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Research article

## A comparative study of proximity in Iranian and American newspaper editorials

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### Abstract

The study is aimed at gaining further insight into the concept of proximity and its contribution to text development in general and newspaper editorials in particular. It also furthers our understanding of cross-linguistic differences in the use of metadiscourse. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate and compare proximity elements in Iranian and American newspaper editorials. Following Hyland's proximity model (2010a) which comprises five major elements, *organization*, *argumentative structure*, *stance*, *engagement*, and *credibility*, we focused on a detailed analysis of proximity features in two corpora, Iranian newspaper editorials and American newspaper editorials. To this aim, 240 newspaper editorials, including 120 editorials from each category, were collected. The outcomes revealed that there were significant differences in the use of proximity elements in the mentioned corpora. It was demonstrated that *stance* markers were considerably more recurrent in the American data than their Iranian counterpart. Unlike the American editorials, the Iranian ones contained a larger number of *engagement* markers. The key reasons behind such discrepancies are discussed in terms of differences in cultural, social, and political backgrounds. This study can be helpful for English for Specific/Academic Purposes (ES/AP) learners who study journalistic English to become familiar with proximity.

**Keywords:** *editorials, proximity, metadiscourse, stance, engagement, English, Persian*

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Научная статья

## Сопоставительное исследование проксимальности в редакционных статьях иранских и американских газет

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### Аннотация

Данное исследование нацелено на осмысление понятия проксимальности и его вклада в формирование текста в целом и газетных редакционных статей в частности. Оно также

углубляет понимание кросскультурных различий в использовании метадискурса. Цель исследования – рассмотрение и сопоставление элементов проксимальности в редакционных статьях иранских и американских газет. Опираясь на модель проксимальности К. Хайленда (2010а), которая включает пять основных элементов (организация, аргументативная структура, позиция, вовлеченность и доверие), мы сосредоточились на детальном анализе особенностей проксимальности в двух корпусах данных – редакционных статьях иранских и американских газет. С этой целью было собрано 240 газетных редакционных статей, по 120 в каждой категории. Исследование показало, что между двумя корпусами наблюдаются серьезные различия в использовании проксимальности. Был сделан вывод о том, что в американских редакционных статьях маркеры отношения встречались намного чаще, чем в иранских. В отличие от американских редакционных статей, иранские включали намного больше маркеров вовлеченности. Причины этих расхождений обсуждаются с точки зрения культурных, социальных и политических фоновых различий. Знакомство с особенностями проксимальности может быть полезным для тех, кто изучает английский язык для специальных/академических целей (ES/AP), в частности для журналистики.

**Ключевые слова:** редакционная статья, проксимальность, метадискурс, позиция, вовлеченность, английский язык, персидский язык

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## 1. Introduction

It is known that the language of newspapers is not completely impartial (Fowler 1991). Editorials can be assumed as the initial part of newspapers that are used to start communication between the writer and the reader. In spite of other parts of newspaper that are considered to provide somewhat neutral reports, this section reflects the editor's personal attitude and "perhaps more than any other type of writing reflects national styles regarding modes of persuasion" (Connor 1996: 143). The main concentration of an editorial is on the establishment of a relationship between the author and the addressee to indirectly convey their thoughts to readers through linguistic elements. This part is marked as a message from the editor (Vazquez Y Del Arbol 2005). Editorials are considered as leading articles. In other words, these articles are accomplished to shape and change people's views. Different rhetorical features are applied to reflect the editor's opinion directly and indirectly (Van Dijk 1996). "Editorials suggest the formal policy of a newspaper on a current issue that contain newsworthy statement at the time of publication" (Le 2004: 688).

In accord with the social view of written communication, writers and readers negotiate shared interpretive practices in texts (Kuhi & Mojood 2014). For Fowler (1991), the text is the offshoot of this negotiation through shared knowledge or culture where the writer must take heed of its social influence on readers (Hyland 2005a). This type of communication can transpire via proximity.

Metadiscourse markers are groups of linguistic elements which assist the writer to predict the addressee's need and allow him/her to write based on readers' attitude (Hyland 2010b). Metadiscourse markers are defined as rhetorical elements

that imply trustworthiness and concerns of addressees. They also demonstrate how the text is tied up with the addressee's expectation and his/her life (Crismore & Farnsworth 1990, Hyland 1999). Metadiscourse markers can be considered as linguistic links that assist people who are involved in conversation to comprehend each other whether in a written or spoken context (Vande Kopple 1985). Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen (1993) stated that metadiscourse devices are crucial linguistic features that are applied intentionally and purposefully to intensify the sense of unification between the author and the reader. They demonstrate the writers' "personality, credibility, considerateness of the reader, and relationship to the subject matter and to readers" (p. 40).

