

Metadiscourse Use in the Persuasive Writing of Malaysian Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Metadiscourse is a prevalent linguistic resource that helps writers to manage the flow of the propositional contents and to direct their stance towards their contents and readers. Its dominance in persuasive writings has motivated this study which is to examine the occurrences and forms of metadiscourse use in the writing of both the high (HEP) and low (LEP) English proficiency Malaysian undergraduate writers. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the metadiscourse use were obtained using a concordance software (MP2.2). The results indicated that between the two main domains of metadiscourse, both groups of writers exhibited a greater preference for the use of *interactional* metadiscourse than the *interactive*. Between the two groups of writers, it was the HEP writers who exhibited a higher frequency of use for both the *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse. In terms of the forms used, the HEP writers also used a greater variety of metadiscourse forms when compared to the LEP writers. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the HEP writers had a greater awareness of the academic writing conventions, while the LEP writers still lacked this awareness in their writing. Furthermore, variant forms of metadiscourse use were also noted. This finding implies that more instructional help may be needed to raise the LEP writers' awareness on the importance of metadiscourse use in a persuasive discourse.

Keywords: metadiscourse use, persuasive writing, interactive metadiscourse, interactional metadiscourse

1. Introduction

Writing is a social act which carries a communicative intent of the writer. This notion that writing and in particular, academic writing, is a social act is very much grounded in the theory of social constructionism (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory purports that both the writer and the reader are actively involved in the 'building, shaping, and elaborating meaning' in a written text (Spivey, 1995, p. 313). In academic writing, this communicative process is manifested through the persuasive rhetoric of the writer. Be it a research article or an academic assignment, the primary goal of the writer is to sway the reader's opinion to that of his. In other words, academic writing is essentially a persuasive endeavor (see e.g. Silver, 2003, who has argued for this stand succinctly). This act of persuasion is done through the writer's use of logical reasoning in presenting his propositions and also his ability to employ linguistic features that build relationship with his readers. Furthermore, the art of persuasion involves the writer's skill in sequencing his thoughts so that they are well received by his reader (Jones, 2011; Hyland, 2005). These persuasive skills are encapsulated in Aristotle's famed rhetorical strategies which are *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* and the employment of the use of appropriate metadiscourse is one of the important strategies in this persuasive act.

1.1 Definition of Metadiscourse

Over the decades, writing scholars have been fascinated by the role of metadiscourse in writing and each of these scholars has defined metadiscourse in their own way. For Vande-Kopple (1985) metadiscourse functions as a linguistic device in writings which indicates the writer's presence but does not add any additional propositional information. This notion is also held by Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen (1993, p. 40) who adds that metadiscourse helps the listener and reader to "organize, interpret and evaluate the information given." In a similar vein, Hyland and Tse (2004) also see metadiscourse as a writing device that helps writers to structure their writing discourse and display their stance towards the text or the reader. More recently, Williams (2007, p.

65) commented that metadiscourse is the language that refers “not to the substance of your ideas, but to yourself, your reader, or your writing.” With these myriad definitions, one point is clear and that is the use of appropriate metadiscourse in writing helps the writer to maneuver his writing to meet the demands and expectations of the discourse community (Nasiri, 2012; Hyland, 2005).

2. Literature Review

Metadiscourse use has been investigated in various academic genres, editorials as well as in cross-cultural studies. Such myriad studies are testaments of its importance in writing, particularly in academic writing. Hyland (1999) made a comparative study of metadiscourse use between introductory textbooks for tertiary students and research articles. The findings showed that although both types of text exhibited a greater use of *textual* metadiscourse, there was an increase in the use of the *interpersonal* metadiscourse in the research articles. This is not surprising as research articles being persuasive in nature, would need a greater use of the interpersonal metadiscourse. Apart from this, Hyland (2004) also examined the metadiscourse use in 240 masters and doctoral dissertations of six disciplines (Computer science, Electronic Engineering, Business Studies, Biology, Applied Linguistics, and Public Administration). The findings indicated that the use of metadiscourse is an important rhetorical device in the academic genre particularly in postgraduate dissertations where the students used slightly more *interactive* than *interactional* forms. In comparing the use of metadiscourse between Ph.D and Masters degree dissertations, it was shown that Ph.D writers used more metadiscourse. One possible reason could be the length of the text. It is common knowledge that the text length of a Ph.D dissertation is definitely longer than a Masters dissertation. Therefore, more *interactive* metadiscourse is needed to structure the argument into a cohesive text. Finally, the study also revealed that dissertations in the soft sciences have more metadiscourse because establishing proof in the field of soft sciences is more difficult. As a result, there is a greater need for the writers to exert credibility in their writing.

Besides postgraduate dissertations, metadiscourse has also been examined in undergraduate academic writings. Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) compared the use of metadiscourse in good and poor undergraduate essays and found that good essays employed more *interactional* metadiscourse while the weak essays exhibited more use of the *interactive*. Furthermore, good essays were found to have more and a wider range of metadiscourse forms. This led them to conclude that metadiscourse use has a bearing on the quality of the essays. A more recent study of undergraduates' use of metadiscourse in their writings was undertaken by Letsoela (2013). The writer examined the metadiscourse used in undergraduate research reports and found that the subjects of the study used more *interactive* rather than *interpersonal* metadiscourse. Like most studies on metadiscourse, the use of *transitions* ranked the highest in the *interactive* metadiscourse category while *hedges* were found to have the highest frequency of use in the *interactional* metadiscourse category.

