Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Applied Linguistics Reply Articles

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Abstract

A published research article is not the final product in the knowledge dissemination circle. One genre entailing negotiation of academic outcomes is reply articles which seem to carry an evaluative burden (Khosravi & Babaii, 2017) and provide the academics with an opportunity to communicate their comments and criticisms on the published research findings. Nevertheless, it seems to have been underestimated compared to other genres in academic discourse communities. Attempting to fill this void, the current study attempted to investigate the frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers in 19 reply articles published in academic journals in applied linguistics from 2016 to 2021. Coding the interactional resources of Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse revealed that self-mentions were the commonest interactional metadiscourse markers followed by hedges, boosters, engagement markers and attitude markers in the reply articles. The study contributes to the existing literature by corroborating the genre-specific nature of interactional metadiscourse and has implications for the academic reading and writing course designers and material developers.

Keywords: *Applied linguistics, Interactional metadiscourse markers, Reply articles*

Introduction

Scholars take great advantage of academic articles for disseminating the findings of their research projects (Russell, 2009). Nevertheless, a published research article is not the final product in the knowledge creation cycle (Bazerman, 1988). It is entangled in the rotation of the academic community since the presented outcomes are constantly challenged, altered, and revised (Khosravi & Babaii, 2017). Despite the absence of face-to-face contact in the publication of academic research articles, it is envisaged as a form of interaction (Myers, 1989) among the members of an academic community possessing "their own rules of communication" (Hatipoğlu,

2007, p. 701). Not only the research articles but also various text types in the academic community utilize their own patterns of interaction through including interactional markers.

One of the academic genres which provide an evaluative interaction between the academic writers and the audience is book reviews, in which the authors present a critical analysis of a book and its authors (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). Another genre that entails negotiation of academic outcomes is reply articles in which the intellectuals "evaluate and comment on other researchers' academic contributions" (Itakura & Tsui, 2011, p. 1366). Hence, they are conceived as a locus in quo of entering a round of negotiations over the views shared earlier in the form of research articles (Khosravi & Babaii, 2017). The genre-specification of interactional metadiscourse markers has gained scholarly recognition within the last decades (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). In this line, a host of scholars have attempted to examine the representation of interpersonal discursive practices in book reviews through investigating the interactional metadiscourse markers in this genre across different languages and disciplines (Gezegin, 2016; Hyland, 2004; Junqueira & Cortes, 2014; Tse & Hyland, 2006). Likewise, unfolding the interactional patterns among the academic community members in reply articles requires a comprehensive model of interpersonality encompassing the interactional metadiscourse markers (Fu & Hyland, 2014). However, this genre has remained untouched and has not been analyzed with regard to the metadiscoursal features.

Notwithstanding the existing extensive literature on the frequency of metadiscourse markers in numerous text types, Hyland (2017) called for conducting further research on the interactional patterns among the producers and consumers of academic text types. Furthermore, using interpersonal discourse markers across various genres demands "more investigation and warrants comprehensive research" (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020, p. 59). Taking prior research altogether and trying to fill this void, the study aimed to investigate the deployment of interactional metadiscourse markers in reply articles published in international academic journals in the field of applied linguistics.

Literature Review

Metadiscourse entails "the interpersonal resources used to organize a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader" (Hyland, 2000, p.109) and refers to a whole host of linguistic features that writers utilize to start, proceed, and end their arguments and align them to their readers' expectations so that the successful bond is developed and the readers' intended interpretation is achieved. The notion of metadiscourse covers the linguistic elements that bear textual and/or interpersonal meanings (Vande Kopple, 1985) and untangles the interactional frames in a wide range of contexts (Hyland, 2017).

Textual, interactive interaction pertains to the organization of information and the connection of ideas through employing such rhetorical resources as transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. Interpersonal, interactional interaction, on the other hand, is relevant to the authors' tendency to establish an interaction with the intended group of audience and inject their own evaluation and attitudes via a particular set of linguistic devices

(Hyland, 2004). The interactional dimension involves "the writer's efforts to control the level of personality in a text and establish a suitable relationship to his or her data, arguments and audience" (Hyland, 2004, p. 139). This dimension reflects the author-reader interaction, which is realized in the use of certain rhetorical devices, namely hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. The interactional metadiscourse resources unravel the cooperative scope that the authors deemed in imparting their ideas to the readers (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020).

