



Metadiscourse Markers Analysis Used in Communication Research Articles

Sompoet Panawas*

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Dusit University, Bangkok, 10700 Thailand

Article info

Article history:

Received : 31 July 2018

Revised : 3 October 2018

Accepted : 26 October 2018

Keywords:

Markers, Metadiscourse,
Communication Research
Articles

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the metadiscourse markers used in communication research articles in terms of studying: (1) the frequency of using metadiscourse markers, (2) the differences between the metadiscourse markers used in the introduction part and the discussion part of the communication research articles and (3) the correlation of 14 metadiscourse markers in 4 categories of metadiscourse markers; self-mention words, attitudinal markers, boosters and hedge. The language data corpus used is 20 communication research articles and only the introduction parts and discussion parts of each research article were analyzed. The instruments used are (1) AntConc 3.2 computer program for research articles random and (2) PASW 18.0 computer program for statistical analysis. The findings revealed that: (1) the three most frequently used markers are attitudinal markers; adjective, booster; verb and hedge; modal verb, (2) there are 9 metadiscourse markers used in the introduction parts and the discussion parts that are significantly different and the other 5 markers are not significantly different and (3) there are 13 metadiscourse markers used in the communication research articles that show correlation and 1 marker that shows no correlation.

Introduction

Language is used with intention and with purposes. It is also used as a means of communication which Matthews (1997) defines that language is the phenomenon of vocal and written communication among human beings in everyday use. Thus, language is the basic means used for communication among people. This intention of communication is supported by Lyons (1981) who said that as we are people, we do not use only the languages originated in the world such as English, Chinese, Thai, etc. but we also use a variety of other systems of communication such as 'sign language' and 'body language' even if they are not written languages

and we use them to communicate feelings among people.

As the aforementioned, it clearly defines the close relationship between language and communication in which the former is the ideal method but the latter is used in the real world. Supporting this, Crystal (1971) also stated that language is the most important method we have for communication. Language is not the only way that we use for communication but we also use other ways of communication such as gestures, facial expressions.

Communication is the process of transferring information from one living thing to another. Not only human who has the process of communicating but also

other living thing. Communication consists of signal systems, such as voice, sounds, intonations or pitch, gestures or written symbols which communicate thoughts and feelings. According to the Mehrabian & Ferris (1967) there are three major parts in human communication especially in face-to-face communication. They are voice, words and body language.

Nowadays, research and linguists take an interest in studying discourse analysis because it relates to everyday language and the study of metadiscourse analysis has a close relationship with discourse analysis. This allows writers to try to find the way to interact with their readers. The writers can obtain several markers by analyzing metadiscourse.

The word “meta-” is a prefix which means “after”, or “beyond,”. It is a prefix used in English to indicate a concept which is an abstraction behind another concept and the word “discourse” means types of written or spoken communication. Therefore, metadiscourse means the discourse about discourse or language about language (Labov, 1989). In fact, the study of language is not that simple. Writers find that they cannot tell their readers what they are going to speak or write about in their text. They try to figure out how they can help their readers to understand what they want to tell. So, writers have to study metadiscourse for writing text in order to help their readers organize, understand, interpret, evaluate and react to texts on the way that the writers intended to (Crismore & Farnsworth, 1989; Hyland, 2004; Kopple, 1985; Labov, 1989).

Besides, Schiffrin (1980) indicated that the speakers use complicated talk or meta-talk for their expressions which organize and evaluate the conversation. Consequently, metadiscourse is not on the information itself but it is on the way that the information is conveyed. In other senses, the writer can make their readers to adopt their own way of thinking and more importantly, their stance may push their readers to adopt the same point of view by hinting at or cluing to or even by making up the details which strike the right point in the mind and heart of the readers.

This research studied the metadiscourse model offered by Hyland (2005) which is considered the basic model of metadiscourse markers analysis in the text. The study of Ådel (2006) used the non-integrative approach of metadiscourse to figure out the aspects of text organization, but exclude the interpersonal components but Hyland (2005) holds the very opposite idea of that model, that is, metadiscourse is interpersonal. The

model set by Hyland (2005) is consisted of two dimensions of interaction as follows;

1. Interactive Dimension

The dimension concentrates on the awareness of the writers to participate with the readers and the methods which the writer finds to accommodate knowledge, interests, expectations and processing abilities. The writers try to shape and constrain a text to meet the needs of their readers. It can be said that this dimension helps to guide the readers to read through the text.

