

Metadiscoursal Features of Letters to Editor from Pakistani English Newspaper: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

Metadiscourse features (MFs) uncover the way authors draw in with various writings and communicate with each other. MFs have been studied in Pakistani English Newspapers, especially in Letter to Editors. This is a corpus based study. 30 letters to Editors published in Dawn News have been taken from online electronic version of the internet. The present study actually has dealt Interactional category of Hyland's model (2005). Interactional category consists subcategories: boosters, engagement markers, hedges, self-mentions and attitudinal markers. For having interactional markers, these markers have been lifted up in the current study for subcategories from Hyland's (2005) model and textinspector.com: an online software. This study has found frequencies of Interactional markers in the developed corpus, also interpreted the functions of the identified markers in the corpus. The findings of the present research revealed that the letters to Editors were marked as writer responsible. It showed the frequent employment of Engagement markers and Self-mentions in order to develop the relation with the Editors and put the attention of the Editors toward the significant matter. The limitation of this study is that the more data, interactive features and other genres may be considered for further researches.

Keywords: Interactional metadiscourse, Pakistani Letters to Editors, Hyland's model (2005)

1. Introduction

Letter to the editor is a mode of communication in which readers discuss, develop, and impart ideas to editors through letters. Apparently, such kind

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of letters is drafted to editors by the readers for peer reviews, correction of mistakes, comments, questions or criticisms about articles, and start a conversation. In order to create these functions in letters to editors, there is a strong need to use of metadiscourse markers (MMs). Using these markers, every letter to editors can be effective and persuasive to convince them about the issue what the writer has.

Hyland (1998) states that: “Metadiscourse is known to be an effective technique for improving writing and making texts more ‘reader friendly’. It is an important mean for supporting the writer’s position and building writer-audience relationships” (Hyland, 1998, p. 4).

The current study has taken letters to the editors for the purpose of analysing data. The letters which have been chosen are short writings that serve two functions: 1) they present both agreement and disagreement toward the previous publications as articles, and 2) they also expose a very precise overview of scientific evidence that requires the detail and the length of the original writing or article.

The aim of this study examines the occurrences of MMs in letters to editors. In order to observe the functions of MMs, the researcher interprets the functions of markers in a deeper sense. The study demands manual analysis for noting marker frequencies. This study is a corpus-based. This study has developed a corpus of 30 letters to the editors by Pakistani writers or authors as taken from online source: Dawn News.

In order to conduct the analysis, the corpus of 30 letters to editors from Pakistani English Newspaper consisting of 7185 words has been analyzed. This study employs Hyland’s model (2005) of Interpersonal metadiscourse. This model is classified into two main classes: Interactional and Interactive metadiscourse.

The current study deals “Interactional metadiscourse” which includes: attitude markers, hedges, boosters, self-mention items, and engagement markers. These markers have been studied in term of frequency and functions as MFs of letter to editors. For the current study, the Antconc.3.4.4.0 as a tool is used for finding frequencies of MMs in the developed corpus.

To sum up, it can be understood that the appropriate use of metadiscourse features is an essential point in understanding texts better, and it can be also helpful in conveying the writers' intended meaning efficiently. The current study deals non-native writers and non-native English editors. The limitation of the current study is that the other than interactional metadiscourse can be studied anymore.

1.1 Research Question

This section is considered as the crucial part of the current study which leads to the answers of the research questions.

- 1) What are the occurrences of metadiscourse features (MFs) in Pakistani English Newspaper, especially in Letters to Editors?
- 2) How metadiscourse features (MFs) function in Pakistani English Newspaper, especially in Letters to Editors?

2. Literature Review

The term "metadiscourse" initially derived theoretically from Halliday's taxonomy of language which performs the following macro-functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The term "metadiscourse" is defined as "discourse that people use not to expand referential material, but to help their readers, connect, organize, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes toward that material" (Vande Kopple, 1985, p. 83).