Many studies (Abdollahzadeh 2007, Andrusenko 2016, Ansarin & Tarlani-ali-abadi 2011, Dafouz-Milne 2008, Khabbazi Oskouei 2011, Kuhl & Mojood 2012; Lee 2011, Lee & Elliott Casal 2014) have investigated cross-linguistic metadiscourse which deals with metadiscourse features across languages. Abdollahzadeh (2007) explored metadiscourse markers in English and Persian editorials. To this aim, he compared 26 editorials from each group to find similarities and differences that might exist between them. The outcomes revealed that English authors tend to employ code-glosses and certainty markers more than Iranians. Also, emphatic markers are used considerably more in Persian editorials. Cultural differences are the most significant factor that affects metadiscourse in both languages. In addition, Andrusenko (2016) demonstrated crucial cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, and genre-related distinctions in the use of hedges. The results disclosed that the total percentage of hedges in Spanish research articles is higher than the Arabic counterparts. In another study, Ansarin and Tarlani-ali-abadi (2011) focused on reader engagement in English and Persian applied linguistics articles. Although there was not any significant distinction among their examined corpora, the results demonstrated that English native writers are more competent to establish a successful interaction between the writer and the reader. Moreover, it was revealed that the differences in reader engagement derive from different cultural norms that are an inseparable part of the writer's characteristic. Moreover, Dafouz-Milne (2008) investigated Spanish and English newspapers to highlight the probable differences that exist in textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers used to establish persuasion with regard to cultural differences. The outcomes illustrated the presence of both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in both languages. Also, textual markers are used more in Spanish opinion columns than English ones.

Khabbazi Oskouei (2011) explored interactional metadiscourse markers in English and Persian editorials. The results disclosed that there is not any significant difference in the employment of interactional elements between Persian and English editorials. In addition, she concluded that both English and Persian authors are willing to utilize the mentioned linguistic features to convince their addressees to accept their views implicitly. In another research study, Kuhl and Mojood (2012) examined metadiscourse in English and Persian editorials. The results revealed

fundamental distinctions across editorial genres and also showed how authors employ metadiscourse devices to convince readers to accept their own points of view. Regarding the differences, the existence of cultural variations cause editorialists to have different preferences for the employment of hedges and boosters. Persian and English editorials utilize interactional metadiscourse devices more than transactional ones to influence the addressee's attitude. Additionally, Lee (2011) examined stance and engagement in Japanese and English in journalistic and academic genres. He discovered that English writers are less willing to use engagement elements in editorials. Lee and Elliott Casal (2014) explored metadiscourse elements in English and Spanish theses. They analyzed 200 discussion and result sections of master's theses in engineering to find similarities and differences across metadiscourse employments. The outcomes demonstrated that metadiscourse devices in English articles are used more than Spanish articles. The study also indicated that cross-cultural differences affected the frequency of metadiscourse patterns in both groups.

According to Hyland (2010a) who first put forth proximity, this concept embodies the idea of interaction and occurs when authors establish mutual interaction via the employment of rhetorical features. Hyland adds that proximity deals with two facets in the establishment of mutual interaction. In other words, it is based on two central concepts. The first one is named *proximity of membership* that is defined as the demonstration of power through experts with regard to the norms of community. The second concept is called *proximity of commitment* that is considered as the manifestation of the writers' position in the text, and the way they declare their point of view (Hyland 2010a).

“Proximity is achieved in argument by the ways writers frame information for their target readers. Framing is achieved by tailoring information to the assumed knowledge base of potential readers, creating proximity for different audiences through language choices which ask readers to recognize something as familiar or accepted” (Hyland 2010a: 121). In case of proximity, very few studies have been conducted so far. Preliminary work on proximity construction in written corpora was undertaken by Hyland (2010a). He concentrated on constructing proximity relating to readers in popular and professional science. He investigated a corpus of texts in two very different genres, research papers and popular science articles, and discovered that the notion of interpersonality is established through the application of proximity elements.

Scotto Di Carlo (2014) explored proximity in online popularizations. Popularization by definition is a social process consisting of a large class of discursive-semiotic practices aiming to communicate lay versions of scientific knowledge (Calsamiglia & Van Dijk 2004). This study aimed to apply Hyland's (2010a) proximity framework in TED (Technology, Entertainment, and Design) talks in order to find out how presenters use rhetorical features to guarantee mutual understanding between the addresser and the addressee. The results showed that proximity features and linguistic devices in TED talks were used to invoke the

audience's emotions. By applying such rhetorical features, speakers boost comprehensibility of their speeches so as to become more understandable. Apart from Hyland, a number of cognitive linguists have investigated proximity. For instance, Johnstone and Mando (2014) examined the relationship between proximity and journalistic practice. Their findings highlighted the significant role of proximity features. Babaii and Rajabi (2018) studied various aspects of proximity in online video courses belonging to the fields of education and psychology from Coursera website. They applied Hyland's (2010a) proximity framework to analyze the collected data. They demonstrated some crucial linguistic features that online instructors used to interact successfully with their learners.

