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A Corpus-Based Analysis of Interactional Metadiscourse Features Used in Argumentative Essays Written by IELTS Test Takers in Pakistan

Aisha Zulfiqar Choudhary[1]
Mutee Ur Rehman[2]

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A Corpus-Based Analysis of Interactional Metadiscourse Features Used in Argumentative Essays Written by IELTS Test Takers in Pakistan

Aisha Zulfiqar Choudhary	Lecturer, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad. Correspondence: aisha.appliedlinguistics@gmail.com
Mutee Ur Rehman	MPhil Scholar, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University, Faisalabad. Correspondence: muteerehman00@gmail.com

Abstract

The proficiency of Pakistani learners in taking the IELTS is vital for their prospects of studying and working overseas. There is a significant amount of research on argumentative essay writing, however, there have been limited studies examining the utilisation of interactional metadiscourse markers by Pakistani learners who are taking the IELTS exam. In order to address this lack of knowledge, this study analyses argumentative essays written by Pakistani IELTS test takers, utilising Hyland's (2005) interpersonal metadiscourse paradigm. The MetaPak programme was utilised for the analysis of corpus. The results indicate that in interactional metadiscourse markers "Engagement markers" were the most commonly employed, followed by "Boosters" and "Self-mentions." "Hedges" and "Attitude markers" were among the least prevalent metadiscourse markers. The findings highlight the need of using strategic metadiscourse in order to enhance argumentation effectiveness. These insights can be valuable for instructing L2 writing and guiding IELTS preparation materials for Pakistani IELTS test takers.

Keywords: Pakistani IELTS test takers, argumentative essay, Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse features, MetaPak, second language learners

INTRODUCTION

The production and comprehension of English academic writing, especially at advanced levels such as the "International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)," poses a significant difficulty for non-native writers and speakers. English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners often find it challenging to produce high-quality academic writing, such as essays, theses, and articles. This difficulty arises from either their limited language proficiency or their lack of knowledge regarding the structural and lexical

conventions of English academic writing. Metadiscourse analysis can help fill this gap by providing IELTS and TOEFL learners with the required support and instruction to improve their writing ability in English academic writing. It specifies the requirements of the genre and equips learners with vital information and skills. Recent studies (Rad, 2020; Dehghayedi, 2023) have utilised metadiscourse analysis to examine different academic writing discourses. Their aim is to provide a framework for academic writing, enhancing our comprehension of this form of communication and assisting IELTS test takers in effectively conveying their message.

The IELTS and TOEFL tests are important academic assessments that significantly impact the prospects of individuals seeking employment or education opportunities overseas. A substantial portion of these two assessments involves writing an essay, which presents challenges partly because of the intricate structure associated with essay creation and the scoring criteria. It was discovered that several IELTS test takers exhibited subpar performance in the writing component of the test while excelling in other portions. This failure was attributed to a lack of understanding of the prerequisites for an IELTS argumentative essay, along with some minor shortcomings. This deficiency could be rectified by incorporating pertinent instructional materials into the curriculum.

The examination of spoken and written genre and discourse has captivated the interest of educators and linguists specialising in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Holmes (1997) asserts that this interest primarily stems from the educational need to develop suitable ESP resources and instructional models that enhance the comprehension and production of proficient academic writing by non-native speakers and writers. This study conducted a metadiscourse analysis of argumentative essays written by by non-native writers in IELTS writing task 2. The primary aim of the study is to uncover interactional metadiscourse markers present in argumentative essays written by Pakistani IELTS test takers and to determine the patterns. The study uses Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. To fulfil the research aims, the following questions have been formulated.

RQ 1: What are the frequencies of interactional metadiscourse markers found in argumentative essays written by Pakistani IELTS Test Takers?

RQ 2: Which interactional metadiscourse markers have been found in the essays, and how are these markers divided into categories?

