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A COMPARISON OF METADISOURSE MARKERS AND WRITING QUALITY IN
ADOLESCENT WRITTEN NARRATIVES

By

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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Discourse, a series of sentences that communicates a topic, consists of two distinct yet connected components. The first element is the propositional content or the meaning of the sentences, and the second consists of the words and expressions that enhance the communicative efficiency and effectiveness of the factual message. Metadiscourse markers, members of the second linguistic category, guide the reader through the text and establish a means for the writer to interact or influence the reader. The use of metadiscourse in writing and speaking embodies the concept that communication is more than just the exchange of information, facts, and figures. Effective use of metadiscourse increases the coherence or holistic meaning of the written piece and also distinguishes maturity in writing. Although coherence is considered fundamental to proficient writing ability, it is an element that is difficult to learn, teach, and assess.

In this study, metadiscourse markers in essays written by 69 adolescent students were counted, categorized, and compared to the Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the *Test of Written Language-Third Edition* (TOWL-3), (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). It is hypothesized that there will be a correlation between the number of metadiscourse markers and the standard score of Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3, (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). Essays given a high score on this subtest, indicating a well-constructed essay, should show a greater overall number of metadiscourse markers when compared to essays given a lower-quality rating. Being able to quickly assess coherence in writing as indicated by the use of metadiscourse in a student's writing sample is an important tool for the Speech-Language Pathologist who is involved in writing assessments and interventions of school-age students.

Key Words: metadiscourse, coherence, adolescent writing

A Comparison of Metadiscourse Markers and Writing Quality in Adolescent Written Narratives

Writing is the graphic expressive form of communication in which the writer offers information and projects to the reader, feelings, and considerations. According to Hammill and Larson (1996), to sufficiently master the task of writing, three basic skills are needed: (a) the ability to write using the accepted standards of conventions, such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization; (b) the linguistic ability to use syntactic, morphologic, and semantic components; and (c) the cognitive ability to express feelings, preferences, and ideas in a creative and mature manner. Mastering those basic written language skills is important for all individuals, even for those who do not think of themselves as writers. According to the *National Commission on Writing* (2003), more than 90% of midlevel professionals place great importance on the ability to write effectively. The report further states that the demand for proficiency in writing is not limited to professional jobs, but extends to clerical and support positions in construction, manufacturing and service industries. Additionally, written language is increasingly used in everyday social contexts (e.g., email, text messages, Twitter, and Facebook).

Developing competency in writing has always been a goal of education. A 2002 finding from the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP), known as the “nation’s report card,” demonstrates most students can write but they cannot write well enough to meet the demands of higher education and the increasing demands of the work environment. While the report states that nearly four out of five students in grades 4, 8, and 12 are at or above the “basic” level of writing, the results shockingly reveal between 69% and 77% of the students at the grade levels tested did not meet NAEP writing goals for proficiency. The results of this exam indicate that most students cannot produce writing at the high-level quality or maturity (e.g. “precise, engaging and coherent”) required for a modern complex society (Graham & Perin, 2007). According to Graham and Perin (2007), competent writing skills are not just an option for young people; they are a necessity.

Writing extends beyond the basic syntactic skills of punctuation and grammar. It is a complex intellectual activity that requires one to stretch his or her mind. Elementary students begin developing writing skills by learning basic conventions, and creating simple narratives. By middle school, students should be able to compose multiple paragraph texts in different genres that develop a central idea, unfold in logical and sequential order, and contain elaborate facts, examples, and details (Nippold, 2007). Maturity is reflected in writing when students are aware of their audience and strive to express themselves more clearly to reflect the reader’s needs. Students must attain a certain degree of higher-level language skills in order to present several perspectives of a single event (Rubins, 1998). Thus, a quality text is more than a string of propositions, but rather an inclusive whole that includes the writer’s perspective, consideration of the reader, and information for functional purpose. When this is achieved, the text is considered to contain coherence. Coherence is considered an essential element in effective and comprehensible writing. Coherence is also the elusive, abstract element in writing that is considered difficult to learn, and difficult to teach (Connor, 1990; Connor & Johns, 1990).

Writing narratives help students learn to create coherence and express understanding of the social world. When children demonstrate difficulty with these skills, interventions are necessary. Narrative language intervention for young school-age children usually involves microstructure analysis such as mean length of utterance or various measures of sentence complexity (Nippold et al., 2008; Heilmann, Miller Nockets & Dunaway, 2010). Macrostructure analysis examines a student’s language skills beyond the sentence level. Often macrostructure

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analysis addresses story grammar elements such as setting and episode (Stein & Glenn, 1979). Kovarsky and Maxwell (1997) expound the importance of a broader view of language in communication disorders by examining the context of the message through communicative activities, discourse genres, and social and formal settings. Furthermore, breakdowns in students' communication processes can be identified through examination of their narrative writing skills. Narratives are an excellent tool for the clinician in examining and remediating these higher-level language attainments.

Writing abilities for older school-age children and adolescents are difficult to quantify or measure with standardized tests due to the fact that quantifying norms for assessing discourse level language abilities are almost nonexistent for this age group. Nippold (2007) presents the following discourse and pragmatic attainments for 15-year-olds: "generates wide variety of different arguments to persuade listener and creates persuasive arguments that are well organized, coherent and lively." As this example demonstrates, it is difficult to define and measure written language competence at the higher-level discourse required by older student.

Lee (2002) considered operational coherence to include the following five features: macrostructure, information structure, propositional relationships, cohesion and metadiscourse. Each of these components is further described in the following paragraphs.

Macrostructure helps writers and readers understand how the sentences in a text are related to each other by providing an outline of the main category or function of the text. Genre is similar to macrostructure in that it is a term used for grouping text together that uses language to respond to similar situations or functions that help to establish understanding with the reader (Hyland, 2005). An example of macrostructure might be when the writer presents an argument in a logical manner: first presenting the positive attributes, then the negative aspects, and concluding with a summary.

Informational structure offers the reader guidance in understanding how information is organized. This type of structure is easily demonstrated when an author provides old information before giving new information. For example, a writer sensitive to the needs of the reader would present background information specific to the given topic prior to presenting steps in problem solving.

Coherence is also provided in text through propositional connectivity. A proposition is a statement or an assertion. Connecting the propositional content in texts facilitates the construction of meaning for the reader. One way for a writer to establish connectivity is to develop or support propositions through elaborate details

Cohesive devices build connectivity to the surface of the text through words. Cohesive devices tie parts of sentences or different sentences together by using pronouns, conjunctions, and lexical devices such as repetition, synonyms, and superordinates. A superordinate is a discourse organizing tool that usually consists of nouns that stand for an entire category or class of things (e.g. *vehicle* is a superordinate for *car*, *ship*, and *bicycle*).

Lastly, metadiscourse markers are words or parts of sentences that connect the writer to the reader. Metadiscourse markers help the reader organize, interpret, and evaluate information in a text. Examples of metadiscourse markers are gloss codes, sequencers, and hedges.

In overview, coherence is essential in a written text if the goal is to communicate an intended meaning to the reader. Yet, to teach coherence, further study is needed to clearly understand the linguistic features and structures that create coherence, as well as good teaching methods that assist students in incorporating them effectively into their writing, (Bamberg,

1984). Giving constructive feedback as to the quality of the coherence is essential for the developing writer. One step toward reaching this goal is to clearly understand the basic writing components of coherence and how they relate to each other in creating a mature text.

Grammar, cohesion, metadiscourse and coherence

Grammar is defined as a set of rules that govern how words are put together into sentences. Each part of speech performs a function in the creation of sentences, phrases, and clauses (Chicago Manual of Style 16th Ed., 2010). Grammar is also applied at the morphological level as well as at the sentence level (Huddleston & Pullman, 2002). Grammar is connected to coherence and cohesion because grammar is a global quality and coherence and cohesion are realized by grammatical structures (Bae, 2001).

Cohesion is defined by Halliday and Hassan (1976) as the semantic relations of meaning that exists within the text. Cohesion occurs when the understanding of an element in the discourse is dependent upon another, as in the use of pronouns. Cohesion includes grammar but moves beyond the sentence boundaries to include paragraphs or complete discourse. As demonstrated by Halliday and Hassan (1976), cohesive links can be identified, categorized and counted. Cohesive elements create the links that produce meaningful texts.