Since persuasion strategies can vary across genres, and according to Hyland's (2005a) claim that editorials apply metadiscourse in their own means to influence the readers, it appears that the editorials genre might as well resort to its particular ways to employ and distribute proximity. However, since "writing is a cultural object" (Moreno 1997: 5) and based on Kaplan's (1966) contrastive rhetoric, every language possesses an exclusive set of rhetorical norms (Connor 1996). As a result, it can be said that the use of proximity markers might differ cross-culturally in one specific genre, which is the editorials genre in the current study. Moreover, we opted for editorials in the same line with Ansary and Babaii (2009) who believe editorials are "persuasive, public and probably representative both of local cultures and of ideological proclivities" (p.214), and are hence worth being cross-culturally investigated.

There have been a few studies on the newspaper genre (Dafouz- Milne 2003, 2008, Le 2004, Abdollahzadeh 2007, Noorian & Biria 2010). Nonetheless, there is merely one cross-linguistic research attempt made by Abdollahzadeh (2007) on the use of metdiscourse across English and Persian newspaper editorials. To the best of our knowledge, despite the above-mentioned studies, there appears to be no research of the proximity concept in the newspaper editorial section in general and between Iranian and American editorials in particular. To bridge this gap, the current study is primarily designed to find out the proximity markers in editorials written by Iranian and American authors. Therefore, the motives for this study are the followings: 1) the need to achieve a successful interaction in the newspaper editorial genre, 2) the need to be familiar with Iranian and American editorialist's lexicon in terms of proximity, and 3) the need to determine the most frequent types of proximity markers across Iranian and American newspaper editorials.

Specifically, the following research questions are pursued:

1. Are there any similarities or differences among Iranian and American newspaper editorials in terms of proximity construction?
2. What types of proximity elements are frequently used in Iranian newspaper editorials?
3. What types of proximity elements are frequently used in American newspaper editorials?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this study, the identification of proximity features was based on the characteristics of proximity defined by Hyland (2010a), the pioneer of its investigation. According to him:

Proximity deals with writer's control of rhetorical features which display both authority as an expert and a personal position towards issues in an unfolding text. It is concerned with how writers represent not only themselves and their readers, but also their material, in ways which are most likely to meet their readers' expectations (p. 117).

This model consists of five major elements that are briefly explained below:

1. *Organization*: It can be seen as one of the writing means that authors employ to attain closeness with their own readers. It is illustrated by a general preface at the beginning of the text to motivate readers to follow the text enthusiastically. This strategy can be implied through *introduction*, *establishing a common ground* with the audience, *contextualizing the topic historically* and using *proverb* (Hyland 2010a).

2. *Argument structures*: These features are utilized to persuade readers to think in the same way that writers desire. In other words, they attempt to promote critical thoughts by the application of technical terminology, acronyms, reference to other investigation and specialized forms of equipment. Moreover, for explanatory technique and paraphrasing, linguistic devices are used to clarify ambiguities. These linguistic devices can be '*that means*', or '*in other ways*' (Hyland 2010a).

3. *Stance*: It is defined as linguistic devices that authors apply to inspire reader's feelings and judgements. Distinctive emotions and beliefs about specific issues can be represented through linguistic elements including: *Hedges*, *Boosters*, *Attitude Markers*, and *Self-mention* (Hyland 2005b).

4. *Engagement*: Hyland (2005b) describes *engagement* markers as rhetorical devices that are used to involve readers in the text. They comprise *reader pronouns*, *personal asides*, *appeals to shared knowledge*, *directives*, and *questions*.

5. *Credibility*: It deals with reliability of the proposition. The sources of propositions must be provided by author to ensure the addressee that the text is credible. To achieve the aim, writer mentions the name of scientists who are well-known and accepted by people (Hyland 2010a).

## 3. Corpus

The corpora used in this study were collected from the editorials of the most accessible and recent Persian and American newspapers. The data consisted of 240 newspaper editorials, 120 Iranian editorials and 120 American editorials. The editorials were compiled from newspapers published from January 2018 to March 2018. The researchers started with the most recent newspapers in March, and they moved backward chronologically in order to access the newest editorials. Therefore, the reason behind the selection of this time interval was recency.

Hereafter, for the purpose of data saturation, we added 30 more editorials to each category. Once the editorials were collected, word count was run in order to determine the size of the corpora. The total number of words in the two sub-corpora was 209,951. We have discovered 13,768 proximity elements described above were in the selected samples.

