Expressing Attitudinal Stance in Pakistani Academic Writing: A Corpus Based Study

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Abstract   *The present research aims to investigate the use of attitudinal stance devices proposed by Biber (2006) in Pakistani academic writing with respect to variation among disciplines. A special purpose corpus of Pakistani Academic Writing is built up with 235 research dissertations of M.Phil and PhD graduates representing three important disciplines (Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences) and is tagged for the lexical and grammatical features expressing attitudinal stance to measure the frequency count of each feature out of 1000 words. The frequencies of attitudinal stance devices are separately calculated for each discipline and one way ANOVA is administered to see the significant differences among disciplines on the use of attitudinal stance devices. The findings reveal statistically significant differences among disciplines and would support the ESP syllabus designers and Pakistani academic writers.Key words: Attitudinal Stance Devices, Disciplinary variation, Pakistani Academic writing*

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Introduction

Academic writing is generally considered to be an objective presentation of facts and propositional information. This consideration is, however, not a reality. "---in fact, in some cases speakers and writers in university registers seem more concerned with the expression of stance than with the communication of 'facts'." (Biber, 2006: 87). Expression of attitudinal stance has become an important aspect of academic discourse. Attitudinal Stance involves the speaker or writer's personal judgment and assessments about proposition presented to the reader and sometimes the way of persuading listeners or readers, drawing upon his own knowledge, beliefs, and/or immediate perception. The academic writers express their personal judgments and feelings towards a proposition through the use of specific words or phrases referred to as attitudinal stance devices/ markers. These markers function as indicators of the writer's attitude to propositions, conveying surprise, agreement, importance, frustration and so on. Biber et al. (1999:966) consider attitudinal stance markers as the expression of "personal feelings, attitudes, and value judgments, or assessments". The use of stance expressions enables academic writers to highlight their point of view and judgment and align with reader. By the use of stance devices academic writers are capable of maintaining a powerful position to influence reader by conveying their own point of view or to "pull readers into a conspiracy of agreement so that it can often be difficult to dispute these judgments" (Hyland, 2005: 176).

Keeping in view the importance of attitudinal stance markers in academic discourse, the present research aims to explore the use of attitudinal stance devices in Pakistani academic writing. Pakistani academic writing is the least explored area so far. A few studies have been conducted on Pakistani academic writing as a register. Early researches on Pakistani academic writing focused on general problems faced by learners in producing academic writing or explored its features by making it a small part of general purpose corpora of Pakistani Written English (PWE) (Mehmood & Mehmood, 2009). In PWE, Pakistani academic writing is represented by three sub-registers of text books, research articles and thesis. However, no distinct features of Pakistani academic writing

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have been studied in this research. Pakistani academic writing has been the focus of researchers only recently. These studies are mainly based on multidimensional analysis and are conducted from the perspective of linguistic variation across disciplines, across research sections and comparing it with British academic writing (Azher, 2016a, 2016b, and 2016c). However, no research has been conducted on the discrete features of Pakistani academic writing so far. Therefore it is important to explore this genre in terms of its distinctive features and attributes. Therefore, the present research is an attempt to develop awareness about the use of attitudinal stance devices in university students' writings across three major disciplines. The stance devices addressed in the present research have been taken from Biber's (2006) framework of attitudinal stance devices namely: adjective, adverbs, verbs, and nouns. (The detailed description of Biber's framework is given in the section on Literature review).

The present paper seeks to explore the use of attitudinal stance markers in the corpus of Pakistani academic writing based on the research dissertations of M.Phil. and PhD graduates of Pakistani universities written between 2006 and 2014. The aim of the study is to explore how disciplinary communities from humanities, social sciences and sciences employ attitudinal stance markers in research theses and to explore the frequency count of each attitudinal stance device in Pakistani academic writing. The study is based on the corpus developed by the author as a part of PhD research project and seeks to address the following research questions.

- How do academic disciplines vary in the use of attitudinal stance devices in Pakistani academic writing?
- What is the frequency count of attitudinal stance devices in Pakistani academic writing?

