

Metadiscourse Markers in Advanced EFL learners' Academic Writing

Ali Qassim Ali

Dep.of English/College of Arts/University of Basrah

Abstract :

The principle aim of using metadiscourse markers is to make communication between the writer and the reader more powerful. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of metadiscourse markers in advanced EFL learners' writing. In this study, two groups of students from third year and fourth year in the Department of English, College of Arts, University of Basrah were analyzed based on Hyland and Tse (2004). Two main types of metadiscourse markers were investigated: interactive category, i.e. transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses and interactional category, i.e. hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers. The results show that there are no significant differences between the third and fourth year students' writing in the use of these markers. Moreover, both groups frequently use transition markers more than other markers. This means that they are more familiar with interactive category than interactional category.

Key words: academic writing, EFL Learners, metadiscourse, markers, interactive markers, interactional markers.

1. **Introduction:** Metadiscourse markers are linguistic elements that offer a way of understanding language in use. Hence, these elements guide the sort of relation between the sender and the receiver of a text. These markers play a significant role in establishing the relation between the writer and the reader or the speaker and the listener. Schiffrin (1980:231) states that metadiscourse is the linguistic ability of the author as well as his rhetorical manifestation in the text. Such a Linguistic ability and rhetorical manifestation of the writer is the realization of both the linguistic competence and communicative competence. Writing is the productive skill in which almost all types of writers' competence are manifested. The writers' performance is a mixture of both linguistic and non linguistic tools. Hence, Hyland (2004: 133) views the term metadiscourse as:

a growing interest in the interactive and rhetorical character of academic writing, expanding the focus of study beyond the ideational dimensions of a text, or how they characterize the world, to the ways they function interpersonally. Such view argues that academic writers do not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to offer a credible representation of themselves and their work, and to acknowledge and negotiate social relations with readers.

Hyland and Tse (2004:156) consider metadiscourse as a principle concept that offers a method of collecting devices writers use to organize their text, engage readers, and their attitudes. It is a term which describes a range of Lexical items. The main function of metadiscourse is to enhance communicative efficiency either by determining the relation between parts of a text and the context or by establishing the relation between communicator and audience. There are two main opinions concerning the function and nature of metadiscourse concept. The first is represented by Crismore (1985), Kopple (1985), and Williams (1981) who consider metadiscourse as textual features that contribute to either propositional or interpersonal functions. The second opinion is represented by Mauranten (1993), Bunton (1999), and Hyland & Tse (2004) who consider metadiscourse as the writer's awareness of text as discourse. Throughout the using of metadiscourse markers, this discourse expresses the writer's voice in writing.

Consequently, there is a variety of metadiscourse taxonomies. Crismore (1985) explain two typologies for metadiscourse markers: informational or referential and attitudinal or expressive metadiscourse. Vande Kopple (1985) distinguishes two types of meaning concerning metadiscourse : propositional meaning and non-propositional meaning . Generally, these taxonomies have some sort of relation with the Halliday's three metafunctions : ideational , textual, and interpersonal . The writer and the reader in the academic communication make use of these metafunctions by organizing, interpreting, and evaluating the given information.

Metadiscourse markers have been used in various contexts and texts. Hyland (1999) examined the use of metadiscourse in two corpora—textbooks and research articles in three disciplines: Biology, Applied Linguistics and Marketing. The results show that Applied Linguistics texts comprised considerably more interactive markers (evidential and relational markers); the biology authors favored interactional markers (hedges); and marketing textbooks had fewer interactive markers (evidential and endophorics). Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) investigated the impact of explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on advanced, intermediate, and elementary EFL learners' writing performance. The findings indicated that such a strategy significantly improves EFL learners' ability. Lu (2011) explores how using and learning to use metadiscourse markers guide readers through texts and facilitating writer–reader communication facilitates Chinese EFL undergraduates' learning of English argumentative writing. Xu (2001) examined the use of metadiscourse markers by 200 students throughout four years of an undergraduate course in English at a Chinese university. He found that students in the final two years used more interactive metadiscourse than those in the first two years. Interactional metadiscourse markers are less used by all four years students. Martinez (2004) investigated the use of metadiscourse markers in English Composition of Spanish undergraduate students. Mostly the same findings that EFL students tend to use the interactive metadiscourse markers more than interactional metadiscourse markers in their writing



