

The Effect of a Suggested Program Based on Interactional Metadiscourse Markers on Developing EFL Majors' Reading Comprehension and the Reader-friendliness of Their Writing

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Abstract—This study attempted to investigate the effect of using a suggested program of interactional metadiscourse markers on EFL majors' reading comprehension and on their reader-friendly writing. The study used a pre-test/post-test experimental and control group design. An experimental group and a control group were exposed to pre-post means of getting data (a pre-post reading comprehension test and pre-post writing test). Thirty four EFL majors at the College of Education and Arts, Northern Borders University, participated in this study. A 10-week program of interactional metadiscourse markers was developed and given to experimental group students. Results revealed a significant improvement in the reading comprehension of the experimental group students and in their reader-friendly writing. Based on these findings, it was recommended that explicit teaching of metadiscourse markers should be integrated into EFL majors' curricula.

Index Terms—metadiscourse markers, reader-friendly writing, reading comprehension

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Recently, linguists, as well as language teachers, have come to an agreement that neither writing is just a communication of ideas and presentation of ideational meaning, nor reading is merely understanding a collection of words on a page (Amiryousefi & Rasekh (2010; Blagojević, 2009; Tavakoli, 2010; Aguilera, 2014; among others). Instead, reading and writing are considered as social acts which involve both writers and readers to interact with each other. In an EFL reading comprehension class, teachers' main concern is to make sure that their students understand what they read. However, reading is no longer seen as a simple process of understanding a host of words on a page. In the past, "reading was considered a relatively static activity. Meaning was embedded in the text, and the reader's job was to understand what was being transmitted via the words on the page" (Tavakoli, 2010, p. 92). Recently, second foreign/language research views reading comprehension as a more active process in which the reader uses the information in a given text to construct the meaning himself. In both first and second language instructional frameworks, reading is seen as an interactive process. In addition to "decoding meaning from print with bottom-up skills, successful readers implement top-down skills to activate their prior knowledge of content and use textual cues to help them cope with new information" (Camiciottoli, 2003, p. 28).

Along with this interactive process taking place between the reader, on the one hand, and the content, on the other, there is also another parallel and essential type of interaction. It is the interaction between the reader and the writer. This mutual dialogue between the author of the text and its reader is known as metadiscourse (Camiciottoli, 2003; Jalilifar, Shooshtari & Mutaqid, 2011). In this respect, William (1981) points out that whenever an author writes, "he usually has to write on two levels: level of direction and the level of information" (Cited in Tavakoli, 2010, p. 92). That is, items such as 'of course', 'but', 'for example', and 'also', when used by authors, they are intended to function as directives to the text reader because they serve more to direct than to inform.

Similarly, writing is no longer viewed as simply a means for retelling or recounting information, or as a "mere account of scientific facts expressed through a piece of writing" (Blagojević, 2009, p. 63). It is neither seen as a solitary job where the author endeavors to complete his work all by himself, nor it is seen as a "simple one-way transfer of information from one person to others" (Ward, 1994, p. 53). It is no more looked at as a "solipsist cognitive process that begins and ends with the individual" (Aguilera, 2014, p. 160), or as "just creating and imitating written texts" (Mok, 1993, p. 152). It is not a "generic skill to be taught as a set of static rules, but rather as shaped by complex interactions of social, institutional, and historical forces in contexts of unequal power" (Starfield, 2007, p. 875). Currently, writing is viewed from a "social-constructionist" perspective "as part of dialogue in which authors and readers produce and

maintain knowledge" (Ward, 1994, pp. 53-54). It is no longer seen as a "neutral individual process but as an interaction between writers and readers within specific discourse communities" (Colpin & Van Gorp, 2007, p.198).

Nowadays, there is a widespread interest in the interactive and rhetorical character of academic writing (Blagojević, 2009; Pérez-Llantada, 2010). This supports the idea that "scientific writing has to be viewed from a new, social perspective which emphasizes the relationship between the producers of a scientific writing and its recipients, i.e. to be looked at from a writer-reader perspective" (Blagojević, 2009, p. 63). This viewpoint expands the focus of our emphasis to encompass, not only the ideational dimension of a piece of writing, but also the way it functions at the interpersonal level. According to this viewpoint, "academic writers do not simply produce texts that plausibly represent an external reality, but use language to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations" (Hyland, 2004a, p. 5). This, again, affirms the idea that scientific discourse, functions on two levels; the first level is the primary discourse, which encompasses facts that add up to the truth. The second is the linguistic material, which is developed to help readers to understand what is said and what is intended by the author in the primary discourse. This level of discourse is generally referred to as a secondary discourse, and commonly called metadiscourse. It serves to "direct readers in how to take the author—that is, how to understand the author's perspective or stance toward the content or structure of the primary discourse and the readers" (Blagojević, 2009, p. 64). In this context, Hyland, (2004b) assures that "the ability of writers to control the level of personality in their texts, claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and acknowledging alternative views, is now recognized as a key feature of successful academic writing" (pp. 133-134).

