



## GENDER DIFFERENCES ON THE USE OF METADISOURSE ON REFLECTIVE ESSAYS: A CASE STUDY OF INBOUND STUDENTS



Noor Hanim  
Rahmat<sup>1+</sup>

Nur Anisah Tan  
Abdullah<sup>2</sup>

Mohamad Hanis  
Yahaya<sup>3</sup>

Choong Pow Yean<sup>4</sup>

Wararat  
Whanchit<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.

<sup>1</sup>Email: [patanim@gmail.com](mailto:patanim@gmail.com) Tel: +6016-2155797

<sup>2</sup>Email: [anistan@uitm.edu.my](mailto:anistan@uitm.edu.my) Tel: +6012-6600365

<sup>3</sup>Email: [mhanis@uitm.edu.my](mailto:mhanis@uitm.edu.my) Tel: +6012-4405548

<sup>4</sup>Email: [choon322@uitm.edu.my](mailto:choon322@uitm.edu.my) Tel: +6012-2913506

<sup>5</sup>School of Liberal Arts, Walailak University, Thailand.

<sup>5</sup>Email: [wararatanoi@gmail.com](mailto:wararatanoi@gmail.com) Tel: +66869646465



(+ Corresponding author)

### ABSTRACT

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During the age of global learning, students' mobility has popularized edutourism in universities around the world. Generally, students benefit in many ways. Although students completed surveys to document how they felt about their stay, the use of reflective essays can be useful for the organizers to find out how the participants felt about their stay in the host country. This study explored the data in students' reflective essays to find out how they felt about their experience learning English in Malaysia. Specially, the use of metadiscourse is used to analyse the students' attitudes and emotions about what they gained from the edutourism programme. The data was analysed based on interactive or interactional metadiscourse. Findings revealed students used interactive metadiscourse such as transitions, frame markers and code glosses; They used interactional metadiscourse such as hedges, boosters and self-mentions in their essays to reveal how they felt about their learning experience.

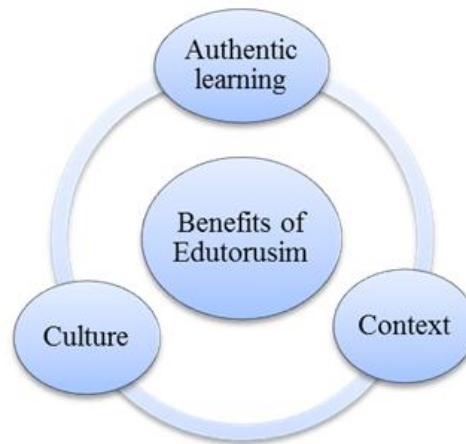
**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature of global learning via edutourism. This study uses the analysis of metadiscourse elements in a reflective essay. Metadiscourse elements used in essays helped researchers understand learners' feelings towards a learning experience.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of Study

Edutourism benefits participating learners in many ways. According to Rahmat, Addullah, and Kashiwazaki (2020) students learn more than what was planned. Through authentic learning, they learnt in context and gain opportunities to understand the culture of the host country. With reference to Figure 1, learners would leave edutourism package gaining authentic learning, in context and also understand the culture of the host country.

Nevertheless, many participants of the edutourism packages who came to the host country to learn a new language may not be proficient in the language to express verbally how they felt about the experience. Fortunately, many EFL learners can express themselves fairly better in written form than in spoken form. One way to know how they felt about the edutourism programme is to analyse what they wrote about their experience.



**Figure-1.** Benefits of edutorusim to learners.  
Source: Rahmat et al. (2020).

The use of metadiscourse can be done to investigate the writer's effort to communicate with the audience by showing the direction and purpose of the text. Hyland (2004) introduced interaction and interactional metadiscourse to analyse what how writers interact with the audience and how the text produced can be interactional enough to convey intended message. In addition to that, the analyse of the use of metadiscourse can allow researchers to understand the attitude of the writer towards the issues presented.

