

The Effect of Textual and Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers on Iranian EFL High School Learners' Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

In any successful written communication, various linguistic expressions are used in texts. Some of these expressions that do not add anything to the propositional content, they show how the logical progress of the content is constructed within the text, who authors own thoughts are expressed in different part of the text, as well as his or her attitudes according to the content is expressed in different part of the text. These special expressions are called metadiscourse. By using metadiscourse markers in the text, authors can provide more coherent passages. Metadiscourse wealthy text shed some light on reading as one of the main goals of English Foreign Language Learners which facilitated language learning and provided opportunity to study language. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers on the comprehension of English texts. This study moreover attempt to explore the effect of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse awareness of learners on their reading comprehension. Participant chosen from among 50 students, studying in high school centers, to take part in the study based on their scores on proficiency test. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups. After reading texts, all participants answer 10 true/false comprehension questions. The result of this study lend supplementary support to the idea that metadiscourse markers can have a positive effect on comprehension. So, greater presence of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers could be linked to the better performance of learners. Without metadiscourse markers, that some would suppose as secondary and less important side of discourse, the passage lose its integrity and hence comprehension is affected. Also it was shown that the more the learners become aware of those markers the more their comprehension will be improved. The results showed that learners with more awareness of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers performed better on reading comprehension test.

Key words: discourse, textual metadiscourse marker, interpersonal metadiscourse marker, reading comprehension, coherent passage.

INTRODUCTION

Issues in foreign language have attracted the attention of researchers, language teachers and educators. They have always been concerned with the question of how a learner develops listening, speaking, reading and writing. It seems that many of the questions, problem and discussions regarding these various language skills have aimed at the acquisition and development of reading comprehension skill in EFL situations (Alderson, 2000).

Current research generally views reading as an interactive and sociocognitive process, involving a text, a reader, and a social context within which the activity of reading takes place (Bernhardt, 1991). In recent year the term interactive has been used to describe the second language reading as a process. Reading process as an interactive process involves interaction between reader and content as well as reader and writer. A good deal of such an interaction in written language is achieved through metadiscourse. Discourse analysis deal with of language larger than sentence, and pay attention to the concern of social, cultural, educational questions and formalistic aspect of language. Discourse analysis provide an appropriate means in order to describe the structures and functions of language within utterances. Thus it shifts attention from words in isolation to words within. The purpose of this study is to test the effects of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers on reading comprehension ability of EFL learners. This study also include the effect of proficiency level of learners as moderator variable. Further the learners' awareness of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers and degree of their interaction with the test is investigated.

What is metadiscourse ?

The term metadiscourse was first coined by Zelling S.Harris in 1959 to describe text elements which comment about the main information of a text. It is seen as interpersonal resources to organize a discourse or a writer's stance toward either its content or the reader (Hyland, 2000). Also metadiscourse has a pragmatic function in that it establishes a link between writer and reader and shows the writer's intention so that the readers grasp the meaning of sentence better and the text become coherent.

Metadiscourse has traditionally been used as a fussy and an umbrella term, which covers a quite disparate range of data. According to Hyland and Tse (2004), metadiscourse is self-reflective linguistic material referring to the evolving text, the writer and imagined reader of that text.

Vande Kopple (1997), also, define metadiscourse as discourse that people use not to expand referential material but to help the readers to connect, organize, interpret, evaluate and develop attitudes toward the material. Essentially metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just exchanging the information, goods or services. In fact it involves personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating (Hyland, 2005). As Vande (1985) and Crismore (1989) indicate, writing involves two levels: discourse level and metadiscourse level. On the first level the reader is provided with propositional content and on the second level, the reader is guided through the text. Students who have problems at metadiscourse level, rather than word or sentence level might benefit from instruction on how a topic is developed in discourse. While comprehending text, reader attempt to memorize as much information as possible. But limitation on working memory make it less effective for most learners. Therefore it is necessary and useful for language learners to allocate their limited attention to some important aspects of text during the process of reading activity. Metadiscourse markers which are some linguistic devices deal with the explicitness of text organization, writer-reader interaction and subsequently the clarity and coherence of the text, can guide readers attention. Metadiscourse markers can give emphasis to certain aspect of the semantic context of text. These linguistic markers can serve as verbal devices that assist readers in deciding where attention should be allocated during the reading process.

