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A Comparative Study of Persuasion Attainment in Iranian and American Newspaper Discourse: Tehran Times vs. The New York Times

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ABSTRACT

Metadiscourse has been identified as a valuable rhetorical resource in the process of persuasion. It refers to self-reflective linguistic expressions that guide readers through a text, representing the writer's interaction with both the evolving discourse and the anticipated audience. Grounded in a view of writing as social engagement, this study investigated the use of metadiscourse markers in opinion articles from two prominent newspapers: Tehran Times (a non-native English publication) and The New York Times (a native English publication). The aim was to identify cross-cultural differences in persuasive writing strategies employed by columnists and freelance writers within the newspaper genre. To this end, a corpus of 200 opinion articles published in 2023 was analyzed using Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse, focusing on the frequency and distribution of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. The results indicated that Iranian non-natives used more interactive metadiscourse markers, while natives used more interactional metadiscourse markers. Furthermore, quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in the overall use of metadiscourse and in the specific use of its two subcategories. The findings highlight distinct rhetorical preferences between native and non-native English writers, suggesting that cultural norms influence persuasive writing styles. These insights have pedagogical implications for language instruction, offering guidance on challenges faced by English language learners in mastering effective discourse strategies.

KEYWORDS: Discourse analysis; Genre analysis; Interactional metadiscourse markers; Interactive metadiscourse markers; Native and non-native English newspapers; Opinion articles

1. Introduction

The distinction between argumentation and persuasion has long been debated, with nineteenth-century classifications separating the two and reducing persuasion mainly to logical appeal. However, scholars such as Kinneavy (1971) and Connors (1981) have contested this limited view, arguing that persuasive writing integrates rational, credibility, and affective appeals to engage and influence audiences. Consequently, argumentation is now recognized as a component of broader persuasive discourse.

Research in persuasive writing highlights the importance of interaction and evaluation as key elements through which writers express opinions and engage readers. These elements are captured under the concept of metadiscourse, linguistic devices that organize texts and convey writers' attitudes toward their content and audience (Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Jiang, 2024; Hyland & Tse, 2004). Metadiscourse markers, among other logical and rhetorical resources, have been shown to play a central role in persuasion, enhancing reader comprehension and fostering the writer-reader connection across genres such as academic articles, textbooks, and newspaper editorials (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1989; Dafouz-Milne, 2003, 2008). By the same token, Nugroho (2020) states that metadiscourse markers in newspapers are significant, as they help writers organize and shape their arguments, indicate their stance concerning the content and readers, and facilitate indirect interaction with the audience, enhancing clarity and coherence in written discourse.

Although there has been considerable research into metadiscourse and its importance, the problem is that there is still an absence of thorough taxonomies and an underexplored understanding of how metadiscourse operates rhetorically across different cultures and genres. Particularly, newspaper editorials, key vehicles for opinion formation and persuasion, have received limited theoretical attention regarding their structural and rhetorical features (Van Dijk, 2010; Caffarel-Cayron & Rechniewski, 2014). While editorials from Western newspapers have been studied, the use of metadiscourse in Iranian newspapers has been largely overlooked.

This gap is significant given evidence that metadiscourse use varies across cultures and influences persuasive effectiveness. Furthermore, prior research has primarily focused on academic and business genres (e.g., Abdi, 2011; Abdi & Ahmadi, 2015; Ajideh, 2024; Geng & Wei, 2023; Jalilzadeh, *in press*; Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019; Nugrahani & Bram, 2020; Wongsu et al., 2024, to name a few). Even studies that have focused on editorials tend to overlook local newspapers and lack comprehensive cross-cultural analyses of persuasive discourse, particularly in relation to recently published editorial texts (e.g., Ahmadi et al., 2024, 2025; Deliry Moghadam, 2017; Khabbazi-Oskouei, 2018, etc.). In order to fill this gap, the current research investigates the metadiscourse markers used in editorials from a native English publication (The New York Times) and an Iranian newspaper (Tehran Times). By analyzing both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers comprehensively, this research aims to identify rhetorical and linguistic strategies that underpin persuasion in these distinct cultural contexts. The findings are expected to enhance the understanding of persuasive writing across different cultures and inform teaching and practice in language-related fields.

Accordingly, to achieve the aim of this research, the following questions directed the research process:

1. Is there any difference in metadiscourse marking between Iranian and native English newspaper opinion article writers?
2. Is there any difference in interactive metadiscourse marking between Iranian and native English newspaper opinion article writers?
3. Is there any difference in interactional metadiscourse marking between Iranian and native English newspaper opinion article writers?

2. Literature Review

This section addresses the theoretical considerations and related studies, which provide a reference point for the current study.

2.1. Theoretical Underpinnings

The study of metadiscourse and its role in persuasive writing is grounded in several interrelated theoretical traditions within discourse analysis, rhetoric, genre studies, and contrastive rhetoric. Discourse analysis, as first conceptualized by Harris (1952), extends linguistic inquiry beyond the sentence to examine how language functions in connected speech and writing, always in relation to its social and cultural context (Widdowson, 2007). This broader perspective has enabled researchers to explore not only the structural features of texts but also the underlying assumptions and communicative purposes that shape language use across different communities and genres.

Central to this approach is the concept of the discourse community, as articulated by Swales (1990), which refers to groups of people who have shared goals, methods of communication, and established genre conventions. Within any discourse community, the production of effective texts is contingent on the writer's ability to understand and adhere to the interpretive conventions of the community (Bizzell, 1992). This holds significant importance in relation to newspaper opinion pieces, which are influenced by the expectations and communication habits of various journalistic and cultural groups.

