

A Discourse Analysis Study of English and Persian Newspaper Editorials Based on Halliday's Functional Grammar

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Abstract

This article aims at contrasting the use of metadiscoursal markers in English and Persian Newspaper Editorials as persuasive text types. The mentioned markers are linguistic constituents in the text which do not enhance the propositional content of it, but they fulfill Halliday's (1985) textual and interpersonal functions of language. The main research question was related to the existence of any difference between English and Persian newspaper editorials in their use of metadiscoursal markers. Initially, some of the most frequent markers from five subcategories of Text Connectives, Illocution Markers, Hedges, Emphatics, and Attitude Markers were found in both English and Persian newspapers. Subsequently, the frequency of occurrence of these markers in both English and Persian corpus consisting of 44 randomly selected editorials (18,000 words in each) from several English and Persian newspapers was recorded. Then, using a two-way chi square analysis, the overall χ^2 obs was proved to be highly significant. So, the null hypothesis of no difference was confidently rejected. Finally, in order to reveal the contribution of each subcategory to the overall χ^2 value, one-way chi square analyses were applied to the subcategories. Our findings revealed that only two of the markers' subcategories were statistically significant. This difference is mainly due to the differing spirits existing in the communities considered. Concerning the minor research question (Is Persian a reader or writer-responsible language as compared and contrasted with English) it was revealed that, as opposed to English writers, Persian writers are more likely to be writer-oriented in their works.

Keywords: English and Persian newspaper editorials, Interpersonal meta-function, Metadiscoursal markers, Textual meta-function, Persuasive texts

1. Introduction

Generally, both written and oral communication used in any language would have three functions as proposed in Halliday's (1978) grammatical theory. These functions given by Halliday (1978) are: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The first one conveys the thoughts and feelings of the outside world. It also explains the fundamental relations that might be existed among them. The second one expresses the interpersonal relations between the speakers, writers and listeners/readers. The last one; textual function, deals with how sentences, paragraphs, and texts are connected with each other to make a cohesive and coherent text one (ibid). Metadiscourse markers are mostly used to guide the readers and listeners throughout the discourse or text rather than to provide them with information.

Metadiscourse encompasses some linguistic clues or elements which are concerned with how different discourses in different genres are organized and the possible connections between writers and readers (Crismore, 1989; VandeKopple, 2002; Williams, 1981). In a broad and general definition, VandeKopple (1985) states that metadiscourse carries both textual and interpersonal meanings in a text.

Some researchers in the past two decades have emphasized the vital role of these functions in writing, teaching composition, and reading; claiming that writers, by using metadiscourse functions, can engage themselves in writing a discourse to express their attitudes. It has been also indicated that the use of functions differ from one language and culture to another and the elements involved in such functions can be used as devices or means that will satisfy the readers and help the writers to express their opinions to the audience (Abdollahzadeh, 2003; Crismore, Hyland, 2005; Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Mauranen, 1993). The main concern of the present study is put on a contrastive study of metadiscourse markers, textual and interpersonal, in both English and Persian newspaper editorials. In fact, this study dealt with investigating the textual and interpersonal metadiscourse elements, which are used in these two types of texts to figure out the similarities and differences between such texts and genres. So, the main research question of the study is:

Is there any difference between English and Persian newspaper editorials in their use of metadiscourse markers?

To find the answer to the foregoing question, the research starts off with the null hypothesis of no difference:

There is no difference between English and Persian newspaper editorials in their use of metadiscoursal markers.

Based on the related issues of the research, the following minor research question will be probed in this regard:

Is Persian a reader or writer-responsible language as compared and contrasted with English?

2. Literature Review

Many research studies have been done on metadiscourse using the Hallidayan classification of metadiscoursal functions of language in order to find out how messages are sent and perceived in one language (Abdollahzadeh, 2001, 2003, 2007; Crismore et al., 1993; Dafouz, 2003; Hyland, 1998; Marandi, 2002; Rahimpour, 2006; VandeKopple, 1985).

The issue of metadiscourse has attracted the attention of many researchers in recent years. Some of them are conducted on the use of metadiscoursal markers in writing by means of comparing and contrasting both professional writers and student writers in English (Abdi, 2000; Beigmohammadi, 2003; Simin, 2004). They found that writers in different professions made use of metadiscourse markers differently in their writings. Some others have paid attention to the relationship or impact of metadiscourse instruction with/on the reading comprehension ability of EFL/ESP students (Dastgoshadeh, 2001; DaftaryFard, 2002; Khorvash, 2008; Jalilifar and Alipour, 2007). Almost all of these studies found metadiscourse instruction and knowledge to be significantly effective in reading comprehension; and it helped the readers to find out the intended meanings in the texts more easily.

