

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

# **Digital Communication and Metadiscourse**

**Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres**





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CERLIS Series  
Volume 9

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

Digital Communication and Metadiscourse  
Changing Perspectives in Academic Genres

CELSB  
Bergamo

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CERLIS SERIES Vol. 9

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Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici

Research Centre on Languages for Specific Purposes

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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>

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Published in Italy by CELSB Libreria Universitaria

Via Pignolo, 113 - 24121, Bergamo, Italy

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STEFANIA CONSONNI / LARISSA D'ANGELO

## Screening knowledge – Academic metadiscourse goes digital<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Screens vs. mirrors

This collection of essays focuses on the interface of three key terms in today's linguistic, semiotic and cultural framework: academic language, metadiscourse and digital communication. Specifically, it investigates dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination in international academia, by looking at recently established pure screen genres, as well as at the increasing digitalization of traditional genres. Boosted by the growingly extensive use of ICT in educational and techno-scientific contexts, on the part of both researchers (Lillis/Curry 2010; Kuteeva 2016; Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018;) and students (Street 1995), today's academic writing practices showcase a number of rhetorical, lexico-grammatical, multimodal and pragmatic strategies that seem to call for a multifaceted methodological approach. The essays in this volume therefore broadly incorporate critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics and literacies research, with a view to studying metadiscourse strategies in a variety of genres and corpora that range from hybridized analogue products (e.g. research papers and abstracts, MA dissertations, slides, etc., which are nowadays produced, both materially and cognitively, with the mediation of computers, databases, etc.) to intrinsically digital (i.e. synchronous and online) resources, such as – for instance – university websites, platforms, MOOCs, blogs, etc. (Jones/Chik/Hafner 2015; Pérez-Llantada 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Although this paper has been planned jointly, Stefania Consonni is responsible for section 1 and Larissa D'Angelo for section 2.

From a systemic-functional standpoint (Halliday 2002, 2004), as well as within the genealogical and materialist perspective founded by Michel Foucault (1966, 1972), academic discourse may be considered as an interrelated system of communicative practices and products, both written and spoken, which coagulate, instantiate and propel the mission pursued by modern universities: the reification and transmission of disciplinary research through structured hierarchies of knowledge. Not only does academic discourse allow core concepts and categories to be linguistically formulated and divulged through specialized publications – thus codifying reality in the very act of questioning and representing it. It indeed ideates and irradiates the truth matrix of a culture. From theoretical abstraction down to formulaic popularization, academic language, which “began as the semiotic underpinning for what was, in the worldwide context, a rather esoteric structure of knowledge”, has come to coincide with “the dominant mode for interpreting human existence” (Halliday/Martin 1993: 11). It has evolved into an epistemological and cultural paradigm.

Academic discourse guarantees legitimate, statutory shape to “the creation of knowledge itself”, while at the same time designing the whole stratified geometry of “roles and relationships which create academics and students” (Hyland/Hamp-Lyons 2002; Hyland 2009: 1). As a consequence, scientific authoritativeness, influence and power are asymmetrically distributed in a social hierarchy of interrelated and interdependent functions – the esoteric core proving as essential as peripheral regions to the functioning of the academic acculturation system (Hofstede 2001). Serving a cognitive as much as social function, academic discourse therefore provides the ideational and interpersonal scaffolding of the power relationships that constitute the modern order of knowledge (Foucault 1966). As a result, the issues of literacy, pedagogy and epistemology overlap and intertwine to such an extent that they form a communicative continuum, or better still, a compound that cannot be broken down, unless by critical dissection of the various functions simultaneously performed by discourse itself.

Crucially, at stake in the discourse-knowledge-power nexus – along with the rethinking of the self-determining Cartesian subject as the historical outcome of a subjectification process that moulds him/her into a disciplined, self-governing conscious agent (Foucault 1982) – is

the anti-mimetic nature of disciplinary discourse vis-à-vis empirical reality. This only seemingly challenges the post-Galilean foundations of experimental science, and John Locke's seminal trust in the naturalised (i.e., conventionalised) communicability of knowledge via the capacity of words to stand in for ideational contents "in proper and immediate signification", thanks to the "voluntary imposition" that is settled and corroborated by shared usage, "whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea" (1690: 405). For academic language performs a constant crystallisation of disciplinary knowledge by means of the shared rules and conventions represented by its communicative genres. Irrespective of their being historical (as research articles, stemming from Robert Boyle's seventeenth-century reports; Gotti 2003) or recent – as abstracts (Sala 2019), posters (D'Angelo 2016; Maci 2016) and infographics (Consonni 2019) –, academic genres do not purely and plainly function as vessels of an *a priori* reality that is supposedly unveiled and mirrored by science. The crystallised knowledge they disseminate at all levels of the cognitive and social hierarchy is all but unrippled by the common stock of lexical, grammatical, rhetorical and multimodal strategies constituting disciplinary discourse.

Paradoxically enough, 'crystallised' refers in this case to the merely imaginary transparency (i.e., referentiality) – which is in actual fact a blatant form of opacity – of academic writing. For not only is reality mediated by science's linguistic constructedness. Far from being mirrored by discourse, disciplinary knowledge is designed by a grid of cognitive categories that derive from academic genres, which redraws – and to some extent strains – our ordinary perception of the world in function of its own taxonomies, conventions and expectations. In radically anti-mimetic fashion, reality thus comes to be configured "by a glance, an examination, a language" (Foucault 1966: xxi). As mentioned above, literacy therefore emerges not simply as a standardized set of technical skills that is shared among experts and that novices need to learn (Scarcella 2003), but as an all-pervasive discursive technology of power, serving the construction of epistemologies and allowing the very possibility of knowing, as it forges the domain of intelligibility itself.

Needless to say, the adjective 'disciplinary' deploys here its semantic density, as it refers to both specialised understandings stemming from scientific research and the categorizing, controlling and self-governing (albeit non-coercive) function that academic discourse performs in regard to the reification and propagation of research into 'truth'. Discourse therefore works as a screen, not a mirror, of reality. It does not reflect it. Rather, it selects, frames, interprets and exposes it. It refracts reality, instead of conducting it. It produces no one-to-one duplication, but a variable scale projection – in the fully representative, geometric (if not somewhat cinematic) sense of the word – of experiential or empirical phenomena. In Foucault's words, "language is knowledge only in an unreflecting form" (1966: 95), for it makes truth possible in the very act of *screening* it.

The concept of academic discourse as a perspectival screen refracting reality – and, precisely because of this, cognitively configuring it – is precisely the intersection point between academic language and metadiscourse on the one hand, and between academic language and digital communication on the other. For the anti-mimetic nature of academic discourse may be said to significantly feed on non-propositional strategies of rhetorical persuasion (and on the social dynamics of competition and negotiation that go with it). Managing the time and space of one's text, or governing the expectations, hypotheses and reactions of a discourse community (Hyland 2009: 10) – for instance, maximising the impact of one's findings or neutralising possible objections, drawing in and motivating readers or listeners –, is in fact a core task of academic discourse, one that reveals the "cognitive style and epistemological beliefs" of academia (Hyland 2009: 13). Interactive and interactional negotiation resources (Hyland 2005) prove ideal dialogical tools for putting forward one's ideas. For this reason, the concept of metadiscourse as a system of (more or less foregrounded) non-propositional or intersubjective meanings has been a constant in the critical debate about this category. It has often been referred to as "text" or "discourse reflexivity" (Mauranen 1993; Bunton 1999; Ädel 2006; Mauranen 2010), in the sense of both writers' expressed awareness of textuality and authorship (Crismore 1983; Vande Kopple 1985) and hermeneutical concern about readership and meaning

reception and negotiation (Crismore 1989; Crismore/Markannen/Steffensen 1993).

It seems that much of the fascination with metadiscourse lies in the fact that this articulate constellation of seemingly accessory resources exceeds the ‘primary’ ideational mission of language, that is, the symbolic capturing of a reality standing outside of sign systems (Halliday 2004). And yet, the clear second-degree, anti-mimetic attitude of “language about language”, or “discourse about ongoing discourse” (Mauranen 2010: 14; 2021) is one that – exactly because it centripetally draws us towards the inside of semiosis itself – crucially contributes to the putting through of messages, as well as to the paradigmatic codification of reality into disciplinary knowledge. As a matter of fact, the interactive and/or interactional effects of metadiscoursal resources pivot on a concept of ‘reflexivity’ that, again, does not point to a mirroring (or duplicating) function of discourse in regard to reality, but to a more sophisticated process of refraction, perspectivization and projection – a *screening* process. That is to say, to an overtly angled, non-mimetic relationship towards reality. One that, by showcasing the constructedness of language, perception and knowledge – and before that, of human subjectivity and cognition, to recall Foucault’s perspective –, brings about an incredibly propagative and hegemonic complexification of discourse.

Metadiscourse is what allows us to produce representations that go “beyond the referential function of language” (Mauranen 2021), to cover semiosis itself – i.e. the whole semiotic spectrum, from its origin to its arrival point – as part of the communicative package. In Foucauldian fashion, metadiscourse thus works as an “act of power” (Mauranen 2021). It frames, contextualizes and validates the writer’s position inside the discourse, and it directs, restrains and legitimizes the reader’s understanding of it. As a consequence, it works by juxtaposing an epistemological grid with the ideational contents of texts, and by governing the conduct of all social actors that operate within the semiotic environment represented by the texts themselves (and within the hierarchy of disciplinary knowledge). By attending to itself, by casting a disciplining gaze upon itself, metadiscourse works as a self-restraint, self-regulation device – as a self-discipline device (Foucault 1982).

Unsurprisingly, a wide variety of metadiscoursal resources has often been investigated in academic writing across languages and disciplines (e.g. Bunton 1999; Hyland 2005; Ädel 2010). Indeed, as shown by Ädel's (2010: 75) "reflexive turn" model, metadiscourse focuses on any verbalization concerning "the evolving discourse itself or its linguistic form, including references to the writer-speaker *qua* writer-speaker and the (imagined or actual) audience *qua* audience of the current discourse". In terms of Jakobson's linguistic functions (1960), metadiscourse operates on a functional triangulation among expression (when awareness about the material source of discourse is conveyed), direction (when dynamics of hermeneutics or meaning reception and negotiation are implied in the discourse) and reflexivity (when 'discourse-internal discourse' is at stake, that is to say, the semiotic system in use represents the code itself; see Jakobson 1985). Clearly, this triangulation excludes referentiality, i.e. language's ideational capacity to stand for referents in the experiential world. Which appears as an interesting fact, when it comes to academic discourse and the 'truth' it crystallizes, especially if we bear in mind the epistemological mission of this communicative domain. And yet, as mentioned above, far from undermining the veridical status of disciplinary discourse, the cognitive affordances brought about by metadiscourse – an intersubjective, second-degree order of phenomena – carry a significant portion of the semantic load inherent to the discourse itself. They reveal the disciplinary self-surveillance of discourse's anti-mimetic, reflexive function.

The discourse-as-screen-metaphor, as well as the concept of reflexivity as discourse's self-governing and anti-referential design, also indicate a salient common denominator between academic discourse and digital practices. As mentioned above, new screen genres are increasingly being used in academic communication, such as blogs, wikis, social networks, etc. (Clark 2010; Lea 2013; Pennington 2013). Moreover, traditionally analogue products – e.g. abstracts, theses, peer reviews, editorials, etc. – are nowadays transitioning towards the digital format, as they are increasingly becoming dependent on the mediation of ICT. This clearly impacts their informative and rhetorical structure, along with their lexico-grammatical features and pragmatic purposes, in ways that extend beyond the materiality of production processes. As

observed by Jones/Chik/Hafner (2015: 3), on account of the increased multiliteracy competence it both requires and stimulates, which involves assemblages of “modes and materialities”, digital media has both opened up the possibility of new social practices (e.g. posting, tagging, ‘liking’ materials, reviewing products or services, etc.) and altered “the way people engage in old ones” (e.g. finding information, commenting on materials or sharing them with others). Which of course affects academic discourse, too. For digital communication represents a front assault to, and an evolutionary opportunity for, the “alien, specialized and privileged” nature of academic discourse (Hyland 2009: 6).

Although there is no room here for delving into the ways these changes are radically affecting writing practices, both new and pre-existent, two phenomena need to be mentioned, as they are deeply interconnected with the impact of digitalization upon metadiscourse. On the one hand, digital communication stems from (and contributes to) the deep verbal-to-visual resemiotization paradigm shift that is the overarching hallmark of today’s textual practices (Iedema 2001, 2003). This means that visibility is in charge of a remarkable amount of semiotic labour, even at the level of metadiscourse. Indeed, language in digital media tends to be reflexively attended to (and gazed at) in ways that are mainly intertextual and multimodal (Thurlow/Mroczek 2011). Think for instance of a recent scripto-visual genre, such as memes, where verbal meanings – typically comments or asides of metadiscoursal nature – are incorporated to (and played against) the referential load that is conventionally attached to visual materials. In these cases, metadiscourse appears to be medium- and mode-related. But this no less perpetrates the self-governing, self-surveillance function that has long been a major mission of discourse reflexive strategies. In the case of synchronous online communication, such as blogs or social networks, this aspect is even radicalized, for besides the actual dialogical actors (e.g. bloggers and commenters), the social floor includes the vast anonymous audience of platform users (Barton/McCulloch 2018). The progressive emergence of medium- and mode-related metadiscoursal strategies, we believe, will provide materials and opportunities for further research (D’Angelo 2016; De Groot et al. 2016).

On the side of verbal academic discourse, which is the focus of this volume, it should be noted that digital textuality, especially in the case of synchronous media, includes a monumental apparatus of paratext (Genette 1987) that, far from being peripheral (or parasitical) with respect to the ideational content of the communication, is indeed substantial to it. Intertextual and intersubjective paratext frames the 'main' informative text and governs its pertinent reading, along with the reception and elaboration of its shared meanings (Geraghty 2015). Think of online comments, for instance. Being "a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy" for dynamics of meaning negotiation and influence on/of the public (1987: 5), they simultaneously serve a hermeneutical and a disciplining function with respect to both the text and the discourse community negotiating its boundaries and functions. More often than not, such paratextual apparatus is instantiated by discourse reflexive resources: to stick to Hyland's taxonomy (2005), it is obvious how frame markers, evidentials, hedges and boosters, engagement markers, etc. may serve the cognitive as well as dialogical purposes of bloggers and commenters. Or, in Mauranen's terms (2021), we may think of how situation-management (i.e. orienting, forward-looking) and discourse-management (i.e. retrieving, backward-looking) strategies collaborate in generalizing or recontextualizing propositions, disciplining expectations, bringing formulations into focus, etc., thus co-constructing scientific knowledge along with power relationships within academia.

The changes this paradigm shift is bringing about in digital academic metadiscourse can be observed at different micro- and macro-levels, as the essays in this collection illustrate. To list a few major ones, there is an increasing use of nonstandard or spoken expressions, especially in (the many) contexts where English is used as a lingua franca (Barton/Lee 2013). Written academic practices are more and more structured like unfiltered conversation threads, "with readers being able to 'write back' to writers, and writers shaping their texts in anticipation of an almost immediate response from readers" (Jones/Chik/Hafner 2015: 7). As a consequence, interaction dynamics between writers and readers/commenters (and more implicitly with the floor of anonymous users) are becoming more straightforward and anything but gate-keeping. Private and public communication strategies

are combining and blending, while research- and opinion-based approaches can found side by side (Kuteeva/Mauranen 2018). Logical argumentation is interspersed with emotional persuasion. Popularization schemata are increasingly used (Calsamiglia 2003; Calsamiglia/Van Dijk 2004), whereby generalization is turned into the parcelling, recontextualizing, rescaling and reassembling of information so as to meet the expectations and competences of different audiences. Scientific objectivity is flanked by expressions of attitude. Techno-scientific description is punctuated by narrativity and storytelling. Key structural dimensions of argumentative discourse such as cohesion and coherence (Halliday/Hasan 1976) are being affected by intertextuality and intersubjectivity, multimodality and intersemioticity, and are overlapping and intersecting with each other in ever more intricate and subtle ways (Bou-Franch/Garcés-Conejos Blivitch 2019).

Undoubtedly, since its very inception digital communication has brought down the alethic illusion of human cognition as a mirror of reality, and of language as a transparent tool for communicating ideas, materializing the textuality that Formalism and Structuralism had theorized all along the twentieth century. As shown by Foucault's reading of Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, long before digitalization was even envisioned (1966), semiotic systems indeed work as screens where the mirroring of a mirror, or a representation of a representation, is projected. And screens – that is, actual device screens, the ones on which the digitalization of discourse is materially occurring – are playing a key role in the process of democratization of information that has been taking place on a global scale over the last decades. A cultural process that nevertheless is the flip side of a deep institutional crisis being faced by structured systems of thought, including academia, and by traditionally authoritative hierarchies of knowledge, whereby what we have previously referred to as the 'core' and 'periphery' of disciplinary knowledge seem to have lost their boundaries and their *raison d'être*. A cultural process, finally, which shows itself in conspicuous techno-social metamorphoses that, despite the libertarian outcries they sometimes tend to inspire, ultimately prove functional to the disciplinary, self-governing design of modern power. For the

reflexive gaze that language turns upon itself is multiplied into millions of smaller gazes – into millions of smaller screens.

And yet, in times of populism, competence dilution and conceptual approximation, a reflexive and self-disciplining re-articulation of scientific research and academic discourse seems to find a possibly renovated degree of significance. Whichever way we come across it – through the hybridization of traditionally analogue genres transitioning from page to screen, or through screen-ready, fully digital genres – *this* seems a good reason why academic communication should nowadays be investing so much in metadiscourse, as the chapters of this book bear witness to.

## 2. Page vs. screen, analogue vs. digital: Academic metadiscourse between hybridization and digitalization

This book has been organised following the genealogical and material distinction proposed in Section 1 above. The first part of the volume, entitled *Page to screen: Transitioning genres*, gathers contributions that investigate progressively hybridized academic genres that have migrated, or are in the process of migrating, from analogue to digital format. Interestingly, all considered genres have a clear pedagogical matrix, belonging as they do to the universe of students' writing practices: MA dissertations, internship reports, undergraduate research papers and upper secondary pupil essays. That is to say, they are typically produced by learners as a unidirectional and standardized product meant for assessment at school or at university. The second part of the volume, under the title *Screen-ready: Digital genres*, analyses writing practices in which the hybridization between different modes and media is stabilized, and where a number of pragmatic functions and communicative expectations have fully been taken over by digitalization: e-mails, university websites and MOOCs. These are bidirectional screen genres mainly used for student-professor or student-institution communication, i.e. for more structured dialogical

exchange between the two parties involved in academic knowledge dissemination.

In the opening chapter, JAMES JACOB THOMSON focuses on traditional novice writing practices across educational contexts (Norway, Sweden and the UK) and different argumentative genres. In particular, the study analyses the interactional expression of attitude in pre-tertiary essays of five different kinds. Attention is paid to how different proportions of individual value-laden lexis and grammar *vs.* impersonal presentation of propositional content and logical argumentation may serve the communicative purposes of academic *vs.* professional writing, as exemplified by a corpus of upper secondary school essays in three different countries. While scantily used in academia, attitude is a key resource in certain types of journalism discourse (e.g. newspaper language) and in popularization discourse (e.g. popular scientific genres), which may stem from different degrees of visibility and different types of audiences, also (possibly) due to analogue *vs.* digital modes of circulation. As students are exposed to traditional argumentative tasks in different subjects pertaining either to strictly academic discourse (e.g. literature and linguistics) or more broadly to journalism discourse (e.g. commentary and opinion essays), patterns of commonality and difference are evidenced across different uses of this rather untheorized interactional resource.

The related issue of how undergraduate students' citation practices are being impacted by the growing shift towards on-screen dissemination contexts is the core of the next contribution, by ROBERT MACINTYRE. The growing need for English for Academic Purposes pedagogy, especially in EFL contexts, suggests academic discourse not as a rigid standardization of restraining measures, but as a more engaging set of tools for the articulation of one's ideas. But as the Internet rapidly replaces libraries as the main source of information, and the process of knowledge formation becomes more expedite and concise, the issues of how to make students aware of the credibility and reliability of the knowledge they use, as well as of the pitfalls of (possibly involuntary) plagiarism, come to the foreground. The study compares and contrasts two corpora of research papers written by Japanese sophomore students, only one of which received explicit instructions of how to use evidentials. The chapter questions the extent

to which this interactive resource may help novices build a solid authorial self, and the limits of the digital format with respect to the development of critical competences.