2. Interactional Dimension

The dimension concentrates on the methods used by the writers to manage interaction by intruding and commenting on their messages. The goal of the writer is to make himself explicit and involved with the readers by allowing them to respond to the text. It can be said that this dimension allows the writer to get involved with the reader in the text.

This research implements the metadiscourse markers analysis using the subcategories of the second dimension as the tool. They are self-mentions, hedges, boosters and attitude markers.

2.1 Self- mentions

According to Hyland (2005), this marker relates to the degree of writer’s presence in the text. These markers are the first person pronouns and possessive adjectives (I, me, mine, exclusive we, our, and ours). Regarding to the study of Hyland, it is found that the use of the first person pronouns is the most powerful markers of self-representation. The writers use this kind of marker to show how they are in relations to their argument.

2.2 Hedges

With regards to Hyland & Tse (2004), hedges indicate the writer's reluctance to the proposition as a created fact. Hyland (2005) states that they are markers such as “possible”, “might” and “perhaps” which are used to hold a complete commitment to a propositional information. They show subjectivity and make information look like an opinion rather than a fact. The point is that they show plausible reasoning of the writer rather than certain knowledge.

2.3 Boosters

Regarding to Hyland & Tse (2004) boosters relate to certainty and emphasize the force of a proposition. Hyland (2005) states that words such as “clearly” and “obviously” allow writers to close in alternatives and prevent conflicting views. Boosters focus

on certainty by marking involvement with the topic and solidarity with a reader, and by taking an involved position against other points of views.

2.4 Attitudinal Markers

Referring to Hyland & Tse (2004) attitudinal markers express the appraisal of the writer on propositional information, conveying surprise, obligation, agreement, importance, etc. Hyland (2005) stated that words such as “agree,” “prefer,” “unfortunately” and “remarkable” indicate the affection of the writer rather than the attitude to proposition. They are lexical items which are much more powerful in expressing attitude than syntactic markers such as subordination, comparatives and punctuation, etc.

Metadiscourse is the newly invented term that is used when the writers mention their own acts of organization, thinking, writing or acts of their readers in reading and understanding. Metadiscourse is applied to help explain the essays, to indicate intentions of the writer, to guide the responses of the readers or to organize the texts as a whole and to improve the writing skills of the writers. Therefore, metadiscourse takes role as a guide which directs readers to the way they should understand, evaluate and respond to the propositional content. This research is to emphasize and promote the concept of metadiscourse markers in communication research articles and also their functions. The study used the samples from a journal which has a high impact factor and could represent a particular trend in writing a research article, namely the Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, and the researcher chose only two parts of research articles where the writers could express their own points of view, that are, the introduction part and the discussion part. This is because the introduction part and in the discussion part are the crucial parts of an article and hold the similar rhetoric characteristics in writing. It is simply stated that, in the introduction part, the writer tries to introduce the image of the whole article. It identifies the topics of content in the research and also condense what is in the entire research article. It also shows how each topic is important, why the research has to be conducted and how advantageous the research is. Writing the introduction part of the research article needs persuasive techniques in order to interest the readers to read through the article.

The introduction part is like the threshold that the writers need to make the readers step over to get in and read the entire article. Doing this, the writer must make this part interesting, persuasive and clear. The same is said for the discussion part which should show the image of the whole article and the writers can additionally discuss on the research results to evaluate and make the research result clear cut and creditable. This part shows the accurate result and indemnifies how it is congruent with the hypotheses, concepts, theories, including the conflicts on the research results. Writing this information needs the same writing techniques and rhetorical use as writing the introduction part.

The reason why the researcher chose to analyze the metadiscourse in communication is that the field of communication takes a larger and more important role in everyday life. As currently found, there are numerous research articles on natural science, medicine, business and education, but only a few on communication. Nowadays, the field of communication studies has seen rapid growth in the 20th century and continued into the 21st century (Wei, 2017). There are many universities increasingly opening this field of study in both bachelor degree and graduate levels. These reasons influence the researcher to pursue conducting the research on metadiscourse markers in communication research articles to obtain the guidelines and improve research article writing.

