

ما وراء الخطاب في الكتابة الأكاديمية لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية الأردنيين في
جامعة العلوم الإسلامية العالمية
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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص مدى استخدام خصائص ما وراء الخطاب في المقالات القائمة على الرأي المكتوبة باللغة الإنجليزية من قبل طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية الأردنيين في جامعة العلوم الإسلامية العالمية. على وجه التحديد، إنّ الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو الكشف عن تكرار ووظيفة علامات ما وراء الخطاب المستخدمة في المقالات القائمة على الرأي التي كتبها هؤلاء الطلاب. لتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم الحصول على 30 مقالة أكاديمية من طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مقرر كتابة 2. استنادًا إلى نموذج (Hyland 2005)، تم تحليل البيانات كمياً لحساب تكرار علامات ما وراء الخطاب ونوعاً لمعرفة وظيفة هذه العلامات في مقالات الطلاب. تشير النتائج إلى أن علامات ما وراء الخطاب الاتجاهية هي السائدة في كتابات الطلاب بينما تظهر العلامات الاخبارية بصورة أقل. تشير النتائج أيضاً إلى أن علامات ما وراء الخطاب تخدم عدة وظائف في مقالات الطلاب. تؤكد هذه الدراسة على أهمية خصائص ما وراء الخطاب لإنشاء مقالات أكاديمية فعالة ومقنعة ومتراصة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العلامات الاتجاهية، العلامات الإخبارية، الكتابة الأكاديمية، اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ما وراء الخطاب.

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Metadiscourse in Academic Writing by Jordanian English as a Foreign Language Students at the World Islamic Sciences & Education University

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine metadiscourse features in opinion-based essays written in English by Jordanian English as a Foreign Language students (EFL) at the World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE). Specifically, the objective of this study is to investigate the frequency and function of metadiscourse features employed in the opinion-based essays composed by these students. To achieve this objective, 30 essays were obtained from EFL students in the course Writing II. Based on Hyland's model (2005), data were analyzed quantitatively to count the frequency of metadiscourse markers and qualitatively to find out the function of these markers within students' essays. The findings show that interactional metadiscourse markers are predominant in students' writings while the interactive ones show a low frequency of occurrence. The findings also reveal that metadiscourse markers serve different functions within students' essays. This study stresses the importance of metadiscourse features to create effective, persuasive, and coherent academic essays.

Keywords: Academic writing, EFL (English as a foreign language), Interactional features, Interactive features, Metadiscourse.

1.Introduction:

Academic writing is one of the most challenging features of foreign language learning. Writing well is a complex task for both native and non-native students (Muslim, 2014). Using English to write among Arab students and Jordanian in particular is challenging (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). Thus, academic writing skills constitute a crucial stage to be acquired by students in higher institutions (Zakaria & Hashim, 2020). One stage that reflects understanding ability of the students to those skills is when they write essays for their assignments. Composing a well-organized essay is an essential part of students' academic path at the university. Basically, writing a well-organized essay poses difficulties for students because they are required to have a good level of language competence as well as to be acquainted with the linguistic devices employed to create an acceptable persuasive essay. Furthermore, the competence to create academic essays proficiently at institutions of higher education is "a practical anticipation to be grasped by the tertiary learners." (Giridharan, 2012: 9). It has been argued that students lack the experience of essay writing, either in their native or second / foreign language (Kobayashi, 2016; Li & Wharton, 2012). In order to create a clear and persuasive academic essay, students need to deploy adequate metadiscourse features within their writing. The incompetence of students to employ metadiscourse appropriately at university "might be a consequence of an insufficient input of metadiscourse knowledge during their secondary education" (Ho & Li, 2018: 65).

Metadiscourse is defined as "the linguistic resources used to organize a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader" (Hyland, 2000: 109). Metadiscourse has also been described as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a

particular community" (Hyland, 2005: 37). Metadiscourse plays an essential role in writing since it clearly organizes the texts, involves the readers, and indicates the writer's stance towards the content or the readers. According to Hyland and Tse (2004:54), metadiscourse features are necessary markers employed to describe "how the text is organized, to clarify difficult words and jargons for readers, and to put into code what rhetorical acts are being performed."

