Construction of Second Language Writer Identity in Student Persuasive Essays: A Metadiscourse Analysis

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Abstract

Academic writing is not a lifeless communicative endeavor. It is an interactive process where both writers and readers negotiate meanings in many complex ways. In the case of persuasive essays, students should venture to manifest stance and identity rather than just write to transport ideas. This paper looked into this important aspect of academic writing by examining the construction of

writer identity in ESL students' persuasive essays. Data were drawn from 50 persuasive essays written by Filipino senior high school students in a polytechnic school. Using Hyland's (2004a) Model of Interpersonal Metadiscourse, analysis revealed that students employ *self-mention* across all samples in displaying their identity as writers. Findings also underscored the employment of other interpersonal metadiscourse elements such as *hedges, attitude markers, boosters,* and *engagement markers* in student essays. The study echoes the following implications to L2 academic writing pedagogy: (1) L2 teachers may consider explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers in the classroom if students are to become effective writers; (2) students should be taught pragmatic functions of personal pronouns to help them carry out their stance in such a highly academic world of writing; and (3) more importantly, L2 writing teachers should employ more real-life and authentic writing activities which can foster the development of critical thinking skills and understanding of various contextualized linguistic elements. Moreover, directions for further research are provided in this research.

Keywords: *writer identity, interpersonal metadiscourse, second language, academic writing, senior high school*

1. Introduction

Writing is a productive performance of expending words in a written form which entails innumerable challenging skills among learners. Academic writing is a complex process that when students create texts, they are assumed to communicate a variety of implications and meanings in an academic style without simply presenting. As reported by Davies (1999), academic writing is regarded as a tough and neglected skill area among Japanese EFL learners with which it is considered the least competent ability in developing critical thinking skills (Kroll, 1990).

In the Philippines, Pablo and Lasaten (2018) identified several areas where senior high school students have difficulties in academic writing ranging from content and ideas, organization, vocabulary and word choice, formality to referencing. They concluded that more exposure to academic writing texts is imperative to improve the quality of students' writing outputs. A study by Hernandez, Amarles and Raymundo (2017) also revealed that College Filipino students demonstrate weakness and negative attitudes towards writing. Furthermore, Martin (2001) on investigating self-representations in reflective essays found that college freshman students appear

to portray themselves as passive subjects in the writing process. They seem to underuse expressions of ability, obligation, intent, and certainty, which are determiners that warrant agency. Suggestion is that Filipino student writers should be encouraged to employ more personal pronouns especially first person in their writing to gain greater ownership of ideas. It is through this sense that this paper is put forward to situate how Filipino ESL students create their identity as writers in the context of academic writing. This study aims at investigating writer identity in senior high school students' persuasive essays through a metadiscourse analysis. Specifically, it seeks to (1) identify dominant metadiscoursal feature in student persuasive essays; and determine how and what kind of writer identity of students is constructed by the dominant metadiscoursal feature.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Identity in Academic Writing

The concept of *'identity'* in writing has been used interchangeably in research across cultures, time and space. Its multidisciplinary nature has carried the notions of self, person role, persona, position, subject, and plurality that encompass the four interconnected features of selfhood: autobiographical self, discoursal self, authorial self, and possibilities for self-hood in the socio-cultural and institutional contexts (Ivanič, 1998). Meanwhile, in an attempt of mirroring how second language acquisition shapes identity and self, Gay (2013) exemplified that the formation of one's identity requires an understanding of social phenomenon where the individual not only creates his own reality but builds his perceptions of individuality and acceptance in socio cultural contexts. Hyland (2005b) strongly acclaimed that writing is not an inanimate communicative process where readers on the other hand see themselves as receptors of knowledge. Writing, in its very nature, should always be interactive since it lives with the people's interests, stance, beliefs, viewpoints, moral, and values. In dwelling more into the reading-writing process, it is evident that the language, the author, the reader, and the socio-cultural context engender an important aspect in understanding a text. While language and culture serve as the soul and background of any writing genre, the author and the reader are the 'clown actors' who give and translate meaning to lifeless thoughts and ideas dancing through the rhythm of a musical entity. In this sense, the readers' fathom of responsibility to untangle meaning within a text is shifting cognitive understanding to sociocultural outlook (Gee, 1992; John-Steiner, Petoskey, & Smith, 1994).

