

Stefania Consonni / Larissa D'Angelo / Patrizia Anesa (eds.)

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse

Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

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Stefania Consonni / Larissa D'Angelo / Patrizia Anesa (eds.)

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse
Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

CELSB
Bergamo

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Digital Communication and Metadiscourse: Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

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HMOUD S. ALOTAIBI

How does the admission homepage appeal to applicants? An investigation of digital metadiscourse in university websites

Abstract

This chapter investigates how admission homepages in the websites of 15 leading US universities use metadiscourse functions to appeal to readers to join the university by portraying the exciting environment that the university has and at the same time to equip them with essential information related to admission processes. The analysis detects three components in admission homepages, namely introductory statements, hyperlinks, and images. The examination of metadiscourse use of these components using Hyland's (2005) model shows the following results. First, introductory statements are found very dialogic; since the use of the Engagement marker "you" is found predominant. In addition, they include references to the university, thus self-mention features are also pervasive. Second, some hyperlinks have a function of referring to other parts in the same homepage, while some links take the users to sources outside the admission homepage. Based on these two functions, hyperlinks noticeably fulfill two metadiscursive functions: endophoric and evidentials, respectively. Finally, images are used to illustrate the written texts, expose students' attitudes, and represent the university and its students. Based on these three functions, images are associated with three metadiscourse categories, namely code-glosses, attitude, and self-mentions. Consequently, it can be discerned that the admission homepage is designed to give a positive impression to readers by showing that the institution has a friendly atmosphere and that its students feel happy and enjoy their life (through photos). In addition, the admission homepage provides simple and friendly instructions to facilitate the admission process (through hyperlinks). While the three

components include some similarities and differences in terms of the use of metadiscursive functions that they carry, they differ in the number of categories they have. Specifically, the analysis of the first two components (i.e. introductory statements and hyperlinks) indicates that the metadiscourse function is carried out through one metadiscursive category. For images, however, visual metadiscourse is different as in many cases a single image is used to realize multiple categories of metadiscourse.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the digital age, universities around the world prioritize their websites to give good impressions of the university and facilitate the experience of users. A certain group of users to which definitely university websites give priority are prospective students. Thus, university websites specify an admission webpage that include several webpages to inform readers of the programs offered at the university and provide information related to admission conditions, processes, procedures, and deadlines. To my knowledge, there is no study that focuses on the admission homepage within the university website despite its central role. Hence, this study uses the model of metadiscourse to explore how the admission homepage is textually constructed as well as how it is designed to establish interactions with readers.

1.1 The theory of metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is “the commentary on a text made by its producer in the course of speaking or writing” (Hyland 2017: 16). According to Hyland (2005), metadiscourse involves two main categories. The first is the interactive category which comprises transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. These resources

allow the writer to produce an organized and a coherent text. The second is the interactional or interpersonal category which includes the following resources: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. These resources help the writer to project his or her persona and establish connection with the reader. The model of metadiscourse has been used to investigate academic genres such as research articles (Alotaibi 2015, 2016; Salas 2015), doctoral dissertations (Bunton 1999; Kawase 2015; Alotaibi 2018), master's dissertation (Akbas 2014; Akbas/Hardman 2017), and introductory coursebooks (Hyland 1999). In addition, the model was used to investigate particular genres such as newspaper editorials (Khabbazi-Oskouei 2013, 2015), book reviews (Bal-Gezegin 2016), job postings (Fu 2012), and slogans and headlines (Fuertes-Olivera et al. 2001).

Scholars (Ädel 2006; Hyland 2017; Alotaibi 2018) specified that metadiscourse is a fuzzy category in the sense of marking its boundaries; especially between what can be counted as metadiscourse and what can be considered as proposition. While he acknowledges this notion, Hyland (2017) pointed out that it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between metadiscourse and propositional content. Hence, he called for an approach that appreciates the flexibility of metadiscourse theory. By using metadiscourse to investigate university websites, the present study hopes to advance our understanding of the new applications of metadiscourse and thus enrich our knowledge of the flexibility of the theory and its boundaries.

1.2 Hypertextual metadiscourse

Recently, websites have received increasing attention and thus several studies used various methodologies to explore commercial websites (González 2005), hotel websites (Law 2018), blogs (Kenix 2009), website hierarchy (Djonov 2007), Parliament House Homepage (Djonov / Knox 2014), website interactivity (Adami 2014), cultural expressions in websites (Pauwels 2012), and presentation of identity in academic homepages (Hyland 2011). Most of the studies have relied on the three metafunctions in the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) framework, i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday 1978).