Hyland (2005) presented that the term "metadiscourse" was originally proposed by Zellig Harris (1959) for the purpose of offering a course of comprehending language in use, respecting a writer's or speaker's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text. Since 1980, a number of definitions of the term "metadiscourse" were presented by different researchers (e.g. Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore, 1989; Mauranen, 1993; Hyland, 1998; 2005). First of all, the definition is credited to William (1999), who considered metadiscourse as "discourse about discourse, intended to direct rather than inform readers". In the same way, metadiscourse comprises linguistic features which refer to the organization of discourse and the relationship between writer and reader implicitly through discourse (Crismore, 1989; Vande Koppel, 2002). Broadly speaking, the term "metadiscourse" is

depended on writing as social engagement which is used by the writers to get involved in their discourse to show their attitude (Hyland, 2005).

2.1 Metadiscourse and Letters to the Editor

The MFs as an emerging linguistics features that were rarely studied in letter to editors. This is regarded as a common genre but it is not studied through the glaze of metadiscourse. Swales (1990) has defined a genre as:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre (Swales, 1990, p. 58; Ahmad, Siddique & Mushtaq, 2019).

The metadiscoursal studies conducted on letter to editors have been discussed ahead. According to International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (1997), it identified that “letters to editors” is a significant thing for post guide overview. In reality, this committee valued that all biomedical journals comprise a bucket of sporting comments, questions, or criticisms about articles what they already published and got response from the authentic authors.

Taking the previous researches on letters to the editors in consideration, the findings of the study noted from the Portuguese Press (Silva, 2010, 2012) were considered.

The letters’ phase, although constructed through specialists as a workout in public debate, also complements credibility in the eyes of the readers and increases stream (Wahl Jorgensen, 2007); like if it were a “public members of the family” tool (idem, 2002). The editors-in-chief underlined this attitude: “If human beings ship letters to us, it’s a signal that we’re vital in society” (editor-in-leader, Metro); “advertising and marketing studies display that the letters section could be very important to readers” (editor-in-leader, Visão), which makes the correspondence segment “simply structural” in the design of a newspaper ad “untouchable to readers”, opposite to different sections of the newspapers (editor-in-chief, Expresso). “We usually put up

letters that criticize our news reporting (...). Is this a benefit, in phrases of public picture of the newspaper? It truly is" (editor-in-leader, Metro).

Similarly, Wahl-Jorgensen (2002, 2007) claimed editors' recognition about democratic potential of the letters sections, as a public forum, but they also considered it as a tool of "customer service", which obviously made the readers happy and might enhance the newspapers' economic profit.

To sum up, it is understood that the appropriate use of metadiscourse features is an essential point in understanding texts better, and it can be also helpful in conveying the writers' intended meaning efficiently. Thus the researcher wants to find out whether native and non-native editors of the selected newspapers use different interactional MMs with reference to subcategories, to achieve the intended persuasion in order to truly involve and challenge the readers' mind while reading. The current study deals non-native writers and non-native English editors. The limitation of the current study is that the other than Interactional metadiscourse can be studied anymore.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Model for this Study

The current study dealt Hyland's model (2005) that was categorized into: interactive and interactional metadiscourse. This study mainly focused on interactional features of letter to editors. This study covered the maximum MFs for the purpose of analysis.

Table 1: Interactional Category of Hyland's Modal

Interactional Category	Functions	Examples
1. Attitude Markers	State writer's attitude to propositional content	Unfortunately, I agree, X claims
2. Hedges	Grasp writer's full commitment to the statements	Might, perhaps, possible, about
3. Relational/ Engagement Markers	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with the reader	Frankly, note that, you, can see
4. Person Markers	Explicit reference to author(s)	I, we, my, mine, our

5. Boosters	Emphasize force or writer's certainty in the message	In fact, definitely, it is clear
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3.2 List of Metadiscourse Markers

For the data analysis, the present study developed a list of MFs taking from Hyland's book (2005): *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing* and *textinspector.com* (Siddique, Mahmood & Iqbal, 2018). The lists of both sources were merged after excluding duplicate markers. The numerical detail of MMs has been given below.

Table 2: Development of final lists of metadiscourse markers

Category	Sub-Category	Textinspector.com	Ken Hyland's Book	Merged Markers
Interactional Metadiscourse	Boosters	39	65	81
	Attitude Markers	26	64	72
	Hedges	47	101	107
	Engagement Markers	21	79	86
	Self-mention	6	11	11
	Total Markers	139	320	357

3.3 Corpus Collection

The current study developed a corpus of 30 letter to editors from Pakistani English Newspaper using online website as mentioned in the coming section (3.4 Source of Data). Moreover, the corpus contained 7185 words.

