

A CORPUS BASED ANALYSIS ON ATTITUDE MARKERS IN ENGLISH DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS WRITTEN IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

Mbugua L. K., Mbaka N. W.

Department of Humanity, Chuka University P.O. Box 109-60400 Chuka Kenya

Email: kamahugu75@gmail.com, mbakanancy52@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

English is widely used for academic purposes in Kenya and globally. In academic writing the authors describe, analyze, and evaluate the development of their research. Metadiscourse markers are used to organize the discourse, engage the audience, and signal the writer's attitude. The writer's attitude is signaled by the use of attitude markers. Attitude markers refer to expressions used in a text to reflect writers' position toward both the content in the text and the reader. Attitude markers include deontic modal verbs, lexical verbs, adjectives, and affective adverbs. This study examined the use of attitude markers in doctoral dissertations written by English second language writers, studying English for academic purposes in Kenya. The data was drawn from the introduction, discussion and conclusion chapters of a randomly compiled corpus of twenty dissertations from eleven universities across Kenya. Hyland (2005) framework of metadiscourse markers was used to identify and code the markers. The data was analyzed using Antconc text 4.1.4 analysis tool, Wilcoxon sum rank test and Log-likelihood statistics to investigate how attitude markers are used. This study revealed that every category of attitude markers was used across all chapters. The discussion chapter had the highest usage relative to other chapters. While the conclusion chapter contained the least number of attitude markers. The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the use of attitude markers in academic writing and can help guide the development of English for academic purposes course materials to improve the academic writing skills of doctoral students in Kenya.

Key words: Second Language Writing, Academic Writing, Metadiscourse Markers, Attitude Markers, Doctoral dissertations.

INTRODUCTION

Attitude markers are a sub-category of interactional metadiscourse markers which is one of the two categories of metadiscourse markers (henceforth MMs) according to Hyland (2005). Essentially, attitude markers are words like agree, surprisingly, significantly, only, important, issue, and need, which assist writers to present their judgements, feeling, and attitude towards the findings and explanations in the text. Besides, attitude markers relate to the readers' information about the author's point of view and his position in the text (Azar and Hashim, 2019). Hyland (2008) feels that stance can be referred to "the writer's textual voice or community recognized personality" (p. 5). They can help to bring out the writer's attitude towards the proposition in the doctoral dissertation which is part of academic discourse.

Academic discourse has been defined as "the ways of thinking and using language which exists in the academy" (Hyland 2011). Academic writing can also be described as a process of knowledge building, with the main purpose of explicitly or implicitly persuading the reader in the discourse community of the knowledge or claims being made (Gang & Wharton 2019). Therefore, writing is either a simply personal expression or a display of well-formed sentences but is an activity performed in a social context, which means seeing writing not just as language but also as discourse. What this means is that when we write, we choose our words to connect with others and present our ideas in ways that

make most sense to them, and we do this by using words, structures and kinds of argument the audience will accept and understand. So, writing is an attempt to achieve something while bearing readers in mind. In this case English doctoral dissertation (henceforth EDD) writers in Kenya are engaged in writing dissertation not just for the purpose of graduation but also for presenting their research findings and convincing their readers to accept them. As a result, they employ attitude markers to help them express their stance on their proposition.

Academic discourse function on two levels. The first level is the primary discourse which shows the facts that add up to the truth of the study. The second level is the secondary discourse also referred to as metadiscourse, which guides the readers to understand what is said and what is meant in the primary discourse (Sultan 2011). This study looks at how the secondary discourse which we will refer to as metadiscourse is carried out in English doctoral dissertations in Kenya. This is because Hyland (2004) notes that "metadiscourse is particularly important at advanced levels of academic writing as it represents writers' attempts to present and negotiate propositional information in ways that are meaningful and appropriate to a particular disciplinary community". Blagojevic (2015) also identifies that the use of sufficient metadiscourse markers in writing enables writers to present their work more explicitly. This enables their readers to navigate and understand them clearly.

