INTERACTIONAL METADISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIVE ESSAYS

Masliza Mat Zali[1], Razita Mohamad[2], Roszainora Setia[3],
Raja Mariam Raja Baniamin[4], [5]Razifa Mohd Razlan

[12345]Academy of Language Studies, *Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu*
[1]*masli154@uitm.edu.my*

ABSTRACT

Metadiscourse is one of the linguistic features which helps to interact between the writer and reader and also to maintain the coherence of an essay. Every writer communicates with the reader and the writer can effectively reach his reader through metadiscourse. Since writing an essay only involved one way interaction between the writer and reader, it is a big challenge to ESL learners to write effectively and coherently. So it is interesting to study how the ESL learners produced the features of metadiscourse in their writing. In this study, an analysis of metadiscourse on a corpus of 200 evaluative essays done by UiTM Degree students from hard and soft science courses was carried on based on Hyland (2005)'s table of interactional metadiscourse. The purposes are to find out whether both groups of students use the same amount of metadiscourse and whether students from different course groups make any differences in their choice of metadiscourse as well as to investigate the most prominent and least of occurance of metadiscourse features produced by both of courses. The analysis revealed that soft science course students produced more metadiscourse features than hard science course students. It was also found that the students prominently used *Self-mention* and hardly found *Attitude Markers* in their writings. The study provides evidences as to the importance of metadiscourse in students' writings and to create the awareness as to its usage in academic writing and also as a proposition for other cross-cultural studies.

Keywords: *Metadiscourse, interactional metadiscourse, evaluative writings, evaluative essays, university level.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study
Writing is no more seen as voiceless and impersonal, in fact, it is a social and communicative engagement between the writer and the reader. When it comes to writing, writers firstly write propositional content of the text and then uses metadiscourse to show organisation and uderstanding in the interpretation of the text. As metadiscourse are linguistic cues which hekps text to look organized thus interpretable and easy to evaluate the information given (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993). There are many different option of metadiscourse which can be used to help in understanding of the text. Many studies have shown the importance of metadiscourse in reaching the audience (Gillaerts & Van de Velte, 2010, Hyland, 1998) for e.g. transition markers : In addition, but, thus, and, because. And there are studies done on other

interactional features in academic writing like hedges and attitude markers (Hyland 1998, Luzon 2009; Mur Duenas 2010). Effective use of metadiscourse increases the coherence or holistic meaning of the written piece and also distinguishes maturity in writing. This is prove in itself how important the part played by metadiscourse in writing and as an academic survival.

Problem Statement

When most students begin to write, they write to what Porter (1992) characterized as a real audience, a flesh-and-blood person who gives a perceptible response to their writing. Unfortunately, the student's real audience is often an impoverished one, a teacher who is considered a stickler for grammar and mechanics, not someone fundamentally interested in the ideas in the text or the development of the essay, and certainly not someone to be engaged in writing. However, as students develop as writers, they become more sophisticated about their audience. They strive to express their ideas more clearly and they pay some attention to whether their potential readers will understand what they are trying to say. These students developing as writers who have some concern about writing text that is more considerate, which is more readable because it conforms to principles identified as increasing the readability or efficiency of a text as observed by Anderson et. Al. (1980) and Armsbuster (1984). Currently, researches on metadiscourse and writing are still in the burgeoning stage, with their emphasis on English writing instruction in the English teaching community specifically in ESL writings by using evaluative essays. Referring to the previous researches related to academic writing that rarely can be found in this area, thus it is interesting to investigate and analyze the metadiscourse in academic texts written by ESL Malaysian learners. This study aimed to investigate; 1) the most frequent features, 2) the least features of metadiscourse produced ESL students in evaluative essays based on Interactioal Metadiscourse Model by Hyland (2005) and 3) how it is differently used by soft and hard science students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Definition of Metadiscourse

There is no unique exact way to define metadiscourse. It is generally described as the ways that writers reflect on their texts to refer to themselves, their readers or the text itself. Nevertheless, it is increasingly recognized as important constructs both in composition of writing and thinking. Zellig (1959) originally coined the term meta-discourse to describe text elements which comment on the main information of a text, but which themselves contain only unessential information. Metadiscourse then was later developed by Williams (1981) who as a whole described it as writing about writings. Avon Crismore, one of the pioneers, who started publishing on metadiscourse as early as the late 1980s, stated that metadiscourse is "the author's intrusion into the discourse, either explicitly or non-explicitly, to direct rather than inform, showing readers how to understand what is said and meant in the primary discourse and how to take the author" (1989). Another famous concept has been defined as discourse about discourse or communication about communication (Vande Kopple, 1985: 83) who pointed out that "on the level of metadiscourse, we do not add propositional material but help our readers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react to such material" (1985).