Literature Review

The way academic writers communicate their assessments, judgments and attitude has become a favorite subject of researchers in recent years. Over the past years, many applied linguists have come to realize the persuasive nature of academic research writing and have become increasingly interested in the ways academic writers convey their attitudinal stance. Attitudinal stance has been defined in multiple ways. Gray and Biber (2012) maintain that attitudinal stance refer to the writer's "attitudes, evaluations and/ or personal feelings and emotions". Conrad and Biber (2000) propose that attitudinal stance communicates writer's opinion and feelings about the proposition presented in the text. Holding a similar proposition, Arrese and Perucha (2005), as cited in Agcam (2015: 123) suggest that attitudinal stance primarily "involves judgments about the necessity and degree of requirement of the occurrence of a certain state of affairs, as well as speaker's/ writer's desire for and/ or commitment to the realization of what is expressed in the proposition". Hyland (2005) has extensively worked on the expression of stance and engagement in academic discourse and has advocated that writers generally maintain their position, stance or authority through the use of linguistic items that not only position writers but also enable them to align with their readers. He also maintain that the academic writers express their judgments, shared attitude, values and opinions to the objects and appeal readers into a conspiracy of agreement so that it can often be difficult to dispute these judgments.

Biber (2006) has defined attitudinal stance as the expression of personal feelings and emotions and identified attitudinal adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns expressing personal feelings and assessments of the writers. Within this framework, he defines attitude markers as attitudinal stance devices which indicate writer's personal attitude to propositions, conveying surprise, hope, preferences, happiness, irony, expectations, agreement, importance, frustration and so on. He argues that attitude is most explicitly marked by attitude verbs (e.g. *agree, prefer*), attitudinal adverbs (e.g. *unfortunately, rightly*) and attitudinal adjectives (e.g. glad, hope) and attitudinal nouns (e.g. view, reason). Table 1 includes attitudinal stance devices in academic writing mostly found in Biber (2006).

Table1. Attitudinal Stance Devices

ASD	Examples
Adjective	afraid, amazed, aware, concerned, disappointed, encouraged, glad, happy, hopeful, pleased, shocked, surprised, worried
Adverb	amazingly, astonishingly, conveniently, curiously, hopefully, even worse, fortunately, importantly, ironically, rightly, sadly, surprisingly, unfortunately

Verb	agree, anticipate, complain, concede, ensure, expect, fear, feel, forget, hope, mind, prefer, pretend, require, wish, worry
Noun	grounds, hope, reason, thought, view

(Adapted from Biber, 2006: 92)"

By adhering to the framework presented by Biber (2006), the present study defines the cover term 'attitudinal stance', as the writer's attitudes, personal feelings or emotions, judgment or evaluation on the proposition. It expresses how the writer commits to the truth of the proposition, what beliefs he possesses, what kind of attitude he holds, as well as how he applies language in organizing the text to persuade or involve the readers.

Attitudinal Stance in Disciplinary Discourse

Viewing that academic writing varies from discipline to discipline; there has been a growing interest in the disciplinary variation in the construction of academic discourse. Several studies have been conducted on exploring the presence of stance markers either in one discipline or across disciplines and have become increasingly popular. Differences have been made and acknowledged in the 'soft' and 'hard' disciplines on a continuum. Soft disciplines refer to humanities and social sciences whereas hard disciplines refer to natural and pure sciences. The type of knowledge associated with the 'hard' end of the continuum is generally regarded to be accumulative, atomistic and linked with universals, quantities, and simplification which results into discovery and explanation. On the other hand, disciplines associated with the 'soft' end of the continuum are regarded to be reiterative and wide-ranging in nature, linked with documents, qualities, complications which result into understanding and interpretation (Becher 1994; Becher & Trowler, 2001). Hyland (2000) has projected the stance that in the hard sciences, the researchers need not to support their findings with their assessments and evaluation as they rely on facts and numbers which tend to speak for themselves. He further says that in soft disciplines writers work harder to establish personal credibility through claim-making negotiations and supporting their conclusions. These variations in the very nature of hard and soft disciplines have led many researchers to explore the use stance devices in and across disciplines. For example, McGrath and Kuteeva (2012) explored the use of stance markers in the discipline of mathematics by focusing all the sections of research articles. He drew comparison among different research sections of this very discipline and came to conclude that mathematics writers are least motivated towards the use of stance devices.