For example, Adami (2015) developed a social semiotic framework for the multimodal analysis of website interactivity. The author showed that digital texts with anchors such as links and buttons have two-fold nature. They have meanings and require an action. Therefore, “as (action-enabling) elements embedded in the text, they demand to be analysed accordingly, both as signs of interactivity and as sites of action producing certain effects” (Adami 2015: 138). Even though Adami's study did not employ the metadiscourse tool, the findings are important to the present study, especially with respect to the two-fold function of anchors. Another important study was the examination of the hierarchy of themes in websites using the SFL model by Djonov (2007). The author found that “a website's structure can be conceptualized as a structure comprising multiple hierarchies of Themes, which are united by the homepage as the website's highest level macro-Theme” (Djonov 2007: 152). The structure has two dimensions: vertical, which is determined by the number of levels under the homepage in each hierarchy, and horizontal, that is determined by the number of different pages or sections accessible from the homepage. Hyperlinks are employed to serve the hierarchical dimension of website structure. Hence, hyperlinks work internally when they connect webpages within the website itself. Additionally, hyperlinks may work externally when they go beyond the website boundaries. The findings in Djonov's study are central to the application of metadiscourse in the present study. For example, the function of hyperlinks when working internally is considered endophoric marking in metadiscourse theory, and when working externally, they are labeled evidentials.

Djonov and Knox (2014) adopted a social semiotic framework to examine the homepage of the Parliament of Australia website. They found that the homepage is designed to give positive feedback about the Australian Parliament House and thus promote it as a tourist destination. Additionally, it facilitates readers and users' navigation through the website. In examining the interpersonal meanings, i.e. the relationship with the reader, the authors found that the homepage “is constructed to appear factual and authoritative; to create a sense of comfort by balancing freedom of navigation with strong support for user orientation; and to align readers around positive, shared values towards Australian history and politics” (Djonov/Knox 2014: 190). In

examining the textual meanings, i.e. the construction of the page, the authors found that the homepage “supports a high degree of freedom of navigation, by offering alternative as well as direct routes to information – up to four levels deeper within the website’s hierarchical structure. It also supports a high degree of user orientation, by allowing readers to predict the destinations of most hyperlinks departing from the homepage” (2014: 190). Djonov and Knox's study draws our attention to the role of metadiscursive functions in websites. For example, the role of homepage in giving a positive impression matches the function of attitude markers in metadiscourse theory.

Drawing on the metadiscourse framework by Hyland (1998, 2000), González (2005) has examined the use of hyperlinks in the genre of business commercials. He found that the textual categories are not frequent in commercial websites. The author attributed this infrequency to “the nature of commercial websites as hypertext documents” (González 2005: 42). For example, in commenting on the absence of transitions, Gonzalez (2005: 42-43) showed that “When readers jump from page to page across links, logical connectives, even if present, may be meaningless because they may refer to something the reader has not read”. In addition to examining categories in traditional metadiscourse, González examined the links in the websites and called it hypertextual metadiscourse. He found that hyperlinks could have metadiscursive functions. For example, navigation links with imperatives such as *jump to* and *go* have a clear endophoric marking function, while links that provide explanations such as *more info* and *definition* are considered code-glosses. Furthermore, resource links that point out to outside sites have a clear function as evidentials (González 2005: 48-49).

Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001) focused on the genre of print advertising by examining how metadiscourse strategies are employed in slogans and headlines. They found that metadiscourse was used as a pragmatic strategy to inform and persuade readers. In particular, they found that “copywriters use person markers, hedges, and emphatics for alerting addressees about the artificial relationship they have with advertisers, and that they also use endophoric markers and evidentials for forming coherent texts and establishing intertextuality” (Fuertes-Olivera et al. 2001: 1305).

1.3 Visual metadiscourse

Undoubtedly, a multimodal analysis is necessary to capture the nuances of the text rather than focusing on one modality in isolation (Moya Guijarro 2011). Visual metadiscourse was examined in De Groot et al. (2016), who analyzed the photos used in annual reports of Dutch and UK companies. The authors developed a research model combining Hyland/Tse's (2004) metadiscourse taxonomy and Kress/Van Leeuwen's (2006: 182) account of multimodal discourse, arguing that their model is designed to "provide a categorized and detailed view of how senders organize or compose visual discourse in an image through incorporating metadiscursive devices and how such visual discourse helps build sender-audience relationships". The analysis showed the absence of interactive categories of frame markers and endophoric markers and the interactional category of hedges. The cross-cultural analysis indicated many similarities in the use of some types of visual metadiscourse between the two business cultures. For example, "attitude markers were often expressed through images of smiling managers in formal dress" (2006: 191). The authors attributed these similarities to the genre of annual reports which is universal in nature (2006: 191). The authors focused on the cases of differences to examine whether there is an impact of the local culture on the use of pictures. In the Dutch-based statements, for instance, there is a higher frequency of visual code glosses and self-mentions including managements teams (CEO and board members). In UK-based statements, on the other hand, the focus of these elements involve individual managers. In explaining this collective vs. individual management variation, the authors hypothesized that "Dutch companies prefer to see company performance as a joint responsibility in which all executive board members have an equal share" (2006: 192).

