

Rhetorical Comparison in Academic English Writing: Metadiscourse Usage in Abstracts between Chinese and Malaysian Undergraduates' Theses

Type of study

Liu Yanfei

Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohammad Musa, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Foreign Languages School, Luoyang Institute of Science and Technology, Xuezi Road, 471023, Luoyang, Henan, China

lylglyf@163.com

Ernisa Binti Marzuki *

Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohammad Musa, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

mernisa@unimas.my

Joseph Ramanair

Faculty of Education, Language and Communication, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohammad Musa, 94300, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Zhao Baoying

Foreign Languages School, Luoyang Institute of Science and Technology, Xuezi Road, 471023, Luoyang, Henan, China

Submitted: 20.07.2025; Accepted: 03.02.2026

Abstract: This study examines metadiscourse usage in undergraduate thesis abstracts by Chinese (EFL) and Malaysian (ESL) English majors, addressing gaps in existing literature that has understudied EFL-ESL comparisons among novice writers. Drawing on Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model, a corpus of 100 abstracts (50 from each context) was analyzed using mixed methods, with normalized frequency calculations and log-likelihood tests to compare cross-contextual variations. Results revealed significant contextual differences: Malaysian writers used substantially more interactive metadiscourse, driven by higher frequencies of frame markers, reflecting a focus on explicit textual scaffolding aligned with ESL genre conventions. In contrast, Chinese writers employed more interactional metadiscourse, characterized by exclusive use of self-mentions and significantly more attitude markers, indicating a rhetorical emphasis on authorial stance. Both groups shared genre-specific patterns, including high usage of transitions and engagement markers and minimal endophoric markers, underscoring abstracts' condensed format constraints. These findings validate Hyland's model in novice writing, clarify how sociolinguistic contexts shape rhetorical choices, and provide actionable insights for EAP pedagogy in EFL and ESL contexts.

Keywords: metadiscourse; rhetorical comparison; academic English writings; abstract; undergraduates' theses

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing serves as a cornerstone of knowledge dissemination and scholarly communication, where writers not only convey propositional content but also strategically deploy linguistic resources to guide readers, establish authorial identity, and negotiate relationships with their audience (Hyland 2017). Central to this process is metadiscourse, a dynamic construct that has evolved from Harris' initial conceptualization as "discourse about discourse" (Beauvais, 1989) to a multifaceted framework encompassing text-organizing and reader-engaging functions (Hyland 2005). In academic genres, metadiscourse acts as a rhetorical bridge, enabling writers to structure arguments coherently (interactive resources) and position themselves within disciplinary communities (interactional resources), thereby enhancing the persuasiveness and accessibility of their work.

Abstracts, as condensed gateways to academic texts, amplify the significance of metadiscourse. Operating under constraints of conciseness, abstracts require writers to balance information density with rhetorical clarity, making metadiscourse indispensable for signaling structural moves, modulating claims, and engaging potential readers (Jameel 2023). Yet, the use of such resources is not universal; it is shaped by contextual factors, including linguistic backgrounds, educational systems, and the role of English in academic settings (Hyland, Tse 2004).

China and Malaysia, despite their geographical proximity, represent distinct sociolinguistic contexts for English use: China functions primarily as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, where English is predominantly an academic and professional tool, while Malaysia operates as an English as a Second Language (ESL) context, with English entrenched in institutional and educational systems (Asadova 2023). These differences raise critical questions: How do undergraduates from these contexts deploy metadiscourse in thesis abstracts? To what extent do EFL and ESL environments influence rhetorical choices in academic writing?

Existing research on metadiscourse in academic writing has predominantly focused on published scholars or postgraduate students (e.g., Pérez-Llantada 2010; Ozdemir, Longo 2014; Afzaal et al. 2021; Guo 2023), with limited attention to novice writers, particularly undergraduates. Moreover, most previous metadiscoursal studies focused on the cross-cultural comparison between native and non-native English writers (e.g., Ozdemir, Longo 2014; Afzaal et al. 2021; Esfandiari, Khatibi 2022); very little research is done on comparisons between EFL and ESL writers, e.g., Chinese and Malaysian. This study addresses these gaps by examining metadiscourse in undergraduate thesis abstracts from China and Malaysia, shedding light on how novice academic writers navigate global rhetorical norms within their unique sociolinguistic landscapes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hyland's Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse

The concept of metadiscourse has undergone significant theoretical refinement since its coinage by Harris (1959), who defined it as "discourse about discourse" to challenge the view of texts as purely propositional content. Since the invention of the term, various scholars created their own theoretical models, such as Kopple's (1985) taxonomy of textual and interpersonal types and Crismore et al.'s (1993) categorization of metadiscourse as textual and interpersonal ones (Ädel 2006). The classifications of metadiscourse are, however, not always clarified, with some overlap between the types (Hyland 2005). Hyland, therefore, revised the previous taxonomy and proposed his model of metadiscourse that became particularly influential in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). According to a systematic investigation by Pearson and Abdollahzadeh (2023), the taxonomy of metadiscourse proposed by Hyland (2005a) is the most frequently adopted model for research.

Table 1: The interpersonal model of metadiscourse by Hyland (2005a)

Category	Function	Example
Interactive Metadiscourse		
Help to guide readers through the text		
Transitions	express semantic relation between main clauses	in addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	finally/ to conclude/my purpose here is to
Endophoric markers	refers to information in other parts of the text	noted above/see Fig./in section 2
Evidentials	refer to source of information from other texts	according to X/ (Y, 1990) Z states
Code glosses	help readers grasp functions of ideational material	namely/ e.g. /such as/ in other words
Interactional Metadiscourse		
Involve readers in the argument		
Hedges	withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	in fact/definitely/ it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately/ I agree/ surprisingly
Engagement markers	explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider/ note that/ you can see that
Self-mentions	explicit refer to author(s)	I/we/my/our

Based on the functional classifications, analyses of discourse and the view that language is related to social context, Hyland (2005a) proposed his own model of metadiscourse, which distinguishes two main categories: interactive resources and interactional resources. Interactive resources are what the writer believes should be made explicit to organize the discourse and guide readers' interpretation of the text. There are five subtypes with their own distinctive functions, namely transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses. Interactional resources, on the other hand, concern the writer's efforts to control the level of personality in a text and establish a suitable relationship with arguments and audience, marking the degree of reader involvement and the expression of attitude and commitments. Similarly, five subgroups are also divided into interactional ones: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mentions (as is shown in Table 1).

Cross-Disciplinary Comparative Studies of Metadiscourse

Disciplinary differences have been found to significantly influence metadiscourse use in academic writing. Tan-de Ramos (2010) found that engineering students favored logical connectives/frame markers, while liberal arts students preferred evidentials, reflecting disciplinary writing goals. Zarei and Mansoori (2011) noted applied linguistics (humanities) emphasized interactive elements more than computer engineering (non-humanities). Salas (2015) showed linguists used more reflexive metadiscourse than economists/medics, with variations in self-mentions and relational markers. Birhan (2021) revealed English articles on language had the highest metadiscourse frequency, with significant disciplinary differences in both interactive and interactional markers. Boginskaya (2023) found engineering abstracts favored modal auxiliaries for hedging, while linguistics used probability nouns/reporting verbs, indicating disciplinary rather than generic influences. These studies highlight metadiscourse variations across soft/hard sciences at both broad and micro levels, offering insights for discipline-specific academic writing instruction.

