

Writer-reader interaction in L2 learner academic discourse: Reader engagement in Czech students' Master's theses

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates writer-reader interaction in L2 (Czech) learner academic discourse with a specific focus on reader engagement in English-medium Master's theses in the humanities. The study draws on Hyland and Jiang's (2016) model of engagement. It aims to reveal how Czech graduates use features of engagement (such as reader reference, appeals to shared knowledge, directives and questions) to establish solidarity with readers by acknowledging their presence and negotiating potential alternative views. The contrastive corpus-based analysis compares a corpus of Czech English-medium Master's theses with two reference L1 corpora representing learner and published academic discourse to explore the impact of linguacultural background, expertise and discipline on the frequency of use and functions of engagement markers. The findings suggest notable variations in the realization patterns and functions of engagement markers across the corpora. It is observed that Czech graduates tend to underuse reader reference and questions, while overusing directives. Moreover, they generally struggle to approximate disciplinary patterns of engagement markers. This trend might reflect students' limited awareness of academic rhetorical conventions, their efforts to blend L1 and L2 academic norms, and the unique context of addressing an audience within the examination framework of the Master's thesis.

KEYWORDS

academic discourse, intercultural rhetoric, Master's thesis, metadiscourse, reader engagement

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.14712/18059635.2023.2.2>

1 INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a highly specialised use of language which aims to present new knowledge, negotiate social roles and persuade readers to accept the writer's claims and views. In order to succeed in this persuasive endeavour, academic writers need to construct a credible persona and develop an appropriate relationship with their readers via the use of various rhetorical devices, typically referred to as interactional metadiscourse (Hyland 2001; 2005b; 2008). Interactional metadiscourse encompasses stance resources, i.e. attitudinal, writer-oriented features casting the writer's voice into the text and expressing his/her judgements, opinions and commitments, and engagement resources, i.e. alignment, reader-oriented features recognising the readers' presence, involving the audience in the argument and guiding them to intended interpretations (Hyland 2008: 5). Learning to use interactional metadiscourse appropriately is a major challenge for university students as they are socialised into an academic discourse community. This task is particularly demanding for L2 students



writing in English, as apart from learning to build an academic argument, they are writing in a language different from their mother tongue and accommodating Anglophone academic writing conventions, which are bound to differ from those of their original academic literacy. As a result, the rhetorical strategies L2 learners opt for to convey authorial stance and engage with readers tend to differ considerably from those employed by L1 British students and published Anglophone academic research (cf. Hyland 2002a; Park and Lee 2022).

Previous studies into interactional metadiscourse features in L2 learner academic writing are primarily quantitatively oriented. They compare tendencies in the frequency of use of the whole spectrum of interactional metadiscourse markers between L2 learners' texts and international journal articles (Liu and Zhang 2022), between L1 and L2 Master's theses (Lee and Casal 2014), between high-rated and low-rated learner essays (Ho and Li 2018; Lee and Deakin 2016), and in successful L2 learner writing across disciplines (Yoon and Römer 2020). Some investigations have explored stance markers, focusing primarily on self-mention (Çandarlı, Bayyurt and Marti 2015; Samraj 2008; Zhao and Liu 2021) and hedges and boosters (Malá 2022; Qiu and Ma 2019; Wang and Zeng 2021; Wu and Paltridge 2021). However, engagement has attracted considerably less scholarly attention, and very few studies explore functions of different types of engagement markers (reader-reference, appeals to shared knowledge, questions and directives) in learner discourse. Even so, previous research into published academic discourse (e.g. Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2021; Hyland 2001; Hyland and Jiang 2016; Myers 1989) has shown convincingly that engagement features reflect politeness considerations and play a key role in enhancing persuasion in academic writing. For instance, Swales et al. (1998) and Hyland (2002c) have noted the rhetorical potential of directives to engage readers and direct their attention to aspects relevant to the progress of the argument. Hyland (2002b) has indicated that questions highlight the dialogic nature of academic writing as they allow writers to invoke explicitly the involvement of their readers in the discourse, addressing the perceptions, interests and needs of a potential audience. Several studies have shown that by binding together the writer and the reader as members of the same community the inclusive *we* creates a feeling of agreement, collegiality and solidarity and thus increases the persuasiveness of the text (Harwood 2005; Hyland 2008; Vassileva 1998). This points to a need for investigation into engagement markers in L2 learner academic discourse in order to deepen our understanding of the rhetorical development of L2 student writers, so allowing us to assist them more effectively in their efforts to make their claims and arguments more convincing.