In a study of attitude markers in the writing of English foreign language students at the university of Basra, Abdul-Qadir and Shakir (2015), defined attitude markers as markers that refer to certain expressions that are used in a text that reflect the writers' position towards both the content in the text and the reader. The main aim of this study was to investigate the use of attitude markers. Abdul-Qadir and Shakir (2015), analyzed 177 written texts in both a pre-test and a post-test. In the pretext they intended to find out if the students used attitude markers or not. In the post-test they intended to find out if the students developed their performance in the use of attitude markers in their writing. They found out that the students used attitude markers in both the pre-test and the post-test. They also found that there were significant differences between the two tests.

In another study, Soylu *et al.* (2023) examined the use of attitude markers by Native English and Turkish English second language writers in 100 academic articles on Teacher Education. The major concerns of their study were to examine the forms and functions of attitude markers used by both groups to indicate their stance in articles and to compare the frequency and variety of attitude markers used by each group. The study used a corpus-based approach and adopted a graph visualization method to present its results. To maximize on the efficiency of corpus compilation, the data were verified using a software-supported approach. Further analysis on the data was carried out using the Antconc text analysis tool (Anthony, 2022) and Log-likelihood statistics. The inter-rater reliability was calculated in order to test the reliability of the analysis. The results ranged from 0.81 to 0.92, indicating a high level of reliability. The findings indicate that both English and Turkish writers commonly use attitude markers to convey their stance, with 'significance' and 'assessment' being the most frequent functional categories, and 'adjective' being the most commonly used form of attitude markers in both corpora. This study guided the current study on concordance and statistical analysis in academic writing. The study also reveals important uses of attitude markers.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-method approach including both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, the former was used for the analysis of the frequency of occurrence of each attitude feature, the differences and similarities, and the significance of the attitude markers in the corpora, and the latter was applied to scrutinize the content, find attitude markers, and verify their functions. For the identification of attitude markers in the corpora, Hyland's (2005) model of interpersonal meta-discourse markers, and Antconc 4.1.4 were used to

identify and classify the attitude markers employed in academic discourse. Wilcoxon sum rank test was used to analyze whether there were any significant differences in the use of attitude markers. The corpus consisted 20 EDD written and uploaded in the eleven universities library repositories between 2013 and 2022. Cluster random sampling was carried out to select the 20 dissertations to be included in the study.

The corpus

A corpus is a large collection of naturally occurring authentic spoken or written texts stored in an electronic data base of millions of words that have occurred in real life (Cuttings, 2015). A corpus displays a writer's use of language in a specific domain, showing an alternative to intuition, by checking on the frequencies with which words or patterns occur and how these elements associate with one another, these are portrayed in collocational patterns that show similar usage in a genre (Hyland, 2016). In this study, a written corpus was created from dissertations written in English languages and used in academic writing in Kenya.

Doctoral dissertations were chosen as the source of data in this study because it is expected that doctoral students are able to use MMs. A doctoral dissertation is considered the most valuable document a student can write at the summit of his or her academic accomplishment, (Hyland, 2004). This characteristic demands conscious structuring of the texts in order to create a bond between the writer and the readers. Moreover, studies have shown that doctoral students use more MMs than the master's students, (Livvytska, 2019). The doctoral students present more determined and sophisticated attempts to engage with their readers and to present themselves as competent and credible academics rooted in the ideologies and practices of their disciplines (Hyland, 2005).

The selected dissertations were chosen because they satisfied both institutional and disciplinary requirements and have passed the disciplinary gatekeepers (internal and external supervisors) and the respective post graduate schools. The introduction, discussion and conclusion chapters of doctorate dissertation was chosen because they were considered sufficient sections of academic writing that can be used for creating the corpus. This is because they represent the writer's introduction of the topic of discussion, the interpretation of the findings, the conclusions of the study and finally, they link the chapters with the current literature in a logical and clear form.