Hyland (2005) explains that metadiscourse reveals the writer's awareness of the reader and his or her need for elaboration, clarification, guidance and interaction. He further elaborates that "in expressing an awareness of the text, the writer also makes the reader aware of it, and this only happens when he or she has a clear, reader-oriented reason for doing so. In other words, drawing attention to the text represents a writer's goals relative to an assessment of the reader's

need for guidance and elaboration." In other words, we can say that metadiscourse is an umbrella term for words used by a writer or speaker to mark the direction and purpose of a text.

b. Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse
Metadiscourse, also termed meta-talk by Schiffrin (1980), refers to the linguistic resources used for organizing propositional content to construct a discourse, for interpreting, evaluating and developing attitudes toward that discourse, and for helping outsiders or new entrants understand how discourse is constructed within a given discourse community and context for a given purpose (Hyland, 2005;Vande Kopple, 2012).

Thompson's (2001) terms of interactive and interactional, recognize the textual and evaluative resources employed in texts. These are then applied in Hyland's (2004) model which takes a somewhat broader focus to include aspects of stance (expressions used to demonstrate attitude and commitment toward proposition) and engagement (resources used to overtly connect with audience) as well

Interactive resources consist of markers which help organize discourse rather than experience, anticipate readers' knowledge and reflect the writers' assessment of what needs to be made explicit while interactional resources contribute to involve readers in the argument by focus their attention to the writer's viewpoints and readers themselves (Hyland, 2004). The interactive dimension of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005,p. 49), which concerns the writer's attempts "to shape and constrain a text" in order to accommodate the readers' interests and needs and set out a rational and proper argument, has been composed of five categories entailing transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses (Hyland, 2004).

On the other hand, the interactional dimension of metadiscourse, which is concerned with "the readers' involvement in the text (Hyland, 2005, p. 49)" and "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 (Hyland, 2004, p. 139)", entails the following five groups of markers.

1. Hedges: Devices by which "the writer withholds full commitment to a proposition; employed as an
index to recognize the alternative voices, viewpoints, and possibilities" (Hyland, 2005, p. 52).
2. Boosters: Words which express certainty and highlight the force of propositions (Hyland, 2004).
3. Attitude markers: Represent "the writer's attitude and judgment of the propositional content
(Hyland, 2005, p. 53).
4. Engagement markers: Refer to addressing the readers explicitly, "either to focus their attention or
include them as discourse participants" (Hyland, 2005, p. 53) through second person pronouns,
imperatives, question forms, and asides.
5. Self-mentions: Indicate the degree of explicit author presence and attendance in the text represented
through the first person pronouns and possessive adjectives (Hyland, 2004; Hyland, 2005, p. 53).

c. Past studies of Metadiscourse in ESL Essays

Sorahi and Shabani (2016) onducted a study to investigate the use of metadiscourse in Persian (20) and English (20) research article introductions in the field of linguistics. In investigating the similarities and differences in the implication of metadiscourse (i.e. the interactive and interactional resources) between these texts, it was found that there are average densities of all subcategories of metadiscourse resources according to the 465 sentences in Iranian texts and 635 sentences in the English texts. Thus it was proven that both Iranian and English RA introductions used more interactive than interactional.

Another study was done to investigate whether discourse markers training leads to a better writing performance of the EFL learners. It was proven that after conducting a pretest without teaching the usage of discourse markers and posttest of writing with the usage of discourse markers, they do indeed perform better in the posttest. This showed the necessisity of teaching metadiscourse elements to learners and also help them make their students aware of how they can succeed in writing tasks by knowing and using the linguistic elements effectively (Taghizadeh and Tajabadi, 2013).