This study explores engagement features in L2 (Czech) learner discourse as represented by Master's theses in the field of humanities. Engagement in English-medium discourse by Czech graduates is a new subject of study. The genre of the Master's thesis was chosen as it is "the most sustained and complex piece of academic writing" that graduate students undertake (Swales 2004: 99) and marks an important milestone in the process of students' partial socialisation into the academic writing conventions of their field. The purpose of the investigation is to study engagement in Czech students' English-medium Master's theses along three dimensions of analy-



sis: realisations, rhetorical functions and disciplinary variation. Previous research into individual engagement categories in Czech academic discourse (Sudková 2012; Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2020) and in English-medium research articles by Czech authors (Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2021, Kozubíková Šandová 2019) has shown that Czech authors tend to overuse or underuse some categories of engagement markers in comparison to L1 English writers. This has to a large extent been explained by differences between Czech academic discourse, which is characterised by a preference for a writer-oriented, depersonalised style (Čmejrková and Daneš 1997; Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2014), and Anglophone academic conventions, which favour a more reader-friendly attitude and a higher level of interactivity (Thompson 2001; Hyland 2005b). Yet Czech graduates' choices of engagement markers are likely to be affected not only by linguacultural variation, but also by the level of their socialisation into disciplinary academic writing conventions.

The aim of this study is to contribute to intercultural rhetoric research by exploring the influence of linguacultural background and level of expertise on the frequency of use, realisations and functions of engagement resources in Czech graduates' Master's theses. Metadiscourse categories will be compared across three disciplines — linguistics, literary studies and English language teaching (ELT) methodology — to establish whether students show awareness of the conventions for the use of these rhetorical features in their own discipline. This investigation combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the differences and similarities in the frequency of use, realisations and functions of engagement markers in English-medium L2 (Czech) Master's theses, L1 argumentative essays and L1 published research articles?
2. Is there variation in the use of engagement markers in academic texts representing the fields of linguistics, literary studies and ELT methodology?

2 METHOD AND DATA

2.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of engagement is based on Hyland's (2005a) interactional metadiscourse framework. It draws on the modified model of engagement suggested by Hyland and Jiang (2016) which classifies engagement markers into two broad categories according to how they modulate the distance between the participants in the interaction. The first category, 'proximity', refers to rhetorical devices creating a sense of alliance and solidarity between the writer and the audience. The second category, 'positioning', comprises rhetorical devices helping the writer to create involvement with readers, suggests intended interpretations and anticipates potential objections and alternative views.

The proximity category comprises two types of engagement markers:

- Reader mentions are typically realised by first-person inclusive pronouns and possessives (*we, us, our, one*), second person pronouns and possessives (*you, your*),



and the impersonal forms *one(s)* and *(the) reader*. They indicate reader involvement by representing the reader as a discourse participant sharing common values, views and positions with the writer. This study considers the two functions of reader reference identified by Dontcheva-Navrátilová (forthcoming): (1) community member, i.e. the writer refers to established practices and knowledge shared within a group, and (2) the ‘reader-in-the text’ (Thompson and Thetela 1995), i.e. the reader is positioned as an interested colleague following the argument presented in the text.

- Personal asides are writer comments, commonly included in parenthesis, which represent the writer’s subjective views on what has been said, thus creating a bond between the writer and the reader. However, personal asides are excluded from this study due to their low occurrence in academic discourse in general and learner writing in particular (cf. Zhao 2012; Yoon and Römer 2020) and a tendency to overlap with self-mention.

The positioning category encompasses three types of engagement markers:

- Appeals to shared knowledge assume in-group membership presupposing shared previous knowledge of circumstances, processes, practices and beliefs, which helps writers to seek the reader’s agreement with suggested claims and opinions. They comprise three categories: logical reasoning (e.g. *of course, obviously*), routine conditions (e.g. *normally, routinely*), and familiarity with tradition (*traditionally, commonly*).
- Directives convey direct address to the reader realised by imperatives (*suppose, note*), obligation modals (e.g. *must, should*) and predicative adjectives (e.g. *it is important to*). They instruct readers to perform three types of acts (Hyland 2002c): (i) textual acts invite readers to refer to another text or a different part of the text; (ii) physical acts give instructions to perform an action in the real world; and (iii) cognitive acts guide readers towards an intended interpretation of the argument.
- Questions open a dialogue with the reader; their rhetorical function is to focus the reader’s attention on the focal points in the writer’s argument.

The analysis of the selected four engagement features (reader reference, appeals to shared knowledge, directives and questions) in this study combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis was used to identify the frequency of occurrence of engagement markers across the three corpora. Qualitative analysis was employed to establish the context-specific rhetorical functions of the various types of engagement markers.

2.2 CORPORA

This investigation into engagement features in L2 academic discourse is carried out on a specialised learner corpus comprising 48 English-medium Master’s degree theses (MT corpus) by Czech university graduate students majoring in English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts or Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. All Master’s theses were defended in the period 2010–2018,

the L1 of their authors is Czech and they were graded 'A' ('Excellent'/'Merit'), which allows me to assume that they represent a high standard of Czech graduates' writing. The MT corpus represents equally three disciplines: linguistics, literature studies, and ELT methodology (16 theses per discipline). The texts of Master's theses were cleaned, i.e. all citations, examples, tables, charts and references were removed, so that only the author's own discourse was subjected to linguistic analysis. The modified corpus totals 948,000 words; the individual disciplines are represented as follows: linguistics: 260,000, literature studies: 328,000, ELT methodology: 360,000.

