrating the writer's attitude and opinion). It is evident that these markers are effective in persuading readers in academic writing (Fu & Hyland, 2014). Writers utilize engagement markers showing their awareness of the presence of their readers through predicting the readers' expectations and anticipating their reactions (Alaghbari, 2023). Since Aristotle, anticipating one's audience is fundamental strategy for persuading them (Robert, 1985) as writers tailor their perspectives to his audience's interest. Thus, thinking of readers as participants in the text, on one hand, posits them as responsible for negotiating meaning and reaching conviction.

On the other hand, it enhances the critical thinking of readers. Therefore, instructors of academic writing should allot adequate amount of time and efforts training learners on the use of linguistic features that foster connectivity and engage readers in the text (Pratumtong et al., 2021). From this understanding of the importance of involving readers, the paper aims to examine the engagement markers used by non-native English researchers in the Kurdistan Region context, identifying their function and frequency. The following questions guide our research:

- 1- What are the engagement features used in the *Zanco journal*?
- 2- What are the functions of the engagement features in the *Zanco journal*?
- 3- What is the frequency of each one of these engagement features in the *Zanco journal*?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on engagement shows how central language is in the formation of social relationships in academic texts.

This study argues that inviting readers to be active participants in written communication is quintessential in academic writing even more than any other genre. Since it addresses academicians who already have their own perceptions on the presented topic, the writer needs to consider and respect their level of knowledge and involve them in knowledge construction.

This study is informed by the convention of two complementary theories: Appraisal theory and Hyland's metadiscourse model. From the viewpoint of Appraisal Theory, writers posit themselves dialogically (White, 2003; Martin & White, 2005). This dialogic view of the role of writers, which is rooted in Bakhtin's dialogism concept (Holquist, 2002; Mackinlay, 2002; Toska, 2008), underscores the aspects of discourse that allow other voices to penetrate. According to Bakhtin, meaning construction is a process in which both discourse participants (writer and reader) are involved (Holquist, 2002). Drawn on Bakhtin's dialogism concept, the subsystem of engagement in Appraisal theory distinguishes between the asserted proposition, monoglossic, when we have a solo authorial voice in the discourse, and heteroglossic, accepting other voice through disclaiming, proclaiming, entertaining, and attributing (White, 2015). In parallel, Hyland's (2005) model signals engagement resources such as reader pronouns, directives, appealing to shared knowledge, personal aside, and questions as strategies to engage readers in participatory relationships. As the investigation was deductively approached, these categories of engagement realization that mentioned above were followed as analytical devices. This adoption of both models was justified by the attempt to capture as many engagement markers as possible to be a blueprint for pedagogical implications.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Interpersonal lexicogrammar devices that illuminate the association between discourse, readers, and social context have been the focus of many studies recently (Sayah & Hashimi, 2014). This is because their uses are closely related not only to the practice of disciplinary community (Hyland, 2008; Hyland & Jiang, 2018) or communicative purpose (Fu & Hyland, 2014), but also to cultural practice (Yuvayapan & Yakut, 2021) as favoring one interpersonal device over another is a result of the "underlying cultural orientation" (White, 2001, p. 4). Therefore, a plethora of studies have examined these devices, each within its own context.

Focusing on cross linguistic context, Jujugenia, Kyei, and Nanglakong (2021), following Martin and White (2005), investigate how students writing in a second language use engagement items in their undergraduate project writing to interact with their academic

community. The study findings displayed that students used expand engagement markers more frequently than contract engagement markers. Additionally, the study confirms that utilizing engagement markers helps achieve promotional and persuasive purposes. In the same vein, in a corpus-based study, Yilmaz and Ilerten (2024) examined the way interactional metadiscourse features are used in critical writing assignments authored by ELT undergraduate students at a Turkish public university. The study revealed that the preference of the use of some interactional features throughout the semester over others shifted. Whereas engagement markers, hedges, and boosters remain prevalent, self-mention and attitude markers decline.

Following the literature on the effect of cultural conventions on the performance of L2 writers. Rasti (2011) compared between native English students and Iranian students to understand how each group interacts with their readers in their argumentative writing through engagements items. Her findings reveal that the Iranian students overused some interactional sources at the expense of establishing persuasive argumentation. In comparison to native English students, the Iranian students employed questions less frequently. She claimed that abundant use of certain sources of engagement does not necessarily facilitate communication, on the contrary, they might cause the text to be subject to readers' subjective interpretation. Therefore, the study argued that instructors should rise awareness among the non-native English language learners on which engagement markers appropriately work for building effective arguments.

In the Kurdistan Region context, Seyyedi (2024) examined engagement markers in Doctoral dissertations written by Kurdish native speakers. For analytical framework, he followed appraisal theory. The study resulted in the fact that the writers tended to use expanding sources of engagement more frequently than contracting. His justification was that the authors of the dissertations considered their readers as active participant. Thus, they attempt to decrease rejection. However, study could not reach comprehensive understanding of how Kurdish native speakers employ engagement markers to connect with their reader in academic text due to the small size of their corpus which was the discussion section of 8 dissertations and only from one discipline. Therefore, the current study endeavors to address this gap through expansive data from various disciplines.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data Collection

This is a corpus-based study focusing on semantic elements to identify both interactive and interaction types

of metadiscourse markers, which are related to linguistic devices that enhance readers' involvement. The study adopted a descriptive research design within a quantitative paradigm attempting to answer questions of what type of engagement markers are used in the *Zanco Journal* their frequency, and what functions they serve. #Lancsbox6.0 (Brezina et al., 2015, 2018, 2020), a corpus analysis tool developed at Lancaster University.

