

Metadiscourse Markers in Academic Writing: A Study of Master Thesis Abstracts Written by Native and Iraqi No-native Speakers of English

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Abstract: The use of metadiscourse markers helps in producing a text in which there is a negotiation of meaning between the writer and the reader, which helps in making communication smooth and successful. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of metadiscourse markers in thesis abstracts, written in English by native speakers and by Iraqi non-native speakers of English. The corpus consists of forty abstracts, in the area of Linguistics. The analysis of the texts is based on the classification of metadiscourse markers proposed by Hyland (2005): interactive category, i.e. transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses and interactional category, i.e. hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers. The results show that there is universality in the use of these markers among the native English writers and the Iraqi non-native writers. However, there are differences as regards the

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frequency of use. Iraqi writers use lower frequencies of in both the interactive and interactional categories.

Keywords: metadiscourse, academic writing, markers, interactive markers, interactional markers, abstracts.

1. Introduction:

Metadiscourse emphasizes that speech or writing is a matter of negotiating with the other as well as making decisions about how to influence the listeners or readers. Metadiscourse markers are linguistic elements that portray the attendance of the writer or the reader in one way or another in the text. Hyland (2005: 3) affirms, “metadiscourse stresses that as we speak or write we negotiate with others, making decisions about the kind of effects we are having on our listeners or readers”. Adel (2006:20) maintains that Metadiscourse is text about the evolving text, or the writer’s explicit commentary on her own ongoing discourse. It displays an awareness of the current text or its language use per se and of the current writer and reader qua writer and reader. We can distinguish between two main types of metadiscourse: ‘metatext’ and ‘writer reader interaction’.

Crismore et al (1993) consider metadiscourse a “Linguistic material in texts, written or spoken, which does not add anything to the prepositional content but that is intended to help the listener or reader organize, interpret and evaluate the information given.”

However, Hyland (2005: 37) defines metadiscourse as “the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to

express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community.”

There are a number of taxonomies of metadiscourse markers. Vande Kopple (1985) divides the metadiscourse markers into textual and interpersonal types. It is a development of earlier taxonomy by Lautamatti's (1978) taxonomy and Williams' (1981) brief style guide. It is influenced by the Halliday's three metafunctions, i.e. ideational, textual, and interpersonal. Besides, Crismore, et al (1993) changed the markers of narrators, shifts some sub-functions to a category of textual markers, and made code glosses and illocution markers part of another category of interpretive markers. Hyland and Tse (2004) offer another revision of Vande Kopple's taxonomy.

Theses have been of interest to many scholars (García-Calvo, 2002; Marandi, 2003; Burneikaite, 2008; Akbas, 2012; Mirshamsi and Allami, 2013; Ozdemira and Longo, 2014). García-Calvo(2002) studies the cultural and disciplinary variations in the use of metadiscourse in research abstracts for scientific events, written in Spanish and English in Linguistics and Bioscience. Marandi (2003) compared the use of metadiscourse markers across three groups and introduction and discussion chapters in theses. The results of this study demonstrated that metadiscourse markers were used differently in different chapters. Furthermore, Burneikaite (2008) developed a framework to analyze metadiscourse in the master's thesis genre in the discipline of Linguistics and compared the use of metadiscourse in native and

non-native English M.A. thesis from British and Lithuanian universities. Akbas (2012) investigated metadiscourse in the abstract section of master theses across three groups: native speakers of Turkish, native speakers of English. Mirshamsi and Allami (2013) investigated the use of metadiscourse markers by Iranian EFL learners. The study examined the cross-cultural similarities and differences in using the markers in theses of three types :native English speakers, native Persian speakers, and non-native English speakers using Hyland's (2005) taxonomy Besides, Ozdemira and Longo's (2014) study aimed at examining cultural variations in using metadiscourse markers between Turkish and USA postgraduate students' abstracts in MA theses written in English depending on Hyland's taxonomy.