Interestingly, the study of metadiscourse is not confined to just its use in texts from different academic genres. To date, cross-cultural studies on metadiscourse have gained significant grounds among researchers particularly those in Europe. They not only investigate the use of metadiscourse in students' writings (Crismore et al., 1993) but also in opinion columns in newspapers (Dafouz-Milne, 2008) and editorials (Aertselaer, 2008). In the comparative study between American and Finnish writers, Crismore et al.'s (1993) study showed that both groups of students used more *interpersonal* than *textual* metadiscourse. It was also found that the Finnish students had a higher density of metadiscourse per line and they used more *hedges* than the American students. In Li and Wharton's (2012) cross cultural and cross disciplinary study on the metadiscourse repertoire of L1Mandarin undergraduates' writing in English in China and in the UK, it was found that there were disciplinary variations in the use of metadiscourse. However, they argued that context was a more influential factor as they found interesting differences in metadiscourse use between contexts. The study revealed that native speakers of Mandarin studying in China chose stronger persuasive markers such as *should* and *must* to make their claims while the native speakers of Mandarin studying in the UK use less quoted *evidentials*. According to the authors, the latter group who are in the UK would be better exposed to the academic writing convention where they would be given explicit guidance to avoid plagiarism. In Dafouz-Milne's (2008) study, she discovered that metadiscourse plays a major role in effecting the persuasive arguments in the opinion columns of newspapers. Her study also echoed the findings of Crismore et al. (1993) in that the use of metadiscourse that was found prevalent in texts written by native writers of English was also a common feature in texts written by the Spanish writers of the *El Pais* opinion columns. Subjecting the editorials to a holistic evaluation by a group of informants, Aertselaer's (2008) research revealed that the texts considered to be most persuasive were those which had a balanced number of *textual* and *interpersonal* metadiscourse categories. Conversely, the texts with a low number of metadiscourse features were regarded as less persuasive. It is clear then that readers of editorials appreciate writers who use appropriate linguistic cues to guide their understanding of the text and build a writer-reader

relationship without appearing dogmatic or patronizing.

2.1 Objective of the Study

There is no doubt that the avalanche of studies on metadiscourse use have all pointed to the pivotal role of metadiscourse in effecting successful writing. Unfortunately, research in L2 writing has shown that its use is still a challenge for L2 writers. Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) who studied the use of metadiscourse in good and weak undergraduate essays commented that L2 writers in their study still lack sufficient knowledge of the language system and also the writing conventions of the target language. This view is supported by Myles (2002) who noted that although most tertiary ESL writers have some writing skills, they are often confused with writing conventions of the academic world which seem to be at odds with the writing conventions they are familiar with in the general writing tasks. Furthermore, Chan and Tan (2010) noted that ESL writers and in particular, Malaysian undergraduate writers, are not only still struggling with the grammatical rules and sentence construction of the language, but also the academic writing conventions. The paucity in linguistic dexterity notably the use of metadiscourse among Malaysian college students was also documented in the study of Anwardeen, Ong, Gabriel, and Kalajahi (2013). Their work which investigated the frequency and common errors of metadiscourse use by Malaysian college students revealed that the writing skill of these students is still in the developmental stage. While Anwardeen et al.'s (2013) study focused on college students, this study examined the metadiscourse use of first year Malaysian undergraduates' persuasive writing. It is important to examine the writing of this group of writers because being in their first year in the university, writing a piece of persuasive writing that follows the academic conventions may be a new challenge for them. Furthermore, these students entered the university with differing English proficiency levels. Apart from the medical or English language degree programmes, other programmes in Malaysian universities may not consider a high level of English language proficiency as one of the criteria for entry into university. However, upon entering the university, certain courses may be conducted in English and the students would have to write their assignments in English. As a result of these challenges and the keenness of wanting to know the writing readiness of these undergraduates and in particular their use of metadiscourse in their writing had motivated this study to investigate the use of metadiscourse features in both the high English proficiency (HEP) and low English proficiency (LEP) Malaysian undergraduate writers' persuasive writing task. As such, the following research questions were formulated to guide this study.

- 1) What is the frequency of the use of metadiscourse in the persuasive essays written by HEP and LEP undergraduate writers?
- 2) To what extent is the use of metadiscourse forms in the HEP undergraduate writers' essays different from the ones written by the LEP undergraduate writers?

The results obtained from this study would be useful to inform writing instructors on the writing readiness of the students. The data then could be a resource for them to design writing programmes that are suitable to the needs of the students. Furthermore, the results could also be used as authentic instructional input and this would definitely help students to enhance their skill in writing a persuasive piece of writing.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study was both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis investigated the metadiscourse frequency of use while the qualitative analysis examined the linguistic realizations (forms) of metadiscourse use in the undergraduate writers' writing tasks.

