Using Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse Markers to Develop EFL First Year Special Diploma Students' Academic Writing Skills

By

Dr. Amr Fathy AbdelWahab

Lecturer of EFL Curricula and Instruction

Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University, Egypt

Email: smart.way2@yahoo.com

الملخص:

هدف البحث الحالى الى تقصي استخدام مؤشرات ما وراء الخطاب التحاورية والتفاعلية فى تنمية مهارات الكتابة الاكاديمية لطلاب السنة الدراسية الاولى للدبلومة الخاصة تخصص مناهج و طرق تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية ، وقد تألفت عينة البحث من ٦٠ طالبا وطالبة موزعين على مجموعتين (مجموعة تجريبية ن = ٣٠، ومجموعة ضابطة ن = ٣٠)، كما تمثلت أداة البحث فى اختبار مهارات الكتابة الاكاديمية ، و اسفرت التحليلات الكمية لنتائج الطلاب عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة احصائية بين متوسطى درجات طلاب المجموعتين للتطبيق البعدى لاختبار مهارات الكتابة الاكاديمية لصالح المجموعة التجريبية، وفى ضوء هذه النتائج تم تقديم مجموعة من التوصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مؤشرات ما وراء الخطاب، الكتابة الأكاديمية .

Abstract

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of using interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers to develop EFL first year special diploma students' academic writing skills at the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University. Sixty students enrolled in first year special diploma, EFL Curricula and Instruction, were chosen as the study participants. Based on a quasi–experimental design, the study involved two groups: An experimental group (n=30) and a control one (n=30). A pre–post academic writing skills test was designed to assess the students' level in the specified skills before and after the treatment. The results revealed that the experimental group surpassed the control one in the overall academic writing skills, except for the last dimension, i.e. "mechanics" where the difference was not significant. Accordingly, using interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers proved to have a large effect on students' academic writing skills, in terms of content, organization, vocabulary and language use.

Keywords: Interactive metadiscourse, interactional metadiscourse, academic writing

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I. Introduction

Writing is not viewed as mere representation of words on a page regardless of its reader, author, and the context in which it occurs. Writing involves much more than generating text-based information and linguistic forms. It is connected in complex ways to various communicative purposes and maintains an interactive relationship between the reader and author (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p.6). As such, when approaching a written text, an exchange of ideas and thoughts occurs between readers and author.

In recent years, theorists as well as researchers have come to a consensus that the development of academic writing skills has become more of a challenge to EFL learners. Typically, university students, particularly learners of English as a foreign language, receive instruction on how to produce a written text. However, less emphasis is given to the social and situated view of writing which allows learners to meet the demands of writing their proposals and academic work effectively. The focus is just on fixed activities concerned with lexical forms, grammatical structures, and textual forms which do not change with different contexts, purposes, and readers (Correa & Echeverri, 2017; Johns, 2011).

Academic writing can be presumed a persistent problem that EFL learners find stressful and challenging. Although more guidance and instruction are paid to graduate students by faculty members, most students lack the ability to write effectively in spite of the years of writing experiences during college (Mullen, 2006). Confirming the obstacles facing EFL learners in academic writing, Thomas (2005, p. 1) noted that the teaching of writing may be more discouraging and frustrating. Such instruction can be difficult as it requires more effort to describe the different cognitive processes to the students.

For post-graduate students, academic writing is a necessary component for which university students should be well prepared. They are required to write sample proposals of considerable quality. Nevertheless, the fact is that post-graduate students find academic writing

a stressful and difficult activity. They lack the necessary skills to tackle academic writing (Thomas 2005). Hence, academic writing can be considered a challenge for researchers in the field of English language teaching. Most post-graduate students need to learn how to communicate with readers through their writings and develop a wide-range of academic writing skills.

Recently, studies on academic writing have focused on the importance of the rhetorical and interactive features of the written text, emphasizing the social relationship between the writer and readers (Franzosi & Vicari, 2018; Hyland & Jiang, 2018; Pérez-Llantada, 2010; Qin & Uccelli, 2019). This perspective stresses readers' role in understanding the author's intentions as well as his/ her stance towards the content. According to Blagojevic (2009, p.64) and Hyland (2004a, p. 5), academic writers do not merely produce texts that represent external reality, but they use the language to negotiate and communicate social relations. This can be accomplished by employing a number of devices that reinforces reader-author relationship. Such devices are called metadiscourse markers which help readers organize, interpret and evaluate the content.

Metadiscourse is recognized as one of the important rhetorical strategies which serves as a means for organizing discourse and exploring the author-reader relationship. It is a key component through which the writer interacts with the reader within the text (Sanderson, 2008, p. 165). Therefore, metadiscourse marks the written text as a social interaction including the ways by which writers negotiate meaning with readers. In order for that interaction to take place, both writer and reader must adhere to certain rhetorical features in the production of written texts.

Guided by various metadiscourse markers, EFL readers draw on their interpretations and refine their understanding of the propositional content, rather than sticking to the linguistic forms and structural patterns. With regard to social engagement with content, Hyland (2005, p. 4) claimed that metadiscourse can stand as a framework which signals the writer's attitude and shows the interactive nature of academic writing. This enables readers to interpret the meaning, understand the language in use and realize the implied author's intentions and attitudes.

