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## **THE USE OF METADISOURSE IN SPOKEN INTERLANGUAGE OF EFL LEARNERS: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS**

### **Abstract:**

Considered as one of the indispensable parts of spoken communication, metadiscourse is defined as the self-reflective linguistic devices used to organize discourse and signal speakers stance towards the listener and/or towards the content of the communication without adding anything to the propositional content. Insights into the significance of metadiscourse as a means of facilitating communication, supporting position and increasing comprehension have led to an upsurge of interest in researching the use of metadiscourse from a variety of perspectives focusing mainly on written language, albeit with little concern for spoken language. Learner language studies have also tended to investigate the metadiscourse focusing mostly on written interlanguage, leaving the spoken language by learners mostly unexplored. This study investigates metadiscoursal features in Turkish EFL learners' spoken interlanguage within the framework of Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis based on the two well-known interlanguage corpora (i.e. LINDSEI-TR and LOCNEC) as the data source. Findings of the study are discussed and presented in connection with pedagogical implications for spoken English.

### **Keywords:**

EFL learners, contrastive interlanguage analysis, learner corpora, metadiscourse

**JEL Classification:** I29

## 1 Introduction

Metadiscourse refers to ways writers or speakers project themselves in their text or speech to interact with their interlocutors. It is based on a view of writing or speaking as a social engagement, which underlies the fact that successful communication is always engaged in social impact -the effect it produces on readers or hearers who are the audience for the communication-(Ädel, 2006; Crismore & Abdollehzadeh, 2010; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland, 2004, 2010). Involving writers/speakers and their interlocutors in mutual acts of comprehension is principally realized using metadiscourse in language production. The use and knowledge of metadiscourse, therefore, is considered to be an essential part of developing communicative competence in a language (Hyland, 2005).

Insights into the significance of metadiscourse as a means of facilitating communication, supporting position and increasing comprehension have led to an upsurge of interest in researching the use of metadiscourse from a variety of perspectives with a focus mainly on written language (Dahl, 2004; Lorés-Sanz, 2009; Mur-Duenas, 2007, 2011; Sheldon, 2009; Vande-Copple, 1997), albeit with little concern for spoken language though metadiscursive phenomena is an indispensable part of speech (Ädel, 2006; Mauranen, 2010). In a similar vein, learner language studies have also tended to investigate the metadiscourse centring upon written interlanguage (Ädel, 2006; Burneikaitė, 2008, 2009, Hyland, 1998, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995), leaving the spoken language by learners mostly unexplored.

Given the background sketched out above, this study sets out to explore the use of metadiscourse in the speech of learners of English. Specifically, the present study aims to compare metadiscoursal features in spoken language by advanced learners of English whose first language is Turkish with comparable spoken data by native speakers (NS) of English with the purpose of contributing to the literature of metadiscourse with a special focus on learner English.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 The concept of metadiscourse

The term metadiscourse has entered into the literature after Zellig Harris in 1960s who proposed a way of understanding language in use focusing on a writer or speaker's efforts to guide the receivers' perceptions of a text or speech. Together with increasing interest in linguistics and applied linguistics, the concept has been further developed and has turned into an umbrella term covering a number of discoursal features ubiquitous in speech and writing influencing interlocutor's reception of the discourse (Hyland, 2005; Ifantidou, 2005).

Being a fuzzy concept as it is easy to accept in principle but difficult to determine its boundaries (Ifantidou, 2005; Swales, 1990), metadiscourse has been defined variously. According to Vande-Copple (1997), metadiscourse refers to linguistic devices that people use “not to expand referential material but to help their readers connect, organize, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes toward that material” (p. 1). This attributes a non-propositional status to metadiscourse distinguishing it from truth-conditional discourse items, which is echoed in Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen, (1993) as “linguistic material in text, written or spoken, which does not add anything to the propositional content but that is intended to help the listener or reader organize, interpret or evaluate the information given” (p.40). Following Ädel (2010) metadiscourse is defined in this paper “as reflexive linguistic expressions referring to the evolving discourse itself or its linguistic form, including references to the writer-speaker qua writer-speaker and the (imagined or actual) audience qua audience of the current discourse” (p.75).

This standpoint of metadiscoursal language postulates a number of properties regarding the identification of metadiscursive uses.

- Metadiscourse is a fuzzy category as it poses difficulties in terms of categorizing language units
- Metadiscourse is a functional category rather than a syntactic one as the same syntactic unit may serve as a metadiscourse marker in some point but not in other one.
- Metadiscourse markers are multifunctional since any metadiscoursal unit may perform more than one function in the same discourse.
- Metadiscourse is context-dependent as without the context in which the language is used, it is difficult to distinguish a metadiscourse item from a non-metadiscourse one (Ädel, 2006).