In the contribution that follows, EMNA FENDRI examines the ways in which young Tunisian academic writers use metadiscourse to structure their identity as researchers through different literacy practices, both in analogue (i.e. traditional on-page MA dissertations) and in digital contexts (i.e. online internship reports). Finding one's sense of authorship and authority – even more so in an English-as-a-third-language context – entails in the former case the building of a particular voice and stance that has to be rated by institutional assessors, while in the latter it means using strategies that may help novices deal with the radically different degree of visibility implied by online publication. Fendri's qualitative and quantitative analysis contrasts how interactional resources are used in both corpora of texts, investigating established *vs.* emerging techniques for intellectual self-perception and identity performance, as well as for building discourse ownership, scientific independence and (in the case of digital communication) even a sense of one's private self. Results show how differently on-page and on-screen personae can be structured, and the different role that writing can ascribe to the student him/herself and to his/her reader(s). While analogue genres seem to frame the figure of the author in the periphery of a knowledge system s/he still has to familiarize with, digital genres appear to boost his/her self-promotion and power to produce legitimate knowledge.

In direct dialogue with this rapidly changing landscape of literacy competences and cognitive practices, the second section of the book opens with a contribution co-authored by VESNA BOGDANOVIĆ and DRAGANA GAK. The focus of their analysis is the use of e-mails as a preferred means of communication, for both pedagogical and institutional purposes, between university students and academic staff. Combining written and oral discourse features, as well as a high degree of formality and a lesser amount of direct social contact, digital exchanges tend to be perceived differently by students and professors. On the one hand, concerns about adequacy, correctness and netiquette may emerge, while on the other, advantages – such as directness and less direct facework – seem to outbalance the possible difficulties that

students may encounter when learning how to interact with staff members. In this chapter, the use of an interactional resource such as engagement markers is measured against the high power distance index that is typical of the academic environment. A corpus of initial e-mails written (in Serbian and English) by undergraduate and graduate students from Serbia and Slovenia is analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, so as to investigate how lexico-grammatical expressions of engagement may contribute to students' construction of their persona in a positive and reliable way, and the different shades of power and trust that academic life may produce in different cultures.

The following contribution, co-authored by MICHELA GIORDANO and MARIA ANTONIETTA MARONGIU, focuses on yet another interrelated aspect of academic communication, that is, the use of metadiscourse in two online teaching methodology courses. The study looks at transcripts of spoken discourse from an online corpus of filmed lectures aimed at teachers from a well-known British MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) platform. This open-access, purely digital genre, offering the only example of speaker-listener interactivity in this book, is analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Interactive and interactional markers are quantified and discussed in regard, on the one hand, to pedagogical needs such as managing the propositional content of lectures in a coherent and convincing way (e.g. transitions). On the other hand, they comply with a need to codify the different social relationships existing between speakers and instructors *vs.* speakers and the anonymous online audience (e.g. self-mentions), to signal openness to debate, communicate inclusivity, etc. While interactive markers appear to satisfy the parameter that classical rhetoric labels as *logos*, i.e. persuasion through logical argumentation, interactional resources may be said to respond to the principles of *ethos* (persuasion through personality, stance and credibility) and *pathos* (persuasion through empathy and emotion).

Communication flows in the opposite direction in the corpus of university admission homepages analysed by HMOUD S. ALOTAIBI, whose contribution focuses on how a number of leading US universities use different arrays of metadiscoursal strategies in order to inform and attract prospective students. Applying metadiscourse analysis to different semiotic systems – i.e. the scriptural, hypertextual and visual

modes – the study shows how different combinations of interactive and interactional resources are used in different areas of the webpages under investigation, therefore serving different rhetorical functions within the framework of digital promotional discourse. Results indicate that there are three different types of metadiscourse – i.e. textual, hypertextual and visual –, which appear to rely on different parameters and result in different kinds of impact on the public. While introductory statements (which present institutions' philosophy of recruitment mainly through the use of words) pivot on the persuasive functions of self-mentions and engagement markers, hypertextual sections (which are used to package practical information), privilege the use of interactive resources, such as endophorics and evidentials. Pictures finally represent an interesting case, as they appear to be multifunctional and polypragmatic, working as code glosses as well as attitude and self-mention markers, and therefore complexifying the debate on the theoretical and pragmatic parameters of metadiscourse.

As this volume will demonstrate, four decades after metadiscourse studies started to emerge, the field is still in a flux and new, thought-provoking studies continue to emerge, driving researchers towards uncharted territories. Reinforcing this continuously innovative inclination on the part of metadiscourse scholars is the development of new research methodologies, including visual research methods and combinations of qualitative and quantitative approaches with special focuses on discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and genre analysis. In particular, we are starting to realize that as digital and social media have gradually entered our daily lives in the past two decades, our academic communication practices have also changed. Along with the linguistic practices in which people engage, and the nature of the social networks they construct, there is a strong and growing interest in how people create meaning and engage in academia not just through language, but through a range of digital resources. It has become so clear that the communicative immediacy of digital media, and the spectrum of genres (or hybridized forms) now available, dictate the way we engage in meaning-making practices in a multimodal environment, that we cannot but welcome further research in hybridized and digitalized academic genres.

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## PART 1. PAGE TO SCREEN: TRANSITIONING GENRES



JAMES JACOB THOMSON

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

### Abstract

The concept of interactional metadiscourse, which refers to linguistic resources that writers use to express their opinions and interact with their readers, has been a subject of growing interest in recent research on written communication. While many metadiscourse-related studies have focused on professional-level genres, few have analysed features of pre-tertiary writing. Furthermore, attitude markers, words that offer the author's affective evaluation, constitute a category of metadiscourse that arguably remains undertheorized. This study thus aims to investigate the types of attitude markers that upper secondary pupils rely on, and how the use of these types varies across educational contexts and genres. To address these aims, I collected and analysed a corpus comprising of 135 essays belonging to five genres written at Norwegian, Swedish and British schools. In total, 216 attitude marker types belonging to four sub-categories were identified. The frequencies of these sub-categories were then compared across educational contexts and genres. In contrast to previous studies, pupils in all three educational contexts offered their personal evaluations more frequently and with a greater range of types than would be expected in professional genres. The results also indicated that the pupils varied their use of attitude markers according to the purposes of the target genre. These findings may be relevant for guiding novice writers to adapt their expression of attitude to the communicative context.

## 1. Introduction

Essay writing is a central part of upper secondary education as pupils are frequently assessed via written assignments (Prosser/Webb 1994). In their essays, pupils not only have to prove their knowledge but also express their “attitude”, a term referring to words that offer an affective evaluation, in an appropriate manner. Drawing on the concepts of “stance” or “metadiscourse” (e.g. Gray/Biber 2012; Hyland 2019), a number of studies have investigated how professional authors and university students express their attitude across a range of contexts (e.g. Mur Dueñas 2010; Lee/Deakin 2016). While studies have found that attitude markers are infrequent in certain contexts, such as in academia, where authors strive to remain objective (Hu/Cao 2015), other studies have found attitude markers to be relatively frequent in contexts such as journalism (Dafouz-Milne 2008), which illustrates the genre-specific demands to which authors have to adhere. Studies of novice writing have found that university students tend to avoid expressing their attitudes, emulating the impersonal style of academic writing (e.g. Ho/Li 2018). However, studies have mainly focused on “high prestige genres in academia” (Ädel 2018: 55), and little research has investigated attitude in pre-tertiary writing (e.g. Qin/Uccelli 2019). Furthermore, studies of metadiscourse have tended to address a large number of linguistic resources. Consequently, attitude often remains undertheorized, and discussions pertaining to attitude are often limited. By analysing the types<sup>1</sup> and frequencies of attitude markers in a corpus of upper secondary essays, this study offers a more comprehensive operationalisation of attitude in order to investigate how pre-tertiary writers express their affective evaluations.

For the purposes of this investigation, I collected a corpus of 135 English essays written across five genres at upper secondary schools situated in Norway, Sweden and the UK. Using these data, attitude markers were quantified and compared across educational contexts and genres. To clarify, this study does not compare how first and foreign-

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<sup>1</sup> The term “type” is used to refer to “each graphical word form” in a text (McEnergy/Wilson 2003: 32).

language speakers of English express their attitudes. Instead, pupils were grouped based on the country in which they study English, regardless of their first language. The UK was chosen because English is taught as a first language. Norway and Sweden, in which English is taught as a foreign language, were chosen because these countries are highly ranked in terms of general English proficiency (EF 2018). At the upper secondary level in these educational contexts, pupils are expected to be at a B2-equivalent level or higher (Council of Europe 2018: 77). This study therefore considers how different practices across educational contexts might affect pupils' writing practices. The research questions for this study are:

- Which attitude marker types are used in a corpus of upper secondary pupil essays?
- How do attitude markers in upper secondary essays vary across educational contexts and genres?

This paper outlines relevant theory and previous research on the expression of attitude in various written contexts before presenting the present study's contribution to the field.

## 2. Previous research

Although, as Biber (2006: 99) puts it, "it is difficult to operationalize [a] study of value-laden word choice", many studies of written communication have investigated how writers express their "attitude" (Mur Dueñas 2010) or "evaluation" (Martin/White 2005). Previous research has tended to focus on professional (e.g. Fu/Hyland 2014; McCabe/Belmonte 2019) and tertiary contexts (e.g. Ozdemir/Longo 2014) and a number of studies have compared metadiscoursal features in texts written by authors with various language backgrounds (e.g. Gholami/Ilgami 2016). However, little attention has been given to attitude in pre-tertiary writing and those few existing studies have

tended to compare attitude in high and low rated essays (e.g. Dobbs 2014). Furthermore, analyses have tended to rely on taxonomies of attitude that incorporate around just 70 attitude marker types (e.g. Lee/Deakin 2016; Hyland 2019). However, more elaborate operationalisations have been proposed, such as Mur Dueñas (2010), who reported using corpus-driven methods that involve considering the content of the corpus itself (Baker 2010). Consequently, she found 118 types of attitude marker in a corpus of research articles within the field of business. This raises questions as to whether previous studies may have overlooked a number of attitude marker types by relying more on corpus-based methods, in which a corpus is used to test pre-existing hypotheses.

Previous research on academic writing has found that authors express their attitudes using a limited number of types that occur relatively infrequently (e.g. Hu/Cao 2015; Khedri/Kristis 2017). In a similar vein, studies on diachronic change (Gillaerts/Vande Velde 2010; Hyland/Jiang 2016) have found that the frequencies of attitude markers in research articles have decreased over the past few decades. Despite these low frequencies in academic writing overall, studies have found that the use of attitude markers varies across disciplines (e.g. Khedri/Ebrahimi/Heng 2013; Hyland 2019). Furthermore, research that has analysed a range of non-academic genres has shown that writers express their attitude relatively frequently in certain contexts such as newspaper writing (Dafouz-Milne 2008; McCabe/Belmonte 2019) and popular scientific writing (Fu/Hyland 2014). These findings illustrate that writers face different compositional demands across contexts: in some cases, they have to assert their credibility among professional peers, while in others they have to emotionally engage a lay audience. Additionally, cross-linguistic studies of attitude (e.g. Dafouz-Milne 2008; Gholami/Ilgami 2016) have largely found that professional authors writing in different languages express attitude in similar ways.

Findings from research on academic writing at the tertiary level have been mixed. Some studies have found that university students avoid expressing attitude. For example, studies comparing attitude in high and low rated essays (Lee/Deakin 2016; Bax/Nakatsuhara/Weller 2019) have found that attitude markers were infrequent regardless of essay quality. Lee and Deakin (2016: 29) argued that students may

perceive attitude markers to express “subjectivity rather than objectivity, which may conflict with their notion of academic writing”. Similarly, in an investigation of the effect of explicit compositional instruction, Cheng and Steffensen (1996: 162) found that, post-instruction, students used fewer attitude markers and persuaded their readers via “the force of the propositional content and logical argumentation” rather than by “soliciting agreement [...] through personal relationships”.

However, other studies of tertiary level writing that compare attitude in high and low rated essays have found that attitude markers were more prevalent in higher rated essays (Intraprawat/Steffensen 1995; Ho/Li 2018). Furthermore, in a study comparing texts written by native speakers of English and Turkish learners of English, Ozdemir and Longo (2014: 62) found that native speakers used higher frequencies of attitude markers. This led them to suggest that teachers of English as a foreign language should encourage students to use a broader range of interpersonal resources. Considering that findings from tertiary level studies have been mixed, there may be other factors that affect attitude marker use that may not have been considered, such as educational context, topic, or genre.

The small pool of studies that have investigated attitude in pre-tertiary writing have produced mixed findings. Qin and Uccelli (2019) reported that there were no differences in the use of attitude markers in academic and colloquial pupil texts, and Dobbs (2014) found that deontic markers did not predict essay quality. However, Uccelli, Dobbs and Scott (2019: 52) reported that, although attitude marker frequencies did not predict essay quality, they found differences in the pragmatic use of attitude markers in high-rated contra low-rated essays. For example, in low-rated essays, attitude markers were used in conjunction with presenting categorical assertions that did not recognise other perspectives (e.g. “this is not the *right* thing to do”). In high-rated essays, on the other hand, pupils offered evaluations in a way that did recognise other perspectives (e.g. “This assertion does not always have to be *negative*”). By investigating the attitude marker types and frequencies in a corpus of upper secondary essays, this study intends to offer a different perspective on understanding the expression of attitude in pre-tertiary writing.

### 3. Methods

In order to investigate which attitude marker types that pupils use and how frequencies vary across educational contexts and genres, a corpus of upper secondary essays was collected. To analyse the corpus, a taxonomy of attitude was devised based on previous studies and on the content of the present corpus. This section outlines the data collection procedures, the process of devising the taxonomy and the methods used for analysing the data.

#### 3.1 Data collection

Over 90 upper secondary schools were contacted across Norway, Sweden and the UK during 2017 and 2018, but only 14 schools agreed to participate in the study. Thus, the data for this study were collected from six schools in Norway, three in Sweden and five in the UK. In total, I collected 282 essays written by pupils aged 17-19 (see Table 1). However, a number of essays were omitted from the corpus based on several criteria.

	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Word count (mean)</i>
POLITICAL ESSAY	40	20	.	50,085 (835)
LITERARY ESSAY	-	20	-	27,588 (1,379)
COMMENTARY	-	-	20	35,889 (1,794)
LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION	-	-	15	29,530 (1,969)
OPINION PIECE	-	-	20	15,148 (757)
WORD COUNT (MEAN)	36,673 (917)	41,000 (1,025)	80,567 (1,465)	158,240 (1,166)

Table 1. Total number and word counts of essays collected from each educational context and belonging to each genre.

Firstly, while some pupils delivered two essays, only one essay per pupil was required. Secondly, essays that contained high frequencies of grammar and spelling errors were omitted. Finally, some essays were considered to fall outside the present genres. The resulting corpus consisted of 135 essays belonging to five genres (political essays, literary essays, commentaries, linguistic investigations, opinion pieces), as shown in Table 1.

The corpus consists of essays written for school evaluations, assigned either by exam boards or by teachers and therefore represents the conditions under which pupils usually write. Although writing for a pre-conceived task devised for a particular research question can be useful to achieve *tertium comparationis*, it was not practically feasible to prepare pupils at all 14 schools equally well for a single task. Thus, pupils wrote essays representing a range of genres and topics that reflect the curriculum aims in the respective educational contexts. In Norway and Sweden, pupils were required to write under timed conditions, whereas pupils in the UK wrote under process-oriented conditions (Badger/White 2000). In Norway, the political essays were written for a course called “Social Studies English” (Udir 2006). These essays were largely discussions of current affairs, such as the 2016 US election, but two of these essays were historical: one was about British colonialism and the other about the industrial revolution. In Sweden, the pupils wrote political essays and literary essays for a course called “English 7” (Skolverket 2020). The political essays were similar to those in Norway, but covered topics like genetic engineering and filter bubbles. The literary essays were discussions of canonical literature, such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and popular films and television series, such as *Game of Thrones*. The commentaries were written for a British course called “Creative Writing” (AQA 2013). For these assignments, pupils had to discuss their processes and inspirations in writing a series of other coursework pieces. The linguistic investigations and opinion pieces were written for a course called “English Language” (AQA 2019). The linguistic investigations were reports from research projects that the pupils had carried out themselves. Like the political essays, some opinion pieces were written about current affairs, but the goal of these pieces was persuasive rather than discursive. Furthermore,

opinion piece essays were usually written with a more clearly delineated genre in mind such as newspaper articles or reviews.

### 3.2 Analysis

In order to investigate the types of attitude markers that these upper secondary pupils used, a taxonomy of attitude was devised to capture the words that were present in this particular corpus. In devising the taxonomy, both corpus-based and corpus-driven approaches (Baker 2010) were incorporated, meaning that a list of search terms was compiled based both on previous studies (e.g. Mur Dueñas 2010; Hyland, 2019) and on a close reading of 50 of the essays. The search terms were then categorised based on their semantic field according to a simplified version of Martin and White's (2005) classification of evaluation. The four sub-categories of attitude that were prominent in this corpus related to complexity, emotion, morality and quality, as shown in Table 2.

<i>Sub-category</i>	<i>Number of search terms</i>	<i>Explanation and examples</i>
COMPLEXITY	18	Describes author's perception of difficulty: <i>basic, understandable</i>
EMOTION	43	Expresses author's emotional response: <i>desperate, tense</i>
MORALITY	41	Attributes a social value: <i>dangerous, misleading</i>
QUALITY	115	Offers author's general assessment: <i>funny, important</i>

Table 2. Sub-categories of attitude.

In total, a list of 216 marker types<sup>2</sup> was used to scan the corpus (see appendix). The quality sub-category could have been broken into further sub-categories, but it did not seem analytically useful to have sub-categories that encompassed a small number of search terms. The

<sup>2</sup> Roughly 270 types were initially used, but only those types that were found to express attitude in the present corpus are reported here.

search terms were used to scan the corpus using the KWIC (key word in context) concordancing function in #Lancsbox (Brezina/McEnery/Wattam 2015). The concordance lines were copied into Excel, and each concordance line was read manually, so that non-attitudinal instances could be removed. A word or phrase was considered to express attitude when it served an evaluative role and when that evaluation could be attributed to the writer, as exemplified by the following:

- (1) I also find it *hard* to create a whole narrative arc (complexity marker; commentary, UK)<sup>3</sup>
- (2) It *should* be his right to state this opinion (morality marker; political essay, Norway)

If the marker was used in a direct quote, or if the attitude was attributed to an extra-textual source (such as the reader of the current text or another author), the instance was discounted, as in the following:

- (3) You *understand* that if you are nice to a person, they will like you more (discounted complexity marker; literary essay, Sweden)
- (4) Stanley claims that there is a marked *inequality* (discounted morality marker; linguistic investigation, UK)

In order to test the reliability of the taxonomy, the concordance lines from 10 texts were sent to a second rater alongside criteria for identifying each attitude marker sub-category. The level of agreement between the second rater's analysis and my own was 94%.

In order to investigate how attitude markers varied across educational contexts and genres, the frequencies per 100 words of each attitude marker sub-category were quantified for each essay and entered into SPSS (IBM Corp. 2017). In the full corpus, roughly 5,000 hits were retrieved using the search terms. After removing instances that did not function as attitude markers, 1,800 hits remained. The number of occurrences of each attitude marker type were calculated for each sub-category in order to identify which types were most frequent. The

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<sup>3</sup> Any spelling or grammar mistakes in the reported extracts are left unchanged.

results did not meet assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity, so the Kruskal Wallis test was used to compare frequencies across educational contexts and genres. Accordingly, the medians and median absolute deviations (MAD) per 100 words for each sub-category are reported in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

## 4. Results

The results of this investigation are presented in the following two sections. The first section focuses on which types of attitude markers were used in this corpus. The second section focuses on how frequencies of each attitude sub-category varied across educational contexts and genres and provides extracts from the corpus to illustrate the trends that were observed.

### 4.1 Attitude marker types in upper secondary essays

Table 3 shows the number of different attitude marker types belonging to each sub-category in each educational context and in each genre.