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Context of the problem

To make sure of the study problem, a pilot study was conducted on a sample chosen randomly from first year special diploma students, EFL Curricula and Instruction, Faculty of Specific Education (n=68) during the academic year 2018/2019. An academic writing skills test was administered to the students. Results revealed that 79% of the students obtained very low scores. Students seemed to focus on the product and the structure of the written text, and do not pay enough effort to the ultimate goal, i.e. communication and interacting with an audience. Additionally, based on students' written works, it was noted that most students lacked the necessary skills to utilize metadiscourse markers. Most students faced many challenges in writing their research proposals. They continually expressed uncertainty about using different devices (e.g., expressions of ability, probability, uncertainty, etc.).

In her study of academic writing skills, Lis (2010) affirmed that academic writing seemed to have been quite challenging to the students. Ten out of sixteen micro-skills were found to be more problematic and difficult. Students could not also present their ideas in an organized way. They lacked the ability to use strong evidences and build correct sentence structures. To understand the writing perspectives across cultures, Eldaba and Isbell (2018) explored the academic writing experiences of three international graduate students. Coping strategies utilized during academic writing assignments were also examined. Results indicated that the students faced challenges and self-doubts concerning their academic writing abilities. They also challenged disconfirmation of producing well-organized pieces of writing and reported self-doubts about their writing abilities. Finally, the researchers recommended the development of new ways to address these challenges and to enhance students' knowledge of academic writing.

Statement of the problem

The problem of this study could be stated in the low level of first year special diploma students' academic writing skills. Consequently, the current study attempted to answer the following questions:

1- How can the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers be utilized to develop first year special diploma students' academic writing skills?

2- What is the effect of using the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers on developing students' academic writing skills?

Hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and those of their control peers in the post administration of the academic writing test favoring the experimental group students.

2. There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre-post administrations of the academic writing test favoring post-administration results.

Significance of the study

As the current study investigates the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers, it is expected to provide EFL curricula developers with insights into how to utilize various writing tasks and activities that promote communication and interaction between the author and readers. It may also help EFL learners to construct more dialogic written texts that maintain reader-writer relationship. The study also provides a test which may help in the diagnosis and assessment of academic writing skills. Additionally, the study emphasizes the social context of written texts. This may attract the attention of EFL instructors to stress the rhetorical features, conventions and linguistic patterns; which may help EFL learners negotiate and construct knowledge.

Definitions of terms

Metadiscourse markers

Ädel (2006, p. 31) regarded metadiscourse as writer's commentary which is made throughout the written discourse. It implies the writer's stance about the content of the text and how the reader is engaged to form decisions on language use and wording of the text. Hence, the reader is influenced by a set of devices and consciously reacts to the presented information, which explains the interaction occurring between the writer and the reader.

Operational definition

Metadiscourse markers refer to language devices and features which are employed by students to help them organize and reconstruct the text content, establish writer-reader relationship to facilitate communication, and assist readers to decode and interpret the text.

Academic writing

It refers to a style of writing that requires careful choice of words in order to communicate complex ideas to various readers and audiences through written message (Strongman, 2014, p. xv).

Operational definition

It is a type of writing that exploits the use of precise word choice, particular devices and expressions, and certain grammatical structures and patterns in order to fulfill the academic purposes of writing for post graduate students. It also aims at communicating ideas logically and clearly for a specific audience.

II. Review of Literature

Writing is a complex skill and difficult to teach. Its mastery requires not only grammatical and mechanical skills but also judgmental and stylistic skills (Heaton, 1994, p. 7). Additionally, Strongman (2014, p. Xiii) maintained that writing involves only communicating ideas clearly, whereas academic writing involves eliciting words and communicating complex ideas to a range of audience.

EFL learners should be equipped with the essential writing skills necessary for academic success, as well as to advance in their careers. Glenn and Gray (2018, p.4) emphasized that although the instruction of academic writing tend to vary across disciplines and courses, its development requires a set of necessary skills. It involves organizing and developing the written material in a logical and coherent manner, communicating ideas clearly with consideration of purpose and audience, editing and proofreading to check writing conventions (e.g., mechanics, grammar, and punctuation), and making use of other resources (e.g., readings, observations, and practices).

Proponents of the systemic functional linguistics maintained that in order to produce well-organized academic texts, it is important to consider three main variables: context, purpose, and audience (De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). Context refers to the setting, the time and place, in which the interaction between the writer and the audience takes place (Glenn & Gray, 2018, p .3). In academic settings, more practice and effort is needed since the language of academic writing contains unfamiliar structures and language patterns which might hinder message delivering (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 588). For example, more complex sentences, embedded clauses, and reduced clauses are used in writing academic genres. The declarative mood is more likely to be employed rather than the imperative and interrogative.

Purpose refers to the function of the written text or the reason why the author produces the text, e.g. whether the author can present information to interpret a phenomena, provide explanations or argue a certain point of view. Hence, recognizing the author's purpose clarifies the intended message conveyed to the reader, e.g. whether it is expressive, expository, or argumentative. Finally, audience refers to the individuals to whom the written text is directed. Understanding audience features (e.g. their interests, knowledge and values) helps in shaping the message. The writer can thus employ suitable terms, follow a logical organization, and use appropriate language patterns (Glenn &Gray, 2018, pp. 2-9). Indeed, the importance of the (context, purpose, audience) in writing is undeniable as it affects the language mode, the subject matter, and the writing situation.