### 1.2. Statement of Problem

Ideally, a good piece of writer is written through a linear progression of ideas. The writer uses strong, and suitable words to describe what the he/she intends to convey. A good writer Does not use words, phrases or sentences that can mislead the audience. However, according to Rahmat (2011) problems occur when writers either over or under utilize certain words and phrases. This may cause the wrong message to be conveyed. Hyland (2004) defined metadiscours as "writing about writing" and this analyse can be done to investigate the use of words and phrases and to see if what is written is conveyed to the audience. This analysis can also help researchers to understand the attitude of the writer towards the message being conveyed. In addition to that the research on metadiscours have been done on writes from India by Mahmood, Javaid, and Mahmood (2017). There have been studies on metadiscourse by writers from China (Lu, 2011) and also on Malaysian writers by Rahmat, Yunos, Syed Abdul Rahman, and Ibrahim (2015).

It would be interesting to continue the comparison across the globe.

### 1.3. Objective and Research Questions

This study is carried out to investigate the use metadiscourse on essays by Japanese undergraduates. Specifically, this study explores the use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse by the Japanese writers. This study hopes to find answers the following questions;

1. How can the interactive metadiscourse on essays by Japanese undergraduates be described in terms of transitions, frame markers and code glosses?
2. How can the interactional metadiscourse on essays by Japanese undergraduates be described in terms of hedges, boosters and self-mentions?
3. How does the use of interactive and interactional discourse differ across gender?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

This section presents information on communication, metadiscourse, past studies, and also the theoretical framework of the study.

### 2.2. Communication

Figure 2 presents the social-interaction model of writing by Nystrand (1989). This model assumes that both the writer and reader depend on the text to communicate. Both the writer and reader have their own set of external and internal forces to deal with. The external forces for the writer would be the availability of materials needed for writing and the technical aspects involved in the writing process. The internal forces that influence the writer would be the writer's ability in his/her content and rhetorical knowledge. The external forces of the reader would be factors such as the technical aspects of the text that hinders the readers ability to read the text. Internal forces for the reader would be the reader's reading proficiency, and background knowledge that may influence the understanding of the text.

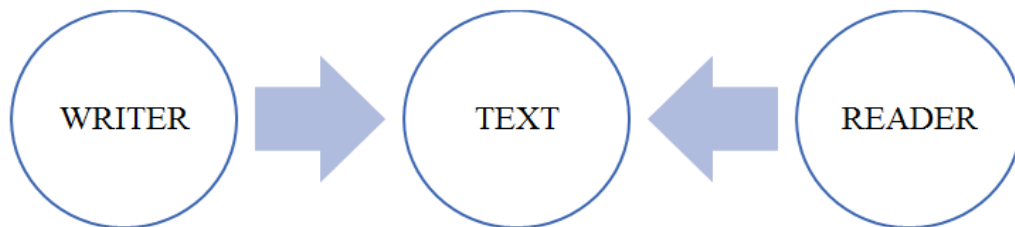


Figure-2. Social interactive model of written communication

Source: Nystrand (1989).

The internal aspects of the writer are the factors that enable the message to be communicated the reader through the text. This involves the writing ability or even the choice of writing style of the writer. This writing style is portrayed often through the use of metadiscourse.

Table-1. Metadiscourse Model.

Category	Function	Examples/signals
Interactive expressions	Help to guide reader through text	Resources
Transitions	Express relations between main clauses refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	In addition, but, thus, and finally, to conclude, my purpose is
Frame makers		
Endophoric makers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above, see Fig., in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	According to X, Y 1990, Z status
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meaning	Namely, e.g., such as, in other words
Interactional expressions	Involve the reader in the argument	Resources
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might, perhaps, possible, about
Boosters	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue	In fact, definitely, it is clear that
Attitude makers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately, I agree, surprisingly
Engagement makers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider, note that, you can see that
Self mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I, we, my, our

### 2.3. What is Metadiscourse?

Metadiscourse in essays is defined in several ways. Hyland (2010) reports that metadiscourse can help in social engagement between the writer and the reader. Hyland and Tse (2004) add that metadiscourse is “self-reflective linguistic material referring to the evolving text and to the writer and imagined reader of that text. It is based on a view of writing as social engagement and in academic contexts reveals the ways that writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitude towards both the propositional content and the audience of the text.” Hyland (2004) presents a detailed characteristics of Metadiscourse Table 1. Academic writing is not only content oriented, the writer communicates with the reader to convey messages. According to Al-Mudhaffari, Hussin, and Abdullah (2019) writers use metadiscourse to project themselves on text so that the content as well as the writer’s stance can be understood. In addition to that, Daciana (2014) reports that the use of metadiscourse helps to reinforce the writer and audience connection.

