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Stance and Engagement in Korean Secondary EFL Students' NEAT Writing*

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The present study explored the use of stance and engagement by Korean secondary EFL students in practice writing for the National English Ability Test (NEAT). The research questions that guide this study are: (1) how do they use stance and engagement in their writing? (2) Does the use of stance and engagement differ according to gender, academic level (middle vs. high school) or major academic branch (liberal arts vs. science)? Two hundred and sixteen NEAT practice compositions written by middle and high school students constitute the corpus of the study. These essays were analyzed based on Hyland's (2005b) model of stance and engagement by employing *Antconc 3.2.3*. Post-interviews were also conducted in order to reveal the rationale behind the participants' use of metadiscourse features. The results indicate that Korean secondary EFL students used more stance and engagement features than both native English speaking academic writers and Korean advanced EFL writers. There were no significant differences according to gender. Regarding academic level, self-mentions and reader pronouns were used to a significantly higher degree by middle school students than by high school students. For major academic branch, hedges were used more by science majors, while directives were used more by liberal arts majors.

**[metadiscourse/second language writing/NEAT/corpus analysis/
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I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is often considered to be a solo activity that is done by a writer sitting alone with a pen and paper or keyboard and computer, giving vent to feelings and putting forth assertions. According to this view, a written product is solely writer-oriented, but in fact writing also entails interaction among writers and readers, because all forms of writing have imagined readers. From academic writing, with its formal rules and formats, to personal writing such as that recorded in diaries and postings on social network services (SNS) such as *facebook* and *metoday*, all written products are shaped for some audience. The former may be read by colleagues, students, and co-workers, while the latter may be read by friends, unspecified members of the public, or possibly by the writers themselves. Either explicitly or implicitly, writers take into consideration the perspective of potential readers as they compose texts. As a result, complex combinations of diverse linguistic features are fully utilized by writers in order to interact with these predicted readers within a text, just as speakers employ a number of means such as intonation, facial expressions, and body language when using their own voices and bodies to communicate orally.

In a broad sense, over time the boundary marking the distinction between written and spoken discourse has eroded. As Paltridge (2006) has shown, the characteristics once thought to distinguish these two forms of discourse, such as grammatical intricacy, lexical density, nominalization, explicitness, and contextualization, are to a certain degree no longer valid. Whether spoken or written, what is important for successful communication is language in use for successful communication. Through the use of metadiscourse, a successful communication can be realized. Hyland (2005a) claims that "metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating" (p. 3). In other words, metadiscourse resources can be defined as linguistic devices that function rhetorically in a communicative context.

If we recognize and embrace the perspective that writing entails an interaction between a writer and a reader, we see that various metadiscourse resources should be fully utilized in order to enable successful communication in a written text; they make a piece of writing reader-friendly, allowing writers to direct their readers according to the intended flow of the discourse. Therefore, it is crucial that second language learners as well as native speakers learn to employ and understand metadiscourse, not only to enable interaction within a text, but also to facilitate the effectiveness of meaning delivery within persuasive written discourse.

In recent years, the effect and importance of metadiscourse in EFL education has been acknowledged all over the world. Studies have been conducted not only in the inner circle, but also in the outer and expanding circles in places such as Hong Kong (e.g., Hyland,

2004), Malaysia (e.g., Heng & Tan, 2010), Japan (e.g, MacIntyre, 2010), and Iran (e.g., Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Heshemi, Khodabakhshzade & Shirvan, 2012). To date, however, only few studies of metadiscourse in second language writing have been conducted in Korea. For instance, C. K. Kim (2009) compared argumentative texts written in English by Korean university students with argumentative texts from a British newspaper, and C. J. Uhm, J. A. Kim, H. Nam and Y. Oh (2009) conducted a comparative analysis of metadiscourse use between native English writers and Korean English writers in academic writing on applied linguistics. These two studies have some limitations: The former focused little on the aspect of engagement markers while the subjects of the latter were not students.

Additionally, little research has been conducted on National English Ability Test (NEAT). NEAT is expected to be a nationwide standard, which suggests that it could be an appropriate instrument for studying and understanding the present state of affairs for students who study English at school, and that research findings garnered from studies using NEAT could be used to suggest pedagogical implications. In this sense, middle and high school students are ideal research subjects because they are supposed to take NEAT as a college entrance exam and for other purposes in the future. Nonetheless, no metadiscourse study has been conducted with them as participants.

Filling the aforementioned gaps, the present study aims to explicate the interactional aspects of written discourse used by Korean secondary EFL students in texts written for NEAT, aspects termed *stance* and *engagement* expressions in Hyland (2005b). Specifically, this study will address the following questions:

1. How do Korean EFL students use stance and engagement in their NEAT writing?
2. For Korean EFL writing, does usage differ according to the (1) gender, (2) academic level (middle and high school), or (3) major academic branch (liberal arts or science) of the student?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Concept of *Metadiscourse*

Metadiscourse, which was initially coined by Zellig Harris in 1959, is a common linguistic phenomenon which is normally used as "a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's or speaker's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 3). The concept is closely related to Halliday's descriptions of language functions and uses. In Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994;

Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999), language has three metafunctions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function. Among these three, studies of metadiscourse seem to focus more on the latter two functions since all metadiscourse (or metalanguage) is interpersonal, and metadiscourse is used in order to help readers to understand a text as the writer intends them to. The interpersonal function is defined as the use of language to encode interaction, allowing us to engage with others, to take on roles, and to express and understand evaluations and feelings. The textual function is defined as the use of language to organize the text itself, coherently relating what is said both to the world and to readers.

As Hu and Cao (2011) note, metadiscourse has attracted increasing attention in the past decade, especially from researchers focusing on scientific and scholarly writing (e.g. Abdi, 2002; Abdi, Rizi & Tavakoli, 2010; Adel, 2006; Dahl, 2004; Gillaerts & Van de Velde, 2010; Hyland, 2005a, 2005b; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Lindeberg, 2004; Peterlin, 2005). This attention has resulted from the recognition that academic writers do not merely propose ideas about their research in a vacuum but rather interact within a realm in which they and their colleagues are joint participants. This point of view can be further stretched to apply to second language learning and teaching. Endorsing this view of written text as embodying interaction between the writer and reader, Thompson (2001) argues that interaction can draw on both *interactive* and *interactional* resources. Interactive resources involve management of the flow of information and thus serve to guide readers through the content of the text, while interactional resources aim to involve readers in the argument or ethos of the text.