Using metadiscourse in academic writing appropriately helps students produce an organized and coherent text. It also indicates the writer's attitude towards the text or the readers through:

- Expressing attitude to proposition, e.g. *hopefully, I agree, I believe*, etc.
- Indicating relations between main clauses, e.g. *in addition, but, and*, etc.
- Elaborating meaning, e.g. *namely, in other words, for example*, etc.
- Emphasizing certainty, e.g. *definitely, in fact, it is clear*, etc.

The significance of the appropriate employment of metadiscourse for successful academic writing has been commonly emphasized in the literature (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004). Metadiscourse theorists (Crismore, 1993; Hyland, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1985, 1997) have proposed several metadiscourse taxonomies. Hyland (2005) proposed a widely known interpersonal model to identify metadiscourse markers in academic writing (Table 1).

Table 1 An Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland 2005: 49)		
Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the text	Resources
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	in addition, and, but, thus
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or stages of parts of the text	first, next, finally, to conclude

Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	as noted above, see Fig, in section ...
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	according to X, Z states
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	namely, for example, such as, in other words
Interactional	Involve readers in the text	Resources
Hedges	withhold certainty and open dialogue	might, perhaps, possible, about
Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	in fact, definitely, obviously, it is clear that, demonstrate
Attitude markers	express the writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately, hopefully, surprisingly, I agree
Self-mentions	explicit reference to the author(s) in the text	I, we, my, me, our
Engagement markers	explicitly build a relationship with the reader	you, your, consider, note, you can see that

Based on the table above, Hyland's model is composed of two main categories of metadiscourse: interactive and interactional. The interactive category consists of transitions (e.g. *thus, and, but*), frame markers (e.g. *first, to conclude*), endophoric markers (e.g. *see Fig, in section*), evidentials (e.g. *according to X, Z states*), and code glosses (e.g. *For example, that is*). The main function of this category is to provide an organized and coherent text that helps guide the reader through the text in a way to meet the needs of the reader based on the writer's expectations. The interactional category includes hedges (e.g. *possible, likely*), boosters (e.g. *certainly, know*), attitude markers (e.g. *I hope/agree*), self-mentions (e.g. *I, we, my*), and engagement markers (e.g. *consider, note*). It specifically aims at providing a vivid text where the

reader can easily find the writer's voice. It also aims at engaging readers in the argument.

1.2.Statement of the Study Problem:

Effective employment of metadiscourse markers is an important means for improving the quality of persuasive essays composed within academic circles. Particularly, the deployment of metadiscourse features was suggested to enhance the writing quality (Letsoela, 2014), boost the readability (Han, 2014), and create an engagement with the readers (Hyland, 2005, Zarrati, 2014). These resources are very essential in creating a good quality persuasive essay (Wong, 2014). In fact, several studies have shown that students have limited knowledge of metadiscourse resources while they frequently employ specific metadiscourse resources, which indicates a common rhetorical style (Al-Khasawneh, 2010, Al-Zubaidi 2012). In recent years, there has been an increasing number of studies within the Arab community, which have shown that the challenges of academic writing are a crucial issue that should be examined in-depth by the researchers (Abdulkareem, 2013, Al-Zubaidi, 2012, Imani & Habil, 2012). These studies have revealed the importance of metadiscourse to improve the academic writing among students in different contexts. However, there is a lack of studies on the employment of metadiscourse markers amongst Jordanian English as a Foreign Language students (EFL). Most importantly, the researcher observed the inability of Jordanian EFL students at WISE University to use metadiscourse adequately. This could be attributed to the fact that they lack the knowledge about the appropriate use of metadiscourse resources, as they have not explicitly instructed on how to use these resources. Therefore, this study aims to determine the employment of metadiscourse markers in the academic essays composed by these students.

