

# A Discourse Analysis of Metadiscourse in Academic Writing by Postgraduate Students

Saddam Salim Hmood

saddam-s@utq.edu.iq

Department of English, College of Education for Humanities  
University of Thi-Qar, Thi-Qar, Iraq

## Abstract

This study explores how advanced second language writers employ metadiscourse by examining a corpus of thirteen master's theses written by Iraqi MA students. It focuses on three challenging sections: the introduction; the results and discussion; and the conclusions. Adapting Hyland's model (2005a), the study employs discourse analysis of written texts alongside contrastive analysis to examine how variations across disciplines influence the use of metadiscourse in academic writing by novice MA students. This analysis uncovers specific discourse characteristics that set this genre apart from others and highlights the disciplinary differences within it. By combining genre analysis and metadiscourse analysis into a single framework, the study offers fresh perspectives on the tools available to writers to organize their texts and interact with readers and the content of their written product, thereby contributing to a more theoretical understanding of the writing of MA theses. It also makes findings available for pedagogical applications at the appropriate level. Reliability is ensured by using a t-test. The results show that metadiscourse is an effective academic technique that writers employ to present themselves, their positions, and their readers. The study also indicates that there are significant differences in the use of some metadiscoursal markers within the discipline. Based on the study's findings, the researcher suggests that particular emphasis be placed on these markers, especially in advanced academic writing, to enhance students' discourse competence.

keywords – discourse analysis, metadiscourse, academic writing, discourse, metadiscourse

## تحليل خطابي لما وراء الخطاب في الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى طلبة الدراسات العليا

صدام سالم حمود

saddam-s@utq.edu.iq

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية الإنسانية، جامعة ذي قار

### الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيفية توظيف كُتاب اللغة الثانية المتقدمين للميتاخطاب، وذلك من خلال تحليل مدونة لغوية تتألف من ثلاث عشرة رسالة ماجستير أعدّها طلبة عراقيون في مرحلة الماجستير. وتركز الدراسة على ثلاثة أقسام تُعدّ من أكثر أجزاء الرسالة تحديًا، وهي: المقدمة، والنتائج والمناقشة، والخاتمة. واعتمادًا على نموذج هايلاند (2005)، توظف الدراسة تحليل الخطاب للنصوص المكتوبة إلى جانب التحليل التقابلي؛ بهدف استقصاء كيفية تأثير الاختلافات بين التخصصات الأكاديمية في استخدام الميتاخطاب في الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى طلبة الماجستير المبتدئين. ويكشف هذا التحليل عن خصائص خطابية محددة تميّز هذا النوع الكتابي عن غيره، كما يسلط الضوء على الفروق التخصصية داخله. ومن خلال دمج تحليل النوع الأدبي وتحليل الميتاخطاب ضمن إطار تحليلي واحد، تقدّم الدراسة رؤى جديدة حول الأدوات التي يمتلكها الكُتاب لتنظيم نصوصهم والتفاعل مع القراء ومحتوى نتاجهم الكتابي، مما يساهم في تعميق الفهم النظري لكتابة رسائل الماجستير. كما تتيح الدراسة نتائج يمكن الاستفادة منها في التطبيقات التربوية على المستوى المناسب. وقد جرى التحقق من ثبات النتائج باستخدام اختبار (T-test) وتُظهر النتائج أن الميتاخطاب يُعدّ تقنية أكاديمية فعّالة يوظفها الكُتاب لتقديم ذواتهم ومواقفهم والتفاعل مع قرائهم. كما تشير الدراسة إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في استخدام بعض مؤشرات الميتاخطاب داخل التخصص الواحد. واستنادًا إلى نتائج الدراسة، يقترح الباحث إيلاء اهتمام خاص لهذه المؤشرات، ولا سيما في مجال الكتابة الأكاديمية المتقدمة، بما يساهم في تعزيز الكفاءة الخطابية لدى الطلبة.

## I. Introduction

Today, researchers look at language as an intrinsically social phenomenon designed to create interaction and persuade readers through a range of interpersonal and argumentative strategies. As a result, academic discourse is now generally seen as dialogic and interactive rather than solely content-oriented.

The view of written texts as embodying interactions between the writer and the reader is now well-established, and this deep-rooted view has led recent studies to investigate discourse features that help writers anticipate their potential audience's perceptions, interests, and needs. Whether for the audience or through fiction, the text must be constructed coherently and persuasively to reflect its purpose (Hyland, 2001).

Metadiscourse is generally defined as discourse about discourse or writing about writing (Williams, 1981). This concept highlights language's unique ability to reflect on itself, a property known as reflexivity, which was acknowledged by prominent linguists long before it gained significant attention in applied linguistics.

