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Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

**Exploring Writer-Reader Interaction  
In Applied Linguistics Research Articles  
With Respect To Metadiscourse Resources**

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*In The Name Of God*

*To My Husband*

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## Abstract

Recent years have seen a considerable growth in the area of writer-reader interaction in academic writing. Also, much has been written on the use of interactional metadiscourse resources (IMRs) in academic discourse. Many of these studies focus on levels of interactions with the aim of investigating intercultural or interdisciplinary variations between academic texts. Very little research (if any), however, has attempted to examine those levels of interaction within disciplines of one particular academic field of study. Applied linguistics as an interdisciplinary field, for example, has grown substantially in terms of its domain, disciplines, and research frontiers (Crismore & Abdollahzadeh, 2010). Therefore, experts practicing in its disciplines such as language education, language testing, language translation, pragmatics, language for specific purposes, etc. may have different priorities and rhetorical norms which could vary depending on the size of their discourse community, the gatekeepers in that community, and how 'conventionalized' the generic practice is (Swales, 1990). This study intends, first, to examine interactional metadiscourse resources in Applied Linguistics research articles (RAs) with the aim of exploring *intradisciplinary* variations in rhetorical practice that may affect the results of studies and comparisons. Second, it aims to compare different applied linguistics journals in terms of type and degree of IMRs. Finally, it attempts to investigate the impact of culture on the use of those interactional metadiscourse strategies in academic writing of Native and Non-native Speakers in English applied linguistics research articles. In doing so, a total of 126 RAs were randomly selected from different disciplines of Applied Linguistics. Using Hyland & Tse's (2004) model of metadiscourse in academic texts, the discussion sections of the RAs were analysed for type and frequency of IMRs, namely hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mentions. To compare data from different applied linguistics disciplines, journals and also natives and nonnatives' writing Chi-Square tests were employed. Functional-contextual analysis showed

similarities and differences in the authors' use of interactional metadiscourse. Findings revealed that IMRs were used with almost the same distribution in different Applied Linguistics disciplines as well as in different journals. In addition, no statistically significant difference was found between Natives and Non-natives' RAs in terms of type and frequency of IMRs. The findings can have pedagogical implications for Applied Linguists as well as for English Language Teachers and Learners.

### **Key Words**

Metadiscourse, Interactional Metadiscourse Resources, Applied Linguistics, Research Article Genre , Discussion Section, Intradisciplinary Variation, Native Speaker

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1.Overview

Interpersonal dimension of writing in general and academic writing in particular has always been fundamental to both systemic functional and social constructionist frameworks with the view of language use embedded in specific social, cultural and institutional contexts (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 2000). The concept of metadiscourse is also based on this interactional view of written discourse which considers discourse as social engagement, and discourse analysis as the analysis of language in use (Halliday and Hassan 1989; Hyland, 2000; Thompson, 2001). In other words, metadiscourse is based on a view of writing as social and communicative engagement; hence, the concept shows the significance of interpersonal functions of language, particularly, in academic communications ( Halliday, 1994).

As Hyland (2005) argues, today, academic writing is viewed as a persuasive endeavour which involves interaction between writer and readers, and this view is against the traditional views of academic writing as an objective, faceless and impersonal form of discourse (p.173).Many researchers have criticized the traditional views of academic writing (e.g. Swales, 1990; Thetela, 1997; Hoey, 2001; Hyland, 2001, 2005; Harwood, 2005). They argue that interaction in written texts can be conducted as that in the spoken text, though with different effects as a result of the different medium.

Indeed, academic writing is viewed as “a persuasive endeavor that owes as much to a writer’s development of an appropriate relationship with his or her readers as the demonstration of absolute truth, empirical evidence, or flawless logic” ( Hyland, 2001, p. 549). Considering this view of academic writing as social engagement, “every successful text must display its writer’s ability to engage appropriately with his or her audience”

(Hyland, 2001, p. 571). Reviewing literature on the dialogic nature of written text (Bakhtin, 1986; Bazerman, 1988; Hyland, 2000; Swales, 1990 ) also demonstrates that writer-reader interaction is an integral part of academic writing involving careful interpersonal negotiations in which writers seek to display awareness of both its readers and its consequences by “balancing claims for the significance, originality, and truth of their work against the convictions of their readers” (Hyland, 2001, p. 550).

As Hyland (1998) points out, academics do not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations (p. 445). This involves metadiscourse which allows writers to project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitudes and commitments and interact with the readers. As operationally defined by Hyland (2005), metadiscourse is “the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community” (p. 37). Academic writers deploy metadiscourse to create a credible and trustworthy persona ( Hyland, 2005 ).