Abdi (2002) investigated disciplinary variation in the use of stance markers by taking 55 research articles from social sciences and sciences. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the use of stance markers in the two disciplines and that social sciences were found more prone to the use of stance markers as compared to sciences particularly in the use of hedges. Abdollahzadeh (2011) investigated the expression of stance in research articles in the discipline of applied linguistics produced by American and Iranian academic writers. The findings revealed that academic writers in the disciplines of applied linguistics are prone to the use of attitudinal stance devices and that they have been found more inclined to the use of attitudinal adjectives and adverbs as compared to attitudinal verbs. Hyland (2011) conducted an extensive study on disciplinary variation in the use of stance markers. He selected 40 research articles from humanities, social sciences (referred to as soft sciences) and sciences (referred as hard sciences). His study concluded that stance markers like hedges and boosters are more frequent in soft sciences than in hard sciences which he related to the lack of confidence in the scholars in soft sciences in being more interpretative and evaluative in the presentation of academic discourse.

Blagojević (2009) worked on the attitudinal stance expressions to draw a comparison between authors from English and Serbian writing cultures in revealing their attitude towards the content. For this purpose, Blagojević selected academic articles from sociology, social psychology and philosophy and compared the academic discourse of the two cultures. He came up with the results that both English and Sebian authors express their stance in academic discourse and that almost the same linguistic forms were being employed by both English and Sebian academic authors. However, he found Serbian writers more inclined towards the expression of their attitudes and judgments than their English associates.

Adams and Quintana-Toledo (2013) in a study on the expression of authorial stance in academic discourse explored the amount of adverbial stance markers in the sections on introduction and conclusion of legal research articles. They found that attitudinal markers were being excessively used by the academic authors for two important reasons: as comments qualifying the information from the author's perspective, as well as guides for the audience towards specific intended interpretations as envisaged by the authors. The authors also revealed that attitudinal stance markers were found to play a protuberant role in the linguistic artifact of the research articles. The stance markers were used to present authors point of view in multiple ways; most importantly, they aimed to create affective appeals or, in other words, appeals to readers' emotions, inviting them to accept their discourse in the same way the authors entertain it.

Akinci, S (2016) explored the use of stance markers in the academic writing of students and experts with specific reference to disciplinary variation in the use of stance markers. By using Hyland model of stance markers he came to conclude that both students and teachers in applied linguistics use twice more stance markers than those of civil engineering.

The above given review of related literature makes it clear that writers in different disciplines represent themselves, their work and their readers in different ways, with those in the humanities and social sciences taking far more explicitly involved and personal positions than those in the sciences and engineering.

Research Methodology

Collection of Data and Corpus Compilation

The current study is corpus based in design. Its major objective is to find out whether humanities, social sciences and sciences significantly differ in the use of attitudinal stance devices and includes the analysis of attitudinal stance devices that are frequently reported to occur in Pakistani academic writing. Three sets of data were constructed with the collection of 235 M.Phil. and doctoral theses written by Pakistani university students between 2006 and 2014. The theses were collected from different universities of Pakistan personally as well as from HEC research repository available on HEC Website. The discipline of Humanities employs interpretative methodology focusing on text analysis, and reflective thinking that distinguish them from social sciences (as extensions of sciences) and sciences that employ empirical, rational, objective and quantitative methodology. However, humanities and social sciences are concerned with human behavior and events and tend to be more interpretive and detailed in description.

The corpus includes all the main research sections of research theses, namely: introduction, review of literature, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. Table 2 shows the size of the corpora investigated throughout this study.

Table 2. Corpus Size (Description of Corpus in Terms of words)

Sr. #	Discipline	No of words
1	Humanities	3,852,622
2	Social Sciences	2,663,503
3	Sciences	1,868,875
4	**Total**	**8,385,000**

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data went through two different phases.