1.4 The present study

It is clear from the above-reviewed literature that none of the studies has focused on universities' admission homepages using metadiscourse despite their importance in linking readers/students with admission

processes and information offered by universities. The main objective of the present study is therefore to analyze admission homepages from a metadiscursive perspective and explore how metadiscourse functions relate to rhetorical move meanings. The study also examines the extent to which the integration of metadiscourse categories and rhetorical functions can empower interaction between potential users/readers of the admission homepages and universities' admission processes.

The rationale for this study stems from the importance of admission homepages as the media via which readers have access to admission information and processes. Analyzing admission homepages from metadiscourse perspective is sought to help exploring the features of interpersonality and interactional values expected in textual, hypertextual, and visual-text components of these homepages. The present study uses the method of metadiscourse to provide an integrated understanding of textual, hypertextual, and visual metadiscourse in this under-investigated genre with its twofold purposes: informational and promotional.

The research questions are:

1. What are the rhetorical components employed most frequently in the admission homepage?
2. To what extent metadiscourse categories successfully co-articulate with the rhetorical components in the admission homepage?
3. What does the metadiscourse theory inform us about the construction of an admission homepage, besides its purposes of supplying information and showing the process of admissions?

2. Methodology

2.1 Data collection

The corpus consisted of admission homepages in 15 US university websites. The universities were selected from the top-ranked 70 US universities based on the US ranking in the 2019 edition.¹ Each university had a link to an admission homepage, which is labeled *Admissions* or *Admissions and Aid*. The admission homepage serves as a roadmap that provides links to areas related to admissions such as undergraduate schools, graduate schools, departments, international students, financial aids, online classes, and summer courses. In some cases, these areas are accompanied by short descriptions to give general information about their nature. Additionally, each area or topic is associated with at least one photo. So, the study focuses on these three components:

- a) introductory statements,
- b) hyperlinks, and
- c) images.

The analysis is restricted to the main homepage and disregards the associated pages related to admissions (which can be viewed after clicking on additional links), because the content of the admissions homepage is huge, given the number of pages it includes. The content of the admission homepage was retrieved and saved on August 30, 2018, so any updates occurred after this date were not included.

2.2. Method of analysis

The study used the model of metadiscourse coined by Hyland (2005) which included two categories: the interactive category that consists of transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses, and the interactional category which consists of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers (see Table 1 for the description of this model). The application of this model on textual metadiscourse is popular and proved to be fitting. The case with hyperlinks and images is somewhat new and under-researched.

¹ <<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>>.

Hyperlinks were examined in González (2005) in the genre of business commercials. González found that hyperlinks could have metadiscursive functions. For example, navigation links with imperatives such as *jump to* and *go* have a clear endophoric marking function, while links that provide explanations such as *more info* and *definition* are considered as code-glosses. In addition, resource links that point out to external sites have a clear function as evidentials (2005: 48-49).

While I agree with González (2005) that links could have metadiscursive functions, I present different interpretations. González considered digital endophoric markers as those that point to other parts of the page such as *top of page*, *next*, *previous*, *return to top*, *jump to*, etc. Such imperatives are not available in admission homepages because the pages are short and condensed. Instead, I have considered the links that move the reader to pages associated with the admission homepage as endophoric markers, and those that take to pages outside of the admission domain as evidentials. In the example below, the undergraduate admission is in the same admission domain as the admission homepage, while the list of departments takes to a different domain. Hence, I considered the link to undergraduate admission as an endophoric marker, whereas the link to the departments as a case of evidentials.

- (1) The admission homepage: <https://www.stanford.edu/admission/>
 Undergraduate admission: <https://admission.stanford.edu/>
 Departments A-Z: <https://www.stanford.edu/list/academic/>
- (2) The admission homepage: <https://www.upenn.edu/admissions>
 Undergraduate admission: <https://admissions.upenn.edu/>
 School of Arts & Sciences: <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/graduate-division>

<i>Category</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Examples</i>
INTERACTIVE	Help to guide the reader through the text	Resources

Transitions	Expresses 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 2
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 certainly or close dialogue	In fact; definitely; it is clear than
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
Self-mentions	Explicit references to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider; note; you can see that

Table 1. A model of Metadiscourse in Academic Texts (Hyland 2005: 49).