Metadiscourse emerged as a formal concept attracting considerable and sustained interest from researchers only in the 1980s, when pioneers like William Vande Kopple and Avon Crismore started using the term "metadiscourse" in a wider sense than "language about language", as it had often previously been described. Several terms have been used as parallels to metadiscourse, to cover any material that is separate from the "primary" discourse (Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990), including "topical" text matter (Lautamatti, 1978/1987), "propositional" content (Mauranen, 1993), or, in the terms of Halliday's theory (1985), the ideational metafunction of language. As a matter beyond metalanguage or reflexivity, Lyons (1977) suggests that metadiscourse is language about language that motivates a growing awareness and interest in the interactive aspects of language.

Some linguists, including Mauranen (1993a, 1993b), limit metadiscourse to elements that structure a text. He (1993b) designates this narrower perspective as the "reflexive model". Conversely, others take a broader approach, understanding metadiscourse in a more inclusive manner that encompasses the interactional elements through which writers provide commentary and evaluation of their ongoing texts. Hyland's (2005a) model is comprehensive, capturing the two dimensions of interaction: that between text producers and their texts, and that between text producers and the users of those texts. This paper, however, examines metadiscourse in selected master's theses written by Iraqi MA students from a discourse analysis perspective. The present study is an attempt to tackle a relatively unexplored area in written communication: the way writers interact with their texts and their readers to build up a relationship with the discourse community. Such a relationship is established by creating a dialogic space for negotiation and evaluation of the discourse members' views.

The study investigates a central problem in written communication that MA students should be aware of – how to use the linguistic and rhetorical features of genres as convenient techniques that can be applied in the student's own discipline. In order to join the academic world, novice and academic writers need to be aware of the strategies and conventions used by professionals in the discourse community. To be accepted by the readers of a discourse community requires one to write appropriately and follow the conventional styles of discourse. It is therefore necessary to develop a good command of a style of academic writing that is interactive and dialogic rather than

objective and impersonal, by recognizing a new view of metadiscourse beyond the ideational dimension of texts (or how the texts characterize the world) and the way the texts function interpersonally.

## II. Literature Review

### *A. An Overview of Discourse Analysis*

The term “discourse” has spurred a variety of research perspectives in multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and linguistics, and has therefore been defined in a number of ways. Stubbs (1983), for example, defines discourse as “language above the sentence or above the clause” (p. 1). This definition identifies discourse as a series of sentences stretched to take the form of social actions, whereas Brown and Yule (1983) relate discourse to the functions of linguistic forms, commenting, “The analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use” (p. 1). As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions that they serve in human affairs.

Bhatia (1993) considers discourse not merely as a way of conveying specific purposes in a given time and place by texts, but as a form of social action and event that embodies certain conventions, social groups, disciplinary practices and interpretations, and cultures. This view supports the idea that knowledge is created through the discourses of social communities. It has its roots in the theory of social constructivism, and implies that the intellectual climate in which individuals live and work determines discourse content (Hyland, 2006). However, Lemek (1995) adds a social dimension to the concept of discourse by defining it as a social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems in certain kinds of situations or settings. His position takes into account the participants, whether they are actually present or only potentially relevant to the situation. Consequently, many kinds of discourse can be enacted, depending on the social habits of a community. Moreover, a text is produced by distinguishing particular meanings that bear specific objectives and interpretations for distinct social groups, resulting in actual realizations of communication, with complementary relationships. Text is concerned with specific events or occasions, whereas discourse focuses on the general description of patterns, commonality, and relationships that cover different texts and occasions. Finally, discourse is a broad notion that falls into two types: the spoken and the written. Accordingly, many registers and variations of language can be involved, depending on the situations in which these units occur.

### *B. General Issues in Discourse Analysis*

The general issues explained below relate to the objectives of discourse analysis and the nature of discourse and communication:

#### *(a). Text–Context Complementary Relationship*

Both the organization and meaning of a text are shaped by social constructs and influenced by the immediate context and cultural traditions. This suggests a reciprocal relationship between text and context, where context can be reinterpreted through text analysis, and the text can also mirror the context (Jamieson, 1975). Moreover, to understand what constitutes an appropriate text in any field, it is crucial to consider the social and intellectual activities that the text is involved in (Bazerman, 1988).

Halliday and Hasan (1989) identify two types of context – context of culture and context of situation – which are both important for the interpretation of any text. Context of culture refers to

the actions and meanings carried out through recurrent representation of the types of situations and texts that distinguish one group from other social groups and their respective cultures. Genres present this type of context. Context of situation refers to the set of meanings that are possible or potentially available in a given situation. Register is an example of this type of context.

In sum, the terms “genre” and “register” describe similar generalizations about discourse, but relate to different forms and functions. “Genre” refers to specific features by which different text types, with recurrent purposes or activities, can be recognized. “Register” refers to a variety of language or style that is associated with a particular and recurrent communicative situation. That is, genre represents the stable use of communicative events whose communicative purposes are recognized by experts within the relevant discourse community, whereas register primarily involves differences in form.