Phase I

In the first phase the analysis of the data went through the following steps:

Tagging of the Corpus

The corpus of Pakistani academic writing was tagged by employing Biber's tagger for all the linguistic features used to indicate attitudinal stance, namely attitudinal adjectives, attitudinal verbs, attitudinal adverbs and nouns as presented in the framework given by Biber (2006).

Turning Raw Counts of Linguistic Features into Normalized Frequencies

Biber's tag count program was used for the raw counts of the frequencies of different linguistic features and normalized frequencies. The raw frequencies of linguistic features were obtained from all texts (235) and computed out of 1000 words.

Analysis of Variance

ANOVA was applied to see statistically significant differences among disciplines in the use of attitudinal stance devices.

Phase II

Frequency Count of attitudinal stance markers

Locating all the occurrences of stance markers in each discipline was the first step to count the frequency of each stance device. This process was accomplished using AntConc (Anthony, 2011). AntConc was considered to be a good choice to analyze the stance markers, calculate their frequency, and Antconc 3.4.4 was used to count the frequency of each stance device taken from Biber in the corpus of Pakistani academic writing and differences were calculated across disciplines**.** Antconc generated the lists of the targeted items along with their concordance lines. In order to keep a record of frequencies, Excel documents for humanities social sciences and sciences were created. The number of times and the instances of the texts in which stance markers appeared, were all documented in the Excel files and used for further analysis. However, the instances which seemed to be irrelevant and least associated with the objectives of the present research were excluded from the final analysis. Additionally, this process of keeping a record of stance markers in Excel files enabled the manual analysis of the stance devices as well.

Results

The table given below presents the ANOVA results of comparison among disciplines on the use of attitudinal stance devices:

Table 3. Comparison of Means among Disciplines on Attitudinal Stance Devices

Group	att_vb_other	th_nn_att	advl_att	th_jj_att
Humanities	3.030±0.406A	0.209±0.026A	0.068±0.008A	0.058±0.008A
Sciences	0.851±0.067B	0.013±0.005C	0.016±0.006C	0.007±0.003C
Social sciences	3.123±0.185A	0.113±0.014B	0.048±0.007B	0.028±0.005B

Means sharing similar letter in a column are statistically non-significant (P>0.05).

The results show that all the three disciplines have statistically significant differences in the use of attitudinal stance devices.

Discussion

The present section discusses disciplinary variation among disciplines on the use of attitudinal stance devices.

Comparison among Disciplines on Attitudinal Stance Devices

The results given in Table 2 reveal that there are statistically significant differences among disciplines in the use of attitudinal stance devices. The figure given below compares the mean dimension scores of attitudinal stance devices across three disciplines of Pakistani academic writing.
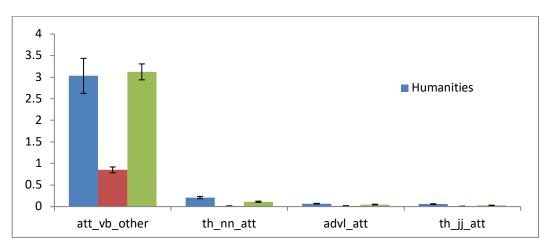
Figure 1. Comparison of Attitudinal Stance Devices across Disciplines

The comparison among disciplines on attitudinal stance devices reveals that the three disciplines incline to use attitudinal stance devices; however, attitudinal verbs with the highest mean score are most the frequently occurring devices in all the three disciplines. Whereas, the other three attitudinal stance devices have been found less frequent in all the three disciplines. Social sciences with the highest mean scores have been found more inclined towards the use of attitudinal verbs. On the use of attitudinal nouns, the three disciplines exhibit a slightly different trend, as humanities are shown more inclined towards the use of attitudinal nouns as compared to social sciences and sciences. Sciences remain consistent on this device as well. There is minimum use of attitudinal adverbs and adjectives in all the three disciplines. However, humanities are shown more inclined towards the use attitudinal adverbs and adjectives than social sciences and sciences. Sciences on all the four stance devices remain consistent in using the least expression of stance in the production of academic discourse. Over all, humanities have shown the highest tendency with maximum mean score in the use of attitudinal stance devices. The frequent use of attitudinal stance devices in humanities indicates the most opinion based and evaluative presentation of facts in this discipline. However, social sciences are also on the same verge with a slight difference in the mean score and are inclined towards the presentation of evaluative and persuasive academic discourse. Sciences are shown as the least evaluative discourse and least inclined towards the expression of opinion and assessments about the proposition of facts. The results also indicate that humanities and social sciences in Pakistani academic discourse are more prone to invoke readers with their own perspective on the presentation of facts. The following example exhibits the evaluative stance of Humanities.