Metadiscourse Studies for Academic Writing of Undergraduates

Existing literature has predominantly focused on metadiscourse in postgraduate students' writing and published papers, with limited attention to undergraduates. Recent studies have begun addressing this gap. Li and Wharton (2012) found disciplinary and contextual (especially institutional culture) influences in metadiscourse usage among Chinese undergraduates in China and the UK. Peng and Zheng (2021) noted increased evidentials, hedges, and boosters in revised Bachelor of Arts theses to enhance authors' voices. Haninda and Bram (2022) adopted Fraser's taxonomy and identified elaborative markers as the most frequent in undergraduate theses,

with misuses highlighting needs for instruction. Zhang and Zhang (2021) showed explicit stance instruction improved undergraduates' academic writing quality and stance performance. Ruonan and Al-Shaibani (2022) found that interactional metadiscourse, notably boosters, was more frequent than interactive types in social science undergraduates' abstracts. These studies collectively enrich understanding of undergraduate metadiscourse use and its pedagogical implications. Most such studies focused on the disciplinary differences and few were found on the contextual differences between EFL and ESL undergraduate writers.

Cross-Cultural and Contextual Variations in Metadiscourse Use

Other than disciplinary differences, metadiscourse use in academic writing also varies widely based on linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Ozdemir and Longo (2014) found Turkish Master of Arts students used fewer evidentials/boosters but more transitions/hedges than US peers. Abdollahzadeh (2019) noted that Iranian and English graduates relied more on modal verbs for uncertainty than professionals, with Iranians using fewer non-modal hedges. Afzaal et al. (2021) showed that native English speakers used more interactional metadiscourse, while Chinese students favoured interactive types. Gai and Wang (2022) linked higher metadiscourse frequency in English-medium texts to metacognition, with Chinese ESL writers transferring L1 patterns. Connor et al. (2022) found that Chinese scholars used more transitions/self-mentions, and Americans more hedges. Binmahboob (2022) reported Saudi authors used more metadiscourse markers than their British counterparts. Esfandiari and Khatibi (2022) emphasized cultural background over publication context, with American writers using more interactional metadiscourse than Persian ones. Dzung Pho and Phuong Cao (2025) found that native English writers employ first-person singular (e.g., "I", "my") and plural (e.g., "we", "our") pronouns to convey direct authorial presence, whereas native Vietnamese writers utilize third-person noun phrases (e.g., "the researcher") to achieve a more impersonal tone when utilizing self-mentions. These studies reveal L1–L2 disparities, aiding EAP pedagogy for cross-cultural and contextual academic writing.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to examine the use of metadiscourse in undergraduate thesis abstracts written by Chinese (EFL) and Malaysian (ESL) English majors, investigating the differences and similarities between them.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the patterns of interactive and interactional metadiscourse use in Chinese and Malaysian undergraduate thesis abstracts?

2. Are there statistically significant differences and similarities in the frequency and distribution of specific metadiscourse subtypes between the two groups?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to understanding novice academic writers' rhetorical strategies, offering implications for EAP pedagogy in EFL and ESL contexts.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a contrastive corpus-based approach to investigate metadiscourse usage in undergraduate thesis abstracts, focusing on cross-cultural comparisons between Chinese EFL and Malaysian ESL writers. The design aligns with Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse and combines quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to contribute to a deeper understanding of the differences and similarities in metadiscourse practices across cultural contexts.

Corpus Compilation

In this study, two self-compiled corpora were created and analyzed by using AntConc (v 4.2.4). The target corpus (TC) is compiled by 50 English-major undergraduates' thesis abstracts randomly selected in a Chinese public university in the year of 2022, totaling 12,553 tokens; the reference corpus (RC) is compiled by 50 files of abstracts of English-major theses randomly collected in a Malaysian public university in the same year, with 10,461 tokens.

The Coding Scheme and Procedures

AntConc was employed to identify initial frequencies using Hyland's lists, during which manual validation to ensure functional accuracy in the context was guaranteed. Raw frequencies were converted to normalized frequency per 10,000 words to enable cross-corpus comparison. All the counting of frequencies was finished manually by two trained raters independently after scrutinizing the context. They then independently coded the full corpus using AntConc 4.2.4 for lexical extraction, with manual contextual validation to classify markers by function. Inter-rater reliability (Cohen's Kappa = 0.89, 95% CI: 0.85–0.93) indicated almost perfect agreement; discrepancies were resolved via consensus with the authors and documented in a coding log. Normalized frequencies (per 10,000 words) were calculated post-coding for cross-corpus comparison.

In Chinese and Malaysian abstracts, "and" appeared 485 times and 420 times, respectively, with various functions. Following Hyland & Jiang (2018) and Hyland & Jiang (2022), "and" is excluded from the counting since it renders large quantities of instances as conjunctions to mean "along with" rather than the transitional marker in interactive metadiscourse, as Example 1 shows:

Example 1: *This paper will analyze the mapping relationship between the source domain **and** the target domain, **and** will summarize what translation strategies translators should adopt to make the target readers have the same reading experience as the source readers."*

1	2122_41_1 Roberts, examining whether cultural information is lost, transformed, added to	or	amplified in the translation and transformation process, and analyzing		
2	2122_41_1 printed on clothing become a carrier to promote positive energy	or	core socialist values and other mainstream social values, inspiring		
3	2122_41_1 and ideas, but also of reference value for better political	or	cultural exchanges between countries in the world. KEY WORDS:		
4	2122_41_1 the relevance principle, that is, to achieve the optimal relevance	or	maximum relevance in terms of contextual effect and processing		
5	2122_41_1 achievement of the informative function, the bank needs to attract	or	persuade the clients to purchase their products and establish		
6	2122_41_1 use witty and humorous words to make a new impression	or	relieve awkward atmosphere, so as to facilitate better interpersonal		
7	2122_41_1 its profiles, such as its history, culture philosophy, financial products	or	services. After the achievement of the informative function, the		
8	2122_41_1 buzzwords reflect the common concerns of people in a country	or	society at a certain period of time, and have		
9	2122_41_1 of people's daily life. When a foreign film	or	TV series wants to enter the Chinese market, it		

Figure 1: Searching "or" in TC in AntConc

1	AMMAR NASIBAH heavy smartphone users, and read academic and leisure materials daily	or	at least once a week. They also have high		
2	DANIEL CHAI HAO were mostly because of their purchasing intention for their spouses	or	families. Most of the participants can recognise the appearance		
3	NUR HASMI BINTI and males from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) who are currently	or	have taken Mandarin as an elective course. The data		
4	MOHD AIMAN AZ common media that can be used to spread information, educate	or	influence the public. This study focuses on one of		
5	WELLHELMINA AN use to different contexts, such as when speaking with parents	or	interacting with siblings. Keywords: Code-switching, types of code-		
6	WELLHELMINA AN a linguistic phenomenon in which a speaker would use two	or	more languages simultaneously in the same discourse. In Malaysia,		
7	NUR FARHANA BIN then utilized to assess whether the respondents have a positive	or	negative attitude towards English. The study's findings indicate		
8	AHMAD AZAMUD to abortion using sentiment analysis. Classify phrases as positive, negative,	or	neutral based on word scores. Conduct thematic analysis to		
9	NURUL NADIA BIN for data collection, the study employed 5-point Likert scales, yes-	or-	no questions, and multiple-choice questions. Data analysis was		
10	DANIEL CHAI HAO delivery elements, due to the limited monthly allowance from parents	or	part time job. Both male and female participants are		
11	NUR SYAHIRAH BIN studied. WTC refers to predisposition to communicate with a person	or	persons at a specific time, and that there are		
12	EVIEN CHUNDIE AN This investigation will also investigate how board games can complement	or	replace conventional language-learning techniques. As it examines the		
13	LINY JUIL_3360199 grab customers' attention and persuade them to buy their products	or	services. This study identifies the different usage of speech		
14	AZIEDIYATUL AMIR experience, particularly perceptions of lessons and activities being too difficult	or	too easy, also contributed to demotivation. Attitude towards learning		

Figure 2: Searching "or" in RC in AntConc

In code glosses, “or” appeared 9 times in Chinese theses and 14 times in Malaysian ones (see the figures 1–2).