#### *(b). Discourse Analysis and Communication*

Discourse analysis considers language in use as an instrument of communication. Communication can be verbal or nonverbal, written, dyadic, monologic, or include several participants who are sending and/or receiving a message on a topic at a given time and place. Most models in discourse analysis promote a method of analysis based on the perceptions and interpretations of the same text or event by different individuals. These models assume that communication entails engagement with the shared knowledge and experience of the participants, which enables them to reach the same or similar interpretations (Aguilar, 2009).

Discourse analysis examines linguistic patterns in texts for their cultural and social contexts. This perspective sees texts as “negotiated communicative achievements” between the writer and the reader (Kaplan and Grabe, 2002: 194). Fundamentally, the writer’s intentions and their relationship with the reader influence the text’s communicative meaning. Furthermore, the linguistic patterns and organizational structures present in the text serve as tools for interpretation. These tools link the analyst to a wider framework that places the texts within a context of communicative purposes and social actions (Hyland, 2002).

The above summary illustrates that discourse links language to communication, and is reflected in language patterns in various ways. These patterns arise from the formation of specific discourse communities that use texts for particular purposes.

#### *C. Metadiscourse*

The concept of metadiscourse was first introduced by Zellig Harris in 1959 as a way to understand language in use, reflecting how writers or speakers help readers organize, interpret, and assess information. Scholars like Williams (1981) and Vande Kopple (1985a) have further developed this idea, providing valuable insights into the primary and secondary categories for identifying and classifying metadiscourse.

Numerous studies have pointed out the advantages of having metadiscourse in texts, drawing in particular on Halliday’s (1973, 1994) macrofunctional theory of language. At the interpersonal level, Schiffrin (1980) and Crismore (1989) note that metadiscourse allows written texts to exhibit features typical of spoken language, such as using personal pronouns to establish an “I–you” relationship and make a text more engaging for readers. At the textual level, Crismore and Farnsworth (1989) highlight the way metadiscourse aids readers in navigating a text, helping them to organize the content while reading, and thus improving overall comprehension. However, they

concentrate on the interpersonal function of language, which they consider necessary for educational success. They argue that controlling the interpersonal function of language is just as important as controlling content expression when it comes to developing learners' abilities to participate in text construction as individuals and express their own personality and uniqueness.

Descriptions of metadiscourse have demonstrated the role that certain linguistic categories play in the organization of discourse and in the expression of interpersonal values. One of these linguistic categories concerns the extent to which writers should make themselves visible to their readers by referring to themselves in the text (Dafouz, 2003). Dahl (2004) observed that academic writers leave traces of themselves in their writings that may be linked to their national culture. It can be concluded, therefore, that writing promotes social identity through the possibilities of selfhood, as well as the subject positions open to the writer in the socio-cultural environment. In this sense, the significance of metadiscourse is recognized as a part of the rhetorical structure of written communication, and as a linguistic resource closely associated with the identity of the writer.

Metadiscourse has been studied from different viewpoints for different purposes, challenging the traditional view that academic writing should be objective and impersonal. Researchers like Thetela (1997), Hoey (2001), and Hyland (2005a) argue that interaction in written texts can be conducted in the same way as it is in spoken dialogue. This view gradually came to reflect a perception of academic writing as social engagement, involving interaction between the writers and the readers. Hyland (2005) states that a writer is not only able to convert a dry or difficult text into coherent, reader-friendly prose, but also able to relate it to a given context and convey his/her personality, credibility, audience sensitivity, and relationship to the message.

Several studies on various types of academic discourse treat metadiscourse as an increasingly important concept. These include both school and university textbooks (Crismore, 1989; Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990; Bondi, 1999; Hyland, 2000). Metadiscourse has also been studied comparatively by the likes of Mauranen (1993), Crismore et al. (1993), and AlKaff (2000) in an effort to understand differences across cultures.

Fundamentally, metadiscourse represents the idea that language is more than a means of merely conveying information from one person to another. Rather, it is also a means of interacting with the attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating. Furthermore, metadiscourse options are the ways we articulate and construct these interactions. Removing these features makes a passage much less personal, less interesting, and less easy to process. Finally, metadiscourse carries an essential social meaning by revealing the author's personality and identity and his/her hopes that his/her readers respond to the ideational material (Hyland, 2005).

#### *D. Discourse and Metadiscourse*

This section aims to clarify the concept of metadiscourse and place it in the broader framework of discourse. Metadiscourse encompasses two levels of discourse: the first, known as "primary discourse", emphasizes the main message and propositional content; the second level, "metadiscourse", focuses on the strategies and linguistic choices used by the writer to facilitate the reader's understanding of the message, the author's attitude, and the overall organization of the text. This second level is considered the non-content aspect of discourse, as it does not contribute propositional information, but instead signifies the author's presence (Vande Kopple, 1985).