A qualitative approach was employed for collecting data as articles from the *Zanco journal* of Human Sciences (ZJHS), were selected based on language and time criteria. Thus, all volumes issued in 2024 to mid of 2025 were searched qualitatively to understand the recent trend in using engagement markers by the non-native English writers that reflects their awareness of the importance of establishing interpersonal relations with their readers. Furthermore, confined to the study objective which is to examine the forms and functions of engagement markers of the English language, all articles written in the English language during this period of time were chosen to comprise the data of the present study. Forty-seven articles were downloaded in PDF format; however, the articles were converted to Word files to clean them up from any extraneous information, anonymize and remove the sections of references and appendices. The files were compiled in a folder, uploaded to Lancsbox6.0 and named Corpus of Engagement Markers whose description presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Description of the Corpus

Name	Language	Texts	Tokens	Additional information
Corpus of Zanco Articles	English	47	273,218	Types: 24,312 Lemmas: 19,944

Table 1 describes the Zanco Articles Corpus which is of the total size of 273,218 running words (tokens) in 47 articles of the total size of 273,218 running words (tokens) in 47 texts. Using corpus allows us to calculate the frequency of items and how they are used (Hyland & Jiang, 2018, p.4).

4.2 Tool Description

A corpus software, #Lancsbox6.0, was utilized to detect linguistic features of engagement in academic articles published in the *Zanco journal* relying on perspectives of the two complementary framework: the subsystem of engagement of Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) and reader engagement in Hyland's model of metadiscourse. The former perspective is concerned with positioning the readers as dialogical participants. While the latter deals with how the writers involve readers explicitly in the texts. Two features of the #Lancsbox6.0 package were employed: KWIC and Whelk. The KWIC tool creates a list of all instances of a

search term in a corpus in the form of a concordance, as because of the multifunctionality of language (Hyland, 2017), it is critically important to examine items in their context “to avoid making superficial assumptions of form-function correspondence and to exclude extraneous examples” (p 20). In addition, the **Whelk** tool was applied to visualize distribution across articles, allowing both quantitative and qualitative insights into how engagement markers were employed in the corpus. Figure 1 shows the screenshot of the interface of the #LancsBox 6.0 corpus analysis tool, displaying frequency lists, range percentages, and distribution graphs of engagement markers within the dataset (102K tokens). The tool enables both quantitative frequency counts and qualitative concordance exploration, supporting the analysis of pronoun use and directive engagement markers in this study.

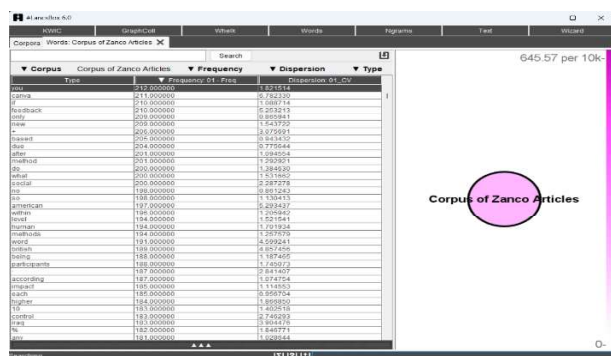


Figure 1. The screenshot of #LancsBox interface

4.3 Analytical Scheme

The analytical coding scheme combined categories from both frameworks (Figure 2)

The analytical tool for coding procedures comprises categories from both frameworks, and it includes the following:

A) The subsystem engagement of Appraisal Theory/Heteroglossic category which is about to what extent the writer allows alternative voices in the text through:

i) contraction

- 1- Deny: Writers reject alternative voices through negating. (e.g. not, never, no)
- 2- Counter: writers get ready to counter the anticipated rejection. (e.g. but, although however)

ii) Expansion

- 1- Entertain: writers offer spaces to alternative voice by lexical items as might, may, perhaps.
- 2- Attribute: writers pass the responsibility of a statement to alternative voice by items such as according to, argue, claim.

B) Reader engagement in Hyland's (2005) model

1- Reader Pronouns such *you*, *your*, and *inclusive we* (Quirk et al. 1985) which function as promoting reader engagement. However, Hyland (2005) argues that in some cultures, writers are advised not to use them in English academic writing so that they would avoid sounding “inappropriately informal and conversational” (p. 161).

2- Directive within this subcategory, writers use imperatives to direct readers either through textual act, physical act, or cognitive act like *in the next sections*, *imagine*, *note that*, and *consider*.

3- Question is when the writers address a rhetorical question through which expecting no answer but rather to provoke readers' mind to consider certain ideas.

4- Personal Aside is an interruptive comment where the writer shows his attitude towards the statement, and this is widely represented by adverbs such as *importantly*, *interestingly*, *I believe* and *so on*.

5- Shared Knowledge is more about naturalizing and normalizing an idea. It is an invitation to the reader to accept going with the norms when lexicogrammatical items such as *it is clear*, *it is well known*, *it is obvious* are used to convince readers that the introduced opinion is out of doubt and the gurus in the field agree upon.

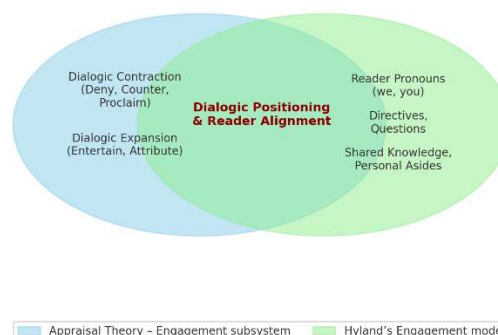


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of Engagement Strategies

5. RESULT

5.1 Use of First- and Second-Person Pronouns

The first and second analyses for person pronouns across a corpus of **47 research papers written by non-native English authors** reveal varied engagement strategies. Among the first-person forms, “**we**” was used **47 times**, making up **53.4%** of all first-person pronouns, whereas “**our**” appeared **30 times (34.1%)** (Figure 3). These markers suggest that many authors seek to create a **collaborative academic voice**, aligning themselves with readers in shared knowledge construction—consistent with Hyland's (2005) model of engagement.

