Interpersonal Metadiscourse in Persuasive Journalism: A Study of Texts by American and Iranian EFL Columnists[1]

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Abstract

Interpersonal metadiscourse refers to aspects of a text which reflect the writer's position towards both the content in the text and the reader. This study aimed to explore the role of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in persuasive writing. For this purpose, two elite newspapers in the United States and Iran, The New York Times and Tehran Times respectively, were chosen. Based on a textual analysis of 12 opinion articles (6 from each newspaper), this investigation intended to find out whether American and Iranian EFL writers employed the same amounts of interpersonal markers (hedges, certainty markers, commentaries, attitude markers, and attributors) in their texts. The findings revealed that interpersonal metadiscourse was present in both sets of data, but that there were significant differences between the two groups regarding the occurrences of interpersonal markers, specifically in the case of commentaries. The results suggested that different factors interacted in the choice of metadiscourse markers in newspaper opinion articles written by American and Iranian EFL columnists: culture-driven preferences, genre-driven conventions, and Iranian EFL writers' extent of foreign language experience. The study also stressed the need for more contrastive studies in the area of metadiscourse and more attention to this important element in L2 writing courses.

Keywords: Contrastive rhetoric, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writers, Genre, Metadiscourse markers, Newspaper discourse, Persuasive writing

1.   Introduction

In general, language employed in writing, like that used in oral communication, serves three functions (macro-functions): ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In Halliday's (1985) grammatical theory, the ideational or referential function represents the external world, consisting of the representation of physical experiences and mental processes like thoughts and feelings as well as the basic logical relations that happen among these experiences and processes. The

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interpersonal function encompasses the relations between the addresser and the addressee in a discourse situation. Finally, in Halliday's theory, the textual function is concerned with the way language establishes links with itself and the situation to create a text that is cohesive and coherent.

The theoretical basis for the term 'metadiscourse' has been derived from Halliday's classification of language macro-functions. Vande Kopple (1985, p. 83) defines metadiscourse as "discourse that people use not to expand referential material but to help their readers connect, organise, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes toward that material". He suggests that writers usually operate on two levels: on the primary level, the propositional content or the information about the subject matter is supplied; on the metadiscourse level, nothing is added to the content but the readers are assisted to understand the message and the writer's views. Vande Kopple states that primary discourse fulfills the ideational function while metadiscourse satisfies the interpersonal and textual functions of language. Some examples of metadiscourse are the underlined parts of the following sentences:

(1) <u>I hope</u> they agree with this notion.
(2) <u>As mentioned before</u>, this area has not received much attention.
(3) <u>Unfortunately</u>, the war broke out.
(4) <u>First</u>, the two sides <u>should</u> start the talks.

Metadiscourse is mostly considered as a set of linguistic devices used to communicate attitudes and to mark the structural properties of a piece of discourse. Therefore, it is regarded as a key element of persuasive writing (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001). Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen (1993, p. 40) point out that metadiscourse plays a vital role in the creation of solidarity between the addresser and addressee since it helps to construct a coherent text and reflects the writers' "personality, credibility, considerateness of the reader, and relationship to the subject matter and to readers". Consequently, this element is highly dependent on the contexts in which it occurs and is closely connected to the norms of specific cultural and professional communities (Hyland, 1998).

The focus of this study, therefore, is on metadiscourse use as an essential characteristic of a text. The metadiscourse markers used in English opinion articles written by American and Iranian columnists were compared. In fact, this study aimed at examining the interpersonal metadiscourse categories predominantly used in these two groups of texts and identifying the similarities and differences between them in this regard.