Objectives

The research aims to analyze the metadiscourse markers in communication research articles with regards to:

1. study the frequency of using metadiscourse markers in the introduction part and the discussion part of communication research article.
2. study the differences between the metadiscourse markers used in the introduction part and the discussion part of the communication research articles.
3. study the correlation of 14 metadiscourse markers in 4 categories of metadiscourse markers; self-mention words, attitudinal markers, boosters and hedge.

Conceptual Framework

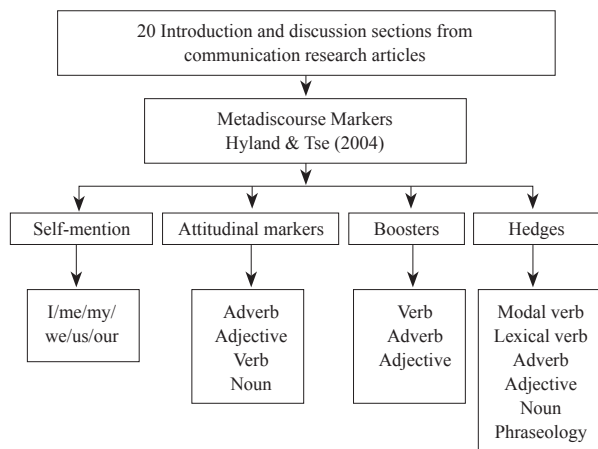


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research methodology

1. Samples

The study includes twenty research articles particularly on communication research from Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies with a total corpus of about 73,700 words. The chosen articles cover the period from 2013 to 2014. The choice of OJCMT in particular is based on its international reputation and on the grounds that the journal represents internationalized standard. Each article was randomly by AntConc 3.2 computer program.

2. Research Tools

The tool used is a code sheet for taxonomy, contexts and functions.

3. Collection of Data

3.1 The metadiscourse markers were identified in the corpus by applying ‘Antconc 3.2’ program.

3.2 The metadiscourse markers were examined according to the taxonomy code sheet.

3.3 The contexts and functions of each class were examined.

4. Data Analysis

PASW 18.0 program is applied to analyze statistical data.

Results

This research analyzed the 14 metadiscourse markers in 20 communication research articles taken from Online Journal of Communication and Media technologies. The findings are revealed as follows:

1. The three metadiscourse markers most frequently used in the introduction parts are: attitudinal marker (adjective), booster (verb), and hedge (modal verb). Shown in Table 1.

2. The three metadiscourse markers most frequently used in the discussion parts are: attitudinal marker (adjective), hedge (modal verb) and booster (verb). Shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Mean and SD of the fourteen metadiscourse markers used in the introduction and discussion section

Metadiscourse Markers	Introduction Sections (n = 20)		Discussion Sections (n = 20)	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Self-mention	2.88	3.75	3.44	3.67
Attitudinal marker (adverb)	.58	.72	1.67	1.53
Attitudinal marker (adjective)	10.26*	8.99	18.83*	9.28
Attitudinal marker (verb)	.02	.11	1.07	2.92
Attitudinal marker (noun)	.30	.69	.79	1.18
Booster (verb)	5.56**	4.09	9.14***	5.76
Booster (adverb)	.47	.70	1.44	1.66
Booster (adjective)	.69	.79	2.02	2.29
Hedge (modal verb)	3.96***	3.87	11.51**	7.02
Hedge (lexical verb)	.65	.99	3.48	3.52
Hedge (adverb)	2.95	3.06	6.24	3.50
Hedge (adjective)	.55	.766	1.50	1.42
Hedge (noun)	.006	.03	.14	.42
Hedge (phraseological)	.14	.36	.10	.36

3. The five words most frequently used as the attitudinal markers (adjective) are ‘important’, ‘significant’, ‘high’, ‘knowledge’, ‘still’ and ‘negative’. The five words most frequently used as the booster (verb) are: ‘have’, ‘can’, ‘found’, ‘show’, ‘must’ and ‘cannot’ and the five words most frequently used as the hedge (modal verb) are ‘can’, ‘may’, ‘will’, ‘would’ and ‘should’ as shown in Table 2-4.