Based on the properties above, the relevant literature proposes a set of criteria to be used in ascribing metadiscoursal function to any language units (Ädel, 2006, 2010). Accordingly, four main criteria, which are also considered in the present study as well, are explicitness, world of discourse, current discourse, speaker / writer qua speaker / writer and audience qua audience.

The explicitness criterion refers to writer/speaker’s explicit and intended commentary on his ongoing discourse. It refers to the writer/speaker’s self-awareness of the discourse through explicit wording. The world of discourse criterion makes a distinction in whether the language unit is related to the discourse itself or it is about the real world. Adel (2010) states that in order to categorize any language use as metadiscursive, “it should be discourse internal rather than discourse external” (p.75). The criterion current discourse states that metadiscourse refers to the current text, current speaker and current interlocutor rather than other texts or speakers or receivers. Put it differently, what determines whether a language unit is metadiscursive or not is the present context in

which the current addressers and the current addressees are referred to in their roles as discourse participants. Finally, the last feature of metadiscourse language, speaker/writer qua speaker/writer and audience qua audience, covers the references that point to the writer/speaker of the current discourse in the role of writer/speaker rather than as experiencers in the real world or in other texts.

## 2.2 Previous research on metadiscourse

As a highly dynamic topic in discourse research, the concept of metadiscourse has informed a number of studies. The research literature on metadiscourse, however, is not unified, and a closer look at relevant literature reveals three main strands in metadiscourse studies: (a) metadiscourse use in written English, (b) comparison of metadiscourse between English and other languages and (c) metadiscourse use in spoken language.

In the line of the research on metadiscursive practices in written English, various genres have been examined (e.g. academic research articles (Gillaerts & Velde, 2010; Hyland, 1998; Silver, 2003), postgraduate dissertations (Bunton, 1999), science texts (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990), textbooks (Hyland, 1999; Moreno, 2003), advertising texts (Fuertes-Olivera, Velasco-Sacristan, Arribas-Bano, & Samaniego-Fernandez, 2001), business letters (Vergaro, 2002) and editorials (Le, 2004).

When scrutinized in detail, the extant studies unfold interesting patterns of metadiscursive use. Regarding metadiscourse as a central pragmatic concept, Hyland (1998) investigated metadiscourse markers in 28 research articles, and found very frequent use of metadiscourse (i.e. 373 instances in each article). In another textual analysis, Hyland (1999) explored metadiscourse markers in 21 textbooks and found 405 instances concluding that the relationship between metadiscourse and its rhetorical context forms an important part of successful academic writing. Fuertes-Olivera et al., (2001) focused on the metadiscursive devices in slogans and headlines. Analysing samples from a typical magazine, the researchers found out that both interpersonal and textual metadiscourse are significant to convey a persuasive message through an informative text. Gillaerts and Velde (2010) investigated the use of metadiscursive language in research article abstracts throughout a 30-year period. The researchers report interesting increasing and decreasing use of some metadiscourse patterns in the course of time among the abstracts in the field of applied linguistics. Examining the language use in an ESL context, Hyland (2010) analysed master and doctoral dissertations by advanced English learners through a corpus of four million words. His analysis revealed that metadiscourse markers are very frequent in postgraduate writing (i.e. 184,000 cases in the four million words) implying that effective academic writing is closely connected to reader-oriented use of appropriate linguistic resources including metadiscourse markers that help writers to represent themselves as they scaffold and present their arguments.

Another dominant strand in metadiscourse research is comparative studies involving either the comparison of native users vs non-native speakers (NNS) of English or cross-linguistic comparison of English with other languages. Blagojevic (2004), for example, depicted the metadiscoursal similarities and differences in academic prose written in English by English and Norwegian native speakers. Analysing a total of 30 research articles, the researcher concluded that although the overall pattern of metadiscursive language does not differ greatly between two language groups, Norwegian speakers of English have certain preferences in designing their written discourse (e.g. Norwegian learners are more inclined to hedge their statements, or they are less willing to announce their presence in the text). This implies a degree of unfamiliarity with the English academic norms and style. In a similar vein, Ädel (2006) compared the metadiscourse use in written texts by Swedish learners of English and by native English and American speakers. The data for her study come from the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) for learner English and its comparable native corpus, the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNES). The results demonstrate that there are notable differences both quantitatively and qualitatively in the use of metadiscourse between ICLE and LOCNES corpus.

