Interpersonal Metadiscourse in Compositions Written by Iranian ESP Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate two types of Hyland's interpersonal metadiscourse (MD) used in compositions written by male and female students. Twelve students including 5 males and 7 females aged between 26 -33 who have been studying chemistry engineering in Islamic Azad University, Shahreza Branch were selected. Without any instruction, they were given a topic to write an eighty-word composition in ten minutes. Compositions were collected and were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Data was analyzed quantitatively in the result section and discussed qualitatively in discussion and conclusion sections. Findings showed that students employed all types of metadiscourse except for two subcategories of interactive MD namely endophoric markers and evidentials. Self mentions were the most frequently used, and hedges and boosters were the least in both males and females. Differences between genders in using MD with different degrees of occurrence are present in the overall interpersonal metadiscourse.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, ESP (English for Special Purposes), composition writing

Introduction

Considering the fact that for this contemporary world which is highly competitive, a fast and appropriate presentation of scientific achievements to other members of the academic community is crucial for the distribution of scientific knowledge and for the receiving of an economic support for more research. The key academic genre commonly used as the means of distribution this scientific knowledge is [writing] the research articles (Jezo, 2010).According to Hyland (2002) genre can be analyzed from different perspectives: (1) a systematic functional perspective, (2) a new rhetorical view and (3) an ESP viewpoint. Under English for Specific Purposes (ESP) viewpoint, a genre comprises communicative events that are determined by particular purposes, which help to shape the structure, content and style to be used by the members of a particular discourse community. In this view, the purpose of a text is the rationale of the genre. Brown (2001) defines ESP (English for special purpose) as programs are specifically devoted to professional fields of study. A course in English for agriculture or in business writing would fall under the general rubric of ESP. Usually ESP courses are differentiated from Vocational/ Technical English in that ESP refers to disciplines in which people can get university majors and degrees, while Voc/Tech refers to trades and other baccalaureate certificate programs (p. 123).

Metadiscourse or MD indicates that there is an author's linguistic and rhetorical manifestation in the text. Writers use social and functional aspects of the language in their discourse reflecting

their attitudes and projecting themselves to their possible readers, their audience, thus creating a text where writer and reader interact (Hyland &Tse, 2004).Hyland (2005) states that "the term metadiscourse was coined by Zellig Harris in 1959 to offer a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's or speaker's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text" (p.3). Hyland (2005) establishes five broad sub-categories of interactive metadiscourse: transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses, as well as five types of interactional metadiscourse resources: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention and engagement markers. As one of the universal properties of human language is creativity (Fromkin et al, 2007), it is to be expected that writers have a wide mental list of lexicons to express their thoughts. In other words, each category of MD can be realized linguistically through a variety of forms. It is also this very characteristic of human language that the analysis of any MD features needs to be done in context as any linguistic realization can be interpreted as having either propositional or metadiscoursal meaning.

The aim of this paper is to determine two types of interpersonal metadiscourse categories namely interactive MD and interactional MD with their sub categories introduced by Hyland (2005) used in compositions written by ESP students majoring in Chemistry engineering.

Review of the literature

Earlier, academic discourse was viewed as being an example of objective, rational and impersonal academic text, and consequently, the teaching of academic literacy was limited to providing students with samples of the genre of academic writing as a pattern for reproduction and teaching "common core skills", such as describing, summarizing, expressing causality, etc (Murray, 1989; Spack, 1988). However, the contemporary approach to teaching academic genre tends to show students another dimension of academic writing—the social interaction between the writer and the reader (Hyland, 2005).Various terms have been employed by researchers to refer to this writer-reader interaction: some researchers use the term "attitude" (Adel, 2006; Halliday, 1994), whereas others have presented this concept as "appraisal" (Martin, 2000),or as "metadiscourse" (Hyland, 2005), the term which is used in this paper. All definitions of metadiscourse highlight its role in viewing academic writing as a social and communicative activity (Crismore, 1989; Vande Kopple, 1985; Williams, 1981). For Hyland (2005; 2004) metadiscourse is an umbrella term including an range of cohesive and interpersonal features which aid to relate a text to its context. Hyland (2005) states that "the term metadiscourse was coined by Zellig Harris in 1959 to offer a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's or speaker's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text" (p.3). The concept hasbeen further developed by writers such as Williams (1981), Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore (1989). Hyland (2004) states that "based on a view of writing as a social and communicative engagement between writer and reader, metadiscourse focuses our attention on the ways writers project themselves into their work to signal their communicative intentions.

