Metadiscourse Markers Revisited in EFL Context: The Case of Iranian Academic Learners' Perception of Written Texts

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Abstract

Moving in line with the postulation that metadiscourse (MD) markers help transform a dry and tortuous piece of text into a coherent and reader-friendly one, the researchers in the current study attempted to investigate the effect different metadiscourse markers might have on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts. To this end, 120 undergraduate English students were given three different texts chosen from the most common textbooks in BA, along with their doctored versions (all MD-removed, interactive-removed, and interactional-removed). Each text duo was then accompanied by an 8-item questionnaire following Ifantido's (2005) lead. The findings, overall, were indicative of the positive role of metadiscourse markers in bringing about EFL learners' ameliorated text perception. Furthermore, data analysis via ANOVA and LSD tests revealed that texts with both interactive and interactional resources had more effect on learners' perception. Moreover, it was found that interactive and interactional resources had more or less the same effect on learners' reactions to texts. To sum it up, in line with the findings of the present study further evidence is garnered in favor of the postulation holding that metadiscourse markers bring about an increased amount of coherence and reader-friendliness in texts.

Keywords: Interactional Markers, Interactive Markers, MD Markers, Perception

1. Introduction

The traditional belief that academic writing is purely objective, impersonal and informational, and is mainly after disguising the author and dealing directly with facts is now prone to confutation (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Indeed, the discourse analysts' interest in recent years is gradually shifting from the traditional focus on ideational dimension of discourse to the ways it functions interpersonally. This view sees the role of academics as not simply producing texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but also as using language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations (Hyland, 2005b). In simpler terms, the authors' principal responsibility is that of drawing the addressees in, and trying to motivate them to follow along. Hence, to communicate effectively, the authors must be able to anticipate their receivers' expectations, requirements and recourses, and try to engage them in their texts and affect their understandings of them. In line with this novel trend, writing and speaking are viewed as social and communicative processes going on between writers and readers or speakers and listeners (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005a).

The concept of textual interactivity in the domain of academic written discourse, in general, and English for academic purposes, in particular, has come to be scrutinized by a growing body of research striving to determine what linguistic and communicative tools the novice researchers must acquire to become fully socialized into their research community. In tandem with this line of thinking, a writer is required to pay due heed to not only what is being conveyed but also how well it is being conveyed. Accordingly, conscious awareness of the rules and conventions that govern the process of scholarly writing and communication is a prerequisite for efficient written/oral production and perception of academic discourse. With regard to the fact that

metadiscourse markers are known as the most salient discourse organizers bringing about increased levels of awareness and engagement in addressees, an in-depth study of their role in text/discourse analysis might help come up with noticeable breakthroughs concerning textual/discursive production and perception.

Metadiscourse is typically used as an umbrella term to include a heterogeneous assortment of cohesive and interpersonal features which help relate a text to its context through assisting readers to connect, organize, and interpret materials in a way preferred by the writer and with respect to the understandings and values of a particular discourse community (Hyland, 1998). Rather than being a mere stylistic device, metadiscourse, as Mao (1993) contends, takes shape with regard to the rhetorical context in which it is used and the pragmatic function(s) it fulfills. In L2 instructional contexts, it has been posited that an awareness of metadiscourse is particularly useful in helping non-native speakers of English with the difficult task of grasping the writer's stance while reading challenging authentic materials (Cammicottoli, 2003). Bruce (1989) suggested that this ability (metadiscursive awareness) enables non-native learners to better follow the writer's line of reasoning in argumentative texts.

Though several metadiscourse taxonomies have thus far been put forth (e.g., Crismore, Markakanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland, 2005a), Hyland's (2005a) categorization is thought to feature as a more theoretically robust and analytically reliable model of metadiscourse. In his model which tries to build upon some earlier models of metadiscourse, Hyland (2001) assumes two main categories for metadiscourse – interactive (instead of textual) and interactional (instead of interpersonal) – following the demarcation made by Thompson (2001) to acknowledge the organizational and

evaluative features of interaction. According to Hyland interactive resources are concerned with the ways through which the writer organizes the discourse by paying due heed to the readers' knowledge level, capacity and expected needs. Interactional resources, on the other hand, are utilized to involve the readers in argument by making them aware of the author's standpoint towards both propositional information and readers themselves (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

In spite of the fact that so many researchers have strived to investigate the function of metadiscourse markers and their subcategories in a number of different contexts and genres (e.g., Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Dahl, 2004), few have been of an experimental nature, had contributions to language pedagogy, and tried to tease out the effect of metadiscourse on the students language skills (Parvaresh & Nemati, 2008; Cammicottoli, 2003; Jalilifar & Alipoor, 2007). Though numerous theoreticians and scholars have shown great propensity in probing the significance of metadiscourse knowledge within the context of academic writing, the true effect(s) this crucial segment of discourse might have on learners' perception of written texts seems not to have been given sufficient heed. Thus, in an attempt to somehow bridge the said gap in the literature on metadiscourse, the current study seeks to pinpoint how Iranian EFL learners react to the presence/absence of both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in written texts. The significance of the present study also lies in the fact that it opts for a different genre, context of study, and model of analysis. To be able to come up with satisfactory answers apropos the overriding study postulations the following research questions were formulated:

1. Do metadiscourse markers have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts?

2. Do interactive markers have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts?

3. Do interactional markers have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts?

4. Is there any significant difference between the effect of metadiscourse markers as a whole and interactive and interactional markers in isolation on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts?

5. Is there any significant difference between the effect of interactive and interactional markers on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

This study benefited from the participation of 120 male and female sophomore and junior EFL students majoring in English language and literature as well as translation, in a range of different venues – Faculty of humanities and letters in Urmia University, Azad university of Maraghe, and Payam-e-Noor university of Mahabad and Oshnavieh. All the participants were 20–25 years of age, with females enjoying the outright majority (n=66.1%). The partakers of the study were mainly juniors and seniors, the reason being that the lengthened amount of exposure to academic discourse was thought to bring about increased levels of sensitivity and awareness as to the academic language, structure, coherence, and style/tone. In other words, seniority of learners was conjectured to be in direct relationship with their awareness of the various uses of metadiscourse markers.