Metadiscourse includes cohesion and grammar but extends beyond creating meaning in text to include the consideration of the audience. Metadiscourse exemplifies the idea that communication is more than the exchange of facts and information. It also involves personalities, attitudes and assumptions between the writer and the reader. It involves the writer determining what type of impact he or she wants to have on their reader (Hyland, 2005).

Coherence is critical if writing is to communicate its intended message to its audience (Bamberg, 1984). Coherence is achieved in a text when the reader is guided by textual cues and his or her own knowledge and expectations in order to bridge gaps and to fill in inferred information. It is up to the writer to determine what cues are necessary, as he or she must define the audience. In example (a), the sentences are grammatically correct and contain cohesive elements, but the passage is not coherent because the reader cannot relate to a context in which the passage makes sense.

- a. *I bought a camera in New York City. The New York Marathon is in the fall. Falling is a one of the biggest causes of hospitalization among the elderly. Box Elder trees are my favorites.*

Conversely, a passage could lack grammatical structure and have no cohesive ties but still be coherent as demonstrated in example (b).

- b. Speaker A: *Doorbell*
Speaker B: *I am not dressed yet*
Speaker A: *Fine*

The three statements do not relate to each other in any way nor are they grammatically complete, but one can imagine a scene or context in which this conversation could take place in which both parties clearly understanding each other.

Metadiscourse, which offers a means of understanding to the reader, focuses explicitly on devices that indicate the relationship between the parts of the text and the author and reader. These devices must be observable. For example, verbal metadiscourse markers include paralinguistic cues such as tone of voice, stress, and gesture. In written texts, punctuation and typographical marks such as underlining, capitalization, and emoticons can indicate the writer's intended message, as demonstrated in the text message sentences (c).

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- c. Ok, meet you at Macaroni Grill. Just us or should we include husbands?
- d. No, husbands ok :)

Without punctuation mark, the written response to the text message (c) could have been interpreted two different ways: husbands are not to be invited or husbands are welcome to come to lunch. The comma in text message (d) clarifies the response for the reader to include her husband in the invitation to the restaurant.

The next passage demonstrates how metadiscourse is used in two different passages on the same topic written by the same author. In sentence (e), an excerpt from a science journal article, was created for peer scientists. Sentence (f) was rewritten for *Scientific America* for a non-specialized audience.

- e. *When branches of the host plant having similar oviposition sites were placed in the area, no investigations were made by the H.hewitsoni females.*
- f. *I collected lengths of P. pittieri vines with newly developed shoots and placed them in the patch of vines that was being regularly revisited. The females did not however, investigate the potential egg-laying sites I had supplied.*

(Meyers, 1990, pp. 180 as cited in Hyland, 2005)

While both passages contain coherence, cohesion, and are grammatically correct, the paragraph in example (f), uses language that reaches out to readers, while example (e), assumes the reader has a great deal of knowledge of the topic. These samples demonstrate the importance of the writer using metadiscourse elements to meet the needs of his or her audience.

In conclusion, grammar, cohesion, coherence and metadiscourse are all different elements of language that reflect fully developed expressive communication skills. Metadiscourse is unique in that it is a key element in effectively creating an active social relationship with the reader.

Classifications of Metadiscourse

Zellig Harris coined the term “metadiscourse” in order to better express the pragmatic relationship between writer and reader several decades ago (Beauvais, 1989). Williams further developed the concept in his 1981 text, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Hyland, 2005; Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995). Over the past several decades, there have been several classification systems developed for metadiscourse markers since the initial interest in this topic (Hyland, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1984; 1997; Crismore, 1984; Beauvais, 1989; Williams, 1980). Most of the classifications generally organize the linguistic units under two basic types: textual and interpersonal (Dafouz-Milne, 2008).

Vande Kopple (1997) referred to metadiscourse as discourse that writers use, not to expand referential material, but to help readers connect, organize, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes toward the informational material. Vande Kopple created a classification system to include features such as hedges, connectives, and other various forms of commentary to demonstrate the concepts of the writer’s influence over the reader. Table 1 illustrates the classification system as suggested by Vande Kopple (1985). Most metadiscourse taxonomies follow the template set by this classification, which in part, was based on works of Williams and Lautamatti (Hyland, 2005). Due to numerous issues with the categories, including vagueness of definitions and divisions of categories, Vande Kopple’s scheme has been revised through the years by various writers, including Vande Kopple himself in 1997 and 2002 (Hyland, 2005).

Table 1

Vande Kopple's Classification System for Metadiscourse (1997)

Textural Metadiscourse

1. Text connectives - used to help readers recognize how texts are organized and how different parts of a text are connected to one another functionally or semantically. They include sequencers (*first, next, however, but*), reminders (*as mentioned in Chapter 1*), and topicalizers (*with regards to, in connection with*). Logical and temporal relationship markers are also included (*consequently, at the same time*).
2. Code glosses – used to help readers grasp the writer's intended meaning of words and phrases. Often they are based on the writer's perception of the reader's knowledge of the topic. These devices reword, explain or clarify semantic relationships (*x means y*).
3. Validity markers – express the writer's commitment to the truth or value of a statement and demonstrate the author's commitment to the statement. Hedges (*perhaps, may, might*), emphatics (*clearly, obviously*), and attributors (*according to Willett*) are included here.
4. Narrators – informs readers who said or wrote something (*according to Scott*).

Interpersonal Metadiscourse

1. Illocution markers – used to explicitly target the speech act being performed at specific points in the text (*to sum up, I hypothesize, we predict*).
 2. Attitude markers – used to reveal the writer's attitude toward the propositional content (*unfortunately, interestingly, and surprisingly*).
 3. Commentaries – used to communicate with readers in an implicit dialogue (*dear reader, you may not agree*).
-

With the goal of attempting to impose order on the various functions of metadiscourse, Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen (1993) offered a substantial revision to metadiscourse marker taxonomy. Crismore et al. (1993) defined metadiscourse as the linguistic material intended to help the reader or listener organize and interpret information in texts, but does not add any information to the propositional content. A summary of the revised categories is shown in Table 2. Crismore et al. (1993) kept the two major categories as defined by Vande Kopple(1984): textual and interpersonal, but collapsed, separated, and reorganized the subcategories. The authors attempted to define and examine metadiscourse markers that assist the reader in interpretation of the text in a more precise manner (Crismore et al., 1993).

Table 2

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Crismore, Markkanen, Steffensen (1993) Categories of Metadiscourse

Category	Function	Examples
Textural Metadiscourse		
1. Textual markers		
Logical connectives		
Sequencers	Show connections between ideas	in addition, therefore, so
Reminders	Sequence/ordering	first, next, finally
Topicalizers	References to previous information	as we saw previously
	Indicates shift in topic	now, I will discuss ...
2. Interpretive markers		
Code Glosses		
Illocution markers	Further explains text material	for example, that is
Announcements	Name the act performed	in sum, to conclude
	Announce upcoming information	in the next chapter.
Interpersonal Metadiscourse		
Hedges	Show uncertainty to truth of claim	might, possible, likely
Certainly markers	Express commitment to claim	certainly, shows, know
Attributors	Give source or support of claim	Scott claims
Attitude markers	Display writer values	surprisingly, I hope
Commentary	Relationship marker with reader	dear reader, please consider

Hyland (2005) reexamined this concept to further clarify the elusive distinctions, assumptions, and classifications of metadiscourse. Hyland ultimately defined metadiscourse as “the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community” (Hyland, 2005). Hyland views metadiscourse as an explicit and open-ended set of language items that can also perform non-metadiscourse roles; therefore, the actual markers can only be recognized through analysis of the text. Hyland and Tse (2004) ascertained three key principles of metadiscourse: 1. Metadiscourse is separate from propositional facets of discourse. Hyland explained that metadiscourse is the means “by which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible and persuasive” (Hyland, 2005). 2. Metadiscourse refers to facets of the text that signify writer-reader interactions. Therefore, Hyland rejected the divisions of textural and interpersonal markers as previously presented schemes. Furthermore, Hyland suggested that all metadiscourse is interpersonal in that it considers the needs of the reader’s background knowledge, textural requirements and processing needs, as well as rhetorical tools. 3. Metadiscourse devices are distinct in that metadiscourse refers only to relations that are internal to the text. Hyland illustrated this point by demonstrating that textual items can be used as interpersonal or propositional, depending on context, as demonstrated below in sentences (g) and (h).

g. *I want to agree about the theme of the wedding, then we can talk about the details.*

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h. *I waited for an hour, then I walked back to the barn.*

In sentence (g), the speaker is telling about a sequence of the discussion, using *then* to organize the progress of the discourse. In this sentence, *then* functions as a textual metadiscourse marker. In sentence (h), *then* tells how events unfold in time and connects two propositions. Hyland’s classification system for metadiscourse exemplifies the defining principles. Table 3 summarizes metadiscourse, according to Hyland (2005).