Table 1 presents the metadiscourse model by Hyland (2004). There are two types of metadiscourse -interactive and interactional discourse. In order to interact with the reader, the writer may use frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses. In addition to that, writers may use interactional expressions such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers or self mentions in the text.

Metadiscourse can serve several functions to both the writer and the reader. According to Safari (2018) writers can create structurally and communicatively well-organised and coherent text through the use of metadiscourse. He adds that metadiscourse is used to allow writers to interact with the readers through the use of language. In addition to that, Cheng and Steffensen (1996) and Abdi, Rizzi, and Tavakoli (2010) found that metadiscourse can enhance the writer’s awareness of the readers’ needs. It can also the sue of metadiscourse can help improve the quality of the text written. In relation to that, Hu and Cao (2011) conducted a study on the use of hedges and boosters. These two types of metadiscourse elements are considered important resources for writers to mark their epistemic stance, as well as help position reader-writer relationship.

### 2.4. Gender Identity in Metadiscourse

When it comes to the use of metadiscourse, gender may or may not influence the way the message is conveyed. The study by Amouzadeh and Zareifard (2019) investigated gender influence on the use of meta discourse during academic presentations among participants in an academic conference. The study compared the quantity and quality of interactional metadiscourse markers as expressed by male and female academics. The quantitative analysis showed a statistically significant difference in the use of interactional metadiscourse by male and female presenters. However, the qualitative analysis helped the authors to identify more similarities than differences. In point of fact, such factors as academic status and nativeness had caused the speakers to use different metadiscourse strategies. In another study, Yavari and Kashani (2013) found that there were no significant gender-based differences in the overall distribution of interpersonal resources in the four sections of the articles (introduction, literature review, methodology and results). Their study confirmed that writing differences are not gender-specific, but rather section-specific. For example, in the introduction write-up, it was discovered that female writers used more attitude markers, while male writers tended to use more evidential. On the other hand, female writers’ were more willing to make their discourse affective might be the result of their emotional or sentimental nature. It might be speculated that the greater use of adjectives as attitude markers can make the discourse interesting for readers so as to show the importance of their work. Female writers tended to be more concerned about paying attention to evaluation of discourse by means of attitudinal lexis When it comes to the Methodology section, -it was found that both types of writers showed higher frequency of the use of attitude markers (through different meanings of surprise, agreement, importance, and frustration) and self-mentions . This shows writer’s confidence about their commitment. Finally, in the results section, there were significant differences between male writers and their counterparts in the use of hedges.

## 2.5. Past Studies

### 2.5.1. Metadiscourse Analysis in Writing

Metadiscourse is reported to have many uses for the writer. The study by Linfeng (2012) examined the use of metadiscourse in seventh-grade English textbooks in Japan and China. Four textbooks were selected for metadiscourse analysis to determine what kinds of metadiscourse used to facilitate learner understanding of propositional content. The findings imply that although both Japan and China are categorized as EFL countries, their English textbooks display different characteristics in terms of metadiscourse usage, reflecting the different ways in which learning materials are designed and developed. In another study, Anwardeen, Ong, Gabriel, and Kalajahi (2013) analysed the usage of metadiscourse in argumentative writing by Malaysian college students. The aims of the study was to examine the frequency and distribution of metadiscourse used by the particular students in argumentative writing as well as to analyze the errors made by the particular students in using metadiscourse. The finding shows that Malaysian college students are more inclined to use interactive metadiscourse instead of interpersonal metadiscourse. Besides, the selected students are using less code glosses and stance indicator in their argumentative writing. Pungpen (1988) conducted a study to describe the patterns of the metadiscourse features in persuasive essays written by college students. The research investigated the quantity and types of the metadiscourse features used. The data used in this study was persuasive essays written by students who came for the English placement examination. They were written by the first year American college (NES) and the new foreign students (ESL) with high and low writing proficiency. The metadiscourse types were classified and examples were given so that the patterns of their use in the four sets of essays became evident. The metadiscourse errors were also identified and counted. This study indicated that the metadiscourse features can be used as an indication of writing proficiency since the high-rated texts, ESL and NES alike.