Two reference corpora were used for the purposes of the contrastive analysis. The first reference corpus — a selection from the *British Academic Written English Corpus* (BAWE_LLC) — was used to identify cross-linguacultural differences in learner academic discourse (native British-English students vs non-native Czech students). The second reference corpus — the *Research Articles Corpus* (RA_LLM) — comprises research articles published in peer-reviewed international academic journals by Anglophone authors (judging from their names and affiliations). Contrastive analysis of the MT and RA_LLM corpus was employed to reveal variation along the expertise dimension (novice writers vs experienced writers). To ensure comparability, maximally similar criteria were applied in the compilation of all three corpora following the principles of *tertium comparationis* (Connor and Moreno 2005). The texts of the reference corpora have undergone the same cleaning procedure as the MT corpus.

The BAWE_LLC corpus comprises 197 assignments graded 'Merit' and 'Distinction' written by British university students in the period 2004–2007. Since only students with L1 British English were selected, these essays can be seen as representing L1 learner discourse at a similar level of proficiency as that of Czech Master's theses writers. Comparability between the MT and the BAWE_LLC corpus along the discipline dimension was ensured by selection of 197 argumentative essays representing similar disciplines as in the MT corpus, i.e. linguistics, English literature and comparative American studies. Thus, the BAWE_LLM corpus, which totals 491,000 words, may be seen as an 'analogue' corpus, i.e. a corpus which is as near as possible in terms of genre and discipline (Tribble 2002; Flowerdew 2015) to the MT corpus.

The RA_LLM corpus includes single-authored research articles by Anglophone scholars published in the period 2010–2018. Comparability with the MT corpus was ensured by selection of 36 articles from journals representing the same disciplines as those included in the MT corpus (12 articles per discipline, four per journal): for linguistics, *Discourse & Communication*, *Journal of Pragmatics* and *Applied Linguistics*; for literature, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, *New Literary History* and *SEL: Studies in English Literature*; and for ELT methodology, *Language and Education*, *Language Teaching Research* and *Language Learning*. Despite the differences in genre, length and intended audience, research articles and Master's theses seem to show "significant areas of overlap in lexico-grammar and rhetorical functions" (Flowerdew 2015: 60); thus, the RA_LLM corpus may be seen as an adequate reference corpus for the purposes of this research. The overall corpus wordcount is 243,000 words, split across the disciplines as follows: linguistics: 77,000, literature studies: 83,000, ELT methodology: 83,000.

The composition of the learner MT corpus and the two reference L1 corpora is presented in Table 1.





Corpus	Texts	Wordcount	Disciplines
MT corpus	48	948,000	linguistics, literature studies, ELT methodology
BAWE corpus	197	491,000	linguistics, literature studies, comp. American studies
RAAs corpus	36	243,000	linguistics, literature studies, ELT methodology

TABLE 1. Composition of the MT, BAWE_LLC and RA_LLM corpora

The *SketchEngine* software (Kilgarriff et al. 2004) was used to build and annotate the corpora. As is common in contrastive corpus-based studies, differences in wordcount between the three corpora were resolved by normalisation to occurrences per 10,000 words. While differences in size and genre between the MT and the reference corpora might have a certain impact on the results, I believe that the analysis will reveal tendencies that could be verified by future research.

2.3 PROCEDURE

The *SketchEngine* corpus tool was used to search for occurrences of engagement markers, i.e. reader reference, appeals to shared knowledge, directives and questions. The hits in all three corpora were checked in context to verify that they perform the target metadiscourse function. It was verified that only inclusive first-person plural pronominal forms (*we, our, us*) were taken into consideration as reader reference markers (cf. Harwood 2005). Obligation modals (*must, should, need, have to, ought to*) were also considered in context to verify that they perform the function of directives. As to questions, close reading was necessary to eliminate research questions which do not function as metadiscourse markers.

All engagement markers were coded according to the taxonomies of realisations and functional classifications as presented in Section 2.1 above. While comparison of realisation types was carried out across the three corpora, analysis of cross-disciplinary differences was limited to the MT and RA_LLM corpora, as the BAWE selection comprises similar, but not identical disciplines. The statistical significance of differences was determined by application of the non-parametric log-likelihood statistical test (Rayson et al. 2004), where the significance level was set at the standard value of <0.05 (very low p-values are represented as <0.001).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the quantitative analysis of engagement features across the three corpora are summarised in Table 2.¹ The significance of the differences between the corpora as identified by the log-likelihood statistical test are presented in Table 3. The results show that overall variation in the frequency of occurrence of engagement features is significant across the MT and the RA_LLM corpora (p-value <0.001) and the RA_LLM and the BAWE_LLC corpora (p-value <0.001), while the difference between

¹ Starting from Table 2 on, the terms 'raw' and 'pttw' stand for absolute and relative frequencies (per ten thousand words).