Other first-person forms were less frequent: “**us**” was used **10 times (11.4%)**, “**ourselves**” only **once (1.1%)**

which indicates that direct invitation to the reader reflect a preference for a **more formal and reserved tone**, avoiding expressions that might be seen as overly casual or directive.

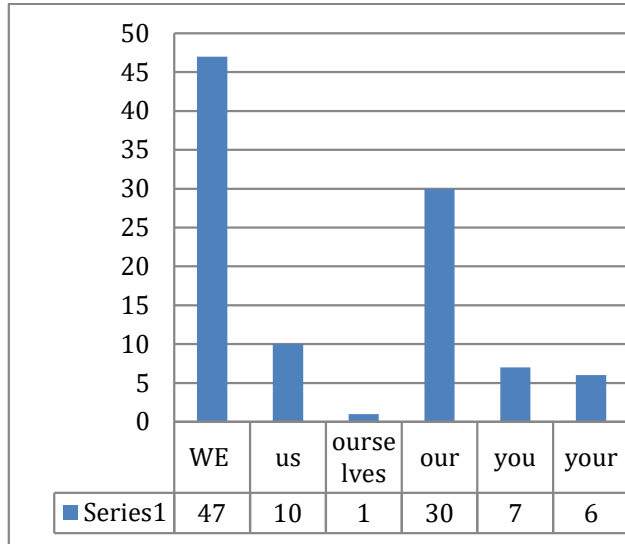


Figure 3. Frequency of First- and Second-Person Pronouns in Zanco Articles Corpus.

5.2. Use of Second-Person Pronouns: You, Your, Yours

A closer investigation was conducted into the distribution of second-person pronouns (*you, your, yours*) across the corpus Figures 4 and 5. The quantitative search using LancsBox revealed that *you* occurred 212 times, *your* 64 times, while *yours* was completely absent (0 instances). This pattern indicates that, unlike the frequent first-person pronouns documented earlier, direct reader address through second-person forms was comparatively limited.

However, a closer look shows that the majority of these instances did not function to directly engage readers. Out of 212 occurrences of *you*, only 7 could be considered genuine attempts at reader engagement. Likewise, of the 64 occurrences of *your*, only 6 served this purpose. Likewise, of the 64 occurrences of *your*, only 6 served this purpose. For instance, in *"Consider your role as a language learner in this process,"* your directly involves the reader in reflective engagement. In contrast, most occurrences appeared in formulaic or descriptive contexts without an interpersonal function, such as *"Your data were analyzed using SPSS software,"* where your merely indicates possession rather than engagement. Thus, while the raw frequency might suggest broader usage, actual attempts to involve readers through second-person address were rare.

By using the KWIC feature in LancsBox, it was further confirmed that these genuine engagement uses were confined to just two articles one in the field of education and the other in statistics. No instances appeared in the remaining 45 articles, suggesting that direct reader engagement through second-person address is an

exceptional rather than typical rhetorical choice among non-native writers in this sample.

The qualitative analysis provides additional insight into these limited cases. For example, some uses of *you* were genuinely directed at readers in instructional or feedback-giving contexts, while others were more structural (e.g., *"How did you acquire...?"* as part of a methodological explanation). Similarly, *your* was typically used in contexts of instruction or exemplification (e.g., *"your pronunciation," "your memory"*), reinforcing its role as a pedagogical rather than dialogic device.

This finding contrasts sharply with the higher frequency of inclusive first-person forms such as *we* and *our* (Section 4.1), which appear to be the preferred means of constructing academic solidarity and shared identity.

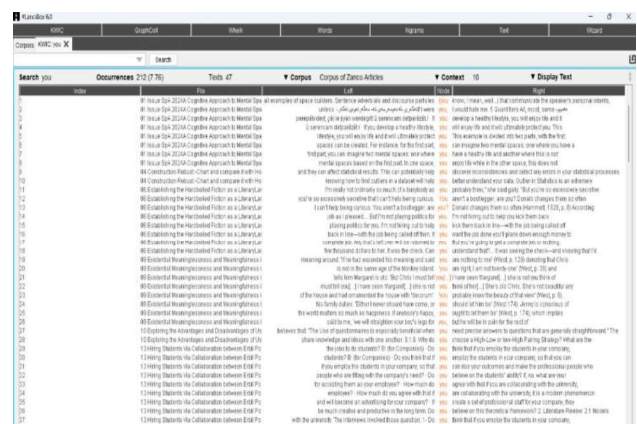


Figure 4. KWIC concordance results for second-person pronouns (*you*) across the corpus (by Authors)



Figure 5. KWIC concordance results for second-person pronouns (*your*) across the corpus (by Authors)

5.3 Use of Directive Engagement Markers

Directive engagement markers are rhetorical devices used by authors to guide, instruct, or direct readers' attention to specific aspects of the text. According to Figure 6, their distribution across the corpus reveals a clear preference for certain forms. The most frequently

used directive was “consider” (40 occurrences), which alone accounted for more than half of all directive markers identified. This strong reliance on consider suggests that non-native writers often use it as a cautious and academically acceptable way of prompting readers to reflect, rather than imposing more forceful directives.

Other directive markers appeared less frequently but still played notable roles. “Observe” (14 occurrences) and “recognize” (12 occurrences) were used moderately, often to draw readers’ attention to examples, patterns, or interpretations in the argument. Expressions such as “note that” and “look at” appeared only 8 times each, functioning mainly in explanatory or illustrative contexts. “Imagine” occurred very rarely (3 instances), and “remember” was entirely absent (0 instances) from the dataset.