*Political scientists **agreed** on the most common tactic.*
*It can be **expected** that the effectiveness of television junk-food advertisements increases.*
*The under discussion study also shows the same results as we were **expecting**.*

The results are in accordance with the previous study on disciplinary variation in stance marking by Biber et al (1991) in that academic writers in humanities and social sciences tend to be more explicitly involved by maintaining personal positions than those in the sciences and engineering. The results of the present study also support Akinci, S (2016)'s findings on the use of stance markers by students and experts in humanities and sciences. By using Hyland model of stance markers Akinci had come to conclude that both students and teachers in applied linguistics use twice more stance markers than those of civil engineering.

Comparison among Disciplines on Attitudinal Adjectives

Figure 2 given on the next page exhibits the comparison among disciplines on stance adjectives and reveals frequency of attitudinal adjectives across humanities, social sciences and sciences.
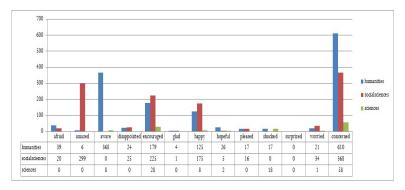
	afraid	amazed	aware	disappointed	encouraged	glad	happy	hopeful	pleased	shocked	surprized	worried	concerned
humanities	39	6	368	24	179	4	125	26	17	17	0	21	610
socialsciences	20	299	0	25	225	1	175	5	16	0	0	34	368
sciences	0	0	8	0	28	0	8	2	0	18	0	1	58

Figure 2: Comparison among Disciplines on Adjectives

Figure 2 draws a comparison among disciplines on the use of stance adjectives. It is considered useful to note that one (i.e. Surprised) out of 13 types of attitudinal adjectives was not found in any discipline. Further, it is seen that the three disciplines display considerable differences. Stance adjectives like *concerned and aware* are shown as the most frequently occurring attitudinal adjectives in humanities when compared with social sciences and sciences. Whereas, *amazed, encouraged, happy and concerned* are shown as the most frequently occurring stance adjectives in social sciences. Sciences are shown as least inclined towards the use of stance adjectives with minimum number of stance adjectives. Over all it is exhibited that there is enough presence of stance adjectives in humanities (as shown with the highest frequency of stance adjectives with the sum total of 1436) and social sciences with slightly lesser number (1168) of attitudinal adjectives as compared with sciences.
The below given example from humanities exhibit the use of adjectives in Pakistani academic writing.

*The civil society remained much **concerned***
*Women are not **aware** of their legal and Islamic rights.*
*They must be **encouraged** to participate in government's anti-terrorist activities.*

The results are similar to Agcam's (2015) study of attitudinal stance devices in academic writing of native and non-native writers, where he found the two adjectives (*concerned and aware)* as the most frequented items.

Comparison among Disciplines on Stance Verbs

The figure given below compares the frequency of attitudinal verbs across three disciplines and reveals that humanities and social sciences are found more inclined towards using attitudinal verbs.
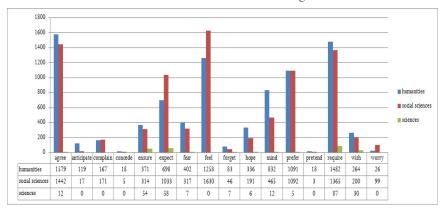

	agree	anticipate	complain	concede	ensure	expect	fear	feel	forget	hope	mind	prefer	pretend	require	wish	worry
humanities	1579	119	167	18	371	698	402	1258	83	336	832	1091	18	1482	264	26
social sciences	1442	17	171	5	314	1033	317	1630	46	191	465	1092	3	1365	200	99
sciences	12	0	0	0	54	58	7	0	7	6	12	5	0	87	30	0

