

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

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse

Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

CERLIS Series

Series Editor: Stefania M. Maci

Assistant Editors: Patrizia Anesa, Stefania Consonni, Larissa
D'Angelo

Editorial Board

Ulisse Belotti
Maria Vittoria Calvi
Luisa Chierichetti
Cécile Desoutter
Giovanni Garofalo
Davide Simone Giannoni
Maurizio Gotti
Dorothee Heller
Michele Sala

Each volume of the series is subjected to a double blind peer-reviewing process.

CERLIS Series
Volume 9

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

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse
Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

CELSB
Bergamo

This ebook is published in Open Access under a Creative Commons License Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0).

You are free to share - copy, distribute and transmit - the work under the following conditions:

You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.



CERLIS SERIES Vol. 9

CERLIS

Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici

Research Centre on Languages for Specific Purposes

University of Bergamo

www.unibg.it/cerlis

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse: Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

Editors: Stefania Consonni / Larissa D'Angelo / Patrizia Anesa

ISBN: 9788897413257

Url: <http://hdl.handle.net/10446/27156>

© CELSB 2020

Published in Italy by CELSB Libreria Universitaria

Via Pignolo, 113 - 24121, Bergamo, Italy

Contents

STEFANIA CONSONNI / LARISSA D'ANGELO

Screening knowledge – Academic discourse goes digital 11

PART 1. PAGE TO SCREEN: TRANSITIONING GENRES 29

JAMES JACOB THOMSON

Attitude markers in upper secondary pupil essays
across educational contexts and genres 31

ROBERT MACINTYRE

Citation machines: The use of evidentials in the academic
writing of Japanese university students 59

EMNA FENDRI

A comparative analysis of identity construction in digital
academic discourse: Tunisian EFL students as a case
study 75

PART 2. SCREEN-READY: DIGITAL GENRES	103
VESNA BOGDANOVIĆ, DRAGANA GAK	
Creating a trusting student-professor relationship: Engagement markers in academic e-mail communication	105
MICHELA GIORDANO / MARIA ANTONIETTA MARONGIU	
‘And as I said at the beginning, this is a journey in which we are embarking’: Metadiscourse as a rhetorical strategy in online teaching methodology courses	131
HMOUD S. ALOTAIBI	
How does the admission homepage appeal to applicants? An investigation of digital metadiscourse in university websites	163
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	191

EMNA FENDRI

A comparative analysis of identity construction in digital academic discourse: Tunisian EFL students as a case study

Abstract

The value of academic research does not only reside in the observations and the conclusions it reaches but also in the scientific debate it raises within a community of interest (Swales 1990; Gosden 1992; Vallis 2010; Nackoney/Munn/Fernandez 2011). Doing academic research online through digital media takes academic discourse from the immediate and local research context to a wider and more heterogeneous community. The examination of written papers in different contexts might reveal something about the way writing is perceived by the writer. The present paper compares and contrasts interactional metadiscourse use in both traditional and digital academic discourse following Hyland's (2005) model of METADISCOURSE. A corpus of ten MA dissertations as an example of traditional communication and ten internship reports as an example of digital communication written by Tunisian EFL students is examined. A qualitative and quantitative analysis is carried out using the *Text Inspector* web tool and manual annotation. The results reveal that, except for boosters, the use of interactional markers significantly differs across the media. The overall tone that METADISCOURSE use creates in dissertation writing reflects an audience-centered way of meaning-making while digital communication is distinguished by a stronger writer authorial presence.

1. Introduction

In academic contexts, writing is seen as “a ‘high stakes’ activity” (Lillis/Scott 2007: 9) because it is the way to assess the writer’s knowledge and competence. For a novice academic writer, it is the means to reach a position and secure a career in academia (Berkenkotter/Huckin 1993; Ivanič 1998; John 2009). Looking at academic writing as such, it becomes paradoxical to advance that it is an impersonal, objective, and faceless kind of writing (e.g. Gillett/Hammond/Martala 2009; Vallis 2010). Academic discourse is rather seen as a persuasive text that is meant to illustrate the validity of the writer’s ideas, arguments, and contribution (Hyland 1999; Charles 2006; Gray/ Biber 2012).

This understanding is particularly promoted within social views of writing that see literacy and writing as an ideological and cultural activity (Trimbur 1994; Atkinson 2003; Vandenberg/Hum/Clary-Lemon 2006). Knowledge is not transmitted from an addresser to an addressee; it is rather actively constructed through the text between participants in a particular social context. The academic text is thus not only the locus of propositional meaning but also of an interactional and interpersonal exchange that is constitutive of academic knowledge (Askehave/Swales 2001; Hyland 2009)

Interaction is persuasive when it conforms to community expectations both in terms of form and content (Goffman 1959; Swales 1990; Hyland 2010). The writer goes through a process of identity construction that fits audience expectations; Flowerdew and Wang call it “identity transformation and academic acculturation” (2015: 82). Indeed, the writer’s identity is perceived as a social and discursive artifact. It is affected by the context of social interaction, the relationship between different participants, and the purposes of the interaction. But at the same time, to prove their worthiness as researchers, academic writers are expected to add something to existent knowledge not just reproduce what has been said in their community (Bizzell 1992; Paltridge/Starfield 2007; Tang 2009; Street 2009; Nackoney et al. 2011). According to Tang, “‘authority’ is a crucial element of good academic writing” (2009: 170). Writers, therefore,

need to negotiate within generic and community conventions their distinctiveness, creativity, and individuality.

