



Analyzing Iran Daily and US Today in Terms of Meta-Discourse Elements

Mir Habib Aboulalaei,
MA in Teaching English Language,
Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran
Email: Mirhabibaboulalaei@yahoo.com

Abstract

The role of using meta-discourse elements in writing, especially in research newspapers, is so important that their authors can convey certainty, doubt, and characteristics of the writers in their writings. There are different meta-discourse markers used by various authors in different branches; for example, hedges and boosters are the most important devices in writing. The meta-discourse elements are communicative strategies for increasing and reducing the force of statements, i.e. authors and writers who write theses, books, or articles give more information with certainty by these markers. In the present investigation, 60 reports from 2 important newspapers, *Iran Daily* and *US Today*, were studied, where for each field 30 articles written by both native and non-native writers were selected and studied. In sum, for each newspaper, 30 articles were chosen. Frequency and distribution of the meta-discourse elements were examined to show which one of the newspapers used those more. The analysis was done by *ANOVA* test to compare the frequency and distribution of the meta-discourse devices. The result of the test indicated differences between the selected newspapers, i.e. *Iran Daily* and *US Today*. It is important to mention that the results of this study can have pedagogical implications for prospective academic writers.

Keywords: Meta-Discourse, Discourse Analysis, Genre, Textual Meta-Discourse, Interpersonal Meta-Discourse

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Introduction

The most important task in communication between people is to convey some information in which for presenting a logical and cohesive construction, a writer uses various linguistic expressions. Some of these expressions reflect the propositional content of the text through the use of lexical and grammatical cohesion, for example, *anaphoric pronouns*, *synonyms*, *antonyms*, and *elliptical expressions*, while the other expressions do not actually add anything to the propositional content and show how the writer constructs the logical progress of the content of the text, how he expresses his own thoughts in different parts of the text, as well as his subjective attitudes according to the content. These special linguistic expressions are called *meta-discourse* or *meta text*. Utilizing the meta-discourse elements in newspaper genres plays the fabulous and vital role in transferring the needed information to the addressees. Communication in media is purposeful social activity; that is, it serves to manifest a goal or an intent which expresses a given community's way of making things happen through language. Given the goal-oriented nature of all human communication, the self-assertive character of manifesting intent verbally, and the manipulative character of newspapers dealing in general, we may consider the common pragmatic function of newspapers as being persuasion, i.e. getting the addressee to comply in some way. The researcher of the present study mostly attempted to find how persuasion achieved in different cultures through the medium of some newspapers is. Comparison of opinion columnists' articles written by American and Iranians may illustrate the ways in which these genres have similarities and differences in terms of meta-discourse elements.

The theoretical basis for the term meta-discourse has been derived from Halliday's classification of language macro-functions (2008). Vande Kopple (1985, p. 83) defined the meta-discourse as "discourse that people use not to expand referential material but to help their readers connect, organize, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes toward that material". He believed that writers usually operate on two levels: on the primary level, the propositional content or the information about the subject matter is supplied; on the meta-discourse level, nothing is added to the content but the readers understand the message and the writer's views by assistance. According to Vande Kopple (1985, p. 84), "primary discourse fulfills the ideational function while meta-discourse satisfies the interpersonal and textual functions of language".

Other view toward the meta-discourse is a set of linguistic devices used to communicate attitudes and to mark the structural properties of a piece of discourse; where it is regarded as a key element of persuasive writing (Fuertes-Olivera, Candlin & Leather, 2001). Creating the solidarity between the addresser and addressee, that meta-discourse plays a vital role since it helps to construct a coherent text and reflects the writers "personality, credibility, considerateness of the reader, and relationship to the subject matter and to readers" (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993, p. 40). Consequently, this element is highly dependent on the contexts in which it occurs and is closely connected to the norms of the specific cultural and professional communities (Hyland, 1998a).

This research considered one of the most popular forms of the communication, i.e., newspapers. It mostly focused on the meta-discourse elements through which both Iranians and American opinion columnists communicate their meaning by these elements. Then our research questions are:

1. Are there any differences between American and Iranian opinion articles in *Iran Daily* and *USA Today* in terms of Inter-personal meta-discourse elements?
2. Are there any differences between American and Iranian opinion articles in *Iran Daily* and *USA Today* in terms of Textual meta-discourse elements?