Since the admission homepage involves photos, visual metadiscourse is another component analyzed in this study. Visual metadiscourse was examined in De Groot, Nickerson, Korzilius, and Gerritse (2016) who analyzed the photos used in annual reports of Dutch and UK companies. The authors updated the model of metadiscourse to fit the visual metadiscourse in photos. The modified model is summarized in Table 2. It shows the absence of endophoric markers and hedges as the authors did not find them in annual report photos.

<i>Compositional (interactive) resources that help readers to interpret photographic content</i>	
<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>Function in Visuals in Annual Reports</i>
Transitions	Express semantic relationship between sections or fragments in the text in order to establish a central theme throughout the annual report (e.g., by including photos that are semantically related)

Evidentials	Refer to additional source(s) affirming company information in order to prove the company's high capacity or professionalism (e.g., by portraying people or organizations that have applauded the company)
Code glosses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exemplify or specify ideational material (i.e., company information) ● Illustrate the factual internal or external identity of the company represented in the text ● Illustrate the instrumental value of the company's products or services ● Illustrate the market and marketing activities of the company, product, or service ● Improve readability of the text by visualizing abstract written information
<i>Interpersonal (interactional) resources that involve readers in the photographic content</i>	
CATEGORY	<i>Function in Visuals in Annual Report Texts</i>
Boosters	Emphasize force of (company-related) proposition in order to illustrate the company's high capacity or professionalism (e.g., by using camera work that shows the grandness of the company or its products)
Attitude markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Express sender's attitude toward (company related) proposition ● Illustrate the associative internal or external identity of the company represented in the text ● Illustrate the associative added value of the company's products or services
Engagement markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build relationship with readers ● Appeal to readers' emotions or attitudes
Self-mentions	Refer to the author(s) of the text in order to provide the company with a personal face

Table 2. A model of metadiscourse in images (De Groot et al. 2016: 177-178).

In order to assign the metadiscursive categories based on their visual functions, this study draws on De Groot et al.'s (2016) classifications. The analysis shows the absence of some items in admission homepages, which are transitions, frame markers, and hedges. So, unlike the finding in De Groot et al. (2016), endophoric markers are present but in a limited number.

3. Results

The examination of metadiscourse in admission homepages has identified three components: introductory statements, hyperlinks, and images. The following subsections present the results of the analysis of these components.

3.1 Metadiscourse in introductory statements

As shown above, the admission homepage often begins with a statement that presents the philosophy of the admission in the university (Figure 1). Additionally, admission areas such as graduate schools, financial aids, and international students are occasionally accompanied by introductory statements (Figure 2) to enable readers to grasp a basic knowledge of what these areas indicate before they surf each page individually. The text in Figure 1 shows that the language is informal in tone with clear interpersonal and dialogic interactions. It is dominated by the use of the second person pronoun “you,” and there is also a use of contractions and ellipses. The first sentence is capitalized and is written in a larger font and in different color to attract the reader’s attention. The university’s name is indicated twice and abbreviated. The text is concluded by an appealing short sentence written in a separate paragraph (And you could be one of them). Overall, it appears to discuss each idea in two parts. The first part discusses a potential case of the prospective student and the second part says what the university is going to offer the student (e.g. *As a student, you will be...* and *Whether you’re enrolling our undergraduate program..., UCLA provides a reach and scope of academic experience...*) The text in Figure 2 involves a description of one admission area, namely graduate school. It indicates what graduate programs the school offers and concludes with addressing the first step the reader should take to apply to graduate school. From these examples (Figure 1 and Figure 2) it is reasonable to find that self-mentions and engagement markers are the

most frequent metadiscursive categories in introductory statements, as shown in Table 3.

ADMISSION

BEING ACCEPTED TO UCLA IS MORE THAN A BADGE OF HONOR.

It's a responsibility. As a student, you will be charged with impacting the world from the moment you step on campus. You will be given every resource and opportunity that comes with the second-highest ranked public university in the nation. You will be supported and guided by faculty who are the foremost experts in their field.

Whether you're enrolling in our undergraduate program or pursuing a graduate degree, UCLA provides a reach and scope of academic experience that has a reputation for producing world-renowned, highly influential, game-changing graduates. They are politicians and Academy Award-winning directors. Olympic gold medalists and Nobel Prize winners. Doctors, scientists, researchers and social activists who aren't just saving lives—they're changing life as we know it.

And you could be one of them.