Table 3
Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse according to Hyland (2005)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Assists in guiding the reader through the text	Resources
Transitional	Indicates relations between main clauses	in addition, but, thus
Frame markers	Discourse acts, stages and sequences	finally, my purpose
Endorphic markers	Indicates information in other part of text	as noted above,
Evidentials	Indicates information in other sources	Crawford states
Code Glosses	Elaborates definitions of words or phrases	Namely, such as, e.g.
Interactional	Involves the reader in the text	Resources
Hedges	Withholds commitment and open dialogue	might, perhaps possible
Boosters	Indicates certainty or close dialogue	in fact, definitely
Attitude markers	Express writer’s attitude to proposition	arguably, unfortunately
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author	I, we, my, me, our
Engagement markers	Explicitly builds relationship with reader	you can see that, note,

Hyland drew from Thompson and Theleta’s (1995) distinction between interactive and interactional resources to organize the subcategories of metadiscourse and also used the basic structures of earlier models of metadiscourse.

The interactive dimension: The focus of this category is concerned with the writer’s awareness of audience and the elements that are needed to adjust for probable knowledge, interest, rhetorical expectations, and comprehension abilities. Therefore, the markers in this category address strategies of organizing discourse rather than an experience. Interactive resources focus on text organization based on the writer’s assessment of the audience. There are five general sub-categories for interactive dimension metadiscourse markers: Transitional Markers, Frame Markers, Endorphic Markers, Evidentials, and Code Glosses.

Transitional Markers, which consist mainly of conjunctions and adverbial phrases, help the reader interpret pragmatic connections and signal additive, causative, and contrastive interactions of the writer’s thoughts. The key point of transitional markers is that they must complete links between ideas that are internal to the text versus external to the text, such as the addition of new information. For example, Transitional Markers add elements to an argument using such statements as: *and, furthermore, by the way*. They mark arguments by comparing similarities or differences by using such statements as *likewise* or *in contrast to*. Lastly,

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Transitional Markers can demonstrate consequence relation by justifying a conclusion (e.g., *therefore, in conclusion*) or indicate that an argument is being countered (e.g., *nevertheless, anyway*). In sentence (i), *and* is used to add an element to the argument and is therefore considered a Transitional Marker.

- i. Facebook was the first widely used social network *and* it continues to lead the others due to innovative changes in formatting.

Frame Markers indicate text boundaries or textural structures. As with Transitional Markers, Frame Markers are internal to the text. They identify or order arguments in the text rather than events in time. Frame Markers are used to sequence parts of text through words or phrases, such as *first, then, at the same time*. They can also explicitly label text stages (*to summarize*), announce goals, (*I argue here, my purpose is*) and indicate topic shifts (*now, let us return to*). Items in this subcategory provide framing information about the presentation of the discourse.

- j. After examining the details of the importance of diet and exercise, we will *next* present a summarized review of the most important elements.

In sentence (j), the word *next* prepares the reader of the order of the information that will be presented rather than elements in time and therefore is used as a frame metadiscourse marker.

Endophoric Markers are phrases that refer to other parts of the text. These markers help make additional propositional information more understandable to the reader. The purpose of an Endophoric Marker is to assist with comprehension and supporting material to help clarify an argument. Endophoric Markers also help direct the reader toward the writer's preferred interpretation of information.

- k. A comprehensive argument for the importance of implementing compensatory strategies along with functional therapeutic activities was presented *in Section 4.5*.

The Endophoric Marker *in Section 4.5* presented in sentence (k) assists the reader in locating supporting material in order to more fully comprehend the subject matter.

Evidentials guide the reader's interpretation and establish command of the subject by distinguishing who is responsible for a particular position or statement. Evidentials can range from hearsay to reliable sources. These markers distinguish the authority for a position, which is separate from the writer's perspective.

- l. *According to* well-known journalist, R. Birkenbuel, the Seattle Times has a nationally noted reputation for excellence in print reporting.

In sentence (l), the statement about excellence in reporting is supported by someone of authority and therefore indicates use of an evidential metadiscourse marker.

Code glosses are words or phrases that provide additional information by restating, elaborating or explaining what has previously been said. Code glosses are used to make sure that the reader understands the writer's intended message.

- m. When Clay was 17 years old, he hit his nadir; *in other words*, his previous perfect life was never really the same.

Sentence (m) uses the code gloss *in other words*, to give the reader a clue about the meaning of the word *nadir* and the events in the subject's life.

The interactional dimension: The focus of the interactional metadiscourse marker is to spotlight the ways writers conduct interaction by intruding and commenting on their message. Often this is referred to as the 'voice' or personality of the writer. These metadiscourse markers

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are described as evaluative and engaging. The purpose of interactional markers is to express solidarity of the constructed text with the reader. There are five general subcategories for interactional dimension metadiscourse markers: Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mentions, and Engagement Markers.

Hedges are words or phrases that the writer inserts to acknowledge alternative viewpoints. Hedges are used to withhold complete commitment to the presented proposition. Information is given as an opinion rather than fact and the writer assigns weight to it by using words such as *perhaps*, *might* or *possible*. Hedges are used to steer the reader to the conclusion or reasoning of the writer's choice.

- n. Based on events that occurred during the recent Facebook IPO offering on Wall Street, it is *possible* that the company *may* have exposed some weakness.

Example (n) uses Hedges *possible* and *may* to steer the reader toward considering the possibility of negative conclusions about recent events without presenting a complete commitment to the position.

Boosters permit writers to express certainty in specific positions even when diverse alternative views are presented. Writers use words like *clearly*, *decisively*, *obviously* to sway the reader and to create unity with the audience. Boosters can also be used to strengthen an argument by suggesting the reader draw the same conclusions as the writer. According to Hyland, boosters and hedges play an important role in expressing commitment in a text while paying respect for the reader.

- o. *Obviously*, Morgan Stanley did not operate under the proper code of ethics for investment firms when they sent information to only select customers regarding Facebook.

The author of sentence (o) is clearly steering the reader to draw the same important conclusion that the writer has chosen by using the word *obviously* as a booster metadiscourse marker.

Attitude Markers express the writer's influence on the information by the presence of attitude verbs (e.g., *prefer*, *agree*) sentence adverbs (e.g. *hopefully*, *fortunately*) and adjectives (e.g., *amazing*, *remarkable*, *appropriate*). Attitudinal markers demonstrate surprise, frustration or obligation, based on the writer's intended mood as demonstrated in sentence (p).

- p. Hopefully, these types of blatant indiscretions by large companies will be directly addressed.

Self Mentions refer to the presence of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives (e.g., *I*, *me*, *mine*, *exclusive we*, *our*, *ours*). Writing always carries information about the author, but the use of personal pronouns project the writer into the text in a powerful manner.

- q. We cannot continue down this same path and expect positive results.

In sentence (q), the author uses inclusive *we*, a Self Mention marker, to draw the reader into the text and influence the reader's position.

Engagement Markers are devices that focus the attention of the reader by directly addressing them. These markers can be used to meet the reader's expectations by addressing them as discourse participants through pronouns such as *you*, *your* or inclusive *we*. Engagement Markers can also be interjected phrases such as *you may notice*, or *by the way*. Lastly, engagement markers can involve rhetorical positioning of the audience, guiding them to interpretations. Often this involves question, directives, and obligation modals (e.g., *should*, *must have*).

