STANCE AND ENGAGEMENT IN EFL LEARNER INTERACTIONS

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Abstract: This study seeks to understand the construction of stance and engagement in Indonesian EFL learners' interactions during panel discussions and group presentations in the classroom. Employing Hyland's (2005) framework, we investigate stance and engagement markers in Universitas Negeri Malang Spoken English in Academia *K*onteks (UMSpEAKs), a spoken corpus of EFL learners' speech in academic contexts. The overall findings show that stance projection is more common than audience engagement. Stance projection in both speech events is constructed by hedges and self-mentions. There seems to be a reluctance among the learners to use other stance markers such as boosters and attitude markers. Regarding audience engagement, audience mentions are highly frequent, while directives, asides, knowledge references, and questions are rarely used. These findings indicate that the speakers in both speech events tend to project a humble and polite stance, which sometimes leads to an uncertain and ambiguous self-projection. These speakers are inclined to address the audience by using the second-person pronoun *you* to keep them engaged in the interactions.

Keywords: classroom interaction, engagement, group presentations, panel discussions, stance, UMSpEAKs

Interactions have been found fruitful in facilitating second and foreign language learning, as they provide opportunities for learners to negotiate meanings (Brown, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). The importance of interactions for language learning is also present in Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism concept, which highlights the vital role of dialogue for meaning-making and learning. His concept is based on the idea that every human being strives to make meaning out of social interactions (Nesari, 2015). Against this background, numerous studies have been conducted to analyze interactions in second or foreign language classrooms. These studies

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have led to a major direction in applied linguistics and educational research (Rashidi & Rafieerad, 2010).

Among many types of interactions (see Dagarin, 2004), studies focusing on teacher-student interactions have received the largest attention because these are the interactions that occur the most in the language classrooms (Mingzhi, 2005). Meanwhile, in the Indonesian context, most studies related to classroom interactions have focused on teachers' talk (e.g., Aisyah, 2016; Sofyan & Mahmud, 2018), patterns of teacher-student interactions (e.g., Suryati, 2015; Zainil, 2013), and teachers' perspectives on classroom interactions (e.g., Sundari, 2017), which are mostly conducted in Indonesian primary to secondary schools. For instance, Aisyah (2016) analyzed the most occurring category of teacher talk in the Indonesian EFL classroom. The study reported that questions are by far the most frequent category that occurred in the classroom. In another study by Sofyan and Mahmud (2018), asking questions is also proven to be dominant in EFL teacher talk.

The extent to which foreign language learners engage in different types of interactions that may promote their language development, and the factors that might contribute to this type of interaction, need further investigation (Philp et al., 2010). Meanwhile, studies about the interactions among EFL students at the tertiary level of education have been quite limited, especially in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Addressing this gap in the literature, the current study investigates interactions among Indonesian undergraduate students in their EFL classrooms, particularly during panel discussions and group presentations. The two speech events are selected due to their interactional nature in EFL instruction (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006).

By investigating learner interactions during the two speech events in the selected setting, this study follows Kang's (2015) suggestion to explore how peer interactions unfold in various sociocultural settings. Since previous studies on panel discussions and group presentations have mostly examined their importance, role, and benefits in language learning (e.g., Brooks & Wilson, 2014; Bucy, 2006; Prayoga, 2018;), this study contributes to the literature by focusing on the learners' stance and engagement construction during these speech events. In addition, it is beneficial to understand how interactions happen in EFL classrooms to help students develop their language proficiency, social interaction strategies, and communication skills (Lucero & Rouse, 2017).

The majority of studies on interactions in Indonesian EFL classrooms (e.g., Sundari, 2017; Suryati, 2015; Zainil, 2013) have been conducted in Indonesian primary to secondary schools. Notably, there has been limited attention to peer interactions, especially among those at the tertiary level. Moreover, these studies have not explored the construction of stance and engagement using Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse framework, which offers a valuable lens for understanding how students use language to project attitudes and engage their audience. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing peer-to-peer interactions during panel discussions and group presentations in an Indonesian EFL setting, applying Hyland's (2005) nine key resources of academic interaction which are classified into stance and engagement. Stance is about how learners project their attitude and evaluation and comprises markers such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. Meanwhile, engagement markers maintain interaction with

listeners through audience mentions, directives, asides, knowledge references, and questions, which all function to include interlocutors in the interactions.

