UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

METADISCOURSE FEATURES IN THE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS OF UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS

HELEN TAN

FBMK 2011 13
METADISCOURSE FEATURES IN THE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS OF UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS

HELEN TAN

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY PUTRA MALAYSIA

2011
METADISCOURSE FEATURES IN THE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS OF UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS

By

HELEN TAN

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2011
Completing this thesis is the pinnacle of my academic achievement and I would not have been able to accomplish it without the help and support of a few individuals. Firstly, I am greatly indebted to the Ministry of Higher Education for providing me the scholarship, and University Putra Malaysia for giving me my study leave. These were made possible through the support of the Dean, Assoc. Prof. Dr Che Ibrahim Salleh, and Head of the English Department, Assoc. Prof. Dr Shameem Rafik-Galea of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. Without their support, completing my thesis would have been a bigger challenge for me.

Secondly, this thesis would not have come to fruition if not for the expert guidance of my three esteemed and dedicated supervisors, Professor Dr Chan Swee Heng, Associate Professor Dr Wong Bee Eng and Associate Professor Dr Mohd. Faiz S. Abdullah. Their insightful comments have helped me to improve and polish my thesis. To each of you, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Furthermore, I would like to record my gratitude to a few friends and colleagues for their support and help. They are Mr John Burke, a former lecturer of the University College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth, England, Mr Richard Cullen, Head of Department for the Department of English and Language Studies, Canterbury Christchurch University, England and Dr John Kullman, a senior
lecturer from the Department of English and Language Studies, Canterbury Christchurch University, England. Not forgetting, too, the help rendered by Dr Afida binti Mohamad Ali, Mr Subramaniam a/l Karuppiiah, Dr Chan Mei Yuet, Ms Liew Nyuk Lan, Ms Norlida Abu Bakar, Mr Mariapan a/l Munnuswami, Associate Professor Christine Della, Ms Sharon Chong, Ms Chong Moi Lian, Ms Tan Meng Choo and BBI3421 instructors. A special thanks, also, to Assoc. Prof. Dr Boo Huey Chern, Head of Department of Food Management and Services of the Faculty of Science and Food Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia. I have benefited from her adept knowledge on statistics.

I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation and gratitude to my beloved spouse, James Lopez, for his encouragement and understanding throughout the course of my study. To my children, Arvind and Neesha, thank you for bearing with me. I know you may not fully understand why your mum had to work for long hours at the computer, but I do hope you are proud of your mum’s achievement. To all my loved ones particularly my mum, Maria Neo and mum-in-law, Clara Lopez, thank you for your prayers and support.

Above all and most importantly, my utmost gratitude and thanks to the Almighty God for the many graces and blessings He has bestowed on me and my family. Thank you for journeying with me and making it possible for me to achieve this important milestone of my life. May this humble piece of work bring glory and praise to your Holy Name.
Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

METADISCOURSE FEATURES IN THE PERSUASIVE ESSAYS OF UNDERGRADUATE WRITERS

By

HELEN TAN
August 2011

Chairman: Professor Chan Swee Heng, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

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

HELEN TAN
Ogos 2011

Pengerusi: Profesor Chan Swee Heng, PhD

Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

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.


Walau 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 mempaparkan 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.

Members of the Examination Committee were as follows:

Wan Roselezam bt Wan Yahya, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Ain Nadzimah bt Abdullah, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications
Universiti Putra Malaysia
/Internal Examiner

Jayakaran a/l A.P.Mukundan, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications
Universiti Putra Malaysia
/Internal Examiner

Anthony David Wright, PhD
Professor
University College Plymouth St. Mark & St. John
Derriford Road
Plymouth P16 8bh
United Kingdom
/External Examiner

NORITAH OMAR, PHD
Associate Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

**Chan Swee Heng, PhD**  
Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Chairman)

**Wong Bee Eng, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

**Mohd. Faiz Abdullah, PhD**  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communications  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
(Member)

---

**HASANAH MOHD. GHAZALI, PhD**  
Professor and Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
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.