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- r. Reader, you must know that an interesting fate (sometimes involving rats, sometimes not) awaits almost everyone, mouse or man who does not conform.

DiCamillo (2003), *The Tale of Despereaux*

In excerpt (r) from the children's book, *The Tale of Despereaux*, the author, DiCamillo (2003), uses an engagement marker to draw the audience into the story.

While Hyland (2005) attempted to present a metadiscourse model that is complete and pragmatically grounded, there are some limitations of his taxonomy. As previously presented, metadiscourse elements must be explicit and clearly identified in the text. However, attempting to define and categorize the author's attempt to present him or herself into the writing is difficult, at best. Language is fluid and in some situations a word or phrase may serve a metadiscourse function and a propositional role at the same time. Therefore, metadiscourse classification formats can only approximate the intricacies of language usage.

In summary, metadiscourse is an important concept in that it reveals the presence of the writer in the text and his or her consideration of the reader. Metadiscourse tools assist the writer in influencing his or her reader. It is a means for the writer to appear credible and convincing to the reader. Thus, successful writing depends on the writer understanding the community of the reader and presenting a considerate text in order to achieve the intent of the discourse.

Metadiscourse Literature Review

The peer-reviewed research on metadiscourse details that discourse markers are an important means to shaping effective communication, supporting a position, facilitating readability, and creating a relationship with the reader. Several studies have examined the use of metadiscourse in persuasion or rhetoric. Examining the research and applications of metadiscourse leads to deeper understanding of the means to creating coherence in texts, as well as, more effective methods of teaching and assessing students who struggle with writing.

Metadiscourse and Persuasion

Writing is a social and communicative interaction between reader and writer whereas metadiscourse is the tool that writers use to influence their audience. Metadiscourse contributes to the art of persuasion or rhetoric by the following: it promotes logical appeals when it explicitly links ideas and arguments; it implies credibility of the writer's authority and competence; and it signals respect by acknowledging the reader's viewpoint (Hyland, 2005). It is a key social communication construct that allows writers to influence reader's understanding of the text as well as the author's attitude toward the context and the audience. Several studies demonstrate the importance of metadiscourse in persuasion (Hyland 1997, 1998; Dafouz-Milne, 2008).

Hyland (1997) examined how the appropriate use of metadiscourse plays a significant role in rhetorical context by analyzing the textual markers in 28 research articles across four academic disciplines: Microbiology, Marketing, Astrophysics, and Applied Linguistics. Research writing is one genre in which awareness of the audience is critical in capturing rhetorical objectives. Writers must organize information and observations into a meaningful structure for the reader, as well as direct the academic audience toward the desired conclusions. The researcher found that metadiscourse markers were used an average of 373 occurrences per research article or one in every fifteen words. The academic disciplines that used the most metadiscourse markers were Marketing and Applied Linguistics. While many reasons could explain this outcome, the researcher pointed to the fact that the other two subjects, Microbiology and Astrophysics, are analytical, 'hard-pure' disciplines based on quantitative models and observations. Marketing and Applied Linguistics are considered 'soft-applied' disciplines and

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involve explaining how human actions influence events, thus requiring more textual and interpersonal metadiscourse tools to convince the academic community. Overall results indicate that successful academic writing involves using metadiscourse to present an argument that is understood and accepted by its audience.

In another examination of metadiscourse and rhetoric, Dafouz-Milne (2008) explored the role that metadiscourse markers play in the art of persuasion in a cross-cultural perspective through an examination of two elite newspapers, *The Times* (British) and *El Pais* (Spanish). Dafouz-Milne (2008) selected these newspapers due to the political and rhetorical effect they have on their respective cultures. The researcher's goal was to unveil how metadiscourse operates as persuasive devices in texts. Specifically, Dafouz-Milne (2008) identified which metadiscourse markers characterized opinion columns in newspapers and which markers functioned more effectively. Informants or readers evaluated the subjective guest columns for persuasiveness. Those rated more persuasive were texts with a medium number of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers. Essays with the lowest persuasive scores were those with a low level of metadiscourse markers. Surprisingly, texts with high numbers of metadiscourse markers were also rated close to the texts with the lowest number of markers. The texts that received the highest scores included those writing samples with a higher proportion of hedges than attitudinal or certainty markers. Therefore, the researcher interpreted hedges as the most effective and favored metadiscourse tool. Overall, based on the analyzed survey of readers, Dafouz-Milne concluded that a balanced number of both textual and interpersonal markers were crucial to creating a text that was both persuasive and sensitive to the reader's needs.

Hyland (2004) demonstrated how metadiscourse was used to facilitate effective persuasive interaction in writing by examining graduate research writing in ESL writers. The researcher examined the overall number of metadiscourse markers in 240 Masters and Doctoral dissertations written by ESL students in Hong Kong. Hyland developed a modified model of metadiscourse to focus attention on how writers project themselves in their writing as a way to signal their intentions. Through this investigation, the author determined that variations occurred when comparing the two levels of advance degree writing. The Master's level students used slightly more interactional metadiscourse (Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mention, Engagement Markers) while the Doctoral students used significantly more interactive forms (Transitional, Frame, Endorpic, Evidentials, Code Glosses). Hyland explained these differences by stating the Doctoral dissertation is usually twice as long as a Master's final written project, therefore requiring more organizational structures. Also, the more advanced students' use of metadiscourse may represent a higher-level language approach to create forthcoming relationships with their reader.

In summary, the use of metadiscourse in persuasion demonstrates the importance of using the microstructure tool in an effective manner to create credibility, and to influence the audience. Metadiscourse markers can link positions and arguments, creating logical explanations when there is no absolute proof. The writer must demonstrate respect to the reader by using the appropriate type and amount of metadiscourse as demonstrated in the presented research. This is a skilled required by students entering the upper grades as they begin to write persuasive essays.

Metadiscourse in the Classroom

Intraprawat and Steffensen (1995), in their research of good and poor ESL essays, revealed that mature writers reflect community values in their writing because they are members of their specific communicative community. For those learning to write in a second language,

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this level of understanding is particularly difficult. Merely the understanding and proper usage of grammar, although necessary, does not lend itself to effective writing. Intaraprawat and Steffensen examined 12 good and poor essays written by L2 students. The essays were analyzed for use of metadiscourse features. Specifically, the researchers were interested to discover that the amount of metadiscourse used in composing the essay impacted the quality rating of the essay, with the expectation that those essays rated ‘good’ would contain more metadiscourse elements. The results revealed educationally and socially significant results. The researchers agreed, while there are no specific ratings or norms for the optimal level of metadiscourse in an essay rated “good,” better essays included a wider variety of metadiscourse forms as well as a higher usage of the same. The researchers also proposed that direct instruction of metadiscourse marker usage for L2 students would be beneficial to their communicative ability to create comprehensive and mature texts.

In contrast to Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995), other researchers have investigated the comparisons between writers of different cultures (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993). These investigations have pointed to the possibility that metadiscourse is a universal language component and applied differently, depending on the communicative values of the particular culture. The implications of these studies have stressed the importance of direct instruction for students learning to write in a second language. The rationale for this study is based in part on the researchers’ conclusions of need for specific instruction and assessment of metadiscourse for those who struggle with the social aspect of language due to language difficulties and disabilities rather than differences.

Rationale for Current Study

Because of the well-established connection between oral and written language, as well as knowledge of normal and disordered language acquisition, it is within the scope of practice for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to support children and adolescents with writing difficulties (ASHA 2001). Appropriate roles for the SLP include prevention, assessment, intervention, and documentation of outcomes and providing assistance to teachers, parents, and students. As school systems adopt the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach, the SLP may contribute in a variety of ways, including consultation and collaboration with administrators, teachers, parents, and students. This innovative approach provides many opportunities to enhance speech-language services to benefit more students. (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2005; Ehren & Nelson, 2005; Ehren, Montgomery, Rudebusch, & Whitmore, 2006; Ehren & Whitmore, 2009).

