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**A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language Teaching**

**A Metadiscourse Analysis of Academic Articles
In the Two Fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences**

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Abstract

Academic writing and reading has always been the focus of many linguistic researchers, especially those who have been involved with English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Metadiscourse is one of the language areas which consider the relations between the reader and the writer of the texts. It is believed that teaching students of different disciplines and fields of the studies to use metadiscourse markers effectively in their writings and also speeches, could improve their writing and reading skills and therefore, helps them to better communicate with their audiences. This thesis aimed at comparing the metadiscourse markers used in the two fields of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences. First, thirty articles from six disciplines were chosen: fifteen articles from Basic Sciences and fifteen articles from Social Sciences. Then the use of metadiscourse markers in the two sets of the articles was analyzed according to Hyland's (1998) taxonomy of metadiscourse. The results show that the articles in Social Sciences tend to use more metadiscourse markers, especially interpersonal markers, in comparison with the Basic Sciences. It was also found out that the number of metadiscourse expressions used in the conclusion and discussion section of the articles was more than the other sections of the articles. The findings of this study could make the syllabus designers and also teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) be more aware of the different kinds of metadiscourse devices used in different disciplines and fields of the studies and as a result, help them to increase their readers or students' knowledge of metadiscourse strategies, an issue which consequently could improve their communicative and also reading and writing skills.

Key Words: Metadiscourse, Interpersonal Metadiscourse, Textual Metadiscourse, Social Sciences, Basic Sciences.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xii

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Introduction	2
1.2 Background of the Study	3
1.3 Statement of the Problem.	4
1.4 Purpose of the Study	5
1.5 Significance of the Study	5
1.6 Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	6
1.7 Definitions of the Key Terms	7
1.7.1 Metadiscourse.....	7
1.7.2 Textual Metadiscourse.....	7
1.7.3 Interpersonal Metadiscourse.....	8
1.7.4 Basic Sciences.....	8
1.7.5 Social Sciences.....	8

1.8 Organization of the Thesis	8
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Chapter II: Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Discourse Analysis and Metadiscourse.....	11
2.3 What is Metadiscourse?	12
2.3.1 Metalanguage vs. Object Language.....	12
2.3.2 Primary Discourse vs. Metadiscourse.....	13
2.3.3 The Definition of Metadiscourse.....	14
2.3.4 Some Key Features and Aspects of Metadiscourse.....	16
2.3.5 The Fuzziness of Metadiscourse.....	17
2.4 Approaches and taxonomies of Metadiscourse analysis.....	19
2.4.1 Broad Approach vs. Narrow Approach to Metadiscourse	19
2.4.2 Textual vs. Interpersonal Metadiscourse.....	19
2.4.3 Visual Metadiscourse.....	22
2.4.4 The Reflexive Model for Metadiscourse.....	23
2.4.5 Oral Metadiscourse.....	24
2.4.6 Other Models and Taxonomies.....	25
2.5 Hyland's (1998b) Taxonomy of Metadiscourse.....	26
2.5.1 Textual Metadiscourse.....	26
2.5.2 Interpersonal Metadiscourse.....	27
2.6 The History of Metadiscourse Analysis.....	29

Chapter III: Methodology & Data Collection

3.1	Introduction.....	35
3.3	Materials.....	35
3.3	Procedure.....	39
3.4	Data Analysis.....	40
3.5	Design.....	41

Chapter IV: Data Analysis & Results

4.1	Introduction.....	43
4.2	Restatement of the Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	43
4.3	Results Obtained from the Analysis of the Articles.....	45
4.3.1	The Results Obtained for the Whole Sections of the Articles.	45
4.3.2	The Results Obtained for the Different Sections of the Articles.....	50
4.4	Discussion of the Results	60
4.5	An in-depth Qualitative Analysis of the Results.....	67

Chapter V: Conclusion

5.1	Introduction.....	84
5.2	Conclusion.....	84
5.3	Pedagogical Implications.....	87
5.4	Limitations of the Study.....	88
5.5	Suggestions for Further Research.....	90
	References.....	92

Appendices

Appendix 1.....99

Appendix 2.....109

Abstract in Persian.....ب

Title in Persian.....الف

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Hyland’s Taxonomy: Functions of Metadiscourse in Academic Texts (1998b).....	21
Table 2.2: An Interpersonal model of metadiscourse by Hyland (2005b).....	22
Table 2.3: The Functions of the Reflexive Model by Adel (2006).....	23
Table 4.1: The frequency of different types and subcategories of metadiscourse functions used in each discipline (per thousand words).....	46
Table 4.2: The frequency of different types of metadiscourse functions used in each discipline (per thousand words).	47
Table 4.3: The frequency of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse functions used in the two fields of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences (per thousand words).....	47
Table 4.4: The number of metadiscourse devices used in each discipline in the different sections of the articles. (Per thousand words).....	51
Table 4.5: The number of metadiscourse devices used in each field in the introduction section of the articles (per thousand words).....	52
Table 4.6: The number of metadiscourse devices used in each field in the main body of the articles (per thousand words).....	54
Table 4.7: The number of metadiscourse devices used in each field in the conclusion & discussion section of the articles (per thousand words).....	56
Table 4.8: The use of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse devices in the articles in Basic and Social Sciences in the different sections of the articles. (per thousand words).....	58