Different investigations have been done on discourses, while the meta-discourse has been a prominent feature of various types of discourse, which include journalistic texts and the effects of meta-discourse on persuading the audience (Crismore, 1989; Crismore & Farnsworth 1990). There are various reasons why the study of newspaper opinion articles could be considered significant as a discourse genre in contrastive rhetoric and EFL studies. First of all, they are persuasive and argumentative in nature, which means that unlike news reports, opinion articles are written in an effort to influence the social cognition of their readers, trying to reproduce their own attitudes and ideologies among the public at large (Van Dijk, 1992). They are at the same time supposed to present evaluations and comments about the news events. Obviously some expert classifications may have generally acknowledged conventions particularly in terms of their general structures. Then again, regarding the matter of utilizing the methodologies of influence and argumentation in a genre like daily paper article, one ought not to reject the part of socio-cultural elements that may impact it. In this way, any push to investigate the diverse acknowledge of these systems in two languages would add to the field. Furthermore, certain attributes of daily papers have supported the utilization of the newspaper language as input to language instructing materials. Therefore, the investigation of newspapers in terms of media course elements across cultures is of essential importance. However, only very few meta-discourse studies set newspaper genre as their research corpus (Abdollahzadeh, 2007; Dafouz, 2003, 2008; Poock & Lefond, 2003; Noorian & Biria, 2010).

To the knowledge of the researcher, the only study that sought to study meta-discourse use cross-linguistically in American and Iranian newspaper editorials is Abdollahzadeh (2007). The need to fill the gap that exists in the studies on meta-discourse was the original impetus for the present research. The study intended to investigate this prospect and determine predominantly used meta-discourse categories and sub-categories in Iranian and American newspapers (*Iran Daily* and *USA Today*) and to examine the probable differences and/or similarities in the distribution and use of meta-discourse resources in these newspapers. By such an exploration there would be much more knowledge about how writers are able to attract and persuade the largest number of people through deploying the meta-discourse elements and how learners of English can use these devices to make their writing more effective and communicative.

Literature Review

Approaches to Discourse

The history of discourse analysis is rich and varied (Sperber & Wilson, 1989). Discourse analysis, as a study of language use beyond the sentence boundaries, has become an established discipline. It started attracting multidisciplinary attention in the early seventies and has developed into a variety of approaches motivated by a wide range of interests and orientations. In sociology, for example, analysis of language, under the name of ethnography of communication, provides insights into the structuring of communicative behavior and its role in conduct of social life. Ethnomethodology, as developed by Garfinkel (1967, 1972), is concerned primarily with discovering the underlying processes which speakers of a language utilize in order to produce and interpret communicative experiences, including the unstated assumption which are shared socio-cultural knowledge and understanding.

According to Bhatia (1993), linguistics discourse analysis has been developed and can be distinguished along several parameters which has been summarized below. The first one is that of theoretical orientation. On the theoretical orientation scale, linguistic researchers could broadly identify at one end discourse studies as an extension of grammatical formalism, with a focus on formal and sometimes functional aspects of language use, including semantics and pragmatics; and, at the other end, discourse analysis of institutionalized use of language in socio-cultural settings with an emphasis on communication as social action. The more theoretical studies are generally based on a particular theoretical framework in linguistics; text linguistics pioneered by van Dijk (1992), for instance, is based on transformational generative framework.

The second parameter, according to Bhatia (1993), is that of general-specific scale. Regarding generality, there are discourse analyses of everyday conversation, analysis of written discourse in terms of descriptive, narrative, argumentative writing; whereas in the specific direction, there are analyses of research article introductions, legislative provision, and doctor-patient consultation and counsel-witness examination as genres. Somewhere in between, register analysis and journalistic texts can be placed.

The third parameter along which is useful to distinguish discourse analysis is that of applications. There are studies of discourse which have been motivated by an applied concern with language teaching, particularly for the teaching of ESP. Much of applied discourse analysis in linguistics, particularly on functional variation in written discourse, belongs to this strong tradition. Earlier work on discourse analysis by Widdowson (2004), register analysis by Halliday (1964), rhetorical-grammatical analysis of scientific discourse by Selinker, Trimble and others (1976), genre analysis of research writing by Swales (1981), and analysis of legislative provisions by Bhatia (1993) all belong to this tradition.

The fourth parameter is that of surface-deep analysis depending upon whether, or at what level, the analysis provides a thin or a thick (Greetz, 1973) description of language in use. This is particularly significant in the context of applied discourse

analysis which has developed from a surface level formal analysis to a deeper functional analysis, with a corresponding development in language teaching, which marks a movement from form to function, usage to use, grammar to discourse, and communication in recent years.

Levels of Linguistic Descriptions

Bhatia (1993, p. 5) believes that “applied discourse analysis has progressed through at least four levels of linguistic description. They include: Register Analysis, Grammatical Rhetorical Analysis, Interactional Analysis, and Genre Analysis”. In the following lines, these levels of linguistic description have been explained.

Register Analysis

One of the earliest approaches to the description of the varieties of language use, characterized in terms of what Reid (1956) called “register”, became the focus of widespread attention in the sixties and of fierce controversy in the Seventies. Developed by Halliday, McIntash, and Strevens (1964), within the “institutional linguistics” framework of Hill (1958), register analysis focused mainly on the identification of statistically significant lexico-grammatical features of a linguistic variety.

