

# A Cross-linguistic Study of Metadiscourse Markers in English Academic Writing of Saudi EFL Students and UK Native Speakers of English

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## (1) What Does the Literature Say about Metadiscourse?

- Metadiscourse (MD) is an umbrella term for linguistic expression used by speakers or writers to mark directions and purposes of a text (Hyland 2005). Broadly defined as 'discourse about discourse' (e.g. *first, therefore, and in this section...*).
- MD has two main functions: textual and interpersonal (see Halliday 1973, on the macro-function of language).
- On the textual level, MD guides the readers through the text and helps them organize and interpret the content (Crismore & Farnsworth 1989).
- On the interpersonal level, MD grants written texts some features of spoken language, to engage and build solidarity with the reader. It also shows the writer's attitudes towards their content and readers.

Table 1. Hyland's(2005) MD Model

Category	Function	Examples
<b>Textual</b>	<b>Help to guide reader through the text</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Logical connectives (Transitions)	Express relations between main clauses	and, but, in addition, however, thus
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	My purpose is..., first, second, the findings are..., In conclusion
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	mentioned above, as follows
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	according to..., X states that...
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meanings	in other words, it means that..., such as..., e.g., for example
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Involve the reader in the text</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to statements	may, might, could, would, perhaps, some, possible
Boosters	Emphasize force or writer's certainty	in fact, definitely
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude including significance, obligation to proposition	should, have to, agree, surprisingly
Self-mentions	Refer to author(s) explicitly	I, my, exclusive we, our
Engagement markers	Build relationship with reader explicitly	imperatives (e.g., Please note that...), You can see that..., inclusive We

## (2) Introduction to Saudi Students Use of MD

- The use of MD markers varies from one group to another depending on sociocultural and institutional contexts (Hyland 2005; Hyland 2017). EFL students' cultural and linguistic traditions could affect the way they write (Kaplan 1987). This practice can be witnessed amongst Saudi students when writing in English (Alowayid 2018).
- Very few studies have looked at Saudi students and concluded that the student underuse and misuse MD, which results in low quality of the writing (Daif-Allah & Albeshir 2013; Alkhatlan 2019).
- Particularly, Alkhatlan (2019) study of Saudi students shows significant differences between the frequency of interactive (8.961%) and interactional (5.320%) markers.
- In conclusion, Alkhatlan (2019, p. 224) states that the Saudi students show more concern about the text organization more than engaging with readers but as texts get longer they fail to connect them together.

## (3) Main Aims of the Study

- To explore and investigate the differences and similarities of MD usage both communicatively and syntactically among three groups of participants (Saudi students in Saudi, Saudi students in UK, and UK native speakers of English) from the same discipline (Applied Linguistics). Special focus is given to frequency and function as reflections of underlying rhetorical strategies.
- To assess which factor could have the most effect on students' use of MD (1) native-ness (Arabic vs English), (2) discipline or (3) institutional context (Saudi universities vs UK universities).

## (5) Methodology

- 30 academic MA dissertations comprise the three corpora of this study (10 dissertations for each corpus) from the three categories of the participants.
- The analytical framework of this research study is Hyland's (2005) MD markers model (see table 1), and For the analysis of the data, UAM corpus tool and manual analysis are used.
- The markers are also analyzed syntactically in terms in which clause constituents (subject, predicate, complement and adjunct) they occur.

Table 2. MD Frequency in this research

MD-TYPE2	N=4614	
- interactive	2784	60.34%
- interactional	1753	37.99%
- htd	77	1.67%
<b>INTERACTIVE</b>	<b>N=2782</b>	
- transitions	633	22.75%
- frame markers	541	19.45%
- endophoric markers	377	13.55%
- evidentials	687	24.69%
- code glosses	544	19.55%
<b>INTERACTIONAL</b>	<b>N=1751</b>	
- hedges	966	55.17%
- boosters	299	17.08%
- attitude markers	382	21.82%
- engagement markers	47	2.68%
- self-mentions	57	3.26%

## (6) Findings and discussion

- Six theses written by Saudi students in the UK have thus far been manually analyzed (totaling 80,000 words).
- The data shows that there is statistically significant difference in the use of the two main categories/functions of MD.
- The students used far more interactive MD (2784 times) than interactional MD (1753 times), totaling 4695 MD markers (see Table 2). This implies that students are focused more on organizing the text than involving or interacting with readers.
- In the interactive MD, *evidentials* are the most frequent markers followed by *transition*. The frequent use of *evidential* could be attributed to the genre as it requires researching and citing information and the students are aware of its importance to support their argument (Alkhatlan 2019).
- In the interactional MD, *Hedges* are the most frequent markers and also the most frequent ones in the corpus as a whole. This is an interesting finding as it contradicts Hyland (2005), Burakaini (2008), and Alshahrani (2015) who state that *transitions* are the most frequent markers.
- The high frequency of *hedges* can suggest that Students are more cautious about being certain and aware of their reader's alternative viewpoints (e.g. examiners) (Hyland 1998) and they express information as opinions rather than facts.
- The least frequent markers in the data are *engagement* markers (from interactional MD) and *frame markers* (from interactive MD).
- The low frequency of *engagement markers* can suggest that the Saudi students may have failed to include their readers, rhetorically position them, pull them into the argument, and predict possible objections. These functions are achieved by engagement markers (Hyland 2005).

- Investigating MD syntactically (i.e. where MD is placed within the clause constituents: subject, predicate, complement and adjunct) shows that most MD is used in an adjunct position, followed by predicate then parenthetical (1441,1098 and 789 times, respectively).
- In the adjunct position, MD occurred 753 times in initial positions. This is expected as MD mostly connects and organizes content; it connects ideas with the previous ones to make them more appealing and understandable (Hyland 2005).
- The most frequent types are reported in table 3.
- An Interesting finding is that the most frequent types of markers are interactional, while the most frequent MD categories are interactive. That is, the students use limited number of interactional types and most of them are hedges.

Table 3. The Most 10 Frequent Types of MD

MD Category	Type of Markers	Number of occurrences in data	MD Category	Type of Markers	Number of occurrences in data
Transition	Also	110	Hedges	Can	243
Code gloss	Such as	100	Hedges	Might	90
Transition	However	91	Hedges	Could	83
Transition	Therefore	65	Booster	Found	65
Transition	Thus	58	Hedges	Would	59
Total		424			459

## (7) Difficulties

This study looks at the functions of MD markers in a clause, which functions of the 4 basic clause constituents (subject, predicate, complement, adjunct) they are serving. For example, *the study suggests that....*

Here *suggest* is a predicate and this instance is clear. However, other markers are quite problematic as some of them like attributive adjectives do not usually serve any of the 4 basic functions of the clause by themselves. For example,

*because the most influential studies are presented in chapter 2.*

*Influential* here has no main function of the clause constituents itself and it occurred in an adjunct clause, but we cannot classify it as an adjunct because it is not an adjunct. So, to code it, we decided to look at the immediate function of the marker in the clause where it occurs regardless of the clause as a whole. If the marker has no immediate function as clause constituents itself, then we look at in which part of the clause it occurred and classify it as part of that clause constituent. *Influential* is a part of the subject but is not a subject so we classified it as part of the clause's subject as it modifies the head noun.

**This is our approach to such instances, but I would like to ask you kindly if you could suggest any alternatives to deal with this or maybe to comment on it.**

## (8) References

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