performance are found in many cases. This gives an impression that undergraduates EFL learners are more familiar with interactive markers than interactional ones. Other examples of related literature , however, can be: post-graduate dissertation (Bunton, 1999); company annual reports (Hyland, 1998); undergraduate textbooks (Hyland, 2000); school textbooks (Crismore, 1989); science popularization (Crismore and Farnsworth, 1989); introductory course books (Hyland, 1999); and slogans and headlines (Fuertes–Olivera et al, 2001).

But still the academic writing is considered to be rich and fruitful contexts and genre for using metadiscourse elements. This means that using these elements or markers in an effective way is the ultimate goal for the language teaching process. Throughout such successful usage, the interaction between the writer (student) and the reader (teacher) or vice versa facilitates the teaching process. Metadiscourse includes a set of open lexical class each of which has a relatively stable pragmatic role. The student gets benefit from knowing almost all of them and how they are used correctly by explicit or implicit instructions. As a result, metadiscourse markers may play a significant role in creative writing process. Since metadiscourse markers are linguistic tools which do not add propositional information but reflect the author identity, Crismore et al (1993: 40) state that metadiscourse is:

linguistic material in text, written or spoken, which does not add anything to the propositional content but that is intended to help



the listener or reader organize, interfere and evaluate the information given.

The principle function of using metadiscourse markers in written or spoken text is to get coherent discourse. In order to produce coherent discourse, writers or speakers have to exploit what they already know about the discourse and integrate it with other sources of information. The writer and the speaker of the text are required to use cohesion appropriately. According to text structure, metadiscourse markers work on discourse relevance. The present study attempts to find out whether the Iraqi advanced EFL learners in the Dep. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Basrah have knowledge of the metadiscourse taxonomies and how they are used in an appropriate way or not. To sum up, it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Do third year students in the Dep. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Basrah distinguish the difference between interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in their writing?
2. Do fourth year students in the Dep. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Basrah distinguish the difference between interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in their writing?
3. Is there any difference between the third year students and the fourth year students writing in using the interactive and the interactional metadiscourse markers?



2. Methodology: This section of the study restates the research questions and describes all aspects of the research material, procedures, and model used in the study.

2.1. The Material: Sixty students' answer books representing literary genre are randomly selected out of 140 answer books the total of the student in third and fourth year of the Dep. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Basrah to study metadiscourse markers. Students are both male and female, aged between 22 to 24 years, and they are almost from the same social background i.e. they are homogenous group. These sixty answer books are the answers of two questions in the English Novel lesson for the third year students and the fourth year students. These questions are part of the first-term tests that have been done in Dep. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Basrah during the academic year 2015–2016. They were given to the students of this study respectively concerned with plot, theme, and related analysis of the English Novel texts they studied. The third year English Novel texts represent the English Romantic Age while the fourth year English Novel texts represents English Modern Age. This means that the two English Novel texts are different in terms of historical era. Generally, the material of this study represents the answer books of literary subject. English Novel lesson has been chosen because of its argumentative questions that can be raised and discussed. EFL writers in this context are expected to defend their own viewpoints, and anticipate and respond to opposing views.

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

1. Identifying the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers category in the third year students' answering books group.
2. Identifying the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers category in the fourth year students' answering books group.
3. Calculating numbers and the frequencies of metadiscourse markers for each category in each group.
4. Comparing the results of the two groups concerning the two main categories of metadiscourse markers.

2.3. The Model: The present study is an attempt to contribute to the literature on metadiscourse markers in EFL academic writing. It makes use of the taxonomy of metadiscourse markers introduced by Hyland and Tse (2004) which is taken as the model for this study. This model is used since it is designed specifically to capture the underlying principles of academic writing. It refers to academic writing as a communication that has an interpersonal feature. The taxonomy of such term has two main distinguished categories of metadiscourse markers. The first interactive metadiscourse markers include:

1. Transition: They are mainly conjunctions used to mark additive, contrastive, and consequential steps in the discourse.

