A Comparative Analysis of Interactive Metadiscourse Features in Discussion section of Research Articles Written in English and Persian

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to examine the interactive metadiscoursal features in the discussion section of the English and Persian sociological research articles.   The analysis is based on a corpus of 20 research articles from sociological discipline; 10 from English-written articles published in international journals, and 10 from Persian-written articles published in national journals. Results of the study showed that English research articles use more overall interactive features than Persian articles in Sociological discipline. The only subcategory that Persian research articles showed more frequency was Endophoric markers. It seems that linguistic and cultural contexts are reflected in the written texts of these two languages.

Keywords: Interactive metadiscourse, Academic writing, Research articles, Contrastive rhetoric, Genre writing

1. Introduction

For several centuries, written language has been seen as being fundamental. This is due to the significance of writing in all aspects of our lives, its roles in social professional and academic contexts, and its decisive role in determining our life chances in high stake situations. According to Widdowson (2007), texts are the noticeable traces of the process of mediating a message. In conversation, these traces are disorganized and vanish.

Different genres are best conceived as actualization of language choices to delineate particular purposes, assumptions about the audience and interpersonal relations with the reader, and thus, different genres approaches persuasion differently. In this regard, academic writing has recently drawn the interest of numerous researchers, with research on this field devoting much of its attention to the genre of the research article (henceforth RA). To elucidate the underlying motives of shifting interest to academic writing, Hyland (2000) provides us with two reasons: a) from a theoretical perspective, this trend has been inspired by the fact that it is the writing which produces different characteristics of various disciplines; and texts are often thought to manifest the way of constructing and negotiating knowledge in each discipline; b) from a pedagogical perspective, he maintains that what attracts attention to academic writing is that writing is one of the principal responsibilities of academics.

Research article as a growing area has garnered great interest in the last 2 decades. In this regard, researchers have probed not only the structure of the RA, but have also focused on other aspects, such as its social construction and historical evolution, and the overall organization of the different sections that integrate it. RAs belong to one type of genre which has been traditionally viewed as a vehicle of information transmission which contributes to the development and maintenance of scientific attempt within a particular community. Even though this genre is assumed to be largely informative, the fact that RAs are created by people means that they simultaneously convey propositional information while creating and sustaining expressive meanings. Hence, in order for the writer's claims to be well-honored, audiences need to feel they are being engaged, influenced and persuaded, and it is precisely through the use of metadiscoursal features that this is accomplished in the genre of the RA. Metadiscourse then is not a subjective question of style, but an important pragmatic feature through which writers show a disciplinary awareness of how to represent themselves and their research (Hyland, 1998).

1.1 The Concept of Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is seen as the interpersonal resources used to organize a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader (Hyland, 2000). It refers to the linguistic devices writers utilize to shape their arguments for the needs and expectations of their target readers. The term is not always defined and used in the same manner, but it is typically employed as an cover term to entail a heterogeneous range of features which facilitate to relate a text to its context by assisting readers to connect, organize, and interpret material in a way preferred by the writer and with regard to the understandings and values of a particular discourse community (Halliday, 1998). While some analysts have limited the focus of metadiscourse to features of textual organization (Bunton, 1998; Valero-Garces,

1996) or explicit illocutionary markers (Beauvais, 1989), metadiscourse is more generally seen as the author's linguistic and rhetorical presentation in the text in order to ''bracket the discourse organization and the expressive implications of what is being said'' (Schiffrin, 1980, p. 231). Metadiscourse has been recently used in text analysis. It has informed studies about the features of the texts, participant interactions, historical linguistics, cross-cultural variations and writing pedagogy. Studies have suggested the significance of metadiscourse in casual conversation (Schiffrin, 1980), science popularizations (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990), undergraduate textbooks (Hyland, 2000), postgraduate dissertations (Bunton, 1998), and school textbooks (Crismore, 1989). It appears to be a feature of a range of languages and genres and has been used to investigate rhetorical differences in the texts written by different first language groups (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Valero-Garces, 1996). In L2 classes, metadiscourse is often familiar to teachers as a range of distinct devices which are helpful in assisting readers to undersyand and analyze written texts. Thus, transition markers (by contrast, however, therefore, etc.), sequencing items (first, next, then, etc.), and hedges (apparently, perhaps, doubtful, etc.) are, if EAP textbooks are any indication, generally taught in academic writing courses. But while the addition of these features can aid writers to transform a dry, intricate text into coherent, reader-friendly prose, they are often taught in a rather piecemeal fashion, and little attention is drawn to how they function more widely to influence the interaction between writer, reader and text, or how they relate to the particular genre and discipline in which the student is working. This is probably because they are often considered as primarily linguistic aspects of writing.