Hyland (2005) writes, "Metadiscourse is 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" (p. 37).Metadiscourse is realized through a range of linguistic forms included in the interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, pp. 49-54). This model comprises two dimensions of writer-reader interaction: interactive and interactional. The followings are the categories and sub categories of interpersonal MD, and related examples underlined the types of MDs used in compositions written by chemistry students who are participants of this research in Shahreza Azad University were selected**:**

I. Interactive Resources: these devices let the writer manage the information flow to provide his/her preferred interpretations. These resources, according to Hyland, contain the following:

1. Transitions: these devices mainly indicate: additive, contrastive, and consequential steps in the discourse. Some examples are:in addition, but, thus, and, etc.

" I love English so much. I would like to continue learning English in an institute, <u>but</u> I don't have enough time".

2. Frame markers: they indicate text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure, like: my purpose here is to, to conclude, etc.

<u>"Finally</u>, for improving my English, I need to study it in an institute to get a better achievement".

3. Endophoric markers: they refer to information in other parts of the text and make the additional material available for the readers. Some examples are:in Section 2, Noted above, etc.

4. Evidentials: they refer to sources of information from texts other than the current one, suchas:Z states, According to X, etc.

5. Code glosses: these devices show the restatements of ideational information, like: in other words, e.g., etc.

"Learning English helps me to read articles related to my field of study.<u>That is</u>, English chemistry engineering articles".

II. Interactional resources: they involve the reader in the text, focus on the participants of the interaction and seek to display the writer's personality in a text as he or she pulling readers along with their argument, focusing their attention, etc. There are five subcategories:

1. Hedges: they withhold commitment and open dialogue. They indicate the writer's unwillingness to present propositional information categorically, such as: about, perhaps, might, etc.

<u>"Perhaps</u> the best effect of learning English in classroom is to read difficult articles on the internet and to chat with English professors".

2. Boosters: these devices express certainty or close dialogue. Some examples are: it is clear that, definitely,etc.

<u>"Obviously</u>, we can promote learning English from both academic and institute programs."

3. Attitude markers: they indicate the writer's appraisal of propositional information. Some examples are: I agree, surprisingly, etc.

"When I search the internet for the chemistry articles, <u>unfortunately</u>, I cannot understand the entire article. Because I don't know enoughvocabulary and grammar"

4. Self-mentions: they refer to the extent of author presence in terms of first person pronouns and possessives. Some examples are: I, we, our, my, etc.

"Learning English helps <u>me</u> to read articles related to <u>my</u> field of study."

5. Engagement markers: they address readers explicitly, or make a relationship with the reader. Some examples are: you can see that, note that, consider, ?, etc.

"If <u>you</u> wish to see why learning English is important, all <u>you</u> need to do islook around <u>you.</u>(Second person pronouns)", or

"How can you be successful in the entrance examination of doctoral while you don't know English well? "(a question marker)

The concept of *metadiscourse* is the central notion around which a number of integrated frames of interpersonal meaning have been grouped (Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore et al. 1993; Hyland 2005). Although there have been many different attempts to define the term, in this study, it is adopted Hyland's (2005a: 37) view of metadiscourse 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". According to Hyland's model (2005) all metadiscourse can contribute to the interpersonal dimension of a text. Nevertheless, he identifies two classes of metadiscourse categories: *interactive* resources, which help the writer or speaker organize the information presented in ways that the audience may find coherent and convincing, and *interactional* resources, which helps involve the readers and alert them to the author's perspective on propositional information or on the readers themselves.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to identify the types of interpersonal metadiscourse strategies introduced by Hyland (2005) used in compositions written by ESP students majoring in Chemistry engineering. Regarding the objectives of the present investigation, the research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. What are the frequency and types of MD use in compositions written by ESP students?