LITERATURE REVIEW

ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

A compelling and persuasive new category has arisen in scholarly writing: the argumentative essay. Researchers can utilise it as a platform not just to express their perspectives but also to assert a stance on a particular matter and amass compelling

information to support their position. Authors in this genre encounter obstacles such as formulating a well-developed thesis statement, structuring a well-organized body of arguments, and anticipating and addressing counterarguments. In order to create a compelling argumentative essay, it is necessary to engage in thorough research and substantial reading within the relevant topic to provide solid evidence for one's ideas. This form of academic writing transcends mere subjective expression; it aims to stimulate readers' critical thinking regarding the presented topics. The argumentative essay is an essential component of academic writing as it equips students with the necessary skills to make significant contributions to discussions on ideas and fosters an environment of critical discourse and scholarly debate.

Argumentative writing refers to the act of crafting a written response to a persuasive subject by presenting logical and well-supported arguments backed by facts. Argumentative writing aims to provide evidence and reasoning to support a contentious viewpoint or defend a position that is subject to disagreement, as defined in the Longman Dictionary of Teaching and Applied Linguistics (p. 337). Argumentative essay writing is fundamentally more challenging than narrative writing due to the greater cognitive load involved in creating an argument (Crowhurst, 1990). The objective of argumentative writing is to persuade the reader to either agree or disagree with the writer's position on a controversial topic by providing evidence, logical reasoning, and analysis to support the writer's perspective (Reid, 1988). Applebee (1984) defines argumentative writing as a form of writing that follows a hierarchical, analytic framework and necessitates the systematic substantiation of critical arguments, as stated in his definition (p. 87).

An argumentative essay necessitates a controversial topic, the author's position on the issue, crucial arguments supporting that position, and justifications to substantiate those arguments. Composing an argumentative piece involves presenting your position and anticipating someone to engage with it. Writing argumentative essays is a demanding task as it requires the writer to convince the reader of their perspective while also presenting evidence that substantiates their claim. To achieve success in writing argumentative essays, students should prioritise their audience and meticulously structure the essential elements in a coherent and efficient manner. To do this, students must possess a thorough understanding of the conventional structure for argumentative essays.

METADISCOURSE

As defined by Vande Kopple (1985, p. 83), "metadiscourse" pertains to conversations within conversations. In 1959, linguist Harris used the term "metadiscourse" to establish a conceptual framework for comprehending language in use. Metadiscourse pertains to the deliberate attempts made by a writer or speaker to shape the interpretation of a written or

spoken text by the reader or listener (Hyland, 2005). Different researchers have reached different results about the precise definition of metadiscourse. Metadiscourse, as defined by Vande Kopple (1980), refers to writing that highlights the speech activities and acknowledges the author's presence. Williams (1989, p. 226) defines metadiscourse as writing that focuses on the act of writing itself, without directly addressing any specific subject matter.

According to Crismore et al. (1993, p. 40), metadiscourse refers to language elements that help the audience in organising, understanding, and evaluating information, without contributing to the actual content of the text. Metadiscourse is a word commonly used in discourse analysis and language education. It refers to an approach that focuses on understanding the interactions between text producers and their texts, as well as between text producers and users. This idea is relatively new and has gained significant attention in recent years (Hyland, 2005, p. 1). According to Hyland and Tse's (2004), authors use metadiscourse to organise their content, involve readers, and convey their ideas about the text and audience (p. 156). In 2013, Hyland provided a formal definition of the term "metadiscourse" to eliminate any confusion. According to Hyland (2013), writers and speakers use metadiscourse to communicate their perspective and establish a connection with readers as part of a specific community. They do this by using self-reflective language that negotiate the meanings of their interactions in a book.

The lack of well-defined boundaries and the potential difficulty in differentiating between metadiscoursal and non-metadiscoursal categories have made the concept of metadiscourse inherently ambiguous from its inception (Adel, 2006). The ambiguity arises due to the various manifestations of metadiscourse, such as punctuation, utterances, phrases, and sentences. Additionally, there are instances where it is challenging to distinguish between the textual and interpersonal functions of language, as they can simultaneously serve the same communicative objective. Despite its limitations as a classification tool, Bamford and Bondi (2005) contend that this lack of precision "is not inherently negative as it mirrors the intricate nature of textual organisation and communication, and continues to be a valuable analytical tool for addressing a highly common pattern in discourse" (p. 18). In essence, metadiscourse refers to a set of linguistic devices that are used to openly structure the discourse, include the audience, and convey the writer's or speaker's attitude (Hyland, 1998, p. 437).