II-Hee Kim(2017) on the other hand, investigated metadiscourse in the persuasive essays of fourth graders from both urban and rural communities which comprised of 224 students in South Korea and 188 in the US. Each student was asked to write a persuasive essay in his or her native Korean or English in response to a story not previously read or discussed. The analysis indicated significant differences in the metadiscourse by country.

In terms of interactive metadiscourse, South Korean students used more sentence-level transitions than U.S. students, who used more frame markers and endophoric markers. With regard to interactional metadiscourse, U.S. students used more hedges, boosters, engagement markers, and self-mentions in their essays. This study also compared the students' essays by the type of community in which the writers lived. In the US the essays of students in rural communities contained more hedges, whereas those of students in urban areas included significantly more self-mentions. In South Korea, no significant difference was detected in the metadiscourse of students living in rural and urban areas.

Another interesting study done by Katharina R. (2014) looked into the used of metadiscourse markers in 7 Indonesian EFL learners' Persuasive writings. It was revealed that the occurrences of textual marker types in EFL learners' Persuasive texts were overall closely similar to those at considered as standard proficient writing (extract from BAWE corpus), while those of interpersonal marker types were different from the standard proficient writing . Since the occurrences of interpersonal marker types are different from those at BAWE corpus in terms of hedges, boosters, engagement markers, the teacher needs to give more practice in teaching the interpersonal metadiscourse markers. These findings showed that metadiscourse analysis can be a strategy to make the students aware of the important role of metadiscourse markers.

While B. Ramoroka (2016) compared students' use of interactional metadiscourse features in two undergraduate courses, Media Studies and Primary Education at the University of Botswana. 40 essays were analysed and the comparison of interactional metadiscourse features in the two corpora indicated that interactional metadiscourse markers were present, but that there were variations in the use and distribution of these features by the learners. Contextual information shows that such variations reflect the different values and beliefs about academic writing of the discourse communities that students belong to. These values and beliefs can be problematic for EAP tutors who have to prepare students for writing in the various disciplines in L2 contexts.

Some studies on the use of metadiscourse features in academic context examined disciplinary variation in the use of metadiscourse features like (Abdi 2002; Hyland 2004) and these studies focused on the research genre. For example, Abdi (2002) examined the way researchers use interpersonal metadiscourse to reveal their identity. Abdi analysed 60 academic research articles in the fields of social sciences (SS) and the natural sciences (NS), and the study was confined to discussion sections because it is the part where writers most obviously try to persuade their readers. In this study, there were significant differences in the use of hedges and attitude markers by the two groups, with the natural science writers displaying more certainty about their proposition. His argument is that because natural science writers report empirical research and are objective in their reporting, some of the uncertainties are removed. Social science writers, on the contrary, tended to intervene a lot (through the use of interpersonal metadiscourse features) and were subjective in their reporting of the proposition. Abdi's findings suggested that the choice of interpersonal metadiscourse was discipline related.

Another study which produced the similar findings was done by Hyland (2004). The study focused on how L2 postgraduate students used both interactive and interactional metadiscourse, and this was based on an analysis of 240 L2 postgraduate dissertations for both master's and doctoral students. His analysis indicates the significance of metadiscourse in academic writing, particularly this genre. The results show that the writers used slightly more interactive than interactional (interpersonal) metadiscourse features. There was also significant difference in the use of metadiscourse across the disciplines, with the humanities and social sciences employing more metadiscourse and over 60% of the interactional features. The interactive metadiscourse was balanced across the disciplines and formed a higher proportion of use of metadiscourse in the science dissertations.

