

CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF INTERPERSONAL METADISOURSE MARKERS IN PERSUASIVE LOCAL NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the role interpersonal metadiscourse markers play in the construction and achievement of persuasion in local British and Iranian newspapers. To this end, a corpus of 120 persuasive opinion articles published in two local Iranian newspapers, namely *Isfahan Ziba* and *Isfahan (Emrooz) Today*, and two local British newspapers, namely *Liverpool Echo* and *Chronicle Live*, from July 2015 to June 2016, were randomly selected and analyzed based on Dafouz-Milne's (2008) taxonomy of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. The overall findings disclose that interpersonal metadiscourse is present in the two corpora; however, there are variations in the distribution and frequency of interpersonal markers.

Keywords

cross-cultural study, interpersonal metadiscourse markers, local newspaper, persuasion

1 Introduction

As the most popular written discourse, newspapers and their audience worldwide play a significant role in public media. Despite its transition from printed to digital version, newspapers still preserve their readers. Communicating with a wide, disparate, anonymous audience requires highly skilled and competent writers to draw the readers' attention. Therefore, journalists should not only have an immense knowledge of the topic, but also be able to establish a healthy relationship with the audience through written discourse. Connor (1996: 144) describes newspaper discourse and opinion columns as "some of the best examples of persuasive writing in all countries; they set standards for written persuasion". In order to satisfy the readers, the columnist or opinion article writer has to develop the materials in such a way as to convince the audience. The purpose of opinion articles is to convince the audience of the importance and significance of a topic and to invite them to admit the writers' perspectives (Fu & Hyland 2014). Opinion articles in editorials "tend to represent institutional perspectives", and, in journalistic commentaries, aim to "encode the views of a single individual" (Wang 2008, as quoted in Fu & Hyland 2014: 124). According to Fu and Hyland (2014: 124), "opinion pieces take a more personal

interactional position, adopting a clear perspective toward both their topics and their readers by establishing a stance early on in the piece and supporting this with a range of warrants for their opinions”. To build a good rapport with the audience, writers apply interpersonal metadiscourse markers, a feature relatively tied with persuasive writing. The present study therefore aims to explore this intricate and complex discourse in local opinion articles.

Metadiscourse markers are devices through which the texts are organized in a manner which involves the readers with writers’ attitudes (Hyland & Tse 2004). In his book, Hyland (2005) defines metadiscourse as a cover term to express self-reflectiveness and help readers or speakers to express their intentions. Thus, using metadiscourse markers helps writers to express their stance in the texts toward the contents or the reader (Hyland 2000). Moreover, metadiscourse resources are the links between text and disciplinary culture through which the audience for whom the text is written understand the rhetorical context (Hyland 2004a).

For the last two decades, a number of taxonomies have been developed to study metadiscourse markers (e.g. Crismore 1984, Dafouz-Milne 2003, 2008, Hyland 2005, Vande Kopple 1985). Most frameworks have divided metadiscourse markers in their type as textual or interpersonal. Textual metadiscourse markers “organize the discourse by pointing out topic shifts, signaling sequences, cross-referencing, connecting ideas, previewing material, and so on” (Hyland 2004a, Hyland & Tse 2004: 158). The texts are examined for the application of logical markers (i.e. additives, adversatives, consecutives, conclusives), sequencers, reminders, topicalizers, code glosses (i.e. parenthesis, punctuation devices, reformulators, exemplifiers), illocutionary markers and announcements (Dafouz-Milne 2008).

Interpersonal metadiscourse markers, on the other hand, “alert readers to the author’s perspective towards both the propositional information and the readers themselves thus contributing to a writer-reader relationship and anticipating the subjective negatability of statements” (Hyland 1998: 443). Interpersonal metadiscourse is “essentially an evaluative form of discourse and expresses the writer’s individually defined, but disciplinary circumscribed, persona” (Hyland 1999: 8). It needs to be pointed out that since writers’ attitude is conveyed through the use of interpersonal markers, the present study has only investigated this category of metadiscourse in local newspaper opinion articles. To study interpersonal devices, the texts are analyzed for the number of hedges (i.e. epistemic verbs, probability adverbs and epistemic expressions), certainty markers, attributors, attitude markers (i.e. deontic verbs, attitudinal adverbs, attitudinal adjectives and cognitive verbs) and commentaries (i.e. rhetorical questions, direct address to reader, inclusive expressions, personalization, asides) (see Table 1).

**CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF INTERPERSONAL METADISOURSE MARKERS
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| Macro Category | Sub Category | Examples |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Hedges | Epistemic verbs | may/might/it <u>must</u> be two o'clock |
| | Probability adverbs | maybe, probably, perhaps |
| | Epistemic expressions | It is likely, They are likely |
| 2. Certainty markers | | undoubtedly, clearly, certainly |
| 3. Attributor | | 'x' claims that.../As the Prime Minister |
| 4. Attitude markers | Deontic verbs | have to, must, need to |
| | Attitudinal adverbs | unfortunately, remarkably, pathetically |
| | Attitudinal adjectives | It is absurd, It is surprising |
| | Cognitive verbs | I feel, I believe, I think |
| 5. Commentaries | Rhetorical questions | What is the future of Europe, integration or disintegration? |
| | Direct address to the reader | <u>You</u> must understand <u>dear reader</u> , |
| | Inclusive expression | <u>We all</u> believe, Let <u>us</u> summarize |
| | Personalization | What the polls are telling me? I do not want |
| | Asides | Diana (<u>ironically for a Spenser</u>) was not of <u>the Establishment</u> |

Table 1: Interpersonal metadiscourse categories (from Dafouz-Milne 2008)

The use of metadiscourse markers differs with variations in culture, communities and genres (Hyland 2005). Therefore, the study of different texts in different disciplines written for disparate audience and divergent purposes could help enhance our understanding as to how writers apply metadiscourse sources to interact with their readers. Due to its importance, metadiscourse markers have been investigated in various genres including research articles (e.g. Abdi 2009, 2011, Afros & Schryer 2009, Dahl 2004, Gillaerts & Van de Velde 2010, Gholami & Ilghami 2016, Mur-Dueñas 2011), students' writings (e.g. Cheng & Steffensen 1996, Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen 1993, Hyland 2004a, Intaraprawat & Steffensen 1995), textbooks (e.g. Hyland 1999), and newspaper editorials (e.g. Belmonte 2007, Boshrahadi et al. 2014, Dafouz-Milne 2003, 2008, Kuhl & Mojood 2014, Le 2004, Maddalena & Belmonte 2011, Mu 2010, Noorian & Biria 2010, Tavanpour et al. 2016). Even so, studies on the application of metadiscourse markers in local newspaper articles are not numerous. The

majority of the literature on metadiscourse focuses primarily on business genres (e.g. Carrió-Pastor & Calderón 2015, Hyland 1998, Ulvskov Jørgensen 2015) and various academic genres (e.g. Estaji & Vafaeimehr 2015). As asserted by Ho (2016), other genres have received less attention by the research community.

The use of interpersonal metadiscourse in realizing means of persuasion in local newspapers, to the best of the authors' knowledge, has not been explored. According to Hyland (2005), writing is always engaged to express the interest, the positions, the perspectives and values of those who enact them. Moreover, as Kuhl and Mojood (2014) state, when making meaning, an author needs to take into account not only its social influence but also the impact it might exert on the readership who, in turn, interpret the meaning and, at the same time, constitute the audience for the act of communication. Therefore, it is assumed that authors of national or local newspapers take the audience of the immediate context into consideration and employ "persuasive, public and probably both local cultures and ideological proclivities" (Kuhl & Mojood 2014: 1047).

2 Previous studies of metadiscourse markers in newspaper editorials

The number of studies on metadiscourse in newspapers is abundant. In a cross-cultural cross-linguistic study, Dafouz-Milne (2008) examined metadiscourse markers in 40 British and Spanish newspapers editorials. Her findings showed variation in the type and distribution of interpersonal and textual metadiscourse markers in the corpus. However, statistical analyses showed no significant difference in the use of textual metadiscourse markers in English and Spanish opinion articles.