After figuring out the context, the authors found that all of them did not belong to this subtype of metadiscourse and should also be excluded from counting. The examples cited from both the corpora can be shown as follows:

Example 2: *After the achievement of the informative function, the bank needs to attract **or** persuade the clients to purchase their products and establish the business relationship.*

Example 3: *The finding suggested that undergraduate students are heavy smartphone users, and read academic and leisure materials daily **or** at least once a week.*

All of the “or” searched in AntConc were used to introduce another possibility instead of introducing a word or phrase that explains or means the same as another, like “geology, or the science of the earth’s crust.” The former usage of “or” is part of the propositional content, while the latter serves as a code gloss of interactive metadiscourse.

Besides those controversial ones mentioned above, the category of some certain metadiscourse items in the list overlapped. Scrutinizing the context is, thus, indispensable to determine the result of counting. For instance, in Hyland’s list, “so” is categorized as both an endophoric marker to shift topic and a transition marker. All the 6 “so” in the Chinese abstract were to introduce the result and should be grouped in the transition marker after excluding “so much,” “so far,” “and so on,” and “so+adj”. None of them functioned the same as “shift to,” “turn to,” “with regard to” and so on in the list to shift topic.

The same case can be found in the usage of “must” in interactional metadiscourse. According to Hyland’s model, “must” is listed in both the subcategory of booster and engagement marker. “Must” in all the instances shown in Figure 3, found in Chinese abstracts, conveyed strong possibility, as in “You must be hungry after all that walking.” Instead, all of them served as engagement markers to involve somebody or something to show that something is very necessary and important.

After excluding items that appeared too frequently and whose metadiscourse function was difficult to determine, and after distinguishing between items that did not fulfill a metadiscourse function and those categorized under multiple subtypes, consensus was ultimately reached between the two raters.

Data Analysis Methods

In the quantitative analysis, a log-likelihood (LL) test was conducted to test whether the distribution of metadiscourse features differs significantly between the Chinese and Malaysian students’ abstracts. This test was chosen for its robustness in handling unequal corpus sizes and its sensitivity to frequency variation in corpus data, especially for low-frequency items (Rayson, Garside 2000). LL values are calculated based on the raw frequency counts and total token counts in each corpus using Paul Rayson’s (2016) spreadsheet for the log-likelihood test and % DIFF. A threshold of $LL > 3.84$ ($p < 0.05$) was adopted to determine statistical significance. % DIFF is a simple and straightforward effect-size metric for keyness analysis. It indicates the proportion of the difference between the normalized frequencies of a word in two corpora (or sub-corpora). Negative values indicate that the particular word has a higher normalized frequency in the reference corpus.

Quantitative findings on interactional metadiscourse aim to explain the “what” and “how much” revealed by quantitative data, while qualitative analysis complements to explain the “why” and “how” behind the numerical patterns. For qualitative analysis, some specific metadiscourse items were examined and compared between the two corpora to discover the influencing factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics of Metadiscourse Use across the Two Corpora

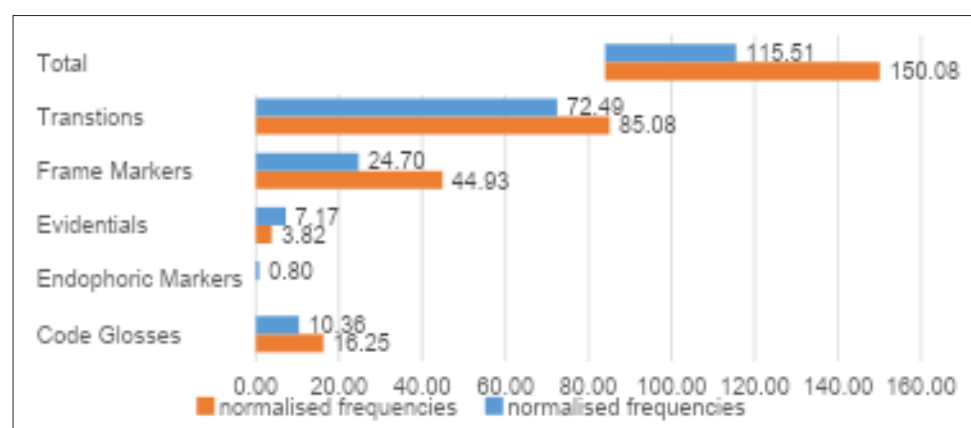
Table 2 and Figure 4 show distinct patterns for using interactive metadiscourse between the Chinese and Malaysian thesis abstracts. Transitions dominated both corpora, constituting 62.76% (72.49 per 10,000 words) of Chinese interactive features and 56.69% (85.08 per 10,000 words) of Malaysian usage. Frame markers were notably higher in Malaysian abstracts (44.93 per 10,000 words) compared to the Chinese abstracts (24.70 per 10,000 words). Meanwhile, code glosses were more frequent in Malaysian abstracts (16.25 vs. 10.35 per 10,000 words), but evidentials appeared more in Chinese abstracts (7.17 vs. 3.82 per 10,000 words). Endophoric markers were minimal in Chinese abstracts (0.79 per 10,000 words) and absent in Malaysian abstracts. On the whole, Malaysian abstracts exhibited higher normalized interactive metadiscourse density (150.08 per 10,000 words) than Chinese abstracts (115.51 per 10,000 words).

1	2122_41_1 of cross-cultural interaction ability. Both parties of the dialogue	must	adhere to the norm of courtesy when engaging in		
2	2122_41_1 as the theoretical support. According to the case analysis, translators	must	adjust their translation strategies based on linguistic, cultural, and		
3	2122_41_1 and English cultures. This paper finds that appropriate translation strategies	must	be used to accurately preserve the characteristics and elegance		
4	2122_41_1 spread abroad. Due to historical-cultural and language differences, translators	must	consider the purpose and the potential ability of readers		
5	2122_41_1 Secondly, when translating the symbols with pragmatic meaning, the translator	must	pay attention to the context and the intention of		

Figure 3: Searching “must” in TC in AntConc

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of interactive metadiscourse between TC and RC

Category	Subcategory	TC: Abstract of Chinese Theses (12,553 tokens)			RC: Abstract of Malaysian Theses (10,461 tokens)		
		raw frequency	% in each category	normalized frequency (per 10,000 words)	raw frequency	% in each category	normalized frequency (per 10,000 words)
Interactive Metadis- course	Code Glosses	13	8.97%	10.35	17	10.83%	16.25
	Endophoric markers	1	0.69%	0.79	0	0.00%	0.00
	Evidentials	9	6.21%	7.17	4	2.55%	3.82
	Frame markers	31	21.38%	24.70	47	29.94%	44.93
	Transitions	91	62.76%	72.49	89.00	56.69%	85.08
Total		145.00	100.00%	115.51	157.00	100.00%	150.08

**Figure 4:** Contrastd normalized frequencies of subtypes of interactive metadiscourse between TC and RC**Table 3:** Descriptive statistics of interactional metadiscourse between TC and RC