HYLAND (2005) INTERPERSONAL MODEL OF METADISCOURSE MARKERS

Multiple taxonomies have been created to categorise metadiscourse markers. The current analysis utilises Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse due to its comprehensive range of categories. The model of metadiscourse classification includes sub-categories such as code-glosses, evidentials, endophoric markers, frame markers, transitions,

engagement markers, self-mentions, attitude markers, boosters, and hedges. These sub-categories fall under the larger categories of interactive and interactional metadiscourse.

Figure 1 illustrates the Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of interactional metadiscourse used for analysis of argumentative essays. The system is identical to the latest design implemented in 2005, and was the focus of his study in 2004. To detect metadiscourse markers in text, the latest approach incorporates a catalogue of likely metadiscourse markers. The framework is primarily divided into two categories: "interactive" and "interactional" metadiscourse. This study exclusively use the interactional category of metadiscourse to analyse the argumentative writings.

Figure 1:   Interactional Category of Metadiscourse

Category	Function	Examples
Interactional metadiscourse functioning to involve readers in the text		
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	may, probably, I guess
Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	certainly, in fact
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to propositions	(un)fortunately, (un)deniably
Self mentions	refer to the writer explicitly	I, we (exclusive), our
Engagement markers	build relationship with readers explicitly	you, we (inclusive), note

Interactional metadiscourse markers engage the reader in the argument (Hyland, 2005, p. 49). Metadiscourse markers encompass signalling words and phrases strategically incorporated into a text to engage the reader in the conversation or sway them towards a particular stance in an argument. Hedges, such as "might," "may," and "should," function as linguistic obstacles that restrict the writer's intended message. "Perhaps" and "possibly" are examples of signalling words that are employed as hedges in metadiscourse. Similarly, "approximately" is another signalling word that serves the same purpose. The second group is boosters, which consist of phrases such as "absolutely," "in fact," and "it is apparent that" or "it is established that." The author's thesis is underscored by these terms and phrases, highlighting their strong belief in it.

Attitude markers are a distinct type of metadiscourse markers that indicate the author's emotions and responses towards the discussed topic. Several clues include the words "regrettably," "unexpectedly," and "yes, I concur." Engagement indicators belong to a distinct

category of words. Engagement markers include words and phrases such as "take note of," "you can see," and "give some thought to." The last category of interactional metadiscourse markers is self-mentions, which involve the explicit identification of the author through the use of first-person pronouns such as "I," "we," "my," and "our."

Although there are some metadiscourse markers available to academic authors, such as those mentioned by Hyland (2005), they are rarely utilised in practice, particularly by less-experienced writers like Pakistani IELTS test takers. It is possible that the same marker can serve as both a metadiscourse marker and a propositional content, depending on the circumstances. The crux of the matter is in the intended significance of the written or spoken words. This list is beneficial for scholars seeking markers of metadiscourse in text samples, especially when dealing with extensive data sets.

PAST STUDIES

Examining argumentative essays penned by Pakistani undergraduates, Mahmood et al. (2017) investigated the prevalence of interactional metadiscourse markers. The study employed Hyland's (2005) Interpersonal model of Metadiscourse. The text corpus analysis was performed using AntConc 3.4.4. The data indicated that 61% of undergraduates from Pakistan were more comfortable with Interactional metadiscourse. In interactional category engagement markers were more commonly used, followed by self-mentions. The category that was employed third most frequently is hedges, while boosters hold the fourth place. The category of Attitude markers was the least frequently utilised.

According to Kashiha's (2018) study on metadiscourse markers, Malaysian ESL students find essay writing challenging. The researchers employed mixed research methodology that encompassed both quantitative and qualitative research designs to investigate the utilisation of metadiscourse markers. The study included candidates from Malaysia who had previously enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. The researchers utilised Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse to assess and examine 143 essay scripts from the essay writing section of the final test. The findings indicated that engagement markers were the most favoured resources for interaction, accounting for 40.7% of all markers. Self-mentions and boosters were the subsequent most commonly used resources. Attitude markers had the lowest frequency, with only three instances.

