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Revisiting Metadiscourse Markers of the Language Learners in Academic Writing

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Abstract: This study which explores successful and less-successful learners' comparative essays written by university students learning Turkish, which is based on two corpora of student writing: 20 successful essays and 20 less-successful essays in Turkish. Using Hyland's (2005) model of interactional metadiscourse, these papers were compared to examine the extent to which successful and less successful student-produced comparative essays differ in their employment of interactive and interactional modes. Findings of the analysis suggest that successful essays contain significantly greater instances of particularly interactive devices than less successful essays.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, learners of Turkish, interactive, interactional.

1. Introduction

It is assumed that academic writers are to “not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations” (Hyland, 2004a, p. 5). This is in line with the idea that scientific discourse functions on two levels; the first level is the primary discourse, which encompasses facts that add up to the truth. The second is the linguistic material, which is developed to help readers to understand what is said and what is intended by the author in the primary discourse. This level of discourse is generally referred to as a secondary discourse, and commonly called metadiscourse. It serves to “direct readers in how to take the author—that is, how to understand the author's perspective or stance toward the content or structure of the primary discourse and the readers” (Blagojević, 2009, p. 64). In this context, Hyland, (2004b) assures that “the ability of writers to control the level of personality in their texts, claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views, is now recognized as a key feature of successful academic writing” (pp. 133-134).

Metadiscourse is the tool that writers employ to have an effect on their audience. Metadiscourse encompasses elements in a text which are used to organize the text, to indicate the writer's attitudes, and to represent

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the intended message of the text in order to make it more effective and more understandable to the intended readers (Hyland, 2005). The term “metadiscourse” was first defined by Harris (1959) as a way of understanding language in use which helps the writer or the speaker to guide the receivers’ understanding of a text (cited in Hyland, 2005). Ädel (2010) defines metadiscourse as “reflexive linguistic expressions referring to the evolving discourse itself or its linguistic form” (p. 75). It is “an author's discoursing about the discourse; it is the author's intrusion into the discourse, either explicitly or non-explicitly, to direct rather than inform the readers” (Crismore, 1984, p. 4).

Communication does not consist of only the exchange of information; but it also highlights the personalities, attitudes and assumptions about the speakers and communicators. In fact, writers use metadiscourse markers to interpret, evaluate, discuss, support or reject the idea in the propositional content and also to express themselves and their ideas through the text. Metadiscourse is, therefore, a crucial device for writers as they want to engage and influence readers in the text and for readers as they tend to make sense of the text in the way the writer intended it to be. However, by using metadiscourse markers, writers can avoid misinterpretations or misrepresentation of self and they can represent the real intention of the text clearly (Alibabae, et al, 2016, p.887).

The role of metadiscourse elements in reading and writing reveals intriguing results. On the one hand, studies like Sloan’s (1984) and Perez & Macia’s (2002) claim that explicit discourse markers are unnecessary and other research (Vande Kopple, 2012) concludes that metadiscourse elements are not always an indicator of reading and writing efficiency. On the other hand, the facilitating role of the metadiscourse has obviously been acknowledged: metadiscourse is believed to be influential to improve writing, to enhance reading and to render textbooks more reader-friendly.

There are many classifications of metadiscourse types. In this section, three of the most commonly known are presented. The first one is that of Crismore (1983) which divides metadiscourse into two main categories; informational and attitudinal. The second is that of Vande Kopple (2012) and it divides metadiscourse markers into six main categories including; text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers, epistemology markers, attitude markers and commentary. The third classification is that of Hyland (2005) which comprises two main categories of metadiscourse; interactive and interactional.

(1) Crismore's Classification (1983)

Crismore's typology of metadiscourse markers includes two main categories; informational and attitudinal metadiscourse, with subtypes for each main category (1983, pp. 11-15). Crismore's typology is based on his assumption that metadiscourse is used on two levels; referential and expressive (1983). Metadiscourse functions on a referential informational level "when it serves to direct readers how to understand the primary message by referring to its content and structure, and the author's purposes or goals" (Crismore, 1983, p. 11). On the other hand, metadiscourse functions on an expressive, attitudinal and symbolic level "when it serves to direct readers how to take the author, that is, how to understand the author's perspective or stance toward the content or structure of the primary discourse" (p.12).