2. Are there any differences or similarities between ESP male and female writers' use of MD when they are compared?

3. Are there any differences or similarities in using two types of metadiscourse by total male and female ESP writers?

Based on the literature above and according to Hyland's interpersonal metadiscourse categories, it was hypothesized that using metadiscourse types in ESP male and females' compositions are different. Therefore, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no difference between ESP male and female students in using MD in their written compositions.

2. There no difference in using two types of interpersonal metadiscourse by total male and female ESP writers?

Methodology

Following Hyland's (2005) terminology, this paper analyzes ESP writers' use of *interactive resources* (transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses) and *interactional resources* (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self -mentions) in ESP composition writing.

Procedures and data collection

In this study, an MA chemistry engineering class including 5 males and 7 females aged between 26 -33 in Islamic Azad University, Shahreza branch was chosen. To elicit the writing evidence, students were asked to write a composition based on the following topic: "Some students prefer to improve their English knowledge through English expert academic course books. For example, some Chemistry students would like to increase their knowledge of English only through their academic books. Others prefer to study outside the university, for example, they would like to increase their knowledge of English through institute programs. Which do you prefer? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer." Beforehand, they were not taught how to write. They were asked to write an 80- word composition in 10 minutes. Because, they were novice and need nearly 10 minutes time to write an 80- word composition. Data was analyzed quantitatively in result section and discussed qualitatively in discussion and conclusion sections.

Instrument

To analyze the MD used, Hyland's (2005) Interpersonal Model of MD has been considered in this study. The details of Hyland's (2005) model are as follows:

Table 1. An interpersonal model of MD (Hyland, p.49)

Category	Function	Example
Interactive MD	*Help to guide reader through the text*	---
Transitions	express semantic relation between main clauses	in addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	finally/to conclude/my purpose here is to
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above/see Fig/in section 2
Evidential	refer to source of information from other texts	according to X/(Y 1990)Z states
Code glosses	help readers grasp functions of ideational material	namely/e.g./such as/in other words
Interactional MD	*Interactional Involve the reader in the argument*	---
Hedges	withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	in fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately/I agree/surprisingly
Self-mentions	explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider/note that/you can see that
Engagement markers	explicit reference to author(s)	I/we/my/our

To run the study, there are some preliminary procedures. First, only words or expressions that have metadiscoursal values are classified as MD. For example, transition 'and' is counted as an MD token only when it is used to link two clauses. If it is used as a linker in listing such as in "out of classroom, in the institute and the academy center", it is not measured as an MD feature. The words as well as phrases of 2-3 words are used for counting MD features. Phrases are considered as one word.

Results

To begin, a frequency count was made in the use of MD. It was found that for each 80- word-composition written by ESP students, the total number of MD words used by males was122 words while that of the females' use was   words. The size of MD use by males consists of an average length of95 words while the length of MD use by females is 70 words.

The frequency count is displayed below (table 2) according to the two major categories of MD use. Two categories of interpersonal metadiscourse (interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse)and their sub categories(for interactive metadiscourse, the sub-categories of transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses; and for interactional metadiscourse, the sub-categories of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers) in a composition written by chemistry male and female students as ESP students. It also shows the total male and female use of metadiscourse. All types of MD were used. However, there is no use of sub categories of endophoric markers and evidential which are the sub-categories of interactive metadiscourse in interpersonal metadiscourse.