With regard to the Iranian corpus, 120 editorials were compiled from *Keyhan* (affiliated with the conservative party), *Mardomsalari* (affiliated with the reformist party), *Shargh* (affiliated with the reformist party), and *Iran* (affiliated with the moderate party) newspapers. Thirty editorials were selected from each newspaper. The rationale behind the selection of these newspapers was their circulation among Iranian newspapers. The circulations of all the mentioned newspapers are roughly 120,000. The Iranian corpus comprised of 120,598 words, and the proximity features were counted to be to 7,934. As regards the American corpus, 120 editorials were culled from *New York Times* (affiliated with the Democratic party) with the circulation of 1,865,318, *Los Angeles Times* (affiliated with the Democratic party) with the circulation of 653,868, *Washington Post* (affiliated with the left-wing political party) with the circulation of 474,767, and *Guardian* (affiliated with the liberal and left-wing party) with the circulation of 185,429. Thirty editorials were compiled from each newspaper. The reason behind the selection of these newspapers was ease of accessibility and their rates of circulation. The American corpus included 89,353 words and 5,834 proximity items. It is worth mentioning that depending on the editorial board’s preferences and the culture, the length of each editorial was different. Table 1 shows the general information of the corpora.

Table 1

General information about the corpora

Editorials	No. of the Texts	No. of Words	No. of Proximity Elements
Iranian	120	120,598	7,934
American	120	89,353	5,834
Total	240	209,951	13,768

The procedure applied in this study began with the collection of 240 Iranian and American newspaper editorials published from January 2016 to March 2016. As mentioned in the corpus section, 120 editorials were compiled from each corpus. Having read each text carefully and thoroughly, we analyzed the editorials in the light of Hyland’s (2010a) proximity model. The rationale behind the selection of this framework is that Hyland’s proximity model is the first and the only available proximity model. Prior to our research, nonetheless, in order to check the feasibility of the study and the reliability of the analysis, a pilot analysis was conducted by two raters. Ten percent of the data (Persian and English) was randomly selected and analysis was run on them by the researcher as well as her supervisor who was familiar with the framework. Both raters reached acceptable agreement over the method of analysis which was further confirmed by the reliability coefficient of ( $r=0.87$ ) obtained through Cohen’s Kappa measure of agreement. After the

reliability coefficient was verified, the same procedure used in the pilot study in identifying the proximity elements was applied to the whole dataset. In the first step, the Persian data was transferred to a word file. Then, all the proximity elements were determined and categorized according to their specific types. The frequency of each element was counted and written. After the calculation of proximity percentages, it was required to calculate the density of proximity features. For this purpose, the frequency of each proximity marker was divided by the total number of words. In the second step, the English data was converted to a word file. Concerning the Persian data, all the proximity features was recognized and the frequency of each proximity element was recorded in the paper. The percentages were then obtained through the division of proximity markers by the total proximity number. Moreover, the density of proximity elements was estimated by dividing the number of proximity features by the number of words. The data were first collected in a paper-and-pencil grid that maintained their sequential occurrence and were then classified according to Hyland's (2010a) proximity model. Next, in order to ensure the comparability between the results for both corpora, the proximity elements were calculated and normalized. This normalization was carried out via multiplying the total number of proximity elements in the English editorials by the total number of words in the Persian editorials and then dividing it by the total number of words in the American editorials. We also identified the frequency, percentage, and density of the proximity elements. On the grounds that compiling texts which comprised exactly the same number of words was not feasible, we employed the 1000-word approach as a common premise to standardize the findings of our analyses.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The present study is theoretically supported by and is in line with Hyland's (2010a) model of proximity that depicts the bilateral cooperation between authors and readers. This interaction involves five major elements.

1. *Organization* can be seen as one of the writing means that is used to attain proximity. It is demonstrated through a general introduction about the topic providing a necessary background at the beginning of the text. This strategy can be implied through *introduction (general statement and quotation)*, *establishing a common ground with the audience*, *contextualizing the topic historically*, and *proverb*. These are applied at the introductory part of the text to motivate the readers to go through the whole text enthusiastically (Hyland 2010a). These linguistic features help readers to decode the text more precisely (Crismore 1989). Table 2 and Table 3 draws on percentages of editorials in which each of these occur. Regarding the *organization* markers, *contextualizing topic historical* markers was the most frequent with 2.24 percent in the Persian texts, while it occurred less in the other corpus. Iranian editorialists employ historical events to create a connection between events which happened in the past and those happening in the present. Thus, by applying references to historical events at the beginning of the text, they provide readers with specific signs about the main idea of the text. With respect to