Category	Subcategory	TC: Abstract of Chinese Theses (12,553 tokens)			RC: Abstract of Malaysian Theses (10,461 tokens)		
		raw frequency	% in each category	normalized frequency	raw frequency	% in each category	normalized frequency
Interactional Metadis- course	Attitude Markers	49	20.76%	39.03	15	11.54%	14.34
	Boosters	44	18.64%	35.05	30	23.08%	26.68
	Self-mentions	32	13.56%	25.49	0	0.00%	0.00
	Engagement Markers	60	25.42%	47.80	49	37.69%	46.84
	Hedges	51	21.61%	40.63	36	27.69%	34.10
Total		236.00	100.00%	188.00	130.00	100.0%	121.96

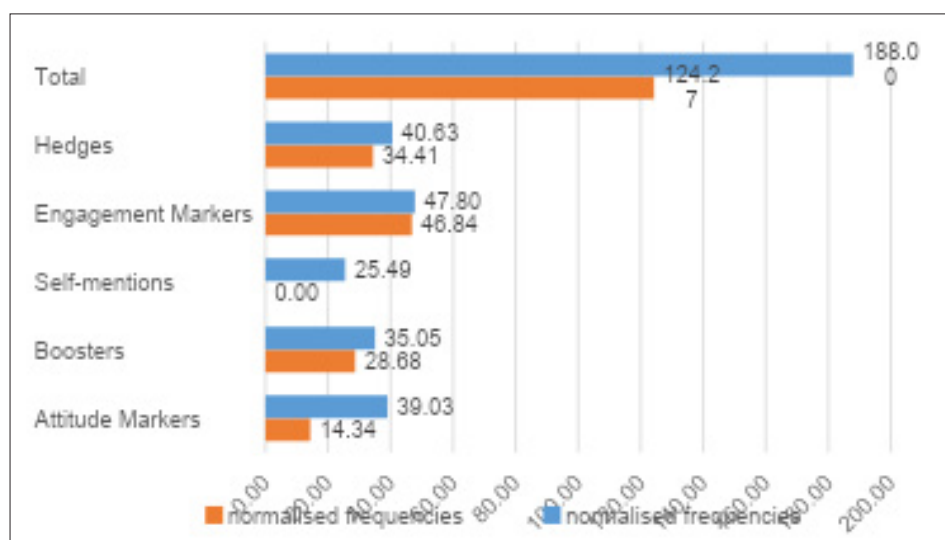


Figure 5: Contrasted normalized frequencies of subtypes of interactional metadiscourse between TC and RC

Table 4: Log likelihood test and %DIFF of subtypes of interactive metadiscourse between TC and RC

	observed frequencies		expected frequencies		Log Likelihood	normalized frequencies		%DIFF
	TC	RC	TC	RC		TC	RC	
Code Glosses	13	17	16.36	13.64	1.51	10.36	16.25	-36.27
Endophorics	1	0	0.55	0.45	1.21	0.80	0.00	#
Evidentials	9	4	7.09	5.91	1.17	7.17	3.82	87.50
Frame Markers	31	47	42.55	35.45	6.87	24.70	44.93	-45.03
Transitions	91	89	98.18	81.82	1.15	72.49	85.08	-14.79
Interactive Metadiscourse	145	157	164.73	137.27	5.17	115.51	150.08	-23.03
TOTAL	12553	10461						

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 5, Chinese abstracts demonstrated significantly higher usage (188.00 per 10,000 words) of interactional metadiscourse than Malaysian abstracts (121.96 per 10,000 words). Engagement markers were predominant in both corpora (Chinese: 25.42%, 47.80 per 10,000 words; Malaysian: 37.69%, 46.84 per 10,000 words). Key contrasts emerged in attitude markers, which were 2.7 times more frequent in Chinese abstracts (39.03 vs. 14.34 per 10,000 words), while self-mentions appeared to be exclusively used in Chinese abstracts (25.49 per 10,000 words). Hedges and boosters were moderately higher in Chinese abstracts (hedges: 40.63 vs. 34.10; boosters: 35.05 vs. 26.68 per 10,000 words).

Inferential Statistics of Metadiscourse Use across the Two Corpora

Inferential statistical analysis revealed significant cross-cultural variation in interactive metadiscourse usage. As is shown in Table 4, the result demonstrates Malaysian writers' stronger emphasis on textual scaffolding because the total interactive metadiscourse was significantly elevated in Malaysian theses (LL = 5.17 > 3.84, $p < 0.05$), showing 23.03% greater density than Chinese counterparts (150.08 vs. 115.51 per 10,000 words). This aligns with the role of English as an institutional and educational tool in Malaysia (ESL contexts), where adherence to global academic genre norms, such as clear structural signaling, is prioritized to facilitate reader navigation. In contrast, Chinese undergraduates (EFL context) show relatively lower use of interactive metadiscourse, suggesting a greater focus on content precision over explicit textual organization.

Within the interactive metadiscourse, frame markers demonstrated the most pronounced divergence ($LL = 6.87 > 3.84, p < 0.05$), with Malaysian abstracts exhibiting 45.03% higher normalized frequency than Chinese abstracts (44.93 vs. 24.70 per 10,000 words). Standard IMRaD (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion) abstract conventions (Sollaci, Pereira 2004) amplified frame markers. Malaysian writers used more frame markers to explicitly signal moves, reflecting stricter adherence to Anglophone genre templates. Elevated frame markers served as “rhetorical shortcuts” to maintain structural transparency despite the word limits of abstracts for Malaysian students. However, lower frame marker usage in Chinese abstracts suggests implicit move structuring, possibly reflecting L1 preferences for deductive flow for Chinese students.

Code glosses also trended toward Malaysian prevalence (%DIFF = -36.25), though this difference was non-significant ($LL = 1.51$). The genre of abstracts makes it a universal convention to minimize the use of code glosses, which are used more often in the body of the thesis for elaboration.

High transition marker density in both groups (Chinese: 72.49/10,000 words; Malaysian: 85.08/10,000 words) emerged from the need to condense argumentative logic—a universal abstract requirement—although there were no statistically significant differences ($LL = 1.15 < 3.84$). A %DIFF value of -14.79 indicated that Malaysian students had 14.97% more usage than Chinese students. The consistent usage of transition markers across contexts implies that they operate as necessary genre conventions for the two corpora, rather than culturally driven choices.

Conversely, evidentials were displayed sparsely in both corpora. There was a substantially higher (87.50% DIFF) but non-significant occurrence in Chinese abstracts (7.17 vs. 3.82 per 10,000 words; $LL = 1.17$). Minimal cross-cultural variation emerged in endophoric markers, being virtually absent in both corpora (Chinese: 0.80; Malaysian: 0.00 per 10,000 words). The compression

imperative universally suppressed features requiring textual elaboration, evidenced by near-zero endophoric markers and sparse evidentials, which may be a direct consequence of abstracts’ limited capacity for internal references or citations.

Interactional metadiscourse usage, as shown in Table 5, was statistically more frequent in Chinese theses ($LL = 14.86 > 3.84, p < 0.05$), with 51.28% greater density than Malaysian abstracts (188.00 vs. 124.27 per 10,000 words). In addition, all %DIFF values were positive, confirming systematically higher frequencies in Chinese abstracts across all subcategories. Higher density of interactional metadiscourse in Chinese theses may reflect that Chinese novice writers demonstrated their critical thinking and ownership of arguments explicitly through these devices. Whereas Malaysian writers, operating in a multicultural, pragmatically oriented ESL context, appeared to adopt a detached stance to accommodate diverse readerships, minimizing subjective language.