A text without metadiscourse, as seen by Hyland (2010), appears "much less personal, less interesting, and less easy to follow" (p. 127). Supporting this, Crismore and Abdollehzadeh (2010) put it very clear that "metadiscourse elements are rhetorical tools that make a text reader-friendly and as such enable the writer to reach the audience" (p. 196). Metadiscourse markers help organize the text and signal the presence of the writer through conveying the writer's attitudes towards his text or towards the readers themselves, and through establishing relationships between the writer and the reader as well (Noble, 2010). According to Hyland (2005), "with the judicious addition of metadiscourse, a writer is able not only to transform what might otherwise be a dry or difficult text into coherent, reader-friendly prose, but also to relate it to a given context and convey his or her personality, credibility, audience-sensitivity and relationship to the message" (p. 4).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Due to the acknowledged importance of metadiscourse to reading and writing in general, and to EFL/ESL reading and writing in particular, several researchers attempted to examine the effect of teaching metadiscourse markers on students' awareness and use of these markers, and on their abilities to recognize and incorporate them.

Steffensen and Cheng (1996) investigated the effect of instruction in metadiscourse on students' composition writing skills. A pretest and a posttest experimental and control group design was used. Students in two college composition classes participated in this study. The experimental class received direct instruction in metadiscourse while the control one received no such instruction. Experimental class students' posttest essays were significantly better than those of the control class. In an exploratory classroom study with a group of Italian university students, Camiciottoli (2003) explored the effect of metadiscourse on ESP reading comprehension. Participants were divided into two equal groups. Students of both groups were asked to read selected extracts from two versions of the same text differing according to quantity and type of metadiscourse. After that, students in both groups were administered a reading comprehension test. Comparison of students' mean scores suggested that a more evident use of metadiscourse markers may be associated with improved comprehension. In a similar study, Parvaresh and Nemati (2008) examined the effects of metadiscourse markers on the reading comprehension of both English and Persian texts. Two types of texts (metadiscourse enriched versus metadiscourse removed) were developed and used for data collection. Both types were translated into Persian and used for a Persian reading comprehension test. Results indicated that all participants performed significantly better on the texts with full metadiscourse markers than on those without.

Tavakoli, Dabaghi and Khorvash (2010) investigated the effect of explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on students' achievement in EFL reading comprehension. Eighty intermediate level students participated in the experiment. They were randomly divided into four equal groups (three experimental and one control). Participants of the first experimental group received instruction in both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse, participants of the second group received instruction only in textual metadiscourse and those of the third one received instruction only in interpersonal metadiscourse markers. Participants of the control group, on the other hand, received no specific instruction in metadiscourse. Results revealed significant improvement in the reading comprehension of the participants of the three experimental groups as a result of the direct teaching of metadiscourse. Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) studied the impact of explicit instruction of metadiscourse on EFL students' writing performance. Participants were 94 students majoring in English Literature at the University of Isfahan. A pretest and a posttest experimental and control group design was used. Experimental group students were exposed to explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers for six successive sessions. Posttest results revealed that explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers significantly improved EFL students' writing ability. Jalilifar, Shooshtari, and Mutaqid (2011) examined the effect of explicit instruction of hedging on EFL university students' reading comprehension. One hundred students were selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. After attending 10 sessions of awareness-raising on hedging,

and on the functions of hedging devices, participants were administered a reading comprehension test as a posttest. Results of data analysis revealed that explicit instruction had a facilitative effect on experimental group students' recognition of hedging devices and therefore on their improved reading comprehension.

In their quasi-experimental study, Allami and Serajfard (2012) explored the effect of direct instruction in engagement markers on the writing of university level IELTS student. Sixty students, equally divided into experimental and control group, participated in this study. Experimental group students received instruction on the use of engagement markers, whereas those of the control group received no such instruction. Results revealed significant improvement in the quality and effectiveness of experimental group students' writing. The study of Yaghoubi and Ardestani (2014) investigated the effect of using both explicit and implicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on the writing skills of ninety female Iranian students at Kish Institute of Science and Technology. A pretest and a posttest experimental and control group design was used. Findings revealed significant improvement in the participants' posttest writing scores. Metadiscourse instruction, both implicit and explicit, had a positive effect on the learners' writing skills. Zarrati, Knabiar and Maasum (2014) investigated the effect of metadiscourse on EFL learners' reading comprehension. Two reading comprehension tests with two text types (metadiscourse enriched versus metadiscourse removed) were developed for the purpose of data collection. Results showed that EFL students performed better on the metadiscourse enriched test booklet than their counterparts who took the metadiscourse removed text booklet.

