

## **Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Sports News in Newspapers: a Cross-cultural study of American and Iranian Columnists**

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### **Abstract**

The present study examined the use of interactional metadiscourse markers (e.g. hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self- mentions and engagements) in sport news of newspapers. Interactional metadiscourse refer to the ways in which authors use to engage their readers in the texts as well as to express their ideas about what they are witting. The purpose was to investigate the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in sport news in newspapers written in English by American English native speakers and Iranian non-native speakers of English. The sport news articles were selected from 5 elite newspapers published in Iran (e.g. Iran Daily, Tehran Times, Kayhan International) and in the United States (e.g. The New York Times and The Washington Post). They were matched in the number of words (4331 words) and were then analyzed based on Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers. Results revealed that interactional metadiscourse markers were present in the two corpora; however, there were different in the number of metadiscourse markers distributed in the two corpora. In other words, the findings demonstrate that the two corpora were different in the number of attitude markers and boosters. Moreover, hedges were used more frequently in Iranian corpus than the American one. Also, results of statistical analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the use of hedge in the two dataset.

**Keywords:** Interactional metadiscourse markers, Hyland's taxonomy, Sport news, newspaper

### **1. Introduction**

The awareness of metadiscourse markers causes the writer sees himself as a reader or a "self-reflective linguistic material referring to the evolving text and to the writer and imagined reader of that text" (Hyland &Tse, 2004; p. 156). Metadiscourse means the ways speakers and writers speak

and communicate with their audience. It expresses the notion that writers and speakers should go beyond the ideational dimension of text and speech to communicate their message efficiently. Metadiscourse refers to the textual resources beyond sentence levels. Writer needs to consider the expectations of their receivers to involve them in the reading development and affect their understanding of the discourse produced.

According to Tannen and Wallat (1999), using metadiscourse means that the writer has predicted the audiences' interactive frames and knowledge schemas and that s/he made the necessary modifications and additions to the information flow. If as members of the same discourse community, both writers and readers use similar mappings, effective comprehension will deal with the readers' expectations in terms of contents, contextual resources and disciplinary knowledge. Therefore, Pérez-Llantada (2003) believes that using metadiscourse allows readers to comprehend discourse texture and intertextuality, to share pragmatic presuppositions, to infer intended meanings, and to interpret the institutional and ideological ties underlying the text. Furthermore, the focus of the current study is on the interpersonal functions of the language known as metadiscourse and comparing the interpersonal metadiscourse markers in sport news columns in newspaper written by American English speakers and Iranian non-native speakers of English. In other words, the aim is to examine whether the two dataset differ in use of metadiscourse markers.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Metadiscourse markers**

The term metadiscourse was first coined by Harris (1959) to describe the way in which a writer or speaker tries to guide their audience's perception of their text (Hyland, 2005). Swales (1990) believes that metadiscourse is writing about the developing the text. Hyland (1998) divided metadiscourse markers into two categories: textual and interpersonal. The textual metadiscourse markers are based on the functions they have in the text, divided into five subtypes: endophoric markers, frame markers, logical connectives, code glosses, and evidentials. Hyland (1998) divided the interpersonal metadiscourse markers into five categories: emphatics, hedges, person markers, relational markers, and attitude markers. Emphatics refer to metadiscourse markers that writers use to express their certainty relating to an idea, or to stress their claims in the text by such linguistic features as certainly, definitely, and it is obvious. When a writer is uncertain about the truth of their claims they use linguistic features such as might, perhaps, it is possible, etc. These are referred to as "hedges". There are situations in which a writer needs to convey their presence in the text. In such cases, they use linguistic items called "person markers" such as I, we, my, and mine. The other type is "relational markers" that a writer directly refers to build relationship with the readers. Phrases like Dear reader, please consider, and note that, are a few examples of relational markers. And the last category includes "attitude markers". They are used when writer is in need of communicating their attitudes towards the propositional content of the text such as *surprisingly*, *I agree*, and *I hope*, that fall into such category. Hyland (2005) states that metadiscourse markers are linguistic features that writers uses to exchange the information and

express their attitudes, personalities, and assumptions by addressing and cooperating with the receivers of the message. Using metadiscourse markers in the text, writers would be able to instantiate the propositional content and their ideas coherently and clearly to show their units of thoughts to the readers.

Different taxonomies have been offered as different types of metadiscourse markers. Each of which has its own tokens (members). The taxonomy introduced by Halliday (1985), Thompson (2001), Dafuze (2003) and Hyland (1999), are a few taxonomies that can be used in discourse analysis research. All of these mentioned categories are the same and maybe the names of category are different, for example in Hayland's category there is attitude markers and in Dafuze's category certainty markers.