3.1 Sample

A total of 628 Malaysian undergraduate writers from a local public university participated in this study. The proficiency levels (HEP and LEP) of the participants were decided based on their *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) English language results. SPM is a Malaysian national examination which is almost equivalent to the United Kingdom General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Those who were categorized as having HEP were students who obtained A1 or A2 (which is generally taken as having 74-100 marks in school examinations) in the English language paper, while those categorized as having LEP were students who scored C5-D7 (45-59 marks). Based on this categorization, 294 participants were identified as HEP undergraduate writers, while 334 participants were classified as LEP undergraduate writers.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used to examine the employment of metadiscourse use by the HEP and LEP undergraduate writers was a writing task. The writing task took the form of a persuasive essay which was timed and based on a given prompt. The topic for the writing task was on the danger of smoking among teenagers and the

undergraduates had to provide their lines of argument to convince their readers as to why smoking among teenagers should be discouraged. The persuasive essay was chosen because Silver (2003) has stated that academic writing is persuasive in nature and therefore, the use of metadiscourse would be evident in such writing. Before the writing task was administered to the participants of the study, a pilot test was carried out. It was done to rule out any anomalies associated with the administration of the writing task and also to determine whether there was any problem with the prompt given for the writing task. The results of the pilot test saw a slight revision to the writing prompts where three extracts from articles that were relevant to the topic of discussion were added. The addition of relevant articles to the topic of discussion as writing prompts is consistent with the theory of reading and writing connection. As observed by Grabe and Kaplan (1996, p. 107), reading and writing are “reciprocal activities”. In other words, knowledge gained from a reading activity can serve as input for a writing task, and in turn, the writing activity can lead a writer to further reading resources.

3.2.1 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework to investigate the metadiscourse use was that of Hyland’s (2005) *An International Model of Metadiscourse*. Although scholars on metadiscourse (see e.g. Crismore et al., 1993; Vande-Kopple, 2002) have each constructed their own taxonomy of metadiscourse, Hyland’s (2005) model was chosen over the others as the framework for this study because the categorization is succinct and comprehensive. These positive traits in the framework have been acknowledged by Vazquez-Orta, Lafuente-Millan, Lores-Snaz, and Mur-Duenas (2006) who also relied on Hyland’s (2005) model in their study on metadiscourse. Below is an illustration of Hyland’s (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse.

Table 1. An interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, p. 49)

Category	Function	Examples
<i>Interactive Metadiscourse</i>		
	<i>Help to guide reader through the text</i>	
Transitions	express semantic relation between main clauses	in addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	finally/to conclude/my purpose here is to
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above/see Fig/ in section 2
Evidentials	refer to source of information from other texts	according to X / (Y, 1990) Z states
Code glosses	help readers grasp functions of ideational material	namely/e.g./such as/in other words
<i>Interactional Metadiscourse</i>		
	<i>Involve the reader in the text</i>	
Hedges	withhold writer’s full commitment to proposition	might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	emphasize force or writer’s certainty in proposition	in fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer’s attitude to proposition	unfortunately/I agree/surprisingly
Engagement markers	explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider/note that/you can see that
Self-mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I/we/my/our

Based on the table above, Hyland (2005) views the purpose of the *interactive* metadiscourse as linguistic resources that help direct the reader through the text. The *interactive* metadiscourse allows writers to write a more cohesive and coherent text. In a way, its use addresses the means of organizing a written discourse to meet the needs of the readers. Under the *interactive* dimension, there are several subcategories such as *transition markers*, *frame markers*, *endophoric markers*, *evidential* and *code glosses*.

The second dimension of metadiscourse as outlined in Hyland’s model is the *interactional* category. In

Vande-Kopple's (1985) and Crismore et al.'s (1993) categorizations, this dimension is known as *interpersonal* metadiscourse. Whatever the choice of lexis, its role in the writing discourse is similar and that is the *interactional* dimension is used to convey the writers' emotions or reactions to the propositional content and to build a personal rapport with the readers. To use this interactional linguistic device, a writer can use one of these subcategories. They are *hedges*, *boosters*, *attitude markers*, *engagement markers* and *self mentions*.

Additionally, for the analysis of the forms of metadiscourse, both Hyland's *Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse* and his list of metadiscourse expressions (see Hyland, 2005, pp. 218-224) were used as an initial guide. The research approach here was to maintain an open system. This means that the initial framework could be modified with the emergent data.

3.3 Data Collection and Procedures

The writing task, which consisted of a 5 paragraph essay, was administered to the undergraduate writers in the second week of the semester. The duration of the writing task was one hour and 15 minutes. Once the writing task was completed, the essays were collected and each of them was sorted according to the undergraduates' SPM English grade. The essays obtained from students who had A1 or A2 in their SPM English grade were classified as HEP corpus while those who obtained from students who had C5, C6 or D7 in their SPM English grade were categorized as LEP corpus.