Statistically significant differences ($LL > 3.84, p < 0.05$) were identified in two subtypes. Most notably, self-mention exhibited extreme divergence ($LL = 38.79$), occurring exclusively in Chinese abstracts (25.49 per 10,000 words) with no instances in Malaysian counterparts, resulting in an incalculable %DIFF. Avoidance of self-mention in Malaysian abstracts aligns with the genre’s expectation of informational focus over authorial prominence, whereas Chinese writers leverage it to establish scholarly credibility within rigid academic hierarchies.

Attitude markers were ranked second, demonstrating substantial disparity ($LL = 13.36 > 3.84, p < 0.05$), with a 172.23% higher normalized frequency in Chinese abstracts (39.03 vs. 14.34 per 10,000 words). This signals that Chinese writers preferred affective engagement (e.g. “important/importantly”, “even” and “essential”, etc.), using evaluative language to signal intellectual investment.

The non-significant variation in boosters, hedges, and engagement markers indicated shared rhetorical approaches to epistemic modulation and reader inclusion. Boosters ($LL = 0.73$; %DIFF = 22.22) and hedges ($LL =$

Table 5: Log likelihood test and %DIFF of subtypes of interactional metadiscourse between TC and RC

	observed frequencies		expected frequencies		Log Likelihood	normalized frequencies		%DIFF
	TC	RC	TC	RC		TC	RC	
Attitude marker	49	15	34.91	29.09	13.36	39.03	14.34	172.23
Booster	44	30	40.36	33.64	0.73	35.05	28.68	22.22
Self-mentions	32	0	17.45	14.55	38.79	25.49	0.00	#
Engagement markers	60	49	59.45	49.55	0.01	47.80	46.84	2.04
Hedges	51	36	47.45	39.55	0.59	40.63	34.41	18.06
Interactional Metadiscourse	236	130	199.63	166.37	14.86	188.00	124.27	51.28
TOTAL	12553	10461						

Rhetorical Comparison in Academic English Writing: Metadiscourse Usage in Abstracts between Chinese and Malaysian Undergraduates' Theses

0.59; %DIFF = 18.06) indicated comparable caution in claim modulation despite moderately higher Chinese usage. Engagement markers showed negligible difference (LL = 0.01; %DIFF = 2.04), suggesting parallel reader-oriented strategies. Similarities in engagement markers (%DIFF = 2.04) could have resulted from the abstract's intrinsic function as a persuasive gateway. Both groups heavily employed reader-oriented engagement markers, such as "allow" and "show", to guide audience attention.

Qualitative Analysis of Metadiscourse Use across the Two Corpora

There are four subtypes under frame markers in Hyland's list: a) sequencing, b) label stages, c) announce goals, and d) shift topics. In the list of "label stages", "overall" reveals an obvious gap between the two corpora (5 times in RC and 0 in TC). When searching "overall" in RC, some were adverbs to function as metadiscourse markers while others were in adjective form to function as determiners for nouns which were excluded from this study (Figure 6).

It was found in the "File View" of AntConc that all "overall" appeared at the end of the Malaysian abstracts to label the final stage to present the significance of the study, as shown in Examples 4 & 5. However, there was none in TC.

Example 4: Overall, the study contributed valuable insights to Malaysian higher education, guiding improvements in teaching practices and potentially informing educational policies to foster a more collaborative and effective learning environment.

Example 5: Overall, understanding the code-switching patterns among Iban youths from intermarriages in home domain based on the types and functions of code-switching provides valuable insight into how youth adapt their language choice and use to different contexts, such as when speaking with parents or interacting with siblings.

Abstracts written by Malaysian students, shaped by Anglophone norms (Khairunnisa, Abu Bakar 2024), prioritized explicit signposting. "Overall" aligns with international expectations for clear, direct communication, especially to highlight a study's significance. This can also be attributed to the training that Malaysian students receive, which includes learning to write abstracts that meet the expectations of international publication, whereas significance was woven into the narrative without explicit markers like "overall" in Chinese abstracts. Chinese universities and academic institutions may emphasize the logical flow and the inherent significance that emerges from the research process, rather than relying on explicit markers. Chinese audience is perceived to be

Name: Malaysian abstra	Total Hits: 9	Page Size: 100 hits	1 to 9 of 9 hits
Files: 50			
Tokens: 10461			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Malaysian ...	ication skills and student engagement in group settings.	Overall,	the study contributed valuable insights to Malaysian high
2 Malaysian ...	ative experiences and barriers had a detrimental effect.	Overall,	the study contributes insights into the dynamics of ERDE
3 Malaysian ...	was analysed using Microsoft Excel. The study found that	overall,	the majority of participants fall into the 1-2 days (36.98%
4 Malaysian ...	originally developed by Horwitz et al. (1986).A moderate	overall	anxiety level (M = 2.50%) was found among undergradu
5 Malaysian ...	gree nor Disagree. To answer the research question, the	overall	average was then utilized to assess whether the respond
6 Malaysian ...	naking, which occasionally results in an emphasis on the	overall	message rather than precise word choice. This study aim
7 Malaysian ...	they were still feeling good and curious with it. In	overall,	participants show positive feedback and reactions towar
8 Malaysian ...	aching, assessment, engagement with coursemates, and	overall	satisfaction and qualitative data gathering through semi
9 Malaysian ...	tic functions were equally used throughout the research.	Overall,	understanding the code-switching patterns among Iban

Figure 6: KWIC of "overall" in RC

Name: Chinese abstract	Total Hits: 1	Page Size: 100 hits	1 to 1 of 1 hit
Files: 50			
Tokens: 12553			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Chinese ...	ntents and evaluation subjects diversified. These suggestions	aim	to provide some useful suggestions for the practice of

Figure 7: KWIC of "aim" in TC

Name: Malaysian abstract	Total Hits: 5	Page Size: 100 hits	1 to 5 of 5 hits
Files: 50			
Tokens: 10461			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Malaysian ...	Abstract The	aim	of this study is to investigate Mandarin language speaking
2 Malaysian ...	ABSTRACT The	aim	of this study was to show how Mahsa Amini'
3 Malaysian ...	reasons for the media outlets to use such articles. The	aim	of this study was to analyse the framing of
4 Malaysian ...	among UNIMAS undergraduate students. To achieve the	aim	of the study, the objectives were to identify the
5 Malaysian ...	ABSTRACT This study	aim	examines online newspaper narratives on abortion issues. T

Figure 8: KWIC of “aim” in RC

Name: Chinese abstract	Total Hits: 1	Page Size: 100 hits	1 to 1 of 1 hit
Files: 50			
Tokens: 12553			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Chinese ...	principle to the study of novels makes the analysis more	objective	and comprehensive. At the same time, this paper demons

Figure 9: KWIC of “objective” in TC

Files: 50			
Tokens: 10461			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Malaysian ...	as a tool to enhance speaking skills in English. The	objective	of the study aims to explore the perceptions of
2 Malaysian ...	ceptions towards the use of mobile applications. The	objective	of the study is to identify mobile applications used
3 Malaysian ...	nd explores its linguistic evolution over the years. The	objective	of this study were to identify the slangs used
4 Malaysian ...	group in English learning through the game. The last	objective	is to determine the perceptions of Malaysian “Genshin
5 Malaysian ...	dicine, obtained from ScienceDirect. Furthermore, the	objective	is to determine the pragmatic function of hedges emp
6 Malaysian ...	ssroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This finding pertains to	Objective 1.	Classification according to FLCAS scores showed that
7 Malaysian ...	ing anxiety and language proficiency in English. Third	Objective	Concluding Points out: Female students consistently re
8 Malaysian ...	gs, differing from findings in other domains. Whereas	objective 2;	Contrary to some prior research, the frequency of usag
9 Malaysian ...	s online newspaper narratives on abortion issues. The	objective	identifying positive and negative phrases and analysin
10 Malaysian ...	a way to validate their distress in cyberbullying. As for	objective 2,	result shows that emotional reactions strongly influenc
11 Malaysian ...	e overcome their fear of public speaking. The second	objective'	s findings examined the relationship between proficie
12 Malaysian ...	ter intervention on cyberbullying scale. The results for	objective 1	shows that the Malaysian bystanders' responses to cyb
13 Malaysian ...	Illova (2021), and Madaminova (2019), the study finds	objective 1	that homophonic processes are the most frequent wor

Figure 10: KWIC of “objective” in RC

able to interpret the significance based on their shared understanding of the academic discourse style.

