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A corpus-based approach to the unnaturalness of non-native metadiscourse

How do native speakers often tell English texts written by non-native speakers from those written by native speakers? What is the "unnaturalness" found in the former? The purpose of this study is to extract characteristics of English argumentative essays written by Japanese EFL learners. This study draws on the Japanese component of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) and the American component of the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS). The method is based on discriminant analysis with stepwise method, and the explanatory variables are the frequencies of ten semantic categories in Hyland's list of metadiscourse markers. With an accuracy of 90% over the entire set of corpus texts, the results of a discriminant analysis show that four categories (self-mentions, hedges, boosters, and frame markers) act as a very powerful discriminant index. This study illustrates how the four discursal categories are used "unnaturally" in the non-native speakers' writing.

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