Technological advent, online media, and the widespread of digital communication made it possible. The move from physical space to virtual space resulted in new ways of using language (Lotherington 2004; Greenhow/Robelia 2009; Clark 2010; Goodfellow 2011; Edwards-Groves 2011; Pennington 2013; Meyers/Erickson/Small 2013; Flowerdew/Wang 2015; Yuming 2017; Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018; Luzón 2018). Meyers et al. for example see that “[n]ew technologies and developments in media are transforming the way that individuals, groups, and societies communicate, learn, work and govern” (2013: 355). Communication in general, and academic writing in particular, are entering a new phase, characterized by new discourse practices and genres (Goodfellow 2011; Pennington 2013; Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018), new ways of self-expression, self-representation, identity formation (Lotherington 2004; Greenhow/Robelia 2009; Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018; Luzón 2018), new ways of negotiating meaning (Edwards-Groves 2011), and new means of establishing “authorship and authority” (Clark 2010: 29).

1. Statement of the problem

Despite the centrality of the academic writer’s identity and the changing views and practices following the widespread of digital communication, identity construction in digital academic discourse remains an under-researched area. The present work is aimed to be a contribution to the understanding of how identity is constructed in digital communication through a comparison with more traditional ways of communication. It hypothesizes that because there is a move from physical to virtual/digital space, the writer’s identity and strategies of self-promotion are affected, and this is reflected in the linguistic choices the writer makes in both corpora, notably through the use of interactional metadiscourse markers.

The superposition of the two forms of writing aims to show that moving from traditional to digital communication is first and foremost about changing spaces. Since academic writing is done in different spaces and uses different tools, the writing processes, the language the writer uses, and the end product might change, too. This study outlines novice EFL students' identity or ways of conversing in both spaces, i.e. the traditional/physical and the digital, through an examination of their academic reports. MA dissertations are an example of traditional communication, whereas internship reports are an example of digital writing as they are published online. Indeed, the way MA dissertations and internship reports are submitted and accessed by the reader makes the two subcorpora inherently different; while MA dissertations are available in the university database once the dissertation is defended, internship reports are submitted on the university online platform where the follow up of the final report as well as the readers' comments, assessments, and appreciations of the different works can be seen. The focus of the present research is on the writers' use of interactional metadiscourse markers as defined by Hyland (2005). The research objectives can be formulated as follows:

1. To map interactional metadiscourse use in both corpora.
2. To compare and contrast interactional metadiscourse use in both corpora.
3. To see what interactional metadiscourse use in both corpora reveals about the academic writer's identity.
4. To understand the effect of the medium on the construction of the EFL academic writer's identity.

3. Literature review

3.1. Academic writing: changing spaces, changing standards

Broadly speaking, academic writing can be defined as “any writing that fulfils a purpose of education in a college or university” (Thaiss/Zawacki 2006: 3). It can be an essay, a report, a research project, an article, a case study, or a dissertation. Digital academic discourse is about the “incorporation” (Goodfellow 2011: 131) of digital media in academic research. It can be research reports and papers but also wiki pages, tweets, or research forums and sites. The move towards digital writing is not only about changing the writing tools and spaces but also about changing the whole perception of the writing activity. This can be discussed with reference to Aristotle’s rhetorical triangle including the text, the reader, and the writer. In any endeavour to understand the nature of discourse, all three elements are to be interpreted regarding specific contexts.

Starting with the text, a brief review of the definitions of academic writing within the social perspective foregrounds a recurrent emphasis on standardization as a defining characteristic. For example, Richards and Miller define it as a form of writing which “conforms to specific expectations of language, structure, and purpose” (2005: 39). Similarly, Scarcella sees it as a text that has “regular” and “well defined” (2003: 10) features. Such a conformity and rule-dependent nature is also evidenced in Hyland’s (2006: 33) comment on the different forms of academic discourse as “approved institutional practices” or “socially authorized ways of communicating”. Academic texts are seen to serve common social and institutional goals within a specific group and to maintain existent hierarchical structures and power relations between its members.

This idea has been largely discussed in works dealing with the concept of academic discourse community (e.g. Swales 1990; Becher/Trowler 2001; Hyland/Hamp-Lyons 2002; Leki/Cumming/Silva 2008). Studies on academic discourse in general, and on research writing in particular, sketch out members of the academic discourse community such as supervisor(s), examiners or peers as gatekeepers (e.g.

Tardy/Matsuda 2009; Pecorari/Shaw 2012) as, in one way or another, they assess the writer's work. Successful academic texts are those that are accepted by the discourse community of a discipline.

Accordingly, the writer is often depicted as the academic writer whose purpose is to occupy a position in a particular academic community, "to display knowledge and understanding of a particular topic, to demonstrate particular skills, to convince a reader, as well as, often, to 'gain admission to a particular area of study'" (Paltridge/Starfield 2007: 4). The writer needs to show an identity that satisfies community expectations and individual distinctiveness at the same time. It has to do with the writer's voice and stance according to Hyland; voice is defined as "a collection of rhetorical devices recognized by a community which allows the writer to speak as a member of that community" whereas stance has to do with "what the writer has to say" (2012: 148). They are both reflected in the linguistic choices the writer makes in the text. According to Hyland, both voice and stance constitute the writer's "rhetorical self" (2012: 148).

