



POSITIVE SIDE OF COVID-19? A METADISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF A PERSONAL BLOG

Nurhidayu Abdul Kadir,
Noor Hanim Rahmatⁱ,
Halimatus Saadiah Abdul Wahid,
Nur Syakirah Dzuradeen
Akademi Pengajian Bahasa,
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Malaysia

Abstract:

A blog is used on online platforms for the author to communicate with his/her readers in a unique way. Metadiscourse markers are often used in writing and these markers help writers share their feelings and attitudes towards the issues they are writing about. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of metadiscourse markers in a personal blog commenting on the positive side of COVID-19. Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse was used to analyse the data. The results revealed that the writer employed interactional markers more than interactive. The in-depth analysis also showed that self-mentions were the most frequent interactional markers that occurred in the text, and the least were boosters, attitude markers and engagement markers. Meanwhile, the use of transitions has the highest frequency of interactive markers, followed by code glosses. To conclude, there were implications drawn from these findings, such as the high tendency of the writers of personal blogs to use interactional markers compared to interactive, as one of the persuasive efforts and the use of transitions to better organize their ideas in order for the text to be more coherent to readers.

Keywords: metadiscourse analysis, interactional markers, interactive markers, personal blog, attitudes

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Discourse analysis in writing involves the study of the social context in which the language is being written. Dutch linguist Teun van Dijk is one of the figures that is associated with 'discourse'. He is responsible in the discourse development such as in his study on the functions of larger units of language, including syntax, lexemes, cognitive

ⁱ Correspondence: email patanim@gmail.com, noorh763@uitm.edu.my

and semantics, and how these whole units of language contribute meanings to the texts or conversations (Van Dijk, 1985, as cited in Nordquist, 2020).

Bloor and Bloor (2013) stated that elements such as social context, background information or knowledge shared between a writer and reader can be involved in the study of discourse. Literary discourse is divided into three categories; 'transactional' which involves the aspect of influencing, 'poetic' that prioritises emotion and 'expressive' which comprises creative writing, yet non-fiction, such as letters or online blogs (Phillips, 2012).

Metadiscourse, adjective *metadiscursive* is a term of words used by a writer to guide the reader towards the purpose of the writing and the direction of some suggested ideas. It is one of the concepts of discourse that can be defined as the study of discourse itself or the aspects of the text that affect the relations of authors to readers (Chrismore, 1989, as cited in Nordquist, 2018). In other words, it is a three-way relationship between the text, the writer and the reader. It allows the message and idea of the writer to flow to the reader through the text, which results in the engagement of the reader in the text (Hyland, 2005, as cited in Tarrayo, 2014).

1.2 Statement of Problem

Hyland (2005) developed a metadiscourse model to analyse metadiscourse markers that can be used primarily in writing. In his model, metadiscourse markers were divided into two categories, namely interactive and interactional. Interactive markers help the organisations of ideas in the text, and interactional markers enable the writers to engage the readers in the text (Hyland, 2005, as cited in Alkathlan, 2019).

When writers maximise the usage of metadiscourse markers, readers can gain more than just the information presented. The study by Alkathlan (2019) explored the frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse, used in fifty research articles written by college students at Saudi EFL. The findings showed that when writers did not use proper metadiscourse markers, the message presented is not properly conveyed.

In this digital era, more research on writings in various social context and platforms, such as online platforms should also be carried out to give better exposure to interactive and interactional metadiscourse elements in writing. The use of blogs can serve as a medium of learning for the students to practice improving their attitude and writing styles when they write (Puschmann, 2010). The occurrences of metadiscourse elements in blog articles as well as in writing their blogs would indirectly help readers understand written texts in more than one way.

1.3 Research Objective

This paper explores the use of interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers in a personal blog. The following questions guide the researcher in presenting the findings.

- How can interactive metadiscourse markers be described in a personal blog, in terms of transitions and code glosses?

- How can interactional metadiscourse markers be described in a personal blog in terms of hedges, self-mention, booster, attitude markers and engagement markers?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Blogs

People communicate online through various platforms, and one of them is blogs. Blogs, or also known as weblogs, are a form of online journal website that people use to communicate virtually, which has gained popularity since its emergence in the late 1990s (Boyd, 2006). Moreover, Nardi et al. (2004) stated that blogs are a series of updated chronological order archived posts and Herring et al. (2004) argued that blogs are the latest genre of online communication. Blogs are often characterised as self-disclosure (Chen, 2012) because it fosters the development of social connections and communication of an individual which is the writer (Hollenbaugh, 2011). Besides, blogs usually connected with hyperlinks, where it develops a sense of community. According to Bronstein (2013), readers can easily interact with bloggers as they can comment or email the writer at an instant. This shows that blogs expanded from one-way communication to online interpersonal communication.