Wang and Zhang (2016) used Hyland's classification method of metadiscourse to study ten English reports on North Korea's nuclear test in 2016. Their findings suggested that interactional metadiscourse, which includes strategies of transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses (Hyland 2005), was used more frequently than interactive metadiscourse with strategies of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers strategies. Moreover, the frequent use of attitude markers and boosters indicated countries' strong opposition toward this act. To account for these findings, the researchers argued that knowledge on metadiscourse would help readers to understand the news reports about this event. In other words, metadiscourse "reveals the ways writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitudes and commitments to their readers" (Hyland 2004b: 133).

Noorian and Biria (2010) explored interpersonal metadiscourse markers in 12 opinion articles of two elite newspapers, namely *The New York Times* and *Tehran Times* published in English in the United States and Iran, respectively. The data were analyzed based on Dafouz-Milne's (2008) framework. Their findings

displayed significant differences in the use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the two corpora. As stated by Noorian and Biria (2010), “culture-driven preferences, genre-driven conventions, and Iranian EFL writers’ extent of foreign language experience” resulted in significant difference in the two corpora.

Kuhi and Mojood (2012) examined metadiscourse markers in 60 newspaper editorials written in English and Persian published in 10 elite newspapers in the United States and Iran. The data were analyzed based on Hyland’s (2005) model of metadiscourse to examine the interactive and interactional markers in the two datasets. Their findings displayed variations in the distribution of interactive and interactional markers. In line with Noorian and Biria’s (2010) study, Kuhi and Mojood (2012) stated writers’ cultural/linguistic backgrounds as the source of differences in the two corpora and that the texts were genre-driven. In other words, the text was constructed following the specific patterns governing texts targeting a given language/culture/discipline. Their findings underscored the significance of the concept of metadiscourse as a vital element in expressing persuasion in newspaper editorials.

In another cross-cultural metadiscourse study, Mehrabi, Biria and Zavari (2014) investigated metadiscourse markers in 10 English and Persian Economic newspaper articles. Coding the data based on Kopple’s (1985) framework, the researchers reported that the tokens of interpersonal metadiscourse markers were rather high in American newspapers compared to Iranian ones, while the occurrence of textual markers was higher in the Persian corpus. The researchers referred to the cultural background of the newspaper article writers as the possible source of observed differences in the corpora.

3 The present study

Research on local newspapers is rather scanty as the majority of studies address opinion articles in national (e.g. Sukma & Sujatna 2014, Hashemi & Golparvar 2012, Mashhady, Fatollahi & Shahraki 2015, Yazdani & Salehi 2017) or international (e.g. Dafouz-Milne 2008, Maddalena & Belmonte 2011, Noorian & Biria 2010) newspapers. Since almost all studies have examined opinion articles in international and national newspapers and no published work has investigated local/regional newspapers, the present study was designed with the following objectives:

- 1) to examine the interpersonal metadiscourse makers used in local British and Iranian persuasive newspaper articles and
- 2) to investigate to what extent there are differences between local British and Iranian persuasive newspaper articles in the use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers.

4 Method

4.1 Corpus specification

The corpus consists of opinion articles randomly selected from two local newspapers in Iran and two local newspapers in the United Kingdom. Topics in opinion articles are around “particular societal importance at the time of publication” (Le 2004: 688) which do not reflect newspapers’ official positions. According to Connor (1996, as cited in Noorian & Biria 2010), opinion columns rightly reflect an example of persuasive texts in a country. In other words, the purpose is to observe the variation of discourse markers in opinion articles written in English in the two cultures.