2.2. Instruments

The major instruments used for data collection procedure were as follows:

2.2.1. Texts

Three different texts with the average length of 200 words were selected for the current investigation. All texts were extracted from the most popular course books in the field of TEFL and applied linguistics for undergraduate level (BA degree). Throughout the selection process due care was given to including only those texts that entailed virtually all the categories of metadiscourse markers, with each text encompassing something around 16-20 elements of metadiscourse.

Text 1

The first undoctored text was adopted from *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* by *Diane Larsen-Freeman* published in 1986 by *Oxford University Press*, plus its doctored (interactive-removed) version which was developed by the researchers through removing only interactive elements specifically for the purpose of this study (see appendix A). As was mentioned earlier, Hyland's (2005a) interpersonal model was adopted in this study as a working framework in metadiscourse identification process, due to some shortcomings of previous classifications put forth by other theoreticians. Other alternative incentives urging the researcher to opt for Hyland's (2005a) taxonomy were its being recent, simple, clear, and inclusive as well as its being built upon previous models. Table 1 illustrates the interactive elements of metadiscourse which were removed from text 1.

Table1. Interactive Elements Removed from Text 1

Line	Interactive Elements
2	Transition (however)
3	Endophoric Marker (have seen in this lesson)
5	Code Gloss (for example), Transition (or – conversely)
6	Code Gloss (for instance)
7	Code Gloss (parentheses), Evidential (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983)
8	Transition (thus)
9	Transition (however, also, and)
10	Code Gloss (parentheses), Transition (however)
11	Transition (or)
12	Code Gloss (parentheses)

Text 2

The second undoctored text was selected from the book *Success in English Teaching* written by *Paul Davis* and *Eric Pearse*, and doctored by the researchers, this time through the omission of interactional elements of the text (see appendix A). Table 2 depicts the interactional markers removed from text 2.

Text 3

The last text was an undoctored extract chosen from *Jim Scrivener's* book entitled *Learning Teaching*, and published by *Macmillan Books for Teachers*. The doctored version of this text was furnished again by the researchers through omitting all the metadiscourse elements, both interactive and interactional, and by resorting to Hyland's (2005a) model (see appendix A). All deleted metadiscourse markers in text 3 are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 2. Interactional Elements Removed from Text 2

Line	Interactional Elements
1	Self Mention (we)
3	Attitude Marker (the selection of text is important), Hedge (as far as possible)
4	Hedge (might), Booster (really)
5	Attitude Marker (potentially, interesting)
6	Engagement Marker (you), Attitude Marker (need to)
7	Booster (really)
8	Attitude Marker (it is relatively easy)
9	Engagement Marker (your)
10	Engagement Marker (you), Hedge (may), Attitude Marker (need to)
11	Engagement Marker (you), Booster (will), Attitude Marker (need to)
12	Booster (only)
13	Hedge (generally)

Table 3. All Metadiscourse Elements Removed from Text 3

Line	All Metadiscourse Markers (Interactive & Interactional)
1	Booster (really), Attitude Marker (normally, quite), Transition (but), Hedge (often)
2	Transition (as well)
3	Code Gloss (etc.), Hedge (may)
4	Transition (and), Hedge (possibly)
5	Code Gloss (say)
6	Code Gloss (etc.)
7	Frame Marker (This is a brief description of an example simulation)
9	Frame Marker (at the start)
11	Hedge (probably, about), Engagement Marker (you)
12	Booster (obviously), Frame Marker (later)
13	Transition (and), Frame Marker (at the end)

2.2.2. Questionnaire

The second instrument employed in the current research was a questionnaire which comprised a set of 8 open-ended questions intended to be used along

with the texts mentioned above, in order to determine the subjects' perception of two different versions of the same text, with and without metadiscourse elements (see appendix B). This questionnaire was adopted from Ifantido (2005), and its questions were purposefully phrased (and rephrased) both in 'lay' and more 'technical' terms, in an attempt to cross-check subjects' reactions. Questions number 1 and 5 asked students to imagine themselves as the writer and show their preference. Question number 7 asked subjects in an objective form to choose one of the items that indicated their attitude towards the metadiscourse markers, whereas the other questions were about their views of the text as readers in terms of need for effort, effectiveness in communicating message and successfulness in terms of relevance of text to their cognitive processing.

2.3. Design and Procedure

The current study is a survey-type study that falls within the category of descriptive research. It sets out to explore whether metadiscourse markers have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' perception of written texts. In the present study, through analyzing some extracts from undergraduate textbooks based on Hyland's (2005a) interpersonal model of metadiscourse and administering a questionnaire devised by Ifantido (2005), the researchers elicited the reaction of junior and senior English students in a number of Iranian universities, toward doctored (modified version of the text resulting from the omission of metadiscourse markers) and undoctored (authentic version of the text with its metadiscourse markers included) texts.

In order to achieve the principal objectives of the study, at the very beginning 10 most popular textbooks taught in English Departments of various Iranian universities in the field of English language teaching and *Applied*

Linguistic were selected through informant nomination approach and with the help of 10 English university lecturers and several English students. In the next stage, three extracts from each book with the average length of 200 to 280 words were selected, and their metadiscourse elements according to Hyland's (2005a) model were picked out. This provided the researchers with a databank of 30 extracts. For ensuring the accuracy of analysis, extracts were analyzed three times and at the end they were checked by an MA holder of TEFL who was familiar with metadiscourse analysis. Then, three texts with the same length of 200 words and highest amount of needed subgategories of metadiscourse were selected out of the whole databank.