Since blogging is a global phenomenon, it is crucial to know the discourse of the blog is about. Puschmann (2013) mentioned that blogging is ambivalent because it highlights both the perceived value and sources of free expression and public discussion in which it lacks liability. Not only that, personal blogging often mischaracterised as vain or self-centred because of unshared expectations. The blog has the power to transform media audiences from content consumers to content producers (Wei, 2009). As Herring (2007) stated, the majority of bloggers are personal journals because they disclosed their personal lives on blogs. On the contrary, fewer bloggers discuss news or political knowledge (Herring et al., 2004). Hence, a blog entry can either be personal or knowledgeable, depending on the blogger's concept.

2.2 Metadiscourse

The term "functional" has many meanings in applied linguistics, but in metadiscourse, it refers to readers as to how they achieve specific communicative functions in the work of language. Metadiscourse is a combination of attitudes, personalities and assumptions of those who communicate. It also expresses the concept that communication is simply an exchange of data, services or goods (Hyland, 2005, as cited in Amiryousefi and Rasekh, 2010). Metadiscourse functions are often divided into two classes; interactive and interactional resources. According to Fa (2012), usually the interactive resources for the writer's understanding of the collaborating listener or audience and therefore the approach they seek to take in their interests, knowledge, skills processing and rhetorical expectations. The interactive metadiscourse also guides readers through the discourse organization, supported by an evaluation of the reader's understanding and anticipation of the writer (Jing et al., 2016). Whereas interactional, Fa (2012) indicated that it is

concerned with commenting on their message and how writers interact through intrusiveness which involves readers in the text. Thus, the metadiscourse is often defined by the interaction between writers and readers. As Amiryousefi and Rasekh (2010) mentioned, metadiscourse discloses how writers and readers interact with each other within the text and rely on reading writing as social interaction. Meanwhile according to Williams (2003, as cited in Nordquist, 2018), metadiscourse refers to the writing itself, the writer's writing and thinking, the actions of the reader, the writer's degree of certainty and the logical connections between its components. Also, as we tend to speak or write, we tend to talk to others, making choices about the style of the implications of the text to our readers or listeners (Hyland and Tse, 2004). Metadiscourse, therefore, as a mere "discourse on discourse" that has to operate in the same way as the use of language, is not only organized by the writers but also by the writers to their readers or listeners. The table below shows the sub-categories between interactive resources and interactional resources based on Hyland (2005) as cited in Tarrayo (2014):

Table 1: Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005)

Main Category	Sub-category	Description	Examples
Interactive Metadiscourse		Help to guide reader through the text	
	Transitions	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition/ but/ thus/ and
	Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	Finally/ to conclude/ my purpose is to
	Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above/ see Fig./ in Section 2
	Evidentials	Refer to source of information from other texts	According to X/ (Y, 1990)/ Z states
	Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings	Namely/ e.g./ such as/ in other words
Interactional Metadiscourse		Involve the reader in the argument	
	Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment	Might/ perhaps/ possible/ about
	Boosters	Emphasize force or writer's certainty	In fact/ definitely/ it is clear that
	Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude	Unfortunately/ I agree to/ surprisingly
	Engagement markers	Build relationship with reader	Consider/ note that/ you can see that
	Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I/ we/ my/ our

Source: Hyland (2005).

2.3 Past Studies of Metadiscourse in Blogs

Assuming that female and male Malaysian teenage bloggers use the different languages in their blogs to share their feelings concerning life, studies and daily problems. Past research by Amir et al. (2012) investigated the use of female and male teenager's blogs in

language differences. This research used a quantitative research design by selecting the participants from BlogMalaysia.com. After the researchers sent emails to several blogs asking bloggers to join the research, and only four bloggers (two males and two females) were chosen as the sample. A checklist and a word counting tool have been used as an analysis tool to count the frequency and to identify the words that have the language characteristics. Findings have shown that the frequency use of five languages are adverbs, intensifiers, tag questions, empty adjectives and hedging; however, determine by the difference between female and male bloggers. The implications of the study showed that gender could mostly be attributed to differences in the use of languages.