Obviously, if the findings of these studies do not provide a clear-cut evidence that metadiscourse awareness improves writing, as well as reading comprehension, they indicate that it has, at least, a facilitating role. It is also clear that all the above reviewed studies, to the best knowledge of this researcher, were conducted with participants other than Arab EFL students. Therefore, instruction in metadiscourse is a topic that deserves further study in order that we can make more valid generalizations.

III. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

During teaching and marking students' oral and written works, it has been observed by this researcher that most EFL students lack strategies for dealing with metadiscourse. To them, metadiscourse may appear as something redundant or even as noise. In reading, they do not use metadiscourse elements appropriately to interpret the writer's message and in writing they do not use them to guide the reader or to engage him/her as a text participant. In addition, they tend to give the same weight to hedged statements or interpretations as to accredited facts.

Statement of the Problem

EFL majors at the College of Education and Arts, Northern Borders University, have always shown low levels in reading comprehension. In addition, their writing is much less reader-friendly and difficult to follow. This might be due to their inability to recognize and use metadiscourse markers of which most students seem to be unaware. Based on this, the current study attempted to explore the effectiveness of using a suggested program of interactional metadiscourse markers on EFL majors' reading comprehension and on the reader-friendliness of their writings.

Hypotheses of the Study

The researcher hypothesized the following:

- (1) There would be statistically significant differences, favoring the experimental group, between the mean scores obtained by students of the experimental group and those of the control group in the post-test of reading comprehension.
- (2) There would be statistically significant differences, favoring the experimental group, between the mean scores obtained by students of the experimental group and those of the control group in the post-test of reader-friendly writing.

Objectives of the Study

The current study attempted to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) Integrating metadiscourse in EFL/ESL language teaching and learning.
- (2) Drawing the attention of EFL/ESL learners to the importance of the so long neglected role of metadiscourse.
- (3) Exploring the effect of direct teaching of metadiscourse on EFL majors' reading comprehension and on the reader-friendliness of their writing.

Significance of the Study

The current study derives its significance from the following:

- (1) The study is considered a pioneering one that attempted to examine the effectiveness of direct teaching of metadiscourse to Arab EFL majors.
- (2) It develops a program of interactional metadiscourse markers that can be used by EFL/ESL teachers for developing their students' reading and writing skills.
- (3) The findings of this study may direct the attention of teachers and curriculum developers to the importance of incorporating explicit teaching of metadiscourse into EFL/ESL curricula.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to:

- (1) EFL male students only due to gender segregation imposed in Saudi Arabia.
- (2) Some interactional metadiscourse markers (mentioned in Hyland (2005)'s Classification) namely *hedging devices*, *attitude markers* and *engagement markers*. These three sub-categories only because they are the most neglected in EFL curricula.

IV. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse represents how the writer uses language in an attempt to guide the perception of his reader. Ädel, (2010) defines metadiscourse as “reflexive linguistic expressions referring to the evolving discourse itself or its linguistic form” (p. 75). It is “an author's discoursing about the discourse; it is the author's intrusion into the discourse, either explicitly or non-explicitly, to direct rather than inform the readers” (Crismore, 1984, p. 4). Metadiscourse refers to the type of discourse that has a job beyond the general norm of communication. It is through this type of discourse, the writer or the speaker can cast light on the aspects he use while introducing herself to signal his attitude towards both the content and the audience of the text or the speech (Blagojević, 2009). Metadiscourse or, as Mauranen (2010) call it, ‘discourse reflexivity’ is generally an essential property of human communication. She explains this by pointing out that whenever speakers cannot depend on much shared linguistic or cultural knowledge with their interlocutors, they need to secure shared understanding by using this level of discourse as a strategy for explicitness. Thus, in spoken language, discourse reflexivity or metadiscourse is a feature that speakers cannot dispense with. For Toumi (2009), metadiscourse is “essentially ‘text about the text’ or ‘talk about talk’... metadiscourse is the linguistic material of text that does not add propositional content, but rather signals the presence of the author” (p. 64). It “embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating” (Hyland, 2005, p. 3). For VandeKopple (2012), metadiscourse refers to “elements of texts that convey meanings other than those that are primarily referential” (p. 37). Ädel (2006) states that metadiscourse is seen as “the means whereby the writer's presence in the discourse is made explicit, whether by displaying attitude towards or commenting on the text or by showing how the text is organized” (Cited in Abdelmoneim, 2009, p. 18).