### 2.5.2. The Different Uses Metadiscourse

The use of metadiscourse has been shown to differ across culture. The study by Kobayashi (2016) investigated the differences in rhetorical preferences in L2 writings among different L1 groups. This study compared the use of metadiscourse markers in L2 essays and identified discourse devices used to distinguish different L1 groups. The essays were taken from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE). The study compared essays from six L1 groups (viz., Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Thai) based on the frequency of metadiscourse markers. The results suggested a substantial difference in the use of metadiscourse markers between East Asian groups (viz., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese) and Southeast Asian groups (viz., Indonesian and Thai). Specifically, the results indicated that there is a substantial difference in the use of metadiscourse markers between East Asian groups (viz., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Taiwanese) and Southeast Asian groups (viz., Indonesian and Thai). Each learner group displayed the specific characteristics of metadiscourse.

Pasaribu (2017) investigated metadiscourse markers in academic 20 essays written by male and female students. These data were analyzed based on the metadiscourse framework proposed by Hyland (2004). The findings revealed that both male and female writers employed more interactive markers than interactional markers due to the fact that both genders inserted transition markers frequently to guide readers through the texts. However, a cultural factor may influence the writers' tendency not to use transition markers showing arguments. Furthermore, although male students employed more interactional markers, female students used more markers in interactional sub-categories except self-mentions. Although it is assumed that women prefer to use a more personalized style, male writers in this study also personalized their essays by using self-mentions. One possible reason was that the use of these features tended to be more field-specific than gender-specific. The findings and discussion indicated that gender is not the only factor influencing the use of metadiscourse markers.

There have been reported research findings to reveal that gender differences influence the use of metadiscourse. [Abdu, Jin, and Nordin \(2016\)](#) investigated how interactional metadiscourse resources are used to articulate and construct gender identity among ESL learners in Malaysia. The main aim of the study was to provide language practitioners with empirical data of how gender is projected in the academic writings of ESL learners and to what extent learners' writings are affected by their gender. The data can then be utilised for the design and development of more effective academic writing courses in Malaysia. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed on the similarities and differences in the use of interactional metadiscourse resources, namely; hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mentions between male and female ESL learners involved in the study. The findings of the quantitative analyses showed no obvious differences in the writing style of female and male writers in the study, while the qualitative findings reveal slight differences in the way writers position themselves in the reader/writer interaction and in the expression of agreement statement.

In addition to that, there are evidence to show that gender does play a role in the use of metadiscourse. [Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi \(2015\)](#) explored the role of gender differences in applying Meta-discourse markers in abstract and discussion sections of articles written in English by native speakers of Persian. This comparative study was done to probe into the frequency number of hedge and booster in these two sections. To do so, 40 English research articles written by native speakers of Persian were chosen. Accordingly, [Hyland \(2004\)](#) meta-discourse taxonomy was employed to identify the list of hedges and boosters. The results of quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that gender differences played a significant role on utilizing these devices in the texts. It was also found that Iranian males were more inclined to use boosters in their academic writing while Iranian females prefer to use more hedges to express the information they supplied.

