METADISCOURSE IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of metadiscourse markers among 50 Malaysian and 50 Arab Pre-University students. The findings of this study indicated that there was a significant difference in the use of metadiscourse markers between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students {$\chi2$ (1, n = 100) = 7.17, p-value is .007} where the use of metadiscourse markers among Malaysian Pre-University students was substantially higher than that of the Arab Pre-University students. In the use of interactive markers, the results showed significant differences between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of transitions, evidential and code glosses. Additionally, in the use of interactional markers, Malaysian and Arab students differed in their use of hedges, engagement markers and self-mentions. These variances in the frequency and forms of metadiscourse markers utilized by the students could be attributed to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the two groups of students. It is therefore suggested that English language teachers integrate and incorporate cultural elements in their lessons with regard to metadiscourse markers.

Contribution/Originality: This study documents the examination of metadiscourse markers employed by ESL students and this has offered interesting findings and thought-provoking insights. The discoveries would certainly be enlightening for stakeholders such as syllabus designers of academic writing classes and language instructors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to compose academic texts competently at institutions of higher learning is a practical skill that needs to be grasped by tertiary learners (Giridharan, 2012). In order to compose a comprehensible piece of writing, learners need to employ appropriate metadiscourse markers within their written tasks. Tan and Wong (2014) mentioned that metadiscourse is a central semantic means that aids authors to navigate the movement of their written content as well as to address their standpoint to the readers. Effective use of metadiscourse markers can be one of the means of enhancing the quality of academic essays written within academic circles (Letsoela, 2014). Specifically, the utilization of metadiscourse markers is suggested to improve the quality of writing (Shi and Han,

2014; Ho and Li, 2018) increase readability (Zarrati *et al.*, 2014) and build relationship with the readers (Hyland, 2005; Salek, 2014). These features are very important in developing good quality academic writing (Tan and Wong, 2014). Furthermore, Feng and Hyland (2018) have indicated that metadiscourse has attracted significant attention in contemporary writing as an approach to understanding the rhetorical negotiations involved in academic writing. Therefore, this research aims to examine and compare the use of metadiscourse markers among Malaysian university students and Arab students studying in Malaysia. This comparison is deemed necessary as metadiscourse usage has been reported to differ from one writer's culture to another (Abbas, 2011; Aya, 2013; Mehrnaz *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, Hogue and Oshima (2007) have stated that academic writing in English is perhaps not the same as academic writing in the writer's first language. As such, the current study will shed more light on the subject as well as help to confirm whether or not metadiscourse use is dependent on one's culture. This study will also provide information on the ways metadiscourse markers are used by two different groups, namely the Malaysian and Arab students in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). In keeping with the aims of the study, the following research question was addressed: Is there any significant difference in the frequency of metadiscourse use between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In an analysis of metadiscourse markers used by authors of varied cultural upbringing, Kaplan (1966) asserted that the explicit idiosyncratic linguistic forms of ESL texts stemmed from the L2 writers' cultural influences in addition to their native linguistic system. He proposed an illustration of five different varieties of language features (Russian, Romance, Semitic, Oriental, and English) which he called as the "cultural thought patterns". In his ground-breaking research on dialogue arrangements in the English writings of a group of foreign learners, Kaplan stated that an English text is categorised by its deductive reasoning as well as directness. In contrast, other languages (e.g. Arabic and Oriental languages) support inductive reasoning as well as indirectness. This pioneering study was crucial in guiding ESL students and instructors to go beyond the sentence and grammar levels to technical hitches. However, when the idea of writers' cultural influence on their native linguistic system was newly proposed, it was not perceived as a practical research subject and was commonly questioned by linguists in the realm of applied linguistics (Mohan and Lo, 1985; Makewa *et al.*, 2014; Dampson *et al.*, 2018). The notion that there could perhaps be socio-cultural variances related to conscious thought-configurations within one's mind has in recent times been experiencing a restoration, supported by considerable as well as creditable empirical evidence (Victori, 1999; Nisbett, 2003; Liu, 2010; Vargas, 2017; Ali, 2018; Dong and Qiu, 2018). Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) analyzed metadiscourse devices in three different types of typescripts: Persian writings produced by Iranians, English writings produced by Iranians as non-natives of English and English writings produced by native speakers of English. To investigate different aspects of written academic texts, the researchers used the metadiscourse taxonomy developed by Hyland (2004), as cited in Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) which comprises two key groups, 'interactional' and 'interactive'. The analysis revealed that the Iranians have utilized interactional metadiscourse to a greater extent than interactive metadiscourse in their academic texts when using the Persian language. However, there is considerably greater use of interactive metadiscourse than interactional metadiscourse in their writings in English. The findings demonstrate the significance of metadiscourse in academic texts. The results of this research therefore propose a direct and mutual connection between culture and language. Mehrnaz *et al.* (2014) conducted a comparative study on the use of metadiscourse markers in English medical journals and their Persian version, based on Hyland's taxonomy. The results suggested that the features of written discourse play a significant role in helping both non-native and native speakers of English to convey their ideas and engage with their readers effectively. The research was conducted in an attempt to compare the metadiscourse markers in English medical journals and their Persian version, with the aim of studying whether these linguistic indicators function identically in Persian and English within the same genre. An additional aim was to find out if there were

