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THE ROLE OF EXPLICIT INTERACTIVE METADISCOURSE MARKERS' INSTRUCTION IN IRANIAN EAP LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract. This research was conducted to investigate the role that explicit instruction of interactive metadiscourse markers plays in Iranian EAP learners' reading comprehension performance. To this end, 36 students of business management in intermediate level of English language proficiency, both male and female, were asked to participate in this study. They, subsequently, were divided into two groups of equal size, that is, control and experimental. Prior to presenting the treatment to the experimental group, all the participants were given a reading comprehension test. Then, the learners in the experimental group were explicitly taught interactive

metadiscourse markers in allocated sessions. Meanwhile, students in the control group of the study were taught through the typical method of the university. Afterward, the students of both groups were given the previously used reading comprehension test again. Statistical analyses of the t-test revealed that those in the experimental group outperformed significantly in the post-test phase of the study ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be inferred that explicit instruction of interactive metadiscourse markers has the outstanding beneficial role in EAP learners' reading comprehension.

Keywords: *interactive metadiscourse markers, reading comprehension, EAP learners, explicit instruction.*

Фаталакі Джавад Ахмаді, Аміні Егзан, Мірзаї Мейсам. Роль експліцитного навчання інтерактивних метадискурсивних маркерів у розумінні читаного тексту студентами, які навчаються за програмою «англійська для академічних цілей».

Анотація. У статті автори вивчають вплив експліцитного навчання інтерактивних метадискурсивних маркерів на ступінь розуміння читаного тексту іранськими студентами, які навчаються за програмою «англійська для академічних цілей». У дослідженні взяли участь 36 студентів жіночої й чоловічої статі спеціальності «діловий менеджмент» із проміжним рівнем знання англійської, які були поділені на дві однакові групи – експериментальну й контрольну. До початку експерименту всі учасники пройшли тест на ступінь розуміння під час читання. Після цього студенти експериментальної групи пройшли впродовж 10 занять інтенсивне експліцитне навчання інтерактивних метадискурсивних маркерів. Студенти контрольної групи в цей час мали звичайне навчання в університеті. Наприкінці навчання обидві групи студентів знову пройшли той самий попередній тест на ступінь розуміння під час читання. Як засвідчили статистичні дані t-тесту Стьюдента, респонденти експериментальної групи суттєво покращили свої знання за період навчання ($p < 0.01$). Автори дійшли висновку, що експліцитне навчання інтерактивних метадискурсивних маркерів покращує рівень розуміння англомовного тексту під час читання.

Ключові слова: *інтерактивні метадискурсивні маркери, розуміння під час читання, студенти програми «англійська для академічних цілей», експліцитне навчання.*

Фаталакі Джавад Ахмаді, Аміні Егзан, Мірзаї Мейсам. Роль експліцитного навчання інтерактивних метадискурсивних маркерів у розумінні читаного тексту студентами, які навчаються за програмою «англійська для академічних цілей».

Анотація. В статье авторы изучают влияние эксплицитного обучения интерактивным метадискурсивным маркерам на степень понимания читаемого текста иранскими студентами, обучающимися по программе «английский в учебных целях». В исследовании приняли участие 36 студентов женского и мужского пола специальности «деловой менеджмент» с промежуточным уровнем знания английского, которые были разделены на две одинаковые группы - экспериментальную и контрольную. До начала эксперимента все участники прошли тест на степень понимания во время чтения. После этого студенты экспериментальной группы прошли в течение 10 занятий интенсивное эксплицитное обучение интерактивным метадискурсивным маркерам. Студенты контрольной группы в это время проходили обычное обучение в университете. В конце обучения обе группы студентов снова прошли тот же предварительный тест на степень понимания во время чтения. Как показали статистические данные t-теста Стьюдента, респонденты экспериментальной группы существенно улучшили свои знания за период обучения ($p < 0.01$). Авторы пришли к выводу, что эксплицитное обучение интерактивным метадискурсивным маркерам улучшает уровень понимания англоязычного текста во время чтения.

Ключевые слова: *интерактивные метадискурсивные маркеры, понимание при чтении, студенты программы «английский для академических целей», эксплицитное обучение.*

Introduction

Motivating students to read as much as possible, teachers can improve students' speed, and fluency which, in turn, will lead to better comprehension of materials on the part of learners. EAP students' familiarities with different types of texts and their elements will have beneficial effect on their performances in reading or even writing tasks. Some of these elements meanings are transparent on the surface level and within the boundaries of sentences, while there are other elements which have deepened meanings and necessitate bigger chunks of discourse for the real comprehension. Therefore, better understanding of the texts' elements needs different processes in the mind of the reader. Moreover, these processes are in a parallel order rather than linear one (i.e., top-down and bottom-up processing). One of the elements which plays the significant role in imparting the meaning of the texts is metadiscourse markers knowledge. Camiciottoli (2003) claimed that metadiscourse markers instruction can be very much influential in ESP courses where it plays the role of appetizer and facilitator. She went as far as to say that scarcity of studies within the realm of metadiscourse markers did focus thoroughly on the explicit instruction of such elements in ESP/EAP courses. Nonetheless, Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) investigated the role of explicit instruction in internalization of metadiscourse markers knowledge in written tasks of EFL learners. They also broadened the border of their study by considering all proficiency levels to see whether the higher proficiency in English language engenders better knowledge of metadiscourse features. The result, however, showed those in intermediate level of proficiency are apt to learn metadiscourse features effectively.