Metadiscourse Function

Generally speaking, the human language used in communication, whether oral or written, service to achieve three metafunctions; ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Crismore, 1983; Crismore, 1984; Hyland, 2005; Noorian & Biria, 2010). According to Hyland (2005)’s explanation of the three metafunctions of language, the ideational or referential function refers to the use of language to express or represent the physical experiences of the external world, as well as ideas, feelings and all mental processes. The interpersonal function, on the other hand, refers to the use of language items to encode interaction and to engage the addressee with the addresser in a discourse situation in order to take on roles, to express feelings and to show evaluations of propositional information. Finally, the textual function refers to the use of language to organize the text and to establish links with the situation and the recipients in order to create a cohesive as well as coherent text. In this respect, VandeKopple (2012) claims that while the ideational function is realized through the primary discourse, interpersonal and textual functions of language are the main responsibility of metadiscourse. It is worth mentioning that, while the three metafunctions constitute “the bases upon which metadiscourse rests” (Hyland, 2005, p. 26), the last two functions are the roots of metadiscourse, upon which, Hyland sets up his famous classification of metadiscourse into textual and interpersonal.

Classifications of Metadiscourse types

There are many classifications of metadiscourse types. In this section, three of the most commonly known are presented. The first one is that of Crismore (1983) which divides metadiscourse into two main categories; informational and attitudinal. The second is that of VandeKopple (2002) and it divides metadiscourse markers into six main categories including; text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers, epistemology markers, attitude markers and commentary. The third classification is that of Hyland (2005) which comprises two main categories of metadiscourse; interactive and interactional.

(1) Crismore (1983)'s Classification

Crismore (1983, pp. 11-15)'s typology of metadiscourse markers includes two main categories; **informational** and **attitudinal** metadiscourse, with subtypes for each main category. Crismore (1983)’s typology is based on his assumption that metadiscourse is used on two levels; referential and expressive. Metadiscourse functions on a referential informational level “when it serves to direct readers how to understand the primary message by referring to its content and structure, and the author's purposes or goals” (Crismore, 1983, p. 11). On the other hand, metadiscourse functions on an expressive, attitudinal and symbolic level “when it serves to direct readers how to take the author, that is, how to understand the author's perspective or stance toward the content or structure of the primary discourse” (Ibid., 12).

Via **informational metadiscourse**, the author can offer his readers numerous types of information about the primary discourse in order to help them for better understanding of the text. Among the subtypes of the informational metadiscourse markers mentioned by Crismore (1983, p. 12), and used by authors for this purpose are: 1) *global goal statements or goals*, as called by Crismore (1983); 2) *global preliminary statements about content and structure or pre-plans*, as he calls them; 3) *global review statements about content and structure or post plans*, as he calls them; and 4) *local shifts of topic which he calls topicalizers*.

In another vein, an author can show his attitude towards the content of the primary discourse and towards his reader via **attitudinal metadiscourse**. An author can give directives about the importance of certain points or parts of his primary discourse from his viewpoint. He can also signal the degree of certainty he has for his statements and his beliefs

or how he feels about the content of the message he is conveying to readers. His commentary here is all evaluative and expressive rather than referential and informational.

Among the subtypes of the attitudinal metadiscourse markers mentioned by Crismore (1983, p. 14), and used by authors for the above mentioned purpose are: 1) *importance of idea*, which Crismore (1983) calls *saliency*; 2) *degree of certainty of assertion*, which he calls *emphatics*; 3) *degree of uncertainty*, which he calls *hedges*; and 4) *attitude toward a fact or idea*, which he calls *evaluative*.

(2) VandeKopple (2002)'s Classification

The taxonomy offered by VandeKopple (2002, as cited in VandeKopple, 2012, pp. 38-40) included six main categories. The first category is Text Connectives which are used by authors to show the readers how the different parts of a text are connected to one another, and how different texts are organized. Typical examples of Text Connectives include: 1) *elements that show sequence such as, first, next, and in the third place*; 2) *elements that show logical or chronological relationships such as, at the same time, and consequently*; 3) *reminders about material presented earlier in texts such as, as we saw in part one, and as we mentioned in the first chapter*; 4) *statements about forthcoming material such as as we shall see in the next chapter, and as will be shown in the next paragraph*; and 5) *topicalizers* (see Williams' classifications).

The second category is **Code Glosses** which are used by authors to help readers understand the proper meanings of elements in a text. Examples of Code Glosses are: 1) *when the author defines a word or phrase for his readers or when he signals that there is a problem with the common interpretation of a word, he uses expressions such as so-called or what some people call*; 2) *when the author indicates how strictly or loosely he wishes his readers to receive his words, he uses expressions such as, strictly speaking or roughly speaking*; and 3) *when the author anticipates that his readers might be having difficulty in understanding passages, and he indicates that he will rephrase by using expressions such as, I'll put it this way or what I mean to say is*.

The third category is **Illocution Markers** which are used by authors to make clear to their readers the type of speech or discourse act they are performing at certain points in texts. Common examples of Illocution Markers are: 1) *elements such as we claim that, I hypothesize that, I promise to, to sum up, and for example*; 2) *when authors use mitigators to attenuate the force of speech acts as, for instance, when adding a modal verb to a direct request, e.g. I must ask that you, or when they, to the contrary, use boosters to increase the force of certain speech acts such as enthusiastically and most sincerely*.