Our preliminary study has confirmed that panel discussions and group presentations in the Indonesian EFL classrooms elicited much interaction among the learners, which was seen from their active participation in the class. During both activities, the learners were assigned different roles as moderators, speakers, and audience. Thus, they could carry out the speech events with little intervention from the teachers. Probably the only difference between the two speech events was the use of presentation slides in group presentations which was absent in panel discussions. Even though it has been widely known that different classroom scenario encourages different ways of interaction, further investigation is needed to examine how learner interactions in panel discussions and group presentations differ, or their similarities, in terms of learners' stance and engagement markers.

Investigating the frequency of speakers' use of linguistic features "is a first step in the study of what motivates the use (or avoidance) of these features in their language" (Gablasova et al., 2017, p. 6). This is useful to reveal emerging issues about stance and engagement construction in Indonesian EFL learners' interactions. Thus, this study aims to answer the following questions.

1. What are the most frequent stance features in panel discussions and group presentations?
2. What are the most frequent engagement markers in panel discussions and group presentations?

Review of Related Literature

Stance and engagement markers belong to the concept of metadiscourse. Many scholars have attempted to pin down the term and classify its taxonomy (e.g., Ädel, 2010; Crismore et al., 1993; Hyland, 2005; Hyland and Tse, 2004; Vande Kopple, 1985). Metadiscourse is a writing about the evolving text, rather than referring to the subject matter (Swales, 2004). It is a concept that offers a way of "collecting under one heading the range of devices writers use to explicitly organize texts, engage readers, and signal their attitude to both their material and their audience," (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 156). It functions to facilitate communication, support a writer or speaker's position, and maintain a connection with the audience (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Thus, understanding the use of stance and engagement markers as the key components of metadiscourse offers valuable insights into constructing meaning and building relationships.

The present study adopts stance and engagement markers from Hyland's (2005; 2008) model of metadiscourse, among other models. Vande Kopple's (1985) model, for instance, became the pioneer as the first systematic taxonomy that inspired extensive research and the development of new frameworks, but its categories are criticized for being vague and overlapping in function (Amiryousefi & Rasekh, 2010). Hyland's taxonomy is considered the most comprehensive as it is evolving and open, with research findings contributing to its refinement and development (Heng & Tan, 2010). Although Hyland's model was originally developed for written discourse, it has been successfully applied to spoken academic discourse

as well (Yu & Cadman, 2009). Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse in academic interaction is shown in Figure 1.
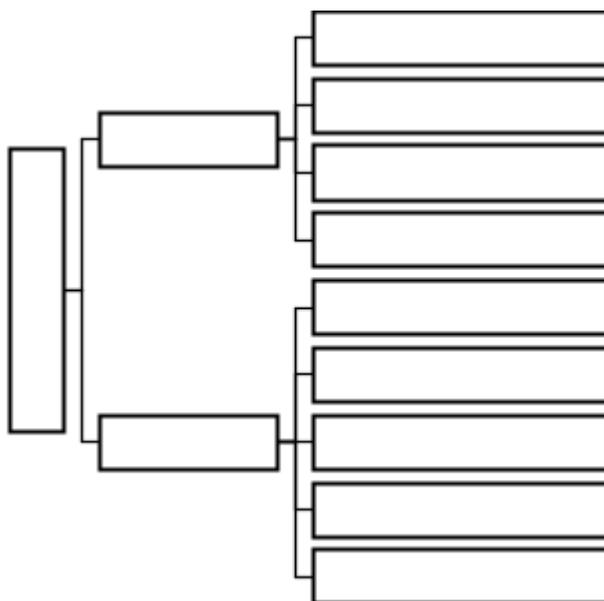
Figure 1. Key Resources of Academic Interaction (Hyland, 2005, p. 177)

According to Hyland (2005), interaction in academic discourse is managed by showing a stance and engaging the audience. Stance is writer- or speaker-oriented revealing how the writer or speaker positions themselves in relation to the proposition being expressed. In a spoken discourse, it is through stance that speakers project themselves in the claims that they make and maintain a credible academic persona. This is also achieved by conveying their attitude toward a proposition. By showing stance, speakers intrude in the arguments to show their authority, or step back and disguise their involvement. Speakers' stance or position and attitude toward a proposition can be seen through hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions.

Engagement, on the other hand, is audience-oriented where the presence of others is recognized, and their concerns are anticipated. Engagement is about inviting the audience along with arguments, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations as desired by speakers. Speakers' engagement with the audience can be observed through the use of pronouns, directives, questions, and shared knowledge. These are markers that speakers consciously choose to connect with the audience to "anticipate their possible objections and engage them in appropriate ways" (Hyland, 2005, p. 182).

Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse was derived from his impressive study of written texts. In his later study (Hyland, 2008), he specified some linguistic items that belong to each metadiscourse marker. Some linguistic items demonstrating speakers' stance and engagement are presented in Table 1. Since the present study deals with spoken data, some references to 'writers' and 'readers' are changed to 'speakers' and 'audience', respectively.

Table 1. Interactional Metadiscourse in Academic Discourse (Hyland, 2008)

Category	Functions	Linguistic Items
Stance	**Convey personal feelings, assessments, and attitudes**	
Hedges	Indicate the degree of confidence for a claim	possible, may, could
Boosters	Express certainty, mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with the audience	obviously, surely, highly, definitely
Attitude markers	Indicate speakers' affective, attitude to propositions, convey surprise, agreement	remarkable, proficient, unexpected
Self-mentions	Project an impression of a speaker's self	I, we, our
Engagement	**Bring the audience into the discourse, anticipate their possible objections**	
Audience mentions	Explicitly engage the audience in a discourse	you, we, our
Directives	Direct audience to engage in textual, physical, or cognitive acts	see, open, consider, note
Personal asides	Interrupt an argument, comment on what has been said	as I believe
Appeals to shared knowledge/ Knowledge references	Ask the audience to recognize something as familiar or accepted	well known, obviously
Questions	Invite engagement, encourage curiosity	Why…?, How…?

In the Indonesian context, studies on stance and engagement in learners' interactions are scarce. The complex nature of peer interaction in the classroom (Philp, et al., 2010) likely contributes to the scarcity of studies focusing on stance and engagement markers in EFL learner interactions. Research specifically investigating these markers in student interactions is limited, particularly in spoken classroom activities. This gap is even more evident in the Indonesian context, where few studies have examined how learners construct stance and engage their peers during classroom discourse. There are also only a handful of studies that explore these markers in EFL settings in other contexts. To the best of our knowledge, only few studies have analyzed discourse markers in EFL learner interactions (e.g., Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017; Yang, 2014; Yu and Cadman, 2009; Zakaria & Malik, 2018;), none of which

have investigated the distinctive patterns of stance and engagement markers in peer-to-peer interactions within Indonesian EFL classrooms.

METHOD

Research Design

Since the present study deals with frequencies and interpretation of the numerical data, a corpus-based design is considered to be the most appropriate design as it combines quantitative and qualitative approaches (Biber et al., 1998), and it is common among corpus researchers to supplement the quantitative results with a qualitative analysis and interpretation of those results (Anthony, 2017).

This study investigates the Universitas Negeri Malang Spoken English in Academic *K*onteks (UMSpEAKs) corpus, an English learner corpus comprising transcriptions of Indonesian EFL undergraduate learners' classroom utterances. Such learner corpora can be a helpful resource to understand "how people learn languages and how they can be helped to learn them better" (Leech, 1998, p. xvi) and are "particularly useful in language pedagogy and second language acquisition research" (McEnery & Xiao, 2010, p. 372). Spoken learner corpora, however, are much rarer compared to written ones, despite the growing demand for them in language research (Yoon, 2020). This is largely because the development of spoken corpora involves significant costs at every stage, from recording to transcriptions. For example, the English Speech Corpus of Chinese Learners (ESCCL) contains valuable data, but the spoken interactions are mainly read-aloud dialogues or controlled tasks rather than spontaneous speech (Kolesnikova & González-González, 2016). In contrast, UMSpEA*K*s focuses on naturally occurring spoken interactions in an EFL classroom setting, specifically within the Indonesian context. This corpus captures real-time peer-to-peer interactions, which makes it a suitable resource for investigating how Indonesian learners of English construct stance and engagement during academic discussions and presentations.

The Corpus

As seen in Figure 2, the UMSpEA*K*s corpus contains naturally occurring spoken texts collected from the Department of English, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang, between 2017 and 2019 (Hidayati et al., 2019). It is composed of interactions from both undergraduate and postgraduate EFL classrooms. Recordings were made during regular classroom activities, including panel discussions, group presentations, and debates. The students continued their activities as usual, ensuring the data captured reflects authentic classroom interactions. The spoken data was then transcribed into written forms, and the final corpus consists of 30,513 words from panel discussions and 34,285 words from group presentations, totaling 64,798 words.