In the following, section 2 will discuss the concept of metadiscourse and will briefly review its theoretical and empirical backgrounds. Section 3 provides relevant information about the material, data collection, and analysis procedures. The findings regarding the number and use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers are presented in section 4, followed by a discussion of the results in section 5. Finally, section 6 includes the conclusions, implications, limitations of the study and some suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Since 1980, various definitions of metadiscourse have been proposed by different researchers (e.g. Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 1998, 2005; Mauranen, 1993; Vande Kopple, 1985). The first definition is attributed to Williams (1981, pp. 211-212) who considers metadiscourse as "writing about writing, whatever does not refer to the subject matter being addressed". Crismore (1983, p. 4) defines metadiscourse as "the author's intrusion into the discourse, either explicitly or non-explicitly, to direct rather than inform the readers". Although the definitions provided so far are varied, most scholars agree that metadiscourse is equal in importance to the primary discourse and that it is essential for the appropriate construction of any piece of writing.

As such, metadiscourse is considered as a cover term consisting of different lexical items like discourse connectives (*but, therefore, so…*), adverbs (*presumably, obviously…*), modals (*may, might…*), personal pronouns (*I, we, my…*), and mental-state verbs (*think, believe, doubt…*) (see, for example, Camiciottoli, 2003; Vergaro, 2002). It has also been linked to non-verbal elements like punctuation (e.g. colon), typographical markers (e.g. parentheses, italics), and other visual non-linguistic features such as paragraph indentations, layout, quality of paper, and font (Kumpf, 2000). In addition, metadiscourse devices can range from a single word (e.g. *possibly*) to a complete sentence (e.g. *the following paragraphs deal with the topic of economy*). It should be noted that the degree and type of metadiscourse use differs according to the rhetorical situation (i.e. writer, reader, topic, occasion, and genre) (Crismore, 1984).

Many metadiscourse studies (see Crismore et al., 1993; Dafouz, 2003; Hyland, 1998; Vande Kopple, 1985, among others) utilise the Hallidayan distinction between textual and interpersonal functions of language in order to classify the linguistic units. Textual metadiscourse, sometimes referred to as metatext (Mauranen, 1993), is employed to organise the text and direct the reader through the text. It fulfills Halliday's textual function. On the other hand, interpersonal metadiscourse is used to develop the relationship between the reader and the writer. According to Crismore (1984), when interpersonal metadiscourse markers are added to texts, along with first and second person pronouns, the interpersonal function of language will be attained.

Interpersonal metadiscourse is an important rhetorical strategy since, according to Vande Kopple (1985), it is the precise layer of the text in which the writer intrudes into his/her text to add affective values and demonstrate the degree of commitment toward the propositional content. Previous research (e.g. Crismore et al., 1993; Mauranen, 1993) has shown that writers from diverse language backgrounds differ in their use of metadiscourse. Moreover, the quality and quantity of this feature have shown to be different in various genres (Abdi, 2002). As a result, the investigation of interpersonal metadiscourse markers can be useful in revealing the norms of different cultures and genres.

For a long time contrastive rhetoric has focused on the specific features that different cultures favor in their written products and has proved to be a useful approach to uncover certain aspects of discourse. Kaplan (1966) introduced contrastive rhetoric and indicated that the linguistic and cultural

traditions of EFL writers may influence the way they write. Therefore, foreign students may have to adopt new conventions that are in agreement with the demands made upon them by the target language system (Kaplan, 1987).

The concept of metadiscourse has generated a lot of research in recent years. A range of recent studies in text analysis have been devoted to the presence and functional role of metadiscourse markers in various genres including science popularisations (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1990), textbooks (Crismore, 1983, 1984; Hyland, 1999), student writing (Simin & Tavangar, 2009; Steffensen & Cheng, 1996), research articles (Abdi, 2002; Hyland, 1998, 1999), and advertisements (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001). Metadiscourse has also been used to examine rhetorical differences in the texts written by different first language groups (Crismore et al., 1993; Dahl, 2004; Mauranen, 1993) and those produced by EFL and native writers (Faghih & Rahimpour, 2009).

Surprisingly, the investigation of metadiscourse in journalistic texts has not received much attention in discourse analysis research. In fact, the issue has been examined by only a few writers (Abdollahzadeh, 2007; Dafouz, 2003, 2008; Le, 2004). Newspaper discourse is probably among the most remarkable genres since it is undeniably one of the most popular public media which has a wide range of audience. According to Fowler (1991), readers gain a large proportion of their knowledge of the world through the media, particularly newspapers.