The fourth category is **Epistemology Markers** which are used by authors to indicate some stance on their part toward the epistemological status of the ideational material they convey. In other words, they mark the degree of certainty with which the author makes a claim about the truth of a proposition or how committed he is to the truth of ideational material. Sometimes the author is cautious, and he signals that caution with what VandeKopple (2012) calls *shields* such as, *it is possible that* and *perhaps*. Sometimes he emphasizes what he really believes, or would like his readers to think he believes, by using what are called *emphatics* such as, *without a doubt* and *most certainly*.

The fifth category of metadiscourse is **Attitude Markers** which are used by an author to help him reveal what attitude he has toward ideational material. Examples of these markers that express attitudes are: 1) *using adverbs such as fortunately*; 2) *parenthetical expressions such as I regret and I rejoice*; and 3) *clauses such as I am grateful that*.

The sixth and last category of metadiscourse, according to VandeKopple (2002, as cited in VandeKopple, 2012, pp. 38-40), is **Commentary** with which the author addresses his readers directly. Common examples of commentary are: 1) *when the author comments on his readers' probable moods, views, or reactions to his ideational material as in saying; some of you will be amazed that* or 2) *when he even recommends a mode of reading as in saying you might wish to skip to the next chapter*.

(3) Hyland (2005)'s Classification

Hyland (2005, pp. 48-54)'s model divides metadiscourse markers into two main categories of **interactive** and **interactional**. Interactive metadiscourse markers help to guide the reader through the text. It includes stance and engagement markers. They concern the author's awareness of his readers, and his efforts to accommodate their interests and needs, and to make his argument reasonable for them (Hyland, 2005).

Interactive metadiscourse markers are divided into five categories including: 1) **Transitions** which express relations between main clauses. Examples of **transitions** include: *in addition, but, and thus*; and 2) **Frame markers** refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages. Examples of frame markers are: *finally, to conclude, and my purpose is*; 3) **Endophoric markers** refer to information in other parts of the text. Examples of endophoric markers are: *noted above, see fig and in section two*; 4) **Evidentials** refer to information from other texts. Examples of evidentials are: *according to x, and z states*; 5) **Code glosses** indicate the restatement of ideational information or propositional meanings. Examples of code glosses are: *namely, e.g., such as and in other words*.

The interactional markers, on the other hand, involve the reader in the text. They concern the author's efforts to make clear his viewpoints, and to have his readers engaged in what he says or writes by anticipating their objections and responses to the text (Hyland, 2005).

Interactional metadiscourse markers are also divided into five categories including: 1) **Hedges** which withhold commitment and open dialogue. Examples of hedges are *might, perhaps, possible and about*; 2) **Boosters** which emphasize certainty or close dialogue. Examples of boosters are *in fact, definitely and it is clear that*; 3) **Attitude**

markers express the writer's attitude to or evaluation of propositional information, i.e. expressing agreement, surprise, obligation and so on. Examples of attitude markers are *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*, and *I agree*; 4) **Self-mentions** express reference to author(s) in terms of first person pronouns and possessives. Examples of self-mentions are *I*, *we*, *my*, *me*, and *our*; 5) **Engagement markers** which explicitly build relationship with the reader either by selectively focusing his attention or by including him as a participant in the text through question forms, second person pronouns, or imperatives. Examples of engagement markers are *consider*, *note*, and *you can see that*.

V. METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

Participants

All students registering in reading 2 (code: 1606115) and writing 2 (code: 1606111) courses at the College of Education and Arts, Northern Borders University, Saudi Arabia, volunteered to participate in this study. They were randomly assigned either to experimental or control group. Participants shared some common characteristics as they are all of average ages ranging from 19 to 21 years old, from the same Saudi culture, and with homogeneous English learning backgrounds. After excluding drop outs the number of the students who successfully completed the experiment was 34 students equally divided between the two groups of the study.

Experimental Design

The study used a pre-test/post-test experimental and control group design. An experimental group and a control group were exposed to pre-post means of getting data (a pre-post reading comprehension test and a pre-post writing test). In addition to attending their usual reading and writing classes by using the prescribed books; *Interactions 2 Writing* by Cheryl Pavlik & Margaret Keenan Segal, ME, Gold Edition, MacGraw Hill: New York, (2007); and *Interactions 2 Reading*, by Kirn, Elaine & Pamela Hartmann ME, Gold Edition, MacGraw Hill, (2009), the experimental group participants received direct instruction in interactional metadiscourse via the suggested program, while those of the control group received no such instruction. They attended the usual reading and writing classes only.