any substantial variances between English academic texts in comparison with their Persian translation, in relation to the number and types of metadiscourse markers. The statistical test outcomes indicate that there is a substantial variance in the rate of occurrence as well as types of metadiscourse markers in Persian translations of academic medical texts and their original English texts (p<0.001). The distribution of many varieties of metadiscourse markers in English medical texts was however not the same as their distribution in the Persian translated versions. The data reported in this study supports the assumption that writers from dissimilar cultural backgrounds employ metadiscourse markers in different ways.

The utilization of metadiscourse by different ethnic groups has also been studied by Mauranen (1993) where English and Finnish academic writings were compared by the researcher in an effort to determine cross-cultural variances related to the use of metadiscourse markers in academic written texts. Mauranen found substantial variances among the speakers of the two vernaculars. The findings from her study showed that Anglo-American authors employed more of Meta dia course features than Finnish writers did. Mauranen's analysis amplified the fact that cultural variances have an influence on the quantity and arrangements of metadiscourse. In another study, Crismore et al. (1993) did a comparative study concerning the usage of metadiscourse in a genre of academic writing, namely argumentative compositions, produced by Finnish and American learners. The analyses showed that learners from both countries made use of all metadiscourse types and their sub-categories. This early categorisation of textual metadiscourse and interpersonal metadiscourse by Crismore et al. (1993) was viewed as a less inclusive theoretical framework concerning the research of metadiscourse in comparison to the modern taxonomy constructed by Hyland (2005). For instance, Hyland had grouped metadiscourse expressions into two separate macro groupings: interactional and interactive, as mentioned before. Nonetheless, the findings derived by Crismore et al. (1993) offer partial indication for the commonality as well as prominence of metadiscourse within academic texts across nations. It also proposes the practical necessity for further cross-cultural research of its use in writings and the need for further consideration with regard to writing instructions by writing instructors. Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) did a comparative study on the academic writing abilities of Arab tertiary learners. The focal objective of the comparative research on the Arab students was to determine linguistic variances between both Arabic and English learners. The researchers reported that the English and Arabic writings of the students lacked coherence and cohesion. As a result, the readers experienced some difficulties in comprehending the texts. According to Aya (2013) Arab native learners may possibly make errors in the use of writing structures, not for the reason of lack of such linguistic devices in the Arabic linguistic system, but for the reason that the customs of academic writing setting and culture in their respective learning establishments do not prepare them for the conventions of English writing. Abbas (2011) investigated metadiscourse terms and phrases to understand the socio-cultural variances of Arabic and English-speaking researchers. Abbas analysed seventy discussions of linguistic academic journals composed by native speakers of Arabic as well as English. He discovered that there was a great preference amongst the Arabic-speaking researchers to use metadiscourse markers in their texts, which was the result of the Arab custom of paying close attention to the formal features of writing instead of the content of the writing. This contrastive research highlights an instructional proposition that students need to intensify their consciousness of socio-cultural influenced conventions in communication.