Hyland and Tse (2004) suggest a model of metadiscourse in academic text, shown in below in Table 1, in which metadiscourse represents the writer's awareness of the unfolding text as discourse. They classified metadiscourse into two categories: Interactive resources refer to features that set out to explicitly establish the writer's preferred interpretation, while interactional resources involve readers in the argument by alerting them to the author's perspective towards both propositional and the readers themselves. This model allows us to examine how writers engage their readers, shaping their propositions to create convincing, coherent text by making language choices in social contexts populated by readers, prior experiences, and other texts.

TABLE 1

A Model of Metadiscourse in Academic Texts

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive resources	help to guide reader through the text	
Transitions	express semantic relation between	in addition/but/thus/and

	main clauses	
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	finally/to conclude/my purpose here is to
Endophoric markers	refer 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
Interactional resources	involve the reader 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	can see/note that/you can see that
Self-mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I/we/my/our

(Hyland & Tse, 2004)

A new model of interaction in academic writing is suggested in Hyland (2005b), a representation of which appears below in Figure 1. As he points out, a range of linguistic features have been identified as contributing to the writer's projection of a stance toward the material referenced by the text, and, to a lesser extent, to the strategies employed to presuppose the active role of an addressee. He employs the terms *stance* and *engagement* rather than metadiscourse for this new model, with each term representing one class of interactional resources. He views stance as "an attitudinal dimension" and it "includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitment," while he defines engagement as "an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations" (p. 176).

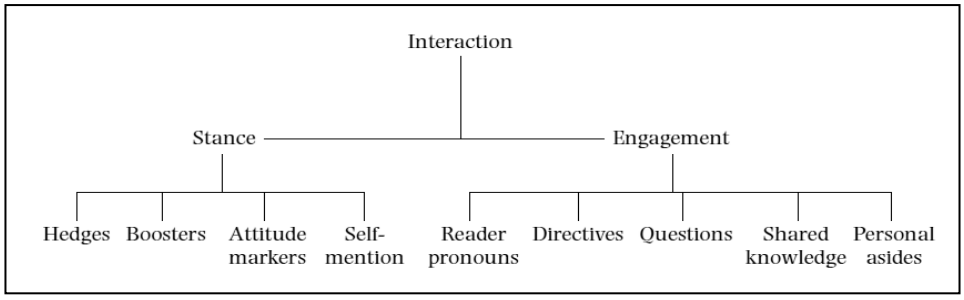

FIGURE 1 Key Resources of Academic Interaction (Hyland, 2005b)

As seen in Figure 1, Hyland's four elements of stance are *hedges, boosters, attitude markers*, and *self-mention*. In another study, he notes that hedges and boosters are communicative strategies for increasing or reducing the force of statements. Hedges like *possible, might*, and *perhaps* play an important role in weakening a claim made by the writer, maybe anticipating possible objections. In contrast, boosters such as *of course*, *obviously*, and *absolutely* help writers to express assurance and maintain a proposition confidently, representing a powerful claim about a state of affairs. Attitude markers such as *unfortunately, amazingly*, and *significantly* reveal the writer's evaluation of a proposition or other information included in the text, indicating surprise, obligation, agreement, importance, preference and so on (Hyland, 2004). Self-mention literally stands for the extent of author presence in terms of first person pronouns and possessives (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Words such as *I, my*, and *mine* are examples of self-mention.

In Hyland's model, engagement is divided into five different categories: *reader pronouns, personal asides, appeals to shared knowledge, directives*, and *questions*. Reader pronouns are one of the easiest ways to put readers into a text explicitly. Hyland (2005b) notes that the words *you* and *your* are actually the clearest way a writer can acknowledge the reader's presence. Personal asides allow writers to address readers directly by making a short interruption in an argument to comment on what has been said (Hyland, 2005b). Appeals to shared knowledge try to make a position of readers within the boundaries of disciplinary understanding (Hyland, 2005b) under the assumption that readers already have some knowledge about what is being said. Directives are the sentences that function as imperatives in a text or that embody obligational meaning. Even though it is said that directives function as textual acts, physical acts, and cognitive acts, what is important is that directives require the reader to act or think as the writer wishes. Hyland (2005b) further puts modal verbs of obligation such as *must, should*, and *ought to* into this category since they show the writer's opinion to be of importance. Questions are an excellent tactic of conversational involvement, inviting engagement and bringing the participant into a

place in which they are able to be led to the writer's point of view (Hyland, 2002). They can also catch a reader's attention or provide textual and mental space for thinking.

2. Previous Studies

Employing Hyland and Tse (2004)'s model as the analytical framework, C. K. Kim (2009) and C. J. Uhm et al. (2009) found that Korean EFL writers used fewer interactional resources (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions) than did native English speakers. Specifically, Korean L2 writers showed a tendency to use hedges more than other stance features, which may indicate a cultural inclination for learners to hesitate when maintaining an argument or anticipating an expected counterargument. It was noted in these studies that Korean writers rarely boosted their argumentation and that they seemed to be afraid to be attacked by readers who did not have the same point of view. These results matched those of Hyland's (2004) study, which revealed that the most frequent resource for Hong Kong doctoral and master students was hedges. The study also reported that least frequently employed was attitude markers. However, attitude markers were the second-most commonly used resource by Korean writers in C. J. Uhm et al. (2009) and the third-most commonly used in C. K. Kim (2009). Thus, no consistent results were found for the use of attitude markers.

Previously, metadiscourse has been studied and various classifications suggested (e.g., Hyland & Tse, 2004; Thomson, 2001; Vande Kopple, 1985). These classifications usually contain engagement markers as one category. However, Hyland (2005b) suggested a new model featuring five categories of engagement markers (reader pronouns, directives, questions, appeals to shared knowledge and personal aside), the advantage of which is to facilitate the investigation of how readers are summoned and engaged in a text by a writer, and to provide a detailed picture of this process. Taking advantage of this model in order to closely analyze interaction in texts, M. Park (2006) found that Korean students used engagement markers the most but they used interrogatives (questions) and imperatives (directives) comparatively rarely, which indicates that Korean students do not seem to have a clear concept of the interaction with readers that takes place in an English text. Some inappropriate uses of metadiscourse were detected as well.