On the other hand, literature on the negotiation between author and reader (Crismore, 1989; Gosden, 1993; Halliday, 1994; Thetela, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Hyland, 2001) indicates that one of the most frequently exploited of the features available to the academic author in order to assist the reader in navigating the text is metadiscourse (Flottum & Kinn & Dahl, 2006, p. 14; Hyland, 1998, p. 440). A great deal of research has shown how professional writers seek to achieve successful interaction with their readers using metadiscourse resources while ,at the same time, maintaining the integrity of their data (e.g. Crismore, 1989; Bunton, 1999; Thompson, 2001; Hyland, 2001; Marandi, 2003; Hyland and Tse 2004; Hyland, 2005; Farrokhi, 2009; Fatemi, 2012).

All kinds of writings whether professional, academic, or personal, include expressions which refer to the text producer, the prospective receiver and the evolving text itself. These expressions are metadiscourse resources which provide information about the participants, the kind of discourse and its underlying context. Indeed, metadiscourse refers to those aspects of a text which explicitly organize a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader. Metadiscourse has enabled us to find traces of social interactions with others within texts, and has offered us a means of understanding the ways writers project themselves into their texts to manage communicative intentions. In general, metadiscourse resources serve as rhetorical tools that make a text reader-friendly and enable the writer to reach the audience by shaping their arguments to the needs and expectations of their target readers. The author can thus convey his/her personality, credibility and reader sensitivity and relationship to the message (Hyland, 2000).

As an important written academic genre, research article has been a means of communication and cooperation among academics having a significant role in creating academic knowledge. The knowledge produced through effective research in one institute is exchanged within the members of different academic communities in order to broaden the boundaries of knowledge and to inform them of the latest findings and developments; and this is done, mainly by means of academic writings such as research articles. The majority of academics write research papers to exhibit their works and establish their reputations. As Hyland (2005) asserts, research article is the primary genre of the academy through which writers show relevance and novelty of their work to colleagues, disseminate knowledge and thus communicate with other members and can also establish themselves as a member of the disciplinary community (p. 90).

According to Hyland (2005), research articles are no more considered as merely propositional and impersonal genre, but are concerned with social processes. Research article writers want to negotiate their claims and arguments, so they need to consider their audience, their reactions and expectations, and establish an acceptable relationship with them so that the readers can find their texts reliable, convincing and persuasive. They need to employ both cognitive and affective strategies and make appropriate linguistic choices to write texts which function both ideationally and interpersonally. An orientation to readers is, therefore, a crucial factor in securing rhetorical objectives. With a clear anticipation of the readers' background knowledge, their expectations, problems, needs and interests, writers can interact with them effectively and can expect their arguments to be understood and accepted (pp. 87-90).

Now, the question is how these objectives can be accomplished? Metadiscourse is, evidently, a specific rhetorical feature that can help discourse analysts show how language choices reflect the different purposes of writers, the different assumptions they make about their audience, and the different kinds of interactions they create with their readers. Within the genre of research articles, however, metadiscourse, can act quite distinctively, and indeed one of the ways that genres vary, both internally and in relation to other genres, is in their use of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, p. 88).

Hyland (2005) further notes that metadiscourse is closely linked to the norms and expectations of particular communities, and this contextual specificity means that metadiscourse must be located in the settings which influence its use and give it meaning. Because of this context-dependency and the close relationship metadiscourse has to the norms and expectations of those who use it in particular settings, writers need to provide as many cues as necessary to secure the reader's understanding and acceptance of the propositional content. Additionally, since communities differ in their purposes, their



audience and other aspects of their social context, this diversity also exists in their use of metadiscoursal patterns and, as a result, studying these variations can help us to understand the ways individuals use language in different communicative situations (p. 143).

As was previously mentioned, results of previous studies on metadiscourse indicate that metadiscourse is variable across scientific communities and disciplines. For instance, while some scientific communities may leave much of the message to be decided by the reader some others may go to great lengths providing a reader-friendly context. Such distinctive characteristics of genre can prompt writers to capitalize on varying degrees of metadiscourse in regard to their addressees, leading to what has been called as writer responsible versus reader responsible stances (Crismore, and Farnsworth, 1990 ; Hyland and Tse, 2004). Such variation embodies different social relationships between the reader and the writer as well as different values and beliefs underlying discursive practices in various discourse communities (Zarei & Mansoori, 2011).

Similarly, research articles are distinctive in their use of interactional metadiscourse, and particularly the ways that writers make their attitudes to text explicit. Exploring interactional metadiscourse in articles across distinct disciplines, and across different cultures and languages has been the focus of many studies so far (Vassileva, 1998, 2001; Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 1999,2001, 2002; Ivanic and Camps, 2001; Marandi, 2003; Dahl, 2004; Martinez, 2005; Biber, 2006; Starfield & Ravelli, 2006; Mur Dueñas, 2007; Shelden, 2009). These studies show that the role that disciplines play in writer-reader interaction is quite different, indicating the fact that distinct disciplines and languages have their own rhetorical features and metadiscoursal patterns.

