A Comparative Study of Metadiscourse Markers in English and Persian University Lectures

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare metadiscourse markers in forty English and Persian university lectures. Twenty of them were selected from the British Academic Spoken English corpus. The other 20 were selected from an Iranian website (www.maktoobkhane.com). We used Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse. The metadiscourses were collected. Further, the frequency of each type was studied. Finally, native English data were compared to Persian ones. Data were analyzed through Chi-square and findings revealed there were meaningful differences between the two corpora. However, as for *boosters*, the difference was not meaningful in both lectures.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, Interactive, Interactional, University Lecture

1. Introduction

Metadiscourse was originally designed by Harris (1970) and was then developed by Williams (1981). Hyland (1998) declares that "metadiscourse has been displayed to be a critical feature of English for Second Language and native speaker student writing by which the authors for international scientific journals can attain intelligibility of communication through proper discipline norms, values, and assumptions to trail their path to academic promotions (p. 438)." Hyland (2005), in his book 'metadiscourse', states that the lecturers' meaning in the text is demonstrated by metadiscourse and may contribute to the better transfer of the text's message Mauranan (2010), though, claims that metadiscourse is more important in spoken discourse in comparison with written prose because of the greater need to manage spoken interaction in real time Though, relatively speaking, fewer studies have focused on the role of metadiscourse in spoken discourse.

A number of studies have examined academic socialization discourse in various educational institutions, particularly at the tertiary level. However, most of them concentrated on investigating how learners were socialized into the writing practices in their respective fields (e.g., Casanave, 1995, 2002; Prior, 1998; Spack, 1997). Few studies have concentrated on oral academic discourse (e.g., Lee & Casal, 2014). It is applied only in recent years that linguists have started to recognize the importance of oral skills and competencies in educational efforts of students (Duff,

2007, 2010; Duff & Kobayashi, 2010; Morita, 2000, 2004; Kobayashi, 2003, 2006; Zappa- Hollman, 2007).

Although lectures are one of the most important instructional activities in academic contexts, and one of the most frequent ways of transferring information is through giving lecture, it seems that not enough attention has been paid to how metadiscourse can shape the genre of the lectures for better understanding. All EA/SP learners need to be aware of effective lecture delivery through appropriate use of metadiscourse as the speaker, and recognizing the specific points in a lecture as the listener.

There appears to be no research to date conducted to investigate metadiscourse use and variation in English and Persian university lectures in particular. For filling the gap in research on the mentioned topic, this cross-linguistic study attempts to find out how metadiscourse, interactive and interactional orientation of metadiscourse in lectures, differs or resembles in English and Persian. This is executed by analyzing an adequate number of lectures in each language. This study is based on the premise that the information derived from this investigation will provide insights in order to help Iranian students, teachers, and all the lecturers who are willing to be more native-like English users.

Therefore, to provide greater insight into lecturers' use of metadiscourse, this exploratory study reports on a corpus-based comparative analysis of metadiscourse used by English and Persian university lecturers. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. Do English and Persian university lecturers differ in their use of metadiscourse in the classroom?
2. What types of metadiscourses are used more frequently in English and Persian university lectures?

2. Method

2.1 Corpus

The study's data consisted of 40 academic lectures organized into two comparable corpora: 20 English academic lectures (105,078 tokens) and 20 Persian academic lectures (170,650 tokens) from diverse disciplines. The English academic lectures distributed across academic subjects included in this study were selected from British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus, all delivered by English native speakers. The Persian academic lectures which were delivered by native Persian speakers in reputable universities of Iran, such as Amirkabir and Sharif Universities of Technology were selected from an Iranian website (WWW.Maktoobkhane.com).

2.2 Procedure

The study began with the collection of English and Persian academic lectures. Prior to the analysis of the data (bottom up analysis), a pilot study was

carried out in order to check the feasibility of working with the framework. Each metadiscourse token within one of the two corpora was analyzed. These items were normalized to occurrences per 1,000 words (ptw) after recognizing all instances of interactive and interactional metadiscourse in both corpora. The next step was identifying the metadiscourse in the whole corpus. Then, the metadiscourse markers presented in these 40 lectures were collected. Further, the frequency of each type was calculated. Finally, native English data were compared to Persian ones to see to what extent the genre of lecture is different in these two languages in terms of metadiscourse, relevant, or significant points. In analyzing the English and Persian university lectures, Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse was used (Hyland, 2005), which contains two broad classificatory resources: interactive and interactional metadiscourse.

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide listener through the text	
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	and, but, since, so
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	okay, now, first, want to
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	earlier, later, handout, page
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	I mean, in fact, like, or
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	quote, according to X.
Interactional	Involve the listener in the text	
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	almost, just, might, seem
Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	know, actually, clearly, never
Attitude markers	express speaker's attitude to proposition	I agree, prefer, surprised
Self-mentions	explicit reference to speaker	I, we, me, our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with listener	let's, take a look, we

Figure 1. Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse (based on Hyland, 2005, p.49).