With reference to Malaysian ESL writers, Chan and Helen (2010) investigated the use of metadiscourse by Malaysian undergraduates by comparing and extracting the details of metadiscourse of two transcribed corpora of persuasive writings. In an attempt to examine the deployment of metadiscourse by the participants, all the written texts were compared to the open British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE) which was accessible online. The study concluded that while there were similarities in usage, the findings presented a key difference in the frequency as well as variation of categories and distributions in the two corpora. The conclusion was the BAWE corpus showed a greater tendency towards the use of metadiscourse markers. Furthermore, on the subject of Malaysian undergraduate writers, NorHafizah et al. (2013) studied the use of metadiscourse in Malaysian tertiary

students' argumentative writings. The writers found that the Malaysian undergraduates had a higher tendency to make use of the sub-category of textual metadiscourse than interpersonal metadiscourse in their argumentative writing. Therefore, it can be inferred that Malaysian undergraduates' tendency to use the sub-categories of metadiscourse in their writing can be easily attributed to the styles of academic writing taught to these students. This was supported by a study conducted by Mohamed and Rashid (2017) on 269 Malaysian ESL undergraduate students whose first language was Malay. The study revealed that undergraduates use more interactive metadiscourse than interactional metadiscourse. In Malaysian academia, students are generally taught to use an impersonal tone and style when writing argumentative and academic texts (NorHafizah *et al.*, 2013). In view of all of the studies that have been mentioned so far, the use of metadiscourse is crucial specifically in academic writing. Nevertheless, there are still very few studies on metadiscourse that have been conducted among Malaysian students. Moreover, not much is known about the use of metadiscourse among Arab students in comparison to Malaysian students. Hence, this research attempts to ascertain the frequency of metadiscourse markers used in academic texts written by Malaysian and Arab students so that the existing gap in knowledge of metadiscourse usage by students in academic writing can be reduced.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Data Collection

This study involves a textual analysis of students' academic writing where the metadiscourse markers in both Malaysian and Arab ESL students' academic texts were identified and analyzed. It is descriptive in nature and to examine whether there is a relationship between two independent categorical variables, a statistical test in the form of a chi-square test was carried out. A total of 100 Level 6 Pre-University Malaysian and Arab students from the Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development (CELPAD), IIUM participated in this study. English and Arabic are the two primary languages used for instruction in IIUM, depending on the programme of study. The CELPAD is responsible for ensuring that all IIUM students have a strong command of the languages required for their studies. Applicants wishing to pursue their studies in programmes with English as the medium of instruction must present a score of 550 in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or Band 6.0 in the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) (Academic) with a minimum Band of 5.5 for each of the Skills, namely Writing, Reading, Listening/ Speaking (WRLS). Alternatively, they may sit for the IIUM-administered English Placement Test (EPT) and obtain a minimum Band of 6.0 to fulfill the English language requirement. Applicants who are unable to submit satisfactory results in any of the above tests may take up language proficiency courses at the University to fulfill the admission requirements (Centre for Languages and Pre-University Academic Development, 2015). Opinion- based essays written by the students' in the English Placement Test were analysed to study the use of metadiscourse markers by the Pre-University Malaysian as well as Arab students. The opinion- based composition was selected for the reason that the academic written text is opinion-centered where the use of metadiscourse was anticipated to be apparent in such text category (Silver, 2003). The essays were written by 50 Malaysian and 50 Arab ESL learners who were registered in the intensive English course at CELPAD. All these essays were given a score of band 6 which means that the writers were considered to have acquired the minimum band of proficiency in writing and can proceed to their faculty programmes.