The reading experience is however different when readers and writers are considered in digital academic discourse. The academic writer is still a researcher whose purpose is to occupy a position in the academic community. However, he/she is no longer limited to the immediate, local academic community; digital technology offers the possibility to disseminate research in varying forms (e.g. forums, social media, wiki pages, and blogs) and reach a wider audience (Barton/McCulloch 2018; Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018). The audience is no longer regarded as a hierarchical structure with supervisors, examiners, and gatekeepers who determine the success or failure of a writer. The audience can be anyone who can get access to the text through any digital resource. Talking about research bloggers, Kuteeva and Mauranen (2018: 3) comment that "the target discourse community in the Swalesian sense [...] evaporates as a useful analytical concept." Online communication does not target a specific discourse community by virtue of the means it uses. The same applies to the corpus under study; the means of knowledge dissemination for MA dissertations and internship reports are not the same. Contrary to the dissertations that are only available to consult, internship reports are evaluated, assessed, and rated by the online platform users; different reports have different

visibility rates. It is significant for their writers because it might take their works from the local community to a wider audience (notably employers, stakeholders, and suppliers who are interested in the project).

The academic text is also affected. Technological tools offer the writer new possibilities of meaning-making. It seems that with digital rhetoric, there is an increasing detachment from the rigidly conventionalized and normative view of academic texts; new forms and conventions emerge with emerging genres (Clark 2010; Lea 2013; Mauranen 2013; Pennington 2013; Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018). Kuteeva and Mauranen for instance, argue that:

compared to its analogue predecessor, digital academic discourse is characterized by a more explicit writer-reader interaction and an increased degree of dialogicity which is both supported and induced by the online medium. (2018: 2)

Likewise, Clark emphasizes that “interactivity, collaboration, ownership, authority, and malleability” (2010: 27) are distinctive features of a successful academic text in the digital age. The tools that writers use as well as their new writing spaces ignite a change in their perception of themselves, their texts, their audience, and the relation between them. Since online communication lends itself to a social constructivist reading (e.g. Greenhow/Gleason 2014), a bottom-up understanding of the situation through the analysis of academic writers’ online discourse and the comparison to analogue forms might reveal something about the online academic writer’s identity. The idea is particularly worth investigating since identity represents a challenging aspect to master for academic writers, especially EFL students.

3.2. The EFL academic writer’s identity

One premise of identity as a social construct is that it differs in accordance with the social context of the interaction. Identity construction represents an issue for academic writers, especially novices, because it is situated in a new social context (Hyland 2002,

2012; John 2009; Fløttum 2012). Hyland sees that “academic literacy is a ‘foreign culture’ to students of all backgrounds, where they find their previous understandings of the world challenged, their old confidences questioned, and their ways of talking modified” (2002: 1108). For a novice writer, the academic community embodies a new culture with new valued conventions and ways of communication. It is, therefore, a site for the writer’s “acculturation” and “identity transformation” as it is advanced by Flowerdew and Wang (2015: 82).

Taking a step further, academic acculturation is especially challenging for non-native (NN) speakers, whether ESLs, EFLs, or EALs (e.g. Casanave/Hubbard 1992; Gosden 1992; Flowerdew 1999; Weigle 2002; Hyland 2003; Leki et al. 2008; John 2009; Fløttum 2012). Weigle for instance confirms that “While writing in a first language is a challenging, complex task, it is more so in a second language” (2002: 38). The task is indeed further complicated by the cultural, educational/instructional, and linguistic differences between the native language and the target language. NN speakers’ texts are often regarded as more problematic and less effective than those produced by NSs. Flowerdew (2008) goes as far as to talk about the stigmatization of EALs. In previous research, Flowerdew noticed that NN writers are at a “disadvantage” (2000: 127) in comparison to NSs when it comes to publishing in international English journals. A similar point is made on a study day about publishing in a foreign language by Labassi (2016), addressing the problems of Tunisian researchers in getting published in international journals. According to him, there is an issue of visibility for Tunisian researchers at an international level. On the one hand, it is mainly due to the standards scientific journals impose on writers as far as language is concerned and, on the other hand, Tunisian researchers’ reluctance to submit their work to those journals for fear of being rejected. It has to do with the stigmatization effect and the self-image that Tunisian EFL writers may have of themselves when using their third language according to Labassi (2016). One aspect of writing that the researcher stresses is the use of voice as a criterion of good academic texts. He notices that Tunisian EFL students fail to use it efficiently. This is not specific to Tunisian writers; it is reported that voice, authority, presence, and distinctive identity are problematic for academic writers of different backgrounds (John 2009; Epstein 2011;

Lee 2011; Javdan 2014). Such issues attracted much attention in academic contexts and it seems that it is gaining momentum with the evolving view of academic writing and identity in digital communication.

With digital technology, there seems to be a changing view of the writer's identity (Flowerdew/Wang 2015; Luzón 2018). Luzón for instance states that:

[d]igital technologies, and the immediacy, visibility, and connectedness they imply, have changed the way we communicate and present ourselves. Social media offer new opportunities for self-presentation, impression management, self-promotion and identity performance. (2018: 24)

The openness that technology offers allows the writer to reach a wider audience having different backgrounds. Indeed, digital communication gives the possibility to take communication to a wider social context. The audience becomes a more heterogeneous group. To meet the discourse community expectations, the writer needs to enlarge the specter of "possibilities of self-hood" i.e. the "abstract, prototypical identities available in the socio-cultural context of writing" (Ivanič 1998: 23). It is empirically proved through the textual analysis of digital texts produced in different settings. Studies revealed that academic writers display a different identity when it comes to digitally mediated discourse; the writer's identity is described as "fluid" (Luzón 2018: 25), reflective of offline identity (Greenhow/Robelia 2009; Edwards-Groves 2011; Greenhow/Lewin 2015), and characterized by a stronger sense of agency, authority, and authorship (Clark 2010; Greenhow/Lewin 2015). Standardization and normative use of English seem to leave space for non-standard usages of the language. For this study, the writer's identity is going to be analysed through the examination of interactional metadiscourse markers following Hyland's (2005) model.