Within a cross-linguistic framework, Dahl (2004) explored metadiscourse in research papers written in three different languages (i.e. English, French and Norwegian). The findings of the study show that French uses much less metadiscourse markers compared with English and Norwegian. The results underlies interesting cultural impacts on the writing style implying that English and Scandinavian tradition is for the author to be clearly visible in the text whereas French tradition seems to be based on an invisible and indirect author presence (Dahl, 2004). Another cross-linguistic analysis was conducted by Mur-Duenas (2011) who compared the metadiscourse use in articles written in English and Spanish. She reports that metadiscourse features are significantly more frequent in English articles than in Spanish articles, which is discussed in connection with socio-cultural differences in both contexts. In a recent study, Junqueira and Cortes (2014) investigated metadiscourse across English and Portuguese in book reviews. They used a corpus of 300,000 words across two languages. The findings reveal that metadiscourse features are considerably higher in English corpus than Portuguese corpus.

Representing the third strand in metadiscourse research, analysis of spoken metadiscourse has remained limited in number (Ädel, 2010; Mauranen, 2001, 2002; Thompson, 2003; Wei-yan, 2014). Mauranen (2001) examined the academic lectures from a metadiscoursal standpoint categorizing metadiscursive language into interactive, monologic and dialogic subtypes of spoken discourse. She concludes that academic discourse tend to be highly reflexive with a myriad of metadiscursive expressions functioning to structure on-going speech. Along the same line, Thompson (2003) focused on the text-structuring metadiscourse and intonation in organizing academic lectures. The researcher argues that metadiscourse markers are important tools used to help audience

“form a coherent mental map”. Ädel (2010) designed one of the most comprehensive studies on spoken discourse proposing a purposive taxonomy for the identification and analysis of metadiscourse markers, which served as a base for the present study as well. Aiming at comparing spoken and written discourse, Ädel (2010) distinguishes between two main functions that metadiscursive language performs: metatext and audience interaction which are further divided into sub-categories. The results of her study shows that both written and spoken language is abundant with metadiscourse markers with varying functions and types for both genres.

To conclude, the literature on metadiscourse as depicted above clearly shows that metadiscourse as a relatively recent concept is a promising area to discover. As stated by Mauranen (2010) it “is a distinctive characteristic of language, ubiquitous in our speech, and it deserves close attention from linguists”. Although it has been investigated from various point of views, the relevant literature still calls for further exploration of the topic particularly within the scope of spoken language (Ädel, 2006, 2010; Hyland, 2005), not to mention spoken interlanguage. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyse Turkish EFL learners’ use of metadiscourse in their spoken English in comparison with the metadiscourse practices of native speakers. What follows is the description of the corpus and method used in the present study.

### 3 The Study

#### 3.1 Corpus and Method

Within the framework of Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA) (Granger, 2009), this study seeks to answer the question “What differences and similarities are there between the use of metadiscourse by EFL learners and use of metadiscourse by native speaker of English as evidenced in spoken corpora in terms of frequencies and functions?” Research data consisted of two comparable corpora as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Corpora used in the study

	Corpora	Participants	Size
Learner	LINDSEI-TR (B Turns)	58 Turkish University Students	63,924
Reference	LOCNEC (B Turns)	50 Native University Students	118.553

LINDSEI-TR is a spoken English interlanguage corpus compiled as a component of the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI). It is made up of informal interviews with an average length of 12 minutes for each participant who

are considered to be advanced learners of English based on the external criteria. The interviews are divided into three parts: set-topic talk, free discussion and picture description, and recorded and transcribed in line with the predefined guidelines (for a fuller description, see Kilimci, 2014). In this study, only the language produced by the learners (i.e. B turns as represented in the transcription) was subjected to analysis. LOCNEC (The Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation) is the comparable corpus to the LINDSEI as it was built considering the same principles as LINDSEI, which makes two sets of data highly homogenous in terms of tasks, contexts and interview durations. As shown in Table 1, total size of two corpora under investigation is 182,477 words.

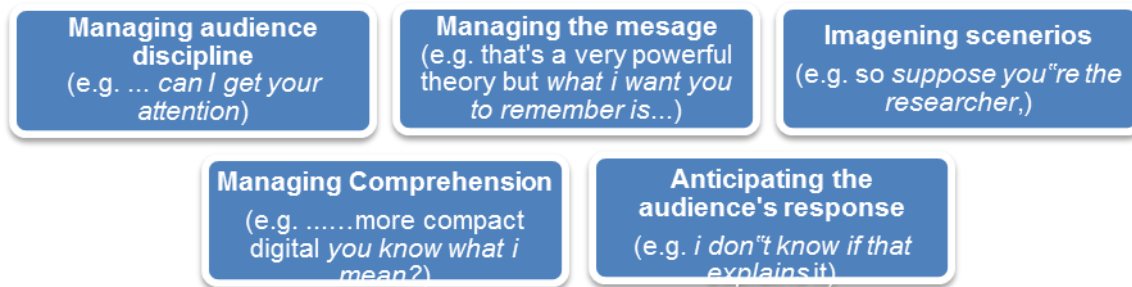
Regarding the method, this study is comparative in nature as it sets out to identify differences and similarities in the use of metadiscourse in learner and native language. It follows the corpus linguistics methods in the retrieval of potential examples of metadiscourse, which is followed by manual analysis of the obtained data to winnow down to a list of possible items considering the “highly contextual nature of metadiscourse”(Ädel, 2010).