Often, when assessing and remediating written expressive language, the SLP’s focus is too narrow. Speech-language therapists tend to concentrate on syntax and vocabulary and give little attention to the overall coherence of the text (Nelson & Van Meter, 2007; Nippold, Mansfield, Billow, & Tomblin, 2008). It is important that SLPs help students address the whole meaning of their discourse by developing interventions that extend beyond sentence-level grammar to produce comprehensive and mature texts.

Previously presented research has supported the position that metadiscourse is difficult for second language learners and that both L2 and L1 students can improve their higher level language skills with intervention or direct instruction of metadiscourse. It is the premise of this study that students with language disabilities have difficulty with higher level language skills such as metadiscourse similar to second language learners. With this in mind, it is vital to

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develop reliable and quick methods for assessing coherence in student's writing as a way to monitor progress in therapy or classroom settings and to report data-driven results.

This study is a preliminary attempt to determine if there is a correlation between cognitive expressive language abilities or maturity in writing, as indicated by scores on Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) and use of metadiscourse as a means to assess coherence, an important but elusive quality for higher level writing ability. It is predicted that student narratives that received higher ratings on the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) will contain more metadiscourse elements using the classification developed by Hyland (2005), and that fewer metadiscourse markers will be found in narratives that received lower ratings. A positive correlation between the number of markers and story construction quality will demonstrate that students who performed well on Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) wrote essays in which the reader's needs were predicted and addressed by using metadiscourse markers.

CHAPTER 2 METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine if a correlation exists between the number of metadiscourse markers used in a written narrative and the subtest scores obtained on the Subtest 8, *Story Construction*, of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). A relationship between these two variables was examined using a previously collected data set (Dinkins, 2006), an outline for metadiscourse markers based on Hyland (2005) and Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). In addition to determining the number of metadiscourse markers per story, the metadiscourse markers were also analyzed for specific type or function based on Hyland (2005).

Participants

An analysis of metadiscourse marker usage was conducted using written language samples from a data set collected by Dinkins (2006). The samples were collected from classrooms that had participated in a teacher mentoring program termed *Oral Written Language Literacy Strategies* (OWLLS). A total of 69 test protocols from the Dinkins' data set were analyzed in this study. Only data from 7th grade was collected. All student subjects had a signed consent form on file in order to participate. Initially 70 seventh-grade students participated but one student did not complete Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) section. The students in this grade ranged in age from 12:0 to 14:11 (years: months, mean=12:10). Approximately 59% were African American, 40% were Caucasian, and 1% was classified as other. Sixty-one percent of the students were considered to be economically disadvantaged due to their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Lastly, 10% of the students who participated in the study had been retained a grade level at some point during their years in school. The demographic profiles of the participants are shown in Table 4.

Because of the wide range of ages in the corpus (12:0 – 14:11), a Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine if there was a relationship between the two variables; age and writing quality based on the results of Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). The results of the statistical analysis determined that negative correlation existed between age and writing quality ($r=-0.2466$, $df=70$, $p>.05$). Therefore, age is not associated with writing quality in the narrative samples of the data. The mean age (12:10) is representative of the average age of seventh graders and supports the data that age did not influence the quality of the writing samples.

Table 4.

Demographic Profiles of Participants

<u>Age</u>		<u>Gender</u>		<u>Race</u>			<u>Number Retained</u>	<u>Free/Red Lunch</u>	<u>Learning Disability</u>
<u>Mean</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Other</u>			
12:10	12:0-14:11	29	41	14	28	1	7	43	6

Procedures for Subtest 8, *Story Construction* TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996)

Students created narratives based on a detailed illustration of a prehistoric scene. The following directions for Subtest 8, *Story Construction*, TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) were given orally to the seventh grade student participants:

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This exercise is designed to see how well you can write a story. Look at the picture before you. You are to write a story about that picture. Before you begin writing, take time to plan your story. A well-written story usually has a beginning, middle and end. It also has characters that have names and perform certain actions. Use paragraphs to help organize your story. Correct punctuation and capitalization will make your story easier to read. After you have made a plan for your story, begin writing. Try to write as long a story as you can. If you need more paper just let me know. You will have only 15 minutes to think about your story and to write it. Write the best story you can. Ready? Begin. (Hammill & Larsen, 1996)

Students were given fifteen minutes to write and then instructed to stop.

The 69 narratives were graded for writing quality using the criteria on of Subtest 8. *Story Construction* to measure use of prose, action, sequencing and theme. See Appendix A for the scoring criteria of the subtest. A standard score and percentile for each story was determined by using normative data from the TOWL-3(Hammill & Larsen, 1996). Interrater reliability of the subtest scores were determined by a practicing speech-language pathologist who graded greater than 20% of the corpus (n=16). Same essay responses were examined and interrater reliability was determined to be .98. Percent interrater agreement was calculated by dividing the number of interrater agreements by the total number of markers in same narratives (175 agreements/178 opportunities), therefore, results from the Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3(Hammill & Larson, 1996) were deemed to be reliable.

Procedures for counting metadiscourse markers

The narratives were examined for metadiscourse features using Hyland's (2005) categories. Specifically, the narratives were surveyed for metadiscourse markers that are defined by two distinct categories; Interactive resources and Interactional resources. Interactive resources are features that consider the relationship between the reader and the writer. Their role is to organize propositional information to maximize understanding for the reader. Interactive resources consist of Transitional Markers, Frame Markers, Endorpic Markers, Evidentials, and Code Glosses. Interactional resources define the ways authors interact and intrude on their message. These types of markers present the writer's perspective and add personality in the text. Interactional markers include Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mentions, and Engagement Markers.

According to Hyland, (2005), metadiscourse markers can serve more than one role (e.g. a Frame Marker and a Self Mention). For the purposes of this study each metadiscourse marker was only counted only once.

Identifying characteristics of interactive resources

Transitional Markers, which signal additive, causative and contrastive relationships in the writers' thinking, were identified in the narratives most frequently as conjunctions and adverbial phrases. Discourse markers were identified as Transitional Markers when they added elements to an argument, marked similarities or differences, or announced a conclusion or justification. Commonly used Transitional Markers include; and, *so*, *because* and *although*.

Frame Markers, which signal text boundaries, were confirmed when these discourse markers provided sequencing or additive relations, provided labels, announce goals, or indicated topic shifts. Commonly used Frame Markers include *then*, *next*, and *finally*.

Endorpic Markers, which refer to other parts of the text, were counted when words or phrases were used to refer to earlier parts of the narrative or indicate information to be revealed

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later. Often these types of markers are used to assist the reader with comprehension. There were no Endophoric Markers found in the subjects' narratives. Commonly used Endophoric Markers include *in this section*, *in this part*, and *in Chapter X*.

Evidentials specify information from other sources, often as a citation. However, depending on the genre, hearsay or an attribution can be considered a reliable source. An example of an Evidential from the student corpus is *they say*. Commonly used Evidentials include: *according to X*, *cited*, and *quoted*.

Code Glosses supply additional information or elaborate what has been said. In this corpus, Code Glosses were recognized when the interpreted goal of the writer was to ensure that the reader received the intended message through rephrasing or elaboration. Commonly used Code Glosses include *called*, *for example*, and *known as*.

Common characteristics of interactional resources

Hedges indicate the author's uncertainty. Hedges were counted in the corpus when comments were made that conveyed the writer's lack of commitment or confidence in the presented information. Commonly used Hedges include *about*, *appear*, and *probably*.

Boosters indicate the writer's confidence in a particular position. Boosters were tallied in the students' narratives when words or phrases were used to influence the reader to draw a similar conclusion or opinion as the author. Commonly used Boosters include *actually*, *believe*, and *know*.

Attitude Markers indicate the writer's attitude toward the information presented in the text. These markers were counted in the data set when words or phrases were used to convey surprise, importance or frustration from the writer to the reader. Commonly used Attitude Markers include *surprising*, *prefer*, and *unusual*.

Self Mentions, which place the writer explicitly in the text, are represented as person pronouns or possessive adjectives (e.g., *I*, *me*, *our*). For the purposes of this study, the stories written from a first person perspective were not counted as Self Mentions. For clarification, in sentence (s), *I*, is used in the first person and the main character in the story. Sentence (t) *me* is an example of a *Self Mention*. Here the writer is directly addressing the reader.