Therefore, it is significant to stress that the conceptualization of meaning by readers in a text is influenced by how the author deliberates the role of the society to control perceptions and understanding relating to reader's prior knowledge and experiences (McKinley, 2010). The written texts present the identity of the language, its symbolic forms and visual components to be interpreted and deciphered accordingly by the demands of the author. Furthermore, as Hyland (2002a) stated, academic writers' identity is influenced and situated by the environment where they write and the knowledge of who their target readers are. Writing cognition is presumably constructed *by* the society as a whole and not just embedded *within* the social context (Lewis, 2000).

The construction of writer identity in L2 academic writing has been implicitly evident in classroom settings. Though it has been undoubtedly guarded as a significant factor in assisting students' writing process in fabricating academic genres, writer identity is subtly created in not just echoing the *'what'* factor which merely pertains to the output, but also explicitly on the *'how'* student writers illuminate their own identity in terms of taking their stance and claims in the text.

Apart from the extensive discourse analysis and the study of pragmatics in various context, writer identity through pronominal usage has gained significant attention from scholars in the spectrum of ESL/EFL teaching-learning processes. Hyland (2002a) unveils that Hongkong L2 writers' underuse authorial pronouns and determiners in representing themselves in the discourse is influenced by writer's skepticism in the notion of authority and loyalty to rhetorical effects. Restraining their role in the research and adopting a less independent stance compared with native writers, HongKong students clearly speak within the misconceptions and distinctions of understanding as to what the functions of metadiscourse will be. More often than not, the focus given to ESL writing contexts nowadays has been intensely shown on how students can produce systematized content that is significant and meaningful. Writing is not all about putting information across as dictated by style guides from the textbooks and from the teachers. Writing should be thought of an opportunity for students to represent themselves, that is, the writing material should leave an impression about the writer (Hyland, 2002b).

In the Philippine ESL setting, the same is true about the insufficient use of pronominal markers. Martin (2011) reveals that Filipino student writers prefer to employ fewer first person pronouns. Although the corpora in the aforementioned study include Tagalog, student written

essays in English yield similar result—that is, first-person referencing is least frequently used making Filipino student writers passive subjects or agents in the writing per se regardless of the languages. In this regard, the author suggested that language teachers must devote their teaching more on the usage of personal pronouns, so students will be able to take a sense of ownership in the ideas expressed and represent themselves quite well in the text.

Other recent studies involving different foci on L2 students' written essays in the Philippines include those of Masangya and Lozada (2009) and Gustilo and Magno (2012). Masangya and Lozada (2009) deal with the investigation on the relationship between the language exposures and errors in English essays of high school students. In this study, they discover that students with high English exposure have significantly less frequency in their errors in terms of wrong case, fragmentation, parallelism, punctuation, and verb tenses. However, with specific reference to verb form, preposition, and spelling, students with high exposure are found to have significant higher frequency in errors compared to those with low English exposure. The significance of this finding is that, since errors are quite inevitable and it takes time to correct them, much more exposure to authentic contexts where English is used is needed among Filipino ESL students. Whereas, Gustilo and Magno (2012) disclose that word choice and capitalization errors are factors impacting essay scores which deviates from Sweedler-Brow's (1993) finding that it is sentence-level errors which play a significant role in essay scores. In this regard, it is suggested that further studies be conducted to validate the conflicting findings. In lieu of pedagogical implications, Gustilo and Magno (2012), despite disparity in findings, maintain that more focus should be given on vocabulary and, while many language teachers are open with the idea of emerging World Englishes in composition writing, emphasis on accuracy in terms of written texts should still be considered beneficial. In addition, Almaden (2006) using topical structure analysis (TSA) reports that parallel progression is the most frequently used in the paragraphs, followed by the extended and sequential progressions. She further reveals that extended sequential progression is the least used. Interestingly, her findings show that Filipino ESL students, despite being L2 learners who are bilinguals, could write in the same pattern as do natives who are monolinguals. She relates this finding to the consistent use of English language in the Philippine context and the fact that English is strictly used as medium of instructions.

2.2. Interactional and Interactive Metadiscourse

Due to its pragmatic role in a written discourse, metadiscourse has appealed with significant attention and interest in the field of language research. Researchers like Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, (1993) and Hyland (2005a) categorized metadiscourse into different classes to describe its functions in written discourse. Vande Kopple (1985) classified metadiscourse into textual and interpersonal domains. The 'textual domain' guides writers connect their propositions in a cohesive manner and the 'interpersonal' gives writers the opportunity to convey the intended meaning of the sentences. The *textual metadiscourse* is illustrated through the use of 'text connectives' and 'code glosses' while the *'interpersonal metadiscourse'* is realized through the use of *'illocutionary markers'*, *'validity markers*, *narrators*, *'attitude markers'* and *'commentary'*. With this, Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore et al. (1993) and Hyland (2005) described metadiscourse into two functional domains: interactive and interactional metadiscourse.