Surprisingly, a few studies have been done to investigate the use of metadiscoursal markers in journals in discourse analysis research (Abdollahzadeh, 2007; Dafouz, 2003; 2008; Le, 2004). A discourse like newspaper is one of the most important genres because it can absorb a great number of audiences through the media used, and readers all over the world can gain most of their knowledge by reading different newspapers in different genres (Fowl, 1991). Crismore and Abdollahzadeh (2010) also consider metadiscourse as a newborn subject in the areas of reading,

writing, and text analysis. They further claim that this new concept has not received much attention from among the researchers in the field of discourse or genre analysis.

To mention a few, Abdollahzadeh (2007) conducted a cross-linguistic comparison and contrast of metadiscourse in English and Persian newspaper editorials. He found that Anglo-American editorials benefited much more from hedges and code glosses. He further put it forward that the more use of hedges by the English editorial writers was due to the fact that such writers are more polite and considerate in their writings. The more use of code glosses was also attributed to the reality that they are more reader-oriented in their writings.

In a similar study, Dafouz (2003) also did a contrastive research on the use of metadiscourse markers in two important newspapers: one in Spanish and one in British. The findings clearly indicated that the Spanish editor writers used more textual metadiscourse markers than the British ones, while the British writers made use of interpersonal markers more than the Spanish ones.

This study tries to contrast the use of metadiscourse markers in English and Persian Newspaper Editorials as persuasive text types. These markers are linguistic elements in the text which do not add to the propositional content of it, rather they serve to realize the Halliday's (1985) textual and interpersonal functions of language.

3. Method

3.1. Selection of the Corpora

In contrastive rhetoric studies, there are certain considerations to be observed. These are: representativeness of the texts in the languages contrasted, cross-cultural comparability of texts, the frequency of texts in the cultures under study, the size of the corpus, and sample selection procedures (Hyland, 2005). Corpus selection of this study was based on these variables.

3.2. Procedures

To ensure that the texts are representative rather than idiosyncratic, care has been taken into account because of the fact that even in the same language and culture there may be personal, situational, and contextual varieties of usage that would influence the validity of one's generalization. In this research in order to guard against this threat to the validity of results, the corpus was selected from a pool of newspapers in English and Persian.

The second variable to be controlled in this research is the comparability of texts as Swales (1991) puts it forward that comparison of texts across cultures should involve texts of the same

genre. It would be unproductive to compare texts written in different contexts for different purposes and tasks. As such, in the present study, the corpora are limited to the genre of newspaper editorials.

Another variable is that of the comparability of the texts with regard to their types. It would be unprofitable to compare argumentative texts in one culture with persuasive texts in another. Hence, the comparison is limited to the persuasive type. The selection of persuasive texts is based on the justification that in most newspapers the purpose of editorials is to influence the opinions of readers on some controversial issues. In addition, newspaper editorials, perhaps more than any other type of writing reflect national styles regarding the mode of persuasion. Another rationale for the selection of persuasive text is the fact that it is the most frequent type in any culture (Halliday, 1985).

The fourth consideration in such studies is the size of the corpus. However, as analysis of texts, especially long ones, is very time-consuming, the present research is limited to a minimal of 44 samples from each language. It is believed that this minimal size can allow statistically valid generalizations to be made.

The final concern, i.e., randomness of sample selection procedure is a general concern in almost all quantitative studies (Henning, 1986). The corpora used in this study were randomly selected from a pool of newspapers in English and Persian. Forty-four editorials were selected from 5 British and American newspapers, and 44 from 5 Persian ones.

3.3. Newspapers Used in this Study

The English newspapers used were: the Sunday Telegraph, the Sunday Times, the International Herald Tribune, the Washington Post, and the New York Times. The Persian newspapers were: Etellat, Keyhan, Hamshahri, Jam-e-Jam, and Resalat.