Viewing academic writing as a social practice which can only be understood from the society's perspective rather than from the individual's, Hyland (2004b, p.1) affirmed that it is necessary for writers to consider the social world which they assume through embedding certain approved discourses in their writings. Given this view, it can be noted that linguistic features are not viewed as grammatical patterns and structures isolated from situated, social contexts. Schryer (2011) added that written materials only have significance when they are considered in relation to their social contexts. Genre researchers, therefore, have put much emphasis on exploring the social contexts in their investigation of written or spoken discourse.

Similarly, Castro, Marcela and Chala (2013, p.27) included two main features that make texts socially situated: (a) the author's experiences, feelings and beliefs which are formed through interacting with others, and (b) aspects inherent within the individual himself such as age, gender or background. Adopting this perspective of academic writing gives students the opportunity to go beyond understanding only the linguistic aspects and forms of language, considering the social and cultural contexts of the text.

Using a multi-strategy approach, Ángel, Lucía and Martínez García (2017) examined pre-service teachers' academic writing skills. The multi-strategy approach involved the development of different genre-based tasks, systematized feedback by the instructor and peers, ongoing tutoring in a writing lab, and repeated practice of writing tasks. Data was collected through analyzing samples of sixteen students enrolled in an English teacher preparation program at a public university in Colombia. Findings indicated that the multi-strategy approach improved pre-service teachers' academic writing skills in terms of discourse, syntax, vocabulary, mechanics and language conventions.

Utilizing blended learning activities through smartphones, Sulisworo, Rahayu and Akhsan (2016) investigated the academic writings skills of 61 EFL college students. A timed-essay examination was used to measure students' writing skills after one semester of using the activities. Findings showed that using blended learning activities had positive effects in some aspects of academic writing, particularly in enhancing the skills of shaping and organizing ideas. Additionally, students acquired the knowledge to understand new concepts that supports their academic writing skills. They were active and increased their ability to search for new ideas.

Although researchers have highlighted the importance of learning academic writing to EFL students (e.g., Ángel, et al. 2017; Baratta & Jones 2009; Stevenson 2006; Sulisworo, et al. 2016), seldom studies - to the researcher's best knowledge - have been conducted on post-graduate students. As a result, EFL instructors, educators and researchers need to put much emphasis on post graduate students' academic writing, as well as investigate new ideas and approaches in order to help students become competent writers.

To strengthen academic writing skills, students need to synthesize information forming a coherent thought and acquire the rhetorical features of academic genres which help them understand the argumentative and interpretive aspects of the language (Angel, et al. 2017, p.3). Hyland (2004b, p.5) posited that such rhetorical patterns and conventions in academic contexts have attracted the interest of scholars across different languages and fields (e.g., humanities, sciences, linguistics, sociology, and languages for specific purposes). Such diversity in academic writing led to employment of various interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers which help in constructing and negotiating knowledge.

In order to meet the needs and expectations of EFL learners, the current view of writing should encompass not only the author's ideas and thoughts within the text but also how the language is used to foster interaction and promote reader-writer engagement. Consequently, academic writers are not expected to produce materials consisting of discrete elements, rather they are required to use language that establishes social relations and allows readers to argue and negotiate meaning.

Metadiscourse has been widely defined by a number of researchers in the field of language research and study. However, there is little consensus on what is meant by metadiscourse, and the term was defined and delimited by a number of scholars from different perspectives. Hyland (2015) maintained that metadiscourse has been used to refer to certain linguistic or rhetorical devices employed by the author to organize a discourse and reflect the author's purpose and point of view. From another token, Ädel (2006, p.31) regarded metadiscourse as writer's commentary which is made throughout the written discourse. It implies the writer's stance about the content of the text and how the reader is engaged to form decisions on language use and wording of the text.

Basically, metadiscourse puts emphasis on connecting the written material with its context, and points out reader's participation in the meaning-making process. Besides, metadiscourse includes an array of devices that assist readers to match the writers' intended meaning and understand the implications and suggestions within the text. Consequently, metadiscourse interweaves language and content, as well as the context in which a piece of written discourse is delivered.

Due to the interest in metadiscourse studies, several classifications have been introduced as a result of a comprehensive review of the different features of metadiscourse. Ädel (2006, p. 179) distinguished between two approaches of metadiscourse, i.e. the narrow and the broad approach. The narrow approach delimits the concept by excluding the interaction between the reader and writer. It emphasizes the linguistic elements within the text and neglects the reader's knowledge. In other words, it does not recognize all metadiscourse markers as interpersonal and experiential; rather such devices are only used as part of language structural patterns. Hence, meaning is constructed through the language itself (i.e., textual functions) which is distinct from interpersonal functions. On the other hand, the broad approach recognizes metadiscourse as comprising both textual functions (i.e., linguistic elements and textual organization) and interpersonal functions which emphasize "the reader's knowledge, textual experiences, and processing needs'' (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.161).

Hyland (2005, 2010, 2015) proposed the interpersonal model of metadiscourse which was developed on the basis of the broad approach. Such model marked a distinction between two main categories of metadiscourse: Interactive and interactional metadiscourse. The interactive metadiscourse includes the ways by which the writer directs the readers, guides them throughout the text, and anticipates readers' knowledge and interests in order to help them comprehend the text. This includes using certain devices to set out an argument, accommodate readers' expectations, and formulate the text to adapt readers' needs. Examples of interactive markers include frame markers, transitions, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses.

