

## **A Comparative Study of Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Sales Contract Written by English Natives vs. Iranian Non-natives**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated two major types of metadiscourse markers as used in typical sales contracts, written by English natives and Iranian non-natives. In so doing, 60 sales contracts were selected, 30 written by native English and 30 by Iranian non-natives. Based on Hyland and Tse's taxonomy, the contracts were codified and classified in terms of the frequency and percentage of the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers found. The results revealed that Iranian non-natives used more interactive metadiscourse markers while natives used more interactional metadiscourse markers. The latter also used more hedges in their sales contracts compared to non-natives.

**Keywords:** Business Correspondence, Interactive Metadiscourse Markers, Interactional Metadiscourse Markers, Iranian Non-native Discourse, Sales Contracts

### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, due to the overarching significance of writing especially in international commercial correspondence, there has been an upsurge pedagogic (e.g. Heidari Tabrizi & Vaezi, 2015; Parvaresh, 2008; Vahid Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010) and research (e.g. Abdi, Tavangar Rizi & Tavakoli, 2010; Adel, 2006; Estaji & Vafaeimehr, 2015; Dehghan & Chalak, 2015; Hasselgard, 2016; Jalilifar & Beitsayyah, 2011; Pooresfahani, Khajavy & Vahidnia, 2012; Rashidi & Alihosseini, 2012; Simin, & Tavangar, 2009) interest in the metadiscourse and the interactive and interactional resources of written professional discourse, shifting the research attention from the ideational aspect of texts; that is how texts characterize the world, to how they may function interpersonally. It means that "writers do not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to offer a credible representation of themselves and their work, and to acknowledge and negotiate social relations" (Hyland, 2011, p. 181).

Effective professional writing is characterized by "the ability of writers to control the level of personality in their texts, claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views" (Hyland, 2004, p. 133). All these are encapsulated in metadiscourse as an umbrella term "for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a

particular community” (Hyland, 2005, p. 37). Metadiscourse markers are also defined by Hyland (2004, p. 134) as “the linguistic devices writers employ to shape their arguments to the needs and expectations of their target readers.” Metadiscourse provides a theoretical framework for understanding and exploring communication as social interaction and communicative engagement. To Hyland (2015), “without metadiscourse, readers would be unable to contextualize a text and writers unable to communicate effectively” (p. 14). The major significance of metadiscourse can be attributed to “its role in explicating a context for interpretation, and suggesting one way in which acts of communication define and maintain social groups” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.175).

In fact, despite the growing importance of the metadiscourse markers as a feature of written professional discourse, it remains to be controversial “due to a lack of theoretical rigor and empirical confusion” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.175). Whereas considerable interest has been paid to the concept of metadiscourse, its descriptive and explanatory potential has to some extent remained undeveloped and under-researched especially in EFL settings. As English develops its role as an International Language, so the importance of the use of English in business communication world-wide increases. Business correspondence especially sales contracts plays a pivotal role in this field. To secure the rhetorical objectives of sales contracts in professional writing, it is crucial for the contract developers to take an orientation through metadiscourse resources to the user including the parties involved as well as the potential readers. This study thus explored whether any differences could be found in English sales contract produced by Iranian non-natives as compared with those produced by American native writers as far as metadiscourse markers were concerned.

## **2. Method**

To achieve the objectives of the present study, the researcher employed a comparative discourse-based descriptive design.

### ***2.1 Corpus and Theoretical Framework***

As for the materials under exploration in the present study, from a 2014-2016 corpus of commercial sales contracts, a sample of 60 sales contracts all written in English by professionals were selected, 30 written by American native English speakers and 30 written by Iranian non-natives. The data were collected from famous Iranian and American companies involved in international business. As it was not possible to have texts with exactly the same length, the results were standardized to a common basis by applying 500-word approach (elements per 500 words) to compare the frequency of occurrence. To codify and classify the interactive and interactional resources of metadiscourse markers employed in the corpus by native vs. non-native writers of English, the researcher employed Hyland and Tse’s (2004) interpersonal model of metadiscourse illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1 *An Interpersonal Metadiscourse Model (adopted from Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 169)*

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive Resources	Assists in guiding the reader through the text	Interactive Signals
Transitional	Indicates relations between main clauses	in addition, but, thus
Frame Markers	Discourse acts, stages and sequences	finally, my purpose
Endophoric Markers	Indicates information in other part of text	as noted above
Evidentials	Indicates information in other sources	Crawford states
Code Glosses	Elaborates definitions of words or phrases	Namely, such as, e.g.
Interactional Resources	Involves the reader in the argument	Interactional Signals
Hedges	Withholds commitment and open dialogue	might, perhaps possible
Boosters	Indicates certainty or close dialogue	in fact, definitely
Attitude Markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	arguably, unfortunately
Self-Mentions	Explicit reference to author	I, we, my, me, our
Engagement Markers	Explicitly builds relationship with reader	you can see that, note,

## 2.2 Procedures

To collect the data, in practice, following Hyland's (2005) suggestions, the texts were first scanned to identify the instances of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers occurring in both types of texts. The next step was to determine under which subcategory each instance would fall. To increase the intra-rater reliability of the rating process, all the data were rated twice by the researcher with a two-week interval between the ratings. Moreover, the researcher asked one of his colleagues who was quite familiar with the theoretical frame work at hand to codify and classify a sample of 20 percent of the whole data to ensure the inter-rater reliability of the procedure. Due to the nature of the data, the instances of discrepancy between the ratings were few; these were resolved through negotiation. Next, the patterns of using every subcategory of metadiscourse markers were compared and contrasted in the data produced by the natives with those produced by non-natives. To analyze the data in terms of descriptive statistics encompassing

frequency and percentage, a multimodal analysis of the interactive markers was done to reveal the typical organizational features of the contracts. Moreover, to provide insights related to the writer-reader relationship, an analysis of the interactional markers was made.