Following Ädel (2010), the investigation is limited to personal metadiscourse expression using the pronouns (i.e. I, you, we with their oblique and possessive forms) as search terms. In the identification of metadiscursive language units, a set of criteria described above was taken into consideration. Application of these criteria resulted in eliminating certain examples including personal pronouns since not every instance of pronouns could be regarded as metadiscourse expression. Only the instances of personal pronouns that were used to direct the audience attention to the discourse and to help them to interpret the discourse were regarded as metadiscourse expressions. The following extracts from LOCNEC and LINDSEI-TR respectively clarify the distinction between metadiscourse (in italics) and non- metadiscourse use of the instances:

(1) <B> [ and also the most depressing because everyone dies in the[i:] end so I thought oh this is gonna be fun <X> you know what I mean . so we went into Manchester from college <\B>

(2) <B> you know about <foreign> K P S S </foreign> <overlap /> they don't know <laughs> </B>

After distinguishing metadiscoursal uses from non-metadiscoursal ones, the remaining instances were categorized through a functional taxonomy devised by Ädel, (2010). The taxonomy primarily divides the metadiscoursal language into two functions: metatext and audience interaction. Metatext is further divided into three categories: metalinguistic comments, discourse organization and speech act labels. Audience interaction contains the language use for references to the audience. Due to the space limitations, this paper reports only the category of references to the audience that is divided into five subcategories as illustrated in figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Sub-categories of References to the Audience

Source: Adopted from Ädel (2010)

Each sub-category shown in Figure 1 represents different metadiscourse functions. Managing comprehension refers to the language use with the purpose of checking interlocutor's understanding of the input. Managing audience discipline encompasses language items used to address directly to the interlocutor to instruct, compliment on or reprimand for a behaviour. Anticipating the audience's response involves the language use through which the speaker predicts the possible reactions of the interlocutors against the information presented. Managing the message is related to emphasizing the main points of the discussion. Finally, imagining scenarios is regarding the language use demanding the interlocutor to suppose something in the shared world of discourse (Ädel, 2010).

## 4 Findings and Discussion

Based on the discussion above, LINDSEI-TR representing EFL learners' interlanguage and LOCNEC representing native English were analysed quantitatively using AntConc, a freeware corpus analysis tool (Anthony, 2014). One point to be noted here is that metadiscourse devices are difficult to identify the boundaries, as they are closely associated with the context. It is a fuzzy term as "no taxonomy or description will ever be able to do more than partially represent a fuzzy reality" (Hyland, 2005 p.58). Even, in some cases, same expression could serve more than one function, which makes the quantitative analysis more demanding.

As a first step in the analysis, frequency of all instances including personal pronouns and their oblique and possessive forms in both corpora were determined. Then, the frequency of metadiscourse units were calculated by eliminating the non-metadiscoursal units manually. The frequencies obtained were normalized per 10.000 words. As the corpora employed are of different size, normalized frequencies would facilitate the comparison (Ädel & Mauranen, 2010). Table 2 displays the distribution of metadiscourse units regarding audience interaction.



**Table 2.** Distribution of metadiscourse units (audience interaction) in NNS and NS spoken language

	LINDSEI-TR		LOCNEC	
	Raw Freq.	Normalized Freq.	Raw Freq.	Normalized Freq.
Total number of instances including pronouns	3680	575.51	9461	798.03
Total number of metadiscursive expressions including pronouns (only audience interaction)	572	89.45	1810	152.67

As seen in Table 2, the use of personal pronouns is quite frequent in both corpora. This is hardly surprising when the content of the interviews through which the corpora were gathered is taken into consideration. Two of the three tasks in both corpora include a set topic to talk in which respondents were asked to choose one of the topics given (e.g. an experience you've had which has taught you an important lesson; a country you have visited which has impressed you etc.) and a free conversation task in which the interviewee was asked various questions (e.g. how is the at the university; what are your future plans etc.) and required to make comments answering the question. The content of the questions clearly shows that the talk was an informal one. Therefore, frequent use of personal pronouns is justified as personal pronouns are regarded as the typical of informal speech (Buysse, 2010).

