



New Trends on Metadiscourse

An Analysis of Online
and Textual Genres

Edited by Begoña Bellés-Fortuño
Lucía Bellés-Calvera
Ana-Isabel Martínez-Hernández

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1

Introduction

Lucía Bellés-Calvera and Begoña Bellés-Fortuño

Metadiscourse has been widely used as an umbrella term in the field of discourse analysis for the ways producers interact with their texts—either written or oral—as well as with their readers and listeners (Hyland, 2017, 2019). In other words, this concept is regarded as “discourse about discourse”, as stated by Flowerdew (2015, 17). Hence, interpersonal relationships can be found within communication, either in academic or non-academic contexts (Abdi, 2002; Ädel, 2006; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Duruk, 2017).

Metadiscourse elements in academic genres have been widely studied in literature (Hyland, 2005, 2013; Lorés-Sanz et al., 2010) where writing has been the main focus of research to see the different metadiscoursal

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variables. The use of metadiscourse as a tool for managing texts and the effect on writers and readers have been analyzed. However, due to digitalization, academic and non-academic communication practices have undergone a transformation process over the past two decades, leading to the emergence of hybridized genres/forms (D'Angelo et al., 2021). The volume presented here is an attempt to depict the new communication scenario. The book is arranged into two main parts where different perspectives are taken when examining written, spoken, and digital genres:

Part I: Metadiscourse and Academic Genres

Part II: Metadiscourse and Non-academic Genres

The first part—Chapters 2 to 6—provides an overview of the metadiscoursal practices found in lecturers' and multilingual learners' speech, conference presentations as well as reports and case reports in medical science. As for the second part, there are four contributions—Chapters 7 to 10—devoted to non-academic texts analyzing communication strategies on digital media (i.e., podcasts, blogs, Twitter, and management statements of European renewable energy companies). What can be clearly observed is that multilingualism and social networks have become a popular area of research among scholars interested in new metadiscoursal practices.

The book opens with the section entitled “Academic texts”. Chapter 2, by **Sarah Khan** and **Marta Aguilar**, from Universitat de Vic and Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya respectively, revolves around a lecturer's metadiscursive use of rhetorical questions in Catalan, the lecturer's L1, and the changes produced when English is the medium of instruction. In line with previous research, this study explores the multi-faceted nature of these questions (Crawford-Camiciottoli, 2004; Dafouz & Sanchez-Garcia, 2013; Rigol-Verdejo & Sancho-Guinda, 2015) in order to identify their metadiscursive function (Hyland, 2005). The findings indicate that these rhetorical questions were mainly employed for content purposes as they functioned as macro and micro topicalizers (Chaudron & Richards, 1986). The authors also stress that complex metadiscursive devices tend to be replaced by simpler ones due to the cognitive effort that entails giving a lecture in a second language.

In Chapter 3, **Galiya Gatiyatullina**, **Marina Solnyskina**, **Roman Kupriyanov**, and **Elzara Gafiyatova**, from Kazan Federal University, present a comparative study where they investigate the distribution patterns of stance features in English and Russian conference presentations related to the field of medical biotechnology. To achieve this goal, they collected a 45,018-word corpus consisting of recorded English and Russian presentations delivered in different English-speaking and Russian-speaking areas, all of them posted on a variety of video channels, such as NIH (genome.gov), Cell and Gene Therapy Conference, UniverTV, FutureBiotech, and RusOncoWeb. The results obtained prove that there is a trend for Russian scholars arguing in an explicit way, which happens to be less common in English spoken scientific domains. With regard to the distribution patterns of hedges, there is a higher frequency rate in English, particularly when reviewing literature and describing the experiments conducted. Presenters' cultural differences may explain such a choice of discourse markers.