Through the use of computers and accessibility of information nowadays, the study of metadiscourse has shifted into newer dimensions with the use of large corpora samples. To point, Hyland (1999) conducted a comparative study comparing the number of uses of metadiscourse in textbooks and research articles where he discovered that the latter has gained more number of interpersonal metadiscourse. On a similar vein, Hyland (2004b) explored postgraduate research artifacts which revealed that the number of metadiscourse employed in doctoral theses is far more obvious in occurrences than masters'. Interestingly, Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) noted that good essays normally receive more metadiscourse than that of underrated essays as good essays project substance and relevance on the subject being discussed.

Aside from previous studies exploring on the two domains of metadiscourse, other language researchers are moving into specific features. Wu (2007), for example, highlighted the uses of engagement resources in high and low-rated undergraduates' geography essays. Harwood (2005) concentrated on the use of *self-mention* with the use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns. Additionally, Hyland (2001a) pinpointed the importance of audience's communicative engagement in academic reasoning and dealt on exclusive pronouns and self-citations as well (Hyland, 2001b).

2.3.Metadiscourse Across Academic Genres

The main impetus of scrutinizing the occurrences and functions of metadiscourse in written discourse is concerning the promotion of how metadiscourse can be a big help for readers in defining and structuring their notions to different approaches in academic genres. For instance, in the cross-linguistic study of English and Persian editorials, Kuhi and Mojood (2014) disclosed that genre conventions influenced the writer's choices in employing metadiscourse which are evident in the distribution of these features across English and Persian newspaper editorials. To prove the discipline and ethno-linguistic aspects, some differences were found between the two sets of data with which, the interactional category has proved to be the predominant feature which mirrors the construction of persuasion in this type of genre. Similarly, Zarei (2011) conducted a comparative study in metadiscourse elements in humanities and non-humanities researches which lays down the difference of employability of metadiscourse features favoring Persian research articles. However, humanities researches which include Applied Linguistics tend to focus more on textuality that relies mainly on interactive metadiscourse as an outflow of reader's involvement. Meanwhile, Sukma and Sujatna (2014) explored the interpersonal metadiscourse markers in Indonesians' editorial articles. Results affirmed that only few of metadiscourse categories were employed and attitude markers ranked first followed by commentaries, hedges, certainty markers, and attributors.

Jimenez (2013) examined a web-based discourse genre by applying a dialogic framework to the study of interpersonality. This genre fits to the sphere of travel and tourism, where the interface of writers-readers (or wreaders—a term coined by Landow in 1994) attempts at persuading others through positive and negative views. Findings indicate the following descriptions of the traveler forum: (1) the stance voice, irrespective of the wreader's turn in the thread, is usually demonstrated through self-mentions and hedges, creating authority and personal discourse with credibility to gain thoughts and evaluations of a nonbusiness nature; (2) the engagement voice displays an ostensibly constant and apparently generic weakness in the wreader; and (3) the most recurrent interpersonal markers that help readers' alignment are personal pronouns/commitment markers and directives. In this respect, the engagement voice attains the traveler forum purpose, having constant reader involvement in evaluations, judgments, and advice and establishing harmony and peer-to-peer communication.

In a much nearer dimension, in the Philippine contexts, metadiscourse research has also found its way in the field. Tarrayo (2014) examined the view of 20 investigative journalism blogs published in the official website of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) blogs and found that interactive and the interactional metadiscourse in Philippine investigative journalism blogs are undoubtedly remarkable where interactive metadiscourse received the highest occurrences than interactional metadiscourse in the two sub-categories. Results advanced that Filipino writers are more conscious in terms of allowing the ideas to flow coherently using prepositions to aid the readers in understanding the texts. Similarly, in an attempt to investigate the intertwining relationship of language and culture through metatext categories, Tarrayo (2011) made use of the results-and-discussion sections of 15 research articles (RAs): Philippine-English variety ESL Ras and EFL RAs Taiwanese-English and Iranian-English varieties. Findings show that although the entire corpus has larger number of previews, Philippine-English RAs has the highest frequency of preview and review metatext categories. Tarrayo concluded that Filipino writers possess "writer-responsible" attitude as compared to other nationalities.