	<i>Complexity</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Morality</i>	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Total</i>
POLITICAL ESSAY (No)	9	12	25	54	100
POLITICAL ESSAY (Sw)	5	10	19	37	71
LITERARY ESSAY (Sw)	10	6	20	41	77
COMMENTARY (UK)	13	33	13	86	145
LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION (UK)	11	16	14	62	103
OPINION PIECE (UK)	8	14	22	57	101
TOTAL TYPES	18	43	41	114	216

Table 3. Total number of types of each category across educational contexts and genres and total types.

One trend was that there were fewer different types of complexity markers (e.g. *struggle*) than other sub-categories across the genres. One exception to this was the literary essays, which contained fewer types of emotion markers (e.g. *terrifying*). Another exception was the commentary genre, which contained the fewest types of morality markers (e.g. *appropriate*) across the genres. Overall, quality markers (e.g. *effective, well*) were represented by the greatest number of types in all genres. The commentaries contained the greatest number of quality marker types, perhaps reflecting the wide range of qualities that pupils ascribed to other pieces of coursework. When comparing the three educational contexts, the UK essays contained the highest number of types overall, which was attributed to the greater numbers of emotion and quality marker types in the commentary essays.

Table 4 presents the five most frequent types (six when the fifth most frequent was tied between two types), alongside the raw frequencies of each type, belonging to each attitude sub-category in the full corpus.

<i>Complexity</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Morality</i>	<i>Quality</i>
Easy (27)	Interesting (47)	Should (98)	Important (93)
Difficult (22)	Feel (17)	Need (34)	Good (58)
Hard (21)	Feeling (17)	Must (27)	Problem (54)
Complex (18)	Felt (12)	Better (25)	Effective (43)
Easily (13)	Like (12)	Bad (15)	Negative (35)
Understand (13)		Needs (15)	

Table 4. Most frequent types (and raw frequencies) of each attitude marker sub-category in the full corpus.

The most frequent complexity markers were often used in relation to the perceived ease or difficulty of a task. Regarding emotion, pupils most frequently assessed whether something was *interesting* and used conjugations of the verb *feel*. The three most frequent morality markers pertain to deontic modality, suggesting that pupils often discuss what action ought to be taken regarding the topic in question. The most frequent quality marker, *important*, was often used to justify why pupils had chosen to discuss the topic in question. Extracts from the corpus

that exemplify how these types were used are presented in the next section.

#### 4.2. Attitude markers across educational contexts and genres

The medians and median absolute deviations per 100 words of attitude markers belonging to each of the sub-categories in the full corpus are shown in Table 5.

	<i>Complexity</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Morality</i>	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Total</i>
FULL CORPUS (N = 135)	0.06 (0.06)	0.08 (0.08)	0.2 (0.16)	0.59 (0.25)	1.11 (0.38)

Table 5. Median frequency (and MAD) per 100 words of attitude markers in full corpus

The median of the total number of attitude markers in the full corpus was 1.11. Reflecting the wider variety of types (see Table 3) belonging to the quality category, these markers were also more frequent overall ( $Mdn = 0.59$ ). In contrast, the complexity category was least frequent ( $Mdn = 0.06$ ).

The medians and median absolute deviations of each attitude sub-category, as well as comparisons across the three educational contexts, are presented in Table 6.

	<i>Complexity</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Morality</i>	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Total</i>
NORWAY (N = 40)	0.09 (0.09)	0.0 (0.0)	0.18 (0.18)	0.54 (0.2)	0.98 (0.25)
SWEDEN (N = 40)	0.05 (0.05)	0.07 (0.07)	0.29 (0.22)	0.5 (0.24)	0.94 (0.42)
UK (N = 55)	0.06 (0.06)	0.18 (0.17)**NS	0.16 (0.12)	0.66 (0.24)*N**S	1.29 (0.48)*N

Table 6. Median frequency (and MAD) per 100 words of attitude markers across educational contexts. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , <sup>N</sup> = Norway, <sup>S</sup> = Sweden, <sup>U</sup> = UK

The total number of attitude markers differed across the three contexts ( $H(2) = 8.04$ ,  $p = .018$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed that the pupils

at British schools ( $Mdn = 1.29$ ) used significantly more attitude markers in total than pupils at Norwegian schools ( $Mdn = 0.98$ ,  $p = .046$ ,  $r = .25$ ), but not significantly more than at Swedish schools ( $Mdn = 0.94$ ,  $p = 0.56$ ,  $r = .24$ ). Regarding sub-categories, emotion markers were significantly different across contexts ( $H(2) = 24.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Emotion markers were more frequent in essays written at British schools ( $Mdn = 0.18$ ) than those written at Norwegian ( $Mdn = 0$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .49$ ) and Swedish schools ( $Mdn = 0.07$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $r = .34$ ). Quality markers were also significantly different across contexts ( $H(2) = 12.75$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and were more frequent in essays from British schools ( $Mdn = 0.66$ ) than essays from Norwegian ( $Mdn = 0.54$ ,  $p = .028$ ,  $r = .27$ ) and Swedish schools ( $Mdn = 0.5$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $r = .34$ ).

The medians and median absolute deviations of each attitude sub-category, as well as comparisons across the five genres, are presented in Table 7.

	<i>Complexity</i>	<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Morality</i>	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Total</i>
POLITICAL (N=60)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.27 (0.22)** <sup>I</sup>	0.59 (0.24)	1.04 (0.31)** <sup>L</sup>
LITERARY (N=20)	0.0 (0.0)	0.0 (0.0)	0.2 (0.13)	0.36 (0.16)	0.73 (0.22)
COMMENTA RY (N=20)	1.05 (0.95)	0.23 (0.13)** <sup>PL</sup>	0.12 (0.08)	0.89 (0.23)** <sup>L</sup>	1.35 (0.41)** <sup>L</sup>
LING. INV. (N=15)	0.07 (0.07)	0.13 (0.13)	0.06 (0.06)	0.61 (0.16)* <sup>L</sup>	0.82 (0.29)
OPINION (N=20)	0.0 (0.0)	0.15 (0.15)	0.5 (0.28)** <sup>CI</sup>	0.62 (0.26)* <sup>L</sup>	1.47 (0.4)** <sup>L</sup>

Table 7. Median frequency (and MAD) per 100 words of attitude markers across genres. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , <sup>P</sup> = political essay, <sup>L</sup> = literary essay, <sup>C</sup> = commentary, <sup>I</sup> = linguistic investigation, <sup>O</sup> = opinion piece

In order to supplement these results, extracts from the corpus are provided to exemplify the trends observed. The total number of attitude markers differed across genres ( $H(4) = 22.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and pairwise comparisons showed that the literary essays ( $Mdn = 0.73$ ) contained significantly fewer attitude markers than the political essays ( $Mdn = 1.04$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $r = .4$ ), commentaries ( $Mdn = 1.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .69$ ) and opinion pieces ( $Mdn = 1.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .7$ ). A number of potential

attitude markers were discounted from the literary essays because the pupils often cited the attitudes of literary characters (5), or reiterated narrative attitudes (6):

- (5) 'He had dreamed of her as a *great* artist [...]. Then she *disappointed* him' (literary essay, Sweden)
- (6) Dorian Grey was a man who *easily* became influenced by people around him (literary essay, Sweden)

Additionally, a number of the pupils who wrote literary essays were required to base their analyses on Kohlberg's theory of morality (Blum 1988). Thus, morality markers were often discounted because they were used in connection with describing, not with evaluating, Kohlberg's theory:

- (7) The first stage [...] is all about being seen as good (literary essay, Sweden)

Of the sub-categories, complexity markers were the least frequently used type of attitude marker in all genres. Nevertheless, while there were no significant differences in the frequencies of complexity markers, different pragmatic trends across the genres were observed. Complexity markers in political essays, literary essays and opinion pieces were more often used to make general statements about how challenging the pupils perceived a task to be:

- (8) If you are born poor it is going to be really *hard* to ever get out. (political essay, Norway)
- (9) Kohlberg's theory is in fact *difficult* to prove in reality. (literary essay, Sweden)
- (10) When we hear the terms 'poverty' or 'inequality', it is far too *easy* to picture a distant, faraway culture. (opinion piece, UK)

In the commentaries, complexity markers were often used in connection with personal experiences regarding compositional struggles (11), and in the linguistic investigations regarding the challenges of conducting research (12, 13):

- (11) I have always found it quite *hard* to produce effective dialogue. (commentary, UK)
- (12) It was a *challenge* for me to organise the data, methodically and coherently (linguistic investigation, UK)
- (13) The transcript from Jimmy Carr's Laughing and Joking show was *easy* to find (linguistic investigation, UK)

Significant differences in the use of emotion markers were found ( $H(4) = 28.41, p < .001$ ). The commentaries ( $Mdn = 0.23$ ) contained significantly more than the political essays ( $Mdn = 0, p < .001, r = .54$ ) and the literary essays ( $Mdn = 0, p = .001, r = .62$ ). These pupils often described their personal emotions related to writing other pieces of coursework:

- (14) I *felt* inspired to set the scene (commentary, UK)
- (15) I was *satisfied* that the structure reflected the tone of the poem (commentary, UK)
- (16) It was my aim to make the opening seem like a typical *mundane* day (commentary, UK)

Although such markers were less frequent in other genres, pupils still expressed emotions for a number of purposes, often using conjugations of the word *interest*. For example, some pupils gave an emotional reason for choosing a topic (17), expressed their personal reaction to the material in question (18, 19), or expressed a reaction to be shared with the reader (20, 21):

- (17) Comedy is a genre which I have had great *interest* in (linguistic investigation, UK)
- (18) This is how I *felt* about the election in 2016 (political essay, UK)
- (19) Something which *surprised* me was the number of similarities both Hunter and Carr exhibited (linguistic investigation, UK)

- (20) The 2016 election is the most *shocking* election of all time (political essay, Norway)
- (21) In terms of euthanasia and rights to die, we cannot continue to *fear* the topic of death (opinion piece, UK)

Morality markers, which were significantly different across genres ( $H(4) = 22.97, p < .001$ ), were more frequent in the political essays ( $Mdn = 0.27$ ) than in the linguistic investigations ( $Mdn = 0.06, p = .009, r = .37$ ), and more frequent in the opinion pieces ( $Mdn = 0.5$ ) than the commentaries ( $Mdn = 0.12, p = .009, r = .52$ ) and the linguistic investigations ( $p = .001, r = .62$ ). In the political essays and opinion pieces, pupils often discussed current affairs, and were consequently more prone to evaluate whether or not something was morally acceptable (22, 23). Deontic markers constituted the most frequent types of morality markers, usually used to argue for actions that ought to be taken (24, 25, 26):

- (22) People got angry at each other for voting on someone as *awful* as Hilary Clinton or *nasty* as Donald Trump (political essay, Norway)
- (23) This implies that today's teenagers do not have any sense of *acceptable* boundaries (opinion piece, UK)
- (24) Governing organs of the USA *need* to come to an agreement (political essay, UK)
- (25) The schools *should* frequently talk about news around the world (political essay, Sweden)
- (26) Prison guards in the UK *must* be empowered to take action on smuggling (opinion piece, UK)

Although quality markers were the most frequent sub-category in all genres, comparing across genres produced significant differences ( $H(4) = 22.66, p < .001$ ). They were significantly less frequent in the literary essays ( $Mdn = 0.36$ ), than in the commentaries ( $Mdn = 0.89, p < .001, r = .72$ ), linguistic investigations ( $Mdn = 0.61, p = .016, r = .53$ ) and opinion pieces ( $Mdn = 0.62, p = .029, r = .47$ ). Among the broad range

of quality markers that were used, *important* occurred most frequently, often as a way of justifying the pupils' own choice of topics and arguments:

- (27) This text has only scratched the surface of a very *important* matter. (political essay, Norway)
- (28) His moral development was therefore *important* for the whole realm (literary essay, Sweden)
- (29) I think it was *important* to introduce magical aspects into this piece (commentary, UK)
- (30) It is *important* to understand the differences in audience of the two texts (linguistic investigation, UK)

The corpus also contained a large number of instances where pupils used quality markers to evaluate the material as either being in some way positive (31, 32, 33) or negative (34, 35, 36):

- (31) In the first paragraph, he puts pathos into *good* use (political essay, Norway)
- (32) There's a *good* reason as to why, children haven't had the time to develop. (literary essay, Sweden)
- (33) With the use of this *positive* imagery the idea is to make the audience feel they can help (linguistic investigation, UK)
- (34) Another *problem* with genetic engineering are the great risks of failure (political essay, Sweden)
- (35) This is a true story about a *bad* car crash I witnessed. (commentary, UK)
- (36) Why are women still labelled in such *negative* ways [...]? (opinion piece, UK)

There were also a range of other qualities linked to, for example, visual aesthetics (37), prestige (38) and humour (39):

- (37) Let's admire the exterior of this sleek and breathtakingly *beautiful* car (opinion piece, UK)

- (38) Scotland could do better as an independent nation because of their *successful* industry (political essay, Norway)
- (39) Often the punchline isn't that *funny* (commentary, UK)

The next section discusses the implications of the results, drawing on findings from previous studies that have investigated attitude in various written contexts.

## 5. Discussion

By drawing on taxonomies used in previous studies and by closely reading a sample of essays, this study offers a more comprehensive operationalisation of attitude than has been used in most previous studies. The findings suggest that pupils in all three educational contexts used a wider range of types and higher frequencies of attitude markers than would be expected in academic writing (e.g. Hyland/Jiang 2016) and in journalism (e.g. Dafouz-Milne 2008). Furthermore, pupils used certain attitude marker sub-categories at different frequencies and with different purposes in each genre. Each of these findings are discussed here in greater depth.

Significant differences were found across the three educational contexts, with pupils at UK schools using the highest frequencies of attitude markers overall. This may reflect that English is taught as a first language in the UK: by being exposed to English in most school subjects (whereas pupils in Norway and Sweden are exposed to English primarily in the English subject only), the UK pupils may be more proficient in using a greater range of attitude marker types. However, it seems that the differences across contexts could be attributed to topics and genres that the pupils worked with. For example, while emotion markers were more frequent in essays written at British schools overall, it was the commentary genre that contained the highest frequency and greatest range of types. This reflects the purpose of the commentaries, in which pupils were to reflect on their personal experiences in

composing a series of coursework pieces (AQA 2013: 15). Thus, an alternative reason for the differences across the three educational contexts may have been the differing national requirements. In the UK, pupils were required, on a national level, to complete pre-determined coursework assignments (AQA 2013, 2019). It may be that the process-oriented structure of these tasks, whereby pupils have more time to write and revise their work, is conducive to eliciting a wider range of attitude marker types. In Norway and Sweden, the curriculum consists of competence aims (Udir 2006; Skolverket 2020), but how these are to be achieved is determined by individual teachers, not by national educational boards. Consequently, it seems that the teachers at the participating schools in Norway and Sweden focused on preparing their pupils for final written exams by holding timed mock exams. These product-oriented approaches may not have granted pupils the opportunity to draw on an equally broad range of attitude types (Badger/White 2000). Thus, while studies have found that attitude markers vary among novice writers with different language backgrounds (e.g. Ozdemir/Longo 2014), but not among professional writers with different language backgrounds (e.g. Noorian/Biria 2010), it remains unclear whether upper secondary pupils in the Norwegian, Swedish and British contexts would express attitude differently had they been given the same task. Future studies might address this by comparing essays written for a single prompt across these educational contexts (Dörnyei 2007: 188), or by comparing how pupils express their attitudes when writing under timed contra process-oriented conditions.

With regards to academic writing, the linguistic investigations probably constituted the most academic-like of the genres represented in this corpus. The linguistic investigations contained 1.29 attitude markers per 100 words in total. This is higher than, for example, Mur Dueñas (2010), who reported 0.81 attitude markers per 100 words in business articles, or Hyland and Jiang (2016), who found 0.31 attitude markers per 100 words in recently published applied linguistics articles. Compared with professional standards, it seems that the pupils expressed their attitudes more frequently than would be expected, but this may be explained by a number of factors. For example, this study used a wider range of search terms to scan the corpus than the studies mentioned, which may have excluded a number of words that express

attitude. Another explanation may be that the pupils often evaluated their own experiences in conducting and writing academic-like studies in order to reflect on what they had learned. While such reflective passages may be seen as a useful pedagogical tool at this educational level (Walker 1985), they would be unnecessary in professional writing.

Regarding journalistic writing, opinion pieces probably constituted the most journalistic-like genre in this corpus. Pupils used 1.58 attitude markers per 100 words, which is higher than in other studies of journalistic writing, such as Fu and Hyland (2014: 7), who found 0.18 per 100 words, and Dafouz-Milne (2008: 103), who found 0.41 per 100 words. Despite the different frequencies reported, these studies found that attitude markers were used for similar purposes to those found in this study. For example, Fu and Hyland (2014: 22) reported that attitude markers were used to evaluate whether something was either positive or negative. They also reported that authors used attitude markers to assume a shared reaction with their readers, which was particularly prominent in the present opinion pieces and political essays. Supporting Dafouz-Milne (2008: 103), deontic markers were the most frequent types of morality markers in this corpus overall, particularly in political essays and opinion pieces where they were used to promote certain actions to take in response to political issues.

Of the genres represented in this study, the literary essays contained the fewest attitude markers. While the pupils who wrote these essays expressed their attitudes to certain degree, evaluative words and phrases were often attributed to literary authors and characters, or to Kohlberg's theory of morality (Blum 1988). While studies have investigated various metadiscoursal features within texts belonging to the field of literature (e.g. Afros/Schryer 2009), none of those reviewed discuss the frequencies of attitude markers. It is therefore difficult to judge the degree to which these upper secondary essays adhered to professional practices.

Overall, although it remains unclear whether pupils in these English as a first and English as a foreign language contexts would express attitude differently given the same prompt, the findings suggest that pupils in these contexts were able to adapt their use of attitude according to the genre in which they were expected to write. For

example, the political analyses and opinion pieces contained higher frequencies of morality markers, while the commentaries contained higher frequencies of emotion and quality markers. Further differences between the genres were observed regarding the pragmatic uses of attitude markers. For example, while complexity markers were used in commentaries to evaluate compositional challenges, they were used in the linguistic investigations to evaluate methodological challenges. Another example is the use of emotion markers, used in the commentaries to react to compositional processes, but used in other genres to justify the choice of topic, or to imply a shared reaction with the reader. Like Uccelli, Dobbs and Scott (2019), these observations illustrate the value of considering the pragmatic choices that pupils make rather than focusing only on attitude marker frequencies.

While Thompson and Hunston (1999) argued that “the term *evaluation* is [...] slippery”, this study approaches attitudinal features in upper secondary essays using a more elaborate taxonomy of attitude than has been used in most previous studies. While some attitude markers may have been overlooked, the combination of corpus-based and corpus-driven methods used for this study helped to account for the range of attitudinal expressions present in this particular data set. The results thus provide further insight into features of upper secondary pupil writing, a demographic who frequently engage in essay writing tasks, but who have received little attention in previous research. In order to further investigate upper secondary writing, future research could account for whether pupils express their attitudes accurately and appropriately.

## 6. Conclusion

By investigating the types and frequencies of attitude markers in upper secondary pupil essays across educational contexts and genres, this study contributes to understanding how attitude is expressed at pre-tertiary levels. Furthermore, this study offers an operationalisation of

attitude that accounts for the content of the current corpus and incorporates a greater range of attitude marker types than used in previous studies. The results showed that pupils across the three educational contexts expressed their attitudes more frequently and using a greater range of types than would be expected in professional writing (e.g. Dafouz-Milne 2008; Mur Dueñas 2010). While the UK essays contained higher frequencies of attitude markers alongside a greater range of types, it seems that attitude varied more according to the genres in which pupils were required to write and pupils across the three contexts were able to adapt their use of attitude markers to the genre in question. This supports the notion that exposing pupils to a variety of genres at the upper secondary level may help to prepare them for the various genres that they may face upon leaving school (e.g. Tribble 2010). Furthermore, pupils may be able to draw on a broader palette of attitudinal features when writing under process-oriented conditions (Badger/White 2000). Thus, the findings from this study may, for example, be relevant for English teachers who aim to guide their pupils regarding the context-dependent nature of expressing attitude.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ion Drew, Oliver Traxel, Maria Kuteeva, Milica Savic, Caroline Gentens and Liviana Galiano for their invaluable contributions to this paper. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the pupils and teachers for their cooperation and to the anonymous reviewers for their detailed and constructive input.