1.2 Metadiscourse Models

Metadiscourse is fundamentally an open category which can be realized in various ways. There are huge arrays of linguistic elements from punctuation and typographic markers (like parentheses and underlying) and paralinguistic cues which accompany spoken messages (like tone of voice and stress) to whole clauses and sentences which are used reveal ourselves and our purposes in our texts (written or oral) (Hyland,1999,2005). A variety of metadiscourse taxonomies have, therefore, been proposed (Crismore, 1989; Vande Kopple, 2002; Hyland, 2005; Adel, 2006).

The first model was introduced by Vande kopple (1985). He introduced two main categories of metadiscourse, namely "textual" and "interpersonal". Four strategies -text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers, and narrators- constituted textual metadiscourse, and three strategies -validity markers, attitude markers, and commentaries- made up the interpersonal metadiscourse. Vande Kopple's model was specifically important in that it was the first systematic attempt to introduce a taxonomy that triggered many practical studies, and gave rise to new taxonomies. The categories are, however, unclear and functionally overlap. Citation, for example, can be used to enhance a position by claiming the support of a credible other (validity markers).They can also be used to show the source of the information (narrators) (Hyland, 2005).

The revised model was introduced by Crismore et al. (1993). They reserved the two major categories of textual and interpersonal, but separated and reorganized the subcategories. The

textual metadiscourse was further divided into two categories of "textual" and "interpretive" markers to separate organizational and evaluative functions. Textual markers are composed of those features that assist to organize the discourse, and interpretive markers are those features used to help readers to better interpret and understand the writer's meaning and writing strategies (Crismore et al., 1993).

The model proposed by Hyland (2005) comprises of two main categories of "interactive" and "interactional". This model owes a great deal to Thompson and Thetela's conception (1995), but it takes a wider focus by including stance and engagement markers. The interactive part of metadiscourse concerns the writer's awareness of his receiver, and his attempts to accommodate his interests and needs, and to make the argument satisfactory for him. The interactional part, on the other hand, concerns the writer's attempts to make his views explicit, and to involve the reader by predicting his objections and responses to the text (Hyland, 2005).

Most of the above models follow Halliday's (1994) tripartite conception of metafunctions which distinguishes between the ideational elements of a text-the ways we encode our experiences of the world-and its textual and interpersonal functions. Of course some others, like Adel (2006), do not follow Halliday's functions. She distinguishes between two main types of metadiscourse; "metatext" and "writer-reader interaction".

Halliday (1994) believes when people use language, they generally work toward satisfying three macro functions. They strive to give expression to their experience, to interact with their audience, and to organize their expressions into cohesive discourses. In other words, Halliday (1994) argues that people communicate with messages that are integrated expressions of three different kinds of meaning; ideational, interpersonal, and textual:

• The ideational function: the use of language to represent experience and ideas. This roughly corresponds to the notion of propositional content.

• The interpersonal function: the use of language to encode interaction, allowing us to engage with others, to take on roles and to express and understand evaluations and feelings.

• The textual function: the use of language to organize the text itself, coherently relating what is said to the world and to the readers (Halliday, 1994). Hyland (1999) believes that "textual metadiscourse is used to organize propositional information in ways that will be coherent for a particular audience and appropriate for a given context"(p.7). He believes that the writer of a text predicts the receiver's processing difficulties and requirements, and accommodates them by using certain devices.

He further maintained that interpersonal metadiscourse "allows writers to express a perspective toward their propositional information and their readers. It is basically an evaluative form of discourse and expresses the writer's individually defined, but disciplinary circumscribed, persona" (p.7-8).

