A REVIEW OF STUDIES ON METADISCOURSE IN WRITTEN TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Metadiscourse is part of linguistic features which helps reader and hearer to further understand the discourse. Written discourse is the most researched genre compared to spoken discourse. Findings from past research have helped future researchers in understanding the methods used and identifying loopholes to produce a research that can contribute to the body of knowledge. Thus, this paper seeks to review past studies on metadiscourse with regard to written discourse in various genres.

Key words: *Metadiscourse, Written Text*

INTRODUCTION

Metadiscourse is an umbrella term referring to 'text elements which contain unnecessary information but put emphasize on the main information of a text' (Zellig, 1959). The term 'metadiscourse' was first coined by Zellig which has now been widely used by researchers. As cited in Crismore (1983), Joseph M. Williams regards metadiscourse as 'discourse about discourse'; a form of writing that guides and informs the reader about main topics. He explains further in the appendix:

> Metadiscourse: Writing about writing, whatever does not refer to the subject matter being addressed. This includes all connecting devices such as therefore, however, for example, in the first place; all comments about the author's attitude: I believe, in my opinion, let me also point out; all comments about the writer's confidence in his following assertion: most people believe, it is widely assumed, allegedly; references to the audience: as you can see, you will find that, consider now the problem of ... (p. 212)

Nonetheless, this does not prevent other writers to interpret it differently based on their school of thoughts. This is due to the term itself which is not a well-defined concept. Among the different terms used to refer to metadiscourse is signaling (Meyer, 1975); transitions, signals or signposting (Bradley, 1981 & Eastman, 1970).

In general, metadiscourse can be interpreted as various linguistic markers used in a text or speech to guide readers as well as to engage them in the particular genre. It carries no information, but to signal the presence of the author or speaker. It is 'an important means of facilitating communication, supporting a writer's position and building a relationship with an audience' (Hyland, 1998).

However, the use of metadiscourse can also be 'disturbing' and 'too much' in which it hinders readers/listeners' comprehension from the primary content of a discourse. This is true as William (1982) argues the importance of utilizing metadiscourse correctly as the excessive use of these linguistic features can be wordiness thus impede the primary discourse from being conveyed. He also suggests that if the clauses or phrases are shortened, then the message will be more direct and easier to digest.

Metadiscourse consists of several classification or sub-types which differ from one scholar to another depending on their interpretation of metadiscourse. However, that should not be the case as the differences mostly occur in the terms used to refer to the classification or

sub-types. Among the prominent scholars whose metadiscourse taxonomies are widely referred and adopted are Hyland (1995 & 2005), Adel (2010), Luukka (1994), and Mauranen (2001).

PAST STUDIES ON METADISCOURSE IN WRITTEN TEXT

A number of studies focusing on written discourse have been conducted through the years. The most researched genre is research articles (RAs). In this genre, some researchers focused on particular sections rather than the whole RAs. Among the prevalent sections are introduction, discussion, and conclusion. Different authors have their own justifications in focusing on a particular section. Some are quoted saying that the focused section contains more metadiscourse markers (though this applies to all sections regardless the researcher's interpretation of metadiscourse).

Besides, the focused section reveals a lot about interaction between writers and readers. This again, depends on the objectives set for the research as well as aspects to be covered in the particular research. There are two noticeable patterns from the research focusing on RAs. One is the multidisciplinary aspects covered in the choosing of RAs to be studied. Another one deals with the intercultural aspects of the RAs writers themselves. At least, one of these two aspects would be covered in studies involving RAs.

In 1998, Hyland analysed a corpus of 28 research articles written in English with seven RAs from each of four academic disciplines: Microbiology, Marketing, Astrophysics and Applied Linguistics. His objective was to show how the appropriate use of metadiscourse essentially depends on rhetorical context. His study adopted a metadiscourse taxonomy proposed by Crismore et al. (1993) and suggested that metadiscourse reflects one way in which context and linguistic meaning are integrated to allow readers to derive intended interpretations.

Harwood (2005) conducted a qualitative corpus-based study of self-promotional 'I' and 'we' in academic writing across four disciplines while Vazquez and Giner (2008) worked on the use of epistemic markers as hedging rhetorical strategies in English RAs in three fields.

Abdollahzadeh (2011) worked on hedges, emphatics, and attitude markers as three types of interactional metadiscourse markers which involved 60 conclusion sections of applied linguistics RAs.

