



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**METADISOURSE FEATURES IN THE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS OF  
UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS**

**HELEN TAN**

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**By**

**HELEN TAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**METADISOURSE FEATURES IN THE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS OF UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS**

By

**HELEN TAN**  
**August 2011**

**Chairman: Professor Chan Swee Heng, PhD**

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Metadiscourse is a useful linguistic resource for writers, particularly, in the writing of a persuasive essay. Its usefulness is two-pronged. It guides readers through the text, and it provides the writers the tool to engage with their readers. It has been acknowledged by writing researchers that a successful employment of metadiscourse will mark writing efficacy. However, L2 writers tend to have difficulties in using such linguistics features in their writing.

To understand the nature of the use of metadiscourse, and therefore the problems associated with its use, this study investigated the use of metadiscourse by a group of high and low English language proficiency (hereafter refer to as HEP and LEP) undergraduate writers. Using a concordance software, MP2.2, the metadiscourse use of the HEP and LEP Malaysian undergraduate writers was compared and contrasted for their frequency (per 10000 words) and forms of use. In addition, the HEP undergraduate writers' use of metadiscourse was also compared with that of a standard learner corpus

[British Academic Written English (BAWE)]. In addition, a quasi experiment was carried out to determine the effect of instructional input on the use of metadiscourse by the undergraduate writers.

The data revealed that between the HEP and LEP undergraduate writers, the HEP writers demonstrated a higher frequency and more varied forms of use of both the *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse. Both groups of writers, however, preferred the use of *interactional* metadiscourse rather than the *interactive*. This suggested that they were more concerned with the building of writer-reader relationships. When the HEP writers' use of metadiscourse was reviewed against that of the BAWE corpus, some differences in their use of metadiscourse were exhibited. The frequency of metadiscourse use in the BAWE corpus was higher, and their forms of metadiscourse use were also much more varied than the HEP writers. The BAWE corpus writers' also used more *interactive* metadiscourse than *interactional* metadiscourse. Conversely, the HEP writers showed a greater preference for *interactional* metadiscourse.

The effect of instructional input on metadiscourse use of an intact group of undergraduate writers, however, was found to be insignificant. One possible reason could be that the sample size was small. In addition, the short duration of instructional input (12 hours) may not be adequate for them to cognitively process and acquire all the ten different subcategories of metadiscourse to show improvement. Nonetheless, the cross tabulation of the data indicated that the instructional input had benefited some LEP participants to some extent. A qualitative analysis also indicated that some HEP

and LEP writers did improve in their awareness of the use of metadiscourse in their post writing. Generally, there was more employment of metadiscourse in the post writing when compared with the pre writing. In addition, the post writing also saw a greater awareness on the appropriate use of metadiscourse. They were in the use of *endophoric markers, transitions* and *frame markers*. The data also indicated that the use of *evidentials* is a major problem among the undergraduate writers, even among those who showed positive improvement in their post writing.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that the undergraduate writers' use of metadiscourse was still at an evolving stage. It is imperative that the awareness of the important use of metadiscourse in academic writing among the undergraduates' writers be further heightened in writing classrooms. However, this has to be done over time, with the provision of graded tasks on the learning of metadiscourse use (from the simple to the most difficult) in writing programmes. Besides this important pedagogical implication, the concordance software has generated a useful display of the nature of metadiscourse use, and it is suggested that the output could serve as an effective authentic instructional input in the learning of metadiscourse. This useful instructional resource would benefit both the ESL practitioners and learners alike.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia untuk memenuhi keperluan ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**CIRI METAWACANA DALAM ESEI BUJUKAN OLEH PENULIS PRASISWAZAH**

Oleh

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Metawacana merupakan sumber linguistik yang bermanfaat bagi penulis, khususnya, untuk penulisan esei bujukan. Manfaat ini diperoleh dalam dua aspek, iaitu sebagai pedoman untuk pembaca menguasai teks, dan sebagai alat untuk penulis berhubung dengan pembaca. Penyelidik dalam bidang penulisan memperakukan bahawa penggunaan metawacana yang berjaya akan menampilkan penulisan yang berkesan. Namun, penulis dalam bahasa kedua biasanya menghadapi kesukaran untuk menggunakan ciri linguistik ini dalam penulisan mereka.