3.4 Source of Data

The electronic version of elite data was taken from the influential Pakistani English Newspaper, especially letter to editors, through internet sites: dawn.com/authors/2677/editorial.

3.5 Procedure of Data Analysis

The current study was a corpus-based. The aim of this study examined the occurrence of interactional markers in 'Letters to Editors' from Pakistani English Newspaper. In order to observe the functions of MMs, the researcher interpreted the functions of interactional markers in a deeper sense. This

study required manual analysis for noting the frequencies as output. In order to carry out the analysis, the corpus of 30 'letters to Editors' containing of 7185 words was investigated. For this analysis, the software as processor (i.e. AntConc.3.4.4.0) was used here to count the frequency of Interactional markers. Hyland model (2005) of Interpersonal features was used for this purpose. The Interpersonal model was classified into two classes: Interactional and Interactive MMs. The first part of Hyland model, Interactional metadiscourse was chosen for the current study. The Interactional features were then observed to find the outcomes. The expressions for the analysis were developed for the current study.

4. Results and Discussion

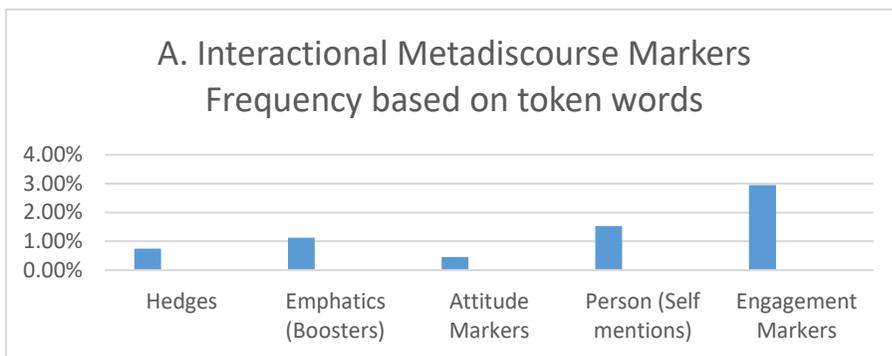
4.1 Results

This section deals numerical results and discussion. First of all, the current study has presented a detail overview of numerical results in terms of frequency and its percentages with respect to token and type words. See the table 3.

Table 3: Results of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in DAWN's Letters to Editor

Interactional Categories	Frequency	Percentage (Token Words)	Percentage (Type Words)
Hedges	54	0.75%	2.57%
Emphatics (Boosters)	81	1.13%	3.86%
Attitude Markers (AMs)	32	0.45%	1.52%
Self-mention	110	1.53%	5.24%
Engagement Markers (EMs)	212	2.95%	10.09%

After presenting the overview of numerical results, this study has shown the graphical representation of the interactional features of metadiscourse. See the graph 1 below.

Graph 1: Interactional Metadiscourse Markers (Token words)

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Attitude Markers

The use of attitude markers (AMs) show the writer's mind-set to propositions. These markers perform various functions such as remarking on the fact's fame, it's possible relevance, truth or reliability, mind-set features present agreement, duty, frustration, significance, surprise, and so on. Attitude markers are actually employed to overt the writer's behaviors toward the proposition he or she offers (Vande Kopple, 1985).

The total 32 attitude markers are observed minutely in the developed corpus which consists of 30 letters to editors taken from Dawn Newspaper, Pakistan. The frequent use of AMs expresses the attitude of writers toward the content (Thompson & Thetela, 1995) as observed in the current corpus. The writers of the letters have frequently used attitude markers: even, have to, important, must and less frequently used are admittedly, importantly, and interest.

Table 3: Frequencies of Attitude Markers as Interactional Discourse Markers

Attitude markers	Frequency	Attitude markers	Frequency
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Admittedly	1	Importantly	1
Even	11	Interest	1
Have to	3	Must	12
Important	3		

As mentioned example below:

- 1) Their citizens cannot **even** feel safe just walking down the street or going to the store.

