INTERACTIVE METADISCOURSE MARKERS IN INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract: The research on metadiscourse markers investigation in academic texts has grown very rapidly in the last decade. However, research on interactive metadiscourse markers on EFL students' academic writing is still relatively underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to reveal how the competence of EFL students in the use of interactive metadiscourse in academic writing by comparing two groups of students with different grades, third-semester students and fifth-semester students. The research design is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 40 students were participating in this research and divided into two groups. Each group consists of 20 students. They were assigned to write a minimum-250-word essay about the importance of English mastery in the disrupted era of 4.0. Around 818 interactive markers were identified in the student's essay texts. The results reveal that the use of interactive discourse markers in the students' writing was considered still low in quantity. The transition markers were the most dominant found in the text, followed by frame markers, code gloss, endophoric markers, and evidential respectively. Moreover, the students in the fifth semester perform slightly better than their third-semester counterparts at using the interactive metadiscourse markers. However, most of the students in both groups still encountered difficulties to employ the interactive markers in their writing. The lack of practice and the student's native language practice might have contributed to the low quality of the student's writing.

Keywords: *academic writing; discourse analysis; EFL students; essay; interactive metadiscourse; writing competence.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial language skills for EFL students to develop is writing (Pasaribu, 2022). The students are required to produce a piece of writing that is well-structured and to hone their writing abilities. However, according to the majority of EFL students, writing is a difficult skill to master (Alkhodari & Habil, 2021). It calls for not only a solid command of vocabulary and syntax but also the capacity to structure writing effectively in accordance with the genre.

Additionally, high levels of motivation and interest can help students write more effectively.

There are certain factors that may be used to judge a student's writing quality. The usage of metadiscourse is one criterion for writing quality. According to Hyland (2017), metadiscourse is the method that authors or speakers communicate with readers or listeners through language. The author's stance in his writing, how he communicates his thoughts to the reader, and how he interacts with the reader through his writing are

all conveyed through the usage of metadiscourse (Bal-Gezegin & Baş, 2020). Metadiscourse is the current term used in discourse analysis. According to Hyland's (2017) research on the topic of metadiscourse has shown a significant increase in the past decade. In the google scholar search engine found 30,200 hits. This figure shows how metadiscourse is a topic that is often discussed in discourse analysis.

Its appeal among researchers and academics who study speech analysis has been demonstrated in few scholarly works (Nugrahani & Bram, 2020; Liu & Buckingham, 2018; Albalat-Mascarell & Carrió-Pastor, 2019; Mirzaeian, 2020; Farahani & Kazemian, 2021) Several metadiscourse analysts were interested in published scientific articles or those who were interested in investigating metadiscourse in academic publications (Jalilifar *et al.,* 2018; Carrio-Pastor, 2019; Almudhaffari *et al.*, 2019). Some scholars (Alkhodari & Habil, 2021; Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019; Zhang *et al.,* 2017) have focused on the analysis of metadiscourse in spoken discourse, as well as on less significant issues like the use of metadiscourse in online advertisements (Al-Subhi, 2022), interactional metadiscourse based on gender (Suhono & Haikal, 2018), and English instruction manuals (Herriman, 2022). However, the study of metadiscourse markers in academic writing has also seen the fastest growth (Alqahtani & Abdelhalim, 2020; Lotfi *et al.,* 2019; Qin & Uccelli, 2019; Ho & Li, 2018; Mohamed & Rashid, 2017; Pasaribu, 2017; Duruk, 2017; Castillo-Hajan *et al.*, 2019; Bax *et al.*, 2019; Zhang, 2018; Hayisama *et al.*, 2019; Yoon & Römer, 2020)

Additionally, a review of the research on the study of metadiscourse producers in academic writing is attempted to identify any gaps in the literature. The interesting topic in academic writing was exposed by Alqahtani & Abdelhalim (2020). They attempted to explore the gender differences in using interactive metadiscourse in academic writing. This study indicated the obvious difference between male and female in interactive metadiscouse application. The female students performed better than their counterparts.