Untuk memahami corak penggunaan metawacana, dan dengan itu memahami masalah penggunaannya, kajian ini meneliti penggunaan metawacana dalam kalangan dua kumpulan penulis prasiswazah, iaitu yang berkemahiran tinggi dan yang berkemahiran rendah dalam bahasa Inggeris [*High English Language Proficiency* (HEP), dan *Low English Language Proficiency* (LEP)]. Dengan menggunakan perisian konkordans MP2.2, perbandingan dan perbezaan kekerapan penggunaan metawacana (dalam 10,000

patah kata), dan bentuk penggunaannya telah dibuat terhadap kedua-dua kumpulan ini. Di samping itu, penggunaan metawacana dalam kalangan prasiswazah HEP juga dibandingkan dengan korpus standard pelajar [British Academic Written English (BAWE)]. Selain itu, uji kaji kuasi dilakukan untuk menentukan kesan input pengajaran terhadap penggunaan metawacana dalam kalangan penulis prasiswazah.

Data membuktikan bahawa penulis prasiswazah HEP lebih kerap dan lebih pelbagai bentuk penggunaan metawacana mereka sama ada jenis interaktif mahupun jenis interaksional, jika dibandingkan dengan penulis prasiswazah LEP. Walau bagaimanapun, kedua-dua kumpulan penulis lebih banyak menggunakan metawacana *interaksional* daripada metawacana *interaktif*. Hal ini menunjukkan bahawa penulis lebih cakna untuk membina hubungan antara penulis dengan pembaca. Apabila dibuat perbandingan antara penggunaan metawacana penulis HEP dengan korpus BAWE, ternyata ada beberapa perbezaan dalam penggunaan metawacana mereka. Kekerapan penggunaan metawacana dalam korpus BAWE lebih tinggi, dan bentuk penggunaan metawacana mereka juga jauh lebih bervariasi berbanding dengan penulis HEP. Penulis korpus BAWE juga menggunakan lebih banyak metawacana jenis *interaktif* berbanding dengan metawacana jenis interaksional. Sebaliknya, penulis HEP lebih kerap menggunakan metawacana *interaksional*.

Walaupun bagaimanapun, kesan input pengajaran terhadap penggunaan metawacana oleh kumpulan penulis prasiswazah asal, didapati tidak signifikan. Ini mungkin disebabkan oleh saiz sampel yang kecil. Selain itu, tempoh input pengajaran yang singkat (12 jam)

mungkin tidak mencukupi untuk mereka memproses dan memahiri semua sepuluh subkategori metawacana yang berbeza dan justerunya, menunjukkan kemajuan dalam penggunaan metawacana. Namun demikian, tabulasi silang data menunjukkan bahawa input pengajaran memberikan beberapa manfaat kepada penulis LEP. Analisis kualitatif juga menunjukkan bahawa beberapa penulis HEP dan LEP telah menunjukkan peningkatan kesedaran dalam penggunaan metawacana semasa proses pascapenulisan mereka. Secara umum, penggunaan metawacana lebih banyak semasa proses pascapenulisan berbanding dengan proses prapenulisan. Di samping itu, pascapenulisan juga memperlihatkan kesedaran yang lebih tinggi untuk menggunakan metawacana yang lebih sesuai. Ini termasuklah penggunaan penanda endoforik (*endophoric markers*), peralihan (*transitions*), dan penanda kerangka (*frame markers*). Metawacana yang amat bermasalah bagi penulis prasiswazah ialah penggunaan pembuktian (*evidentials*). Masalah ini juga dihadapi oleh penulis prasiswazah yang menunjukkan kemajuan dalam penggunaan metawacana.

Sebagai kesimpulan, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan metawacana oleh penulis prasiswazah sedang berkembang. Kesedaran tentang kepentingan penggunaan metawacana dalam penulisan akademik amat perlu ditingkatkan segera dalam kelas penulisan. Walau bagaimanapun, kesedaran ini harus dilakukan secara berterusan dan dengan penyediaan latihan pembelajaran penggunaan metawacana yang berperingkat (dari tahap mudah ke tahap susah) dalam program penulisan. Di samping implikasi pedagogi penting ini, perisian konkordans telah memaparkan corak penggunaan metawacana yang bermanfaat dan ia boleh digunakan sebagai input asli pengajaran

yang berkesan bagi pembelajaran metawacana. Sumber yang berguna ini dapat memberikan manfaat kepada pengajar dan pelajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua.



I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 9 August 2011 to conduct the final examination of **Helen Tan** on her doctoral thesis entitled **Metadiscourse Features in the Persuasive Essays of Undergraduate Writers** in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for the quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.



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**HELEN TAN**

Date: 9 August 2011

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