After the essays were sorted out according to the students' English proficiency, they were typed verbatim onto Notepad so that the data could be analyzed with the concordance software, MP2.2. Two approaches were adopted for the identification of the metadiscourse features in the writing task. The first employed the use of MP2.2 to obtain the frequency and forms of metadiscourse use. The second which complemented the use of the first approach was the old fashion manual identification method. The manual identification was necessary as not all language forms have metadiscoursal value. So, those which did not have metadiscoursal values were deleted from the concordance list.

Since the identification of metadiscourse in writings can be problematic as some of them are polypragmatic, four raters were employed to help the researchers identify the metadiscourse features. In order to maintain objectivity in the identification of the use of metadiscourse, both the researchers and the raters identified the metadiscourse used in the writers' essays separately. In total, four essays were used for this purpose. Several discussion sessions were held with the raters to solve any anomalies in the identification of metadiscourse used in the undergraduate writers' essays. An example of the identification of metadiscourse use as taken from the data is as follows. In the use of *transitions*, the co-ordinating conjunction "*and*" was counted as a token when it was used to link two clauses; however, it would not be counted as a token if it functioned to list elements in a sentence (see example below).

One token:

1. ... an appetite suppressent for years now, [and] young women world - wide still think th
2. ... do everything to look sexy and adorable [and] they believe that are way for them to a
3. ... hat smoking makes them more attractive [and] some of them used cigarettes as an appe. (Undergraduate writers' essays)

0 token:

1. ... he world if they get involve with drugs [and] the social problems....
2. ... think that smoking makes them look cool [and] desirable. Along with this, there is.
3. ... ng for women and men on 2006 and 10.1 % [and] 22.3 % for 2007. The trend shows that ... (Undergraduate writers' essays)

Furthermore, a corpus that has a total word count of thousands of words would definitely produce occurrences of metadiscourse that run into thousands of hits or tokens. For example, the conjunction *and* has 23,707 hits. It would be humanly impossible to identify each and every sentence which has metadiscoursal value. To overcome this problem, a method used by Hyland and Tse's (2004) was adopted in which a list of words with more than 200 hits would be randomized. From this list, the first 200 concordance lines would be analysed for the metadiscourse used. The identified metadiscourse would be estimated as a percentage of the total number of analysed metadiscourse. It was then normed to an occurrence of 10,000 words so that the metadiscourse used in the two collection of essays (HEP and LEP writers' essays) of unequal size could be compared. The HEP corpus comprised 145,425 words, while the LEP corpus consisted of 140,888 words.

In addition, when two or more metadiscourse features occur in a sentence, each occurrence of the metadiscourse was considered as a token. The example below would have four tokens of metadiscourse.

1. ... years old. If **you** smoke, **you probably [could]** live until the age of 55 only. As a co...

The four metadiscourse are *you* (2 tokens), *probably* (1 token) and *could* (1 token).

Finally, the frequency of metadiscourse use in the corpora as quantified based on the number of occurrences per 10000 words. This method was adopted because the total number of words in the essays of both groups of undergraduate writers (HEP and LEP writers) were unequal. This method of quantifying the frequency of use of metadiscourse was also used by Hyland (2004).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overall Frequency of Metadiscourse Use

Table 2 indicated that the overall frequency of metadiscourse use between the two proficiency groups was different. The frequency of metadiscourse use among the HEP writers was much higher than that of the LEP writers. The total frequency of use of *interactive* metadiscourse for the HEP writers was 325.5 occurrences per 10000 words, while that of the LEP writers was only 244.7 occurrences per 10000 words. For the *interactional* metadiscourse, the HEP writers again registered a higher frequency of use with a total of 377.8 occurrences per 10000 words. In contrast, the LEP writers registered a total frequency of 281.3 occurrences per 10000 words. In short, the HEP writers used more of both the *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse than the LEP writers. This result further affirmed Intaraprawat and Steffensen's (1995) findings in which they found that there were more metadiscourse use as well as there was a greater variety of the forms of metadiscourse use in good essays.

Table 2. Total frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse

Metadiscourse Category	HEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 145,425)	LEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 140,888)
	Total no. of Hits	Occurrence per 10000 words
Interactive	4733	325.5
Interactional	5494	377.8

However, when comparing between the two domains of metadiscourse used, both groups of writers used more of the *interactional* (HEP: 377.8 occurrences per 10000 words; LEP: 281.3 occurrences per 10000 words) than the *interactive* (HEP: 325.5 occurrences per 10000 words; LEP: 244.7 occurrences per 10000 words). In short, both the HEP and the LEP writers seem to have a preference for the use of the *interactional* resources. This finding is similar to Crismore et al.'s (1993) and Intaraprawat and Steffensen's (1995) findings in which their subjects also showed a preference for the use of the *interactional* resources. However, our finding is different from Letsoela's (2013) as the undergraduate writers in the latter demonstrated a preference for the *interactive* resources. One possible reason for this distinction could be that Letsoela (2013) was examining students' research reports which could be classified as a 'specialized' type of academic writing in the vein of ESP. Furthermore, it could be assumed that these students would have been given explicit instruction on the importance of coherent writing.