Undergraduates' argumentative essays were analysed by Shafqat et al. (2020) for interactional metadiscourse markers. The quantitative analysis in their study employed Hyland's (2005) Interpersonal metadiscourse paradigm. A total of 144 argumentative writings were examined using the AntConc 3.5.7 software. The results indicated that engagement markers were the most commonly utilised interactional metadiscourse markers, followed by self-

mentions. Boosters were the markers that rank third in accordance with usage, followed by hedges. The least often utilised markers were attitude markers.

The main emphasis of Castillo-Hajan et al. (2019) was on the persuasive essays written by ESL students. The study was conducted using a sample of 50 persuasive essays authored by Filipino high school seniors who were enrolled in a polytechnic university. The theoretical framework employed in this study was Hyland's (2005) model of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. The findings indicated that 66.79% of the works incorporated interactional markers. In interactional metadiscourse, self-mentions accounted for the highest proportion (51.61%), followed by engagement markers (25.34%), and attitude markers had the lowest percentage (only 3.25%).

The use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in persuasive essays authored by Iranian EFL students was examined by Dehghayedi (2023). A total of 50 participants were involved in the study, and their objective was to write an essay advocating for the benefits of rural life for urban residents. The theoretical framework employed in this study was Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. The findings indicate that boosters were the metadiscourse markers that appeared most frequently, followed by attitude markers. Engagement markers were ranked third, while self-mentions were ranked fourth. The category of hedges was the least utilised.

METHODOLOGY

THE CORPUS

The argumentative essay corpus consists of a total of 500 essays. In order to assure the representativeness of the corpus, data was collected from multiple centres in Lahore, Pakistan, that offer IELTS preparation. The three variables that were controlled were task, duration, and time. The essay assignment closely approximated the format and requirements of IELTS Writing Task 2. There was a single essay prompt and a word restriction of around 200 words. The essay has to be completed within a set time frame of 40 minutes, as outlined by the IELTS criteria. The corpus was compiled in 2022. The essay prompt was: *"Some people think that it is better to educate boys and girls in separate schools. Others, however, believe that boys and girls benefit more from attending mixed schools. Discuss both these views and give your own opinion."*

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

This study examines argumentative writings by applying Hyland's (2005) interpersonal metadiscourse paradigm as a framework. This study employed the MetaPak corpus tool, which is based on Hyland's metadiscourse taxonomy. Concordance tables were generated after the corpus was loaded. Afterwards, the researcher classified the occurrences into two distinct tables: one for metadiscourse and the other for non-metadiscourse. The raw frequencies of

metadiscourse features were standardised by scaling all the values to a common scale, particularly per 1,000 words.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigates the utilisation of interactional metadiscourse markers in argumentative essays written by Pakistani IELTS test takers. The study utilises Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse features. This study uses MetaPak, a computer tool based on Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model, along with a corpus of 500 argumentative essays. The table 1 displays the frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers found in argumentative essays. The corpus reveals that "Interactional metadiscourse markers" occurs 5287 times. The table also displays the frequency of these markers per 1000 words, with the rates of 36.566.

