



WCLTA 2013

Metadiscourse Use in Thesis Abstracts: A Cross-cultural Study

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate cultural variations in the use of metadiscourse between Turkish and USA postgraduate students' abstracts in MA thesis written in English. The taxonomy was borrowed from Hyland (2005). The corpora in the present study comprise a total of 52 thesis abstracts written in English from the department of English Language Teaching, 26 thesis from USA students and 26 from Turkish students. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to analyse the texts in the corpora. The analysis revealed that there were some cultural differences in the amounts and types of metadiscourse. The incidence of evidential, endophorics, code glosses, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions were fewer in Turkish students' master thesis abstracts. However, Turkish students used metadiscourse transitions, frame markers and hedges more than USA students. Pedagogical implications were provided in light of empirical data.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of WCLTA 2013.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, cross-cultural study, abstract;

Introduction

When we write, we usually write at two levels. The first level contains propositional content that is the subject of the text, while the second level is metadiscourse that helps readers read, organise, understand and interpret the writing (see Vande Kopple, 1985). More specifically, metadiscourse refers to linguistic cues which help the reader to organize, interpret and evaluate the information provided (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993). These cues can be realised by a variety of linguistic forms and be used as an effective interpretation of the written discourse

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(i.e., such as, means, however). Thus, as a significant component of academic writing, metadiscourse facilitates communication with the readers to foster comprehension of the texts. Authors use various linguistic signals to project themselves throughout their texts for a better comprehension of their writing, i.e., attitude markers such as ‘surprisingly’ or ‘unfortunately’ to show their positions. Relevant literature suggests that effective use of metadiscourse is significant for authors to reach the target reader (see Gillaerts & Van de Velte, 2010; Hyland, 1998; Longo, 1994) because metadiscourse is considered a “self-reflective linguistic expression” with its strategic focus on text, the writer and the reader (Hyland, 2004, p. 133). Indeed, the language used in academic writing tends to present creativity skills and build credibility to reach the target audience.

It is notable that as a lingua franca, English is used in academic contexts for scientific publication purposes to situate scholars, academics, postgraduate students themselves in the world of science. Therefore, academic texts have been examined considerably in the literature (for contrastive approach see Dahl, 2004; Mauranen, 1993; for expert academic writing see Hyland, 2010; Onder, 2012). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is scant attention on the use of metadiscourse with a comparison of native and non-native speakers’ academic writing. Considering this gap in the literature, in the present study, we intend to investigate whether metadiscourse changes across cultures when English is used by native speakers (America) and non-native speakers (Turkish), and, if so, what the variations tend to be. Specifically, this study is designed as a cross-cultural study involving MA students in Turkey and the United States.

2. Methodology

The study employed qualitative and quantitative analysis with a focus on frequency counts and manual text analysis of a corpus of 52 thesis abstracts written in English by Turkish and American students in the last five years who are doing MA in English Language Teaching/Linguistics. The total number of the words in USA corpus was higher than Turkish corpus, 12,101 and 7,046, respectively. To alleviate the problem, we calculated the frequency of each metadiscourse type per 10,000 words.

The literature covers various metadiscourse taxonomies (see Adel, 2006; Crismore, Markkanen, Steffensen, 1993; Mauranen, 1993). Given the significance of academic writing, various taxonomies were suggested (e.g., Adel, 2006; Crismore, et al., 1993; Hyland, 2005) with some overlapping features. This study adopts the taxonomy Hyland (2005, p. 49) developed (see Table 1). The taxonomy suggests that metadiscourse is comprised of two types of classification as interactive and interactional resources (Thompson, 2001). According to Hyland (2004), interactive resources allow the writer to help the reader to correctly interpret the text by managing information flow. On the other hand, interactional resources allow the author to communicate an authoritative and credible persona by means of the interaction of the text and reader.

Table 1. Functions of metadiscourse in academic texts

Category	Function	Examples from the corpora
Interactive		
Transitions	connections between steps in an argument	thus, although, and, however
Frame markers	discourse acts, sequences or stages	the purpose of the study
Endophoric markers	information on other parts of the text	the first chapter
Evidential	information from other texts	X's (1980) observations about
Code glosses	additional information	such as, including, e.g.
Interactional		
Hedges	subjectivity of a position	possible, may, seem
Boosters	expressing certainty	clear, somewhat, suggest

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