## Appendix: Attitude marker search terms

COMPLEXITY (18): advanced, basic, challenge, challenges, challenging, complex, complicated, difficult, easier, easily, easy, hard, perplexing, struggle, understand, understandable, understanding, understood

EMOTION (43): agree, appealing, calm, depressing, disappointed, embarrassing, enjoy, fear, feel, feeling, feelings, feels, felt, frightening, happy, hope, hoped, hopefully, hoping, interest, interested, interesting, interests, like, love, loved, mundane, pleasure, prefer, proud, sad, satisfied, scary, shock, shocking, surprise, surprised, surprising, surprisingly, tense, tension, terrifying, unfortunately

MORALITY (41): acceptable, appropriate, awful, bad, better, blame, correct, cruel, cruelty, dangerous, democratic, egocentric, evil, fault, forbidden, good, immoral, improve, innocent, misleading, moral, morally, must, nasty, need, needed, needing, needs, ok, okay, racist, right, should, taboo, terrible, unfair, value, well, worse, worst, wrong

ASCRIBING QUALITIES (114): accurate, attractive, average, bad, beautiful, beauty, beneficial, better, bright, capable, comedic, comfortable, confident, confused, conservative, cool, correct, crazy, critical, crucial, dramatic, effective, effectively, engaging, entertaining, essential, exaggerated, exciting, fault, friendly, fun, fundamental, funny, good, great, harsh, helpful, honest, humorous, ideal, importance, important, improve, improved, improvement, improves, influential, intellectual, intense, intimate, key, minor, mistake, mistakes, modern, mundane, natural, naturally, negative, negatively, nice, odd, okay, ordinary, perfect, perfectly, poor, popular, positive, powerful, prime, problem, problematic, prominent, proper, reasonable, relatable, relevant, responsible, right, safe, serious, significant, strange, strong, stronger, stupid, subtle, success, successful, successfully, superior, surprise, surprised, terrible, threatening, traditional, tragedy, tragic, trouble, unique, unusual, useful, vague, value, vital, vivid, vulnerable, weak, well, wild, wonderful, worse, wrong

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ROBERT MACINTYRE

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

### Abstract

The digital medium has transformed communication and the way that knowledge is presented. This influences many spheres of life including academia where digital literacy skills are of major importance in the composing of academic texts. Technology is allowing for an ease of access to information and this is affecting the use of citation as writers begin to more frequently use sources which are available electronically (Pérez-Llantada, 2016). In recent decades, the citation practices of academic writers have been widely-researched (e.g. Hyland, 1999; Pecorari, 2006; Petrić, 2007) but, while many of these studies have focused on expert writers at the postgraduate and professional level, there has been less written about novice student writers writing in an EFL environment. Therefore, this study analyses a corpus of research papers written by Japanese university students writing in English. The corpus was examined for the use of evidentials and their form and function assessed. By understanding more about how student writers use this important metadiscoursal feature we can assist learners in developing the resources and strategies necessary to successfully integrate sources in their writing.

### 1. Introduction

Writing remains the most important way in which students in academic life demonstrate their understanding of their subjects. This importance adds to the significance of the instruction that students receive in EAP academic writing classes as this will shape their future university lives. However, fundamental issues remain, especially when we consider exactly what academic writing is. In her review of EAP writing manuals, Bennett (2009: 52) found that there was a broad consensus as to what English written academic discourse is and this was distinguished by a number of general principles:

As regards the *general principles* underlying this discourse, it is clear from the emphasis upon clarity, economy, rational argument supported by evidence, caution and restraint, and the incorporation of accepted theory through referencing and citation, that the scientific paradigm still dominates, even in subjects like literature, history and law.

There is therefore the impression, reinforced by these manuals, that academic writing is a monolithic entity whose practices learners must adhere to in order to be successful. However, work by Hyland (2001, 2004, 2008, 2012) has shown that this is not the case and writers in different disciplines represent themselves in very different ways. The instructional materials used by many EAP writing classes in universities portray academic writing as a single entity where it is in fact more diverse, causing a number of problems for student writers, especially if their L1 is different and they also have to accommodate writing conventions which differ considerably from their own language.

This raises another issue of how to teach academic writing. If academic writing is discipline-specific should we be teaching it as one entity or focussing on the specific disciplinary needs of the students? Spack (1988, as cited in Cooper/Bikowski, 2007: 207) maintains that “the disciplinary needs of EAP students are simply too diverse to be practically taught in EAP courses, and moreover, EAP instructors are generally not qualified to teach such discipline-specific tasks.” However, Hyland (2011: 53) believes that academic literacy needs to be “embedded in the beliefs and practices of individual disciplines” and that EAP should allow students to contextualize their writing allowing them to argue their claims persuasively. The pedagogy to teach

academic writing does not match the findings of the research and this is clearly a contentious issue but precisely which is the best way to teach academic writing is not clear. This lack of clarity causes problems both for the students trying to learn and the instructors trying to teach academic writing.

Another issue, connected to EAP pedagogy, is the different genres and writing tasks that the students are required to write in university. In their study of the writing tasks assigned in graduate courses at an American university, Cooper/Bikowski (2007) found that a number of different assignments were set, including a research paper, book review, report on an experiment, case study, summary, essay, etc. These different tasks and genres would require differing academic writing skills and varying levels of discipline-specific knowledge. In fact, in the university in which I carried out my research, the students in my study had not yet decided their major so any discipline-specific teaching would be difficult. Hyland's premise that knowledge of the discipline is important, especially in postgraduate courses where students are more aware of the disciplinary practices of their area, is acknowledged, but for many undergraduates the tasks they are asked to perform do not always require this awareness.

Whether disciplinary practices are taught or not it is clear that research has indicated that academic writing is not a monolith and by teaching students that it is we are restricting their abilities to express themselves. This leads to confusion and especially for L2 students who have an identity as a writer in their L1 it is difficult for these student writers to express themselves as they are constrained rather than engaged by academic writing.

Based on this dilemma it is no surprise that L2 students writing their academic papers on computer in English are relying more and more on easy-to-access digital sources to support their ideas and complete their assignments. However, while technology has brought many advantages, its ease of use has also brought problems. It is becoming much more important for university students to be digitally literate to write academic papers that are clearly sourced and avoid the pitfalls that a 'cut and paste' convenience bring to writing. This has implications for how we teach academic writing and as Belcher (2017: 84) argues:

The critical question that teachers should pose to themselves may be less about whether or not to actively bring technology into the classroom, and, instead, much more about how to help language and literacy learning writers approach technology use in mindful, reasoned ways that support their communicative goals while engaging with digitally accessible real-world audiences.

Rather than just leaving the students adrift in the sea of information available online we need to provide a ‘raft’ on which they can navigate through the tricky waters and enable them to use the information and position their arguments as credible, reliable sources of knowledge.

In order to find out more about the use of digital technology by student writers in an EFL environment to find sources to use in their academic writing, this paper examines the use of evidentials in the research papers of Japanese university students writing in English. Evidentials are features of metadiscourse which refer to the source of information from other texts (Hyland/Tse, 2004: 169). A pedagogical approach which involves the explicit instruction of evidentials is also examined to discover if it would have an effect on the citation practices of the student writers. To this end, these research questions were formed to guide this study:

1. How do student writers obtain and use sources to support their ideas in the writing of academic research papers?
2. What is the effect of the explicit teaching of evidentials on the citation practices of these student writers?

## 2. Method

A year-long academic writing course was taught to second-year university students studying English in a four-year program at a Japanese university. The students in this department receive two years’ instruction in academic writing: in the first-year the basics of essay

writing are covered, and in the second, they are expected to write research papers. In this case, the participants wrote four research papers in a year-long course. These research papers formed the basis of a corpus which was examined for the features of metadiscourse including evidentials. The final corpus consisted of 188,565 words and there were 21 participants.

The researcher coded the corpus for features of metadiscourse but to improve reliability a second coder who was familiar in its features and definitions according to Hyland/Tse (2004) independently coded a sample of the corpus. Miles/Huberman (1994) suggest a figure of 80% agreement on the consistency of coding as being reliable and we found that when we compared results we had achieved a figure of 83%.

The coded-research papers were then used to stimulate recall in interviews as to how and why the participants used the evidence in their writing i.e. their personal citation practices.

In order to examine the pedagogical effect of the explicit instruction of metadiscoursal features including evidentials, another corpus was collected. This class also wrote four research papers over the course of a year, but they received no explicit instruction into the features of metadiscourse whereas the first did. This corpus had 20 participants and consisted of 163,557 words. The form and function of the evidentials used by the two groups were then compared to ascertain what effects explicit instruction had had.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 How do student writers obtain and use sources to support their ideas in the writing of academic research papers?

Figure 1 shows the sources of the information used by the participants in the study, and it clearly shows that the majority of them are using the internet, especially Google.

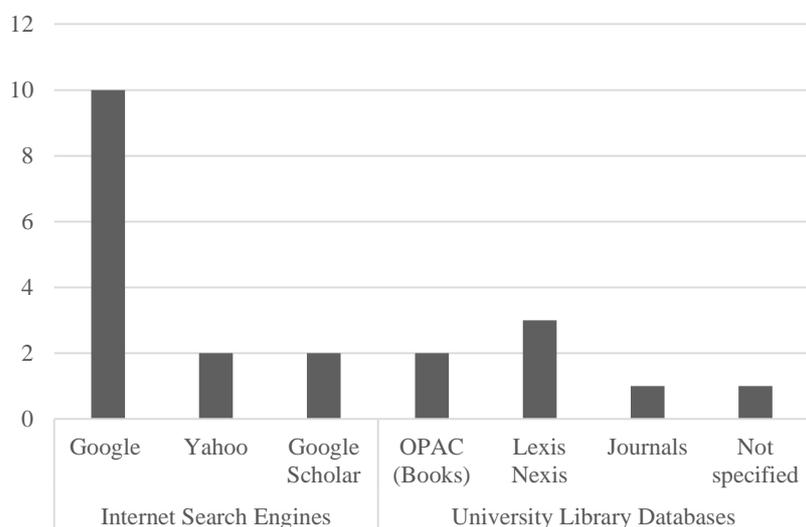


Figure 1. Sources of citations used in participant's research papers.

In a study by Thompson et al. (2013), when they also examined the research-based assignments of L2 university students, they found similar results with the use of internet sources and the criteria for guiding the selection of sources were very similar. The criteria given for selecting sources included:

- authoritativeness
- reliability
- academic
- supporting the writer's opinion

However, when the participants in my study were interviewed about this, although many commented it was not good to use blogs and Wikipedia, they did not have particularly strong justifications for what actually constituted 'reliable' and 'authoritative'. Some of their criteria included:

- If it's a big company...

- If the source is a newspaper...
- A very famous (source) like the BBC, *New York Times*...
- I try to get a resource from a website which seems to be organized by some institution...

As their instructor I found this quite problematic as one of the issues about the use of the internet is the sheer volume of information that can be accessed and it seems clear that the students were not critical enough about this information. Our pedagogy needs to provide students with guidance as to what makes a source 'reliable' and 'authoritative' and, therefore, worthy of using in academic writing.

In respect of the use of digital media it is not only the finding of sources but how to use them that is being affected. Figure 2 represents the sources of the information used by the students to format their citations and 43% referenced online databases such as Citation Machine, Bib Me, and Easy Bib. In itself this is not a problem but it does tend to add to the impression that students are relying too much on the technology without actually understanding how and when to cite. In composition classes we focus on writing skills but digital literacy is becoming more and more important.

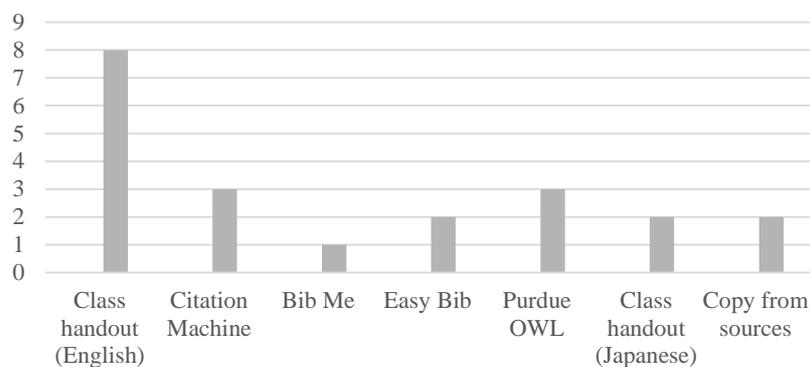


Figure 2. References used by participants to format their citations.

This possible lack of understanding of citation practices could be seen in the overuse of information in the in-text citations of some of the participants. In the two examples below the students use the source, the title, the author, and the date in the citation and much of this information is only necessary in the reference list at the end of their papers.

- (1) According to New York Time's article, "Why won't Hollywood cast Asian actors?" by Keith Chow, 2016, Hollywood mentions that appointing non-white actors is risky.
- (2) According to (Korean mother-in-law's mantra: Please cook for my son. Lee, C. 2016, July 11), Kim Eun-ji a 39-year-old wife and also a registered nurse at the Korea Herald told her story of her 9-year marriage life with her husband and the relationship with her mother-in-law.

In these examples from the corpus, 'according to' is used to cite the sources and, as can be seen from Table 1, it was the most frequently used evidential.

<i>Evidential</i>	<i>Raw number</i>
ACCORDING TO	432
SHOW	79
SAY	79
STATE	53
CLAIM	44

Table 1. Most frequent evidentials used in the corpus

In fact, nearly half (47%) of all evidentials, were 'according to' and the five most frequent as shown in Figure 3 represented 74% of all evidentials used. This is also interesting because these evidentials are all integral citations which place the author in the subject position, which reinforces the previous comment that one of the reasons for the participants to use sources was the authority of the writer. The use of integral citations signalled the authority of the source. Hyland (2005: 161) examined the use of evidentials in different disciplines and noticed that more integral and subject citation forms were used in social science and humanities papers. He hypothesizes that these are "helping to construct an authorial self by positioning the writer in relation to other

views.” However, while this is plausible in his corpus of expert academic writers with knowledge of the conventions of their discipline, in the case of this study of student academic writers, it is far more likely that they simply see the author as being an authority on the subject whose ideas support what they want to argue.

Also, in the example below the student has used the author’s name several times, both in the sentence and in the citation. It seems that they are not sure about how to cite and therefore, to ‘be safe’ they add too much information. This could be caused by reliance on the online citation software because the students simply input the information without realizing what is required in an in-text citation and in a reference list and what the differences are.

- (3) Hodal also explains about a study from the World Bank suggesting, that by women making as much money as men, global economy would “enrich” by approximately \$160tn (Hodal, 2018). Not only will it benefit just a country, but by making gender equality possible, it could create global wealth boost of \$23,620 (Hodal, 2018). Both Japan and the United States could take advantage of such economic jump.

Another aspect of the possible confusion of in-text citation and reference/works cited list is highlighted by this example below:

- (4) In April 2017, AI and facial recognition technology were introduced to survey the jaywalkers. The Shenzhen Police set a big screen beside every crosswalk to project the jaywalkers’ faces and documents. The jaywalkers were not only publicly shamed and named, but also this information was sent to the center of the city’s government. This technology, providing to display the violators’ faces on screen is continuing to evolve. The local government is now concurring with social media like WeChat. They aim to make a system where the violators immediately receive a text message when the jaywalk.

In this example the writer uses specific information and was told it needed to be cited. However, in the extract from an email sent by the writer below they are clearly confused as they believe that the information was correctly cited. If you look at the corpus extract, there were no in-text citations and the writer was referring to the fact that they had referenced the source at the end of their paper.

- (5) If I was to say one thing, you said that the Shenzhen part is specific and needs citations, but the article called “In China’s new surveillance state, everyone will be watched, reviewed, and rated” was used as information (as to research fundamental basics, and the same information in Japanese was just used for further research), and this one is clearly referred.

In this instance as the instructor I advised the student that if they did not cite correctly they would be plagiarizing and therefore would fail the assignment. The student re-submitted a new draft but still did not cite their sources and was failed. However, were they ‘innocent’ or ‘guilty’ of plagiarism? After they had received a warning, would they purposefully attempt to deceive or was it simply that they still did not know how to cite properly? As Casanave (2017: 186) writes: “novice writers tend not to see that they are interacting with other authors when they write from sources, but instead see sources as authoritative funds of information that just need to be transferred into their own writing.”

This is even more problematic for L2 writers as language proficiency is an issue. They may not have sufficient language resources to paraphrase or summarize the original sources and therefore unintentionally plagiarize. L2 student writers can have issues with citation practices and language, but there have also been studies which suggest problems caused by the use of the internet. Sutherland-Smith (2005) examined the use of internet sources by ESL students in Australia and, when interviewed, some of them believed that information on the internet was common knowledge and did not need citing. As was mentioned earlier, while the use of digital media seems to make writing easier, it also brings challenges for student writers who face issues with how to use the technology responsibly to avoid problems such as plagiarism. This class used Turnitin (the plagiarism detection software which was required to be used by the university) to submit their assignments, but whereas this use of technology does detect ‘textual borrowings’, it does not detect the intention of the writer to purposefully use the information as their own. Both ourselves as educators and our students are relying on technology to help us complete our tasks, but we need to be more circumspect and instead of submitting to the machines learn how to use them to support our needs.

### 3.2 What is the effect of the explicit teaching of evidentials on the citation practices of these student writers?

In order to examine the effects of explicitly teaching evidentials on the citation practices of the student writers, another corpus of student writing was collected. The writers in corpus A and B both wrote four research papers (RP) over the course of a year's class in academic writing, but whereas A received instruction in the features of metadiscourse including evidentials, B received no instruction. As can be seen in Table 2, the student writers in A used evidentials more frequently than those in B.

	<i>RP1</i>	<i>RP2</i>	<i>RP3</i>	<i>RP4</i>	<i>Total</i>
A	4.8	4	5.9	4.9	4.9
B	3.4	3	4.5	4.3	3.8

Table 2. The frequency of evidentials used in the corpora (per 1,000 words).

It could be hypothesized that as the writers in corpus A were exposed to the features of metadiscourse they were more aware of the features of academic discourse, and therefore used more evidence from academic sources to support their ideas, and subsequently more evidentials. This is supported by the frequency in usage of self-mentions as in corpus A. the frequency per 1,000 words was 1.3, whereas it was more than double in B at 3.3. The more frequent use of self-mentions in corpus B can be seen in the example below as the writer uses a more personal tone and examples from their own experience to support their ideas.

- (6) Watching movies are one of my favorite things to do in my free time. Whether it is an action, a romcom, a drama on Netflix series, I prefer anything but mostly foreign films with foreign actors. Maybe this is because I spent my elementary school years in L.A and grew up watching Hanna Montana or Sponge Bob rather than the Japanese TV shows. Even today, watching films in English feels right for me.

Although there was a difference in the frequency of the evidentials used between the two corpora, there was no significant difference in the problems of their usage, as the writers in corpus B had many of the same issues with their citation practices. For example, in the extract below the writer includes too much information in the text, most of which would be expected to be used at the end of the paper in the list of references.

- (7) For example, according to the article by Eugene Scott posted on "The Washington Post" on March 15th, 2 police officers responded to an 911 call and shot 20 bullets at an unarmed black man, Stephon Clark ending up to killing him in his backyard. The police say they shot him, because they saw an object in the black man's hand. The Washington post by Julie Tate on "Police shooting data," revealed that from the police tracking footage installed from 2015, that 987 people have been killed in 2017 by police using fatal force. Although the data from the article "Nationwide, police shot and killed nearly 1000 people in 2017" posted on January 6th 2018, showed that the number of black males being killed by police have slightly decreased, there is still high rates as statistics show.

In the next extract the writer uses specific information which should have been cited but was not.

- (8) Even after refugees get out of their country, it doesn't mean that they can definitely go to Europe and not all of them can go to Europe. There are about 4million refugees caused by the civil war in Syria. 1.94 million people is in turkey, 1.11 million in Lebanon, 630 thousands in Jordan and 250 thousands in Iraq. This means that only few people went to Europe. This is due to their economic status, it takes lots of money and they have to pay hundreds and thousands of dollars to employ a person that helps them to illegally enter the country. Most of the refugee therefore choose to go to the nearby country. Only 14 percent of the refugees in turkey are able to enter the refugee camp that is ran by the government.