### 3. Results

To present the results of the data analyses in a systematic way, the researcher first reports the results for comparing the metadiscourse patterns used by both groups via tabulation and then those related to the two major resources of metadiscourse markers and their subcategories using figures.

#### 3.1 Results of Comparing Metadiscourse Patterns

The results of the data analyses revealed that significant differences were found between metadiscourse patterns used by American native writers and Iranian non-natives in terms of amount and type. Table 2 summarizes the frequencies and percentages of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers distribution in sales contracts.

Table 2 *Interactive and Interactional Metadiscourse Markers Distribution in Sales Contracts*

Macro-category	Sub-category	Americans		Iranians	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Interactive	Transitions	213	36.47	201	37.15
	Frame Markers	61	10.45	92	17
	Endophoric Markers	38	6.51	51	9.43
	Evidentials	2	0.34	5	0.93
	Code Glosses	24	4.11	33	6.10
			338	57.88	382
Interactional	Hedges	63	10.79	44	8.13
	Boosters	56	9.59	32	5.92
	Attitude Markers	17	2.91	26	4.81
	Self- Mentions	69	11.81	38	7.02
	Engagement Markers	41	7.02	19	3.51
			246	42.12	159
Total		584	100	541	100

As presented in Table 2, the total number of metadiscourse markers used by the native writers was 584 in the 3000 words, while the non-natives used 541; that is, the size of metadiscourse markers by the Iranian non-natives was smaller. All in all, it shows that both groups tend to use much more interactive than

interactional resources. However, the main point is that the Iranian writers did use interactive metadiscourse markers more extensively (N=382) than the American writers did (N=338) in the texts of the same type and genre. In contrast, more interactional resources were used by the Americans (N=246) compared to the Iranians (N=159).

### 3.2 Results of Comparing Interactive Metadiscourse Markers

Interactive resources encompass those “features which set out an argument to explicitly establish the writer’s preferred interpretations. They are concerned with ways of organizing discourse, rather than experience, to anticipate readers’ knowledge and reflect the writer’s assessment” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 168). Figure 1 illustrates the results of comparing interactive metadiscourse markers in English sales contracts written by the Americans vs. Iranians:

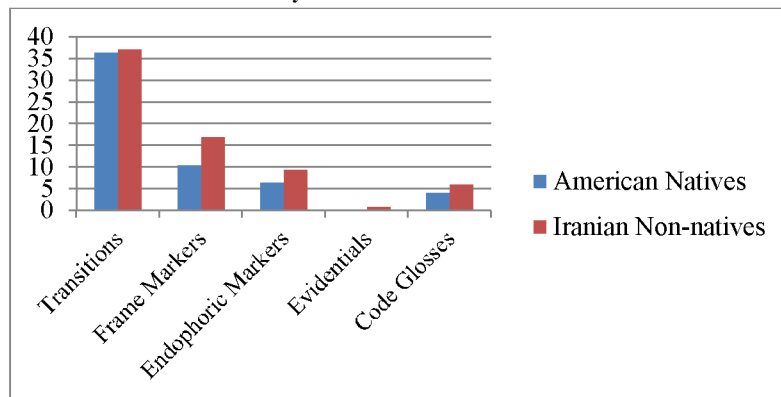


Figure 1. Comparing interactive metadiscourse markers.

As evident from Figure 1, the Iranian non-native writers more frequently used all types of interactive metadiscourse markers in their sales contracts than the Americans did. Transitions are the most frequently used type for both groups followed by Frame Markers. The American writers used less Endophoric Markers than the Iranians did. The same is true about Code Glosses. Evidentials rarely occurred in the sales contracts. Both groups used a small size of Evidentials in their sales contracts.