Closely related is the notion of genre, defined by Swales (1990) as a class of communicative events with common purposes acknowledged by expert members of the parent discourse community. Genre not only shapes the schematic structure and style of texts but also constrains the choice of content and rhetorical strategies. The development of genre-focused teaching has shown that direct instruction in genre norms improves students' capacity to create successful written works (Henry & Roseberry, 1998; Hyon, 2002; Mustafa, 1995). Bhatia (1993) further emphasizes that genre analysis is a sophisticated level of applied discourse analysis, focusing on the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features that distinguish different types of texts.

The concept of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, has a long and complex history, with its classical roots in Aristotle's identification of *ethos* (character), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (reason) as the primary means of persuasion. These rhetorical

appeals remain central to contemporary theories of composition and text analysis, as they inform the strategies writers use to construct arguments, select language, and organize their discourse. Metadiscourse, in this context, serves as a key mechanism for realizing these appeals: it links elements of the argument (logos), projects the writer's authority and credibility (ethos), and signals respect for the reader's perspective (pathos).

Contrastive rhetoric, introduced by Kaplan (1966), provides a framework to help understand how cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence writing practices, including the use of metadiscourse. This perspective has been further developed by scholars such as Abdi (2002), who argues that writing projects socially situated identities and that metadiscourse markers are particularly sensitive to cultural conventions. Comparative studies in this tradition have revealed that writers from different cultural backgrounds employ distinct rhetorical and metadiscourse strategies, reflecting their unique communicative norms and values.

As noted by Hyland (2005), metadiscourse was initially put forth by Zellig Harris in 1959 and has since been expanded upon by Williams (1981), Vande Kopple (1985), and Crismore and Farnsworth (1989). Metadiscourse encompasses linguistic elements that do not contribute new information but instead indicate the writer's involvement, assist the reader in comprehension, and promote interaction between the writer and reader. Hyland (2005) offers a widely adopted model that distinguishes between interactive metadiscourse (which organizes the text and guides the reader through the discourse) and interactional metadiscourse (which engages the reader and expresses the writer's stance). This model, grounded in systemic functional linguistics, highlights the dual role of metadiscourse in both structuring texts and managing interpersonal relations.

In sum, the theoretical foundation for the present study is built on the intersection of discourse analysis, genre theory, rhetoric, and contrastive rhetoric, with a particular focus on metadiscourse as a key resource for constructing persuasive texts. This framework provides the basis for examining how authors from various cultural backgrounds utilize metadiscourse markers in newspaper opinion articles to achieve their communicative and persuasive goals.

2.2. Related Studies

Empirical research on metadiscourse has demonstrated its central role in creating coherent and persuasive texts across a range of genres and cultural contexts. In academic writing, studies have shown that metadiscourse markers enhance text usefulness and reader comprehension (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Ledy, 2024; Simin & Tavangar, 2009; Vahid Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010). Research articles have also been a focus, with findings indicating significant differences in the use of metadiscourse markers across languages and disciplines (Abdi, 2002; Ajideh, 2024; Geng & Wei, 2023; Nugrahani & Bram, 2020; Wongsu, 2024; Zarei & Mansoori, 2007, 2011).

Closely related to the scope of this study, a substantial body of work has specifically examined metadiscourse in newspaper discourse. Dafouz-Milne (2003) investigated opinion columns in Spanish and British newspapers, finding that Spanish writers used more textual metadiscourse markers, while British writers favored interpersonal markers. This suggests that different rhetorical traditions influence the way writers construct persuasive arguments. Abdollahzadeh (2007) analyzed Persian and English editorials. The findings indicated that English writers used more hedges, while Persian writers employed more emphatics, reflecting culturally rooted differences in rhetorical style and attitudes toward authority and politeness.

Noorian and Biri (2010) investigated interpersonal metadiscourse markers in American and Iranian opinion articles, reporting significant differences that were attributed to cultural preferences, genre conventions, and the language proficiency of Iranian EFL writers. Their findings highlight the intricate relationship between cultural background and the utilization of metadiscourse. Hashemi and Golparvar (2012) found that Persian news reports contained a higher frequency of textual markers compared to interpersonal ones, while Yazdani (2014) observed that journalists in the United States employed interpersonal markers more often than those in Iran. These studies collectively suggest that American writers prefer to adopt a more reader-oriented and interactive style, while Iranian writers may prefer more impersonal and text-focused strategies.

Further comparative studies, such as those by Mehrabi Boshraadi (2014), confirmed that American economic news articles contained more interpersonal metadiscourse markers, whereas Persian articles relied more on textual markers. The authors attributed these differences to the cultural backgrounds of the writers. Deliry Moghadam (2017) conducted a comparison of 60 opinion articles, consisting of 30 written by American authors and 30 by Iranian EFL authors, to analyze the application of metadiscourse devices. Utilizing Hyland's (2005) framework, she discovered notable disparities in the employment of code glosses, hedges, self-mentions, and engagement markers. Such variations were shaped by genre conventions, cultural influences, and the Iranian writers' level of English proficiency. Khabbazi-Oskouei (2018) investigated interactional metadiscourse in editorials from British and Iranian news magazines, discovering that British writers leaned towards indirect methods of persuasion, whereas Iranian writers preferred more direct strategies, which mirror broader cultural and political factors.

Recently, Ahmadi (2024) used 300 popular science commentaries (150 from magazines and 150 from newspapers) to analyze interactive metadiscourse markers. Drawing from a 346,825-word corpus, they identified 24,492 instances of such markers, with magazine articles showing higher frequency and more structured use. Chi-square tests revealed significant differences across subcategories like transitions, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. Later on, Ahmadi (2025) conducted an analysis of a corpus comprising 987,625 words from various popular science subgenres, such as books, documentaries, magazine articles, and newspapers, to investigate the presence of interactive metadiscourse markers based on Hyland's (2019) Interpersonal Model. They utilized AntConc to find 75,477 occurrences, with transitions and code glosses

occurring with the highest frequency. The study found both shared and distinct patterns across subgenres, showing how these markers help structure content and enhance reader engagement.