Taken together, these results indicate that non-native writers employ directive markers sparingly and tend to favor less confrontational forms. The dominance of consider reflects a preference for inviting reflection rather than commanding action, aligning with a more formal and cautious academic style. Stronger imperatives (e.g., *remember*, *imagine*) were either avoided or only minimally used, which reinforces the overall tendency of these writers to adopt an instructive yet restrained rhetorical stance.

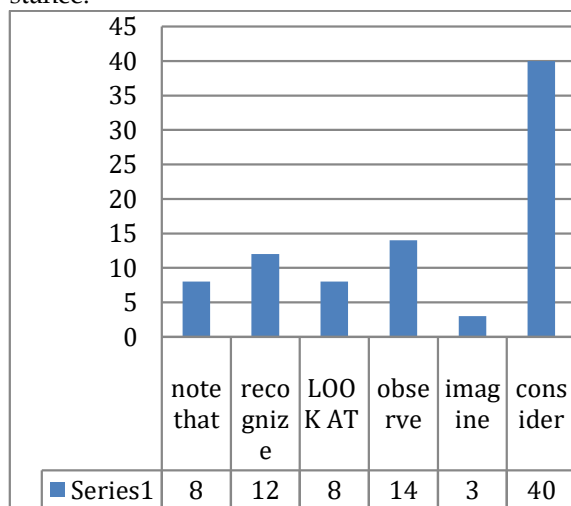


Figure 6. Distribution of directive engagement markers across the corpus.

5.4 Personal Asides

Personal asides appeared with limited frequency in the corpus, totalling 21 occurrences. As shown in Figure 7, the most frequent markers were indeed (8) and importantly (6), followed by surprisingly (3) and interestingly (2). Subjective remarks, such as 'I believe' and 'to be honest,' were each used only once. This pattern suggests that academic writers in English as a foreign language rely occasionally on evaluative adverbs to guide emphasis (importantly, indeed) but tend to avoid overtly subjective insertions (I believe, to be honest).

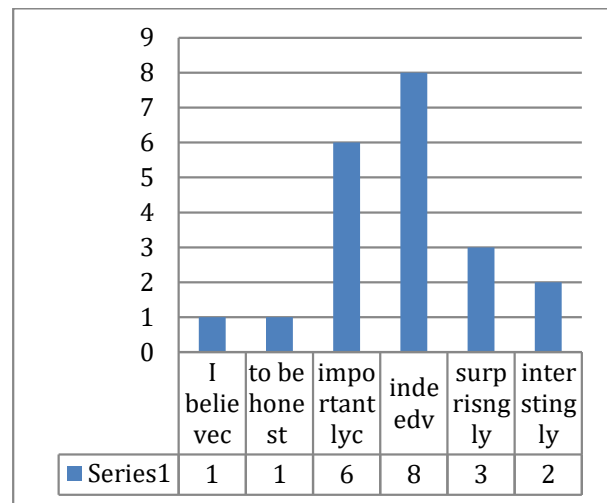


Figure 7. Frequency of Personal Asides in the Corpus

5.5 Shared Knowledge

In this study, 30 cases of shared knowledge markers were found. The phrase it is clear was the most common with 22 uses, while obvious appeared 8 times. These results show that writers sometimes try to build agreement with the reader by presenting something as self-evident. Still, compared with other engagement strategies, the use of Shared Knowledge is not very frequent.

This suggests that non-native academic writers prefer to keep a more formal and neutral style, even when they want to highlight points that seem clear or widely accepted.

It is also worth noting that no rhetorical questions were found in the corpus, which means this form of engagement was completely absent.

5.6 Use of Proclaim Engagement Markers

Within the Appraisal Subsystem of Engagement the Proclaim category includes linguistic resources that allow writers to assert propositions with confidence and reinforce the factual status of their claims. In this study, Figure 8, a total of 22 Proclaim markers were identified across the 47 non-native English research papers analysed.

The most frequently used marker was “clearly” (7 occurrences, 31.8%), followed by “it is evident that” (5, 22.7%) and “in fact” (4, 18.2%). The expressions “this shows” and “obviously” were used less frequently, with 3 instances each (13.6%). These markers function as tools for emphasizing clarity, certainty, or logical interpretation, enabling the writer to guide the reader’s perception of key points. The presence of these markers, while moderate, suggests that non-native academic writers are aware of the rhetorical function of assertive stance-taking, especially in argumentative or explanatory contexts.

However, their overall restrained use reflects a cautious rhetorical stance, likely influenced by academic conventions that discourage overt subjectivity or self-promotion in scholarly writing (Hyland, 2005). The finding aligns with previous research indicating that non-native writers tend to underuse stance features like boosters and assertive claims, often in favor of hedging and more neutral formulations (Dueñas, 2007).

In short, the use of Proclaim markers in this corpus shows a selective but deliberate effort to signal certainty and structure argumentation, albeit with measured confidence, a pattern that reflects both linguistic awareness and the influence of academic norms in English as a foreign language context.

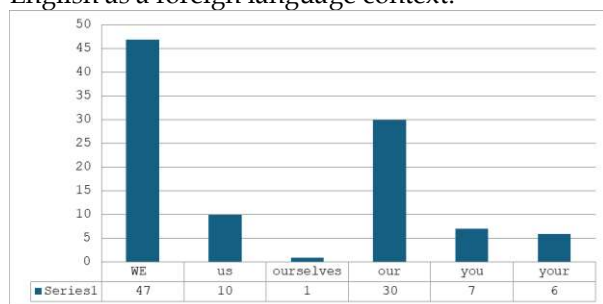


Figure 8. Frequency of Proclaim Engagement Markers in Zanco Articles Corpus

5.7 Use of Disclaim Engagement Markers

The Disclaim category, which includes contrastive and denial markers, was the most frequently used engagement strategy across both Hyland's model and the Appraisal subsystem. The seven markers analysed in this category, not, never, but, although, however, nevertheless, and yet, were present in the corpus, demonstrating full representation of the category.