Grammatical Rhetorical Analysis

Grammatical-rhetorical analysis, as stated in Selinker, Lackstrom, and Trimble (1973), aims to investigate the relationship between grammatical choice and rhetorical function in written English for Science and Technology (EST).

Interactional Analysis

Discourse analysis as interaction representing the third level language description at the heart of interactional analysis which lies in the notion of interpretation of discourse by the reader-listener can best be described as the applied discourse analysis in Widdowson (2004), in terms of speech functions in Candlin, Bruton, and Leather (1974), analysis of interactive discourse in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), analysis of predictive structures in Tadros (1980), or analysis in terms of clause relations in Hoey (1979). It is claimed that “discourse meaning is not present in a piece of text ready to be consumed by the reader but is negotiation by the ‘interactive’ endeavor on the part of participants engaged in the encounter, giving specifically appropriate values to utterances” (Mitchel, 1957 as cited in Carter & Nunan 2001, p. 49). Discourse analysis in all the approaches discussed so far appears to have steadily moved from surface level analysis to deep description of language use in three respects (Bhatia, 1993). First, in the values that features of language were assigned in the specialist discourse; second, in the way the discourse was seen as underlying interaction between the writer and the reader, which Candlin and Lotfipour-Saedi (1983) called equalization of the writer’s and the reader’s discourse process; and third, in the attention that was given to the structuring in discourse.

Bhatia (1993) suggested that in order to introduce a thick description of language in use, it is necessary to combine socio-cultural (including ethnographic) and psycholinguistic (including cognitive) aspects of text construction and interpretation with linguistic insights in order to answer the following question: why are specific discourse-genres written and used by the specialist communities the way they are? One such model has been proposed by Swales (1981). Genre analysis as an insightful and thick description of academic and professional text has become a powerful and useful tool to arrive at significant form-function correlations which can be utilized for a number of applied linguistic purposes, including the teaching of English for specific purposes (Swales, 1981).

That is one of the main reasons why it is often referred to as applied genre analysis. Because this study is within the framework of journalistic genre, in the next part, having glance at the history of genre studies in more details is necessary.

Genre Analysis

The term genre has a long story, dating back to ancient Greeks and their study of rhetorical structure in different categories of the epic, lyric, and dramatic. For many years, the term has been commonly used to refer to the particular kinds of literature or other media of creative expressions (e.g., art or film). More recently, however, it has been used in a range of educational contexts to refer not only to types of literary texts, but also to the “predictable and recurring texts that are part of everyday life. (e.g., work and study)” (Eggins, 2004, p.55). According to Salahshoor and Afsari (2017), metadiscourse mostly participated on the structure of the text and important interaction between authors and their readers.

As Bakhtin (1986) has argued, learning genres is a fundamental part of language development, and it is users’ ability to predict the compositional structure and length of genres that enables them to communicate meaning.

Genre knowledge

Genre knowledge is an important notion closely related to genre learning and genre instruction (Tardy, 2006, 2009). Some researchers of disciplinary writing have made a distinction between genre knowledge and disciplinary writing knowledge, considering the former as the mastery of discourse organizations and formal features and the latter as the understanding of target discourse communities and subject matters of the field (Beaufort, 1999, 2004). This view of confining genre knowledge to the formal knowledge of genre has been challenged by other researchers. Freedman and Medway (1994), for instance, stated that “formal knowledge was essential but insufficient on its own to learn a genre” (p. 12). Although genre knowledge is described as “vague and schematic” (Hyland, 2004) and “complex and dichotomous due to its cognitive and socially shared nature” (Johnson & Kaye, 2004, p. 21), the researchers’ discussions of genre knowledge have generally covered three dimensions of this notion: *formal knowledge*, *rhetorical knowledge*, and *content knowledge*. The process dimension of genre knowledge has not been highlighted by all the genre researchers. However, given that process genre

knowledge plays an important role in helping writers go through the course of completing their intended rhetorical goals and getting things done, this type of knowledge is worth serious consideration in the domain of genre knowledge. Tardy (2009) carried out a case study on four multilingual postgraduate students' genre knowledge development in an ESL writing course at an American university. She found that all four dimensions of genre knowledge (formal, rhetorical, process, subject-matter) were demonstrated and gradually integrated with each other in the process of the learners' building up and developing genre expertise. Tardy's findings supported Hyland's (2004) argument for a unified understanding of genre knowledge. In other words, although multidimensionality is a characteristic of genre knowledge, the interplay between different dimensions is natural, and good control of a genre relied on the complementary contributions of all the dimensions of genre knowledge. Yet notwithstanding the unifying characteristics of genre knowledge, it is still arguable that the taxonomical classification of genre knowledge dimensions is requisite for the discourse studies. Such taxonomy practically allows the researchers to closely observe the journalists' perceptions of different dimensions of genre knowledge, their difficulties and weaknesses in specific knowledge areas, the interplay of different knowledge dimensions in writing opinion articles, as well as the impact of genre instruction on the production of persuasive opinion articles.