Following Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse, Chapter 4 examines the metadiscursive features produced by academic writers across brief reports and case reports in medical science and how these linguistic elements affect the creation of their identities. To this end, **Sabiha Choura**, from the University of Sfax, analyzed a corpus of 81,869 words taken from the Military Medicine journal at interactive and interactional levels. This study reveals that the distribution of metadiscursive features is motivated by generic conventions, with a preference for interactive over interactional markers in brief reports. However, the opposite is true for case reports, thus revealing that academic writers of case reports show more engagement with the readership than their peers in brief reports.

The last chapters of this section focus on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environments. Chapter 5, by **Sofia Martín-Laguna**, from Universitat Jaume I, addresses learners' development of interpersonal metadiscourse knowledge in multilingual classrooms. The study is set in a bilingual region of Spain, where Spanish and Catalan co-exist as co-official languages and English is learnt as a third language (L3), thus examining to what extent multilingual learners' use of hedges and attitude markers is related across languages over time. As for the

subjects, 313 bilingual high school learners in Spanish and Catalan learning English as their third language participated in this study writing opinion essays in all of these languages. From a quantitative perspective, the findings show that there are stronger correlations over time in both metadiscourse markers analyzed. The author concludes that these results are supported by qualitative analyses of learners' essays, which also show transfer at phrase and discourse levels.

This section comes to an end with Chapter 6, which delves into the production of metadiscursive elements in EFL digital academic platforms. More specifically, **Dongyun Zhang** and **Diyun Sheng**, from Shanghai Jincai North Secondary School and Shanghai Normal University, present a contrastive analysis of metadiscourse by native and EFL lecturers in Chinese university MOOCs, a tool that has gained importance within the Chinese government in the last years, particularly to meet educational needs. As in previous chapters of this book, Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model has been adopted and serves as the basis for the subsequent analysis of a self-built 100,933-word corpus. The authors claim that oral communication through MOOCs leads to a low frequency of metadiscursive features, which are mainly generated to enhance intelligibility, reliability, and interactivity. The rate of these elements seems to be related to lecturers' proficiency level in English since native speakers tend to use a higher number in contrast to Chinese EFL lecturers. All in all, what emerges from these results is that Chinese EFL lecturers are more concerned with reliability issues.

Part II includes four chapters on non-academic genres. **María José Luzón** (Chapter 7), from Universidad de Zaragoza opens this section. She discusses the role of Twitter as a powerful tool for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and thus engaging and reaching a larger audience. Her study departs from the need to understand how semiotic resources can be combined in this genre. To achieve this purpose, Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse is expanded with semiotic elements (e.g., pictures, emojis, animations) as they complement written discourse. In fact, they play a significant role in the guidance, engagement, and persuasion of readers through the text. A total number of 150 tweets posted by three scientific organizations make up the corpus examined here. All of them deal with a variety of scientific issues (e.g., climate

change or wildlife, the conservation of nature and life diversity). Both visual and verbal metadiscursive strategies are combined with the aim of linking to content on other sites, influencing readers' comprehension of and attitude toward content, and prompting the readers to take specific actions. The choice of metadiscourse resources is also determined by the purpose of these tweets.

In Chapter 8, **Maria Cristina Urloi** and **Miguel F. Ruiz-Garrido**, from Universitat Jaume I, inspect the persuasive communication strategies used in management statements of European renewable energy companies through the identification of interactional metadiscursive elements. Based on Hyland's model (2005), they perform a comparative analysis of interpersonal features with a focus on the role of stances (Biber, 2006). In this sense, they can explore how these devices contribute to promoting and creating a positive corporate identity as well as to engaging readers by means of pronouns (Fortanet, 2004; Kamio, 2001; Wiczorek, 2009). Quantitative and qualitative analyses report the relevance of metadiscourse in both management statements. In fact, executives and chairmen appeared to employ a similar quantity of interpersonal metadiscursive elements, yet with slightly different tendencies of persuasive linguistic strategies.

A different metadiscursive dimension is offered in Chapter 9 with a cross-linguistic study on travel blog posts. **Giuliana Diani**, from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, describes the most common elements spotted in these written texts produced by American and Italian travelers describing Italian destinations. In this regard, emphasis is placed on self-mentions and engagement markers, from text and corpus perspectives, drawing attention to the similarities and dissimilarities across languages and cultures in the construction of the blogger's stance and in the way bloggers engage with their readers.