(2) VandeKopple's Classification (2012)

The taxonomy offered by Vande Kopple (2012, pp. 38-40) included six main categories.

a. The first category is Text Connectives used by authors to show the readers how the different parts of a text are connected to one another, and how different texts are organized. Typical examples of Text Connectives include: 1) elements that show sequence such as, first, next, and in the third place; 2) elements that show logical or chronological relationships such as, at the same time, and consequently; 3) reminders about material presented earlier in texts such as, as we saw in part one, and as we mentioned in the first chapter; 4) statements about forthcoming material such as we shall see in the next chapter, and as will be shown in the next paragraph; and 5) topicalizers.

b. The second category is Code Glosses which are used by authors to help readers understand the proper meanings of elements in a text. Examples of Code Glosses are: 1) when the author defines a word or phrase for his readers or when he signals that there is a problem with the common interpretation of a word, he uses expressions such as so-called or what some people call; 2) when the author indicates how strictly or loosely he wishes his readers to receive his words, he uses expressions such as, strictly speaking or roughly speaking; and 3) when the author anticipates that his readers might be having difficulty in understanding passages, and he indicates that he will rephrase by using expressions such as, I'll put it this way or what I mean to say is.

c. The third category is Illocution Markers which are used by authors to make clear to their readers the type of speech or discourse act they are performing at certain points in texts. Common examples of Illocution Markers are: 1) elements such as we claim that, I hypothesize that, I promise to, to sum up, and for example; 2) when authors use mitigators to attenuate the force of speech acts as, for instance, when adding a modal verb to a direct request, e.g. I must ask that you, or when they, to the contrary, use boosters to increase the force of certain speech acts such as enthusiastically and most sincerely.

d. The fourth category is Epistemology Markers which are used by authors to indicate some stance on their part toward the epistemological status of the ideational material they convey. In other words, they mark the degree of certainty with which the author makes a claim about the truth of a proposition or how committed he is to the truth of ideational material. Sometimes the author is cautious, and he signals that caution with what Vande Kopple (2012) calls shields such as “it is possible that and perhaps”. Sometimes he emphasizes what he really believes, or would like his readers to think he believes, by using what are called emphatics such as “without a doubt and most certainly”.

e. The fifth category of metadiscourse is Attitude Markers which are used by an author to help him reveal what attitude he has toward ideational material. Examples of these markers that express attitudes are: 1) using adverbs such as “fortunately”; 2) parenthetical expressions such as “I regret and I rejoice; and 3) clauses such as I am grateful that”.

f. The sixth and last category of metadiscourse, according to Vande Kopple (2012, pp. 38-40), is Commentary with which the author addresses his readers directly. Common examples of commentary are: 1) when the author comments on his readers’ probable moods, views, or reactions to his ideational material as in saying; some of you will be amazed that or 2) when he even recommends a mode of reading as in saying you might wish to skip to the next chapter.

(3) Hyland’s classification (2005)

Hyland’s model divides metadiscourse into two broad categories:

- Interactive features used to organize propositional information in ways that the target reader should find coherent and convincing (2005, p. 50).
- Interactional features that draw the reader into the discourse and give them an opportunity to contribute to it and respond to it by alerting

them to the writer's perspective on propositional information and orientation and intention with respect to that reader (2005, p. 52).

Interactive Metadiscourse

There are five interactive features, which are briefly defined and exemplified below.

Code glosses supply additional information by rephrasing, illustrating or explaining. They reflect the writer's assumptions about the reader's cognitive environment.

Examples: called, defined as, e.g., in other words, specifically:

Endophoric markers refer to other parts of the text in order to make additional information available, provide supporting arguments, and thus steer the reader toward a preferred interpretation.

Examples: (in) (this) Chapter; see Section X, Figure X, page X; as noted earlier.

Evidentials are metalinguistic representations of an idea from another source and help to establish authorial command of the subject.

Examples: (to) quote X, according to X.

Frame markers are used to sequence parts of the text or order arguments in the text. They serve four specific purposes:

(a) to sequence: (in) Chapter X, first, next, lastly, I begin with, I end with;

(b) to label stages: all in all, at this point, in conclusion, on the whole;

(c) to announce goals: my focus, goal, objective is to, I seek to;

(d) to shift topic: back to, in regard to, return to, turn to.