2.4. Metadiscourse in Persuasive/Argumentative Essays

Persuasive essays, also known as argumentative essays are genres of writing that require student to inspect a topic to accumulate, produce, assess evidence, and establish a stance on the topic in a concise manner. Persuasive essays are one of the common writing genres that students are tasked to produce as classroom writing activities (Hyland, 2009) and usually considered the most sophisticated type of writing due to their complexity (Johns, 1993) comprising the writer – reader interaction (Hyland, 2004a). Kuteeva (2011) affirmed that argumentative essays are predominantly a social norm that requires the writer to hold the reader's anticipations of how ideas are coherently and cohesively interconnected, as well as the proficiency of the linguistic features that are used to convey meaning (Morgan, 2011).

Hyland (2004) argues that apart from composing texts that denote external veracity, writers also used language to plausibly characterize their output as themselves and formulate social relations with readers. This mirrors the importance of writer-reader interaction in a persuasive essay that knowledge of metadiscourse being one of the interactional writing tools is of paramount importance in developing the skills and styles of L2 student writers. To Hyland (2004), "the ability of writers to control the level of personality in their texts, claiming solidarity with readers,

evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views, is now recognized as a key feature of successful academic writing" (as cited in, Tarayo, 2014, p. 36). Though a similar study was conducted by Rahimivand and Kuhi (2014) exploring discoursal construction of identity in academic writing employing 30 research articles, gaps remain in our understanding as regards authorial presence in academic writing produced by EFL and ESL learners. In particular, knowledge of metadiscoursal features presented within academic writing by senior high school students is almost scarce since remarkably the K to 12 is a new established curriculum program in the Philippines with varying education settings. Moreover, while there have been a number of investigations into self-mention and personal pronoun used in published student academic essays (e.g. Hyland 1999, 2001; Harwood 2005), there is hardly ever any study that has directly examined writing produced by ESL learners in senior high school which is the mainstream focus of this paper.

3. Theoretical Framework

Metadiscourse analysis has been extensively studied in different academic genres of English language. The proliferation of research works in the field has engendered several frameworks; however, this study adopted Hyland's (2004a) model on metadiscourse over others because the categorization is concise and comprehensive (Vazquez-Orta, Lafuente-Millan, Lores-Snaz, & Mur-Duenas, 2006, as cited in, Tan & Eng, 2014).

According to Hyland (2005a), the writer makes use of *interactive* metadiscourse as linguistic devices to direct the reader through the text. With the *interactive* metadiscourse, writers establish a more cohesive and coherent content. The *interactive* dimension covers various subcategories such as *transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential* and *code glosses*. In addition, Hyland's model underscored the second dimension of metadiscourse which is the *interactional* category. This dimension is recognized by Vande Kopple's (1985) and Crismore et al.'s (1993) as *interpersonal* metadiscourse. Regardless of the differentiation in categorization, its role in the writing discourse is alike; that is, the *interactional* dimension is employed to express the writers' affective aspects or reactions to the propositional content and to establish a reader-friendly atmosphere with the intended audience. This metadiscourse domain encompasses subcategories such as *hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers* and *self-mentions (See Figure 1 below).*

CATEGORY	FUNCTION	EXAMPLES
INTERACTIVE	*HELP TO GUIDE THE READER THROUGH THE TEXT*	*RESOURCES*
TRANSITIONS	Express relations between the main clauses	In addition; but; thus; and
FRAME MARKERS	Refer to the discourse acts, sequences or stages	Finally; to conclude; my purpose is
ENDOPHORIC MARKERS	Refer to information in another part of the text	Noted above; see Fig.; in Section 2
EVIDENTIALS	Refer to information from other texts	According to X; Z states
CODE GLOSSES	Elaborate propositional meanings	Namely; for example; such as; in other words
INTERACTIONAL	*INVOLVE THE READER IN THE TEXT*	*RESOURCES*
HEDGES	Withhold commitment and open dialog	Might; perhaps; possible; about
BOOSTERS	Emphasize certainty of close dialog	In fact; definitely; it is clear that
ATTITITUDE MARKERS	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
SELF-MENTIONS	Make explicit reference to the author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
ENGAGEMENT MARKERS	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider; note; you can see

Figure 1. An Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2004a)

4. Methodology

4.1. Corpus of the Study

This qualitative analysis utilized 50 persuasive essays on societal problems highlighting key topics such as Extrajudicial Killings, Martial Law in Mindanao, Overpopulation, Social Media, and Youths of Tomorrow. The articles were written by Grade 11 senior high school students as part of the requirements in Reading and Writing subject. Since it was impossible to obtain similar data from students in terms of the degree of writing interest, the length of the essays which passed the criterion of 250-word count and above served as the prime consideration in the selection of the learner corpus. Of the 150 student persuasive essays, only 50 were considered to

be the data with 10 articles representing each key topic (See Table 1 for a breakdown of the corpus). The researchers regarded each key topic as important since topics are diverse in nature and may uncover various linguistic evidences from students that are helpful in realizing the study's purpose.