Finally, new communication opportunities come with the popularization of online spoken discourse in Chapter 10. **Syamimi Turiman** and **Siti Aeisha Joharry**, from Universiti Teknologi MARA, investigate the use of stance and engagement as interactional elements (Hyland, 2005) in a collection of podcasts from a local Malaysian independent business radio station. To this end, a corpus linguistics approach was necessary. When it comes to frequency, it was found that "you know" and "I think"

were the most frequent two-word combinations. The former generally functions to signal shared experience. The latter, “I think”, is used mainly as a hedge to sound less assertive when expressing opinions and providing factual information. The authors argue that both discourse organization and audience engagement are conditioned by the use of stance and engagement markers, hence becoming an integral aspect of conversations in podcasts.

In sum, all the contributions provide an updated overview in the analysis of academic and non-academic genres in a digital era. Not only has the aim of research focused on digital genres but also in hybrid and traditional genres that are lesser known, thereby enriching a field of growing interest with a variety of cross-linguistic, multilingual, and disciplinary angles and perspectives.

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Part I

Metadiscourse and Academic Genres



2

So What Do We Have Here? **An Engineering Lecturer's Metadiscursive Use of Rhetorical Questions in L1 and English-Medium Instruction**

Sarah Khan and Marta Aguilar-Pérez

Introduction

With the growth of EMI (English-medium instruction) in European higher education, more and more university lecturers are called upon to teach their subjects in English. In some institutions, parallel subjects are available in both L1 and English as a more inclusive strategy for both local and international students to choose from, depending on their proficiency in the respective languages on offer. Another reason why EMI, together with ESP courses, can be regarded as inclusive strategies is that they both have the potential to improve students' disciplinary communication skills and their intercultural competence at different

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levels (Aguilar, 2018; Aguilar-Pérez, 2021; Arnó-Macià & Aguilar-Pérez, 2019) and hence offer an Internationalization at Home (IaH) experience to those local students who cannot afford a study abroad experience. These potentially international contexts provide a rich source of data for comparative language studies, particularly, as is the case in this study, when the same lecturer teaches the same course in both languages. Such comparisons, on the one hand, serve teachers engaged in professional development, providing personalized feedback and making language and pedagogical differences between their L1 and EMI lecturing much more salient. On the other hand, these comparisons also allow ESP teachers to update knowledge on their students' needs, as ESP courses in settings where the presence of EMI is increasing are also perceived to be good preparation toward successfully following an EMI course (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020).

As lecturers teaching the same content in L1 and EMI are far and few between, little research has been reported on them, despite their potential for improving our understanding of teaching and learning in the EMI classroom. Given that for most students understanding a lecture in English is a demanding task, content lecturers who teach through English should make conscientious efforts to make knowledge accessible (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2022), a task fraught with difficulties. Among the few studies carried out, metadiscourse appears as a feature of lecture clarity. The following are examples of some differences found in lecturers' discourse in EMI when compared with L1: lower speech rate, more repetition and greater formality (Thøgersen & Airey, 2011), less stylistic richness in metadiscourse devices, less explicit signaling to mark topic shift and fewer conclusion markers (Dafouz & Núñez, 2010), fewer rhetorical questions and comprehension checks (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017), less interaction triggered by lecturer questions (Sánchez-García, 2018), lower speech rate but more discourse structuring and redundancy (Ädel, 2010; Costa & Mariotti, 2017; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015; Molino, 2018; Suviniitty, 2012; Zare & Tavakoli, 2016), or lower speech rate and less metadiscourse for clarifying, endophoric marking and reviewing (but more for managing terminology, making asides and introducing topics) (Aguilar & Khan, 2022).