Numerous studies have been conducted to unravel the metadiscourse markers across various academic genres, such as research articles (Abdi, 2002; Atai & Sadr, 2008; Hyland, 1996, 2005; Yağiz & Demir, 2015), university students' essays (Gardner & Han, 2018), master's and PhD theses (Akoto, 2020; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Salahshoor & Afsari, 2017; Samraj, 2008), newspaper articles (Dafouz-Milne, 2003, 2008), and popular science articles (Saidi & Saiedi, 2020). Furthermore, research article subsections have been scrutinized in terms of the frequency of metadiscourse markers. In this regard, research article abstracts (Gillaerts, 2010), introductions (Rubio, 2011), and discussion sections (Faghih & Rahimpour, 2009) were examined. In addition, metadiscourse markers used by the speakers of various languages have been investigated (Yang, 2013). In a recent study, Ahmadi et al. (2021) analyzed the metadiscourse markers in the abstract sections of applied linguistics articles written by celebrity and non-celebrity authors and revealed no significant differences between the two sets of articles in terms of the frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers.

On the other hand, metadiscourse markers have been explored in a genre akin to the reply articles (i.e. book reviews). Hyland (2004) demonstrated longer, more detailed and more discursive practices in soft disciplines book reviews. In another study, Tse and Hyland (2006) conducted a cross-disciplinary study of book reviews and revealed a higher frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in book reviews in the field of philosophy. Gezegin (2016) compared English and Turkish book reviews and found the higher frequency of interpersonal metadiscourse devices in the English corpus and demonstrated a significant difference between the two corpora in terms of the frequency of hedges. The same results were obtained in a study by Junqueira and Cortes (2014), who compared the English and Portuguese book reviews. More recently, Zal and Moini (2021) investigated the stance and engagement markers in the book reviews of various disciplines and found out that stance markers were more frequently included in the book reviews in soft disciplines.

The review of the literature indicates the paucity of research on reply articles. Only one study revealed the evaluative nature of reply articles through identifying the judgment resources of Appraisal Theory (Khosravi & Babaii, 2017). This genre has not been scrutinized in terms of the frequency of use of interactional metadiscourse markers. Hence, the current study attempted to fill this gap and explore the interactional patterns of communication in the reply articles published in the academic journals in the field of applied linguistics through addressing the following question:

RQ1: What are the frequent interactional metadiscourse markers in reply articles published in the international peer-reviewed applied linguistics journals?

Method

The study adopted an ex post facto design since the data were not manipulated. The interactional metadiscourse was coded, and the frequency of each category was reported.

Corpus

The corpus of the study included 19 reply articles published in four international peer-reviewed applied linguistics journals. The list of the journals was obtained via the judgment of an expert panel of three associate professors of applied linguistics and following the sampling procedure adopted in Khosravi and Babaii (2017). The ultimately selected journals were *Journal of Second Language Writing* (4 reply articles), *Journal of Pragmatics* (6 reply articles), *ELT Journal* (6 reply articles), and *Applied Linguistics* (3 reply articles). To control the possible impact of time on the writers' style, only the reply articles published from 2016 and 2021 were selected from the archives of the abovementioned journals. The purposive sample comprised of 33,777 words. Since the journals are highly ranked in the field and the quality of the papers are precisely checked by the qualified editorial board members, the reply articles were included regardless of the author's affiliations and being English native speakers.

Theoretical Framework

Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse markers was used to analyze the reply articles. It entails two sets of resources, including interactive and interactional (See Table 1). Interactive metadiscourse markers constitute transitions, frame markers, endophoria markers, and code glosses which contribute to the formation of a well-organized and coherent text. Interactional metadiscourse markers, on the other hand, encompass hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions which enable the authors to manage their interactions with the given group of audience.