As for the interactional markers, they are employed to indicate how readers are involved in the text, and how the writer establishes an appropriate relationship of his ideas and the reader (Hyland, 2004b, p. 139). This allows readers to interact and respond to the propositional content, as well as participate in the joint construction of meaning. Examples of interactional markers include hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers (Hyland, 2005, p.50).

Table 1

An Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, p.49)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the text	Resources
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	In addition; but; thus; and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally; to conclude; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above; see figure; in section 2
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	according to X; Z states
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meaning	namely; e.g.; such as; in other words
Interactional	Involve the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps; possible; about
Boosters	emphasize certainty and close dialogue	In fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	expresses writers' attitude to proposition	unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
Self mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; note; you can see that

As shown in table 1, interactive metadiscourse markers include five sub-categories. They are used to manage the flow of information, organize the content and help readers to obtain interpretations. These markers involve:

Transitions: They include conjunctions and adverbial phrases employed to mark connections between ideas, paragraphs, or sentences. They are used to indicate concession (*e.g., nevertheless, although, regardless, however, yet, etc.*), addition (*e.g., and, also, furthermore, moreover, in addition, etc.*), similarity (*e.g., likewise, by the same token, similarly, correspondingly, equally, etc.*), and consequence relations (*e.g., consequently, therefore, thus, in conclusion, etc.*).

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Frame markers: They refer to words that signal schematic text structure, indicating sequence and topic shifts. They are used to show sequence (e.g., first, then, at the same time, next, etc.); text stages **(e.g.,** in sum, to summarize, to conclude, etc.); and discourse goals **(e.g.,** my purpose is, I argue here, there are several reasons why, etc.) (Chen, 2006).

Endophoric markers: They include words indicating previously mentioned material or anticipating a following discussion. They are used to refer to other parts of the text and provide the opportunity to recover writer's information in order to make the written text salient and comprehensible (e.g., see Figure 2, in section two, as noted above, etc.) (Burneikaitė, 2009).

Evidentials: They refer to referenced information or using ideas from other sources and represent them in a way that guides readers to interpret the text and allow him to rely on authentic and reliable resources (e.g., *according to X / (Y, 1990), Z states, etc.*).

Code glosses: They refer to the restatement or rephrasing of ideas which helps readers grasp propositional meaning and elaborate on previously mentioned information. They also serve as a means to clarify and support the meaning (e.g., *namely, for example, such as, in other words).*

On the other hand, interactional metadiscourse are used to evaluate the ideas and indicate the writer's perspectives of the content and the reader. They include the following.

Hedges: They are used to indicate the writer's viewpoint and commitment to the propositional meaning. They can be recognized by using epistemic modals (e.g., may, might, could, etc.); lexical verbs (e.g., claim, maintain, suggest, etc.); adjectives and adverbs (e.g., probably, perhaps plausible, etc.); nouns (e.g., possibility, probability, etc.); and other expressions of qualification (e.g., in general, to some extent) (Hyland, 2010).

Boosters: Unlike hedges, boosters express the writer's certainty in what they claim and emphasize the degree of the propositional content. They indicate the writer's solidarity and absolute certainty without having any alternatives or choices. They can be recognized by epistemic modals (e.g., *must*), lexical verbs (e.g., *prove*, *affirmed*, etc.), adjectives and adverbs (e.g., *undisputed*, *undoubtedly*), nouns (e.g., *certainty*), and other expressions (e.g., *with no doubt*) (Peacock, 2006).

Attitude markers: They express the writer's attitude of the propositional information, conveying importance, agreement, surprise, frustration, obligation, and so on. They can be realized by using deontic modal verbs (e.g., *should*, *have to*), lexical verbs (e.g., prefer, agree), adjectives (e.g., *appropriate, unfortunate*, *desirable, remarkable*), affective adverbs (e.g., *hopefully, surprisingly, interestingly*, *unfortunately*), and some other expressions (e.g., *it is necessary*, *what is more important*).

Self mention markers: They refer to the degree to which the author establishes his/her presence in the text using possessive determiners and first person pronouns (e.g., (*I, me, mine, we, our, ours).* They indicate the position of authors as related to the argument and their readers. The choice of the absence or presence of the author's identity indicates the writer's decision to form authorial identity (Hyland, 2005, p. 53).

Engagement markers: They are used to address readers whether by focusing their attention or by involving them in the text through asides, second-person pronouns, or question forms (Hyland, 2001b, 2004). They are used to direct readers to act in a particular way and allow them to participate in meaning-making. So, writers can mark the presence or absence of their readers in the text using such markers.

Based on metadiscourse studies, it can be noted that metadiscourse analysis puts more emphasis on the functional approach to text. The term function indicates how certain language devices are employed to achieve communicative purposes (Fa-gen, 2012, p.2). The focus is on how the language is used in context, not on the meanings in the dictionary. In this context, Halliday (2005, p. 26) explained the three metafunctions of language which form the basis upon which metadiscourse analysts code and organize their data. These metafunctions (i.e., the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual function) are integrated simultaneously to form the meaning of the written text. According to Fa-gen (2012) and Noorian and Biria (2010), the ideational function indicates how the language is used to express ideas and experiences. The interpersonal function implies using language to promote interaction, engage the author with readers, and understand feelings and mental processes. The textual function refers to using language to maintain an organizational pattern that connects what is written to the reader and the world.