Table 4.9: The number of total metadiscourse devices used in different sections of the articles (Average, per thousand words).....	64
Table 4.10: The frequency of different subcategories of metadiscourse functions used in each field (per thousand words).....	68
Table 4.11. Number of Citations in Hyland (1999) and Thompson (2000) Corpora (cited in Thompson & Tribble (2001, p.93).....	72

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. The reflexive triangle (Adel, 2006, p. 18).....	24
Figure 4.1: The frequency of different types of metadiscourse functions used in the two fields of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences in the whole part of the articles (per thousand words).	48
Figure 4.2: The frequency of different types of metadiscourse functions used in the two fields of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences in the introduction section of the articles (per thousand words).....	52
Figure 4.3: The frequency of different types of metadiscourse functions used in the two fields of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences in the main body of the articles (per thousand words).....	54
Figure 4.4: The frequency of different types of metadiscourse functions used in the two fields of Basic Sciences and Social Sciences in the conclusion & discussion section of the articles (per thousand words).....	56
Figure 4.5: The use of textual metadiscourse devices in the articles in Basic and Social Sciences in the different sections of the articles (per thousand words).....	58
Figure 4.6: The use of interpersonal metadiscourse devices in the articles in Basic and Social Sciences in the different sections of the articles. (per thousand words).....	59
Figure 4.7: The proportion of textual to interpersonal metadiscourse in the conclusion & discussion section of the Basic and Social Sciences articles.....	63
Figure 4.8: The number of total metadiscourse devices used in different parts of the articles (Average, per thousand words).....	65

Figure 4.9: The frequency of different subcategories of metadiscourse functions used in each field (per thousand words).....69

Figure 4.10: The proportion of different subcategories of metadiscourse functions used in each field.69

List of Abbreviations

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

HS: Hard Sciences

SFG: Systemic Functional Grammar

SS: Social Sciences

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

During the past years, metadiscourse and the way it was used by writers in different types of texts has been studied frequently by the language researchers. It is believed that teaching language learners to exploit the metadiscourse functions in the texts can improve their reading and writing skills as well as their communication skills. Cheng and Steffensen (1996) and Intraprawat and Steffensen (1995) have argued that students' writing can be improved when it is with an awareness of textual metadiscourse, one of the two types of metadiscourse markers which will be discussed in the second chapter. Perez- Llantada (2003) has conducted a research on the effect of metadiscourse techniques on learners' communication skills in university courses of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and has arrived to the conclusion that students in the study become more successful communicators as they use metadiscourse strategies.

The above studies show the importance of the metadiscourse studies especially for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In fact, by increasing our knowledge about the way metadiscursive elements are used in academic articles, we can help students in their academic activities and also help researchers of different disciplines to better interact with their readers in their articles.

This study has its focus on the academic articles and the way metadiscourse functions are used in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences.

Academic articles have always been one of the most important areas for researchers, especially for language researchers. As Hyland (2006) states:

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has evolved rapidly over the past twenty years or so. From humble beginnings as a relatively fringe branch of English

for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the early 1980s, it is today a major force in English language teaching and research around the world. (p. 1)

1.2 Background of the Study

There have been different types of researches on academic articles including discourse based analyses. However, most of the work on metadiscourse studies has focused on the contrastive studies of the use of metadiscourse devices by writers of different nationalities or the contrastive study of the native and non-native language users. Although there were very fruitful results and a growing interest to increase our understanding of the way language is used by writers from different language backgrounds, there have been few studies to focus on the way language is used by the writers in different fields and academic disciplines.

One of the recent works in studying academic articles is an MA thesis by Ünsal (2008) in which she compared two fields of (Basic) Sciences and Social Sciences. She chose three disciplines for each of the two fields and compared six different disciplines with each other. Interestingly, she found out that contrary to the common belief, articles in (Basic) Sciences were not as impersonal and insensitive to their readers as many think. She found not only a lot of instances of metadiscourse elements in Basic Sciences, but also more interpersonal metadiscourse elements in Basic Sciences articles than Social Sciences articles. Also, the number of textual metadiscourse elements in Social sciences was more than Basic sciences.