Faghih & Rahimpour (2009) examined a corpus of ninety discussion sections of applied linguistics research articles, aimed to analyze different aspects of academic written discourse. The text involved were; English texts written by native speakers of English, English texts written by Iranians (as non-natives of English), and Persian texts written by Iranians. Hyland's (2004) model was adapted in examining the texts. The findings revealed that the rhetorical strategies employed in academic writings by these groups differed greatly due to their respective mother tongues.

In Malaysian context, Mohsen Khedri, Jamal Ebrahimi, & Swee Heng (2012) analyzed sixteen academic RA result and discussion sections. The discipline covered were English Language Teaching and Economics representing soft sciences and Biology and Civil

Engineering representing hard sciences. Their study sought to explore how the use of interactive metadiscourse markers is different in academic RAs across four disciplines.

In the following year, Khedri, Heng, & Ebrahimi (2013) directed their research focus to analyzing 60 research article abstracts written in Applied Linguistics and Economics adopting Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. Their study aimed to explore the usage of interactive metadiscourse markers among research article abstract writers within the soft sciences discipline. The results revealed significant variations across the two disciplines.

Among the other researchers who conducted studies on metadiscourse in written text are Myers (1989), Mauranen (1993), Luuka (1994), Moreno (1997), and Swales (1990, 1998, 1999, 2000, & 2001).

Apart from research articles, job postings are another genre which has been studied by researchers. Fu (2012) adopted Hyland's (2005a, 2005b) model in examining the use of interactional metadiscourse in 220job postings. His study revealed that the occurrences of stance markers and engagement markers are close in frequency. On the other hand, a remarkable differences have been demonstrated within the two sub-corpora of job postings (one is oriented to college students and the other is not) in terms of interactional metadiscourse use.

Jensen (2009) looked at metadiscourse use in e-mail negotiation. Her analysis aimed at the relationship development between the participants through the use of specific discourse strategies in their e-mail communication for a period of three months, where the relationship progresses from initial contact to on-going business. In her study, Hyland's (2005) concept of metadiscourse and Charles' (1996) categories of 'old and new relationship negotiations' were employed. The participants in this study were Danish Company and its business contact in Taiwan. The results illustrated that metadiscourse perform different functions relative to the context and that it could be used to highlight the development of the relationship between buyer and seller as the relationship progressed from initial contact (new relationship) to on-going business (old relationship).

Another genre which has also been studied is textbooks. Hyland (1998) examined the use of metadiscourse in university textbooks with regard to students' acquisition of a specialised disciplinary literacy. Features contain in extracts derived from 21 textbooks in microbiology, marketing and applied linguistics were compared with a similar corpus of research articles. The results differ significantly in the two corpora in which these differences suggested that textbooks lack of rhetorical guidance to students seeking information.

Analyzing a wide spectrum of academic texts consisting of 20 research articles, 20 handbook chapters, 20 scholarly textbook chapters, and 20 introductory textbook chapters in applied linguistics, Kuhi & Behnam (2010) looked at the ways metadiscourse is employed in different academic genres. The researchers displayed the importance of establishing social relationships in academic arguments as well as suggested some of the ways this is achieved.

Newspapers are also part of the researched genre in written discourse. Noorian & Biria (2010) focused on the role of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in persuasive writing. Two elite newspapers in the United States and Iran, The New York Times and Tehran Times respectively, were chosen. Their objective was to find out whether American and Iranian EFL writers employed the same amounts of interpersonal markers in their texts. For this purpose, a textual analysis of 12 opinion articles; 6 from each newspaper, has been conducted. The findings discovered significant differences specifically in the case of commentaries. These differences were due to culture-driven preferences, genre-driven conventions, and Iranian EFL writers' exposure of foreign language experience.

CONCLUSION

Metadiscourse is a much researched field specifically in written discourse. It is undeniably a very interesting feature to look at. The choosing of written discourse might be due to the availability of research articles as well as other written discourse. As for spoken discourse, though there are several well-developed corpora available such as MICASE and BASE, the texts are limited to only British and American English. If they are to study different languages, researchers have to develop their own corpus, if not big, but still, the meticulous process to transcribe the texts and taking into consideration the non-language aspects during the interaction, makes it difficult to be researched.

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