Table 2 Frequency of the five attitudinal markers (adjective) used both in the introduction section and discussion section

The most frequently used word	Frequency (per 1,000 words)
important	4.6
significant	2.8
high	2.8
knowledge	2.3
still	1.9

Table 3 Frequency of the five boosters (verb) used both in the introduction section and discussion section

The most frequently used word	Frequency (per 1,000 words)
have	15.4
can	7.4
found	3.1
show	1.9
must	1.2

Table 4 Frequency of the five hedge (modal verb) used both in the introduction section and discussion section

The most frequently used word	Frequency (per 1,000 words)
can	7.4
may	6.8
will	4.1
would	3.1
should	2.7

4. There are nine metadiscourse markers which are significant difference among each of them in both introduction and discussion parts of the research articles. They are attitudinal marker (adverb), attitudinal marker (adjective), booster (verb), booster (adverb), booster (adjective), hedge (modal verb), hedge (lexical verb), hedge (adverb) and hedge (adjective) as shown in Table 5.

5. There are five metadiscourse markers that found no significant difference between the uses of each marker in the introduction and discussion parts of the research article. They are self-mention, attitudinal marker (verb), attitudinal marker (noun), hedge (noun) and hedge (phraseology) as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 The differences of metadiscourse markers used in the introduction section and discussion section

Metadiscourse markers	Introduction (n = 20)		Discussion (n = 20)		t	p
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Attitudinal markers (adverb)	.58	.72	1.67	1.53	.16	.007**
Attitudinal markers (adjective)	10.26	8.98	18.83	9.28	2.01	.005**
Booster (verb)	5.56	4.10	5.56	4.09	.91	.030*
Booster (adverb)	.47	.70	1.44	1.66	.16	.022*
Booster (adjective)	.69	.79	2.02	2.28	.17	.019*
Hedge (modal verb)	3.97	3.87	11.50	7.02	.86	.000***
Hedge (lexical verb)	.66	.99	3.48	3.52	.22	.001***
Hedge (adverb)	2.95	3.06	6.23	3.50	.68	.003**
Hedge (adjective)	.55	.76	1.50	1.41	.17	.012*

6. There are thirteen markers that show relationship with each other. One marker which shows no correlation with others is attitudinal marker as a verb shown in Table 6.

Discussion

The results reveal that the three metadiscourse markers most frequently used in the introduction parts show significant differences in characteristics of stance and engagement model proposed by Hyland (2005) that identifies how the written texts embody interactions between writers and readers. This can imply that most writers try to develop their own style of persuasion. It is congruent with the study of Hyland (2006) who states

Table 6 The correlations of metadiscourse markers used in the introduction section and discussion section

marker	Introduction & discussion sections (N = 40)										
	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	3
1			.337*			.341*			.391*		
2			.428**			.610**	.396**	.410**	.364**	.522**	.449**
3				.453**		.396**			.487**		
5			.388**			.435**					
6				.443**	.387*	.496**	.496**				
7	.436**	.409**	.475**	.392*	.363*	.313*	.855**				
8	.346*	.517**	.534**	.428**	.491**	.420**					
9		.558**	.607**	.477**	.532**						
10		.328*	.573**								
11			.420**								
12		.576**									

Remark: Code of metadiscourse markers

- 1 = Self-mention
- 2 = attitudinal marker (adverb)
- 3 = attitudinal marker (adjective)
- 5 = attitudinal marker (noun)
- 6 = booster (verb)
- 7 = booster (adverb)
- 8 = booster (adjective)
- 9 = hedge (modal verb)
- 10 = hedge (lexical verb)
- 11 = hedge (adverb)
- 12 = hedge (adjective)
- 13 = hedge (noun)
- 14 = hedge (phraseology)

that while the writers try to control the personal identity, they are presenting and developing their own style of writing. However, each language has its own rhetorical structures that can indirectly enhance the academic writing, for example, the word like "self-mention" was used as central pragmatic feature or to refer to the majority of people such as "us" "our". It is not only the writer's construction of a text, but also of a rhetorical style of the writer (Hyland, 2003). This feature was frequently used by the writers in order to project the indirectness of their rhetorical structures and their cautious style when they want to express their opinion" (Scollon & Scollon, 1994).

