



**METADISCOURSE IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING OF  
MALAYSIAN AND ARAB PRE-UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC  
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

Effective deployment of metadiscourse markers is one of the ways to improve writing quality. However, non-native writers seem to show lesser use of these markers. Therefore, this study examines the use of metadiscourse markers among 50 Malaysian and 50 Arab Pre-University students at the International Islamic University Malaysia to determine the frequency and forms of metadiscourse markers in the academic essays written by these students. The findings of this study indicated that there was a significant difference in the use of metadiscourse markers between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University student writers,  $\chi^2(1, n = 100) = 7.17$ ,  $p$ -value is .007 where the use of metadiscourse markers among Malaysian Pre-University students was substantially higher than that of the Arabs Pre-University students. A closer analysis revealed significant differences in the employment of *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse markers between the two groups. For the *interactive* metadiscourse markers, results showed significant differences between Malaysian and Arabs Pre-University writers in the use of *transition*, *evidentials*, and *code glosses*. Meanwhile, for the use of *interactional* metadiscourse markers, there were significant differences between Malaysian and Arabs Pre-University writers in the use of *hedges*, *engagement markers* and *self-mentions*. These variances in the frequency and forms of metadiscourse markers utilized could be attributed to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the two groups of students. Based on the observation that there were differences in the use of metadiscourse markers by the two groups, it was therefore suggested that English language teachers integrate cultural considerations in their syllabus with regard to metadiscourse markers. This could assist them in preparing teaching materials as well as in developing the students' awareness of the importance of these linguistic features.

## ملخص البحث

من المعلوم أن استخدام الفعال للعلامات في بداية الكتابة أو الكلام، مثل: الظروف المكانية أو الزمانية تُعد واحدة من الطرق المستخدمة لتحسين نوعية الكتابة والكلام أيضاً. ومع ذلك، يبدو أن الكتابة غير الصحيحة تُظهر استخداماً أقل لهذه العلامات. لذلك، تبحث هذه الدراسة استخدام علامات بادئة الكتابة بين عينتين من الطلبة، وهما: 50 طالباً من الجنسية الماليزية، و 50 طالباً من الجنسية العربية وكلتي العينتين من الطلبة في المرحلة ما قبل الجامعية علماً بأن جميع الطلبة ينطون تحت مظلة الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد وتيرة، وأشكال علامات بادئة الكتابة أو ما تسمى (بالظروف) في حالة كتابة المقالات الأكاديمية التي كتبها هؤلاء الطلبة. أوضحت النتائج التي توصلت إليها هذه الدراسة أن هناك فرقاً كبيراً في استخدام هذه العلامات بين الطلبة الماليزيين عند كتابة المقالات مقارنة بطلبة العرب في المرحلة ما قبل الفترة الجامعية، (س2، 1، ن = 100) = 7.17، ف القيمة (0.007) من حيث استخدام هذه الظروف حيث كان استخدام العلامات بين الطلبة الماليزيين في المرحلة ما قبل الجامعية أعلى بكثير من استخدام الطلاب العرب في المرحلة ما قبل الجامعية. وأوضح تحليل التباين أيضاً أن هنالك اختلافات كبيرة في الالتزام بكتابة علامات بادئة الكتابة أو ما يسمى بالظروف من حيث التفاعلية والتفاعل بين المجموعتين. حيث الظروف التفاعلية، أظهرت النتائج وجود فروقات معنوية بين الطلبة الماليزيين والعرب في المرحلة ما قبل الجامعية في استخدام أدوات الوصل بين الجمل، والتعليمات البرمجية. وفي الوقت نفسه، من حيث استخدام الظروف التفاعلية، كانت هناك اختلافات كبيرة بين الكُتَّاب الماليزيين والعرب ما قبل مرحلة الدخول للجامعة في استخدامهم لهذه العلامات محفوف ببعض التحولات، ويمكن أن تعزى هذه الفروقات المعنوية في وتيرة وأشكال بادئات الكتابة إلى الخلفيات الثقافية المتنوعة بين مجموعتي الطلبة التي شملتهم الدراسة. بناء على هذه الملاحظة نجد أن هناك اختلافات في استخدام الظروف الزمانية أو المكانية من قبل المجموعتين، لذلك يجب على معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية أخذ الاختلافات الثقافية في الحسبان مع إدماجها في المناهج الخاصة فيما يتعلق بعلامات وبادئات الكتابة مثل الظروف الزمانية والمكانية. وهذا بدوره يمكن أن يساعد في إعداد المواد التعليمية، وكذلك في تطوير وعي الطلاب بأهمية هذه الميزات اللغوية.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Applied Linguistics).