The problems in citation practices were similar between the writers in the different corpora, but apart from the more frequent usage of evidentials, there was little evidence to suggest that there had been an effect in explicitly teaching the use of evidentials to the writers in corpus A.

In their study of argumentative essays in a L2 English composition class, Taguchi et al. (2013: 428) discovered that the 'higher-rated essays used both specific author reference as well as attributive language more frequently than the lower essays.' Therefore, to investigate a potential effect of explicitly teaching about evidentials a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. The two variables were the frequency of evidentials per paper and the grade the writer received for the paper. The hypothesis being that in the experimental group (Corpus A) as they had used evidentials more frequently this should have an effect on their grades, whereas no effect would be seen in the control group (Corpus B) who had not been taught about evidentials and had used them less frequently. The Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.16$ ,  $p = 0.14$  ( $N=89$ ) was found for the experimental group (Corpus A), and for the control group (Corpus B) the figure was  $r = 0.00$ ,  $p = 0.99$  ( $N=80$ ). This means that although there was a weak correlation between the frequency of evidentials and grade in Corpus A, there was none in Corpus B. However, the statistical difference between them is not significant, which is clearly shown in Figure 3.

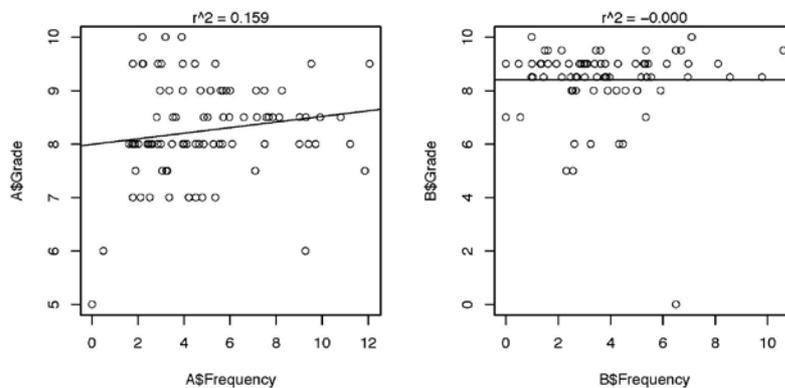


Figure 3. Scatterplot representing the correlation between frequency of use of evidentials and grade (out of 10) of the papers in the corpus

In Figure 3, the correlation values, and regression line for Corpus A is shown on the left, and for Corpus B on the right, and this graphically represents the lack of correlation.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study has described the effect of the use of technology on the citation practices of student academic writers in an EFL environment. It has highlighted the widespread use of the Internet by these writers to find sources to support their ideas, and reference sites which are used to cite them correctly in appropriate styles. This use of technology has facilitated the academic writing of the students in the study, but this convenience has also brought problems. There is a danger that the student writers rely on their 'machines' rather than actually knowing how and when to cite. Many composition programs focus on the importance of academic literacy, but it is clear that this must involve the use of technology and how it can be used ethically to support our students' writing.

In this paper, I have introduced an attempt to explicitly teach the use of evidentials to help in the student writers' citation practices but the effects of this were limited. However, I do believe that the explicit instruction of other features of metadiscourse, not just evidentials, would have a positive effect on the academic writing of my students. This is an area of future research and I completely agree with Wette (2017: 111) who wrote that "sustained, explicit instruction and discussion, supported by a variety of task types contextualized into specific disciplines and outputs, and constructive, targeted feedback are needed to build confidence and skill." However, this instruction in academic literacy must take into account the digital literacy skills that are now so important for our students.

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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.

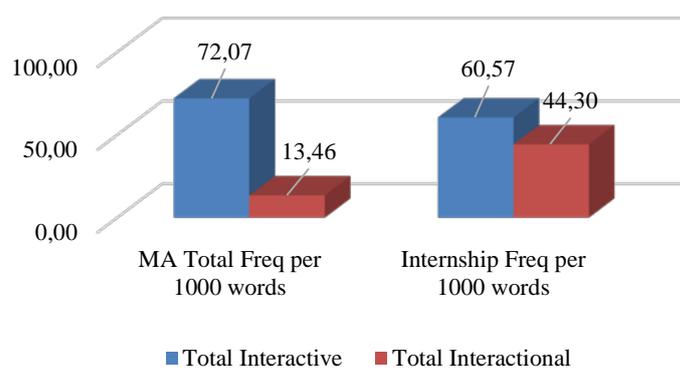


Figure 1. Total metadiscourse distribution in MA dissertations and internship reports.

<i>Metadiscourse</i>	<i>2-tailed t-test value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
TOTAL METADISCOURSE	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.

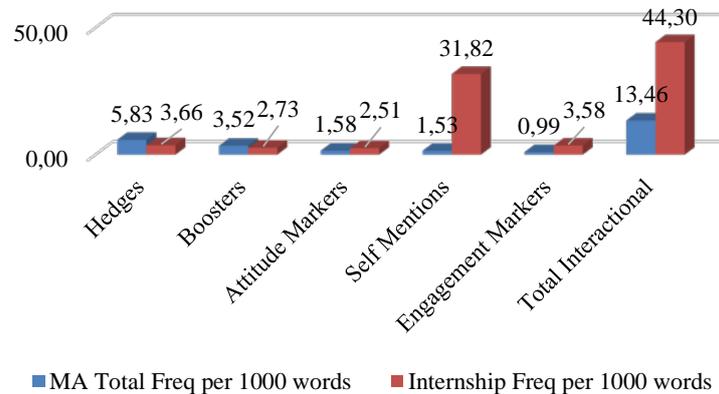


Figure 2. Interactional metadiscourse marker distribution in MA dissertations and internship reports.

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.

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## PART 2. SCREEN-READY: DIGITAL GENRES



VESNA BOGDANOVIĆ/DRAGANA GAK

## Creating a trusting student-professor relationship: Engagement markers in academic e-mail communication

### Abstract

E-mails present an interpersonal computer-mediated communication and a most-widely used form of digital communication. In the formal academic setting, digital interaction between students and professors, although used on daily bases, frequently requires students to deliver higher pragmatic competence and language awareness to reflect power asymmetry. However, it also provides an opportunity for lowering the power distance settings, and for the utilization of engagement markers in order to establish and maintain a more accommodating and beneficent environment. As the markers involving the reader into the context, engagement markers explicitly build the relationship between the students and their professors. Using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the paper will demonstrate how the use of engagement markers as a distinct metadiscourse category in student-professor e-mail communication facilitates interaction and establishes a more trusting relationship. Using the corpus of student e-mails to professors, in both Serbian and English, the analysis will focus on the lexical elements (second person pronouns, imperatives, question forms, etc.) that explicitly address professor as the participant in the e-mail content, thus creating a more amiable context and a low power distance setting. The results will demonstrate the differences in the use of engagement markers in English with the distinct formal communication and in Serbian with less lexical formal engagement markers. Finally, the results will reveal the distinctive use of metadiscourse markers in

digital environment and the informal tendencies that are gradually prevailing over the formal communication.

## 1. Introduction

E-mails present a most-widely used form of interpersonal computer-mediated communication between students and university professors (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; Alcón 2013b). In the formal academic setting, digital interaction between students and professors requires students to deliver higher pragmatic competence and language awareness to reflect power asymmetry (Spencer-Oatey 1997; Hofstede 2001). However, it also provides an opportunity for lowering the power distance settings, and for the utilization of engagement markers in order to establish and maintain a more accommodating and beneficent environment.

Faculty staff may express their concern about the frequency of e-mails, their content and their linguistic forms. Complaints are related to unreasonable requests, copying notes from classes, inappropriate openings and closings, spelling and grammar mistakes (Kočović 2015), or impolite tone (Hardford/Bardovi-Harlig 1996; Glater 2006). Students, on the other hand, may prefer e-mails due to spatial and “a healthy” distance (Glater 2006: 3), possibility of directness (Cameron 2003), absence of evident social context (Baron 1984), or simply preference for modern technology (Baron 1984; Halliday 1990). Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) suggests that it is possible that e-mails have not been taught properly, and thus students are simply uncertain about e-mail etiquette. Therefore, there is an obvious need for students to be provided with appropriate models, a feedback on the written e-mails, prior to being involved in academic communication with their professors. Likewise, they may be introduced to metadiscourse markers as a valuable linguistic tool in the digital dialogue.

As the markers involving the reader into the context, engagement markers explicitly build the relationship between the students and their professors. Using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the paper

will demonstrate how the use of engagement markers as a distinct metadiscourse category in student-professor e-mail communication facilitates interaction and establishes a more trusting relationship. Using the corpus of student e-mails to professors, in both Serbian and English, the analysis will focus on the lexical elements (second person pronouns, imperatives, question forms, etc.) that explicitly address professors as the participants in the e-mail content, thus creating a more amiable context and a low power distance setting.

## 2. Theoretical background

E-mails are considered a digital form of communication, combining elements of both written and oral communicative styles, in order to achieve a certain pragmatic function (Bou-Franch 2011). Though a form that is not frequently used nowadays, it can still be related to real-life situations between speakers of different social ranks writing in different situations (e.g., as workplace request e-mails, see Ho 2018), including the computer communication between students and their professors (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2012; Alcón 2013a). Alpay (2005: 7) emphasizes that e-mail writing provides a number of benefits: logistical convenience, especially if participants are based in disparate locations; time and space to express all ideas and opinions in a convenient manner; and the automatic documentation of communication for later reflection. On the other hand, it can create a number of potential problems due to the social distance (Barón/Ortega 2018: 149), incoherent dialogue, and ambiguities in the interpretation (Alpay 2005: 7).

To understand e-mail communication, a number of studies (Ford 2006; Allami/Serajfard 2012; Chen 2015) carried out experiments with students writing e-mails for specifically created situations, though these tasks may have lost authenticity (Bardovi-Harlig 2013: 7). Their results led to a number of studies related to the pedagogical perspective of e-mail writing, presenting aspects to be taught in order to avoid problems in real-life situations (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2015; Barón/Ortega

2018). Furthermore, authors were interested in opening and closing sentences in e-mails (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011), politeness aspects (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006; Hendriks 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2016; Kim/Lee 2017) and speech act performances (Chen 2001; Biesenbach-Lucas 2006).

In e-mails, selecting the form of address and complimentary form are of great significance, since the correspondents utilize these elements to perceive their relationships (Bjørge 2007). The appropriate level of formality in e-mails is influenced by how well one knows the recipient, whether they have already established a relationship, whether the recipient dislikes e-mails without certain elements such as greetings and sign-off or finds them unnecessary, and finally, by personal style and preferences of both sender and receiver (Bjørge 2007). The authors also suggest (following Ardila 2003) that, culturally, new generations might be less formal, which may affect their pragmatic choice. Ardila (2003) claims that, in the university setting (in Spain in the period between 1960s and 1990s), the informal addressing has become more preferred than the formal one. This is the suggestion by the present study as well.

There are a number of structures that may help students gain their professors' trust, engaging them in a digital communication. Research presents diverse linguistic features that are used by writers in order to shape their texts to meet the expectations of the readers (Swales 1990; Hyland 2000). Students as writers need to present their argumentation, interpretation and requests so that professors and readers are likely to find them persuasive and credible. In order to construct an academic identity that can be recognized as positive and trusting, writers may use diverse metadiscourse markers, such as self-mentions (e.g., Ivanic 1998; Hyland 2001b; Akbas/Hardman 2017), hedges and boosters (Hyland 1998a; Akbas/Hardman 2018), interpersonal metadiscourse (Crismore 1989; Hyland 1998b; Bogdanović/Mirović 2018; Ho 2018), stance markers (Hyland 1999; McGrath/Kuteeva 2012), or engagement markers (Hyland 2001a; Allami/Serajfard 2012). Likewise, a number of authors focused on the differences in metadiscourse markers in academic writing when writing in L1 and L2 (e.g., Mirović/Bogdanović 2016; Hatipoğlu/Algi 2018).

Thus, one of the possibilities to engage readers into the academic dialogue via e-mails is the use of engagement markers. These markers

explicitly build a relationship with the reader (Hyland 2005), trying to focus their attention, guide them through interpretations, and include them in the dialogue (Hyland 2001a). Using engagement markers, writers anticipate reader's background knowledge, interests, and interpersonal expectations; they manage their impression of the writer, and try to monitor their understanding and response. Hence, they seem to be appropriate markers to be used by students to appeal to their professors.

One more important aspect in the student-professor relationship, influencing this digital communication, is the power distance. As one of four dimensions of culture, Hofstede (2001) defines power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 2001: 98). In an educational system, according to Hofstede's research (2001: 100-102, 107) a high power distance educational situation comprises inequality in a teacher-student relationship: teachers should be treated with respect, the educational process is teacher-centred, teachers do not expect to be contradicted or criticised, teaching is fact-oriented, and students are not encouraged to speak up in classes. This contrasts with low power distance educational situations, which comprise teacher-student equality: teaching is student-centred, critical discussion is expected, and teachers have to be prepared to be challenged in class.

The power distance index from 1991, for Yugoslavia, and projected for Serbia, was 86 (Hofstede 2001: 45-46, 501).<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Serbia used to be a high power distance society, where hierarchy and inequality were accepted and addressed as such. In a more recent research, Nedeljković (2011) calculated the power distance index to be approximately 56 for Serbia, while Podrug et al. (2014) calculated it to be 51.91. The authors clearly confirmed that Serbia moved from high to low(er) power distance society, evident in the fact that more people refuse to accept social inequalities and demonstrate a growing demand for individual social independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Power distance rankings are based on averages; the maximum score for a country can be 104, and low power distance cultures have their index score 40 or below (Hofstede, 2001).

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of engagement markers in e-mail communication between students and professors, focusing on both qualitative and quantitative research. The creation of the trusting relationship among discourse participants should explain whether students use engagement markers, how they use them when they write in L1 (Serbian) and L2 (English), and whether the power distance academic setting present in the university influences the student-professor relationship in any aspect.

### 3. Methodology

Over the course of one year, from September 2018 to September 2019, professors from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia and University of Maribor, Slovenia, collected e-mails sent by their students enrolled at academic undergraduate and graduate studies. Only initial e-mails in the communication were included in the corpus. These e-mails were part of regular written communication between students and their professors for which the students used no templates. The aim of the project was to analyse a number of diverse linguistic, interlinguistic and cultural elements, as well as contexts related to this aspect of academic writing.

The corpus for this study includes 124 e-mails in English and 150 e-mails in Serbian, with approximately the same number of words (6,544 words in e-mails in English and 6,469 words in e-mails in Serbian). These particular e-mails from the overall corpus were written by undergraduate students of engineering and management from two universities<sup>2</sup> to three professors teaching ESP courses at these two universities.

Engagement markers, as a focus of this study, were analysed following the Hyland's (2001a: 553, 2005a, 2005b) taxonomy. Hyland established the taxonomy following the research about interactive

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<sup>2</sup> E-mails written by Slovene students in Slovene were part of the project, yet not selected for this research.

features of academic writing (e.g. Bondi 1999; Hyland 1999, 2000) and on grammars (Halliday 1994; Biber et al. 1999). The analysis during the project revealed that the taxonomy could be applied to the corpus in this study. Hence, the engagement markers analysed include the following:

1. Questions, both real and rhetorical;  
[e.g. *Can you please check?* (E32);<sup>3</sup> *Can we settle for another day?* (E16)]
2. Inclusive first person, indefinite, and second person pronouns and items referring to readers;  
[e.g. *We will have exam preparation* (E61); *I kindly ask you to assist me* (E83)]
3. Directives, including imperatives, obligation modals referring to actions of the reader (must, ought, should, have to, need to), and adjectival predicates controlling a complement to- clause, directing readers to a particular action;  
[e.g. *I need support* (E42); *Is it possible that I apply* (E13)]
4. References to shared knowledge;  
[e.g. *In your last email message you let us know* (E74); *Of course, we guarantee we will attend your classes* (E68)]
5. Asides addressed to the reader, marked off from the ongoing flow of text.  
[e.g. *To be honest I totally forgot* (E6); *Unlucky, I was in a bit hurry yesterday* (E86)]

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<sup>3</sup> All examples are taken from the corpus. E-mails in Serbian are marked by S and e-mails in English by E, followed by the number of e-mail in the corpus. All examples in Serbian are written originally and translated into English. These are referred by the same number of the example, while in the examples listed, Serbian original is marked with (a) and English translation is marked with the same number and (b).

#### 4. Corpus analysis

During the project realization, there was evidence that students tend not to perceive e-mails as formal pieces of academic writing. Rather, students tend to write in lower power distance context and tend to be less formal. Following that direction, one would assume that engagement markers are plenty to be found in students' digital correspondence. As this study will demonstrate, it is only partially correct.

<i>Engagement markers</i>	<i>E-mails in English Total no. of instances</i>	<i>E-mails in Serbian Total no. of instances</i>
<b>QUESTIONS</b>		
real	26	103
rhetorical	0	0
<b>READER PRONOUNS</b>		
inclusive first person pronouns	10	2
indefinite pronouns	1	1
second person pronouns	64	45
<b>DIRECTIVES</b>		
imperatives	1	0
obligation modals	3	2
adjectival predicates in <i>to</i> -clauses	6	14
<b>SHARED KNOWLEDGE</b>	4	8
<b>PERSONAL ASIDES</b>	20	2

Table 1. Occurrence of engagement markers in students' e-mails.

Table 1 displays the number of markers found in students' e-mails. All examples were examined in their sentential context and both authors evaluated that they only addressed readers, i.e. professors. The examples were treated as a single instance regardless the number of words, and only instances were counted. As Table 1 demonstrates, when students write in English, they prefer second person pronouns as a manner to acknowledge the need to meet the reader's expectations of solidarity and membership in the academic in-group (Hyland 2001a: 555). Students also ask real questions when writing in English. However, these are used much more when they write in Serbian, thus

rhetorically positioning the professor as a critic who will have to enter the discourse and answer these questions (Hyland 2001a: 557). As a formal way of addressing their professors, students use a great number of second person pronouns in e-mails in Serbian as well. In order to observe the student-professor relationship more closely, each engagement marker will be analysed separately, from the least to the most used ones.

#### 4.1 Directives

In academic writing, directives are frequent markers used to initiate reader participation by instructing the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer (Hyland 2001a, 2002). When students write e-mails to professors, directives present a very rare category, used in order to refer to the action of the reader, aka professor.

Directives include several forms: modals of obligation, imperative and adjectival predicates in the extraposed *to*-clauses (Hyland 2002). Unfortunately, students tend not to use these markers in order to build the relationship and direct their professor to do something for them. Directives include modals of obligation (1, 2), which are usually writer-oriented, signaling what the writer/student believes to be necessary or desirable. In the corpus, there are only three examples of modals in English e-mails and two in Serbian e-mails. When using modals of obligation, students imply that the action should be carried out by the reader/professor. In examples (1, 2), even though written in first person singular, students imply that the professor should correct the CV attached, or write down the grade in the student's booklet. The lack of implication to the professor can be attributed to students' feeling that they cannot direct their professors into doing something, as much as they would like to have something completed. Thus, they would prefer using other engagement markers.

- (1) As I mentioned in the class, I will be applying for Emirates soon and I would appreciate if you could tell me what *should* I keep in my CV and what *should* I delete for that occasion. (E108)

- (2a) Da li mi možete reći kada i gde će biti usmeni jer sam pismeni deo Stručnog engleskog položio u prošlom roku? *Treba* i da upišem ocenu iz engleskog nižeg srednjeg. (S18)
- (2b) Can you tell me when and where the oral will be because I passed the written part of Professional English in the last term? I *should* also write the grade from English pre-intermediate. (S18)
- (3) And about the exam if *it's possible to take* it after the new year somewhere between the 5th and 10th of January? (E21)
- (4a) Da li *postoji mogućnost da se pomeri datum izlaganja prezentacije*? (S62)
- (4b) Is there *a possibility to move* the presentation date? (S62)

Directives can also be in the form of imperative. Typically, in academic writing, one could find the examples of *note*, *concede*, *consider* to introduce the reader into the text, focus their attention, or emphasize important points (Hyland 2001a). However, in e-mails, as expected, there are no imperatives. In a short digital form, students do not need to emphasize or focus, since they are trying to be as brief as possible.

