

THE USE OF INTERACTIVE METADISOURSE IN SERBIAN STUDENTS' WRITING IN ENGLISH¹

Writing can be very demanding, especially if it is done in a foreign language. What can make writing even more difficult are different writing traditions in L1 and L2 languages. Having that in mind, the aim of this paper is to establish to what degree is students' usage of discourse markers successful in organizing their ideas in argumentative essays in the target language. In other words, this research sets out to determine how well Serbian students of the English language employ resources available to them to anticipate the readers' needs and guide the readers through their writing. The theoretical background for this research is Hyland's (2010) interpersonal model of metadiscourse, more precisely, interactive resources, whose purpose is to guide the readers through the text. These include transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. This paper hopes to provide new insights into Serbian students' writing in English.

Key words: metadiscourse, discourse markers, interactive resources, academic writing, student writing

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1. INTRODUCTION

Metadiscourse gained in prominence and research interest in the 1980s, but the extensive research that has been done since then reveals its importance in different areas of linguistic study. Hyland (2005) provides a short overview of studies which stress the significance of metadiscourse for spoken and written genre, register, rhetoric structures, native and non-native language production, among others. This paper is restricted to exploring the importance of using metadiscourse in non-native writing. Having in mind that the lack of metadiscourse in written or spoken piece of discourse may render text unintelligible, we aim to investigate how well students of English as a foreign language are able to use different metadiscursive resources in composition writing to organize their ideas effectively and have in mind the readers' needs that will make their compositions coherent, comprehensible and interesting.

2. AN INTERPERSONAL MODEL OF METADISOURSE

Metadiscourse was originally seen as not contributing to propositional meaning:

[A]s we write, "we usually have to write on two levels." On one level we supply information about the subject of our text. On this level we expand propositional content. On the other level, the level of metadiscourse, we do not add propositional material but help our readers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react to such material. Metadiscourse, therefore, is discourse about discourse or communication about communication.' (Kopple, 1985, p. 83)

However, it has come to be clear that determining what linguistic units count as metadiscourse is more difficult than it seems "as many items can be either propositional or metafunctional depending on their role in context" (Hyland, 2005, p. 25). Ifantidou (2005) questions non-truth-conditional status of metadiscourse, claiming that not all metadiscourse is non-propositional, using the relevance theory to illustrate her claims. Though Hyland (2005) admits that metadiscourse cannot be completely set apart from propositional meaning, he uses the criteria of external and internal relations, where textual resources which point to the events in the real world are not, in a given context, primarily functioning as metadiscourse.

Relevant literature seems to suggest that there are two established approaches to the study of metadiscourse, namely 'the reflexive model' and 'the interactive model'. The former is referred to as a narrow definition of metadiscourse and the latter as a broader one (Ädel, 2010; Ädel and

Mauranen, 2010; Hyland, 2005; Hyland, 2010). The approach we follow in this paper belongs to the broader view of metadiscourse, which sees writing as an interaction between a writer and a reader, as represented in the work of Hyland (2005; 2010). His model of metadiscourse, influenced by Thompson (2001), comprises two parts, interactive and interactional. The former “concerns the writer's awareness of a participating audience and the ways he or she seeks to accommodate its probable knowledge, interests, rhetorical expectations and processing abilities” while the latter deals with “the ways writers conduct interaction by intruding and commenting on their message” (Hyland, 2005, p. 49). Table 1. illustrates this approach.

Table 1. An interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, p. 49)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the text	Resources
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	in addition; but; thus; and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally; to conclude; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above; see Fig; in section 2
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	according to X; Z states
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	namely; e.g.; such as; in other words
Interactional	Involve the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps; possible; about
Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	in fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's 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

We will restrict our research to interactive resources, since the aim of the study is the writer's ability to organize discourse to make compositions comprehensible, i.e. we are particularly interested in the writer's relationship with the text, which does not exclude the reader, as “**all**

metadiscourse refers to interactions between the writer and reader” (Hyland, 2005, p. 45).

