

Chapter 7

The Use of Metadiscourse Markers in Dissertations Produced by MATESOL Students

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ABSTRACT

The use of metadiscourse markers is an important writing strategy employed both to structure the text and to engage the reader in the text production. In this connection, the purpose of this study is to assess the use of metadiscourse markers in term papers produced by MATESOL students at university of Khartoum. Forty papers were examined using Hyland's model of metadiscourse markers. Twenty papers were chosen from class 2016-2017, and the other 20 were selected from class 2017-2018. The data were analyzed in percentage terms. The results revealed that trained students use more metadiscourse markers than the untrained students. Additionally, it was found that female students used more metadiscourse markers than male. Also, it was found that all participants used more metadiscourse markers in the background section than in the statement of the problem section.

INTRODUCTION

The use of metadiscourse markers in students' dissertations has been studied extensively in the last decades (Hyland, 2004; Abdi, 2002; Blagojevic, 2004; Bunton, 1999; Atai et al 2008). Researchers investigated both differences and similarities in

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the use of metadiscourse markers in students' writing for the central role that they play in the construction of the text. For example, Hyland (2004) states that they are a valuable means of exploring academic writing, and comparing the rhetorical features and preferences of different discourse communities. Bunton (1999) informs that they are frequently used to make the text more cohesive and coherent.

Generally, definitions of metadiscourse varied from broad ones, such as "writing about writing" (Williams 1981, 211) or "discourse about discourse or communication about communication" (VandeKopple 1985, 83), to more specific ones, such as "writing about the evolving text rather than referring to the subject matter" (Swales 2004, 121). Metadiscourse markers are also known as an umbrella and fuzzy term which is easy to accept, though not easy to establish its boundaries (Swales, 1990; Nash, 1992). The term metadiscourse describes features of rhetorical organization by including only text elements which refer to the text itself (Bunton, 1999; Mauranen, 1993; Valero-Graces, 1989). As pragmatic constructs, metadiscourse features are "crucial rhetorical devices that allow the writer to acknowledge, accommodate and engage with the reader according to socially sanctioned norms." (Hyland, 1998:5). Where the Sudanese context is concerned, several studies have investigated the use of metadiscourse in research articles. For instance, Ali (2016) compared the use of metadiscourse in discussion section of research articles written by Sudanese and English native speakers. He concluded that there is dichotomy in the use of metadiscourse among disciplines. On the other hand, a study conducted by Mohamed (under process) about metadiscourse markers in academic articles, produced by native speakers, researchers of ESL and EFL background and male and female researchers. He found gender-based differences where female researchers used more metadiscourse markers than their male counterparts. A third study was Albaggari (2011). She compared the use of certainty markers in journals published by Khartoum University press in soft and hard science departments. The findings revealed no significant difference based on the discipline of the research. Finally, Sulaiman (2012) investigated the use of metadiscourse markers in university students' writing. The study revealed that the participants both misused, and overused metadiscourse markers, which negatively affected the quality of their writing.

The studies revealed above fall into two categories. First, most of them (Ali, 2016; Albaggari, 2011; Mohamed, under process) centred upon the use of metadiscourse by writing experts. They learned to write through the process of slow acculturation (Carter, 2007). As to second, Sulaiman (2012) studied the use of metadiscourse by EFL learners who were trained to write paragraphs and essays. Thus, the study aimed to decide if such training produces student writers who could produce text that engage their imagined audience.

Apparently, these studies did not tell about the role that explicit training plays in the use of metadiscourse markers in academic writing. Therefore, the purpose of this

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