- Undergraduate Admission
- Graduate Admission
- Extension Enrollment
- International Admission
- Transfer Admission
- Financial Aid


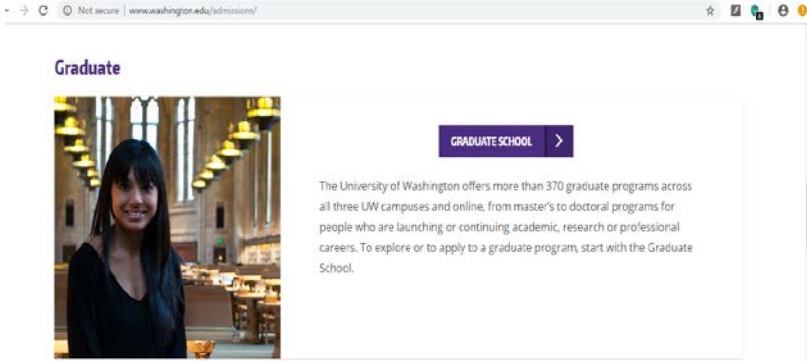


Figure 1. An introductory statement at the outset of an admission homepage.



Graduate

GRADUATE SCHOOL >

The University of Washington offers more than 370 graduate programs across all three UW campuses and online, from master's to doctoral programs for people who are launching or continuing academic, research or professional careers. To explore or to apply to a graduate program, start with the Graduate School.

Figure 2. An introductory statement accompanying a link to graduate school.

<i>Interactive Category</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Interactional Category</i>	<i>No.</i>
Transitions	8	Hedges	1

Frame markers	1	Boosters	1
Endophoric markers	2	Attitude markers	5
Evidentials	9	Self-mentions	69
Code glosses	14	Engagement markers	91
Total	34		167

Table 3. The results of metadiscourse markers in introductory statements.

The examination of metadiscourse in introductory statements is summarized in Table 3. The result shows clearly that the statements in admission homepages are highly interactional. Particularly, they draw heavily on engagement markers through addressing readers and through self-mentions. The case of overusing “you” is evident in Example 3, which also shows one reference to the school and two mentions to the campus. In their study of headlines and slogans, Furtes et al. (2001) found that copywriters use first person markers in advertising because they “help potential customers to have trust in the goods being advertised” (2001: 1299).

- (3) When *you* come to the UW’s Seattle campus, *you’re* part of more than the innovative city that’s brought us everything from legendary music to lifesaving cures. *You’re* part of something bigger, too. *You’re* part of a globally connected community that loves to innovate, to explore, to create. Here, *you’re* part of Seattle’s vibrant history—and the world’s promising future.

While using “you” is the strategy employed the most to engage with readers, there are also other strategies. Asking questions to establish a connection with the reader is another discourse strategy used in introductory statements. The rhetorical questions in the following examples (Example 4, 5, 6) clarify this strategy.

- (4) Why choose Texas A&M? Because as the largest university in the state and one of the largest in the nation, we’ve got something for everyone. But we’re not just big—we’re also a family. We’ve been ranked the nation’s friendliest campus, with the happiest students.
- (5) What are you looking for in a university? Are you hoping to just learn or make an impact? Would you like to leave with a degree or a career?

- (6) You're undaunted by challenges. In fact, you seek them out. You believe that a world of good starts with one person. One step. We believe that too. So what are you waiting for? Start the journey to become a Husky today.

The strategy of asking rhetorical questions resembles those in the genre of job postings as found in Fu (2012). According to Fu, questions in JPs are used to establish a dialogic atmosphere with the reader. The writer often begins with some *yes-no* questions concerning the reader-in-text *you* in JPs. Definitely, the default answer of the question is *yes* and the question is performing phatic function in the text (Fu 2012: 410).

In addition, readers/users are given specific instructions to perform certain tasks. The instructions are found specific (Example 1, 2) and general (Example 2). The strategy of directives is used by writers to "instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer" (Hyland 2002: 215). While this notion might be true in the first case of general instructions, it is less applicable to the case of specific instructions because they deal with users of websites more than with general interested readers. Examples 7, 8, 9 show the varying degrees of directives from general to specific.

- (7) The University of California, Berkeley, is the No. 1 public university in the world. Over 35,000 students attend classes in 14 colleges and schools, offering 350 degree programs. *Set* the pace with your colleagues and community, and *set* the bar for giving back.
- (8) *Explore* this site to learn more about the application process and *join* our Berkeley email list to receive application tips, event invitations, and information about the Berkeley campus.
- (9) To start your Graduate School application, *create* an application account below. You will be emailed a temporary PIN to log into the Graduate School Application. (*Be sure to check* your junk mail folder if you do not see the email.) *Log in* using your birthdate and this temporary PIN. Once logged in, you will be prompted to create a password. *Use* this password along with your email address in subsequent logins.