4.2 Frequency of Use of the Different Categories of Interactive Metadiscourse

When comparing the different categories within the *interactive* metadiscourse, there were variations in their frequency of use. The highest occurrence for both groups of participants was the use of *transitions* (see Table 3). The HEP writers' corpus registered a frequency of 246.1 occurrences per 10000 words, while the LEP writers' corpus registered 175.6 occurrences per 10000 words. Such a finding is not surprising as it is synonymous to most results obtained in past studies (see e.g. Hyland, 2004; Letsoela, 2013; Li & Wharton, 2012). It could be that *transitions* are fundamental linguistic elements that have been taught to students in grammar and writing classes. Therefore, students are aware that the use of *transition* markers to link clauses and sentences would make their ideas more coherent to their readers.

Table 3. Number of occurrences of the interactive metadiscourse categories

Metadiscourse Category	HEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 145,425 words)			LEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 140,888 words)		
	Total no. of Hits	Occurrence per 10000 words	% of Total	Total no of Hits	Occurrence per 10000 words	% of Total
<i>Interactive</i>						
Transitions	3579	246.1	75.6	2474	175.6	71.8
Frame Markers	363	25.0	7.7	391	27.8	11.3
Endophoric Markers	148	10.2	3.1	51	3.6	1.5
Evidentials	117	8.0	2.5	52	4	1.5
Code Glosses	526	36.2	11.1	479	34.0	13.9
Total	4733	325.5	100.0	3447	244.7	100.0

In comparison with *transitions*, *evidentials* (8.0 occurrences per 10000) was least used by the HEP writers while the lowest frequency of use of interactive metadiscourse by the LEP was the *endophoric markers* (3.6 occurrences per 10000 words). As seen in Table 3, the second highest occurrence of *interactive* metadiscourse categories by the HEP writers was the use of *code glosses* (36.2 occurrences per 10000 words) followed by *frame markers* (25.0 occurrences per 10000 words) and *endophoric markers* (10.2 occurrences per 10000 words). Similarly, the second highest frequency of use of the categories of *interactive* metadiscourse was *code glosses* (34 occurrences per 10000 words) followed by *frame markers* (27.8 occurrences per 10000 words). Incidentally, the frequency of use of the frame markers by the LEP writers was slightly higher than the HEP writers (LEP writers: 27.8 occurrences per 10000 words; HEP writers: 25.0 occurrences per 10000 words). *Evidentials* for the LEP writers was ranked as the second lowest (4 occurrences per 10000 words) after *endophoric markers*. With these results, it could be seen that the HEP writers generally had a better grasp of the use of metadiscourse while the LEP writers demonstrated a lack of knowledge on the use of *interactive* metadiscourse. The fact that *evidentials* were ranked the lowest in both groups of writers reveals that the writers were still not fully aware of the importance of citing from previous studies. In contrast, writers in Letsoela's (2013) study revealed a high use of *evidentials*. This result is significant as it revealed that advanced level undergraduates when compared with the first year undergraduates are more conscious of producing writing that is aligned to academic conventions. This finding, in fact, reaffirms the importance of carrying out the present study as results obtained could provide insights into the first year undergraduates readiness to embark on academic writing and what metadiscourse input needs to be introduced to them so that a more engaging prose that meets the expectation of the discourse community is produced.

4.3 Forms of Interactive Metadiscourse Use

The forms of *transitions* for both groups of writers were quite varied. However, it was interesting to note that the three most preferred forms of transitions for the HEP and LEP writers were almost alike. Both groups demonstrated a high frequency of use for the form *also* and *because* (see Table 4) except for their ranking order. While the form *also* topped the ranking order followed by *because* and *and* for the HEP group, the LEP group registered a preference for *because* followed by *also* and *but*.

Table 4. The three most preferred forms of transitions used

NO	HEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 145,425 words)			LEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 140,888 words)		
	Forms of Transitions	Total no of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words	Forms of Transitions	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words
1	also	707	48.6	because	579	41.1
2	because	665	45.7	also	483	34.3
3	and	453	31.2	but	347	24.6

These manifestations of forms of metadiscourse revealed that the HEP writers preferred to conjoin their ideas through the use of conjunctions that denote additional ideas (*also* and *and*) and subordination that signifies cause and effect (*because*). On the other hand, the LEP writers not only demonstrated their preference for such means in linking their ideas, they also showed a preference for using contrastive conjunctions particularly through the use of *but*. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the HEP writers did not use contrastive conjunctions. A closer look at the data indicated otherwise. The use of *but* was ranked fourth (28 occurrences per 10000 words) among the other forms of transitions but it came third place in the ranking of metadiscourse use by the LEP writers. This frequency of use of *but* for the HEP was higher than that of the LEP writers', which had only 25 occurrences per 10000 words. Thus it could be concluded that similar to the LEP writers, the HEP writers were also capable of using *transitions* that not only signify additional ideas, cause and effect but also contrastive ideas. In fact, the data indicated that they used more of such forms of *transitions* when compared with the LEP writers. It can be surmised then that even though the use of the contrastive conjunction *but* by the LEP writers was ranked third, the number of occurrences was slightly lower than that registered by the HEP writers. However, the forms of *evidentials* used by both groups of writers were limited (see Table 5).