At the outset of the study the doctored version of text 1 whose interactive elements were removed and then its undoctored version were administered to 120 EFL English students in four different universities of *Urmia, Maragheh, Mahabad* and *Oshnavieh*. The students were asked to read both doctored and undoctored versions of the text and complete the ensuing questionnaire. Then, on the same session students were given text 2, in which the interactional elements were deleted, along with its undoctored form and were asked to answer the questionnaire and express their attitudes towards the texts. Finally, after an 8-day interval two versions of text 3 (A and B), were administered and students were required to complete the related questionnaire. Eventually, the questionnaires were analyzed and selection of text A was determined as negative attitude and selection of text B as positive.

2.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used, and the significance level was set at .05. A distribution of the frequency of positive perception of undoctored texts was used for each questionnaire item.

Of course, a whole frequency of '+metadiscourse' text preference in each questionnaire was calculated by considering 1 point for choosing text B and 0 point for text A. Thus, what the researchers came up with was the frequency comparison of each item in each questionnaire, and of course the whole frequency of each questionnaire. It seemed useful to calculate the mean scores of each questionnaire between minimum of 0 and maximum of 8. Yet, the Analysis of Varience and LSD test were also run to compare the means of text scores and establish their statistical significance.

3. Results

What the reader is presented with in the following sections is the description of findings of the study and answers to the research questions which mainly try to find the possible effect(s) of metadiscourse and its subcategories on EFL learners' perception of written texts.

3.1. MD Markers as a Whole and Iranian Learners' Perception of Written Texts

The first purpose of the current study was to explore the effect of metadiscourse markers, both interactive and interactional, on learners' perception of written texts. In other words, the first research question dealt with the attitudes of EFL learners towards texts under the effect of metadiscourse elements. It was hypothesized that metadiscourse markers have no effect on learners' perception of written texts. Table 4 summarizes the results of the frequency of positive and negative attitudes of students towards doctored and undoctored texts in answering each item of the questionnaire.

Table 4. Subjects' Reactions to +/– Metadiscourse as a Whole in Texts

Questions	Negative (–metadiscourse)		Positive (+metadiscourse)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Preference as a writer	35	29.17	85	70.83
2. Preference as a reader	25	20.83	95	79.17
3. Easy reading	29	24.17	91	75.83
4. Less effort to read	40	33.33	80	66.67
5. Less effort to write	70	58.33	50	41.67
6. Effective communication	18	15.00	102	85.00
7. *Role of metadiscourse items	17	14.17	103	85.83
8. Actual or expected relevance	23	19.17	97	80.83

* a) was considered as negative b) as positive

As is shown in table 4, there is a clear preference for the '+metadiscourse' text from both standpoints, writers' (70.83%) and readers' (79.17%) (Questions 1 and 2). *Ease of reading* was tested in general terms with Question 3 and more specifically with Question 4, where the *'less effort'* factor was mentioned and further specified in terms of *less time* and *less mental effort*. Again, 75.83% and 66.67% of the participants speculated that the '+metadiscourse' text needs less time to read and is easier to understand, despite the greater number of words involved. Question 5 raised the particularly interesting issue of academic metadiscourse from the writer's perspective; 58.33% of the subjects agreed that they would have to spend less time and effort to produce the '– meradiscourse' text because, as they admitted, it would save them time and effort in working out appropriate metadiscourse items. From the non-native speakers' viewpoint, this piece of finding seems to be the expected type of reaction. Approximately 41.67% of the subjects considered the '+metadiscourse' text easier to write and justified their answer by claiming that metadiscourse expressions help the author organize his/her writing. This may suggest that on the issue of '*writing*

effort', results might be different for native speakers who may be using metadiscourse expressions to save writing 'effort', rather than adding to it, as non-native subjects of this experiment have reckoned.

Question 6 revealed that a total of 85% viewed the '+metadiscourse' text as more effective in communicating its message. In response to Question 7, 85.83% considered the metadiscourse expressions as *essential to effective and effortless comprehension* of ideas. Only 14.17% thought that such expressions are a matter of *style*, and hence *non-essential* to comprehension of the ideas communicated. No one had any other sort of ideas about these elements and so nobody chose part (c). At the end, a scenario based on the idea of 'students conducting research' was considered and students were asked to choose the text that would satisfy their expectations in terms of 'actual or expected relevance'. Again, 80.83% opted for the '+metadiscourse' text. Overall, the survey revealed an impressive appreciation of metadiscourse from both the readers and writers' perspectives. It is evident in Figure 1 that the percentage of positive reaction to '+metadiscourse' text in all questions except question 5 was higher than '– metadiscourse' text.
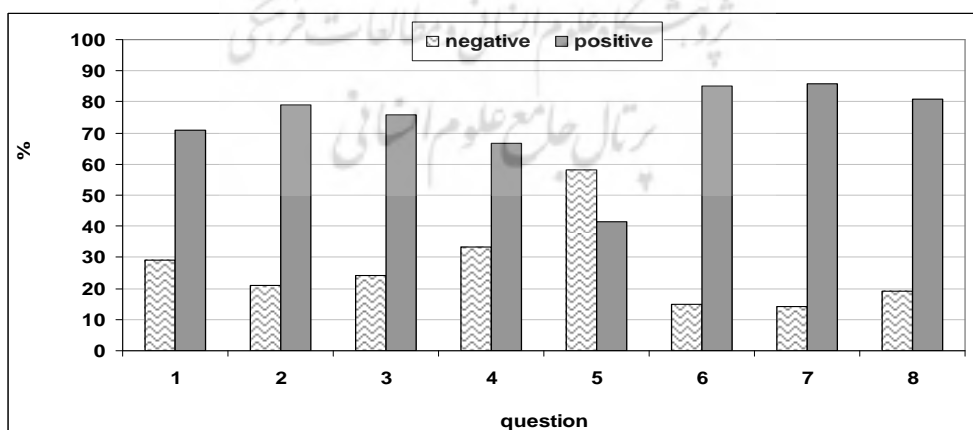

Figure 1. Subjects' Reactions to +/– Metadiscourse as a Whole in Texts

Statistical analysis of the participants' responses yielding these results provided evidence, on the basis of which the null hypothesis was prone to rejection and hence the postulation that the removal of metadiscourse items from the text hinders its comprehensibility, clarity and friendliness received further support. Altogether, the obtained results are thought to be conducive of the claim that writers are interested in producing an optimally attractive text, one that will communicate the intended meanings and interpretations with the minimum mental effort required. In addition, readers are supposed to be interested in productive and economical readings of texts, i.e., texts that yield as many cognitive effects as possible with the minimum possible mental effort required to achieve those effects. The results, therefore, confirm that metadiscourse items in academic texts transform the dry and difficult texts to coherent and friendly ones. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, then, it can be concluded that participants prefer texts containing metadiscourse elements, as such texts can provide a suitable situation for students to read and write successfully.