Figure 3: Comparison among Disciplines on Attitudinal Stance Verbs

Figure 3 draws a comparison among disciplines on attitudinal verbs and reveals that the attitudinal verbs are the most frequent stance device in Pakistani academic discourse. The figure shows that both humanities and social sciences have a similar tendency in the use of attitudinal verbs, whereas, sciences are shown least inclined to use the attitudinal verbs. *Agree, feel, mind, prefer, and require* are found as the most frequently occurring verbs in humanities. *Expect, feel, prefer, prefer and agree* are the most frequently occurring attitudinal verbs in social sciences. Sciences are again shown as the least inclined towards the use of attitudinal verbs. Attitudinal verbs like anticipate, complain, concede, feel, pretend and worry don not occur at all in the corpus of sciences.

Feel, require, agree and expect are the most frequent attitudinal verbs in humanities and social sciences. Attitudinal verbs like *pretend and concede* are the least common among all attitudinal verbs in all the three disciplines. The attitudinal expressions with the highest frequency in both Humanities and social sciences indicate that there is an intense presence of opinion based and affective stance in both these disciplines that is enough to persuade readers. Moreover it is notable that humanities and social sciences have similar tendency in the use of attitudinal verbs occurring both at high frequency and low frequency. There are slight differences in the frequency rate of attitudinal verbs like *require, prefer, complain, wish and fear* in both humanities and social sciences. Following are the extract from the corpus of Pakistani academic writing.

- *Students and teachers **agree** with what should be implemented*
- *It is **agreed** that it is valid too.*
- *teacher at higher education level feels under paid,*
- *It is **hostile feeling** towards the job*
- *Employees **feel** dissatisfaction if they find any discrepency——*
- *Women therefore rightly **feel** a kinship and partnership with nature*

The results are quite different from Abdollohzadeh's study (2011) on stance expression in the discipline of applied linguistics where he found attitudinal adjectives and adverbs more frequent than attitudinal verbs.

Comparison among Disciplines on Attitudinal Adverbs

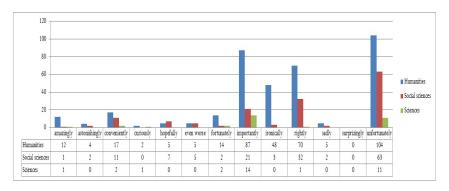The below given figure exhibits comparison among disciplines on the use of attitudinal adverbs.

	amazingly	astonishingly	conveniently	curiously	hopefully	even worse	fortunately	importantly	ironically	rightly	sadly	surprizingly	unfortunately
Humanities	12	4	17	2	5	5	14	87	48	70	5	0	104
Social sciences	1	2	11	0	7	5	2	21	3	32	2	0	63
Sciences	1	0	2	1	0	0	2	14	0	1	0	0	11

Figure 4: Comparison among Disciplines on the use of Attitudinal Adverbs

Figure 4 draws a comparison among disciplines on the use of attitudinal adverbs. Attitudinal adverbs are found as the least frequently occurring items in all three disciplines. As shown in the figure above, most of the types falling into the category of attitudinal adverbs occurred less than ten times in all the three disciplines (i.e., *amazingly, astonishingly, conveniently, hopefully, even worse, fortunately, and sadly*). Since the most frequently used attitudinal adverbs (i.e., importantly, surprisingly and unfortunately) appeared less than 100 times in each set, it is not surprising if some of them are occurring less than ten times. Almost all the attitudinal adverbs have been found most frequent in humanities where *unfortunately and importantly* are comparatively shown as more frequent. In sciences, attitudinal adverbs are seldom used. In the whole corpora, only 33 attitudinal adverbs have been

used. The following examples from humanities exhibit the use of attitudinal adverbs in Pakistani academic writing.