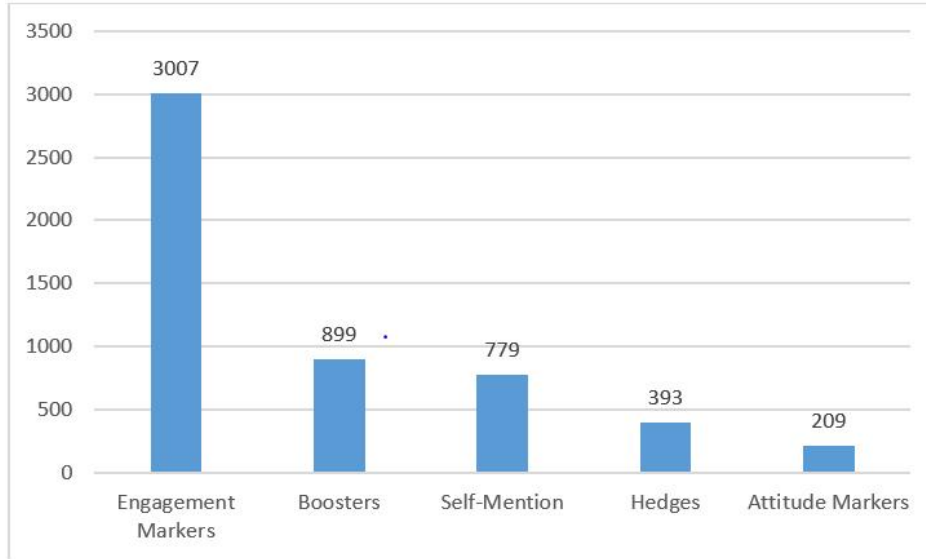**Table 1:** **Frequency of Interactional Metadiscourse Features in Argumentative Essays**

Sr. No.	Category	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	Interactional Feature	5287	36.566

The table 2 displays the frequency of five categories of interactional metadiscourse markers in the corpus. The predominant marker type is the "Engagement Marker," which occurs 3007 times, or 20.797 times per 1000 words. "Boosters" appears next, with a frequency of 899 occurrences, occurring at a rate of 6.217 instances per 1000 words. There are a total of 779 occurrences of "Self-Mention," with a frequency of 5.387 incidences per 1000 words. "Hedges" occurs 746 times, with a frequency of 5.159 occurrences per 1000 words. The "Attitude Markers" are the least frequently seen, appearing 209 times, with a frequency of 1.445 per 1000 words.

Table 2: **Distribution of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Argumentative Essays**

Sr. No.	Sub-Category	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	Engagement Markers	3007	20.797
2.	Boosters	899	6.217
3.	Self-Mention	779	5.387
4.	Hedges	393	2.718
5.	Attitude Markers	209	1.445

Figure 1: Distribution of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Argumentative Essays

ENGAGEMENT MARKERS

Engagement markers are the most favoured form of interactional metadiscourse markers. Their objective is to establish a connection with the reader, as the name suggests. By employing these markers, IELTS test takers foster the development of analytical thinking, demonstrate recognition of the reader's requirements and preferences, and actively involve them in the conversation. 'We' is the predominant term within this group, employed to foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging in the reader. By utilising the pronoun 'we' to refer to the reader and the writer, the author suggests that both parties are actively involved in the act of understanding. Reading becomes a collaborative endeavour and an enjoyable pastime as a consequence of this. The corpus contains examples, such as sentence (1).

(1) *The non-shyness and overconfident behavior of both male and female involve them in unethical activities. **We** have concluded from above scenario that the co-education system is necessary in order to develop confidence.*

'Our' ranks second on the list. When used inclusively, it invites the reader to fully embrace the topic as if they were part of a community. Consequently, the dynamic and attractive nature of the reading experience enhances the reader's motivation to engage more actively in the story. Sentence (2) in the corpus exemplifies the employment of the word 'our'.

(2) *He is ruler of the World and we should follow the guidelines even if it cost us anything. **Our** Quran is a book of ultimate education and it gives us teachings about hijab and about modesty.*

The word 'us' ranks third in terms of frequency, serving to facilitate mutual understanding and perspective-taking between the reader and writer. When IELTS test takers use the pronoun 'us,' they are implying that the reader and the writer share the same perspective on the subject. By employing this markers, the reader is captivated and develops a stronger interest in the matter as it is thoroughly examined. An illustration from the corpus is provided by sentence (3).

