

An Analysis: The Usage of Metadiscourse in Argumentative Writing by Malaysian Tertiary Level of Students

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the results of a corpus-based study on the usage of metadiscourse in argumentative writing by Malaysian college students. The aims of the study is to examine the frequency and distribution of metadiscourse used by the particular students in argumentative writing as well as to analyze the errors that made by the particular students in using metadiscourse. The finding shows that Malaysian college students are more inclined to using textual metadiscourse instead of interpersonal metadiscourse. Besides, the selected students are using less code glosses and stance indicator in their argumentative writing. In addition, Malaysian college students committed quite a number of errors in using metadiscourse and practices are needed to train them in using metadiscourse correctly. These findings are useful for Malaysian tertiary level of educators or teachers as they help the educators to figure out the weaknesses of students in using metadiscourse.

Keywords: metadiscourse (MD), argumentative writing, Malaysian college students, corpus-based study and MCSAW

1. Introduction

Metadiscourse is widely used by writers to interact with the readers, especially in argumentative writing. Hence, it is important for our local students to have the knowledge to use metadiscourse accurately in order to produce a written product which will interact with readers effectively. In this study, the researchers are adapting Ken Hyland's taxonomy model of metadiscourse which focuses on the interactive function of metadiscourse. This is the interactive position of metadiscourse, where a writer's commentary on his or her unfolding text represents coherent set of interpersonal options (Ken Hyland, 2009). In other words, by using metadiscourse accurately in writing, it will help the writer to convey the intended message of the writing content more efficiently to the readers.

Metadiscourse is an intuitively attractive concept as it seems to offer a motivated way of collecting under one heading the range of devices writers use to explicitly organize their texts, engage readers, and signal their attitudes to both their material and their audience. This promise, however, has never been fully realized because metadiscourse remains and under-theorized and empirically vague.

The view of metadiscourse and the descriptive framework discussed in this paper emerges from corpus analysis of 440 essays written by students from vary colleges in Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. Our purpose of selecting the college students in this study is to observe their level of exposure and understanding of using metadiscourse towards the format of argumentative writing.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of doing this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using metadiscourse by Malaysian college students in argumentative writing.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study is to find out the distribution of the metadiscourse used in argumentative writing by Malaysian college students and to analyze the errors that are commonly made in argumentative

writing by Malaysian college students.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) What is the frequency of metadiscourse used by Malaysian college students in argumentative writing?
- 2) What are the common errors made by Malaysian college students in using metadiscourse?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corpus Based Studies

Corpus linguistics is defined by Granger (2002:4) as ‘...a methodology which is found on the use of electronic collections of naturally occurring texts, vis. Corpora’. Corpora, then, are computer databases of naturally occurring language (McEnery, Xiao & Tono, 2006). They enable researchers to observe enormous amounts of data in a relatively short time with relative ease (Gilquin, Granger & Paquot, 2007) which renders corpora powerful tools for discovering language features (Granger, 2002). The language they contain has been produced naturally for the purpose of real life communication, whether casual conversations between workmates or academic essays written by students. It has not, in other words, been produced under controlled conditions for purposes such as teaching or research. This allows the researchers to draw comparisons across a range of co-texts which, in turn, allows for the analysis and description of linguistic features (Gilquin, Granger & Paquot, 2007). This has led, amongst other things, to the realisation that academic phraseology is not generic but that it varies across genres and is affected by the communicative purpose it serves (Gilquin, Granger & Paquot, 2007) which has had a major impact on language teaching (Hunston, 2002; Johns, 2002; Mukherjee, n.d.).

Concordance tools are computer programmes designed to sift out and read specific language features, at the behest of the researcher, from the language contained in the corpus: data are presented in the form of concordance lines. This enables the researcher to observe specific language functions as well as the framework of norms that are defined by the community in which the communication is taking place, and which shapes features of the discourse such as formality and vocabulary. In terms of student essay writing, these norms are defined by the academic community that the lecturer who set the task belongs to, and into which the student is being apprenticed. A corpus approach, therefore, constitutes a powerful way to observe specific language features that are part of the community’s discourse practices.

