

**Tarbiat Moallem University**

**Department of Foreign Languages**

**The Effect of Explicit Teaching of Textual Metadiscourse on ESAP Reading Comprehension Performance of Iranian University Students**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for MA Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

**Supervisor: Dr. E. Babaii**

**Adviser: Dr. F. Asadi**

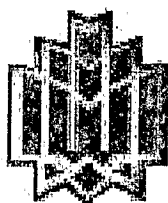
**By: M. R. Negahi**

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Tarbiat Moallem University

Department of foreign languages

We certify that the thesis entitled "the effect of explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian University Students" by M. R. Negahi is accepted as partial fulfillment of MA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

Supervisor: Dr. E. Babaii ..... *E. Babaii* .....

Advisor: Dr. F. Asadi ..... *Fazl Asadi* .....

Head of English Department: *M.R. Negahi*

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## **Abstract**

The present study attempted the relative effect of explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students through an awareness raising experiment. A sixty-item multiple choice English for Specific Academic Purposes reading comprehension test of accounting was developed and validated to act as the pre-test and post-test. The test included items for assessing specific comprehension of students in their specialist subject. The test was administered to 80 undergraduate intermediate and upper-intermediate randomly assigned to experimental and control groups as the pre-test. After the treatment was over, the ESAP test was again given to the same students as the post-test. The results of the two-way ANOVA indicated that the experimental group benefited from the explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers and the treatment had a facilitative effect on ESAP reading comprehension of students. Moreover, the results of the two-way ANOVA showed that the proficiency level had an effect on ESAP reading comprehension of the students, that is upper-intermediate level students in the experimental group benefited more from the explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers. The overall results of the study provide empirical support for the facilitative effect of

explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers on ESAP reading comprehension of students.

**Key words: metadiscourse, textual metadiscourse, ESAP, reading.**



# *Chapter One*

## **Introduction**

## 1.1. Overview

It is generally believed that reading is the most important language skill for ESL learners in academic contexts (Eskey, 1988; Carrell, 1989; Robinson, 1991; Grabe and Stoller, 2001). This is especially in point where students have to read English materials from their own specialist subject but may never have to speak the language itself (Eskey, 1988). According to Grabe and Stoller (2001), reading has been the most important academic language skill for second language students in the past 15 years. They (2001, p. 187) also maintain that "in academic settings, reading is assumed to be the central means for learning new information and gaining access to alternative explanations and interpretations."

Reading is seen as an interactive process incorporating both bottom-up and top-down knowledge (Shih, 1992; Vacca et al, 1995). Several scholars have generally argued that efficient and effective readers use both top-down and bottom-up processes operating interactively and simultaneously to enhance comprehension (Bernhardt, 1991; Grabe, 1991; Stanovich, 1997). This approach is particularly effective in teaching reading skills for academic or specific purposes. In addition to decoding meaning from print with bottom-up skills, successful readers implement top-down skills to activate their prior knowledge of content and use textual clues to help them cope with new information.

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in metadiscourse from a variety of ESP perspectives to consider, for example, its impact on reading comprehension (Infanidua, 2005). As one of the categories of metadiscourse, textual metadiscourse markers have been favorite topics in reading comprehension. According to Vande Kopple (1985, cited in Dahl, 2004), textual metadiscourse refers to devices which primarily organize the text for the reader. "Textual metadiscourse is used to organize propositional information in ways that will be coherent for a particular audience and appropriate for a given purpose" (Hyland, 1997, p. 7).

Dahl (2004) states that the main function of textual metadiscourse is to help the reader go through the text. In a study by Hyland (1999), it was shown that textual metadiscourse constituted about 70% of all metadiscourse in the course books. "Such metadiscourse provides an overt framework which not only clarifies the schematic structure of the text but also serves to fill in gaps and explicitly spells out connections to related ideas, thus helping to convey propositional context more coherently to novices" (Hyland, 1999, p. 9).

Ozono (2002, cited in Ozono and Ito, 2003) states that the explicit indication of logical relations causes higher degrees of text comprehension. Mayer (1975) maintains that logical connectives, as one

of the textual metadiscourse markers, play a structural role in discourse processing.

In a study conducted by Camiciottoli (2003), two groups of students read selected extracts from two versions of the same text differing according to quantity and type of metadiscourse, each group then took a reading comprehension test and their scores were compared. The findings suggest that the more presence of pronounced metadiscourse elements could have a positive influence on ESP reading comprehension.

In addition to the above-mentioned studies, several other studies (Nippold et al. , 1992 ; Nishimoto, 1997 ; Chung , 2000; Ozono, 2002) have investigated how logical connectives, as one of the textual metadiscourse markers, are tackled by L2 readers of different proficiency levels. Nippold et al., for example, examined how logical connectives could be processed by English native speakers of different proficiency levels. They divided their native (L1) subjects into four age groups, who were required to carry out both reading and writing tasks involving logical connectives. The results showed that the older age group had higher scores on both reading and writing tasks than the younger age group . Chung (2000) found that the low proficiency group, unlike the high and medium groups, relied heavily on explicit metadiscourse signals as meaning making devices.

Nishimoto (1997) studied how Japanese high school students understood logical connectives and he obtained mixed results. Ozono (2002) found that the high and low subjects achieved higher degrees of text comprehension when logical relations were indicated explicitly rather than implicitly.