Engagement markers	MT corpus		BAWE_LLC corpus		RA_LLM corpus	
	raw	pttw	raw	pttw	raw	pttw
<i>Reader reference</i>	1,489	15.7	1,087	22.1	650	26.7
<i>Shared knowledge</i>	1,770	18.6	842	17.0	418	17.1
<i>Questions</i>	87	0.9	137	2.8	126	5.1
<i>Directives</i>	1,205	12.6	393	8.0	271	11.2
Total	4,551	47.8	2,459	50.1	1,465	60.1

TABLE 2. Frequency of engagement categories in the MT, BAWE_LLC and RA_LLM corpora

Corpora	MT vs BAWE		MT vs RA		BAWE vs RA	
	LL-G ²	p-value	LL-G ²	p-value	LL-G ²	p-value
<i>Reader reference</i>	72.5116	<0.001	118.9419	<0.001	14.3343	<0.001
<i>Shared knowledge</i>	4.1749	0.04	2.3140	0.128	0.0026	0.95
<i>Questions</i>	1.0341	0.30	152.1923	<0.001	24.6126	<0.001
<i>Directives</i>	68.2377	<0.001	1293.638	<0.001	17.2357	<0.001
Engagement markers	2.8607	0.09	55.5445	<0.001	31.2252	<0.001

TABLE 3. Significance of differences across the corpora (log-likelihood statistical test)

the MT and BAWE_LLC corpora is not statistically significant (p-value 0.09). This suggests that in academic discourse level of expertise seems to be a more important variable than linguacultural background.

Two engagement categories — reader reference and directives — show significant variation across all three corpora. Reader reference shows the lowest frequency of occurrence in the MT corpus, which may stem from advice to opt for impersonality and objectivity as provided by academic writing instruction and style manuals (e.g. Bennett 2009). Other factors affecting the less frequent use of reader reference by Czech graduates may include their rhetorical immaturity and the specificity of writer-reader interaction in the examination context of the Master's thesis, where the primary reader is an examiner, whom students may not easily position as an in-group member sharing the same values and understandings. Unlike novice writers, expert writers rely extensively on inclusive *we* to build a proximity relation with the reader, which is confirmed by the very high frequency of reader reference in the RA_LLM corpus. The BAWE corpus is somewhere between the MT and the RA_LLM corpora in terms of frequency of reader reference, as L1 English novice writers differ from L1 publishing scholars in terms of expertise and from MT writers in terms of linguacultural background.

By contrast, directives are most frequent in the MT corpus, while the BAWE corpus shows by far the lowest rate. As the subsequent analysis will show, the high rate of directives in the MT corpus is due to a large extent to use of the textual directive *see* to indicate intertextual reference. This seems to be a sign of transference from Czech academic discourse, where the use of the imperative *viz (see)* in parenthetical ref-



ferences to previous research is standard practice (cf. Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2021). The low frequency of directives in BAWE_LLC may stem from the less frequent use of inter- and intra-textual reference, as well as from the limited length of the text, where the need to guide the reader through the argumentation chain is less pressing.

These results differ somewhat from the findings of Lee and Casal's (2014) analysis of reader reference and directives in English and Spanish theses in engineering: they found that Spanish graduates use these engagement features significantly more frequently than L1 English authors. Following Lafuente-Millán (2014), Lee and Casal explain this intercultural difference by a preference on the part of Spanish authors for positive politeness strategies, in contrast to a preference on the part of Anglophone authors for negative politeness. Moreover, the divergence between my results and those of Lee and Casal (2014) may be due to disciplinary variation.

The second positioning feature, questions, shows significant variation when the RA_LLM corpus is compared to the learner corpora, where its incidence is rare. This suggests that this explicitly dialogic feature allowing writers to bring key points of the argument to the attention of the reader tends to be associated with rhetorical maturity and expertise. Due to their relatively low rate and lack of functional variation, questions will not be discussed in the subsequent detailed analysis of engagement features.

The only engagement marker that does not show significant variation across any of the corpora is appeals to shared knowledge. It is the most frequent type of engagement marker in the MT corpus and the second in frequency in the L1 corpora. This highlights the centrality of this positioning feature in academic discourse, as it allows writers to assume shared knowledge, values and beliefs with the reader and thus to seek acceptance for suggested arguments and claims. The lack of differences across the corpora may also be due to the relatively small number of adverbs, adjectives and set phrases that typically realise shared knowledge appeal, which helps learners to notice and use them.

In the following sections I will present and discuss consecutively the results of the contrastive analysis of the engagement categories included in my analytical framework.

3.1 READER REFERENCE

A contrastive analysis of reader reference features indicates that in all the corpora proximity is established primarily by the inclusive *we* in the agentive subject position and the possessive form *our* (Table 4). However, L1 writers use this strategy reflecting politeness considerations (Myers 1989; Harwood 2005) considerably more extensively than Czech graduates — in the case of expert authors the inclusive *we* has twice as many instances than in the MT corpus. This difference is not only quantitative. As Table 5 shows, the corpora also differ in the distribution of the functions of inclusive *we*: in the MT corpus the community member and the reader-in-the-text functions are equally represented (49.6% vs. 50.4%), while in the L1 corpora the reader-in-the-text function is more prominent (77.5% in the RA_LLM corpus and 63% in the BAWE_LLC corpus).