As regards the interactive resources, Table 3 indicates that code glosses are somewhat present in introductory statements. The basic function of code glosses is that they "signal the restatement of ideational

information in other ways” (Hyland/Tse 2004: 168). The major strategy used in the present study is adding additional information by using hyphens as in Example 10, which also shows the use of colon and the word “meaning”. In this example, it can be noticed that the first clause in the second sentence is clarified by the following clause which begins with the word “meaning” and that clause itself is further clarified by examples indicated between the hyphens.

- (10) UChicago brings together a diversity of top minds from around the world. Every application goes through the same holistic review process, *meaning* that there's no one piece of information – *academic and extracurricular records, essays, letters of recommendation, and SAT or ACT scores* – that could tell us on its own whether or not you would be a good fit for the College. And that's really what this process is about: *finding a college home that is a good fit for your personality and your plans.*

3.2 Metadiscourse in hyperlinks

Hyperlinks are found to be crucial in admission homepages, mainly because they function as a roadmap that users first take to know other admission pages. In the present study, hyperlinks sometimes take to pages within the admission domain, hence in this case they function as endophoric markers. Often hyperlinks take to pages outside the admission domain, thus hyperlinks in this case function as evidentials. Table 4 indicates that the content in admission homepages mainly consists of three areas. First, all admission homepages show the degree programs offered in the university such as undergraduates and graduates. The hyperlinks that take to the pages of these degrees function as endophoric because they refer to sources within the admission domain. Second, nine (out of 15) admission homepages provide a list of colleges or departments and by clicking on the links of these colleges or departments, the user is taken to a domain outside of the admission area, hence these hyperlinks function as evidentials. Third, all the examined homepages provide links to sources that apparently exist outside the admission domain such as contact info, calendar, and maps. The links to these sources are found at the bottom of the page which resembles the case of footnote in traditional

documents. Fourth, similar to the previous case, icons of social media are found in the footnote of 13 admission homepages. Fifth, about half of the admission homepages provide separate pages for international students. Half of the homepages take to pages associated with the admission homepage, therefore they function as endophoric markers, and the other half take to pages outside of the admission domain, thus they function as evidentials.

	<i>Uses of hyperlinks</i>	<i>Degrees (undergrad., graduates, etc)</i>	<i>Schools (medicine, law, humanities, etc.)</i>	<i>Useful links (e.g. contacts, calendar, maps, directory, privacy policy, etc.)</i>	<i>Icons of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)</i>	<i>International students</i>
METADIS. FUNCTIONS	Endophoric	Evidentials	Evidentials	Evidentials	Evidentials	Endophoric / Evidentials
NO. OF PAGES (OUT OF 15)	15	9	15	13		8 (4 endophoric and 4 evidentials)
PLACE IN THE PAGE	Body	5 in the footnote 4 in the Body	Bottom of the page	Bottom of the page	Bottom of the page	Body


Table 4. Uses of hyperlinks in the admission homepage and their metadiscursive functions.






The functions of hyperlinks found in this study differ to some degree from those found in commercial websites by Gonzales (2005). Regarding endophoric markers, for example, Gonzales found that hyperlinks were represented by imperatives such as *go* or *jump* and by phrases such as *top of page*, *next page*, or *go to section*. In the present study, however, such labels are not found and thus hyperlinks are examined according to their functions (i.e. where they move the reader to) rather than their labels. Also, Gonzáles found some links that were used to provide additional explanation such as *definition* and *more info* and therefore he associated them with code-glosses. While almost all links in the admission homepages can function as code-glosses because they provide the user with additional information, yet it can be adequate

to name the function of the links based on the source they take to, i.e. within the admission homepage, hence endophoric, or outside of the admission domain, thus evidential.

3.3 Visual metadiscourse

The total number of photos in the 15 admission homepages is 92 with an average of 6.13 per page. This overuse of photos clearly reflects the importance of visual elements in conveying the rhetorical language in admission homepages. As found in De Groot et al. (2016), a single image can comprise multiple metadiscursive categories. A photo of a group of smiling young students, which associates the link of undergraduate admission, can be interpreted as both a self-mention and an attitude marker. Likewise, a photo of students wearing medical uniforms associated with a link of a medicine college can be presented as both a self-mention and a code-gloss. Table 5 shows the total of metadiscursive functions used in the corpus. It shows that the functions of code-glosses, self-mentions, and attitude markers are dominant. The focus on these functions may reflect the central purposes of visual metadiscourse in admission homepages. They clarify the ideational material, make reference to the university, and express the feelings of the university representatives and students.

