Exploring Metadiscourse Markers in Persian News Reports

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Abstract

This research attempts to examine textual and interpersonal metadiscourse used in Persian news reports. In order to carry out this research project 20 news reports were selected by dint of random sampling from a corpus of 38 news reports taken from 5 Persian news agencies. To investigate metadiscourse markers, Vande Kopple's (1985) original classification system for metadiscourse or metatextual functions based on Halliday's functions of language was utilized. Sample Persian equivalents for Kopple's metadiscourse markers were suggested by the researcher. The findings indicated that metadiscourse markers are quite frequent in Persian news reports suggesting their importance in this genre. Moreover, this study revealed that there are more instances of textual metadiscourse markers in comparison with interpersonal metadiscourse markers. Finally, this research endeavor demonstrated that text connectives, narrators, and commentary markers are more abundant than other kinds of metadiscourse.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, Textual Markers, Interpersonal Markers

1. Introduction

Recently there has been a shift of focus in linguistic inquiries from ideational facets of discourse to the functional and interpersonal aspects of discourse (Hyland, 2004). Based on this view, not only do authors produce a text to convey ideation content, i.e. information, but also they want to make certain that what they express is comprehensible and reasonable. Hence, they can attract their audience's attention and communicate

effectively. In other words, by anticipating their audience's expectation, needs, interests, and abilities authors try to engage them in their texts and influence their comprehension (Hyland and Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2005).

Metadiscourse, which is a relatively newly introduced concept in the area of discourse analysis, refers to how authors manage to interact with their audience. This view is built on the assumption that speaking and writing are social and communicative phenomena (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). Thus, metadiscourse is used to organize the discourse, involve the audience, and express authors' attitudes (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001). Therefore, researchers have investigated metadiscourse to find out, among other things, patterns of interaction between authors and their audience.

There has been a growing interest in investigating the use of metadiscourse in different genres. Hyland (1998) claimed that the use of metadiscourse elements is closely related to the conventions and norms of cultures in genera and discourse communities in particular. In this line of research, metadiscourse has been examined in various genres, e.g., academic research articles (Hyland, 1999; Dahl, 2004), post-graduate dissertation (Bunton, 1999), casual conversation (Schiffrin, 1980), and school textbooks (Crimsone, 1989). There seems to be a dearth of research on metadiscourse used in news reports, therefore, the present study aims to investigate metadiscourse markers used in Persian news reports.

2. Literature Review

Haliday (1994) considered three functions for spoken and written language, namely ideational function, textual function, and interpersonal function. Ideational function or propositional content refers to the information the writer or speaker conveys. Textual function of language is aimed at creating coherent written and spoken texts that are related to its audience and to its context, and the interpersonal function establishes, maintains, and signals relations between people. Metadiscourse markers are linguistic elements that signal the presence of the author rather than contributing to the propositional content of the text. They enable listeners or readers to organize, understand, and evaluate the content of a text. Kopple (1985) held that there are cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in using metadiscourse elements.

Crismore (1984) has defined metadiscourse as "discoursing about spoken or written discourse" (p. 66). She has added that metadiscourse provides readers or listeners with direction rather than information. She has also made a distinction between primary and secondary level discourse. Primary level discourse is concerned with information or propositional content, but secondary level discourse, i.e., metadiscourse, provides a discourse about the primary level discourse. Expressions like *definitely, undoubtedly, first, in the previous chapter,* and *according to* be examples of metadiscourse. Crismore (1984) also mentioned that metadiscourse facilities the reconstruction of the writer's writing plan by readers. It also helps reads create and affirm expectations about the text. Hence, metadiscourse markers contribute to the organization of the text. Moreover, metadiscourse markers help writers display their attitudes toward the subject of the discourse, express their personality, and have interaction with their audience and create a more reader-oriented text (cited in Amiryousefi, and Rasekh, 2010).

An initial problem in the investigation of metadiscourse can be that metadiscourse elements are separate from the propositional content of the text. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no linguistic criteria have been set to identify metadiscourse markers. The reason can lie in the fact that these markers can be realized through a wide range of linguistic elements, ranging from affixes to whole clauses. Similarly Enkvist (1978) considered metadiscourse as an open linguistic category to which new elements can be added according to the demands of the circumstances almost indefinitely. Moreover, Enkvist contended that metadiscourse markers are relative; a particular part of a text or a linguistic item is metadiscourse only in relation to the other parts of the text.