- s. family and I were getting hungry.
(subject 11)

- t. Let me take you back a long time ago.
(subject 26)

In order for a first person pronoun or possessive adjective to be counted as a Self Mention, the pronoun must represent the explicit presence of the writer.

Engagement Markers, which directly address the reader to focus his or her attention, were recognized in the stories when phrases were used to direct the reader's attention or include them in the context. Commonly used Engagement Markers include *allow*, *by the way*, and *see*.

For this project, the author of the study identified the metadiscourse markers manually and used the following methods described by Witte (1983). First, the stories were read thoroughly. Next, the subject of the sentence or given information was identified by asking the question, "What is this sentence about?" Then, the predicate or new information was determined by asking, "What is being said about X?" Once the propositional information was determined,

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the metadiscourse words or phrases were categorized by determining their contribution to the condition of the proposition. Lastly, the metadiscourse markers were recorded and totaled.

In order to consider reliability of the number of metadiscourse markers found in the data set, a total of 12 (20%) of the 67 narratives were randomly selected and independently analyzed by a second examiner, who was a faculty member in the department of Communicative Sciences and Disorders at the University of Montana. Percent interrater agreement was calculated by dividing the number of interrater agreements by the total number of markers in same stories. The results of the reliability check indicated that interrater agreement was .90 (44 agreements/49 opportunities).

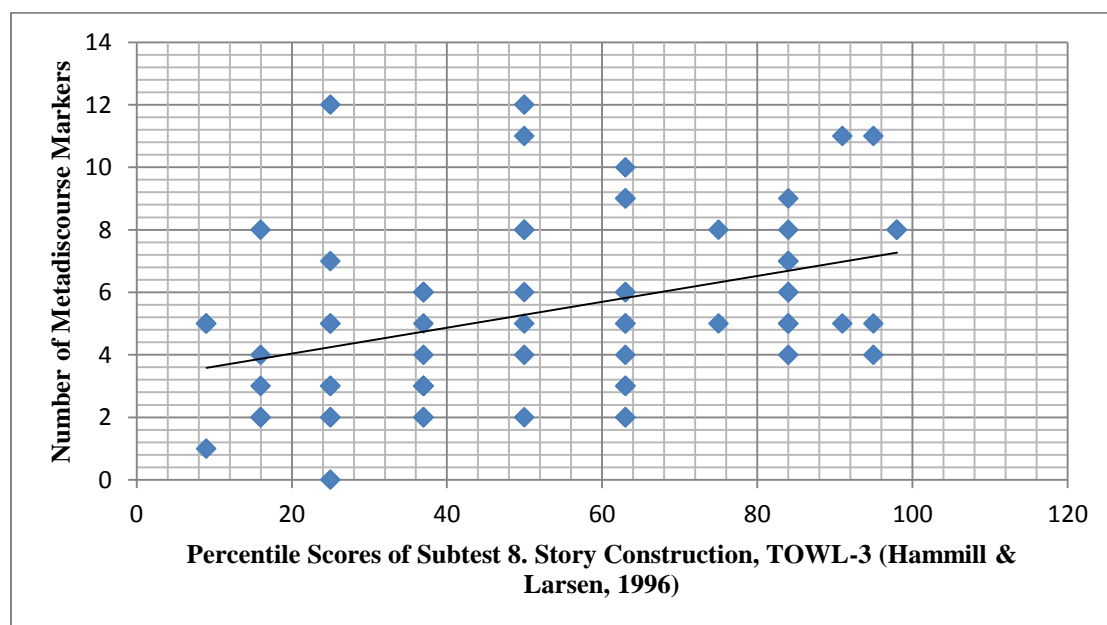
In determining a relationship between the results on the Subtest 8, *Story Construction*, TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) and the number of metadiscourse markers a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. A Pearson product moment correlation is used to describe a linear relationship between two variables. A scatter graph was created to graphically represent the correlation of the two variables. Upon examination, it was noted that there were two outliers, or two points on the graph that were extreme in comparison to the rest of the corpus (subtest percentile and metadiscourse numbers were 25, 12, and 16, 9 respectively). After further examination of the corresponding essays, it was determined that both stories displayed significantly inappropriate or incorrect use of metadiscourse markers and that their extreme scores would skew or significantly distort the central distribution of the corpus. Therefore, the two stories were deleted from the data set. Thus, the results of the study are based on the correlation of metadiscourse and story quality of the remaining 67 stories.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

The results of the Pearson product moment correlation test used to determine the relationship between writing quality and metadiscourse indicated a statistically significant correlation between the variables ($r=.38966$, $df=70$, $p<.01$). Figure 1 shows a scattergram of the results of the correlation. The line on the scattergram represents a linear positive relationship between the two variables; number of metadiscourse markers and writing quality based on percentile scores of the Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996).

Figure 1

Scattergram of TOWL-3 Subtest 8, (Hammill & Larsen, 1996) Percentile Scores and Metadiscourse Markers



A total of 360 metadiscourse markers were counted among the 67 stories. The process of counting markers included identifying the category of metadiscourse markers. All of the types of metadiscourse markers were found among the story data set except for Endophoric Markers which are used to indicate information from other parts the same text. The most frequently used metadiscourse markers were Frame Markers with a count of 169 and Transition Markers with 107 among the story data set. See Table 5 for types of markers, number of markers found per type in the data set and examples of markers of each that the subjects placed in their stories created for the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996).

Table 5

Number, Type, & Examples of Metadiscourse Markers Found in TOWL-3 Narratives

Metadiscourse Marker	Number	Sample of Metadiscourse Marker from subject
Interactive Resource		

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Transition Markers	107	Because, and, so, although
Frame Markers	169	A long time ago, next, then
Endophoric	0	
Evidentials	1	They say
Code Gloss	32	(Saden), which was..., like this..., known as
Interactional Resources		
Hedges	2	Probably, What looks like probably...,
Boosters	3	Very much, seems like
Attitude Markers	8	Luckily, Thank God, All of a sudden
Self Mention	20	I cannot imagine, that is what I see
Engagement Markers	18	They will never forget the day.

The mean number of metadiscourse marker used per story was 5.37. The range of markers was from 0 to 12.

To further clarify the relationship between metadiscourse marker usage and quality of writing, the students' scores were grouped by descriptive rankings from very superior to very poor. The test authors used standard scores ranging from 0 to 20 with 10 being average to determine rankings. Students were then grouped according to rank. The number of metadiscourse markers per rank was parsed among the descriptive rankings and the average number of markers per rank was determined. In Table 6 the descriptive ranks, standard scores, students per rank, exact number of marks per rank and mean number of markers per rank and variance are presented.

A single-factor ANOVA was used to determine if there was a meaningful difference between the mean number of metadiscourse markers and the group rankings (superior, above average, average and below average). The statistical analysis demonstrated that differences between the mean number of the markers and the groups were statistically significant, $F(3,63) = 2.96, p = .038 (>.05)$. The results can be interpreted that as students wrote narratives which were ranked as higher in quality, a statistically significant increase in metadiscourse markers usage was observed.

Table 6

Descriptive Ranking and Standard Scores used in TOWL-3, Subtest 8, and Number of Students, Exact Number of Metadiscourse Markers, Mean number of Metadiscourse Markers per Descriptive Rank

Descriptive Ranking	Standard Score Range	Number of Students per Rank	Exact Number of Markers per Rank	Mean Number of Markers per Rank	Variance
Very Superior	17-20	0	0	0	0
Superior	15-16	5	36	7.2	7.7
Above	13-14	10	69	6.9	3.88

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Average					
Average	8-12	44	225	5.11	8.20
Below					
Average	6-7	8	30	3.73	5.07
Poor	4-5	0	0	0	0
Very Poor	1-3	0	0	0	0

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

In this study it was predicted that metadiscourse use and writing quality would be positively correlated in that the writing samples that demonstrated stronger writing skills would contain more metadiscourse markers, and the lesser skilled students’ essays would contain fewer elements of social language. The results indicated that this predication was correct.

The use of metadiscourse markers indicates maturity in writing specifically, the writer demonstrates awareness of the needs of the reader in both an interpersonal and an interactional manner. According to Graham & Perin, (2007), many adolescents have severe writing difficulties even if their reading is at “benchmark.” Certainly dense reports have been created that address the causes as to why writing is so difficult for so many students offering detailed teaching techniques. Easy and effective ways of measuring student growth in higher level language skills is essential in ensuring teaching methods are producing results.

