

Metadiscourse in Students' E-mail Essays and Research Proposals in Cameroon



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Outline



1. Introduction: some pertinent remarks

- Metadiscourse as an important concept in academic writing (see Hyland 2005, 2009; Adel 2006; Dafoul-Milne 2008; Amiryousefi & Rasekh 2010; Nkemele 2011; Gholami et al 2014)
- *Status of metadiscourse research in Cameroon*
- *General observations on the use of metadiscourse markers by Cameroonian students*
- *Observations on the English used in e-mails*
- Metadiscourse: brief definition

2. Aim of the study

3. Model at the basis of the study

- Nkemele (2011: 55): three main categories of metadiscourse

4. Data and method

5. Findings

6. Conclusion

7. References



1. Introduction some pertinent remarks (1)

1.1. Metadiscourse as an important concept in academic writing

- Idea of writing as a social engagement
(see Crismore et al. 1993; Hyland 1999: 5, 2005, 2009; Adel 2006; Dafoul Milne 2008; Amiryousefi & Rasekh 2010; Nkemleke 2011; Gholami et al 2014)
- Syntactic or functional issue: metadiscourse is a functional category that can be realized in a variety of ways (see Hyland 2005, Adel 2006: 22-24).



some pertinent remarks (2)

1.2. Status of metadiscourse research in Cameroon

- Nkemleke (2011: 53-75) contextualizes metadiscourse within academic writing in Cameroon, and demonstrates it in some academic texts.
- Nkemleke (2008: 43-64) examines modality in novice academic writing in which he includes the student essay component of CCE.
- Sala (2011:108- 115) gives guides on the use of hedging in scientific writing.
- Other scholars in Cameroon (e.g. Sala & Ubanako 2010: 210-212) have undertaken research only into partial aspects of metadiscourse like conjunctions. such studies examine them grammatically, without emphasising the important role they play in transmitting intelligent ideas in academic writing

This study extends the discussion of Nkemleke (2011).

A decorative graphic at the top of the slide consists of two groups of three circles. The first group on the left has a solid light purple circle on the left, a white circle with a light purple outline in the middle, and a solid light purple circle on the right. The second group on the right has a solid light purple circle on the left, a white circle with a light purple outline in the middle, and a solid light purple circle on the right.

some pertinent remarks (3)

1.3. General observations on the use of metadiscourse markers by Cameroonian students

- Many students have problems employing appropriate metadiscourse markers into their academic writing. This results in academic texts that are not logical and convincing.



some pertinent remarks (4)

1.4. Observations on the English used in e-mails

- Researchers (e. g. Herring 1999, Berman 2006) have reported that CMC is relatively incoherent in various text-only situations. According to Berman, there is the growing use (or misuse) of e-mail type informal discourse in formal written assignments.
- Tabe (2011: 215-218) equally established that some Cameroonian e-mails are loosely structured.

This is a cause for concern as it can lead to incoherent writing. I deemed it necessary to inquire into how Cameroonian students can do some academic assignments in the context of e-mail, particularly if they can apply metadiscourse markers and communicate ideas in the same way they do when writing in other natural environments.



some pertinent remarks (5)

1.5. Metadiscourse: brief definition

- Williams (1989: 211) refers to it as “writing about writing”
- Vande Kopple (1985: 83) describes it as “discourse about the discourse”.
- Metadiscourse is a term used to describe words or expressions included within a discourse, but which do not refer to the subject matter being discussed.



2. Aim of the study

This study explores metadiscourse in Cameroon students' e-mail essays (EEs) and research proposals (RPs) with the aim of:

- Describing the types of metadiscourse employed by students and the extent to which they use them.
- Comparing students' use of metadiscourse in e-mail essays and research proposals.
- Examining the impact of metadiscourse on students' writing.



3. Model at the basis of the study

- Nkemleke (2011: 55) draws from other researchers (Hyland 1999; Rahman 2004; Burneikaite 2008;). He proposes three main categories of metadiscourse:
 - *Text-organizing metadiscourse* : indicate the structure of the unfolding text and show how the various parts of the text are organized.
 - *Participant-oriented metadiscourse*: authors project themselves in the texts and engage readers in the discourse process.
 - *Evaluative metadiscourse*: writers place themselves in the discourse and demonstrate clearly their thoughts/ attitude towards the text in progress

He gives a comprehensive or detail classification that is going to help us in our analysis of metadiscourse in students' e-mail essays and research proposals.



4. Data and method

- ❑ Authentic e-mail essays (EEs) and Research proposals (RPs) from ENS Maroua and ENSET Douala
- Composition: 02 text categories
- No. of texts: 254 texts (i. e. 144 Research proposals and 110 e-mail essays)
- Period: 2012 -2015

Essays that were sent as Ms Word attachments were rejected.

- The EEs and RPs provided the researcher with actual and complex patterns of academic texts for analysis of metadiscourse.
- ❑ Analysis of the data: quantitative and qualitative terms.
- Quantitative Analysis: KWIC concordance method (Nkemleke 2008) will be used

5. Preliminary findings (1)



- The three main categories of metadiscourse proposed by Nkemleke (2011:55) (text- organizing metadiscourse, participant-orientated metadiscourse and evaluative metadiscourse) were found with varying degrees in the two corpus. However, non was widespread.
- Data analyses indicated *text organising metadiscourse* dominates the other categories.