Table 2

**Details of Proximity Features in the American Corpus**

Hyland's (2010a) Proximity Framework		American	%	Density in Text	
Organization	Introduction	General Statement	114	1.95	0.12%
		Quotation	6	0.1	0.006%
	Stablishing Common Ground		43	0.73	0.04%
	Contextualizing Topic Historically		125	2.14	0.13%
	Proverb		0	0	0
Total		288	4.92	0.296%	
Argumentative Structure		196	3.37	0.21%	
Stance	Hedge		2,549	43.69	2.85%
	Booster		1,891	32.43	2.11%
	Attitude Marker		420	7.19	0.47%
	Self-mention		216	3.7	0.24%
Total		5,076	87.01	5.67%	
Engagement	Reader Pronoun		65	1.11	0.07%
	Personal Aside		24	0.43	0.02%
	Shared Knowledge		43	0.74	0.04%
	Directive		3	0.05	0.003%
	Question		100	1.71	0.11%
Total		235	4.04	0.243	
Credibility		39	0.66	0.04%	
Total No. Of Density				6.459%	
Total No. of Proximity		5,834			
Total No. Of Words		89,353			

Table 3

**Details of Proximity Features in the Iranian Corpus**

Hyland's (2010a) Proximity Framework		Iranian	%	Density in Text	
Organization	Introduction	General Statement	112	1.41	0.09%
		Quotation	8	0.1	0.006%
	Stablishing Common Ground		66	0.83	0.05%
	Contextualizing Topic Historically		178	2.24	0.14%
	Proverb		30	0.37	0.02%
Total		394	4.95	0.306%	
Argumentative Structure		334	4.2	0.27%	
Stance	Hedge		1970	24.86	1.63%
	Booster		2532	31.91	2.09%
	Attitude Marker		1014	12.81	0.84%
	Self-mention		774	9.75	0.64%
Total		6,290	79.33	5.2%	
Engagement	Reader Pronoun		149	1.87	0.12%
	Personal Aside		138	1.73	0.11%
	Shared Knowledge		66	0.83	0.05%
	Directive		20	0.25	0.01%
	Question		346	4.36	0.28%
Total		719	9.04	0.57%	
Credibility		197	2.48	0.16%	
Total No. of Density				6.506%	
Total No. of Proximity		7,934			
Total No. of Words		120,598			

*introduction* markers, the calculated percentages were slightly different, 1.95 percent of American editorials initiated by *general statement*. The results demonstrated that editorialists were aware of this linguistic device and employed it similarly. Therefore, editorialists employ this linguistic element to increase the opportunity for understanding the message that is embedded in the text. In this respect, it should be noted that the last *organization* sub-category, i.e. *proverb*, was the proximity marker that was only employed in Iranian editorials with 0.37 percent. Iranian writers use *proverbs* to clarify the issues under the debate and strengthen the idea that is rooted in the same cultural background. Further, the application of *proverbs* increases the neutrality of the text, as it is narrated from a third person's viewpoint. Hence, it can be more understandable for people who live in the same society, belong to the same culture, and are familiar with similar *proverbs*. Table 2 demonstrates the non-presence of *proverbs* in American editorials. Instances are provided below to clarify the *general statement*, *contextualizing topic historical* markers, and *proverb* from the *organization* element of the proximity model:

In Iranian data

*General statement:*

(1) "*The dispute over the promotion of the music art is not a new debate...*". (Iran, March 4, 2018)

*Quotation:*

(2) "*Secretary of Foreign Affairs said "not only there is just one solution, but also several solutions exist to the nuclear issue."*(Keyhan, February 7, 2018)

*Establishing common ground:*

(3) "...Let us not forget that we are on the verge of the biggest historical story of *our country*...". (Shargh, January 31, 2018)

*Contextualizing topic historically:*

(4) "...America's embassy in Sana'a was attacked on February 11-the anniversary of the Iranian Islamic Revolution- in Tehran...". (Keyhan, February 15, 2018)

*Proverb:*

(5) "...*Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it* (Literal meaning: Death is good but just for neighbors)...". (Mardom Salari, February 26, 2018)

2. *Argument structure* is employed to grasp a wide range of audiences. Authors try to persuade readers to think in the same way they desire. Moreover, for explanatory technique and paraphrasing, linguistic devices are used to clarify ambiguities. These linguistic devices can be 'that means', or 'in other ways' (Hyland 2010a), among many others which are investigated in the present study. Bernstein (1999) claims that via exemplification, authors render difficult concepts to a comprehensible form for ordinary people. Results demonstrated that the Persian editorialists made a considerable effort to convince their readers by employing this linguistic device than the American counterparts. According to Table 3, with 4.2 percent, Persian editorials contained more argumentative structures than their English counterparts. Further, the Persian editorialists employ *argumentative*

*structure* to support their statements. The application of this linguistic feature helps them to justify and defend their own claims about a phenomenon. In addition, via this linguistic device, they clarify vague concepts for their addressees. Among the many instances of argumentative structure we could detect in the editorials, in example 6, ‘*that means*’ is a linguistic device which is applied as an explanatory technique to clarify ambiguity (Hyland 2010a).