Propositional and metadiscoursal elements take place together in text and in the same sentences. We should not be surprised that a stretch of discourse may have both functions. This combination is common and each element states its own content, one focused on the world and the other with the text and its reception. Furthermore, metadiscourse conveys the intended meaning of the writer in a given situation. It is part of the message not an entirely different one.

## **2.2. Previous Studies**

Metadiscourse is an important area in discourse analysis as it helps writers to convey their intended message by creating a social and communicative interaction with the reader and, writers would be able to create a coherent text. A review of the selected studies is as follows:

Marandi (2000) worked on the introduction and discussion sections of 30 master's theses written after 1990 by Persian-speaking and English-speaking graduate students. He analyzed the first 1000 words in each section and found out textual metadiscourse subtypes were utilized more in the introductions but interpersonal metadiscourse subtypes were employed more in the discussion sections. The results showed that the native speakers of Persian used text/logical connectors the most but the native speakers of English used them the least.

Abdollahzadeh (2003) stressed the use of interpersonal metadiscourse. He examined discussion and conclusion sections of 65 articles that were written by native speakers of English and by Iranian academics writing in English. The results revealed a significant difference between native and non-native writers in their use of interpersonal metadiscourse. The American writers employed more certainty and attitude markers than the Iranian academics.

Dafouz-Milne (2003) studied the use of interpersonal and textual metadiscourse markers in the opinion columns of two elite newspapers: the Spanish *El Pais* and the British *The Times*, 20 articles in each newspaper. The findings showed that the frequency of textual metadiscourse

markers utilized by Spanish writers was more than that of English reporters, while the British writers employed more instances of interpersonal markers than that of the Spanish news reporters.

Rahimpour (2006) studied metadiscourse features in the discussion sections of 90 English and Persian applied linguistics research articles: 30 articles written in English by Iranians as non-native speakers of English; 30 articles in Persian written by Iranians; and 30 articles written by native speakers of English. According to Hyland's (2004) model writers of all three groups of applied linguistic discussion sections employed all sub-types of metadiscourse. Transitions and hedges were used more than other subtypes. Native speakers of English utilized more textual metadiscourse than the other groups did. Moreover, textual metadiscourse was used considerably more than interpersonal metadiscourse by all groups.

Abdollahzadeh (2007) studied the ways writers with different cultures organize their written texts by using metadiscourse markers. Abdollahzadeh examined 53 Persian and English newspaper editorials. The findings showed no difference between Persian and English editorials for the metadiscourse subtypes of text connectives, attitude markers, and person markers. Regarding the interpersonal metadiscourse markers, conversely, English editorials employed more hedges while Persian editorials used more emphatics. The results showed that the emphatics used by the Persian editorial writers was due to an Iranian tradition of valuing by the rules of those in power without questioning them or without stating uncertainty about social and religious issues. In contrast, the heavy use of hedges by the English editorial writers was due to their being more polite to their readers.

Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) examined 90 discussion sections of applied linguistics research articles. The corpus consists of English articles written by native speakers of English, English articles written in English by Iranian non-native speakers of English, and Persian articles written in Persian. The data were then analyzed based on Hyland's (2004) model. The findings revealed that native speakers of English used more interactional metadiscourse than Iranians did. Frame markers and code glosses were utilized more by Iranians than native speakers of English. By comparing both groups of Iranians, they found out that evidentials, code glosses, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions were employed more when Iranians wrote in Persian. Conversely, transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, hedges, and boosters were utilized more when they wrote in English.

Noorian and Biria (2010) studied the frequency and degree of the use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in persuasive discourse. The metadiscourse markers employed in English opinion articles written by American and Iranian columnists were compared. The findings showed that interpersonal metadiscourse markers were present in both sets of corpora. There were significant differences between the two groups concerning the occurrences of interpersonal

markers, particularly in the case of Commentaries. The findings revealed that different reasons for instance culture-driven preferences, genre-driven conventions, and Iranian non-native English writers' extent of foreign language experience interrelated in selecting the interpersonal metadiscourse markers by the columnists.

Hashemi and Golparvar (2012) examined the textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers utilized in Persian news reports. The findings showed that metadiscourse markers were utilized in Persian news reports and the number of textual metadiscourse markers was higher compared with interpersonal metadiscourse markers.