Hyland (20040 maintained that metadiscourse help authors interact with their audience in order to communicate successfully with them. Moreover, Hyland (1998) contended that metadiscourse markers are integral to the text. In other words, they cannot be removed or changed at will. In a quantitative study, Hyland (1998) examined metadiscourse markers in 28 research articles and found 373 instances of metadiscourse in each research article. In another textual analysis, Hyland (1999) explored metadiscourse markers in 21 textbooks and found 405 instances of metadiscourse markers in each text, around one per 15 words. Hyland has concluded that metadiscourse play an important part in communication.

2.1 Vande Kopple's Metadiscourse Taxonomy (1985)

Kopple (1985) suggested seven types of metadiscourse markers. The first four types are textual metadiscourse and the last three types are interpersonal\ metadiscourse.

2.1.1 Text Connectives: They help readers understand the organization of the text and the connection between its parts. They consist of expressions that signal temporal or logical relation (e.g. however), sequence (e.g. first),

reminder of previously presented materials (e.g. as noted earlier), reminder of material to be presented later (e.g. we will come to this point in the next chapter), and Topicalizers that highlight materials that are thematically important (e.g. regarding).

2.1.2 Code Glosses: They enable readers understand the meanings of words, phrases, or idioms (e.g. in other words, that is to say).

2.1.3 Illocution Markers: They point to the specific discourse act performed by the writer (e.g. I hypothesize that, my purpose is).

2.1.4 Narrators: They are expressions that tell readers who said or wrote what (e.g. according to, X announced that).

2.1.5 Validity Markers: They signal certainty and uncertainty of the ideational content. In other words, they express the author's view of the validity of the content of the text. They include highs (e.g. probably), emphatics (e.g. clearly), and attributors that attribute a material to someone or something to influence readers (e.g. according to Einstein).

2.1.6 Attitude Markers: They express the author's attitude towards the propositional content (e.g. I find it interesting, surprisingly).

2.1.7 Commentary: They are used to establish interaction between the author and his or her audience (e.g. you may not agree that, dear reader).

3. Method

3.1 Corpus

The corpus used in this study involved news articles in two languages, namely English and Persian. Twenty English news articles and 20 Persian ones were selected by means of random sampling from around 75 articles. Moreover, random sampling helped us overcome the problem of particularity of writers' styles. The researchers did their best to choose articles as diverse in subject as possible to increase the external validity of the findings. All the articles dealt with current events (2011). The Persian news articles were chosen from several Iranian news agencies like IRNA, IPNA, ISNA, etc. Table 1 shows the number of news articles taken from each news agency.

Table 1: The corpus used in this research

News Agency	Number of Articles
IRNA	9
ISNA	3
PNA	3
FARS NEWS	4
ILNA	1
Total	**20**

3.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

In order to investigate metadiscourse markers used in news articles Kopple's (1985) classification of metadiscourse markers were utilized. To examine metadiscourse markers in Persian news articles the Persian equivalents of these markers were considered. Descriptive statistics were calculated to measure the frequency of metadiscourse markers in news articles. Table 2 displays some of the Persian equivalents used to represent textual metadiscourse markers introduced in Kopple's taxonomy, and Table 3 demonstrates sample Persian Equivalents for interpersonal metadiscourse markers.

Table 2: Sample Of Persian Equivalents for Textual Metadiscourse Markers: Textual Function

1	**Text Connectives**	
	Sequencers	اولا، دوما، نخست اینکه، دوم آنکه، ...
	Logical / Temporal connectors	درنتیجه، بنابراین، بر این اساس / با وجود این، به هر حال، در عین حال، ....
	Reminders	همان طور که در بالا اشاره شد ...
	Announcements	اکنون به این مطلب می‌پردازیم که .... و ....
	Topicalizers	راجع به، در خصوص، در مورد، نسبت به
2	**Code Glosses**	
	Defining	به این صورت تعریف می‌شود ...
	Explaining	به عبارت دیگر، یعنی، به عبارت دقیق‌تر ...
	Delimiting	تا حدی، تا اندازه‌ای، نسبتاً ...
3	**Illocution markers**	به طور مثال، فرض بر این است که، به طور خلاصه، در مجموع، مقصود من این است که ...
4	**Narrators**	به نقل از، به گفتهٔ، بنابر، بر اساس، ...