In considering the pragmatics of metadiscourse in academic context, Hyland (1998) define written discourse as those aspects of text which explicitly organize the discourse, engage the audience and signal the writer's attitude. With metadiscourse awareness and strategies for using it, readers will better understand the author's text plan (Crismore, 1990). They will know whether they are reading the introduction, the body or conclusion of a text, they will understand that an author is conceding his/her point or consider certain ideas more important than others. In order to solve these problems attention should be paid to giving learners metacognitive awareness of metadiscourse and strategies for its use so that they may understand how to take the author, maintain schemas by connecting sentences, shift topics, recognize an introduction, transition, and a conclusion, recognize the author's attitudes and whether he is being subjective or objective, and recognize the relevance signals and circumstances, which define the rhetorical situation of the text.

Taxonomies of metadiscourse:

Metadiscourse divided in two categories, namely textual and interpersonal metadiscourse (Hyland, 1998).

The interpersonal function is the use of language to encode interaction, allowing us to engage with others, to take on roles and to express and understand evaluations and feelings. The textual function is the use of language to organize the text itself, coherently relating what is said to the words and to others.

1. Textual metadiscourse

Ajmir (2005) uses the term pragmatic marker as "a superordinate or umbrella term for elements which do not have propositional meanings but have the procedural and indexical meaning of signaling the writer's and speaker's evaluation and opinion. Textual metadiscourse have five functions: logical connectives, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses.

1.1. Logical connectives. logical connectives are used to express semantic relation between sentences. Without using appropriate logical connectives, the text become ambiguous and difficult to follow and understand the transitions between statements. Such as in addition, because, but, however, therefore and since.

1.2. Frame markers. Frame markers are explicitly refer to text stages such as firstly, finally, to repeat. Altering the topic shifts and sequencing are among the functions of frame markers.

1.3. Endophoric markers. Endophoric markers are whether the reminders of previous content or as a reference to the information in other parts of the text and generally used as spatial metaphors.

1.4. Evidentials. Evidentials refer to the source of information from other texts. Academic writers make use of evidential abundantly to support their arguments and thus by citing the others' studies or ideas on that matter, they make their arguments stronger and more plausible. Also, in recent year there is an increase in the number of evidentials and self-citations in research articles.

1.5.Code glosses. Code glosses help the reader to understand the ideational material better. Some code glosses are namely, in other words, in that ...

2.Interpersonal metadiscourse

Interpersonal metadiscourse has many functions in writing . It allows the reader to express his or her thought , interpret the content or inform the reader about his/ her perspective toward the propositional content. With interpersonal functions a writer can determine the relationship s/ he want to construct with the reader either choosing a style with a strong persona or remote stance . Also it helps the writers to directly refer to the reader so that it involves the readers into the text and make it more interactional. Interpersonal metadiscourse functions also give the reader clues about the writers' certainty in the message whether the writer uses words related to possibility or with strong words such as must, certainly or definitely. They help the readers to understand the text better. Interpersonal metadiscourse has five sub- categories:

2.1.Hedgs. Hedges can be simply defined as the writer full commitment to the statements. Hedges are the interpretations or a way of softening the claims of the writer.

2.2.Emphatics. Emphatics enable the reader to realize the degree of writer's claims and force of writers certainty in message such as in fact , definitely , it is obvious.

2.3.Attitude markers. Attitudes markers express the writers perspective or evaluation of the propositional content.

2.4.Relational markers. Relational markers refer to the relationship with the reader. It directly addresses to the reader and include the reader to the text ,thus making the test interactional.

2.5.Person markers. Person markers contribute to signal the author's presence in a text.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population from which the participants were selected for this study included Iranian EFL advanced learners in high school center, whose first language was Persian . To began data collection , a group of 50 students who had voluntarily agreed to take part in this study was selected , All of the selected subjects whose age range was between 17 and 19 were female.

The participants were randomly assigned to two groups. Those who got just one standard deviation above the mean score were selected as high level and those who got just one standard deviation bellow the mean score were assigned to low level. According to objective and design of study , participants were randomly assigned to one experimental group and one control groups.