In c) announcing goals of frame markers, nouns such as “aim,” “objectives,” “purpose,” “intention,” and “focus” were the most frequently used. It was found through the Key Word in Context (KWIC) function of AntConc that in TC, “aim” was used once and did not serve as metadiscourse to announce the thesis goal (Figure 7), but the five instances in RC (Figure 8) all signaled the

thesis goal. It was the same case for “objective” in TC (Figure 9), whereas all the cases of “objective” in Figure 10 clearly stated the research purpose of the theses.

Figures 8 and 10 demonstrate that Malaysian writers used more frame markers to explicitly signal moves (e.g., “This study aim/objective of the study is...”), reflecting stricter adherence to Anglophone genre templates. Elevated frame markers served as “rhetorical shortcuts” to maintain structural transparency despite the word limits

Rhetorical Comparison in Academic English Writing: Metadiscourse Usage in Abstracts between Chinese and Malaysian Undergraduates' Theses

of abstracts for Malaysian students. However, lower frame marker usage in TC, as shown in Figures 7 and 9, suggests implicit move structuring, possibly reflecting L1 preferences for deductive flow for Chinese students. The unawareness of how frame markers should be used explicitly to signal moves of abstract suggests future focus on teaching explicit interactive metadiscoursal devices in Chinese academic English instructions.

As the inferential analysis (Table 5) shows above, self-mentions and attitude markers presented statistically significant differences. Through the KWIC function in AntConc, "we" in TC (Figure 11) demonstrated five appearances to claim the authors' identity and get readers involved in the research background, along with the engagement markers "need to" and "should". On the other hand, there was zero usage of "we" in RC (Figure 12).

Similarly, the self-mention "our", also listed as an engagement marker in Hyland's interactional metadiscourse, was used six times in TC to include both the authors (sometimes including the researchers and supervisors in the team) and the readers. Chinese students tended to involve readers in their thesis abstracts and try to persuade readers to acknowledge their claims. Besides, the cultural belief of collectivism can be witnessed

by the phrases: "in our lives," "in our country," "protect our environment" (Figure 13). In contrast, there was also zero case of using "our" in the abstracts of Malaysian theses (Figure 14). Malaysian students seemed to avoid the subjective tone of using "our" in the academic genre. They might use "in people's daily lives," "in Malaysia," "protect the environment" to replace the phrasing of Chinese style.

In the Chinese abstracts, "I" only appeared once (Figure 15), which complies with the potential objective norm of academic writing and the collectivism in Chinese culture. In order to avoid "I", 19 Chinese students employed "the author" to demonstrate neutrality and objectivity (Figure 16). This may hint at the pedagogical guidance of using "the author" to replace "I" in Chinese institutional contexts. In contrast, Malaysian students avoided this type of interactional metadiscourse. They used neither "I" nor "the author" in the abstracts (Figure 17 & Figure 18).

The absence of self-mentions in the abstracts of Malaysian students' theses can be attributed to several interrelated factors rooted in cultural, academic, and institutional contexts. Malaysia is a multicultural and multilingual society, with students from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, etc. (Choo et al. 2017). By avoiding self-mentions,

Name: Chinese abstract	Total Hits: 5	Page Size: 100 hits	1 to 5 of 5 hits
Files: 50			
Tokens: 12553			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Chinese ...	Functional Equivalence Theory ABSTRACT In recent decades,	we	can see that more and more foreign documentaries have
2 Chinese ...	tor Theory ABSTRACT With the acceleration of globalization,	we	have more opportunities to participate in international comm
3 Chinese ...	slation is different from general movie subtitle translation, so	we	need to propose some specific translation strategies accordi
4 Chinese ...	has entered a crucial stage of transformation and upgrading.	We	need to further energize the regional economy and tap
5 Chinese ...	target readers. It can also be seen that in translation,	we	should pay attention to the context and methods, and

Figure 11: KWIC of "we" in TC

Name: Malaysian abstra	Total Hits: 0	Page Size: 100 hits	0 to 0 of 0 hits
Files: 50			
Tokens: 10461			
File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
Warning No hits found!			
Search Query ☒ Words ☐ Case ☐ Regex Results Set All hits Context Size 10 token(s)			
we Start ☐ Adv Search			

Figure 12: KWIC of "we" in RC

Name: Chinese abstract

Files: 50

Tokens: 12553

Chinese abstract (1).pc

Chinese abstract (2).pc

Chinese abstract (3).pc

Chinese abstract (4).pc

Chinese abstract (5).pc

Chinese abstract (6).pc

Chinese abstract (7).pc

Chinese abstract (8).pc

Chinese abstract (9).pc

Chinese abstract (10).f

Chinese abstract (11).f

Chinese abstract (12).f

Chinese abstract (13).f

Chinese abstract (14).r

Total Hits: 6

Page Size

100 hits

1 to 6 of 6 hits

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Chinese ...	rid of embarrassment and it is an integral part of	our	daily language communication. Although a large amount o
2 Chinese ...	an important pattern of cognitive. And it is ubiquitous in	our	daily lives. This paper uses descriptive methods, inductive a
3 Chinese ...	e accurate and faithful. Besides, it is more advantageous to	our	country online buzzwords to spread the foreign countries, a
4 Chinese ...	transmission. Mr. Xu Yuanchong plays an important role in	our	country's translation career, and his English translation of
5 Chinese ...	f learning a foreign language both for the development of	our	economy and for individuals. But there is a strange
6 Chinese ...	al people to actively deal with climate change and protect	our	environment. KEY WORDS: ecological discourse analysis, sy

Figure 13: KWIC of “our” in TC

Name: Malaysian abstracts
Files: 50
Tokens: 10461

Total Hits: 0
Page Size: 100 hits
0 to 0 of 0 hits

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
Malaysian abstract (1).d			
Malaysian abstract (2).d			
Malaysian abstract (3).d			
Malaysian abstract (4).d			
Malaysian abstract (5).d			
Malaysian abstract (6).d			
Malaysian abstract (7).d			
Malaysian abstract (8).d			
Malaysian abstract (9).d			
Malaysian abstract (10).d			
Malaysian abstract (11).d			
Malaysian abstract (12).d			
Malaysian abstract (13).d			
Malaysian abstract (14).d			
Malaysian abstract (15).d			
Malaysian abstract (16).d			
Malaysian abstract (17).d			
Malaysian abstract (18).d			
Malaysian abstract (19).d			
Malaysian abstract (20).d			
Malaysian abstract (21).d			
Malaysian abstract (22).d			
Malaysian abstract (23).d			
Malaysian abstract (24).d			
Malaysian abstract (25).d			
Malaysian abstract (26).d			

Warning

No hits found!