A study conducted in Iran (Taki & Jafarpour, 2012) used Hyland's (2005b) model to present a detailed analysis of linguistic features occurring in articles from two different Persian academic disciplines (sociology and chemistry) in order to explore how similar they are to their English counterparts. A total of 120 articles from these two fields in the languages of Persian and English were analyzed, and the authors found that while stance features were used more in the Persian articles, engagement features were used more in the English ones. Specifically, hedges were used much more in the English sociology articles.

Similarly, other studies compared research articles written in English to articles published in Asian contexts in order to figure out language- or culture-specific influences. Lee (2011) examined 60 research articles from academic journals based on Hyland's model, half of which were published in the US and half in Japan. This study revealed that stance features appeared more frequently in articles published in the US, and that engagement features were more prevalent in articles published in Japan. Specifically, questions were plentiful in Japanese writing, while boosters were scarce—a fact likely due to the linguistic and rhetorical characteristics of Japanese writing, while the English articles featured an abundance of hedges. Hu and Cao (2011) examined 649 abstracts from the field of applied linguistics, setting out to determine whether hedging and boosting strategies differ depending on where the articles were published and on whether their methodological frameworks were empirical or non-empirical. They found that abstracts published in English-medium journals contained many more hedges than those published in Chinese-medium journals, and that empirical research articles were found to contain many more boosters than non-empirical ones.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Corpus and Analytical Framework

NEAT has been developed by the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE) as a replacement for US- and UK- based English proficiency tests, the current College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), and several civil service examinations.[1] At present, third-year high school students can use NEAT scores for early university admission,[2] and the present elementary and middle school students are expected to take NEAT as a college entrance exam in the future. NEAT differs from current CSAT and school tests in that it contains both speaking and writing sections, and it has garnered interest from numerous schools and English institutes. Teachers are undergoing training for this new test, and new teaching and testing materials are currently under development.

A total number of 216 NEAT compositions constitute the corpus of this study. The total words gathered number 23,575, with an average of approximately 123 words per NEAT essay[3]. The compositions collected for the study include totals of 124 from male students

[1] The English examination for police officers will be replaced by NEAT in 2014.

[2] In the 2014 academic year, a total of 34 colleges and universities will consider NEAT (second and third level) scores for early admissions and special admissions.

[3] On an official NEAT test, students would receive point deductions for writing over 120 words for one question, or for spending over 35 minutes on the whole writing section. In addition, NEAT

and 92 from female students, with 116 of these coming from middle school students and 100 from high school students. Specifically, the corpus was made up of writing samples from 60 students from Yatap Middle School (31 male and 29 female), 29 from Yangmyeong High School (all male), 34 from Gongju High School (all male), 23 from Gongju Girls' High School (all female), 6 from Gongju Science High School (2 male and 4 female), 37 from various English institutes (14 male and 15 female middle school students; 4 male and 4 female high school students), and 27 from various English e-learning centers (10 male and 17 female middle school students).

The compositions of the students were analyzed on the basis of Hyland's (2005b) model of interaction (see Figure 1 above) in which linguistic devices are categorized into stance and engagement features under the super-category of interaction. Although Hyland and Tse's (2004) model has both interactive and interactional resources, it does not seem to be appropriate for an analysis of middle and high school students' writing such as this: Since the type of composition required for NEAT is not characterized as difficult academic writing, it is unlikely that the writing samples will exhibit certain interactive resources such as *endophoric markers* (noted above, see Table 1) or *code glosses* ("e.g.," "i.e."), which are prevalent in academic articles. As previously mentioned Hyland's model is an expanded version of the interactional portion of a previous metadiscourse model and can therefore show the details of engagement as well as the overall interaction between writer and reader in a text. For this reason, it is better to use Hyland's model of stance and engagement, which does not contain interactive resources, in order to analyze the EFL students' argumentative writing.

2. Procedure

The participants were asked to write a practice argumentative essay for the second-level NEAT.[4] Their English teachers guided them to write because the test was still unfamiliar to them. The topics that the participants were asked to write about differed according to where they studied. The topic given to Yatap Middle School and Yangmyeong High School students was studying a foreign language in Korea versus studying one overseas.

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is an internet-based test (IBT) during which a computer monitor displays how many words have been written and how much time is remaining for the test. However, the participants in this study wrote primarily on paper, without the help of a timer or word count. Since the focus of this study was not on the ability of students to produce a certain number of words in a given amount of time but rather on the discourse facets of stance and engagement, we disregarded the problems of word count.

[4] The second-level NEAT test features two essay formats: argumentative and narrative. The argumentative essay was chosen for this study.

The topic for Gongju High School was the advantages and disadvantages of electronic books, while the topic for Gongju Girls' High School was the pros and cons of major supermarket chains. Finally, Gongju Science High School students were asked to write about whether they agree or disagree with the statement that young people should learn from their elders. The essays submitted by the students from English institutes and e-learning centers were written on a diverse variety of topics because we were not able to control their writing topics. The students were allowed to use a maximum of 50 minutes, which was the duration of one class period, and were encouraged by means of written instructions to write compositions of 80 to 120 words. The compositions of students on site were all paper-based, while most of the essays from the English institutes and e-learning centers were composed on computers. Paper-based compositions were converted into *.txt* files, a format that is readable by the concordancer *Antconc* 3.2.3.[5]

As we converted the aforementioned submissions into a computer-readable format, we also corrected spelling errors such as "foriegn" (which surely meant "foreign," notwithstanding the point that this word does not function as a metadiscourse resource and is thus irrelevant to the study), because only correctly spelled words are readable by the concordancer program. In order to sort the resources appropriately, some grammatical errors were not corrected. For example, one student wrote "There *is* some *reasons* for it," which violates subject-verb agreement and should have been "There *are* some *reasons*." Another example of a grammatical error we ignored can be found in the sentence "I think *go* to foreign country is better than *learn* in Korea," which means "I think *going* to a foreign country is better than *learning* (*English*) in Korea." Since the focus of the study, was to see how the writers pose themselves and put readers in a text, grammatical errors such as these which had no bearing on stance or engagement were disregarded.