There are many justifications for doing cross-cultural study of metadiscourse markers in abstracts. Such a study provides information about the various uses of metadiscourse cross-culturally. It enables us to understand metadiscourse markers as persuasion strategy. Hence, this paper attempts to answer the following questions following a quantitative analysis:

- a) Is there a universal feature in using metadiscourse markers?
- b) Are there any differences between native and Iraqi non-native speakers of English in the use of interactive/interactional metadiscourse markers in the abstract of master theses?

2. Methodology:

2.1 Choice of Genre:

An abstract is a succinct synopsis of a larger body of information used in large reports , theses or articles. The goal of an abstract is to enable the readers find out the relevance of the work to their needs and provides useful information about a text. García-Calvo (2002, 195) shows that “abstracts help readers learn about the most important aspects of a research study.” Among the characteristics proposed to identify abstracts, the researchers suggest that these types of texts do not provide an objective synthesis of a research study, but, rather, supply arguments to convince the selection committees on the relevance of research (Kaplan et al., 1994). Abstracts are part of academic writing, in which metadiscourse "present and negotiate propositional information in ways that are meaningful and appropriate to a particular disciplinary community" (Hyland, 2004: 136). Cooley and Lewkowicz (2003:112) believe that the abstract “is written after the research has been completed and the writer knows exactly what is contained in the body of the text. It is a summary of the text and it informs readers of what can be found in the dissertation and in what order, functioning as an overall signpost for the reader.”

2.2 The Material

Forty theses abstracts representing Linguistics were selected to study the metadiscourse markers. These theses abstracts are collected from the University of Basra (Iraqi university) and some British universities . Twenty of them are written by native speakers

of English and the other twenty are written by Iraqi non-native speakers of English in the University of Basra. The total number of words in the corpus is 13598. The mean number of words in each abstract is 271.96. These master theses were written during 2002–2014 assuming that the writers would have followed the recent standards of academic writing.

2.3 Procedures:

For the purpose of analysis and discussion, the following procedures are followed:

1. Identifying the texts in each group by numbering them.
2. The number of words in each text was counted, to determine its length.
3. Analyzing each text on the basis of the two main categories of metadiscourse categories of analysis and the markers of each category.
4. Calculating numbers and the frequencies of metadiscourse markers for each category.
5. Comparing the results of the statistics.

2.4 The Model

This study is an attempt to contribute to the literature on metadiscourse markers in master thesis abstracts written by Iraqi MA students who are non-native speakers of English. The present study makes use of the taxonomy of metadiscourse markers introduced by Hyland (2005). It is based on a functional approach that considers metadiscourse “as the ways writers refer to the text, the writer or the reader” (Hyland, 2005:48). This taxonomy

depends on a distinction between two main categories of metadiscourse markers: those that indicate the writer's interest in the reader's knowledge and abilities, i.e. interactive metadiscourse markers and those that attract the reader's attention to the writer's stance and attitude of the content of the text as well as the reader, i.e. interactional metadiscourse markers. The former, interactive markers include code glosses, endophoric markers, evidential, frame markers and frame markers. The latter, interactional markers include attitude markers, boosters, self-mention items, engagement markers, and hedges.

Table (1) Hyland's Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the text	Resources
Transitions	Express relations between main clauses	In addition, but, thus, and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	Finally, to conclude, my purpose is
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above, see Fig., in section 1
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	According to x; z states,
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meanings	Namely; e.g.; such as, in other words
Interactional	Involve the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might, perhaps, possible, about
Boosters	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue	In fact, definitely, it is

		clear that
Attitude markers	Express writers attitude to proposition	Unfortunately. I agree , surprisingly
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I, we, my, me, our
Engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider, note, you can see that

3. Results:

As far as the interactive metadiscourse markers, the NES used 73 while the NNES used 64 in the whole corpus. This means that the frequency of the interactive MDM per 1000 word in the NES abstracts is 10.18557 while their counterparts in NNES is 9.965742. On the other hand, the study shows that the NES used 66 interactional MDM which means a frequency of 9.208874 while the NNES used 44 interactional MDM with a frequency of 6.851448(see tables 2 &3).