However, metadiscourse theorists (e.g., Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Hyland & Tse, 2004; VandeKopple, 2012) noted that metadiscourse does not involve the ideational function as it neglects the notion of the propositional content. They consider the interpersonal and textual functions as inseparable elements of metadiscourse, stressing the interaction writers have with their readers and the organization of a coherent discourse. On the contrary, Ädel (2006, pp. 174-176) identified three main functions as the focus of metadiscourse items. The first is the metalinguistic function, which is used to make the code clearer to the reader, i.e. to make clarification about the content. The second is the expressive function which reflects some of the writer's emotions and feelings. Finally, the directive function is used to influence readers and affect their responses in their interpretations of the text.

Hence, metadiscourse directs readers on how to understand the author's purpose and helps them engage effectively with different discourse situations. In addition, students can probe into communicative events and implicit features of academic writing (Hyland, 2005, p. 185; Aguilar, 2008, p. 67). Thus, writers need to employ different metadiscourse markers in order to clarify their intentions, organize, interpret, and evaluate their ideas. This enables readers to understand the author's point of view, intentions, and degree of confidence. Further, readers can recognize different perspectives within the text and expand their focus beyond the factual information within a written discourse. To achieve this, metadiscourse items should be regarded holistically from different perspectives without paying attention to one aspect. Additionally, theorists need to consider the different features of metadiscourse as it involves forming the propositional content, realization of the word and self, interpersonal engagement with others, and producing coherent and well-organized texts.

Incorporating metadiscourse markers in written texts maintains the interaction between the writer and reader. Authors can communicate effectively by considering readers' interests, needs, and perceptions of the propositional content. In this respect, readers need to consider how the writer deals with a certain rhetorical context and how the current text is related to other texts (Hyland, 2005, p.12). Metadiscourse promotes "reader-writer solidarity" which occurs through the mutual dialogue between the author and the reader. This includes using persuasive devices which are used to affect readers' responses to the text based on their expectations and underlying purposes (Camiciottoli, 2003, p.29). It is vital to anticipate readers' reactions and responses through presenting information in a way that predicts the readers' reaction to what is written.

Through employing different metadiscourse markers, writers can thus criticize and evaluate the presented ideas, taking into consideration the readers' potential responses. It is also vital to anticipate readers' reactions and responses through presenting information in a way that predicts the readers' reaction to what is written. Moreover, writers can bring additional arguments to the content in order to make the text more dialogic and maintain the readers' independence. For instance, the author

may use the emphatic *"do"* to emphasize the idea of objection to what is perceived. In addition, when the author does not have enough information to support his/her claims, he/she anticipates criticism to lessen the strong opinions that were expressed.

In fact, writers should understand their readers thoughtfully and communicate their ideas precisely. When presenting content information, they should at the same time address readers and direct them through the text. Writers can utilize various metadiscourse markers in order to guide readers and promote their thinking.

In order to understand the assumed meaning, readers need to initiate interaction and seek interpretations by understanding the writer's intentions and constructing their own assumptions. What is important is the interrelationship between the writer, the reader, the text, and the context. This interrelationship signals the transaction of ideas between the author and reader through text and affects the reader's active role in responding to and interacting with any written discourse. Hence, the text, writer, reader and context are conjoined in the process of constructing metadiscourse.
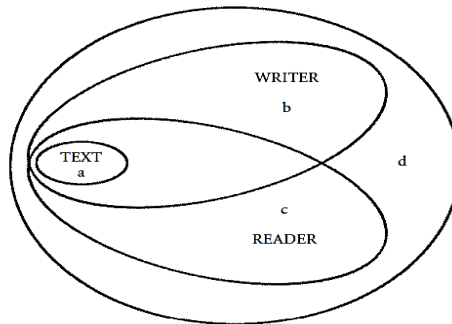

Figure 1. **Configuration of Metadiscourse (Adel, 2006, p.32)**

Hyland (2005) and Thompson (2001) argued that novice academic writers might be struggling to establish a level of interaction between them and their readers. Such writers need to employ both interactive resources, as they are used to organize the content in order to guide readers through the text, and interactional resources, as they are used to inform about author's perspectives on the content and readers themselves; giving the opportunity for readers to be involved in text development.

In their investigation of the effect of metadiscourse markers on students' reading comprehension, Tavakoli, Dabaghi and Khorvash (2010) selected a sample of eighty intermediate level students. They were equally assigned into four groups (three experimental and a control one). Group 1 was taught using both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse, group 2 was taught using only textual metadiscourse, and group 3 was taught using only interpersonal metadiscourse. On the other hand, participants of the control group did not receive any specific instruction in metadiscourse. Results indicated significant improvement in the level of reading comprehension of the three experimental groups, whereas the control one obtained the lowest score.

Ahour and Entezari Maleki (2014) studied the impact of metadiscourse instruction on Iranian EFL learners' speaking. Thirty four university students were assigned into two groups: the experimental group (receiving metadiscourse instruction) and the control one (receiving regular instruction). The speaking section of Preliminary English Test (PET) was employed as the pre-post speaking test. Results indicated that experimental group students' speaking performance was significantly higher than that of the control group.