Transition markers are primarily conjunctions and conjunctives that help the readers determine the logical relationships between propositions. Authorities have proposed a number of categorizations, including Halliday and Hasan (1976):

(a) additive —moreover, for example (also an endophoric marker), similarly;

(b) causal —therefore, as a result, it follows that;

(c) adversative —however, that being said, nevertheless;

(d) temporal —first, second, next, then, finally.

Interactional Metadiscourse

There are five interactional features too.

Attitude markers indicate the writer's opinion or assessment of a proposition. Examples: I agree, I am amazed, appropriate, correctly, dramatic, hopefully, unfortunately.

Self-mention refers to explicit authorial presence in the text and gives information about his/her character and stance. Examples: I, we, the author.

Engagement markers explicitly address readers to draw them into the discourse. Examples: we, our (inclusive), imperative mood.

Hedges indicate the writer's decision to recognize other voices, viewpoints or possibilities and be (ostensibly) open to negotiation with the reader. Examples: apparently, assume, doubt, estimate, from my perspective, in most cases, in my opinion, probably, suggest....

Boosters allow the writer to anticipate and preclude alternative, conflicting arguments by expressing certainty instead of doubt. Examples: beyond doubt, clearly, definitely, we found, we proved, it is an established fact.

After deliberations among these three models, the researcher of the study has decided to use Hyland's model of metadiscourse. First, this study adopts a genre-based approach. That is, it aims to investigate the similarities and differences in metadiscourse features in the discipline of applied linguistics. Because Hyland's model is genre-based and has been established from a large corpus of studies, it was considered appropriate for this study. Second, Hyland's model reflects the latest development in the methodological approaches to metadiscourse analysis and is simple, clear and inclusive (Abdi, Rizzi, & Tavakoli, 2010). Third, Hyland's model builds on previous taxonomies and reorganises the categories of metadiscourse more accurately (Mu et al, 2015).

2. Method

2.1. Data Collection

The corpus consists of the essays written by 20 successful and 20 less successful students at the undergraduate and graduate level of a western state university. Their comparative essays were analysed to showcase to what extent successful and less-successful comparative essays differ in their use of interactional and interactive modes in terms of Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model. Students were from New Guinea, Mongolia, Columbia, Tunisia, Palestine, Algiers, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Morocco and Iran. They were asked an essay to compare and contrast their homeland with Turkey in 30minutes

and their essays were graded by two writing teachers whose inter-rater reliability was found to be, 90.

Table 1 provides descriptions of the successful and less-successful learners coming from different African, South American and Asian countries. None of them had any background of Turkish learning before. They started to learn Turkish when they came to Turkey and enrolled in the state university. Their ages range from 18 to 29 as they are at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Table 1 Descriptions of the learners

Students	Age	Early experience	Months in Turkey
Mean	22.90	--	6.5
(<i>n:40</i>) SD	1.46	--	0.90
Min	18.00	--	6
Max	29.00	--	7

3. Results and Discussions

When students' essays are item analysed, the results show that the essays yield more interactive expressions than intertextual ones: 155 versus 48. When successful and less successful learners' essays are compared, the dominance of interactive expressions did not change.

Students make use of "yani" (e.g.)(*n:29*) as a code gloss and "ama" (but)(*n:42*) and "sonuç olarak" (therefore)(*n:30*) more frequently than the others.

Table 2 Interactive

Code gloss	
e.g	29 (15+14)
That is	2
Endomorphic (this section)	1
Evidentials	--
Frame markers	
Primarily	11(6+5)
Secondly	5 (3+2)
Thirdly	2
Goal	1
lastly	1
Transitions	
But	42 (22+20)

Moreover	11 (5+6)
Because	16 (8+8)
However	3
Therefore	30 (16+14)

Table 3 has less frequencies than the interactive mode, totally 48. The first person singular pronoun “ben” (I) is used by half of the learners. This self-mentioning is astounding for Turkish speakers as they do not use a separate pronoun in their sentences but add the pronoun marker at the end of their verbs. The attitude adverb “maalesef” (unfortunately) increases the number of attitude markers as mthe second rank. Boosters such as “açıkça” (clearly), “şüphesiz” (of course) ve özellikle” (specially) rank third.

When successful and successful essays are analysed separately, the results do not show any radical variation.