Dafouz's (2003) contrastive study explored the use of metadiscourse in the opinion columns of two leading newspapers: the Spanish *El País* and the British *The Times*. The results showed that the Spanish writers used significantly more textual metadiscourse than the English writers while the British-English group used more interpersonal markers than the Spanish group. Regarding interpersonal markers, the findings marked hedges as the most frequent category in the corpus, followed by attitudinal markers, and certainty markers. Commentaries showed the lowest scores and attributors were almost absent in the corpora. In general, the analysis disclosed that the two groups differed only in the use of hedges (English writers used more).

In a similar study, Abdollahzadeh (2007) examined the use of metadiscourse in Persian and English (British and U.S.) newspaper editorials. Regarding the use of interpersonal markers, the results revealed significant differences for the subtypes of hedges (English editorials used more) and certainty markers (Persian editorials used more). According to Abdollahzadeh, the heavy use of certainty markers by the Persian editorial writers was due to an Iranian tradition of valuing and abiding by the rules of those in power without expressing uncertainty about social and religious issues. The heavy use of hedges by the English group, however, was attributed to their being more polite to their readers.

In a nutshell, metadiscourse is a relatively new concept; however, it is increasingly important to research in reading, writing, and text structure. Despite their importance, studies of metadiscourse outside of European or U.S. contexts have not received the attention they deserve (Crismore & Abdollahzadeh, 2010). Furthermore, very few studies have examined metadiscourse devices in

persuasive newspaper articles and, to the authors' knowledge, no study so far has contrasted metadiscourse in opinion articles written by American and Iranian EFL journalists. Considering all this, the researchers decided to present a text-oriented study, analysing a corpus of English texts written by L1 American and L2 Iranian columnists with regard to the use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers and their pragmatic-rhetorical role in this important genre.

3. Methodology

3.1. Material

The data of this research came from the opinion columns of two influential and prestigious newspapers in the United States and Iran*: The New York Times* and *Tehran Times* respectively. These two are among the most widely read newspapers in the United States and Iran (see also Appendix A). In addition, their opinion articles cover a wide variety of topics.

Twelve English texts (6 from each newspaper) comprising 10139 words were selected. The texts derived from the American newspaper contained a total of 4991 words ranging from 760 to 1013 words whose average length amounted to 832. The articles extracted from the Iranian newspaper comprised 5148 words. The lexical range of the articles was between 676 and 1188 with an average length f 858 words. The selected articles were matched for length and topic in order to ensure comparability. They were written by Americans (as Native-English Speaking writers) and Iranians (as EFL writers) and they covered various topics including Middle East issues, health issues, and a human rights issue (see Appendix B).

The reason why newspaper articles were chosen in this analysis is closely related to the importance of mass communication in present day societies. Within the wide range of text-types that a newspaper presents, this study concentrated on opinion articles. Like editorials, opinion columns are written about topics that are "of particular societal importance at the time of publication" (Le, 2004, p. 688). However, contrary to editorials, these texts are written by experts and they may not reflect the official position of the newspaper. Connor (1996) considers opinion columns as one of the most appropriate examples of persuasive texts in all countries which can set standards for persuasive writing.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

The first step involved the collection of 140 opinion articles from the online archives of *The New York Times* and *Tehran Times*. The data collection was done in August 2009 and the articles were published in the period between 1995 and 2009. All the texts were saved into the computer to form a database of corpora.

Then, 6 articles from each newspaper were finally chosen for the analysis since, as mentioned before, there was a need to control the different variables involved in the writing of the texts such as the writers' native language, topic, and length of the articles. As many discourse analysts have proposed (e.g. Dafouz, 2003; Hyland, 1999; Thompson, 2001), the topic of a text may

influence the type and frequency of metadiscourse categories found. Therefore, the choice of theme was carefully controlled in this research. Furthermore, a careful selection needed to be made among the texts collected from the two newspapers since some of the texts derived from *The Times* were not written by Americans (as native speakers of English) and in the same way, there were texts collected from *Tehran Times* that were not produced by Iranians (as EFL writers). Finally, of the matched articles, 4 were discarded in order to balance the length of the articles for both corpora.