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Faridah Abdul Malik  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Applied Linguistics).

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Sciences

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The first chapter introduces the concept of metadiscourse markers by first giving the background of the study which includes metadiscourse's purpose in the academic writing. The 'background of the study' section also highlights metadiscourse prominence in producing a coherent text. The subsequent sections will include the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions as well as significance of the study.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY**

Writing essays is an important part of a student's life at the university for the reason that they have to write essays for their assignments. The quality of the written assignments would have a significant influence on their academic achievement. Moreover, the capability to compose academic texts competently at institution of higher education is a practical anticipation to be grasped by the tertiary learners (Giridharan, 2012). In order to compose a comprehensible writing, the learners need to employ appropriate metadiscourse markers within their written tasks. Tan and Wong (2014) mentioned that metadiscourse is a central semantic means that aids authors to navigate the movement of their written content as well as to address their standpoint to their readers.

According to Hyland and Tse (2004), the metadiscourse markers are important resources deployed to designate how the text is organized, to clarify difficult words and jargons for readers, and to put into code what rhetorical acts are being performed. Competent employment of metadiscourse markers will make a text readable.

Thus, the knowledge of metadiscourse is frequently observed to be beneficial not only for students and the anticipated readers of the students' written works, but also for language instructors. Teachers can interpret their students' writing by looking at the students' deployment of metadiscourse. Consequently, the observation on the deployment of metadiscourse might assist the teachers to guide their students to be more thoughtful of the variances between students' national culture and the culture of the discourse or the community to which the text denotes to (Hyland, 2005). Furthermore, this would benefit the writing instructors in three conducts, primarily to enhance the students' writing skill, to enhance the teachers' teaching, and to provide concentration on individual areas that require support as well as to address future needs of these students especially in relation to their written proficiency. Nevertheless, not many studies have been conducted on metadiscourse especially in Malaysia.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

According to Irvin (2010), academic writing is a method of assessment that probes the author to display adeptness and demonstrate understanding within specific disciplinary expertise of interpreting, presenting, as well as thinking. Academic writing requires careful considerations on structure, readability and correctness.

Effective deployment of metadiscourse markers can be one of the means of enhancing the quality of academic essays written within academic circles (Letsoela, 2014). Specifically, the utilization of metadiscourse markers were suggested to improve the writing quality (Shi & Han, 2014), increase the readability (Zarrati, Nambiar & Maasum, 2014), and build a relationship with the readers (Hyland, 2005; Salek, 2014). These features are very important in developing a good quality academic writing (Tan & Eng, 2014). In fact, several studies have shown that the use of

metadiscourse can improved the academic writing among students. For instance, a study done by Lu (2011) shows that metadiscourse has helped in improving the academic writing among the Chinese EFL students' in the pedagogical context of composition classrooms in China. Furthermore, Tan and Wong (2014) mentioned that metadiscourse deployment in written context has been studied in numerous academic categories, journalistic and editorial columns as well as in inter cultural scholarships. Such abundance of studies provide evidence of its prominence within the writing realm, predominantly in academic writing. Moreover, there is an increasing concern with the quality and standard of academic writing among university students especially concerning ESL students (Abbas, 2011).

According to Giridharan, (2012), many L2 writers found composing academic text as dreary and frequently perceived it as an engulfing academic chore. This is mainly due to ESL students' deficiency of deploying proper linguistics feature within their academic texts. Moreover, the specific skill of composing academic text is every so often established in learners through proper academic instructional sceneries. Even though, with regards of the ESL authors, Chan and Tan (2010) stated that Malaysian undergraduate authors in particular, are overwhelmed with the proper structural guidelines to be applied in their writings and the use of good sentence structure of the English language. They also deemed to have difficulties in grasping the standard academic writing norms. It has been shown that the university students in Malaysia encounter great challenges in producing a good academic writing (Chan & Tan, 2010).