3.2. Textual Analysis

The essays were analyzed based on the following 3 stages: categorising, ordering, and inferring. To start with, the metadiscourse markers of ESL students' academic writings were identified. Next, the markers were categorized as either *interactive* or *interactional*. The *interactive* metadiscourse markers were then further categorised into *code glosses*, *transitions*, *endophorics*, *frame markers* or *evidentials*; while the *interactional* metadiscourse markers were categorised into *self-mentions*, *booster*, *attitude markers*, *engagement markers*, or *hedges*. This inclusive categorisation is

grounded on Hyland (2005) taxonomy. The researcher then identified the *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse markers that were dominantly employed by the learners. To achieve a higher reliability, the whole corpora was manually analysed word by word because computer-assisted analysis faces the risk of assuming external reference items as metadiscourse and could damage the validity of research (Mehrnaz *et al.*, 2014). All the procedures were carried out separately by another rater, in order to countercheck as well as to uphold impartiality in the process of detailing the use of metadiscourse markers within the selected corpora. The second rater received sufficient training in doing the task. During the training session, the researcher and the second rater carried out comprehensive discussions to clear all confusion and incongruity with regard to the metadiscourse markers. A series of exercises using samples from the participants' writings were studied by both researchers to make sure that both raters comprehended and perceived the metadiscourse markers along the same lines. The researcher and the second rater agreed on the frequency count of metadiscourse markers in the students' academic essays. After the collection of data, the total number of metadiscourse markers in each group of writing was determined. The total number of metadiscourse markers in the academic essays written by the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students was tallied and checked individually. Then, the data and records from the two groups were statistically compared with the aim of detecting any substantial difference between them. This presented the answer to RQ1 which. Is: Is there any significant difference in the frequency of metadiscourse use between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students?

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Comparisons of Main Categories of Metadiscourse

Table 1 shows the total frequency of metadiscourse (including the sub-categories *interactional* and *interactive*) usage among the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in their academic essays. The total occurrence of metadiscourse in the academic texts produced by the Malaysian and Arabs students was 1795 and 1511 respectively. A chi-square test was conducted to determine any significant difference in the total count of metadiscourse usage (*interactive* and *interactional*) between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the academic essays. The test showed that the frequency of metadiscourse used (*interactive* and *interactional*) among the Malaysian Pre-University writers was substantially higher than that of the Arab Pre-University writers. The result was significant, $\chi2$ (1, n = 100) = 7.17, where the *p*-value is .007, which is meaningful at α level = 0.05 with a degree of freedom of 1. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the total frequency of metadiscourse used (*interactive* and *interactional*) between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in their academic essays. This finding indicates that the Malaysian students were more attentive to the variety of metadiscourse markers in comparison to the Arab students. However, based on the fact that the total frequency of the two clusters was high, it should be acknowledged that the students; both Malaysian and Arab, were aware of the different categories of metadiscourse markers that they could use to interact with readers.

It is notable that when comparison is made on the frequency of the *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse, Malaysian students used *interactional* metadiscourse almost twice as much (786 vs. 592) as the Arabs, whereas the use of *interactive* metadiscourse was approximately similar (1009 vs. 919) for both groups. A conceivable justification for this result might be that there was a lack of awareness among the Arab students of the expressions of intimacy and attitude due to cultural influences. Additionally, it is apparent from Table 1 that the total count of *interactive metadiscourse* was higher among the Malaysian pre-university students (n = 1009) than the Arab pre-university students (n = 919). This means that the *interactive* markers were used more frequently by the Malaysian pre-university students than the Arab pre-university students A chi-square test was conducted to determine any significant difference in the total count of *interactive* metadiscourse usage between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the academic essays. The test showed that the *interactive* metadiscourse used among the Malaysian Pre-University students was substantially higher than the Arab Pre-University students. The result was

significant, $\chi 2$ (4, n = 100) = 43.88, *p*-value is < .00001 which is meaningful at α level = 0.05 with a degree of freedom of 4. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the total frequency of *interactive* usage between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in academic essays. Table 1 below shows the distribution for the two groups.