3.2. Interactive Resources and Iranian Learners' Perception of Written Texts

In line with the second hypothesis, interactive elements as a main category of metadiscourse markers were posited to have no significant effect on EFL learners' attitudes towards written texts. In order to investigate this null hypothesis and its relevant research question, the frequency of subjects' selection of text A (negative view of MD) or text B (positive view of MD), in response to questionnaire items was specified.

Table 5. Subjects' Reaction to + Interactive vs. − Interactive Texts

Questions	Negative		Positive	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Preference as a writer	51	42.50	69	57.50
2. Preference as a reader	48	40.00	72	60.00
3. Easy reading	51	42.50	69	57.50
4. Less effort to read	58	48.33	62	51.67
5. Less effort to write	81	67.50	39	32.50
6. Effective communication	36	30.00	84	70.00
7. *Role of metadiscourse items	40	33.33	80	66.67
8. Actual or expected relevance	41	34.17	79	65.83

* a) was considered negative and b) positive

As is indicated in table 5, results revealed that 57.5% of participants preferred the undoctored text in response to Question 1. In addition, 60%, 57.55%, and 51.67% of subjects had positive attitudes towards the undoctored text in response to Questions 2, 3, and 4, respectively, in which the subjects were asked to put themselves in the readers' shoes. Also, in response to Question 5, 67.5% of participants believed that they would have to spend *less time* and *effort* to produce the '− interactive' text. The answers to Questions 6 and 8 indicated that 70% of subjects agreed that '+interactive' text is more effective in communicating the intended message, and 65.83% viewed '+interactive' text as the provider of successful input for their cognitive process. The statistical analysis of Question 7 showed that 66.67% of participants believed interactive markers were essential to effective and effortless comprehension of ideas. In contrast, 33.33% viewed them as *decorative*, *stylistic*, and *non-essential* to comprehension (The results germane to the second research question of the study are briefed in the form of a diagrammatic illustration in Figure 2 below).

Considering the obtained results which were based upon the subjects' attitudes, the second null hypothesis of the research was also rejected, and it was revealed that interactive elements were helpful in forming a coherent text through relating individual propositions to each other (Hyland, 1998). As interactive elements help create logical and temporal relationship between parts of the text, subjects were able to easily comprehend the text and viewed them as essential elements for organizing texts for readership.
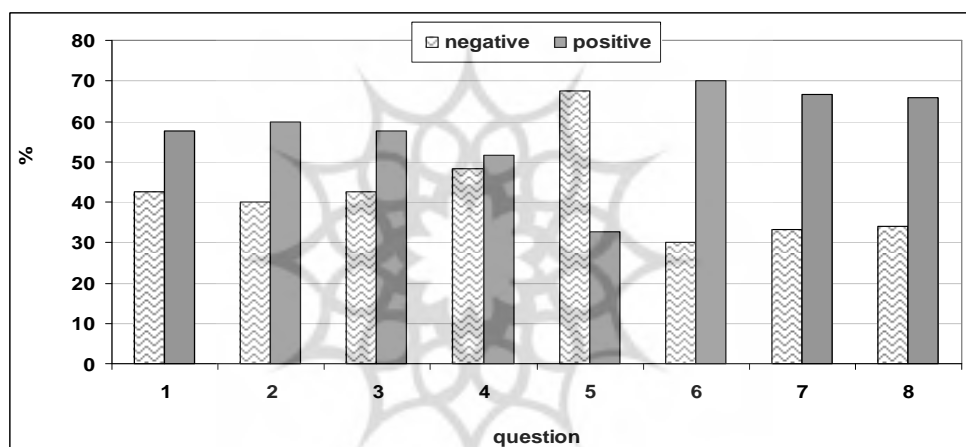

Figure 2. Subjects' Attitudes Regarding Interactive Resources

3.3. Interactional Resources and Iranian Learners' Perception of Written Texts

The third research question in the current study was concerned with the frequency of Iranian EFL learners' positive attitude towards +interactional texts. In other words, the researchers sought to find out how frequently subjects might prefer text B (the undoctored version) in response to 8 different questions listed in the relevant questionnaire. It was hypothesized that

interactional markers had no significant effect on learners' perception of written texts.
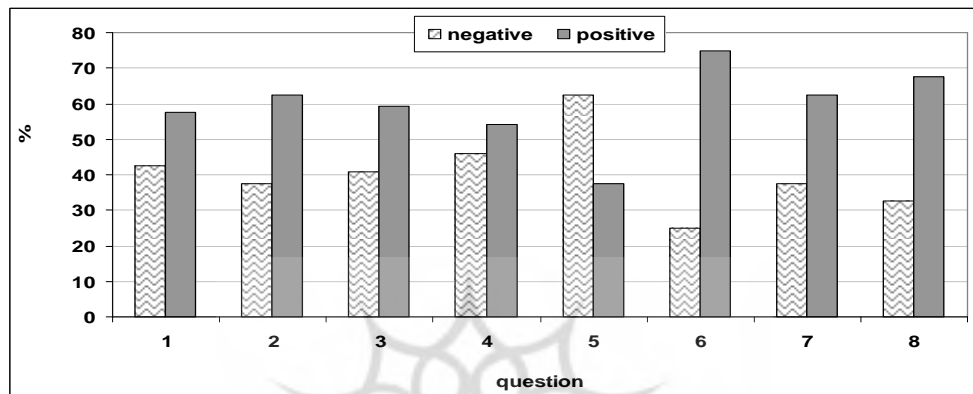