Utilizing both explicit and implicit instruction of metadiscourse, Yaghoubi and Ardestani (2014) examined the effect of metadiscourse markers on EFL students' writing skills. Ninety female students at Kish Institute of Science and Technology participated in the study. They were divided into two experimental groups: group 1, which received explicit instruction, and group 2, which received implicit instruction. Receiving an eight-session treatment, the participants were post-tested using a writing ability test. Results revealed that both the explicit and the implicit instruction of metadiscourse had a positive effect on the students' writing.

Hassanein (2016) investigated the effect of a suggested program based on interactional metadiscourse markers to develop EFL majors' reading comprehension. Thirty-four EFL majors participated in the experiment. They were randomly assigned into two groups: an experimental group and a control one. A pre-post reading comprehension test was developed to assess students' reading comprehension. Results showed that experimental group students' reading comprehension was improved as a result of explicit teaching of interactional metadiscourse markers.

Using a sample of 50 undergraduate students, Mardani (2017) investigated the effect of metadiscourse explicit instruction on listening comprehension. They were divided into two groups (experimental and control). Participants of the experimental group were taught through metadiscourse markers in addition to a process method, whereas participants of the control group received instruction only through a process method. Findings indicated that explicit instruction of metadiscourse significantly improved students' listening comprehension. It was concluded that researchers need to pay more attention to metadiscourse markers as an important aspect of learning language.

To sum up, researchers need to exert more effort and time to develop academic writing skills, taking into consideration the interaction between the writer, reader, text, and context. Such development of academic writing skills has recently gained more importance in the field of English language teaching and learning. However, limited work- to the researcher's best knowledge - has been done on the effect of interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers on academic writing skills.

III. Methodology

Participants

Sixty first-year special diploma students, EFL Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University were involved in the current study. This sample was chosen since at this stage, students are required to obtain necessary skills for writing academic texts, e.g. thesis proposals. They were randomly assigned to either experimental or control group (each group comprised 30 students). In order to make sure that the two groups were homogenous, participants were at the same average age (ranging from 21-22) and they had spent four years studying English at college. In addition, pre-testing students' academic writing revealed no significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the two groups.

Table 2

t-test results of the experimental group and the control one in the pre-testing of the academic writing test.

Group	No.	Mean	S.D	t-value
Exp.	30	13.766	3.18	0.247
Cont.	30	13.566	3.08	

t-value is not significant at (0.01) level

Experimental Design

The quasi-experimental design was adopted in the current study, where a sample of two groups were assigned for the purpose of the study, i.e. the experimental group receiving instruction though metadiscourse and the control one taught through regular instruction. The experiment lasted for two months and a half during the academic year (2018-2019). A pre-post academic writing skills test was administered to investigate any significant differences. The obtained data were analyzed using t-test.

Instrument

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, a pre-post academic writing skills test was designed (See Appendix B). To determine its validity, the test was submitted to a panel of jury specialist and experts in the field of TEFL. They were requested to evaluate the test in terms of clarity, correctness, wording and the suitability of the items for the students' proficiency level. The test was pre-administered to both groups in order to make sure that the study groups were at the same level before the treatment, and hence any progress achieved after the treatment could be attributed to using meta-discourse markers. The same version of the test was post-administered to find out if there is any significant difference. In addition, the test was piloted on a sample of 30 students other than the study participants to determine the suitability and the clarity of the test items. The test-retest method was used to determine the reliability by calculating the internal consistency (alpha coefficient = 0.89)

Dr. Amr Fathy AbdelWahab

Study Material

In order to develop the students' academic writing skills, four units based on the interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers were designed (See Appendix C). The suggested units aimed at:

1. Developing EFL first year special diploma students' academic writing skills in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics.
2. Identifying the general characteristics of academic writing.
3. Identifying how interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers are used in academic writing.
4. Describing the different purposes of using interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers.
5. Utilizing interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in writing.
6. Presenting academic information in a clear and coherent manner.

Content of the Units

The content of the units was designed on the basis of the metadiscourse markers and in terms of the specified objectives. It included four units comprising a variety of tasks and activities. Each unit was intended to develop certain academic writing skills and dealt with particular types of metadiscourse markers.

Unite One: Using hedges and boosters

In this unit, students were presented with an introduction to using hedging and boosting as communicative strategies in academic writing. The instructor guided the students to recognize the difference in tone when using hedging or boosting. Students were taught how to make generalized statements and express their certainty about the content using lexical verbs, adverbs, adjectives or other phrases. They were also asked to work in groups and compare the meaning of sentences with and without hedges or boosters. Making sure that the metadiscourse devices were consistent with the content, students were asked to match hedges and boosters with evidence. The instructor then distributed copies of selected paragraphs and asked the students to reformulate the paragraphs using hedges and boosters. Finally, the students were divided into groups and were asked to engage in interactive discussions about certain topics, using hedges and boosters.