A generic weakness with corpora studies is that the language observed and can only be viewed within the very limited context of the concordance lines, which is particularly problematic when studying features such as metadiscourse which are context dependent (Hyland, 2005). In defence, concordance programmes have a feature that allows the researcher to expand on a chosen concordance line to view the context in which the language operates. A number of writers (Charles, 2007; Granger, 2002; Luzon, 2009; Weber, 2001) also caution that corpus studies compliment, and do not replace, other research methods. Luzon (2009) and Weber (2001), for example, call for corpora approaches to teaching academic writing to be combined with genre analysis whilst Charles (2007) argues for the teaching of specific rhetorical functions by combining corpora studies with discourse analysis. A corpus based study does not necessarily define the boundaries of a research project yet forms, in many respects, a potential starting point for further analysis.

2.2 Argumentative Writing

According to Hyland (1998; 2009) and Johns (1993), argumentative essays are one of the common genres that tertiary level students have to produce. Argumentative writing is considered as the central of many disciplines (Kuteeva, 2011), where all the students are going to produce one of this type of writing sooner or later. It is considered as the most complicated type of writing for non-native speakers (Johns, 1993) as it involves the writer interacting with the reader (Hyland, 2004). Kuteeva (2011) then reported that argumentative essays is primarily a social practice that requires the writer to grasp the reader’s expectations of how ideas are communicated, as well as a mastery of the linguistics features that are used to convey meaning (Morgan, 2011). This shows that interaction between the writer and readers in an argumentative essay is very important. In order to achieve this, writers need to have the skills in using metadiscourse because it is considered as one of the interaction tools used in writing.

The effective use of metadiscourse devices to achieve a rhetorical aim hinges on understanding the social norms, the relationship with the reader and the purpose for writing (Hyland, 1998a) which hints at a more complex interaction that Hyland’s categories suggest. It also depends on a shared knowledge of disciplinary practices between reader and writer, as well as understanding and familiarity with the genre (Hyland, 2005) which can be highly problematic for L2 writers who may lack the cultural insight as well as the necessary linguistic sophistication (Aijmer, 2002; Park, 1986).

The skill of the writer in engaging the audience has been shown to have a significant effect on the grades students are awarded for their essays (Mei, 2007). Hyland (2005), for example, discovered that high scoring GCSE essays written by Chinese speaking students in Hong Kong tended to exhibit metadiscourse features closely associated with L1 students' writing. He argued that metadiscourse is the language of a community of practice in that it shapes the discourse so as to conform to the knowledge building norms of that community (Hyland, 2005). Thus, he concluded that 'a lack of familiarity with the metadiscourse conventions central to many expository genres in English may be detrimental to learners' academic performance' (Hyland, 2005:136) and that interactional features of metadiscourse are a 'defining feature of successful academic writing' because they allow the writer to 'claim solidarity with readers' whilst displaying self reflection on claims made and 'acknowledging alternative views' (Hyland, 2005:219). Thompson (2001) concurs, stating interactive metadiscourse needs to form the focus of training in academic writing.

With the literature review that was obtained, the researchers decided to conduct a corpus based study on metadiscourse in argumentative writing in order to look into the effectiveness of metadiscourse usage by Malaysian college students.

2.3 Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse (MD) refers to linguistic devices which writers include to help readers decode the message, share the writer's views and reflect the particular conventions that are followed in a given culture. It is defined by Hyland (2000) "as the interpersonal resources used to organise a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader" (p.109). Although the term is defined by various scholars in different ways, it is seen as an umbrella term including an array of features that help relate a text to its context by assisting readers to connect, organise, and interpret material in a way preferred by the writer with regard to the understandings and values of a particular discourse community (Halliday, 1998). Following Hyland (2005, p.37), in this study metadiscourse is defined as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assist the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community." On the one hand it helps the writer to organise the content of the text, on the other it assists the reader to understand and interpret the text. During reading, the reader, by making use of these metadiscoursal features, decodes, reconstructs and interprets the text. In short, by providing context it facilitates communication, supports the writer's position and builds the writer-reader relation.

Metadiscourse has informed several studies that focus on text features, cross-cultural variations and writing pedagogy (Hyland, 2004, p.134) Areas which have been examined are wideranging, with examples such as casual conversation (Schiffrin, 1980), undergraduate textbooks (Hyland, 2000), postgraduate dissertations (Bunton, 1998) and school textbooks (Crismore, 1998). Studies investigating rhetorical differences in the texts written by different first language groups shown that it is a characteristic of a range of languages and genres (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993; Valero-Garces, 1996). Particularly persuasive and argumentative texts have been found to utilize metadiscourse as a prominent component (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990; Hyland, 1998).