When all the compositions had been saved in a computer-readable format, we read them and employed the concordance program *Antconc 3.2.3* to search for words and to reanalyze words and phrases. The program enabled us to see how many times a specified word or expression occurs in the corpus, and concordance lines showed each sentence that contains a key word, which made it easy to access the context of each token. We then searched for linguistic features based on the categories of Hyland's (2005b) model of stance and engagement. When analyzing the keywords in the compositions, we first proceeded on the basis of the index of interpersonal metadiscourse from Hyland (2007, p.191-193), and then re-categorized some linguistic features based on the categories of Hyland (2005b)[6].

[5] Antconc 3.2.3 can be downloaded free of charge from the Internet. Antconc ver. 3.2.3 shows fewer errors compared with the more recent versions Antconc 3.2.4 or 3.2.5. It has similar functions to those of *Wordsmith*, *wordpilot, Monoconc*, and other concordance programs used in previous studies.

[6] Hyland (2005b) presents different features. When he divided engagement resources into five

Furthermore, we referred to C. J. Uhm et al. (2009) and Hyland and Tse (2004) for data analysis as well.

Working with the papers and the concordance lines, we checked everything manually and completely in order to judge the specific function of each expression. For instance, according to C. K. Kim (2009), the word *true* can function as a booster and has a tendency to be used more by Korean writers. However, when examining forms in context through the concordance lines, we found that the word *true* did not function as a booster unless it was used in the forms *In truth* or *It is true that*. Similar problems are a risk when inspection is not done carefully. Therefore, we checked each composition manually in addition to consulting the concordance lines.

As pointed out above, sometimes both stance and engagement can apply to a single feature because they are two sides of the same coin, as Hyland (2005b) described. They are closely related to each other and cannot be clearly separated. For instance, one of the classification problems concerned the distinction between boosters, hedges and, occasionally, attitude markers. When it was difficult to determine the specific function of a feature, we based our judgments on discussion and mutual consensus. Since the essays were written by middle and high school students who were rarely able to use difficult words in their English, there were few disagreements as to the function of particular linguistic features in given contexts.

The texts contained some linguistic features of engagement which could not be detected by the concordance software such as questions, directives, shared knowledge, and personal asides. These were checked manually and classified according to discussion and consensus. For example, some students used proverbs, a rhetorical device which has not been mentioned in previous studies and is an uncommon occurrence in academic articles. In our discussion, we determined that the use of proverbs would be classified as *shared knowledge,* since proverbs are expected to be understood by people who share the same culture.

Approximately ten percent of the students participated in follow-up interviews, which were conducted at their schools and institutes. In order to avoid trespassing on their time, the students were informed that participation in the interviews was voluntary. Those who chose to be interviewed showed interest both in what we are studying and in what they were doing (NEAT writing), and in general they seemed to be highly motivated to learn something from us. In order for them to feel comfortable, the interviews were conducted in

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categories, some linguistic features from stance were put in engagement. For example, deontic modal verbs such as *must* and *should* were classified as ATTITUDE MARKERS but these were then changed to the category of DIRECTIVES. RELATIONAL MARKERS such as *!, ?*, and *Let's* were divided into ATTITUDE MARKERS, QUESTIONS, and DIRECTIVES, respectively.

Korean. In the beginning of the interview, we introduced the notion of writing as interaction and described some linguistic features of stance and engagement. In reading and checking their compositions together, we provided supplementary explanations for the sake of better understanding. Through interviews, we tried to extract the rationale behind the choices of words and expressions they made. All interview sessions were audiotaped and transcribed.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Use of Stance and Engagement

Table 2 below shows the stance and engagement features used by the participants in their compositions. Overall, combining stance and engagement, they used more stance and engagement features in comparison to both native English speaking academic writers (Hyland, 2005b), and Korean advanced EFL writers (C. K. Kim, 2009; C. J. Uhm et al., 2009)[7]. Specifically, as seen in Hyland (2005b), the total amount of stance features used by native speakers of English from the soft fields seems to be similar to that of the present study, but the amount of engagement is different.

TABLE 2

Stance and Engagement Features in Korean EFL Students' NEAT Writing

Stance	Items per 1000 words	% of total	**Engagement**	Items per 1000 words	% of total
Hedges	4.75 (112)	10.84 %	Reader pronouns	36.05 (850)	86.45 %
Boosters	5.68 (134)	12.96 %	Directives	3.99 (94)	9.57 %
Attitude markers	13.02 (307)	29.72 %	Questions	0.55 (13)	1.33 %
Self-mentions	20.36 (480)	46.46 %	Shared knowledge	0.93 (22)	2.23 %
			Personal asides	0.17 (4)	0.42 %
Total	43.82 (1033)	100 %	**Total**	41.70 (983)	100 %

The numbers in parentheses represent the total appearance in the entire text.

[7] C. K. Kim (2009) revealed that 179 out of 31,620 words of the corpus from Korean writers were interactional resources, which amounts to roughly 6 words per thousand. C. J. Uhm et al. (2009) showed that Korean writers used 1,885 interactional resources out of a total of 50,000 words, which amounts to 37.7 words per thousand. However, a simple one to one comparison of these studies to the current one seems inappropriate because their frameworks are different.

Based on the analysis of the corpus of this study, it was found that, among the features of stance (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions), the participants used self-mentions the most, attitude markers second most, boosters third, and hedges the least. As for the features of engagement (reader pronouns, directives, questions, appeals to shared knowledge, and personal asides), they used reader pronouns to an overwhelmingly higher degree than the other features, while directives were used second most, and the others were rarely used at all. In sum, the present study displays some important differences from previous research concerning the use of the stance features of self-mentions, attitude markers, and hedges and of the engagement features of reader pronouns. The aspects of usage of the other relevant features, however, are not significantly different from those of previous studies.