(3) *This essay on co-education will take **us** through its importance and advantages. Co-education is very essential for understanding social intelligence.*

Table 3:   List of Engagement Markers in Argumentative Essays

Sr. No.	Word	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	We	1091	7.5457
2.	Our	1032	7.1377
3.	Us	254	1.7567
4.	You	199	1.3763
5.	Should	149	1.0305
6.	Pay	31	0.2144
7.	Find	30	0.2074
8.	See	30	0.2074
9	Follow	28	0.1936
10.	Order	28	0.1936

BOOSTERS

The metadiscourse markers known as "Boosters" in the interactional category are the second most frequently utilised. They demonstrate that the individuals taking the IELTS test possess a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the information they are providing. They aim to convince the reader of the truthfulness of the arguments or statements by expressing certainty. The phrase 'should' is often used and refers to normative expectations or suggestions. It implies that some behaviours or actions are more morally superior and enhances the reader's comprehension of the topic. The writer presents themselves as knowledgeable about what is considered appropriate or desirable in a specific situation, use the word 'should' to generate a sense of authority or expertise. This impacts the reader's understanding and reaction to the discussion. Here is an example: (4).

(4) *We **should** follow the rules of Islam. So it is the best possible way to live life. We **should** always save positive things. In our minds, we must pay close attention to our studies. Education means boys and girls getting.*

The word 'know' is the second most frequently used. Hence, the arguments and assertions made by IELTS test takers carry greater credibility and persuasiveness. The learners' confidence in the material enhances the argument or thesis by demonstrating their expertise and credibility on the subject matter. For example, let's examine sentence (5).

(5) *In my own thinking, I am assured that co-education is not good for us. I **know** it makes for competition, but Islam is more important than competition.*

The word 'think' ranks as the third most often used word. IELTS test takers might utilise it to articulate their personal viewpoints. Expressing one's personal perspective on the matter enhances the argument's strength and enhances its persuasiveness. Through promoting engagement and dialogue within the discourse, 'Think' also prompts the reader to contemplate the writer's perspective. The corpus contains examples, such as sentence (6).

(6) *I **think** mixed school system is better. Sending boys and schools in the same school is also termed as co-education.*

Table 4:   List of Boosters in Argumentative Essays

Sr. No.	Word	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	Should	243	1.6806
2.	Know	169	1.1688
3.	Think	131	0.906
4.	Always	48	0.3319
5.	Show	40	0.2766
6.	Must	38	0.2628
7.	Believe	35	0.242
8.	Find	34	0.2351
9	Certain	18	0.1244
10.	True	16	0.1106

SELF-MENTIONS

We will now analyse the third most prevalent metadiscourse markers, which is "Self-Mentions." When IELTS test takers refer to themselves, it indicates their active engagement in their writing. They achieve this by utilising possessive adjectives such as 'my' and 'mine', or first-person pronouns such as 'I', 'me', and 'my'. Self-mentions serve the purpose of emphasising the writer's viewpoint on a particular matter, asserting authorship of the arguments or statements presented, and demonstrating that a claim is grounded in the writer's own experience or competence. The term 'our' is commonly used to establish a connection with the reader, either through shared knowledge or participation in a certain group. By use the pronoun 'our', IELTS

test takers acknowledge the presence of a mutual comprehension of the topic, thereby fostering a connection. For example, let's examine sentence (7).

(7) *This is not twentieth or nineteenth century. I think now we should be modern enough to send **our** children in co-education. It is a good system in many ways.*

The pronoun 'I' holds the second position on the list. It demonstrates the level of concern and dedication that IELTS test takers have towards their writing. By doing this, the writer can more effectively showcase their trustworthiness and knowledge on the topic. Consequently, the writer is able to exhibit personal commitment to the statements or arguments presented. Consequently, the writer may get increased trust and responsibility. The corpus contains instances, including sentence (8).

(8) *One of the major demerits given around is that children in co-education become involved in unethical activities. **I** am against this point of view. **I** think there is no harm in sending children in the mixed schools.*

'My' is the third most often used word among these markers. It indicates that IELTS test takers are engaged in or possess the discourse. This strategy might emphasise the writer's viewpoint, personal experiences, or expertise on the matter, so bolstering the legitimacy and relevance of the material presented. The inclusion of the possessive pronoun 'my' fosters a sense of intimacy and connection between the speaker and listeners, prompting them to engage with the writer's introspective thoughts and emotions conveyed in the text. An example sentence from the corpus is (9).