Reader mention	MT corpus		BAWE_LLC corpus		RA_LLM corpus	
	raw	pttw	raw	pttw	raw	pttw
<i>we/our/us</i>	1,005	10.6	889	18.1	537	22.1
<i>you/your</i>	47	0.5	54	1.1	24	1.0
<i>one/reader</i>	437	4.6	144	2.9	89	3.6

TABLE 4. Reader reference features across the sub-corpora (pttw)

Inclusive <i>we/us/our</i>	Community member		Reader-in-the-text	
	raw	%	raw	%
MT corpus	499	49.6	506	50.4
BAWE_LLC corpus	329	37.0	560	63.0
RA_LLM corpus	121	22.5	416	77.5

TABLE 5. Rhetorical functions of inclusive *we/us/our* across the sub-corpora (in per cent)

The more extensive use of the community member function, i.e. the less powerful function (cf. Tang and John's (1999) representative role), suggests that Czech graduates tend to create the feeling of solidarity and agreement with the reader by claiming shared in-group membership; however, the group with which the reader is invited to identify is typically fuzzy and general, such as people in general (1), readers of literary texts or speakers of English. This is also indicated by the most frequent collocates of *our*, which in the MT corpus are rather general, e.g. *minds, culture, everyday language, experience, understanding*, while in the RA_LLM corpus they are primarily research oriented, e.g. *data, research, research questions/findings, understanding, work*.

- (1) Sure, **we** experience **our** memories as limited — **we** do not and physically cannot remember everything that flows through our consciousness, but this is not because there is a certain space that can “house” only a given amount of content. (MT_LIN_04)

The use of the second person (*you, your*) and indefinite reference forms (*one, reader*) to refer to people in general, as in (2) and (3), has a similar function, although general reference forms lack the solidarity dimension prominent in the inclusive first-person forms. Similarly to experienced writers, Czech graduates tend to use considerably more indefinite reference forms than second-person forms, thus showing awareness of the expected level of formality in academic writing. An additional reason for the low incidence of second-person pronouns may be their potential to imply a distance between the reader and the writer rather than creating a bond between them (Hyland and Jiang 2016; Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2020). The BAWE_LLC corpus displays the lowest rate of indefinite forms and the highest rate of second-person pronouns, which seems to indicate a lower degree of formality. This may stem from the composition of the corpus, as apart from graduate assignments it comprises the work of undergraduate students, who might lack full awareness of academic writing conventions.



- (2) *Following CLL, or humanistic techniques (Richards, and Rodgers, 2001), I believe it is extremely difficult to learn when **you** feel resistance or anxiety in the environment (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). (BAWE_LIN_150)*
- (3) ***One** can expect a theoretically and empirically grounded incorporation of time as it works in educational contexts to profoundly affect ISLA both as a field of inquiry and as a field of practice. (RA_MET_08)*

The more powerful reader-in-the-text function, which positions the reader as a competent peer co-participating in the research and following the flow of argumentation (14), is highly prominent in the RA_LLM corpus. It is typically expressed by the inclusive *we* collocating with cognitive and research verbs, e.g. *we may hypothesize/assume/consider, (as) we can/may/will see, we see/saw, we observe, we may call*. This function is also present in Czech graduates' text, where it tends to indicate intratextual connections (5) expressed primarily by *(as) we can/will/have see(n)*.

- (4) *In Extract 13 **we** find one of the rare occasions in the interview when the IE produces a denial in response to an IR turn: As noted above, in this interview there are mainly IE confirmation responses to IR turns. (RA_LIN_01)*
- (5) *As **we** will see later on in my analyses, it is in this sense that Berger later on uses the erotic as something that drives his characters despite any social circumstances. (MT_LIT_02)*

Taking in consideration that Dontcheva-Navrátilová (forthcoming) has shown that Czech scholars (linguists) publishing in English use the reader-in-the-text function in a similar way to L1 writers, its more limited occurrence in the MT corpus cannot be attributed to linguacultural variation; rather, it may be motivated by the lower level of rhetorical maturity of the students and the examination context in which the Master's thesis is set.

3.2 APPEALS TO SHARED KNOWLEDGE

The potential of appeals to shared knowledge to position the reader as a colleague sharing the same disciplinary knowledge as the writer (cf. Hyland 2001: 566) seems to explain the lack of significant frequency variation in the incidence of the three functional categories of this engagement marker (Table 6). The existing differences concern the slightly higher occurrence of logical reasoning markers in the longer research-based genres of the Master's thesis and the research article in comparison to BAWE essays, the more prominent presence of familiarity and tradition markers in the learner corpora in comparison to published research and, within the barely represented category of routine condition, the slightly higher occurrence of these markers in research articles.