1) Use of Stance

The results for stance use from the present study are different from those of previous studies conducted in the Korean context. C. K. Kim (2009) found that Korean university students employed hedges, boosters, and attitude markers the most, in that order. In C. J. Uhm et al. (2009), Korean academic writers used the stance features of hedges the most, boosters second most, attitude markers third, and self-mentions the least. Comparing the results of this study with those of Hyland (2005b), we can see that native English academic writers used hedges the most, and seemed reluctant to refer to themselves in their research articles as the number of self-mentions was somewhat lower than that of the other stance features.

Two reasons are likely to be involved in these results. First, since the participants' writing format was a test format (NEAT), they needed to be more persuasive, revealing their opinions clearly about the topics suggested or the questions presented to them. In addition, a big difference was that the type of essay that they were asked to write differs from other types of compositions such as academic research papers, editorials, and TOEFL essays. The differences are that NEAT argumentative writing is rather limited in length (80 to 120 words) and requires the writer both to state opinions or preferences directly, and to use a number of self-mentions and attitude markers, yet to some extent discourages the use of hedges. Therefore, it was necessary for the participants to frequently use the subject *I* and various attitude markers in order to express their opinions. One student responded as follows:

> I like to reveal myself in writing by using *I* as a subject. Because it is important to show my opinion to others when writing argumentative essays, revealing myself is one of the strategies I usually use, and also, I do not say things like *I would like to* or

> *It seems that*, because, as I said, it can weaken the strength of my argument. (Student #14)

Moreover, one reason the students frequently used attitude markers is that some of them were specifically asked to discuss their preferences or to present the pros and cons for a specific topic. Thus, expressions such as *I agree/disagree* or *I prefer* appeared often in their compositions. One of the participants argued:

> It is important to reveal my attitude, since without revealing my attitude on the topic, it is just an instructional manual. (Student #15)

Some of the students revealed the reasons they did not use hedges, with two of them responding as follows:

> I have never been exposed to any hedge strategies. I was surprised to find out about those things because I didn't learn about hedges in depth in English class. (Student #4)

> I can recall very little of the hedge words in the Korean language. That's the reason I didn't use hedges in my English composition. (Student #5)

One of the possible reasons for the lack of hedges in the corpus can thus be extracted from the post-interview comments of the participants, and that is simply that the students were not taught about hedges in English, neither about their types nor their effects in a text. The infrequent use of hedges by the participants is revealing. Previously, it was found that Korean EFL writers employed quite a few hedges in their writing (e.g., C. K. Kim, 2009; C. J. Uhm et al., 2009; M. Park, 2006), and, as observed in contrastive rhetoric studies, people in some Asian cultures prefer using hedge words. For example, Turkish writers traditionally do not present their position until the end of an essay and revealed often their indirectness (e.g., Hinkel, 1997, 2005), which causes them to employ hedge words, and Lee (2011) also found that Japanese academic writers used hedges the most. This phenomenon is purported to result from the propensity to consider modesty in argument a virtue in Asian cultures, which incites the use of hedges. In addition, the writers of Persian culture have also been found to prefer using more hedges in their arguments than do native English speakers (Faghih & Sepideh, 2009).

The results of the present study, however, indicate that Korean secondary students barely use hedges in their NEAT writing. Through analysis of their compositions, it was shown that not only modal verbs functioning as hedges such as *would*, *might*, and *could*

but also other hedge words like *sometimes* and *almost* were scarcely used by them. Furthermore, since the participants' writing was argumentative and the topics they received were primarily familiar ones related to everyday life and not very difficult for them, they used personally oriented stories. It was noticed that the students provided examples of personal stories in their compositions while they were developing their paragraphs, which made it natural for them to use self-mentions such as *I* and *my*. Personal event-oriented writing definitely encourages the use of personal pronouns. In contrast to academic writing, using *I* as a subject is not shunned in argumentative writing, and is in fact preferred by the students. Although C. J. Uhm et al. (2009) argued that Korean academic writers are reluctant to use self-mentions because of the fact that Korean people culturally prefer objectivity, and Chang and Swales (1999) pointed out that graduate students showed a dislike of displaying *I* in research articles, Korean secondary students in the present study did not seem to be concerned about this matter.

2) Use of Engagement

Since the features of engagement markers used in previous studies were different from those of the present study, a one to one comparison seemed both inappropriate and difficult. However, two studies in the Korean context (C. K. Kim, 2009; C. J. Uhm et al., 2009) showed few uses of engagement features, whereas this study revealed almost as many engagement features as stance features. Meanwhile, M. Park (2006) found that many engagement markers were employed by Korean writers.

As indicated in Table 2, we found that reader pronouns were used to an overwhelmingly higher degree by Korean secondary students than any other engagement features. This is possibly due to the characteristics of Korean culture and the Korean language, in which the boundary between *I* and *we* is uncertain. Native Korean language users most often use the first person plural pronoun even when they are talking about themselves in the singular form. The distinction between *I* and *we* in the Korean language is thus somewhat vague. For example, Koreans usually say *our home*, *our mother*, and *our school* instead of saying *my home*, *my mother*, and *my school* in Korean. Therefore, a tremendous number of reader pronouns can be shown. Students were certainly affected by their L1, and this interpretation is supported by the results of M. Park's (2006) study, which also indicated that Korean writers used *we* more than any of the other engagement markers. He suggested that the higher frequency of use of *we* by Korean speakers when compared to native speakers of English is possibly due to L1 transfer, pointing out that "when they speak or write in Korean language, Koreans use the word *we* quite often compared to English speakers. Koreans thus may have used *we* much more than NS in research papers" (p. 73).

Another significant point about reader pronouns is that students explicitly make use of the second person reader pronoun *you* in their compositions as well. This is somewhat contrary to the previous argument because it cannot be seen as L1 transfer, since Korean writers hardly ever use the second person pronoun *you* in compositions written in Korean. This phenomenon could possibly result from the low level of English proficiency of the participants and their lack of English writing experience. They might have no choice but to use *you* when they write. That the students used a lot more reader pronouns in their writing does not mean bad or decrease the quality of the writing. The problem, however, is that their sentence structures were not varied. They usually began their sentences with *you* or *we* when they used reader pronouns.

The number of other engagement features such as directives, shared knowledge, questions, and personal asides used by the Korean secondary students was almost the same as the native English academic writers. In particular, questions were used to almost the same degree by the participants and the native academic writers. In spite of M. Park's (2006) claim that the usage of questions is unclear to the Korean EFL writers, the total number of questions in English academic articles and in NEAT writings were not that different. Furthermore, the students who participated in the interviews revealed that the use of questions in writing is not unfamiliar to them.