OK

Search Query
☒ Words
☐ Case
☐ Regex
Results Set
All hits
Context Size
10 token(s)

Figure 14: KWIC of “our” in RC

Name: Chinese abstract

Files: 50

Tokens: 12553

Chinese abstract (1).pc

Chinese abstract (2).pc

Chinese abstract (3).pc

Chinese abstract (4).pc

Chinese abstract (5).pc

Chinese abstract (6).pc

Chinese abstract (7).pc

Chinese abstract (8).pc

Chinese abstract (9).pc

Chinese abstract (10).pc

Chinese abstract (11).pc

Chinese abstract (12).pc

Total Hits: 1

Page Size

100 hits

1 to 1 of 1 hit

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 Chinese ...	Principle in pragmatics. Based on the research of this thesis,	I	hope to offer some helpful advice for the study

Figure 15: KWIC of I in TC

Malaysian students made their abstracts more neutral and inclusive, which helped in achieving the goal of clear and objective communication across different cultural and linguistic groups. In addition, Malaysia has a long-standing connection with the Anglophone academic world, influenced by its colonial history and ongoing integration into international academic networks (Choo et al. 2017). In traditional Anglophone academic writing, there is a strong emphasis on objectivity (Mu 2021). The use of first-person pronouns like “I,” “our,” and “we” is often seen as introducing subjectivity into the text. Using self-mentions can potentially create a sense of distance or even bias among readers.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis revealed fundamental rhetorical characteristics between Chinese (EFL) and Malaysian (ESL) academic writing, shaped by intersecting cultural, pedagogical and genre forces. Malaysian writers demonstrated significantly greater use of interactive metadiscourse, particularly frame markers. Conversely, Chinese theses exhibited markedly higher interactional metadiscourse density, with pronounced emphasis on self-mentions (absolute absence in the Malaysian corpus) and attitude markers. Similarities emerged in universal genre conventions: near-identical usage of transition markers and engagement markers underscoring

Rhetorical Comparison in Academic English Writing: Metadiscourse Usage in Abstracts between Chinese and Malaysian Undergraduates' Theses

Name: Chinese abstract	Total Hits: 19	Page Size: 100 hits	1 to 19 of 19 hits
Files: 50			
Tokens: 12553			
Chinese abstract (1).pc	1	Chinese ... causes of the problem and the corresponding measures.	The author hopes that through this research, people can reasonably
Chinese abstract (2).pc	2	Chinese ... , and then put forth some feasible translation strategies.	The author hopes that this study can make contributions to
Chinese abstract (3).pc	3	Chinese ... title translation. Through this three-dimensional research,	the author hopes to promote the standardization of documentary s
Chinese abstract (4).pc	4	Chinese ... s improper translation and cultural omissions. Therefore,	the author also hopes to attract more translators to pay
Chinese abstract (5).pc	5	Chinese ... alysis and field investigation. In the process of research,	the author also found some problems such as improper translation
Chinese abstract (6).pc	6	Chinese ... he original commercial advertisement. On the one hand,	the author analyzes the puns in a large number of
Chinese abstract (7).pc	7	Chinese ... ty of documentary subtitle translation. At the same time,	the author comes to the conclusion that the three-dimensional
Chinese abstract (8).pc	8	Chinese ... or. Based on their classification of conceptual metaphor,	the author discusses that the English translation in the China
Chinese abstract (9).pc	9	Chinese ... detail to illustrate the application of variation methods.	The author draws the following conclusions through analysis and res
Chinese abstract (10).f	10	Chinese ... exts Based on Functional Equivalence Theory ABSTRACT	the author finds that Based on Nida's functional equivalence
Chinese abstract (11).f	11	Chinese ... ical level, syntactic level and content level. On this basis,	the author further summarizes the corresponding translation strateg
Chinese abstract (12).f	12	Chinese ... s on the English translation of the four-character idioms.	The author studied and analyzed from Linguistic Adaptation Theory.
Chinese abstract (13).f	13	Chinese ... Chinese commercial advertisements, on the other hand,	the author summarizes four methods of translating puns, namely, fit
Chinese abstract (14).f	14	Chinese ... aded words and the guidance of zero translation theory,	the author tries to analyze the five types of culture-
Chinese abstract (15).f			
Chinese abstract (16).f			
Chinese abstract (17).f			
Chinese abstract (18).f			
Chinese abstract (19).f			
Chinese abstract (20).f			
Chinese abstract (21).f			
Chinese abstract (22).f			
Chinese abstract (23).f			
Chinese abstract (24).f			
Chinese abstract (25).f			
Chinese abstract (26).f			

Figure 16: KWIC of the author in TC

Name: Malaysian abstra	Total Hits: 0	Page Size: 100 hits	0 to 0 of 0 hits
Files: 50			
Tokens: 10461			
Malaysian abstract (1).c			
Malaysian abstract (2).c			
Malaysian abstract (3).c			
Malaysian abstract (4).c			
Malaysian abstract (5).c			
Malaysian abstract (6).c			
Malaysian abstract (7).c			
Malaysian abstract (8).c			
Malaysian abstract (9).c			
Malaysian abstract (10).c			
Malaysian abstract (11).c			
Malaysian abstract (12).c			
Malaysian abstract (13).c			
Malaysian abstract (14).c			
Malaysian abstract (15).c			
Malaysian abstract (16).c			
Malaysian abstract (17).c			
Malaysian abstract (18).c			
Malaysian abstract (19).c			
Malaysian abstract (20).c			
Malaysian abstract (21).c			
Malaysian abstract (22).c			
Malaysian abstract (23).c			
Malaysian abstract (24).c			
Malaysian abstract (25).c			
Malaysian abstract (26).c			

Figure 17: KWIC of I in RC

abstract-specific demands for argumentative coherence and audience inclusion transcend cultural boundaries. The shared avoidance of endophoric markers further confirms genre constraints overriding contextual differences.

This study makes meaningful contributions to metadiscourse research and academic writing pedagogy. Theoretically, it enriches understanding of metadiscourse as a context-sensitive rhetorical resource by focusing on understudied EFL (Chinese) and ESL (Malaysian) undergraduate contexts, addressing gaps in literature that have predominantly centered on L1–L2 contrasts or advanced academic writers. By comparing thesis abstracts, it reveals differences in how undergraduate

writers deploy interactive and interactional resources, validating Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model in novice writing and extending its applicability to condensed genres. Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for EAP pedagogy. In EFL contexts, they highlight the need to balance interactional stance with explicit textual organization; in ESL contexts, they underscore refining reader engagement strategies without compromising structural clarity, bridging local educational practices and global academic norms.

Despite these contributions, limitations remain. Metadiscourse, as an open category with contested boundaries, includes emerging language forms not captured