In this study, the purpose is to investigate the effect of teaching interactive metadiscourse markers explicitly on EAP learners' reading comprehension to confirm whether such explicit instructions will lead to significantly different result or just simple exposures to such features without awareness bring about such results. These instructions are administered on students By the use of Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse markers and Ann's (2011) model of metadiscourse teaching methodology which has some differentiated features leading to more cognitive load on students' perception of such features' use through awareness raising activities.

Theoretical background

The metadiscourse was first coined by Harris (1959) to indicate the relationship between the writers and readers and to bridge the gap to guide receivers of written texts with varieties of genres (cited in Hyland,2005).Later, this concept was developed by the different researchers' contribution which made it more comprehensive in theory and practice (i.e. Crismore 1989; Vande Kopple 1985; Williams 1981).

Metadiscourse in its simplistic view was regarded as 'discourse about discourse' or 'talk about talk'. However, allocation of any meaning or definition should be accompanied with real identification of infrastructural components of metadiscourse to, inductively, shape and characterize the holistic view of metadiscourse. Hyland (2000) meticulously defined metadiscourse as a concept which "discusses those aspects of the text which explicitly refer to the organization

of the discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader" (Hyland 2000:109). Metadiscourse is also a reminder to show that communication serves several purposes more than its transactional role to transfer knowledge and information within the construct of the texts. In other words, texts are shaped and have the role to shape the ideologies, attitudes, assumptions and so forth.

Metadiscourse makes textual and interpersonal relations in different texts enjoying diversity of tastes and opinions. Halliday (1976) contended that the interpersonal function is an identifier of the relationship between the addresser and addressee, that is, the role of the speaker and the role assigned to the listener (as cited in Tajeddin & Alemi 2012). Interpersonal markers are comprised of the two interactive and interactional dimensions (Hyland 2001). The former concerns the ways the writer seeks to accommodate his/her knowledge, interests, rhetorical expectations, and processing abilities while the latter concerns the ways the writer conducts interaction through intruding and commenting on his or her message.

There are several different models of Metadiscourse markers with different patterns to show the concept and classifications of metadiscourse markers (e.g., Crismore 1989; Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen 1993; Hyland 2004, 2005; Vande Kopple 1985; Williams 1981). Among these researchers, those who took interpersonal and interactional aspects of metadiscourse markers into account were more successful to adapt their pattern to the current research in this field.

Williams (1981) put different types of metadiscourse markers within three broaden categorizations:

- hedges
- sequencers
- topicalizers

Vande Kopple (1985) categorized metadiscourse markers under some headings as follows: "Connectives (first, therefore, but), Code Glosses (for example, i.e.), Illocutionary Markers (to conclude, frankly speaking), Narrators (according to), Attitude Markers (I find it surprising), and Commentary (Dear friend, you will find it surprising)., and included are Validity Markers, which are further subcategorized into Hedges (maybe, might, it is possible that) and Emphatics (it is true, certainly." (cited in Cheng & Steffens 1996:153)

Hyland (2005) classified metadiscourse markers into two broad categories which have been depicted in Table 1 by their subsets:

Table 1

Metadiscourse model according to Hyland (2005)

Category	Subcategory	Function	Examples
Interactive	1-Transitional	Indicates relations between main clauses	in addition, but, thus
	2-Frame markers	Discourse acts, stages and sequences	finally, my purpose
	3-Endorphic markers	Indicates information in other part of text	as noted above,

	4-Evidentials	Indicates information in other sources	Crawford states
	5-Code Glosses	Elaborates definitions of words or phrases	Namely, such as, e.g.
Interactional	1-Hedges	Withholds commitment and open dialogue	might, perhaps possible
	2-Boosters	Indicates certainty or close dialogue	in fact, definitely
	3-Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	arguably, unfortunately
	4-Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author	I, we, my, me, our
	5-Engagement markers	Explicitly builds relationship with reader	you can see that, note,