(9) *All boys and girls should attend separate schools, in **my** opinion, and all mixed-gender institutions should be shut down. People are capable of both good and negative thought.*

Table 5: **List of Self-Mentions in Argumentative Essays**

Sr. No.	Word	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	Our	287	1.985
2.	I	256	1.7705
3.	My	104	0.7193
4.	We	85	0.5878
5.	Us	41	0.2835
6.	Me	6	0.0414

HEDGES

Next, we shall proceed to the category labelled "Hedges". They help to reduce the absolute nature of the statements made by IELTS test takers. They introduce an atmosphere of uncertainty or ambiguity. Words and phrases such as adverbs and verbs can assist in

accomplishing this. By incorporating hedges, writers acknowledge the complex and diverse nature of knowledge and avoid presenting their views as unquestionable truths. The term 'Sometimes' was the most frequently used by IELTS test takers. By positing that something is not universally true or occurs solely in particular conditions, it mitigates the argument or engenders scepticism. Sentence (10) in the corpus is an example that illustrates the usage of 'Sometimes'.

(10) *If the arguments are not handled in a proper behavior then it can **sometimes** lead to unwanted arguments and might divert from their studies.*

'May' is the second most frequently utilised word, serving to express a degree of uncertainty or hesitation while still conveying information with a certain level of confidence. It acknowledges the potential for variability or alternative outcomes. Sentence (11) is cited as an example from the corpus.

(11) Since they will be living together in the future it will help them deal with issues that any couple ***may*** face in their later life.

'Would' is the third most frequently used hedging word. The text gives a hypothetical situation to demonstrate that the effectiveness is dependent on certain conditions and not guaranteed. It reduces the level of assurance of the prediction by suggesting a potential outcome or an informed estimation of what could occur. The sentence (12) is an example extracted from the corpus.

(12) *If children learn these things at an early age they **would** be able to fight the stereotypes attached on the basis of gender as well as they can create a better society.*

Table 6: List of Hedges in Argumentative Essays

Sr. No.	Word	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	Sometimes	58	0.4011
2.	May	52	0.3596
3.	Would	49	0.3389
4.	Feel	44	0.3043
5.	Could	30	0.2074
6.	Around	29	0.2005
7.	Mostly	21	0.1452
8.	Almost	13	0.0899
9.	Might	13	0.0899
10.	Usually	12	0.0829

ATTITUDE MARKERS

When considering the frequency of usage, "Attitude Markers" is the least commonly used. Their objective is to elicit the personal sentiments or evaluation of the IELTS test takers regarding the provided material. The author's subjective evaluation of a topic is communicated through these markers. Attitude markers enable writers to explore the reader's psyche and influence their interpretation of the text. 'Important' is the most commonly used word in these markers. By conveying the writer's viewpoint, it indicates to the reader that this section merits their attention and diligence in order to comprehend it properly. The example is given in sentence (13).

(13) *Moreover, it also makes them better at managing their emotions. Co-education is also **important** as it helps in nurturing healthy competition amongst the opposite sexes.*

'Agree' ranks as the second most often used word in these markers. It signifies concurrence or conformity with a particular perspective or assertion and functions as an indicator of attitude. The authors may demonstrate their support or endorsement of the ideas or opinions presented in the book by employing this strategy. Moreover, it enhances the writer's stance and bolsters the credibility of the argument. Sentence (14) is utilised as an example.

(14) *Co-educational schools have been promoted in Pakistan by some policymakers as a way to improve the quality of education and help manage the economy. But not many **agree** with this approach.*

'Essential' is the third most frequently used attitude marker. The primary objective of it is to underscore the significance of a concept or idea. As an assessment, it is more assertive than 'important'. The instance from the corpus is the (15) sentence.