Rhetorical genre knowledge refers to the understanding of shared communicative purposes among the users of a genre, the situational contexts in which the genre regularly recurs, the writer-reader relationships in these social contexts, readers' cultural values and beliefs which may influence their acceptance of the texts in the genre, and the connection between a text and other texts in the genre. Rhetorical knowledge forms the underlying basis of genre knowledge (Tardy, 2006).

Subject-matter genre knowledge refers to the writers' background knowledge regarding the writing topics. Gaining genre knowledge constitutes genre learning. Facilitating journalist' genre development through enhancing their competence in using and producing socially, professionally, and academically valued genres has consistently been an important issue in genre-based pedagogies and ESP courses (Tardy, 2006).

Classical Rhetoric

Classical rhetoric, mainly derived from Aristotle's book *Rhetoric*, was concerned with the art of public speaking by orators and their attempt to win over the hearers by making effective arguments. Its main concern was "making a point and winning over an audience through a coherent, convincing presentation" (Connor, 1996, p. 6). Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is divided into three books, discussing the stages of preparing a rhetorical speech. Book I focuses on the speaker and his role in the process of persuasion. Book II focuses on the audience and the relationship between human nature, emotions, and moral considerations. Book III discusses the language to be used in preparing the rhetorical speech. In Book I, Aristotle defines rhetoric as:

The faculty of observing in any given case is the available means of persuasion. This is not the function of any other art. Every other art

instructor can persuade about its own particular subject-matter [...] but rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us; and that is why we say that, in its technical character, it is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects. (Aristotle, translated by Barnes, 1984, p. 2155)

For Aristotle, rhetoric is a method or art to structure speech for the purpose of persuasion. Therefore, he emphasizes the manner in which a speech is organized and delivered over the content. He refers to three modes of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* refers to “the personal character of the speaker”. It is “the most effective means of persuasion” and makes us think the speaker “credible” (ibid, p. 2155). *Pathos* refers to the arousal of emotion in the hearers and “putting the audience in a certain frame of mind” (ibid, p. 2155).

Categorizations of Meta-discourse

Given the breadth of meaning realized by meta-discourse markers, there are a number of different ways with which these features have been categorized. Most taxonomies are closely based on that proposed by Kopple (1985) whose categorization consists of seven kinds of meta-discourse marker divided into textual and interpersonal types, which are summarized in table (1).

Table 1. Vande Kopple’s (1985) Classification System for Meta-Discourse

Textual meta-discourse
Text connectives - used to help show how parts of a text are connected to one another. Include sequencers (first, next, in the second place), reminders (as I mentioned in chapters 2), and topicizers which focus attention on the topic of a text segment (with regard to, in connection with).
Code glosses - used to help readers to grasp the writer’s intended meaning. Based on the writer’s assessment of the reader’s knowledge, these devices reword, explain, define, or clarify the sense of a usage, sometimes putting the reformulation in parentheses or marking it as an example, etc.
Validity markers – used to express the writer’s commitment to the probability or truth of a statement. These include hedges (perhaps, might, may), emphatics (clearly, undoubtedly), and attributers which enhance a position by claiming the support of a credible other (according to Einstein).
Narrators – used to inform readers of the source the information presented - who said or wrote something (according to Smith, the Prime Minister announced that).
Interpersonal meta-discourse
Illocution markers - used to make explicit the discourse act the writer is performing at certain points (to conclude, I hypothesize, to sum up, we predict).
Attitude markers - used to express the writer’s attitudes to the propositional material he or she presents (unfortunately, interestingly, I wish that, how awful that).
Commentaries - used to address readers directly, drawing them into an implicit dialogue by commenting on the reader’s probable mood or possible reaction to the text (you will certainly agree that, you might want to read the third chapter first).

This classification has been used by numerous writers such as Crismore and Fransworth (1989, 1990), Intarprawat and Steffensen (1995), and Cheng Steffensen

(1996) and is itself a development of Lautamatti's (1978) taxonomy and William's (1984) brief style guide treatment. The vagueness of the categories and functional overlaps, however, mean they have proved difficult to apply in practice. Hyland (2004) found that one of these problems is distinguishing of the narrators and attributors, particularly in academic writing where citation is used to perform a variety of rhetorical functions. "Not only can citations provide propositional warrants (validity markers in Vande Kopple's (1985) terms, and meet conventions of precedence (narrators), but they might also be used to offer a narrative context for the research (Berenkötter & Huckin, 1995) or establish intertextual framework to suggest a cumulative and linear progression of knowledge (Hyland, 1999)." The most substantial revisions have been those of Crismore et al. (1993) and Hyland (1998a, 1998b, 1999) who have collapsed, separated, and recognized Vande Kopple's (1985) categories. This study, too, uses Crismore et al.'s (1993) categorization which is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Crismore et al.'s (1993, pp. 47-54) Categorization of Meta-Discourse