Therefore, this research aims to examine the deployment of metadiscourse markers among the university students in Malaysia as well as comparing it with Arab students studying in Malaysia. The comparison is taken into consideration as metadiscourse usage has been reported to differ from one writer's culture to another

(Abbas, 2011; Aya, 2013; Mehrnaz, 2014). Moreover, Hogue and Oshima (2007) stated that academic writing in English is perhaps not the same as the academic writing in the writer's first language. The grammar and words and also the way in organizing certain ideas are probably different from what the writer are used to. For that reason, the current study will shed more light on the subject as well as help to confirm whether or not metadiscourse use is dependent on one's culture. This study will also provide some information on the ways metadiscourse markers are used by two different groups, namely the Malaysian and Arab students in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The significant of metadiscourse in academic writing prompts this research which attempts to:

1. determine the forms and frequency of metadiscourse markers used by Malaysian Pre-University writers in their opinion-based essays.
2. determine the forms and frequency of metadiscourse markers used by Arab Pre-University writers in their opinion-based essays.
3. identify the differences between the frequency of metadiscourse by the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University writers.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In keeping with the aims of the study the following research questions were addressed:

- RQ1** What are the forms and frequency of metadiscourse used in the opinion-based essays written by Malaysian Pre-University writers?

**RQ2** What are the forms and frequency of metadiscourse used in the opinion-based essays written by Arab Pre-University writers?

**RQ3** Is there any significant difference in the frequency of metadiscourse between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University writers?

### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Primarily, the study will cater to the teaching and learning need of IIUM's multi-national environment where the second biggest group of students is the Arabs who come second after the Malaysians. Besides, metadiscourse markers are important to the targeted groups which include the Malaysian and Arab students of English as ineffective deployment of metadiscourse in their academic writing will affect the quality of their writings. Thus, knowing about metadiscourse markers will assist the language instructors to increase the Malaysian and Arab students' language awareness and improve their writing ability. This is very significant in the case of the local Malaysian students as well as the latter group, as higher education institutions in Malaysia are receiving scores of international students particularly from the Middle East.

Furthermore, language instructors can apply the knowledge on the use of metadiscourse markers to their own classroom contexts where many written communication challenges in English language learning are exhibited by language learners. Language instructors can ascertain any metadiscourse issues related to both Malaysian and Arab learners of English within their classroom setting. This study will also help teachers in preparing their teaching materials which highlight metadiscourse.

Last but not least, although metadiscourse is essential specifically in the realm of academic writing, there are still very few research of metadiscourse usage that have

been conducted among Malaysian as well as Arab writers. Hence, the current research will try to fill the gap in the academic collected works by giving an insight to the targeted groups which are the Malaysian and Arab writers of English.

## **1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE CHAPTERS**

This study consists of five chapters which are Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion, and finally, Conclusion.

Chapter I - Introduction – This chapter provides the background to the study, highlights the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research objectives, the research questions, and the significance of the study.

Chapter II - Review of Literature – This chapter provides an analysis of metadiscourse models, metadiscourse typology, metadiscourse in academic texts, studies on metadiscourse in academic writing, metadiscourse in cross-cultural studies, and the use of metadiscourse by Malaysian and Arab students. The significance of each literature with the current study is elaborated. Besides that, theoretical framework and definition of terms are explained in this section.

Chapter III - Methodology – This chapter explains the procedures, instrumentation, and data analysis.

Chapter IV – This chapter shows the findings of this study which include the forms and frequency of metadiscourse used in the academic essays written by Malaysian and Arab Pre-University writers. This is where the author provides the answers to RQs 1, 2 and 3. The frequency of each category found within the analytical frame work is presented. The categories were identified based on the criteria provided in the methodology section. The types of metadiscourse used by the students are presented and discussed.