(6) “...since the L.A. bull hook ban, which passed in 2014, doesn't go into effect until 2017, *that means* the Ringling show that comes to Los Angeles this summer will include elephants...”. (Los Angeles Times, March 6, 2018)

3. *Stance* is defined as linguistic devices that authors apply to inspire the reader’s feelings and judgments. Distinctive emotions and beliefs about specific issues can be represented through linguistic elements including: *Hedges*, *Boosters*, *Attitude Markers* and *Self-mention*. Authors cast doubt through the use of *hedges* and demonstrate a sense of solidarity and certainty through the accomplishment of *boosters*. They also try to make their addressees agree with them via *self-mention* pronouns. *Attitude markers* are applied to demonstrate attitudes and feelings of writers (Hyland 2005b). As observed in the above Table 2, *hedges*, with 43.69 percent in American newspaper editorials, were the most frequent *stance* sub-group. Moreover, the Iranian corpus included a lower percentage of *hedges*, 24.86 percent. In addition, the high frequency of *stance* in the American corpus is in line with Hyland’s (2008) study which discovered that *stance* markers occurred more than other metadiscourse devices. The analysis displayed that *hedges* from the *stance* group and *questions* of the *engagement* category were the most repeated items. The findings about the frequency employment of *hedges* are in line with Hyland (2005b) and McGrath and Kuteeva (2012) who demonstrated that *hedges* were the most recurrent metadiscourse markers in English across different disciplines. In line with Hyland (1999) and Lee and Elliott Casal (2014), English writers tend to state their idea as an assumption. Moreover, they put the burden of interpretation on the addressee’s shoulders. Further, the wide use of *hedges* in the English corpus demonstrates that American editorialists tend to create a fuzzy situation for their addressees. They also want to leave the final decision about the discussed issues to the reader’s preference through *hedge* markers. The existence of *hedges* decreases the sense of author’s bigotry. As seen from Table 2, after *hedges*, the second frequent proximity item was *boosters*, from the *stance* sub-group, showing a very similar number. Further, an overall look at the density column demonstrates that the highest density of proximity markers belongs to *hedges* and *boosters* from the *stance* sub-group in both corpora. The Iranian editorialists utilized *boosters* to highlight assurances in their texts and engage readers by a great use of *questions*. It manifests that the Iranian authors tend to assure readers about the accuracy of issues by a great use of *boosters*. They also utilize these linguistic devices to show that they are assertive about their texts. Moreover, Iranian writers employ *boosters* to highlight the significance of a specific concept and highlight it to attract the reader’s attention. A detailed look at

Table 3 demonstrates that *attitude* markers stood at the third place in terms of the occurrence frequency. This proximity feature prominently outnumbered others in Persian texts, being 12.81 percent compared to the American corpus. It demonstrates that Iranian authors tend to express feelings and beliefs more explicitly than American editorialists do. Moreover, they prefer to avoid skepticism and doubtfulness in their texts. They furthermore employ *attitude markers* to enhance definiteness and sureness in the reader's mind. Similar to Dafouz- Milne's (2008) study, the American editorials employed *attitude markers* less than *hedges* and *boosters*. The remaining proximity categories experienced a low frequency of occurrence in all the editorials under study. In other words, they were hardly applied in this genre. Further, there is a significant difference in *self-mention* employment across the texts. The Iranian editorials contained the largest occurrence of *self-mention* element. Hence, *self-mention* is favored by Iranian editorialists more than their peers. It showed that American editorialists are reluctant to create a sense of solidarity with their readers. Examples are provided:

In American data:

*Hedge:*

(7) "These contrasts *may* help explain why delays in discharging patients...".  
(Guardian, February 18, 2018)

*Booster:*

(8)  
"...That was *certainly* the right result". (New York Times, March 10, 2018)

*Attitude marker:*

(9) "The Obama administration counters persuasively — to us, if not to Hanen — that it acted *properly* and within its legal authority.". (Los Angeles Times, February 17, 2018)

*Self-mention:*

(10) "*We* think Montanez is the candidate...". (Los Angeles Times, February 15, 2018)

3. *Engagement* devices can be assumed as linguistic markers that are applied to manifest the author's place/position with regard to others' position in a specific context (Marthin & White 2005). Based on Bakhtin (1981) and Voloshinov (1995), from a social dimension, writers must be able to project the addressee's reaction to their text and be familiar with the reader's social needs. Then, they can involve them in their text successfully. Hyland (2005b) describes *engagement* markers as rhetorical devices that are used to involve readers in the text. They comprise *reader pronouns*, *personal asides*, *appeals to shared knowledge*, *directives*, and *questions*. The outcome revealed that the Iranian editorials had significantly higher frequencies of *engagement* markers than their American counterpart. Put simply, Iranian authors attempt to involve their readers in their editorials more than American authors and boost the reader's presence in their texts. This finding was in line with the study by Lee (2011) who examined *stance* and *engagement* in both Japanese and English in journalistic and academic genres. He discovered that the