Surprisingly, the least impersonal and more personal section is the section on Result

At the end amazingly it was mentioned that the United States and Canada will be the net gainers

During the past two centenary two states have modified trade plans importantly by decreasing duties, the magnitude of tariff kinds and regulative tariffs.

Comparison among Disciplines on Attitudinal nouns

The figure given draws a comparison among disciplines on attitudinal nouns.

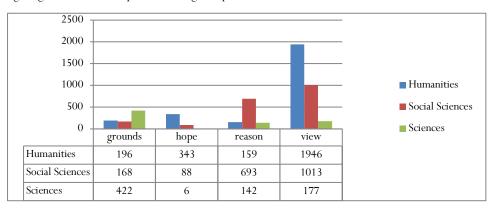|	grounds	hope	reason	view
Humanities	196	343	159	1946
Social Sciences	168	88	693	1013
Sciences	422	6	142	177

Figure 4: Comparison among disciplines on attitudinal nouns

Attitudinal nouns comprise another frequently occurring semantic class in the three disciplines. However, '*view*' is as the most frequent semantic class among all attitudinal stance devices and have been found most frequently occurring in humanities. However, social sciences are next to humanities in the frequency of attitudinal nouns, view, grounds and hope. Sciences, although have shown least inclination towards the use of attitudinal stance devices, are found comparatively more inclined towards the use of attitudinal nouns in using the least number of stance expressions which indicates that humanities and social sciences are more inclined towards the expression of subjective and opinion based discourse as compared to sciences.

*The Government may have **review** on this participation and formulate the policy for WAT by taking people into confidence.*

*Drone strikes on religious seminary have minimized the **hopes** of Taliban*

*For this **reason**, multiple comparisons are required to compare more than different categories.*

Conclusion

The present study has revealed that attitudinal stance devices are fundamentally important in Pakistani academic writing. Academic writers from all the three disciplines have been found more or less inclined towards the use of attitudinal stance markers to communicate their feelings and attitudes while producing academic discourse. However, the results have shown that academic authors of humanities and social sciences are more inclined towards subjective and opinion based discourse and convey their attitudes more than the sciences group in their academic writing. By using more attitudinal stance markers, academic writers in humanities and social sciences intend to plea to their readers' feelings and persuade them to agree with what they have communicated in their discourse and accept it in the same way they themselves entertain it. Considering what Hyland (2005) has commented on writing in the soft disciplines, the humanities and social sciences seem to use attitude markers to invoke an intelligent reader and a credible, collegial writer more frequently than the sciences group. The findings of the present study are in confirmation of the previous studies (Hyland, 2005; 2011; Vold, 2006, Akinci, 2016), where humanities and social sciences are much more inclined to the use of attitudinal stance markers as compared to sciences.

The findings of the present research might also be attributed to differences in the subject matter as humanities and social sciences are concerned with human behaviour and social events and the academic writers are to elaborate and justify results. Whereas, sciences on the other hand deal with factual data, so the writers need not to explain and defend their results. The findings may also be attributed to the type of readership associated with the three disciplines.

As far the use of attitudinal stance devices, attitudinal verbs with the highest frequency (17412) have been found the most frequently occurring device in all the three disciplines, whereas, the attitudinal adverbs with the lowest frequency (554) have been found the least frequently occurring device in the three disciplines.

The results of the present study may prove to be useful source to the researchers working on Pakistani English as a distinct variety and may be compared with other varieties of English. Academic writers from different other disciplines may also get insight into variation among disciplines on the use of stance devices.

The present study is limited to the inquiry of 235 M.Phil. and doctoral dissertations produced by Pakistani university students between 2006 and 2014. It is confined only to the three academic disciplines. Therefore, it is thought that more ample corpora including works of various disciplines and genres of academic discourse might be constructed and investigated in relation to other aspects of academic writing. Similarly, author stance might be scrutinized through spoken productions of academics in such events as conferences or symposiums. Finally, reasons why attitudinal stance devices were overused by academic authors of humanities in comparison to social sciences and sciences might be explored in further studies.

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