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

The ability to read academic English is becoming increasingly important for researchers and students at higher-level education. This is primarily because of the fact that after World War II, English rapidly became the lingua franca in science and technology, and the main currencies of them are presented in English worldwide (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). It is of high necessity for university students to make extensive use of academic texts in English. Jordan (1997) maintains that reading academic texts (such as textbooks, research articles, etc.) seems to be the greatest requirement for students in most higher education situations where English is taught and/or used as a foreign language. Thus, they should be able to read textbooks in English. To achieve this goal, students' awareness should be raised regarding text patterning and discourse conventions of English academic texts.

One area which needs more attention in this respect is textual metadiscourse markers. It seems that the awareness of textual

metadiscourse devices is considered fundamental for successful and facilitative reading (Johns, 1997). Considering the fact that the issue of textual metadiscourse is controversial with relatively little experimentation with ESAP learners, the present study tries to examine other researchers' findings (Meyer, 1975; Ozono, 2002; Camiciottoli, 2003) in a more rigid research design, controlling the proficiency level of the students. Therefore, this study aims at showing the relative effect of textual metadiscourse on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian students of accounting through an awareness raising experiment.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

It is of no doubt that reading is the most generally needed skill in EAP and ESAP worldwide. Reading and understanding texts especially in ESAP and ESP situations have been an essential task in second and foreign language educational contexts. In these contexts, research that focuses on the improvement of text comprehension is of great importance.

Dahl (2004) states that textual metadiscourse has been shown to be a typical feature of metadiscourse. Hyland (1998) maintains that metadiscourse is a typical feature of text because "it provides cues to the pragmatic presupposition which help readers process the text, encoding

relationships between ideas and ordering material in ways that the potential audience will find appropriate and convincing" (p. 00440). He (1999) also maintains that textual metadiscourse markers guide the reading process by indicating discourse organization and clarifying propositional connections and meaning. Consequently, it is likely that one could improve the comprehension of a text by raising his textual metadiscourse consciousness.

Several studies have investigated logical connectives, hedging and the presence of metadiscourse in texts. By conducting a study, Ozono (2002; cited in Ozono and Ito, 2003) found that the subjects, high and low, achieved higher degrees of text comprehension when logical relations were indicated explicitly rather than implicitly. Hyland (2000; cited in Silva, 2001) suggests that hedges are often unnoticed by both L1 and L2 readers respectively. Silva (2001) conducted a study and concluded that hedging awareness-raising can have a positive effect on students reading comprehension. Crismore (1989; cited in Camiciottoli, 2003) attempted to determine whether including informational and attitudinal metadiscourse in social studies textbook passages would have any effect on reading retention with sixth graders. She found that there was some improvement in retention after reading passages with both types of metadiscourse. However, it should be said, to the best of researchers' knowledge, there has been no experimental

research on the effect of the explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students. Thus, the present study intends to show whether the explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse has any effect on the ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students of accounting.

#### **1.4. Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The present study is designed to answer the following questions concerning the effect of textual metadiscourse on ESAP reading comprehension of Iranian university students:

1- Does explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers have any effect on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students of accounting?

2- Does the proficiency level of the students have any effect on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students with reference to teaching textual metadiscourse markers?

Based on the above-mentioned questions, the following null hypotheses are resulted:

H01. Explicit teaching of textual metadiscourse markers has no effect on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students of accounting.



H02. The proficiency level of the students has no effect on ESAP reading comprehension performance of Iranian university students with reference to teaching textual metadiscourse markers.

### **1.5. Definitions of Key Terms**

#### **ESAP**

According to Jordan (1997), ESAP is a subdivision of EAP that is 'subject-specific'. ESAP or "subject specific English is the language needed for a particular academic subject, e.g. economics, together with its disciplinary culture. It includes the language structure, vocabulary, the particular skills needed for the subject, and the appropriate academic conventions" ( p. 5).

#### **Reading**

According to Chastain (1988), reading is "a process involving the activation of relevant knowledge and related language skills to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another" (p. 216). Widdowson (1979) also defined reading as "a reasoning activity whereby the reader creates meaning on the basis of textual clues" (p.173).

#### **Metadiscourse**

According to Vande Kopple (1985), "metadiscourse is discourse about discourse or communication about communication" (p. 85).

As Hyland (2004) pointed out, "metadiscourse is self-reflective linguistic expression to the evolving text, to the writer and to the imagined readers of the text" (p. 133).

According to Hyland (1999, p. 437), "metadiscourse refers to aspects of a text which explicitly organize the discourse, engage the audience and signal the writer's attitude".

### **Textual Metadiscourse**

Hyland (1999) defines textual metadiscourse as "devices which allow the recovery of the writer's intention by explicitly establishing preferred interpretations of propositional meanings" (p.442).

Textual metadiscourse consists of five sub-categories, as appeared in Hyland's (1999) classification system.

The first is logical connectives, primarily conjunctions and adverbial and propositional phrases, which link ideas in the text (Hyland, 1999). The second is frame markers, which indicate stages or shifts in discourse content (e.g., first, finally, in conclusion) (ibid). The third, Hyland (ibid) says, is endophoric markers such as 'in section 2', and 'see table 1', which refer to other parts of the text. The fourth is evidential markers, which refer to sources cited in the text (ibid). Finally, code glosses, which explain or expand propositional information to facilitate interpretation and ensure the writer's intention, help readers to

understand a word or phrase in the text (e.g., namely, in other words) (ibid).

### **1.6. Limitations of the Study**

- Considering the subjects, only students of accounting took part in this study.
- There was no opportunity to take into consideration the interpersonal metadiscourse because it was the aim of this study to investigate the effect of textual, not interpersonal, metadiscourse on reading comprehension.
- There was no opportunity to take into consideration the gender factor, although both male and female students took part in this study.

# *Chapter Two*

## **Review of Literature**