Table 2. Frequency of use of interactive and interactional MD in 80-words compositions of both groups of male and female.

	interactive metadiscourse					interactional metadiscourse				
	Transitions	Frame markers	Endophoric markers	Evidentials	Code glosses	Hedges	Boosters	Attitude markers	Self-mentions	Engagement markers
Male	26	21	0	0	4	4	7	9	40	11
Female	24	38	0	0	6	3	3	8	43	12
All	50	59	0	0	10	7	10	17	83	23

Figure 1 to 4 show the results based on the percentages of using two major categories of Hyland's (2005) interpersonal metadiscourse (interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse) and their sub-categories (for interactive metadiscourse, the sub-categories of transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses; and for interactional metadiscourse, the sub-categories of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers) in a composition written by chemistry male and female students as ESP students.
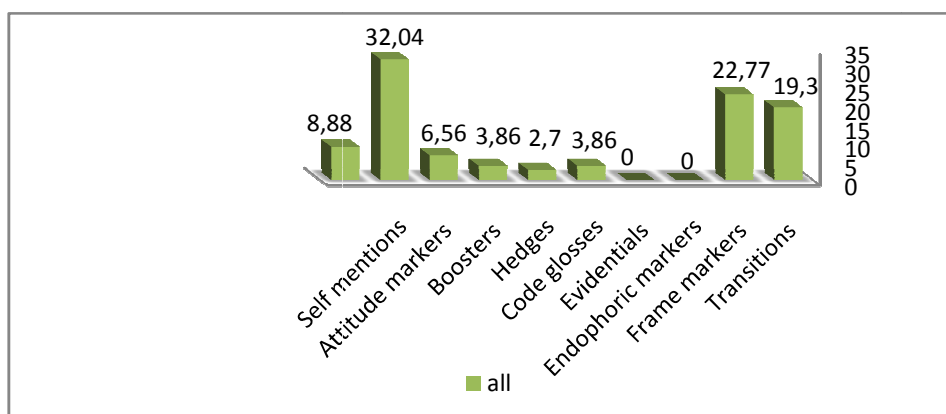

Figure 1. Percentages of use of interactive and interactional MD in both groups of male and female

Figure 1 reveals that in ESP compositions, both maleand female writers use 32.04% self-mentions the highest point and 2.07% hedges the lowest. Using the sub- categories of metadiscourse between the highest i.e. self- mentions and the lowest named hedges are 22.77% frame markers, 19.03% transitions, 8.88% engagement markers, 6.56% attitude markers, 3.86% boosters and 3.86% code glosses, respectively. However, there are no use of endophoric markers and evidentials in their compositions.

Figure 2 shows the males' use of MD. It reveals that self-mentions with 32.78% are higher than hedges and code glosses both with 3.27 % which are the lowest in sub-categories of MD. After self-mentions which is the maximum among the categories of interactive and interactional metadiscourse, 21.31% transitions, 17.21% frame markers, 9.01% engagement markers, 7.37% attitude markers, 5.73% boosters, 3.27% hedges and 3.275% code glosses are to the lowest, respectively.
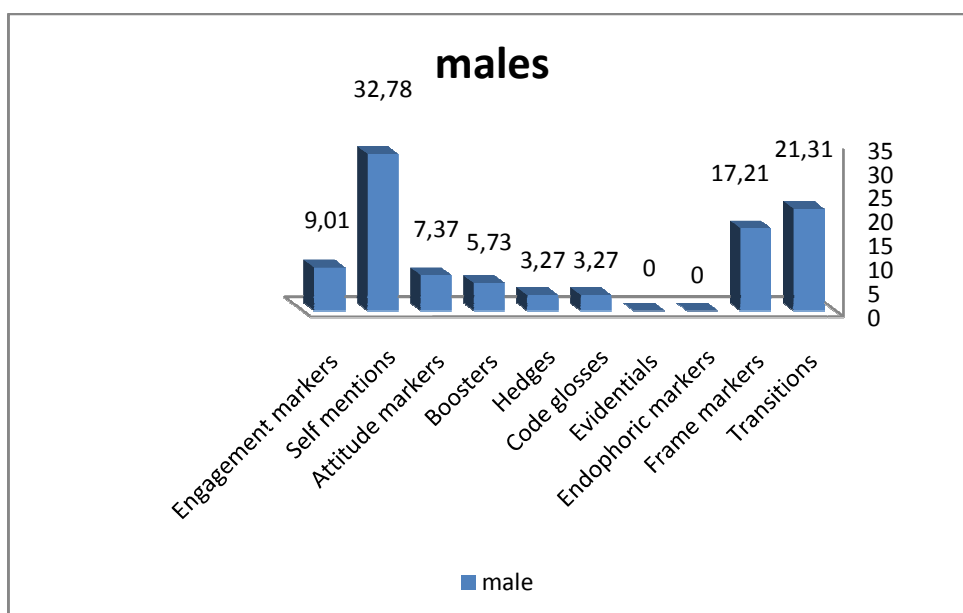