3.4. Analysis of the Corpora

For the analysis of the corpora regarding the use of metadiscourse markers, the study followed the theory of metadiscourse proposed by Vandekopple (1985). Kopple (1985) analyzed seven types of metadiscourse, four of which realize the textual, and the remaining three realized the interpersonal functions of language. The textual metadiscourse comprises: Text Connectives

(e.g., first, therefore, but) which help readers with the organization of the text; Code Glosses (for example, i.e.) that help readers to interpret meanings of words and phrases; Illocution Markers (to conclude, frankly speaking) that indicate the speech act; and Narrators (according to) that let readers know who said that.

The interpersonal metadiscourse, on the other hand, includes Validity Markers that assess the truth of the content and shows author's commitment. They are subcategorized into Hedges (maybe, might, it is possible that); Emphatics (it is true, certainly); Attitude Markers (e.g. I find it surprising) that reveal the writers' attitudes towards content; and Connectives (dear friend, you will find it surprising) that draw readers into implicit dialogues with the author (Halliday, 1985).

This study was limited to the subcategories of Text Connectives and Illocution Markers of the main category of the Textual Metadiscourse, and to the Validity and Attitude Markers' subcategories of the main category of the Interpersonal Metadiscourse.

First, several most common metadiscoursal markers in each category in English were identified, and then their corresponding Persian equivalents were established as given in Table 1 and 2 below. As the study involved the tabulation of frequencies, the Chi Square of data was thought to be the suitable statistical method of data analysis.

Table 1. Some of the most commonly used markers in English Newspapers

Textual Metadiscourse		Interpersonal Metadiscourse		
Text Connectives	Illocution Marker	Validity Markers		
		hedges	emphatics	Attitude markers
First	To conclude			
To start with	To sum up	May be	Doubtless	Surprisingly
For one thing	To give an example	Might	Certainly	Fortunately
Firstly	Frankly speaking	It is possible...	Clearly	It is fortunate...
In the first place	Honestly speaking	It is likely...	Obviously	It is odd...
One is...		It is probable..	Definitely	More important
Another		It appears...	Really	Sadly
Second		It tends to	Indeed	It is/was terrible...
Third		It appears to	It is obvious...	It is interesting
Next		X Seems to	It is clear...	It is difficult
Then		X is said to	Without doubt	X was right that/to
Last		As if	Surely	
Lastly			Extremely	
Finally				
In the end				

Table 2. Some of the most commonly used markers in Persian Newspapers

Textual Metadiscourse		Interpersonal Metadiscourse		
Text Connectives	Illocution Marker	Validity Markers		
		hedges	emphatics	Attitude markers
نخست	نتیجه گیری می کنیم			
اولا	خلاصه می کنیم			
ابتدانا	صادقانه می گویم	ممکن است که	به یقین	جای تعجب است
مقدمتا	صراحتا می گویم	لا بد	به وضوح	خوشبختانه
ثانیا		احتمال دارد که	یقینا	مناسفانه
دوم آنکه		به نظر می رسد که	بدیهی است که	جای خوشوقتی است که
دیگر آنکه		گفته می شود که	مطمئنا	شگفتا که
سپس آنکه			قطعا	
در خاتمه			آشکارا	
سر آخر آنکه			واقعا	
آخرین			ناگفته پیداست که	
در انتها			واضح است که	
			درست است که	
			بی شک	
			بی تردید	

4. Results and Discussions

Subsequently and after revealing the most common textual and interpersonal markers used in both English and Persian newspapers editorials (see Table 3), the English and Persian corpora were analyzed and the results obtained are as the following:

Table 3. Occurrence Frequency of the Metadiscourse Markers in English and Persian Corpora

Language		Markers					Total
		TC	IM	H	E	AM	
English	Count	6	5	46	35	27	119
	Expected count	9.8	5.6	32.2	46.7	24.7	119.0
Persian	Count	15	7	23	65	26	136
	expected Count	11.2	6.4	36.8	53.3	28.3	136.0
Total	Count	21	12	69	100	53	255
	expected Count	21.0	12.0	69.0	100.0	53.0	255.0

TC= Text Connectives, IM= Illocution Markers, H= Hedges, E= Emphatics, Am= Attitude Markers

Table 3 above clearly shows the overall contribution of each subcategory in both English and Persian with their frequency of occurrence. For the textual metadiscourse and its subcategories, text connectives and illocution markers, the findings revealed that the textual markers were employed more frequently by the Persian newspaper editorials (11.2, 6.4). Regarding the interpersonal metadiscourse categories, the results disclosed interesting differences between the two corpora. Hedges were used far more frequently in the English Corpus (46=32.2), emphatics were used almost twice the frequency number of the English newspaper editorials in Persian (65=53.3). With regard to the subcategory, attitude markers, it can be observed that the two corpora, English and Persian, nearly enjoyed the same frequency number of occurrence (27=24.7, 26=28.3), respectively.