<i>Category</i>	<i>No. of uses</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Example</i>
Endophoric markers	7	A clickable photo that takes to another page associated with admission homepage	

Evidentials	6	A clickable photo that takes to a source outside the admission domain (Instagram)	
Code glosses	66	Give an illustrative example of the text	
Boosters	1	Provide an image that gives support to readers to take an action	
Attitude markers	33	Show how students feel (smiling and happy)	
Self-mentions	45	Show a photo that represents the university (campus or particular location) or its students	


Engagement markers	3	A photo that makes direct address to the reader	
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Table 5. Visual metadiscourse in admission homepages.

Code glosses are the most frequent used metadiscourse category because almost every image helps to “improve readability of the text by visualizing abstract written information” (De Groot et al. 2016: 177). In a few cases, only the function of code glosses stands alone, but often the image has another metadiscourse function, especially self-mention or attitude. The images are not randomly inserted, but they put with painstaking involvement of the writer’s persona to give a positive influence on the potential reader.



Undergraduate

Find out about application deadlines, student profiles, the academic setting and what it takes to “Be Berkeley.”

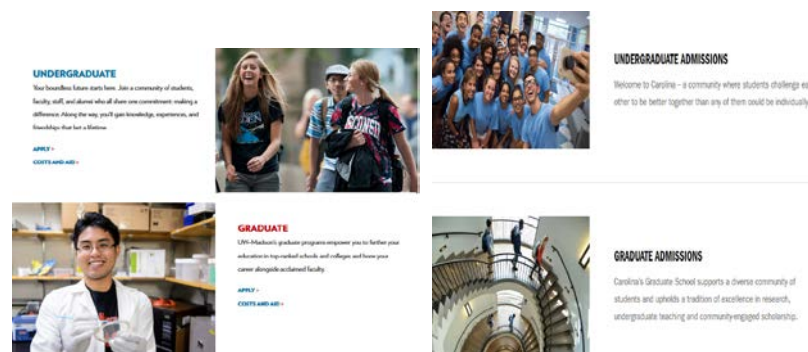


Graduate

Explore graduate programs, research and professional development opportunities and funding options for your graduate education.

Figure 3. Comparison of photos related to undergraduate and graduate admissions at the same university.

For example, images associated with undergraduate admission represent a certain identity different from those associated with graduate admissions. The images for undergraduate students represent young and happy students, often walking, as if they are having fun, while images of graduate students exemplify professional students working in a lab or doing research (see Figure 3 and 4, which represent these two cases, respectively, and both photos belong to a website of one university). In addition, it appears that the number of students in the image is also taken in consideration; as a photo of undergraduates represent a group of students and often their number in the photo is bigger than that of graduates (Figure 5). This strategy might appeal to the young reader who wants to socialize and make friends. Also, as in Figure 6, the photos indicating international students exemplify them as multicultural who represent different races and cultures.



Figures 4 and 5. Comparison of photos related to undergraduate and graduate admissions at the same university.



Figure 6. A photo related to international students admissions.

4. Discussion

The first research question was to explore the content of the admission homepage by highlighting the employed rhetorical components. Based on the results, the structure of the admission homepage can be identified as the following. First, they begin by a short opening statement showing the philosophy of admission in the university (obligatory). Second, the page displays lists of program degrees (which are often adjoined by short descriptive statements) (obligatory). Third, they mention the schools, colleges, or departments (optional). Fourth, they provide a link for international students (optional). Fifth, they conclude with showing the contact information and important resources (obligatory). Finally, they provide readers/users with links to various social networks (obligatory). Only the first component, i.e. introductory statements, is attained through textual metadiscourse. The other components, however, are obtained through hyperlinks. The visual aids accompany all the units to add clarification and attract readers.

The second research question was to investigate which metadiscursive categories are associated with the rhetorical components indicated above. The application of metadiscourse shows that introductory statements rely on self-mentions and engagement markers, while hyperlinks depend on endophoric markers and evidentials, and the visual discourse relies on code-glosses, attitude markers, and self-mentions. Hence, it is obvious and expectedly that the admission page depends on hyperlinks to display its content and guide readers/users through the page. Therefore, the use of metadiscursive units in this genre is not optional, but mandatory, as the reader/user needs to click on a link to view more about the content or to go to another page. While hyperlinking is a well-known concept in research on computer science, metadiscourse discerns two functions: endophoric marking and evidentials. As stated above, this finding is similar to that by González (2005) who observed the presence of these two resources in annual reports. Yet, González restricted the functions of endophoric markers to mirror those in textual metadiscourse by considering endophoric markers as those that include phrases that refer

to information in other parts of the page. In this study, however, the function of endophoric markers is extended to fit the nature of homepage with its multiple associated webpages. Hence, endophoric markers include also references to other webpages, provided that they fall within the same domain as the homepage. However, if it includes different domains, the hyperlinks are considered evidentials.