Its importance in writing cannot be disputed and over the past decades, the study of MD has garnered much attention from researchers of Second Language (L2) writings. This is evidenced by the number of studies that ranged from classification to cross-cultural studies on MD. Researchers such as Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore et al (1993) and Hyland (2005) have classified MD into different functional categories to explain the workings of MD. Vande Kopple (1985) categorized MD into two main domains – textual and interpersonal. The 'textual domain' helps writers link their propositions in a cohesive manner and the 'interpersonal' provides writers the avenue to convey their feelings towards the given propositions. The textual MD is exemplified through the use of 'text connectives' and 'code glosses' while the 'interpersonal MD' is realized through the use of 'illocutionary markers', 'validity markers, narrators, 'attitude markers' and 'commentary'.

Based on Vande Kopple's (1985) categorization, Crismore et al (1993) further modified, collapsed and created new categories of MD. Although they retained the terminology of the two main domains of MD, they further sub-divided 'textual MD' into 'textual markers and interpretative markers'. Under 'textual markers', they added 'logical connectives', 'sequencers', 'reminders' and 'tropicalizes'. They then removed temporal connectives and narrators and created the code glosses, illocution markers and announcement as interpretative markers. Other than these frameworks, Hyland (2005) promotes the interpersonal model of MD. His model is not only an update on the taxonomies used by Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore et al (1993), it also gives greater comprehensibility and distinction to the varieties of MD features. As a result, his framework is adopted in this study, though keeping in mind that it is still open for further refinement. Hyland (2005), in the same manner of

Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore et al (1993), distinguishes MD into two main domains. However, he identifies them as 'Interactive' and 'Interactional MD'. He explains that the function of the 'interactive MD' is to help guide readers through the text while that of the 'interactional MD' is to involve the reader in the argument.

Interaction with the reader is firmly anchored in his framework and he further details the categories of the interactive and interactional MD, providing comprehensive examples for each sub-category. The sub-categories of the 'interactive' MD are manifested as 'transitions', 'frame markers', 'evidentials', 'endophoric markers' and 'code glosses'. For the 'interactional' MD categories, they are realized as 'hedges', 'boosters', 'engagement marker', 'attitude markers' and 'self-mention'.

With the advent of information and computer technology (ICT), the study on MD took on a new dimension. ICT made possible the investigation of large corpora through the use of concordance software. A case in point is the comparative study carried out by Hyland (1999) where he compared the use of MD in textbooks and research articles. The results showed that research articles have more interpersonal MD. Another corpus study on MD is Hyland's (2004) investigation on the use of MD in postgraduate writings. The study revealed that doctoral theses have more interactive MD than masters' theses. Interestingly, 'evidentials' were seen as appearing four times more in doctoral theses indicating the value placed on the greater use of citation as central to the argumentative or persuasive force of the text. Comparison of MD use between good and poor ESL undergraduate writers is evident in Intaraprawat and Steffensen's (1995) work which found that good essays have more MD features than poor essays.

Apart from the various studies that explore the use of different categories of MD others have been done to explore specific MD features. Wu (2007) concentrated on the use of engagement resources in high and low rated undergraduates' geography essays, while Hyland (2001a) studies the importance of audience engagement in academic arguments. Harwood (2005) concentrates on the use of self-mention, especially the use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns, and Hyland (2001b) focuses on the use of self-citation and the exclusive pronouns.

Therefore, research examining the distribution of the metadiscourse used in argumentative writing by Malaysian college students.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Corpus

The corpus that is used in this study is MCSAW, Malaysian Corpus of Students' Argumentative Writing. MCSAW contains the written data that was produced by Malaysian Form 4, Form 5 and College students. The essays that were provided in this corpus are written by 1010 students from higher secondary schools and colleges. These students are from Selangor and Negeri Sembilan and their age are from 16,17 and 18 years old. However, the researchers in this study are using only the college level students' essays, where there are only 440 students who are from this level. The written products consist of 174.300 tokens from the overall corpus. The rationale of selecting the college students in this study is to observe their level of exposure and understanding of using metadiscourse towards the format of argumentative writing.