Examples:

(a) The city is great place to visit, but would you want to bank there?

(b) They solved the problem by reducing their costs and borrowing more money.

(c) They consider him as outsider and always they insult him.

2. Frame markers: They are items used to sequence, to label text stages, to announce discourse goals, and to indicate topic shifts. Examples:

(a) My purpose here is to clarify the issue.

(b) Finally, they did not help him.

(c) To conclude, the children really behave differently.

3. Endophoric markers: They are items used to refer to other parts of text and attempts to recover the writer's intentions.

(a) As it is noted above, the problem is not easy to solve.

(b) In section two, the researcher attempts to give theoretical background.

(c) For more information see the figure below, please.

4. Evidential: They are items used to indicate the source of textual information which originates outside the current text.

Examples:

(a) The supervisor states that Jake's statement is supportive.

(b) According to the children on the island, Simon is outsider.

5. Code glosses: They are items used to elaborate propositional meanings and restate the ideational information in

other ways. Examples:

(a) There is one more topic to discuss, namely the question of your study.

(b) In other words, they respect him.

Second interactional metadiscourse markers which include:

1. Hedges: They are items refer to possibilities while avoiding direct personal responsibility for one's statements make sentences more acceptable to the reader. Examples:

(a) Perhaps, worst of all was the corruption in the cities.

(b) In this case, "employment" probably refers to a person's job.

(c) It would seem from archeological evidence that they were hunters.

2. Boosters: They are items used to imply certainty and emphasize the force of prepositions. They can therefore help writers to present their work with assurance while effecting interpersonal solidarity. Examples:

(a) This, of course, is an oversimplification of the slavery problem.

(b) This is true, even if we assume that the two leaders were equally intelligent.

(c) In fact, tempers were so on edge that arguments and fights were common.

3. Attitude markers: They are items that express the writer's appraisal of propositional information. They are different comparative, progressive particles, certain attitudes verbs, adjectives or adverbs. Examples:

(a) Unfortunately, most Americans do not vote as often as they could.

(b) Luckily, this trench protected them from their enemies.

(c) I think it is interesting that the villages were spared.

4. Engagement markers: They are items used to address readers and guide them to interpretations. Examples:

(a) Simon considered the children's' comments.

(b) You can see that everything is on the safe side.

5. Self-mentions: They are items used to reflect the writer's identity and style. They are mostly first person pronouns and progressives. Examples:

(a) Our main aim is unity.

(b) My ultimate goal is to pass the exam.

Table (1) below represents the model of metadiscourse in academic texts according to Hyland and Tse (2004):

Table (1): A model of Metadiscourse in Academic Texts.

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive resources	Help to guide reader through the text	
Transition	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition, but, thus, and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	Finally, to conclude, my purpose here is to
Endphoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above, see fig, in section 2

Evidential	Refer to source of information from other texts	According to x, (y, 1990), Z states
Code glosses	Help readers grasp functions of ideational material	Namely, e.g., such as, in other words
Interactional resources	Involve the reader in the argument	
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	Might, perhaps, possible, about
Boosters	Emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	In fact, definitely, it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately, I agree. Surprisingly
Engagement markers	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Consider, note that, you can, see that
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I, we, my, our

3. Results: As mentioned earlier, the present study attempts to find out the differences in the quantity of used metadiscourse categories in the two groups based on Hyland and Tse's (2004)