The third question was to explore how metadiscourse theory informs us about the construction of admission homepage, besides its purposes of supplying information and showing the process of admissions. The application of metadiscourse discerns that the structure of the admission homepage is not static, i.e. a page full of information and instructions to applicants, rather it involves interactions with readers, and this is noticeable through the use of images. The study proves that photos are essential to:

- a) improve readability of the text by giving an illustrative example,
- b) picture how students feel happy and energetic (undergraduates) as well as serious and professional (graduates), and
- c) represent the university (campus or particular location) or its students.

As shown earlier, these three functions account for three metadiscursive categories: code-glosses, attitude markers, and self-mentions, respectively. Often a single photo represents these three categories together. This result is in line with that by De Groot et al. (2006) who showed that a single image could contain multiple metadiscursive categories, which the authors marked as an interesting distinction between textual and visual metadiscourse. Indeed, the focus on these functions can reflect the central purposes of visual metadiscourse in admission homepages. They clarify the ideational material, make reference to the university, and express the feelings of the university representatives and students. Furthermore, the use of interactional metadiscourse in introductory statements indicates that the genre of the admission homepage is not only informational but also promotional. Fuertes et al. (2011: 1305) argued that “interpersonal metadiscourse allows copywriters to adopt a kind of balance between informing and persuading” in print advertising.

Hyland (2011: 292) stated that “[t]he importance of design cannot be overestimated as online texts are never purely linguistic but involve different semiotic resources which, in combination, create new meanings”. Although it is beyond the scope of the present paper to analyze each photo based on the model of multimodality, it is apparent that the representations of students in photos vary. While undergraduates appear smiling and mostly walking in groups, graduates tend to be serious and more professional. Hyland (2011: 294) pointed out that most academics in their homepages choose to show themselves smiling because “the smile invites a connection of social affinity”. It can be assumed that displaying undergraduates and graduates differently may indicate that the designers find it more appealing to young users who think of joining the university to see a friendly atmosphere while those who think of applying to graduate programs are already familiar with university life.

5. Conclusion

The study has highlighted the importance of metadiscourse in the admission homepage of university websites. It reflected how top-ranked universities exert effort in constructing the admission homepage with comprehensive and up-to-date information. Based on the findings of this study, it could be argued that admission homepages are multi-discourse facets and patterns which have composites of information, messages, and meanings that can be construed in different ways by different potential readers/users. Introductory statements, hyperlinks, and images are sorts of discourse that have particular communicative purposes and values. It is the manipulation of metadiscourse resources that may help or determine the way every communicative function can be interpreted. The general tendency of the deployment of metadiscourse resources in the current study may give an impression that admissions homepages are not only informative but interactional, entertaining, and inviting. In other words, students at different levels

are not only shown the processes of admission and the nature of the academic programs, but they are also shown the possibility of being friendly and sharing ideas. The main contribution of this study might, therefore, be the exploration of how metadiscourse resources articulate with each other to formulate informative, interactional, and interpersonal values in admission homepages. Likewise, the interplay between metadiscourse strategies and the three examined components may have a crucial role in the organization of admission homepages and in the realization of the overall communicative messages intended by the universities.

Although the results are important in shedding light on this under-examined genre, they may not be generalized for three reasons. First, the size of the corpus is relatively small. An examination of a large number of admission homepages can provide a clearer picture of the generic and rhetorical structure of this essential webpage in university websites. Second, the investigation is restricted to websites of US universities and it would be more illuminating to explore the websites of universities from different parts of the world and perhaps to carry out a cross-cultural investigation. Third, the analysis has focused on the main homepage of the admission page leaving out important related webpages. Thus, future research is needed to explore all admission webpages related to the homepage to fully enable us to see the full picture regarding the admissions part in university websites.

In addition, the application of metadiscourse to digital language is relatively new and therefore we see clear disparity in the methodologies used in different studies. While it is obvious that more studies are required to determine the appropriate model for each genre, it is important to consider that metadiscourse is a fuzzy concept concerning delineating its boundaries. Thus, extending the textual metadiscourse functions to other genres such as hyperlinks and images should be undertaken with the caveat that it should not confuse metadiscourse with propositional content.

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