(15) *We should send our women to study in separate girls-only institutes. This is **essential** for all of us to understand. We should protect our women.*

Table 7: **List of Attitude Markers in Argumentative Essays**

Sr. No.	Word	Frequency	Per 1000 Words
1.	Important	146	1.0097
2.	Agree	17	0.1175
3.	Essential	11	0.076
4.	Prefer	11	0.076
5.	Inappropriate	5	0.0345

Table 8 presents the entire classification of interactional metadiscourse markers found in the corpus. It is crucial to provide this information so that other researchers studying metadiscourse among IELTS test takers can gain valuable insights from these comprehensive findings.

Table 8:   **Interactional Metadiscourse Markers Identified in the Corpus**

Sr. No	Category	Interactional Metadiscourse Markers
1.	Engagement Markers	We (inclusive), Our, Us, You, Should, Pay, Find, See, Follow, Order, Need to, Prepare, Consider, Look at, Set, Choose, Key, Let, Show, Think about, Increase, Apply, Let's, Use, Observe, Remember, Add
2.	Boosters	Should, Know, Think, Always, Show, Must, Believe, Find, Certain, True, Never, Prove, Known, Thought, Clear, Shows, Actually, Believed, Really, Thinks, Established, No doubt, Proved, Proves, Establish, Realized, Believes, Found, Obviously, Shown, Sure
3.	Self-Mentions	Our, I, My, We, Us, Me
4.	Hedges	Sometimes, May, Would, Feel, Could, Around, Mostly, Almost, Might, Usually, Mainly, Often, Quite, Likely, Tend to, Frequently, Possible, Supposed, Generally, Maybe, Feels, Claim, Claimed
5.	Attitude Markers	Important, Agree, Essential, Prefer, Inappropriate, Preferred, Agreed, Interesting, Appropriate, Disappointing, Disagreed, Unfortunately

The findings of the current investigation align with previous research conducted by Mahmood et al. (2017), Kashiha (2018), and Shafqat et al. (2020). These investigations have consistently identified engagement markers as the most commonly employed interactional metadiscourse markers, followed by self-mentions. However, the findings of the current study diverge from those of Castillo-Hajan et al. (2019) and Dehghayedi (2023), who discovered that self-mentions and boosters were the most commonly employed interactional metadiscourse markers, followed by engagement markers and attitude markers, respectively. The corpus extensively employs interactional metadiscourse markers, as revealed from the comparison of the findings with the genre requirements. Formal IELTS argumentative essays have a remarkably high frequency of engagement markers in terms of interactional aspects. This is seriously disrupting the natural development and tone of the composition. There seems to be an undue reliance on emphasising assertions, considering the remarkably frequent utilisation of boosters. The corpus exhibits an unusually high frequency of self-mentions, suggesting a skewed representation of perspectives rather than a deliberate effort to present alternative opinions. Excessive utilisation of hedges reduces the effectiveness of the argument. There is a notable prevalence of attitude markers, particularly when discussing neutral subjects such as coeducation. To ensure objectivity, students should refrain from using attitude markers to express their political or religious opinions. In summary, the utilisation of all interactional markers is remarkably elevated, particularly self-mentions and engagement markers.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the utilisation of interactional metadiscourse markers in a corpus of argumentative essays written by IELTS test takers in Pakistan. The objectives were to identify the presence of interactional metadiscourse markers in argumentative essays and to analyse the frequency patterns of these markers. In order to achieve the goals, the research employed a strictly quantitative approach to analyse the corpus. The investigation utilised Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse features. In order to investigate the metadiscourse markers, the researcher utilised MetaPak, a computer package specifically designed to analyse the metadiscourse markers outlined by Hyland (2005). The study's findings indicated that the IELTS test takers most commonly utilised metadiscourse markers were engagement markers, followed by boosters and self-mentions. Metadiscourse markers such as hedges and attitude markers were found to be employed infrequently. These findings are highly relevant as they will provide guidance for IELTS test takers, teachers, material designers, and other stakeholders to make future improvements. The study's limitation is in its exclusive focus on the interactional category of metadiscourse features offered by Hyland (2005), while neglecting the interactive category. Future researchers can investigate both metadiscursive features and conduct gender-based comparisons to better our comprehension of the utilisation of metadiscourse features by Pakistani IELTS test takers.

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