Critically speaking, these empirical studies underscore the central role of metadiscourse in shaping persuasive writing and reveal significant cross-cultural variation in its use, particularly in newspaper editorials. Despite some previous comparative research, there is a lack of recent, systematic, and genre-specific studies that analyze both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in a large corpus of opinion articles from a non-native English (Iranian) and a native English (American) newspaper. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in opinion articles from Tehran Times and The New York Times, which will enhance a deeper understanding of cross-cultural persuasive writing within the newspaper genre.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus

The criteria of text type and genre were used to guide the selection of the corpus. A total of 200 editorial opinion articles (100 from The New York Times and 100 from Tehran Times) were selected for analysis. These articles were drawn non-randomly from a pool of editorials published over a four-month period in 2023. This time frame was intentionally controlled in order to minimize the temporal variability associated with genre because it can be subject to evolution and transformation over time (Dudley-Evans, 2002).

To ensure thematic comparability, the selection process also controlled for topic, focusing on articles that addressed political events and some economic and cultural issues. The online editions of both newspapers were accessed, and the selected articles were electronically stored for subsequent analysis.

As many studies on metadiscourse in specific genres, such as opinion articles, tend to rely on relatively small, carefully delimited corpora due to the specificity and functional nature of the texts analyzed (Dafouz-Milne, 2003; Deliry Moghadam, 2017; Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Noorian & Biria, 2010; Nugroho, 2020, to name a few), the corpus size in the present study was deliberately expanded beyond this commonly adopted range in order to ensure the identification of more robust and reliable patterns of metadiscourse use, while maintaining strict control over genre and topic. With this in mind, the final corpus totaled 142,863 words. Tehran Times corpus included 71,642 words, with each article averaging 716 words in length. The New York Times corpus contained 71,221 words, averaging 712 words per article. The articles were thus largely homogeneous in terms of length and topic, enhancing the validity of cross-cultural comparisons.

All selected texts were journalistic opinion pieces, a genre that holds significance in shaping public discourse. Opinion articles typically reflect the author's stance on current societal issues and are considered exemplary instances of persuasive writing. As noted by Connor (1996), these types of texts serve as some of the best examples of persuasive writing globally, establishing benchmarks for effective persuasion.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theoretical basis of metadiscourse markers and persuasion is presented.

3.2.1. Metadiscourse Model

Hyland (2005) holds that “metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes, and assumptions of those who are communicating” (p. 3). He goes on to explain that metadiscourse refers to “the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community” (p. 46). Table 1 below presents the interpersonal model that was used as the theoretical foundation for the present study, as it is a strong, clear, and practical model of metadiscourse.

Table 1.*An Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005, p. 49)*

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the test	Resources
Transitions	Express relations between main clauses	In addition; but; thus; and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	Finally, to include; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above, see Figure; in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	According to X; Z states
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meaning	Namely; e.g.; such as; in other words
Interactional	Involve the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might; perhaps; possible; about
Boosters	Emphasize certainty and close dialogue	In fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writers' attitude to proposition	Unfortunately; I agree; Surprisingly
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider; note; you can see that

3.2.2. Persuasion

Numerous definitions of persuasion can be found in the literature, among which Seiter and Gass's (2022) definition is the most comprehensive and thorough one. According to their definition, "persuasion involves one or more persons who are engaged in the activity of creating, reinforcing, modifying or extinguishing beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivations and/or behaviors within the constraints of a given communication context" (p. 34). The concept can also be understood as using one's available resources to influence people's views and ultimately their behavior and manner. All contemporary definitions of persuasion originate from Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*. Aristotle (1991/2007) suggests three ways of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. In Kennedy's translation of Aristotle (1991/2007), the mentioned means have been listed as follows: (a) *Ethos*: the projection of the character of the speaker as trustworthy, (b) *Pathos*: consideration of the emotions of the audience, and (c) *Logos*: inductive or deductive logical argument. The three factors of Aristotle's persuasion (*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*) are logistically associated with the term *metadiscourse*. As *metadiscourse* relates the elements of argument, it is related to *logos*. It pertains to *pathos*, as the writer utilizes *metadiscourse* to indicate respect and attention for the audience's opinions. And ultimately, *metadiscourse* belongs to *ethos* when it signifies the writer's dominance and competence. According to Hyland (2005), "because *metadiscourse* helps writers to engage their audience, signal relationships, apprise readers of varying certainty and guide their understanding of a text, *metadiscourse* pursues persuasive objectives." (p. 63).

3.3. Data collection and Data Analysis Procedures

To build the corpus, a total of 200 opinion articles were electronically retrieved from the websites of Iranian and American newspapers. All collected articles were documented in Microsoft Word format and stored on the computer. Each article was meticulously organized into folders assigned to particular sources to prevent the blending of articles from various newspapers. Data was collected in August 2023, and editorials published over a four-month period, from May to August 2023, were documented. Subsequently, a smaller group of articles was divided into sections to facilitate a more manageable analysis. Concerning the topic, careful selection was undertaken to ensure the inclusion of homogeneous texts discussing cultural events, book reviews, and certain Middle East issues, as it was necessary to control the subjects of the articles. This is consistent with the perspectives of scholars like Hyland (1999) and Dafouz (2003, 2008), who argue that the subject matter might affect the type, frequency, and distribution of *metadiscourse* markers. Another factor that needed to be controlled was the originality of the texts, particularly making sure that opinion articles from America were not written by non-native writers and that opinion articles from Iran were not written by native English speakers. To address this, the chosen opinion articles ended with a short biography of the writer. Additionally, efforts were made to make the articles in both groups comparable, ensuring they contained approximately the same number of words and maintained similar average word counts.