The local newspapers published and circulated in Esfahan, Iran are entitled *Isfahan Ziba* and *Isfahan (Emrooz) Today*. The Persian version of these newspapers is available both in print and online, and the English version is only available online. These newspapers are run by Iranians and the license owners with their publishing houses based in Esfahan. For the purpose of this study, the online English version written by Iranian non-native speakers of English was examined. Needless to mention that English is considered a foreign language in Iran practised through exposure to formal instruction. The national and official language of Iran is Persian (Farsi). The local British newspapers are *Liverpool Echo* (www.liverpoolecho.co.uk) and *Chronicle Live* (www.chroniclelive.co.uk), whose electronic versions are available for readers. 120 articles in total (60 in each corpus) published from July 2015 to June 2016 were randomly selected based on the similarity of the topic to include political issues. The size of each corpus was around 30,000 words.

4.2 Procedure and data analysis

The data were analyzed based on Dafouz-Milne’s (2008) classification of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. In doing so, every sentence in each corpus was checked to detect the markers used. The analyses were carried out manually and the markers coded. With markers that could serve more than one function, the meaning of the marker in the sentence was taken into account. To ensure the reliability of the codification, two raters checked the coded data yielding an interrater reliability coefficient of 0.9. The data were then entered into version 22 of SPSS for further descriptive (i.e. frequency) and statistical (i.e. chi-square) analyses.

5 Results

Table 2 shows the use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the two corpora. As shown in the table, out of 3,837 metadiscourse markers, British local newspapers used 2,317 markers compared to the Iranian corpus with a total of 1,520 markers. The findings show that commentaries were the most frequent category in the two corpora (41.2% and 31.1% in local British and Iranian newspapers respectively) compared to other categories. Attitude markers and hedges were the second and third most frequently used categories in each corpus with hardly any difference found between the two corpora. Moreover, attributors and certainty markers were the least frequently used strategies in local British and local Iranian newspapers.

| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | | χ^2 | df | p-value |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|----------|----|---------|
| | | F | P | F | P | | | |
| 1. Hedges | Epistemic verbs | 490 | 21.1 | 383 | 25.2 | 8.563 | 1 | .003 |
| | Probability adverbs | 58 | 2.5 | 42 | 2.8 | .244 | 1 | .621 |
| | Epistemic expressions | 33 | 1.4 | 25 | 1.6 | .300 | 1 | .584 |
| | Total number | 581 | 25.1 | 450 | 29.6 | 9.584 | 1 | .002 |
| 2. Certainty markers | | 110 | 4.7 | 46 | 3.0 | 6.972 | 1 | .008 |
| 3. Attributor | | 62 | 2.7 | 102 | 6.7 | 36.518 | 1 | >.001 |
| 4. Attitude markers | Deontic verbs | 167 | 7.2 | 126 | 8.3 | 1.523 | 1 | .217 |
| | Attitudinal adverbs | 50 | 2.2 | 37 | 2.4 | .316 | 1 | .574 |
| | Attitudinal adjectives | 102 | 4.4 | 87 | 5.7 | 3.422 | 1 | .064 |
| | Cognitive verbs | 290 | 12.5 | 199 | 13.1 | .274 | 1 | .601 |
| Total number | | 609 | 26.3 | 449 | 29.5 | 4.871 | 1 | .027 |
| 5. Commentaries | Rhetorical questions | 85 | 3.7 | 38 | 2.5 | 4.039 | 1 | .044 |
| | Direct address to the reader | 6 | 0.3 | 0 | 0.0 | --- | -- | .087 |
| | Inclusive expression | 69 | 3.0 | 14 | 0.9 | 18.350 | 1 | >.001 |
| | Personalization | 748 | 32.3 | 359 | 23.6 | 33.571 | 1 | >.001 |
| | Asides | 47 | 2.0 | 62 | 4.1 | 13.982 | 1 | >.001 |
| Total number | | 955 | 41.2 | 473 | 31.1 | 40.061 | 1 | >.001 |
| Total number of Interpersonal Metadiscourse markers | | 2317 | 100.0 | 1520 | 100.0 | | | |

Table 2: Interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the two corpora (F: Frequency; P: Percentage)

The findings show that epistemic verbs were the most frequent subcategory of hedges in both local British and local Iranian corpora. Moreover, cognitive verbs were the most frequent subcategory of attitude markers in the corpora. Likewise, within the category of commentaries, personalization had the highest number of instances in both the local British and local Iranian corpora.