Table 5. The three most preferred forms of evidentials used

NO	HEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 145,425 words)			LEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 140,888 words)		
	Forms of Evidentials	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words	Forms of Evidentials	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words
1	According to X	96	6.6	According to X	44	3.1
2	X states/state that	13	0.9	said	8	0.6
3	said	7	0.5			

In their writing task, the HEP writers used three different forms of *evidentials* while the LEP writers, only two different forms. This limited use could be due to their lack of vocabulary and knowledge on how to cite source materials in academic writing. For both groups, their most preferred form of *evidential* was *according to X*. However, the forms used did not follow conventional academic citation styles in English. The following exemplify this point.

1. ... try, they are our future leader. But, [according to report], on average, every day about 50 teena...
2. ... chemical compound that you blow out. [According to research], passive smoker will die faster than s ...
3. ... larly among teenagers is on the rise. [According to resources], on average, everyday about 50 teenag ...
4. ... happen about stealing or kidnapping. [According to table] 1.1 which is source by Health Digest, ...

Evidentials are important linguistic elements used in written academic discourse. Citation of other writers' work provides credibility to the writer's own writing. This result indicates that these two groups of writers have yet to achieve the sophistication required for citing material from other sources as found in the writings of expert academic writers.

As for *code glosses*, both the HEP and LEP writers had a similar preference for their forms of expressions. They were *such as*, *for example* and *like* (based on the ranking from most to least preferred forms of expressions). For *frame markers*, the three most preferred forms of expressions by the HEP writers were *first*, *in conclusion* and *finally*, while those of the LEP writers were *then*, *first* and *firstly*. For both groups of writers, besides using *first* as a sequencer, the other common expression was *first of all*. It is also interesting to note that some HEP writers but not the LEP writers had also used a variant for the sequencer *first*. Besides *first* or *first of all*, some of them used the form *first thing first* as can be seen in no 5 and 6 below. However, the correct form for this expression should be *first things first*.

1. ... So, how can we deal with this problem. [First] of all, we can do advertisement. Based ...
2. ... o discourage smokers among teenagers. [First] of all, we have to use mental attack s ...
3. ... blic especially for the teenagers. The [first] step to discourage smoking among teenag ...
4. ... not a good habit for many reasons. The [first] reason is smoking cause death to the sm ...
5. ... cts that they will get as a smokers. [First] thing first, the smoking habits give t ...

6. ... y will get as a smokers. First thing [first], the smoking habits give the bad effec ...

In the use of the frame marker, *in conclusion*, it was found that both groups of writers tended to use non-standard expressions or variants. Examples of such expressions were *as conclusion*, *as a conclusion*, *as the conclusion* and *for the conclusion* (see concordance lines below). A similar finding was also found in a learner corpus in the study of Gilquin, Granger, and Paquot (2007).

1) ... ne our leader who stop their speaks for smoking? [Conclusion], smoking will affect the healthy life of teenage ...

2) ... o prevent teenagers from cigarette smoking. As a [conclusion], teenagers, who are the assets for the country ...

3) ... How can you become cool and beautiful. As the [conclusion], smoking is not good at all, it will affect our ...

4) ... re of dangerousity of cigarette smoking. For the [conclusion], many ways can be done to discouraged people fro ...

If this usage is similarly found in a learner's corpus (see Gilquin, et al., 2007), then we can confirm that both the HEP and LEP writers' target language abilities are still at the emerging writers' stage. Such information is crucial in order to inform language instructors on how to help these writers reach the level of ability of expert writers. In any L2 writing situation, the primary goal of any classroom instruction is to help L2 writers write effectively. Therefore, knowing the standard and non-standard use of metadiscourse features in L2 writers' writing will provide informed input for both classroom instructors and language planners to construct a suitable writing programme that meets the needs of the L2 writers.

4.4 Frequency of Use of the Different Categories of Interactional Metadiscourse

Similar to the use of *interactive* metadiscourse, there was also variation in the frequency of use of the subcategories of *interactional* metadiscourse by both HEP and LEP undergraduate writers. Both groups of writers demonstrated a higher frequency of use of *engagement markers* when compared to other metadiscourse categories (see Table 6).

Table 6. Number of occurrences of the interactional metadiscourse categories

Metadiscourse Category	HEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 145, 425 words)			LEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 140,888 words)		
	Total no. of Hits	Occurrence per 10000 words	% of Total	Total no. of Hits	Occurrence per 10000 words	% of Total
<i>Interactional</i>						
Hedges	819	56.3	14.9	262	18.6	6.6
Boosters	1309	90.0	23.8	1155	82.0	29.1
Engagement Markers	2918	200.7	53.1	2057	146.0	51.9
Attitude Markers	166	11.4	3.0	215	15.3	5.4
Self Mentions	282	19.4	5.1	274	19.4	6.9
Total	5494	377.8	100.0	3963	281.3	100.0