1.3 Hyland's (2005) Model of Metadiscourse

Hyland's new pragmatically founded model of metadiscourse (2005) aspires to overcome the controversies surrounding the notion of metadiscourse, which are based on the distinction between propositional and metadiscoursal matter, (see Lautamatti, 1978; Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore et al, 1993) and to provide an alternative to the long-standing categorization of metadiscourse as either textual or interpersonal (see Vande Kopple, 1985; Mauranen, 1997; Valero-Garces, 1996). consequently, Hyland's new model advocates the need to view all metadiscourse as interpersonal: '' in that it takes account of the reader's knowledge, textual experiences and processing requirements and that it provides writers with an armory of rhetorical appeals to achieve this'' (Hyland 2005, p. 41). Within this new framework, metadiscourse is self-reflective linguistic material, attempting to guide the reader's perception of a text while focusing attention on the ways writers project themselves in their discourse to convey their stance towards both the content and the audience of the text. Hyland (2005) as well underlines the ability of metadiscourse to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, to aid the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and to engage with readers as members of a particular community. Metadiscourse is thus grounded in the belief that communication is social engagement and based on a view of language as a dynamic entity since: ''as we speak or write, we negotiate with others, making decisions about the effects we are having on our listeners or readers'' (Hyland, 2005, p. 3).

Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse recognizes the existence of two dimensions of interaction, the first one is the interactive dimension which: ''concerns the writer's awareness of a participating audience and the ways he or she seeks to accommodate its probable knowledge, interests, rhetorical expectations and processing abilities'' (Hyland, 2005, p. 49). Incorporated in this dimension are the resources which address ways of organizing and constructing discourse with the reader's needs in mind. On the other hand, interactional metadiscourse deals with the ways the writers comment on their own messages to make their views known while revealing ''the extent to which the writer works to jointly construct the text with the reader'' (Hyland, 2005, p. 49).

This new model proposes that metadiscourse is immersed in the socio-rhetorical context in which it occurs, and thus disparity in the use of metadiscoursal features has been revealed to be dependent on the purposes of writers, the audience orcommunity, as well as socio-cultural settings.

1.4 The Hyland's Elements of Interpersonal Model

As mentioned earlier, interactive resources allow the writer to manage the information flow to explicitly build his or her preferred interpretations. They are concerned with ways of organizing discourse to anticipate readers' knowledge and echo the writer's assessment of what needs to be made explicit to constrain and guide what can be recovered from the text. These resources include the following:

_ Transitions, comprise a range of devices, mostly conjunctions, used to mark additive, contrastive, and consequential steps in the discourse, as opposed to the external world.

_ Frame markers are references to text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure, including items used to sequence, to label text stages, to announce discourse goals, and to indicate topic shifts.

_ Endophoric markers make additional material salient and available to the reader in recovering the writer's intentions by referring to other parts of the text.

_ Evidentials illustrate the source of textual information which originates outside the current text.

_ Code glosses signal the restatement of ideational information.

Interactional resources focus on the participants of the interaction and seek to display the writer's persona and a tenor consistent with the norms of the disciplinary community.

Metadiscourse here concerns the writer's efforts to control the level of personality in a text and establish a suitable relationship to his or her data, arguments, and audience, marking the degree of intimacy, the expression of attitude, the communication of commitments, and the extent of reader involvement. They include:

_ Hedges mark the writer's reluctance to present propositional information categorically.

_ Boosters express certainty and emphasize the force of propositions.

_ Attitude markers express the writer's appraisal of propositional information, conveying surprise obligation, agreement, importance, and so on.

_ Engagement markers explicitly address readers, either by selectively focusing their attention or by including them as participants in the text through second person pronouns, imperatives, question forms and asides (Hyland, 2001).

- Self-mentions: explicitly signal the authorial persona of the scholar(s). They feature self-references and self-citations.

1.6 Corpus and Methods

In order to carry out a cross-cultural analysis of the interactive components of Hyland interpersonal model in English and Persian academic Sociological RA writing, a corpus was compiled which is composed of the discussion section of 20 research articles from Sociology discipline: 10 of them written in English by native scholars and published in international journals, and 10 written in Persian by Iranian scholars and published in national journals.

2. Present Study

This paper seeks to contrastively analyze research articles (RAs) in Sociology, written and published within the discipline in two different cultural contexts – the English speaking context, which is open to an international readership, and Iran, national context- Revealing probable different rhetorical conventions favored in international RAs in English and in national RAs in Persian may contribute to provide scholars with valuable cues when it comes to successfully addressing the international community.