### 2.6. Theoretical Framework of the Study

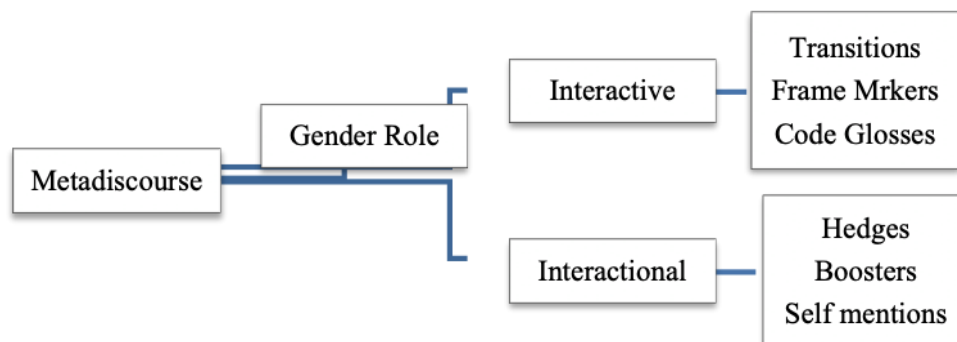


Figure-3. Theoretical framework of the study.

Figure 3 above presents the theoretical framework of the study. This study is done to find out if gender difference plays a role in the use of metadiscourse among writers. Past studies have revealed that there are differences in the use of interactive metadiscourse such as transitions, frame markers and code glosses. There were also previous studies revealing that there are differences in the use of interactional metadiscourse such as hedges, boosters and self-mentions.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This mixed mode study explored the use of metadiscourse across gender on reflective essays done describing their experience with Edutourism programmes organized by a public university in Malaysia. Data was randomly collected from 10 participants. The essays were analysed based on the categories of metadiscourse by [Hyland \(2004\)](#). This study only focused on three interactive discourses (transitions, frame markers and code glosses) and three interactional discourses (hedges, boosters and self-mentions). The method of data analysis is replicated from

the data analysis done by Tarayo (2014). The categories were coded based on Hyland (2004) labels. The analysis is done manually to ensure its validity. During the analysis, only words or expressions that have metadiscourse values were classified as metadiscourse. In order to achieve higher reliability in the manual analysis, two independent coders from the university was chosen. Both the researcher and coders conferred on the individual coding made and reached agreement in cases where opinion differed. Frequency and percentage counts were used to analyse the data.

#### 4. FINDINGS

This section discusses the findings. To ease understanding, the findings are presented in the form of answers to the research questions presented in the previous section.

##### 4.1. Overall Findings

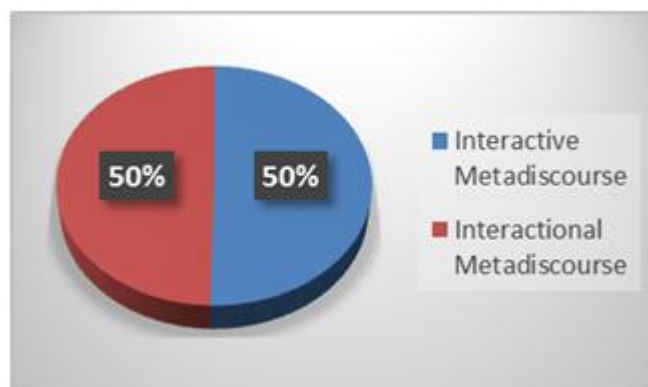


Figure-4. Overall frequency.

Figure 4 shows the overall frequency of the use of metadiscourse of all writers in the study. As a whole, the writers used both interactive and interactional metadiscourse equally. This is not in accordance with the findings by Anwardeen et al. (2013) who found that Malaysian college writers used more interactive than interactional metadiscourse. Perhaps the writers for this study wrote reflective essays compared to the study by Anwardeen et al. (2013) who studies college students writing argumentative essays. Argumentative essays need to be written in a more forceful manner compared to the tone in reflective essays.

##### 4.2. Interactive Metadiscourse

This section presents the answer to research question 1: How can the interactive metadiscourse on essays by Japanese undergraduates be described in terms of transitions, frame markers and code glosses? Findings are presented based on (a) transitions, (b) frame markers, and (c) code glosses.

###### (a) Transitions

According to Anwardeen et al. (2013) transition expressed semantic relation between main clauses. Transitions are often used to show similarity, exception (contrast), time, example, emphasis, place/position, cause and effect, additional support or evidence, and also conclusion/summary. Findings of this study refer to Table 2 revealed that the most frequent transition used was “additional support or evidence” (39.2%) and the least used is “emphasis” (1%).