This research intends to study and observe the use of self-mention words in communication research article. As Harwood (2005) stated the personal pronouns are used as techniques to promote someone's work. It is believed that the personal pronouns are one of exclusive characteristics to make the writers' significance presence stronger in their studies, to support the new rhetoric under the study, and to emphasize the psychological nature of the ego identity of the writers. As Tang & John (1999) stated the first personal pronoun is not a homogeneous entity, but instead it can help to present some different roles or identities with various degrees of authorial presence. Besides, Scollon & Scollon (1994) also stated that the use of first personal pronouns is mostly unacceptable in the Asian traditional cultures

because it is associated with individual rather than collective identity. To publish in the famous journals, it will help to process more self-confidence to share the uniqueness of the study via first or plural personal pronouns and to cross the boundary of culture and nations. Besides, hedge (lexical verb) and hedge (modal verb) like "can" in communication research article was considered to decrease the vagueness and tentativeness of the other modal verbs. The word "may" was marginalized in communication journals not only to express the writers' "due caution, modesty, and humility, and to negotiate diplomatically to the work of colleagues and competitors" (Hyland, 1998b), but also it had précised authorial attributes to first direct the attention of the readers to compare the present study to the literature reviewed in the study. Using this kind of modal intends to show less responsibility of the asserted previous literature and to preserve their face and to make the pleasant truce with other researchers and to avoid any open conflicts. The word "could" was used as the unconfirmed modal verbs. Also, Hyland (1998b) mentioned that "could" was used to hasten the unconfirmed arguments.

Hedge (lexical verb) was also a significant device in communication research articles. It seemed that the writers of communication research articles had a strong trend to improve the vagueness of the claims and strengthen the knowledge structures of the whole research. The writers of communication research articles actually invited the readers and professional researchers to correspond to the vagueness and the unconfirmed arguments or comments of the study more collaboratively.

'Hedge (adverb)' or called 'approximator' as the "institutionalized" language of science (Slager-Meyer, 1994) was significant more in communication journals focusing on the words; "some" and "somehow", "often" and "about". Those words served to clarify the unknown and unavailable attributes of other research and at the same time highlighted the strength of the essential characteristics and constructs of the research. Approximates such as "sort of, entirely, a little bit, roughly and approximately" never appeared in communication journal. The significant difference between the application of hedge (adverb) in communication journals could highlight the vagueness of the literature while indirectly impose their independence from it.

Boosters also were important in writing communication journals and specifically the use of "must and should" was significant. They were also the

marginalized application of "no one" and "no" to express the previous literature's lacks. Communication articles seemed to develop a kind of authorial self and power and also call for cooperation and partnership at the same time. It is similar to hedges used for the persuasion and allow writers to show their opinions thorough certainty and marking involvement with the readers and the topic alike" (Hyland, 2005).

Hedges were used for making a balance between full certainty and assertiveness of the claims and their vagueness as the cautious markers of taking less responsibility of the asserted discussions to convince the readers from academia. Sometimes the excessive use of boosters and hedges in just the introduction parts of the communication research articles may lead to inconsistency. It may make the readers confused whether it is the crucial arguments or acceptance while negotiating with the main claims.

"Attitudinal markers" was among the attributes practiced in all articles. The attributes were to express commitment to theoretical and experimental literature while searching the degree of truth in order to generate the genuineness of the research. Over perseverance of these attributes in communication journal could be interpreted as being over dependent to popular statements of the writers as the best engagement attributes with less self-confidence to present one's own texts in at least the introduction parts of the research. Over statements and misuse of influential statements of the writers could express modesty and respectfulness toward them, try to meet the expectations of the skilled readers, and urge the uniqueness of the research, but at the same time may ask about the professional adequacy and capabilities of the writers. Hence, all writers need to rely to an extent on a personal presentation into the text through self-mention and attitudinal markers to invoke an intelligent reader and credible article writers (Hyland, 2005).

This research was conducted according to the set objectives and framework and developed with the research objectives. The metadiscourse markers are one of the exclusion that could illustrate the main problems of the research, research's design, and the types of the instruments (Hyland, 2005). Some journal writings may either neglect the significance of research objectives in building open relationships and interaction with the readers in determining an organized preconception about development process of the claims or might accept the whole responsibility on readers to develop the whole research's tentative hypotheses. Some journal writings

may evaluate the procedures and predict the outcomes without posing the questions in qualitative or quantitative investigations.