Duruk (2017) then investigated the use of metadiscourse markers in Turkish researchers' academic writings using corpus-based research. To determine the frequency of occurrence of interpersonal metadiscourse indicators, 20 dissertations produced by Turkish scholars were investigated. According to the findings of this study, 'hedges,' 'boosters,' and 'attitude markers'

are found in the data analysis, and the metadiscourse markers that emerge the most frequently are attitude markers. While the frequency with which Turkish writers employ personal metadiscourse markers varies.

Similarly, research on the identification of metadiscourse indicators in EFL students' academic writing is seen through the lens of gender inequalities (Alqahtani & Abdelhalim, 2020; Pasaribu, 2017). They compared the frequency of metadiscourse markers in essay writing across genders. This study's findings confirm that both male and female EFL students prefer interactive metadiscourse markers over interactional metadiscourse markers.Research on metadiscourse markers was also conducted by Mohamed & Rashid (2017) on students' essay writing corpus. This research involved 269 Malaysian undergraduate writers to produce an essay writing corpus. The results of this study reveal that undergraduate students use interactive metadiscourse markers more often than interactional metadiscourse markers in their essay writing.

Ho & Li (2018) and Lotfi *et al.* (2019) did research on metadiscourse markers in student essay writing. These two studies seek to learn more about how students employ interpersonal metadiscourse markers in argumentative writing. This study reveals that students continue to struggle with employing metadiscourse to persuade readers in their argumentative compositions.

Another study on metadiscourse indicators was undertaken by comparing students' academic and colloquial writing (Qin & Uccelli, 2019). They attempt to investigate the strengths and shortcomings of EFL students' use of metadiscourse markers in academic and colloquial writing. This study found no significant difference in the usage of metadiscourse markers by students in the two forms of writing.

Other interesting applications of metadiscourse were also utilized to uncover issues in the newspapers and publications (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Siddique *et al.*, 2018; Anuarsham *et al.*, 2020). These studies exposed the issues of metadiscourse makers in newspaper were complex. Other minor research in metadiscourse makers was explored in the high school settings (Soysal, 2020) and school textbook (Birhan, 2021)

Based on the findings of the previous studies of metadiscourse markers on academic writing, it can be concluded that metadiscourse research on

EFL students' academic writing, particularly by comparing the abilities of students from different grades in using metadiscourse markers, has received little attention from previous researchers. As a result, this study will attempt to compare the use of metadiscourse markers in academic writing by university students at various grade levels.

The term "metadiscourse" can be traced back to Zelling Haris's time in the 1950s. Metadiscourse is used to understand how language is employed and how the author transmits messages to readers in an understandable manner (Alqahtani & Abdelhalim, 2020). Hyland (2017, p. 16) defined metadiscourse as "the commentary on a text made by its makers in the course of speaking and writing." Hyland (2017)further categorized metadiscourse analysis into two types: interactional (interactional) metadiscourse and interactive (textual) metadiscourse. The former is concerned with tactics for regulating the writer's personality in the text, while the latter incorporates the reader in the discourse and allows them to contribute and respond to it (Hyland, 2017). This group comprises of attitude makers (e.g., I agree, hopefully, rightly), self-mention (e.g., I, the writer), engagement makers (e.g., we, our), hedges (e.g., in my opinion, perhaps, seem, evidently), boosters (e.g., I, the writer), and boosters (e.g., I, the writer) (e.g., absolutely, definitely, clearly, obviously). The latter refers to information discourse arrangement that guides readers to find it coherent and convincing. According to Hyland's taxonomy, this group is separated into five categories (Hyland, 2017): (1) Transitions: it is a set of devices, mostly conjunctions, used to express relations between main clauses (e.g., but, however, therefore, in addition). (2) Frame markers: concerned with the discourse acts, sequences, or stages (e.g., finally, in conclusion, the aim is, the purpose is). (3) Endophoric markers: refer to the information in other part of the text (e.g., as stated above, as discussed in previous chapter). (4) Evidentials: refer to the source of information from other texts (e.g., according to A, B states, (C, 2005)). (5) Code glosses: signal the rewording of knowledge regarding the ideational material (e.g., for example, for instance, that is, in other words)