Table 1. Breakdown of the Learner Corpus

Key Topics on Persuasive Essay	Number of Essays Used	Word Count
Martial Law	10	6, 923
Extra-Judicial Killings	10	3, 477
Social Media	10	2, 855
Overpopulation	10	3, 472
Youths of Tomorrow	10	11, 109
Total	50	27, 836

4.2.Procedure

This study is an analysis of the use of metadiscourse structures in student persuasive essays following Hyland's model of interpersonal metadiscourse (2004a) which has been considered most comprehensive and pragmatically grounded means of exploring interpersonal features in written texts (Vazquez-Orta, et al., 2006, as cited in, Tan & Eng, 2014). This framework is seen progressing and can adapt to any relevant studies revolving around metadiscourse categories. According to Rahimivand and Kuhi (2014, p. 1495), "this model overcomes many of the limitations of other models and tries to move beyond exterior and superficial forms or assays about metadiscourse as a self-sufficient stylistic scheme" in which evidentials, hedges, boosters, self-mentions and attitude markers are analyzed. Considering Ivanič's (1998) model of identity, which is also used significantly in the study, can give a thorough understanding of the issues about constructing L2 writer's identity.

The corpus was collected from students as part of their requirements in an English class. After collecting the corpus, essays were carefully read and examined. Frequency count was done through a concordance tool called AntConc (3.4.4w) and analysis was done manually. To add the validity of the results, the researchers invited two teacher-researchers who were language teachers from the same school to assist in coding the metadiscourse features found in student persuasive essays. Both the researchers and the teacher coders discussed if decisions on individual markings

are differed. However, it is important to note that it is very difficult to identify metadiscoursal features since words chosen by the writer do not always suggest one pragmatic interpretation (Hyland, 1996b). This supports the idea of language as a creative human activity in which, writers are expected to have a wider scope of vocabulary to help readers perceive the intended meaning of the texts. As such, categories of metadiscourse can be treated and realized through linguistics in various forms (Rahimivand and Kuhi 2014), however, a context-sensitive analysis should be carried out since metadiscourse features are multifunctional (Tarrayo, 2014) which, in this study, only expressions suggesting metadiscourse characteristics were selected and analyzed as metadiscourse.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1.Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse in Student Persuasive Essays

Metadiscourse as defined by Crismore etal. (1993) refers to writer's direction and involvement for how readers should read, analyze, and assess the ideas presented. That is, in this context, it could be comprehended that, writers dictate the reaction of their readers. In contrary to the former view, Hyland (2005a) has seen metadiscourse as 'self-reflective expressions' through which the reader and the writer are engaged to interact within the text. This statement is parallel with Vande Kopple's (1985) textual and interpersonal categorization of metadiscourse by classifying metadiscourse features into interactive and interactional, where interactive devices play to "guide the reader through the text and interactional resources include the reader actively in the progress of the text" (Thompson, 2001, p. 58). Hence, while interactive metadiscourse is used to structure a text coherently, the interactional category designates the writer's voice through personal note cohesively.

Table 2 below presents the metadiscourse features used in student persuasive essays. Remarkably, the data showed that the student essays employed more interactional features (66.79%) than interactive (33.21%). It appears that student L2 writers are sensitive in making their ideas strong, organized, and cohesively presented as interactional features build a notable sense of ownership of thoughts through the development of the text. Students tend to actively engage their readers in a way that a sense of writer identity is projected, and at the same time, a collaborative reading community is assumed. This result supports the claim of Kuhi and Mojood (2014) which states that interactional metadiscourse is overtly argumentative in nature, i.e. highlighting the

explicit construction of textual persona. However, this is inconsistent with Hinds' (2001) finding which found native English writers to be more favorable on the use of interactional devices such as hedges, attitude markers and boosters. Additionally, this finding challenges the idea of Morgan (2011) that L2 writers show preference for interactive metadiscourse features to interactional resources. As far as rhetorical styles are concerned, Hyland (2005b) argued that Asian writers overuse frame markers *(firstly, secondly, finally)* which is a sub-category of interactive features, while Swedish (Aijmer, 2002), and Chinese (Hyland 2005b) tend to rely freely on the modal verb *will* versus the *can* and *could* by Germans, and *may* by French (Aijmer, 2002).