The only form of directives that students tend to use in e-mails are adjectival predicates in *to*-clauses (3-7). There are 6 instances in e-mails in English and 14 instances in e-mails in Serbian. Interestingly, in both languages, the only adjective is *possible* and the only structures to be used are direct or indirect questions (5, 6, 7) with this particular adjective. Students are using this form to initiate the relationship with the teacher and to initiate their participation in the action needed to be taken. As already observed, students avoid to use adjectival predicates such as *it is necessary*, *it is important*, since these may be aggressive and thus intervene with building a trusting relationship.

- (5) *Is it possible* maybe that I can apply now or if it is possible that I take the exam now and apply for the next one in January? (E13)
- (6a) Da li Vam mogu doneti opravdanje (otpusnu listu) na uvid kada dođem na predavanja? *Da li postoji mogućnost da nadoknadim moje odsustvo*? (S146)
- (6b) Can I bring you an excuse (discharge list) for inspection when I come to lectures? *Is there a possibility to make up* for my absence? (S146)

- (7a) Ja nisam u mogućnosti da dođem na ta predavanja jer imamo stručnu ekskurziju od 1.11. do 11.11. pa bih Vas zamolila da mi samo kažete *da li postoji neki način* da nadoknadim te moje izostanke? (S93)
- (7b) I am not able to come to those lectures because we have a professional excursion from 1/11 to 11/11, so I would ask you to just tell me *is there a possibility to make up* for my absences? (S93)

It can be concluded that students rarely use directives in their e-mails to professors and do not find these metadiscourse markers suitable for building a trusting relationship with professors. The situation is similar with markers related to shared knowledge.

#### 4.2 Shared knowledge

Metadiscourse markers appealing to shared knowledge draw on what is common between writers and readers in numerous ways, by using jargon, acronyms, preferred metaphors, familiar argument structures, citation practices, and so on, within the common frame of seeing the world, identifying problems, and resolving issues (Faber 1996; Hyland 2000, 2001a). These markers present a less imposing strategy, since students can use disciplinary and classroom understandings to build a relationship with their professors and thus provide a positive reaction on their side. However, as this research demonstrates, students prefer asking direct questions and they do not rely on the strategy to refer to mutual knowledge.

As depicted in Table 1, there were only four instances of shared knowledge in English e-mails and eight examples in e-mails in Serbian. In these examples, students use markers to refer to a previous arrangement (8) or to something already stated (9).

- (8) *In reference to our agreement* I am sending you an email example for order of 20 bottles of Flaska. (E84)
- (9a) *Imajući gore navedeno u vidu*, da li biste mi, molim Vas, izašli u susret i napisali potvrdu/dokaz o poznavanju engleskoj jezika? (S110)

- (9b) *With the above in mind*, would you please help me and write a certificate/proof of English language proficiency? (S110)

In academic papers, the adverbial phrase *of course* is the most common explicit appeal to shared knowledge (Hyland 2001a: 567). Although this marker can be observed as a marker of epistemic stance that indicates writer's certainty of a proposition (Biber et al. 1999: 540), it can also be used to move the focus of the conversation from the student to the professor or a situation that the professor will understand (Hyland 2001a) (11). This marker can also be used to build a trusting relationship by anticipating a possible objection and providing an expected solution to it (10). In students' e-mails, *of course/naravno* is used only a few times. As already mentioned, students do not recognize the possibility to use the marker to acknowledge the professor that they had already anticipated an obstacle or a problem.

- (10) *Of course*, we guarantee we will attend your classes, participate in debate as much as we can and at the end of semester pass the exam. (E68)
- (11a) Zanima me da li u njoj [prezentaciji] sme da se nalazi i neki video, *naravno* bez zvuka... (S65)
- (11b) I am interested if it [the presentation] can hold a video, *of course* without sound (S65)

Contrary to expectations, students tend not to use slang or jargon as shared knowledge. In English, they probably do not use it since they do not know it. As non-native English speakers, students may be familiar with idioms and colloquial expressions only in the domain of oral communication. In Serbian, only four instances of jargon were found (12, 13). In the example (12), a student uses the colloquial expression "throw out results" instead of the collocations "release/post results", while in the example (13), a student is talking about "social exam term" which only professors and students from the same institution, i.e. same discourse community, understand what it is and when it is.

- (12a) Da li se zna kada ćete *izbaciti rezultate* sa predispitnih obaveza? (S4)
- (12b) Is it known when you will *throw out the results* from the prerequisites? (S4)

(13a) Položila sam Engleski jezik – stručni u *prvom socijalnom roku*, upisala sam se sa statusom budzeta... (S10)

(13b) I passed the English language – professional *in the first social exam term*, I enrolled with the budget status ... (S10)

Hence, it can be concluded that in academic e-mail communication, students still pay attention that their writing is grammatically correct and quite formal, avoiding jargon and acronyms as metadiscourse markers of shared knowledge.

#### 4.3 Personal asides

The first encouraging reference for metadiscourse markers comes with the use of personal asides. Asides are used as a metacomment when the writer directly addresses the reader, briefly breaking off the argument. It is rather common in social sciences and humanities; these fields deal with less predictable variables and more diverse research outcomes, so the readers have to be drawn in and involved as participants in a dialogue (Hyland 2001a: 561). These metadiscourse markers express something of the writer's personality and willingness to intervene explicitly to offer a view and acknowledge the relationship with the reader. Hence, they present a valuable marker in e-mails and could help students in building a trusting relationship with their professors.

When writing in Serbian, students do not use any metacomments. They do not recognize the possibility of building a relationship in this manner. There were only two instances in e-mails in Serbian (14, 15). In example (14), by providing a comment about the workload at the registrar's office, the student wanted to provoke empathy in the teacher, hoping it would help with the exam application that had not been submitted in time. In example (15), the initial statement in the e-mail immediately implies that there is a problem and that it will take the teacher's involvement for it to be solved. Moreover, this metacomment is presented before the actual problem is described, as an appeal to the teacher's willingness to follow the reasoning presented in the

continuation of the e-mail and to accept the student's argumentation as such.

- (14a) *U studentskoj službi je verovatno veliko opterećenje, pa prijava ispita za 28.01. ne može da prođe još uvek.* (S37)
- (14b) *They probably have a great workload in the student service, so the application for the exam on January 28 can't pass the system just yet.* (S37)
- (15a) *Pišem Vam u nadi da se moja situacija može rešiti.* Polagala sam vaš predmet 2016. godine i položila sam ga (S117)
- (15b) *I am writing to you with the hope that my situation can be resolved.* I took your course in 2016 and I passed it (S117)

However, when students write in English, they tend to use asides more often to comment on their argumentation. There were 20 instances in 124 e-mails, meaning that one fifth of students writing in English actually used them. In most cases, personal asides are used to communicate a more personal explanation related to the topic of the e-mail (16, 18). Sometimes these explanations are not suitable to be presented to professors (16); they can be attributed to low power distance between students and professors, or students' belief that honesty establishes a trusting relationship. Likewise, personal asides are used to explicitly offer a view, a positive opinion (17) as a reader-oriented strategy, in order to build a closer relationship with the professor. In most cases, this strategy is beneficial, since teachers (at least those participating in the project) positively responded to personal asides and were willing to invest in the student-professor relationship.

- (16) I am sorry for my absence on the speaking exam. *To be honest I totally forgot about it.* (E6)
- (17) I really hadn't that kind of experience, and i can say *it was worth every atom of my attention!* (E9)
- (18) For some reason, *probably my ancient computer*, I have difficulties with posting on forum. (E95)

#### 4.4 Pronouns

The corpus of e-mails in this study reveals that students prefer using second person pronouns to inclusive first person pronouns and indefinite pronouns. Since students are writing directly about their own issues, it is understandable that indefinite pronouns are not used. There was only one instance of indefinite pronoun in e-mails in Serbian (20) and one in e-mails in English (19).

(19) I will send an email if *anyone* changes their mind. (E113)

(20a) *Da li se zna* kada ćete izbaciti rezultate sa predispitnih obaveza? (S4)

(20b) Is *it* known when you will throw out the results from the prerequisites? (S4)

Inclusive *we* is often used to explicitly bring readers as discourse participants into the text (Hyland 2001a: 557). One would assume that students regard lectures as something related to both them and professors, and that they perceive professors as discourse participants. Hence, inclusive *we* should have been present in their e-mail correspondence. However, the corpus proves that assumption wrong. There are only two examples of inclusive *we* in e-mails in Serbian (21). In students' e-mails, there is a strong distinction between "us" students and "you" teacher (22). Even though in example (22) a student is writing about lectures, there is a clear distinction that "we" (students) did not have lectures because "you" (teacher) were absent, as if the professor is not the part of those lectures. One possible assumption is that students, when thinking and writing in Serbian, have the traditional distinction between professors and students, i.e. they are thinking in terms of high power distance context. In doing so, they are unconsciously failing to accept that students and professors belong to the same discourse community and have the same practice in e-mail communication.

(21a) *Da li [mi]* imamo sutra predavanje? (S3)

(21b) Do *we* have a lecture tomorrow? (S3)

- (22a) *Mi* imamo predavanja sredom. Poslednje srede *mi* nismo imali predavanja, jer ste *vi* bili na bolovanju. (S8)
- (22b) *We* have lectures on Wednesdays. *We* didn't have lectures last Wednesday, because *you* were on sick leave. (S8)

On the other hand, when they think and write in English, where this academic gap has not been emphasized, students use inclusive *we* more freely. As a result, there are 10 instances of inclusive *we* in e-mails in English. Nevertheless, students use *we* only when they refer to the shared activity, the one involving both the teacher and the student (23, 24). In classes in English, the power distance tends to be lower and the trusting student-professor relationship is already established in the classroom and thus can be reflected in e-mails.

- (23) When can *we* do the Skype meeting? (E21)
- (24) *We* could have *our* last lecture [...] differently. (E82)

Since they are addressing their professors, second person pronouns are often used. Half of the e-mails in English and a third of e-mails in Serbian contain second person pronouns (25, 26). This is the most obvious manner of building a relationship with professors, textually constructing both the student and the professor as participants with similar understanding and goals (Hyland 2001a: 558). Using second person pronouns is a well-known persuasive strategy, encouraging the reaction to the e-mail and hoping for a reply.

However, what is striking about this is the lack rather than the presence of second person pronouns. Corpus analysis of students' e-mails has revealed that students are quite "self-observed". Half of the e-mails in English and two thirds of e-mails in Serbian are written in first person singular (27, 28). Explicit "I" is present everywhere. Students have a problem, they have a situation, they need something, and it is half of the time in first person singular. For instance, in example (28), instead of asking when the professor will hold tutorials, the student is presenting the question in first person singular, asking when they can come to tutorials. Apparently, students do not tend to establish a relationship nor engage the professor in the communication. This may

appear rather odd, since the objective of digital communication is to write to their professors and engage them in a dialogue.

- (25) In the course *you* mentioned that *you* can send a link to "drive" for "listening" lessons. Can *you* please send me? Thank *you*. (E69)
- (26a) Da li *biste* [Vi] mogli molim *Vas* da mi date potvrdu o znanju engleskog, kako bih mogla da se prijavim za razmenu studenata? (S107)
- (26b) Could *you* please give me a certificate of English proficiency so that I can apply for a student exchange? (S107)
- (27) *I* have some problems with *my* e mail account... *I* think *you* did not get *my* [my] mail. (E70)
- (28a) Poštovana, kada [*ja*] mogu doći na konsultacije? (S108)
- (28b) Dear, when *can I* come for a tutorial? (S108)

The use of pronouns in e-mails is in opposition with their usage in research articles (Hyland 2001a). In this academic genre, the inclusive *we* is most often used to explicitly bring the reader into the text as discourse participants, while second person pronouns occur only rarely due to the fact that the reader's presence is not explicitly acknowledged.

#### 4.5 Questions

Questions present a dialogic strategy, inviting engagement and bringing the reader into the discourse (Hyland 2001a: 569). In academic writing, direct questions are a "minor way of establishing a niche" (Swales 1990: 156), usually avoided and replaced with indirect questions (Swales/Feak 1994: 74). However, since questions challenge the reader into thinking about the topic, having a direct appeal in bringing the reader into the dialogue with the writer (Webber 1994: 266), it is understandable that this will be a common strategy to establish a dialogue between students and professors. Asking questions is also directly linked to the purpose of e-mail communication, which is to begin a dialogue and obtain desired information. E-mails have a

conversational aspect and they imply questions being asked and answered.

As expected, there are no rhetorical questions in e-mails. Students do not need to be rhetorically positioned in this dialogue; rather, they seek the answer immediately. However, the results demonstrate (see Table 1) that students ask more questions in Serbian than in English. The results demonstrate that students tend to thank or apologize when writing in English, without explicitly needing anything. If they ask a question, they often explicitly acknowledge that the question is to follow (29, 30), and they prefer indirect (30) to direct questions. In high power distance communities, indirectness is more appreciated; hence, students may feel that they will engage professors in the dialogue more likely if they tend to be less direct.

(29) *My question is* how to make a new date? (E18)

(30) I am *writing to ask* whether it would be possible to postpone my 1st presentation. (E52)

On the other hand, when students write e-mails in Serbian, they always have a question in mind. There are 103 questions in the Serbian corpus of e-mails, which constitutes two thirds of e-mail corpus. This is the only engagement marker category that students extensively use when writing e-mails in Serbian. This is the most direct engaging technique. Due to the higher power distance setting in the classroom, students often begin with the indirect question (*Can you tell me, I am interested, I would like to ask*) and then they continue with the direct question and finish with the question mark (31, 32, 33). The beginning and ending may be in opposition; however, students feel that indirectness is necessary in order to establish the dialogue with the professor, while directness is something they are familiar with and commonly utilize.

(31a) *Da li mi možete reći* kada i gde će biti usmeni? (S18)

(31b) *Can you tell me* when and where will the oral be happening? (S18)

(32a) *Interesuje me da li* postoji mogućnost uvida u radove? (S43)

(32b) *I am interested* is there a possibility of seeing the papers? (S43)

(33a) *Htela sam da Vas pitam* kada mogu doći na konsultacije? (S113)

(33b) *I wanted to ask you* when can I come for a tutorial? (S113)

Even though this strategy can provide them with the answer and establish a trusting relationship with their professor, students should be able to utilize other markers as well.

## 5. Conclusion

E-mails between students and professors present an important segment of academic writing. While writing e-mails, students assume that the words and expressions they use would be suitable enough to make teachers want to be engaged in this digital conversation. Even though the conventions in higher education institutions imply that professors have to answer students' e-mails, students as writers still have to follow certain rules in politeness, formality and adequate expressions in order to actually receive the answer. Hence, they need all the help in recognizing the appropriate linguistic expressions to be utilized in this communication.

The aim of the research has been to demonstrate whether and to what degree students use engagement markers when they write to their professors. Following Hyland's (2001a: 553) taxonomy, the study focused on five features as the evidence of reader engagement: questions, personal pronouns, directives, shared knowledge and personal asides. As demonstrated in the paper, students tend not to use personal asides, directives or shared knowledge. These may seem as too indirect and personal, and as such not really welcomed in the higher power distance institutions. The instances found in the corpus belong to students' personal choices and are only occasional. Likewise, due to the nature of e-mails as genre, the corpus lacks rhetorical questions and contains only several instances of indefinite pronouns.

The paper demonstrates that the most common engagement markers in students' e-mails to professors are second person pronouns and real questions, both direct and indirect. Use of second person pronouns is understandable, and an obvious selection by the students. It is a well-known persuasive strategy, encouraging the reaction to the e-mail and anticipating a positive reply. This technique textually includes both the student and the professor as participants with similar understanding and goals. The study revealed that, even though students use second person pronouns, they also tend to be "self-observed", using first person pronoun instead of the second person. This strategy is something that students should learn to recognize and avoid, since it can lead to the lack of reply they are hoping to obtain. As anticipated, students ask questions in e-mails, since most of their e-mails are requests. However, the research demonstrated that they tend to ask more questions when they write in Serbian. In English, on the other hand, students prefer to write thank-you notes rather than requests and thus they do not utilize questions.

In conclusion, the research has presented that students use engagement markers, though not in the satisfactory amount. Time should be devoted to teach them the nuances important for academic communication and for achieving one's goals. Likewise, the final conclusion may be that, apart from teaching students about the structure of e-mails, we could devote some attention to "tricks of the trade", i.e. teach them how the use of engagement markers can actually help them build a relationship with the professor and thus get them closer to receiving a satisfactory answer.

## Acknowledgements

The research was supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia through

the project “Statistical Analysis of Business Correspondence from the Aspect of Students’ Country of Origin”.

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MICHELA GIORDANO / MARIA ANTONIETTA MARONGIU<sup>1</sup>

## ‘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

### Abstract

Taking for granted that “metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods and services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating” (Hyland 2005: 3), this work aims to analyse the features of metadiscourse in online teaching methodology courses. As we speak or write, we negotiate with our readers or listeners, we make decisions about the effects we want to attain on our audience (Hyland 2005, 2015). Instructors in online teaching methodology courses use a vast array of metadiscoursal features, under the form of commentaries embedded in the oral text, which express the speakers’ intentions, and how confident they are about what they are saying, along with directions to the listeners, and logical connectors or frame markers referring to the structure of the oral text. After a categorization of different types of textual metadiscourse in online courses, the present study aims to investigate whether and to what extent these commentaries can be considered as ways to signal speakers’ attitudes towards the content and their audiences. Following Hyland (2005), both interactive resources (to guide the listener through the text) and interactional resources (to

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been jointly planned and developed; Michela Giordano is responsible for Sections 1, 3 and 5; Maria Antonietta Marongiu is responsible for Sections 2 and 4. Conclusions are a joint effort.

involve the listener in the subject) will be considered in order to ascertain whether these features are used to control, evaluate and negotiate the goals and impact of the ongoing talk (Hyland 2015). From this point of view, metadiscoursal features can be deemed rhetorical as long as they contribute to the informative and persuasive impact of methodological lessons taught online. Therefore, metadiscourse in this genre is also investigated from a rhetorician's perspective, focusing on figures of presence, figures of focus and figures of communion, and on ethos, pathos and logos appeals which contribute to effective communication rather than being merely used for ornamentation.

## 1. Introduction

This paper presents a metadiscoursal analysis of online teaching methodology courses.<sup>2</sup>

After looking at the theoretical framework that forms the basis for this study (Section 2), the aims of the investigation will be introduced and search questions will therein be listed (Section 3). Then data will be presented (in Section 3); findings, both quantitative and qualitative, will be the object of Section 4. Several examples

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<sup>2</sup> Attention should be given to the title: in the abstract first sent as a proposal for the "MAG 2019" conference, *Metadiscourse in Digital Communication: What has changed?*, hosted by CERLIS, University of Bergamo, Italy (June 27-29, 2019), the quote was "this is a journey on which we are embarking", using the preposition *on* after the verb *to embark*. The authors have now decided to keep the original sentence of the analysed transcripts and video lessons: "this is a journey in which we are embarking", using the preposition *in*. The instructor who uttered this sentence in the video lessons in this case is a native speaker of Spanish based in Buenos Aires (Argentina) and this is why this transfer from the Spanish language is found. This explanation is due for the sake of clarity but transfer and interferences from other languages into English are not topics addressed in the present study.

taken from the transcripts of the original video lessons (filmed lectures) in the teaching methodology courses will then be shown and analysed. The aim of the present research is to ascertain whether the same metadiscourse features or strategies used in written discourse and listed and recorded in much of the literature on the topic are also used in the examples of oral production under scrutiny here. The aim is also to try and discover whether these metadiscourse markers fulfill a rhetorical function. Conclusions can be considered still provisional since the corpus might seem to be quite small or not fully representative: a wider corpus would certainly allow the researchers to draw more thorough, conclusive and definitive final conclusions.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Metadiscourse is notoriously problematic to pin down, both because it refers to features of discourse whose functions are context-dependent, and because, despite its copious presence in texts of various types across time, researchers have disagreed on its definition and on research methodology. The term gathered momentum in the field of applied linguistics only in the 1980s, yet, it had already been used by Harris (1959), and later, in his studies on speech communication, Rossiter Jr. (1974) referred to metacommunication as being (verbal or non-verbal) messages about communication in spoken communicative interactions which inform interlocutors on the speaker's intentions and feelings. Wunderlich (1979) stated that communication partners can switch roles, can talk about communication itself, and even comment on their own speech production, all relevant aspects in the notion of metadiscourse. In the field of sociolinguistics, Ragan/Hopper (1981) speak of meta-talk when referring to talk about someone else's talk, while Schiffrin (1980), referring to spoken communication, defined meta-talk as talking about one's own talk, both aspects involved in the definition of metadiscourse.