In contrast to other researchers' interest in discourse markers, the applications of interactive markers were the primary focus of this study. The study focused on the usage of interactive markers in students' academic writing, particularly the use of interactive markers by university students of various grades. Students in higher grades were expected to be better at using interactive makers than their lower grade peers because they had considerably more expertise in academic writing than the lower grade students. As a result, the purpose of this research is to provide solutions to the queries.

METHOD
This study compares two separate groups of students from various grades to discover the application of interactive metadiscourse markers in EFL students' academic writing. This study is a comparative descriptive study. The study used a mixed method approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The former was used for data collection, identification, coding, description, and explanation of the interactive markers. Meanwhile, the latter was assigned to deal with data statistical analysis.

Students from the English department at the University of HKBP Nommensen in Medan participated in the study. To achieve the research goal, two groups of students from the third and fourth semesters were chosen. Twenty students were assigned to each group. Both groups were given the task of writing an article titled "The Importance of Mastering English in the Disruptive Era 4.0." Each student was encouraged to write a minimum of 250 words. In the essay writing, 818 interactive markers were discovered.

After that, the data were analyzed by employing Hyland's (2017)metadiscourse markers to determine the frequency of interactive markers. The data were processed, grouped, and evaluated to get insight into how university students from various years used interactive markers in their work. The data analysis was also included in the description to enable for the qualitative presentation of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The study sought to uncover the presence of interactive metadiscourse signals in the academic writing of EFL students. The comparison of two different year student groups' writing was intended to investigate how the two distinct groups used their understanding of interactive metadiscourse markers in their writings. The data revealed that the two groups of pupils used the interactive markers in slightly different ways. Senior students were rated higher for their use of interactive markers and frequency of occurrences. The findings are detailed in the table below.

Table 1. *Number of interative markers in students' academic writing*

Interactive Markers	Group 1 (3rd semester students)		Group 2 (5th semester students)	
	F	*%*	*F*	*%*
Transitions	278	68.47	285	69.18
Frame markers	52	12.81	48	11.65
Endophoric markers	26	6.40	20	4.85
Evidentials	8	1.97	12	2.91
Code glosses	42	10.35	47	11.41
Total	406	100	412	100

The distribution of interactive markers on student writing in both groups is shown in Table 1. The use of transition markers was highest in both groups of students, accounting for more than half of the total number of interactive markers in each group. The number of transition markers in the third semester group of students differs slightly from the number in the fifth semester group of students. The second is slightly higher than the first.

Furthermore, in the second position, the number of interactive markers that are frequently employed by the two groups of students is frame markers, with 52 to 48 occurrences. Code glosses come in third, with 42 and 47 instances, respectively. Endophoric markers occupy the next sequence, with 26 and 20 occurrences in both groups, respectively. Evidential was the least used category of interactive markers by students in both groups, with 8 and 12 occurrences, respectively. In total, 818 interactive markers were realized throughout the literature. Around 406 interactive markers are assigned to third-semester students, whereas 412 are assigned to fifth-semester students.

The table shows that students in the fifth semester used interactive markers more than students in the third semester in the categories of transition, code glosses, and evidentiary markers. Third-semester students, on the other hand, used frame markers and endophoric markers more frequently than fifth-semester students. This research implies that university students with higher grades are not necessarily in line with their writing ability.

This study demonstrated that EFL students still struggled with the use of interactive markers in academic writing (Qin & Uccelli, 2019). The usage of repetitious similar conjunctions was one of the pupils' major flaws in their writing. For example, the connectors 'and' and 'then' clearly overburdened the entire texts in both groups of students. This issue may bore readers and eventually lead them to incomprehensible content

(Hyland, 2017). This finding indicates that the number of interactive markers discovered in students' work was not connected to the manifestation of the markers in the text.