3.3. Data Analysis

The analysis of the selected texts was closely based on Dafouz's (2003) taxonomy of interpersonal metadiscourse markers (see Table 1). It is important to note that metadiscourse instances usually play a multifunctional role; therefore, in this research, metadiscourse markers were analysed based on the primary function of each element in its particular context (see Dafouz, 2003). This required an individual and manual analysis of all the metadiscourse elements present in the selected articles.

Table1. Dafouz's (2003) classification system for interpersonal metadiscourse

Macro-category	Subcategory	Examples
Hedges: Withhold full commitment to the statements presented by the writer	Epistemic verbs Probability adverbs Epistemic expressions	May / might / it <u>must</u> be two o'clock Probably / perhaps / maybe It is likely
Certainty markers: Express full commitment to the statements presented in the text		Undoubtedly / clearly / certainly
Attributors: Mention explicitly the source of information and use these references with persuasive goals		'x' states that… / As the Prime Minister claimed
Attitude markers: Express the writer's affective values toward the text and the reader	Deontic verbs Attitudinal adverbs Adjectical constructions Cognitive verbs	Have to / we <u>must</u> understand Unfortunately / remarkably It is absurd / it is surprising I feel/ I think / I believe
Commentaries: Help to establish reader-writer rapport through the text	Rhetorical questions Direct address to reader Inclusive expressions Personalisations Asides	What is the future of Europe…? <u>You</u> must consider, <u>dear reader</u> <u>We all</u> agree that / let <u>us</u> consider <u>I</u> do not want / he is telling <u>me</u> The presidential candidate preached proudly (and <u>falsely</u>) to his voters

After identifying and categorising the metadiscourse markers, a quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the frequency of different types of interpersonal metadiscourse and to find the differences between the two groups in this regard. In general, quantitative information was essential for marking the existence of and the relative emphasis placed on various metadiscourse

categories and subcategories in the data. Since a single judgment seemed to be inadequate, the articles were also analysed independently by an expert by coding all metadiscourse markers. An inter-rater reliability of 0.84 was obtained which indicated that the coding was acceptable.

Finally, the statistical analysis involved the use of non-parametrical means (Mann-Whitney U test) since the items in the sample articles were not normally distributed. In fact, the Mann-Whitney test was employed to see whether the differences between the two sets of data with regard to the occurrences of metadiscourse markers were significant. Since the sample texts contrasted did not have exactly the same length (see section 3.1), the raw figures were standardised to a common basis (markers per 1000 words) in order to compare the frequency of occurrence. The 1000-word approach is the usual method employed by many researchers (see Hyland, 1998, 1999; Faghih & Rahimpour, 2009).

4.   Results

The findings (Table 2) disclosed interesting quantitative similarities and differences between the two sets of data. Comparing the total number of interpersonal markers used in both groups of texts revealed that metadiscursive elements were employed far more frequently by the American writers and the difference showed to be statistically significant[2]. As for the interpersonal metadiscourse categories and subcategories, the statistical results indicated that the two groups differed only in the occurrences of commentaries and personal markers.

Table 2. Results for Interpersonal Metadiscourse Categories and Subcategories

Macro-category	Subcategory	Iranians No. of markers	Americans No. of markers	Mann-Whitney U Test Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)
Hedges		*27*	*36*	*0.200*
	Epistemic verbs	23	25	0.522
	Probability adverbs	2	8	0.153
	Epistemic expressions	2	3	0.592
Certainty markers	–	*22*	*8*	*0.108*
Commentaries		*15*	*65*	*0.037 **
	Rhetorical questions	10	3	0.171
	Inclusive expressions	3	21	0.135
	Asides	2	6	0.073
	Personalisations	0	31	0.022 *
	Direct address to reader	0	4	0.140
Attitude markers		*13*	*24*	*0.423*
	Deontic verbs	9	11	0.575
	Attitudinal adverbs	3	0	0.059
	Adjectival constructions	1	3	0.528
	Cognitive verbs	0	10	0.140
Attributors	–	*11*	*28*	*0.076*

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[2] The results were standardized to a common basis (markers per 1000 words) in order to compare the frequency of occurrence since the articles contrasted differed in length.