Category	Function	Examples
Textual meta-discourse		
1-Textual markers		
Logical connectives	Show connections between ideas	Therefore; so; in addition; And
Sequencers	Indicates sequence / ordering of material	First; next; finally; 1, 2, 3
Reminders	Refer to earlier text material	As we saw in chapter one
Topicalizers	Indicate a shift in topic	Well; now I will discuss ...
2-Interpretive markers		
Code glosses	Explain text material	For example; that is
Illocution markers	Name the act performed	To conclude; in sum; I predict
Announcements	Announce upcoming	In the next section ...
Interpersonal meta-discourse		
Hedges	Show uncertainty to truth of assertion	Might; possible; likely
Certainty markers	Express full commitment to assertion	Certainly; know; shows
Attributors	Give source / support of information	Smith claims that ...
Attitude markers	Display writer's affective values	I hope / agree; surprisingly ...
Commentary	Build relationship with reader	You may not agree that ...

The taxonomy employed here, based on the scheme for identifying cultural variations in essay writing, was developed by Crismore et al. (1993), and distinguished textual and interpersonal meta-discourse. This system offered a comprehensive and pragmatically grounded description, so this system can be used in analyzing opinion articles written by Iranians and Americans to reveal the cultural preferences in both corpora. In order to clarify the textual and interpersonal meta-discourse, a detailed explanation of these seems necessary.

Methodology

As mentioned before, journalistic genre is generally considered as one of the most ritual, formulaic, and standardized types of communication. However, even if genre repertoires are shared within this discourse community and are indeed the result of the activities and the conventions established by that specific discourse community, the communicative purpose of this genre can be achieved differently in different cultures.

Van Dijk (1995, p. 17) recommended that analysis of texts unfolded in three moves: “the description of argumentative structures, the explication of presupposed (tacit) assumptions, examination norms and values.” Gee’s approach is to focus on the six building tasks of language, including the semiotic, world activity, socio-culturally-situated, identity and relational, political, and the connection building - which, taken together, can help one explicate what is being attempted and achieved in the public discourse (Gee, 1973 as cited in Van Dijk, 1992).

To investigate such an issue, the present study and investigation adopt a perspective that shows how meta-discourse elements are used by native and nonnative speakers. As is mentioned before, meta-discourse elements allow the writer to “intrude” into the text by organizing what is said and by expressing personal feelings about it. For the purpose of this study, Crismore et al.’s (1993) classification of meta-discourse will be used for analyzing Iran daily and USA Today opinion articles.

As we read in Edwards and Potter’s (1992) *A Way of Studying the Social Reality*, discourse analysis challenges earlier epistemological understandings and aims to make pragmatic assessments of stipulated truth claims. In this perspective, discourses can be understood as “conduits” that point to a reality beyond itself, whether or not this “pointing” can be understood as strictly representational (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Language acts are both linguistic and social in nature, and discourses are understood as dependent on the conditions in which they emerge and as existing within a field of discourse.

The present study, which relies on methods developed by the table of Crismore et al. (1993), attempts to build upon the newspapers of two different countries.

Materials

Within the wide range of text-types that a newspaper presents, the current study concentrated on opinion articles. Like editorials, opinion columns are written about topics that are “of particular societal importance at the time of publication” (Le, 2004, p. 688). However, contrary to editorials, these texts are written by experts and they may not reflect the official position of the newspaper. Connor (1996) considered opinion columns as one of the most appropriate examples of persuasive texts in all countries which could set standards for the persuasive writing.

The data of the present research was from the opinion columns of two influential and prestigious newspapers in the United States and Iran: *USA Today* and *Iran Daily*, respectively. These two are among the most widely read newspapers in

the United States and Iran. 30 opinion articles from each newspaper (totally 60) was selected which had been published from 2013 to 2015. In addition, their opinion articles cover a wide variety of topics such as perspectives on Islam, Social Justice, Economics, and Politics. The selected articles were matched for length and topic in order to ensure comparability. They cover various topics including Middle East Issues, Health Issues, and a Human Rights Issue. The reason why newspaper articles were chosen in this analysis was closely related to the importance of mass communication in present day societies.

Data Collection

Since the linguistic analysis is usually based on the systemic-functional grammar, Halliday considered three functions of the language: ideational, textual, and interpersonal. In the present study, the analysis of the meta-discourse took into account only two of these functions, i.e. the textual and the interpersonal (Halliday, 1973 as cited in Vande Kopple, 1985).