model of metadiscourse. It explores the frequency of using interactive and interactional category in the Iraqi advanced EFL learners' writing. As far as the interactive metadiscourse markers is concerned, the third year students used 442 while the fourth year students used 542 in the whole sample. This means that the frequency of the interactive MDM (metadiscourse markers) per 12,000 word in the third year students' writing is 3,681 while in the fourth year students' writing is 4,5083. On the other hand, the study shows that third year used 122 interactional MDM which means a frequency of 1,015 while fourth year students used 134 interactional MDM with a frequency of 1,116 (see tables 2 & 3). The writers of the two groups employ MDM non significantly differently. In the interactive category, TR is used 407 by the 3rd year group with a frequency of 3,39 while the 4th year group used 505 MDMs with high frequency of 4,2083. As far as the FMs (Frame markers) in the 3rd year group, the writers used 35 FMs with a frequency of 0,291 while 4th year group used 36 FMs with a frequency of 0,3. Regarding the using of Ems (Endphorc markers), EVs (Evidential markers), and CGs (Code glosses), both groups did not use any of them in their writing except the 4th year group used (1) CGs. Low frequency or high frequency of MDMs is a consequence of their discourse functions, i.e. Ems, EVs, and CGs are most frequent in research articles genre that are written by post-graduated students. Moreover, the genre of the present study does not require much use of such MDMs. The 3rd year group

used lesser number of interactive MDMs than the 4th year group due to language exposure. Table (2) shows these results.

Table (2) MDMs in the interactive category

MDMs	3 rd year	Fr./12,000	4 th year	Fr./12,000
TR	405	3,39	505	4,2083
FM	35	0,291	36	0,3
EM	0	0	0	0
EV	0	0	0	0
CG	0	0	1	0
Total	442	3,681	542	4,5083

Comparing interactive category, the 3rd year and the 4th year groups use less interactional category because they lack the appropriate knowledge of the concept of metadiscourse in general and interactional category specifically. The two groups of writers used low numbers of the type of the interactional category of MDMs. The 3rd year group used (9) HGs (Hedges markers) with a frequency of 0,075 while the 4th year group used (8) HGs with a frequency of 0,066. As for BOs (Boosters markers), 3rd year group used (113) and 4th year group writers used (126) with a frequency of 0,94 and 1,05 respectively. It is worth to mention here that BOs are more frequently used by the two groups because of their discourse function. They emphasize the writer's certainty in proposition. On the other hand, the writers of the two groups did not use AMs (Attitude markers), SMs (Self-mention markers),

EnMs (Engagement markers) in their answer books. This is shown in table (3).

Table (3) MDMs in the Interactional Category

MDMs	3 rd year	Fr./12,000	4 th year	Fr./12,000
HG	9	0,075	8	0,066
BO	113	0,94	126	1,05
AM	0	0	0	0
SM	0	0	0	0
EnM	0	0	0	0
Totals	122	1,015	1,116	1,116

4. Conclusion:

The results of this study in regards to the frequency of metadiscourse markers in the third year students' writing and the fourth year students' writing reveal that:

1. Both groups use interactive category of metadiscourse markers more than interactional category. It is not surprising to see transition markers the most frequent metadiscourse strategy in this study because of the genre of writing under investigation. One of the most crucial factors to be considered in the academic writing is maintaining coherence. The Iraqi EFL learners are familiar with using transition metadiscourse markers like "and" and "but" more than others.

2. It has been found that there is no big difference between the two groups in using the interactive category of metadiscourse markers.

3. Both groups less used interactional category of metadiscourse markers. This is due to the fact that either they do not distinguish between the two categories of metadiscourse markers or the type of the writing they perform in this study does not require the much using of interactional category. Taking into consideration the fact that each metadiscourse strategy fulfills a conceptually different function and the employment of each of them could be assumed independent.

4. The quantitative analysis of this study points to the importance of metadiscourse elements across the writing of the two groups. It is intended to realize that EFL learners have a limited or shortage in their repertoire concerning the selection and employment of metadiscourse markers.

5. The difference in the frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers in the (transition) and “but” (transition) appear in undergraduate academic writing far more frequently.

To justify the above results, the writing performance of students who represent the sample of the current study heavily depends only upon the instructor’s comments, notes, and explanations about English Novel texts without referring to other references of their own. Such situation indicates that the answer books of the students are highly similar in regards with the frequent use of the two main types of metadiscourse markers: interactive



and interactional. The students do not make use of their own reasoning to draw a logical map in their mind to join and discuss the events of the English Novel texts. For the pedagogical implications, the Iraqi advanced EFL learners need explicit and implicit directions for the teaching of metadiscourse markers and its relevance with skillful and creative writing. Besides, the students' writing is improved when they write with an awareness of metadiscourse strategies i.e. students became successful communicators with regards to metadiscourse strategies. The students' answer books in the present study represent argumentative essays about argumentative questions of English Novel texts but unfortunately most of them are merely readymade answers of what the instructors have said. Metadiscourse markers, therefore, are the most important features of English argumentative writing.

