

# Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Computer-Mediated British Parliamentary Debate: A Discourse Analysis

**DAVID B. DICHOSO**

SDO- Quirino, Cabarroguis National School of Arts and Trades

**CONCHITA MALENAB- TEMPORAL**

Cagayan State University

**EDDIE L. GALUTAN EDD**

SDO Quirino- Education Program Supervisor

*Abstract* — The computer-mediated British parliamentary debate participated in by L2 students from a TechVoc school, widened the scope of discourse analysis. This present study concentrated on interactional metadiscourse markers using AntConc to determine the frequency of the markers, and NVivo12 for the thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated that interactional discourse markers are crucial on the formation of argumentative discourse, for these markers develop connections between the speaker and the audience. The results indicated the current reality of learners' communication abilities, notably in rebuttal and refutation. Based on the findings, the most frequent subcategory of interactional markers used in the computer-mediated British parliamentary debate is Engagement markers, followed by Self-mentions, Hedges, Attitude markers, and Boosters. The use of interactional metadiscourse in computer-mediated debate exhibits prominence of engagement markers 'we' and 'our'. They draw the audience into the argument. Self-mentions in facts or statements show speakers' confidence. The students' frequent use of hedges indicates their doubt about their arguments. In computer-mediated debates, attitude markers and boosters should be emphasized since they show the debaters' appealing attitude and establish claim concreteness. In conclusion, teachers are advised to include Metadiscourse markers in subjects like English for Academic and Special Purposes and other English subjects, focusing on their categories and functions. In addition, learners need to be reminded to use fewer hedges in argumentative discourse. Teachers are further advised to teach the use of boosters and engagement markers to appeal to audience using shared knowledge.

*Keywords* — *Interactional metadiscourse markers, discourse analysis, British parliamentary debate, English as Second Language, thematic analysis*

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## I. Introduction

The nature of the communication process necessitates the need to study discourse, its components, purpose, and context. Debate is one of the interesting fields in discourse, and its origin can be traced back to the dialectic method of Plato and Hegel. Learning to engage in rebuttal and refutation in an argumentative discourse develops critical thinking and sound reasoning. For a

speaker to be competent in argumentative discourse, there is a need to be aware of rhetorical selections, specifically metadiscourse markers that enable debaters to establish more persuasive arguments, draw the listeners' interest, and create informed judgments. Moreover, a debate is also a specialized activity in English learning that increases the ESL (English as Second Language) learners' willingness to communicate (Shamsudin, Othman, Jahedi, & Aralas, 2017).

A plethora of research confirmed that metadiscourse is a key element in argumentative and persuasive discourse (Hyland, 2005; Saidi, & Karami, 2021; Ngai, & Sing, 2020). Saidi & Karami (2021) define interactional metadiscourse markers as devices that empower authors to manage their interactions with the audience. Hyland (1999) stresses that metadiscourse markers are essential in argumentative discourse for they clarify the claims and its receiver of the message engage in an argument. Hyland (2000) also explains that metadiscourse involves interpersonal resources used to establish a discourse or the writer's attitude towards its content or the reader. Furthermore, according to Ngai & Singh (2020), linguistic markers in the form of metadiscourse are used to assert a position or claim, increasing a writer's credibility. A study on interactional markers of review articles conducted by Saidi & Karami (2021) revealed that self-mentions were the prevalent interactional metadiscourse markers trailed by hedges, boosters, and engagement attitude markers. In the same vein, based on a comparative study by Papangkorn & Phoocharoensil (2021), results exposed that stance and engagement interactional markers are the dominant metadiscourse markers used by Thai in argumentative essays.