3.3. Interactional metadiscourse markers in Hyland's (2005) model

In this model, metadiscourse is defined as expressions "which explicitly organize a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or

the reader” (Hyland 2005: 14). It captures the relationship between the writer, the reader, and the text. Writers use metadiscourse markers to project themselves into their writing and to position themselves in relation to the materials they use and the audience they address. The first function is realized through interactive metadiscourse markers and the second through interactional resources. Interactive markers “[h]elp to guide the reader through the text” and interactional markers are meant to “[i]nvolve the reader in the text” (Hyland 2005: 49).

<i>Category</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Examples</i>
HEDGES	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might; perhaps; possible; about
BOOSTERS	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue	In fact; definitely; it is clear that
ATTITUDE MARKERS	Express writer’s attitude to proposition	Unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
SELF-MENTIONS	Explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
ENGAGEMENT MARKERS	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider; note; you can see that

Table 1: Hyland’s (2005) categorization of interactional metadiscourse markers

The focal point of the present research is on interactional resources because they “focus more directly on the participants of the interaction” (Hyland/Tse 2004: 170) by expressing the writer’s stance and reader engagement in the text. In his distinction between stance and engagement, Hyland refers to stance as “a writer’s community-recognized persona as expressed through his or her rhetorical choices, conveying epistemic and affective judgements, opinions and degrees of commitment to what they say” (2009: 111). It has to do with the writer’s academic identity according to him; the stance a writer expresses towards the content or the reader of the text reflects features of the identity he/she adopts in a particular context. The identification and examination of stance expressions throughout the text trace the identity that the writer adopts in a specific communicative act. Engagement has to do with the way the writer manipulates discourse to involve the readers in the text by “recognizing their uncertainties, including them

as discourse participants and guiding them to interpretations” (2009: 111). Together with stance, engagement markers reflect the way the writer conceives the writer-reader relation and identity construction in academic texts.

In Hyland’s (2005) model, interactional resources consist of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. Hedges and boosters mark the writer’s epistemic commitment to the content while attitude markers express his/her affective commitment to propositional content. Self-mentions reflect the writer’s explicit presence in the text, whereas engagement markers are used to explicitly address the reader. The above table (Table 1) summarizes interactional metadiscourse categories as they are defined by Hyland (2005: 49).

4. Methodology

The research aims to understand the way Tunisian EFL academic writers use metadiscourse markers across different media of communication. According to researchers such as Bhatia (2002) and Hyland (2006), the understanding of participants’ experience of a language is achieved through the exploration of the linguistic choices they make. Therefore, a corpus of authentic EFL texts is chosen as a tool to study the identity that Tunisian EFL writers reflect through their communication in two different contexts of interaction. Metadiscourse markers are identified, categorized, and quantified to highlight patterns of language use.

4.1 Corpus description and selection

The corpus consists of two groups of texts: ten MA dissertations as an example of traditional writing and ten internship reports as an example of digitally mediated communication. It should be noted that in Tunisia English is used as a third language, Arabic is the native language and

French is used by the majority of academic writers. The first problem in the data collection process was to find academic texts written in English. A second problem was to find such texts in a digital form, as digital communication is still not widespread in Tunisian academia.

The difference between MA dissertations and internship reports lies in the way they are submitted and retrieved; while dissertations are available to consult by readers who are interested in specific topics, internship reports are available on the university online platform where they are evaluated and shared by different parties i.e. the supervisor, English instructors, the administration, peers, and potential employers. Their visibility on the platform is determined by the readers' feedback.

Dissertations are written by MA students in English Studies who studied English for academic purposes at university for at least five years. Internship reports are collected from another institution; a private English-medium university – one of the very few in Tunisia. The selected authors have used English for academic purposes for at least three years. Texts in both subcorpora are written by graduate students; MA dissertations are produced by students in the field of linguistics and internship reports are written by students in electrical engineering.

The corpus was chosen following a “non-probability sampling” (Kothari 2004: 15) technique. The dissertations can be accessed after filling a consent form provided by the university administration. It is meant to guarantee the anonymity of students. Since the analysis is carried out on the core content of the dissertations and reports, other sections such as front and back matters, abstracts, acknowledgements, list of abbreviations, list of tables, list of figures, table of contents, reference lists, webography, and appendices have been discarded. The MA dissertation subcorpus consists of 224,067 words, whereas the internship report subcorpus consists of 23,585 words. The difference in the number of words between the two subcorpora is dealt with by normalizing metadiscourse markers per 1,000 words.

4.2 Data analysis

The corpus is analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. A qualitative analysis is first carried out using the *Text Inspector* (2016)

web tool. The texts are then checked manually. The quantitative analysis consists of calculating frequency distribution and mean occurrence. Then, two-tailed independent samples *t*-tests are computed to qualify the significance of the mean difference between the different categories of interactional metadiscourse markers.

A null hypothesis H0 and an alternative hypothesis H1 are formulated. H0 stipulates that the mean difference of a particular metadiscourse category in MA dissertations and internship reports is not significant. H1 postulates that the mean difference is significant. If the value of the two-tailed *t*-test *p* equals or is superior to 0.05, the null hypothesis is retained. Otherwise, it is rejected and H1 is retained.

5. Results

This section starts with a presentation of interactional metadiscourse distribution in both subcorpora; frequency distribution is first compared to the total number of words in each subcorpus. Interactional categories are then compared to interactive metadiscourse. The second part focuses on the distribution of the different categories of interactional metadiscourse and explains the differences/similarities between them.

The significance of interactional metadiscourse markers occurrence is only complete when it is compared to interactive metadiscourse markers distribution with reference to the total number of words. Figure 1 (below) shows interactive and interactional metadiscourse marker distribution in MA dissertations and internship reports (figures have been normalized per 1,000 words).