1.3. Objectives of the Study:

The current study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To determine the most and least frequent metadiscourse makers employed in opinion-based essays written in English by Jordanian EFL students at the World Islamic Sciences & Education University.
- To identify the functions of metadiscourse markers used by Jordanian EFL students in opinion-based essays.

1.4. Significance of the Study:

Metadiscourse markers are essential to Arab EFL students, which include Jordanian students, as inappropriate employment of metadiscourse in their opinion-based essays will affect the quality of their writings. Therefore, mastering the use of metadiscourse markers will help the language instructors to increase students' language awareness and enhance their writing skills. More particularly, this study may be of some interest to the writing course designers to include the concept of metadiscourse in writing courses. In addition, the findings of this study may have essential implications for teaching English writing courses because metadiscourse is scarcely introduced explicitly in foreign language academic writing (Hyland, 2005).

2. Review of the Literature

A number of studies have investigated the different types of metadiscourse markers used by students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in their academic writing (Lee, 2014; Li, 2012; Liu, 2007; Pooresfahani, 2012). Fewer studies have explored the employment of metadiscourse resources in the academic writing area of Arab EFL students (AlKhathlan, 2019; Al-Quraishy, 2011; Anwardeen et al., 2013).

Al-Quraishy (2011) examines the use of a specific metadiscourse marker, namely, hedges in academic writing of Iraqi students of English as a foreign language. The findings of his study reveal that students use hedging devices frequently in their writing. Students use hedging devices to present their claims accurately to meet

their discourse community's expectations. The study concludes that Iraqi EFL students have difficulty in interpreting and employing hedging devices accurately. The researcher attributes the causes to the lack of instructions given by teachers, which play a significant role in increasing the Iraqi EFL students' use of these markers in their writing.

In terms of the deployment of metadiscourse markers in argumentative essays, Anwardeen et al. (2013) examine the employment of metadiscourse features in the academic writing of Malaysian students of English as a second language. They explore the distribution of metadiscourse markers, and whether or not Malaysian students have the ability to employ metadiscourse features appropriately. The study reveals that these students employ textual discourse markers more frequently than the interpersonal discourse ones. The study also shows that Malaysian college students committed quite a number of errors in employing metadiscourse and practices are required to train them in using metadiscourse appropriately.

Jahangar et al. (2015) compare three argumentative essays composed by three different university students: native speakers, Iranian EFL learners and native Persian. The study finds that there are significant varieties in the way that Iranian students and native English speakers follow in terms of the employment of metadiscourse features.

In a contrastive study of Arabic and English, Al-Humidi (2016) examines college students' use of metadiscoursal markers in both languages. Based on a corpus of college students' essays, a total of 500 words for each student, which represents a running word total of 12,300 words for English texts and 12,100 words for Arabic texts, the study investigates the similarities and differences between Arabic and English in terms of the metadiscourse markers. The findings indicate that there is a higher frequency of interactive resources than interactional resources in both the

English and Arabic corpora. The findings also show that more metadiscourse markers are frequently used in the Arabic corpus than in the English texts. The study also reports that some metadiscourse markers occur in the English corpus but do not occur in the Arabic texts. Al-Humidi (2016) attributes this variation to the cultural differences between the two languages. However, the researcher does not provide a functional analysis of metadiscourse markers in Arabic or English; it only presents the frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in Arabic and English without supporting the quantitative analysis with examples from the corpus of the study.

Zakaria & Malik (2018) conduct a study to investigate the use of metadiscourse by Arab pre-university students in opinion-based essays. Their study reveals that the students use more interactive metadiscourse markers than interactional ones. The study also shows that the most frequently used type of metadiscourse markers is transitions and the least employed type of metadiscourse markers is endophoric markers. The researchers attribute the frequent use of interactive markers to cultural differences reflected in the students' writing conventions and styles.