Table 1
Hyland's Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, p. 49)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	**Help to guide the reader through the text**	**Resources**
Transition	Express relations between main clause	In addition; but; thus; and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	Finally; to conclude; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the texts	Noted above; see fig.; in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	According x; z states
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meanings	Namely; e.g.; such as; in other words
interactional	**Involve the reader in the text**	**Resources**
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might; perhaps; possible; but
Booster	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue	In fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
Engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider; note; you can see that
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; our

Considering the interactional metadiscourse markers, hedges moderate the authors' degree of certainty while boosters reveal their tendency to highlight particular propositions. Furthermore, attitude markers enable the authors to inject their appraisal of the ideas. In addition, engagement markers are used to establish a relationship with the readers and self-mentions are included to value one's personal status as the author and represent the authorial presence in the text (Hyland, 2005).

Data Analysis

First, each reply article was analyzed manually to code the interactional metadiscourse markers by the two researchers based on Hyland's (2005) classification. Another coder was also asked to identify the interactional metadiscourse markers in the corpus, and inter-coder reliability of 0.97 was achieved. Before proceeding with the data analysis, the areas of disagreement were negotiated, and the researchers and the coder reached a consensus over the category to which a particular resource belonged. The frequency and percentage values were determined and reported for each category.

Results

The study aimed to investigate the interactional metadiscourse markers in reply articles published in the refereed journals in the field of applied linguistics. Table 2 illustrates the frequency and percentages of interactional metadiscourse markers in the reply articles.

Table 2
Frequency and Percentages of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Reply Articles

Interactional Metadiscourse Markers	**Reply Articles**	
	F	**%P**
Hedges	302	27
Boosters	215	19
Attitude markers	60	5
Engagement markers	85	8
Self-mentions	468	41
Total	1130	100

As Table 2 displays, the most frequent category of interactional metadiscourse markers was self-mentions in the reply articles. Some examples are presented below.

Self-mentions
1)   **I have** little doubt that they would immediately be marked as errors.
(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2019)
2)   Based on **our understanding** of the compatibility, these two theories are in agreement with each other on the category of ''particularized implicatures'' (i.e., context-dependent meanings that arise through inference).

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2016)

3)   **In my research**, **I found** that teachers of intermediate-level adult English learners engaged in a wide range of scaffolding techniques during Joint Construction, many of which initiated a language-related episode, or LRE (Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2019)

4)   In what follows, **we aim** to clarify the relationship between code-meshing and translingual pedagogy, emphasizing ways to move toward a more fully articulated translingual pedagogy.

(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2018)

5)   In fact, as **I made clear** in **my proposal** in Capone (2003)1 and (2006) on the topic (see Haugh, 2013 for a reply), the circle arises both through generalized and particularized explicatures (the discussion in those papers, in fact, focused on particularized explicatures).

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2017)

Out of 1130 interactional metadiscourse markers coded in the corpus, 468 included the self-mention devices, indicating the authors' inclination to present their personal judgments and establish their authorial stance.

With a lower frequency, hedges and boosters were included in the reply articles. Almost 302 hedges and 215 boosters were used by the authors of reply articles. Some examples are presented below.

Hedges

1)   They discuss what they found with each other, and with the whole class, then go back to their own literature reviews to see how they **might** change their uses of tense in what they have written.

(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2019)

2)   To repeat, the speaker **may** worry about how the hearer will interpret the utterance in context, and **could** (and, **probably**, should) take steps to avoid misunderstanding.

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2019)

3)   In this section, we will compare ''explicature'' and ''default meaning'' to show that no compromise **could** be made between Default Semantics and Relevance Theory.

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2016)

4)   Despite the change in labels, **itwould** appear that the 'noncompatible view' remains in force.

(ELT Journal, 2016)

5)   The adjective red, for instance, **maynot** have a high frequency in text corpora because references to many natural objects, for example, blood, lips, do not specify what is latently understood, but it has to be a semantic element of the core vocabulary to allow for adequate paraphrases.

(Applied Linguistics, 2016)

Boosters

1)   I assume it would have been **moreconstructive**, instead, to engage in a discussion of modularity vs. modularization.