The chosen texts were analyzed using Hyland's (2005) model for interactive and interactional *metadiscourse* markers (see Table 1). Given that *metadiscourse* markers often serve multiple functions, it was essential to carry out a precise, manual analysis of each text. All *metadiscourse* elements were color-coded and highlighted within the texts to facilitate accurate calculation. For this purpose, a list of *metadiscourse* items from Hyland (2005) was employed. Hyland emphasizes the fluid nature of *metadiscourse*, noting that "what can be a *metadiscourse* in one rhetorical context can express propositional content in another rhetorical context, and the study should constantly analyze each element individually to specify their function" (p. 24). Consequently, the context surrounding each element was meticulously analyzed to prevent misunderstandings regarding its function, either as propositional content or as a marker of *metadiscourse*. Each item was also assessed in relation to its corresponding *metadiscourse* category. After identifying and categorizing the *metadiscourse* markers, a quantitative analysis was performed to discover the frequency of different types of conversational *metadiscourse* and to identify any differences between the two groups in this regard. The data obtained through the quantitative analysis was instrumental in establishing the presence and distribution of *metadiscourse* categories. Additionally, a qualitative analysis was carried out to uncover any implicit cooperative principle underlying their use. To ensure inter-coder reliability, the data and corpus were reviewed and cross-checked

by a competent professor of English Language Teaching (ELT), resulting in a more reliable dataset. The reliability between raters was assessed using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, resulting in a value of .89. Additionally, a chi-square test of independence was utilized to discover the statistical significance of differences in the frequency of the variables.

4. Results

According to Table 2, the overall distribution of metadiscourse markers is comparable between Tehran Times and The New York Times, with totals of 8,848 and 9,214, respectively. Although The New York Times showed a slightly higher overall frequency, both newspapers demonstrated a substantial use of metadiscourse to organize and engage readers. As for interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers, Tehran Times and The New York Times showed differences in the overall use. Tehran Times employed a higher total of interactive markers (5,668) compared to The New York Times (2,830). Conversely, The New York Times used more interactional markers, with a total of 6,384, nearly double that of Tehran Times (3,180). Further analysis of specific categories is provided in the following paragraphs.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for Metadiscourse Makers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

		Tehran Times	New York Times
Interactive	Code Glosses	1399	972
	Endophoric Markers	191	0
	Evidentials	8	54
	Frame Markers	516	398
	Transition Markers	3554	1406
Total		5668	2830
Interactional	Attitude Markers	233	255
	Boosters	688	928
	Self-Mentions	377	1081
	Engagement Markers	1142	2151
	Hedges	740	1969
Total		3180	6384
Grand Total		8848	9214

On the whole, as Figure 1 indicates, the overall count of metadiscourse markers in Tehran Times and The New York Times showed only slight differences.

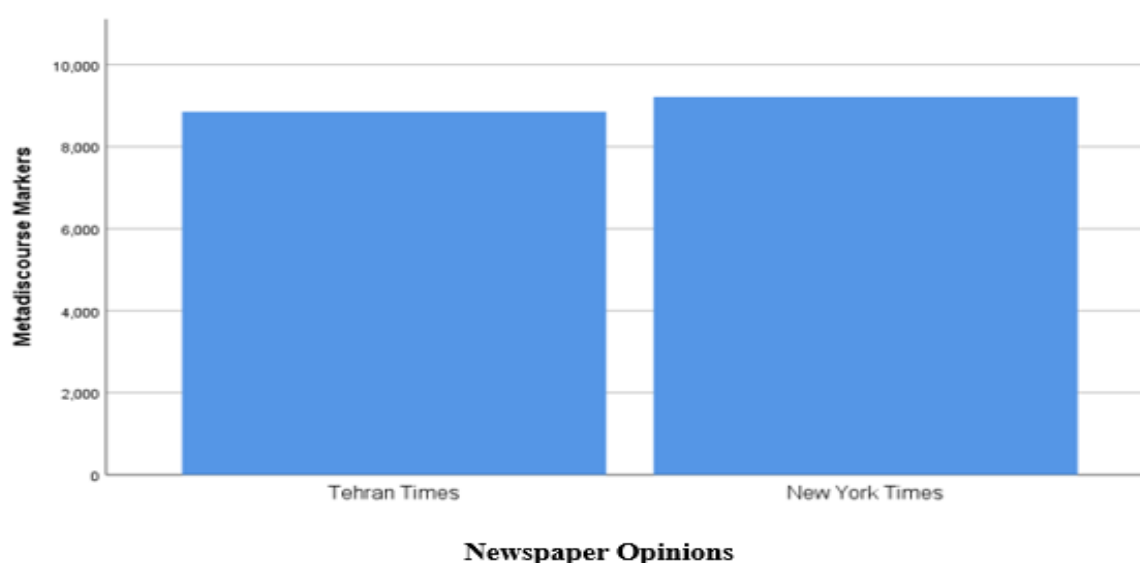


Figure 1.

Bar Graph of Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

It is also important to highlight that the findings from the chi-square test indicated a significant difference in metadiscourse markers between Iranian newspapers and those of native speakers, $\chi^2 (1, n = 18062) = 7.416, p < .05$. Table 3 below indicates the results in this regard.

Table 3.

Chi-Square Test Comparing Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

Chi-square	7.416 ^a
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.006

^a 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.