A similar conclusion is reached by AlKhathlan (2019) who follows Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse to investigate the type and frequency of metadiscourse markers employed by Saudi EFL college students. The study reveals that there are significant differences between the use of interactive and interactional markers. The study also shows that transitions are frequently used by Saudi EFL students, followed by hedges. The least employed metadiscourse markers are endophoric markers and attitude markers. AlKhathlan concludes that Saudi students tend to show more concern about the organization of the text than engaging with readers.

Contrary to what have been reported in previous research on EFL writers, the study conducted by Heng & Tan (2010) reveals that the corpus of argumentative

essays composed by Malaysian undergraduate students shows more interactional metadiscourse markers rather than interactive metadiscourse markers. Similar to Heng & Tan's (2010) findings mentioned above, Mahmood et al. (2017) find that Pakistani undergraduate students have more tendency to employ interactional metadiscourse markers instead of interactive ones in their argumentative essays. Nevertheless, in both studies, 'transitions' which is one of the subcategories of interactive metadiscourse, is the most frequently used type of metadiscourse by EFL learners.

In a more recent study, Binmahboob (2022) investigates the employment of metadiscourse markers by Saudi and British authors in Applied Linguistics discipline. Specifically, the aim of this study is to determine the most and least frequent metadiscourse makers. Based on the framework outlined by Hyland (2005), the study finds out the distribution of metadiscourse markers. The findings reveal that interactive metadiscourse markers are used more frequently than the interactional metadiscourse markers. Saudi authors are found to employ metadiscourse markers more than the British authors. The study concludes that Saudi authors employ all metadiscourse sub-categories more commonly than the British authors except frame markers, evidentials, endophoric markers, and self-mentions. In addition, the study reports that transitions are the most frequent metadiscourse markers in the whole corpora, followed by hedges, evidentials, boosters, and attitude markers, respectively. On the other hand, engagement markers are the least metadiscourse markers frequently used in the whole corpora. Generally, the study concludes that Saudi authors overuse metadiscourse markers. This indicates that Saudi authors usually dedicate much attention to the formal dimensions of the text rather to the content.

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that it is essential for Arab EFL students to employ different tools of metadiscourse in their academic writing to organize their texts and to produce an effective piece of writing. All the abovementioned studies confirm the importance of using metadiscourse features in academic writing. Yet, they may vary in the type and frequency of metadiscourse markers they employ. Moreover, most studies reveal that the interactive categories are more frequently employed than the interactional categories. These studies reveal different quantitative findings. These different findings could be due to the different factors such as the model followed, the methodology involved (software tagging vs. manual tagging), or genre differences or disciplines.

Many studies have been conducted in different context on the employment of metadiscourse features such as Malaysia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. However, the metadiscourse use in the opinion-based essays written by Jordanian EFL students is under-researched. Therefore, the current study attempts to examine how these markers are used in Jordanian context. Moreover, although a considerable number of studies have been conducted on metadiscourse in EFL context, a great deal of the literature tends to put the major focus on the types and frequency of metadiscourse markers, disregarding the functional analysis of these markers within students' academic writing. Thus, contrary to previous studies, this research focuses on examining how students perceive their opinions, points of views and engage with their readers through the employment of metadiscourse markers in their essays. The principal aim of this study is to investigate the frequency and functions of the two types of metadiscourse namely interactive and interactional metadiscourse employed in opinion-based essays written by Jordanian EFL students at the World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE).

3. Methodology:

3.1 Participants:

The data used in this study includes 30 opinion-based essays written by 30 Jordanian EFL students, both female and male, aged between twenty to twenty-three, who were registered in Writing II course at the bachelor level at WISE University. This course is mandatory for all students who study English language at this university. They had enrolled in this course i.e. Writing II; after they had all passed the prerequisite course, i.e. Writing I. Students' consents were obtained to analyze the essays for research purposes.