Table-1. The total frequency of the metadiscourse used among the Malaysian (n = 50) and Arab Pre-University students (n = 50) in academic essays

Metadiscourse category	Malaysian Pre-University students		Arab Pre-University students	
	Total count	Percentage (%)	Total count	Percentage (%)
Interactive	1009	56.2	919	60.8
Interactional	786	43.8	592	39.2
Total	1795	100.0	1511	100.0

It also can be seen from the table that Malaysian pre-university students had a higher total count for *interactional markers* than the Arab pre-university students. This means that there was a higher application of the *interactional* markers by the Malaysian pre-university students than the Arab pre-university students. With the aim of determining any significant differences in *interactional* metadiscourse marker usage between Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the academic essays, a chi-square test was further conducted. The result was significant, $\chi 2$ (4, n = 100) = 23.72, *p*-value is .00009 which is meaningful at α level = 0.05 with a degree of freedom of 4. In short, there is a significant difference in *interactional* metadiscourse used between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the academic essays. These results are in line with NorHafizah *et al.* (2013) and Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) findings which showed that undergraduate students show a greater tendency to employ *interactive* metadiscourse (also known as *textual metadiscourse*) than *interactional* metadiscourse (*interpersonal metadiscourse*). One dominant cause might be due to the culture differences demonstrated in the students' writing conventions. In the same vein, the results for the Arab students is in line with Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) findings which showed that *interactive* metadiscourse (markers which help guide the reader through the text) were used at a considerably greater degree in comparison to *interactional* metadiscourse (metadiscourse markers which include the person who reads the text) by Iranians as non-natives of English within their research articles.. In addition to the main reason of different socio-cultural background among the ESL writers, Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) provided another possible explanation that the ESL students might be more familiar with the usage of certain markers under the *interactive* dimension; for instance, *frame markers*, *transition markers*, as well as *code glosses*. The result concerning the high rate of *interactive* metadiscourse among both groups of students, , in excess of the *interactional* markers, was also found to be in agreement with the results described in a study conducted by Salek (2014) on academic synopses written in English by native authors. This result reflects those of Hyland and Jiang (2018) who also found a significant increase in interactive structures and a significant decrease in the interactional ones. This consistency evidently advocates the significance of *textual* metadiscourse (also known as *interactive* metadiscourse) components in academic essays in comparison to the *interactional* ones. Consequently, the diversity in the individual writing styles among the writers of different backgrounds may be demonstrated by the construction as well as conceptualization of discrete worldviews which are rooted in a specific culture of a specific discourse cluster (Shokouhi and Baghsiahi, 2009).

4.2. Comparisons of Sub-Categories of Metadiscourse

For a better understanding of the differences in metadiscourse usage of the Malaysian and Arab students, further analysis was carried out to determine if there was any significant difference in the use of sub-categories of *interactive* and *interactional metadiscourse*.

4.2.1. Sub-Categories of Interactive Metadiscourse

Table 2 shows the frequency of use of *interactive* metadiscourse subcategories among the Malaysian and Arab pre-university students in academic essays (refer to observed N). The Malaysian pre-university students made greater use of three out of the five sub-categories of *interactive* metadiscourse: i) *transition*, ii) *evidentials*, and iii) *code glosses*. Meanwhile the use of two other sub-categories; i) *frame markers* and ii) *endophoric markers* were higher among the Arab Pre-University students when compared with the Malaysian Pre-University students. It is interesting to note that from the five sub-categories of the *interactive* metadiscourse, the use of *transition* was highest among both the Malaysian (total count = 729) and Arab Pre-University students (total count = 583). Meanwhile, the *endophoric markers* and *evidential* were the least used by both Malaysian (total count = 1) and Arab Pre-University students (total count = 3). These results are consistent with those observed in several other previous studies such as the study by Martín-Laguna and Alcón (2015). They conducted the study in a bilingual region of Spain, among the Valencian Community. Within the community, English was taught in most schools as a foreign language. They found that the students who participated in the study seemed to rely mainly on *transition* markers (or *logical connectives*), followed by *frame markers* in the academic essays while the use of *endophoric markers* and *evidentials* was low or absent in the opinion-based academic essays. This pattern may again be clarified by the fact that the text analysed in this research was an opinion- based essay. Opinion- based essays may call less for the use of original sources of data from other texts (*evidentials*) or references to supplement parts of the written text (*endophoric markers*) as these are rarely used in this type of compositions compared to other academic genres like thesis or manuscripts (Martín-Laguna and Alcón, 2015). Another study carried out by Shi and Han (2014) on students from China where Chinese is their mother tongue, also found the same pattern of use in sub-categories of *interactive* metadiscourse. They showed that the mean scores of some sub-categories, *transitions* and *self-mentions* of metadiscourse were very high while *evidentials* and *endophoric markers* showed very low scores. This could be due to the length and type of text analysed, in this instance an opinion- based essay. It is possible, therefore, that this explanation may answer the findings of the lesser use of *endophoric* and *evidentials* markers. This is because the essays used in these studies (Shi and Han, 2014; Martín-Laguna and Alcón, 2015) were also opinion-based academic essays.