Although rhetorical questions (RhQs) have been identified and compared in some of these studies, they have received little mention and, when they have, RhQs have been examined either as one out of many other metadiscursive items or as one of the different types of questions lecturers pose in class. Understood in this study as questions posed by the lecturer that are not expected to be answered by the audience, RhQs in academic lecturing merit special attention mostly due to the explicitness and clarity that their metadiscursive nature is thought to bring to the listener, helping non-native students retain lecture content (Aguilar & Arnó, 2002; Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Flowerdew & Miller, 1997) and allowing teachers to signal and organize the structure (Ädel, 2010). Because of the lack of focal studies on RhQs in lecturing, and particularly in EMI lecturing, little is known about their specific pedagogical function, that is, their role in enhancing comprehension of disciplinary content when the latter is interspersed with RhQs. This may be even more relevant in EMI contexts where English adds an extra layer of complexity for both lecturers and students (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2022).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to foreground RhQs by placing them at the center of our research, firstly comparing the RhQs an engineering lecturer used in delivering the same content in L1 and EMI and secondly examining their communicative function in order to further our understanding of the effects created by the use of RhQs and ultimately of the challenges lecturers face with their spoken delivery when shifting from L1 to EMI.

Background

Rhetorical questions have long been known as a common persuasive technique in public discourse. They have been studied in written discourse as well as in public speeches (e.g., TED talks, political speeches, university lectures) or everyday conversations. In research on academic discourse, as mentioned above, RhQs are either regarded as a type of textual metadiscursive device or as a type of teacher question. Within the metadiscourse strand of research, RhQs are studied as self-answered questions that signal topic and topic shift (Ädel, 2010; Hyland, 2005;

Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992) while within the teacher questions strand, RhQs tend to be defined as questions that are not expected to be answered, often left open for contemplation (Dafouz & García, 2013; Dafouz & Núñez, 2010; Fortanet, 2004; Hu & Duan, 2019; Morell, 2004; Rigol-Verdejo & Sancho-Guinda, 2015; Sánchez-García, 2020). In many cases, they are viewed as content-oriented questions (Querol-Julian, 2008; Suviniitty, 2012; Thompson, 1998), and defined as interrogative forms that “don’t expect an answer”, “have the feel of an assertion” and “can optionally be answered” (Biezma & Rawlins, 2017, p. 302).

Doiz and Lasagabaster (2022) and Zhang and Lo (2021) have very recently studied the scaffolding role of metadiscourse in the construction of knowledge and in making its transmission accessible to students within EMI. Drawing on Zhang and Lo’s study (2021), Doiz and Lasagabaster (2022) study the role of textual and interactive metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005) in EMI from an English-as-a-Lingua-Franca perspective (i.e., where native English is not the reference language model), finding that transition markers are the most commonly used metadiscursive items, followed by code glosses and reminders, while frame markers are the least used, in both the Spanish and Chinese contexts. Given the paramount role of frame markers, reminders and code glosses in transmitting knowledge, Zhang and Lo (2021) and Doiz and Lasagabaster (2022) point to the need to draw attention to EMI lecturers and the insufficient use they make of these items. Yet, RhQs are not the focus of their study.

By and large, metadiscourse research identifies the role of RhQs in structuring academic discourse (viz. signaling topic shift, marking a transition) and to a lesser extent acknowledges their role in engaging with the audience, thus contemplating the two typical metadiscursive functions, textual/discourse-organizing and interactional/audience-oriented (Ädel, 2010; Aguilar, 2004; Hyland, 2005). Research on metadiscourse in EMI has found lectures to be characterized by discourse-organizing metadiscursive items (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2022; Molino, 2018; Zare & Tavakoli, 2016). Dafouz and Núñez (2010) found that Spanish lecturers used more explicit metadiscourse and wider stylistic choices when teaching in L1. Molino (2018), for example, analyzed metadiscourse