There are also other articles which compare a limited number of disciplines like the work by Afros (2007) in which the (meta)discourse in two disciplines of language and literary studies have been compared. Also, among other studies, we can mention Abdi (2000) in which 30 discussion sections per discipline (Natural and Social Sciences) in research articles have been compared and also Beig-Mohammadi (2003) who has analyzed a total of 75

introductions from three domains: Social Sciences (SS), Hard Sciences (HS), and ELT in research articles. (Crismore & Abdollehzadeh, 2010, p.197).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

As it was mentioned in the previous section, there have been several studies which have focused on the use of metadiscourse in academic articles. The current study is different from the other studies in that not only the different disciplines are compared with each other, but also there is a comparative study of different sections of the articles to see if there is a difference in the use of metadiscourse devices in different parts of the articles or not. Many of the previous studies have focused only on the introductions, conclusions or the abstracts of the articles. To the best of my knowledge, there have been very few comparisons of those sections in terms of metadiscourse in one single study. In this study, as it will come, there has been a comparative study of the introduction, main body and conclusion & discussion of the articles and it has tried to find out if the difference in one of the sections has any effect on the final results for the whole part of the articles. Indeed, as it will come on the discussion section of chapter four, the study finds some interesting results for the above question.

Also, in this study, an effort has been made to use a variety of disciplines to see if there are differences in the use of metadiscourse functions among them. Of course, the first aim of this study was to compare the use of metadiscourse functions in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences. Another issue is that many of the previous studies have focused on the use of some subcategories of metadiscourse functions in the articles. This study has focused on the use of all the subcategories of the two types of metadiscourse devices according to Hyland's (1998b) model and has tried to give a comparative view of the use of all these subcategories in different sections and also in the whole of the articles in the chosen disciplines.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The aim of the present research was to compare the main metadiscourse functions used by writers of articles in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences. It tried to find out if there were differences or similarities in the distribution of the two types and the subcategories of metadiscourse functions according to Hyland's (1998b) model in the articles and also in the different sections of those articles in the two fields. Although there was a complete quantitative analysis of the use of metadiscourse devices in the articles, some qualitative analysis was also done to find out possible reasons for the similarities or differences among the articles.

1.5 Significance of the Study

One of the areas which is of great importance for ESP Syllabus designers is the scientific domain, especially academic articles and the way language is used in this area. Increasing our knowledge about the use of metadiscourse functions in different fields and disciplines can help the ESP Syllabus designers to focus on those parts of the articles which seem to be problematic for the students and also the fresh researchers who want to interact as efficiently as possible with their readers. Teaching textual metadiscourse functions to the students can help them to write more cohesively and more coherently and better read and understand the materials. Furthermore, teaching interpersonal metadiscourse functions can help them to improve their interaction with their readers and to get their message across their readers in a better way.

Comparing the different disciplines and fields of the studies can also help us to understand whether there are any differences or similarities in the authors' stance towards their own articles. Studying interpersonal metadiscourse functions can inform us about the degree of the responsibility which the authors take about their own statements in different

fields and disciplines and also shows their degree of certainty about what has been stated in the articles.

1.6 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study tries to find answers for the following questions:

- RQ1: Are there any differences or similarities in **the number of metadiscourse devices** used by writers in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences?
- RQ2: Are there any differences or similarities **in the distribution of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse** used by writers in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences?
- RQ3: Are there any differences or similarities in the distribution of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse used by writers in the **introduction** section of the articles in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences?
- RQ4: Are there any differences or similarities in the distribution of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse used by writers in the **main body** of the articles in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences?
- RQ5: Are there any differences or similarities in the distribution of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse used by writers in the **conclusion and discussion** section of the articles in the two fields of Social Sciences and Basic Sciences?
- RQ6: Are there any differences or similarities in the distribution of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse used by writers in **the three sections of the articles**?

And the following research hypotheses were proposed:

- H1: Writers in Social Sciences use more metadiscourse elements in their writings than writers in Basic Sciences.

- H2: The density of textual metadiscourse used in Basic Sciences is higher than Social Sciences.
- H3: the density of interpersonal metadiscourse used in Social Sciences is higher than Basic Sciences.
- H4: The introduction section of the articles tends to have more metadiscourse elements in comparison with other sections of the articles.

The above questions and hypotheses will be presented in more detail in chapter three.

1.7 Definition of the Key Terms

There are some expressions and terms which have been used frequently in this study. Here are some definitions for them. It must be mentioned that for some of these terms, there is not a definite definition:

1.7.1 Metadiscourse

By ‘metadiscourse’, we mean the rhetorical device that writers use in their texts to interpret, organize, connect and develop attitudes towards the material. ‘Metadsicourse’ has been referred to as “discourse about discourse” (Hyland, 2005, p. 16) and helps the readers to understand and interact well with the authors.

1.7.2 Textual Metadiscourse

‘Textual metadiscourse’ is related to the organization of the text and is used for enabling semantic relations between sentences and the whole text and organizing discourse acts.

Expressions like ‘because’ or ‘such as’ are considered as textual metadiscourse.