To see the overall relationship between language, English and Persian, and markers, textual and interpersonal, and to figure out if language and markers are significantly related, Table 4.1 is given as the following.

Table 4.1. Results of Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	19.831	4	.001
Likelihood Ratio	20.160	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.014	1	.905
Not Valid CASES	255		

The findings reported in Table 4-1, revealed that language and markers are significantly related to each other ($p=0.001$). This implies that the difference and similarity between the two languages in terms of language-marker relationship can be attributed to the differing spirits prevailing in the linguistic communities involved in the two languages, English and Persian.

To find out the potential relationship which might exist between language and markers in the English and Persian newspaper editorials with regard to each category and subcategories, tables 4.2-4.6 are given.

To see the overall relationship between languages (English/Persian), and markers (textual and interpersonal), and to figure out if language and markers are significantly related, Table 4.2 is given as the following.

Table 4.2. Results of the Textual Subcategory (Text Connectives) in English and Persian

marker	language	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-square	df	Asymp sig.
Text Connectives	English	6	10.5	3.857	1	.050
	Persian	15	10.5			

As we can see in the above table, the Persian newspaper editorials use far more frequency of text connectives in their writings. Such items were used more in order to connect various sections of a text or essay, to show the order of the ideas, to remind of the already mentioned ideas presented before, to indicate the upcoming information, and to use the words or phrases which refer to the main idea in the text to the readers in the society. So, one might claim that there is no significant relationship between the two languages on the use of “text connectives” in newspaper editorials ($p < .050$). In other words, Iranian newspaper editorials are more propositional-oriented and reader-responsible in their writings.

The second subcategory of textual metadiscourse, illocution markers, was also investigated and analyzed in both English and Persian corpus. The results of which are given in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Results of the Textual Subcategory (Illocution Markers) in English and Persian

marker	language	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-square	df	Asymp sig.
Illocution Marker	English	5	6.0	33.3	1	.564
	Persian	7	6.0			

As for the subcategory of textual metadiscourse, illocution markers, the statistical analysis revealed that the two languages are not different in their writing of newspaper editorials. It means that the two languages are somehow the same on the use of illocution markers as a textual metadiscourse in newspaper editorials (.564). So, the writers in the two languages make use of such elements/markers to signal the readers about the kind of discourse acts that the writers are

employing in each text. In sum, the results indicated no significant difference between English and Persian editorials for the illocution markers as one of the subtypes of textual metadiscourse.

With respect to the subcategories of interpersonal metadiscourse; that are hedges, emphatics, and attitude markers, the results obtained revealed both differences and similarities in the two languages in their newspaper editorials. The results of which are presented in the following tables.

Table 4.4. Results of the Interpersonal Subcategory (Hedges) in English and Persian

marker	language	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-square	df	Asymp sig.
Hedges	English	46	34.5	7.667	1	.006
	Persian	23	34.5			

As it can be seen, the Chi-square test results demonstrated that the differences between the number of hedges in both English and Persian newspapers editorials were statistically significant (Pearson Chi-square Value=7.667; $p < .006$). It was noted that there are significant differences in the two languages in terms of interpersonal metadiscourse subcategory, hedges. It means that English editorials are far more heavily hedged than the Persian editorials. Such heavy uses of hedges by the English editorials can be related to the fact that English writers are more conservative and respectful to their readers. More employment of hedges can also be an indication of vagueness, indeterminacy, and doubt on the part of English newspapers editorials (Davoodifard, 2006; Atai and Sadr, 2008).

Table 4.5. Results of the Interpersonal Subcategory (Emphatics) in English and Persian

marker	language	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-square	df	Asymp sig.
Emphatics	English	35	50.0	9.000	1	.003
	Persian	65	50.0			

The statistical analyses in Table 4.5 clearly indicated that the two languages (English and Persian newspaper editorials) were significantly different from each other (9.000; $p < .003$). In other words, Persian newspaper editorials used more emphatics than the English ones. It can be discussed that the writers in the English newspaper editorials are more likely to challenge the ideas of those who are in power. This implies that Iranian writers are likely to be more assertive

in their persuasive writings, and so it shows that the Persian newspaper editorials might be more exposed to limitations imposed on them.