This study analyzed the introduction, discussion and conclusion sections of a corpus of 20 doctoral dissertations written by English linguistics students in Kenyan universities. Having selected the chosen dissertations in the university repositories open access, each dissertation was electronically downloaded, labeled, converted and saved in a text file (TXT) format. The following sections of the dissertations were removed, title page, sub-titles, abstract, images, figures, tables, content page, acknowledgement page, and footnotes. This was because there is a probability that the sentences or the phrases found in them could also be found in the three chapters. A total of 20 introduction chapters, 20 discussion chapters and 20 conclusion chapters were selected to be compared and contrasted regarding metadiscourse markers in English. Finally, a sub-corpus was developed.

In order to reduce the danger of subjectivity when collecting the data and to increase the reliability of results, a manual analysis and a concordance analysis were conducted. For the manual analysis, a context-based sensitive analysis was done, since some items had different meanings and word classes. This was done in line with other researchers in the field of discourse studies (e.g., Ahmed & Maros, 2017), who followed four steps for the analysis of the data. The first step was to read the data in details to ensure familiarity with the topics being presented. The second step was to search the data word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence manually with more focus paid to the occurrences of the attitude markers. The third step was to confirm that the identified attitude markers was fitting Hyland's (2005) taxonomy and criteria. The identified markers were later recorded in three microsoft excel workbooks (labeled; English introduction chapter, English discussion chapter, and English conclusion chapter).

A concordance program is used in linguistics to analyze and report any instances of a searched word or phrase in the corpus. It displays these words as lists of unconnect-

ed lines of texts, showing examples of actual language use, (Hyland 2016). This study adopted a corpus-based procedure where a pre-selected list of potential productive attitude markers/words was used and investigations were carried out in the corpus on their frequencies and use. From the recorded markers a wordlist was generated, then AntConc 4.1.4 concordance software (Antony 2022) was used to conduct the concordance analysis. When all markers were identified and recorded, the last procedure was to apply a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) for analysis. The quantitative analysis included the use of descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages). The obtained occurrences of metadiscourse markers were then interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively in relation to the linguistic meaning and functions achieved based on their use in the dissertations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are four basic ways of revealing attitude markers in a dissertation. Firstly, it could be a lexical verb like, *I agree, I support, or prefer*. Secondly, it could take the shape of sentence adverbs like, *fortunately, and hopefully*. Thirdly, several adverbs like *absurd, fitting, and outstanding* can be categorized as attitude indicators. Finally, they could be adjectives like *appropriate or unfortunate* (Hyland, 2005; Mat Zali *et al.*, 2022). The EDD writers used attitude markers to display their positive and negative attitudes toward the different propositions. The following are some examples from EDD to illustrate some of these attitude markers.

KE3: D96; Going by these findings and aware that there are also strong arguments for other subjects which this study did not delve into, we would **agree** with the second education officer who believes that the teaching of LLs should not be made compulsory in all the schools.

In Example 1 the writer, acknowledges the second education officers believes and displays their positive attitude and their stand about the teaching of LLs in schools, when he uses the attitude marker ‘agree’

Two, experimental group learners **correctly** expressed what they did not know and what they knew about the topics of the reading comprehension assessment passages before reading.

In example 1, the writer uses ‘*correctly*’ to display his positive attitude towards the students’ responses.

MOE1: D105 The use of such Circumstances (sic) therefore, paint Joshua Kerago – the Actor – **in negative light** implying that he was guilty.

In example 2 *in a negative light* show the writer's negative attitude towards the circumstances that have just been discussed.

In example 1, 2 and 3 the writers’ use attitude markers ‘agree’ ‘correctly’ and ‘in negative light’ to show their readers their positive or negative opinions about the statements or arguments they have just presented.

Table 1 shows the frequency of attitude markers in the three different chapters and their occurrences per 1,000 words in the corpus. The results on the frequency of occurrence of attitude markers in English doctoral dissertations revealed that they were used at varying frequencies across the three chapters. For example, we identified 29.6 attitude markers per 1,000 words in the conclusion chapter which, was less frequent than in the discussion chapter, where there were 39.7 markers per 1,000).

