

Does Metadiscourse Indicate Writing Quality? A Case of Argumentative Essays by EFL Learners

Ahmad Ansarifar

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad; ahmad.ansarifar@gmail.com

Mohammad Ghazanfari

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad; mghazanfari@um.ac.ir

Hesamoddin Shahriari

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad; h.shahriari@um.ac.ir

Writing appropriately and precisely is of critical importance for students' success in a wide range of situations such as education and profession. A better understanding of the linguistic and textual features that contribute to writing quality would be advantageous for language teachers and L2 learners. To date, linguistic and textual features of argumentative essays that influence writing quality such as phrasal and clausal complexity features, text cohesion features, lexical sophistication and syntactic complexity have been investigated in many studies. Despite the abundance of the studies that have examined the relationships between textual/linguistic features of argumentative essays and writing quality, few have investigated metadiscourse features as contributors to writing quality. Accordingly, this study, framed with Hyland's (2005) model of interactional metadiscourse, aims to address this research gap. To this end, three corpora of students' writings: 30 pre-intermediate, 30 intermediate and 30 upper-intermediate were analyzed. By comparing the interactional metadiscoursal features (i.e., hedges, boosters, self-mentions, attitude markers, and engagement markers), the differences between the three groups were observed. The findings of the study reveal how the writing of EFL students differs across different proficiency levels with respect to metadiscoursal features. Finally, pedagogical implications for L2 writing are also suggested.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, Writing Quality, Argumentative Essays, Proficiency Level