Vande Kopple (2002) talks similarly of two levels of meaning: the first supplying the reader with information about a topic; and the second emphasizing the act of writing. The second level does not develop the ideational material, but maps the discourse in a way that helps the readers to organize, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes towards that material.

Halliday (1994) states that propositional material is something that is negotiated and argued about, confirmed, disagreed with, and so on. Hyland (2005) comments that this definition does not always eliminate much of what is typically considered metadiscourse. He further stresses that metadiscourse is one of the principal means by which the interests, the positions, the perspectives, and the values of those who establish the propositions are realized. In this sense, writing and acts of meaning-making are never seen as impartial processes, but as immersed in reciprocal acts of comprehension and involvement.

Metadiscourse is not viewed as a separate level of meaning, and it does not support propositional content; that is, both the propositional and metadiscoursal components constitute the meaning of a text. Myers (1990), as cited in Hyland (2005), elucidates this position through the analysis of a paper in the journal *Science*, which was rewritten by the editors of *Scientific American* for a wider non-specialist audience. Analysing the transformation of one sentence into another, he found that the content or subject matter remained the same, but the meanings changed considerably.

Ifantidou (2005) contests the view that metadiscourse has no actual propositional content, claiming instead that metadiscourse plays an essential role in facilitating an effective interpretation of academic discourse and often contributes to the propositional content of utterances. She confirms her claim by demonstrating the propositional nature of several items of metadiscourse in some example sentences.

#### *E. Models of Metadiscourse*

Several models, classifications, or typologies of metadiscourse have been suggested and applied. Moreover, there are significant differences and overlaps between the components of these models because the definition of metadiscourse is imprecise and the features it is meant to address are not strictly classified (Hyland, 2005).

The early studies, relying on the Hallidayan distinction between textual and interpersonal macrofunctions of language, recognize two levels of metadiscourse. The first level is concerned with the rhetorical strategies and linguistic devices that are employed in constructing a coherent text to present the propositional material in a systematic way. The second level relates to the interactional and evaluative aspects of the author's presence in his/her discourse. It expresses the writer's assessment and evaluation of the propositional material and his/her involvement in greater intimacy and dialogue with the reader (ibid.).

TABLE 1  
INTERPERSONAL MODEL OF METADISOURSE, ADAPTED FROM HYLAND (2005)

Category		Function	Examples
Interactive		Help to guide the reader through the text by:	
1	Transitions	Expressing the relations between main clauses.	in addition, but, thus

2	Frame Markers	Referring to discourse acts, sequences, or stages.	finally, to conclude, my purpose is
3	Endophorics	Referring to information in other texts.	noted above, see fig. 1, in section 2
4	Evidentials	Referring to information from other texts.	according to x, z states
5	Code Glosses	Elaborating propositional meanings.	namely, e.g., such as
Interactional		Involve the reader through intruding and commenting on the text by:	
1	Hedges	Withholding commitment and opening dialogue.	might, perhaps, possibly
2	Boosters	Emphasizing certainty or closing off dialogue.	in fact, definitely, it is clear that
3	Attitude Markers	Expressing the writer's attitude to the proposition.	unfortunately, I argue, surprisingly
4	Self-Mentions	Referencing author(s) explicitly	I, we, my, our
5	Engagement Markers	Building an explicit relationship with the reader.	consider, note, you can see

### III. Methodology

#### A. Data Selection Criteria

The corpus subjected to analysis consisted of 13 Master of Arts (MA) theses written by Iraqi students studying Applied Linguistics. The choice of the MA theses in this discipline was based on several factors. First, the number of studies carried out to investigate metadiscourse in MA theses is very limited. Most studies in this area examine the use of metadiscourse in research articles and journals. Second, the genre of MA theses is distinguished by its intended purpose and discourse community, as well as its discursive practices, and this has implications for the writer-reader interactions as discourse community members. Third, this research was based on the features of this genre, which include introductions, results, discussions, and conclusions. These sections were chosen because of their challenging and rhetorically compelling dialogic nature. It was based on the different rhetorical functions found in these sections that the researcher mainly established the significance of the study and generalized the main findings.

#### B. Data Analysis Procedures

One main objective of this study was to examine the occurrence of IV metadiscourse, which organizes and guides the reader through the text (discourse-level/interactive), and I metadiscourse, which expresses the writer's personal stance, engagement, or attitudes (writer-level/interactional), in three rhetorical chapters or sections of MA theses. A second aim was to identify the differences among postgraduate students in the use of IV metadiscourse and I metadiscourse. In order to meet these goals, many samples of selected excerpts were examined and analysed in terms of the use and distribution of IV metadiscourse and I metadiscourse features.

The analysis took into consideration only the main text of the theses written by the students; that is to say, quotations, citations (including summaries where the stance marker was used by the original author), and examples were excluded from the material.