A 70-item English language proficiency test was used in order to select the participants with advanced level of proficiency and also divide them in to two levels , high and low level according to their scores. There were 70 questions in the proficiency level exam: 20 listening, 20 reading and 30 language use. Time of the exam was 50 minutes. A set of 10 true/false questions are carefully worded statements in which absolute clues are avoided. The last instrument was a five-item questionnaire in order to measure the degree participants awareness of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the text.

RESULTS

Considering type and number of variables and the design of this study , two - way analysis of variance was run to determine the effect of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers presence and learners proficiency level and their interaction of reading comprehension . In order to analyze the effect of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers and their interaction with those text a t- test was used, after gathering require data on Proficiency Test and reading comprehension test. To test the comprehension , learners' score on reading comprehension were analyzed. Descriptive statistic for the effect of metadiscourse markers and learners proficiency level on reading comprehension test scores are separately presented in table.

Table1: Descriptive statistics for proficiency as pre- test scores1 and post -test in two groups

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	control pre-test	6.8000	25	2.00000	.40000
	control post-test	7.2000	25	2.00000	.40000
Pair 2	experimental pre-test	6.8000	25	2.16025	.43205
	experimental post-test	9.6800	25	1.70098	.34020

DISCUSSION

The present study motivated at investigating the relationship between textual and interpersonal metadiscourse marker's presence at a whole on the comprehension of English text by EFL learners and also the effect of learners awareness of these metadiscourse markers on their reading comprehension. So the presence of these two types of metadiscourse was found to be effective in overall understanding of reading text.

As an interdisciplinary field, course analysis emerge from the need to a better understanding of the language and the thought that language is meaningful only in its context. The interaction between the reader and the writer for the discorsal factors contributes to the creation of a coherent text and help the writer to express views in a clear and organized way.

From pragmatic view textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers establishes a link between writers and readers and shows the writer's intention so that the readers comprehend the meaning of sentence better and text becomes coherent. Kumpf(2000) highlights that omission of the use of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers on the text would blur the separation of content and make the text less cohesive and less considerate of readers. So using textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in reading text can facilitate the reading process, promote understanding, and builds relationship between writers readers and constructs. Most texts contain some metadiscourse markers without them, an author cannot announce that s/ he is changing subject or coming to conclusion, that his or her ideas are important, or what s/ he is asserting is more or less reliable.

From cognitive point of view, textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers will focus on text processing. Particularly, through textual metadiscourse markers, readers can do over the organizing structure of the text, identify a logical linkage of contents in this way processing the flow of information more easily and can also activate conceptual schema which involved in communication of meaning.

Also, from the perspective of sociology and pragmatics, attention can be drawn to the process of interaction between author and reader. Consequently interpersonal metadiscourse markers permit the audience to understand the author's presupposition as well as authors stance while considering the social frame work of the speech act. Using textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers means that the author has foreseen the audience's interactive frames and knowledge schemas and that s/ he has made the necessary modifications and additions to the knowledge flow.

In second language interactional contexts, the knowledge of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse is distinctly useful in helping learners when reading authentic materials. Camiciottoli(2003) based on findings of his study suggests that a more pronounced use of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse will be associated with improved comprehension.

Conclusion

Learners awareness of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in both high and low levels affects their reading comprehension. The results confirm the relationship between effects of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse awareness and learner's reading comprehension performance. Beside, Tavakoli, Dabaghi and Khorhash (2010) confirm the effect of metadiscourse instruction and metadiscourse awareness on second language reading comprehension

Textual and interpersonal Metadiscourse awareness and strategies for using it can help readers to better understanding of the author's text plan. By giving textual and interpersonal metadiscourse awareness to learners and informing them by strategies to use this type of awareness, they may learn how to take the author, maintain schema by connecting sentences, shift topics, recognize the organizing factors of text body, recognize author's attitudes and whether s/ he is subjective or objective, and recognize the relevance signals and circumstances, which define the rhetorical situation of the text. Textual and interpersonal metadiscourse awareness may help learners to become independent readers and be able to represent and encode the discourse into their long- term memory.

In general, the result of this study lend supplementary support to the idea that textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers can have a positive effect on comprehension. So, greater presence of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers could be linked to the better performance of learners. Without textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers, that some would suppose as secondary and less important side of discourse, the passage loses its integrity and hence comprehension is affected. Also it was shown that the more the learners become aware the learners become aware of those markers the more their comprehension will be important.

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