Unite Two: Attitude and Engagement markers & Self mentions

In unit two, students were introduced to the other types of interactional discourse markers (i.e., attitude markers, engagement markers and self- mentions) in order to express attitude, establish a relationship between the reader and the author, and refer to the author in the text. They were also taught the purpose for which the specified devices were used and the strengths of utilizing them in academic writing. The instructor guided the students to employ the devices using lexical verbs, affective adverbs, adjectives, questions, personal asides, determiners, or personal pronouns. Reviewing the main guideline for identifying author's attitude, the instructor asked the students to work in pairs to identify the discourse markers in the text and state the type of attitude the word or the phrase conveys. Distributing copies of selected academic excerpts, the instructor asked the students to work in groups and describe how the author utilized different discourse markers, explaining the function for which the devices were used. Having completed the previous tasks, the students were divided into groups and guided to engage in authentic discussions using the specified devices. Finally, a copy of a research article, along with a copy of "Text Analysis Worksheet", was given to each group to analyse the text and explore the use of metadiscourse markers.

Unit Three: Frame markers, endophoric markers, and code glosses

The focus of this unit was to instruct students to utilize different frame and endophoric markers, as well as code glosses. Students were taught to use each marker purposefully (e.g., using frame markers to sequence ideas, label stages, indicate topic shifts, and announce goals; using endophoric markers to direct readers' attention towards the writer's interpretation; and using code glosses to make sure that readers understand the written message). The instructor guided the students to produce sentences using the specified devices. In addition, they were taught how to indicate text stages, make information more understandable, and explain what has been said. Having completed the previous tasks, students were asked to choose a topic, engage in authentic discussions about the topic, and produce a written text using the interactive discourse markers

worksheet. Reviewing the main features of the specified markers, the instructor asked the students to locate the discourse markers and identify the function of each marker. Finally, guided by a text analysis worksheet, students were asked to work in groups to analyse the use of certain discourse markers in research articles.

Unit Four: Transitions and evidentials

Students, at this stage, were trained on how to use transition and evidential markers in order to signal text connections and establish authority of the topic. Students were asked to investigate the use of different transitions and evidentials in academic writing, explaining the purpose for which each marker is used (e.g., using transitions to indicate addition, comparison or consequence; using evidentials to establish responsibility of information). Using an interactive discourse markers worksheet, students were guided to engage in a discussion about a certain topic and then produce a written text, demonstrating their ability to use the specified markers. Divided into groups, students were given copies of selected paragraphs in order to highlight different transitions and evidentials and determine their functions within the text. Finally, students were asked to analyse the use of discourse markers in selected research articles using a text analysis worksheet.

IV. Results

Results were presented in the light of the study hypotheses. Data were analyzed *using paired and independent samples t- test.* Both the descriptive and inferential statistics (means, standard deviation, t-test, etc…) were calculated using the Statistical Package for Social Science.

Testing the First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis states that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students and those of their control peers in the post administration of the academic writing test favoring the experimental group students. To test the first hypothesis of the study, t-test for independent samples was used to determine any significant differences.

Table 3

t-test results of the experimental group and the control one in the academic writing post-test

Dimension	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Content	Exp.	30	11.1333	1.634	17.91	29	0.001
	Cont.	30	4.1667	1.366			
Organization	Exp.	30	12.00	1.231	25.345	29	0.001
	Cont.	30	4.30	1.118			
Vocabulary	Exp.	30	3.8667	0.6814	12.502	29	0.001
	Cont.	30	1.733	0.6396			
Language use	Exp.	30	5.900	1.155	8.720	29	0.001
	Cont.	30	3.333	1.124			
Mechanics	Exp.	30	6.833	0.912	1.711	29	Not sig.
	Cont.	30	6.433	0.897			
Total	Exp.	30	39.733	3.628	23.865	29	0.001
	Cont.	30	19.966	2.722			

Table 3 indicates that the experimental group surpassed the control one in the overall academic writing and its dimensions except for the last dimension, i.e. "mechanics" where the difference was not significant. The means of the experimental group for content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics were 11.1333, 12.00, 3.8667, 5.900, and 6.833 respectively. Conversely, the control group obtained lower means in the overall academic writing and in each dimension except for mechanics (6.433). These results are expected since regular instruction of writing focuses on practicing writing conventions (e.g., punctuation, spelling and capitalization). The t-value for the overall academic writing skills (23.865) is statistically significant at (0.001) level. Therefore, the first hypothesis is partially accepted.

Testing the Second Hypothesis

The second hypothesis states that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group students in the pre-post administrations of the academic writing test favoring post-administration results. To test the second hypothesis of the study, t-test for paired samples was used to determine any significant differences.

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Table 4

t-test results of the experimental group in the pre- and post-academic writing test

Dimension	Measurement	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Content	Pre	30	1.3667	1.351	51.437	29	0.001
	Post	30	11.133	1.634			
Organization	Pre	30	2.50	0.937	51.591	29	0.001
	Post	30	12.00	1.230			
Vocabulary	Pre	30	1.2	0.406	22.100	29	0.001
	Post	30	3.8667	0.681			
Language use	Pre	30	2.30	0.794	22.045	29	0.001
	Post	30	5.90	1.155			
Mechanics	Pre	30	6.566	1.006	0.516	29	Not sig.
	Post	30	6.666	0.9227			
Total	Pre	30	13.933	3.183	67.634	29	0.001
	Post	30	39.566	3.597			

Table 4 indicates a significant difference between the means of the experimental group in the pre- and post- testing favoring the post-testing in the overall academic writing and its dimensions except for the last dimension, i.e. mechanics. The t-value for content, organization, vocabulary, and language use (51.437, 51.591, 22.100, 22.045) are statistically significant at (0.001), while the t-value for mechanics (0.516) is not statistically significant. The t-value for the overall academic writing skills (67.634) is statistically significant at (0.001) level. Therefore, the second hypothesis is partially accepted.