d. Theoretical Framework

By using the estalished table of interactional metadiscourse by Hyland (2005), this study analyzed the students' evaluative essays to find out the occurance of interactional metadiscourse features like Attitude Markers, Self-mention, Engagement Markers, Hedges and Boosters as shown in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Study
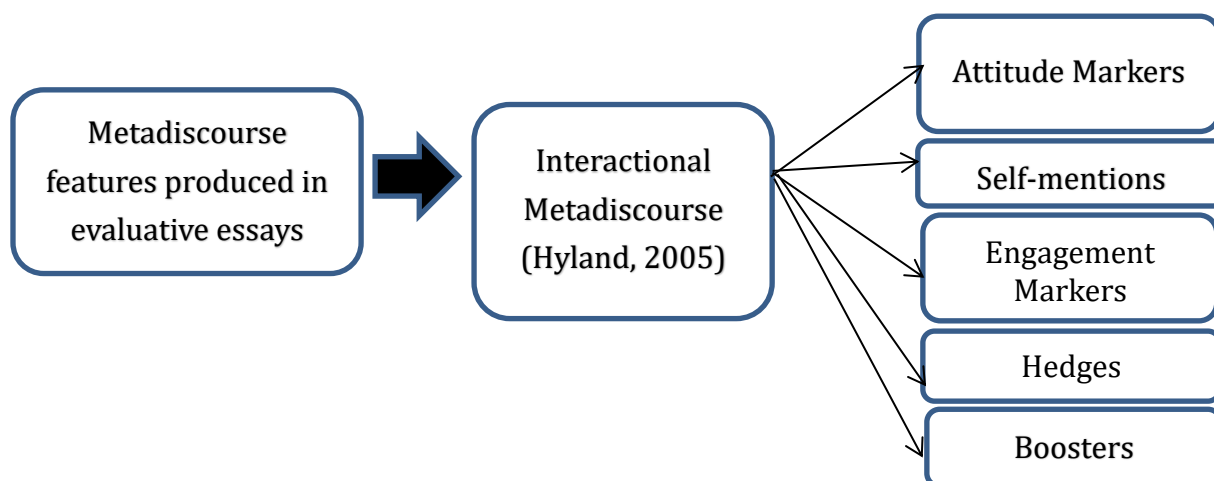
METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out at the Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu which invloved two campuses; Dungun and Kuala Terengganu from two different courses; bussiness administration (soft science) and computer science Khard science) course. This quantitative and qualitative research which involved 200 students were currently taking English for Critical Reading (ELC501) code for their degree study of part two. The subjects were selected by using purposive sampling method.The 200 corpus of evalauative essays were submitted for the purpose of the study and as for requirement of their on going assessment, and these were subsequently analysed for the use of interactional metadiscourse. The interactional metadiscourse model developed by Hyland (2005) was used to differentiate the metadiscourse features produced in 5 items like Attitude Markers, Self-mentions, Engagement Markers, Hedges and Boosters. To obtain data on the writers' use of metadiscourse, an analysis of the corpus of essays was carried out using a list of search items compiled based on Hyland's (2005, pp. 218–224) list of metadiscourse items as shown in Table 1.1 below:

**Table 1.1**: Interactive Metadiscourse Model based on Hyland, 2005

No.	Interactional Metadiscourse	Examples
1.	**Attitude Markers-** indicate the writer's opinion or assessment of a proposition.	I agree, I am amazed, appropriate, correctly, dramatic, hopefully, unfortunately.
2.	**Self-mention** refers to explicit authorial presence in the text and gives information about his/ her character and stance.	I, we, the author
3.	**Engagement markers**- explicitly address readers to draw them into the discourse.	We, our (inclusive), imperative mood.
4.	**Hedges**- indicate the writer's decision to recognize other voices, viewpoints or possibilities and be (ostensibly) open to negotiation with the reader,	Apparently, assume, doubt, estimate, from my perspective, in most cases, in my opinion, probably, suggests
5.	**Boosters-** allow the writer to anticipate and preclude alternative, conflicting arguments by expressing certainty instead of doubt.	Beyond doubt, clearly, definitely, we found, we proved, it is an established fact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was designed to (a) identify the most prominent metadiscourse features produced, (b) determine the least metadiscourse features produced and (c) compare the metadiscourse features produced between Soft and hard science students. The results and discussion of the study are explained according to the objectives of the study.