The realizations of the three categories of appeals to shared knowledge across the corpora are also very similar, although there are some differences in frequency of occurrence of individual items. In the MT corpus the three most frequent realizations of logical reasoning engagement markers (i.e. more than 1.0 occurrences per 10,000 words) are *obviously* (2.0), *apparently* (1.9) and *of course* (1.1). In the BAWE_LLM cor-

Appeals to shared knowledge	MT corpus		BAWE_LL_C corpus		RA_LLM corpus	
	raw	pttw	raw	pttw	raw	pttw
<i>Logical reasoning</i>	717	7.6	311	6.3	177	7.3
<i>Familiarity and tradition</i>	974	10.3	509	10.3	208	8.5
<i>Routine conditions</i>	79	0.8	22	0.4	33	1.3

TABLE 6. Appeals to shared knowledge across the sub-corpora (pttw)

pus these are *obviously* (1.8), *apparently* (1.6) and *evidently* (1.1), while in the RA_LLM corpus they are *apparently* (2.1), *of course* (1.8) and *evidently* (1.4). Probably the most important difference between the MT corpus and the L1 corpora is that Czech graduates tend to place logical reasoning markers in sentence initial position, as in (6). While in the MT corpus reasoning markers in initial position account for 15 per cent of all instances of this category, in the RA_LLM corpus they amount to 8 per cent and in the BAWE_LL_C corpus only to 1 per cent. The preference for initially placed logical reasoning markers in Czech graduates' theses may be motivated by academic writing instruction and the greater visibility of engagement markers in initial position, which makes them easier to notice and use.

- (6) *Obviously, teaching language skills requires adopting different procedures than teaching language systems.* (MT_MET_12)

Familiarity and tradition is the most frequent type of appeal to shared knowledge, and it shows similar realizations in all the corpora. The most frequent items assuming familiarity with general understandings and ways of doing things on the part of the reader are *common(ly)*, *typical(ly)* and *traditional(ly)*, as in (7).

- (7) *It is **commonly** believed by historians that the first 20 Africans in America came as indentured servants, like the white servants.* (BAWE_CAS_055)

The rare occurrences of routine conditions markers tend to be realised by the adverbs *regularly* and *routinely* (8). Their more frequent occurrence in research articles seems to reflect the assumption that readers will be familiar with disciplinary practices and the routine conditions under which research is carried out.

- (8) *Further, researchers **regularly** ignore actual data patterns, in the form of descriptive statistics or effect sizes, focusing instead on reductionist “significant or not” decisions that show nothing about the size, strength, or importance of findings.* (RA_MET_11)

3.3 DIRECTIVES

The use of directives as engagement markers varies across the corpora in terms of both preferred realisations and functions performed (Tables 7 and 8).

In terms of realisation, the most prominent category in all the corpora is obligation modals, e.g. *should*, *must*, *need to* (9). This conforms with Hyland and Jiang's (2016) finding indicating obligation modals as the preferred realisation pattern across



Directives	MT corpus		BAWE_LLC corpus		RA_LLM corpus	
	raw	pttw	raw	pttw	raw	pttw
<i>Imperatives</i>	335	3.3	26	0.5	96	3.9
<i>Obligation modals</i>	584	6.2	288	5.9	151	6.2
<i>Predicative adjectives</i>	286	3.1	79	1.6	24	1.0

TABLE 7. Realizations of directives across the sub-corpora (pttw)

Directives	MT corpus		BAWE_LLC corpus		RA_LLM corpus	
	raw	%	raw	%	raw	%
<i>Textual acts</i>	314	26.0	22	5.6	88	32.5
<i>Cognitive acts</i>	899	74.0	371	94.4	181	67.5
<i>Physical acts</i>	2	0.2	0	0.0	2	0.7
Total	1,205	100	393	100	271	100

TABLE 8. Functions of directives across the sub-corpora (pttw)

numerous disciplines and with Lee and Deakin's (2016) results based on an analysis of L2 (Chinese) student writing. In my corpus, the predominance of obligation modals might be explained by the interpretative character of the disciplines — the writer uses this rhetorical strategy to position the reader as an in-group member sharing the same set of assumptions and beliefs and thus prepares the ground for acceptance of the suggested views and claims.

- (9) *Thus — and this forms the first conclusion of this paper — in discussing the construction of the case study, we **need to** be acutely aware of the politics of the case study.*
(RA_LIT_07)

However, Hyland and Jiang (2016) point out that the use of modals has shown a decreasing tendency over the last 50 years, while the use of directives is on the increase. Recent research (Hyland 2002c; Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2021) has confirmed this tendency, reporting imperatives as the predominant form of realisation of directives in academic writing. This change may be related to the level of imposition and face threatening that the two forms imply (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987). By positioning the reader to see things in a way determined by the writer, directives confer greater authority on the writer (cf. Hyland 2001), which is most apparent in the case of obligation modals (Hyland and Jiang 2016). Imperatives, which are second in the frequency category of directives in the MT and RA_LLM corpora, tend to imply less imposition: firstly, because they are considered a useful rhetorical strategy for conveying knowledge and instructions to the reader in a concise and clear way (Swales et al. 1998), and secondly, because the most prominent textual and cognitive directives, e.g. *see*, *note*, *let*, *consider* (10, 11, 13, 16) carry less threat to the reader's face as they serve text-orientation and highlighting purposes (cf. Hyland and Jiang 2016). One of the most prominent patterns of imperative directives in the MT corpus is *let us* (11) employed to indicate a change of perspective; this pattern is scarcely used in the L1

English corpora. However, I believe that more than indicating intercultural variation, this reflects the influence of the writing style of textbooks, which is characterised by frequent occurrence of the inclusive *let us* pattern (Hyland 2002c).