The minimum expected cell frequency is 9031.0.

Regarding the comparison of interactive metadiscourse markers, Table 4 indicates that Tehran Times had a greater overall usage of these markers (5,668) than The New York Times (2,830). Specifically, Tehran Times frequently employed code glosses (1,399 vs. 972), endophoric markers (191 vs. 0), frame markers (516 vs. 398), and transition markers (3,554 vs. 1,406). Extracts illustrating the above-mentioned metadiscourse markers are presented respectively below, drawn from Tehran Times. Examples of code glosses were seen in instances such as “One of the disagreements between the government and the parliament is how to make oil resources more productive. In other words, how to use the capacities of the private sector so that we can develop new oil fields or improve the existing fields”. Examples of endophoric markers were observed in sentences like “Considering the issues mentioned above, it can be said that finally Erdogan was able to secure his victory in the election round by obtaining Sinan Ogan's support”. Examples of frame markers appeared in cases such as “Finally, for reasons beyond the scope of this article, the Soviet administration admitted defeat in confrontation with the West and collapsed”. Examples of transition markers were seen in cases like “This is due to the visa waiver between Iran and Russia that has increased for Russian tourists visiting Iran, Mehr reported. In addition, the number of Iranian passengers visiting Russia has been on the rise”. In contrast, The New York Times used more evidentials (54 vs. 8). Here is an extract from The New York Times in this regard: “Only 47 percent of Democrats want to see Joe Biden on the ballot in 2024, according to the latest Associated Press poll”.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics for Interactive Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

	Interactive Metadiscourse Markers					Total
	Code Glosses	Endophoric Markers	Evidentials	Frame Markers	Transition Markers	
Tehran Times	1399	191	8	516	3554	5668
New York Times	972	0	54	398	1406	2830

The distribution of interactive metadiscourse markers in newspaper opinion articles is graphically represented in Figure 2 below.

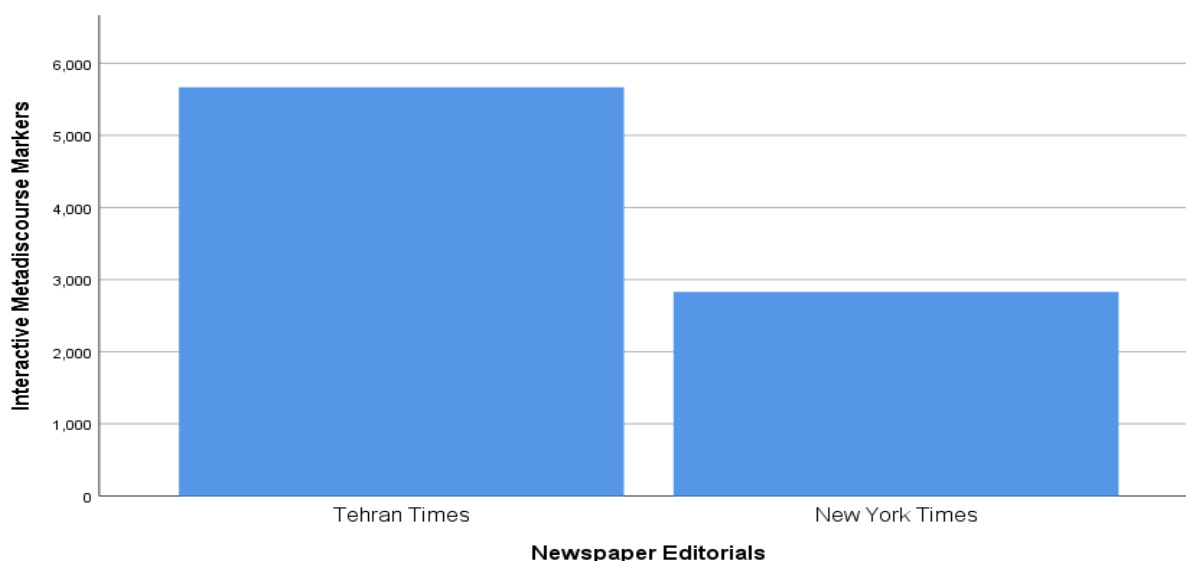


Figure 2.

Bar Graph of Interactive Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

Also, the results of the chi-square test revealed that there was a significant difference in interactive metadiscourse markers between Iranian and native newspaper editorials, $\chi^2 (1, n = 8498) = 947.781, p < .05$. Table 5 below shows the results in this regard.

Table 5.

Chi-Square Test Comparing Interactive Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

Chi-square	947.781 ^a
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

^a 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.
The minimum expected cell frequency is 4249.0.