2.1. Metadiscourse in ESL / EFL writing

Audience awareness, among other things, is a prerequisite of successful writing. Hyland (2005, p. 4) states that “it is generally accepted that a clear sense of who we are writing for or speaking to makes the communicative task easier and increases the chance that the resulting text will successfully meet our goals.” One of the ways to express this is by using metadiscourse. The value of metadiscourse has been recognized in academic writing. This is how Ifantidou (2005, p. 1349) explains it in the light of relevance theory:

Writers are interested in producing an optimally attractive text, one that will communicate the intended meanings and intended interpretations with the minimum mental effort required. Readers are interested in productive and economical readings of texts, i.e., texts that yield as many cognitive effects as possible with the minimum possible mental effort required to achieve those effects.

Based on Wilson and Sperber’s (2004) relevance-theoretic approach which states that relevance of an input to an individual is greater if the positive cognitive effects are greater and if the processing effort is smaller – Ifantidou proceeds to test non-native undergraduate students of English’s comprehension of a text with and without metadiscourse. The results reveal that the students found the text containing metadiscourse items more comprehensible and it took them less time to read, despite the fact that ‘+metadiscourse’ text had more words. Similarly, Intaraprawat & Steffensen (1995) have established a correlation between good ESL essays and effective use of metadiscourse. Moreover, some studies suggest that cultural differences may influence preferred writing style in target language (Mauranen, 1993). Hyland (2005, p. 6) stresses the importance of metadiscourse for both native and non-native speakers of English: “Metadiscourse has therefore been important in writing instruction for academic purposes, as a way of helping both native and non-native speakers of English to convey their ideas and engage with their readers effectively.” This paper is largely inspired by the research done by Hyland (2010) in which he investigates the distribution and function of metadiscourse in a corpus of four million words consisting of masters and doctoral dissertations done by L2 postgraduate writers. The fact that texts belong to different academic disciplines (Electronic Engineering, Computer Science, Business Studies, Biology, Applied Linguistics and Public Administration) allowed for the comparison of metadiscourse distribution and role across different disciplines. His findings reveal that the writers use more

interactive than interactional categories, that PhD writers use more metadiscourse overall than master's writers, partly due to the length of texts, that metadiscourse items depend on the discipline, so that soft disciplines employ more metadiscourse, especially interactional. Our research, however, is restricted to a single genre – undergraduate student essays, and it explores the use of interactive metadiscourse categories.

3. CORPUS AND METHODS

For this research we examined students' writings in their target language – English. The texts are a collection of 325 essays in English (202,621 words). Essays in target language were extracted from *International Corpus of Learner English - third version (Serbian subcorpus)*. We searched the target language corpus for 175 items performing the function of interactive resources (following Hyland, 2005). Corpus analysis was performed using *ICLE web interface* (<https://cental.uclouvain.be/icle/rc1/>). The list is given in appendix. The second step in the analysis was to evaluate each hit individually so as to ensure it performs the function being analyzed. Quantitative results are presented in the total number of occurrences in corpus, in percentages and per 10,000 words. Our hypothesis was that the frequency of interactive metadiscourse resources used by Serbian students of English would be low (i.e. underuse of interactive resources).

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The frequency counts reveal the importance of metadiscourse in student composition writing with 3468 cases in the 202,621 words, or one metadiscourse item every 58 words. Table 2. reveals unequal distribution of interactive metadiscourse categories in our corpus.

Table 2. Interactive metadiscourse categories in students' essays

Category	Total items	Items per 10,000 words	% of total interactive metadiscourse
Transition markers	2168	107.3	62.5
Evidentials	17	0.8	0.5
Code glosses	757	37.47	21.8
Frame markers	494	24.5	14.2
Endophoric markers	32	1.5	0.9
Totals	3468	171.6	100

Transition markers are the most frequently used interactive metadiscourse items. Hyland (2005, p. 50) defines them as “conjunctions and adverbial phrases which help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument. They signal additive, causative and contrastive relations in the writer's thinking, expressing relationships between stretches of discourse.” Hyland (2005) lists 48 conjunctions and adverbial phrases in this category. Those that seem to be most familiar to Serbian students are *however, but, and, so, on the other hand, since, while, though, also*:

- 1) **Moreover**, financial stability also causes early marriages. [SEES2016]
- 2) **However**, technology is a double-edged sword, if not used properly it can be a potential danger. **Therefore**, we should try to be more careful while using it. [SEBG1003]
- 3) **On the other hand**, a constructive approach to resolving conflicts involves a good argument. [SENS1024]

Hyland (2005) stresses an important feature of transitions, which is that they refer to transitions of ideas, and not events from the outside world: “It is unimportant whether items here contribute to syntactic coordination or subordination, but to count as metadiscourse they must perform a role internal to the discourse rather than the outside world, helping the reader interpret links between ideas” (p. 50). To illustrate this difference, let us take a look at the examples 4) and 5):

- 4) Some improvements, for example, in the field of medicine, are undeniable. **Yet**, state-of-the-art technology didn't help us to protect our environment from further destruction. [SEES3004]
- 5) So much so that cigarettes rooted themselves deeply as a habit of many societies, a habit that is **yet** to be broken. [SENS3013]

Though ‘yet’ does function as metadiscourse in example 4) because it introduces a contrastive idea, the same cannot be said for example 5), where ‘yet’ is used as an adverb meaning “before or at some future time” (*The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 1459).

Interestingly enough, some transition markers from Hyland's list were not used at all, such as *accordingly, alternatively, by the same token, equally, the result is*, and there were those that were used only a few times (e.g. *besides, by contrast, conversely, further, hence, in contrast, in the same way, leads to, likewise, nonetheless, similarly, thereby*).

Code glosses are the second most used items. They “supply additional information, by rephrasing, explaining or elaborating what has been said, to ensure the reader is able to recover the writer's intended meaning”

(Hyland, 2005, p. 52). Code glosses are used 37 times per 10,000 words. Students most frequently used ‘-’, *for example, such as*, and ().

- 6) This would be a successful way of learning for all three types of students (Audio, Visual and Kinesthetic). [SEBG2025]
- 7) It is also important to consider that there are features we cannot influence, **for example** skin colour, posture, height, the shape of the jaw... [SEBJ2010]
- 8) Money can be often viewed as a well-deserved reward for our hard work. It often enables us to buy appliances and electronic devices which make our life easier, **such as** computers, mobile phones and washing machines. [SEBG1014]

Frame markers, which function “to sequence, label, predict and shift arguments, making the discourse clear to readers or listeners” (Hyland, 2005, p. 51) occupy the third place. The students most frequently used those frame markers which signal the sequence of ideas (as in example 9):

- 9) **Firstly**, books can give you a plenty of details and descriptions. [SEBG2030]

Labeling stages of discourse was also relevant for students, and they especially used markers that point to the final stage in essays, such as *to conclude, to sum up, in conclusion, all in all*:

- 10) **To conclude**, even though watching a movie can be a fun way to spend free time, or give the main plot overview and great visualization, it lacks the essence of a book, author's original thought, and most importantly reader's own impression of the book. [SEES2026]

What is interesting is that the students did not feel the need to mark other stages, so frame markers such as *at this point, at this stage, by far, for the moment, in brief, so far, thus far* had zero hits.

Shifting topic was mainly achieved using *well, so, now, back to*:

- 11) If we go **back to** the example regarding my own relationship, we can notice that maturing also has its role in the answer to this question. [SEBG1005]

Out of the four functions of frame markers mentioned above, announcing goals was perceived as least relevant by the students, with items like *in this essay, aim, focus, intend to, purpose, would like to* accounting for only 17 hits of total metadiscourse use:

- 12) **In this essay**, I am going to show that freedom of speech is an illusion. [SEES1023]

Endophoric markers “which refer to other parts of the text (see Figure 2, refer to the next section, as noted above)” (ibid. p. 51), and **evidentials** “which guide the reader's interpretation and establish an authorial command of the subject” (ibid. p. 51) are underused i.e. their frequency is very low. They are represented by the examples 13) and 14), respectively:

- 13) All mentioned **above** led me to believe that we live in a truly unequal world. [SEBG1032]
- 14) The **quote** by George Orwell, <*> is still accurate and, unfortunately, will be for a long time. [SEBJ1039]

5. DISCUSSION

Transition markers were the most frequent metadiscourse sub-category in the corpus, comprising 62.5% of total interactive metadiscourse. It appears that transitions are central to argumentative essay writing as they help readers to recover the writer's reasoning and organization of ideas. This only shows that Serbian learners of English are very aware of their audience in this respect. Another reason for such frequent use of transitions is that such markers comprise most frequent connectives *and, but, also, even though, furthermore, on the other hand*, etc. which are mostly taught in writing courses. Transitions are followed by the use of code glosses (21.8%) and frame markers (14.2%). The analysis also reveals an underuse of endophoric markers (0.9%) and evidentials (0.5%).