Figure 9 shows the furthestmost frequent marker by far was "not" with 223 occurrences, accounting for 47.2% of all Disclaim usage. This was followed by "but" (124 instances, 26.3%) and "however" (82 instances, 17.4%). Less frequent, but still present, were "although" (27), "never" (12), "nevertheless" (11), and "yet" (9). In sum, the category totalled 488 occurrences, making it the most dominant engagement type in the dataset.

This widespread use of Disclaim markers suggests that non-native English academic writers heavily rely on contrast and negation to manage meaning, introduce counterpoints, and frame arguments. Unlike other engagement strategies that involve reader interaction or personal stance, Disclaim markers allow writers to remain detached yet rhetorically strategic, offering nuance and reinforcing academic caution. This aligns with Hyland's (2005) view that writers use such markers to signal critical thinking while maintaining objectivity and confirms interpretation of Disclaim as central to heteroglossic meaning making.

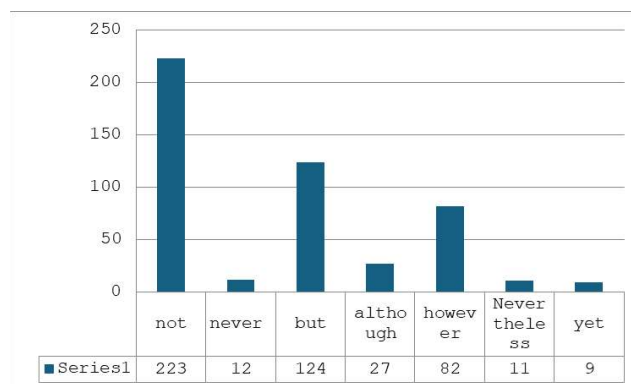


Figure 9. Frequency of Disclaim Engagement Markers in Zanco Articles Corpus

5.8 Use of Entertain Engagement Markers

The Entertain category, which includes hedging expressions that reflect tentativeness or possibility, was the second most frequently used engagement strategy in the corpus, following Disclaim. A total of 173 instances were recorded across all seven markers, indicating that all items in this category were used at least once (Figure 10). The most frequent marker was "may" with 89 occurrences (51.4%), followed by "could" (46 occurrences, 26.6%) and "might" (22, 12.7%). Less frequently used were "it seems" (8), "perhaps" (5), "I think" (2), and "it is possible that" (1).

This wide range of hedging expressions suggests that non-native English academic writers rely heavily on cautious and tentative language, possibly to avoid overgeneralization and to maintain academic politeness and humility.

These results align with prior research (e.g. (Hyland, 2005), (Dueñas, 2007)), which shows that writers, often favor hedging devices to mitigate the strength of their claims and protect themselves from potential criticism. The high use of modal verbs such as may, could, and might further confirms the preference for indirect and probabilistic expression, which reflects awareness of disciplinary conventions that value careful and qualified assertions.

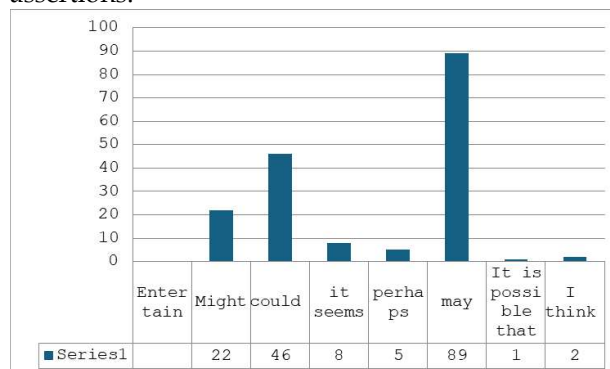


Figure 10. Frequency of Entertain Engagement Markers Used in the Zanco Articles Corpus

5.9 Use of Attribute Engagement Markers

The Attribute category used to attribute statements to external sources was the least frequently used engagement strategy in the corpus, with only 67 occurrences. Of these, “according to” was overwhelmingly dominant, appearing 62 times (92.5%), while “argues that” occurred 4 times (6%) and “claims that” only once (1.5%) (Figure 11).

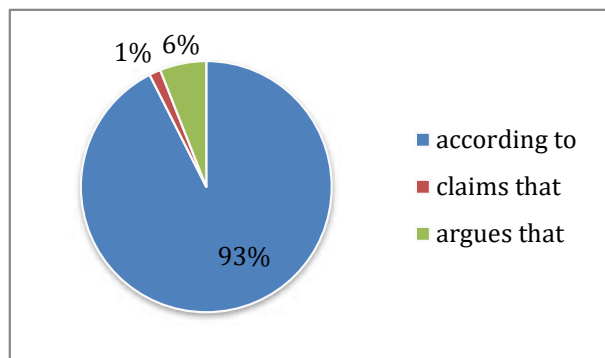


Figure 11. Percentage Distribution of Attribute Engagement Markers in the Zanco Articles Corpus

This strong preference for “according to” suggests that non-native writers are more comfortable using **neutral reporting structures**, possibly to avoid misrepresenting authorial stance or overstating certainty. The minimal use of more evaluative verbs like “argues” or “claims”, which signal interpretation or critical distance, may reflect a cautious rhetorical approach typical of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic context (Hyland, 2005; Dueñas, 2007). This underuse of attribution markers may also indicate limited training in integrating sources dialogically, a key skill in persuasive academic writing.