Table 3: Sample Of Persian Equivalents For Textual Metadiscourse Markers: The Interpersonal Function

5	Validity/Modality markers	
	Hedges	شاید، احتمالاً، ظاهراً، به نظر می رسد که، ...
	Emphatics	بدون تردید، مسلماً، بی شک، واضح است که، به وضوح، آشکارا، ...
	Attributors	بنابر اساس، ...
6	**Attitude markers**	به طرز جالب/غم انگیز/تعجب آوری .....، ....
7	**Commentary**	
	Comment on reader moods, views	ممکن است شما با این مطلب موافق نباشید، ...
	Comment on reading procedures	در صورت ... می توانید از مطالعۀ این فصل صرف نظر کنید، ممکن است مایل باشید ابتدا بخش نهایی را بخوانید
	Comment on anticipations for readers	مطلب بعدی ممکن است در ابتدای امر دشوار به نظر آید
	Comment on author/reader relationships	دوستان من، خوانندۀ گرامی

4. Results

The quantitative analysis illustrated the importance of metadiscourse markers in Persian news reports. The total number of metadiscourse elements in Persian news reports was 166. The total number of words in these reports was 1889. This shows that there exists one instance of metadiscourse markers per every 11 words. In other words metadiscourse markers consist of 8.7 % of the words used in this corpus. Hence, in Persian new reports there is relatively high instance of metadiscourse markers. These findings point to the importance of metadiscourse elements in Persian news reports. Table 4 demonstrates the information regarding the use of metadiscourse elements in the whole corpus.

Table 4: Metadiscourse Elements Used In the Whole Corpus

No. of metadiscourse Elements	No. of Words	Percentage
166	1889	8.7 %

Table 5 demonstrates the frequency and percentage of textual metadiscourse markers in these news reports.

Table %: Frequency and Percentage of Textual Metadiscourse Markers in Persian News Reports

Metadiscourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Text Connectives	70	42.1%
Code Glosses	10	6%
Illocution Markers	2	1.2%
Narrators	54	32.5%
Total	136	

Based on Table 5, text connectives were the most frequent metadiscourse markers (n= 70). They consisted of 42.1% of the whole instances of metadiscourse markers in the corpus. There were 54 instances of narrators in this corpus. They consisted of 32.5% of the whole instance of metadiscourse markers in the corpus. There were 10 instances of code glosses in these reports consisting 6% of the whole instances of metadiscourse markers in these texts. Finally, illocution markers are the least frequent metadiscourse markers in this corpus (n= 2, 1.2%).

Table 6 displays the frequency and percentage of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in these news reports.

Table 6: Frequency and Percentage of Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers in Persian News Reports
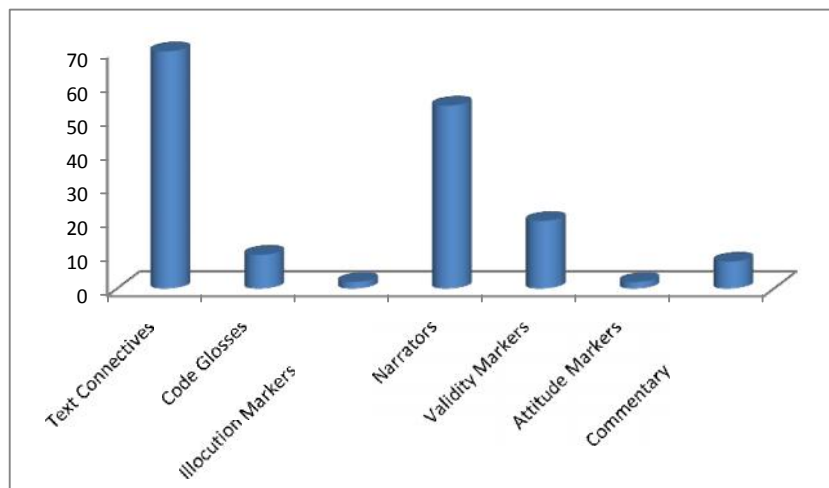
Metadiscourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Validity Markers	20	12%
Attitude Markers	2	1.2%
Commentary	8	4.8%
Total	30	