____________________
HELEN TAN
Date: 9 August 2011
TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter     | Title                                                                 | Page |
|-------------|                                                                     |      |
| ABSTRACT    |                                                                      | ii   |
| ABSTRAK     |                                                                      | v    |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS |                                                                | ix   |
| APPROVAL    |                                                                      | xi   |
| DECLARATION |                                                                      | xiii |
| LIST OF TABLES |                                                             | xviii|
| LIST OF FIGURES  |                                                              | xxi  |
| LIST OF APPENDICES |                                                          | xxii |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS |                                                  | xxiii|
| 1 INTRODUCTION |                                                               | 1    |
| 1.1          | Background to the Study                                             | 1    |
| 1.2          | Definition of Metadiscourse                                          | 3    |
| 1.3          | Theoretical Underpinnings                                           | 5    |
| 1.3.1        | Social Constructionist Theory                                       | 5    |
| 1.3.2        | Social Cognitive Theory of Writing                                  | 7    |
| 1.4          | Statement of Problem                                                | 12   |
| 1.5          | Purpose and Scope of Study                                          | 20   |
| 1.6          | Research Questions                                                  | 22   |
| 1.7          | Significance of the Study                                           | 22   |
| 1.8          | Limitations of the Study                                           | 24   |
| 1.9          | Definition of Terms                                                 | 27   |
| 2 LITERATURE REVIEW |                                                   | 31   |
| 2.1          | Classification of Metadiscourse                                     | 31   |
| 2.1.1        | Williams’ (1981, 2007) Notion of Metadiscourse                      | 32   |
| 2.1.2        | Vande Kopple’s (1985) Classification of Metadiscourse               | 36   |
| 2.1.3        | Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen’s (1993) Categorization of Metadiscourse | 42   |
| 2.1.4        | Hyland’s (2004, 2005) Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse          | 47   |
| 2.2          | Studies on Metadiscourse in Different Academic Genres               | 61   |
| 2.2.1        | Use of Metadiscourse in Introductory Coursebooks and Research Articles | 63   |
| 2.2.2        | Use of Metadiscourse in L2 Postgraduate Dissertations               | 66   |
| 2.2.3        | Use of Metadiscourse in Undergraduate Assignments                   | 72   |
2.3 Studies on Specific Categories of Metadiscourse
2.3.1 Use of Engagement Markers in Academic Discourse 77
2.3.2 Use of Self-mention in Academic Discourse 81
2.4 Use of Metadiscourse in Cross-cultural Studies
2.4.1 Comparison between American and Finnish Undergraduates’ Writings 88
2.4.2 Comparison between English and Spanish Editorials 92
2.4.3 Comparison of Editorials in the English-Spanish Contrastive Corpus (ESCC) 95
2.5 ‘Noticing’ Technique in Language Acquisition 97
2.6 Conclusion 99

3 METHODOLOGY
3.1 Research Design 101
3.2 Research Framework 103
3.3 Site of the Study 105
3.4 Questionnaire on the Undergraduate Writers’ Demographic Information, their Affect on the Use of English and their Writing Difficulties
3.4.1 Sample Size 107
3.4.2 Instrument 108
3.4.3 Pilot Study of Questionnaire 109
3.4.4 Data Collection 109
3.5 Research Question 1: Assessing Metadiscourse Knowledge 110
3.5.1 Sample Size 110
3.5.2 Instrument 110
3.5.3 Pilot Study of Metadiscourse Knowledge Test 111
3.5.4 Data Collection 112
3.6 Research Question 2: Comparing Metadiscourse Use between HEP and LEP Undergraduate writers 113
3.6.1 Sample Size 113
3.6.2 Instrument 114
3.6.3 Constructing and Piloting the Writing Task 114
3.6.4 The Use of Concordance Software: MonoConc Pro 2.2 (MP2.2) 116
3.6.5 Identification of Problematic Metadiscourse Forms - Troubleshooting 117
3.6.6 Data Collection 121
3.7 Research Question 3: Comparing the Metadiscourse Use in the HEP Undergraduate Writers’ and BAWE Writers’ Essays 123
3.7.1 Sample Size 123
3.7.2 Instrument 125
3.7.3 Data Collection 125
3.8 Research Question 4: Effect of Explicit Metadiscourse Instruction on Undergraduate Writing 126
3.8.1 Sample Size 127
3.8.2 Instrument 129
3.8.3 Data Collection 133
3.9 Qualitative Analysis 135
3.9.1 Sample Size 136
3.9.2 Instrument 137
3.9.3 Data Collection 137
3.10 Conclusion 137

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 139
4.1 Results of the Questionnaire 139
4.1.1 Demographic Information of the HEP and LEP Participants 139
4.1.2 Perceptions of the English language by the HEP and LEP Participants 141
4.1.3 Difficulties Encountered while Writing in English 144
4.1.4 Concluding Remarks 151
4.2 Research Question 1: Assessing Metadiscourse Knowledge 151
4.2.1 Comparison of Mean Score between the HEP and LEP Participants on the Identification of Interactive Metadiscourse 152
4.2.2 Comparison of Mean Score between the HEP and LEP Participants on the Identification of Interactional Metadiscourse 153
4.2.3 Concluding Remarks 155
4.3 Research Question 2: Comparing Metadiscourse Use between the HEP and LEP Participants 155
4.3.1 Overall Frequency of Metadiscourse Use between the HEP and LEP Participants 156
4.3.2 Frequency and Forms of Interactive Metadiscourse Used by the HEP and LEP Participants 157
4.3.3 Frequency and Forms of Interactional Metadiscourse Used by the HEP and LEP Participants 162
4.3.4 Concluding Remarks 166
4.4 Research Question 3: Comparing Metadiscourse Use in the BAWE Corpus and the HEP Essays 169
4.4.1 Overall Frequency of Use of the Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse 169
4.4.2 Frequency of Use of the Subcategories of Interactive Metadiscourse in the BAWE and HEP Essays 171
4.4.3 Frequency of use of the Subcategories of Interactional Metadiscourse in BAWE and HEP Essays 172
4.4.4 Language Expressions of the Subcategories of 174
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metadiscourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.5 Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Research Question 4: Effect of Explicit Metadiscourse Instructions on the Undergraduate Writers’ Essays</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1 Statistical Analysis of the Effect of Explicit Metadiscourse Instructions on the Undergraduate Writers’ Essays</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.2 Qualitative Analysis of the Effect of Explicit Metadiscourse Instructions on Selected Undergraduate Writers’ Essays</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.3 Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 CONCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Summary of Findings</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Contribution to the Body of Knowledge on Metadiscourse</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Recommendations for Future Studies</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIODATA OF STUDENT</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>