(Continued)

Total no. of interpersonal markers	–	88	161	0.037 *

* The difference is significant at the 0.05 level (p<.05).

As seen in Table 2, in terms of frequency of occurrence, the ranks of most of the interpersonal metadiscourse macro-categories differed from one group to another. In the texts written by the Iranian EFL columnists, hedges were the most numerous interpersonal marker (30.68%), followed by certainty markers (25%), commentaries (17%), attitude markers (14.77%), and finally attributors (12.5%). In the other group, however, commentaries were the most frequent interpersonal marker and the difference between the two groups was significant. In fact, this category comprised 40.37% of all the interpersonal metadiscourse used by the American writers. Hedges were the second most frequent marker (22.36%) for this group, followed by attributors (17.39%), attitude markers (14.9%), and certainty markers (5%).

As for the subcategories of interpersonal metadiscourse, the statistical analysis revealed both differences and similarities between the two groups. Among the three types of hedges (i.e. epistemic verbs, probability adverbs, epistemic expressions), epistemic verbs were employed the most by both groups of writers (Iranians 85%, Americans 69%). Linguistically speaking, modal epistemic verbs (e.g. *would, can, could, may*) were the most frequently used strategy to express caution in both sets of data. Regarding the subtypes of commentaries (i.e. rhetorical questions, inclusive expressions, asides, personal markers, direct address to reader), the two groups of writers appeared to have very different preferences to establish rapport with their readers. The Iranian writers preferred the use of rhetorical questions while the American group favored the use of personal markers (*I, my…*) and inclusive expressions (*we, our…*) which comprised 80% of all the commentaries used in this group. As seen in Table 2, the difference between the two sets of data was statistically significant only with regard to the occurrences of personal markers. Finally, among the four types of attitudinal markers (i.e. deontic verbs, attitudinal adverbs, adjectival constructions, and cognitive verbs), deontic verbs (*should, have to…*) were used more than others by both groups of writers.

5.   Discussion

The presence of interpersonal metadiscourse in the selected texts supported Dafouz's (2008) idea concerning the essential role of this important element in the construction of persuasion in the genre of newspaper opinion articles. Furthermore, the heavy use of interpersonal markers by the American group confirmed Ädel's (2006) study, in which she indicated L1 American writers' concern for reader-writer interaction. It is probable that in American culture, the writers opt for the use of more interpersonal metadiscourse in order to gain acceptance and solidarity, especially with a general audience.

The analysis of the data revealed that hedges occupied a high position in both sets of data. This was in line with the findings of many studies (Abdi, 2002;

Dafouz, 2003, 2008; Hyland, 1999) in which it was shown that hedges hold a predominant position among different interpersonal metadiscourse categories. It was also found that both groups of writers favored the use of epistemic verbs, specifically modal verbs. This was also consistent with other studies in which modal epistemic verbs were used as the predominant strategy for hedging. Additionally, the results of this study confirmed the key role of hedges in persuasive texts where the author "needs to strike a difficult balance between commitment to his/her ideas and respect and dialogue with the reader" (Dafouz, 2008, p. 107).

In general, hedges have shown to be an essential element of different genres such as research articles (Hyland, 1998, 1999), advertisements (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001) as well as newspaper opinion articles (Dafouz, 2003, 2008) and editorials (Abdollahzadeh, 2007). Hedging shows the degree of tentativeness, possibility and/or politeness that writers use in their texts. According to Camiciottoli (2003), hedges can function to mitigate the writer's authorial position which makes the text more reader friendly. Hedging then can be considered as an important characteristic of professional writing. The ability to hedge effectively and successfully is a rather difficult skill, especially for EFL students, and needs to be considered seriously by both teachers and students.