Table-2. Frequency of use for transitions.

Transitions shown by the use of;	Word	Frequency Male	Frequency Female	Total Frequency
Similarity	So	3	4	
	also	3	2	
		6	6	12 (6.1%)
Exception/Contrast	but	5	9	
	however	3	3	
	In contrast		1	
	On the other hand		1	
		8	14	22 (11.2%)
Time	Now		1	
	For a start		1	
	Then		1	
	Before		2	
	gradually		1	
			0	6
Example	For example	2	2	
		2	2	4 (2.0%)
Emphasis	Of course	1		
	indeed		1	
		1	1	2 (1.0%)
Place / position	In	15	11	
	There	3	3	
	On	3	2	
	above	1		
		22	16	38 (19.4%)
Cause and effect	So	10	7	
	Therefore	3	2	
	Because	2	1	
	Hence	1		
		16	10	26 (13.3%)
Additional support or evidence	And	18	45	
	Also	3	4	
	In addition	1		
	Or	1		
	moreover	1		
	Too		1	
	Then		1	
	24	51	77 (39.2%)	
Conclusion/ summary	In conclusion	4	5	
	Sum up	1		
	Finally		1	
	5	6	11 (5.6%)	
ALL		84	112	196(100%)

Table-3. Frequency for frame markers.

Topic/Shifts		Frequency Male	Frequency Female	Total Frequency
Sequencing	Firstly/at first	4	6	
	Secondly/second	4	8	
	Thirdly/third	3	1	
	For a start		1	
	finally		4	
			11	20
Label Stages	In conclusion	3	4	
	Sum up	1		
		4	4	8 (19.5%)
Announce Goals	I would like to	1		
	In my case		1	
		1	1	2 (4.8%)
ALL		16	25	41 (100%)



*(b) Frame Markers*

According to Anwardeen et al. (2013) frame markers refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages in written texts. With reference to Table 3, the commonly used frame markers in this study are sequencing, label stages and announce goals. The most frequently used frame markers is “sequencing” (75.7%).

*(c) Code Glosses*

According to Anwardeen et al. (2013) code glosses helped clarify a proposition by defining, exemplifying, reformulating and simplifying it. With reference to Table 4, the most commonly used code glosses is “exemplifying” (75%). Excerpts from the data shows the male writers use of “for example” as;

[M3] “For example, there are many drivers..”

[M4] “For example, how we learn..”

The female writers’ used “such as” and “for example”;

[F3] “rely on other persons such as buddies..”

[F4] “For example, how we live..”

**Table-4.** Frequency for code glosses.

Type of Proposition	Example of proposition	Frequency Male	Frequency Female	Total Frequency
exemplifying	For example	2	1	3 (75%)
simplifying	Such as		1	1 (25%)
		2	2	4 (100%)

*4.3. Interactional Metadiscourse*

This section presents the answer to research question 2: How can the interactional metadiscourse on essays by Japanese undergraduates be described in terms of hedges, boosters and self-mentions? Findings is presented based on; (a) hedges, (b) boosters, and (c) self-mentions.

*(a) Hedges*

According to Hu and Cao (2011) hedging is a communicative strategy for increasing or reducing the force of statements . The most common hedges used by the writers in this study is “could” (50%). With reference to Table 5, the male writers from this study uses “could”, “believe”, “think” as a sign of hedging. Excerpts from the data for the male writers are;

[M1] “I could learn Malaysian culture..”

[M3] “They believe that this....”

[M4] “we could find out more findings...”

[M4] “I think PBL project could be useful...”

[M5] “the unique and unconventional actions by young students, I think.”

In addition to that, the female writer used “could “ and “may” in one sentence. Excerpts from this writer is;

[F3] “However, if we could research about....we may get more..”

**Table-5.** Frequency for hedges.

Function of Hedging	Type of hedging	Frequency Male	Frequency Female	Total Frequency
To reduce the force of statements	could	2	1	3 (50%)
	may		1	1 (16.7%)
	believe	1		1 (16.7%)
	think	1		1 (16.7%)
			4	2

*(b) Boosters*

According to Daciana (2014) boosters creates an emphatic impression in the reader even if many non-native writers of English refrain from using it. However, the competence of metadiscourse devices such as boosters is crucial in having native-fluency in academic writing. The most commonly used boosters is “so” at 57.15% (refer to Table 6).