It is to be noted that the mean occurrence of metadiscourse is higher in internship reports in comparison to MA dissertations but *t*-tests for equality of means (see Table 2 below) reveal that the difference is not significant for the total use of metadiscourse.

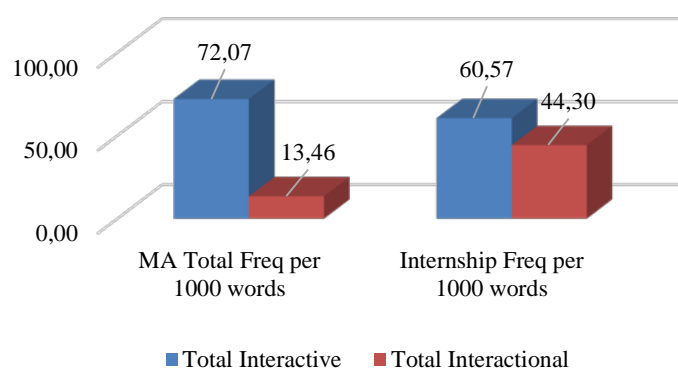


Figure 1. Total metadiscourse distribution in MA dissertations and internship reports.

<i>Metadiscourse</i>	<i>2-tailed t-test value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
TOTAL METADISOURSE	0.17	Not significant
INTERACTIVE	0,24	Not significant
INTERACTIONAL	0.00	Significant

Table 2. Two-tailed *t*-test results for total metadiscourse and interactive/interactional subcategories.

For the separate categories, it is to be noted that the difference between interactive and interactional metadiscourse in MA dissertations is important (72 occurrences for interactive vs. 13 occurrences for interactional resources). It is not the case for internship reports; the difference between interactive and interactional markers is less significant (60 occurrences for interactive vs. 44 occurrences for interactional resources). The *t*-test for equality of means for interactive resources in MA dissertations and internship reports shows that the difference is not statistically significant. Conversely, for interactional resources, the difference is significant; interactional resources in internship reports are significantly higher than in MA dissertations. The greater use of interactive resources in MA dissertations in comparison

to interactional resources indicates a greater tendency to guide the reader throughout the text rather than to establish an interpersonal relationship with him/her.

In internship reports, however, there is a tendency to give equal importance to both guiding and involving the reader in the text. Interactional resources are more frequently used in internship reports in comparison to MA dissertations. The result is in line with Kuteeva and Mauranen’s (2018) finding about the explicit dialogicity that characterizes digital communication. Tunisian EFL academic writers demonstrate a greater ability to establish an interpersonal relationship with the reader in digital communication in comparison to the more traditional way of writing MA dissertations.

This idea needs to be further discussed with reference to the different categories of interactional metadiscourse markers. The following histogram (Figure 2) shows the distribution of interactional resources per 1,000 words in MA dissertations and internship reports.

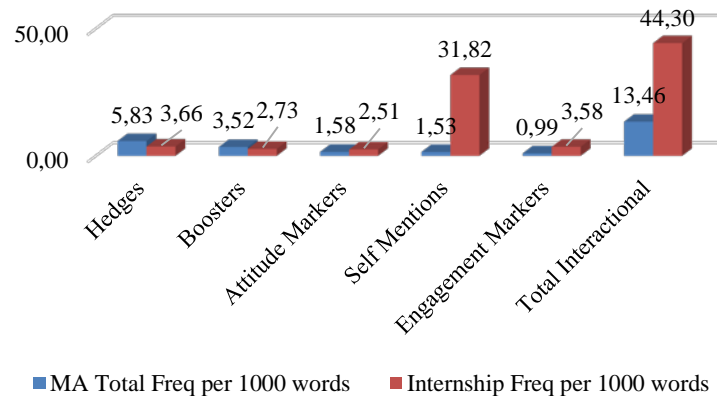


Figure 2. Interactional metadiscourse marker distribution in MA dissertations and internship reports.

The *t*-tests for equality of means (Table 3 below) shows that, except for boosters, all interactional resources are statistically different between MA dissertations and internship reports. Hedges are more frequently used in MA dissertations whereas attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers are more frequently used in internship reports.

<i>Metadiscourse marker</i>	<i>2-tailed t-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>MA vs. internship</i>
HEDGES	0.006	Significant	MA> Intern
BOOSTERS	0.097	Not significant	-
ATTITUDE MARKERS	0.007	Significant	MA<Intern
SELF-MENTIONS	0.000	Significant	MA<Intern
ENGAGEMENT MARKERS	0.000	Significant	MA<Intern

Table 3. Two-tailed *t*-test results for interactional metadiscourse subcategories.

5.1 Hedges

Hedges are more frequently used in MA dissertations in comparison to internship reports. This finding means that writers tend to withhold commitment to propositional content in MA dissertations; they tend to be more cautious when it comes to presenting facts. It seems that, compared to internship writers, MA students are more inclined to give space to alternative interpretations and anticipate possible oppositions from the discourse community they are addressing. MA writers tend to be more “audience-oriented” (Hyland 1998: 4) in their writing in comparison to internship writers. This might be explained by their perception of the discourse community's hierarchical structure and the need to abide by reader expectations. The less frequent use of hedges in internship reports, on the contrary, might reflect another perception of writer-reader relations in writing. The reader is not considered as a source of meaning-making; little space is given for him/her to intervene in the text through hedges.