The relatively recent research interest in metadiscourse has mainly focused on written texts such as school textbooks (Crismore 1989), or company annual reports (Hyland 1998b), and especially on academic text writing, like undergraduate textbooks (Hyland 2000), postgraduate dissertations (Swales 1990; Bunton 1999; Hyland/Tse 2004), and research articles from a variety of disciplines (Hyland 1998a). Metadiscourse has increasingly become important to research in the fields of composition, reading and text structure, and more recently in L2 writing (Ädel 2006; Toumi 2009). Interest has also been shown in the field of language learning, as the presence of metadiscourse has proven to augment text readability and comprehension (Crismore 1990; Crismore/Vande Kopple 1997; Reitbauer 2001; Crawford Camiciottoli 2003; Tavakoli/Dabaghi/Khorvash 2010; Correia 2013; Ahour/Entezari Maleki 2014). Recently, research has also focused on spoken genres, especially in academic lectures (Ädel 2012; Agnes 2012; Lee/Subtirelu 2015; Zhang/Sun/Peng/Gan/Yu 2017), and on digitalised discourse (Ryoo 2005). English, as used by native or non-native speakers, is the language most studied in metadiscourse research, together with Spanish, Chinese, and Persian (Hu/Cao 2011; Salas 2015; Khabbazi-Oskouei 2016;).

While Crismore (1989) classified written metadiscourse into two general categories, informational and attitudinal, Vande Kopple (1985) referred specifically to writing as being a two-tier activity, where on the one hand writers provide propositional content, and on the other hand, that of metadiscourse; they organize discourse so as to help the reader to successfully relate to the topical material provided. At this level, otherwise defined as “communication about communication” (Vande Kopple 1985: 87), he classified seven types of metadiscourse, four of which are textual (text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers, and narrators) and the other three are interpersonal (validity markers, attitude markers, and commentary). This broad approach, which takes into account both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse is also embraced by Crismore/Markkanen/Steffensen (1993), Markkanen/Steffensen/Crismore (1993) and Hyland (1998b, 2004, 2005, 2017). Other researchers, such as Schiffrin (1980), Mauranen (1993), Bunton (1999), Dahl (2004), Moreno (2004) and

Peterlin (2005), however, considered only textual metadiscourse in their studies, and thus had a narrower approach.

Following Mauranen's (1993) comparative study of American and Finnish academic production based on the concept of *text reflexivity*, Ädel (2006) studied the use of metadiscourse in the argumentative texts produced by advanced Swedish learners of English and compared them to that of native speakers of British and American English. The taxonomy of metadiscourse that she developed is based on the model of 'the reflexive triangle' involving the text/code, the writer and the reader, representing the Jakobsonian metalinguistic, expressive and directive functions. By working on reflexivity in particular, the concept of metadiscourse is restricted to what she defined as "the world of discourse" (Ädel 2006: 44), where text, writer and reader are strictly context-related. Ädel has applied her taxonomy of metadiscourse to both spoken and written academic English (Ädel 2010, 2012), and her view of metadiscourse has been adopted in research on a variety of academic contexts (Toumi 2009; Salas 2015; Zhang 2016).

Drawing on Thompson (2001), Hyland (2005) developed a taxonomy where he distinguished between *interactive* features, fulfilling the writer's management of propositional information, to guide readers through a text, and *interactional* features, used by the writer to comment on content material. Interactive and interactional elements are considered to be essential parts of the metadiscourse resources available in both spoken and written communication. In his model, he listed five broad sub-categories as interactive resources (transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses), and five sub-categories as interactional resources (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self mentions and engagement markers).

Within the broad approach, Hyland/Tse (2004, in Hyland 2017: 18) defined metadiscourse as "an integration of talk about the experiential world and how this is made coherent, intelligible and persuasive to a particular audience". On several occasions Hyland (1998a, 2000, 2005, 2017, 2018) defined metadiscourse as the writer's linguistic choices to organize a discourse and to show their own stance towards the content matter and the intended reader. The writer's

choice of cohesive and interpersonal features is intended to help relate a text to its context by assisting readers to connect to it, and interpret it based on the values of a specific discourse community. Accordingly, metadiscourse is context dependent, and its features differ across genres and languages; that is to say, metadiscoursal functions may be performed in different ways, and single items may perform more than one metadiscoursal function in the same or in different contexts.

These levels of ambiguity or fuzziness in the definition of metadiscourse have influenced research from a methodological perspective. Accordingly, Hyland (2017: 18), stressing the idea that metadiscourse is a pragmatic category, recommends examining metadiscourse features “in their sentential contexts to ensure they are performing metadiscourse functions”, yet does not reject corpus-based investigation. On the other hand, Ädel/Mauranen (2010) consider Hyland’s model to be methodologically weak and superficial, and in referring to research on genre and language comparisons, have argued in favour of a qualitative approach to metadiscourse research. They have also criticised corpus-based approaches, which rely on predefined sets of lexical items, and consider them to be limited and limiting for the interpretation of any item’s metadiscoursal function.

### 3. Data and methodology

Following Hyland’s classification (2005) (see Table 1), the various metadiscoursal categories and their functions were the point of departure for the analysis of the data under scrutiny: interactive features help to guide the reader through the text and interactional ones involve the reader in the text (2005: 48-54). As the title of the paper anticipates, the present investigation deals with oral lessons and online videos or filmed lectures: therefore, the focus will be on communication between speakers and listeners, rather than on writers and readers.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Examples</i>
INTERACTIVE	Help to guide the reader through the text	<i>Resources</i>
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	<i>in addition; but; thus; and</i>
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	<i>finally; to conclude; my purpose is</i>
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	<i>noted above; see Figure; in section 2</i>
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	<i>according to X; Z states</i>
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	<i>namely; e.g.; such as; in other words</i>
INTERACTIONAL	Involve the reader in the text	<i>Resources</i>
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	<i>might; perhaps; possible; about</i>
Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	<i>in fact; definitely; it is clear that</i>
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	<i>unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly</i>
Self mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	<i>I; we; my; me; our</i>
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	<i>consider; note; you can see that</i>

Table 1. Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse (2005: 49).

The corpus under exploration includes two online teaching methodology courses: "Teaching your subject in English" (Figure 1)

and “Teaching English Online” (Figure 2), both produced by the University of Cambridge and powered by FutureLearn (Figure 3). FutureLearn is a digital education platform founded in December 2012. The company is owned by The Open University in Milton Keynes, England. It is a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) learning platform, and as of May 2018 included 143 UK and international partners, including non-university partners.



Figure 1. “Teaching your subject in English” online course ([www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com)).



Figure 2 (left). “Teaching English Online” online course ([www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com)).

Figure 3 (right). Future Learn digital education platform ([www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com)).

A MOOC is an online course aimed at unlimited participation by users all over the world and with open access via the web. In addition to traditional course materials, such as filmed lectures, readings, forums, many MOOCs provide interactive courses with user forums to support community interactions among students, professors, and teaching assistants, as well as immediate feedback to tests, quizzes and assignments. MOOCs are an example of distance education. The best known MOOC platforms in English are, along with FutureLearn, Alison, Cognitive Class, Coursera, and Eduopen. Additionally, Emma has courses in eight languages and edX has courses in thirteen languages, including Japanese, Turkish, Korean and Hindi.

These MOOC courses, which are based on interactions among students, instructors and a variety of audiences, recall the concept of *community* that Hyland emphasizes by making reference to some insightful quotes such as “A discourse community is a group of people who have texts and practices in common” (Barton 1994: 57, taken from Hyland 2005: 139). Swales (1990) considers these types of communities as “having collective goals or purposes”; Bizzell (1982: 2017) talks about “sharedness” and discusses communities in terms of “traditional, shared ways of understanding experience” while Doheny-Farina (1992: 296 in Hyland 2005: 139) points to the idea that communities share “rhetorical conventions and stylistic practices that are tacit and routine for the members”.

The two courses under scrutiny here are designed for teachers, mainly English language teachers, but also subject teachers. Therefore, the topics at stake range from the relationship between language and subject content, students’ engagement and eliciting, to classroom routines, learning objectives and the use of technology for learning both in class and autonomously. As the courses anticipate in the Welcome week videos, there are many opportunities for teachers and users in general to repeat and respond to audio recordings, record their voices, practice pronunciation, join in the discussion with other teachers or simply read others’ comments and questions, read papers and fix notions and concepts through tests and quizzes. The two courses additionally provide Q&A sections and end-of-week reviews.

A quantitative analysis of the courses’ transcripts was carried out using Sketch Engine, a corpus manager and text analysis software

(developed by Lexical Computing Limited in 2003). By using this concordance software, the corpus was first examined from a basic and general statistical point of view, by looking at the overall organization of the courses, number of sections (or weeks of teaching and learning activity), number of videos and their duration in time, number of words in the transcripts of the videos, as well as tokens and total sentences. The results of this first and preliminary search are shown in Table 2 (Teaching your subject in English, henceforth TSE) and Table 3 (Teaching English online, henceforth TEO).

<i>TEACHING YOUR SUBJECT IN ENGLISH (TSE)</i>			
<i>sections</i>	<i># of videos</i>	<i>duration</i>	<i># of words</i>
WELCOME TO THE COURSE	1	00:00:52	236
WEEK 1	6	00:20:23	3,059
WEEK 2	4	00:12:29	2,064
WEEK 3	4	00:10:19	1,783
WEEK 4	4	00:12:07	2,194
WEEK 5	4	00:14:33	2,652
GRAND TOTALS	23	01:10:43	11,988
		tokens	13,896
		sentences	766

Table 2. Statistical data of the TSE online course.

The TSE course is organised into five weeks, plus a Welcome week. Table 2 shows the duration in time for each week's video lessons and the total number of videos, which amounts to 23, the total number of words, almost 12,000, with 1 hour and 10 minutes of recordings, almost 14,000 tokens and 766 sentences.

As can be seen from Table 3, the TEO course is divided into four weeks, in addition to a Welcome week video and includes 36 video lessons amounting to a total of about 16,000 words and 1 hour and 33 minutes of recordings. There are almost 19 thousand tokens and 1,457 sentences. One thing common to both courses is the fact that these filmed lectures are organised into different types of lessons: 1) lessons with one single instructor, teacher-fronted; 2) interactions

among two or three instructors who deal with a specific topic in front of a camera. Therefore, it should be noted that the video lessons are sometimes monologues and sometimes dialogues; nevertheless, this distinction has not been taken into consideration in the analysis so far, since both monologues and dialogues are presently considered as types of interactional discourse addressed to an ideal external audience intended as a community. What has been analysed up to now are the actual transcripts of the filmed lectures: a thorough and careful listening and watching of the video lessons shows that lectures are pre-organized, pre-structured in terms of quantity of speech, duration in time, and quality of speech or topics addressed. The instructors' performances in the video recordings are somewhat controlled, as is the case in written-to-be-spoken discourse.

<i>TEACHING ENGLISH ONLINE (TEO)</i>			
<i>sections</i>	<i># of videos</i>	<i>duration</i>	<i># of words</i>
WELCOME TO THE COURSE	1	00:01:15	332
WEEK 1	10	00:27:03	4852
WEEK 2	7	00:13:08	2416
WEEK 3	11	00:36:11	5019
WEEK 4	7	00:16:06	3051
GRAND TOTALS	36	01:33:43	15,670
		tokens	18,776
		sentences	1,457

Table 3. Statistical data of the TEO online course.

The second step of our research entailed a more in-depth investigation of the transcripts in the corpus in order to identify the items in Hyland's 2005 list of metadiscourse features in academic writing. The digital search and statistical investigation proved insufficient; therefore, the concordance lines obtained through the Sketch Engine search were further manually checked in order to verify and ensure that the occurrences of metadiscourse features found were indeed functioning as metadiscourse. As a final step, extraneous examples, i.e. those not functioning as metadiscourse in the specific context and

co-text, were excluded. Section 4 below shows the results obtained and provides an explanation of the findings.

## 4. Analysis and discussion

### 4.1 The interactive dimension

As mentioned above, the transcripts of the filmed lectures belonging to the two courses were analysed according to Hyland's 2005 model of metadiscourse, and all the features the author listed in his Appendix were taken into consideration, given that, as he argues, both interactive and interactional dimensions "are defining characteristics of any communication, whether spoken or written" (Hyland 2005: 50).

The quantitative analysis, carried out through Sketch Engine as indicated above, provided the means to search the *interactive* resources used to organize propositional material in ways that are reasonably coherent and convincing for the audience. Throughout the investigation, the *transitions* found are mainly *conjunctions* (i.e. *and*, *also*, *but*, *so*, etc.), *adverbs* (*likewise*, *similarly*, *therefore*, *yet*, etc.) and *adverbial phrases* (*in addition*, *by the way*, *on the other hand*, *of course*, etc.) used to help the reader interpret pragmatic connections in the development of an argument within the discourse. Transitions can establish additive, contrastive or causative relations between discourse parts, to show the writer/speaker's line of thought.

Based on the analysis carried out, the interactive features identified as those occurring with the highest frequency in both courses (as shown in Table 4), were the addition markers *and* (343 in TSE and 499 in TEO) and *also* (48 in TSE and 54 in TEO), used to add arguments; the comparison marker *but* (72 in TSE and 73 in TEO), used to compare and contrast events; and the consequence markers *so* (150 in TSE and 311 in TEO) and *because* (43 in TSE and 55 in TEO), used to express consequence relations and to draw conclusions.

<i>TRANSITION MARKERS</i>		<i>TSE</i>	<i>TEO</i>
ADDITION	and	343	499
adding arguments	further	5	0
	again	20	15
	also	48	54
	still	2	10
COMPARISON	but	72	73
comparing and contrasting events	however	1	0
	on the other hand	1	0
	rather	8	3
	at the same time	1	7
CONSEQUENCE	so	150	311
drawing conclusions	since	2	0
	of course	1	19
	because	43	55

Table 4. Occurrences of *transition markers* in the TSE and TEO courses.

<i>TRANSITION MARKERS</i>		<i>TSE</i>	<i>Metadis.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>TEO</i>	<i>Metadis.</i>	<i>%</i>
		<i>Tot.</i>	<i>function</i>		<i>Tot.</i>	<i>function</i>	
		<i>occur.</i>			<i>occur.</i>		
ADDITION	and	343	159	46	499	221	44
adding arguments							
COMPARISON	but	72	72	100	73	73	100
comparing and contrasting events							
CONSEQUENCE	so	150	111	74	311	237	76
drawing conclusions							

Table 5. *Transition markers* with metadiscoursal function in the TSE and TEO courses.

Among the features occurring with the highest frequency, the addition marker *and*, the comparison marker *but*, and the consequence marker *so* were analysed in their sentential co-text in order to identify their functions in the text. Accordingly, as shown in Table 5, *and* was found to be used as an addition marker only in 46% of the times in TSE and in 44% of the times in TEO. On the other hand, the marker

*but* was used to contrast events in 100% of its occurrences in both courses.

Finally, the marker *so* deserves some attention, since it is used with similar frequency in the two courses (74% in TSE and 76% in TEO) as a transition marker, to express consequence relations and draw conclusions, as in the following two examples.

- (1) I want you to predict two things that you might see in that diagram. And in this way I give them a focus, a reason for doing the task that I want them to do. And so there's quite a lot of work to be done, I think, before you actually begin working with the material, the task, or activity. (Week 4, TSE, DRAWING CONCLUSIONS)
- (2) We teach different subjects. And so we have quite a lot of different learning objectives for our classes. (Week 1, TSE, DRAWING CONCLUSIONS)

Further analysis of the remaining occurrences of *so* found that it fulfilled the function of frame marker, used to shift topic, 14% of the time in TSE and 8% in TEO (Example 3).

- (3) So what next? This weekend we will continue to read and comment on your posts. (Week 1, TSE, SHIFTING TOPIC)

Another of the functions of *so* was typically that of giving instructions to the listeners on a particular task (Examples 4 and 5), occurring 12% of the time in TSE and 16% in TEO, as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5 (below).

- (4) Great. So let's first correct a phrase. So please type the correct version in the chat box. (Week 1, TEO, GIVING INSTRUCTIONS)
- (5) So write three things you hear that I did, OK? OK. So I am going to pause my camera so you cannot read my lips. So you are just going to listen, OK? OK. (Week 2, TEO, GIVING INSTRUCTIONS)

A close quantitative analysis of the transcripts has indicated that the occurrences of the other interactive resources enlisted in Hyland's 2005 taxonomy (frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and

code glosses) were of little relevance; accordingly, they were not taken into consideration.

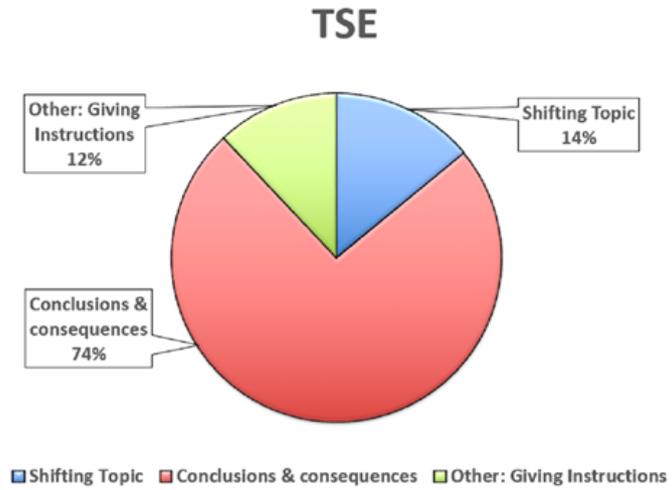


Figure 4. *So* as a transition marker and a frame marker in the TSE course.

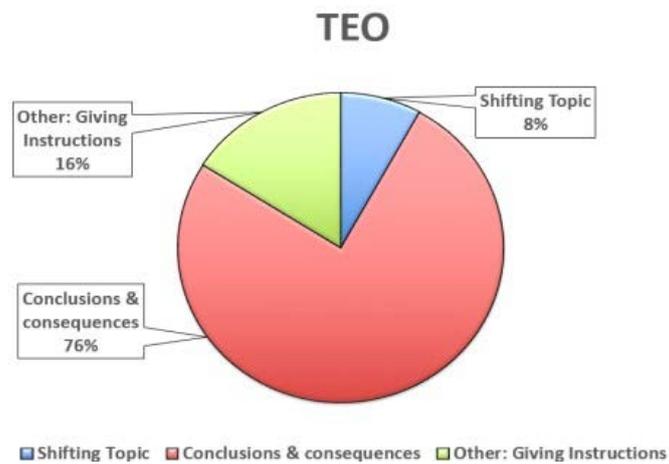


Figure 5. *So* as a transition marker and a frame marker in the TEO course.

#### 4.2 The interactional dimension

Further analysis has shown the predominant presence of interactional resources in the form of self mentions, hedges, engagement markers, and boosters.

Self mentions show the presence of the speaker in the text, which is mostly measured by the frequency of use of first-person pronouns or possessive adjectives. Since the corpus under scrutiny consists of filmed lectures in the form of monologues and dialogues, the occurrences of the first person singular pronoun *I* were quite high in number, amounting to about 300 in both courses. Likewise, the use of the first person plural pronoun *we* was also found to have a relatively high frequency. The coding of the pronoun *we* was then carried out manually in order to identify its use as having an either exclusive or an inclusive function (Table 6). *Exclusive we* is used to refer to the speakers and the instructors involved in the dialogue, but not the listeners, as in Examples (6) and (7); while *inclusive we* includes the speakers and the audience, who belong to the same teaching and learning community, as in Examples (8) and (9). By using exclusive and inclusive *we*, speakers project an impression of themselves and explicitly manifest how they stand in relation to their arguments, their community and their listeners, as highlighted by Hyland (2005: 53).