Pooresfahani, Khajavy and Vahidnia (2012) investigated the interactive and interactional metadiscoursal markers of English articles in applied linguistics and engineering by considering Hyland's (2005) model. The findings show that writers of both groups employed interactive and interactional markers in their research articles. Engineering writers utilized more code glosses and endophoric markers, and less sequencers and topicalisers than applied linguistics writers. Difference between the two groups was in use of logical markers and evidential. As regards interactional engineering writers employed more hedges and self-mentions, and less attitude markers and boosters than applied linguistics writers.

Yazdani, Sharifi, and Elyassi (2014) studied the interpersonal metadiscourse markers in Political English and Persian news articles. The corpus consisted of 30 news articles from both languages. They employed Hyland's (2005) classification of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference between two sets of corpora about the frequency of interpersonal markers. The results revealed that American journalists utilize them more in their news articles, while Iranian writers did not indicate a tendency towards personal markers such as I, we, and our, in writing news articles; instead, they use third person pronouns and passive structures to address the reader about their ideas.

Farzannia and Farnia (2016) examined 68 Mining engineering research articles in English and Persian using Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse. The findings show that interactional metadiscourse markers have been used significantly more in English corpus than the Persian one.

### **3. Objectives and Research Questions**

The focus of the present study is to examine the use of interpersonal discourse markers in American and Iranian sports news columns. Thus, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What discourse makers are used in American and Iranian sports news?
2. Is there any significant difference between the two corpora?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Corpus

The corpus of the present study consists of selected newspapers in the United States and Iran: The New York Times, The Washington Post, Tehran Times, Iran Daily, and Kayhan International respectively. The texts extracted from the American newspapers contained a total number of 4529 words. The articles selected from Iranian newspapers included a total number of 4331 words. They were written by American as native-English Speaking writers and Iranians as non-native English writers. Of the matched words, 198 were discarded in order to balance the number of words. It is necessary to mention that the selected articles in both Iranian and American newspapers were matched for their number of words.

### 4.2 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection procedure started with collecting different articles from online archives of The New York Times, The Washington Post, Tehran Times, Iran Daily, and Kayhan International newspapers. The data collection was done in February 2016 and the articles were published in the period between 2014 and 2016. All the texts were saved into the computer in order to compose a database or corpora. Next, articles from each newspaper were selected for the analysis.

According to Hyland (2005, cited in Paltridge2012), interactional metadiscourse resources are used to express writers' stances towards what they are saying and how they are explicitly engaging or addressing their readers in their texts. The word "Stance" refers to the ways in which writers express themselves and signal their ideas, judgments, and commitments to others. That is why the researchers in this study preferred to investigate interactional metadiscourse markers in Persian and English newspaper articles on sport discourse.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

The corpus was analyzed based on Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of interactional metadiscourse resources (see Table 2).

Table 2: Interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland and Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005)

Category	Function	Example
Interactional	Involve the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps; possible; about
Boosters	emphasize certainty and close dialogue	in fact; definitely; it is clear that

Attitude markers	expresses writers' attitude to proposition	unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly
Self- mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; note; you can see that

Metadiscourse markers are like sign spots which the author employs them to direct the readers towards specific goal for the text has been formulated. After clarifying and classifying the metadiscourse markers, a quantitative analysis was used to investigate the differences between them in this regard. Quantitative information was needed in the light of marking the presence of different types of interactional metadiscourse resources in both Persian and English corpus. Consequently, Chi-Square test, as a statistical analysis, was employed to examine the strength of similarities or differences between two sets of data.

### 5. Results

Table 3 indicates the frequency and percentage between these two sets of data. Comparing the results of two sets of data, as for the interactional metadiscourse markers, the statistical analysis revealed that the two datasets used all metadiscourse markers. They were also different in the number of hedges, attitude markers and boosters present in the two corpora. As presented in Figure 1, in Iranian corpus, hedges were more frequently used (36.4%) metadiscourse markers. Moreover, boosters (3%), self-mentions (46.2%), attitude markers (7.6%), and engagement (6.8%) ranked second to fourth in terms of frequency of use. Some extracts from Iran Daily are as follows:

"I put in a lot of hard yards this winter, which obviously hasn't been easy with a new family starting and everything back home. (Self- mention: I)(Booster: obviously)

(from: Chris Froome won the Herald Sun Tour in Australia after overhauling fellow Briton and Team Sky teammate Peter Kennaugh on the final stage.)

"To do this, you have to make them doubt, (Engagement marker)

(from: Jose Mourinho hinted that he wants his next job to be in the Premier League and he is ready to get back into management.)