If we compare our results to Hyland's (2010, p. 139) results regarding interactive metadiscourse in the discipline of applied linguistics (Table 3), we might see that postgraduate writers used more interactive metadiscourse (265.9 per 10,000 words) than undergraduate students from our corpus (171.6 per 10,000 words). This does not come as a surprise when we take into account the variables of learner differences in the two corpora (undergraduate vs. postgraduate students) as well as the length of texts (student compositions vs. dissertations). Nonetheless, the results do not differ to a large extent when it comes to distribution of transitions, frame markers and code glosses.

Table 3. Interactive metadiscourse in Hyland (2010, p. 139) and in ICLE Serbian subcorpus (frequency per 10,000 words)

Category	Hyland 2010 (Applied Linguistics)	ICLE Serbian subcorpus
Transition markers	95.1	107.3
Frame markers	25.5	24.5
Endophoric markers	22.0	1.5
Evidentials	82.2	0.8
Code glosses	41.1	37.47
Totals	265.9	171.6

The biggest differences are in the use of endophoric markers and evidentials. This can be explained by the fact that compositions were mainly written in class, so the students did not have the time and resources to do pre-writing research, which would account for more frequent use of evidentials such as *(to) cite X*, *(to) quote X*, *according to X*. In addition, evidentials are more characteristic of academic writing than of essay writing, which might be another explanation for their low frequency in our corpus. With regard to endophoric markers, they are used to refer to other parts of the text (examples, tables, chapters, sections, paragraphs), and so their scarce use can be attributed to the specificities of essay writing. Namely, these types of compositions are short, concise, and do not contain figures, tables, which would call for more use of such metadiscourse resources.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper we aimed to explore the distribution of interactive metadiscourse categories in Serbian students' essays written in English. The results showed that the analysis of metadiscourse usage by non-native writers of English may provide significant insights into the nature of L2 writing process. We observed that Serbian learners pay very much attention to signaling shift of ideas which is evident in their frequent use of transition markers. The results also revealed active use of code glosses, which means that the Serbian students feel the need to restate the information previously mentioned in their essays so as to ensure the readers understand what they mean, which indicates audience awareness.

On the other hand, the analysis showed an underuse of endophoric markers and evidentials (accounting for 0.9% and 0.5% of total interactive metadiscourse in our corpus), which can be explained by the conditions of

composition writing, the length of compositions, and the features of argumentative essay genre. Namely, 171 out of 325 compositions were timed, and 265 compositions were written with no reference tools. In addition, composition length ranges from 310 to 1144 words. Thus, composition writers did not feel the need to use metadiscourse to refer to other parts of the text, perhaps due to the fact that the writers assumed easy recovery of their intentions, since they were mainly given on the same page.

The unequal usage of metadiscourse items across categories was also observed, which means that students use a small number of items in the majority of cases. Based on this, we might draw a conclusion that more formal instruction on metadiscourse is required in writing courses. Further research might explore the use of metadiscourse in students' writing in Serbian, and whether there are important cultural differences that need to be addressed in English writing courses.

Finally, we should point to possible weakness of our research with regard to the evaluation of what items count as metadiscourse. We already mentioned that in some cases it might be very difficult to determine whether a certain item performs a role of metadiscourse or not. For that reason, the reliability of results would have been greater had the analysis been done by two or more researchers.