The analysis was carried out via AntConc (version 3.2.4, Anthony, 2011), a text analysis and concordance tool. I conducted both quantitative and qualitative

analyses of the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. For the quantitative analyses (using SPSS 22.0), the frequency per 1000 words of each main type and its subtypes of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in both academic lectures was examined. The qualitative analyses involved studying every instance of metadiscourse in its context and examining how the various types and subtypes of interactive and interactional metadiscourse were used qualitatively similarly or differently across the research disciplines.

3. Results

Our analysis cropped up with identification of metadiscourse markers across the two corpora. The following table reveals the type, frequency, percentage and density of the metadiscourse markers employed in university lectures of this study.

Table 3.1 *Metadiscourse in English and Persian University Lectures*

1. Interactive	Frequency/ Percentage in English University Lectures	Density per 1000 Words in English University Lectures	Frequency/Percentage in Persian University Lectures	Density per 1000 Words in Persian University Lectures
Transitions	6765 (37.52%)	45.29	3700 (29.43%)	29.94
Frame markers	2398 (13.30%)	16.05	2305 (16.27%)	18.65
Endophoric markers	97 (0.54%)	0.67	291 (2.11%)	2.35
Code glosses	1437 (7.97%)	9.62	1849 (13.45%)	14.96
Evidentals	51 (0.28%)	0.34	234 (1.20%)	1.89
Total	10748 (59.61%)	71.97	8379 (46%)	67.79
2. Interactional				
Hedges	1432 (7.94%)	9.58	736 (4.85%)	5.95
Boosters	1359 (7.54%)	9.09	969 (6.55%)	7.84
Attitude markers	54 (11.81%)	0.36	71 (0.51%)	0.57
Self-mentions	2129 (12.81%)	14.25	3013 (21.43%)	24.38
Engagement markers	2309 (0.29%)	15.45	581 (4.20%)	40.70

Total	7283 (40.39%)	48.	5370	43.44
Total	18031 (100%)	73	(37.54%)	111.23
		120	13749	
		.7	(100%)	

Through the analysis, it was found that both English and Persian university lectures employed interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in their articles, but the percentage of interactive metadiscourse markers was far greater than interactional metadiscourse markers in both corpora.

In order to find out whether or not the differences in the use of metadiscourse markers across the corpora were significant, I analyzed the obtained frequency data using chi-square test for independence. The result of the chi-square test is presented below (Table 3.2). It must be pointed out that the data were normalized prior to performing chi-square since the total frequencies of metadiscourse markers were different between the corpora. In the overall comparisons of interactive markers, the Chi-square test statistic (chi-square = 988.855) was $p < 0.000$, less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05.

Table 3.2 *Chi- Square Tests of Interactive Comparison of the English and Persian University Lectures*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	885.855[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	899.259	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	718.084	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	19127		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 124.85.

The results of Chi-square test for the overall results of interactive markers indicate that there are significant differences in employing metadiscourse markers between English and Persian university lectures.

Table 3.3 *Residuals for Inerective Metadiscourse Markers*

			Frequency in English University Lectures	Frequency in Persian University Lectures	
Transitions	1	Count	6765	3700	10465
		Std. Residual	11.5	-13.1	
Frame Markers	2	Count	2398	2305	4703
		Std. Residual	-4.8	5.4	
Endophoric Markers	3	Count	97	291	388
		Std. Residual	-8.2	9.3	
Code Glosses	4	Count	1437	1849	3286
		Std. Residual	-9.5	10.8	
Evidentials	5	Count	51	234	285
		Std. Residual	-8.6	9.8	
Total		Count	10748	8379	19127

As it is evident in Table 3.3, all rows illustrate that the differences between English and Persian university lectures are meaningful in all categories.

Table 3.4 demonstrates the overall comparisons of interactional markers, the chi-square test statistic (chi-square = 1214.817) was p< 0.000, less than the alpha level of significance of 0.05.

Table 3.4 *Chi- Square Tests of Interactional Comparison of the English and Persian University Lectures*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1214.817[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	1263.570	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.833	1	.361
N of Valid Cases	12653		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 53.05.

The results of Chi-square test for the overall results of interactional markers indicate that there are significant differences in employing metadiscourse markers between English and Persian university lectures.

Table 3.5 *Reduals for Interactional Metadiscourse Markers*

			Frequency in English University Lectures	Frequency in Persian University Lectures	
Hedges	1	Count	1432	736	2168
		Std. Residual	5.2	-6.1	
Boosters	2	Count	1359	969	2328
		Std. Residual	.5	-.6	
Atitude	3	Count	54	71	125
Markers		Std. Residual	-2.1	2.5	
Self-Mentions	4	Count	2129	3013	5142
		Std. Residual	-15.3	17.8	
Engagement	5	Count	2309	581	2890
Markers		Std. Residual	15.8	-18.4	
Total		Count	7283	5370	12653

As it is evident in Table 3.5, all rows except *boosters* illustrate that the differences between English and Persian university lectures are meaningful in all categories.