Table 3 displays the distribution and type of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the two corpora. As shown in Table 3, the modal verbs *can* and *will* were used most frequently ($n = 102$ and 131 , 17.5% and 22.5% respectively) in both local British and local Iranian corpora. Besides, the probability adverbs of *maybe*, *perhaps*, and *probably* were the most frequently used adverbs in the British corpus ($n = 13$, 12 , 11 , respectively) while *probably* and *almost* were the most frequent adverbs in the Iranian corpus ($n = 7$ for both adverbs).

| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | Types | | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|
| | | | F | P | F | P |
| Hedges | 1. Epistemic verbs | May | 36 | 6.19 | 22 | 4.88 |
| | | Can | 102 | 17.55 | 89 | 19.77 |
| | | Could | 55 | 9.46 | 33 | 7.33 |
| | | Will | 131 | 22.54 | 117 | 26 |
| | | Would | 43 | 7.40 | 31 | 6.88 |
| | | Won't | 2 | 0.34 | 2 | 0.44 |
| | | Shall | 3 | 0.51 | 1 | 0.22 |
| | | Should | 54 | 9.29 | 45 | 10 |
| | | Need | 20 | 3.44 | 17 | 3.77 |
| | | Might | 19 | 3.27 | 8 | 1.77 |
| | 2. Probability adverbs | Must | 26 | 4.47 | 18 | 4 |
| | | Maybe | 13 | 2.23 | 5 | 1.11 |
| | | Probably | 12 | 2.06 | 7 | 1.55 |
| | | Perhaps | 11 | 1.89 | 5 | 1.11 |
| | | Possibly | 3 | 0.51 | 3 | 0.66 |
| | | Almost | 5 | 0.86 | 7 | 1.55 |
| | | Apparently | 3 | 0.51 | 4 | 0.88 |
| | | Presumably | 3 | 0.51 | 2 | 0.44 |
| | | Seemingly | 4 | 0.68 | 6 | 1.33 |
| | | Relatively | 4 | 0.68 | 3 | 0.66 |
| 3. Epistemic expressions | | 33 | 5.67 | 25 | 5.55 | |
| Total number | | | 581 | 100 | 450 | 100 |

Table 3: Use of hedges in the corpus

Table 4 presents the distribution and types of certainty markers in the two corpora. As shown in Table 4, certainty markers were used more frequently in the British corpus than the Iranian one (n = 110 and 46 in British and Iranian local newspapers respectively).

| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | Types | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
| | | F | P | F | P |
| Certainty markers | Undoubtedly | 2 | 1.81 | 0 | 0 |
| | Clearly | 5 | 4.54 | 0 | 0 |
| | Certainly | 8 | 7.27 | 3 | 6.52 |
| | Truly | 1 | 0.90 | 0 | 0 |
| | No/without doubt | 1 | 0.90 | 2 | 4.34 |
| | Evidently | 4 | 3.63 | 3 | 6.52 |
| | Really | 14 | 12.72 | 8 | 17.39 |
| | Surely | 24 | 21.81 | 9 | 19.56 |
| | In fact | 10 | 9.09 | 4 | 8.69 |
| | Indeed | 8 | 7.27 | 4 | 8.69 |
| | Obviously | 8 | 7.27 | 5 | 10.86 |
| | Actually | 22 | 20 | 8 | 17.39 |
| Total number | | 110 | 100 | 46 | 100 |

Table 4: The use of certainty markers in the corpus

Table 5 displays the distribution of attributors in the two corpora. As shown in Table 5, attributors were used more frequently in the local Iranian (n = 102) corpus than the local British one (n = 92), but the difference was insignificant.

| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | Types | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | |
|---|-------|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|-----|
| | | F | P | F | P |
| Attributor | | 92 | 100 | 102 | 100 |

Table 5: The use of attributors in the corpus

Table 6 shows the distribution and type of attitude markers in the two corpora. As evident from the table, local British writers (n = 609) used attitude markers more frequently than local Iranian writers (n = 449).

| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | Types | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|------|
| | | F | P | F | P | |
| 1. Deontic verbs | Have to | 16 | 2.62 | 9 | 2.00 | |
| | Must | 28 | 4.59 | 18 | 4.00 | |
| | Need to | 25 | 4.10 | 14 | 3.11 | |
| | Has to | 3 | 0.49 | 5 | 1.11 | |
| | Be able to | 24 | 3.94 | 11 | 2.44 | |
| | Is to | 14 | 2.29 | 17 | 3.78 | |
| | Was to | 3 | 0.49 | 2 | 0.44 | |
| | Were to | 1 | 0.16 | 0 | 0 | |
| | Are to | 6 | 0.98 | 2 | 0.44 | |
| | Got to | 1 | 0.16 | 0 | 0 | |
| | Be going to | 10 | 1.64 | 9 | 2.00 | |
| | Let's | 18 | 2.95 | 7 | 1.55 | |
| | I wish | 2 | 0.32 | 9 | 2.00 | |
| | I hope / It is hoped that | 8 | 1.31 | 18 | 4.00 | |
| | Be bound to | 2 | 0.32 | 0 | 0 | |
| | 2. Attitudinal adverbs | Used to | 4 | 0.65 | 4 | 0.89 |
| If I were | | 2 | 0.32 | 1 | 0.22 | |
| Unfortunately | | 9 | 1.47 | 6 | 1.33 | |
| Remarkably | | 8 | 1.31 | 4 | 0.89 | |
| Fortunately | | 12 | 1.97 | 9 | 2.00 | |
| Usually | | 8 | 1.31 | 7 | 1.55 | |
| Significantly | | 9 | 1.47 | 7 | 1.55 | |
| Preferably | | 4 | 0.65 | 4 | 0.89 | |
| It is surprising | | 5 | 0.82 | 4 | 0.89 | |
| It is amazing | | 5 | 0.82 | 8 | 1.78 | |
| It is odd | | 8 | 1.31 | 10 | 2.22 | |
| It is unfortunate | | 4 | 0.65 | 5 | 1.11 | |
| It is shocked | | 5 | 0.82 | 2 | 0.44 | |
| It is essential | | 12 | 1.97 | 4 | 0.89 | |
| 3. Attitudinal adjectives | | It is important | 15 | 2.46 | 18 | 4.00 |
| | | It is interesting | 10 | 1.64 | 13 | 2.89 |
| | It is striking | 3 | 0.49 | 0 | 0 | |
| | It is unusual | 7 | 1.14 | 4 | 0.89 | |
| | It is bizarre | 5 | 0.82 | 0 | 0 | |
| | It is usual | 8 | 1.31 | 5 | 1.11 | |
| | It is wonderful | 8 | 1.31 | 9 | 2.00 | |
| | It is curious | 7 | 1.14 | 5 | 1.11 | |

**CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF INTERPERSONAL METADISOURSE MARKERS
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| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | Types | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | | F | P | F | P |
| 4. Cognitive verbs | Feel /felt | 27 | 4.43 | 4 | 0.89 |
| | Believe /believed | 22 | 3.61 | 21 | 4.67 |
| | Think /thought | 46 | 7.53 | 29 | 6.45 |
| | Assume | 7 | 1.14 | 3 | 0.66 |
| | Guess | 7 | 1.14 | 4 | 0.89 |
| | Presume | 9 | 1.47 | 5 | 1.11 |
| | Expect | 10 | 1.64 | 19 | 4.23 |
| | Imagine | 14 | 2.29 | 5 | 1.11 |
| | Consider | 27 | 4.43 | 17 | 3.78 |
| | Pretend | 8 | 1.31 | 6 | 1.33 |
| | Appear | 21 | 3.44 | 16 | 3.56 |
| | Sound | 12 | 1.97 | 7 | 1.55 |
| | Be aware of | 5 | 0.82 | 2 | 0.44 |
| | Notice | 7 | 1.14 | 5 | 1.11 |
| | Sense | 2 | 0.32 | 6 | 1.33 |
| | Deem | 1 | 0.16 | 4 | 0.89 |
| | Judge | 5 | 0.82 | 3 | 0.66 |
| | Wonder | 14 | 2.29 | 9 | 2.00 |
| | Suppose | 11 | 1.80 | 6 | 1.33 |
| | Predict | 15 | 2.46 | 9 | 2.00 |
| | Estimate | 4 | 0.65 | 5 | 1.11 |
| | Tend | 5 | 0.82 | 0 | 0 |
| | Propose | 4 | 0.65 | 5 | 1.11 |
| Suggest | 7 | 1.1 | 9 | 2.00 | |
| Total number in Table 6 | | 609 | 100 | 449 | 100 |