Research Instruments

To answer the study questions, a pre-post reading comprehension test and a writing test, together with a reader-friendly writing scoring scale, were developed and used by this researcher. In addition, a suggested program of interactional metadiscourse was also designed and built by this researcher (See Appendices).

(1) Pre-post Reading Comprehension Test.

A pre-post reading comprehension test was developed for assessing EFL majors' reading comprehension. In order to construct this test, a reading comprehension passages was adapted from the free reading comprehension passages by MrNussbaum.com, available online at: <http://mrnussbaum.com/tornado-reading-comprehension/>. Before using it in the current test, the passage was enriched with appropriate interactional metadiscourse markers. Thus, the present test included one reading comprehension passage followed by ten questions. Questions were formed in a multiple choice format. Each item included a stem followed by four alternatives. This way, the test included 10 items. In items no. 1 to 8, where only one of the alternatives is the correct option, students were asked to select only one answer, whereas in items no. 9 to 10, students were asked to select all true alternatives.

Validity and Reliability Measures of the Test

Construct validity of this test was determined by a panel of TEFL experts. Procedures of test reliability and its duration, were calculated through piloting it with a group of 15 level-three EFL majors by using the test re-test method. The stability coefficient was ($r=.86$) and the optimum time for finishing this test was forty (40) minutes.

Scoring

A student's score is simply the number of correct answers he gives; there is no added penalty for wrong answers. Four marks were given to each correct test item. Thus the test maximum score is 40 marks.

(2) Pre-post Writing Test.

In order to assess EFL majors' reader-friendly writing, a pre-post writing test, together with a scoring scale, were developed. The test was of the essay type. It consisted of two writing prompts; one for the pre-test and the other for the posttest. For each prompt, students were asked to write at least a five-paragraph essay.

Validity and Reliability Measures of the Test

Construct validity of this test was also determined by the same panel of TEFL experts who judged the reading comprehension test. Procedures of test reliability and its duration, were calculated through piloting it with the same group of 15 level-three EFL majors by using the test re-test method. Then, a coefficient of stability was decided on by calculating the correlation between the scores on the two administrations using Pearson product moment correlation formula. The reliability of the test was found ($r=.76$) which is considered a reasonable value for such tests and the optimum time for finishing this test was forty (60) minutes.

Inter-rater reliability was also estimated by administering it to the same piloting group. This researcher and another trained rater of his colleagues rated the writings of the pilot group students on the test scoring scale. Correlation between scores of the researcher and those of his colleague was calculated. Reliability coefficient was found ($r=.81$). This value indicates that the writing test is reasonably reliable.

Scoring the Test

For scoring this test, a 5-point reader-friendly writing scale was also developed by this researcher. The scoring scale was based on the criterion of metadiscourse as one of the major factors hypothesized to contribute to writing friendliness. Three main domains were specified to be measured via this scale. Each domain is represented by some features of friendly or considerate writing; the first domain was about *Using Hedged Language*, represented by 3 features (1-3); the second was about *Using Evaluative/Attitudinal Language*, represented by 2 features (4-5); and the third was about *Using Interactive/Engaging Language*, represented by 3 features (6-8). Each student's paper was scored by two raters, who independently rated his writing on the features of the three domains. These features should be present in the student's writing. Thus, a student's final score on this test was the mean score given by the two raters. The values given to this scale were: 4 for point (A) *Strongly agree*; 3 for point (B) *Agree*; 2 for point (C) *Uncertain*; 1 for point (D) *Disagree*; and zero for point (E) *Strongly Disagree*. This way, each item of the eight feature of reader-friendly writing was rated from zero to 4, and the total score on the scale ranged from zero to 32.

(3) The Suggested Interactional Metadiscourse Program

In order to develop EFL majors' reading comprehension and their reader-friendly writing, a program of interactional metadiscourse markers was proposed. Three main categories of interactional metadiscourse markers were included in the training of the EFL majors who participated in this study. These categories constituted the general objectives stated for the program.

Content of the program

The content of the proposed program was designed in the light of the stated objectives it was intended to achieve. It consisted of a teacher's guidebook and a student's book. It included three units that were to cover its objectives. Each unit dealt with a different area of interactional metadiscourse and was divided into some lessons that were to cover the objectives of that unit:

Unit One: Hedging Devices

Lesson One Lexical Verbs with Epistemic Meanings

Lesson Two Epistemic Modal Verbs

Lesson Three Epistemic Modal Adverbs and Downtoners

Lesson Four Epistemic Modal Adjectives

Unit Two: Attitude Markers

Lesson One Adverbs and Adverbial Phrases Functioning as Sentence Adverbials

Lesson Two Verb-modifying Adverbs

Lesson Three Adjectives Functioning as Subjective Complement in Sentences with Expletive 'it'

Unit Three: Engagement Markers

Lesson One Reader Pronouns

Lesson Two Directives

Lesson Three Appeals to Shared Knowledge

Thus, The program in its final form consisted of three units; unit one was about *Hedging Devices* and it was divided into four lessons; unit two was about *Attitude Markers* and it was divided into three lessons; and unit three was about *Engagement Markers* and it was also divided into three lessons. Hence, the program included ten lessons. Each lesson had its own behavioral objectives which were derived from the unit objectives.