A Chi-square test was also conducted to compare any significant differences within the sub-categories of *interactive* metadiscourse (*transition, evidentials, endophoric markers, frame markers* and *code glosses*) used by the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the academic essays, as shown in Table 2. There were significant differences in the use of metadiscourse between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students, specifically in the use of *transition, frame markers* and *code glosses* at $p < .05$ α-level. However, there were no significant differences found between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of *endophoric markers* and *evidentials* which had the at $p < .05$ α-level.

Table-2. Chi-square test for the sub-categories of *interactive* metadiscourse used by Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in academic essays

Interactive		Observed N	Expected N	df	χ^2	*p*-value
Transition	Malaysian	729	656	1	16.25	< 0.001*
	Arab	583	656			
Frame markers	Malaysian	127	173.5	1	24.93	< 0.001*
	Arab	220	173.5			
Endophoric markers	Malaysian	1	2	1	N.S	N.S
	Arab	3	2			
Evidentials	Malaysian	15	12.5	1	N.S	N.S
	Arab	10	12.5			
Code glosses	Malaysian	137	120	1	4.82	0.028*
	Arab	103	120			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ α-level
N.S – not significant. The frequency is too small for statistical analysis

It is evident in Table 2, with reference to the most frequently used sub-category of *interactive* metadiscourse in the use of *transitions*, the total value of metadiscourse used by the Malaysian students is n = 729 in comparison with the value of metadiscourse used by Arab students which is n = 583, which is meaningful at *p* being less than .05. Also, it is advocated that the differences may be attributed to the students' educational background and the status of English across cultures (whether as a second language or as a foreign language) in both students' native education systems. Overall, the results derived from the analysis indicate that the two cultures studied used *interactive* metadiscourse differently.

4.2.2. Sub-Categories of Interactional Metadiscourse

Table 3 shows the frequency of the sub-categories of *interactional* metadiscourse used by the Malaysian and Arab pre-university students in academic essays (refer to observed N). As can be seen from the table, the Malaysian pre-university students had a higher use of three sub-categories of *interactional* metadiscourse compared with the Arab students,which were *hedges, engagement markers* and *self-mentions*. Meanwhile, the Arab pre-university students showed high use of *boosters* and *attitude markers*. This shows how the Arab students seem to be more confident in expressing their opinion compared with the Malaysian students as these two markers, *booster* and *attitude markers*, indicate explicit certainty in expressing their attitudes. Furthermore, from the table, it can be seen that *self-mentions* was frequently used by both Malaysian and Arab pre-university students. This is then followed by the *hedges*. Letsoela (2014) stated that a great number of research on metadiscourse had found that the deployment of *hedges* in academic texts was highest in the *interactional* metadiscourse group. This outcome may essentially mirror the students' desire for the readers to receive the texts as the truth with conceivable reasoning. They also wanted their written texts to be perceived as accurate by the readers (Letsoela, 2014).