As depicted in Table 6, there were 20 instances of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in theses news reports. They consisted of 12% of the whole instances of metadiscourse markers. In addition, there were 8 commentaries (4.8%) and 2 attitude markers (1.2%) in this corpus. Based on Table 7, which provides a summary of these findings, there were 136 instances of textual metadiscourse markers (81%) and 30 instances of interpersonal metadiscourse markers (19%) in these news reports.

Table 7: A Summary of the Findings on Metadiscourse Markers in Persian News Reports

Metadiscourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Textual Markers	136	81%
Interpersonal Markers	30	19%
Total	166	100%

Figure 1 shows the frequency of different types of metadiscourse markers in this corpus of Persian news articles. As demonstrated in this figure, text connectives, narrators, and validity markers are the most metadiscourse markers with highest frequencies respectively.

Figure 1: The Frequency of Different Types of Metadiscourse Elements

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicated that metadiscourse plays a salient role in the genre of news reports. There was one instance of metadiscourse markers in every 11 words. This finding is in line with the results of the text analysis conducted by Zarei and Mansoori (2011) that revealed one metadiscourse element per every 16 words. It also supports Hyland's (1998) finding that showed one metadiscourse markers in every 15 words. The importance of metadiscourse lies in the fact that they contribute to the organization of the text and effective interaction between authors and their audience. In addition, metadiscourse markers enable writers or speakers to express their attitudes towards the information they convey and also towards their audience (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001).

This study also demonstrated that textual metadiscourse were far more frequently used than interpersonal metadiscourse in Persian news reports. Textual metadiscourse, as mentioned in the literature review, are used to connect different pieces of information in a text, to explain the meanings of words or concepts, and to inform readers who said what. However, interpersonal metadiscourse are utilized to by authors to express their opinions about ideational content or to interact with their audience. This suggests that in Persian news reports text organization is more important than interacting with readers. The formal and relatively objective style of the journalistic genre may account for the abundance of textual metadiscourse markers in comparison with interpersonal metadiscourse markers.

Among different types of metadiscourse markers examined in Persian news reports, text connectives were the most frequent type. This indicates that writers in this genre attach prime importance to the organization of the text in general and to the connection between different bits of information presented in the report in particular. In other words, it is fair to say that writers of news reports do their best to make connection between different blocks of information in the report. Of course, this is also observed in other texts and genres, but the great number of text connectives in comparison to other kind of metadiscourse shows that text organization rather than interaction with readers has more importance in the journalistic genre.

Narrators were the second most frequent metadiscourse markers in this corpus of Persian news reports. Narrators, as pointed out in the literature review, are to inform readers who mentioned wheat. This seems to be important in a situation in which objectivity is essential. In other words, the source of every proposition needs to be determined. Hence, in news reports, which are characterized by objectivity, narrators are used to specify the source of propositions. Another type of metadiscourse that were relatively frequent was commentary. These metadiscourse markers help authors to comment on the information presented or on the writer-reader relationship.

6. Conclusion

This research project showed that metadiscourse markers are quite frequent in Persian news reports suggesting their importance in this genre. Moreover, this study revealed that there are more instances of textual metadiscourse markers in comparison with interpersonal metadiscourse markers. Finally, this research endeavor demonstrated that text connectives, narrators, and commentary markers are more abundant than other kinds of metadiscourse.

As it is clear from any scientific research, nothing can be self-evident unless verified by observation or experimentation. To conduct any kind of scientific research, one may confront with problems and limitations. The present study could have obtained rather different findings if it had not faced the following limitations. First, the corpus of this study was almost limited. Other studies with larger samples could be done to ensure the external validity of these findings. Second, in this study the researcher did not draw a distinction between news reports with different subjects, i.e., political, social, economic, and sports news. Therefore, a comparison of metadiscourse use in news reports with different topics can be the subject of future research.

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