The metadiscourse markers are essential to bond the interaction of the readers-writers, group work, and negotiation of meaning. Significant differences were examined in different markers namely self-mention, attitudinal markers, boosters, and hedges in the communication research articles. This significance may confuse the new readers to either embed as hedges and boosters or other characteristics that they could express in the academia or develop their own styles. In other words, the writers should practice authorial self and power over readers or indicate their modesty and honesty that neither nullifies other characteristic's influence (Hyland, 2005) nor practice over booster or over hedge using. Though the other option may be convenient, many writers follow the same path of some specific pieces of research article writings as the best stance without substantial instructions. It is necessary to emphasize impressions of these characteristics on the construction of rhetorical understandings of the readers, and to develop an exclusive content and provide it for the research article writers with implied interactional stance that is necessary in promoting the indirect persona of the writers in academia.

Suggestion

1. Suggestion for implementation

The benefits of this study is to provide research article writers with a guideline and how to use the discourse markers in writing the communication research article. From the research findings, metadiscourse markers take a crucial role in writing the communication research article. The researcher would like to suggest for implementation as follows:

1.1 The research article writers should select metadiscourse markers that are appropriate for writing each content and the topic presented, especially the stance of the writer. Even though the finding indicates the metadiscourse markers that should be used in what part of the article, research presentation of each writer is different by the research topic. Hence, the finding could not be used directly. The writers should apply for each content that the writer would like to present to the readers.

1.2 Even though some metadiscourse markers are determined reagrdong to use them, only some of them appeared in this research. In reality there are other

metadiscourse markers used in the research article. Hence, the writers should consider when using them for writing the research article.

2. Suggestion for further research

2.1 The further research should consider doing on language in other field of study like mass mediaor communication technology.

2.2 The results of this study should be generalized to the field of communication arts and analyze a larger corpus, and articles written by more writers in wider ranges of journal.

2.3 The same framework used here should be applied for further research to make results more dependable and applicable.

2.4 The further research should consider doing the research on comparison of metadiscourse markers used by Thai researcher and native speaker researcher.

References

- Ädel, A. (2006). *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Crismore, A., & Farnsworth, R. (1989). Mr. Darwin and His Reader: Exploring Interpersonal Metadiscourse as a Dimension of Ethos. *Rhetoric view*, 8(1), 91-112.
- Crystal, D. (1971). *Linguistics*. England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Harwood, N. (2005). We Do Not Seem to Have a Theory ... The Theory I Present Here Attempts to Fill This Gap: Inclusive and Exclusive Pronouns in Academic Writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 26(3), 343-375.
- Hyland, K. (1998b). Persuasion in academic articles. *Perspectives*, 11(2), 73-103.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2004). Disciplinary interactions: metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. *Journal of second language writing*, 13(2), 133-151.
- Hyland, K., & Tse, P. (2004). Metadiscourse in academic writing: A reappraisal. *Applied linguistics*, 25(2), 156-177.
- Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and engagement: a model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies*, 7(2), 173-192.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book*. London: Routledge.
- Kopple, V. (1985). Some Exploratory Discourse on Metadiscourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 36(1), 82-93.
- Labov, W. (1989). The child as linguistic historian. *Language variation and change*, 1(1), 85-97.
- Lyons, J. (1981). *Language and Linguistics an Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Matthews, P. H. (1997). *Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University press.

- Mehrabian, A., & Ferris, S. R. (1967). Inference of attitudes from nonverbal communication in two channels. *Journal of consulting psychology*, 31(3), 248.
- Salager-Meyer, F. (1994). Hedges and textual communicative function in medical English written discourse. *English for specific purposes*, 13(2), 149-170.
- Schiffrin, D. (1980). *Discourse Markers*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. (1994). Face parameters in East-West discourse. In Ting-Toomey, Stella (ed.), *The challenge of facework*, 133-158.
- Tang, R., & John, S. (1999). The 'I' in identity: Exploring writer identity in student academic writing through first person pronoun. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(S1), 23-39.
- Wei, R. (2017). Trends and patterns in communication research on Asia: A review of publications in top SSCI journals, 1995-2014. *MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research*, 33(62), 12.