3.2 The Written Data

The data that were used in this study are adopted from the Malaysian Corpus of Students' Argumentative Writing (MCSAW) which is developed by Mukundan J. and Rezvani Kalajahi, S.A. (2013). The students in this corpus were asked to write an argumentative essay with the topic of "Do you think Facebook has more advantages than disadvantages? Discuss your reasons." and "What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a hostel?". All the students were asked to write a 250-word essay based on the topics given during the class hour. Students were given the essay questions in different places and time due to the random selection of students from Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. It was conducted during their English language class and required to write the essay in class. The number of essay scripts collected from college students were 440 and analyzed it using the Word Smith 4.0 software.

3.3 Statistical Tool

The software tool that was used to analyze the essays was Word Smith 4.0. It is a concordance that was developed by Mike Scott, Oxford University Press (1996). This tool is used to analyze the frequency of metadiscourse usage by Malaysian College students in their writing.

In order to analyze the metadiscourse used by Malaysian College students by using Word Smith, the researchers will first identify all the metadiscourse that are listed by Hyland and put those words into the software to find out the frequency of usage. For example, the word "also" is considered as one of the metadiscourse (under the

category of Logical Connectors), so the researchers will find out the frequency of this word being used in the corpus by using Word Smith 4.0. However, some of the metadiscourse are used inaccurately by the students. Therefore, the researchers of this study have decided to do error analysis of the usage of metadiscourse by Malaysian College students.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the metadiscourse used by college students in their writing and to do this; the researchers adapt the taxonomies offered by Hyland (2004) and Hyland & Tse (2004). The taxonomies are modified by the researchers because the main focus of the researchers is to check the Textual discourse and Interpersonal discourse that used by the Malaysian College students. Table 1 shows the taxonomies that are adopted by the researchers.

Table 1. A model of metadiscourse in academic texts (adopted from Hyland, 1998; Hyland & Tse, 2004)

Category	Function	Examples
<i>Textual discourse</i>	Help to guide the reader through the text	
Logical connectors	Express semantic relations between main clauses	In addition, but, therefore etc.
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts or texts stages in an explicit way	Finally, to conclude etc.
Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely, in other words etc.
<i>Interpersonal discourse</i>	Involve the reader in the argument	
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to statements	Might, perhaps, about etc.
Stance indicators	Express writer's attitude to propositional content	Surprisingly, I agree, X claims etc.

In this paper, we will report the preliminary findings of an examination of how the connectors, hedges, and stance indicators are used in argumentative writing by Malaysian college students. Through quantitative analysis, the frequency and use of the metadiscoursal features will be investigated the effectiveness of using metadiscourse by Malaysian college students in argumentative writing.

4. Results

4.1 Textual Discourse

Table 2. Frequency of textual discourse of metadiscourse usage in Malaysian college student's argumentative writing

Textual Discourse		
Category	Total hits	Percentage of total (%)
Logical Connectors	2413	51
Frame markers	1529	32
Code Glosses	820	17
TOTAL	4762	100

4.1.1 Logical Connectors

In the study for the analysis of metadiscoursal features the taxonomies offered by Hyland (1998) and Hyland and Tse (2004) are used with certain modifications (see Table 1). Here the focus of these findings is on the textual discourse category which is logical connectors. It expresses semantic relations between main clauses.

We have selected 17 single-word logical connectors for concordancing. Table 2 lists the items we counted for this study.

Table 3. Frequency of usage of logical connectors in Malaysian college student's argumentative writing

Logical connectors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
accordingly	1	0.04
Also	1591	66
As a result	26	1.07
Consequently	1	0.04
Furthermore	104	4.31
However	135	5.6
In addition	64	2.6
In fact	32	1.3
In other words	5	0.2
In short	10	0.4
Indeed	47	2.0
Moreover	191	7.9
Nevertheless	8	0.33
On the other hand	24	1.0
otherwise	4	0.16
therefore	90	3.73
Thus	80	3.32
TOTAL	2413	100

Table 3 shows the frequency of Textual Discourse (Logical Connectors) used by Malaysian college students in their argumentative essay writing. The most prominent and highest frequency of logical connector used by Malaysian college students in writing an argumentative essay is 'also' which appeared for 1591 times in student's essays. This shows that the students are much exposed to write an essay using the word 'also' in order to portray their further explanation in writing an argumentative essay. Two connectors are used significantly less frequently: accordingly and consequently where there were used only 0.04% (total frequency of 1) by the Malaysian College students. It is interesting to discover that a word such as accordingly, which is generally regarded as suspiciously colloquial, appears more often in published texts than it does in our students' writing. Students were not exposed to the usage of these logical connectors in written essays. Although students seem to use some connectors whether they were always connectors or correctly used cannot be determined from this surface comparison but they had about the same frequency as native speakers.