### 3.3 Results of Comparing Interactional Metadiscourse Markers

Interactional resources are essentially involving and evaluative. They “involve readers in the argument by alerting them to the author’s perspective ... influencing the degree of intimacy, the expression of attitude, epistemic judgements, and commitments, and the degree of reader involvement” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 168). Figure 2 presents the results of comparing interactional metadiscourse markers in English sales contracts written by the Americans vs. Iranians:

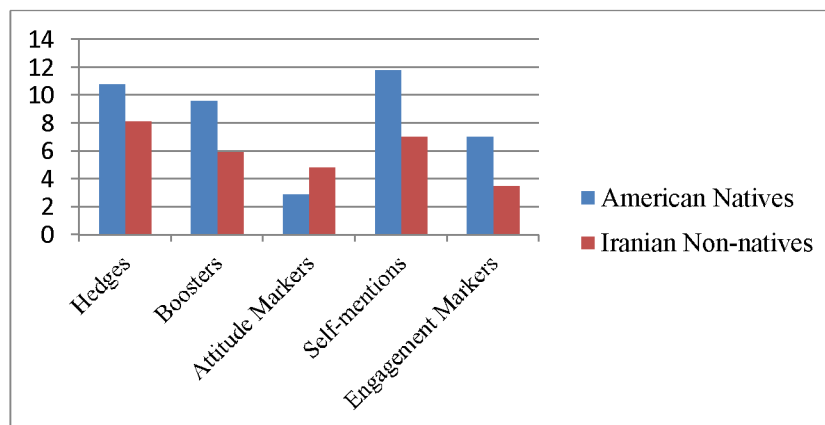


Figure 2. Comparing Interactional Metadiscourse Markers

As shown in Figure 2, in general the American writers more frequently used all types of interactional metadiscourse markers than the Iranians did, except for Attitude Markers. Whereas Self-mentions was the most frequently found subcategory for the Americans followed by Hedges and Boosters, the most common marker used by the Iranians was Hedges followed by Self-mentions and Boosters. Attitude Markers were the least frequently used ones for the Americans, but Engagement Markers for the Iranians.

#### 4. Discussion

One major result was that the Iranians used more interactive signals than the Americans, while the Americans more extensively used interactional resources than the Iranians. It can be interpreted that whenever writers want to reveal sensitivity and ability in achieving coherence, interactive perspective gets more attention. In other words, to organize their propositions in a more coherent way, writers make use of interactive signals as linguistic resources. On the other hand, when writers use more interactional signals, their purpose is to express their solidarity with the reader/user and to work more on creating bonds with them. Thus, it can be said that while the American writers were more oriented towards explicit interventions to comment on and evaluate the sales contract, Iranian writers managed the information flow to guide readers through the text as a linguistic entity. This is in line with the results of studies by Dehghan and Chalak (2015), Hyland (2005), and Pooresfahani, Khajavy and Vahidnia (2012). Moreover, both groups most heavily employed similar amounts of Transitions in writing sales contracts but in different ways. The Iranian writers mostly used short sentences most of which were joined together by connectors such as *and*, *but*, *therefore*; on the other hand, the Americans used other varieties of Transitions especially *as a result*, *in addition*, *by the way*. This is compatible with what Hyland (2004, 2005), Rashidi and Alihosseini (2012), and Simin, and Tavangar (2009) found: Transition are vital to

professional writing because “they represent writers’ attempts to ensure readers are able to correctly recover their intentions” (Hyland, 2004, p.141).

The results also showed that both groups employed Attitude Markers least frequently. Attitude Markers were also the only interactional metadiscourse resource the Americans used less than Iranians. In other words, the American writers used almost all types of interactional metadiscourse markers more extensively than the Iranians except for Attitude Markers. Emotionally evaluative in nature, Attitude Markers determine the writer’s attitude toward the propositions rather than the precision of the information. It can be discussed that perhaps due to the cultural differences, the Americans held a more objective stance towards the accuracy of the content of the sales contracts employing Attitude Markers the least. This is in line with the findings of similar studies in the literature (Estaji & Vafaeimehr, 2015; Abdi, Tavangar Rizi & Tavakoli, 2010; Dehghan & Chalak, 2015; Hasselgard, 2016).

Another thought-provoking result is that while the most frequently employed interactional metadiscourse marker by the American writers was Self-mentions (the degree of author presence and visibility), the Iranian non-native writers used Hedges most frequently. One possible interpretation is that the personal voice via self-mention is used to address the contract parties directly through a firm alignment with their views, assuring certainty and an interpersonal pledge of conviction. An effective writing is determined by “writers’ success in convincing readers of their reasonableness, seriousness, and sincerity ... achieved by balancing caution with commitment. Writers must display appropriate respect for alternatives, but back their views with a personal warrant where necessary” (Hyland, 2001).

### **5. Conclusion**

Do Iranian non-native writers of English signal the metadiscourse of their English commercial correspondence in general and in sales contract in particular in the same way as native speakers do? As revealed from the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that a number of significant differences were between native and non-native writers in using interactive and interactional metadiscourse signals. Such findings suggest obvious applications and implications for education in academic and professional writing for English native and non-native writers alike. More specifically, the metadiscourse knowledge as well as the ability to implement different interpersonal metadiscourse resources is crucial for Iranian EFL teachers and learners, as prospective members of professional groups. They have to understand and use metadiscourse more efficiently and effectively to have control over disciplinary-sensitive writing practices. Enhancing students’ familiarity with, awareness of and sensitivity to metadiscourse, as Hyland (2009) suggests, may therefore “provide them with important rhetorical knowledge and equip them with ways of making discourse decisions which are socially grounded in the inquiry

patterns and knowledge structures of their disciplines” (p.142 ). Thus, it is recommended to include in academic and professional writing courses some room for teaching the concept of metadiscourse.

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