Also, by studying the other researchers' investigations, the researcher found that the textual meta-discourse was realized to be the explicit signals expressing the logical order and relations between different parts of the text. There are three various issues through the contextual meta-discourse which are as follow: 1) analyzing the text in whole; 2) looking through a subtheme of a text; 3) dividing the subthemes into small parts; that is, the mentioned main functions of the textual meta-discourse can be analyzed through the smaller functions (Vanhala-Aniszewski, 2001).

Some previous studies and investigations illustrated that the textual meta-discourse was more frequent in the different texts than the other ones. According to Vanhala-Aniszewski (2001), interpersonal meta-discourse dealt with two sides of communication. On the one hand, it dealt with the social side of communication, i.e. with the interactional relations between the participants of the communication act. This may include how the writer refers to himself, how he refers to the reader, and how he refers to third persons, for instance, his colleagues. On the other hand, interpersonal meta-discourse dealt with the subjective attitude of the writer to the content of the proposition.

As was mentioned before, meta-discourse elements allow the writer to "intrude" into the text by organizing what is said and by expressing personal feelings about it. For the purpose of this study, Crismore et al.'s (1993) classification of meta-discourse (Table 1) was used for analyzing *Iran daily* and *USA Today* opinion articles. To do this, the types and frequencies of meta-discourse elements in each corpus were investigated. All the texts were saved into the computer to form a database of corpora. Then, 30 articles from each newspaper were finally chosen for the analysis since, as mentioned before, there was a need to control the different variables involved in the writing of the texts such as the writers' native language, topic, and length of the articles. As many discourse analysts have proposed (e.g. Dafouz, 2003; Hyland, 1999; Thompson, 2001), the topic of a text may influence the type and frequency of meta-discourse categories found. Therefore, the choice of theme was carefully controlled in this study.

Procedures of Data Analyses

In order to investigate the data, the researcher scrutinized the texts on the basis of meta-discourse elements as far as meta-discourse was concerned; the classification of Crismore et al. (1993) was applied and the frequency, number and type of different meta-discourse elements were counted and analyzed.

After identifying and categorizing the meta-discourse markers, a quantitative analysis was conducted to find the differences between the two groups in this regard. In general, quantitative information was essential for marking the existence of and the relative emphasis placed on various meta-discourse categories and subcategories in the data. Since a single judgment seemed to be inadequate, the articles were analyzed independently by an expert by coding all meta-discourse markers. Since the 1000-word approach was the usual method employed by many researchers (Hyland, 1998a), the raw figures were standardized to a common basis (markers per 1000 words) in order to compare the frequency of occurrence. Finally, a Chi-Square analysis was conducted to compare the means of distribution of meta-discourse elements between the two corpora.

Since the main purpose of the present article was to explore and examine how meta-discourse functions in the opinion columns of two influential and prestigious newspapers in the United States and Iran: *USA Today* and *Iran Daily*, the researcher attempted to make the study on the basis of the principles of functional linguistics and discourse analysis. These principles suggest that the use of language is understood as a social phenomenon - a means of interaction between members of a society. Further, according to the discourse analysis in the study of the language (the text), one has to take into account how the socio-cultural context influences the use of linguistic expressions.

Descriptive Statistics

From among different articles in the selected newspapers, *Iran Daily* and *USA Today*, Economic, Social, Political sections of the newspapers, 60 news articles (30 from each newspaper) were randomly chosen and selected to be studied and investigated. Collected data were quantitatively analyzed to disclose their frequency occurrence in a given text and to realize whether there was an outstanding difference or similarity between two sets of corpus data in this respect.

Overall Distribution of Meta-Discourse Elements with Regard to the Newspaper

Academic writing is created by paying special attention to the specific constraints or conventions of different disciplines. Scholarly work is reflected in academic discourse through a selection of linguistic elements, and this selection is made by following the conventions or rules of a particular discourse community. These conventions might ensure academic writers that their work will actually be recognized by readers and accepted by their colleagues in that discourse community. According to the findings of Varttala (1999, p. 248), “different disciplines may not be altogether uniform when it comes to frequency, forms, and variety of hedges”. In

this way, meta-discourse elements in different disciplines may not present the same occurrence in the other discipline.

By attention to the scheme which the researcher had in his mind and stated through the present paper, after selecting from the leading news, the chosen parts were precisely and correctly read and studied several times word by word in order to paper recognize and find the meta-discourse elements and markers. Afterward, the number of stated markers was counted in each article and in each newspaper separately. The markers were underlined, then, classified and characterized to the five types based on the classification of Crismore et al. (1993). According to classification of Crismore et al. (1993), the taxonomy included five main types which are as follow:

1. Shields, such as *can, could, may, might, would, to appear, to seem, probably, to suggest*.
2. Approximates of degree, quantity frequency, and time: e.g., *approximately, roughly, about, often, occasionally*, etc.
3. Authors' personal doubt and direct involvement, expressions such as *I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that...*
4. Emotionally-charged intensifiers, such as *extremely difficult / interesting, of particular importance, unexpectedly, surprisingly*, etc.
5. Compound hedges, the examples are: *could be suggested, would seem likely, would seem somewhat*.