- (10) *Apart from earlier research (see Vaněk 2009), much of this work builds on the ‘working hypotheses’ (relative to the language learning behaviour of deaf individuals) that I have developed over the years of working with the deaf from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the USA. (MT_MET_12)*
- (11) *First, **let us** look at a novel metaphor from the Lakovian perspective. (MT_LIN_08)*

The low occurrence of imperatives in the BAWE_LLC corpus is likely to result from the scarce need for intratextual reference due to the length of the text and the lesser occurrence of intertextual references expressed by textual directives.

Predicative adjectives are most prominent in the MT corpus (12), where they are comparable in frequency with directives, while in the L1 corpora their incidence is considerably lower, especially in the RA_LLM corpus. This kind of directive practically functions as an emphatic drawing the reader’s attention to certain points in the argument, thus facilitating text processing (cf. Lafuente-Millán 2014). Its higher frequency in the learner corpora might be explained by the formulaic character of the phrases, which makes them easy to learn and use. The prominence of predicative adjectives in the MT corpus may reflect the influence of Czech academic discourse, where predicative adjectives controlling an infinitive clause are common (cf. Dontcheva-Navrátilová 2021).

- (12) *To better understand what Jameson, a critic of postmodernism, means by the category of cognitive mapping, **it is necessary to** look at his understanding of postmodernism as such. (MT_LIT_02)*

As to the functions of directives, the most salient type across all the corpora is clearly the directive expressing cognitive acts (e.g. 13, 14, 15). Although this is the function implying the highest degree of imposition, it shows the highest ratio in all the corpora, as the interpretative character of knowledge-making in the soft disciplines forces writers to try hard to guide readers through the argument chain and steer them to conclusions in order to make proposed views and claims more persuasive. The extremely high ratio of cognitive directives in the BAWE_LLM corpus seems to be counterbalanced by the scarce use of the other two functions of directives in this corpus.

- (13) ***Consider** the similarity between Lincoln’s chosen course, the rightness and purity of the goal, and Bush’s patient justice and rightness of the cause. (MT_LIN_01)*
- (14) ***It is important to** note that by rejecting the specific names for historical details the narrator separates them from their time and place and assigns to his story a timeless quality. (BAWE_ENG_110)*
- (15) *Talk is situated (Alexander 2001) and as such these contextual factors **must** be acknowledged and recognised in an exploration of tutors’ dialogic stance. (RA_MET_03)*



Directives performing textual acts are prominent in the RA_LLM and the MT corpora, but their occurrence in the BAWE_LLC corpus is considerably lower. This stems from the shorter length of the essays, which requires less intratextual reference as well as fewer references to previous research. However, establishing dialogical engagement with previous research by intertextual connection is indispensable to persuasion in the Master's thesis and the research article. Like publishing authors, Czech graduates use textual directives to relate their work to previous research in the literature review, method and data and discussion sections of Master's theses (10) and to indicate visuals and examples in the results section (16). The more extensive use of textual directives in the RA_LLM seems to stem from the higher number of citations that publishing authors tend to use. This seems to reflect level of expertise variation (cf. Li and Zhang 2021) and may be further motivated by cultural factors, as Dontcheva-Navrátilová (2014, 2016) reports that Czech scholars publishing in English tend to use half the number of citations used by Anglophone scholars.

- (16) While on the surface some of these items may not seem inherently tied to a rhetoric of uncertainty and doubt, closer inspection of concordance lines and texts (see Table 3) reveals the rhetorical function each serves in the discourse. (RA_LIN_04)

The occurrence of physical act directives is insignificant in all the corpora, which is in conformity with the general tendency in soft disciplines (Hyland and Jiang 2016).

3.4 CROSS-DISCIPLINARY VARIATION

As Table 9 shows, variation across the three disciplines — linguistics, literary studies and ELT methodology — in the RA_LLM and the MT corpora is considerable. In the RA_LLM corpus, the most extensive use of engagement is found in literary studies research articles, ELT methodology research articles come second, and linguistics research articles show the most limited use of this rhetorical feature. This seems to stem from the highly interpretative character of literary studies and in particular from an extensive use of reader reference, as literary scholars conventionally employ the inclusive *we* to refer to themselves and the audience as the reader. ELT methodology and linguistics articles tend to be based on data analysis and case studies and therefore rely more heavily on empirical evidence, which might account for the somewhat lower occurrence of engagement markers in comparison to literary studies research articles.