References

- Bunton D. (1999). The use of higher level metatext in ph.D thesis. *English for Specific Purpose*, 18: 41–56.
- Crismore, A. (1985). Metadiscourse as rhetorical act in social studies texts: Its effect on student performance and attitude. *Reprinted from Dissertation Abstract International*, 46(4). University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.
- _____ (1989). *Talking with Readers: Metadiscourse as Rhetorical Act*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Crismore, A. & R. Farnsworth (1989). Mr. Darwin and his readers: Exploring interpersonal metadiscourse as a dimension of ethos. *Rhetorical Review*. 8 (1): 91–112.
- Dastjerdi, H. Vahid and M. Shirzad (2010). The Impact of Explicit Instruction of Metadiscourse Markers on EFL Learners' Writing Performance. *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS)*, Vol,2, No.2, Summer, Ser.60/4
- Fuertes–Olivera PA, M. Velasco–Sacristan, A. Arribas–Btío & E. Samaniego–Fernández (2001). Persuasion and Advertising English: Metadiscourse in slogans and headlines. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33: 1291–1307.
- Hyland, K. (1998). Exploring corporate rhetoric Metadiscourse in the CEO's letter. *Journal of Business Communication*, 35(2): 224–245.
- _____ (1999). Talking to students: Metadiscourse in introductory coursebooks. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18 (1) : 3–26.
- _____ (2000). *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interaction in Academic Writing*. London: Pearson.

_____(2004). Disciplinary interactions: metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13: 133–151.

Hyland, K. & Tse, P. (2004). Metadiscourse in academic writing: A reappraisal. *Applied Linguistics*, 25(2), 156–177.

Lu, LU (2011). *Metadiscourse and Genre Learning: English Argumentative Writing by Chinese Undergraduates*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation. University of Hong Kong.

Martinez, A. C. L. (2004). Discourse Markers in the expository writing of Spanish university students. *IBERICA*, 8, 63–80.

Mauranen, A. (1993). Contrastive ESP rhetoric: Metatext in Finnish–English Economics texts. *English for Specific Purposes*, 12: 3–22.

Schiffrin, D. (1980). Metatalk: Organization and evaluative brackets in discourse. *Sociological Inquiry: Language and Social Interaction*, 50: 199–236.

Vande Kopple, W.J. (1985). Discourse about discourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 36: 82–93.

Williams, J. (1981). *Style Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Boston. Scott Foresman.

Xu Haiming. (2001). *Metadiscourse: A cross-cultural perspective*.

Nanjing: Southeast University Press.

علامات الميتا خطاب في الكتابات الاكاديمية لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية ذوي المستوى المتقدم

المستخلص:

الهدف الاساسي من استخدام علامات الميتا خطاب هو لجعل عملية التواصل بين الكاتب و القارى اكثر فاعلية. تهدف الدراسة الى اختبار استخدام علامات الميتا خطاب في كتابات متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية ذوي المستوى المتقدم. تم اختبار مجموعتين من الطلبة في قسم اللغة الانكليزية/كلية الاداب/جامعة البصرة. هاتان المجموعتان هما طلبة المرحلة الثالثة و طلبة المرحلة الرابعة. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج Hyland & Tse (2004). كذلك تم اختيار نوعين من انواع علامات الميتا خطاب وهما : العلامات التفاعلية و العلامات الحوارية. اظهرت نتائج الدراسة انه لا فرق بين طلبة المرحلة الثالثة و الرابعة في استخدام هذه العلامات في كتابتهم الاكاديمية. علاوة على ذلك، فأن كلتا المجموعتين استخدمتا علامات التفاعل اكثر من غيرها. هذا يعني بأن الطلبة في كلتا المجموعتين اكثر استخداما للعلامات التفاعلية من العلامات الحوارية.