In line with the major aim of the study, the corpus from the discipline was analysed, and the most frequently used metadiscourse features were identified. After the frequency of IV metadiscourse and I metadiscourse in three rhetorical chapters and sections had been determined and the uses categorized, the total words used in each chapter or section, as well as the number of items in each category, were counted, and their percentages were calculated for each discipline.

The model used for the analysis of metadiscourse was Hyland's (2005a) interpersonal model. Hyland and Tse (2004) claim that metadiscourse must be conceptualized as an interpersonal feature of communication. This stands in sharp contrast to Crismore's (1983) and, later, Crismore and Farnsworth's (1989) views that metadiscourse contributes to either the propositional or interpersonal function of a text.

Furthermore, unlike Mauranen (1993) and Bunton (1999), who see meta-text as the writer's self-awareness of their text, Hyland and Tse (2004) believe that metadiscourse represents the writer's awareness of the unfolding text as discourse, and thus relates to how the writer uses his/her language to include text, writer, and reader. According to this viewpoint, academic discourse is more than just a convincing text production that represents a study of reality; rather, it must also include credible self- and work-representations, as well as negotiating its social interactions with readers.

### *C. Description of Hyland's Model*

Hyland's model (2005) takes a more expansive approach than earlier studies by including both stance and engagement features. He contends that showing an awareness of the text is a fundamentally reader-oriented activity, as it "reveals the writer's awareness of the reader and their need for elaboration, clarification, guidance, and interaction" (Hyland, 2005, p. 55). Consequently, metadiscourse is seen as incorporating interactive elements.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) has had an impact on Hyland's model, particularly regarding how meaning is generated within clauses and how textual devices operate concurrently in different roles. Hyland (2005) points out that while metadiscourse is not officially part of the systemic functional model, there are overlaps, such as in relation to transitions and hedges and Halliday's categories of conjunctive relations and modality. Nevertheless, there is a distinction in how textual and interpersonal functions are defined. In metadiscourse, the textual function refers to aspects that relate to text organization, while in SFG, textual metadiscourse includes "general text-creating strategies, such as theme/rheme structure, old/new information, and broader cohesion concepts like anaphora and reference" (Adel, 2006, 17).

In the study of metadiscourse, the interpersonal dimension of a text is understood as a comprehensive concept that incorporates all the resources used to engage the reader, including textual elements. Halliday defines this interpersonal aspect using mood and modality systems. Conversely, Hyland's model stresses that metadiscourse represents an interaction between the writer and the reader.

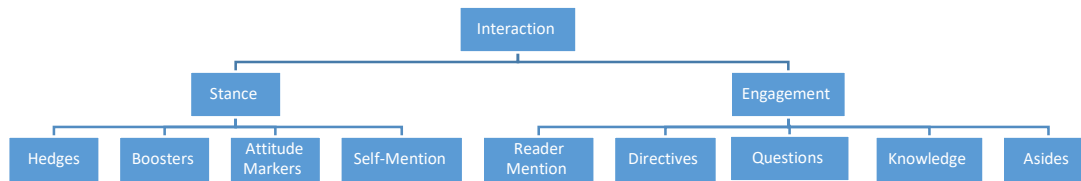


Figure 1 Interactional Macro-Functions and Their Realizations (Hyland, 2008)

#### IV. Data Analysis

##### A. Metadiscourse Markers in Linguistics Theses

Linguistics is a soft knowledge field, meaning it focuses on how human actions impact events. The variables, therefore, are diverse, and the relationships between them tend to be ambiguous and uncertain. Linguistics also often uses artificial inquiry methods rather than genuine ones, which demonstrate repetitive developmental patterns but with limited reproducibility. As such, it expects to discover probabilities rather than certainties. Moreover, representations of this type of knowledge have rhetorical effects, influencing preferred methods of persuasion, interaction, knowledge construction, and the representation of oneself and others in academic writing (Becher, 1989, as cited in Hyland, 2005). The excerpts below were used to examine some of these patterns and demonstrate how academics use them to establish credibility and show the importance of their work within their academic community.

##### B. Interactive Metadiscourse in the Introduction Chapter

Different patterns of text organization can be expected in foreign language writing because each discipline has its own perceptions of how to present ideas in texts. In linguistics, MA theses are usually divided into several sections, with sentences and clauses being joined by the formal links known as cohesive links or textual markers. By using the appropriate norms of engagement and epistemological belief, the discourse acquires its persuasive and interactional force. In the following excerpts, the use and distribution of the interactive (textual) markers will be analysed and discussed.

###### (a). Transitions

Transitions, like other textual devices, can be “interactionally motivated, contributing to the creation and maintenance of shifting interpersonal orientations” (Hyland, 2004, p. 137).