3.2 Data Collection:

As stated earlier, the aim of this study is to determine the frequency and functions of metadiscourse markers employed by Jordanian EFL students. To achieve this aim, students were asked to write an opinion-based essay based on the following topic: "Many students now have the opportunity to study in other countries. Studying abroad may bring some benefits to some students, but it also has a significant number of disadvantages. Discuss both sides of the argument and give your own opinion". The opinion-based essay was selected because this kind of essays is opinion centered where the employment of metadiscourse is anticipated to be predominant (Silver, 2003). Compared to other types of essays, opinion-based essays rely very much on metadiscourse to direct the reader through the text and reflect his or her stance. The required length of each essay ranged from 200 to 250 words. Some students wrote more than the limit whereas some just reach the limit. Thus, the total number of words for the present study of opinion-based essays consists of about 6000 words.

3.3 Data Analysis:

As mentioned earlier, the study follows the taxonomy of metadiscourse proposed by Hyland (2005) to analyse the data (see Table 1). To start with, metadiscourse markers are identified manually. Manual analysis helps identify metadiscourse markers accurately since metadiscourse is context-dependent (Ädel, 2006). Upon identifying the metadiscourse markers, they are categorized into either interactive or interactional based on Hyland's model (2005). After identifying and classifying the metadiscourse markers, a quantitative analysis is conducted. The focus of this quantitative analysis is to determine the most and least frequently used markers by EFL students. After determining the frequency of each type of metadiscourse markers, a more detailed analysis is presented to find out their functions within students' writing and possible explanations of the rhetorical intentions behind the use of these markers are provided. To make counting easier, all the metadiscourse markers are highlighted in the texts in the coded colours.

To achieve a higher reliability, the analysis of 15 randomly selected essays are examined and compared by the researcher and a second rater who is a Professor specialist in applied linguistics, yielding high inter-rater reliability rates (98%). For validity, it is achieved by asking a number of experts about their opinion on the suitability of the model to the research objectives. The model is considered valid since it was employed in plenty similar research and adopted from the original study of Hyland (2005).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 displays the type, frequency as well as the percentage of the two main categories and sub-categories of metadiscourse employed in opinion-based essays composed by Jordanian EFL students at WISE University. Since the size of the essays is certainly unequal, the frequency of metadiscourse markers is determined per 1000

words with the purpose of making the length of the essays consistent and achieving a precise comparison between the metadiscourse markers.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Metadiscourse Markers in Jordanian Opinion-Based Essays				
		Frequency	Percentage of total	Per 1000 word
Interactive markers	Transitions	230	19.10	38.3
	Frame Markers	97	8	16.16
	Endophoric	36	2.99	3.16
	Evidentials	19	1.57	6
	Code glosses	37	3.07	6.16
Sub-total		419	35	69.78
Interactional markers	Boosters	350	29	58.3
	Hedges	300	24.9	50
	Attitude markers	80	6.6	13.13
	Self-mentions	55	4.5	9.16
	Engagement markers	0	0	0
Sub-total		785	65	130.59
Total		1204	100	200.37

Table 2 shows that Jordanian EFL students do use all subcategories of metadiscourse- except for one of interactional metadiscourse, namely engagement markers- while writing their opinion-based essays to organize their texts, to show their attitude, and to engage readers in their arguments. The statistical analysis indicates the significant role of metadiscourse in students' essays with 1204 occurrences in the corpus of 6000 words. Overall, the number of interactional markers accounts for about 65% of the overall number of metadiscourse markers employed in the essays, which is two times more than the interactive markers. Examining the subcategories of both types of metadiscourse in detail, it is clear that there are specific lexical choices in each subcategory. For instance, boosters are the most frequently used markers in students' writing, which make up about 29% of the overall metadiscourse markers. Following boosters are hedges, and transition

markers. Endophoric, evidentials, and code glosses markers are the least employed and represent only about 7.6% of the overall metadiscourse markers.