A better understanding may be achieved of the beliefs, values and assumptions shared among members of this community in both contexts by carefully analyzing the pragmatic and discoursal conventions used by scholars in transmitting disciplinary knowledge. This study takes a more comprehensive perspective allowing for a detailed description of the textual enactment of the writer–reader relation in academic texts of specific discipline i.e. Sociology, in which its primary concern is discerning diversities in societies.

The research questions to be addressed in this article are:

(1) What is the function of interactive metadiscourse in English native scholars' RAs in their national context within Sociology RAs?

(2) What is the function of interactive metadiscourse in Iranian native scholars' RAs in their international context within Sociology RAs ?

(3) Is there any significant difference between English and Persian authors' use of interactive metadiscourse within Sociology RAs?

3. Results and Discussion

First, the RAs were carefully read and scanned in search of potential metadiscourse features. Once it was determined that a given feature qualified as metadiscursive, it was assigned to one of the categories outlined above. The frequency analyses of each of the five categories of interactive metadiscourse features are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of the interactive metadiscourse features in English and Persian corpus

Interaactive Metadiscourse	Code Glosses	Endophoric Markers	Evidentials	Transition Markers	Frame Markers	Total
English Corpus	63	25	56	412	58	614
Persian Corpus	33	66	27	310	36	472

In order to compare the type and amount of metadiscourse employed by Persian and native speakers of English in their use of total number of *interactive* metadiscourse in writing research articles on sociology in Persian and in English respectively, chi-square test was run. Table 2 shows the summary of the results of this chi-square.

Table 2. Results of chi-square tests of English and Iranian writers' use of interactive metadiscoursein English and Persian, respectively.

	value	df	p
$X \leq$	17.54	4	.01
n	1086		

As the results show, the value of observed chii-square (x^2=17.52) is significant at α level (α=0.01) with degrees of freedom of 4 (df=4) indicating that there is a significant difference between these two groups in their use of interactive metadiscourse in English and Persian sociological texts. In other words, interactive metadiscourse is actually used differently by these two groups, and different subtypes of it are generally used differently from one another.

The English corpus shows a statistically significant higher inclusion of both interactive metadiscourse features than the Persian corpus. This implies that a stronger interaction between the writer and the reader is established in the texts in English than in the texts in Persian within this discipline.

Results suggest that English scholars more closely guide the readers through their discussions in their RAs especially by means of transitional markers and code glosses.

The results for each category will be comparatively described in turn.

3.1 Code Glosses

In order to compare the type and amount of metadiscourse employed by Persian and native speakers of English in their use of code glosses in writing research articles on sociology in Persian and in English respectively, chi-square test was run. Table 3 shows the summary of the results of this chi-square.

Table 3. Results of chi-square tests of English and Iranian writers' use of code glosses in English and Persian, respectively

	value	df	p
X≤	9.36	1	.01
n	96		

As the results show, the value of observed chii-square (x^2=9.36) is significant at α level (α=0.01) with degrees of freedom of 1 (df=1) indicating that there is a significant difference between these two groups in their use of code glosses in English and Persian sociological texts.

Therefore, Code glosses are significantly more frequent in the RAs in English than in those in Persian (Table 3).

In other words, English-writing authors tend to elaborate propositional meaning more than the Persian authors by exemplifying and reformulating. The reason for this difference may be due to international readership of English-writing authors which is lacking in Persian texts where they are written for national readers. Hence, English-writing authors clarify the meaning by using code glosses markers like e.g., in other words, and so force.

3.2 Endophoric Markers

In order to compare the type and amount of metadiscourse employed by Persian and native speakers of English in their use of endophoric markers in writing research articles on sociology in Persian and in English respectively, chi-square test was run. Table 4 shows the summary of the results of this chi-square.

Table 4. Results of chi-square tests of English and Iranian writers' use of endophoric markers in English and Persian, respectively

	value	df	p
X≤	18.46	1	.001
n	91		

As the results show, the value of observed chi-square (x^2=18.46) is significant at α level (α=0.001) with degrees of freedom of 1 (df=1) indicating that there is a significant difference between these two groups in their use of endophoric markers in English and Persian sociological texts.