Table 2

Frequency of use of Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse in Student Persuasive Essays

Metadiscourse Category	Frequency	Percentage	Total Percentage
Interactive Features			
Transition	51	46.78	15.66
Frame Markers	22	20.18	06.76
Endophoric Markers	1	0.94	0.03
Evidentials	19	17.43	05.84
Code Glosses	16	14.67	04.92
Total	109		33.21
Interactional Features			
Hedges	22	10.13	06.76
Boosters	21	9.67	06.43
Attitude Markers	7	3.25	02.18
Engagement Markers	55	25.34	16.87
Self-Mentions	112	51.61	34.55
Total	217		66.79
Grand Total	326		100

Among the five features under interactional metadiscourse, the use of self-mentions overrides the frequency (51.61%) which almost doubled the list of all interactional resources total count. Since, it is viewed that the metadiscoursal analyses can provide ample evidences on how writers build reader-relationship through academic genre, it means that when students are to write an argumentative article, they are anticipated to take position, lead, and persuade readers to take their stance using the four elements of persuasion namely: claim, reasons, arguments, and counterarguments (Pena and Anudin, 2017). With this, Wilson and Sperber (2004) added that, argumentative writers should know their audience well so they can assess their claims properly

brought by the topic discussed on hand. Moreover, understanding social norms, relationship with readers, and the purpose of writing help achieve rhetorical goals in writing an essay (Hyland, 1998).

Also, the data revealed that the total number of engagement markers ranked second in terms of the frequency of use (25.34%). The former result appeals to the thoughtfulness of writers which provides an evaluation that readers' inclusion in the subject discussion is of paramount importance as the arguments unfold. The students tend to demand readers' participation and delve into reading engagement all throughout. Meanwhile, attitude markers were the least favored interactional metadiscourse (3.25% only). This shows that student writers did not find attitude markers or sentiment devices a strong feature. Though it mirrors intensity of ideas given, student slightly stressed its significance in underpinning writer identity. This evidence is supported by Rahimivand and Kuhi (2014) who discovered similar result in the case of ESL/EFL research articles. As evidenced, this report relays that student persuasive writers stress significance of both projecting identity in writing as well as involving readers actively in the texts.

As regards the interactive metadiscourse features, transition was ranked first (41.78%). Hyland (2004b) stated that metadiscourse includes "unpacking decisions writers make in creating discourse itself rather than the events and processes that they participated in" (p.140). Transitions are being used to connect the chronological points in the arguments while expressing relationship with sentences in a paragraph. The use of this transitional interactive metadiscourse feature provides the text an edge to be qualitatively-impacting. Thus, in writing persuasive essays, the employability of transition signals the reader what to expect next in the text and dictates readers to change or to maintain anticipation with the previous understandings.

5.2. Interactional Metadiscourse Features in Student Persuasive Essays

The following tables reflect the analysis of the 10 different metadiscourse features found in student persuasive essays as anchored on Hyland's (2004a) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. Again, it should be noted that the analysis was manually contextualized in nature to match the validity of the expected results and to surpass the notion of no one pragmatic meaning yields one single interpretation (Heng & Tan, 2010).

Table 3

Frequency of Hedges Used in Student Essays

Form of hedges	Frequency
Could	5
Can	5
Might	4
May	3
Would	2
Maybe	1
Seem/Seemed	1
Is believed	1
Grand Total	22

The use of hedges in student persuasive essays is relatively less frequent. However, it is obvious that students used a variety of hedges in their articles. Most evident hedges used are *could, can,* and *might.* The result indicates that although students are most likely to share inputs with less commitments and anticipations in expressing their statements, they appear to be cautious and modest in giving their views to preserve their identity. This may be due to the notion that persuasive essays are more into reasons and takes up less commitments because writers merely play as a dispenser of thoughts informing readers of the stance they take regarding a certain issue. In contrary, William (2007) points out the need to use more hedges for writing to be a successful one. As such, Rahimivand and Kuhi (2014) argue that through the use of hedges, writers can anticipate possible oppositions while appearing not to be too assertive, which is a valuable element to hold writer's position (Hyland 1996a, 1998; Moreno 1998, & Salager-Meyer 1994).

