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## Metadiscourse Markers: A Contrastive Study of Translated and Non-Translated Persuasive Texts

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### Abstract

Metadiscourse features are those facets of a text, which make the organization of the text explicit, provide information about the writer's attitude toward the text content, and engage the reader in the interaction. This study interpreted metadiscourse markers in translated and non-translated persuasive texts. To this end, the researcher chose the translated versions of one of the leading newspapers in the United States, The New York Times, and the original versions of Hamshahri newspaper (an Iranian newspaper). Qualitative and quantitative analysis of both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in second language (L2) translated and non-translated version of the opinion articles from The New York Times and Hamshahi (6 from each), found out how the translators organize their texts and how these organizations were related to the non-translated texts. Findings of the study revealed that textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers were seen in both sets of data. Regarding the occurrences of textual metadiscourse categories and subcategories, the results showed significant differences between the two groups. It was, however, found that the Iranian writers used interpersonal markers significantly more than the Iranian translators did. The results suggested that metadiscourse markers have a prominent role to help the translators of opinion articles to understand the original texts.

**Keywords:** Iranian columnists, Metadiscourse markers, Newspaper discourse, Persian translators, Persuasive writing

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### INTRODUCTION

Metadiscourse markers, also known as transitions, are a good way to show the readers how the ideas in one sentence are connected to the ideas in a previous sentence (Hyland, 2004). One can think of metadiscourse like street signs, which tells the reader whether the flow of the text is

continuing in the same direction, or in a new direction. Newspapers are probably still the most read text types today, in hard copy or online. Newspaper editorials as a kind of opinion texts are different from the other types of news discourse in that they present evaluations and comments about the news events already reported in the newspapers. An increasing volume of studies carried out by various scholars (Caldas-

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Coulthard., 1996; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Fowler, 2013; Hall, 1982; Hodge & Kress, 1993; T. van Dijk, 1991; T. A. Van Dijk, 1993) demonstrated that news, due to its nature, cannot be a totally value-free reflection of facts. News production process comprises the selection, the interpretation, and the presentation of events to the audiences. Thereby constructing reality corresponds with the underlying ideologies of the news producers and presenters. News imposes a structure of values on whatever it represents, and therefore produces meanings, which construct the ideological representations of a society (Fowler, 2013).

As (Hyland, 2004) states in his book on metadiscourse, “the term metadiscourse was coined by Zelling Harris in 1959 to offer a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's or reader's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text” (p. 3). The concept has been further developed by writers such as Williams (1982), Kopple (1985) and Avon Crismore (1989).

Hyland (2004) asserts that metadiscourse is a widely used term in current discourse analysis, and is a relatively new approach that refers to the ways writers or speakers project themselves in their texts to interact with their receivers. Metadiscourse is a concept, which is based on a view of writing or speaking as a social engagement (Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland, 2004). Metadiscourse also plays an important role in organizing the discourse, engaging the audience, and signaling the writer's or speaker's attitude (Fuertes-Olivera, Velasco-Sacristán, Arribas-Baño, & Samaniego-Fernández, 2001).

Metadiscourse has been recognized as one of the major rhetorical features and strategies in the production of a text (Hyland, 1998). In fact, authors cannot vary the stylistic device at will. It is integral to the contexts in which it occurs and is intimately linked to the norms and expectations of particular cultural and professional communities. (Hyland, 1998). Based on this view the ways in which metadiscourse is used in a text may differ in different languages and cultures.

Hyland (1999) believes that “textual metadiscourse is used to organize propositional information in [the] ways that will be coherent for a particular audience and appropriate for a given context” (p. 7). He believes that the writer of a text predicts the receiver's processing difficulties and requirements, and accommodates them by using certain devices. He also states that interpersonal metadiscourse “allows [the] writers to express a perspective toward their propositional information and their readers. [metadiscourse] is essentially an evaluative form of discourse and expresses the writer's individually defined, but disciplinary circumscribed, persona” (pp. 7-8).

Hyland (1998), based on a textual analysis of 28 research articles in four academic disciplines, acknowledges the importance of metadiscourse in attaining persuasion. The quantitative analysis of his study showed an average of 373 metadiscourse occurrence per paper- about one every 15 words. Hyland, in his textual analysis of 21 textbooks in three disciplines, found exactly the same results. The quantitative analysis revealed the importance of metadiscourse with an average occurrence of 405 per text- about one every 15 words. Hyland also, in a study on the distribution of metadiscourse in second language (L2) post-graduate writing, revealed the importance of metadiscourse to students' writing with an average occurrence of 184000 cases in 4 million words- one every 21 words. Its high occurrence, however, represented that it was an important part of the communication without which the propositional and pragmatic content of utterances would be in risk.