In case of Interactional metadiscourse, the employed marker 'even' is performing the writer's attitude and the credibility of him. With the help of this marker, the writer conveys the meanings in term of propositional content. Though this marker, in the above example (1) the writer holds the persuasiveness of the message when he needs to deliver the intended meanings to the editors, then the author uses attitude markers to execute such ideas in an excellent way. It is understood that the writer frequently uses this marker in the current study for showing the effects of his personality to the editors (Siddique, Mahmood & Qasim, 2019). As Crismore et al. (1993) indicate attitude markers that they display writer's affective values.

4.2.2 Hedges

Hedges show the writer's decision to understand the substitute voices and viewpoints and so suppress complete commitment to a proposition. Hedge are devices: think, might, probable, and so on (Siddique, Mahmood, Akhter & Arslan, 2019). The prime function of hedges puts emphasis on the subjectivity of a position by providing information to be presented as an opinion rather than a fact and hence open that position for negotiation (Hyland, 1998a).

Hedges are such devices which show uncertainty to truth of assertion (Crismore et al. 1993), these frequent devices observed in the current corpus being 54 in numbers which also show the writer's politeness. The most frequent devices which are frequently used in the present corpus such as may, maybe, could, would and believed. On the other hand, the less frequent devices observed in the current study are: almost, apparently, estimate, frequently, likely, might, possible, possibly, and little.

Table 4: Frequencies of Hedge as Interactional Discourse Markers

Hedges	Frequency	Hedges	Frequency
Almost	2	Maybe	3
Apparently	1	Might	2
Believed	3	Possible	2
Could	6	Possibly	1
Estimate	2	Probably	1
Frequently	1	Usually	1
Likely	2	Would	16
May	9	Little	2

As mentioned below example:

- 2) From Indian point of view, the ISIS threat **may be** viewed as inconsequential. But, the realities are different.

In order to observe the use of 'may be' as Hedge device, as above mentioned that the use of this marker represents the ambiguity, and very often it mentions the politeness strategy to get the editors to take an action as well as to describe the event with the prediction. This is why, the writer feels comfort to convey his intended meaning with the help of this marker. This is a very persuasive way to let the editor to understand independently (Siddique, Mahmood, Akhter & Arslan, 2019). This is also frequently used by the author in his writing to the editors. Normally, it is also coming under the features of a letter to the editors which are written by the different authors.

4.2.3 Boosters

Boosters are metadiscourse devices such as obviously, demonstrate, and clearly, which permit writers to alleviate alternatives, head off conflicting views and express their certainty in what they say. Boosters are also intensity markers which make situation attentive. These devices are extremely employed in editorials when the editorialists want to grab the attention of their readers through newspaper editorials (Siddique, Mahmood, Azhar & Qasim, 2018).

The writers emphasize certainty or close dialogue (Thompson & Thetela, 1995) with the help of emphatics (Boosters). These emphatics are considered as subcategory of Interactional discourse markers which are frequently used by the writers such as always, in fact, never, obvious, show and true. The less frequent emphatics are used to reinforce the content of the message with emphatic markers.

Table 5: Frequencies of Emphatics (Boosters) as Interactional Discourse Markers

Boosters	Frequency	Emphatics (Boosters)	Frequency
Always	5	Never	6
I believe	1	Obvious	3
Certainly	1	Obviously	2
Certainty	1	Of course	2
Clearly	1	Prove	2
Essential	1	Show	5
In fact	4	Sure	2
The fact that	1	True	3
Indeed	2	Won't	1
Know	6	Should	21
Must	12		

As indicated below:

- 3) Quantifying extent of action or no-action is **always** debatable.

The use of boosters or emphatics is used to value and devalue the things. The use of 'always' marker, shows the possibility of the things. This marker is used to enhance the effectiveness of the content of the text. This marker is usually used by the author to emphasize the matter (Siddique, Mahmood, Azhar & Qasim, 2018) to get the editor to take action upon.