Although questions are rarely found in either the academic papers or the NEAT writings, the use of questions surely helps student writers avoid monotony in their essays. The students usually showed an amicable attitude about questions in a text, and the high school students were pretty sure about the effects of using questions in writing. Two of them answered as follows:

> If a question is located at the end of a text, it could make me think about the topic and the writer's assertion. So I believe it could be a better way to persuade other people. (Student #2)

> When I faced questions in a text, and if the topic was interesting for me, I was easily hooked by the question. Questions make me more interested in the topic! (Student #3)

Another intriguing finding was that some students were able to take the original question asked of them in the instructions and ask it back to the imagined readers or to themselves, even though they were the ones who were asked to reveal their opinion about the topic presented. A student who used this strategy made the following comments:

> Asking myself and answering myself is my favorite strategy in a text because I watched a famous person on television do this. And, I was very impressed by that. That's the reason I use questions and answers in writing. (Student #16)

By imitating what he saw a native speaker do on a talk show, this student tried to create the strong impression he had received. He did not clearly perceive what kind of effect questions in a text have, but based on his experience, he employed the strategy of asking and answering questions to himself. We suggest that questions were not widely utilized in the students' argumentative writing because they were required to answer the questions they were given, not to raise questions themselves. Nevertheless, the use of questions can boost their arguments and be used as an effective engagement strategy.

One thing we have to mention regarding "appeals to shared knowledge" is that we classified items such as proverbs, maxims, quotes from famous people, specific place names (e.g., *Hongdae, Myeongdong*), movie titles (e.g., *Harry Potter*), and news network names (e.g., *CNN*) as shared knowledge. An idiom, like a maxim or an adage, is short and has a shared meaning among people of the same culture. It can convey the meaning of a sentence easily without the person having to ramble on, because people understand what it means in a culturally shared context. We think using a maxim or a saying in argumentative writing can be categorized as an "appeals to shared knowledge" because this usage is based on the fact that people have shared knowledge of the maxim. The following comment reflected one student's understanding of this well:

> Since we are in Korea, we share the same culture and have been educated similarly. Among Korean people, Korean proverbs will be understood easily. This can be a strategy for arguing economically. (Student #2)

Another interesting usage was detected in the essay of one student who mentioned a specific place name, which meant that the writer possibly thought that whoever would be reading the paper would be familiar with this place. We decided that this student's mention of the Seoul neighborhoods *Hongdae* and *Myeongdong* could be considered a strategy of engagement because other students who were given the same subject did not mention any particular place names. Similar situations arose in which some students provided concrete examples, such as a specific news program, a movie title, and so forth. This strategy is likely based on the writer's thought that both the writer and whoever else reads it may be familiar with what has been mentioned. These methods of writing should be included in the category of "appeals to shared knowledge," which may be rarely detected in academic research papers.

In the case of the feature "personal asides," only four cases were found in the whole corpus. An example is where one student wrote, *You can still learn these from movies (just like I did),* which suggests to readers that they do exactly what the writer did because the writer had a strong conviction about doing it and wanted to show this certainty. The reason for the interruption was to persuade readers to do what the writer had done or to engage the readers' interest. This kind of usage was detected very scarcely but it still functions as an engagement strategy.

2. Gender, Academic Level, and Major Academic Branch

1) Gender Differences

Generally, it is known that women use more hedge words in their language use (Bonvillain, 2003) and "appear to use language that expresses more uncertainty than men, suggesting less confidence in what they say" (Brown, 2007, p. 234). Although Holmes (1990) argued that there was no chasm between men's and women's speech concerning hedges and boosters, and Kubota (2003) proclaimed that new approaches for gender (as well as for class and race) are demanded in the field of second language writing, the tendency for women to use more hedges than men in their language use is somewhat supported by the results of the present study. Although the different usage between genders was not statistically significant, the overall quality was still different. As we can see in Table 3, the results show that there were no statistically significant differences according to gender. However, the number of hedges, attitude markers, and reader pronouns employed by female participants was slightly higher than that of male students in comparison to other linguistic features.

TABLE 3

Use of Stance and Engagement by Gender

Variables	Male (n=124)		Female (n=92)		t	*p*
	M	SD	M	SD		
Stance	1.10	0.95	1.32	1.24	1.493	.137
Hedges	**0.40**	0.74	**0.67**	1.35	1.736	.085
Attitude markers	**0.50**	0.98	**0.78**	1.42	1.639	.103
Boosters	1.36	1.04	1.50	1.24	0.884	.378
Self-mentions	2.14	3.14	2.34	3.30	0.453	.651

Engagement	0.87	0.73	0.96	0.79	0.884	.378
Reader pronouns	**3.77**	3.31	**4.16**	3.66	0.832	.406
Directives	0.43	0.73	0.45	0.72	0.182	.856
Questions	0.05	0.25	0.08	0.31	0.732	.465
Shared knowledge	0.09	0.34	0.12	0.39	0.623	.534
Personal asides	0.02	0.27	0.01	0.10	0.450	.653

It is often mentioned that language use (for either L1 or L2) is affected by culture (e.g., Lee, 2011; Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993; C. J. Uhm et al., 2009, among many others) and that people are socialized to use language in the way that it is expected to be used in certain contexts. Variation in language use according to gender, therefore, is colored by the broad social context. However, students who are in the midst of adolescence may not have yet been able to fully establish their gender identity or to reveal this identity in their language use.