Chapter V - Conclusion – This chapter includes the summary of findings; conclusion, implications of the findings, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review is organized according to the subject matters which are deemed as pertinent in addressing the objectives of the research. This chapter comprises of six main sub-topics that offer explanations as well as rationalizations to the motivation of the research. The first three parts: metadiscourse, definitions of metadiscourse marker and the Functions of metadiscourse marker in writing, discuss the concepts of metadiscourse along with its effectiveness in aiding readability of academic texts as well as forming a meaningful rapport with the reader. The next part: the research on metadiscourse markers in academic writing, reviews the theories of metadiscourse markers that are pertinent to the study in addition to its extensive history in academic writing. Subsequent to that, the reviews examine relevant academic works concerning the research on metadiscourse markers by writers from different backgrounds/cultures. This part justifies the research by highlighting the deployment of metadiscourse markers in academic texts that have been written by student writers from dissimilar cultural backgrounds. The final section deliberates on the theoretical framework that was selected over the others as the core framework for this research. To conclude, the summary of the chapter presents the review of the relevant collected academic works as a whole.

#### **2.1 METADISCOURSE**

According to Hyland (2005), metadiscourse is a universal feature of our daily verbal and nonverbal communication, plus the most important characteristic with regard to the way we interact in an assortment of settings and genres. Many research on

metadiscourse detail that discourse markers are essential elements of supporting a position, shaping effective communication, facilitating readability, as well as creating a connection with the reader. Over the past decades, in the literature, many metadiscourse classifications have been recommended by linguists in attempt to categorize metatextual components based on their function, form, or connotation since the initial interest in this topic and most of the groupings proposed for metadiscourse markers are according to the linguistic functions and roles (Crismore, 1984; Hernandez Guerra & Hernandez Guerra, 2008; Hyland, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1985, 1997). The focal purpose of this chapter is to present briefly the earlier research carried out concerning the area of metadiscourse.

## **2.2 DEFINITIONS OF METADISCOURSE MARKERS**

Harris (1959) was the first to coin the term ‘metadiscourse’ to refer to writing components which remark on the key information of writing, nonetheless which the deployed elements themselves comprise only a supplementary information. The subject of metadiscourse was neglected during the 1960s and 1970s. However, in the later years, namely during 1980s, it was accepted in discourse research by many academics who were interested in writing instructions (Williams 1981; Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore 1989). Following the re-emerging of metadiscourse in the 80’s, the term was redefined by Crismore (1983) in a taxonomy that is still largely used today. It is the writer’s imposition within the existing communication via texts. In addition, it is utilized by the author to channel information to the reader rather than to notify them (Crismore, 1983).

Generally, metadiscourse is the verbal means of writing that do not enhance intended data. It acts as an indication to signal the company of the writer as the writer

aids the person who reads, to categorize, organise, understand, react, as well as evaluate such material (Vande Kopple, 1985). In the early 1990s, many linguistic scholars displayed their strong disagreements with the notion of emphasising propositional connotation in a certain writing research. For instance, Fairclough (1992) saw metadiscourse as a kind of 'manifest intertextuality' where the writer interacts with his or her own text. This undertaking steered to a variety of innovative viewpoints concerning writing. As a result, the research of metadiscourse increased in its reputation (Vande Kopple, 2002).

Hyland (1998) defined metadiscourse as a universal term to comprise many diverse categories of features which aid in relating a context to its text. It facilitates readers to interpret, connect, and organize the written material in a manner desired by the author. This is done with concern on the knowledge and principles of a specific discourse group. Metadiscourse in essence can be referred to as 'talk about the talk' or 'text about the text', which is contingent on the types and genre of the writing that one wishes to investigate. In writing or speaking, metadiscourse can also be perceived as the writer's verbal expression within a certain manuscript (Hyland, 1999). As stated by Hyland (2000), it also denotes the semantic manoeuvres which writers employ to form their points of view to the specific desires and the anticipations of their intentional readers.