Metadiscourse has been investigated in different genres including textbooks (Crismore, 1984; Hyland, 1999, 2001), dissertations (Bunton, 1999), student writings (Markkanen, Steffensen, & Crismore, 1993), science popularizations (Avon Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990; De Oliveira & Pagano, 2006), advertisements (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001), research articles (Hyland, 1998, 1999, 2001; Mauranen, 1992; Moreno, 1997; Mur Duenas, 2007; Myers, 1989;

Rahimpour & Faghih, 2009; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Swales, 1990), university textbooks (Hyland, 1994, 1999, 2001); casual conversation (Schiffrin, 1980), and newspaper discourse (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). It has also been investigated cross-culturally between English and Finnish (Markkanen et al., 1993; Mauranen, 1992).

## THIS STUDY

This research study investigated the role of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in translated and non-translated opinion articles. The matadiscourse-based comparison was employed between the texts written by the Iranian columnists and translated materials done by the Iranian translators. This study applied Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers as a model of analysis. Hyland divides metadiscourse markers into two broad categories with a set of subcategories as follows (pp. 50-52):

• **Interactive Markers:** *These markers enable the writer to manage the information flow to provide his preferred interpretations. They include the following subtypes:*

○ Transitions: These markers mainly indicate: additive, contrastive, and consequential steps in the discourse. Some examples are *in addition, but, thus, etc.*

○ Frame markers: These indicate text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure, like *my purpose here is to, finally, to conclude, etc.*

○ Endophoric markers: These refer to information in other parts of the text and make the additional material available to the readers. Some examples are *in section, see figure, noted above, etc.*

○ Evidentials: These refer to sources of information from other texts, such as *X states, According to X, etc.*

○ Code glosses: These help readers grasp functions of ideational material. They show the restatements of ideational

information, like *namely, such as, in other words, e.g., etc.*

• **Interactional Markers:** *These markers involve the reader in the argument. They focus on the participants of the interaction and seek to display the writer's persona and a tenor consistent with the norms of the disciplinary community.*

○ Hedges: These withhold writer's full commitment to proposition. Examples: *might, about, perhaps, possibly, etc.*

○ Boosters: These emphasize force or the writer's certainty in proposition. Examples: *it is clear that, in fact, definitely, etc.*

○ Attitude markers: These indicate the writer's appraisal or attitude to propositional information. Some examples are *unfortunately, surprisingly, I agree, etc.*

○ Engagement markers: These explicitly refer to or build a relationship with the reader. Examples: *consider, you can see that, note that, etc.*

○ Self-mentions: They explicitly refer to authors' presence in terms of first person pronouns and possessives. Examples: *I, we, our, my, your, etc.*

The focus of this study, therefore, was on metadiscourse use as an essential characteristic of a text. The metadiscourse markers used in the translated and non-translated versions of persuasive texts were compared. In fact, this study examined the metadiscourse markers predominantly used in these two groups of texts and identifying the similarities and differences between them in this regard.

## DATA COLLECTION

The data collected from the translations of the opinion column of a newspaper titled The New York Times printed in the United States and the original versions of Hamshahri newspaper print-

ed in Iran. Of the 120 (60 from each) articles collected from the online archives of these newspapers, 12 texts (6 from each) were finally chosen for the analysis since there was a need to control the different variables involved in the writing of the texts and the translations. First, a random selection was made among the texts collected from the newspapers to choose those written by Iranians (as Native-Persian Speaking writers) and those translated by Iranians (as English-to-Persian translators). To create a focused analysis of the texts, and prevent the biased vision of the texts, the choice of topic was controlled in this research. The selected opinion articles covered some topics including health and environmental issue. The selected texts

were read and analyzed carefully for metadiscourse categories. The analysis was repeated after three months to validate the results of the first data analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As mentioned earlier this study investigated the role of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in translated and non-translated opinion articles. The researcher compared the quantitative nature of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers used in translated and non-translated versions of persuasive texts. The frequency of each text, based on Hyland's (2005) model, was calculated and the results are shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.**

*The frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in translated and non-translated versions of persuasive texts*