In Kayhan International newspaper other examples are as following:

TEHRAN (IRNA) – If the existing political problem between Tehran and Riyadh is not solved until March 15, they may hold FC competitions in an impartial country, Iran's Football Federation President Ali Kaffashian said. (Hedges: may)

(from: Kaffashian: Iran, Saudi Arabia May Hold FC Contests in Impartial Country)

Or even in Tehran Times newspaper this example can be seen:

“We played better than last match, but we still have to improve some details,” Iran coach Raul Lozano told FIVB.com. (Attitude marker: have to)  
 (from: Iran suffers narrow defeat to USA at FIVB World League)

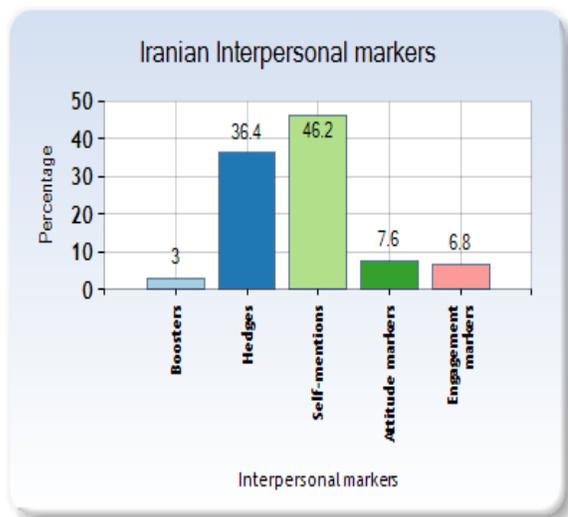


Figure1. Iranian interpersonal markers

On the other hand, in the American corpus, attitude markers were the most frequently used metadiscourse makers (16.8%), followed by boosters(7.1%), hedges (23.0%), self-mentions(46.9%) and engagements(5.3%). They can be seen in Figure 2. In The Washington Post newspaper these examples are seen:

“I certainly know how hard it is to get here. It takes a lot of hard work, and you’ve got to have some good fortune. . . . That [Carolina] defense was stout, just like I thought they were. Their defensive line was very impressive and gave us fits all night. But our defense was even better. They’ve been great all season, and they showed that tonight as well.”

(Self -mentions: I, our, us) (Booster: certainly)(Attitude marker: I thought)

(from: Broncos beat Panthers, 24-10, to win Super Bowl 50)

Manning said he spoke to Tony Dungy, his former Indianapolis Colts coach who was elected Saturday to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, about not making an emotional retirement decision. He said he will take some time to make up his mind and he wasn’t certain whether this was his final game.

(Hedges: he wasn’t certain whether this was his final game)

(from: Broncos beat Panthers, 24-10, to win Super Bowl 50)

In The New York Times newspaper the examples are as following:

Priorities for tomorrow? Deciding whether he should come back for the money? Or come back because he would miss the spotlight? Engagement marker

(from: For Peyton Manning, the Setting Is Perfect for a Curtain Call)

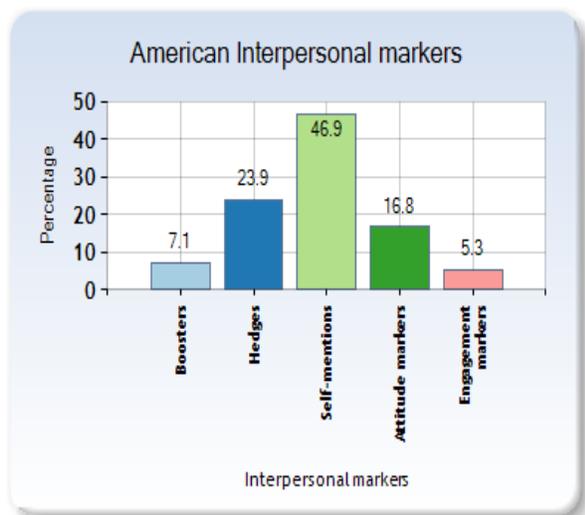


Figure2.American interpersonal markers

Table3: Frequency of interpersonal markers in the two data set

	American No. of markers		Iranian No. of markers	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Booster	8	7.1%	4	3%
Hedges	27	23.9%	48	36.4%
Self-mention	53	46.9%	61	46.2%
Attitude markers	19	16.8%	10	7.6%
Engagement markers	6	5.3%	9	6.8%
Total	113	100%	132	100%

According to the statistical analysis presented in Table 3, Iranian writers preferred the use of hedges (i.e. Probability adverbs) while the use of hedges were smaller in American corpus than Iranian one (American corpus 23.9%, Iranian corpus 36.4%). Compared to Iranian corpus, attitude markers, that are used to express writer’s view towards proposition, were employed the most by the American writers (Americans 16.8%, Iranians 7.6%). Boosters such as *in fact*, *definitely*, *it is clear that* that are used to indicate the writers’ certainty were used frequently in American corpus (7.1%), while Iranian writers only used 3% of boosters. As presented in Table 3, in the texts written by both Iranian and American writers, there were no statistically significant differences between the use of self-mentions (American corpus 46.9%, Iranian corpus 46.2%), and engagement markers (American corpus 5.3%, Iranian corpus 6.85) in the two dataset.