Student compositions in this data set successfully incorporated metadiscourse qualities into succinct and delightful stories, as example (u). Others did not present an organized and thoughtful story that connected to the reader as an example (v). Some demonstrated incorporated incorrect use of metadiscourse as an example w) in which the markers were over-used, rendering the overall coherence less effective.

- u. Long ago in a mysacal forest there was a golden mammoth. This mammoth was very hard to find *but they say*, if *you* find and kill your tribe will never go hungry.
(subject 6)
- v. These men were after the dinosars. The mamuths supplied lots of food and supplies. The early humans did lot of work to stay alive.
(subject 42)
- w. From this story, *I* think about a couple of things, One of the things *I* think about when I look at this picture is the people trying to kill the mammoth.
(subject 19)

Teaching and learning to incorporate metadiscourse or social elements into discourse can be difficult for several reasons. The research indicates that metadiscourse, a component of coherence, is a pragmatic feature. It is the social relationship between the writer and the reader. Some students have pragmatic language impairments (e.g. asking appropriate questions, understanding social implications, maintaining eye contact with listener, maintaining conversational topics) and this may be reflected in their writing. According to Hyland (2005),

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metadiscourse is part of the social language, pragmatics and this piece of the language puzzle is difficult to teach and difficult to learn. Currently, research in metadiscourse primarily involves ESL and is reported in journals specific to ESL and journals specific to pragmatic language. Studies have demonstrated the importance of metadiscourse in cultural differences and the importance of direct teaching. At this point, no research has linked the difficulties demonstrated by L2 students to those of monolingual students with language impairments.

By investigating metadiscourse, through examination of student essays and applications of theory, and prior research, it can be argued that metadiscourse needs to become a fundamental component for effective reading and writing instruction for students. Students depend on SLPs and teachers to facilitate language development and help students become successful communicators in their social, academic, and occupational communities.

Conclusion and Implications

In this study, 67 seventh-grade writing samples were analyzed to investigate the relationship between two variables, the number of metadiscourse markers and the quality of essay writing based on the results of Subtest 8, *Story Construction*, of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). A statistically significant relationship was discovered between the two variables of this study. The higher-rated essays contained more metadiscourse markers than the lower-rated essays. This finding suggests that direct instruction in metadiscourse marker usage may result in higher quality student narrative production.

Students, specifically those who have difficulty with language due to deficits in their native language or challenges with writing in a second language, find metadiscourse a difficult skill to master. Direct instruction in how to incorporate metadiscourse markers in writing has been shown to greatly improve writing skills in second language learners (Cheng & Steffensen, 1996).

Teachers also have revealed challenges in giving specific and effective feedback in helping students develop clarity and maturity in their writing (Lee, 2002; Connors 1990). This study demonstrates that writers who produce mature texts are also using more metadiscourse markers therefore offering direct instruction in the use of this coherence-creating tool may be an effective means for improving writing in the classroom

Limitations of the current study

Several limitations may have influenced the findings of this study. One problem can be referred to as the multi-functionality of metadiscourse. As described by Hyland (2005), metadiscourse markers can serve more than one purpose. Some words and phrases can serve as both metadiscourse and propositional information. For the purposes of this study, metadiscourse markers were only counted once, even if they served more than one purpose. See example in sentence (x). This sentence contains both a Self Mention, *let me take you*, and a Frame Marker *a long time ago*. In the data set, this sentence was counted as one Self Mention metadiscourse marker.

- x. Let me take you back a long time ago,
(subject 26)

Another possible limitation of this study was the time limit of 15 minutes placed on writing the essays per the directions given in the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996). While an investigation of spontaneous writing gives an evaluator much information as to the level of writing ability of a student, students may have produced higher quality essays had more time

been allotted. Developing adolescent writers may find it difficult to incorporate social elements of language into a creative narrative in such a brief amount of time.

Finally, two possible areas of analysis were not addressed in the counting of the metadiscourse markers. The markers were not eliminated if used incorrectly in the essay, with the exception of the two extreme results, which were eliminated for statistical purposes. Also, it was noted by the author that longer essays contained more metadiscourse markers. In this investigation no consideration was given for density of metadiscourse markers based on length or numbers of words per essay. Also, there was no consideration taken if the markers were used correctly or incorrectly in the story. Better writers may have taken their time and created more cohesive stories with proper use and amount of metadiscourse marker placement but further research is needed for further clarification as to proper use and amount of effective metadiscourse in a particular type of written genre.

Lastly, research demonstrates several categorizations for metadiscourse markers. Further research is needed to continue to clarify categories, as these tools of coherence are continually investigated in different genres and diverse writing communities.

Future research

This preliminary investigation lends itself to future studies with the shared goal of further understanding of the complexity of metadiscourse in writing. Four specific areas of investigation would be helpful in gaining a more complete picture in the use of metadiscourse. First, a more in-depth analysis as to what specific types of metadiscourse markers increases the quality of narrative writing. This information would be helpful to both the student and the writing instructor in that this information would narrow the focus of learning and teaching effective writing strategies using metadiscourse.

As demonstrated in the current study and others, metadiscourse can be overused. Future research is needed to investigate the importance of adding the correct amount of metadiscourse for the maximal results of clarity of writing. In this study, two outliers or extreme results were found in the data set and eliminated. The over-use of metadiscourse was presented in the study by Dafouz-Milne (2008), which determined that the very high use of metadiscourse was as ineffective as too little. Both studies demonstrate the importance for high quality direct instruction of metadiscourse for L1 and L2 writers.

Third, in this study, a creative narrative written within a specific time limit based on a detailed picture was used for analysis. Researchers such as Hyland (1998a), Crismore and Farnsworth (1990), and others have demonstrated that metadiscourse markers are used most significantly in number and influence the reader in essays that present a position or use rhetoric as the writing genre. While analyzing narratives can reveal much about the student's development of language, a persuasive writing assignment would likely result in increased metadiscourse marker usage. These types of essays require the engagement or convincing of the reader. A useful area of research would be to investigate a quick simple assessment, such as the Subtest 8, *Story Construction* of the TOWL-3 (Hammill & Larsen, 1996), to quantify metadiscourse and writing quality of a persuasive or expository genre.

Lastly, since the holistic quality of discourse coherence makes it difficult to break down into component parts for teaching and for learning, the effects of direct instruction of metadiscourse marker usage should be examined. The results of this study suggest that the number of metadiscourse markers used in a narrative is positively correlated with the overall

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story quality. Future research should examine whether instruction that emphasizes the use of discourse markers would result in higher quality student essays.

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Appendix A

Subtest 8, *Story Construction*

From *Test of Written Language 3rd Edition*, (TOWL-3) Hammill and Larsen(1996)

Subtest 8 measures story construction. Evaluation the student's use of prose, action, sequencing, and theme. The criteria for scoring the items are as follows:

1. Story beginning
0=none, abrupt
1=weak, ordinary, serviceable,
(e.g., "When I was young, I always
wanted to go to Mars.)
2=interesting, grabbing
2. Story somehow relates to picture
0=no
1=yes
3. Definitely refers to a specific event occurring
before or after the picture
0=no
1=yes
4. Story sequence
0=none, a series of random statements
1=rambles, but has some sequence
2=moves smoothly from start to finish
5. Plot (the series of events that constitute
the action of a story)
0=none, incoherent, statements in random order
1=weak, meager, spotty
2=logical complete
6. Characters show feelings/emotions
0=no
1=some emotion/low-affect story line
2=strong emotion clearly evident in at
least one character (e.g. "father was fighting
hard because he was afraid the baby would be hurt.")
7. Express some moral or philosophic theme

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(e.g., right or wrong: love or pursuit of wisdom:
or search for knowledge)

0=no

1=yes but weakly stated

2=overtly, clearly stated

8. Story action or energy level

0=no action

1=boring, tedious

2=run-of-the mill predictable

3=exciting, interesting

9. Story ending (The use of “The End” should be disregarded when deciding if 0, 1 or 2 is scored.

The actual ending of the story is used to measure this item.)