As noted earlier, UM-SpEA*K*s is a corpus of spoken data collection. The recordings were intentionally made without disrupting classroom activities, which allowed for capturing students' natural spoken performances during classroom discussion, presentations, and debates (Pratiwi et al., 2020). The audio was then transcribed manually and resulting in written data

consisting of transcriptions of these classroom activities. The present study focuses on two sub-corpora from UMSpEAKs, namely students' interactions during panel discussions and group presentations. Although these two sub-corpora have been orthographically transcribed, they have not yet been part-of-speech (POS) tagged. However, for this analysis, tagging was not required. The study relied on AntConc software to extract stance and engagement markers, which are relatively easy to identify in a corpus of this size without the need for tagging. Additionally, various stance and engagement markers which support Hyland's analytic scheme can be efficiently identified using the Word and KWIC features in AntConc.

While other spoken learner corpora, such as ESCCL (Kolesnikova & Gonzalez-Gonzalez, 2016), are valuable resources, they also highlight certain limitations in representing spontaneous speech, since they often contain read-aloud tasks. Each corpus, including UMSpEAKs, has its strengths and limitations, with the focus on learner interaction being a unique feature of UMSpEAKs. Compared to written learner corpora, spoken learner corpora are relatively scarce, due to the higher cost of building and publishing them at all stages (Yoon, 2020). UMSpEAKs, by providing insights into spontaneous classroom interactions, contributes to filling this gap in the literature, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context.
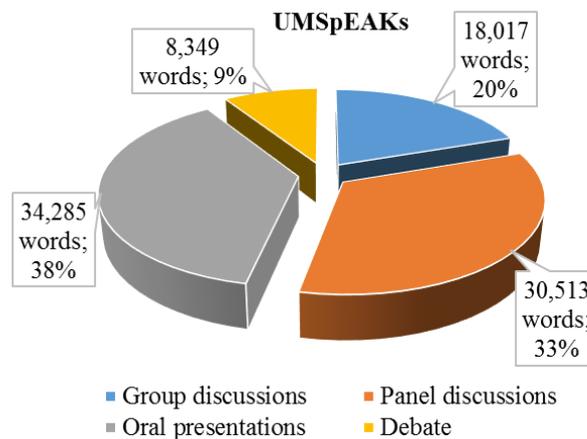

Figure 2. The Composition of UMSpEAKs

Thus, the data for the present study were taken from the two sub-corpora compiled from 2017 to 2019. The data were in the form of utterances produced by undergraduate students of the English Department, Faculty of Letters, majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT) and English Language and Literature (ELL) programs. Their utterances during panel discussions and group presentations which were held in the classrooms were recorded and manually transcribed. We then examined the transcriptions in detail to check if the utterances had been transcribed accurately and used consistent transcription conventions.

Data Analysis

Considering the importance of the early stages of analysis in corpus study (Marchi, 2009), selecting lexical items to investigate requires careful reading of previous relevant studies. Hence, we identified a set of words showing stance and engagement in the academic setting by following Hyland's (2005; 2008) definition of stance and engagement features. In addition to that, lexical items that had been identified in and suggested by previous studies on metadiscourse markers (e.g., Akinci, 2016; Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Gilquin, 2008; Yang, 2014; Yu & Cadman, 2009) were also compiled into the wordlist. The list of stance and engagement markers examined in this study can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. List of Lexical Items Showing Stance and Engagement

Stance Feature	Lexical Items
Hedges	may, might, perhaps, feel, like, can, could, seem, kind, sort, think, bit, approximately, apparently, generally, many, most, primarily, largely, mostly, often, relatively, somewhat, usually, sometimes, just, something, whatever, really, maybe
Boosters	surely, obviously, clearly, in fact, certainly, always, significantly, very, highly, strongly, totally, definitely, undoubtedly, without a doubt, extremely, truly
Attitude markers	!, unfortunately, fortunately, (dis)agree, important, interesting, excellent, amazing, exciting, outstanding, fantastic, perfect, great, nice, challenging, best, narrow, poor, problematic, (in my) opinion, good
Self-mention	I, my, we, our, presenter, speaker, panelist, members

Engagement Feature	Lexical Items
Audience mention	you, your, everyone, ladies, gentlemen/man, friends, classmates, audience, guys
Directives	see, refer to, open, note, consider, look, take, must+verb, should+verb, have to, need to, it is necessary to, it is important to, suppose, imagine, remember, repeat
Asides	as I believe, it is true, by the way, as I know
Knowledge reference	well known, popularly believed, it is generally believed, (as) we know, of course, we can see, we know that
Questions	what, why, who, when, where, how, can, could, do is, are