With regard to the high frequency in the use of *self-mentions* by both the Malaysian and Arab pre-university students, it can be contended that the learners were openly getting themselves involved in the text and the writers were inviting the readers to involve themselves in the written discourse. Study on *self-mentions* by Harwood (2005) showed that these clear mentions of the writers are linguistic approaches that are normally employed by scholars to display themselves as experts within their turfs. In doing so, the academics are constantly trying to endorse themselves as well as mention their different bearings within their respective fields of expertise. To confirm the findings, a chi-square test was conducted to compare any significant difference in the *interactional* metadiscourse (*attitude markers, boosters, hedges, engagement markers* and *self-mentions*) used by Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the academic essays as shown in Table 4.3.The results indicate that there are significant differences between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of *hedges, engagement markers* and *self-mentions* usage at $p < .05$ α-level. However, there is no significant difference found between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of *boosters* and *attitude markers* at $p < .05$ α-level.

Table-3. Chi-square test for the sub-categories of *interactional* metadiscourse used by Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in academic essays

Interactional		Observed N	Expected N	df	χ^2	*p*-value
Hedges	Malaysian	180	142.5	1	19.74	< 0.001*
	Arab	105	142.5			
Boosters	Malaysian	65	72	1	1.36	0.243
	Arab	79	72			(N.S)
Attitude markers	Malaysian	83	85	1	0.09	0.759
	Arab	87	85			(N.S)
Engagement markers	Malaysian	94	69.5	1	17.27	< 0.001*
	Arab	45	69.5			
Self-mentions	Malaysian	364	320	1	12.10	< 0.001*
	Arab	276	320			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ α-level
N.S – not significant.

The Malaysians used few *boosters* while the Arab Pre-University students had the last *engagement markers* within the *interactional* metadiscourse. The low frequencies in the use of *boosters* and *engagement markers* are deemed as indications of how the learners comprehended their affiliations with the person who reads their texts, particularly their instructors. Writers, predominantly tertiary students taking their first degree, normally have the tendency to identify their self-image as of lesser academic prominence. This causes them to become doubtful in stating their opinions to their instructors. Therefore, the supposedly low academic distinction of their own self-image in addition to the circumstance whereby their written assignment is evaluated by their lecturers might be the causes that inhibit the students from surfacing confidently as well as constructing well-made claims (*boosters*) or even addressing readers unswervingly (*engagement markers*). However, in contrast to the Malaysian students, the Arab students provided more *boosters*. This indicates their trends to directly voice out their views in order to strengthen the positions they have taken with their written texts. This may also be an indication that self-image may not be a concern to the Arab students. On the other hand, the Malaysian students had the skills to make their writings more acceptable. They were more careful by making use of *hedges* and *evidentials* in comparison with the Arab students. Though the two groups utilized less *endophoric markers*, the overall analysis showed that they differed significantly in the usage of certain subcomponents of *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse.

All in all, the results derived from the analysis seem to indicate that the two cultures studied use *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse differently. The results derived from the analysis disclose the following findings:

(a) When determining the forms of metadiscourse markers used by Malaysian Pre-University students in their essays, the findings show that the Malaysians tend to prioritize interactive metadiscourse markers over *interactional* resources. The same findings are true of the Arab students. However, differences between the two groups of students are evident in the following:

- In the total frequency of metadiscourse used, the Malaysian Pre-University students utilized a substantially higher number of metadiscourse structures compared with the Arab Pre-University students.

- Both Malaysian and Arab pre-university students had a greater inclination towards the use of interactive markers rather than *interactional* ones.

- There are significant differences in the use of *interactive* and *interactional* metadiscourse between the two groups of students.