The use of hedges in student persuasive essays are presented in the following extracts:

*(1): At the very least, it is possible that soldiers **could** misinterpret their orders and miscommunicate their authorities through power out of ignorance. (ML)*

*(2): The government and powerful leaders keep this private from the society to avoid the breakdown of ideologies and **might** lessen the faith in religion. (OP)*

*(3): A simple post of a teenager about global warming can inform many about the effects of it and more or less, a reader of the post **may** start to change his un-eco-friendly ways. (YT)*

Table 4

Frequency of Boosters Used in Student Essays

Form of Boosters	Frequency
Truly	6
Must	5
Should	4
Surely	2
Of Course	2
Legally	1
In Fact	1
Grand Total	21

As can be gleaned from the table above, the use of boosters was downplayed in terms of the number of occurrences which displays a very slight difference only as compared to the number of hedges. It is surprising that students see this feature as not obligatory in taking propositions and stance. Persuasive essays are supposed to be reflections of reasons and arguments of writers. As Rahimivand and Kuhi (2014) confirms that boosters or certainty markers are complex metalinguistic devices that strengthen authoritative persona in various functions. The most evident use of boosters are *truly, must, and should*.

See extracts (4), (5), and (6) for the reference:

*(4) Many minors commit crimes because they think they can get away with it. **Legally**, they can. (YT)*

*(5) We **must** do our best to help the youths to go through the right direction. (YT)*

*(6) **Of course**, the issue of privacy remains to be unsettling topic but we already have milked it and stressed on it more than enough times. (OP)*

Table 5

Frequency of Attitude Markers Used in Student Essays

Forms of Attitude Markers	Frequency
Especially	5
More Importantly	1
Unfortunately	1
Grand Total	7

Interestingly, this result corroborates Burneikaite's (2008) study which accentuated that the dominant reason why attitude markers are objectively less preferred because this feature represents reluctance and lack of confidence of writers in establishing their voice in their outputs. This does not mean that feelings or affective stimuli of students do no longer exist when writing, however. It simply indicates that, in the academic world especially in the realm of persuasion, emotional sentiments must always be controlled by reasons. Following below are extracts that served as the evidence.

*(7) With this, the situation then was clearly different, **especially** by the terms situated for its declaration. (ML)*

*(8) **Unfortunately**, many teenagers commit suicide just so, they can escape from problems.*

Table 6

Frequency of Self-Mentions Used in Student Essays

Form of Self-Mentions	Frequency
I	35
We	48
Our	10
Us	10
My	6
Me	2
Grand Total	112

Interestingly, self-mentions are distinctly illustrated the most visible representation of constructing writer identity in persuasive essays. The prevalence of self-mentions promotes the writer and his/her work in academic community which holds the overwhelming part of this study. Harwood (2005b) supports the use of self-mentions or promotional devices in projecting authority in writing, *authorial self*. This is consistently supported by Hyland (2002) claim, *"*self-mention constitutes a central pragmatic feature of academic discourse since it contributes not only to the writer's construction of a text, but also of a rhetorical self (p.1110).

Hell, Verhoeven, Tak and Oosterhout (2005) exposed that the use of first person singular and plural, and third person singular is seen more dominant in narrative texts than in expository counterparts whereas impersonal pronouns are favored in expository than in narrative texts. In contrary, Martin (2011) revealed that Filipino student writers have a tendency to employ fewer

first person pronouns. The result was evident in both Filipino and English essays where first-person referencing is least favored. This implies that the students are more inclined with self-representation than with having a feeling of otherness (Partington, 1993). They tend to create individual identity while managing to establish solidarity and foster an atmosphere of oneness. Extractions (9), (10), and (11) below justify the points.

*(9) Such utterances from **my** parents strike **my** heart and soul. Telling **me** to become studious and be more pro-active in **my** academics. **I** have always thought that maybe they're just worried for **my** future, if not, my reputation in general. If so, **I** try to attain excellence in the work **I** do. However, as the average student that **I** am, **I** do not take this too much into consideration – until now. (EJK)*

*(10) **I** believe in the meaning of Martial Law that is meant to give the military control over its coverage area when the civilian government could no longer function. (ML)*

*(11) **I** would like to express to those affected by this calamity that **I** am thinking of them and wish to send them **my** love and prayers. **I** know that **we** will rise together stronger and united as a country and as a people.*

Table 7

Frequency of Engagement Markers Used in Student Essays

Form of Engagement Markers	Frequency
You	40
We	15
Grad Total	55

It can be seen from the table above that engagement markers ranked second in establishing writer identity in student persuasive essays. This shows that student writers develop a writing strategy to bring readers into the text in an unfolding dialogue (Hyland, 2004a). Using the pronoun *you enables* the students to link the past knowledge and experiences of readers to strengthen the interaction between the speaker and the audience in the speech event. The following extract could prove the effective use of an engagement marker, in a form of rhetorical question, which aims to call readers' participation and engagement in giving insightful arguments. The use of *You* showing the uniformity of ideas or a *'shared knowledge'* between the writer and the reader is also notable.