Categories	Persian originals		translations		
	Total No.	%	Total No.	%	
Interactive	Transitions	576	46.33	411	39.03
	Frame markers	33	2.65	52	4.93
	Endophoric markers	11	0.88	20	1.89
	Evidentials	59	4.74	97	9.21
	Code glosses	51	4.10	42	3.98
Interactive	Hedges	311	25.02	237	22.50
	Boosters	70	5.63	56	5.31
	Attitude markers	63	5.06	41	3.89
	Engagement markers	17	1.36	3	0.28
	Self-mentions	52	4.18	94	8.92
$\Sigma$	1243		1053		

The quantitative analysis of the data revealed that, on a general level, the Iranian translators used more textual (n=128) than interpersonal metadiscourse (n=88) while the Iranian writers used more interpersonal (n=161) than textual (n=84). The general findings also showed that

the Iranian translators used a higher number of textual metadiscourse markers than the Iranian writers while the Iranian writers used more interpersonal markers than the Iranian translators. In the latter case, the difference showed to be statistically significant.

To test the differences between Persian original metadiscourse markers and English to Persian translations, the researcher ran the first chi-square test. According to Table 2 below, the value of observed chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 15.97$ ) was meaningful at  $\alpha$  level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) with a degree of freedom of 4. This indicated that there was a significant difference between Persian translations and Persian originals in their use of metadiscourse markers.

**Table 2.**  
*Results of chi-square test of Iranian writers and Iranian translators' use of interactive metadiscourse markers*

p	df	Value	
0.005	4	15.97	$X < 0.05$
		1352	n

*Level of significance = 9.488*

To test the differences between Persian translations and Persian original metadiscourse markers, the second chi-square test was run. As shown in Table 3, the value of observed chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 13.10$ ) was significant at  $\alpha$  level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) with a degree of freedom of 4. Data indicated that Persian translators and Iranian writers of persuasive texts use metadiscourse markers significantly differently

**Table 3.**  
*Results of chi-square test of Iranian writers and Iranian translators' use of interactional metadiscourse markers*

p	df	Value	
0.01	4	13.10	$X < 0.5$
		944	n

*Level of significance = 9.488*

According to the analysis, Iranian translators used a higher number of metadiscourse markers

than the Iranian writers (Persian translations,  $n = 513$ ; Persian originals,  $n = 431$ ). There was also a significant difference between the uses of all subtypes of the metadiscourse markers. Although far more recurrently employed in Persian translations, findings disclosed that 'hedges' were the most frequently used in both languages among the interactional metadiscourse subtypes i.e. Persian translations ( $n = 311$ ) and Persian original texts ( $n = 237$ ).

The possible interpretation was that the mitigated points of view and linguistic facts were combined in persuasive texts so as to attain maximum effect. After 'hedges', 'boosters' were the second most frequent metadiscourse marker in Persian translations. Conversely, the second most frequent marker in Persian original persuasive texts was self-mention. Hedges, boosters, attitude markers and engagement markers in Persian translated texts were more frequently utilized than in Persian non-translated texts. Engagement markers in both languages displayed the lowest frequency within the interactional metadiscourse subtypes. This possibly suggested that Iranian writers and English did not favor these markers to Persian translators.

The analysis of total corpus showed that there were 2,296 metadiscourse elements in 49,455 words- there was one metadiscourse element in almost 21 words. This is almost one per 23 for the Persian non-translated corpus (total Persian non-translated corpus 23,903 words), and one in almost 20 for the Persian translated corpus (total Persian translated corpus 25,552 words). In other words, the total percentage of metadiscourse use for the Persian non-translated versions of persuasive texts was 4.4 while it was 4.86 for the English to Persian translated versions of persuasive texts (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4.***The analysis of metadiscourse markers in the translated and non-translated versions of persuasive texts*

	Total Words	Metadiscourse Frequency	Interactive	Interactional	Total
Persian original	23,903	1053	2.6	1.8	4.4
Persian translation	25,552	1243	2.8	2.0	4.86
Z-test	*****	*****	15.97	13.10	$\chi^2 = 29.04$

## CONCLUSION

Findings of this study revealed that metadiscourse markers play a very significant role in persuasive texts in both writing and translating. This research study centered on writing and translating in Persian language concerning the use of metadiscourse in persuasive texts. In general, the findings of the study showed a tendency among Iranian translators to use metadiscourse markers. This was justifiable in those Iranian translators who considered the formal aspects of the text as to the content.

The analysis of the selected texts was closely based on Hyland's (2004) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers. It is important to note that metadiscourse instances usually play a multifunctional role. Therefore, in this research, metadiscourse markers were analyzed based on the primary function of each element in its particular context. This required an individual and manual analysis of all the metadiscourse elements in the selected articles.

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