Misuse of logical connectors

Table 4. Frequency of misuse of logical connectors in Malaysian college student's argumentative writing

Logical connector	Frequency
In short	4

Students have seldom been made to understand that, in English at least, ideas pointing in the same direction or in consecutive sentences are normally seen to be connected, and therefore without need of extraneous correlation. The following texts exemplify our student's misuse of logical connectors:

There are lots of functions that one cannot finish experiment all of it in short time.

Facebook is a virtual treasure trove of information that we can get it in short time.

So you must punctual to online your Facebook only just in short time.

So, we can online in Facebook but in short time.

There is no mention in the rubric to the exercise of the recursive process of writing which includes searching for background information, planning, drafting and revising. There is a constant pressure at secondary school to rush through the syllabus, which is based on anticipated examination questions, and students are usually required to

do their writing at home without guidance, or to complete their compositions in a single class period without any organizational planning. In such a situation, it is hardly surprising that students resort to using logical connectors as the magic glue to bind their disorganized ideas together.

Students entering tertiary study are concerned about their difficulties in oral and written communication. If they would identify the meaning for each logical connector then they might be able to speak and write using the correct connectors. Students are confused over such terms and sometimes overgeneralize the meaning of logical connectors. Ajmer (2002) picks up on this point arguing that an L2 writer's lack of engagement with the audience is likely due to learner's uncertainty about linguistic choices when developing an academic argument. In that case, students who continue to tertiary level should be well prepared to overcome this issue so that it will never affect their learning enthusiasm.

4.1.2 Frame Markers

Table 5. Frequency of usage of frame markers in Malaysian college student's argumentative writing

Frame Markers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aim	3	0.20
All in all	9	0.59
Desire to	6	0.39
Finally	16	1.05
First	179	11.71
First of all	50	3.27
Firstly	107	6.97
Focus	61	3.97
Goal	2	0.13
In brief	10	0.65
In conclusion	122	7.98
In short	25	1.64
Intention	14	0.92
Last	52	3.40
Lastly	42	2.75
Next	82	5.36
Now	204	13.34
Objective	3	0.20
On the whole	1	0.07
Overall	5	0.33
Purpose	18	1.18
Second	65	4.25
So far	1	0.07
Then	177	11.58
Third	10	0.65
Thirdly	25	1.64
To begin	1	0.07
To conclude	7	0.46
To sum up	15	0.98
Want to	201	13.15
Wish to	3	0.2
Would like to	13	0.85
TOTAL	1529	100

Table 5 shows 50 types of frame markers used in argumentative writing. Out of the 50, only 6 are prevalent among college students which are *First, Firstly, In conclusion, Now, Then, and Want to*.

The frame marker ‘First’ and ‘Firstly’ that show sequences (Morgan, 2011) are commonly used to begin a sentence. Students tend to opt for such frame markers to show importance of an idea or an order of sequence.

First of all, having a facebook account is time consuming.

The first advantage of facebook is free.

(The most important reason why people have a facebook account is because it is free.)

‘In conclusion’ is a frame marker that is placed in the beginning of the last sentence to indicate the ending and also in some circumstances a summary of the written work. ‘In conclusion’ is a popular choice compared to ‘To conclude’, ‘To sum up’, ‘In sum’ and ‘In summary’ although these words have the same definition. There were no errors identified in the usage of ‘In conclusion’ in argumentative writing.

The frame markers ‘Now’ and ‘Then’ are unique as they can be written in both the beginning and the middle of the sentence. The usage of both of these words has minimal errors in among students.

According to Morgan, M (2011), ‘want to’ is a frame marker that is used to announce goals. Moreover, it is the most hassle free or uncomplicated frame marker that indicates the direct meaning of the word. These are a few good examples written by students:

We can ask them directly on what we want to know.

People now a day want to save time and shop online.

Most students nowadays want to stay in hostels because they want to save money.