Zarei & Mansoori (2011), for example, investigated metadiscourse patterns in two disciplines (Applied Linguistics vs. Computer Engineering), representing two general streams of disciplines, namely, humanities and non-humanities, across two languages

(Persian and English) attempting to compare and contrast disciplines in the two languages and also to specify the rhetorical preferences that characterize the Persian and English scientific communities. The purpose of their study was to analyse metadiscourse in research articles to capture the discipline and language specific nature of metadiscursive elements ( Zarei & Mansoori, 2011).

Based on the results of their study the selected Persian articles outweighed their English counterparts, by capitalizing more on metadiscourse elements. As representative of humanities, applied linguistics outweighed computer engineering in the use of metadiscursive resources. Findings confirmed the idea that languages and disciplines relied on specific use of metadiscourse, thus making themselves understandable to their readership differently. The significant differences between the two disciplines also indicated that humanities showed greater reliance on metadiscourse. As the authors pointed out, this finding could be attributed to the fact that humanities do not work on the quantitative data, thereby they needed to get established through further compensatory measures such as using more textual, transitional, and interactional elements ( *ibid.*).

While interdisciplinary variation between distinct disciplines in terms of their use of interactional metadiscourse resources has already been the focus of so many studies, Crismore & Abdollehzade (2010) state, studying such interactional variations internally, that is, within sub-fields of one specific discipline has not been systematically investigated yet. Indeed, very little (if any) study has been carried out to see whether related fields within a broad academic discipline differ in the ways they exploit, for example, interactional markers in their discursive patterns. This was actually the impetus to choose the topic of the present study which is designed to explore incidences of writer-reader interaction in research articles considering potential intradisciplinary variations that might exist within related sub-fields of a broad academic discipline like Applied Linguistics.

Furthermore, attempts have been made to investigate differences between Native and Non-native writers in English Applied Linguistics research articles in terms of the type and amount of IMRs used in their research articles in order to find out divergences or convergences in ways they interact with their audiences.

## **1.2. Statement of the problem and Purpose of the Study**

According to Hyland (2005, p.175), the significance of metadiscourse is gradually becoming recognized in academic writing as well as in language teaching. While in traditional language teaching the focus of attention was largely on the content of written texts, today, as Halliday (1994) has also asserted, learning to control the expression of textual and interpersonal relationship in a text is just as crucial to rhetorical and educational success as learning to control the expression of content. Therefore, it seems vital that students “ receive appropriate instruction in metadiscourse using models of argument which allow them to practice writing within the socio-rhetorical framework of their target communities” (Hyland, 2005, p. 178).

As a crucial element of text meaning, metadiscourse helps connect a text to its context by taking the relative status ,needs and expectations, understandings and knowledge, and intertextual experiences of the readers into account. It is therefore a key concept for analyzing how writers engage with their subject matter and readers, allowing us to compare strategies used by members of different social communities. This is exactly what this study intends to explore: The ways writers interact with their readers, their texts and show their attitudes and stance to the text, self and reader in the big community of Applied Linguistics, aiming at comparing its related disciplines with respect to those interactional metadiscourse resources.

Obviously, research article is, as an advanced academic genre, a significant means of communication between the academic writers and readers all over the world. Indeed, the present study is intended to bring interactional dimension of metadiscourse into focus by examining writer-reader interactional resources in research article genre in the broad interdisciplinary field of Applied Linguistics (AL) as well as in its disciplines (Grabe, 2002). To this end RAs were selected from different journals representing distinct disciplines of AL. The purpose is to explore the use of interactional metadiscourse devices in AL research articles in order to identify commonalities or differences in ways authors in different disciplines of AL exploit IMRs to engage their readers.

Also, analysis of metadiscoursal elements in research articles by considering the different journals within one specific academic field (here applied linguistics) can be regarded as a challenging issue which is missing in previous corpus-based studies. While different journals address different types of readers with different areas of interest and specialism, the research articles published in those distinctive journals might reveal different kinds of written discourse, particularly with respect to interactional metadiscoursal resources selected by the authors. None of the previous studies on metadiscourse focused on the potential difference that might exist among the academic journals and the way they interact with their readers. Hence, the second purpose of the present study is to compare different applied linguistics journals in terms of type and amount of interactional metadiscourse resources.

Moreover, there are differences between cultures in what is considered suitable behaviour in the same or similar communicative behaviour (Crismore et al., 1993). The conventions for scientific and academic writing and the style of argumentation has been shown to vary from culture to culture (Clyne, 1991; Galtung, 1979; Markkanen and Schroder, 1988). As such, “a cross-cultural study of the discourse of professional writers