a. The Most Prominent Metadiscourse features produced

Table 1.2 The frequency of metadiscourse features produced by Soft Science Students
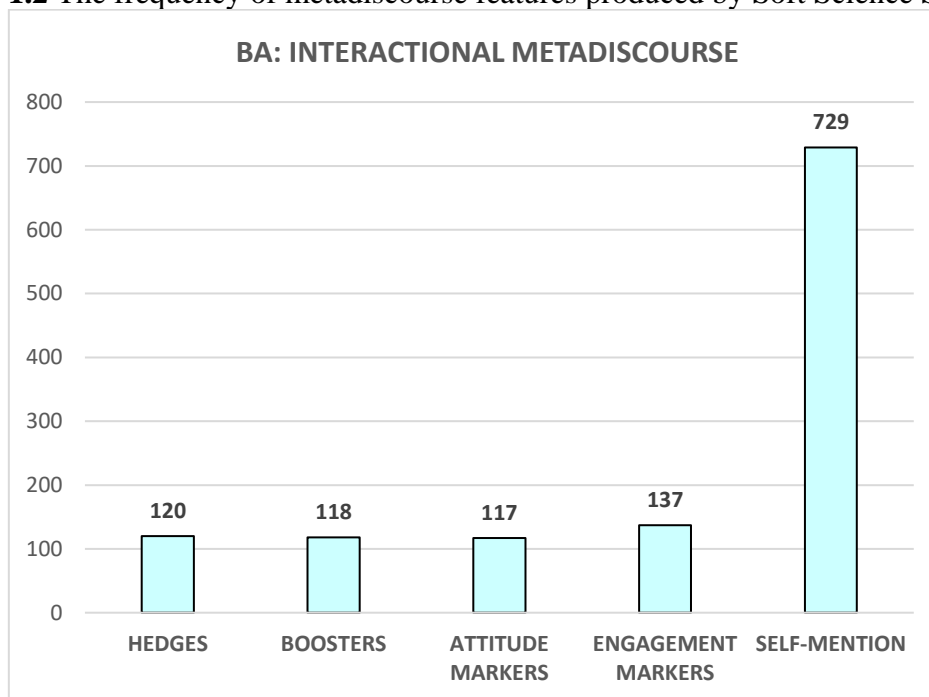
Table 1.3 The Frequency of metadiscourse features produced by Hard Science Students
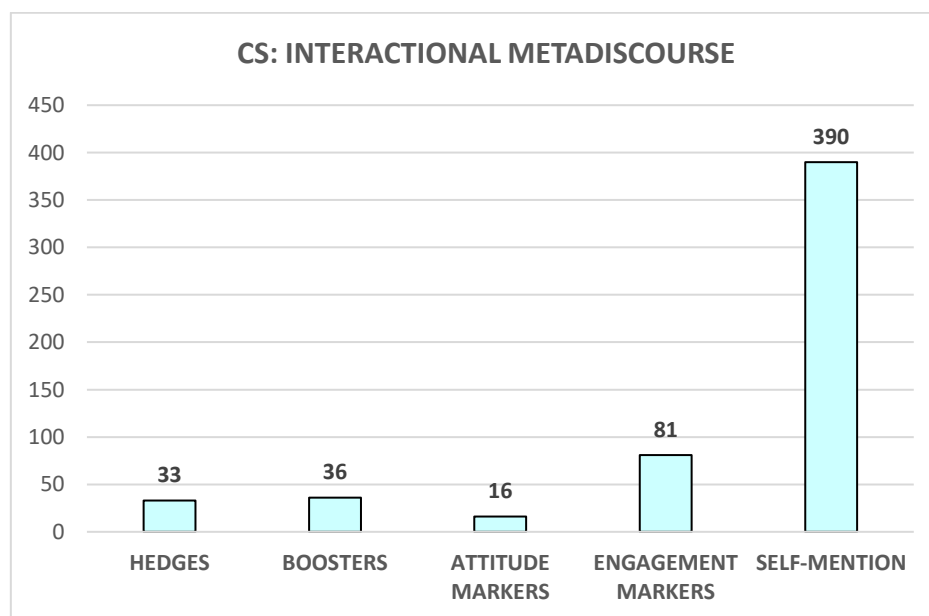

Table 1.2 and table 1.3 shows the frequency of metadiscourse features produced by Soft Science (Business Administration) and Hard Science (Computer Science) students. Based on the table, *Self mention* was the highest metadiscourse features used by both students with 729 for Business Administration (BA) and 390 for Computer Science (CS) students. Hence, we can conclude that Soft Science students applied more metadiscourse features compared to Hard Science.