Table 6: The use of attitude markers in the corpus

Table 7 shows the distribution and type of commentaries in the two corpora. As shown in Table 7, local British writers used commentaries more frequently (n = 955) than local Iranian writers (n = 473).

| Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers | Types | Local British Newspapers | | Local Iranian Newspapers | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
| | | F | P | F | P |
| Commentaries | Rhetorical questions | 85 | 8.90 | 38 | 8.03 |
| | Direct address to the reader | 6 | 0.62 | 0 | 0 |
| | Inclusive expression | 69 | 7.22 | 14 | 2.95 |
| | Personalization | 748 | 78.32 | 359 | 75.89 |
| | Asides | 47 | 4.92 | 62 | 13.10 |
| Total number | | 955 | 100 | 473 | 100 |

Table 7: The commentaries used in the two corpora

6 Discussion

The data revealed the frequent use of hedges in both local British and Iranian newspapers. This is in line with previous studies (e.g. Abdi 2002, Dafouz-Milne 2008, Noorian & Biria 2010, Sukma & Sujatna 2014) speaking to the crucial importance of using hedges as mitigated opinions in newspaper discourse to reach persuasion (Dafouz-Milne 2008). The findings also showed that local British newspapers used epistemic verbs significantly more than local Iranian newspapers. The frequent use of epistemic verbs in the two corpora also accorded with other relevant studies (e.g. Dafouz-Milne 2008, Noorian & Biria 2010, Sukma & Sujatna 2014) suggesting that, along with other types of hedges, they are the main indicators of interpersonal metadiscourse in all previous metadiscourse research (Khabbazi-Oskouei 2013). The high proportion of epistemic verbs used by local British writers may indicate their cautiousness to express their opinions. Similarly to Dafouz-Milne's (2008) and Sukma and Sujatna's (2014) studies, the use of probability adverbs and epistemic expression was rather low in the two corpora.

With regard to the use of certainty markers (i.e. emphatic markers or boosters), the analysis revealed that local British writers used certainty markers significantly more than Iranian writers did. Taking linguistic preference into consideration, the expressions *actually*, *surely* and *really* were the most frequently used adverbs by both local British and Iranian writers. The findings displayed that British writers tend to express their opinions more overtly than Iranian writers to persuade their readers. As Dafouz-Milne (2008: 108) puts it, the use of certainty markers

“creates a sense of solidarity with readers when discussing issues that are in fact divisive”.

Attributors as “references to authorities that the writer used for their intellectual or persuasive force” (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen 1993: 54) were also used more significantly by local Iranian writers compared to their British counterparts. In other words, the findings show that Iranian writers used “authoritative values with persuasive goals” (Dafouz-Milne 2008: 99) more frequently than British writers.

Attitude markers are persuasive devices whose function is to express writers’ affective values toward the propositional content. They are applied differently in text as they take on different functions as “expressions of surprise, of thinking that something is important, or of concession, agreement, disagreement, and so on” (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen 1993: 53). The analysis further revealed that the number of attitudinal markers was rather high in the two corpora with cognitive verbs being the most frequent subcategory in each group. The findings also delineated that local British newspaper writers used attitude markers more than local Iranian newspaper writers. From a statistical perspective, these differences were found to be significant. Attitude markers help the writers to express their personal feelings as a persuasive tool to the eye of the reader (Dafouz-Milne 2008). Linguistically speaking, the occurrences of certain cognitive verbs such as *feel*, *believe* and *think* were rather high in local British newspapers, a result which replicated that of Dafouz-Milne’s (2008) English corpus. The most frequent deontic verbs in the two corpora were *must*, *need to*, *be able to* and *be to*. No significant distinction, however, was found for attitudinal adverbs.