NB: Quantitative analysis is incomplete, so appropriate figures can not be advanced.

Preliminary findings (2)

□ Text organizing metadiscourse

Illustration from the data

A) *Text connectors*

● *Addition*

- He considers the action self protection which puts him in a dilemma **and** bring the idea of super-ego as he tries to control his guilt. **In addition**, David Zaleswski, in his *New York* article “The Background Hum” says that ... (RP03, p. 15)
- Education in the school milieu is optional. No roll call is conducted **and** no pressure exerted on anyone. (EE14, p.2).

Preliminary findings (3)

- **Text organizing metadiscourse (cont'd)**

Illustration from the data (cont'd)

- *Comparison* (similar)
 - Ama Ata Aidoo was born in Saltpond in Ghana's Central Region... **Similarly**, Anne Tanyi-Tang was born at Akiriba village in Manyu Division, Cameroon. (RP 02, pp.14-15)

(opposite)

- thus, the privilege is given to the boy **whereas** the girl is marginalized due to the fact that they think girl is good only for household matters. (EE 05, p. 2)

Preliminary findings (4)

Text organizing metadiscourse (cont'd)

B) Metatext management features

- *Discourse entities*

- **The cock festival** is a yearly tradition in the tupuri tribe. It takes place after harvest each year. (EE08, p.1)
- **This investigation** is important because it will help learners studying Shakespeare's text to know the different dimensions that have existed in the domain of syntax... (RP 05, p. 9)



Preliminary findings (5)

Text organizing metadiscourse (cont'd)

B) Metatext management features (cont'd)

- *Discourse labels*
- **This chapter** gives guidelines on how the plays under study can be taught to Cameroon secondary school students. (RP02, p. 16)
- **This section** seeks to examine the opinions of some critics who have commended on their works. (RP03, p. 19)

NB: Discourse labels were not found in e-mail essays.

Preliminary findings (6)

❑ Participant-orientated metadiscourse

The use of participant-oriented metadiscourse was low in the two data.

Illustration from the data

- *Inclusive markers*
- Sister, your behaviour is not what is supposed to be expected from you. You perfectly know that **our** father is doing everything for **us** to carry on **our** studies without difficulty. (EE06, p. 2)
- There are three major things to take into account when studying shakespeare's grammar ... And forms or constructions **we** use today which were not used by him at all. (RP05, p. 2)
- **NB:** In e-mail essays, there is a lot of use of first person ("I") ...

Preliminary findings (7)

□ Evaluative metadiscourse

The use of evaluative metadiscourse was equally low in the two text types.

Illustration from the data

- *Mitigation markers*
- DEAR; **hope** this story will help you discover the rich cultural heritage of the South west region and equally the aesthetic cultures of the people. (EE01, p. 1)
- **It will attempt** to propose methods in which these books could be taught through critical thinking. (RP03, p. 21)

Preliminary findings (8)



- ❑ **Function:** Most of the metadiscourse markers found play the roles emphasized under each category by Nkemleke (2011: 55).

- ❑ **Comparison of the use of metadiscourse in the two data**
 - EEs are poorer in the employment of the markers than RPs.

 - Discourse entities seem to appear more while code glosses, discourse acts, evidentials, emphatic markers have very low occurrences in the two text types.

 - Very low occurrence of directives in EEs, but they are absent in RPs

 - Absence of discourse labels in EE

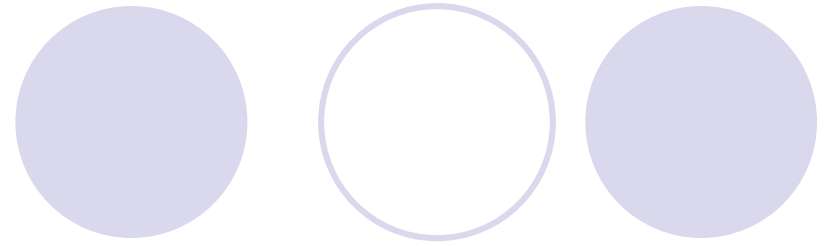


Preliminary findings (9)

Possible reasons for differences in the use of metadiscourse in the two corpora

- Text type: most e-mail essays are creative while research proposals are academic (even the topics in the two corpora are different)
- Length of texts: e-mail essays are shorter than research proposals
- Time and resources: students take more time and use resources to prepare their research proposals than e-mail essays

Preliminary findings (10)



General

Generally, there appears to be insufficiency in the employment of metadiscourse by Cameroonian students and this results in writing which is not persuasive or impressive.



6. Conclusion

- Pedagogy

- Teachers / Lecturers should help raise students' awareness to metadiscourse by teaching them the various categories and how they can employ them in writing.

- Research

- More research on metadiscourse in different text types in Cameroon need to be done so as to continue expanding the horizon of the markers in academic writing.

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Thanks for your attention