Table-6. Frequency for boosters.

Category	Example of boosters	Frequency Male	Frequency Female	Total Frequency
BOOSTERS	In fact			
	Certainly			
	Definitely			
	It is clear that			
	Very			
	So	3	1	4 (57.1%)
	Indeed	0	1	1 (14.3%)
	Always	0	1	1 (14.3%)
	Actually			
	Undoubtedly			
	Obviously			
	Know			
	Prove			
	conclusively	0	1	1 (14.3%)
	3	4	7 (100%)	

*(c) Self-Mention*

According to Daciana (2014) self-mention is a powerful rhetorical strategy for constructing authorial identity in communication, in this case, written. The most frequently used self-mention is “I” at 52.7%. This is followed by “we” at 28.6%. The least used is “our” at 2.6%.

*4.4. Metadiscourse Across Gender*

This section presents the answer to research question 3: How does the use of interactive and interactional discourse differ across gender? This question will be answered by comparing the frequency of use of metadiscourse among the writers.

Table-7. Frequency for self-mentions.

Type of Self-mention	Example of Self-mention	Frequency Male	Frequency Female	Total Frequency
Constructing authorial identity	“I”	56	62	118 (52.7%)
	“me”	3	7	10 (4.5%)
	“we”	34	30	64 (28.6%)
	“my”	3	12	15 (6.7%)
	“our”	6		6 (2.6%)
	“us”	6	5	11 (4.9%)
		108	116	224 (100%)

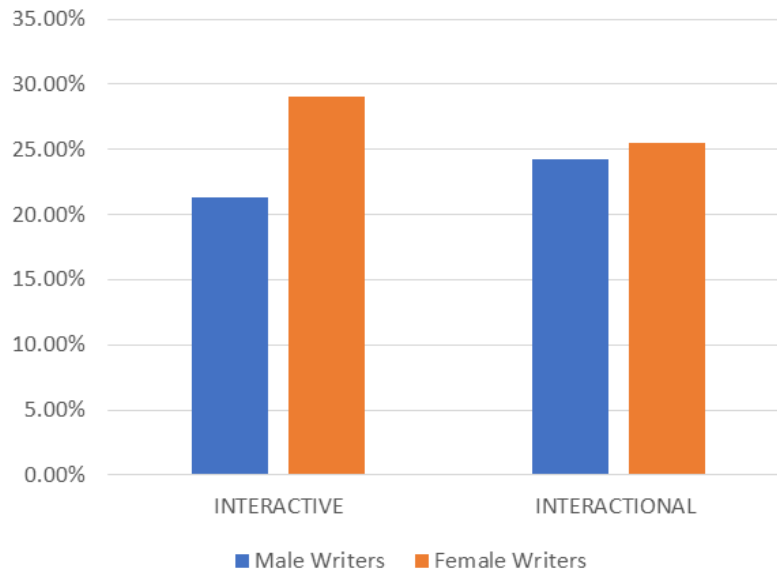


Figure-5. Interactive vs interactional across gender.

Figure 5 shows the comparison for interactive and interactional metadiscourse across gender. Female writers used more interactive and interactional metadiscourse compared to male writers.

Table 6 shows the frequency for interactive metadiscourse. Female writers (57.2%) were reported to use more transitions compared to the male writers (42.8%). When it comes to frame markers, again female writers (61%) used more than male writers (39%). The use of code glosses shows no difference across gender.