V. Discussion of Results

This study attempted to investigate the impact of using interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers on developing EFL first year special diploma students' academic writing skills. The results indicated significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and those of the control one, in favour of the experimental. The experimental group surpassed the control one in overall academic writing and its dimensions (content, organization, vocabulary, language use) except for the last dimension, i.e. mechanics.

This improvement in the experimental group could be due to explicit teaching of various metadiscourse devices. The experimental group students received a systematic instruction in both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. They were engaged in various tasks such as identifying the difference between statements containing metadiscourse markers and those without metadiscourse markers, locating and classifying different transition words in a text (e.g., addition, comparison, consequence), and scanning texts to identify different metadiscourse devices and the type of relationships being expressed. In addition, they were trained on how to compare two texts in order to discuss how certain devices are employed within each text, as well as examine research articles to determine what types of devices are being used and their functions.

Being trained on using interactional metadiscourse markers (e.g., hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self-mentions), students could explicitly build a relationship with the reader, express the author's attitude, withhold author's commitment, establish presence in the text and emphasize their point of view. Students could make generalized statements and express their degree of certainty about the content, which enabled them to provide a credible representation of their work. They showed their ability of acknowledging and negotiating social relations with readers. Recognizing the functions of such markers, students could control the level of personality in their writings, claim solidarity with readers and adopt an assertive stance through focusing the reader's attention toward a particular understanding. Ideally, students could transform incoherent, difficult texts into reader-friendly, coherent formats. Furthermore, helping students to utilize different words (e.g., adjectives, adverbs, modals, lexical verbs) and expressions (e.g., questions, directives, asides) to form discourse markers in various contexts provided opportunities for them to produce varied sentence structures correctly and correct grammatical patterns. Moreover, students were engaged in various tasks to evaluate the ideas within the text and indicate the writer's perspective towards the propositional content and the reader. This helped students to provide an in-depth, thoughtful analysis of the given topic.

This is consistent with Azar and Hashim, 2019; Esataji and Vafaeimehr, 2015; Farokhi and Emami, 2008; Hryniuk, 2018; and Susanti, Kurnia, and Suharsono, 2017, who emphasized the importance of using interactional metadiscourse markers in writing academic texts.

On the other hand, using interactive metadiscourse markers (e.g., transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses) allowed students to rephrase ideas, determine the sequence of the text and topic shifts, establish connections between ideas and paragraphs, and anticipate a following discussion. This assisted them to clarify and support the meaning, interpret the text, and develop ideas clearly and purposefully. Furthermore, students could relate the written text to its context through language, which helped them in considering readers' needs, understandings of the content, existing knowledge, and prior experiences.

By engaging students in authentic discussions using different metadiscourse markers, the students could express themselves clearly. Following this task, they were asked to work in groups and think of possible questions for the assigned topic and challenge a point of view. Thus, they were able to elaborate on different ideas, organize ideas logically, and support the topic with relevant and accurate information. They could negotiate information in ways that are appropriate and meaningful.

This result is in line with studies such as Chen, 2006; Khedri, Heng and Ebrahimi, 2013; and Sanford, 2012, which stressed the importance of using different interactive metadiscourse markers in writing academic texts.

Contrary to the experimental group students, their control peers showed lower mean scores on the post-administration of the academic writing skills test, except for the last dimension, i.e. mechanics. They did not pay attention to the ultimate goal of writing, i.e. communicating and interacting with the reader. They lacked the necessary skills in order to identify what the text is trying to communicate. They just received regular instruction which focused only on certain skills and rules in grammar, spelling, and mechanics. Such type of instruction did not allow students to communicate their ideas effectively, consider the needs and interests of the reader, or establish interaction between them and their

readers. Additionally, students did not consider the social context of the written text, the function for which the text is written, nor the individuals to whom the text is written. Rather, in traditional instruction, a topic was assigned and then the students were asked to apply the steps of writing till they produced the final product.

In another vein, there was no significant difference between the two groups in the last dimension, i.e. mechanics. This was expected since both groups developed the writing conventions throughout their study during college years. In addition, spelling, punctuation and capitalization are all aspects that both groups studied and practiced.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, explicit instruction of interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers should be integrated into EFL post-graduate curricula. EFL students, specifically those who have challenges with academic writing, need more training on how to incorporate different types of metadiscourse markers in their writings. Besides, EFL instructors need to shed light on metadiscourse markers as communicative devices used by writers to engage with readers and negotiate arguments, rather than considering them as unnecessary and redundant elements. The assessment of EFL students' academic writing, especially the use of metadiscourse markers, should comprise an integral part of EFL writing courses.

Suggestions for Further Research

In the light of the present study, the following topics are suggested:

1. Further research is needed to investigate the effect of metadiscourse markers on the comprehension of academic texts.
2. Investigating the effect of metadiscourse markers instruction on EFL learners' narrative and descriptive writings is needed.
3. An in-depth analysis of using metadiscourse markers in academic written discourse is needed.
4. Investigating the impact of utilizing metadiscourse markers on spoken language processing.
5. Exploring the relationship between utilizing metadiscourse markers and social interaction in academic writing.
6. A case study to investigate EFL instructors' beliefs about utilizing both interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers is needed.

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