5.10 Summary of Comparative Results

The comparative analysis of engagement markers using both Hyland’s Model and the Appraisal Framework reveals a rhetorical tendency among non-native academic writers toward indirect, formal, and cautious engagement (Table 2). Overall, Hyland’s Model accounted for 237 instances (24%), while the Appraisal Framework was much more frequent with 750 instances (76%). This tendency resonates not only with linguistic models (Hyland, 2005) but also with cross-disciplinary findings on engagement practices in education, public systems, and digital platforms.

Table 2

Frequency of engagement strategies based on Hyland’s Model and the Appraisal Framework

Model	Category	Frequency
Hyland's model	directive	85
	shared knowledge	30

Appraisal	personal aside	21
	question	0
	pronouns	101
	proclaim	22
	disclaim	488
	entertain	173
	attribute	67

As shown in Table 2, from Hyland’s framework, the most frequent device was pronouns (101 instances), particularly inclusive forms like *we* and *our*, reflecting attempts to foster a shared academic identity. This aligns with Hyland’s argument that reader pronouns are the most explicit markers of engagement, serving to construct solidarity and alignment with the reader (Hyland, 2005; Arjomandi, Seufert, O’Brien, & Rossetto, 2021, Xu & Nesi, 2019) also found that pronoun usage differs by cultural and disciplinary context, noting that British academic writers employ more interactive engagement features than Chinese writers—further confirming the cultural specificity of pronoun-based engagement (Xu and Nesi, 2019).

By contrast, Shared Knowledge (30), Personal Asides (21), and Questions (0) were much less frequent, showing that non-native writers only occasionally use these strategies. This mirrors findings by Gallagher, Bennett, Keen, and Muspratt (2017), who observed in their respective contexts that audience-directed rhetorical participation is often constrained by institutional norms or cultural expectations, especially in formal or evaluative settings where subjectivity is minimized. In particular, Gallagher et al. emphasize that educators’ rhetorical choices reflect broader engagement philosophies embedded in local pedagogical traditions (Gallagher et al., 2017).

In terms of the Appraisal Framework, Disclaim markers (488 instances) were by far the most dominant, with common items like *not*, *but*, and *however* signaling contrast and dialogic negotiation. These findings reflect a preference for cautious engagement, a trait also noted in (Mou, 2010) constructive-engagement strategy in comparative philosophy, which favors dialectic over assertiveness to maintain scholarly neutrality. This rhetorical caution is also evident in high frequencies of Entertain markers (173), especially modal verbs such as *may*, *might*, and *could*, supporting (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012) view that engagement is often shaped by strategies for managing uncertainty and risk in formal contexts (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012).

Though Proclaim (22) and Attribute (67) markers were present, their lower frequency suggests that writers in this corpus rarely assert claims strongly or refer overtly

to source voices. This is consistent with Arjomandi et al. (2021), who observed in higher education that direct rhetorical assertion is often avoided by less experienced writers in favour of safer, less confrontational strategies (Arjomandi et al., 2021). Similarly, in digital and government systems, Chan and Pan (2008) found that engagement was more successful when it maintained formality and indirectness, underscoring the transferability of cautious engagement across domains.

In short, the analysis has successfully addressed the study's core research questions by identifying the engagement features used in the *Zanco journal*, interpreting their rhetorical functions, and quantifying their frequency across both Hyland's model and the Appraisal Framework.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Section 6 highlight a striking rhetorical tendency among non-native English writers to favor *detachment over dialogue*. This preference, reflected in the overwhelming use of *Disclaim* and *Entertain* markers, suggests that academic communication within this corpus remains largely informative rather than interactive. Such restraint reflects what (Vergie, 2025) calls the "*communication gap*" between the author's disciplinary voice and the imagined reader in open-distance learning contexts. Writers appear aware of audience expectations but still equate credibility with impersonality.

In contrast, (Jalongo, 2023) reminds us that scholarly writing is always "*writing for an audience*": texts succeed not merely by conveying information but by positioning readers as participants in knowledge construction. Yet, the current corpus rarely exhibits such dialogic awareness; pronoun use, rhetorical questions, and personal asides remain minimal. This under-engagement suggests that local authors internalize a monologic model of research communication – one dominated by reporting results rather than negotiating meaning.

Comparative corpus studies reinforce this interpretation. (Vega Garrido, 2019) found that Latin-American EFL students, like the Kurdish academics examined here, rely heavily on contrastive connectors and hedging to manage stance but seldom adopt overt interpersonal markers. Similarly, (Prudenciano & Raymundo, 2024) reported that even high-achieving Filipino students under-use reader-engagement features, revealing that linguistic proficiency does not automatically translate into rhetorical sophistication. The present study therefore exposes a broader pedagogical issue: academic-writing instruction in many EFL contexts still prioritizes grammatical accuracy and citation conventions over pragmatic interaction.

The dominance of *Disclaim* markers (e.g., *not*, *but*, *however*) further points to a defensive discourse style – what (Haji & Abdulla, 2020) identified as a "risk-avoidance strategy" in Kurdish academic English. By continually negating or contrasting, writers protect themselves from over-commitment, but in doing so, they may weaken argumentative clarity. Conversely, the scarcity of *Proclaim* resources (e.g., *clearly*, *it is evident that*) limits the text's persuasive force. Vergie (2025) warns that excessive hedging can "dilute authorial presence," a tendency evident here.

From a sociocultural perspective, (Jin, 2015) observes that Korean graduate students likewise adopt a cautious stance toward reader engagement, stemming from academic hierarchies that privilege deference over individuality. The same pattern likely influences Kurdish scholars writing in English, where modesty and collective ethos remain valued. Yet Jalongo (2023) argues that *responsible scholarship* requires both humility and interpretive authority. Hence, encouraging authors to claim interpretive ownership – without sacrificing politeness – should be a pedagogical priority.