English writers were less specialized to use *engagement* elements in editorials. Regarding the *engagement* markers, the findings displayed that *question* device was the most recurrent proximity feature in this category. The Iranian editorials used *question* markers with the rate of 4.36 percent, the English editorials 1.71 percent. *Question* markers are more prominent in Iranian editorials than in the American counterparts since editorialists believe that *questions* are the best linguistic device used to increase the addressee's involvement in the written discourse. *Reader pronoun* was the second frequent *engagement* sub-group. There was also a minor difference between the corpora in *reader pronoun* and *shared knowledge* employment. The frequency of *reader pronoun* and *shared knowledge* in both Iranian and American corpora had a relatively similar degree. As it is illustrated in Table 2 and Table 3, the least frequent *engagement* marker was *directive* in both corpora. Thus, this proximity feature made up the least density in comparison with all the proximity markers. For instance:

In American data:

*Reader pronoun:*

(11) “*What does citizenship mean to you?*”. (Los Angeles Times, February 17, 2018)

*Personal aside:*

(12) “*Besides being willing to sabotage any deal with Iran (before they know the final details), these Republicans are ...*”. (New York Times, March 11, 2018)

*Shared knowledge:*

(13) “*The code on our streets is pre-emptive aggression*”. (New York Times, March 10, 2018)

*Directive:*

(14) “*Notice these examples...*”. (Keyhan, January 4, 2018 by Hossein Shamsian)

*Question:*

(15) “*...So what's left?*” (Los Angeles Times, February 18, 2018)

5. *Credibility* of the text is achieved through the contribution of new events with well-known facts that occurred in the past. In other words, it deals with reliability of the proposition. To achieve the aim, a writer mentions the names of scientists who are well-known and accepted by people. On the other hand, they imply their ideas through scientific reports to enhance the reliability of their statement (Hyland 2010a). The occurrence of the *credibility* item in the corpora was very low. As is evident from Table 3, *credibility* markers were more frequent in the Iranian editorials than the American ones. Nonetheless, *credibility* markers were scarcely used in the American counterpart with 0.66 percent. As scientists and scholars hold a lofty position in the Iranian society, they give credibility to their texts by incorporating famous people's quotations. The religious concepts are also significant for Iranian people. Thus, they give reference to verses of the holy Quran to authenticate their texts. In other words, Iranian editorialists tend to validate their statement by employing the quotations of famous people or verses of Quran. It is a

kind of verification that makes readers to accept statements and accompany the writer to follow the rest of the text. Thus, this distinction is deeply rooted in cross-cultural differences. For example:

In Iranian data:

(16) “*Freud believes that crime is instinctive*”. (Iran, February 21, 2018)

The outcomes of the study illustrated the significance of proximity features in the corpora. The comparison between the American and the Iranian corpora demonstrated crucial differences in the use of proximity. These variations can derive from cultural, social, and political issues that encompass all languages. As far as the frequency of proximity items was concerned, *stance*, *engagement*, and *organization* were successively the most frequent proximity elements in the Iranian editorials. Moreover, a detailed analysis revealed that *boosters* from the *stance* group and *questions* from the *engagement* category were the prominent proximity elements in the Iranian data. With regard to differentiation in *credibility*, the American and the Iranian editorials employed this rhetorical element in a very different way. This element is observed more in Iranian editorials than in American ones. With regard to the American data, *stance*, *organization* and *engagement* occurred with the highest frequencies in comparison with other proximity elements. The analysis displayed that *hedges* from the *stance* group and *questions* of the *engagement* category were the most repeated items. Findings about the frequency employment of *hedges* are in line with Hyland (2005b) and McGrath and Kuteeva (2012) who demonstrated that *hedges* are the most recurrent metadiscourse markers in English across different disciplines.

The findings of our study are in line with previous studies devoted to metadiscourse markers in other genres (Andrusenko 2016, Ansarin & Tarlani- ali abadi 2011, Dafouz- Milne 2008, Lee & Elliott Casal 2014). The key outcome of the present study was the substantial difference in Iranian and American newspaper editorials in terms of using the proximity factors. For instance, the total number of *engagement* markers in the Iranian editorials was more than the American ones. Furthermore, the number of *stance* markers was considerably larger in the American data than the Iranian counterpart. Broadly speaking, there was a notable difference in proximity realization among the corpora.