To generate the frequencies of each lexical item, this study used Antconc 3.5.8, which was developed by Anthony (2019). Wiechmann and Fuhs (2006) claimed that the software gives many advantages to any corpus linguist who deals with multiple files. Each occurrence of the lexical items was checked by using the KWIC feature to ensure that the examined items did function to show stance or engage the audience. Finally, the frequencies of the lexical items were normalized per thousand words (ptw). From this, the patterns of stance and engagement in panel discussions and group presentations were identified and the construction of stance and engagement in both speech events were discussed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In general, stance and engagement features do not share the same frequency of occurrences in panel discussions and group presentations. As seen in Table 3, the total frequency of stance features in both speech events (147.1 ptw) is three times larger than that of engagement features (48.2 ptw). When the speech events are compared, stance features are more prevalent in panel discussions than group presentations. Furthermore, the frequency of engagement features in panel discussions is slightly higher than that in group presentations.

Table 3. Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Panel Discussion and Group Presentations

Speech events	Stance features (ptw)	Engagement features (ptw)
Panel discussions	95.0	27.4
Group presentations	52.1	20.8
Total	**147.1**	**48.2**

Frequencies of Stance Features

As seen from Figure 3, hedges and self-mentions are the most frequent stance features used by the learners in panel discussions. The similarity of both speech events is in the lack of boosters and attitude markers. Another similarity is in the lexical items that function as hedges. In panel discussions, *like* appears 13.5 ptw, *can* 7.4 ptw, and *think* 6.5 ptw. Similarly, in group presentations, the most frequent items are *like* (7.2 ptw), *can* (4.6 ptw), and *think* (1.7).
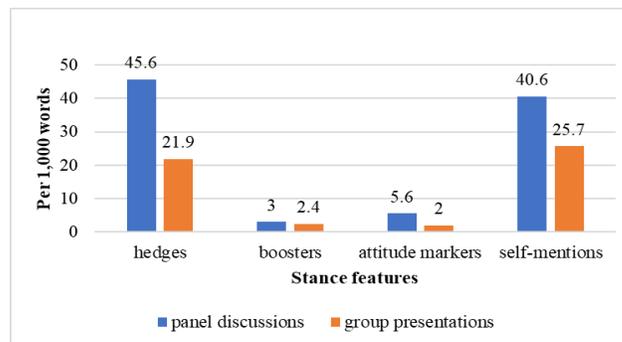

Figure 3. Distribution of Stance Markers in Panel Discussions and Group Presentations (per 1,000 words)

In both speech events, *like*, *can*, and *think* appear at the initial, medial, and final positions in learners' utterances. Among these utterances, *like* appearing in phrases such as *like that* and *something like that* are the most frequently hedged expressions that occur in both speech events. The following are some examples.

(1) When man wears, **something like**, pink t-shirt we call him as a gay and so when men is capable doing house work, it is a shame. (PD 3)

(2) So, sometimes, she, she showed herself as she, sometimes as 'I am a gay man', sometimes, uh, she like, uh, 'I am both', or **something like that**. (OP 1)

(3) It depends on, uh, it depends on her, **like**, environment and also home she grows up, **like that**. (PD 2)

The second highest frequency of hedges in both speech events is *can*. In panel discussions, *can* is mostly preceded by the pronouns *we*, *you*, *it*, *that*, and *they*. In group presentations, *can* mostly appears in *you can*, *we can*, and *it can*. Observed from the context, most instances of *can* function to impose flexibility in arguments, possibility, and permission. The following are some examples.

(1) So with gender equality we can take a look nowadays **we**, as a woman here, **can** get equal education as well. (PD 10)

(2) Okay, let's move to the third question. What are the advantages by having that personality? **We can** start from Miss Emi. (PD 8)

(3) Today we will hear the presentation of thesis proposal by Bila. So, **you can** start. (OP 9)

The third most frequent hedges in panel discussions and group presentations is *think*. In both speech events, *think* mostly appears as *I think*, as seen in the following samples.

(1) **I think**, uh, I agree, uh, with, uh, opinion that we do not need to limit, uh, someone's talent. (PD 1)

(2) **I think** gender is like, uh, it is created not from biologically but from the environment, like that. (PD 2)

(3) **I think** it may be better than lacking of pronunciation. (OP 8)

The findings above also show the prevalence of the first pronoun *I* in the speech events. This pronoun has the highest frequency in both speech events. It occurs 19 ptw in panel discussions and 12.8 ptw in group presentations and was mostly followed by *think*.