An overview of the data reveals that Jordanian EFL students use a more recurrent employment of interactional resources (65%) as compared to interactive resources (35%). This finding is in line with other metadiscourse related studies such as Anwerdeen *et al.* (2013), Heng & Tan (2010), and Mahmood *et al.* (2017). The findings of these studies reveal that interactional metadiscourse markers are more frequent than interactive ones. Frequent deployment of interactional markers, which reveal the writers' stance towards the content is understandable in the current study due to the opinion-based nature of the essays. Similarly, the high frequency of boosters (29%) and hedges (24.9%) suggests that EFL students resort to emphasize their opinions and to open a dialogue with their readers concurrently. Regarding the employment of interactive markers, students frequently use transition markers, which are important devices to organize the text. The most notable finding is the absence of engagement markers. This suggests that Jordanian EFL students tend to avoid direct engagement with the reader as this "may indicate a conversational and an informal tone" (Alotaib, 2015: 8).

4.1 Interactive metadiscourse

Table 2 presents the frequency of the different subcategories of interactive metadiscourse features employed by Jordanian EFL students in their opinion-based essays. The total number of instances is 419. According to Table 2, transitions, which express relations between elements of the discussion, are the most commonly used interactive markers (19.10%). Likewise, frame markers, which help readers identify different stages in a discussion, have also been shown to be important elements employed in students' essays with 97 instances (8%). Endophoric (2.99%) and code glosses (3.07%) are very uncommon in the essays, while the type of evidentials, which refers to information from other texts, is the least frequently used marker

among all categories. This may indicate that Jordanian EFL students lack sufficient knowledge to refer to other sources in their writings.

Examples of *interactive* metadiscourse subcategories employed by Jordanian EFL students are illustrated in (1) – (5).

(1) Transitions “...some students prefer to pursue their study overseas, **but** they face different challenges **and** obstacles which make them reluctant to do so....”

(2) Frame markers “**Secondly**, studying abroad helps students to be self-dependent, and shapes their personalities to succeed in their future career.”

(3) Evidentials “For instance, in a **study conducted by** Harvard University, researchers found that high cost is considered an important reason that makes students hesitant to study abroad.”

(4) Code glosses “To conclude, this trend faces many difficulties, **namely**, high costs and homesickness.”

(5) Endophoric markers “**As noted above**, learning a new language and being independent are the most important advantages of studying abroad....”

As mentioned earlier, of the subcategories most frequently used, transitions are most frequently used by Jordanian EFL students. This could be explained as an attempt to guide the readers in the intended direction and thus, achieve the expected persuasive aim of students’ essays. As Hyland (2004:140) notes, transitions are devices that “represent writers’ attempts to ensure readers are able to correctly recover their intentions.” The same results are found in the studies of Al-Humidi, 2016; Alkhathlan, 2019; Binmahboob, 2022; Zakaria and Malik, 2018) who found that transitions are the most frequently used type of interactive metadiscourse markers. Frame markers are the second category most frequently used. A detailed analysis of the data reveals that these markers are used to label the stages of the text or signal a shift in the topic. Regarding endophoric, the findings of the study indicate

that they are very uncommon in the essays. This finding is not totally unexpected since these markers are used to refer to the other parts of the text. Therefore, it is natural not to find many such markers in opinion essays considering their limitation in terms of length. This finding is in line with other studies in the literature (Alkhathlan, 2019; Binmahboob, 2022; Zakaria and Malik, 2018) which reveal that EFL writers uncommonly use this type of markers. These studies also reveal that Arab students did not have sufficient information to make a mention of facts in other sections of the writing.

Another uncommon sub-category in the current study is the evidential markers. The analysis indicates that Jordanian EFL students fail to strengthen their arguments by comparing other people's ideas with their own or by supporting their arguments by presenting similar ideas from more texts. This corresponds with Farahani's (2019) study, which reports that students employ fewer evidential markers in their academic writing. Farahani claims that students "were convinced with their propositions and did not much have to cite others to justify their argumentation" (2019: 68). Code glosses are the least frequently used markers by Jordanian EFL students. This is attributed to the content of opinion-based essays, which can be exposed with less complexity, and to a larger audience. This finding coincides with Ashgar's (2015) study, which reveals that code glosses are hardly used in student's academic writing. This finding is also in agreement with Zakaria & Malik's (2018) study which reports that students habitually suppose that their intentional readers already "acquired sufficient contextual knowledge to comprehend and appreciate whatever messages they were conveying in the texts" (2018:4).