The contrastive connective “but”, for example, can have a different meaning depending on the context. In the following excerpt, it serves as an additional comment or elaboration on the preceding sentence to indicate that the following sentence is not congruent with what has come before:

###### Excerpt 1

“**Thus**, it is felt necessary to bridge the gap resulting from this confusion, as it is problematic” (Al-Abassi, 2004, p.155).

###### Excerpt 2

“It will **also** be of help to textbook designers and those who are interested in the linguistic discipline of error analysis” (Al-Muttalibi, 2006, p. 32).

*Excerpt 3*

“Indefiniteness is not a specific notion, **and** the distinction between indefiniteness and definiteness is not easy to understand” (Taahir, 2005, p.43).

*(b). Frame Markers*

Frame markers can be described as discourse activity markers. Fraser (1993) defines them as “markers that signal discourse activity relative to some part of the foregoing (explaining, summarizing)” (p. 10). The announcing of discourse goals or aims is a frequent function of such markers in the thesis introductions. This marker is used substantially, and is now a conventional practice in these kinds of academic writings:

*Excerpt 4*

“This study **aims at**:

1. Describing the context of thesis examinations.
2. Investigating how the turn-taking system operates in thesis examinations” (Sa’eed, 2005, p.55).

In the following excerpt, the text is mapped in a systematic way to direct the reader’s attention to a particular kind of relation between discourse units. In this way, the frame markers minimize the processing effort required from the reader to manage the text by guaranteeing that the information will be introduced in relevant stages:

*Excerpt 5*

“The objectives of the research are to investigate the area under investigation, namely, the progressive and perfective aspect of English; **secondly**, to survey the previous research in the field; and **the next step** is to design a test that will draw the full ... The **final step** that follows the administration of the test will be ... ” (Al-Nueimi, 2006, p.66).

*(c). Endophoric Markers*

As the term suggests, endophoric markers are text-internal or intratextual markers that represent the reflexive use of language. They also function interpersonally, since they make the text more interactive and thus more easily accessible to the reader. In functional linguistics terms, they perform the metalinguistic and directive functions in Jakobson’s (1960) system, and the textual and interpersonal functions in Halliday’s (1973) system. Nevertheless, such markers are not frequently used in the introductions, but section and sentence levels are used in clusters with vague markers, such as in the example shown below.

*Excerpt 6*

“What also makes it an attractive area to investigate is the great amount of research carried out in it” (Bihora, 2006, p. 99).

*(d). Code glosses*

These devices indicate the restatement of ideational information. Textually, they describe what the speaker perceives as the relation between propositions. With an interactional function, these

markers indicate the writer's awareness and prediction of the additional explanatory material the readers may need to understand the text. In the following example, the code gloss can be regarded as text modification, which entails adding some type of linguistic information to aid comprehension:

*Excerpt 7*

**“To illustrate**, students, for example, are unable to identify the different categories the underlined adjectives and adverbs represent ...” (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p. 55).

*C. Interactive Metadiscourse in the Results and Discussion Chapter*

The results and discussion section of linguistics theses may be included within the practical side of the study or appear as a separate chapter. Whatever form it takes, this part is highly interpersonal in communicating the initially highlighted assumption and letting the reader know what sort of inferential processes the proposed interpretation involves. To meet such goals, the researcher tries to elucidate the relation that exists between the reader's cognitive environment, on the one hand, and his/her attitude and evaluation of the content and the readers, on the other hand. In most language studies, the segments of the discussion are divided into subsections, with each subsection dealing with an aspect of the phenomenon addressed. Furthermore, subsections can end with a summary, as in the following example:

*Excerpt 8*

**“It is important to say that the choice of the indefinite or definite is relative to the world in which the speaker/writer and addressee live”** (Taahir, 2005, p.77).

Many strategies, such as rhetorical choices, are used to promote the writer's standpoint and shed a positive light within the discussion on the study outcomes. Some of these choices are discussed in the following excerpts:

*(a). Transitions*

Some devices, such as “accordingly”, function as inferential devices that indicate that the current sentence conveys a message consequential to some aspect of the foregoing one:

*Excerpt 9*

“The results clearly show that, at the recognition level, the subjects have faced difficulties in distinguishing transitional conjunctions. **Accordingly**, the second hypothesis, which states that most Iraqi EFL university students often do not distinguish between these devices and their two types, is verified” (Al-Mousawi, 2006, p.123).

Contrastive markers are also transitions, and typically convey a contrast between two sentences or utterances. In this excerpt, the contrastive marker “but” is not a part of the message content, but it does indicate that the previous sentence needs to be modified or qualified:

*Excerpt 10*

“The interpretation is that there is a strong positive relationship between the frequencies of occurrences of implicit relationships in English and Arabic, **but** this relation is not as strong as those of the other types” (A-Attia, 2005, p. 204).

*(b). Frame Markers*

*Excerpt 11*

“As for English, three subjects are raised. **First**, plural noun phrases must be bare, i.e., indefinites. **Secondly**, they should have lasting attribute predicates. **Finally**, they should occupy the subject position” (Al-Hilali, 2005, p. 113).