The discourse of cyber-genres like blogs pays relatively little attention instead of different genres, such as academic papers, school textbooks and more. For instance, Tarrayo (2014) looked at how research journalism blogs in the Philippines use interactive and interactional resources in their study and their implications for ESL writing. This study used the mixed-method research design by focusing on 20 investigative journalism blogs, which were selected from the official website of Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) blogs. The researcher collected data on the number of words between 302 and 1195. The researcher chose five blogs that were published on the PCIJ blog website every month from January to April 2014. Words or expressions that have been classified as metadiscourse values were used to analyse the data. Two local, comprehensive universities, while independent codes have been used. Data and frequency were used to analyse the data and the findings showed sufficient proof within the use of interactive and interactional resources in Philippine investigative journalism blogs. The result revealed that the use of evidential has the highest frequency among the five categories of interactive resources and hedges are the highest frequency in the use of interactional resources. The study provides pedagogical implications for ESL writing.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research has employed a qualitative approach to document analysis. Bowen (2009) stated that the analysis of documents is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic documents because it is cost-effective and time-efficient as the data sample was taken from the Internet. This study used online documents from a personal blog, as reported by Corbin and Strauss (2008), document analysis is used to generate meaning, gain understanding and develop empiric knowledge from the data in which researchers wanted to know the functions of the metadiscourse elements used in the data.

3.2 Sample

The sample of the data is Azlan’s article on his personal blog entitled “COVID-19 Exposes Us, In A Good Way”.

3.3 Instrument

Table 2: Coding for metadiscourse markers

Main	Sub-category	Code Given
Interactive Resources	Transitions	IN-ACTIVE (Tr)
	Code Glosses	IN-ACTIVE (CG)
Interactional Resources	Hedges	INR-TIONAL (H)
	Boosters	INR-TIONAL (B)
	Attitude Markers	INR-TIONAL (AM)
	Engagement Markers	INR-TIONAL (Eng M)
	Self-Mentions	INR-TIONAL (SM)

Source: Hyland (2005).

The instrument was identified and categorized based on Hyland’s (2005) classification of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. It was subdivided into categories and coded like Table 2.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The data was found online at Azlan’s personal blog .The blog was written on March 25, 2020. The researchers went to Azlan’s website page and lookup for a short article. During that time, COVID-19 was at the front page of the blog. Thus, the researchers decided to choose the article as it was a hot topic during the current situation and wanted to view the how the writer felt about the current situation through his writing.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

3.5.1 Reliability

In order to achieve reliability, three independent coders from the same group members reviewed and coded the personal blog for metadiscourse markers. The tentative coding was discussed, and an agreement is reached in cases where the markings differed.

3.5.2 Data Collection

The analysis of the selected text was carefully done based on Hyland’s (2005) taxonomy. The data was collected by extracting metadiscourse markers from Azlan's personal blog about COVID-19, which was written in English. Metadiscourse markers were counted and classified accordingly in the table. The article was read, and the first-rater counted the number of metadiscourse markers. Then, second-rater reread the sentence of the article to identify metadiscourse markers to make sure that no error occurs during the first count. Finally, each metadiscourse marker has been re-checked by the third-rater to ensure that it is correctly classified.

3.5.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed quantitatively, using frequency and percentage, as well as qualitatively. The categories resulting from each analysis are then presented separately, following the corresponding research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings and analysis, organized in the context of the sequence of research questions. The research questions were;

- a) How can interactive metadiscourse markers be described in a personal blog, in terms of transitions and code glosses?
- b) How can interactional metadiscourse markers be described in a personal blog in terms of hedges, self-mention, booster, attitude markers and engagement markers?

4.2 Interactive Metadiscourse Markers in Personal Blog

This section presents findings for the use of interactive markers. Presentation is done by first discussing the qualitative findings, followed by quantitative analysis of the data.

4.2.1 Qualitative Findings

(a) Transitions

[1] *"Seeing the numbers go up every day doesn't make it better either. **But** even in these trying times, there is something good that came out of COVID-19 unexpectedly."*

[2] *"Without any distractions to keep us busy, we have to look at each other **and** face the issues we have forgotten or chosen to ignore."*

[3] *"Communication is the key to any relationship, **more so** in a family."*

[4] *"Do we talk to each other about the things that matter, or do we keep it in **and** hoping to forget it with the next distraction?"*

The role of transitions is to express the semantic relation between main clauses. It shows the addition of previous ideas. Meaning, the sentences connect and give more or better information or explanations of an idea. In the blog, transitional words such as "but" and "and" are highly used. For example, the word "but" in example [1], at the beginning of the sentence to give a comparison to the previous sentence. The writer wanted to indicate phrases that are considered to be different. Other than that, the excerpt [2] above shows the transition of "and" was used as it gives function as a relation between the clauses. The sentences also relevance between the previous clause and the next clause.