The HEP writers obtained a frequency of 200.7 occurrences per 10000 words in the use of *engagement markers*, while the LEP writers had a frequency of 146.0 occurrences per 10000 words. On the other hand, *attitude markers* had the lowest frequency of use. The HEP writers registered a frequency of only 11.4 occurrences per 10000 words while the LEP writers registered a slightly higher occurrence of 15.3 occurrences per 10000 words. The next highest occurrence of the *interactional* metadiscourse categories for the HEP writers was the use of *boosters* (90 occurrences per 10000 words) followed by *hedges* (56.3 occurrences per 10000 words) and *self mentions* (19.4 occurrences per 10000 words). However, for the LEP writers, the second highest frequency of use was the use of *boosters* (82 occurrences per 10000 words). The next highest was *self mentions* (19.4 occurrences per 10000 words) and then *hedges* (18.6 occurrences per 10000 words). Based on the data obtained, it is evident that there was only a marginal difference in the use of *boosters* between both groups of writers. In contrast, the LEP writers exhibited a substantially lower occurrence in the use of *hedges* (18.6 occurrences per 10000 words).

The fact that the HEP writers had a much higher frequency of use of *hedges* is significant as the findings further affirmed other studies on the use of metadiscourse in academic writing (Crismore, et al., 1993; Hyland, 2006; Letsoela, 2013; Vazquez-orta, et al., 2006). It is claimed that good writers are more able to balance their use of *hedges* and *boosters*. Poor writers like the LEP writers, on the other hand, are more inclined to use *boosters* (Williams, 2007). This indicates their lack of sensitivity to the writing conventions of academia where hedged claims are more valued.

4.5 Forms of Interactional Metadiscourse Use

In terms of the language expressions of *engagement markers*, the three most preferred forms for both groups of writers were similar (see Table 7). They were *we (inclusive)*, *our* and *you*. The use of these linguistic forms indicates that both groups of writers favoured two distinct modes of building rapport with their readers. First, the use of the inclusive pronouns *we* and *our*, indicates that the writers were able to include themselves together with their readers in their line of persuasion. Second, their use of the second person pronoun *you* suggests that the writers were sensitive in creating a dialogic space with their readers. Such effort by the writers to build a closer relationship with their readers facilitated their process of achieving a successful persuasive prose.

Table 7. The three most preferred forms of engagement markers

HEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 145,425 words)				LEP Undergraduate Writers (Total no. of words: 140,888 words)		
NO	Forms of Engagement Markers	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words	Forms of Engagement Markers	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words
1	we (inclusive)	974	67.0	we (inclusive)	970	68.8
2	our	811	55.8	our	590	41.9
3	you	383	26.3	you	181	12.8

Although the frequency of use of *attitude markers* was similarly low for both groups of writers, their preferences for their linguistic realization for the three most preferred forms were markedly differently. The linguistic realization of *attitude markers* for the HEP writers (ranked from highest to lowest occurrence) were the *exclamation mark (!)*, *unfortunately* and *important* while the LEP writers' preferred forms were *important*, *agree* and *even X*. The low occurrence of *attitude markers* is similarly found in the results of Letsoela (2013). The possible reasons could be that as non-expert writers, they were not too confident in projecting their voice into their writings nor too critical of the propositions forwarded.

Table 8. The three most preferred forms of attitude markers

High English Proficiency (Total no. of words: 145,425 words)				Low English Proficiency (Total no. of words: 140,888 words)		
NO	Forms of Attitude Markers	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words	Forms of Attitude Markers	Total no. of Hits	Total Occurrence per 10000 words
1	!	74	5.1	important	72	5.1
2	unfortunately	25	1.7	agree	60	4.3
3	important	19	1.3	even x	27	1.9

As for the use of *hedges*, the three most preferred forms of the HEP writers were all modals, i.e. *may*, *would* and *could*. However, for the LEP writers, their most preferred forms were *about*, *maybe* and *may*. Examples of some of the forms of expressions of hedges used are shown below.

- 1) ... good for nothing guy. A smoking habit [could] attract this teenagers to involves
- 2) ... rgarten, even at home. So, children [could] be aware of that. Prevent is better
- 1) ... the smokers among women increasing [about] 0.3 % from the year before a
- 2) ... cigarette smoking. Whereas, there is [about] 0.9 % of men deaths caused by cig
- 3) ... creasing from year 2006 to year 2007 at [about] 1.3 % because most of them cam

As can be seen in the above examples, the use of *could* demonstrates tentativeness while expressions with *about* were used to indicate estimation of numerical information. Such deliberate uncertainty demonstrated the writers' choice of not being fully committed to the propositional truth. In doing so, the writers were conveying the message that they did not own the whole knowledge on the subject matter. The use of hedges becomes necessary to gain the readers' acceptance towards the line of argument raised.