Reading Comprehension Studies in EFL Context

Table 2

Empirical studies of metadiscourse markers and reading comprehension

Author	Topic	Subjects/texts	Dependent measures	Results
Dastgoshadeh (2001)	The impact of MD use in texts on reading comprehension	High and low proficiency TEFL learners	Original and MD added reading passages	MD in modified texts helped students get the intended meaning more easily than in original texts
Daftary Fard (2002)	MD relation with the reading comprehension constructs	650 EFL students of varying reading abilities	Reading tests measuring reading constructs including MD construct	MD knowledge was shown to be a significant part of the multi dimensional reading skill model
Khorvash (2008)	MD awareness raising and reading comprehension	Four groups of intermediate EFL learners	Pre/post reading comprehension tests	Not all MD types affect reading comprehension

Jalilifar & Alipour (2007)	The impact of the presence of MD on reading comprehension	Three groups of similar language proficiency levels	Three versions of the same texts, original, modified, and unmodified MD free texts	Performances were similar on original and modified texts; positive influence of MD instruction
Parvaresh (2008)	The impact of proficiency level and MD presence in comprehending English and Persian texts	High and low level learners	English texts with MD present/ absent and their translated equivalents in Persian	Lower proficiency groups benefited more from the MD present Persian/English texts
Amiri (2007)	The impact of MD instruction on L2 writing	60 senior university EFL students writing 60 senior university EFL students Performance on pre/post	Performance on pre/post tests	Experimental group essays received significantly higher grades than those in control group

(Cited in Crismore & Abdollehzadeh, 2010, pp. 199–200)

Reading Comprehension in ESP/EAP. Following the skill-based syllabus, several studies within the realm of ESP and EAP were conducted to discuss the role of reading comprehension to shed more light on the better understanding of genres properties. For example, Dhieb-Henia (2003) investigated the role of metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension according to their genres. She concluded that these strategies are conducive when they are accompanied by instruction. In another study by Erfani, Iranmehr and Davari (2011), the role of visualization for ESP reading comprehension through applying mental image has been discussed. After implementation of such items, they claimed that ESP learners' familiarity with subject and overall theme of the texts can be enhanced by the use of visualization. This Study is also in line with the result of Hudson (2012) research which put more emphasis on the effective role of content knowledge on better retention of lexical and grammatical items in reading tasks.

Research Question and Hypothesis. Q. Does explicit instruction of interactive metadiscourse markers has any significant impact on EAP learners' reading comprehension? H0. Explicit instruction of interactive metadiscourse markers does not have any effect on EAP students' performance in reading comprehension.

Methods

Participants. A total of 36 undergraduate learners, who were majoring in business management at the University of Qom, were selected out of 67 students to be the participants of this study. All of these participants registered in an extracurricular English course in order to serve the purpose of this study. 22 of these participants were female (61.1%) and 14 were male (38%) aged from 20 to 33 (mean = 25.5). Due to the discrepancies among the students' level of proficiency, researchers selected, through purposive sampling, those who were in intermediate level of proficiency under their instructors' scrutiny who conducted the previous achievement tests.

Instrumentation. Reading comprehension tests: The texts used in this study were culled from different texts on the web which were, to some extent, related to learners' field of study. Two sets of questions were used in order to check participants' reading comprehension. One set of them was consisted of 4 true/false questions which were already designed by Parvaresh and Nemati (2008). The other set was consisted of 3 multiple-choice items which was designed and developed by the authors. Table 3 shows the relationship between the True/False questions and the text paragraphs.

Table 4 shows the relationship between the multiple-choice questions and the text paragraphs.

Table 3

The relationship between the True/False questions and the text paragraphs

Question number	Paragraph number
1	2
2	1
3	3
4	3

Table 4

The relationship between the Multiple-choice questions and the text paragraphs

Question number	Paragraph number
1	2
2	1
3	3

The study

Data collection procedure. For the purpose of this study, the participants were first divided into two groups, one control and the other experimental. The reading comprehension tests were first given to both control and experimental groups. This move shaped the pre-test of the current study. In the next move, while the learners in the control group were taught through the typical methods of pedagogical system, the students in the experimental group were taught using both Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse markers taxonomy and Ann's (2011) "Ten Ways to Teach Discourse Markers."

The experimental group received input on metadiscourse markers. That is, learners received exposure and rehearsal of twenty-five interactive metadiscourse markers during the class activities in which interactive metadiscourse markers were by-product of instruction.

Finally, after ten sessions of explicit instruction, the reading comprehension test, which was used in the pre-test, was once again administered to both control and experimental groups to check the experimental learners' achievement in terms of interactive metadiscourse markers knowledge. Using the SPSS 18 software, both groups' scores on the pre-test and post-test were compared to find the potential differences in the improvement of each group.