The employment of frame makers in student writing is also worth discussing. The use of this sort of metadiscourse is deemed to be quite modest, with an average incidence rate of 50 in the papers of the two groups of students. The terms "finally" and "in conclusion" appear frequently in student writing of this type. These two phrases accounted for more than 65% of all frame markers detected in the academic works of both groups of students. For example, the word "finally" is typically used to conclude a series of justifications for the importance of English or the steps of procedures or tactics in studying English. According to the data analysis, students' capacity to employ frame markers in academic writing is still much behind what is expected, particularly in terms of the variety of words, types of frame markers used, and how to use them.

The term "for example" is frequently used in code gloss by students in their academic writing. More than half of all code gloss detected in student writing contains this sentence. The fact that pupils frequently utilize the term "for example" in daily communication utilizing Indonesian or local languages may have contributed to its high frequency of occurrence (Duruk, 2017).

In addition, there are extremely few instances of endophoric markers being used in academic writing by students. An average of 20 instances of this kind of metadiscourse can be found. The types of endophoric markers that are most frequently used in student writing include the phrases "as mentioned above" and "as stated above." Nearly 90% of the many types of endophoric markers discovered contain this sentence. This discovery is intriguing because it is believed that the students' habit of utilizing this phrase in their work accounts for its high frequency of recurrence. In addition, the lack of student references to this type of endophoric markers is also the reason why students do not use other variations of phrases in this type of interactive metadiscourse.

Of all types of interactive metadiscourse markers, evidentials are the type that students rarely use in academic writing. This may be due to the type and purpose of writing that does not require students to look for references to strengthen their arguments, such as writing a thesis or scientific article. The use of the

sentences "according to the books I've read" and "according to the English dictionary" appears most often in this type. The use of the former sentence in the students' academic writing shows how students are not able to show the specific reference of the book in question. This will result in the quality of student writing in convincing readers with the arguments they build.

From the results of the discussion above, this research has revealed several important findings that need to be highlighted. The use of interactive metadiscourse by EFL students in academic writing is still relatively low. In addition, the low competence of students in using interactive markers can be clearly seen in the students' academic writing as they still made some errors in the applications of the interactive markers.

The research also confirmed that the students' writing competence especially in employing the interactive markers was influenced by individual determination in practicing. That is to say that the senior students may have little progress in academic writing compared to the junior students who spent much time for writing practice. On the other hand, a teacher needs to find a direct and effective method to improve students' writing skills, especially the use of metadiscourse (Bogdanović & Mirović, 2018; Ho & Li, 2018; Almudhaffari *et al.*, 2019; Yoon & Römer, 2020). On the students' side, the writing practice in using the interactive markers should bring better improvement to the quality of their writings (Castillo-Hajan *et al.*, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study explored how EFL students used interactive metadiscourse markers when composing essays. The usage of transitional markers predominated over other interactive markers, which were found to be few in number and used by the students in their writing. Additionally, it was clear from comparing students in the fifth and third semesters of their grade levels that the proportion of interactive markers realized in their work varied slightly. Lack of experience using metadiscourse markers in academic writing is the root of students' limited capacity to employ interactive metadiscourse in their writing. The influence of students' native language usage in writing or speaking is another issue that is thought to be the root of their limited proficiency in the use of interactive metadiscourse markers.

The study's implication is that lecturers who teach academic writing can utilize the study's

findings as a guide to discover innovations in the form of effective teaching strategies and methods that can enhance students' writing skills and competencies. In order to boost students' understanding and awareness of the usage of metadiscourse markers in academic writing, introduction and training on this topic also has to be improved.

Other scholars who are interested in studying metadiscourse markers in other academic texts can use this research as a reference. The number of corpus data and the number of students that participated in the study are still very limited, so it is important to emphasize that this study still has certain flaws. In order to obtain more conclusive conclusions, future study must take into account a larger sample size and data set.

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