Certainty markers were another interpersonal marker present in the corpus. These items (also called emphatics or boosters) are regarded as an important aspect of opinion articles since they allow readers to find out about the writer's opinion and they create a sense of solidarity with readers (Dafouz, 2008). Although the results of this study revealed that the two groups did not differ statistically in the use of certainty markers, it was found that the Iranian writers used them more. In fact, this type of marker showed a low occurrence in the American English texts. The reason could be that the American columnists tried to be more considerate and polite to their audience by limiting the use of certainty markers. On the other hand, the more frequent use of this marker by the Iranian group could indicate that the Iranian writers were probably more assertive in their persuasive writing. The following examples[3] show how the Iranian and American writers emphasise their overtly stated opinions by employing these intensifying items:

(1)   TTArticle3 "The Iraq War and U.S. Soldiers' Suicides"

Undoubtedly, in history, the mass killing of the people of Iraq will eternally be the highlight of George W. Bush's legacy.

(2)   NYTArticle6 "Guantánamo's Long Shadow"

No one can seriously doubt that cruelties and indignities have been inflicted on prisoners at Guantánamo.

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[3] Examples are coded according to the two selected newspapers: TT is *Tehran Times* and NYT is *The New York Times*.

The significant use of commentaries by the American writers compared to the Iranian columnists disclosed the American writers' considerable concern for establishing rapport with their readers. Of the five various subtypes of commentaries, personal markers and inclusive expressions were employed more frequently by the American writers. This finding coincided with Mauranen's (1993) research, in which she indicated Anglo-American writers' frequent signaling of their personal presence in academic texts. It appears that both personal markers and inclusive expressions play an important role in American opinion articles since they allow writers to express their opinion in a more personal way and help the reader find out about the writer's stance. According to Crismore (1989), the use of these markers creates reader-writer solidarity which promotes comprehension.

The preponderance of personal markers and expressions of inclusion by the American writers suggested that they had a preference for adopting a personal style (as shown in examples 3 and 4) while Iranians preferred employing an impersonal rhetorical style (as in example 5) in writing this particular genre. Using the third person indefinite pronoun 'one' instead of personal markers, inclusive expressions or expressions of direct address to the reader by the Iranian writers is probably considered awkward to American writers because it has the disadvantage of creating distance and diminishing the level of interaction in the text.

(3)   NYTArticle5 "A Hanging and a Funeral"

After watching Saddam's hanging in the morning, <u>I</u> was sitting at <u>my</u> computer late in the afternoon and suddenly heard the strains of "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty" being played on the TV in the next room. When <u>I</u> checked what was going on, <u>I</u> saw President Ford's coffin being unloaded from Air Force One.

(4)   NYTArticle6 "Guantánamo's Long Shadow"

Over many years the United States has worked to persuade and compel governments around the world to abide by the rules. By spurning <u>our</u> own rules, <u>we</u> put that effort at risk.

(5)   TTArticle4 "Another Middle East Peace Conference"

In other words, the outstanding questions, such as those pertaining to Palestine's territorial integrity, the final status of East Beit-ul-Moqaddas…have been raised repeatedly, but each time no proper answer has been provided. Thus, <u>one</u> cannot have much hope about such diplomatic talks and international conferences.

The analysis showed that personal markers were the most frequent subtype of commentaries in the texts written by Americans while rhetorical questions were

used more frequently by the Iranian writers. The heavy use of personal markers in the American English texts and their absence in the other group indicated that the American writers felt more comfortable using self-mentions (personal markers) in the genre of opinion articles while the Iranian group probably saw it as inappropriate, believing that it conflicted with the formality usually practiced in newspaper discourse. In general, the difference could be attributed to Iranian and American writers' different approaches to formal writing (e.g. newspaper discourse, research articles) which could influence their degree of freedom in the use of personal markers. The Iranian writers, however, preferred the use of rhetorical questions. A possible explanation could be that they generally act very conservatively and contrary to American writers, they opt for the use of more implicit ways of establishing bonds with readers such as the use of rhetorical questions.