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2017)

2)   **Certainly**, not everyone possesses the higher-level interpretive skills demanded by some text-based teaching activities.

(ELT Journal, 2017)

3)   **Indeed**, 'evidence' is the key word in his lexicon: it is used 30 times throughout his article.

(ELT Journal, 2017)

4)   In contrast, Stein employs the term 'core' vocabulary to refer to **a very different** type of construct, namely, to lexical items that are closely related to 'defining vocabulary' (i.e. a set of words used in dictionary definitions).

 (Applied Linguistics, 2017)

5)   This research demonstrates that psychological functioning **does indeed** develop in adults as they internalize new and/or **more sophisticated** psychological tools (e.g. scientific concepts) through education.

(Applied Linguistics, 2017)

   The use of hedges and boosters in reply articles indicated that the authors took care of the academic norms while defending their own stances. The use of hedges aimed to moderate their arguments and counter-arguments, and the boosters were employed to highlight their ideas. Indeed, the authors tended to persuade their audience to embrace the true values of their claims while taking heed of the standards of academic communication.

   The results showed that the least prevalent interactional metadiscourse markers included engagement markers and attitude markers. The examples are provided below.

Engagement Markers

1)   So, **let's consider** the relevant passage from Levinson, most of which is quoted by KP in citing Levinson: Grice's account makes implicature dependent on a prior determination of "the said".

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2018)

2)   **Take the case of silence**, for which a theory of interpretation has been developed by Kurzon (1995) in a very instructive and interesting paper.

(Journal of Pragmatics, 2017)

3)   In the classroom, **we** must do more than acknowledge with students the differences between speech and written communication; **we** must also examine why those distinctions have historically emerged so that students more fully understand the ideological, political, and inherently racist systems in which they have long been uncritically taught to participate.

(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2018)

4)   **We need to think more**, however, about how **we can do** this, in ways that move the students forward in their writing, rather than repeating **what we have already done** with them.
(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2019)

5)   **This takes us** to the word-class information which the authors provide.
 (Applied Linguistics, 2016)

In examples 3, 4, and 5, the resources used seemed to be self-mentions at first glance. However, the meticulous reading of the sentences revealed the different nature of these as being engagement markers in that the authors summoned the readers to accompany them and attempted to engage them in their own claims and counter-claims. The authors used engagement markers to give recognition to the given group of audience and establish an effective relationship with them.

Attitude Markers

1)   **We agree** that translingual pedagogy isn't yet fully articulated, especially when it comes to assessment of students' writing (however, see Lee, 2016, 2017 and Inoue, 2017, for work in this direction).
(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2018)

2)   **We agree** that a larger sample is always more helpful, as is true for almost all research.
(Journal of Pragmatics, 2019)

3)   **We accept** Hughes's point (not that we ever disputed it) that coursebooks are not concerned exclusively with grammar or with explicit teaching.
(ELT Journal, 2019)

4)   **It is not surprising that** the essay-driven approach to EAP produces little growth in linguistic complexity or accuracy (Polio).
*(Journal of Second Language Writing, 2019)*

5)   **I am surprised**, however, that he fails to mention that IDP accrued AU$103.6 million in gross profits from its English language testing operations in 2017, rising to AU$129.1 million in 2018 (IDP Education Limited 2018).
(ELT Journal, 2019)

Only 85 engagement markers and 60 attitude markers were employed by the reply article authors. This might refer to the self-defending nature of the reply articles, which provide the authors with an opportunity to clarify their own ideas judged and commented on by the other members of the academic community. In such a genre, the authors may find it more necessary to establish their own territory, and hence, wise references to the audience might be needed. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of interactional metadiscourse markers in reply articles.