When the instances of metadiscourse units in NNS speech are compared with those in NS speech, it was observed that native speakers use considerably more metadiscursive expressions than non-native speakers. Similar findings have also been reported in the relevant literature (Deng, 2007; He & Xu, 2003; Wei-yan, 2014). Although not all of these studies focused directly on metadiscoursal units, they still provide significant observations regarding the organization of the discourse by NNS. He and Xu (2003), for example, have found that EFL learners of different backgrounds use small words (e.g. I mean) to organize their discourse less than native speakers. In his study, Deng (2007) investigated interactional sequences and found out that NNS have a tendency to underuse interactional elements in their speech. In a recent study, Wei-Yan (2014) focused on the metadiscourse units in Chinese learners of English, and concluded that NNSs have a poor metadiscoursal performance in their spoken English.

Apart from the overall occurrences of metadiscourse units regarding audience interaction, NS and NNS speech was analysed in terms of the subcategories in the taxonomy proposed by (Ädel, 2010). Table 3 presents the results.

**Table 3.** Distribution of metadiscourse units (audience interaction) according to the functional subcategories

	LINDSEI-TR		LOCNEC	
	Raw Freq.	Normalized Freq.	Raw Freq.	Normalized Freq.
Managing comprehension/channel	158	24.71	342	28.84
Managing audience discipline	—	—	—	—
Anticipating the audience's response	—	—	—	—
Managing the message	347	54.28	1067	91.56
Imagining scenarios	67	10.48	401	32.25

As shown in Table 3, metadiscoursal units are mainly distributed to the functional categories regarding managing comprehension and managing the message. No metadiscoursal device was found in the category of managing audience discipline. This is hardly surprising because the managing audience discipline could be applicable to the one-to-many conversational settings. The conversational setting in which the language data used in this study was compiled was in the form of one-to-one interview. In such a setting, collocutor would not need to manage the audience discipline because the interviewer as the unique audience was purposefully present to listen and record the interviewee's speech. Likewise, one-to-one format and question-answer based format of the data collection method justifies the fact NSs and NNSs did not use metadiscourse expressions to anticipate the audience response. Since this study analysed only the B turns in both corpora which refer to the language used by the interviewees who were not in the position of asking questions, it was not expected for the interviewees to use language devices that function to anticipate the audience response. Although the interviews used to gather the corpora under investigation seem to be dialogic by definition, they could be claimed to be monologic in essence because of the research-oriented approach to the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Similar findings have been found in the study by Zare and Tavakoli (2016) who observed no instances of metadiscourse expression in the categories of managing audience discipline and anticipating the audience response in monologic speech.

As table 3 shows, managing comprehension which happens when the collocutors want to make sure that they are on the same ground is frequent in bot NS and NNS speech. Managing the message that is used to emphasize the core message is the most frequent category in both corpora. This is not surprising as it is "typical of monologues to make use

of this function” (Zare & Tavakoli, 2016 p.10). The frequent use of this function could be accounted for the power relations between the interviewer (i.e. university lecturer in this case) and the interviewee (i.e. university students in this case). Ädel, (2010) notes that managing the message is frequently used when the addresser and the addressee are not of equal relations. This finding, however, is in contrast with the findings in Zare and Tavakoli’s (2016) who found out that speakers do not frequently use this function in monologues.

Finally, when the use of metadiscourse expressions by NS and NNS was compared, it was observed that NNS are not frequent users of these language devices. The category of managing the message, in particular, implies that NNS show a weaker tendency to organize their discourse to manage the message to be conveyed. This scarcity could be linked to the EFL learners’ being unaware of the significance and the roles of the metadiscourse expression in spoken language.

## 5 Conclusion

Focusing on the spoken English by Turkish EFL learners and native speakers, this study has found that NNSs have a weaker tendency to employ metadiscourse expressions regarding audience interaction in their speech. This result may be linked to the neglect of metadiscourse properties of English in instructional settings.

One implication arising from this is that more emphasis should be laid on metadiscourse while teaching English to the learner. Awareness-raising activities could make an initial step in this direction. When the learners grasp the significance of organizing discourse, it would be easier for them to internalize the language devices. Additionally, special attention should be paid to teaching the non-propositional functions of commonly used language items (e.g. you know, you see etc.). Explicit instruction on these metadiscourse markers could be helpful in drawing learners’ attention. Finally, use of authentic materials for speaking activities could be suggested for teaching metadiscourse markers.

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