4.2.4 Engagement Markers

Engagement markers are markers that overtly address readers, take their attentions and include them as discourse participants. Engagement markers explicitly build relationship with the reader (Thompson & Thetela, 1995) as found in the current corpus. The writers engage the editors by using more

frequent engagement devices such as our (inclusion), you, yours, us (inclusion), we (inclusion), must, find, go and have to (Siddique, Aqeel & Imran, 2019).

Table 6: Frequencies of Engagement Markers as Interactional Discourse Markers

Engagement Markers	Frequency	Engagement Markers	Frequency
Add	1	Need to	2
Allow	1	Note	1
Order	1	Notice	1
Our (inclusion)	19	Do not	1
State	10	Ensure	2
You	59	Estimate	2
Your	27	Find	4
Turn	1	Go	4
Us (inclusion)	19	Have to	3
See	3	Imagine	2
Use	1	Mark	1
We (inclusion)	27	Key	2
Show	5	Let's	1
Must	12		

As indicated example below:

- 4) Three significant issues **need to** be factored when considering the assessment of ISIS threat in India.

In Interactional markers, the role of engagement markers is considered important to show the engagement with someone. The marker 'need to' is used to show the importance of something and put the attention of the people toward the author. This marker is employed commonly to point out the necessity of the things. The underlined marker in above example (4), it is used to engage and aware the editors by showing considerable importance of something. This marker tends to focus upon the things to highlight.

The writers use less frequent devices to engage their readers, such devices are: imagine, key, mark, add, allow, note, notice, let's, order, and see. The writers use less frequent devices to convey their content meanings to the

readers and also engage the reader with the help of text (Siddique, Aqeel & Imran, 2019).

4.2.5 Person Markers

Self-mention markers show an explicit presence of author in a text measured by the parameters such as first-person pronouns: I, my/mine, me, we, our and us, and possessive adjectives: my, our, and so on. Mostly, all writing contains information about the writer, but it is conventionally viewed when personal's influence through first person pronouns that are the most powerful means of self-representation (Ivanic, 1998). The use of self-mention markers shows writers' presence or absence explicitly, it is a conscious choice of writers who present their stance and authority contextually. (Hyland, 2001b)

Thompson and Thetela (1995) views, person markers are used to explicit reference to author(s). With the use of person devices, the writers represent personal authority to the editors by employing person markers such as I, we, me, my, our and mine. These markers lead to the writers of the letters. The most frequent use of person markers (i.e. I, we, our) show the presence of the writers. The use of less frequent markers (i.e. me, my, mine) undoubtedly creates self-representation.

Table 7: Frequencies of Person markers (Self-mentions) as Interactional Discourse Markers

Self-mentions	Frequency	Self-mentions	Frequency
I	49	My	9
We	27	Our	19
Me	4	Mine	2

As indicated below in examples:

5) By the help of your newspaper **I** want to aware high authorities about this issue.

In order to define the functions of Person markers (self-mentions), the use of person markers in letters to editors elucidates the most frequent marker 'I' as self-mentions in the current corpus. This marker in the above text is showing the responsibility of the writer, who is actually fulfilling his job

personally to aware someone. The other aspect of the use of this marker is representing the presence of the writer who is trying to involve with the editors upon serious matter. Person markers are used to explicit reference to author(s) and this perspective is supported by Thompson and Thetela (1995).

The person markers in the current study put the writer's stance toward the editors. The most important point is that these markers lead to the writer's stance and the way to engage the editors.

5. Conclusion

The current study answers the research questions in terms of frequency, functions and features of Pakistani English Newspaper, especially in letter to editors taken from Dawn News (online) source. The frequency of the MMs shows the behavior of the writers during writing letters to editors. It also depicts the features of letter which are written to the editors by the authors. The letters show the features of the writers in term of their stance about any matter, their personalities and their attitude through the attitude markers, their politeness and emphasis through hedges, their presence and authorities through relational markers or Person markers (Self-mentions), and engage their audience (editors) through engagement markers.

It is concluded that the writers use more MMs in their writing to show the persuasiveness and effectiveness of letters. They use MMs in their letters to get the editors to focus on certain matter which is needed to be highlighted. This study guides the learners to keep in mind the metadiscourse features explored in the selected data while drafting letter to editor. The current study further opens the further research areas for new researcher taking other MFs for the future research.

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