### **2.3 FUNCTIONS OF METADISCOURSE MARKERS IN WRITING**

Concerns with the utilities of metadiscourse markers in writing have led to the earlier models to divide metadiscourse markers into "*interpersonal*" and "*textual*" (Vande Kopple, 1985). According to Pooresfahani and Khajavy (2012), Vande Kopple's classifications of metadiscourse markers was specifically prominent owing to the fact

that the model was the earliest structured model of metadiscourse that had been published. Furthermore, Vande Kopple's systematic attempt at presenting a novel categorization of linguistics elements, namely metadiscourse markers, has led to a great deal of new research and different classifications of metadiscourse markers in academic writing. However, one criticism made on the Vande Kopple's model is that the functions of groups of metadiscourse overlap with each other and are ambiguous (Mehrnaz et al, 2014). Having commented on Vande Kopple's model, Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen (1993) introduced a revised model. In this model, they divided the metadiscourse markers into *interpersonal* metadiscourse (*commentary, attributors, attitude markers, certainty markers, and hedges*) and *textual* metadiscourse (*interpretive markers and text markers*). Later, metadiscourse shifted its focal point as of existing verbal transaction, into a position of an additional area of discourse within a specific intentional setting or the author's perspective. The additional area of discourse was aimed to guide the practical bearing as well as the meaning of the written messages. This was pointed out by Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore (1989) who both stated that composing a text implicates two stages: discourse level plus metadiscourse level. At the discourse level, a person who reads the written text is offered with propositional themes. At the metadiscourse level, the reader is deliberately directed through the writing. Other than these outlines, the *interpersonal* model of metadiscourse was then promoted by Hyland and Tse (2004) in their research. They proposed a new model which outlined the different features concerning classifications, for instance '*interactive*' and '*interactional*' (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

Later, Hyland (2005) categorised the metadiscourse into two comprehensive types. The first category is '*interactive*' where different types of metadiscourse were

deployed to establish intentional material within methods that are deemed to be convincing as well as coherent to the anticipated reader. The second category is concerned with '*interactional*' types that act as an attraction to invite the intended reader to partake within the written materials. It also offers the reader a chance to join as an active participant and react to the text by notifying the readers through the author's viewpoint concerning the intentional orientation of the written data as well as the authors' objective. As a result, this different taxonomy suggests that metadiscourse is engaged within the realm of socio linguistic milieu, and with reference to this fact, variations with regard to the deployment of metadiscourse components have been validated and certified to a certain degree, to be intensely reliant on the objectives of the intentional audience, community or writers, in addition to socio-cultural settings (Hyland, 2005). The *interactional* category is in relation to the techniques that authors use to conduct their communication by commenting and intruding on their message. *Interactive* languages are deployed to establish and form written intentional data by using techniques that a projected target reader is expected to find it as convincing and coherent.

More recent studies have applied these two macro-categories and some researchers have referred to these macro-categories as *interpersonal* and *textual* in the general practical sentence structure rules (Abbas, 2011). According to Chan and Tan (2010), the most accepted model for metadiscourse was the one proposed by Hyland (2005). Chan and Tan (2010) stated that Hyland's (2005) taxonomy is not only a contemporary version of the metadiscourse categorisations as compared to the taxonomy utilized by Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore et al (1993), it correspondingly provides better clarity plus division to the variations of metadiscourse types (Chan et al, *ibid*).

## 2.4 RESEARCH ON METADISOURSE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Research on metadiscourse in academic writing has a broad and long history. Toumi (2009) mentioned that metadiscourse has a substantial prominence in composing a proper academic text. It conveys an indispensable communal sense by signifying how the author expects the person who reads it to react to the ideational material as well as by enlightening the author's identity and character. Hyland (1999) conducted a comparative research of metadiscourse deployment in research articles and preparatory course books for tertiary students. The findings indicated that the two categories of manuscript similarly presented a high rate of deployment of *textual* metadiscourse and *interpersonal* metadiscourse. This result was somehow anticipated since academic research articles normally exist in a persuasive form of writing genre, and thus the kind of genre would require utilization of the metadiscourse markers in the written texts. Besides, the deployment of metadiscourse markers in persuasive writings was linked with the setting up of logic also consistency of the text materials (Mauranen, 1993).

With the growth of discourse analysis as a key tool in understanding language use, the importance of interaction in writing as much as in speech has become even more obvious, and metadiscourse has emerged as a way of bringing these *interactional* features to prominence. Thus, by enticing their audience's devotion, communicating efficiently, and forestalling their audience's expectation, needs, interests, and capabilities; authors try to influence their audience's understanding and engage them in their writings (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005).

Hyland (2004) examined how metadiscourse was used to facilitate effective persuasive interaction in writing by examining graduate research writing by ESL