Finally, with regard to commentaries, the most noticeable feature was the use of personalization in the two corpora, though from a statistical point of view British writers used the categories of commentaries significantly more frequently than Iranian writers. Moreover, the number of rhetorical questions in the British corpus was high, suggesting that “the writer spells out the question that the cooperative reader expects to be answered and this encourages the reader to accept the direction the text is taking” (Thompson 2001: 61). The overuse of commentaries in the corpus compared to other categories of interpersonal metadiscourse markers reflects “the tendency of opinion columns to express opinion in a much more personal way than is the case for editorials or academic papers” (Dafouz-Milne 2008: 108). There are, however, few instances of direct reader address in the British corpus, and this category is absent in the Iranian corpus, a result which indicates that in Iranian culture direct address “conflicted

with the formality usually practiced in newspaper discourse” (Noorian & Biria 2010: 71).

According to Williams (1989, as cited in Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen 1993), argumentative writing can be enhanced when using interpersonal metadiscourse markers. Although using a greater number of interpersonal markers would lead to a more persuasive text, the variation of use in the two corpora of this study might be due to the writers’ decision to develop the texts based on their general audience and culture. As the findings show, the local British newspaper writers used significantly more types of interpersonal metadiscourse markers than the local Iranian newspaper writers. These findings are in accordance with other cross-cultural studies comparing native and non-native writers’ use of interactive metadiscourse markers in English in other genres (e.g. Marandi 2003, Mirshamsi & Allami 2013, Tabrizi 2017). In these studies, the use of metadiscourse makers was found to be more frequent in English corpora than in non-native English ones. According to Mirshamsi and Allami (2013: 36), the frequent application of metadiscourse markers by native speakers could be due to the fact that native speakers are “more familiar with the norms and conventions of their rhetorical structure”. In addition, the variations in the use of metadiscourse markers might denote writers’ differing tendencies in developing or reporting materials based on their cultural and linguistic background. In other words, authors’ cultural and linguistic background plays a vital role in the application of metadiscourse markers.

As Hyland and Tse (2004: 175) argue, “metadiscourse is thus an aspect of language which provides a link between texts and disciplinary culture, helping to define the rhetorical context by revealing some of the expectations and understanding of the audience for whom a text was written”.

Local authors’ language background could also be an effective factor contributing to variation in the use of metadiscourse markers as found in the studies of English native and non-native writers (e.g. Akbas 2012, Keshavarz & Kheirieh 2011, Marandi 2013, Mirshamsi & Allami 2012). In addition to the language background of the authors, the topics in persuasive articles could play a vital role in the deployment of metadiscourse markers to persuade the readers. Indeed, some topics require more persuasive devices (e.g. interactive metadiscourse markers) to persuade the readers.

7 Conclusion

The present study provided an analysis of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the local British and Iranian newspaper opinion articles. The findings

show that, in line with previous research on newspaper discourse, metadiscourse markers play a vital role in building rapport between the addresser and the addressee and their application in texts is highly dependent on the norms and expectations of the setting where they are used (Fuertes-Olivera, Velasco-Sacristán, Arribas-Baño & Samaniego-Fernández 2001). The present study is of both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it has extended the scope of analysis of metadiscourse as an analytical framework by analyzing local newspapers instead of national or international newspapers as done in most previous studies. Practically, the findings can add to our understanding as to how the local newspapers persuade their readers. Its contribution to the advancement of theory and understanding of professional practice notwithstanding, the study can be refined and extended in some ways: first, it is suggested that other frameworks and taxonomies should be used for further analysis; second, the use of metadiscourse markers can be studied in other local newspaper articles to (dis)confirm whether these devices are used similarly or differently in other languages; third, comparative studies should be conducted to compare local newspapers with most widely read newspapers such as national or international ones.

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