(b) Code Glosses

[5] *"For the vast majority of us, we have day jobs from 8 to 5. **Meaning**, we are not home for half the day and we are away from our family for half the day".*

Code glosses help readers to understand the ideas stated, by examples or other related words and ideas. It gives the readers the satisfaction feeling of a complete, understandable idea. In the example as mentioned above [5], the writer has employed marker “meaning” as a concept of equivalence is seen between statements that are helpful in order to rephrase the previous sentence to make the readers get the clear.

4.2.2 Quantitative Findings

Table 4.2.2: Interactive Resources

Main	Sub-Category	Code	Frequency	Percentage
Interactive Resources	Transitions	IN-ACTIVE (Tr)	11	91.7
	Code Glosses	IN-ACTIVE (CG)	1	8.3
Sub-Total Interactive			12	100

Table 4.2.2 showed that the frequency and percentage of use of interactive resources. Hyland (2005) stated that interactive metadiscourse helps in guiding the readers through the text. Meaning that the use of interactive linguistic resources allows the writer to organize and structure his propositions, hence the text becomes more coherent to the readers. Thus, from the interactive perspective, the writer of “COVID-19 exposes us”, in the right way blog seems to lack of sensitive in achieving coherence in writing because based on the findings, the writer used only two types of interactive metadiscourse which are transition and code glosses. Among the two categories of interactive resources, the use of transitions has the highest frequency with more than half of the percentage of interactive metadiscourse (11 or 91.7%). According to Hyland (2005), “*identifying as metadiscourse those cases where transitions are being used to express relations between processes.*” Also, the data reveal some code glosses (1 or 8.3%). This metadiscourse helps the readers to understand the ideas by writer, by the examples or other related words and ideas. Thus, based on the findings, the blog writer gives importance to both the organization of the text in general and the connection with the readers in writing.

4.3 Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Personal Blog

This section discusses findings for interactional metadiscourse markers. The findings are first presented in the form of qualitative analysis and then quantitative analysis.

4.3.1 Qualitative Findings

(a) Hedges

[6] “No, I am not talking **about** the disease.”

[7] “I am merely talking **about** the situation that the disease puts us in.”

[8] “Do we talk to each other **about** the things that matter, or do we keep it in and hoping to forget it with the next distraction?”

[9] “Since we have all this time with each other, I guess there is no better time to think **about** it.”

Hedges function to depict the writer's degree of certainty and believes about some particular ideas or statements. For example, in the sentences above, we clearly can see the direction of the writer's thought when he stated his ideas firmly, which in example [6], the writer does not mean to say about the COVID-19. However, it is about the condition regarding the COVID-19 as shown in example [7]. Thus, by adding hedges "about", the readers could have a better grasp of what the writer means.

(b) Boosters

[10] *"When **in fact**, they should be enjoying each other's company."*

Boosters carry the writer's degree of confidence which as the effect could potentially influence and convince the readers to believe and act in the suggested idea. Boosters give the impression to the readers that there is something better that could be done, like the sentence stated above. Example [10] shows that the writer used boosters "in fact" to influence and convince the readers. The writer wanted to strengthen his opinion that people should be enjoying each other's company even though they are staying at home for a long time.

(c) Attitude Markers

[11] *"For those of us who are at home, it is **likely** that we are with our family for the whole week."*

Attitude markers reflect the writer's position and attitude towards both ideational materials and readers. It suggests the readers consider and to relate the writers' views on the discussed topic. The sentence above, the attitude markers of "likely" functions as the possibility that people who work from home will be with their family 24/7 hours.

(d) Engagement Markers

[12] *"When was the last time **you** had the opportunity to reflect for 14 days?"*

The function of engagement markers is addressing readers, taking their attention selectively, and anticipating their expected problems, considering their presence as participants with the assistance of second-person pronoun (Hyland, 2005). Like the stated sentence above, the writer is making a relationship with the reader through the channeled ideas in the text. He tries to convince the readers to reconsider and rethink by using words that function as some form of invitation for the readers to relate to his thoughts.