The last metadiscourse marker investigated in this study is one of the subtypes of metadiscourse, attitude markers. Table 4.6 gives a clear picture of the phenomenon.

Table 4.6. Results of the Interpersonal Subcategory (Attitude Markers) in English and Persian

Marker	Language	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-square	df	Asymp sig.
Attitude Markers	English	27	26.5	.019	1	.891
	Persian	26	26.5			

As mentioned for the subcategory of textual metadiscourse, illocution markers, the collected data analyzed in Table 4.7 put it forward that the two languages, English and Persian newspaper editorials, are not significantly different from each other in terms of the interpersonal subcategory, attitude markers (Chi-square value= .019; p , .891). This implies that the two groups of writers in the two languages show almost an overlap using attitude markers and try to help the audience (readers) to figure out the writer's attitudes towards the intended meanings or information in the texts.

5. General Discussion and Conclusion

Five subcategories of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse in both English and Persian newspaper editorials were examined in this study. After specifying and classifying the metadiscoursal markers, some quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to (1) identify the frequency of different types of both textual and interpersonal subcategory markers, (2) to find out both similarities and differences between the two groups, and (3) to provide reasons for the potential contrast in the two languages with respect to their randomly selected newspaper editorials.

The findings obviously revealed the fact that except for the two subcategories, illocution markers and attitude markers, all other subcategories were significantly different from each other which might be due to the contrast existed between the two linguistic systems and having different cultures. Since such studies deal with both quantitative (working on the frequency counts) and qualitative (dealing with practical analyses) approaches to text or discourse analysis

(Abdollahzadeh, 2007), some points should be taken into account. Our findings are in line with those of some precious studies (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Steffensen et al., 1996; Thompson, 2001; Vergaro, 2002).

First of all, since such researchers are mostly concerned with a kind of cross-linguistic and cultural analyses of the obtained data, repeated studies with consistent information are needed. It means that more and more studies should be conducted to be reliable and dependable. Another one is the priority given to each culture which results in cultural differences and preferences. Such preferences allow the writers to make use of different rhetorical tools in their writings which show if one language prefers a reader-based orientation or a writer-based orientation (Adel, 2006; Hyland, 2004). The last but not the least, similarities reported in some studies like the present one with regard to some of the subcategories of metadiscourse markers would account for the fact that in spite of the cultural differences existed between the two groups of writers in newspaper editorials who which belong to different 'national cultures' (Iranian, British, American), they would have similar 'disciplinary culture' (Mauranen, 1993) cited in Abdollahzadeh, 2007). This means that such writers are trained in their own discipline, reporting and writing news in newspapers editorials and are already familiar with the rhetorical maxims and priorities of the discourse or genre they are involved in.

In sum, one can understand that the use of different metadiscourse elements along with different rhetorical devices are is greatly influenced by the differing linguistic and cultural differences prevailed in different languages all over the world (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Salager-Meyer, 1994; Steffensen & Cheng., 1996; Thompson, 2001; Vergaro, 2002). So, as for pedagogical implications, one can argue that in order to design a syllabus for metadiscourse pedagogy, teachers and professionals should not only consider the existing cultural and linguistic differences but they need to help such trainees to develop their understanding of different metadiscourse categories and subcategories in different genres or discourses they are dealing with. Moreover, the findings of the present study can be useful in L2 writing contexts for EFL/ESL teachers and students. Teachers can teach or include the rhetorical norms in their teaching or syllabi to help students find the differences between the language and cultures in different texts and genres which would lead to L2 writers (Foreign and second language writers) to create more efficient and reader/writer-based writings based on the context or the language they are working in.

As the other studies, the present one was also affected by some limitations. One is the reality that metadiscourse categories and subcategories might have different functions in different texts. Another limitation could be attributed to the small number of newspapers selected for the study. The third one deals with the fact that only two languages (English vs. Persian) are considered as a cross-linguistic study. Therefore, more and future researches are needed to consider all of the metadiscourse functions and subfunctions into account developed by different scholars, and to base our studies on greater number of newspapers published in so many different languages throughout the world.

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