With respect to the different types of MDM in the interactive category, TR is used 20 times by NES with a frequency of 2.790568 while the NNES used 10 MDMs with a frequency of 1.557147. As far as the FMs in the NES group, the writers used 23 FMs with a high frequency of 3.209153 while the NNES writers used only 8 FMs with a frequency of 1.245717. The NES writers used 10 EMs with a frequency of 1.395284 while the NNES used more EMs than the NES , i.e. 18 times with a frequency of 2.802865. As for EVs, the NES group used 9 of them with a frequency of 1.255756 while the NNES group used 7 EVs with a

frequency of 1.090003 . The NES group used less CGs than the NNE group, i.e. the former used 11 with a frequency of 1.534812 while the NNE group of writers used 21 CGs with the highest frequency of 3.270009. These results are shown in Table(2). The NES group used 73 Interactive MDMs with a frequency of 10.18557 ; the NNE group used lesser number of interactive MDMs than the NES group with a frequency of 9.965742.

Table(2) MDMs in the Interactive Category

MDM	NES	Fr./1000	NNE	Fr/1000
TR	20	2.790568	10	1.557147
FM	23	3.209153	8	1.245717
EM	10	1.395284	18	2.802865
EV	9	1.255756	7	1.090003
CG	11	1.534812	21	3.270009
Totals	73	10.18557	64	9.965742

The two groups of writers used different numbers of the types of the interactional category of MDMs. The NES group used 15 HGs with a frequency of 2.092926 while the NNES writers used 10 HGs with a frequency of 1.557147. As for BOs, the NES writers used 12 BOs and the NNES used 11 BOs with a frequency of 1.674341 and 1.712862 respectively. The NES group used 13 AMs with a frequency of 1.813869 while NNES group used 10 AMs with a frequency of 1.557147. Furthermore, SMs are used 11 times by NES writers while they are used only seven times by NNES writers with frequencies of 1.534812 and 1.090003 respectively. Finally, ENS writer used 15 EnMs with a frequency of 2.092926 and NNES writers used Only 6 EnMs with a very low frequency of 0.934288. This is shown in table (3).

Table(3) MDMs in the Interactional Category

MDM	NES	Fr/1000	NNES	Fr/1000
HG	15	2.092926	10	1.557147
BO	12	1.674341	11	1.712862
AM	13	1.813869	10	1.557147
SM	11	1.534812	7	1.090003
EnM	15	2.092926	6	0.934288
Totals	66	9.208874	44	6.851448

4. Conclusion

The results of this study as regards the frequency of metadiscourse markers in native English and non-native Iraqi writers of MA thesis abstracts in linguistics reveals that:

1. Both groups use metadiscourse markers, which indicates a sort of universality. It is clear that the two groups of writers made use of both interactive and interactional metadiscourse categories with certain strategies.
2. It has been found that there are similarities in the abstracts depending on the fact that the total number of interactive metadiscourse items and their frequencies were more than that of interactional markers for each group.
3. Native English writers use more metadiscourse markers than the Iraqi writers who write in English.
4. The Iraqi writers in English use more code glosses than the English writers, which might be interpreted as the feeling that there is a need for additional information to be presented to the reader.
5. There is a difference of conceiving how to build a relationship with the reader that is shown in the different frequencies of the use of metadiscourse markers by the native English writers and the Iraqi non-native writers of English.
6. As far as engage metadiscourse markers are concerned, the Iraqi writers use the lowest frequency, which indicates a problem in engaging the reader in the interaction in comparison with the native English writers who tend to engage readers.

7. The Iraqi writers of English use lower frequency of endophoric reference in comparison with the English writers which marks a problem in relating the different parts of their writing.

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