Figure 3. Subjects' Attitudes Regarding Interactional Resources

In order to investigate the third null hypothesis, the frequencies of positive and negative answers were determined. Figure 3 demonstrates the total distribution of attitudes towards interactional markers employed in the academic texts. Also, as table 6 below shows, participants preferred '+interactional' text from both *writer's* (57.5%) and *readers'* (62.5%) standpoints (Questions 1 and 2). *Ease of reading* was addressed in Question 3, where 59.17% preferred text B (the undoctored version), and this issue was tested more specifically through Question 4 by considering '*less effort'* factor, detailed in terms of utilizing *less time* and *mental effort.* The obtained frequency determined that 54.17% selected text B as a text that needs less effort to read. Likewise, the responses to Question 5 again disclosed the participants' preference for the doctored text to write, because of the less amount of effort needed for finding appropriate interactional markers.

Table 6. Subjects' Reaction to +/– Interactional Texts

Questions	Negative		Positive	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Preference as a writer	51	42.50	69	57.50
2. Preference as a reader	45	37.50	75	62.50
3. Easy reading	49	40.83	71	59.17
4. Less effort to read	55	45.83	65	54.17
5. Less effort to write	75	62.50	45	37.50
6. Effective communication	30	25.00	90	75.00
7. *Role of metadiscourse items	45	37.50	75	62.50
8. Actual or expected relevance	39	32.50	81	67.50

* a) was considered negative and b) positive

The outcome of Questions 6 and 8 in order demonstrates that 75% and 67.5% of participants agreed that the undoctored text was more *effective in communicating the message* and more successful in relating the input to the subjects' *cognitive process*. Analyzing the responses to Question 7 shows that 62.5% of participants considered these elements *essential* to effective and effortless comprehension of text ideas. These results provide further evidence for the rejection of the third null hypothesis.

It can be concluded that participants are aware of the role of interactional markers and acknowledge the author's seminal role in providing friendliness by engaging the reader and showing his/her stance through different subcategories of interactional resources. The obtained results indicate that elimination of these items makes the text difficult and dry for the reader, in that it provokes the feeling of having a very big gap between the writer and the reader, and consequently readers are liable to come across some sort of difficulty in getting the writer's intended meaning.

Overall, the findings of the current research lead us to acquiesce the belief that by processing different metadiscourse expressions, the reader will be able to derive relevant conclusions about the text being produced and will form (i) relevant contextual implications with less processing effort than in the absence of metadiscourse expressions, and (ii) interpretations that could have not been derived in the absence of metadiscourse expressions.

3.4. Metadiscourse Markers as a Whole vs. Interactive and Interactional Resources in Isolation

In order to come up with satisfactory answers with regard to the fourth research question of the present study, the frequency of '+metadiscourse' text preference in each item of three text types (with the omission of interactive, interactional and both types of metadiscourse markers), and also the total frequency of the subjects' positive attitudes towards '+metadiscourse' texts were compared (The results of this comparison are depicted in Tables 7 and 8). As the results show, the frequency of text B preference in all the items of questionnaire 3 related to text 3, from which all the metadiscourse markers had been removed, was higher compared with the two other questionnaires. Moreover, the total preference of undoctored version of text 3 (73.23%) was clearly higher than text 1 (57.71%) and text 2 (59.48%). Figures 4 and 5, presented on the ensuing page, will help better reveal the results of this comparison.

Table 7. Comparison of the Subjects' Preference for Interactive and Interactional Markers vs. MD Markers as a Whole

Questions	General MD	Interactive	Interactional
1. Preference as a writer	70.83	57.50	57.50
2. Preference as a reader	79.17	60.00	62.50
3. Easy reading	75.83	57.50	59.17
4. Less effort to read	66.67	51.67	54.17
5. Less effort to write	41.67	32.50	37.50
6. Effective communication	85.00	70.00	75.00
7. *Role of metadiscourse items	85.83	66.67	62.50
8. Actual or expected relevance	80.83	65.83	67.50

Table 8. Comparison of Subjects' Total View of Interactional, Interactive, and All MD Resources

		General MD	Interactive	Interactional
Negative	Frequency	257	406	389
	Percent	26.77	42.29	40.52
Positive	Frequency	703	554	571
	Percent	73.23	57.71	59.48
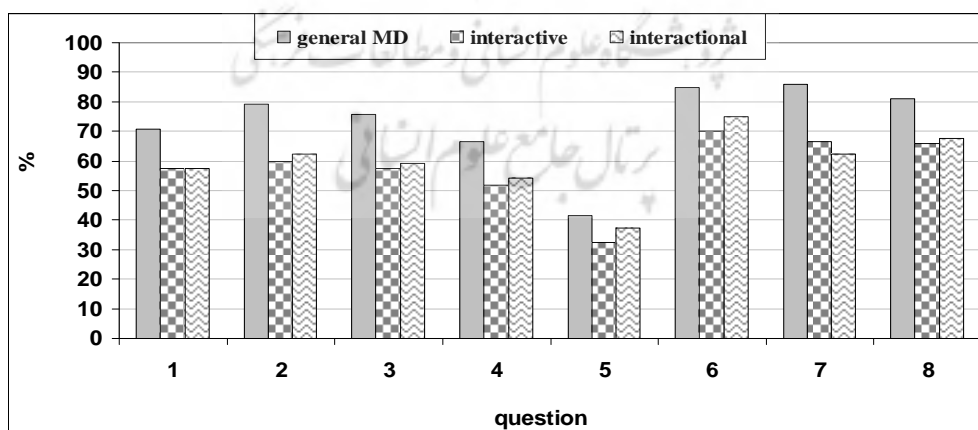
Figure 4. Comparison of Interactive, Interactional, and MD Markers as a Whole
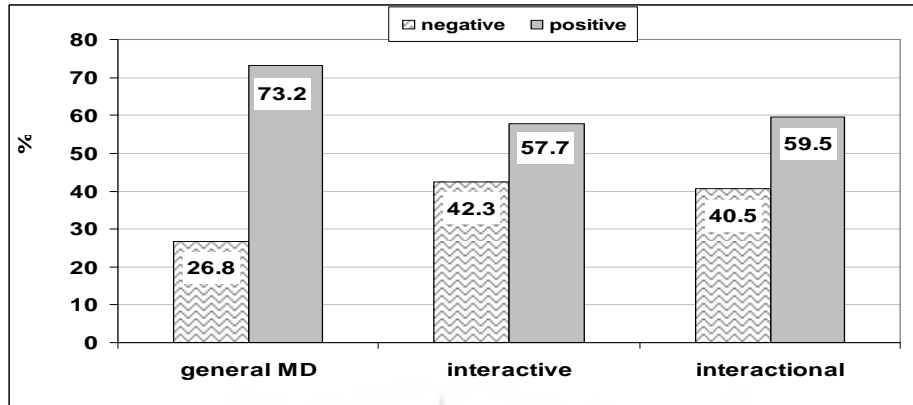
Figure 5. Comparison of Total View of Interactive, Interactional and All MD Resources