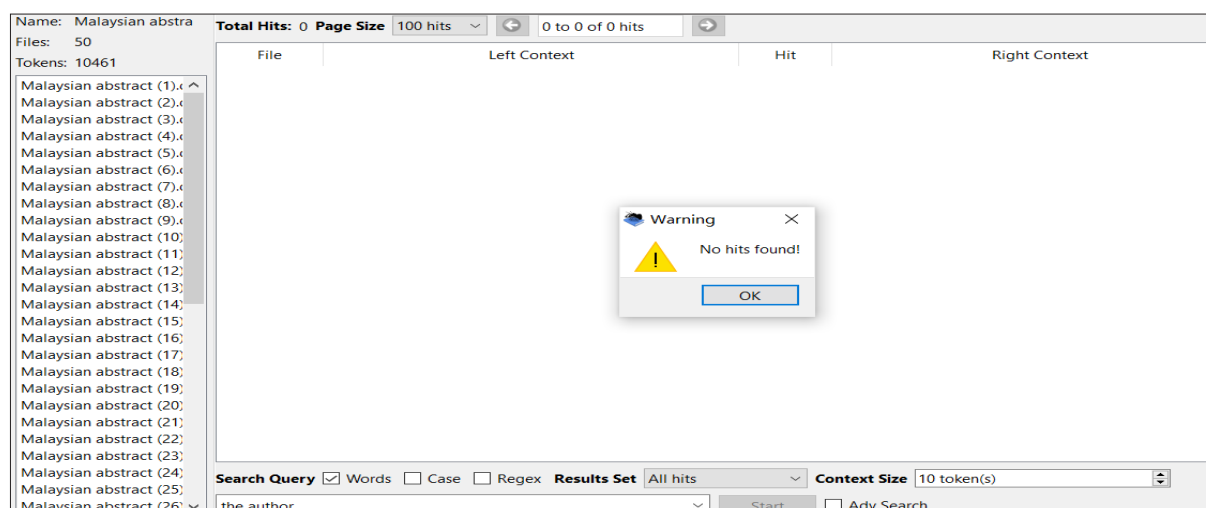


Figure 18: KWIC of the author in RC

by Hyland's framework. The modest corpus size (12,553 tokens for Chinese abstracts; 10,461 for Malaysian ones) limits generalizability beyond sampled institutions and English-major undergraduates. Methodological constraints, including manual coding subjectivity, also hinder deeper exploration of writers' motivations. Additionally, findings specific to thesis abstracts cannot be extended to other academic or non-academic genres, where metadiscourse practices may differ.

Future research should expand the corpus scope and representativeness to more disciplines and institutions. Supplementary qualitative methods, such as questionnaires or interviews with writers, can offer deeper insights into the motivations and effects of metadiscourse use. Extending the time frame to include theses from different years would also enable diachronic analysis, tracking how metadiscourse use evolves in response to educational policy shifts or technological changes, especially the impact of AI writing tools on metadiscourse choices.

REFERENCES

- Abdollahzadeh, E., 2019. A cross-cultural study of hedging in discussion sections by junior and senior academic writers. *Ibérica*, 38, 177–202.
- Ädel, A., 2006. Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English (Studies in Corpus Linguistics). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Afzaal, M. et al., 2021. Metadiscourse in Chinese and American graduate dissertation introductions. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 8(1), available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1970879> >.
- Asadova, N. R., 2023. English and its language policy in different countries. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 51, 303.
- Beauvais, P. J. (1989). A speech act theory of metadiscourse. *Written communication*, 6(1), 11–30.
- Birhan, A. T., 2021. An exploration of metadiscourse usage in book review articles across three academic disciplines: a contrastive analysis of corpus-based research approach. *Scientometrics*, 126, 2885–2902, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03822-w> >.
- Binmahboob, T. (2022). The Use of Metadiscourse by Saudi and British Authors: A Focus on Applied Linguistics Discipline. *English Language Teaching*, 15(2), 78–89.
- Boginskaya, O. A., 2023. Lexical realizations of hedging: A cross-disciplinary study of research article abstracts by Russian authors. *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta. Yazyk i Literatura*, 20(2), 380–396.
- Choo, L. B., Lin, D. T. A., Singh, M. K. M., & Ganapathy, M. (2017). The significance of the academic word list among ESL tertiary students in a Malaysian public university. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 23(4).
- Dzung Pho, P., Phuong Cao, D. T., 2025. Self-mention in English Theses: A Corpus-based Comparison of Native-English and Native-Vietnamese Speakers. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 31(2), 178–193, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2025-3102-13> >.
- Esfandiari, R., Khatibi, Z., 2022. A cross-cultural, cross-contextual study of interactional metadiscourse in academic research articles: An interpersonal approach. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 40(2), 227–242, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2022.2056064> >.
- Gai, F. H., Wang, Y. 2022. Correlated metadiscourse and metacognition in writing research articles: A cross-linguistic and cross-cultural study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1026554> >.
- Guo, Y., 2023. Comparing conclusion sections of MA theses and research articles in applied linguistics: Move structure and meta-discourse analysis. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 43(3), 37–45.
- Haninda, M., Bram, B., 2022. Academic writing of EFL students' undergraduate theses: A discourse marker analysis. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(1), 109–114.

- Hyland, K., 2017. Metadiscourse: What is it and where is it going? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 113, 16–29.
- Hyland, K., Tse, P., 2004. Metadiscourse in academic writing: A reappraisal. *Applied Linguistics*, 25(2), 156–177, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/25.2.156> >.
- Hyland, K. (2005). Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing. Continuum.
- Hyland, K., & Jiang, F. (Kevin). (2018). "In this paper we suggest": Changing patterns of disciplinary meta-discourse. *English for Specific Purposes*, 51, 18–30.
- Hyland, K., & Jiang, F. (2022). Metadiscourse: The evolution of an approach to texts. *Text and Talk*.
- Jameel, A. S., 2023. The Significance of the Abstract in Academic Research. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 30(12, 2), 323–335, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.30.12.2.2023.27> >.
- Khairunnisa, A., & Abu Bakar, R. (2024). Problems in teaching English academic writing among ESL lecturers at public and private universities in Malaysia. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 82(4), 434–455. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/24.82.434>
- Li, T., Wharton, S., 2012. Metadiscourse repertoire of L1 Mandarin undergraduates writing in English: A cross-contextual, cross-disciplinary study. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(4), 345–356, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2012.07.004> >.
- Mu, C. (2021). A Multidimensional Contrastive Analysis of Linguistic Features Between International and Local Biology Journal English Research Articles, *Scientometrics*, 126:9: 7901-7916.
- Ozdemir, N. O., Longo, B., 2014. Metadiscourse use in thesis abstracts: A cross-cultural study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 141, 59–63, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.05.011> >.
- Peng, J. E., Zheng, Y., 2021. Metadiscourse and voice construction in discussion sections in BA theses by Chinese university students majoring in English. *Sage Open*, 11(2), available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211008870> >.
- Pérez-Llantada, C., 2010. The discourse functions of metadiscourse in published academic writing: Issues of culture and language. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 9(S2), 41–68, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.35360/njes.217> >.
- Pearson, W. S., Abdollahzadeh, E., 2023. Metadiscourse in academic writing: A systematic review. *Lingua*, 293, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2023.103561> >.
- Rayson, P., Garside, R., 2000. Comparing corpora using frequency profiling. In *Proceedings of the Workshop on Comparing Corpora* (pp. 1–6). Association for Computational Linguistics.
- Rayson, P., 2016. Log-likelihood spreadsheet [Software], available at: < <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html> >.
- Ruonan, L., Al-Shaibani, G. K. S., 2022. An investigation into the use of metadiscourse in undergraduates' abstracts in social sciences. *Topics in Linguistics*, 23(2), 36–49.
- Salas, M. D., 2015. Reflexive metadiscourse in research articles in Spanish: Variation across three disciplines (Linguistics, Economics and Medicine). *Journal of Pragmatics*, 77, 20–40, available at: < <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2014.12.006> >.
- Sollaci, L. B., & Pereira, M. G. (2004). The introduction, methods, results, and discussion (IMRAD) structure: a fifty-year survey. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 92(3), 364.
- Tan-de Ramos, J., 2010. A comparative study of the discourse marker types in the body section of the research papers of DLSU students. *Tesol Journal*, 2, 62–73.
- Zarei, G. R., Mansoori, S., 2011. A Contrastive Study on Metadiscourse Elements Used in Humanities vs. Non Humanities across Persian and English. *English Language Teaching*, 4(1), 42–50.
- Zhang, L., Zhang, L. J., 2021. Fostering stance-taking as a sustainable goal in developing EFL students' academic writing skills: Exploring the effects of explicit instruction on academic writing skills and stance deployment. *Sustainability*, 13(8), available at: < <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13084270> >.