Table 1 Attitude markers in the different Chapters of the English Doctoral Dissertations

Chapter	Overall words	Hits	Per 1000 words	First five frequent attitude markers
Introduction	51511	137	30.7	Important, even, must, interest, appropriate
Discussion	58477	162	39.7	Must, even, interest, important, appropriate, agree.
Conclusion	37304	76	29.6	Must, even, important, interest, appropriate
Total	147291	375	100	

From the results, it can deduce that most attitude markers were used in the discussion chapter. This might be because in this chapter writers discuss the results of their research finding and their main target is to convince the readers of their findings and to show them their stand on the various results. Attitude markers were used in EDD to clearly show the writers surprise, (dis)satisfaction, or frustration in their proposition.

Though, Ahmadi (2022) realized that attitude markers were frequently used in Persian academic research articles, this study revealed different findings because attitude markers produced a low frequency of 375 markers out of 147291 words. This difference could be culturally influenced because the Kenyans

culture advocates for writers to be more subjective than objective therefore they withhold their emotions about their proposition and as a result they avoid using attitude markers.

Contrary to Ebadi’s *et al.* (2015) findings that native Persians did not use any attitude markers in their academic manuscripts. This study found that EDD writers in Kenya used attitude markers in varying degrees among the three chapters, this variation ranged between 29.6% in the conclusion chapter to 39.7% in the discussion chapter (Table 1). The frequent use of attitude markers in the discussion chapter stems from the researchers’ need to present their arguments, testing their methods, phenomena and procedures, and persuade readers and other scholars to adopt their propositions or research finding.

Table 2: The Sum Score, Expected Score and Standard Deviation under Null hypothesis for attitude Markers per 10,000 Words in English Doctoral Dissertations

English doctoral dissertations					
Metadiscourse markers	SS	EUH0	SDUHO	p-value	
AM	2734.0	3135.0	174.05	0.0232	

Where ED = English Dissertations, metadiscourse markers = metadiscourse markers, SS = Sum of Scores, EUH0 = expected scores under H0, SDUHO = standard deviation under H0 and H0 = null hypothesis, and AM = Attitude Marker

The test of normality showed that the data was not normally distributed. Hence, [Wilcoxon sum rank test](#) or Mann-Whitney U test, which is a non-parametric statistical test, was used to compare the

attitude markers and to test if there are significant differences in use of attitude markers in the different chapters of EDD. The results of this study showed that there was significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in usage of attitude markers in EDD. Assuming, the usage of the attitude markers in EDD is the same, the findings of this study revealed that the attitude markers are underused by EDD writers in Kenya.

Table 3: Median of Attitude Markers per Chapter per 10,000 Words in English Doctoral Dissertations

Section	AM
Introduction	1.36a
Discussion	0.94b
Conclusion	1.07b
Chi-square	6.32
p-value	0.048

^aMedian followed by same letter are not significantly different at 5% probability level. AM = Attitude Markers,

In EDD the usage of attitude markers in the introduction chapter was significantly different from other chapters, but there was no-significant difference in usage of attitude markers in discussion and conclusion chapters (Table 3). Akoto and Afful (2020) compared the use of attitude markers, which the English writers used to explicitly show their surprise, (dis)satisfaction, or frustrations. They found out that English language writers used more attitude markers in the literature review chapters than the introduction chapters. This is because in the literature review it is expected that they comparatively display their feelings about their ideational materials than in the introduction chapter. Borrowing from Akoto and Afful’s (2020) discussion we could relate the low use of attitude markers in introduction and conclusion chapters of EDD and the higher use in discussion chapters to a need of displaying their feelings in the discussion chap-

ter than in the introduction and conclusion chapters.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study found out that EDD writers used attitude markers in line with Hyland (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers. The attitude markers were used to display the writer’s stance to their proposition. Both positive and negative attitudes were revealed either on other writers’ views on a given proposition or the dissertation writers proposition. I also realised that there was an underuse of attitude markers in all the three chapters. This could be an influence from the Kenyan culture, where most Kenyans prefer to be objective to their proposition. As such they avoid using words that could create contrary opinions from their readers. Based on this study, it is recommended that EDD writers incorporate more attitude markers in their writing. These markers are effective in clarifying their propositions and facilitate reader acceptance and understanding their stance.