Pedagogically, the results advocate for rhetorical training that integrates stance and engagement awareness into English-for-Academic-Purposes curricula. Following Vega Garrido (2019) and Prudenciano and Raymundo (2024), such instruction should highlight how engagement markers function not as stylistic decoration but as tools for audience alignment. Editors and reviewers of regional journals could also include guidance on effective stance-taking to enhance textual persuasiveness and international readability.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of research that bridges Hyland's (2005) engagement model and the Appraisal Framework. By analyzing the interplay of these systems within a local corpus, it reveals how linguistic, cultural, and institutional forces jointly shape academic voice. Future research might contrast Kurdish, Arab, and Asian corpora to explore whether this cautious engagement style represents a transitional phase toward more globally dialogic academic communication.

7. CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate a clear rhetorical pattern among non-native English academic writers, one characterized by cautious engagement, formal restraint, and selective interaction with the reader. The use of engagement markers drawn from both Hyland's model and the Appraisal Framework reveals a strong preference for strategies that emphasize clarity, caution, and detachment over subjectivity or direct reader involvement.

Within Hyland's model, the most prominent engagement resource was pronouns, with inclusive forms

like we and our signalling efforts to build a collaborative voice. Personal asides and shared knowledge markers appeared but were relatively limited, while rhetorical questions were completely absent, suggesting that these writers prefer to maintain objectivity and rhetorical distance rather than adopt informal or subjective tones. Directive markers were used at a moderate level, often in softer forms such as *consider* and *observe*, again pointing to a preference for subtle guidance rather than overt instruction.

The Appraisal system, particularly its Disclaim and Entertain subsystems, revealed even stronger trends toward rhetorical caution. Disclaim markers were overwhelmingly dominant, showing that writers frequently rely on contrast and negation to manage multiple perspectives and pre-empt counterarguments. This was followed by the Entertain category, with modal verbs like *may*, *might*, and *could* enabling writers to hedge their claims and express tentativeness, techniques often employed to avoid overstatement and maintain politeness in academic discourse.

By contrast, Proclaim markers were present but modestly used, suggesting that while some writers were comfortable expressing confidence (*clearly*, *it is evident that*), they still tended to limit assertiveness. Attribute markers, such as *according to*, were similarly restrained, with a strong reliance on neutral attributions rather than evaluative verbs like *argues that* or *claims that*, reflecting a general avoidance of taking strong personal positions when reporting sources.

In short, non-native academic writers in this corpus display a measured and careful rhetorical style, heavily informed by the norms of formal academic English. They show awareness of engagement strategies but tend to favor those that reduce risk, maintain formality, and avoid overt interaction. While inclusive pronouns suggest a desire to involve the reader, this involvement is controlled and often indirect, limited by cultural and instructional influences that privilege impersonality and restraint.

The study effectively answered all three research questions guiding the investigation. First, it identified the engagement features employed in *Zanco journal* articles by non-native English authors, using both Hyland's (2005) Model of Engagement and the Appraisal Framework (Kim, 2016). Second, it analyzed the rhetorical functions of these features such as building solidarity, guiding the reader, managing stance, or asserting claims within the academic discourse context. Third, it provided detailed frequency data on each category and individual marker, revealing a clear preference for cautious, formal, and indirect engagement strategies. These findings not only align with previous research but also contribute to a deeper understanding of academic writing practices in EFL settings.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that non-native writers receive targeted training on the strategic use of engagement markers. In particular, greater awareness is needed on how second-person pronouns can be appropriately used to engage readers, and how a wider range of directive markers beyond *consider* (e.g., *observe*, *recognize*, *note that*) can diversify rhetorical style. Integrating corpus tools such as LancsBox into academic writing instruction can further support learners in identifying authentic usage patterns and making informed rhetorical choices. Future comparative research across disciplines and between native and non-native writers is also encouraged to refine these insights.

9. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies could compare engagement markers use across native and non-native corpora or across different academic disciplines to reveal broader rhetorical patterns. Longitudinal research on how training interventions influence writers' engagement strategies would also provide valuable pedagogical insights.

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مؤشرات التفاعل لمخاطبة القراء بصفتهم مشاركين في عملية التواصل في الكتابة الأكاديمية: مجلة "زانكو" (Zanco Journal) دراسة حالة

الملخص

يُعد إبراز الجانب التفاعلي للغة في الوقت الحاضر أمراً مهماً للكتاب الأكاديميين لبناء علاقات مع قرائهم، مما يعزز وظيفة اللغة كممارسة اجتماعية. يتمحور التفاعل حول كيفية بناء الكاتب صراحةً لعلاقات مع القراء من خلال نصه. في الآونة الأخيرة، لفت هذا المجال انتباه الباحثين في الغالب من خلال التحقيق في الاختلافات القائمة على التخصصات والثقافة في استخدام علامات التفاعل. ومع ذلك، لا يزال هذا المجال يفتقر إلى البحث في تحديد مجموعة من السمات اللغوية التي تشارك في تعزيز التفاعل بين الكاتب والقارئ. لذلك، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى استكشاف أشكال ووظائف علامات التفاعل المستخدمة في المقالات المنشورة في مجلة Zanco. تعتمد الدراسة على منهج كمي قائم على تحليل المدونات (Corpus-Based Quantitative Research)، حيث تم استخدام برنامج LancsBox 6.0 عبر الإنترنت لتحديد مؤشرات التفاعل المستخدمة وحساب تكرار كل منها. تكشف الدراسة عن الحاجة إلى مزيد من البحث للتحقيق في تصورات القراء لعلامات التفاعل المحددة وقياس قوتها البلاغية. كشفت النتائج عن الحاجة إلى مزيد من الدراسات التي تستقصي تصورات القراء حول مؤشرات التفاعل المحددة وتقييم فعاليتها البلاغية. كما أظهرت النتائج أن موارد التقييم (Appraisal Resources) استخدمت بنسبة 76%، وهي أعلى بكثير من مؤشرات التفاعل وفق تصنيف Hyland (بنسبة 24%)، مما يشير إلى تفضيل واضح للاستراتيجيات التقييمية والمعتمدة على الموقف. وكانت الضائير أكثر الموارد استخداماً (101 مرة)، في حين غابت الأسئلة البلاغية تماماً ويمكن أن تشكل نتائج هذه الدراسة معياراً مرجعياً للإطار التربوي المستخدم لتحسين مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية. وتكشف الدراسة عن الحاجة إلى مزيد من الدراسات لاستكشاف تصورات القراء لمؤشرات التفاعل المحددة وقياس فعاليتها البلاغية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علامات المشاركة، الخطاب المكتوب، تفاعل الكاتب والقارئ، مجلة زانكو، لغويات المدونات.