Figure 2. **Percentages of males' use of interactive and interactional MD**

It is illustrated by figure 3 that the top average used by female belongs to self- mentions with 31.38 % and the lowest in sub-categories of metadiscourse goes to boosters and hedges both with equal percentages 2.18 %.After self-mentions which is the top average use among the categories of interactive and interactional metadiscourse, There are some sub- category use from the top to the low, 31.38% self- mentions, 27.73% frame markers, 17.51% transitions 8.75% engagement markers, 5.83% attitude markers, 4.37% code glosses, 2.18% boosters, 2.18% hedges.

Figure 4 offers a quantitative comparison of the male and female use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse. It shows self mentions for both male and female on the top. However, males use is 32.78% and for female is 31.38%, and the lowest use belongs to hedges . Althogh, there are differences in percentages. That is, male use is 3.27% and female use is 2.18%. the Bar graph also reveales that females use of boosters with 2.18% is the lowest one.Hedges and code glosses used by males have equal percentages of 3.27%. The most differences in use of MD goes for frame markers use by males with 17.21% and females with 27.73%. the least differences belongs to the use of engagement markers . that is, for males 9.1% and for females 8.75%.
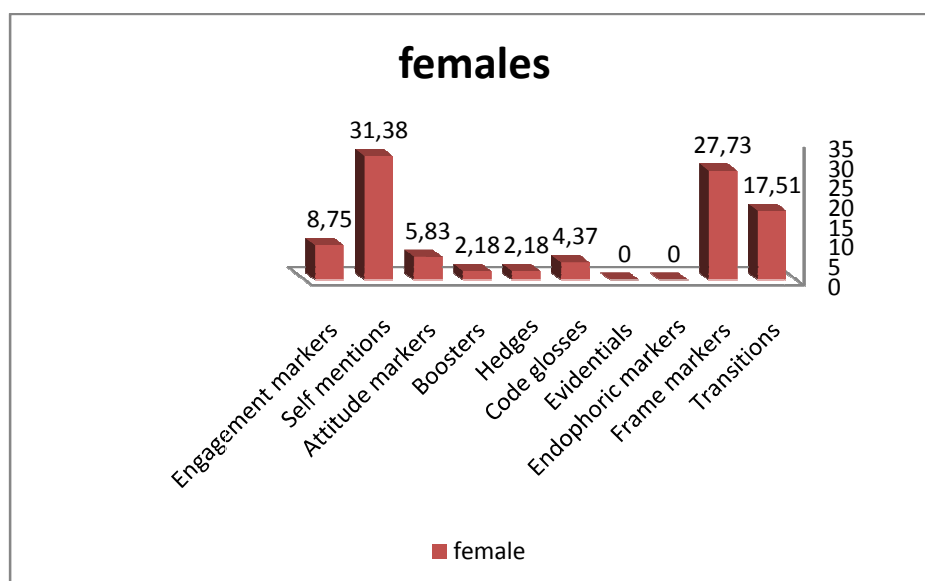
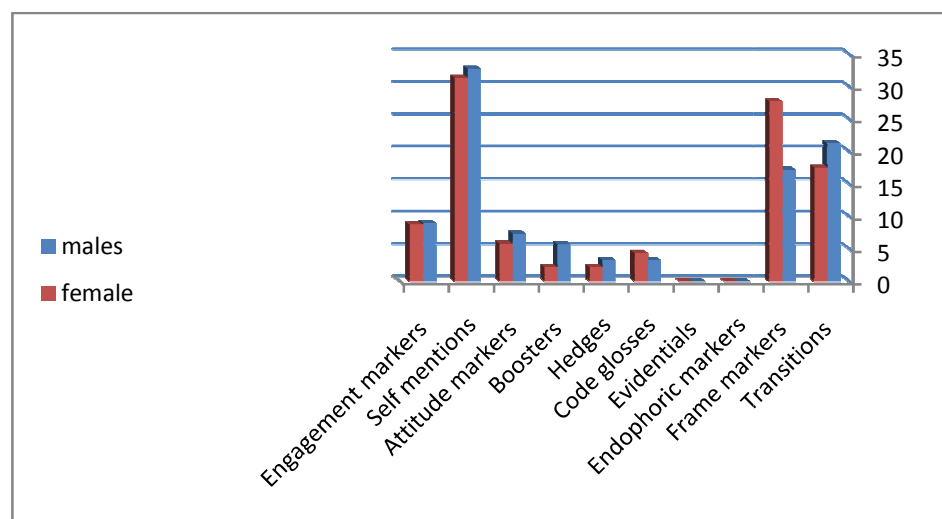**Figure 3**.**Percentages of females' use of interactive and interactional**