4.1.3 Code Glosses

According to Vande Kopple’s (1985) terminology, Code Glosses give cues to the proper interpretation of elements, comment on ways of responding to elements in texts, or call attention to or identify a style (cited by Annelie Adel, 2006).

Table 6. Frequency of usage of code glosses in Malaysian college student’s argumentative writing

Code Glosses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
For example	271	33.04
For Instance	63	7.69
I mean	2	0.24
In fact	26	3.17
In other words	7	0.85
Indeed	27	3.29
Known as	20	2.44
namely	1	0.12
Say	50	6.10
Specifically	1	0.12
Such as	275	33.54
That is	69	8.41
That means	3	0.37
Which means	3	0.37
Defined as	1	0.12
As a matter of fact, Called, e.g, or X, Put another way, That is to say, This means, Viz	0	0
TOTAL	820	100

Based on Table 6, there are two prominent code glosses that are widely used in argumentative writing. They are 'For example' and 'such as'. Although these two glosses had the most hits in the argumentative essays, not all students managed to use them accurately. Below are the 2 examples of errors with these two code glosses:

Facebook is used to spread agendas which are for example, political and religious agenda.

Using cyber network to communicate, for example Facebook, it is free for everyone.

'For example' is a code gloss which is most commonly used in the beginning of a sentence (followed by a comma) in order to introduce new examples in writing. Hence, the examples indicate the misuse of 'For example'.

On the other hand, 'such as' has the similar function as 'For example', which is to introduce one or more examples in a sentence. However, it is commonly written in the middle of a sentence and usually followed by a list or a string of examples instead of a single example. Below are the errors made by students. Both sentences contain the gloss 'such as' in an incomplete sentence form.

Share opinion with other Facebooker. Such as share recipe.

Such as student don't want to burden their parents.

All in all, out of the three textual discourses discussed in this paper, code glosses is the least used discourse in argumentative writing. This could be due to the difficulty in meaning of each gloss. Therefore, students opt for logical connectors and frame markers instead.

4.2 Interpersonal Discourse

Table 7. Frequency of interpersonal discourse of metadiscourse usage in Malaysian college student in argumentative writing

Interpersonal Discourse		
Category	Total hits	Percentage of total (%)
Hedges	2694	78
Stance Indicators	770	22
TOTAL	3464	100

Table 7 shows the frequency of Interpersonal Discourse (Hedges and Stance Indicator) used by Malaysian college students in their writing. Hedges are used more often by the students as compared to Stance Indicator. This shows that the students are more withholding of their commitment towards the statements and less expressing of their attitude towards the content. The hedges that are used the most by the students is the word "about" where it is used 25% (total hits of 666) in the Malaysian College students writing. The least used of words are "apparently", "appeared", "approximately", "claimed", "couldn't", "generally", "guess", "in most cases", "in my view", "indicated", "suggest", "suggests", and "suspect"; where they were used only 0.04% (total hits of 1) by the Malaysian College students. On the other hand, in Stance Indicator, the word that has most hits is "even" where it was used 36.8% (total hits of 283) by the Malaysian College students in their writing. The least used words are "dramatic", "dramatically", "preferable", "preferably", "remarkable", "surprised", "unbelievable", "unbelievably", "unexpected", and "unfortunate"; where were used only 0.13% (total hits of 1) in the students' writing.

Based on this information, it could be concluded that Malaysian College students are not very effective in expressing their own point of view confidently. A persuasive text which has a lack of Stance Indicator would be too arid and impersonal (Chan S.H. and Tan H., 2010). Malaysian College students are quite uncertain in conveying their message in argumentative writing. Table 8 and 9 are provided to summarize the distribution of Hedges and Stance Indicators in details.

Table 8. Frequency of usage of hedges in Malaysian college student's argumentative writing

Hedges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
About	666	25
Almost	94	3
Apparently	1	0.04
Appear	1	0.5
Appeared	1	0.04
Appears	21	0.78
Approximately	1	0.04
Argue	2	0.07
Around	304	11.3
Assume	2	0.07
Certain amount	11	0.41
Claimed	1	0.04
Could not	5	0.20
Could	172	6.38
Couldn't	1	0.04
Doubt	37	1.37
Essentially	4	0.15
Estimated	1	0.04
Fairly	3	0.11
Feel	59	2.20
Felt	2	0.07
Frequently	16	0.60
Generally	1	0.04
Guess	1	0.04
In general	2	0.07
In most cases	1	0.04
In my opinion	66	2.45
In my view	1	0.04
Indicate	2	0.07
Indicated	1	0.04
Likely	12	0.45
Mainly	3	0.11
May be	26	0.97
May	149	5.53
Maybe	42	1.56
Might	109	4.10
Mostly	17	0.63
Often	165	6.12
Perhaps	4	0.15
Possible	12	0.45
Probably	13	0.50
Quite	13	0.50
Rather	43	1.60
Seems	22	0.82
Should	210	7.80
Sometimes	82	3.04