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Minja S. Radonja

UPOTREBA INTERAKTIVNOG METADISKURSA U SASTAVIMA SRPSKIH GOVORNIKA NA ENGLESKOM

Rezime

Vještina pisanja izuzetno je zahtjevna, naročito na stranom jeziku. Ono što pisanje može dodatno otežati jesu različite konvencije u pisanju na maternjem i stranom jeziku. Imajući to na umu, cilj ovog rada jeste da utvrdimo da li se srpski govornici engleskog uspješno koriste metadiskursnim markerima da organizuju svoje ideje u pisanju eseja na engleskom jeziku i da pomognu čitaocu da što uspješnije i sa što manje napora razumije tekst. Istraživanje je zasnovano na Hajlendovom [Hyland] modelu metadiskursa (2005, 2010), koji se dijeli na interaktivne i interakcione dimenzije. Naše istraživanje posmatra samo interaktivnu dimenziju metadiskursa, a u okviru nje tranzicione markere (transitions), markere okvira (frame markers), endoforične markere (endophoric markers), markere dokaza (evidentials) i markere objašnjenja koda (code glosses). Korpus se sastoji od 325 eseja (202.621 riječi) na engleskom jeziku koje su pisali studenti prvog i drugog ciklusa studija anglistike čiji je maternji jezik srpski. Eseji su preuzeti iz korpusa pod nazivom *International Corpus of Learner English - third version (Serbian subcorpus)*. U korpusu smo pretraživali 175 markera iz kategorije interaktivne dimenzije metadiskursa. Rezultati pokazuju da su najzastupljeniji tranzicioni markeri (62.5%), markeri objašnjenja koda (21.8%), te markeri okvira (14.2%), što pokazuje da studenti imaju u vidu potrebe čitaoca. U zanemarljivom procentu koriste se endoforični markeri (0.9%) i markeri dokaza (0.5%), što možemo objasniti dužinom studentskih sastava, koji variraju od 310 do 1144 riječi, kao i činjenicom da su sastavi pisani bez prethodne pripreme.

Ključne riječi: metadiskurs, diskursni marker, interaktivna dimenzija metadiskursa, akademsko pisanje, pisanje na stranom jeziku

Appendix:

Code Glosses

-
 ()
 as a matter of fact
 called
 defined as
 e.g.
 for example
 for instance
 I mean
 i.e.
 in fact
 in other words
 indeed
 known as
 namely
 or X
 put another way
 say
 specifically
 such as
 that is
 that is to say
 that means
 this means
 viz
 which means

Endophoric Markers

(In) Chapter X
 (In) Part X
 (In) Section X
 (In) the X chapter
 (In) the X part
 (In) the X section
 (In) This chapter
 (In) This part
 (In) This section
 Example X
 Fig. X

Figure X
 P. X
 Page X
 Table X
 X above
 X before
 X below
 X earlier
 X later

Evidentials

(date)/(name)
 (to) cite X
 (to) quote X
 [ref. no.]/[name]
 according to X
 cited
 quoted

Frame Markers

a) Sequencing

(in) chapter X
 (in) part X
 (in) section X
 (in) the X chapter
 (in) the X part
 (in) the X section
 (in) this chapter
 (in) this part
 (in) this section
 finally
 first
 first of all
 firstly
 last
 lastly
 listing (a, b, c, etc.)
 next
 numbering (1, 2, 3, etc.)
 second

secondly
 subsequently
 then
 third
 thirdly
 to begin
 to start with
b) label stages
 all in all
 at this point
 at this stage
 by far
 for the moment
 in brief
 in conclusion
 in short
 in sum
 in summary
 now
 on the whole
 overall
 so far
 thus far
 to conclude
 to repeat
 to sum up
 to summarize
c) announce goals
 (in) this chapter
 (in) this part
 (in) this section
 aim
 desire to
 focus
 goal
 intend to
 intention
 objective
 purpose
 seek to

want to
wish to
would like to
d) shift topic
back to
digress
in regard to
move on
now
resume
return to
revisit
shift to
so
to look more closely
turn to
well
with regard to

Transition Markers

accordingly
additionally
again

also
alternatively
although
and
as a consequence
as a result
at the same time
because
besides
but
by contrast
by the same token
consequently
conversely
equally
even though
further
furthermore
hence
however
in addition
in contrast
in the same way

leads to
likewise
moreover
nevertheless
nonetheless
on the contrary
on the other hand
rather
result in
similarly
since
so
so as to
still
the result is
thereby
therefore
though
thus
whereas
while
yet