Frequencies of Engagement Features

The pattern of engagement features as seen in Figure 4 points out the similarity between the interactions in panel discussions and group presentations. Seen from the frequencies of each feature, there is slightly more engagement in panel discussions than in group presentations. Engagement markers appear 27.46 ptw in panel discussions.
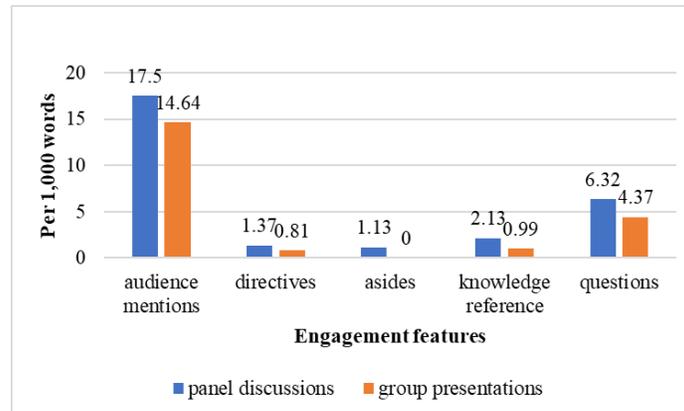
Figure 4. Distribution of Engagement Markers in Panel Discussions and Group Presentations (per 1,000 Words)

In panel discussions, audience mention is the most frequent engagement feature, which occurs 17.5 ptw. Similarly, there is a frequent use of audience mention in group presentations, totaling up to 14.6 ptw. In both speech events, the second-person pronoun *you* has the highest frequency of occurrence (14.25 ptw in panel discussions and 12.45 ptw in group presentations), which is followed by the possessive form *your* (2.13 ptw in panel discussions and 1.98 ptw in group presentations). *You* is used by the speakers in both speech events in various forms. This pronoun appears as questions, thanking expressions, and fillers. The following are some examples.

(1) **Thank you** for the time, Miss Risa (moderator). Why is gender equality, I mean, that, why is gender equality important for us, okay, I will answer. (PD 10)

(2) That's it our presentation, **thank you** very much for your attention. (OP 6)

(3) And that's all from our group. **Thank you** so much for your attention. (OP 4)

You also appears with the verb *know*. *You know* is categorized as lexicalized fillers (Rose, 1998), which appears flexibly in an utterance and can be deleted from the utterance without changing its meaning. Below are the examples.

(1) And that is what makes, **you know**, the culture change, like, **you know**. (PD 1)

(2) So, I have to, **you know**, join some serious bilingual communities in order to always have this spirit to learn a new language. (OP 8)

The phrase *you know* also marks the speakers' hesitations, which is apparent from the short pauses accompanying the phrase. Below are some examples.

(1) Uh, related with the point of, uh, my, **uh**, **you know**, the significance of the study. (OP 1)

(2) And then we can, we can, **uh**, **you know**, use more polite to speak with the women or something like that. (PD 7)

Discussion

The overall findings suggest that although stance and engagement markers are highly regular in Indonesian EFL learners' interactions during panel discussions and group presentations, conveying an authorial stance is more prioritized than engaging the audience. The weaker tendency to employ engagement expressions regarding audience interaction is not only present in the Indonesian EFL context but is also found in other EFL contexts such as among Turkish English learners (Kizil, 2017) and pre-university Arab students (Zakaria & Malik, 2018). For learners from various academic cultures, connecting with the audience in an English language presentation remains challenging (Yu & Cadman, 2009). In other words, what is expected by the members of an academic domain may differ from the culture where the EFL class is located. The paucity of engagement markers in Indonesian EFL learners' interaction seems to be related to the difficulty in determining the extent to which an audience engagement is considered appropriate. This is because in an academic spoken discourse held in the classroom, most learners have to deal with different expectations of the academic culture and the culture of society where the discourse takes place.

Furthermore, the findings show that there are more instances of both stance and engagement markers in panel discussions compared to group presentations. Thus, in terms of speech events, learners in panel discussions seem to enjoy a more interactive atmosphere. This may indicate that in cases where promoting learner-centeredness and facilitating learners' speaking practice, panel discussions can be an alternative classroom activity, as it has been found to encourage more interactions among the learners. A possible explanation for the fewer stance and engagement markers in group presentations is that, in the Indonesian EFL context, most speakers in group presentations tend to focus more on the content than on how they deliver the presentation. As Mardiningrum and Ramadhani's (2022) study revealed, most students found the content of their presentation challenging. The difficulty of the content might contribute to the lower engagement in this speech event. There also seems to be a custom among the students to display and read overload information on the slides, as reported by Angelina (2019), instead of improvising or engaging the audience. Some Indonesian EFL students in Amelia (2022) reported that when making a presentation, students might know what to say but they could not find the right expressions to deliver it. Thus, in cases where students often present excessive information on slides, which detracts from meaningful audience interaction, educators may consider several pedagogical interventions. First, incorporating active learning strategies can enhance student engagement and presentation skills. For instance, research by Mardiningrum and Ramadhani (2022) suggests that interactive presentation techniques and peer feedback sessions could encourage learners to focus on their delivery and audience engagement rather than merely reading from slides. Additionally, integrating interactive presentation tools like Mentimeter, can promote a more interactive approach to giving presentations. Training sessions on how to use them, along with effective slide design and presentation skills, could help EFL learners better understand how to use

visual aids to balance their stance and engagement, without overwhelming their audience with information.