Somewhat	2	0.07
Suggest	1	0.04
Suggested	2	0.07
Suggests	1	0.04
Supposed	4	0.15
Suspect	1	0.04
Tend to	38	1.41
Tends to	2	0.07
Usually	88	3.27
Would not	10	0.37
Would	131	4.90
TOTAL	2694	100

Table 9. Frequency of usage of stance indicator in Malaysian college student's argumentative writing

Stance Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	59	7.65
Amazing	5	0.64
Appropriate	5	0.64
Appropriately	4	0.52
Correctly	11	1.42
Curious	11	1.42
Disagree	27	3.51
Dramatic	1	0.13
Dramatically	1	0.13
Essential	8	1.04
Essentially	4	0.52
Even	283	36.80
Important	264	34.28
Importantly	4	0.52
Interesting	28	3.64
Prefer	30	3.90
Preferable	1	0.13
Preferably	1	0.13
Remarkable	1	0.13
Shocked	2	0.26
Surprised	1	0.13
Surprisingly	2	0.26
Unbelievable	1	0.13
Unbelievably	1	0.13
Unexpected	1	0.13
Unfortunate	1	0.13
Unfortunately	12	1.55
Usual	1	0.13
TOTAL	770	100

However, although hedges are used widely by Malaysian College students, there are some mistakes that were made by them while using Hedges in their writing. The most common errors are the misuse of Hedges grammatically:

“In other view I think Facebook got a place for distributing information as it will appeared on every page that called ‘Home’ for related person.” (Text 326)

Above is one of the examples that show the grammatical errors committed by Malaysian College students in using Hedges. This is a serious problem and as highlighted by William (2007), successful writers usually are able to hedge more. Malaysian College students who are considered as second language learners should be trained more in using Hedges correctly in order to produce a better written product. Besides, out of 99 hedges listed by Hyland, Malaysian College students are using only 57 hedges in their writing. Words like “from my perspective”, “ought”, “roughly” etc. are not used by the students in their writing. Students could be trained to hedge more in their writing as this will help them in producing better product of argumentative writing.

As for Stance Indicator, errors are not found in the corpus yet, it is used less by the students in writing argumentative essays. Malaysian College students should be trained to use Stance Indicator in writing persuasive essay as Stance Indicator would help to convey the confidence of the writer in their writing to the readers. It is important for the writers to express their confidence in argumentative essay in order to convince the readers to believe in the writers’ point of views.

5. Discussion and Summary

The results or findings show three main insights which are useful for the field of teaching English writing skills. Firstly, the distribution and frequency of metadiscourse used by Malaysia college students in their writing, it shows that the college students used more textual discourse rather than interpersonal discourse. The total hits of textual discourse are 4762 (57.9%) and for interpersonal discourse, the total hits are 8226 (42.1%). This distribution shows that Malaysian college students are unable to use interpersonal discourse in writing argumentative essays effectively. It is important to use more interpersonal discourse in writing argumentative essays as this discourse would help the writer to interact with the readers while they are reading. An argumentative essay that contains more interpersonal discourse is more convincing and it would be more effective in persuading the readers to believe in the points of the text written. The main purpose of argumentative writing is to convince the readers to believe in the writer’s point of view. If the writer failed to interact with the readers with their writing, this main purpose is hardly to be achieved. Using interpersonal discourse effectively is the way to produce a well written argumentative essay. Therefore, it is important for the ESL teachers to notice this and train their students to use more interpersonal discourse in their writing. Stance indicator, one of the interpersonal discourse categories, as stated by Hyland & Tse (2004), the function of this interpersonal discourse is to express the writer’s attitude to propositional content. Again, college students should use this discourse more as it will convey the confidence of the writer about what they believe in to the readers. A good reader would be able to realize the attitude of a writer in their writing. If the writer could not convey a confidence attitude through their writing to the reader, it would be a waste for the writer to spend so much times for writing as the writing would not convince the reader to believe in the writer’s opinions. Readers would not read a written product which will not benefit them; in order to make the writing beneficial, it is the writer’s responsible to produce a written product which has confidence and positive attitude. It is essential for the writer to attain this goal and to do this; the writer needs to have efficient ability in using stance indicator in their writing. In essence, it is substantial that Malaysian educators of tertiary level train their students more on using code glosses and stance indicators in order to produce an effective argumentative writing. By doing this, students could produce an argumentative writing which is assertive and decent.