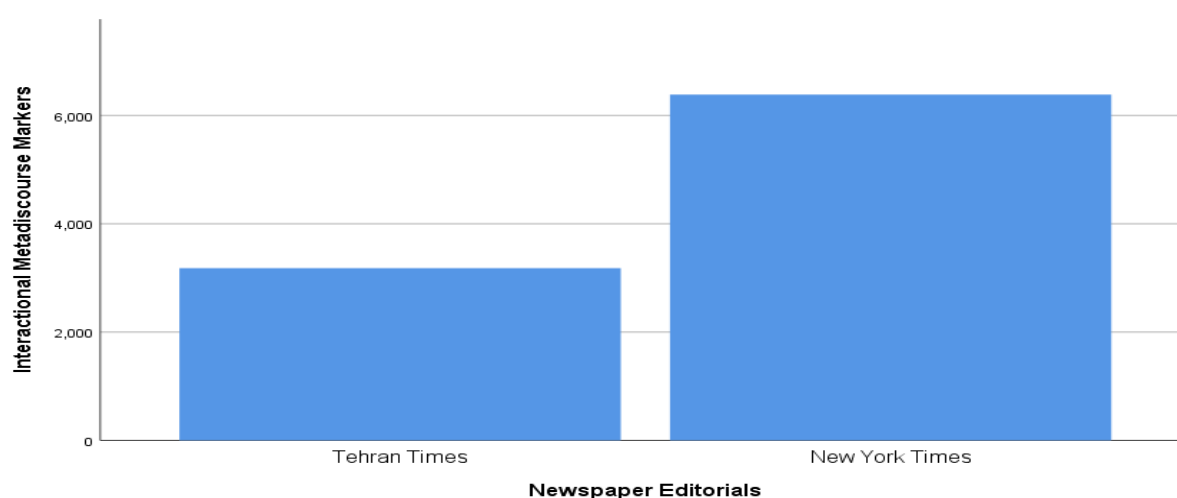
As for the comparison of interactional metadiscourse markers, Table 6 depicts that The New York Times showed a substantially higher overall use of interactional metadiscourse markers (6,384) compared to Tehran Times (3,180). Specifically, it employed more boosters (928 vs. 688), self-mentions (1,081 vs. 377), engagement markers (2,151 vs. 1,142), and hedges (1,969 vs. 740). The use of attitude markers was relatively similar in both newspapers (255 in The New York Times vs. 233 in Tehran Times). Extracts illustrating the above-mentioned interactional metadiscourse markers are presented respectively below, drawn from The New York Times and Tehran Times. Examples of boosters were seen in instances such as “What these political myths have in common is an understanding that the golden age is definitely not right now”. Examples of self-mentions were observed in sentences like “This is what West Virginia fears: that more of us will remember who we are”. Examples of engagement markers appeared in cases such as “It’s important to note that masks only work when people wear them, so adherence will always be the key”. Examples of hedges were found in cases like “Seen from outside Washington, the debt ceiling battle might seem like an abstract argument between the political parties over federal spending and deficits”. Finally, examples of attitude markers were observed in instances like “Unfortunately, the serious problems and complications of the conflict in Ukraine have caused the Caucasus region to be neglected to some extent”.

Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics for Interactional Metadiscourse Markers Across Opinion Articles

	Attitude Markers	Boosters	Self-Mentions	Engagement Markers	Hedges	Total
Tehran Times	233	688	377	1142	740	3180
New York Times	255	928	1081	2151	1969	6384

Figure 3 below graphically depicts the distribution of interactional metadiscourse markers across newspaper opinions.

**Figure 3.**

Bar Graph of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

It is also worthy to mention that the results of the chi-square test showed that there was a significant difference in interactional metadiscourse markers between Iranian and native newspaper editorials, $\chi^2(1, n = 9564) = 1073.360, p < .05$. Table 7 below indicates the results in this regard.

Table 7.
Chi-Square Test Comparing Interactional Metadiscourse Markers Across Newspaper Opinion Articles

Chi-square	1073.360 ^a
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

^a 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.
The minimum expected cell frequency is 4782.0.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the use of metadiscourse markers in opinion articles from a native English newspaper (The New York Times) and an Iranian publication (Tehran Times). The primary objective was to explore how metadiscourse markers are utilized for persuasive purposes, especially in the opinion pieces of both sets of writers. In general, the results indicated that the frequency of metadiscourse markers was somewhat similar between Tehran Times (8,848) and The New York Times (9,214). However, Tehran Times used more interactive markers (5,668 vs. 2,830), while The New York Times employed more interactional markers (6,384 vs. 3,180).

According to Hyland (2005), metadiscourse markers are common elements that help authors clearly organize and evaluate their writings to effectively engage with readers. Although the results reinforce Hyland’s claim, as both groups of writers similarly took good advantage of these linguistic elements, American writers utilized more metadiscourse markers in comparison to their Iranian counterparts (9,214 vs. 8,848, respectively). The results align with other cross-cultural research that examines the employment of metadiscourse markers by native and non-native writers in English (e.g., Deliery Moghadam, 2017; Heidari Tabrizi, 2017; Mirshamsi & Allami, 2013). These studies revealed that the occurrence of metadiscourse markers is greater in English corpora compared to those produced by non-native English speakers. Taken together, the findings of the current study, which support Hyland’s perspective, suggest that the use of metadiscourse markers varies across cultures, communities, and genres. As noted by Noorian and Biria (2010), significant differences in the two corpora arise from culture-driven preferences, genre-specific conventions, and the extent of foreign language experience among Iranian EFL writers. A plausible explanation offered by Mirshamsi and Allami suggests that the higher frequency of metadiscourse marker usage by native speakers could stem from the fact that they are “more familiar with the norms and conventions of their rhetorical structure” (p. 36).

Concerning the comparison of interactive metadiscourse markers across the two corpora, it can be stated that the primary function of interactive metadiscourse is guiding the reader through the text (Thompson & Thetela, 1995). Through this phase of analysis, the second research question can be addressed. Statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the use of interactive metadiscourse markers between native and Iranian texts. The findings revealed a significant difference in the application of interactive metadiscourse markers across the two corpora. Specifically, both sets of data indicated that transition markers were the most frequently used type of interactive metadiscourse. Notably, Iranian writers employed these linguistic elements more extensively than their native-speaking counterparts (3.554 vs. 1.406 items, respectively). The higher frequency of transition markers in the Iranian writers’ texts may reflect their greater effort to guide readers through the discourse and clarify rhetorical intentions. This can be interpreted as the writers’ attempt to lead readers in the intended direction and thus achieve their anticipated persuasive goal. As Hyland (2004, p. 140) notes, transitions “represent writers’ attempts to ensure readers are able to correctly recover their intentions.” The comparatively lower use among native-speaking writers may indicate a greater reliance on implicit cohesion and reader inferencing.