Notice that the most frequently used “Frames” are those that list points that relate to a subordinate item, such as reasons, conclusions, stages, etc.:

*Excerpt 12*

“From the tables above, **the following results are concluded**:

1. The coefficient variation for ...
2. The testees’ performance at the recognition level ...” (Al-Mousawi, 2006, p. 63)

*Excerpt 13*

“The analysis of students’ performance on interrogation in general ... reveals a more comprehensive developmental continuum consisting of **the following stages**: ...” (Bihora, 2006, p.95).

Labelling of the stages is also observed in the following example, where the writer directs the reader to draw a conclusion concerning the previous proposition:

*Excerpt 14*

“**To sum up**, the English construction resembles the Arabic one only when the undefined noun in the latter is singular” (Al-Hilali, 2005, p.47).

*(c). Endophoric Markers*

To make the additional material salient and available to the reader so that they can process the writer’s intentions, the researcher uses endophoric markers. Non-linear text references (e.g., “table” and “figure”) and chapter/section-level markers are the most frequent devices. Moreover, the underuse of vague markers (e.g., “above” and “below”) is also significant.

*(d). Code Glosses*

Reformulation that can function as reduction is overused in this chapter, particularly phrases like “in other words” and abbreviations such as “i.e.” Both are used as a means of rephrasing the original material in different words to clarify and enhance understanding of the intended meanings. In this way, reformulation is an option for finding a linguistically appropriate text. Thus, this form involves a simplification of existing material to meet the reader’s needs for full comprehension.

*Excerpt 15*

“Item analysis explains the extent to which an item is difficult, **i.e.**, its difficulty level, and how far that item discriminates between high and low students, **i.e.**, discrimination level” (Al-Zaidi, 2005, p.58).

#### *D. Interactive Metadiscourse in the Conclusions Section*

The conclusions section in linguistics MA theses normally forms part of a chapter that involves recommendations and suggestions for further research. Frame markers, in particular those labelling lists, such as findings and other basic related points, were the most frequently observed technique here.

The students used some code glosses that functioned as reduction rather than expansion, such as “namely”. These help the readers follow the meaning of the text by rephrasing what has been said, rather than offering an extended explanation of the theoretical framework and plunging into an analysis.

#### *Excerpt 16*

“The research has led to the hierarchy of acquisition, **namely**, present progressive, past progressive, past perfect ... ” (Al-Nueimi, 2006, p.33).

The heavy use of endophorics was noticed in only one of the selected theses. This may be due to the way the nature of the data here required evidence, which is often endophorically signalled. Other theses used these devices sparsely.

#### *E. Interactional Metadiscourse in the Introduction Chapter*

The following selected samples from the introduction chapter of the MA theses on linguistics provide examples of the interpersonal role of metadiscourse, which cannot be separated from its subjective role.

##### *(a). Boosters*

Boosters and other interactional sources, such as hedges, engagement markers, and evidentials, help the writer suggest a clear adherence to particular views, and thus create an effective ethos that projects the writer as competent, reliable, and honest (Hyland, 1998). In the following excerpt, the writer tries to present his/her personal view and make his/her perspective more prominent in an attempt to project his/her persona, on the one hand, and to indicate the centrality and interest of his/her study on the other.

##### *(b). Attitude Markers*

These markers belong to stance choices, through which an impression of authority and credibility is created. The writer in the following excerpt tries to convey his/her evaluation of the phenomenon presented by the intensifying expression “very important”.

#### *Excerpt 17*

“Reading is a **very important** skill in our life” (Al-Khafaji, 2003, p.46).

##### *(c). Engagement Markers*

There is an enormous emphasis on binding participants together through the use of the inclusive “we”. This person marker acknowledges the presence of both the writers and their audience to create a sense of disciplinary solidarity. The effective appeal of this pronoun lies in the way it demonstrates common ground with the reader, and presents him/her as a person with similar views, interests, and objectives.

*Excerpt 18*

“**Why** is it that a student seems to produce a target-like structure and seems to forget it later? **Is** this actually backsliding or part of a learning progress the learner employs for testing hypotheses about the TL?” (Bihora, 2006, p.122).

*(d). Self-Mention*

It has been observed that there is no explicit reference to the writers themselves as being responsible for the ongoing text. Instead, the word “**researcher**” is frequently used to refer to the presence of the writer. This is a conscious choice by the writer to maintain a particular stance and authorial identity.

*Excerpt 19*

“**The researcher** thinks that some methods of teaching these connectors in the classroom can be confusing...” (Al-Mousawi, 2006, p. 2).

A few abstract rhetors are used, in which actions are allowed to be attributed to things rather than persons, as in the following example:

*Excerpt 20*

“**The study** undertaken here is expected to provide knowledge about the acquisition of the progressive and perfective aspects of the English language by Arabic-speaking learners” (Al-Nueimi, 2006, p.46).