5.2 Boosters

Similarly, boosters acknowledge the existence of a multiplicity of views and opinions towards an argument but, contrary to hedges, they narrow

the diversity of these positions by privileging one over the others and signalling a commitment to it. They signal the writer's strong authorial presence and voice. The use of boosters is not significantly different in MA and internship reports. But coupled with frequent use of hedges, the use of boosters in MA dissertations opens less space for the writer to impose himself/herself as the source of knowledge. Conversely, in internship reports, similar use of boosters with less frequent use of hedges might convey a stronger authorial presence in comparison to reader presence. Writer-reader roles in meaning-making are not distributed similarly in the studied subcorpora.

5.3 Attitude markers

With attitude markers, which express affective rather than epistemic commitment, the tendency is reversed; they are more frequently used in internship reports. It might be said that in digital communication there is more space for the writer's feelings. In academic writing, there is a tendency to avoid expressing an attitude to sound objective and detached. In digital communication, this tendency is reversed; digital writers sound more comfortable relying on their personal experience to demonstrate credibility, visibility, and disciplinary competence.

5.4 Self-mentions

The tendency to express explicit author presence is emphasized through the higher use of self-mentions in internship reports; there are 31.92 occurrences in comparison to 1.58 in MA dissertations. The tracking of self-mentions use in each subcorpus shows that internship reports writers use this marker to highlight what they did in the internship, the actions they undertook, and their evaluation of the experience. Internship writers rely on the use of self-mentions to increase their visibility as active agents in the construction of meaning. Because their work is accessed by other users of the platform, the writer's presence and stance are crucial for the distinctiveness of their work in comparison to others. Digital communication thus triggers the writer's

voice expression and distinctive identity. Explicit subjectivity is a means to promote the writer and his/her work and to claim responsibility for it. In MA dissertations, however, there is a tendency towards self-effacement and impersonality at the expense of community belonging.

5.5 Engagement markers

Likewise, for engagement markers, which are used to establish an explicit relationship with the reader, they are more frequently used in internship reports in comparison to MA dissertations. Their use affects the degree of reader-writer solidarity and influences the overall rhetorical effect. In MA dissertations, writers do not explicitly engage in a dialogic relation with the reader as much as internship writers do. It might be explained by the sense of dialogue that the platform elicits from internship writers; because their work is assessed based on the different comments and interactions that the users leave on the platform, internship writers rely more on the linguistic resources which help them establish networks with the audience. By investing the reader with the power to intervene in the discourse unfolding, the writer protects himself/herself from potential objections and guides the reader towards a preferred interpretation. In dissertations, however, the use of engagement markers is limited and the writer-reader relation remains abstract. Because digital communication gives a concrete image of the reader, it enhances the writer's ability to establish connections with the audience. The dialogue with the reader not only increases the persuasiveness of the text but also fosters the identity of the writer as a source of knowledge dissemination. It might thus be affirmed that the means of communication affect the way writers perceive themselves and their audience.

6. Discussion

The comparison of metadiscourse marker use in MA dissertations and internship reports reflects the changing ways of using language in academic contexts as it is argued by Lotherington (2004), Clark (2010), and Luzón (2018). The study shows that writers make different linguistic choices that might be reflective of distinct perceptions of stance expression and reader engagement in digital communication in comparison to traditional ways of writing academic reports. The use of an online platform where the writer shares his/her internship report increases his/her visibility within a wider discourse community. The medium has an impact on the way the writer promotes himself/herself as an active participant in the process of knowledge construction. The significantly higher frequency of interactional resources in internship reports indicates that writers using digital communication deploy more resources to express their authorial stance, to affirm their presence in the text, and to establish a stronger writer-reader dialogue.

The study shows that dialogicity exists in both traditional and digital communication, but while it is induced through hedges in traditional communication, in digital communication it is created through the use of attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. The analysis of metadiscourse markers reflects the different roles that the writer and the reader endorse in each means of communication. The higher use of hedges in MA dissertations provides more space for the reader's presence. This image corresponds to audience perception in the traditional view of the academic discourse community; communication is governed by the group's strict hierarchical structure, where the audience has a centre-stage role and the novice writer is at the periphery. However, the higher use of attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers in internship reports as an example of digital communication reflects an image of a writer who is more present and invested with more power to create knowledge. Stance expression, self-promotion, and reader-engagement are crucial to increase the visibility of the work. Digital communication makes it possible through a more concrete image of the readers and audience

expectations. Dialogicity and academic writer identity are thus more explicit in digital academic discourse.

Indeed, dialogism in online communication reflects greater authority on the part of the writer. It opens more space for him/her to show his/her distinctive identity and voice. As claimed by Flowerdew and Wang (2015), in online communication writers show more of their private self. It seems that digital communication triggers more self-assurance and a higher sense of ownership and interactivity (Clark 2010). Luzón's finding is also confirmed; the connectivity that digital media offers brings to the foreground different strategies of "impression management" (2018: 32). The digital writer does not have the same perception of the reader as in traditional writing. Digital communication offers the possibility for the writer to have a more concrete image of the readers' needs. This substantial difference with traditional communication enhances the writer to further engage the audience in the dialogue and to construct an image of himself/herself as a source of knowledge.

7. Conclusion

This study made it possible to map out interactional metadiscourse use in samples of both traditional and digital communication through the examination of Tunisian EFL students' academic writings. The comparison between the two subcorpora reveals that there is a difference in the use of metadiscourse markers across media. The difference is marked by the higher use of all interactional metadiscourse categories in digital communication, except for hedges that are more frequently used in MA dissertations. As it has been hypothesized, the change in the medium of communication affects both the writer's and the reader's presence in the text as well as their relation. Digital discourse is characterized by greater dialogicity between the participants. The writer takes a central role in knowledge creation through a more salient use of attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. The expression of voice and stance in online

communication highlights the writer's authorial presence in the text and allows him/her to uncover his/her identity.