In line with the gained outcomes it can be maintained that both interactive and interactional elements are essential in terms of helping the reader understand the text and interact with the writer. Though omitting just one of the categories from the text might create some problems as to the comprehensibility and transfer of writer's attitudes, it does not render the text as utterly unintelligible as does the removal of all metadiscourse markers from the text, because when simply one of the categories is removed, the other will help the reader, but in the absence of all MD markers there isn't any cue for the reader to get the message and relate the input to his/her cognition. Thus, it can be concluded that these two main categories play a complementary role for one another in making academic texts coherent. To gain further evidence for the existence of difference between the effectiveness of three categories, the mean for each group was determined and one way ANOVA was also run on the results of the questionnaires given to the participants (see Table 10). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations obtained for each of the three texts utilized in the present study, are also displayed in Table 9 and Figure 6 below.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Three Texts

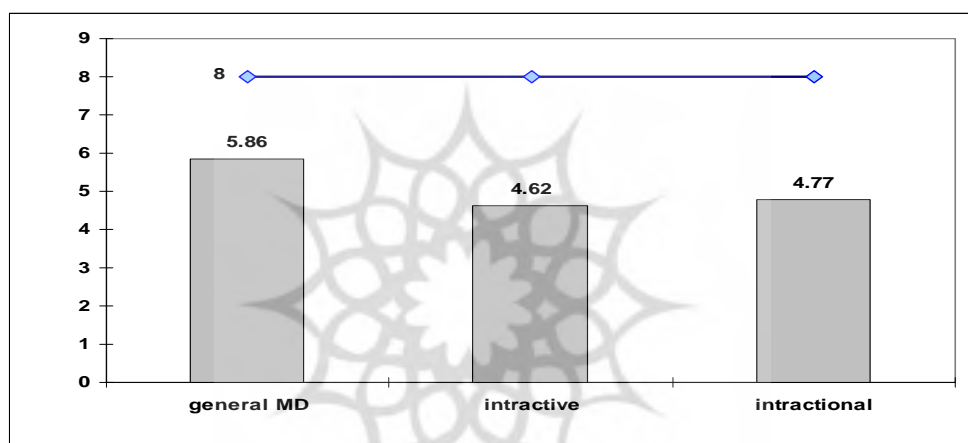|	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
General MD	120	5.86	2.41	0	8
Interactive	120	4.62	3.11	0	8
Interactional	120	4.77	3.00	0	8
Total	360	5.08	2.90	0	8

Figure 6. Mean Scores of Three Texts

As is shown in Table 9, the mean score relevant to the omission of all metadiscourse elements was 5.86, and the one for omission of interactive elements equaled 4.62. The removal of interactional MD markers, however, was found to have a mean of 4.77. Figure 6 helps provide a more lucid elucidation of the difference between three groups. The ANOVA table below (Table 10) contains within and between group descriptive statistics, F value, and significance for between group results. It gives a precise sketch of the results of the Analysis of Variance for comparing 3 questionnaires. Faced with the p value of .000 that is below .05, and with F equaling 6.75, it can be maintained that there is a drastically significant difference between the three categories of scores.

Table 10. The Result of ANOVA Test for All the Study Questionnaires

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	110.24	2	55.12	6.75	.00
Within Groups	2914.43	357	8.16		
Total	3024.66	359			

All of the above-mentioned results provide some evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis holding that there is no difference between a text which has no metadiscourse markers and the one with either interactive or interactional markers. Besides all the said approaches for clarifying the existence of difference, Fisher's LSD test was also run, through which the means of the three texts were compared. As is shown in Table 11 difference between mean score of text 3, and that of 1 and 2 equaled 1.24 and 1.09, respectively, statistically depicting a significant difference. But the result of comparing the mean scores of text 1 (interactive-removed) and text 2 (interactional-removed) was .15 being statistically non-significant ($p > .05$), and hence the fifth hypothesis had to be confirmed. Consequently, it might be concluded that no significant difference exists between the subjects' perception of texts with either interactive or interactional markers. In other words, participants are thought to be of the view that both of these metadiscourse markers are almost equally important and effective in comprehending academic texts.

Table 11. LSD Test Run for Comparison of Mean Scores

(I)	(J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
General MD	interactive	1.24	.37	.00	.52	1.97
	interactional	1.09	.37	.00	.37	1.82
Interactive	general MD	-1.24	.37	.00	-1.97	-.52
	interactional	-.15	.37	.68	-.88	.58
Interactional	general MD	-1.09	.37	.00	-1.82	-.37
	interactive	.15	.37	.68	-.58	.88

4. Discussion

To reiterate the principal upshots gained in the current study, the frequency of positive attitude towards the '+metadiscourse' texts demonstrated that Iranian EFL learners have positive attitude towards the texts which include metadiscourse markers, and consequently read and understand them much more eagerly. The findings also indicated that the amount and variety of metadiscourse markers in a text affect the comprehensibility and reader friendliness of a text. The results also showed that reaction of Iranian students to interactive and interactional elements in texts is the same and they feel that both of them are essential for communicating the message of the text. Therefore, students have a positive reaction to a text that includes both categories of metadiscourse markers, and consequently understand it much better.