*(e). Evidentials*

Citations play a crucial role at this point in providing a degree of ratification of what is being investigated because they imply an application of the view that the new claims need support and justification. A reference to evidentials involves a reference to the originators of these new claims, as the two cannot be separated. Furthermore, citations are also crucial for providing validation and demonstrating the novelty of an assertion. They are also a means by which the writer mitigates his/her responsibility for the proposition. Both types of citation – integral and non-integral – were used in this chapter.

*Excerpt 21*

“The term ‘aspect’ was first used to refer to the distinction of ‘perfective’ and ‘imperfective’ (**Lyons, 1979**)” (Al-Nueimi, 2006, p.255).

*F. Interactional Metadiscourse in the Results and Discussion Chapter*

This section of a thesis provides a detailed explanation of the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis. It also incorporates references to both past and present research, forming a

crucial part of the discussion around the arguments. Various rhetorical choices are employed to support the writer's perspective and highlight positive aspects of the research findings.

*Excerpt 22*

“Correction was observed in all students when they recognized that their reading was incorrect due to their attempts to link it with meaning. They reverted to reviewing and correcting their understanding to grasp the intended message. Overall, this appeared to be a constructive strategy, indicating effective reading for comprehension” (Al-Khafaji, 2003, p. 34).

*(a). Boosters*

In an effort to remain as objective and neutral as possible, writers often aim to present viewpoints grounded in scientific research and practical methods. Consequently, boosters may appear in clusters to indicate the writer's confidence in their argument and to highlight the importance of their work in relation to alternative interpretations:

*Excerpt 23*

“**Clearly**, the students in these instances frequently view the auxiliary verb ‘did’ as equivalent to the Arabic counterpart. In fact, the use of ‘do’ seems to be an overgeneralization. This is also the case when applying the verb ‘do’ in negative constructions” (Bihora, 2006, p.22).

Some boosters are employed to reinforce sentences by creating an impression of certainty or underscoring the strength of the proposition. In this way, the writer demonstrates a strong commitment to the claim and presents their argument as evidence. This approach does not require persuasion; instead, the writer reaffirms the content, reflecting a greater level of objectivity.

*G. Interactional Metadiscourse in the Conclusions Section*

*(a). Boosters*

Based on the concrete results obtained from a test, the writer asserts their proposition as being indisputable by using the epistemic term “must”, which not only implies inference but also includes an element of evidentiality:

*Excerpt 24*

“The meaning, function, and appropriateness must be clarified to prevent the incorrect use of transitional conjunctions” (Al-Mousawi, 2006, p. 88).

*(b). Attitude Markers*

In the following example, the writer's affective attitude toward the proposition is conveyed by the adjective “most common”, which he/she uses to appeal to the readers by claiming solidarity with them and also by suggesting a suitable response to their potential question. The potential question on the readers' part is, “What is the common process to investigate interlingual interference?”

*Excerpt 25*

“In this respect, the use of translation is the **most common** phenomenon, but the testees in the present study try to avoid using such a process” (Al-Mousawi, 2006, p.22)

## V. Conclusion

Several important conclusions have been reached in the course of this study. First, metadiscourse is acknowledged as a significant tool for enhancing communication, playing a vital role in building relationships with an audience. It encourages audience participation and offers clarity on different perspectives, aiding in the interpretation of the message. In line with the social constructivist viewpoint, metadiscourse serves not just as a personal exchange but also as a communal process. This indicates that texts must adapt to the dynamics and intentions of various communities, as well as their understanding of and responses to the message. Furthermore, metadiscourse is valuable for endowing academic writing with a high level of professionalism. This approach equips the producer with the means to engage with their audience effectively. In terms of rhetorical preferences, the rhetorical inclinations of distinct discourse communities can be examined through a methodological analysis. In this context, the current master's degree programme demonstrates a practical approach to aligning textbook content with techniques aimed at assisting students in adapting their responses to different attitudes and to engage with readers. Additionally, the language choices made by the master's students in the two fields – introduction and research – depend on the respective roles they assume and how they present their research questions. The impact of these choices is shaped by both the intended audience and the context of their work, emphasizing that the role of methodological discourse serves as a vital analytical tool and that clearer reasoning is crucial in instances where introductions and conclusions are being emphasized. Since the use of metadiscourse is closely related to its socio-rhetorical context, it is not surprising to see that discipline specificity affirms the fact that academic discourse demonstrates autonomous disciplinary visions. That is, it develops and employs some distinctive rhetorical forms relative to the situations, convictions, and expectations of discursal communities to achieve certain academic goals. Put simply, academic writers from different disciplines may be subjected or exposed to distinct modes of interaction that lead them to be involved with suitable rhetorical choices that are relevant to the particular culture of a particular discourse community.

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