The findings of this research regarding the presence of attitudinal markers in the selected articles coincided with Dafouz's (2003, 2008) study, in which she pointed out that this type of marker is regarded as a persuasive tool in the eyes of the reader in the genre of opinion columns. Contrary to hedges that are considered as weakening expressions, attitudinal markers (like certainty markers) are regarded as strengthening ones (Dafouz, 2008). From a linguistic perspective, the findings suggested that both groups of writers considered deontic verbs as a key strategy to convey their affective values towards the propositional content. With regard to cognitive verbs, the analysis of the data showed that they were present in the American English texts while they were non-existent in the other group. This finding indicated that Iranian columnists probably tried to show respect for their readers by keeping their distance from them and avoiding the use of markers which require the explicit signaling of their personal presence. Nonetheless, the use of such devices as cognitive verbs in opinion articles reflects the tendency of this genre to express the writers' opinions and feelings in a much more personal way than is the case for editorials or research articles. This is probably an area where Iranian EFL writers need more training.

Finally, concerning attributors, the analysis disclosed that they were used by both groups of writers. Curiously, this finding was contrary to Dafouz's (2003) expectations, where she stated that due to the particular authorship (i.e. topic experts) and the linguistic economy of opinion articles, this type is not a metadiscourse category that characterises this genre. Our analysis, however, indicated that this marker can be considered as an important persuasive tool, even in the genre of opinion articles, since it helps writers provide support and justification for their arguments. Examples 6 and 7 show how the Iranian and American writers use references to authorities in order to support their ideas concerning different issues:

(6)   NYTArticle3 "War's Psychic Toll"

There was plenty of evidence that this would be an enormous problem. Speaking of Iraq back in 2004, <u>Dr. Stephen Joseph, who had been an</u>

assistant secretary of defense during the Clinton administration, said, "I have a very strong sense that the mental health consequences are going to be the medical story of this war."

(7)   TTArticle6 "The Pentagon's Endless Procession of Scandals"

The U.S. has been repeatedly condemned for its treatment of prisoners at home by the UN human rights watchdog and other international bodies, not to mention the situation of those held overseas. <u>British constitutional Affairs Minister Harriet Harman says,</u> "If it is perfectly legal and there is nothing going wrong there, why don't they have it in America?"

Although the statistical results revealed that the two groups of writers used attributors to the same extent, numerically, the American group employed them more. This could indicate that the Iranian writers were more assertive in their writing and, as topic experts, they relied more on their own opinions in persuading the readers. However, this interpretation could only be tentative since it is based on numerical differences. In general, studying this marker reveals that the kinds of evidence people consider as persuasive may vary from one culture to another.

6.   Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to examine the persuasive role of interpersonal markers in the opinion articles written by a group of American and Iranian EFL journalists. It also aimed to investigate the similarities and differences between the two sets of articles regarding the use of interpersonal metadiscourse categories and subcategories. The results revealed that interpersonal markers were present in both groups of texts. This finding substantiated the view that metadiscourse, particularly interpersonal, is an essential feature of professional rhetorical writing.

Concerning similarities, the results suggested that the presence of certain types of metadiscourse categories like hedges, certainty markers, and attitude markers in the articles could be genre-driven. In other words, the similarities between the two groups could be attributed to the newspaper-genre characteristics of opinion articles. Both American and Iranian columnists seemed to be familiar with the rhetorical norms and preferences of their genre.

Moreover, the quantitative analysis of data disclosed both statistical similarities (in the case of hedges, certainty markers, attitude markers, and attributors) and differences (in the case of interpersonal metadiscourse, its category 'commentaries', and subcategory 'personal markers') between the texts written by American and Iranian EFL columnists. These similarities and differences could be attributed to the two groups' cultural and linguistic preferences and the Iranian writers' degree of foreign language experiences. Clearly, more cross-cultural studies are required before any firm conclusions can

be drawn about the differences and their interpretation in terms of metadiscourse markers.