Therefore, endophoric markers are significantly more frequent in the RAs in Persian than in those in English (Table 2). It is the only interactive metadiscourse which is significantly more frequent the RAs in Persian than in the RAs in English. Their use may be explained by the need to direct the readers' attention to a particular point which has already been discussed which will be discussed later (Mur-Duenas, 2011). This shows that discussions in Persian texts are less linear than English texts.

3.3 Evidentials

In order to compare the type and amount of metadiscourse employed by Persian and native speakers of English in their use of evidentials in writing research articles on sociology in Persian and in English respectively, chi-square test was run. Table 5 shows the summary of the results of this chi-square.

Table 5. Results of chi-square tests of English and Iranian writers' use of evidentials in English and Persian, respectively

	value	df	p
X≤	10.13	1	.01
n	83		

As the results show, the value of observed chi-square (x^2=10.13) is significant at α level (α=0.01) with degrees of freedom of 1 (df=1) indicating that there is a significant difference

between these two groups in their use of evidentials in English and Persian sociological texts.

Thus, evidential are significantly more frequent in the English corpus than in the Persian one (Table 1). In other words, English-writing authors refer to information from other texts than Persian authors. By using a larger number of evidentials, a firmer and more reasonable contextualisation and justification of the research is established in the RAs in English than those in Persian. English-writing authors base their research more strongly in the disciplinary field than Persian-writing authors. As a result, readers of the English texts have a better understanding and knowledge on which the authors base their research.

3.4 Transitional Markers

In order to compare the type and amount of metadiscourse employed by Persian and native speakers of English in their use of transitional markers in writing research articles on sociology in Persian and in English respectively, chi-square test was run. Table 6 shows the summary of the results of this chi-square.

Table 6. Results of chi-square tests of English and Iranian writers' use of transitional markers in English and Persian, respectively

	value	df	p
X≤	14.09	1	.001
n	722		

As the results show, the value of observed chi-square (x^2=14.09) is significant at α level (α=0.001) with degrees of freedom of 1 (df=1) indicating that there is a significant difference between these two groups in their use of transitional markers in English and Persian sociological texts.

Transitional markers were common in both corpuses. However, The English corpus presents a higher number of transitional markers than the Persian one. Therefore, English-writing authors express relations between main clauses by using additives, contrastives, and consecutives more than the Persian-writing authors.

3.5 Frame Markers

In order to compare the type and amount of metadiscourse employed by Persian and native speakers of English in their use of frame markers in writing research articles on sociology in Persian and in English respectively, chi-square test was run. Table 7 shows the summary of the results of this chi-square.

Table 7. Results of chi-square tests of English and Iranian writers' use of frame markers in English and Persian, respectively.

	value	df	p
X≤	5.14	1	.05
n	94		

As the results show, the value of observed chi-square (x^2=5.14) is significant at α level (α=0.05) with degrees of freedom of 1 (df=1) indicating that there is a significant difference between these two groups in their use of frame markers in English and Persian sociological texts.

The English corpus presents a higher number of frame markers than the Persian one. Therefore, English-writing authors refer to discourse acts, sequences, or stages more than the Persian authors. Also, regarding the sub-categories of the frame markers, again, English-writing authors used more sequencing, labeling stages, goal announcing, and topic shifts than Persian-writing authors.

The cross-cultural analysis of interactive metadiscourse features in sociological RAs has revealed significant differences in the way authors express their discussions, portray themselves and their readers in the international English and national Persian contexts. It has been found that English-based sociological scholars tend to use more interactive metadiscourse features in their RAs than their Persian peers.

Persian Sociological RAs present fewer interactive metadiscourse markers, that is, explicit signals of the relationship between ideas and the organisation and clarification of ideational material than the English RAs.

The results of the present study may be useful for Persian sociological scholars who want to adjust their writing conventions to meet the expectations and required strategies in the international context in order to facilitate the publication of their research in international English language journals.

There are some limitations in this study which further research could take into account. The corpus was restricted to a small number of RAs from a single disciplinary community. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other disciplinary fields but should be considered as limited to the RAs written within the specific Sociology community. Furthermore, only the interactive part of the interpersonal metadiscourse framework of Hyland was examined in this study. Future research is needed to examine the interpersonal aspect of metadiscourse framework.

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