using Ädel's (2010) reflexive model to classify personal and impersonal markers retrieved from her corpus. She found the discourse-organizing function of these markers, including an example of a RhQ, more prevalent than audience-oriented metadiscourse. In the same vein, Zare and Tavalokli (2016), who compare lectures with classroom discussions, encounter more discourse organizing metadiscourse in lectures whereas more audience interaction in discussions. In contrast to these studies, Costa and Mariotti (2017), comparing English- and Italian-medium instruction at Master's level, describe RhQs, one of several discursive features they analyze, as marking lecture interactivity and found that rhetorical questions had slightly fewer occurrences in EMI than in L1. All in all, whether RhQs are considered textual or interactional, they have a relatively inconspicuous place among other metadiscourse markers. Worth mentioning among studies on the interactional function of RhQs is Bamford (2005). In this earlier qualitative study, Bamford views academic lectures by native English speakers as highly interactional where "one of the ways in which the lecturer enhances the interactive conversational nature of the lecture is by asking questions which he then proceeds to answer himself" (Bamford, 2005, p. 126). She analyzes the function of RhQs using a conversation analysis framework, considering the question-and-answer sequences of adjacency pairs, and claiming that lecturers conform to conversational norms.

Within studies centering on teacher questions, the metadiscursive role of RhQs is often acknowledged, though usually attention is placed on the interactive role of display and referential questions and comprehension checks, RhQs being relegated to a monologic-based technique and an opportunity to interact with students that lecturers miss. Hu and Duan (2019), for example, found that teacher questions eliciting a verbal response (even by the teachers themselves) in both Chinese-medium instruction (CMI) and EMI tended to be cognitively simple questions eliciting lower-order thinking skills (e.g., remembering, understanding) in spite of the potential for questions to promote higher-order thinking (analysis, evaluation and creativity), basing complexity on an adaptation of Bloom's 6-level taxonomy. They found no significant difference in syntactic or cognitive complexity of the questions asked between CMI and EMI. Dafouz and Sánchez-García's (2013) small-scale study of three

Spanish EMI lectures on Business, Physics, and Engineering courses analyzed four types of teacher questions (display questions, referential questions, confirmation checks and self-answered questions), finding similarities (rather than differences) in the distributions of question types. Neither of these studies draw attention to RhQs, focusing rather on the quality of the questions that elicit a verbal response from the audience in terms of their potential for learning (eliciting verbal interaction and co-constructing knowledge). RhQs, however, can also be regarded as a tool for constructing meaning, a synonymous reformulation of topicalizers and transition markers. In lecture comprehension, macro-organizing phrases that signal topic shift (e.g., *let's start topic number 4, let's take a peek at these slides*), which could be reformulated into RhQs, have been found to create a greater impact than micro monosyllabic markers (e.g., *so, ok, right*) because they help non-native students retain lecture content, whereas micro markers “do not add enough content to make the subsequent information more salient or meaningful” (Chaudron & Richards, 1986, p. 123). Thus, because of their length and lexical complexity, questions in general and RhQs in particular (e.g., *What's this first instruction doing?*) act in the same way as other metadiscursive textual items that render lectures more comprehensible and appealing (Morell, 2004).

Although their interrogative form is relatively easy to identify, since RhQs act as an assertion or an imperative (e.g., *let's look at x* versus *What is x?*), their functions are far more difficult to decipher. After identifying three major functions of questions found in civil engineering students' oral presentations in an ESP setting (rhetorical, display and referential), Rigol-Verdejo and Sancho-Guinda (2015) further subdivide RhQs into three categories, *evaluative* (eliciting a neutral or confrontational response), *repository* (research questions ‘Can we eliminate nuclear wastes?’, ‘Not yet’) and *mention* (used to clarify content as glosses or build intimacy in an aside, ‘Governmental corruption (How long are we going to stand delinquents in office?) is today a big concern’), although few examples of these are provided in their paper. Based on students' oral presentations, this classification does not provide enough explanatory power about the functions of the RhQs for our study on lecturing, in

spite of shedding light on their functions of capturing the listeners' attention or establishing some sort of dialogue through irony and humour (Magnuczné-Godó, 2011).