Regarding other interactive metadiscourse markers, Iranian writers employed a higher frequency of code glosses compared to Americans (1,399 vs. 972). This finding lends support to Heidari Tabrizi (2017), who found that Iranian writers employed more code glosses in comparison to their native counterparts. Also, this finding corroborates Dafouz-Milne (2008), who stated that columnists are likely mindful of the broad and diverse readership they write for, which may explain their use of explicit cues and a higher number of examples to clarify their points. Interestingly, this finding runs counter to Le’s (2004) expectations regarding journalistic writing. In her study of editorials, a genre closely related to opinion pieces, she argued that such texts typically present content in a more accessible manner for general audiences, making extensive use of code glosses unnecessary. Yet, it may be the very nature of addressing a large and not specialized audience that prompts Iranian opinion writers to incorporate more code glosses in their texts.

Regarding frame markers, Iranian writers used them more than their American counterparts (516 vs. 398). Indeed, this may suggest a stronger tendency to overtly structure their discourse and make the organization of ideas more transparent for the reader. This may indicate an attempt to guide the audience step by step through the argument, particularly when writing for a broad or mixed readership that may not specialize in the target language. This finding lends support to Belli (2019), who

discovered that non-native writers utilize the greatest quantity of frame markers and a wider variety of types, whereas native writers use the fewest numbers and only a small range of types.

Conversely, native writers exceeded their corresponding Iranian writers in the use of evidentials (54 vs. 8, respectively). This difference may suggest that native writers place greater emphasis on attributing information to external sources, thereby distancing themselves from certain claims or reinforcing credibility through outside authority. As Hyland (2005) notes, evidentials serve to “distinguish who is responsible for a position,” suggesting that native writers may be more attuned to strategically managing stance and accountability within their arguments. Thus, the use of evidentials by American writers could be explained by the fact that they resort to such markers to strengthen the overall persuasive force of the text.

Surprisingly, no endophoric markers were identified in the corpus of native articles compared to those of Iranians (0 vs. 191, respectively). This striking difference may stem from differing assumptions about audience competence. As Hyland (2005) explains, endophoric markers refer to information elsewhere in the text, serving to guide readers in navigating internal references. Native writers in *The New York Times* may presume their audience possesses sufficient linguistic proficiency and rhetorical awareness to independently make connections across the text without the need for explicit guidance. In contrast, Iranian writers, addressing a readership that may include non-native English users, may adopt a more cautious and reader-friendly approach, using endophoric references to enhance clarity, ensure cohesion, and strengthen the overall persuasiveness of their arguments.

On the whole, it can be stated that the finding that Iranian writers use more interactive metadiscourse markers than their American counterparts is in line with Heidari Tabrizi (2017). As he suggests, it can be interpreted that Iranian writers tend to demonstrate greater awareness and favor in achieving coherence and maintaining an interactive stance, effectively managing the flow of information to guide readers through the text as a cohesive linguistic whole, more so than their American counterparts.

Additionally, as for comparing interactional metadiscourse markers in the two corpora, it can be stated that using interactional metadiscourse is meant to bring in the readers’ voice (Thompson, 2001). The third research question, through this phase of analysis, can be addressed. Statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the use of interactional metadiscourse markers between native and Iranian texts. The findings revealed a significant difference in the application of interactional metadiscourse markers across the two corpora. Specifically, engagement markers were the most frequent subcategory in both corpora. However, native writers employed engagement markers nearly twice as often as their Iranian counterparts, with frequencies of 2,151 and 1,142, respectively. Engagement markers function as tools that directly involve readers by drawing their attention or making them active participants in the discourse (Hyland, 2005). These markers are crucial for establishing and maintaining the relationship between the author and the audience. As mentioned by Hyland, engagement markers are aimed at “acknowledging the need to adequately meet readers’ expectations of inclusion” and “pulling the audience into the discourse at critical points, predicting possible objections and guiding them to particular interpretations” (p. 54). This difference suggests that native writers place greater emphasis on explicitly engaging the reader and managing the writer-reader relationship, which aligns with rhetorical norms in English academic writing that favor an interactive and inclusive style. Conversely, the relatively lower presence of engagement markers in the writings of Iranian authors may reflect cultural and educational conventions that prioritize formality and an impersonal stance in academic discourse. Such conventions may have led Iranian writers to adopt a more detached tone, thus utilizing fewer engagement markers to directly connect with or involve the audience.

The second most frequent category in both data sets was also hedges. Nonetheless, the number of hedges found in native articles was notably different (1,969) compared to those written by Iranians (740). This disparity suggests that American writers tend to use hedging more frequently, which may reflect a greater sensitivity to politeness and the need to show consideration for the audience’s perspective, as noted by Holmes (1982, as cited in Crismore et al., 1993). Hyland (2005) further emphasizes that hedges help build rapport between authors and readers by softening claims and allowing space for opposing views. Conversely, the lower use of hedges in Iranian texts, as supported by Deliery Moghadam (2017), may be influenced by their view that cautious or mitigated language probably does not add to the persuasive power of discourse. This being said, this finding confirms comprehension American writers have regarding the important role hedges play in persuasive writing where the writer “needs to strike a difficult balance between commitment to his/her ideas and respect and dialogue with the reader” (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 107).