Teaching Methodology

A three-phase instructional sequence that was situated in the task-based approach to language teaching was followed in teaching this program:

The Pre-task phase

In the pre-task phase, students were introduced to the topic of the lesson at hand. Through whole-class interaction, they were presented with a definition of the linguistic technique used to realize the respective category of interactional metadiscourse and how it is used effectively.

The Actual Task or the Task Cycle

In this stage, the teacher took a step back and let the students do their work independently, whether individually or in groups. Students in this stage were, first, asked to make groups of five and to work together either to decide the words that express signs of caution, vagueness or playing down of claims in the given sentences, or to decide the words that express the author's evaluation of the propositional content or his attitude towards the semantic content of some given sentences. They were also asked to decide the words used for interacting with the readers and engaging them or drawing their support in the given sentences.

After that, students were asked to work individually either to identify hedged versus unhedged utterances or to identify the words that reflect the author's attitude towards the propositional content in a given list of utterances. They were also asked to identify interactive versus non-interactive utterances. Having completed the given tasks, whether individually or in groups, students were asked to report to the whole class on the outcome of their work, and the teacher was always ready to comment, advise and to facilitate learning during that stage.

The Post-Task or the Language Focus

In the post-task stage or the language focus, students were given the opportunity to work on the language technique learned. They were asked to work in groups or in pairs to produce as much hedged sentences using the learned linguistic techniques and as much utterances using evaluative attitudinal language as possible. They were also asked to produce as

much interactive and engaging utterances as possible using the learned engagement techniques. At the end of the task cycle, awareness of the target linguistic technique was assessed via having students finish a two-part written quiz.

Pre-test

On September 6th 2015, a day before beginning the intervention, the reading comprehension test and the writing test were administered to the participants of the study as pre-tests. This step was intended to ascertain the equivalence of the two groups of the study. An Independent Samples t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the participants of the two groups. Results of comparisons revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores obtained by students of the control and experimental groups, neither in the reading comprehension pre-test ($t=.90$, $p<0.05$) nor in the reader-friendly writing pre-test ($t=.39$, $p<0.05$). This result indicated that the two groups of the study were equivalent both in reading comprehension and in the reader-friendliness of writing.

Intervention

On September 7th 2015, teaching the suggested program to the experimental group students began. The teaching lasted for about 10 weeks with almost one lesson per week. Each Linguistic technique was taught in three hours. Thus, the total time of teaching the suggested program was 30 hours.

Post-test

On 23th November, 2015, after finishing teaching the suggested program to the experimental group students, the reading comprehension test and the writing test were re-administered to the study participants as post-tests.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results obtained from this study are presented in terms of the study hypotheses in this section.

Testing the First Hypothesis

Independent Sample t-tests were used to test the first hypothesis of the study. Findings are presented in table 1 below:

TABLE 1:
“T” VALUE OF THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS IN THE READING COMPREHENSION POST-TEST

Group	N	M	SD	“T” value	Sig.
Control	17	21.5294	1.807	-8.28**	0.001
Experimental	17	27.2941	2.229		

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by participants of the control and experimental groups in the post-test of reading comprehension in favour of the experimental group. The experimental group got a higher mean (27.2941) than that obtained by the control group (21.5294). The result of the t-test shows that the t-value = (-8.28) and the difference is significant at (0.001) level. Thus, the first hypothesis is affirmed.

Testing the Second Hypothesis

Independent t-tests were also used to test the second hypothesis. To obtain specific information on particular aspects of the reader-friendliness of writing, participants’ scores on the three individual domains of metadiscourse as a major factor hypothesized to contribute to writing friendliness were also compared. The findings are presented in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2:
“T” VALUE OF THE CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS IN THE POST-TEST OF READER-FRIENDLY WRITING

Metadiscourse Domain	N	Mean Score		SD		“T” value
		Control	Experimental	Control	Experimental	
Hedged Language	17	3.4706	5.2353	1.419	1.715	-3.27**
Evaluative/Attitudinal Language	17	2.7059	5.4706	1.213	1.281	-6.46**
Interactive/Engaging Language	17	3.3529	6.0588	1.169	1.983	-4.85**
Total	17	9.5294	17.0588	2.896	3.132	-7.28**

The results in Table 2 indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by participants of the control and experimental groups in the post-test of reader-friendly writing, in favour of the experimental group. The experimental group got higher mean scores than those obtained by control group. They obtained a mean score of (5.2353) in using hedged language in writing; (5.4706) in using evaluative/attitudinal language; (6.0588) in using interactive/engaging language; and they obtained an overall mean score of (17.0588) in reader-friendly writing. Conversely, control group students obtained lower mean scores for each evaluated metadiscourse domain. The overall result of the t-test shows that the t-value = (-7.28) and the difference is significant at (0.001) level. Thus, the second hypothesis is affirmed.