نشاندهری به‌شداریکردن بۆ قسه‌کردن له‌گه‌ل خوێنه‌ران وه‌ک په‌یوه‌ندیکه‌ر له‌ نووسینی نه‌کادیدیدا: گۆفاری زانکو (Zanco Journal) به‌ نمونه

پوخته

نیشاندهانی نێوانی زمانی که‌سه‌کان له‌م سه‌رده‌مه‌دا گرنگه‌ بۆ نووسه‌رانی نه‌کادیدی بۆ دامه‌زراندنی په‌یوه‌ندی له‌گه‌ل خوێنه‌ران، په‌ره‌بێدانی کاری زمان وه‌ک کرداریکی کۆمه‌لایه‌تی. تیکه‌لبوون بریتیه‌ له‌وه‌ی که‌ چۆن نووسه‌ر به‌ ناشکرا په‌یوه‌ندی له‌گه‌ل خوێنه‌ران دروست ده‌کات له‌ پرکێکی تیکسته‌که‌یه‌وه‌. ئه‌م بواره‌ سه‌رنجی توێژه‌رانی راکێشاه‌وه‌ که‌ لیکۆلینه‌وه‌ له‌ جیاوازی دیسپلین و که‌لتووری له‌ به‌کارهێنانی نیشانه‌ی تیکه‌لبووندا ده‌کهن. له‌گه‌ل ئه‌وه‌شدا، ئه‌م بواره‌ هه‌شتا توێژینه‌وه‌ی که‌مه‌ له‌سه‌ر دیاریکردنی کۆمه‌لێک تایه‌تمه‌ندی زمانه‌وانی که‌ به‌شداری له‌ به‌ودان به‌ کارلیک له‌ نێوان نووسه‌ر و خوێنه‌ردا. بۆیه‌ ئامانجی ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ دۆزینه‌وه‌ی شتیوه‌ و ئه‌رکه‌کانی نیشانه‌کانی تیکه‌لبوون که‌ له‌ وتاره‌کانی گۆفاری Zanco بلاو کراونه‌ته‌وه‌. ئه‌مه‌ توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌کی چه‌ندیتی له‌سه‌ر بنه‌مای زمانناسی کۆریس که‌ Lancsbox # نه‌رمه‌واله‌ی سه‌ره‌یل 6.0 به‌کارهێناوه‌ بۆ دیاریکردنی نیشانه‌کانی تیکه‌لبوون و ژماردنی دووباره‌بوونه‌وه‌ی هه‌ریه‌که‌یان به‌کارهاتووه‌. توێژینه‌وه‌که‌ تیشک ده‌خاته‌ سه‌ر پێویستی توێژینه‌وه‌ی زیاتر بۆ دۆزینه‌وه‌ی تێروانی خوێنه‌ران سه‌باره‌ت به‌ نیشانه‌کانی به‌شداری دیاریکراو و هه‌له‌سه‌نگاندنی کاریکه‌ری ره‌وانیژیان. ده‌ره‌نجاهه‌کان نیشانی ده‌ده‌ن که‌ سه‌رچاوه‌کانی هه‌له‌سه‌نگاندن (%76) به‌ شتیوه‌یه‌کی به‌رچاویاتر به‌کارهێناون له‌ نیشانه‌کانی به‌شداری هایلاند (%24)، ئه‌مه‌ش ئاماژه‌یه‌ بۆ په‌سه‌ندکردنیکی به‌هێز بۆ ستراتیجی هه‌له‌سه‌نگاندن و له‌سه‌ر بنه‌مای هه‌له‌سه‌نگاندن. جێناوه‌کان باوترین سه‌رچاوه‌ بوون (101)، له‌ کاتیکیدا پرسیاره‌ ره‌وانیژییه‌کان به‌ته‌واوی دیار نه‌بوون. ئه‌نجامه‌کانی ئه‌م توێژینه‌وه‌یه‌ ده‌توانن وه‌ک پێوه‌ریک بۆ چوارچێوه‌ی فێرکاری به‌ ئامانجی په‌ره‌بێدانی توانای نووسینی نه‌کادیدی خزمه‌ت بکه‌ن. توێژینه‌وه‌که‌ پێویستی به‌ توێژینه‌وه‌ی زیاتر ده‌رده‌خات بۆ دۆزینه‌وه‌ی تیکه‌یه‌شتی خوێنه‌ران سه‌باره‌ت به‌ نیشانه‌کانی به‌شداری دیاریکراو و هه‌له‌سه‌نگاندنی کاریکه‌ری ره‌وانیژیان.

وو‌شه‌ سه‌ره‌یه‌کان: نیشانه‌کانی به‌شداریکردن، وتاری نووسراو، کارلیک له‌نێوان نووسه‌ر و خوێنه‌ر، گۆفاری زانکو، زمانناسی کۆریوس.