4. Discussiom

In the following section, I raise the research questions again, attempting to discuss the detected differences between English and Persian university lectures from a qualitative point of view:

Q1. Do English and Persian university lecturers differ in their use of metadiscourse in the classroom?

As mentioned earlier, metadiscourse markers classification model proposed by Hyland (2004, 2005) was used in this study to investigate them in the two corpora, English and Persian university lectures. For the first question of the study, concerning the use of metadiscourse markers in the two corpora, as the results demonstrated above, there were differences between the use of metadiscourse markers in the English and Persian university lectures. According to Hyland (2009), "counter intuitively," such "high levels of involvement and interactivity" are the

most distinctive characteristics of classroom discourse (p. 102). The density of the use of metadiscourse markers is higher in the English university lectures than in the Persian ones (120.7 vs. 111.23). Hence, we can conclude that English university lectures comprise more metadiscourse markers in contrast to Persian university lectures.

Interestingly, both corpora, on the whole, have very small differences in terms of the types of metadiscourse markers. This could mean that metadiscourse markers are generally recognized as a valuable rhetorical tool in the process of persuasion in university lectures. In both corpora, the interactive metadiscourse category i.e., *transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, code glosses,* and *evidentials,* was used more frequently than interactional resources which are *hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions,* and *engagement markers.* This shows that interactive markers are more significant tools for English and Persian lecturers in producing university lectures. This comparative analysis of English and Persian university lecturers demonstrates that use of metadiscourse is inextricably linked to the context and content of teaching and learning. As the figures represent, interactive and interactional markers are employed more frequently in English university lectures than those used in Persian ones. Overall, metadiscourse markers are abundant in university lectures. The results of this study are in line with the study conducted by Lee and Subtirelu (2015) which showed that metadiscourse markers helped lecturers to improve the language of their text and convey their message effectively.

Q2. What types of metadiscourses are used more frequently in English and Persian university lectures?

Essentially, the concept of metadiscourse grew out of the pioneering works of Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore, (1989), and others to balance earlier views of discourse that saw texts as largely propositional and expository, merely serving to convey 'content'. Most studies have focused on interactive metadiscourse and the resources used to organize speech and emphasize what the speaker is referring to. In the English university lectures, the two most frequently used metadiscourse markers were in order: *transitions* (45.29) and *frame markers* (16.05) in interactive metadiscourse markers, and *Engagement markers* (15.45) and *self-mentions* (14.25) in interactional ones. Similarly, in the Persian university lectures were *transitions* (29.94) and *frame markers* (18.65) in interactive metadiscourse markers, and *engagement markers* (40.70) and *self-mentions* (24.38).

5. Conclusion

Metadiscourse plays a much more crucial role in English university lectures than Persian. While Persian university lecturers' priority lies in establishing relationships between ideas in the unfolding arguments of lectures. In addition, English university lectures involve greater direct attempts at student engagement to

establish interactive and participatory environments in order for students to engage in various academic and linguistic tasks, which need explicit task instructions. Thus, English university lectures utilize linguistic expressions to explicitly signal engagement with learners more frequently, unlike Persian university lecturers whose main charge is to assist students gain disciplinary knowledge. Though, for some features (e.g., *hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions*), the real-time spoken environment of the classroom appears to supersede pedagogical focus and approach, as these elements are utilized in relatively similar ways across these two contexts.

This study can have a range of implications. The first and one of the most important pedagogical implications of this study is the significance of presenting an affective lecture through proper use of metadiscourse markers and the role of these markers in transferring information and achieving the goal of teaching. The results of the study also have implications for university lecturers to become aware of different conventions governing this kind of genre. Metadiscourse markers are used in dissimilar ways in different languages and disciplines; this makes it important for teachers and ES/AP course designers to recognize this for instruction. The findings of the study can also make English and Persian university lecturers cognizant of the conventions of their English and Persian lectures and help them to be careful in using different metadiscourse markers to deliver their speeches in a more natural way. What is more, the knowledge of metadiscourse markers might help them understand, create, and connect speech with greater ease. The results can also inform those students who want to improve their lecture comprehension process for a more successful academic career.

A few limitations of this exploratory study should be pointed out. First, I faced some problems during data collection. The Persian data were selected from prestigious university websites, and I had to find an equal number of lectures from each discipline in English as well. These factors made the process of data collection more time-consuming than we expected. Second, this study did not include student viewpoints on which lectures were perceived as encouraging greater participation and being more engaging, clearer, and easier to follow. Furthermore, the full transcripts of the Persian lectures were not generally available on the website, and hence the researcher had to transcribe all the lectures by herself; this was a painstaking undertaking.

The following directions are suggested for further research. This study examined in details the frequencies and occurrences of metadiscourse markers between English and Persian university lectures. It would be useful to carry out a further research on metadiscourse markers in a variety of disciplines other than the disciplines analyzed in this study and in a variety of languages other than the languages analyzed here.

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