According to Hyland (2004), the writers' cultural and rhetorical preferences can affect the use of metadiscourse markers and the style of discourse organisation. It can be concluded that, in order to produce successful texts in a foreign language, L2 writers must also become familiar with the cultural conventions of metadiscourse use in the target language. The study also indicates the need for further studies in order to better understand the complexity of metadiscourse use in writing.

The findings of this study might be beneficial to pedagogical grounds, especially L2 writing courses. Metadiscourse is part of the pragmatics of language, but proficiency in this area is very difficult to gain in a foreign language (Crismore et al., 1993). According to Mauranen (1993), cultural differences in metadiscourse use may result in unintentionally inefficient writing on the part of L2 writers. The results of such studies as the present one then may be used by teachers in order to inform EFL/ESL students of the differences that occur in the conventions of metadiscourse use between native and non-native writers. This knowledge can help foreign/second language writers produce texts that are more effective or reader-based.

Focusing on the social role, function, and purpose of metadiscourse is, therefore, an important way of helping students say what they want to in their texts. Teachers must learn more about metadiscourse use in different discourse communities (Elbow, 1991) and cultures (Mauranen, 1993) and must teach students how to identify metadiscourse and then use it for different readers and genres. This study stresses the need for including metadiscourse markers, specifically interpersonal ones, in EFL/ESL courses since they are an indispensable feature of various types of texts such as newspaper discourse, research articles, textbooks, and student writing.

The findings of the study might have been influenced by a number of limitations. One problem was the multifunctionality of many metadiscourse categories and the fact that they can serve several functions simultaneously in a given context. The small-scale nature of the research, i.e. the limited number of selected articles, was another limitation of the study. Future studies can be carried out expanding the corpus size to see if the same results are obtained. Other contrastive studies may be conducted to compare English and Persian newspaper articles. Concerned researchers may also choose to analyse other types of discourse including advertisements, business letters, or PhD dissertations.

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Appendix A. Selected Newspapers

Tehran Times is Iran's first English-language daily newspaper based in Tehran. It was founded after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. This newspaper covers domestic, political, social, foreign, and sports news as well as commentary. *Tehran Times* has turned into a reliable source of news for hundreds of foreign media outlets and envoys from various countries based in Tehran who want to learn about the country's current events. Its site (www.tehrantimes.com) is among the most frequently visited websites with over 10,000 visitors each day.

New York Times is an American daily newspaper founded in 1851 and published in New York City. It is regarded as a national newspaper of record. It is third in national circulation, after *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. It is organised into three different sections; namely, News, Opinion, and Features. The News includes themes on International, National, Business, Technology, Science, Health, etc. Opinion contains Editorials, Opinion Articles, and Letters to the Editor. The third section, Features, consists of such parts as Arts, Movies, Theater, and Travel. Its website (www.nytimes.com) is one of the most popular American online newspaper websites.

Appendix B. List of Selected Opinion Articles

Tehran Times Articles:

1. From Mirage to Mirage; 25 June 2008
2. Mind Control in Ritalin Nation; 7 May 2008
3. The Iraq War and U.S. Soldiers' Suicides; 27 April 2008
4. Another Middle East "Peace" Conference; 27 November 2007
5. Saddam Execution Scenario; 10 January 2007
6. The Pentagon's Endless Procession of Scandals; 13 June 2006

New York Times Articles:

1. What if Israel and Syria Find Common Ground?; 24 January 2007
2. Reading, Writing and Ritalin; 21 October 1995
3. War's Psychic Toll; 18 May 2009
4. Israel, Palestine, Crab Cakes; 19 November 2007
5. A Hanging and a Funeral; 3 January 2007
6. Guantánamo's Long Shadow; 21 June 2005

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