According to Hyland (2005), entities in soft sciences are utterly more specific, but less exactly evaluative, and less clear-cut. In this sense, setting up a suitably authorial persona and keeping an influential degree of personal intrusion and involvement with addresses can be of use strategies in forging links and relationships between entities. He further describes that in achieving the desired communication, marking a boundary between writers' own work and others and making a self-reputation in their texts as well are all feasible via self-mentioning features. Accordingly, one of the characteristics of humanities and social sciences is that writers can individualise their authorial identities and what they need to state using self-mentions. In all, in the present research, results relate to self-mentions in both soft and hard sciences are in line with Hyland's (2005) assertions.The example of self mentioned used by the students were such as the author, I, we and our. The strategic application of self-mention in writing provides an opportunity for authors to assert their authorial persona by stating their strong beliefs and ideas, putting emphasis on their contribution to the field, as well as seeking recognition for their endeavour (Kuo, 1999).

b. The Least Metadiscourse Features produced

Table 1.2 shows the least frequent of metadiscourse features is *Attitude Markers* (117) and *Hedges* (118) for Soft Science students meanwhile table 1.3 shows the least occurrence of metadiscourse is *Attitude Markers* (16) for Hard Science students. Since the corpus used was evaluative essays in which students supposed to insert their opinion and ideas in their essays, it was expected students to use more attitude markers and hedges. As mentioned by Sehrawat (2004), *Attitude Markers* increase the interpersonal component of the text by revealing writers' feelings about their assertions meanwhile *Hedges* are used to encode information about the probability of the proposition being true and provide an "out" in case the assertions prove to be incorrect. When hedges are used appropriately, they raise the ethical level of the text because the writers must consider what they know to be true and what they must support with evidence. This indicates that students did not really convey their strong personal feeling in their writings for example the words like, "unfortunately, I agree, I am amazed, appropriate, correctly, dramatic, hopefully etc." (Hyland, 2005).

c. The Differences Metadiscourse Features by Students from Soft and Hard Science Courses

Table 1.4 The comparison of metadiscourse features produced by both groups

	INTERACTIONAL METADISCOURSE					
	HEDGES	BOOSTERS	ATTITUDE MARKERS	ENGAGEMENT MARKERS	SELF-MENTION	TOTAL
BA	120	118	117	137	729	1221
CS	33	36	16	81	390	556

Table 1.4 shows the comparison of the metadiscourse features of the two groups (Business Administration BA and Computer Science CS). BA students used most *Self Mention* (729 BA and 390 CS) and followed by *Engagement Markers* (137 BA and 81 CS) than CS students. The BA students were also more focussed on *Boosters at* 118 compared to 36 for CS students and *Hedges* 120 for BA and only 33 for the CS batch. Additionally, *Attitude Markers* showed a siqnificant difference (BA 117 and CS 16) compared to the other Interactional Metadiscourse.

This indicated that the BA students were able to organize their information better than the CS students. Overall, BA students used more Interactional Metadiscourse at 1221 compared to their counterpart, the CS students at only 556 due to they are more interpretative (Hyland, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In overall, descriptive statistics show that students in soft and hard science courses produced the same significant feature of interactional metadiscourse. There is no difference of metadiscourse features produced by both courses. The most prominent metadiscourse feature is self-mention meanwhile the least feature produced by these two courses are attitude markers.

Metadiscourse is a construct that is important in both composition and reading research. Although virtually all universities required undergraduate composition classes, most students do not write effectively even after instruction. Thus to teach metadiscourse, it would be effective to teach the concept of metadiscourse. In teaching the concept of metadiscourse, the students will be exposed on features of metadiscourse in writing. This would be an effective for university level students because many novice writers just focus on the product, the written text and they do not pay enough attention to ultimate goal of writing which is communication with an audience. Vande Kopple (1985) suggested that exploring metadiscourse would increase students' sensitivity to the needs of their readers, making them better able to meet those needs, and thus changing writer-based prose (Flower, 1979) into reader-based prose. Furthermore, he argued that understanding metadiscourse would make writers more aware of the truth value of the propositional content and turn them into ethical writers who pay more attention to reflecting any doubts they may have rather than simply asserting that their statements are true. Intaraprawat (1988) and Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) have shown that appropriate use of metadiscourse plays an important part in a successful text. When student writers lack an overall knowledge of rhetorical conventions, they do not know how to make good use of these interpersonal and textual functions of language. This often leads them to produce writer-based prose in which the propositional content is not effectively conveyed, thus lowering the overall quality of their texts.

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