Concerning other markers, American writers utilized more self-mentions compared to their Iranian counterparts (1,081 vs. 377, respectively). According to Hyland (2005, p. 53), “the presence or the absence of explicit author presence is generally a conscious choice by writers to adopt a particular stance in relation to their argument, their community and their readers”. As such, it can be discussed that the higher frequency of self-mentions among American writers suggests a preference for a more personal and involved rhetorical style, where the writer actively positions themselves within the text and engages with the audience. In contrast, the lower use of self-mentions by Iranian writers may indicate a tendency toward a more impersonal style, reflecting cultural or disciplinary conventions that favor authorial distance and a less personalized interaction with readers. This finding supports Mauranen’s (1993) research, where it was noted that Anglo-American authors often highlight their personal involvement in academic writing. A possible speculation, as mentioned by Deliery Moghadam (2017), is that in the Iranian educational system, students are generally encouraged to avoid frequent self-references in formal writing, as doing so can be seen as a sign of arrogance or excessive self-promotion. However, this may lead to the reduction of rapport between the writer and the reader.

Regarding boosters, Americans used them more than their corresponding Iranian counterparts (928 vs. 688, respectively). As Hyland (1999) states, “boosters emphasize certainty and construct rapport by making involvement with the

topic and solidarity with an audience, taking a joint position against other voices” (as cited in Hyland, 2005, p. 53). Boosters are “an intrinsic characteristic of opinion columns, since readers expect to find the writer’s opinion overtly stated” (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 108). With all this in mind, it can be discussed that American writers may be more confident and assertive than Iranian writers, who tend to be rather conservative, unlike their Western counterparts (Noorian & Biria, 2010). A possible explanation is that Westerners, in general, might be perceived as the primary custodians of the English language, a view that, although recently challenged by Asltaleb Maghferat (2025), may still influence native writers. This perceived linguistic authority could unconsciously encourage them to adopt a more assertive tone and make more definitive claims, making their non-native counterparts prefer a more cautious and conservative approach when articulating their positions.

Strangely, attitude markers were the least used subcategory in both native and Iranian articles, with slightly different frequencies (255 vs. 233, respectively). This low frequency may suggest that writers in both groups tend to downplay overt expressions of personal stance, possibly to maintain a more objective or neutral tone. As Heidari Tabrizi (2017) notes, attitude markers convey the writer’s stance toward the content rather than its factual accuracy, so their limited use could reflect a shared preference for impersonal or less evaluative academic writing.

On the whole, the finding that American writers employ more interactional metadiscourse markers than their Iranian counterparts aligns with the observations of Heidari Tabrizi (2017) and Deliery Moghadam (2017). As Deliery Moghadam points out, this difference can be better understood when considering the nature of the genre analyzed in this study. Opinion articles are typically written to address current societal issues and to convince readers of the author’s perspective. To do so effectively, writers often focus on establishing a strong connection with their audience through the use of interactional elements. As noted by Crismore (1993), such features are more prevalent in writing that adopts a personal, informal, and conversational tone. This style is particularly characteristic of American opinion writing, which may account for its heavier reliance on interactional metadiscourse.

It is worth noting that, while these results contribute to our understanding of cross-cultural differences in metadiscourse usage, some limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the relatively small size of the corpora (100 samples each from The New York Times and Tehran Times) may limit the generalizability of the results. A larger sample would likely provide a more comprehensive view of what was observed in this study. Additionally, the study focused solely on opinion articles from a four-month period in 2023, which restricts the temporal scope and could result in differing outcomes if a wider range of texts or a longer time frame were considered. Finally, the study only analyzed opinion articles from two newspapers, which may not fully represent the diversity of metadiscourse usage across other genres or media outlets.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study offer several pedagogical insights, particularly for language and English for specific purposes (ESP) instructors. First, they highlight the importance of raising awareness about metadiscourse among both teachers and learners. Understanding that texts contain both propositional content and interactional elements can help learners become more effective readers and writers. Recognizing how writers guide readers and construct arguments may not only enhance reading comprehension but also improve students’ ability to craft persuasive and coherent texts. Also, ESP teachers should be attentive to the needs of their audience when teaching academic writing. In this context, integrating metadiscourse instruction into ESP curricula is essential. Specifically, instruction can focus on familiarizing students with various types of interactional markers and their rhetorical functions. Additionally, novice writers should be made aware of genre-specific expectations, equipping them to tailor their writing to different readerships. The results are also valuable for the broader field of English language teaching, particularly in writing instruction. English as a foreign language students and teachers can use these insights to identify and address cross-cultural rhetorical differences in written communication. Moreover, in translation studies, these findings can aid both instructors and practitioners in understanding how metadiscourse usage varies across languages, contributing to more rhetorically appropriate translations. Finally, the study holds fruitful implications concerning curriculum design and material development. Language teaching programs and textbooks should incorporate metadiscourse instruction as a core component. Materials should support learners in both recognizing and applying metadiscourse markers effectively, helping them construct texts that engage and persuade readers more successfully.

All in all, it can be concluded that although the two newspapers employ metadiscourse markers in relatively comparable quantities, they diverge significantly in the types of markers used. Iranian writers make greater use of interactive metadiscourse markers, particularly transition markers, code glosses, and frame markers, which indicates a stronger focus on guiding readers through the structure of the text and clarifying meaning. This tendency likely reflects cultural and pedagogical norms that emphasize textual coherence and explicit organization. In contrast, American writers rely more heavily on interactional metadiscourse markers such as engagement markers, hedges, self-mentions, and boosters. This pattern aligns with a more dialogic and personalized rhetorical style, where writers aim to engage readers directly, assert their stance, and maintain a tone of politeness and balance. Finally, it is worth wrapping up the paper with this concluding remark that the findings underscore the persuasive role that metadiscourse plays in opinion writing and highlight the extent to which rhetorical choices are shaped by linguistic background, cultural norms, and educational expectations.

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