However, this paper is not to emphasis on interpersonal discourse, yet the researchers notice the importance of textual discourse as well in argumentative writing. The writer needs to have the ability of guiding the readers to read through their text by using suitable words or phrases. This is to ensure that the readers grasp the intended meaning of the text that the writer tried to convey through his/her writing. A written product which is produced using none or less textual discourse is hardly to be understood by readers as there is not enough guidance provided by the writer for the readers to read through the written product. The findings in this study show that although the students used more textual discourse in their writing, but from the data obtained, it could be seen that the college students need more training in using code glosses and stance indicator in their writing. Code glosses are important rhetorical functions that assist the reader in ‘grasp[ing] the writer’s intended meaning’ (Hyland, 2005). To achieve this, the writers are required to be able to anticipate reader’s knowledge of the subject and to anticipate the response to claim made (Hyland, 2005). In other words, code glosses are important because they help readers to understand what the writer is trying to convey through their writing. More code glosses should be used in order to help readers grasp the full meaning of the written product. From the analysis, it shows that the selected students are often using code glosses to give example. Words like ‘for example’ and ‘such as’ are used frequently when they wanted to describe about examples. There are other words like ‘for

instance', 'specifically' etc. to use as the substitute of the selected words that used oftenly by them. In the point of view of the researcher, this incident happens due to the lack of vocabulary of the students in writing. ESL teachers need to provide more vocabularies to the students in order for them to produce a good argumentative essay. This is to avoid students using the same phrase or words repeatedly in their writing.

Lastly, the error analysis that was done by the researchers shows that the errors that are commonly made by Malaysian college students involve mainly grammatical aspects of writing. The students somehow confuse the usage of metadiscourse in writing and misused them as the prepositions or adverbs in their writing. This shows the inefficient knowledge of students in using metadiscourse. To avoid this, again, more trainings and exercises should be given to the students in order to improve their writing skills. Besides, students tend to use code glosses in incomplete sentences. This error is considered as crucial as it will cause fragment in the writing. Readers will be confused when there are some incomplete sentences or fragment sentences in their reading as the information is not fully conveyed to them. In addition, the students are unable to use correct tenses while they use the metadiscourse. They tend to attempt errors in the part of using singular verbs and present verbs. Grammar is considered as one of the essential parts in learning English. Students have fear in learning this part of English as it is considered as complicated for them. In order to remove this thinking among the students, ESL teachers should make grammar learning realia, which in other words, make grammar learning related to their daily life. When the students realize how realia grammar learning to their daily life, they will have the motivation to learn English grammar. This motivation will help them to remove the thinking of 'complicated' towards English grammar; once this thinking is deleted, they would be able to learn and use English grammar precisely. Teachers, as well, should pay more focus on how the students apply metadiscourse in their writing instead of only explaining the function of each category of metadiscourse. There is no point for students have the knowledge (competence) and they could not use or apply the knowledge (performance) into their daily life. Educators need to ensure that students could apply what they have learnt in their writing product.

In summary, not all metadiscourse are being used by Malaysian college students in their argumentative writing. The students are more comfortable in repeating the same words of the particular discourse in their writing. This is evident in the writers' lack of vocabulary in writing effective argumentative essays. Training and practices need to be given more to students in order to decrease the errors that they made in using metadiscourse. To produce a good argumentative essay, college students are required to be more interpersonal in their writing as to engage the readers into their writing. The framework that has been suggested in this study could help educators and teachers to realize which metadiscourse should be focused on more while teaching students in writing argumentative essays. Metadiscourse is thus considered as one of the tools to help writers communicate better with readers in a written form. Hence, more research should be done on this so that it could help to produce a generation with better writing skills.

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