Generally, the role of interactive metadiscourse markers is to make the text more readable and explicitly lead the reader through the text. In the current study, it is clear that all interactive metadiscourse categories apart from transitions are used to a very low extent. Specifically, the infrequent deployment of this category by Jordanian

EFL students may indicate that they do not recognize their importance in organizing the text and the effect they can create in readers.

The following section shows the results on the deployment of *interactional* metadiscourse markers in the present study.

4.2. Interactional metadiscourse:

Table 2 presents the frequency of the different sub-categories of the *interactional* metadiscourse employed by EFL students in their opinion-based essays. The overall number of instances of these markers in the academic essays produced is 785. It also shows that the frequently employed interactional markers are boosters (29%), hedges (24.9%), attitude markers (6.6%), and self-mentions (4.5%).

A close examination of the data reveals that Jordanian EFL students have shown a greater preference to employ hedges and boosters. In the data of the study, boosters exceeded hedges only by a marginal difference of 4%. This marginal difference shows the need for persuading readers of the argument through a skillful employment of hedges and boosters. In this utilization, a balance between conviction and caution is required in view of building up “an appropriate disciplinary persona of modesty and assertiveness” (Hyland, 2000: 180). Likewise, students use attitude markers in their writing to create an emotional relationship with readers and show their attitude towards the content in the form of opinion and feeling. The essays also show a 4.5% frequency of self-mentions, which indicates that the students are aware of the significance of their presence in their persuasive essays which involve a personal point of view. The most remarkable result is the absence of engagement markers, which are lexical devices employed by text producers to directly engage the readers and involve them in the claims. Their absence may be attributed to the fact that they may indicate a conversational and an informal tone as they entail an explicit engagement with the readers.

Examples of *interactional* metadiscourse subcategories employed by Jordanian EFL students are illustrated in (1) – (4).

(1) Boosters *“Studying abroad is **definitely** a perfect tool to face problems and acquire new experiences...”*

(2) Hedges *“This experience has many drawbacks, such as high costs which **could** be much more than students’ budgets, and homesickness which **might** lead to **possible** mental problems.”*

(3) Attitude markers *“However, **unfortunately** the number of students who aspire to study abroad is increasing. They prefer studying abroad rather than studying in their own country.”*

(4) Self-mentions *“To sum up, **we** can conclude that this trend has many disadvantages, such as high costs and homesickness.”*

As indicated earlier, boosters dominate among all the metadiscourse markers identified in students’ essays. These quantitative results are in line with other studies in the literature where boosters are found to be predominating in Arab EFL context (Al-Humidi, 2016; El-Seidi, 2000). The qualitative analysis of the data reveals that students use boosters as a technique of persuasion as well as to convince readers and persuade them about their points of view. Regarding hedges, findings show that they are the second most common metadiscourse subcategory. This result is in agreement with previous studies (Alkhathlan 2019; Al-Quraishy, 2011; Binmahboob, 2022) that show that Arab EFL students frequently use hedges. This may stem from the fact that they stress “the subjectivity of a position by allowing information to be presented as an opinion rather than a fact.” (Hyland, 2005: 52). In the data of the study, hedges are used by Jordanian EFL students to distinguish facts from opinions to present facts cautiously, and to present claims in a way that leaves room for alternative interpretations.