- The Malaysian pre-university students have a higher frequency in the use of three out of the five subcategories of *interactive* metadiscourse; i) *transition*, ii) *evidentials*, and iii) *code glosses*. Meanwhile the two remaining categories; i) *frame markers* and ii) *endophoric markers* are higher among the Arab Pre-University students when compared with the Malaysian Pre-University students. The differences above could be attributed to the different cultural backgrounds of the two groups of students. The students' educational backgrounds in addition to the different status of English as either a foreign language or a second language in both students' native educational systems may be responsible for these findings. The use of *interactional* metadiscourse by the Malaysians is slightly greater than those of Arabs. This could indicate that for the Arab students, straightforwardness of writing overshadows the connection that is anticipated to be established between the author and the person who reads the text. In the same vein, the Malaysian students' greater use of '*transitions*' further supports the fact that consistency of writing is fundamentally essential. The Arab students used more '*boosters*', that is, they stated their opinions openly, whereas Malaysian authors constructed their writing more cautiously by relying on a greater use of '*hedges*' plus '*evidentials*'.

To put it in a nutshell, there are differences in the usage of metadiscourse in the academic texts written by the different groups of students who were from different cultural backgrounds. However, it should be emphasized that the greater or lesser deployment of metadiscourse in L2 writings is not identified here within this study as an 'abnormality' from a standard rule, but purely as a culture-grounded distinctiveness of the written transcripts. The

overall findings from the study also indicate that metadiscourse resources play a significant role in opinion-based essays. These findings also advocate that metadiscourse is an essential device for communication with readers in both cultures.

5. CONCLUSION

The examination of the metadiscourse employed by the subjects in this study has offered interesting findings and thought-provoking insights. One of the significant findings that have emerged from this study is that both Malaysian and Arab pre-university students have a greater inclination towards the use of interactive markers than *interactional* ones, as there was a higher percentage of *interactive* metadiscourse usage than the *interactional* ones among both groups of students. Another important finding is that the Malaysians had a higher frequency of use of metadiscourse than the Arab Pre-University students in both its components; the *interactive* and *interactional*. The research has also shown that there is a significant difference in the frequency of *interactional* metadiscourse markers used in academic writings between the Malaysian and the Arab students. Evidently, the Malaysian students used a diverse range of metadiscourse markers as compared to the Arab students and had more metadiscourse markers in their essays than the Arab pre-university students.

A further in depth examination of the statistics offers a comprehensive presentation for the sub-categories of *interactional* and *interactive* metadiscourse. There are differences in the use of metadiscourse between the two groups, Malaysian and Arab students. The statistics show that there are significant differences between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of *transition, frame markers* and *code glosses*. However there is no significant difference found between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of *endophoric markers* and *evidentials*. In the category of *interactive* metadiscourse, the findings indicate that there are substantial differences in the use of *hedges, engagement markers* and *self-mentions*. However there is no significant difference between the Malaysian and Arab Pre-University students in the use of *boosters* and *attitude markers*. Culture differences demonstrated in the students' writing conventions may be the reason for the differences. More research is required to determine the effectiveness of this text-analysis instrument (i.e. metadiscourse) in the future. It is recommended that further research can involve more comparisons with other international students who are studying in Malaysia. This will profit Malaysian higher education institutions. In addition, the learners can be more conscious of the use of metadiscourse markers in English for academic writing. Even though this research has made an attempt to analyse the usage of metadiscourse markers by two different groups of students, there are many aspects of metadiscourse use that are yet to be studied. A potential practical investigation that could be carried out is to investigate the association of a standard learner corpus with metadiscourse used by specific groups of writers. As mentioned by Tan and Wong (2014) this kind of effort may offer insights as well as indepth understandings in order for the students to make important comparisons between their use of metadiscourse and its use by native students within the standard learner corpus, such as the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus. Additionally, research ought to be carried out in an attempt to observe the importance of conducting lessons on the use of metadiscourse, as well as to perceive its effects on ESL students' capabilities to use the varieties of metadiscourse markers in their academic writings. The discoveries would certainly be enlightening for the stakeholders such as the syllabus designers of academic writing classes as well as language instructors. Regardless of the confines and limitations concerning the execution of this study, it is much anticipated that all results and findings attained in this research can be a contribution to the current body of works concerning the use of metadiscourse markers by ESL students. .

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