(e) Self-Mentions

[13] *"There is a chance that **we** are not used to spending that much time with **our** family."*

[14] *"Without any distractions to keep us busy, **we** have to look at each other and face the issues **we** have forgotten or chosen to ignore."*

[15] *"Do **we** really have a healthy relationship with **our** own family, or do **we** see each other as strangers?"*

[16] *"Since **we** have all this time with each other, **I** guess there is no better time to think about it."*

[17] *“Take this 14 days of opportunity to break away from **our** normal routines and to look deeply in **ourselves** and in **our** family.”*

The function of self-mention is to directly announce the writer of the text by using possessive adjectives and first-person pronouns to present information. The sentences employed the forms of first-person and its possessive forms for presenting the information. In the excerpt [13], the word “we” and “our” show self-mention that give function to draw and inform the readers. It means that the writer informs the readers that people might not become awkward unintendedly because of spending too much time with family. Apart from that, in the instance, as mentioned above [16], the writer has used the first-person pronoun “I” in order to show his presence and judgement. Not only that, these sentences give the idea that the writer is also in the same condition or situation as the reader, to help to build connection and relation between the writer and the readers.

4.3.2 Quantitative Findings

Table 4.3.2 Interactional Resources

Main	Sub-Category	Code	Frequency	Percentage
Interactional Resources	Hedges	INR-TIONAL (H)	4	10
	Boosters	INR-TIONAL(B)	1	2.5
	Attitude Markers	INR-TIONAL (AM)	1	2.5
	Engagement Markers	INR-TIONAL (ENG M)	1	2.5
	Self-Mentions	INR-TIONAL (SM)	33	82.5
Sub-Total Interactional			40	100

According to Hyland (2005), interactional metadiscourse involves the readers in the argument. It is used to interact and encourage the readers to take part in any arguments of the text. Regarding the interactional resources, the results from Table 4.3.2 show the most frequent use of self-mentions (33 or 82.5%), which is more than half of the total number of interactional metadiscourse. Although such an interactional resource is relatively more frequent as a persuasive strategy, it still allows the writer to express his stand on issues and seems to demonstrate personal feelings toward a proposition. The data also reveal several hedges (4 or 10%). The use of hedges mostly reflects the objectivity of the writer and the readiness to accept alternative views. Hence, in blogging, the use of hedges ensure that assertions are toned down, persuasion and confidence are shown with caution (Tarrayo, 2014). Other than that, the data reveal some boosters, attitude marker and engagement marker (1 or 2.5%). Such interactional resources are relatively less frequent as a persuasive strategy.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

To sum up, findings showed that the writer employed interactional markers more than interactive markers, where the frequency of self-mentions is the highest followed by

hedges. The results differed from the previous study by Tarrayo (2014). This is because compared to investigative blogs, personal blogs tend to have a high frequency of interactional markers than interactive to relate more to the readers. The result also revealed that boosters, attitude markers and engagement markers were the least used by the writer, which supports the previous study by Amir et al. (2012). Finally, the results also showed that transitions were the most used interactive markers, whereas code glosses were the least used.

5.2 Implications

This study, as well as previous studies on metadiscourse markers in online articles, help to show different views of metadiscourse features in the cyber genre like personal blog. Just like the previous studies, our study also has several limitations. One of it is that the scope of this study was limited to only one online platform, which is a personal blog. Besides, the total number of words in the personal blog was relatively small. Therefore, the scope of the findings was also narrowed, revolving only around the chosen text.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research with more substantial and more samples can be done to obtain more significant results in the study. Different types of blogs' aspects such as sports, products, foods and beverages could also be covered in the future research to figure out, how metadiscourse elements were used depending on the subjects that were discussed. Studies on contrastive rhetoric, in the direction of cross-linguistic or cross-cultural analysis of metadiscourse, such as metadiscourse in English as a second language (ESL) and English for Learning (EFL), in the blog genres can also be conducted as future research.

About the Author(s)

Nurhidayu Abdul Kadir, Halimatus Saadiah Abdul Wahid and Nur Syakirah Dzuradeen are postgraduate students taking the programme Masters for Professional Communication at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Univeristi Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. Noor Hanim Rahmat is an associate professor at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Univeristi Teknologi MARA, Malaysia for the past 26 years. Her research interests include academic writing, language skills, as well as educational psychology.

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