The editorials were examined to identify meta-discourse devices. Based on Varttala's (2002) model, modal instances of hedging were identified in the editorial. It is necessary to know that the kinds of hedges were determined, recognized, and recorded. For avoiding errors, all the editorials were examined different times.

According to Thompson (2001), Varttala's (2001) model divided meta-discourse elements and markers into five groups such as modal auxiliaries, verbs, nouns, adjectives, and other groups like if clauses. Non-native reporting verbs were used to give description of the authors own research such as suggest and argue. Tentative cognition verbs like hope and suspect were used. Probability adverbs like *apparently* and *probably* show some tentative degree. *Sometimes* and *often* are adverbs of indefinite with which author provides the reader with exact information. *Significantly* and *somewhat* are adverbs of indefinite. *About* and *almost* are approximately adverbs that show imprecision on data. *Possible* is probability adjective.

The total number of meta-discourse markers taken in *USA Today* and *Iran Daily* were 871 and 626, respectively. In *USA Today*, 431 were used in Politics, 132 in economics, and 308 in social editorials, while in *Iran Daily*, 245 were used in economics, 207 in political, and 174 in social editorials. Table 1 bellow provides a summary of the frequency of the considered meta-discourse markers.

Table 3. Frequency of Meta-Discourse Markers in Different Text Types of Discourse

<i>Newspapers</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Total</i>
USA Today	431	132	308	871
Iran Daily	207	245	174	626

Iran Daily and *USA Today* used meta-discourse differently. Table 1 clearly shows *USA Today* used more hedges (871) than *Iran Daily* (626), but regarding Economic section *Iran Daily* editorials tend to use more hedges rather than *USA Today* (245). The present study adopts the classification proposed by Salager-Meyer (1994). Accordingly, Meta-discourse was classified into five types. Table 2 indicates the classification of hedges in both American and Iranian newspapers as well as their frequency.

Table 4. Frequency and Types of Hedges in American and Iranian Newspapers

	<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Total</i>
	Shields	approximates	Authors involvement	emotionally	compound hedges	
<i>Newspapers</i>						
USA Today	66	36	0	12	10	124
Iran Daily	74	27	0	10	8	119

As can be revealed through Table 2 (shields), hedging devices are the most frequently employed by both groups of writers, with *USA Today* writers using 8 shields more than *Iran Daily's* authors. The present discovery and finding correspond to findings of Adam Smith (2001) who believes type one hedges are being used more than other hedges in academic papers. Accordingly, Butler (1990) also says that modal auxiliary verbs (type one contained) occur in approximately one of every 10 words in newspapers. Recently, Hyland (2004) found that 29% of all lexical devices in his corpus of biology were modal auxiliary verbs (related to type one in this study). However, Iranian authors through the newspaper preferred to use type 2 (*Approximates*) hedging devices through using this type, 9 meta-discourse markers more than others.

Considering type 3 (*personal involvement*), there was not any occurrences of these devices in both corpora. In type 4 frequency (*Emotionally-charged intensifiers*) meta-discourse makers for academic were 10 and for *Iran Daily* was 12. Finally, type five (*compound hedges*) frequency in *USA Today* was 8 and for *Iran Daily* 10.

The results disclosed that some differences could be seen in using meta-discourse markers between two groups of writers from different cultures in same language; that is, they both used English language for reporting news through the newspaper while their cultures were different, one Iranian newspaper and the other one English. Based on these differences, *USA Today's* authors had higher preference for type 1, and 5, while *Iran Daily's* writers tended to use types 2 and 4. However, the prominent similarity between Iranian newspaper and English newspapers is that there were not any meta-discourse expressions using type 3. As Table 1 discloses, nearly 0% of Iranian and American newspaper writers were using type 3 meta-discourse (author personal doubt and direct involvement).

Table 5 below shows the frequency of occurrence for different types of shields in both newspapers. It is clearly observed in the table that among different types of shields, Iranian newspaper writers tended to use modals more than English writers, but regarding *Probability adverbs* and *Semi-auxiliaries*, it is *USA Today's* writers who had higher preference for them. The table also indicates that totally shields are more frequent (124) in *USA Today* newspaper editorials than *Iran Daily* ones (119).

Table 5. Shields in English and Iranian Newspaper

Types of shields		Frequency
Modals	<i>Iran Daily</i>	29
	<i>USA Today</i>	28
Probability Adverbs	<i>Iran Daily</i>	21
	<i>USA Today</i>	32
Semi-Auxiliaries	<i>Iran Daily</i>	16
	<i>USA Today</i>	24
Total	<i>Iran Daily</i>	66
	<i>USA Today</i>	74

Below there are some samples extracted from *Iran Daily* editorials published in Iran and *USA Today* published in United States.