- (6) So at the end of every step, there'll be comments where we ask you to exchange ideas, say what you feel about things you're learning on the course, and that sort of thing [...] (Introductory video, TEO, EXCLUSIVE WE)
- (7) So again, we are talking about making sure that you have clear objectives, that you have a good reason for doing it. (Week 3, TEO, EXCLUSIVE WE)
- (8) We are a global community. We're a global community. And we're starting a journey together. (Week 1, TSE, INCLUSIVE WE)
- (9) We are teachers of pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary, and university levels. (Week 1, TSE, INCLUSIVE WE)

Table 6 shows the higher use of *inclusive we*, with respect to *exclusive we*, in both online courses.

<i>SELF MENTIONS</i>	<i>TSE</i>	<i>TEO</i>
I	292	310
me	14	30
my	21	45
we	98	148
we (exclusive)	27	9
we (inclusive)	71	137
our	19	9
us	8	4

Table 6. Occurrences of *self mentions* in the TSE and TEO online courses.

Among the other interactional resources present in the corpus analysed are hedges, used to emphasize the subjectivity of a position and the openness to possible negotiation. Writers and speakers use hedges to mitigate their own stand-point, and to present their reasoning and convictions in a prudent way. Although all the hedges listed in Hyland's model were considered and counted, the most frequently occurring have been reported in Table 7.

<i>HEDGES</i>		<i>TSE</i>	<i>TEO</i>
about		80	119
almost		10	3
certain		14	5
maybe		6	25
perhaps		12	3
probably		3	25
quite		24	19
sometimes		22	12
I think		61	87
M	can	93	219
O	could	38	32
D	may	43	7
A	might	39	51
L	should	11	11
S	would ('d)	41	80

Table 7. *Hedges* in the TSE and TEO online courses.

The hedges *about*, *quite*, and *sometimes* are frequently used in the corpus, especially to mitigate the force or the strength of a statement, while *I think* is used by the speakers/instructors to allow information to be presented as a personal opinion rather than a fact, thus opening their position to discussion and negotiation. The most frequently used hedges are in fact the modal verbs *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *should* and *would*. Modality indicates the degree of confidence, or prudence and caution in expressing a certain piece of knowledge.

Examples (10) to (14) show the co-occurring text where the metadiscoursal function of these hedges is accomplished.

- (10) But I think what you want to avoid is a lot of text, long readings. So you need to display on the interactive whiteboard, don't you? So it needs to be quite short so everyone can see it clearly, and not too much information. (Week 4, TEO)
- (11) So I think teachers maybe have to work a little bit harder at establishing rapport. (Week 1, TEO)
- (12) As to monitoring your students' progress, I think you should never underestimate the power of justified praise. I think power of praise is something extremely important, and it helps to keep students motivated. (Week 4, TSE)
- (13) You might have to spend a bit more time with a group. (Week 4, TSE)
- (14) Yeah, so if you're doing a bit of language work prior to the actual speaking activity, you might use immediate feedback. Now when students are speaking in class, and if the focus is on accuracy, you would pull a face when you want them to correct. You might repeat half of what they say up to the point where they make the error. (Week 3, TEO)

Engagement markers are another category of interactional resources classified by Hyland, and are used copiously in the online lectures analysed in the present research. They explicitly address the listeners, either to focus their attention or include them as discourse participants; they are used to highlight or downplay the presence of the interlocutor in the discourse. As Table 8 shows, in both courses, but especially in TEO, the mostly used feature fulfilling the role of

engagement marker is the second person subject pronoun *you*, followed by the first person subject pronoun *inclusive we*, both used to involve the listener, as shown in Example (15). The pronoun *you* is used to orientate listeners through the discourse and focus their attention on the topic at stake. The first person object pronoun *us* and the possessive adjective *our* are used with the same purpose of communicating inclusivity.

- (15) I mean I think we do insist a lot on widening the vocabulary range. Because geography is a science. And sometimes we need to be very precise. I mean if we're talking about the term 'amplitude', that's the word that you're supposed to be using. I mean you can't talk about this stuff or that thing or that sort of thing. I mean, you need to be very precise. (Week 2, TSE, ENGAGEMENT MARKERS)

<i>ENGAGEMENT MARKERS</i>	<i>TSE</i>	<i>TEO</i>
you	221	737
your	36	104
we (inclusive)	71 out of 98	137 out of 148
us (inclusive)	8 out of 8	4 out of 4
our (inclusive)	13 out of 19	9 out of 9
let's	1	15
look at	7 out of 21	14 out of 23
see	4 out of 18	17 out of 46
think about	14	28
(we're) going to think about	0	11

Table 8. *Engagement markers* in the TSE and TEO online courses.

Furthermore, 15 occurrences of the imperative form *let's* were found in the TEO course, and imperative forms such as *look at* and *see* were present in both courses, where the verbs of perception account for the immediacy and interactivity of the filmed lectures. Moreover, the presence of 11 occurrences of the expression *we're going to think about* was noticed in one of the courses (TEO).

Although they are not present among the engagement markers listed in Hyland's model, the authors of the present work decided to classify three further features as engagement markers. The first is the voice *OK*, occurring frequently in both courses. As the concordance lines show in Figure 6, expressions such as: "*So, OK, lovely,*", "*OK.*

All right?” or “OK Wonderful. OK, so I’m going to start telling you the story”, check listeners’ involvement and comprehension and signal the speakers’ engagement in the interaction.

The screenshot shows the SKETCH ENGINE interface with the search term 'ok'. The results show 68 occurrences. The concordance lines are as follows:

- doc#1 , you need a good, stable internet connection. **OK** . And then you need a Platform You do, yes. So the
- doc#1 classroom and kids respond very well to that. **OK** , lovely, yeah. You could also bring in real
- doc#1 please type the correct version in the chat box. **OK** . You should see a table in front of you. The top is
- doc#1 , and the quality of. Yeah? Uh-huh. Yes. **OK** . So the nouns and adjectives in the table there,
- doc#1 are adjective, can you try and create the noun. **OK** . All right? See what you can do. I'm just focused
- doc#1 . Yeah. Don't worry about the last one for now. **OK** . If you're done reading, please tick Yes on Zoom
- doc#1 , please tick Yes on Zoom. Wonderful. Now socks. **OK** ? Socks. Socks. Yeah. Now I'm going to draw the
- doc#1 colours, you're using different colours. **OK** . Dimity's colour is purple. **OK**. Wonderful. So
- doc#1 colours. **OK**. Dimity's colour is purple. **OK** . Wonderful. So can you please clear what you've
- doc#1 . Move them. Because I can do it with pencil. **OK** . I can see two versions of the first phrase. We
- doc#2 play it through your platform. So it's usually **OK** . But it's always worth, I think, just checking
- doc#2 they are for face-to-face. Absolutely, yeah. **OK** , so today, I'm going to tell you about a special
- doc#2 is in Sicily in Palermo, so in the south of Italy. **OK** , so I'm going to tell you this story. And I want
- doc#2 I did. So write three things you hear that I did, **OK**? **OK** . So I'm going to pause my camera so you cannot
- doc#2 . So write three things you hear that I did, **OK**? **OK** . So I'm going to pause my camera so you cannot
- doc#2 not read my lips. So you're just going to listen, **OK**? **OK** . So what are you going to do? I will write
- doc#2 read my lips. So you're just going to listen, **OK**? **OK** . So what are you going to do? I will write three
- doc#2 I hear that you did. Yes, in my story, very good. **OK** , you can write in your notebook-- yeah, it's
- doc#2 fine-- or in the chat box, whatever you prefer. **OK** ? All right, so I'm going to pause my camera now.
- doc#2 going to pause my camera now. Are you ready? Yes. **OK** , so I'm going to start telling you the story. I

Figure 6. Concordance lines of “OK” in TEO.

The other two features classified as engagement markers are the assertions *yes* and *yeah*, especially present in TEO, as shown in Table 9, possibly because of the higher presence of dialogues between different instructors in these video recordings. The markers *yes* and *yeah* fulfil the same functions as *OK* does, likewise, they may also contribute to calling the audience’s attention, as in Example (16).

- (16) Absolutely, yeah. *OK*, so today I’m going to tell you about a special weekend.  
(Week 2, TEO)

<i>OTHER ENGAGEMENT MARKERS</i>	<i>TSE</i>	<i>TEO</i>
<i>OK</i>	25	68
<i>Yeah</i>	5	99
<i>Yes</i>	11	50

Table 9. Other *engagement markers* in the TSE and TEO online courses.

The last interactional resources taken into consideration in this work are boosters, used to emphasise certainty, confidence, to express

commitment to a proposition, or close off alternative viewpoints by strengthening the position of the speaker (Carrió-Pastor/Muñiz-Calderón 2015: 221). As shown in Table 10, the most frequently used booster in both online courses, but especially in TEO, is *really*, used as an adverb, also in a reinforced formula with *important*, as in Examples (17) and (18).

- (17) Starting off with pair work or with smaller group work is really important to make it easier for our learners to work effectively. (Week 4, TSE)
- (18) And correction, of course-how to give feedback in speaking and writing activities. Really important. Absolutely. We are going to show you some useful digital resources [...] (Week 4, TEO)

<i>BOOSTERS</i>	<i>TSE</i>	<i>TEO</i>
actually	20	23
always	13	18
certain	15	5
clear	14	16
really	23	93
really important	5	10

Table 10. *Boosters* in the TSE and TEO online courses.

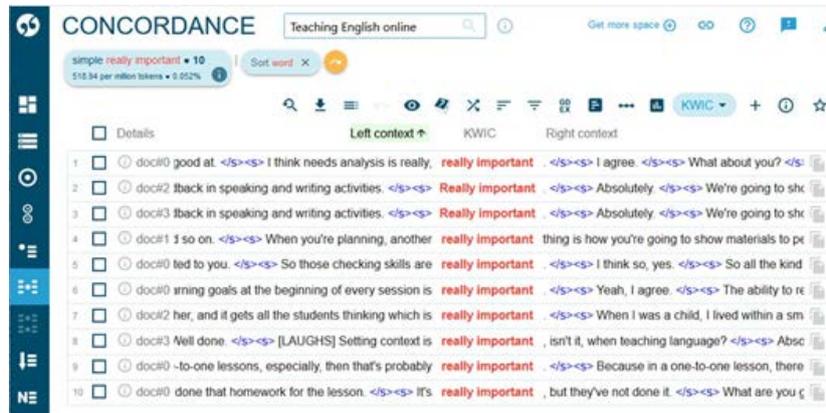


Figure 7. Concordance lines of “really important” in TEO online course.

The dialogic and interactional character of the booster *really important* is also shown by the co-text in the concordance lines in Figure 6, where in a number of occasions it appears together with other expressions aiming at reinforcing the statement, such as in “*Really important, Yeah, I agree.*”, “*Really important I think so, yes.*”, “*Really important. Absolutely.*”, or “*Really important, isn’t it*”.

The other boosters occurring with relatively meaningful frequency are *actually*, *always*, *certain*, and *clear*, as shown in Table 10 above.

## 5. Metadiscourse and rhetoric

Following Conley (1983, cited by Crismore 1989: 83) metadiscourse in this genre will also be examined from a rhetorician’s perspective, focusing on figures of presence, figures of focus and figures of communion. It will be argued that the three are mainly used to contribute to effective communication rather than merely for ornamentation and embellishment of the texts. “According to Conley”, Crismore (1989: 83) explains, “figures of thought are important, necessary aids to argument, exposition and narrative”.

Figures of presence include repetition, which helps make the discourse more vivid and memorable. Some examples follow, taken from the two online courses:

- (19) Well I think one of the most fundamental strategies that you can use in this sort of approach is to get students who have the aims and the vocabulary in advance [...] it gives them much confidence. [...] So I think that gives them much confidence to work throughout the unit. (Week 1, TSE)
- (20) Yeah, I think quite often, online lessons are one-to-one, not always, but they seem to be more commonly one-to-one. And just one-to-one lessons face-to-face, I think quite often the teacher becomes a listening resource. (Week 2, TEO)

Figures of focus such as similes, metaphors, and definitions help the audience focus on something in the discourse. Metaphors are widely used in both courses. One of the most utilized metaphors is that of a *community of learners*:

- (21) We are a global community. (Week 1, TSE)
- (22) I think this online community thing is an important thing. (Week 4, TEO)
- (23) Join an online community is another important thing. (Week 4, TEO)

Another important metaphor found in the courses is that of the *journey*, through which the commitment to follow and engage in an online distant learning course is seen as undertaking a journey, with successive steps and stops:

- (24) We are going to take you through the course over the next four weeks. (Welcome Week, TEO)
- (25) And in every week, in every step, there are activities for you to do. (Welcome Week TEO)
- (26) So at the end of every step, there will be comments where we ask you to exchange ideas, say what you feel about things you're learning on the course. (Welcome Week, TEO)
- (27) We're a global community. And we're starting a journey together. (Week 1, TSE)
- (28) This week our first stop is getting learners ready to learn [...] (Week 1, TSE)
- (29) Back to our first stop, getting learners ready to learn [...] (Week 1, TSE)
- (30) The second stop of our journey was reviewing learning [...] (Week 1, TSE)
- (31) The last stop in our journey this week is engaging with learners, eliciting. (Week 1, TSE)
- (32) This is a journey in which we are embarking. And enjoy the ride! (Week 1, TSE)

Another metaphor is that of *light juxtaposed to darkness*: sharing objectives with the students is shedding light on what they are going to learn and making students aware of every moment of their learning process.

- (33) I share learning objectives with learners, because I think it's a principle of good teaching, never to leave them in the dark about what the desired outcome of a particular unit or a lesson is. (Week 1, TSE)

The metaphor of *building and construction* is utilized to mean that students and teachers have to use strong and solid materials in order to create new understanding: just as building a strong and sturdy house requires strong materials such as iron, wood and concrete, in the same way building learning and knowledge requires scaffolding and building blocks:

- (34) It's important, I'd say, to scaffold learning. So in the sense of constructing, we think of building a building. You could imagine having the building blocks in this which might be those words, adding to them to create those sentences, and then building on [...] Yes, I agree with Paul that scaffolding is absolutely essential. (Week 2, TSE)

Figures of communion (allusions and rhetorical questions) help form a common bond with the audience. The authors of this paper argue that *question tags* also have this function of creating a connection with the public or the listeners:

- (35) It makes them really keen to want to know it in English then, doesn't it? (Week 1, TSE)
- (36) Referencing, and substitution, ellipses, and things like that that can sometimes prove problematic for learners. And those are the kinds of things that you can also do in the classroom as well, aren't they? (Week 2, TEO)

With regard to metadiscourse and rhetoric, it should be underlined that all features found and analysed in the two MOOC courses satisfy the appeals of classical rhetoric (Mortara Garavelli 2008; Hyland 2005: 63-67) in modern forms of persuasive discourse. The metadiscourse items identified have distinct rhetorical effects but, as can be seen

from the examples given, many of them perform more than one function simultaneously (Hyland 2005: 84). For example, transitions, by which the instructors connect elements in the discussion, explain, orient and guide the audience, appeal to *logos*, which according to Classical Rhetoric is persuasion through logical reasoning. This can be noticed in Example (33) where the instructor illustrates her use of learning objectives at the beginning of the lesson and, through the causal transition *because* she explains the reasons behind her choice. As a matter of fact, sharing learning objectives with learners contributes to effective learning, favours awareness and triggers motivation.

Hedges, boosters, self-mentions are features by which the instructors underline certainty and establish an individual presence in the discourse. This confident, decisive and commanding image appeals to *ethos*, which can be defined as persuasion through personality, stance and credibility of the speaker. As the following example shows, through the repetition of the personal pronoun *I*, and the listing of activities linked to the planning of a lesson, the speaker is successfully building her credibility and expertise on the matter.

- (37) When *I* plan my lessons, what *I* like to do is to spend quite a lot of time thinking about the questions that *I*'m going to be asking. And *I* have to do a lot of lateral thinking, because *I* not only have to think of the questions that *I* would like to ask, but also what the learners are likely to say so that *I* can think of further questions. *I* also like to use prompts. They may be visual, they may be linguistic. (Week 1, TSE)

Attitude markers, self-mentions, engagement markers are those features by which the instructors empathize with the audience's values and goals, invite them to participate and respond, consider their attitude to the arguments and establish a relationship with them. Therefore, it can be affirmed that these features appeal to *pathos*, which means persuasion through affect, empathy and sharing.

- (38) And I like learners to reflect not just on what they think they've achieved, but specifically, what they've achieved in subject learning and what they think how their English has improved to communicate the subject. So that they're

also feeling good about how much their English has developed through learning a subject. (Week 5, TSE)

In Example (38), the instructor is explaining how she appeals to learner's emotions and how she manages to establish a relationship with them by reinforcing their feelings about their achievements.

## 6. Conclusions

Concluding, spoken discourse in the filmed lectures use many of the metadiscourse markers found in written discourse and identified by several scholars, Hyland (2005) in particular. The quantitative analysis reveals a higher frequency of interactional features such as self mentions, engagement markers, hedges and boosters, rather than interactive features. The commentaries in the transcripts signal the speakers' attitudes towards the texts and their listeners. The authors of the present paper argue that interactional features are more frequent precisely because of the spoken character of the texts analysed, i.e. video lessons.

The commentaries used are not just ornamentation but they actually bring the material alive, and certainly perform a rhetorical function since they persuasively reinforce the speakers' attitudes and stance. It can thus be affirmed that metadiscoursal features found in the two online courses present information in ways which engage the participants as members of a community, where commitment and dedication, common ground and sharing seem to be fundamental and essential aspects.

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <<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"> <li>● Exemplify or specify ideational material (i.e., company information)</li> <li>● Illustrate the factual internal or external identity of the company represented in the text</li> <li>● Illustrate the instrumental value of the company's products or services</li> <li>● Illustrate the market and marketing activities of the company, product, or service</li> <li>● Improve readability of the text by visualizing abstract written information</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>● Express sender's attitude toward (company related) proposition</li> <li>● Illustrate the associative internal or external identity of the company represented in the text</li> <li>● Illustrate the associative added value of the company's products or services</li> </ul>
Engagement markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build relationship with readers</li> <li>● Appeal to readers' emotions or attitudes</li> </ul>
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.

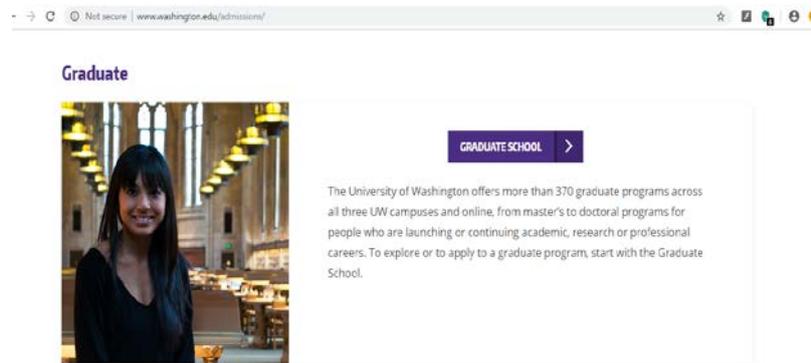


Figure 2. An introductory statement accompanying a link to graduate school.

<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.”

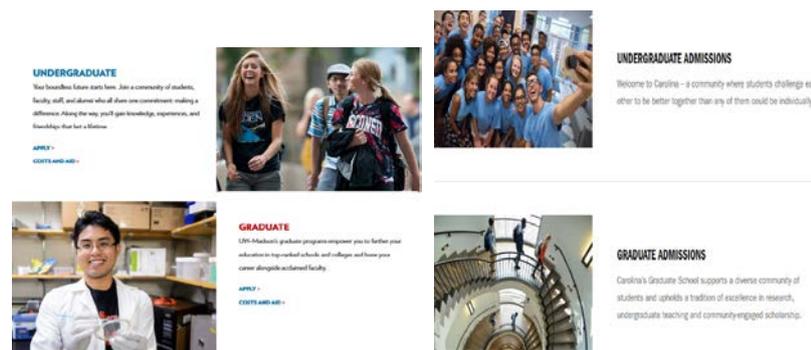


### Graduate

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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