Table 3 Interactional

Attitude	
Amazed	4 (2+2)
Unfortunately	7 (5+2)
Odd	1
wish	1
Self (I)	18 (10+8)
Engagement	
Inclusive we	1
Imperative	
Hedges	
Generally	6 (3+3)
Possibility	
From my perspective	
Boosters	
Clearly	3
Of course	3 (2+1)
specially	4 (2+2)

One striking feature of the Table 3 is the scarcity of hedges. According to Hyland, hedges are categorized into accuracy-oriented and writer-oriented ones. Accuracy-oriented hedges are used to hedge the accuracy, precision, and reliability of the propositional content (e.g., generally, may, possible), while writer-oriented hedges protect a writer

against threats of contradiction by reducing the writer's commitment to the proposition (e.g., assume, appear, seem). They are those devices used to proactively attend to readers' judgments and potential objections and to show deference and modesty (e.g., in my view, would). Hyland holds that "all hedges are 'writer-oriented' in the sense that they function to reduce the risk of claim negatability, but reader-oriented hedges anticipate this possibility by addressing interpersonal rather than strictly epistemic issues" (2005, p. 184). The low frequency of hedges show that students have not fully developed their own language identity.

Another interactional feature is the low usage of boosters. Congruent with Li and Wharton's (2012) findings of UK-based Chinese ESL undergraduate student texts and Lee and Deakin's (2016) study, we found that boosters appear much less frequently. Between successful and less successful learners, no significant differences were found between the groups, as shown in Table 3 above, which suggests that both groups appear to construct their arguments with less conviction. They appear to be somewhat limited in their linguistic repertoires for marking conviction.

The contrastive feature between the use of "I" and "we" as the engagement marker is astounding. The use of engagement markers is the most overt indication of a writer's dialogic awareness of texts and readers. Only one learner has used "we" and he may have felt less of such shared values in texts written in an L2 for a writing course in a foreign culture.

4. Conclusion

All in all, the study aimed at exploring the extent to which learners of Turkish utilize the metadiscourse markers. To achieve this purpose 40 participants' essays were item analysed according to Hyland's (2005) model. It was revealed that the essays persistently contained fewer metadiscourse markers, which signals a contradiction with the proficiency level of the learners.

Hyland (2005) believes that an awareness of metadiscourse offers three main advantages to students. First, it helps them better understand the cognitive demands that texts make on readers and the ways writers can help them to process information. Second, it gives them enough resources to take a stance toward their ideas. Third, it enables them to negotiate that stance, and engage with their readers. Crismore et al. (1983) also state that students should be given metacognitive awareness of metadiscourse markers and strategies to use it, so that they might know how to consider the author,

connect sentences to maintain schemas, change topics, notice an introduction, transition, and a conclusion, identify the author's attitudes and whether he/she is being subjective or objective, and realize the relevant signals and circumstances, which define the rhetorical situation of the text. In his last essay in 2017, Hyland claims that metadiscourse is a fuzzy category. Metadiscourse is what signals the presence of a text-organising and content-evaluating author rather than the subject matter, but Hyland believes it is hard to apply this. Secondly, "that metadiscourse is a pragmatic category also means that all items should be examined in their sentential contexts to ensure they are performing metadiscourse functions: reading concordance lines is more important than recording frequency counts and, unfortunately, this is sometimes forgotten" (2017, p.18). A third aspect of fuzziness is that functions may be performed in different ways or individual items may perform more than one function simultaneously. A fourth problem associated with the term concerns what metadiscourse actually does in a text.

Most generally, metadiscourse is the author's rhetorical manifestation in the text to "bracket the discourse organisation and the expressive implications of what is being said" (Schiffrin, 1980, p.231). This deceptively simple definition, however, is understood in various ways. Some restrict the term to what the author has to say about the unfolding text by self-referential acts such as labelling text stages, previewing upcoming material, and making connections explicit. Others include in their analyses how writers and speakers react to what they are saying; the ways they intervene to offer affective or epistemic comment on propositional information or establish a connection with readers. (Hyland, 2017, p.19)

To conclude, some pedagogical implications for the writing instruction of L2 undergraduate students can be drawn from these findings. As numerous writing scholars have repeatedly advocated, there is a vital need for more direct instruction on interactional metadiscourse in writing courses designed specifically for L2 students (Hyland, 2005; Li & Wharton, 2012; Lee & Deakin, 2016). Secondly, writing teachers need to let learners know the fact that writing is an ongoing dialogic, interactive, and social activity. Finally, teachers should remember that practice makes perfect in align with their corrective constructive feedback to students who are believed to be able to grasp with the use of metadiscourse elements in writing and utilize them successfully.

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