Regarding the occasional use of stance markers in group presentations, the nature of this speech event somewhat leads the learners to give little attention to the use of attitude markers. The first explanation is the difficulty that most novice EFL learners face in making a critical review of related literature. During group presentations in EFL classrooms, most learners are usually assigned a topic to discuss, which can be challenging, particularly for novice EFL learners, as it requires them to read, review, and report related research projects that are conducted by published writers. The second explanation for the reluctance to show attitude and personal comments might be related to learners' minimal background knowledge regarding the presentation topics (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017). It is also possible that the learners consider the published writers as professionals and do not feel confident to comment on their work. This might be because "they feel they are not able to challenge the opinions of 'established' academics" (Read, et al., 2001, p. 394) and they do not 'believe that they have the necessary ability to comment or present their attitudes' (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017, p. 75).

Besides confidence issues, the frequent usage of hedges and self-mentions, which exceeds the other stance markers such as boosters and attitude markers, marks the learners' uncertainty. The tendency to underuse markers like boosters and attitude markers is not only apparent in spoken discourse, as EFL learners are also reported to avoid projecting their attitudes in written discourse (Ramoroka, 2017). Considering the function of boosters to upgrade the commitment of the truth value of a statement (Hyland, 2008) and "to express their certainty in what they say and to mark involvement" (Hyland, 2000, p. 87), the rarity of this marker highlights the learners' uncertainty and lack of commitment in their claims. A direct consequence that follows is that the learners sound distant from their claims. Further investigation of the hedged expressions reveals a greater use of *like* among other hedges. *Like* appearing in *like that* and *something like that* is highly common in both speech events. Such phrases are categorized as vague language which speakers use to "soften expressions" (Lin, 2013, p. 70). While one of the functions of vague language is to avoid being too direct and authoritative (Alkhatnai, 2017), the use of *like that* and *something like that* in the present study may indicate ambiguity, as it is often unclear what these phrases refer to.

Considering the use of this first pronoun as "the most prominent way of making identity roles visible in discourse" (Zareva, 2013, p. 73), the ample uses of *I* in the learners' interactions show that they aim to make an explicit presence in the interactions. This finding is particularly surprising, as the previous studies (e.g., Basthomi et al., 2015) have suggested that in a collectivistic culture, the inclusive pronoun *we* tends to be more dominant. This is because in such culture, harmony is more prioritized than individuality, and using *we* complies with this cultural value. The higher frequency of *I* compared to *we* in panel discussions and group presentations can be attributed to the learners' efforts to make an individualistic, instead of collectivistic presence in the speech events. The pronoun *I* is found to most likely co-occur with *think*, which is identical to the previous study by Yang (2014). According to Yang (2014, p. 68), the common use of *I think* among speakers in soft sciences reflects that "personal interpretation, uncertainty, and the acceptance of diversity are the basis of knowledge

construction in the domain". During panel discussions and group presentations, employing *I think* before making a claim allows the learners to project a humble stance as the speakers, allowing them to acknowledge other possible interpretations.

Furthermore, the numerous uses of *I* in the interactions during the speech events are noticeably different from written discourse, where using *I* is generally avoided especially when committing to an interpretation or claim (Hyland, 2002). In his interview with university lecturers about the use of self-mention, Ramoroka (2017, p. 8) found answers which suggested that using the first-person pronoun in academic writing is 'not academic', not professional', and 'not allowed'. Meanwhile, due to the presence of the audience in spoken discourse and the demand to manage face-to-face communication with the audience, using *I* is important to create a clear dialogic turn between the speakers and the audience.