Altogether, the findings of the current study are in line with those of Ifantido (2005) – in terms of the effectiveness of metadiscourse resources in the learners' general impression of the texts, though the model, context and genre

of her study are not the same as those implemented in the present study. In addition, the present findings are consistent with those of Crismore's (1990) study, in which hedges were found to have a positive effect on readers' attitudes towards reading a given text.

The subjects' positive attitudes towards undoctored texts might be because the doctored ones were difficult to understand and subjects could not follow the main point of the texts. The distortion in comprehension might well be ascribed to the dearth of textual metadiscourse that is responsible for organizing the propositions and managing quite extended stretches of discourse (Mc Carthy, 2005, cited in Jlilifar & Alipoor, 2007) in the text.

Finally, the subjects' positive attitudes towards +metadiscourse texts as a reader can further be explained by Hyland's (1998) claim that the use of metadiscourse markers allows writers to intrude in their texts to signal their communicative intentions, and affects the ways these intentions are understood by their readers. The students can interpret the flow of information easily by the use of metadiscourse markers representing the reactions and functions of different parts of texts, authors' attitudes, implicatures and presuppositions, shifts of topic, and so on (Crismore, 1989, cited in Amiryousefi & Eslami Rasekh, 2010).

5. Conclusion

All in all, the results of this study lend further support to the idea that metadiscourse could have a positive influence on setting up reader-writer relationship. Especially for academic texts, which typically aim at conveying highly specific, strictly technical and unequivocally relevant information, metadiscourse items contribute to utterance interpretation in significant ways,

by creating the linguistic infrastructure for maximally effective communication of ideas.

However enticing the results of the current study might appear, the mere use of questionnaire as the main means of data collection is likely to be regarded as one of the limitations of the research at hand, toward which due heed is to be paid on the part of the prospective studies; the authors are aware that the use of other data collection procedures such as face-to-face interviews with the learners successive to the reading of the texts would have enriched the current scrutiny. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the current probe has partly succeeded in making at least partial contribution to the enhancement of language teaching and learning, particularly with regard to macro-level perspectives such as the rumination over the key role of metadiscursive awareness.

6. Implications of the Study

The most important contribution of this study is its classroom applications, which have certain implications for both L2 teachers and learners. The findings might imply that both language teachers and learners should pay particular attention to the concept of metadiscourse while teaching or learning language. Through raising the learners' awareness toward metadiscourse, teachers can enable their students to become better readers and more insightful writers. If the students become aware of the fact that texts consist of both propositional content and interactional elements, they can comprehend the texts better by following the writer's line of argumentation, and will also be able to write more comprehensibly by anticipating their readers' interaction with the content. Overall, the current study is thought to reconfirm the advantages of bringing metadiscourse markers into learners' foreground of attention.

Hyland (2005a) believes that an awareness of metadiscourse offers three main advantages to students. *First*, it helps them better understand the cognitive demands that texts make on readers and the ways writers can assist them to process information. *Second*, it provides them with enough resources to take a stance toward their ideas. *Third*, it enables them to negotiate that stance, and engage with their readers. Crismore et al. (1993) also state that attention must be paid to giving students metacognitive awareness of metadiscourse and strategies for its use, so that they may understand how to take the author, maintain schemas by connecting sentences, shift topics, recognize an introduction, transition, and a conclusion, identify the author's attitudes and whether he is being subjective or objective, and realize the relevant signals and circumstances, which define the rhetorical situation of the text.

In view of the diverse gains associated with metadiscourse awareness, it sounds more beneficial for learners to receive appropriate instruction regarding both interactive and interactional kinds of metadiscourse markers. From *the textual viewpoint*, students can be asked to identify instances of frame markers and then predict content. Attention to logical connectives will help students analyze the writer's line of reasoning and rhetorical strategies. Tracing endophoric markers can help students understand the macrostructure of a text and will also encourage them to retain and build on newly acquired knowledge. Students can also be encouraged to notice code glosses as the writer's way of helping them to understand important new concepts.

On *the interpersonal level*, students can look for hedges, attitude markers and emphatic pronouns and reflect on why the writer has chosen to use these features. Attitude markers can prompt students to contribute their own ideas and thus critically react to the text. Although it may not be appropriate to

burden students with terminology of metadiscourse, teachers can nonetheless exploit the concepts when working with students in this way. For example, a series of simple questions (e.g., Where does the writer tell you what is coming next, Where does the writer mention other parts of the text, How does the writer tell you that he/she is not completely sure, etc.) could be employed instead.

The findings also have implications for syllabus designers and material developers. This study identifies some guides to be incorporated into language learning and teaching curricula. In other words, the findings might suggest that teaching metadiscourse markers should be a part of some language courses. Furthermore, the results can help feed into the process of designing relevant and authentic course material. Language books should enable learners to not only understand those materials and use them as appropriately as possible, but also teach them how to use those markers as a strategy for comprehending the texts and also communicating with others. Appropriate language teaching materials should be written to ask learners to identify the instances of metadiscourse in texts while reading and to make proper use of them while writing.

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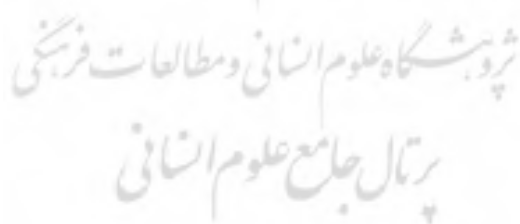
Appendix A: Text 1

Please read the following texts:

Text A: How is language viewed?