2) Differences in Academic Level

Academic level is an important thing to be considered for language learning and teaching. Through the comparison between academic levels, differences are revealed from which educational directions can be inferred. Therefore, we tried to investigate the significance of academic level by examining the differences in the use of stance and engagement features between middle school students and high school students. Significant differences between middle and high school students were shown for the stance feature of self-mentions, for the engagement feature of reader pronouns, and for engagement overall. These differences are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Stance and Engagement by Academic Level (Middle/High School)

Variables	Middle school (n=116)		High school (n=100)		t	*p*
	M	SD	M	SD		
Stance	1.31	1.20	1.07	0.93	1.645	.101
Hedges	0.42	1.14	0.63	0.94	1.450	.149
Attitude markers	0.68	1.28	0.59	1.09	0.346	.730
Boosters	1.42	1.04	1.42	1.22	0.016	.988

Self-mentions	**2.73**	3.78	**1.63**	2.23	2.651	**.009****
Engagement	**1.02**	0.79	**0.79**	0.70	2.262	**.025***
Reader pronouns	**4.41**	3.68	**3.39**	3.13	2.166	**.031***
Directives	0.51	0.81	0.35	0.61	1.642	.102
Questions	0.04	0.24	0.08	0.31	0.984	.326
Shared knowledge	0.12	0.40	0.08	0.31	0.829	.408
Personal asides	0.01	0.09	0.03	0.30	0.728	.467

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Middle school students used self-mentions and reader pronouns more than high school students did. Two reasons are suggested to account for this result. First, high school students have learned more about English structure. Middle school students usually depended on the personal pronouns *I*, *you*, and *we* as sentence subjects and used them often in their compositions. The less frequent use by high school students of self-mentions and reader pronouns, however, indicates that high school students were able to use more varied forms of sentence structure such as passive voice, or to use various subjects besides personal pronouns, including other animate nouns such as *people* and *human beings* as well as inanimate subjects. When middle school students made their arguments, they typically used expressions such as *I think*, *I believe*, *I can*, and *you can*, which means that their sentence variation was insufficient.

Second, high school students understand how personal pronouns are used in particular senses and can use them appropriately in certain contexts. The statically significant differences in engagement must have been caused by the large amount of reader pronouns used by middle school students. It is necessary to examine this result carefully because the use of reader pronouns by middle school students seemed unintentional. When I interviewed middle school students, they hesitated to give their reasons for using *you* or *we* in their essays. Also, because of first language transfer, middle schools students seemed to confuse the inclusive *we* and *I*, as discussed above.

Additionally, some of the high school students demonstrated in the post-interviews that they partially understood what kind of effect they could expect to create by using the inclusive *we*, which can help to signify solidarity between people. One high school student replied as follows:

> I like to use *we* in writing because I always say *we* instead of *I*. It feels like it makes two of us. To include other people who read my writing is vital because, when they feel we are in the same place, they will agree with my opinion. (Student #13)

Another high school student gave the following response:

> Saying *I* or *you* directly is, I think, too strong both in speaking and writing. But I can avoid this problem by saying *we* in a text. (Student #9)

These high school student participants used reader pronouns with a purpose in mind and understood how the reader pronoun *we* functions in discourse. These answers are in the same vein as various cultural linguistic studies which maintain that revealing the author or addressing the reader directly in a text is sometimes considered arrogant or rude in the culture of Asian countries such as Korea and Japan.

The statistical figures in Table 4 needs to be examined cautiously because a high frequency of self-mentions and reader pronouns alone does not in itself indicate good writing: In reality, the high school participants had more knowledge about the English language and were able to write faster and longer, to create more complicated syntactic structures and to use a wider vocabulary.

3) Differences According to Major Academic Branch

Table 5 shows that significant differences were found in the use of hedges and directives according to the major academic branch of the high school participants. Hedges were used more by science students while directives were used more by liberal arts students. These results can be compared with Hyland's (2005b) study in which the uses of stance and engagement in the "soft fields" and "hard sciences" were investigated and compared. He concluded that the soft knowledge domains (e.g., philosophy, sociology, applied linguistics) exploit more interactional markers than the fields of natural science (e.g., physics, micro biology, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering) because of the inclination of "soft" area writers to spell out their evaluations and engagement. However, the findings of that study did not match the results of the present study. This is because secondary students do not do much writing in either Korean or English although they do spend more time on the subjects of their own major branch subjects than those of the other. The influence of major academic branch seemed to affect the writing style of the students very little.

TABLE 5

Stance and Engagement by Major Academic Branch (Liberal Arts/Sciences)

Variables	Liberal arts (n = 43)		Sciences (n = 21)		t	*p*
	M	SD	M	SD		
Stance	1.10	1.18	1.38	0.74	-.982	.330
Hedges	**0.47**	0.63	**1.14**	1.35	-2.184	**.039***
Attitude markers	0.63	1.25	0.90	1.00	-0.884	.380
Boosters	1.58	1.38	1.62	1.16	-0.107	.915
Self-mentions	1.74	2.90	1.86	1.62	-0.166	.869
Engagement	0.87	0.74	0.58	0.57	1.600	.115
Reader pronouns	3.60	3.28	2.48	2.79	1.354	.181
Directives	**0.56**	0.77	**0.24**	0.44	2.124	**.038***
Questions	0.05	0.21	0.05	0.22	-0.019	.985
Shared knowledge	0.09	0.37	0.14	0.36	-0.515	.609
Personal asides	0.07	0.46	0.00	0.00	0.696	.489

* $p < .05$

As mentioned above, hedges were employed more by science majors than by liberal arts majors. Two students whose major is science offered the following comments:

> The reason I used what you called hedges was that I think it made my writing look more native in style. I prefer using *would*, *might*, and *maybe* because I learned *will* is used when pointing to the future. (Student #7)

> I knew hedge words such as *could* weaken my assertions, but while I wrote a NEAT essay, that was not my focus. I think I tried to reveal my cautiousness about the topic. But did I use them too much? (Student #8)

Their answers did not provide suitable and sufficient qualitative evidence to account for the statistical differences. Although many of the participants knew hedges could make the writer seem very cautious and could help the writer escape from counterviews, the rationale for their use seems to be rather vague. There was no reason for science students to use more hedges than the other group of students. It is possible that this result was caused by a small number of science majors who used a lot more hedges than the others.