After collecting the data, the SPSS 18 software was used in order to compare the possible difference in learners' achievements in reading comprehension in both control and experimental groups. As it is shown in table 5, the mean scores of the control and experimental group in pre-test are 5.33 and 5.22, respectively. These amounts suggest the similarity between the groups. This shows that before conducting the research and presenting the treatment, the groups' abilities in reading comprehension were equal.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics in the pre-test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Control	18	5.33	.68
Experimental	18	5.22	.80

Next, the researchers calculated the mean score and standard deviation of the post-test. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics in the post-test. The mean score of the post-test of the control group was 5.77 which showed an insignificant increase of 0.44. The mean score of the post-test of the experimental group which was 7.66, on the other hand, compared to their pre-test showed an increase of 2.44. The greater increase in experimental group than that of control group can be resulted from the treatment.

Table 6

Descriptive statistics in the post-test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Control	18	5.77	.73
Experiment	18	7.66	1.02

After the calculation of the Means and SD in the pre-test phase of the study, researchers analyzed the probable significant difference between experimental group and the control one in pre-test. The result of t-test in the pre-test is depicted in table 7 as follows:

Table 7

The T-Test for the pre-test Phase

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-observed
G.E	18	5.22	0.80	-0.444
G.C	18	5.33	0.68	
P <0.01		d.f.=34		t-critical=2.72

In order to test the null hypothesis, the observed value on the difference between the two means, i.e. the independent sample t-test, was calculated and compared with the critical value to check whether the scores that the learners in experimental group obtained in the post-test differed significantly from that of the control group or not. The statistical results are shown in table 8:

Table 8

The T-Test for the post-test Phase

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-observed
G.E	18	7.66	1.02	6.393
G.C	18	5.77	0.73	
P <0.01		d.f.=34		t-critical=2.72

According to the above table, the t-critical value corresponding to 34 degrees of freedom at the 0.01 level of significance is almost 2.72. T-observed value equals 6.393, is higher than the t-critical value, this, in turn, imply that the null hypothesis is rejected (t-observed= 6.393 > t-critical=2.72). In other words, it shows that the treatment was effective enough to make a significant difference between the experimental and the control group.

Results and discussion

In this study the researchers attempted to explore the potential positive or negative effect of explicit instruction of interactive metadiscourse markers on EAP learners' reading comprehension. According to the findings of the current study, it can be inferred that explicit instruction of interactive metadiscourse markers is significantly beneficial for Iranian EAP learners' reading comprehension. This study supports Dastjerdi and Shirzad's (2010) claim concerning the role that explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers plays in better writing performance which

works, hand in hand, with reading comprehension. Therefore, the result of current study, in line Dastjerdi and Shirzad's (2010), strengthens the stabilization of consideration for teaching metadiscourse markers in EAP or even EFL contexts. Discussing such an upshot in ESP, this investigation is also in line with Davaei and Karbalaee's (2013) study in which interpersonal metadiscourse markers' instruction has considered to be effective on Iranian ESP learners' composition writing. Camiciottoli (2003) has mentioned several times through her paper that awareness raising can be very much influential on ESP learners reading comprehension. Her research was a tantalizer for us, researchers in the present study, to gauge the extent to which we, as researchers, can rely on the role that awareness raising plays for the better comprehension of special features of texts.

Another point be mentioned, here, is that the mean score of the post-test of the participants in the control group increased negligibly, i.e. 0.44. In relation to this increase, two reasons can be pointed. The first reason can be the normal improvement in the reading comprehension of the control group's learners after being taught for 10 sessions through the typical method of pedagogical system. The second reason can be the testing effect of the post-test. Although researchers focused on some specific kinds of interactive metadiscourse markers which had higher frequency of use among other different subsets of interactive metadiscourse markers, the overall performance of the students were outstanding to confront with unexpected conditions. That is, students' awareness engendered greater opportunity to understand those metadiscourse elements which weren't instructed in the allocated session. Hence, awareness raising has the beneficial role in reinforcing senses of autonomy and this autonomy, consequently, motivates students to use clues which are provided through contextual features to resolve and decipher constituents meanings intrasententially and intersententially.

Conclusions and limitations

The result of this is susceptible of lacking enough evidence to prove its generalizability to other fields due to the number of participants and their major. In this sense, extrapolation of the result of this study may be credible and valid for those fields which necessitate greater exposure to the foreign languages. For instance, the result of implementing such methodology on other field such as, Persian language and literature or even theology may not be very much consistent with the upshot gained in the current study due to the role of the linguistic elements and culture, respectively. In one sense, admitting that focus on one broad category of metadiscourse markers seems insufficient for the overall judgment about such features, researchers tried to narrow down the scope of the study to draw a detailed and exclusive judgment on some features which entangle students during the process of the reading tasks. However, conducting any research which can consider and encompasses all different metadiscourse features is welcome. This study didn't also consider the role of subset of the interactive metadiscourse markers to see whether which one enjoy higher proportion among the other elements.

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