As for the forms of *boosters*, the three most preferred forms for both groups were the same except for their rankings. The HEP writers preferred the use of *especially* the most, followed by *very* and *must*. In contrast, the LEP writers preferred the use of *must* followed by *very* and *especially*. Some examples of the linguistic realizations of boosters as used by the HEP and LEP writers are shown below.

of slimming pills and other 'slimming products' [especially] smoking. These are

2) ... re. There are a lot of disadvantage of smoking, [especially] among teenager. Pe

3) ... ve before this, smoking habit must be banished, [especially] among youths. Th

... g and this very critical. Some action [must] be taken to lower down the number

2) ... cause to death. As the conclusion, we [must] open our mind and think our heal

3) ... On the regulation, we agree that we [must] ban direct tobacco advertisement,

Similar results were also observed in the study by Li and Wharton (2012) where *must* was frequently used by native writers of L1 Mandarin in China rather than by native writers of L1 Mandarin in the UK. Their study also indicated that *should* was also the preferred form. However, this form was evidently absent in the ranking of the three most preferred forms of *boosters* in this study, although it must be noted that their use was also evident in the findings. The only difference is that it was ranked lower than the third ranking.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of this study indicated that both groups of writers did attempt to use metadiscourse in their writings. However, there were some variations in their use. Although both groups of writers used more *interactional* metadiscourse, the HEP writers used more of both types of metadiscourse: *interactive* and *interactional*. For both groups, the results indicated that the frequency of use for *transitions*, and *engagement markers* ranked the highest. The use of *hedges* and *boosters* was quite different between both groups of writers. The HEP writers seemed to be able to balance their use of *boosters* and *hedges* while the LEP writers' use of *hedges* was minimal compared to their use of *boosters*. Perhaps, the HEP writers were more aware of the need to persuade their readers in a more cautious manner. In contrast, the LEP writers seemed to be less aware of this important aspect of academic writing conventions. This phenomenon was noted by Williams (2007) when he commented that good writers hedge more than weak writers and this same phenomenon has been well attested in the studies of Hyland (2004) and Crismore et al. (1993). Furthermore, the lack of use of *evidentials* by both groups of writers could suggest that the writers have not been initiated to the convention of using citations in academic writing. This is not surprising as these writers are first year undergraduates and would therefore need further apprenticeship in the crafting of successful academic discourse.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

As mentioned above, both groups of writers exhibited limited use of *evidential* and *hedges* and so, the data obtained from this study forms an invaluable database to inform language practitioners as to how they could help L2 undergraduate writers to excel in their academic writing. Perhaps, the learning of metadiscourse use needs to be incorporated into the existing writing programme (Amiryousefi & Rasekh, 2013; Hyland, 2005). This would provide opportunities for the undergraduate writers to become more conscious of academic writing conventions involving metadiscourse use. Academic writing is not merely about presenting the propositions at hand but how the writer could skillfully accommodate his ideas by orientating his stance towards the expectation of his readers. This could be done through the adept use of both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse.

In the findings, there were instances of non-standard usage of the forms of metadiscourse (e.g. as a conclusion, in a conclusion, etc.). These non-standard variant forms of metadiscourse use could be addressed through the use of the concordance list as generated by the MP2.2. It could be used as authentic teaching materials in the classroom to help undergraduate writers be aware of the (in)correct linguistic forms of metadiscourse. Moreover, the various forms of metadiscourse generated by the software would help them realize that a particular metadiscourse category could be expressed in a number of ways. This would definitely enrich their repertoire of vocabulary for their use in writing. As mentioned by Li and Schmitt (2009), vocabulary is a prerequisite for writing. As such, one quick method of enhancing these L2 undergraduate writers' literacy in the target language

would be to expose them to the linguistic patterns of metadiscourse. As most metadiscourse expressions exist as “formulaic multi-word sequence” (Li & Schmitt, 2009, p. 85), the exposure to the concordance list of metadiscourse forms would be a helpful resource in guiding the undergraduate writers to increase the variety of forms used for a particular category of metadiscourse. In fact, exposure to such multi-word patterns of metadiscourse in academic writing would also minimise the L2 learners’ over-use of a limited repertoire of just some well-known phrases. In a way, acquainting L2 learners to the collocation of metadiscourse forms is an efficient and quicker way of increasing their knowledge of a wide repertoire of metadiscourse expressions that exist in the target language (Chen & Baker, 2010; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2012).

The acquisition of lexical phrases with metadiscourse features can also be made available to the learners through the construction of graded learning activities. The teaching activities used in this study are useful teaching and learning metadiscourse resources. Through the activities, the learners are initially given input that raise their awareness of metadiscourse use and also help them to be acquainted with the metadiscourse expressions. The activities culminated with the writing of a persuasive discourse which demands the learners to use appropriate metadiscourse features to engage with their readers.

5.2 Limitations and Future Studies

Although the study has attempted to investigate the use of metadiscourse between two different proficiency levels of Malaysian undergraduate writers, there are still areas in metadiscourse use that have not been tapped. One possible future research that could be undertaken is to look into the comparison of the HEP undergraduate writers’ use of metadiscourse with a standard learner corpus. This effort may give insights into the extent to which the HEP undergraduate writers approximate their use of metadiscourse with the writers of the standard learner corpus such as the BAWE corpus. Furthermore, investigation should be made to find out the effects of explicit teaching of metadiscourse use on L2 learners’ ability to use metadiscourse in their writing. The findings would indeed be informative for both classroom instructors and writing program designers. Despite the limitations, it is hoped that the results obtained in this study have contributed to the existing body of literature on metadiscourse use by L2 writers.

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