Figure 1
Distribution of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Reply Articles
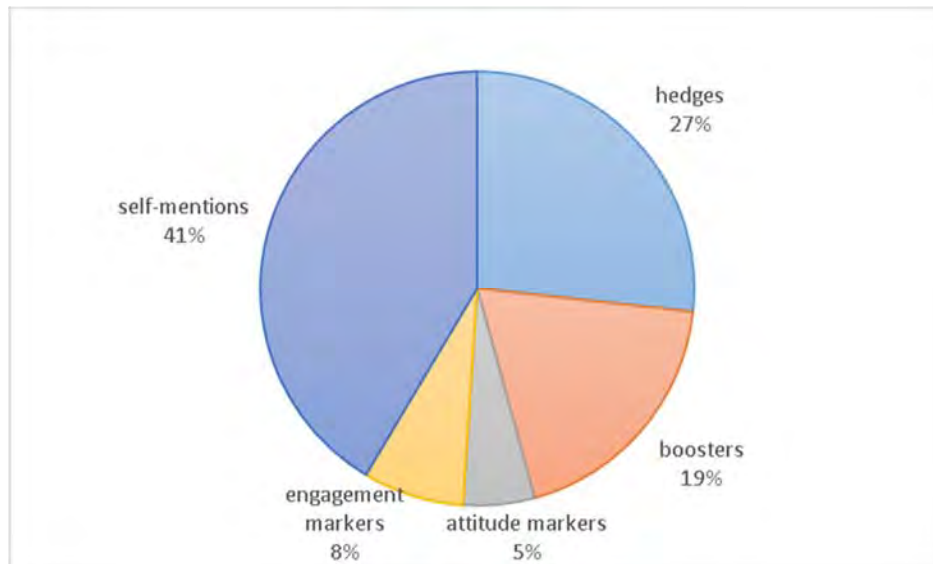
The results revealed that self-mentions were the commonest interactional metadiscourse markers followed by hedges, boosters, engagement markers and attitude markers in the authors' responses to the comments given and criticisms levelled against their previously shared outcomes in the form of academic research articles. Hence, it might be said that the authors somehow crossed the academic borderlines and injected a more authorial stance in an academic genre to defend their research findings and accomplishments.

Discussion

The study sought to explore the deployment of interactional metadiscourse markers in reply articles in refereed journals in the field of applied linguistics. The analysis of the reply articles indicated that the authors were inclined to employ these devices to accomplish the interpersonal function in this under-researched genre. The results revealed that the self-mentions were the most frequent category of interactional metadiscourse resources, whereas attitude markers were the least prevalent one. The authors attempted to restore the credibility to their academic outcomes through defending their authorial stances represented in the high frequency of self-mention metadiscourse markers while paying attention to the academic benchmarks through employing hedges and boosters and providing an accountable account of their self-defence (Fu & Hyland, 2014). Indeed, they preferred to express their authorial stances when they responded to the members of the academic community (Zal & Moini, 2021).

The results corroborated those of previous studies (Gezegin, 2016; Hyland, 2004; Junqueiro & Cortes, 2014; Tse & Hyland, 2006), which pointed to the high frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers in the book reviews, which might be considered as the sister genre to the

reply articles due to its evaluative and critical communicative goal (Khosravi & Babaii, 2017). Furthermore, the findings were in line with the results of the previous bulk of research (Ahmadi et al., 2021; Tse & Hyland, 2006; Zal & Moini, 2021) that demonstrated the higher frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers in soft disciplines. The results of the current study confirmed that applied linguistics as a soft discipline was no exception and the reply articles in this field carried interpersonal meanings through encompassing a rich and variety of interactional resources. The same results were obtained in analyzing the metadiscursive practices in other genres (Ahmadi et al., 2021).

The presence of a large number of self-mentions in the reply articles may challenge the prevailing claims of the scholars who still advocate and adhere to the impersonal nature of academic writing (Morley, 2015). The authorial presence or visibility seemed to be an indispensable part of the reply article genre since the scholars were involved in "conflictive illocutions" (Leech, 1983, p. 105) and negotiate their power as a member of the academic community while responding to the comments posed by other community members on their academic outcomes (Hyland, 2002a, 2002b). In such a genre, the authors seemed to have a strong preference to express their "affective values- their attitudes towards the propositional content and/or readers rather than a commitment to the truth-value" (Crismore et al., 1993, p. 53).