A considerable number of studies analyzing teacher questions put forward somewhat similar classifications. Worth mentioning are two studies by Sánchez-García (2010, 2018), who draws upon Dalton-Puffer's taxonomy of questions for a CLIL primary and secondary education setting. In her 2018 study, Sánchez-García studied teacher questions, RhQs being one of the types examined, in EMI and L1 (Spanish). She analyzed the cognitive load of questions using Dalton-Puffer's (2007) classification based on secondary education students, identifying four types of questions, (referential, display, fact-closed and fact-open), to which she added three types dealing with miscomprehension (comprehension check, confirmation checks and clarification requests). Dalton-Puffer classifies them according to their complexity, from greater to lower cognitive load: *metacognitive, reason, explanation, description, fact-open and fact-closed*. In a previous study, Sánchez-García (2010) examined lecturer questions in six lectures from three disciplines (Business, Physics and Engineering) in L1 Spanish and EMI. She adapted Dalton-Puffer's taxonomy, including rhetorical questions within the repertoire (display questions, referential questions, rhetorical questions, retrospective questions, self-answered questions, personal addresses). Interestingly, she distinguished between the lecturers' self-answered questions which structure or develop the ongoing discourse, and rhetorical questions, where a question is left open and unanswered to provide students with food for thought, and concluded that questions are a pivotal tool for making teachers' lessons more interactive. Along these lines, Morell's (2004) study identified four types of lecturer questions: referential, display, rhetorical and indirect questions, finding that the more interactive lecturers used more display questions and few RhQs. Khan (2018), in a comparison of lecturing strategies of 4 EMI lecturers on an International Business program, also found that RhQs were not among the most frequent strategies employed. In this study, not all the lecturers used RhQs, but they were characteristic of one particular lecturer, suggesting that they may be related to a personal lecturing style rather than the discipline being taught. However, as these studies on

teacher questions do not focus on RhQs alone, we could say that the bulk of research has focused on questions that elicit a response from students and render lecturing more interactive and dialogic, somehow overshadowing other important functions of RhQs questions—sometimes viewed as ‘failed’ questions, or display questions that went unanswered because lecturers failed to pause and thus missed the opportunity of creating interactive episodes (Navaz, 2020).

In this article, therefore, we aim to place RhQs at the center of our research to study their metadiscursive functions. This study relates to the findings from a previous one (Aguilar & Khan, 2022) where the same lecturer teaching in L1 and EMI was analyzed in terms of the metadiscourse he used. In this previous study, a total of 21 different kinds of metadiscourse were identified in the lectures according to their discourse function, using Ädel’s (2010) classification for spoken metadiscourse. The lecturer was found to employ a substantial amount of metadiscourse striking a balance between structuring his discourse (metatextual) and engaging his students (audience interaction). Comparing the L1 and EMI classes, there were few differences in the frequency and type of metadiscourse, suggesting that the move from L1 to EMI did not hinder the lecturer’s dynamics in this sense. One metadiscourse item, *managing the comprehension channel* (e.g., *Any questions regarding this? Does that make sense?*) was particularly frequent, leading us to conclude that despite the monologic nature of the lectures, the lecturer was consistent in engaging his audience and aware that they may have difficulty following him in both L1 and EMI. It was hypothesized that, among other resources, the use of metadiscourse could account for the students’ high rating of the lecturer. Against this backdrop, rhetorical questions, a striking feature of the lecturer’s discourse, were identified as an outstanding lecturing practice, although Spanish academic culture may also have to be factored in (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017; Sánchez-García, 2020), given that “the Spanish academic style traditionally favors the use of rhetorical questions as a way to organize discourse and to keep the audience’s attention” (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017, p. 25). Assuming the inherently metadiscursive role of RhQs, our aim therefore was to find out if the lecturer transferred them from L1 to EMI, in the same manner as he did with his metadiscourse (Aguilar & Khan, 2022), to examine their