The similarities found across the Iranian and American editorials can be explained in light of the linguistic features peculiar to the editorial genre which tend to surpass culture-specific conventions of each language. However, a fair justification for the discrepancies can be attributed to a number of factors impacting the ways in which Persians and Americans establish their argumentation and create editorials.

As far as the reasons behind the differences in Iranian and American editorials go, they deal with a range of cultural, socio-political and historical influences which vary from culture to culture. Jiang (2000) points out that “language and culture make a living organism; language is flesh, and culture is blood. Without culture,

language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape”. Mitchell and Myles (2004) stated that “language and culture are not separate but acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other” (p. 235). Jacobs (2017) argues that “there is no point in analyzing any type of institutional discourse if we are not seriously trying to find out about the complexity of life inside those institutions” (p. 35). When writers produce texts, they bear in mind the audience for which they create their linguistic products. That is probably why Iranian and American editorialists resort to rather different proximity strategies to put forth their arguments and establish rapport with their readers. Thus, the discrepancies in interaction behaviors are an indication of the diversity in cultural patterns and values. In other words, cultural backgrounds deeply influence the way people talk (Wang 2011). Adel (2006) suggested that cultural norms vary in different languages and also across varieties of English. Put simply, customs and rituals are coded by linguistic elements. Kuo and Lai (2006) asserted that “Language should be conceptualized as an integrated part of a society and its culture” (p. 5). Social background can also lead to such differences. Therefore, language is a social phenomenon that is formed by society (Armour-Thomas & Gopaul-McNicol 1998). In fact, language is an inseparable structure of community that is fed by society, and it is dependent on culture. Language cannot survive in isolation. It is meaningless without connection to culture and society (Fairclough 1989). Thus, the social factor is one of the most important issues that associate with the rhetorical features that authors employ to create the proximity concept with their readers. Chilton (2004) asserts that “language serves the needs of politicians” (p. 6). It means language is at the service of politics. As Persian and English languages are affected by different policies that are applied by politicians and statesmen, political variations lead authors to employ different linguistic elements to attain proximity with their addressees.

The variations across Persian and American editorials can also be discussed in terms of journalistic routines of each linguistic community. According to Bell (1991), to interpret the newspaper language, one should take into account news-processing practices, rather than merely focus on the news events. Given the degree of openness or pressure writers experience and the severity of censorship they have to cope with, Iranian and American editorials undergo different editing processes. In Iran, for instance, writers suffer from a higher degree of pressure to adhere to newswriting conventions and regulations set by the government, particularly with respect to sensitive political issues and religious topics, so crossing these red lines can at times mean the temporary or even permanent closure of a newspaper. For American editorialists, nevertheless, this censorship stranglehold is much looser. This can elucidate the discrepancy in the employment of differing proximity markers.

Following Guyot (2009), apart from political interferences, the editorial sphere has in the course of history been influenced by “advertising, commercial pressures, competition and other economic pressures” (p. 135). Thus, newspapers have to

grapple with a range of economic pressures, especially when dealing with sensitive or contentious matters, which can be synonymous with the fact that editorials need to consider financial considerations as well. This problem is more pressing in Iran since many newspapers are either state-run or depend on the money funded by the government.

## 5. Conclusion

Newspapers are read by most people. The editorial section is one of the most significant sections of a newspaper that is represented on the first pages. Newspaper editorials are worth studying since these sections echo cross-cultural distinctions. They are impressive, argumentative texts that represent cultural and ideological aspects (Ansary & Babaii 2009). In the case of this study, the researchers analyzed 240 Iranian and American newspaper editorials published from January 2018 to March 2018 based on Hyland's (2010a) proximity model. The results of the analysis disclosed that different types of proximity features were utilized in editorials in the corpora. The most striking point was that the overall outcomes of the present study approved differences with regard to all the proximity elements across the corpora. Even though all the corpora belong to the editorial genre, they employ proximity elements differently. Further, these distinctions across languages reflect cross-cultural differences. In other words, linguistic differences have roots in cultural norms. The results suggest that proximity elements are not a specific characteristic of English but are eloquent features of languages other than English. Embarking on such studies is essential to better portray the rhetorical features of editorials across languages, still far from being completely presented. This study can help English for Specific/Academic Purposes (ES/AP) learners who study journalistic English to become familiar with proximity and the way it is used to create interpersonal connections among writers and readers in Iranian and American editorials. Further, they will understand how appropriate rhetorical features are used to engage readers and motivate them for reading newspapers. The findings can also assist ES/AP material developers to highlight such differences and can help ES/AP teachers to draw students' attention to such differences. Moreover, proximity elements can be taught in writing sessions. Awareness of these linguistic elements can assist students to be more competent in their writings. It also aids them to enhance mutual understanding in their texts via applying proximity features. When students initiate to write about a given topic, they can simultaneously consider proximity features to achieve closeness and establish rapport with their readers.

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