Attitude markers are used by Jordanian EFL students to convey either positive or negative evaluation. The frequent employment of these markers might be explained by the fact that writing opinion-based essays requires students to explicitly express their attitudes towards the texts. The tendency to frequently employ attitude markers in academic writing by non-native English writers is also reported in previous studies (Alzubeiry, 2019; Mirapour & Mahand, 2010). Self-mentions are used by Jordanian EFL to show their strong presence in the text. The most frequent self-mention employed in the essays is the inclusive pronoun 'we'. This finding is in line with Al-Rubaye's (2015) study on the use of metadiscourse markers in the academic writing of Iraqi EFL students. His study reveals that Iraqi EFL students' usage of the plural personal pronoun *we* is frequently common. Finally, the least frequent interactional metadiscourse markers are engagement markers. This corresponds with Farahani's (2019) study, which reveals that engagement markers are the least used resources within students' writing. Basically, engagement markers are employed to explicitly attract the attention of the reader towards a proposition. However, the analysis shows that students did not employ any engagement markers, which indicates that students lack the experience of directly addressing the readers in the argument.

The fact that interactional metadiscourse markers are employed more frequently than interactive resources can be explained by taking the genre of the texts studied in this study into consideration. Opinion-based essays are written to persuade the reader of the stance taken by the writer toward the issue. To achieve this aim, students try to build a relationship with the reader through interactional devices in the text. Interactional metadiscourse tends to be frequently used in a more conversational, informal, and personal style of writing.

Overall, it can be concluded that interactional metadiscourse markers play a significant role in convincing readers and creating arguments that are more persuasive. Interactional metadiscourse markers help to convey propositional argument in an explicit, persuasive and interesting way in the endeavour to obtain acceptance and comprehension.

5. Conclusion:

The principal objective of this study is to investigate the employment of the two types of metadiscourse; interactive and interactional metadiscourse proposed by Hyland (2005) employed in opinion-based essays written by Jordanian EFL students at the World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE). The analysis reveals that EFL students have shown a greater tendency for the employment of interactional markers than the interactive ones. This implies that the students focus more on engaging the reader in the text rather than on organizing the text. Perhaps this is because they did not receive explicit instruction on how to employ interactive metadiscourse and its significance. The high frequency of interactional markers is rationalized since the writing task under examination in this study is opinion-based essays, which require students to indicate their opinion towards a topic. In this type of essay, there are obviously more linguistic markers to involve the reader to create a personal engagement. This is achieved through the skillful manipulation of hedges, boosters, and attitude markers, while the use of transition markers directs the reader and helps produce a well-organized text.

Although the EFL students at WISE University were not previously taught the concept of metadiscourse in the Writing II course, the findings of this study undoubtedly indicate that they are capable to employ almost all categories and subcategories of metadiscourse. Their primary focus is on engaging the readers in their argument. However, some markers are inadequately used, or sometimes they are used to a very small extent. Moreover, certain metadiscourse markers are used

too often in successive sentences. Based on these findings, this study suggests that EFL students need instructions in the appropriate employment of metadiscourse features. They should learn “appropriate ways to convey attitude, mark structure, and engage with readers” (Hyland, 2004: 148).

The findings of this study suggest that metadiscourse can be considered an important area to be taught to EFL students since it helps writers and readers establish interpersonal relations. It also helps readers understand discourse relations. Furthermore, the findings of this study help EFL students to write persuasive opinion-based essays and convince readers effectively. The findings of this study offer further understanding for the employment of metadiscourse in the area of academic writing. More particularly, this study extends our knowledge of the employment of metadiscourse among Arab EFL students. This finding is essential, as it will be a source that students and English language educators can refer to and learn about the types of metadiscourse markers to be employed more frequently in their writing so that it will improve their quality of academic writing.

This study has a number of limitations. The scope of the study is limited only to the employment of metadiscourse markers in academic writing, specifically, opinion-based essays. Future studies can examine other types of essays (e.g. cause and effect essays) in a way to find out the extent to which the present findings hold true for other types of essays. Another limitation is that this study investigates a small corpus of opinion-based essays; therefore, larger scale-based research is needed to verify whether the findings of the current study can be generalized. In addition, it is recommended that future research compares the use of metadiscourse by Jordanian EFL students and their English language proficiency levels to examine whether overuses or underuses of a certain metadiscourse category are related to language proficiency levels.

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