Language is for communication. Linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and meanings is, just one part of communicative competence. Another aspect of communicative competence is knowledge of the functions language is used for. A variety of forms can be used to accomplish a single function. A speaker can make a prediction by saying 'it may rain', 'perhaps it will rain'. The same form of the language can be used for a variety of functions. 'May' can be used to make a prediction or to give permission 'They may sit in the back.' The learner needs knowledge of forms and meanings and functions. He must use this knowledge and take into consideration the social situation in order to convey his intended meaning appropriately. A speaker can seek permission using 'may' 'May I have a piece of fruit?' If the speaker perceives his listener as being more of a social equal, the situation as being informal, he would more likely use 'can' to seek permission 'Can I have a piece of fruit?'

Text B: How is language viewed?

Language is for communication. Linguistic competence, the knowledge of forms and meanings is, **however**, just one part of communicative competence. Another aspect of communicative competence is knowledge of the functions language is used for. **As we have seen in this lesson**, a variety of forms can be used to accomplish a single function. A speaker can make a prediction by saying, **for example** 'it may rain' **or** 'perhaps it will rain'. **Conversely** the same form of the language can be used for a variety of functions. 'May' **for instance**, can be used to make a prediction or to give permission ('They may sit in the back') **(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983)**. **Thus,** the learner needs knowledge of forms and meanings and functions. **However,** he must **also** use this knowledge **and** take into consideration the social situation in order to convey his intended meaning appropriately. A speaker can seek permission using 'may' ('May I have a piece of fruit ?'), **however**, if the speaker perceives his listener as being more of a social equal **or** the situation as being informal, he would more likely use 'can' to seek permission ('Can I have a piece of fruit ?').

Appendix A: Text 2

Please read the following texts

Text A: Reading activities

As has been said, reading has much in common with listening, and many aspects of the teaching of reading comprehension are similar to the teaching of listening comprehension. Texts should as far as possible be what the learners want or need to read .Many course books nowadays contain reading texts, like the one about chimpanzee medicine on page 73. But there are alternatives to texts which are of little interest and are trying to give practice in grammar not reading comprehension, like the one about Mary Tom and Jack on pages 72-3. If necessary, teachers can substitute or supplement the reading material in course book with authentic material from magazines, newspapers, holiday brochures, and books. They simplify such material for lower level classes, and design suitable activities and exercises. The text is one element in a reading activity. As in listening comprehension practice, three stages are recommended to make reading more realistic and interesting: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading.

Text B: Reading activities

As **we** have said, reading has much in common with listening, and many aspects of the teaching of reading comprehension are similar to the teaching of listening comprehension. For example, the selection of texts is just as **important**. They should as far as possible be what the learners **might** **really** want or need to read. Many course books nowadays contain **potentially** **interesting** reading texts, like the one about chimpanzee medicine on page 73. But **you** still **need to** be prepared to find alternatives to texts which are of little interest and are **really** trying to give practice in grammar not reading comprehension, like the one about Mary Tom and Jack on pages 72-3. If necessary, **it is** **relatively easy** to substitute or supplement the reading material in **your** course book with authentic material from magazines, newspapers, holiday brochures, and books**. You** **may** **need to** simplify such material for lower level classes, and **you** **will** **need to** design suitable activities and exercises. The text is **only** one element in a reading activity. As in listening comprehension practice,

three stages are **generally** recommended to make reading more realistic and interesting: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading.

Appendix A: Text 3

Please read the following texts
Text A: Simulation

Simulation is a large-scale role-play. Role cards are normally used, there is a lot of other printed and recorded background information, newspaper articles, graphs, memos, news flashes which, come at the start of the simulation or appear while the simulation is unfolding, causing all participants to take note of the new data, possibly read just their positions. The intention is to create a much more complete, complex 'world', of a business company, television studio, and government body.

The participants are all members of a UFO-spotters society at their annual meeting. They are deciding how they could better publicise their cause to the public. They have some facts about UFO incidents and some government statements (collected from magazines and the Internet). At an appropriate point in the simulation (one-third of the way through), introducing a new flash that a UFO has landed in Siberia changes the direction of the meeting! Interventions include a request to interview members of the society, news that the UFO was another fake.

Text B: Simulation

Simulation is **really** a large-scale role-play. Role cards are **normally** used, **but** there is **often quite** a lot of other printed and recorded background information **as well** – newspaper articles, graphs, memos, news flashes, **etc.** – which **may** come at the start of the simulation or appear while the simulation is unfolding, causing all participants to take note of the new data **and possibly** read just their positions. The intention is to create a much more complete, complex 'world', **say,** of a business company, television studio, government body, **etc.**

<u>**This is a brief description of an example simulation:**</u>

The participants are all members of a UFO-spotters society at their annual meeting. They are deciding how they could better publicise their cause to the public. **At the start,** they have some facts about UFO incidents and some government statements (collected from magazines and the Internet). At an appropriate point in the simulation (**probably about** one-third of the way through)**, you** introduce a new flash that a UFO has landed in Siberia. This **obviously** changes the direction of the meeting! **Later** interventions include a request to interview members of the society **and at the end,** news that the UFO was another fake.

Appendix B: The Study Questionnaire

Thank you for participation. All this information will be kept confidential.

Name:	gender:	Age:

According to the previous texts answer the following questions:

1) Which text would you prefer to have **written yourself**? Can you give any reason why so?

2) Which text would you rather **read yourself**? Can you give any reason why so?

3) Which text did you think was **easier** to read?

4) Which text requires less **effort** (in terms of time, mental effort) to **read**?

5) Which text would require less **effort** (in terms of time, mental effort) to **write**?

6) Which text is more **effective** in communicating its message? Can you briefly explain?

7) Would you consider the **underlined words** in TEXT B as: (please tick once)

    (a) decorative, stylistic, non-essential to comprehension of ideas communicated

    (b) essential to effective and effortless comprehension of ideas

    (c) if other, please specify

8) Overall, in terms of **actual** or **expected relevance** of the text as an 'input to your cognitive processing ', which text would you consider more 'successful'?