Sample 1:

The general secretary of the central bank by stating this issue that the minimum sufficient of the bank should be reached to 80 percent said

Sample 2:

When the insurance system and schedule is weak in our country, and in the mine section we see the costing problem, paying the subsidy in cash will not be possible.

Sample 3:

The WHO estimates there could be up to four million cases of Zika in the Americas in the next year. However, no recommendations were made on Monday to restrict travel or trade....

Conclusion

The Inter-Generic Perspective

Most of the contrastive work on meta-discourse in both native and non-native newspapers has focused on the analysis of how cultures and disciplines influence writers' choices at the time of constructing their authorial self. However, the aim to be recognized as a competent and well-informed member of a certain disciplinary community might also demand mastering of the meta-discourse uses which are certain to special social practices. The exploration of meta-discourse from the point

of view of genres in contrast undoubtedly contributes with a complementary perspective to the ones mentioned before.

According to Orta, Vanhala, and Aniszewski (2006), the corpus that they have compiled so far has allowed them to start drawing conclusions from the comparison between two research genres: the RA abstract and the RA¹ itself, both within the discipline of Applied Linguistics. It is now generally agreed that research articles are the outcome of a complex process, a negotiation in which writers anticipate readers and reviewers' reactions. As Hyland (2004) observed, “[it] remains the primary genre of the academy: the site where names are made, knowledge authenticated, rewards allocated and disciplinary authority exercised.”

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that, based on the analysis of English and Non-English newspapers writers, English editorials used more hedges than Persian ones. This difference refers to the cultural variation between two communities. Besides, another reason related to the discourse consideration. Students can benefit from parts they have opportunity to survey and disclose the correctness of hedging roles and are aware of cultural, social factors underlying them.

Without underplaying the promotional role that the RA may have as a textual construction, abstracts are increasingly becoming a way of assuring that the attempts to promote writers' research are given space in the disciplinary world to which they belong. The increasing information flow in the scientific community in the last decades has made necessary the development of a genre whose main function is to channel flow of information. The close relationships and links between the *USA Today* and *Iran Daily* confer them the quality of what Swales (1981) has come to call a “*genre set*” in academic writing, “that part of the total genre network that a particular individual engages in, either or both receptively or productively, as part of his or her normal occupational or institutional practice” (Devitt, 1991 as cited in Vázquez & Giner, 2008). The exploration of such links can be pursued, for instance, by means of the analysis of interactional meta-discourse features.

Newspaper writing and reporting are created by paying special attention to the specific constraints or conventions of different disciplines. A scholar's work in casual method is reflected in newspapers discourse through a selection of linguistic elements, and this selection is made by following the conventions or rules of a particular discourse community. These conventions might ensure academic writers that their work will actually be recognized by readers and accepted by their colleagues in that discourse community. As Varttala (1999, p. 248) stated, “different disciplines may not be altogether uniform when it comes to frequency, forms, and variety of hedges”. In this way, the meta-discourse elements like hedges and

1- Research Article (RA)

boosters in Medicine might not present the same occurrence as in Linguistics or Chemistry.

Acknowledgment

Acknowledging some limitations of the present study, certain suggestions can be made for further researches. First, the present investigation and study were conducted to find the differences and similarities regarding hedging phenomenon in English and Persian social, economic, and political newspaper editorials. Further research can focus on meta-discourse elements in newspapers in English language by both *Iran Daily* and *USA Today*. Second, other researchers can consider hedges in other eras such as sports or other global issues.

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Author's Biography



Mir Habib Aboulalaei is the Head of Faseleh Language Institute in Tabriz, which makes use of a creative method invented by him. He has graduated from Tabriz University and taught and worked as a translator and interpreter in Tabriz University, Miyaneh Technical University, and some other universities, organizations, and offices. He invented the Method for Teaching Languages in 7 months and was selected as the best translator in translating the Interpreting-Guidelines for Community Interpreting under the Iranian National Standardization Organization in 2017. He has been the referee for the following journals: 1. *EJES journal* – Special Journal in Linguistics (www.ejes.eu), 2. *NET journals* – Special Journal in Linguistics, Medical, Science, and Psychology . . . (www.netjournals.org), 3. *IJEPRR journal* – *Special Journal in Linguistics and Teaching Method* (<http://www.journalissues.org/IJEPRR/>), 4. Referee and reviewer in *Journal of Advances in Linguistics* (<https://cirworld.com/index.php/jal>), 5. Referee and reviewer in *Journal of Educational Research and Reviews (JERR)* (<http://sciencewebpublishing.net/jerr>), and 6. Referee and Reviewer in *JOURNAL OF ADVANCES IN LINGUISTICS*.