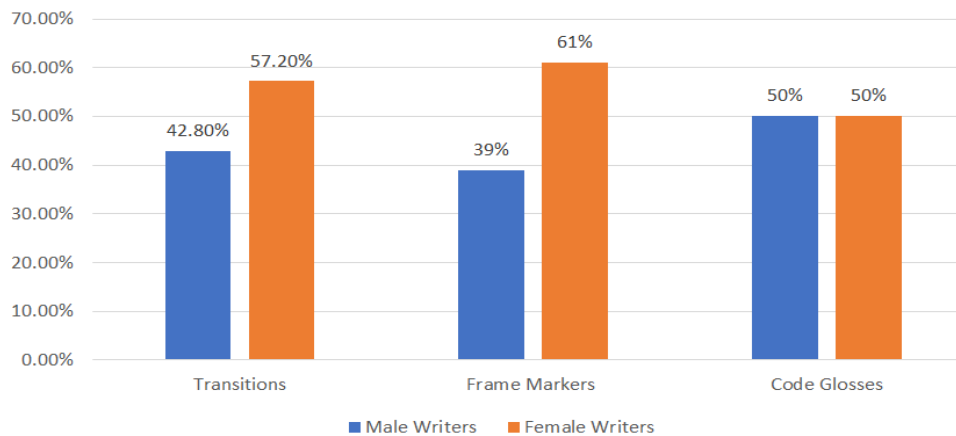


Figure-6. Frequency of interactive metadiscourse.

Figure 7 presents the frequency for interactional metadiscourse. Male writers (71.4%) used more hedges than female writers (28.6%). For boosters, female writers (57.2%) used more compared to male writers (42.8%). Finally, for self-mentions, female writers (51.8%) used more than male writers (48.2%). The study by Yavari and Kashani (2013) also revealed that both types of writers had high frequency in the use of self-mentions.



Figure-7. Frequency for interactional metadiscourse.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1. Summary of Findings

A summary of findings revealed that in general, writers show preferences of some types of interaction metadiscourse compared to others. For transitions, writers used more “additional support or evidence” and least for “emphasis”. When it comes to frame markers, writers in this study used “sequencing” the most and for code glosses, they used “exemplifying” and “simplifying” most often. For interactional metadiscourse, again, writers used some types more often compared to the others. For hedges, “could “ was often used. For boosters, “so” was very often used. In addition to that for self-mention, “I” and “we” were used often. This study has also revealed some gender differences in the use of metadiscourse. This finding is in accordance with the study by [Abdu et al. \(2016\)](#) who also found gender differences when it comes to metadiscourse. When it comes to interaction metadiscourse, female writers used transitions and frame markers compared to male writers. For interactional metadiscourse, female writers used more boosters and self-mentions compared to the male writers.

### 5.2. Suggestion for Future Research

It is interesting to note that in the past 10 years there has been an increase in the studies of metadiscourse. This research trend should be continued because findings in the use of metadiscourse reveal a lot about the way millennium writers interact with the text and also with their audience. More reaserch should be done to compare the use of metadiscourse across the globe, across cultures and also across disciplines.

### 5.3. About the Writers

Dr Noor Hanim Rahmat is an associate professor at the Akademy of Language Studies , Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. She teaches Writing for Professional Communication to masters students. She has presented at conferences, written journal articles, books and chapters in books on the area of academic writing, educational psychology and English as a Second Language proficiency.

NUR ANISAH TAN has 30 yrs of teaching experience. Teaching Japanese Language to foreigner, Teaching & Learning Japanese Language for Foreigner. Her research interest includes language proficiency and language teaching and learning.

Choong Pow Yean teaches Japanese language Lecturer at Jabatan Bahasa Asia & Eropah (Japanese Unit), Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language and she also has a Master's Degree in Modern Language. She is working closely with The Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur which is supporting the Japanese education in Malaysia. She is currently working with two universities in Tokyo Japan to organize the Oversea Internship Program of Japanese Language.

Mohamad Hanis bin Yahaya is an English language lecturer at English Language Department, Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), with 9 years of teaching experience. He graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) from UiTM and Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Currently, he is teaching English Language Proficiency (ELC) courses in UiTM Dengkil, an examiner for Majlis Peperiksaan Malaysia, resource team member for ELC course, and an active committee member of various summer school programmes organised by Akademi Pengajian Bahasa.

Dr Wararat Whanchit is a lecturer of English at the Department of Languages and Culture, School of Liberal Arts, Walailak University. With her personal interests in linguistics and applied linguistics, she focuses her research work on EFL writing, English language teaching, learner corpora, and cross-culture translation.

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