In the MT corpus the situation is reversed: while theses in the field of linguistics tend to overuse engagement markers, literature and ELT methodology theses are marked by severe underuse of these rhetorical devices in comparison to RA_LLM corpus. This may be tentatively associated with the more focused attention to language features that students writing linguistics theses may be expected to pay, which at the same time makes them overuse markers that they consider important for enhancing the persuasiveness of their discourse. The underuse of engagement markers in literature and ELT methodology theses may be attributed to a certain shyness on the part of the students to engage explicitly with the reader as extensively as publishing authors

Engagement markers	MT corpus			RA_LLM corpus		
	LING	LIT	ELT MET	LING	LIT	ELT MET
<i>Reader-reference</i>	18.9	7.7	6.3	13.1	35.0	18.0
<i>Shared knowledge</i>	19.1	22.9	5.6	15.5	21.2	14.7
<i>Questions</i>	1.9	1.1	0.1	0.0	14.0	1.2
<i>Directives</i>	15.4	6.5	16.4	9.8	5.1	19.1
Total	54.5	38.3	28.4	38.4	75.3	53.0

TABLE 9. Cross-disciplinary variation in engagement across the MT and RA_LLM corpora

do, as engagement markers are considerably more prominent in research articles in these disciplines than in linguistics. Even so, the presence of cross-disciplinary variation in the theses of Czech graduates indicates that they have an awareness of academic writing in their own discipline.

A closer look into variation across the different types of engagement markers reveals that reader references show the most striking differences across all the disciplines. As already mentioned, divergence in the use of reader reference in literary studies texts is huge (7.7 in the MT corpus vs 35.0 in the RA_LLM corpus), as Czech graduates tend to employ impersonal constructions and avoid use of inclusive *we*, probably overgeneralising academic instructions and restraining from use of the exclusive *we* under the influence of Czech academic writing conventions. ELT methodology and linguistics theses also diverge from the way reader reference is used in the RA_LLM corpus, the former showing underuse and the latter overuse of reader reference. Variation in shared knowledge markers is less substantial in linguistics and literary studies theses displaying a tendency to overuse this type of engagement. However, ELT methodology theses show a striking underuse of shared knowledge markers, which may be explained by the adoption of a more distanced stance. While generally rare, questions are relatively frequent in literary research articles. Bearing in mind that the primary readers of the thesis are examiners, it is probably not surprising that students fail to adopt this openly dialogic attitude. Finally, directives are marked by overuse in linguistics and literary studies theses and underuse in ELT methodology theses, but the differences are considerably smaller than in the other types of engagement markers. Overall, it may be concluded that the way Czech graduates engage with the reader in their Master's theses differs from the discipline specific conventions in Anglophone academic discourse, which may be attributed not only to their linguacultural background but also to their novice-writer status.

4 CONCLUSION

This corpus-based study has explored the influence of linguacultural background and level of expertise on the frequency of use, realisations and functions of engagement resources in Czech graduates' English-medium Master's theses by comparing them to L1 English learner and published academic discourse. The results of the contrastive analysis have shown that while there is significant variation in engagement along the



linguacultural background and level of expertise dimensions, overall level of expertise seems to be a more important variable than linguacultural background.

Czech graduates' Master's theses employ the whole spectrum of engagement markers; however, it was found that they tend to underuse or overuse significantly most types of engagement resources in comparison with the L1 English writers. The only category of engagement which Czech students employ similarly to L1 writers is appeals to shared knowledge, which attests its key role in establishing solidarity with readers. Reader reference and directives are the engagement categories showing the most significant differences. Czech graduates tend to underuse reader reference, which may stem from an effort to display impersonality and objectivity as a result of academic writing instructions combined with the influence of the distanced style of writing characteristic of Czech academic discourse (Čmejrková and Daneš 1997). The overuse of directives may be tentatively interpreted as a 'compensation' strategy students use to enhance reader engagement by positioning the reader as an in-group member sharing the writer's assumptions and beliefs. Overall, it can be concluded that Czech graduates prefer to rely on positioning features and underestimate the role of proximity as they strive to make their discourse more persuasive. An additional factor affecting students' choices might be the examination context in which the Master's thesis is set, as the primary reader of the text is an examiner, whom the students might struggle to position as an in-group member sharing the same values and understandings.

The analysis has also shown that the students have an awareness of disciplinary conventions in academic writing as the use of engagement resources varies across the linguistics, literary studies and ELT methodology theses. However, ways in which Czech students use engagement resources differ considerably from their use in L1 English research articles in the same disciplines. While linguistics Master's theses overuse all the categories of engagement, probably as a development stage in the acquisition of these rhetorical devices, literary studies and ELT methodology underuse by far the most of the engagement categories. This indicates that raising students' awareness of engagement resources as one of the linguistics aspects of academic writing may help Czech graduates improve their rhetorical skills.

To conclude, this study has shown that writer-reader interaction in L2 Master's theses is affected by complex contextual factors, comprising the students' original literacy, Anglophone writing conventions, previous writing experience and academic writing instruction, as well as the intended audience of the text. The findings of this study may inform the design of resources that can be used in university writing courses to draw the attention of graduate students to the use of engagement resources across disciplinary and cultural contexts. Of course, the results of this investigation should not be generalised, as they take into consideration only one L2 linguacultural background and three disciplines. They should be verified by further intercultural rhetoric studies in different linguacultural contexts and disciplines.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Czech Science Foundation grant 21-12150S *Intercultural variation in writer-reader interaction in English-medium academic discourse by Czech and Anglophone novice writers*.

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