REFERENCES

- Abdul-Qadir, I., & Shakir, M. (2015). Attitude Markers in the Writing of EFL Learners: A Pragma Stylistic Study. *IRAQI Academic Scientific Journals* <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348264689>
- Ahmad, W., & Maros, M., (2017). Using Hedges as Relational Work by Arab EFL students in Student-Supervisor Consultations. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 17(1), 89-105. DOI: 10.22055/RALS.2023.18073
- Ahmadi L. (2022). *Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Scientific Texts (Based on Research Articles Written by Native and Non-Native Speakers)*, Volgograd state university; Russia. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362236820>
- Akoto O. Y., & Afful, J. B. A., (2020) *Variations in Metadiscourse use in English Language Introduction and Literature Review Thesis Chapters* *Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching*. Vol 4 No.2 pp390-408 DIO:1030743/II: V4i2.2601
- Ali N., A., (2016) *Metadiscourse in Academic Genres: An Interdisciplinary study of Research Articles in Sudan*. *British Journal of English Linguistics* vol4 No.5 pp35-63 www.eajournals.org
- Antony L., (2022) Antron (version 4.1.1) *Computer Software* Waseda University Tokyo Japan <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/>
- Azar, A. S., & Hashim, A. (2019). The Impact of Attitude Markers on Enhancing Evaluation in the Review Article Genre. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 19(1).
- Blagojevic S., (2015). *National Writing Habits as a Potential Hinderance to international Academic Communication*. In *Academic Discourse across Cultures*
- Ebadi S., Salman A. R., Ebrahimi B., (2015) *A Comparative Study of the Use of Metadiscourse Markers in Persian and English Academic Papers*. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Research* V.2, Issue 4, P28-41
- Geng Y., Wharton S., (2019) *How do Thesis Writers Evaluate their own and others Findings An appraisal Analysis and a Pedagogical Intervention* <http://ees.elsevier.com/esp/default.asp>
- Hyland, K. (2004). Disciplinary Interactions: Metadiscourse in L2 Postgraduate Writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 13 133-151
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing*. London: Continuum
- Hyland, K. (2008). Genre and academic writing in the disciplines. *Language Teaching*, 41(4), 543-562. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444808005235>
- Hyland, K. (2011). *Academic Discourse*. In Hyland, K. & Paltridge, B. (eds.) *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum. pp 171-184
- Hyland, K. (2016). Academic publishing and the myth of linguistic injustice. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 31, 58-69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeslp.2016.01.005>
- Livytska (2019). The Use of Hedging in Research Articles on Applied Linguistics: *Journal of Language and Cultural Education* 7(1):35-53. Aachen, NRW, Germany. <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jolace>
- Mat Zali, M., Razlan R.M., Raja M., Ana B (2022) *Essays by ESL learners: Interactional Metadiscourse Markers (MD) Analysis. Journal of ASIAN Behavioral Studies (JABS)*, <https://doi.org/10.21834/jabs.v7i23.417>
- Soylu, M., Soyly, A., & Das R.,(2023) A New Approach to Recognizing the Use of Attitude Markers by Authors of Academic Journal Articles, *Expert Systems with Applications*, Volume 230, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0957417423010400>
- Sultan, A. H. J. (2011). A Contrastive Study of Metadiscourse in English and Arabic Linguistics Research Articles. *Acta Linguistica*, 5, 28-41

Appendix: Attitude Markers in English doctoral dissertations.

agree, amazed, amazing, appropriate, appropriately, astonished, correctly, curiously, desirable, disagree, dramatic, essential, essentially, even, important, admittedly, importantly, inappropriately, inappropriate, interesting, interestingly, prefer, preferable, preferred, surprisingly, have to, hopefully, interest, pleased, must, ought, remarkable, unfortunate, unusually, understandably, in a negative light.