Although it is extremely difficult to prove “cause and effect” in educational intervention studies, the findings of this study indicate that an interactional metadiscourse program is promising in developing reading comprehension and the reader-friendliness of writing in an EFL context. According to the post-test scores, explicit teaching of interactional metadiscourse markers is capable of improving EFL majors’ reading comprehension and the reader-friendliness of their

writing. Experimental group students outperformed those of the control group in reading comprehension and in reader-friendly writing. These high gains shown by the students of the experimental group on a pre-test post-test comparison could be attributed to the effect of the systematic instruction and training those students had in interactional metadiscourse markers, and to their exposure to the especially prepared and appropriately tuned authentic materials used in the suggested program.

EFL majors' mean scores on the post-test of reading comprehension displayed an enhanced reading comprehension ability among experimental group students. Being aware of interactional metadiscourse markers, as a result of their exposure to direct instruction in them, via the suggested program, experimental group students were able to pick up and identify different kinds of such markers and cues, interpret their textual, physical and cognitive functions, and predict the subsequent events from the preceding propositions in the text. Thus, instead of recalling factual information that has been explicitly stated or wasting their time seeking for direct statements from the text to answer the test questions, experimental group students seemed to apply their awareness of interactional metadiscourse markers in understanding what they read, and they went beyond what was said and read for deeper meanings via recognizing the writer's style of writing.

In another vein, direct teaching of interactional metadiscourse markers proved to be effective in improving, not only EFL majors' reading comprehension, but also their reader-friendly writing. According to the results on the reader-friendly writing scale, experimental group students appeared better able to produce reader-friendly writing than those of the control group. These remarkably high gains shown by students of the experimental group on a pre-post comparison could also be attributed to the effect of the systematic instruction and training EFL majors had in the suggested program.

Experimental group students' mean scores on the post-assessment revealed a better ability to produce a more cautious or hedged language. Their propositions sounded more tentative and less forceful, and they displayed politeness and indirectness as a result of being attenuated by the use of hedging devices. In addition, Experimental group students seemed better able to produce more considerate writing via expressing their attitudes, whether affect, judgment or appreciation, towards the semantic content of their utterances. Moreover, experimental group students showed a better ability to build a kind of writer-reader interaction, engage their readers more explicitly, and invite them to see themselves as participants in the discourse. Via using appropriate engagement markers, experimental group students expressed their recognition of their potential readers, pulling them along with their arguments, focusing their attention and leading them to the right interpretations.

These results are compatible with the proposition, made by Hyland (2004b) that "consciousness raising is crucial in L2 writing instruction" (p. 148). In the same vein, these results are also in accord with the claim made by VandeKopple (2012) that "metadiscourse deserves a prominent place in second-language instruction" (p. 42). These results are also in line with those of Steffensen and Cheng (1996), Jalilifar and Alipour (2007), Tavakoli, Dabaghi and Khorvash (2010), Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010), Jalilifar, Shooshtari, and Mutaqid (2011), Allami and Serajfard (2012), Yaghoubi and Ardestani (2014), and of many others which reported positive impacts of direct teaching of metadiscourse markers on EFL/ESL majors' reading and writing skills. As indicated by the results of these studies, together with the present one, metadiscoursal awareness can actually be systematically developed through well-planned classroom activities. Moreover, these studies, together with the present one, affirm that metadiscoursal awareness raising is crucially important for both effective reading and considerate writing skills.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study indicate that metadiscoursal awareness raising could be successful in suitable EFL contexts such as those of this study. That is, direct instruction in metadiscourse markers could be integrated with great success in EFL majors' curricula. What is direly needed is a radical change in EFL students' views of metadiscourse markers who mistakenly view these markers as redundant elements that have no function or even as noise.

Further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of explicit teaching of other types of metadiscourse markers on EFL majors' reading and writing skills. More contrastive studies are needed to assess how far functional similarity is possible between Arabic and English metadiscourse features.

In conclusion, one needs to re-iterate the limitations of the study reported on here. This remains a small scale study that does not enable generalizing results beyond this population. Furthermore, it remains difficult to claim "cause and effect" in the case of any educational intervention. However, the equivalence of the two groups of the study on the pre-test measures reported on before the intervention, and the differences in scores after the intervention, provides some indication that it is possible that the intervention contributed to the improved reading comprehension and the reader-friendly writing of the experimental group students. These empirical findings in the EFL teaching setting at least indicate that instruction in metadiscourse could be potentially useful in this context.

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