The differences between the two means of communication foreground the changing ways of using language in today's academic communication. The study thus has an important pedagogical implication. As mentioned earlier, Tunisian EFL writers strive to gain international visibility, but problems in voice expression persist. Results show that the use of digital communication enhances the writers' ability to express a distinctive self-image and engage the reader in an active co-construction of meaning. Therefore, digital communication can be used as an alternative medium to teach academic writing to novices, especially EFLs, to help them produce research that is more marked as far as self-promotion and reader-engagement are concerned. It might help EFL writers attain greater visibility than in traditional media. The findings can be further supported through the examination of a larger corpus that involves other genres and disciplines.

References

- Askehave, Inger / Swales, John M. 2001. Genre Identification and Communicative Purpose: A Problem and a Possible Solution. *Applied Linguistics* 22/2, 195-212.
- Atkinson, Dwight 2003. L2 Writing in the Post-process Era: Introduction. *Second Language Writing* 12, 3-15.
- Barton, David / McCulloch, Sharon 2018. Negotiating Tensions around New Forms of Academic Writing. *Discourse, Context & Media* 24: 8-15.
- Becher, Tony / Trowler, Paul, R. 2001. *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual enquiry and the culture of disciplines*. Philadelphia: The Society for Research into Higher Education.

- Berkenkotter, Carol / Huckin, Thomas N. 1993. Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive Perspective. *Written Communication* 10/4, 475-509.
- Bhatia, Vijay K. 2002. Applied Genre Analysis: A Multiperspective Model. *Ibérica* 4, 3-19.
- Bizzell, Patricia 1992. *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Charles, Maggie 2006. The Construction of Stance in Reporting Clauses: A Cross-disciplinary Study of Theses. *Applied Linguistics* 27/3, 492-518.
- Clark, Elizabeth J. 2010. The Digital Imperative: Making the Case for a 21st-century Pedagogy. *Computers and Composition* 27/1, 27-35.
- Edwards-Groves, Christine J. 2011. The Multimodal Writing Process: Changing Practices in Contemporary Classrooms. *Language and Education* 25/1, 49-64.
- Epstein, Erwin H. 2011. Writing with Authority: Pitfalls and Pit Stops. In Rocco, Tonette S. / Hatcher, Tim (eds) *The Handbook of Scholarly Writing and Publishing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 91-101.
- Fløttum, Kjersti 2012. Variation of Stance and Voice across Cultures. In Hyland, Ken / Sancho-Guinda, Carmen (eds) *Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 218-231.
- Flowerdew, John 1999. Problems in Writing for Scholarly Publication in English: The Case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 8/3, 243-264.
- Flowerdew, John 2000. Discourse Community, Legitimate Peripheral Participation, and the Nonnative-English-Speaking Scholar. *TESOL Quarterly* 34/1, 127-150.
- Flowerdew, John 2008. Scholarly Writers who Use English as an Additional Language: What Can Goffman's 'Stigma' Tell us?. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7/2, 77-86.
- Flowerdew, John / Wang, Simon H. 2015. Identity in Academic Discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35, 81-99.
- Gillett, Andy / Hammond, Angela / Martala, Mary 2009. *Successful Academic Writing*. London: Pearson Longman.

- Goffman, Erving 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goodfellow, Robin 2011. Literacy, Literacies and the Digital in Higher Education. *Teaching in Higher Education* 16/1, 131-144.
- Gosden, Hugh 1992. Research Writing and NNSs: From the Editors. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 1/2, 123-139.
- Gray, Bethany / Biber, Douglas 2012. Current Conceptions of Stance. In Hyland, Ken / Sancho-Guinda, Carmen (eds) *Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 15-33.
- Greenhow, Christine / Robelia, Beth 2009. Informal Learning and Identity Formation in Online Social Networks. *Learning, Media and Technology* 34/2, 119-140.
- Greenhow, Christine / Gleason, Benjamin 2014. Social Scholarship: Reconsidering Scholarly Practices in the Age of Social Media. *British Journal of Educational Technology* 45/3, 392-402.
- Greenhow, Christine / Lewin, Cathy 2015. Social Media and Education: Reconceptualizing the Boundaries of Formal and Informal learning. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 1-25.
- Hyland, Ken 1998. Boosting, Hedging and the Negotiation of Academic Knowledge. *Text-Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* 18/3, 349-382.
- Hyland, Ken 1999. Academic attribution: Citation and the Construction of Disciplinary Knowledge. *Applied Linguistics* 20/3, 341-367.
- Hyland, Ken 2002. Authority and Invisibility: Authorial Identity in Academic Writing. *Journal of Pragmatics* 34/8, 1091-1112.
- Hyland, Ken 2003. *Second Language Writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, Ken 2005. *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing*. London: Continuum.
- Hyland, Ken 2006. *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*. London: Routledge.
- Hyland, Ken 2008. Persuasion, Interaction and the Construction of Knowledge: Representing Self and Others in Research Writing. *International Journal of English Studies* 8/2, 1-23.