0=none, abrupt

1=weak

2=logical, definite ending

10 Prose is

0=immature

1=ordinary, serviceable, matter-of-fact

2=artful, stylish (ample use of alliteration, metaphor etc.)

11 Story is

0=dull

1=simple

2=interesting, unique, coherent

Appendix B

Metadiscourse Markers
According to Hyland (2005)

Interactive Resources—Help guide the reader through the text (5 types: transitional markers, frame markers, Endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses)

These markers are features that consider the relationship between the reader and the writer in that they organize propositional information in ways that the audience is likely to find coherent and convincing. They are a consequence of the writer's assessment of the reader's comprehension capacities, understanding of related texts and the need for interpretive guidance. Interactive metadiscourse markers depend on what the writer knows of his or her reader and not simply text organizing devices.

1. Transitional Markers: Express relations between clauses

- Mainly conjunctions and adverbial phrases which help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument
- Signal additive, causative and contrastive relationships in the writer's thinking
- Express relationships between stretches of discourse
- Perform role **internal** to discourse rather than external i.e. help reader interpret links between ideas.

Includes:

Additions: Adds elements to argument

Examples: and, furthermore, moreover, by the way

Comparisons: Marks arguments as either similar or different

Examples: Similarly, likewise, equally, in the same way, correspondingly, in contrast, however, but, on the contrary, on the other hand

Consequences: Relations either tell readers that a conclusion is being drawn or justified or that an argument is being countered

Examples: thus, consequently, in conclusion, admittedly, nevertheless, anyway, in any case, of course

Words to look for:

Accordingly, additionally, again, also, alternatively, although, and, accordingly, additionally, again, also, alternatively, although, and, as a consequence, as a results

At the same time, because, besides, but, by contrast, consequence, by the same token, consequently, conversely, equally, even though, further, furthermore, hence, however, in addition, in the same, leads, to likewise, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, rather, results in, similarly, since, still, thereby, though thus, whereas, while, yet

2. FRAME MARKERS-REFER TO DISCOURSE ACTS, SEQUENCES AND STAGES

-
- Signal text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure.
- Must identify features which order arguments in the text rather than events in time
i.e. function of **sequence, label, predict, and shift arguments**; making the discourse clear to readers or listeners.
- Provide framing information about the elements of the discourse

Includes:

Sequencing: Frame markers that are used to sequence parts of the text or to internally order an argument such as explicit additive relations.

Words to look for:

(in) chapter x, (in) part x (in) section x, (in) this section, finally, first, first First of all, firstly, last, lastly, listing (a, b, c) next, numbering, second, subsequently, then, third, to begin, to start with

Label: Frame makers that explicitly label text stages.

Words to look for:

All in all, at this point, at this stage, by far, in brief, in conclusion, in short, in sum. overall,so far, thus far, to conclude, to repeat, to sum up, on the whole, now,

Announce goals: Frame makers that announce discourse goals.

Words to look for:

In this chapter, in this part, in this section, aim, desire, focus, goal, intend to, intention, objective, purpose, seek to, want to, with to, would like to, I argue here, my purpose

Topic Shifts: Frame markers that indicate shifts in topic.

Words to look for:

Well, right, ok, now, let us return to, back to, digress, in regard to, move on , resume, return to revisit, shift to so, to look more closely, turn to with regards to:

3. Endophoric Markers—Refers to information in other parts of text

- Expressions that refer to other parts of the text
- Goal is to make additional content material salient and therefor available to the reader in aiding the recovery of the writer's meaning.
- Assist with comprehension and supporting arguments by referring to earlier or anticipating something yet to come.

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- Guide to reader through the discussion and help direct the reader to the writer's preferred interpretation of the discourse.

Words to look for:

In Chapters x, in part s, in section x, in the x chapter, in x part, in x section, in this part, in this section, example x, fig x, p, x, x above, x earlier,

4. Evidentials—refers to information in other texts

- Metalinguistic representations of an idea from another source.
- Guide the reader's interpretation.
- Establish an authorial command of the subject.
- Can involve hearsay, or attribution to a reliable source.
- Refers to a community based literature and provides important support for arguments.
- Distinguishes who is responsible for a position and while this may contribute to a persuasive goal it needs to be distinguished from the writer's stance toward the view.

Words to look for:

Date, name, cite, quote, reference number, name, according to,

5. Code Glosses—elaborates propositional meaning

- Supply additional information by rephrasing explaining or elaborating what has been said
- Goal is to ensure the reader is able to recover the writer's intended meaning
- Reflect the writers prediction about the reader's knowledge-base
- Introduced by the following phrases, parentheses can be used here

Words to look for:

(mm), as a matter of fact, called, defined as, e.g. for example, for instance, I mean, in fact, in other words, indeed, known as, namely, or, put another way, say, specifically, such as, that is to say, that means, via, which means,

Interactional Resources: involves the reader in the text (5 types: Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mention, Engagement Markers) These type of markers alert the reader to the writer's perspectives for both information and the readers themselves. They are the means that readers become involved and are drawn into engaging opportunities of the discourse. Interactional markers control the level of personality in the text. They help to focus the reader's attention, acknowledge uncertainties, and guide interpretations. They also help explain the positions of others, anticipate, acknowledge and challenge alternative or divergent information.

1. Hedges—withhold comment and open dialogue

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- Indicate the author's decision to recognize alternative viewpoints and voices
- Withhold complete commitment to a proposition
- Emphasize subjectivity of a position through opinion
- Create positions of negotiation
- Imply statements are passed on writer's reasoning
- Indicate writer's degree of confidence in position

Words to look for:

about, almost, apparently, appear, approximately, argue, around, assume, broadly, certain amount, certain extent, certain level, claim, could, couldn't, doubt, essentially, estimate, fairly, feel, felt, frequently, from my perspective, generally, guess, indicate, in general in most cases, in my opinion, in my view, likely, mainly, may, maybe, might, often, on the whole, ought, perhaps, plausible, possible probably, quite, rather, relatively, roughly, seems, should, sometimes, tend to, typical uncertain, unclear, unusual, would, wouldn't

2. Boosters—emphasize certainty and closes dialogue

- Strengthens and argument by emphasizing the need for the reader to draw same conclusion as writer
- Close down possible alternative by emphasizing certainty and narrowing diverse positions
- Create rapport with reader by taking a joint position and using a confident voice

Words to look for:

have, beyond doubt, certain, clear, conclusively, decidedly, definitely, demonstrate, doubtless, established evident, find, found, in fact, incontestable, incontrovertible, indeed, indisputable, know, known, must, never, no doubt, obvious, of course, prove, realize really, show, sure, think thought, truly, Indicate writer's attitude to propositions

3. Attitude Markers—expresses writer's attitude toward the propositional information

Convey surprise, agreement, importance frustration versus commenting on status of information i.e. truth, relevance, undeniable, without a doubt

Words to look for:

!, admittedly, agree, amaze, appropriate, astonish, correctly, curious, fortunate, hopeful, important, inappropriate, interesting, prefer, preferred, remarkable, shocked, striking, shocking, surprising, unbelievable, understandable, unexpected, unfortunate, unusual, usual

4. Self Mention—explicit reference to the writer

- Refers to explicit writer presence in the text

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- Measured by frequency of first person pronouns and possessive adjectives

Words to look for:

I, we, me, my, our, mine, us, the author, the author's the writer, the writer's

5. Engagement Marker—explicitly build relationship with reader

- Devices that directly address the reader by focusing their attention or to include them in the context
- Creates impression of authority, integrity, credibility by emphasis or dampening the reader in the text

Words to look for:

Add, allow, analyze, apply arrange, asses, assume, by the way, calculate, choose, classify, compare, connect, consider, consult, contrast, define, demonstrate, determine, do not develop employ, ensure estimate, evaluate, find, follow, go, have to imagine, incidentally, increase, input, insert, integrate, key, let us, look at, mark, measure, mount, must, need to , note, notice, observe, one's order, ought our, pay, picture, prepare, recall, recover, refer, regard, remember, remove, review, see, select, set, should show, suppose, state, take, think about, turn, us (inclusive)