Another finding was the use of hedges and boosters following self-mentions in the reply articles. The moderate incidence of hedges may refer to the authors' inclination towards moderating their voice and accentuating their own counter-arguments to follow the norms of academic modesty. This might be justified by the nature of the field of applied linguistics as a soft discipline that appears to own a "more interpretive" nature and more reliance on "a dialogic engagement and more explicit recognition of alternative voices" (Hyland, 2005, p. 145). These devices disclosed the writers' degree of caution and underlying reasoning.

Considering the frequency of hedges and boosters in reply articles, the results disconfirmed the findings of previous studies (Junqueira & Cortes, 2014; Salahshoor & Afsari, 2017; Tse & Hyland, 2006.). It might be argued that reply articles opened up an opportunity for the scholars to stand up for their own claims, and thereby, they preferred to substantiate their ideas and authenticate their own voices through taking advantage of a larger number of self-mention devices and fewer hedges and boosters. In fact, they may consider this genre as a locus of saving their academically endangered face (Khosravi & Babaii, 2017).

Moreover, the study pointed to the low frequency of engagement and attitude markers in reply articles. These resources enabled the authors to establish a relationship with the audience by drawing their attention to the significant propositions in the text (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). The limited use of engagement markers might imply that the writers did not prefer to address a wide range of audiences and conceived of the reply articles as relevant to the academic parties directly and deliberately involved in the raised negotiation. Hence, they were more interested in counteracting the comments made on their previously presented claims and findings and making use of the resources which "serve the underlying purpose of the genre" (Jalilifar, Hayati, & Don,

2018). On the other hand, previous studies on another evaluative genre (i.e. book reviews) indicated the genre-bound use of attitude markers in academic contexts (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). Low frequency of attitude markers in reply articles may lie in the authors' inclination to establish their status as a member of the applied linguistics community through sticking to the widely held academic norms of objectivity and impersonality.

Conclusion

The study attempted to explore the interactional rhetorical devices used in applied linguistics reply articles adopting Hyland's (2005) model of interpersonal metadiscourse. The findings showed that the reply articles were highly laden with self-mention metadiscourse resources. Nevertheless, the scholars seemed to take heed of the academic standards by hedging their propositions. However, the reply article authors seemed to be reluctant to include their feelings in their self-defence arguments which might underlie their awareness of the norms of the academic communities. The findings revealed the genre-specific nature of the interactional metadiscourse markers (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). Indeed, the authors employed certain interactional resources to present their responses, keeping a personal and evaluative voice.

The findings of the study validated viewing metadiscoursal analysis as "a valuable means of exploring academic writing and of comparing the rhetorical preferences of different discourse communities" (Hyland, 2004, p. 148). The use of metadiscourse markers manifests the authorial voice construction in various genres (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). Being cognizant of these genre-specific conventions seems to enrich the academic learning procedures (Holmes, 1997; Swales, 1990).

The results of the current study expand the available literature on the contribution of interactional metadiscourse markers to the formation of interpersonal and dialogic engagement in an academic community. Indeed, metadiscourse studies disclose the expectations of academic communities (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020; Khosravi & Babaii, 2017). Exploring the "conventional discursive practices of a particular disciplinary community" (Hyland, 1998, p. 439) raises the academic writing and reading instructors' awareness of the generic features and rhetorical devices. They can transfer this awareness into a genre-based rhetoric-oriented instructional planning for their EAP/ESP classes. Incorporating the results of the study in the educational settings enable the instructors to develop and enhance the learners' understanding of the academic conventions in conveying the interpersonal function of the language. These particularly contribute to the enrichment of academic skills instruction in EFL settings since "the opportunities for language socialization are limited" (Cook, 2001, p. 84).

The study focused on investigating the interactional metadiscourse markers in applied linguistics reply articles. Further studies can be conducted to explore the interpersonal discourse markers in reply articles across various disciplines and languages. Furthermore, future studies may focus on exploring the interaction metadiscourse markers in reply articles written by native and non-native scholars in different academic communities. The study can also be replicated,

taking a critical approach to unravel the hidden agenda underlying the use of various interactional patterns in different academic genres.

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Ethics Declarations
Competing Interests
No, there are no conflicting interests.
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