- Hyland, Ken 2009. Corpus Informed Discourse Analysis: The Case of Academic Engagement. In Charles, Maggie / Pecorari, Diane / Hunston, Susan (eds) *Academic Writing: At the Interface of Corpus and Discourse*, London: Continuum, 110-128.
- Hyland, Ken 2010. Metadiscourse: Mapping Interactions in Academic Writing. *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9/2, 125-143.
- Hyland, Ken 2012. Undergraduate Understandings: Stance and Voice in Final Year Reports. In Hyland, Ken / Sancho-Guinda, Carmen (eds) *Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 134-150.
- Hyland, Ken / Hamp-Lyons, Liz 2002. EAP: Issues and Directions. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 1/1, 1-12.
- Hyland, Ken / Tse, Polly 2004. Metadiscourse in Academic Writing: A Reappraisal. *Applied Linguistics* 25/2, 156-177.
- Ivanič, Roz 1998. *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Javdan, Shiva 2014. Identity Manifestation in Second Language Writing through Notion of Voice: A Review of Literature. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4/3, 631-635.
- John, Suganthi 2009. Using the Revision Process to Help International Students Understand the Linguistic Construction of the Academic Identity. In Charles, Maggie / Pecorari, Diane / Hunston, Susan (eds) *Academic Writing: At the Interface of Corpus and Discourse*. London: Continuum, 272-290.
- Kothari, Chakravanti R. 2004. *Research Methodology: Methods & Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age.
- Kuteeva, Maria / Mauranen, Anna 2018. Digital Academic Discourse: Texts and Contexts: Introduction. *Discourse, Context & Media* 24, 1-7.
- Labassi, Tahar 2016. Publish or Perish: Tips for Successful Research Publications. Study Day Faculty of Human and Social Sciences 9 Avril, March, 26.
- Lea, Mary R. 2013. Reclaiming Literacies: Competing Textual Practices in a Digital Higher Education. *Teaching in Higher Education* 18/1, 106-118.

- Lee, Monica 2011. Finding Voice: Appreciating Audience. In Rocco, Tonette S. / Hatcher, Tim (eds) *The Handbook of Scholarly Writing and Publishing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 102-114.
- Leki, Ilona / Cumming, Alister / Silva, Tony 2008. *A Synthesis of Research on Second Language Writing in English*. London: Routledge.
- Lillis, Theresa / Scott, Mary 2007. Defining Academic Literacies Research: Issues of Epistemology, Ideology and Strategy. *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 4/1, 5-32.
- Lotherington, Heather 2004. What Four Skills? Redefining Language and Literacy Standards for ELT in the Digital Era. *TESL Canada Journal* 22/1, 64 - 78.
- Luzón, María-José 2018. Features of Online ELF in Research Group Blogs Written by Multilingual Scholars. *Discourse, Context & Media* 24, 24-32.
- Mauranen, Anna 2013. Hybridism, Edutainment, and Doubt: Science Blogging Finding its Feet. *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 12/1, 7-36.
- Meyers, Eric / Erickson, Ingrid M. / Small, Ruth V. Digital Literacy and Informal Learning Environments: An Introduction. *Learning, Media and Technology* 38/4, 355-367.
- Nackoney, Claire K. / Munn, Sunny L. / Fernandez, Jesus 2011. Learning to Write: Wisdom from Emerging Scholars. In Rocco, Tonette S. / Hatcher, T. (eds) *The Handbook of Scholarly Writing and Publishing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 26-43.
- Nystrand, Martin 1989. A Social-interactive Model of Writing. *Written Communication* 6/1, 66-85.
- Paltridge, Brian / Starfield, Sue 2007. *Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: A Handbook for Supervisors*. London: Routledge.
- Pearson-Casanave, Christine / Hubbard, Philip 1992. The Writing Assignments and Writing Problems of Doctoral Students: Faculty Perceptions, Pedagogical Issues, and Needed Research. *English for Specific Purposes* 11, 33-49.
- Pecorari, Diane / Shaw, Philip 2012. Types of Student Intertextuality and Faculty Attitudes. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 21/2, 149-164.

- Pennington, Martha C. 2013. Trends in Writing and Technology. *Writing & Pedagogy* 5/2, 155-179.
- Richards, Janet C. / Miller, Sharon K. 2005. *Doing Academic Writing in Education: Connecting the Personal and the Professional*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Salager-Meyer, Françoise 1994. Hedges and Textual Communicative Functions in Medical English Written Discourse. *English for Specific Purposes* 13/2, 149-170.
- Scarcella, Robin 2003. *Academic English: A Conceptual Framework*. Berkeley: UC Berkeley Technical Reports.
- Street, Brian 2009. 'Hidden' Features of Academic Paper Writing. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* 24/1, 1-17.
- Swales, John 1990. The Concept of Discourse Community. In Wardle, Elisabeth / Down, Doug (eds) *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. Boston: Bedford St Martins, 466- 473.
- Tang, Ramona 2009. A Dialogic Account of Authority in Academic Writing. In Charles, Maggie / Pecorari, Diane / Hunston, Susan (eds) *Academic Writing: At the Interface of Corpus and Discourse*. London: Continuum, 170-188.
- Tardy, Christine M. 2012. Current Conceptions of Voice. In Hyland, Ken / Sancho-Guinda, Carmen (eds) *Stance and Voice in Written Academic Genres*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 34-48.
- Tardy, Christine, M. / Matsuda, Paul K. 2009. The Construction of Author Voice by Editorial Board Members. *Written Communication* 26/1, 32-52.
- Text Inspector 2016. Online lexis analysis tool. <textinspector.com>
- Thaiss, Christopher J. / Zawacki, Terry M. 2006. *Engaged Writers, Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Trimbur, John 1994. Taking the Social Turn: Teaching Writing Post-process. *College Composition and Communication* 45/1, 108-118.
- Vallis, Gina L. 2010. *Reason to Write: Applying Critical Thinking to Academic Writing*. Charlotte: Kona.
- Vandenberg, Peter / Hum, Sue / Clary-Lemon, Jennifer (eds.) 2006. *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers*. Urbana: NCTE.

Weigle, Sara C. 2002. *Assessing Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yuming, Li 2017. Influence of Language Technologies on Language Life and Social Development. *Social Sciences in China* 38/1, 181-198.