Figure 4. **The percentages of males' and females' use of interactive and interactional MD**

Discussion

The present study illustrates differences in the frequency use of MD in males and females. As mentioned in result section, the most focuses of males' and females' use of MD in their compositions is on self-mentions, one of the sub- categories of interactional metadiscourse in the model of interpersonal MD introduced by Hyland (2005). However, the most use of self-mentions belongs to males. In comparing males and females, all types of Hyland's interpersonal MD is used. However, there was no mention of two sub-categories of endophoric markers and

evidentials which are the sub-categories of interactive metadiscourse in interpersonal metadiscourse. This is indicated that for writing their ideas in their compositions which is not, for example a scientific article writing, there is no need to point out to theendophoric markers that refer to information in other parts of the text for instance, (This chapter; see figure; in section 2, etc.), and to the evidential that refer to information from other texts, for instance, (According to X; Z states; as cited in; etc. The most use of sub-categories goes to the interactional MD in which the aim of the writer is Involving the reader in the text. In the result section, it is considered that in the category of interactive MD, the sub- categories of frame markers(which refer to discourse acts, sequences and stages, e.g., Finally; to conclude; my purpose is; etc.) and transitions (which needed for most writings, express relations between main clauses, e.g. In addition; but; thus; and; etc. are of the most uses). The analysis of the data revealed that hedges as well as boosters, especially females use of boosters, occupied low positions in result section. The most differences between genders' use of MD belongs to frame markers. i.e. Females use it higher than males. The least differences belongs to the use of engagement markers. Males use it more than females**.**

Conclusions
This study moves from the frequency and the types of MD use in compositions written by ESP students to the gender differences in using MD in their personal compositions. It unveils the differences in their ideas about the given subject for writing. The present study analyzed results of this research quantitatively and qualitatively. The indicators of transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses for interactive MD and also for interactional metadiscourse, the indicators of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers in a composition written by chemistry male and female students as ESP students are studied. The analysis carried outin this paper reveals that differences between genders in using MD are present in the overall distribution of interpersonal metadiscourse. The present study provides evidence of similarity in no using of endophoric markers and evidentials which are in the category of interactive MD. It shows that using of endophoric markers and evidentials are not useful for writing compositions that ask the writers' personal ideas. Because it is not a scientific writing or a kind of academic writing in which writers need special training how to write, for example, the citationsof others . The sub -category of self mentions in compositions by males and females was to a great extent on top because they write about their opinions. However, males use of self mention was a little more than females.) It is clear that interactional MD used by both genders is more personal.

Although further research as well as a little long- term research is necessary for comparing the trained ESP writers and the novice ones in using MD. Or else, it can be studied the novice ESP writers after teaching how to use metadiscourse in their compositions and then compare them with the time that they may be rather in experienced in using MD.

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