Table 4: results of chi-square

	df	Asym assumption
Booster	1	.24
Hedges	1	.01*
Self-mention	1	.45
Attitude markers	1	.09
Engagement markers	1	.43

According to Table 3 that showed the frequency and percentages of two data set, hedges, attitude markers and boosters were different among the rest. But as can be seen in Table 4, the most significant difference among other metadiscourse markers is hedges (.01\*) that revealed both groups, Iranians and Americans, used this type of metadiscourse marker more than others to show when a writer is uncertain about the truth of their claims they use linguistic features such as might, perhaps, it is possible, etc. These are referred to as “hedges”. According to the statistical analysis presented; Iranian writers preferred the use of hedges (i.e. Probability adverbs) in order to hide the writer’s full idea to a commitment. American columnists, however, use hedges less than Iranian writers (Americans 23.9%, Iranians 36.4%).

## 5. Discussion

The current study aimed at investigating the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in sports news articles written by American and Persian columnists. According to Paltridge (2012) interactional metadiscourse markers are used to express writer’s view towards the texts being reported. A lot of studies on this issue have indicated that metadiscourse resources are both culture-dependent and discourse-dependent. In fact metadiscourse markers are like signs that writers use them to direct their readers in a way they want to. By changing the domain, discourse can change as well as metadiscourse markers.

The statistical analysis revealed that self-mentions used to make an explicit reference to the writer(s) occupy a high position in both sets of data (i.e. Americans 46.9%, Iranians 46.2%). Both Iranian and American writers tended to use engagement markers almost the same (i.e. Americans 5.3%, Iranians 6.8%). According to Paltridge (2012), writers use engagements to recognize and acknowledge the presence of their readers. Attitude markers were another types of interactional markers introduced by Hyland (2005). The statistical analysis displayed that American authors tend to use more attitude markers than Iranian writers (Americans 16.8%, Iranians 7.6%). Moreover, boosters were used in Americans news articles more than Iranian news articles (i.e. American corpus 7.1%, Iranian corpus 3%). The American writers used them to emphasize their certainty in a proposition. Hedges also have shown to be essential elements used in both sets of data (American corpus 23.9%, Iranian corpus 36.4%). Statistical analysis showed that boosters were used significantly more in American news articles than Iranian ones.

The result of this study was in contrast with Abdollahzadeh’s (2007) findings. In his study, English editorials employed more hedges while Persian editorials used more boosters. The results showed that the frequent use of boosters in the Persian editorials could be due to Iranian tradition

of valuing those in power without questioning them or without stating uncertainty about social and religious issues. The frequent use of hedges by the English editorial writers was due to their being more polite to their readers.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study set out to compare English and Persian Sports news reports in terms of the frequency of interpersonal metadiscourse markers used. The researchers examined the data based on the Hyland's (1998) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers. Concerning the Interpersonal metadiscourse markers, the results of the analyses showed that both groups of writers used all Interpersonal markers. Surprisingly, the statistically significant difference between two sets of data was found in the frequency of hedges.

The results of interpersonal markers showed that the American group used fewer hedges and more attitude markers and boosters than Persian writers. Accordingly, it can be concluded that contrary to Persian writers, American Authors may be more assertive, less conservative to express their affective values in their writings.

Since metadiscourse is related to pragmatics, practitioners of this field must concentrate this aspect of language to overcome the difficulty of acquiring knowledge of metadiscourse (Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen, 1993). Metadiscourse studies such as this is a great help to foreign language teachers and learners by showing the problematical areas in the utility of metadiscourse markers in the texts. Students must become familiar with cohesion and coherence in the text. The way to reach this goal is through learning the functional roles of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in different contexts.

Metadiscourse is a part of language that provides a relationship between texts and disciplinary cultures, helping to define the rhetorical context by showing some of the expectations and understandings of the audience for whom a text was written. Differences in metadiscourse patterns can provide an important means of distinguishing discourse communities and accounting for the ways writers identify the inferences they would like their readers to make. Moreover, the importance of metadiscourse is in its role in explicating a context for interpretation and suggesting one way in which acts of communication describe and maintain social groups.

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