*(12) Did **you** ever wonder or ask **yourself**, why NASA needs a vast exploration outside the world? What is their purpose? What is the benefit? (OP)*

*(13) How can **you** tell if **you** are using social media appropriately and wisely? (SM)*

*(14) Did **you** see? Do **you** see what is happening today? (OP)*

*(15) Open **your** eyes; Clear **your** mind. Let everything sink in and realize that **we** are in danger. The future held by the teenagers is in jeopardy. How can **we** progress if people like such are executed, killed and accused without real and solid evidences? Even if so, where is the proper due process? (EJK)*

Indeed, metadiscourse owns a prominent rank in second language academic writing. It has been proven that explicit instruction about metadiscourse has a positive impact on students' writing experiences (Crismore, 1984; Perez-Llantada, 2003; Simin & Tavangar, 2009; Xu, 2001, as cited in Tarrayo, 2014). Through explicit classroom instruction, students will be able to try to employ mostly on metadiscoursal elements to present a more acceptable piece of writing within the socio-rhetorical framework of academic picture within their target communities (Hyland, 2005b). In other words, by introducing metadiscourse in L2 academic approach, student moves out from simple sharing information to context-rich interaction (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, as cited in, Tarrayo & Duque, 2011) as it carries social meaning by displaying the author's dispositions and identity and by marking how he/she expects his/her readers to react to the ideational material.

6. Conclusion

This study concluded that the use of *self-mention* by students in persuasive essays constitutes a metalinguistic feature that promotes, establishes, equips, and secures their writer identity. The predominance of *self-mention* as a sub-category of interactional metadiscourse allows student writers to achieve interaction of readers personally where they can construct their metadiscoursal identity, i.e. *authorial self* not only to represent the text but more importantly position themselves as writers. Furthermore, the strategic use of personal pronouns as engagement markers is overwhelming in the study as clearly exemplified through rhetorical questions attempting to evoke participation and engagement among the readers. This is useful for student writers should know how to label their readers as interlocutors in order to attain persuasive and argumentative insights while creating a highly communicative engaging reading environment.

Hence, it can be concluded that such distinct feature of personal pronouns unquestionably helps shape writer identity in student persuasive essays. Nonetheless, it is significant to note that attitude markers are considered to be the least frequently used interactive metadiscourse element. The underuse of attitude markers or sentiment markers approves the dominance of reason over emotional perception in academic writing. Thus, attitude markers are seen to be impersonal feature that weakens authoritative voice and personal involvement of writers. In an academic world especially in the parlance of persuasion, overtaking emotions by arguments means eradicating "impressionalism" (Rahimivand and Kuhi, 2014, p. 1499) and highlighting opinionated schemes. In addition, the underuse of hedges is remarkable in the study which shows that students are cautious and modest in giving their views regarding certain topics while the less frequency of boosters is surprising in that students' authoritative persona in their persuasive essays were not truly reflected.

In conclusion, the role of metadiscourse in discoursal construction of student identity lies in its intermediary nature in the sense that, with special use of its elements like evidentials, hedges, boosters, self-mentions, engagement markers and attitude markers, students can reflect their principles and uniqueness as a writer. This being said, factors that affect the use of metadiscourse markers when developing an academic argument may reside on the type of academic genre, the translation of various writing experiences through cultural norms, and linguistic choices.

7. **Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing findings and the conclusion, this study offers some pedagogical implications useful for second language academic writing instruction. There is no question that metadiscourse markers are important ingredients in L2 academic writing. For an effective use of these markers, L2 teachers should directly teach them to students as explicit instruction of metadiscourse significantly enhances quality in student writing (see Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2012; Yaghoubi & Ardestani, 2014). It is also imperative that teachers pay equal attention to the teaching of personal pronouns in the writing classes. Students should be taught the pragmatic functions of personal pronouns to help them carry out their positions in such a highly academic world of writing. Enough exposure on the different uses of personal pronouns is deemed necessary if the goal is to strengthen representation skills of students in different written discourses (Martin, 2011). Moreover, L2 writing teachers should employ more real-life and authentic writing activities which

can foster the development of critical thinking skills and familiarization of contextualized linguistic elements to transfer significant student writing experiences in the classroom.

However, a much deeper qualitative analysis of large and varied learner corpora is important to reach at a more conclusive result. Future studies may also investigate other persuasive essays that tackle other topics such as politics, sports and business. Lastly, since writing is culture-bound, a contrastive rhetoric analysis on metadiscourse can be a rich information showing the distinction of functions between metadiscourse categories of different languages situated within the broad field of academic writing.

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