Concerning engagement construction, the speakers in panel discussions and group presentations commonly employ the second-person pronoun *you* to invite the audience into the interactions. This finding highlights the difference between written and spoken academic discourse. *You* is rarely used in academic writing due to the lack of audience involvement in written discourse (Hyland, 2005). Distinct from that, in spoken discourse such as panel discussions and group presentations, both the speakers and the audience are present. This face-to-face communication requires the speakers to directly acknowledge the presence of the audience and anticipate their possible concerns. Thus, there is a need for the speakers to catch the audience's attention to follow their presentations (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017). It has also been observed that, during both speech events, the second-person pronoun *you* appears mostly in phrases like *thank you* and *you know*. Yang, (2014) maintained that the frequent *you know* in both speech events indicates that in soft disciplines like humanities, "plurality, possibility, and acknowledging the existence of the past and humans are valued" (p. 68). Hence, similar to the frequent use of *I think*, the function of *you know* is also to acknowledge another possibility of interpretations of others. In addition to this, the findings of the present study reveal another discursive function of *you know* which is likely to appear between short pauses. This particular function of *you know* marks the speakers' hesitations and is used to fill the silence and keep the audience engaged while they prepare for what to say. The speakers at the speech events are also seen to build rapport with the audience in a polite manner, that is, by frequently saying *thank you* in their speech. However, the phrase is also found to be used abruptly as a concluding marker, indicating the end of the speech event. This echoes the finding from the study by Yu and Cadman (2009), where thank you is also used as a concluding frame marker to avoid grammar issues.

The findings of the present study have revealed that directives, questions, knowledge references, and asides have low frequencies in both speech events. This finding bespeaks learners' restricted way of connecting with the audience. In the Indonesian EFL context, Angelina (2019) reported that most learners in her study found interacting with the audience to be one of the most difficult aspects of group presentations and they acknowledged their weaknesses in building rapport with the audience. It is also possible that the lack of other engagement markers is related to the learners' understanding of the importance of making the audience engaged during panel discussions and group presentations. Most of the time, panel discussions and group presentations are graded based on the clarity of their content, originality

of ideas, and the speakers' ability to answer questions from the audience. Whether or not the audience is engaged or the extent to which they are paying attention or interested in the discussions or presentations, is not included in the evaluation by the teachers. Thus, most Indonesian EFL learners probably do not feel the need to make a strong engagement with the audience in the speech events.

Lastly, the findings offer some understanding of the stance and engagement markers used by Indonesian EFL learners. The patterns observed in this study reflect the complex interplay between cultural expectations, pedagogical practices, and assessment frameworks within the Indonesian EFL context. The use of content-focused evaluation criteria, which emphasize clarity and accuracy over interactive engagement, may have discouraged learners from developing audience rapport-building strategies. Additionally, the tendency toward text-heavy presentations may reflect a priority of content delivery over dynamic audience interaction. These factors, combined with cultural inclinations toward face-saving strategies, contribute to the distinctive stance and engagement patterns observed in Indonesian EFL academic discourse.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigates Indonesian EFL learners' interactions during panel discussions and group presentations by adopting Hyland's (2008) framework of stance and engagement. The findings reveal that there are generally more stance markers than engagement markers in the learners' interactions in both speech events. Further investigation reveals that certain markers are far more frequent than others, which calls for the need to introduce EFL learners to various linguistic markers showing stance and engagement, and how to use them appropriately to build effective academic persuasion in spoken academic discourse. Speech events such as panel discussions and group presentations may be challenging for EFL learners because speakers are expected to present their arguments, negotiate with the audience, and finish in time (Yang, 2014). Therefore, it is important for teachers of English for Academic Purposes to give explicit instruction about stance and engagement markers. Learners can benefit more from explicit instruction about various categories and functions of stance and engagement markers available (Kizil, 2017; Ramoroka, 2017). Regarding the lack of engagement markers in both speech events, developing a sense of audience engagement in classrooms as well as real-world contexts should be emphasized (Yu & Cadman, 2009). To authenticate the teaching, it is useful to occasionally invite an audience from various disciplines to attend panel discussions and group presentations in the classroom. This can increase the learners' audience awareness as well as help them practice presenting convincing arguments.

Lastly, we acknowledge several limitations of the present study. First, the absence of a statistical test, such as a t-test, limits the robustness of our conclusions regarding the differences between the two groups. While our qualitative observations suggest notable variations in the use of hedging markers, further quantitative analysis would have provided a more definitive understanding of these differences. Future research could incorporate such

statistical evaluations to enhance the validity of findings in this area. Second, the limited corpus size may be insufficient to capture the full range of linguistic behaviours exhibited by Indonesian EFL learners in academic contexts, which restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating larger corpora with appropriate statistical analysis to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how factors such as proficiency level and discipline might influence stance and engagement of Indonesian EFL learners in academic contexts.

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