Directives were more frequently employed by the students majoring in liberal arts. They used significantly more directives than the students majoring in science did. Some students made the following comments:

> I think sentences such as *Let's do it* and *Let's think about this* are much more powerful and can show adamancy. (Student #3)

> When I want to point out that something is important, I like to say *we have to*, *we must*, or *we should*. I didn't realize these are also functioning like imperative sentences until you explained it to me, but I believe expressions and words that show obligations of people have influence on readers' minds. (Student #16)

Since suggesting sentences with words such as *let's* and sentences containing obligational expressions such as *have to* and *should* are included in the engagement feature of directives, the number of directives was increased, and it can be inferred from their interviews that these participants understand how to engage people in an argument and to recommend what readers should do.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has explored the aspects of stance and engagement in Korean secondary students' NEAT practice writing. It was found that overall, the participants in this study used more stance and engagement features in their writing than both the advanced EFL writers in Korea and the native English speaking academic writers from previous studies. Moreover, the order of frequency of use among the different features was different as well. Concerning stance, the participants of the present study used self-mentions the most, attitude markers second most, boosters third, and hedges the least, and used a lot more reader pronouns than any other engagement features.

Specifically, this study has found that there were no statistically significant gender differences in the use of stance and engagement, meaning that students were not able to inject their gender-sensitivity into their compositions. Despite these results, to a statistically insignificant yet visible degree, the tendency of women's language can still be seen because hedges, attitude markers and reader pronouns were used slightly more by female students than by male students.

According to academic level (middle vs. high school), there were significant differences only for self-mentions, reader pronouns, and overall engagement, all of which were employed more by middle school students. This observation should be treated carefully because the difference in engagement was caused by overuse of reader pronouns.

Furthermore, the insertion of many self-mentions and reader pronouns does not necessarily make a good essay. This indicates that the middle school participants were not able to use diverse subjects but instead simply used the personal pronouns *I*, *you*, and *we*, whereas high school students were able to make various sentence forms such as passive voice and complex sentences, and to use more varied subject forms.

It was shown that the major academic branch of the students can partially influence their use of stance and engagement. Hedges were used more by science majors, and directives were used more by students majoring in liberal arts. The differences among them were significant, but the rationale for the participants' usage choices, elicited during post-interviews, seemed vague. Although students spend more time learning about the material which is related to their major, the major itself does not seem that relevant to their second language writing.

On the basis of the results of the study, we offer the following suggestions. The concept should be taught in school that writing embodies interaction between the writer and the reader, along with the various metadiscourse features of stance and engagement and their functions. This will help students perceive that writing is also a form of communication in which interaction takes place and various strategies are exploited for successful communication. Xiaoguang and Hui (2004) suggested that metadiscourse can be usefully applied to language education because it is a novel theory for reading and writing based on interpersonal and textual functions. Based on this view and on the knowledge of interactional expressions, students will be able to argue effectively in writing by using stance and engagement. It is also essential for learners to receive explicit instruction on varied metadiscourse strategies of stance and engagement, as many studies mentioned previously have demonstrated that teaching and learning about metadiscourse can positively affect not only writing, but also other L2 English skills such as reading, listening and speaking.

EFL instructors, we strongly believe, should be aware of the importance of metadiscourse in advance and try to produce and teach material which contains this kind of knowledge. Not merely advanced learners but also novice learners will benefit more from explicit instruction by teachers and books dealing with stance and engagement than from self-study. To provide a specific example, it should be taught that the words *would, could, might, maybe* and *probably* function as hedges that weaken the certainty of a proposition that is being stated, regardless of their subtle differences in meaning and nuance. When students know the effect a word or phrase will have, they can use the appropriate language in the right place in the text. The microdimensions of second-language use, such as the effectiveness of stance and engagement features and their expected effects, certainly does not come easily to learners. Teachers, therefore, have to truly be aware of what is important when teaching second-language learners. For this reason, teacher training which raises the awareness of metadiscourse is required as well.

Another relevant issue is that of textbooks, which should contain not only content about language forms but also about how to interact in written discourse. Hyland (1994) pointed out one of the problems with EAP or EST writing books, arguing that, in spite of the interest in hedges, many popular textbooks pass over their usage. It is also found in Korea that hardly any writing books for EFL students properly deal with the issues of how writers can boost or weaken their opinions, how to convey their voices well, or what types of words should be used in certain contexts to achieve expected effects. These books instead mainly deal with elements such as sentence grammar (e.g., subject-verb agreement, word order), paragraph formats based on the genre of the text, specific use of markers such as commas and modifiers, or guides and solutions for specific tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL, and IELTS, which shows that the interaction of so-called stance and engagement is not being considered adequately in the world of EFL publishing. This is problematic in that learners have very limited access to this kind of content. Therefore, textbooks need to include interactional aspects of written language so that students can learn metadiscourse strategies of stance and engagement from books, either with teachers or by themselves.

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APPENDIX

Stance and Engagement

Stance

Hedges
about
almost
apparently
appear to be
approximately
believed
certain extent/amount / level
could/couldn't
doubt
essentially
estimate
frequently
generally/in general
indicate
largely
likely
mainly
may
might
most
mostly
often
perhaps
plausible
possible(ly)
presumably
probable(ly)
relatively
seems
should
sometimes/somewhat
suggest
suspect
unlikely
uncertain
unclear
usually
would/wouldn't
little/not understood

Boosters
actually
always
apparent
I believe
certain that
certainly
certainty
clearly/it is clear
conclusively
decidedly
definitely
demonstrate
determine
doubtless
essential
establish
evidently
in fact the fact that
find/found that
indeed
(we) know
It is known that
It is important
must
never
no/beyond doubt
obvious(ly)
of course
prove
we show
really
strongly
sure(ly)
(we) think
the fact that
true
undoubtedly
well-known
(we) believe
(we) know

Attitude markers
!
admittedly
I agree
I can't agree more
amazingly
appropriately
correctly
curiously
disappointing
disagree
even X
fortunately
have to
hopefully
important(ly)
interesting(ly)
like (prefer)
glad
pleased

must (obligation)
ought (obligation)
prefer/preferable
remarkable
should (obligation)
sadly
surprisingly
unfortunate(ly)
unusually
understandably

Self-mentions
I
my
me
mine
myself

Engagement

Reader pronouns
you
your
yours
yourself
we (inclusive)
our (includes readers)
us (includes readers)
ours
ourselves

Questions
?

Directives
you should
you have to
you must
you ought
we should
we must
we have to
imperative sentences
Let's / let us
Let x = y

Appeals to shared knowledge
quotation from a famous person
proverb
maxim
specific place
specific book name, movie title
historical event

Personal asides
( )

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary

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