In another bracket, Ketcham (1917) defines argumentation as a form of written or spoken discourse that aims to persuade or influence others. MacEwan (1898) explained that argumentation includes the method of proving and disproving a proposition to establish truth, correct errors, and trigger a new belief. Nussbaum (2021) asserts that collaborative argumentation, such as competitive debates in schools, is an essential social practice to develop oral competence and conceptual understanding. Najafi, Motaghi, Nasrabadi, & Heshi (2016) emphasized the effectiveness of debate as a teaching method to enhance learners' social skills in the learning process. Forbes and Cordella (1999) explained that argumentative discourse is a speech activity where participants express dissenting opinions using linguistic strategies in a framework of turn-taking. In a study conducted by Temporal (2018), results revealed that ESL learners' prevalent performative utterances in classroom contexts are those for explaining, asking questions, confirming, giving emphasis, and citing examples. Based on the Toulmin Argument of Stephen Edelson Toulmin (1958) a British philosopher, rebuttal in argumentation is an opportunity for a debater to address the opposing views. The debater can use a rebuttal to obstruct counterarguments, making the original argument stronger ([owl.excelsior.edu](http://owl.excelsior.edu)). Despite these varying definitions, the common idea is that persuading an audience is the goal of argumentative discourse (Mshvenieradze, 2013). Moreover, Eckstein & Bartanen (2015) claim that British Parliamentary Debate (BP) is gaining popularity among millennials for it offers two distinct advantages: its accessible format, amenable to the demands of busy students, and (b) its conferment of global argumentation skills required to be competitive in a globalized society. Furthermore, Barker

(2006) highlights the importance of the British Parliamentary Debate to provide opportunities for learners to collaborate and cooperate in the learning process.

Conversely, according to Matthiessen and Halliday (2009), one of the three functions of language is the textual function. This metafunction of language focuses on constructing text and building up sequences of discourse, organizing the discursive flow, and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along. Turner (2020) defines discourse as written, verbal and non-verbal communication. He also claims that it includes more comprehensive social concepts that underpin what language means and how it changes. Discourse Analysis (DA) is one of the effective approaches in language education that aims to understand the elements of discourse, such as its purpose, procedures, and findings. This approach is a critical examination of concepts in a spoken or written discourse (Francesci, 2013; Turner, 2020). Discourse analysis encompasses reviewing and analyzing the functions of language (Brown & Yule, 1983; Hodges, Kuuper, & Reeves, 2008). It accentuates the contextual meaning of language (Luo, 2020). Furthermore, it also evaluates the different patterns of people's utterances when involved in various social activities (Jorgensen & Philipps, 2002; Luo, 2020). According to Hodges et al. (2008), discourse analysis also focuses on the functions of language in action and themes involved in the discourse. In the same vein, Braun and Clarke (2006) developed the Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyze qualitative data. It is practically used for a set of texts, including interviews or transcripts. Using this technique, researchers scrutinize the data thoroughly to identify common themes — recurring topics, concepts, and meaning patterns. The approach consists of six steps: familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. Ultimately, discourse analysis, according to Williams (2014), is a time-consuming study, yet the results will be fulfilling.

The COVID19 pandemic opened opportunities for teachers to be adaptive and innovative in engaging learners in purposeful learning experiences (Benito, Yenisey, Khanna, Masis, Monge, Tugtan, Araya, & Vig, 2021; Hendriksen, Garssen, Bijlsma, Engels, Bruce, & Verster, 2021; Karakaya, Adigüzel, Üçüncü, Çimen, & Yilmaz, 2021; Yundayani, Abdullah, Tantan Tandiana, & Sutrisno, 2021; Cao, Chen, Liu, & Shi, 2021). Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is a ubiquitous tool to ensure learning continuity in every academic institution (Liu & Ginther, 2002; Babni, 2009). Computer-mediated discourse is communication between individuals through wireless technologies and computer networks; the message is produced by typing, speaking, and video-conference platforms (Palacio, & Gustilo, 2016; Zhu, Bonk, & Herring, 2019). Hodgkinson-Williams, & Mostert (2005) claim that computer-mediated communication in schools presents openings for learners to engage online learning process irrespective of their address. Today, CMC is maximized in learners' learning experiences, as well as in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes.

Although a myriad of research in ESL deal with structural analysis of written argumentative discourse, little is documented on interactional metadiscourse markers used in computer-mediated discourse. Thus, this present study aims to address the literature gap in

discourse analysis on interactional metadiscourse markers used in a computer-mediated British parliamentary debate.

#### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The study aims to describe prevalent interactional metadiscourse markers, and the themes revealed from the transcribed discourse of eleventh-grade students' computer-mediated British parliamentary debate. Specifically, it identifies the frequency of the different interactional metadiscourse markers, and describe the generated themes raised by the opposing teams in their argumentation.

## II. Methodology

### Research Design

The study employed the qualitative research approach by Creswell & Creswell (2018). Qualitative research aims to reconnoiter and understand individuals' responses to a human or social problem, and it involves inquiries and procedures from data collected in the participant's setting. Data analysis in this design inductively presents particulars to general themes, and it is the researcher's role to craft interpretations based on the meaning of the data gathered. In the conduct of this study, qualitative research design describes the functions of interactional Metadiscourse markers from the generated themes of the students' computer-mediated British parliamentary debate.

### Source of Data

This study's results come from a transcribed computer-mediated British parliamentary debate undertaken by eleventh-grade students at a technical-vocational secondary school. The debate format is selected to optimize the contestants' representation of the eight grade 11 sections. The researcher personally transcribed the recorded video, which was subsequently reviewed by another English teacher and confirmed by the school's Master teacher. The proposition of the debate is 'People should be legally required to get vaccines.' The proposition is selected based on its relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic and its timeliness. The debate activity is anchored from the learning competency which aims to enable the learners to demonstrate effective use of communicative strategy in a variety of speech situations (EN11/12OC-IIab-22.1-22.6).

### Theoretical Framework

Eleventh-grade students' computer-mediated British parliamentary discussion is analyzed from two perspectives. The foundation of this research is Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. It has two categories: interactive and interactional. This study concentrated on interactional metadiscourse markers used by the participants. This category of metadiscourse markers involves boosters, hedges, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers.

Hyland (2005) explains that hedges moderate the authors' degree of certainty, and boosters tell their tendency to highlight particular propositions. Moreover, attitude markers allow the authors or speakers to insert their appraisal of the ideas. In addition, engagement markers are used to create a relationship with the readers or listeners, and self-mentions are used to value one's status as an authorial presence in the discourse.

**Table 1.** Hyland's Interactional Metadiscourse Model (2005)

Category	Function	Examples
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	May; might; could; would; perhaps; some; possible
Booster	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue	In fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	Emphasize writer's attitude to a proposition	Should; have to; agree; surprisingly; unfortunately
Engagement markers	Explicitly refer to or build a relationship with reader	Consider; note; you can see that; our; We (inclusive)
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I; we (exclusive); my

Thematic analysis was used to understand the underpinning themes from the students' rebuttal and refutation. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017, claim that Thematic Analysis is the foundation of qualitative research for it develops core skills in performing the qualitative analysis. This method identifies, analyzes, organizes, describes, and reports themes from a gathered data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Align to this, King (2004) asserts that thematic analysis is a useful method for evaluating the participants' perspectives, highlighting prevalence and differences regarding themes, and generating unanticipated insights.

### Data Analysis

Firstly, the transcribed British parliamentary debate of the eleventh graders underwent computational linguistics using Antconc software designed by Anthony (2016), to identify the frequency of Hyland's (2005) classification of interactional metadiscourse markers. The frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers of each category was recorded, and an English teacher reviewed the interactional metadiscourse markers in the source of data to establish the reliability of the frequency.

Secondly, to establish the trustworthiness of the thematic analysis of the students' rebuttal and refutation, the researcher followed the method designed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The practical and effective procedure suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) includes 6 Phases: Familiarizing yourself with your data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing of themes; defining and naming themes, and producing a report. To analyze the transcribed data, NViVO12 was used to compute the percentage of the generated themes from the computer-mediated British parliamentary debate of the eleventh-graders.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### Results

**Table 2.** *Frequency of Interactional Metadiscourse markers*

Interactional Metadiscourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Hedges	32	20.16
Boosters	5	3.14
Attitude markers	18	11.32
Engagement markers	54	33.96
Self-mentions	50	31.45
Total	159	100

*Table 2.* shows that the most frequent subcategory of interactional markers used in the computer-mediated British parliamentary debate is Engagement markers with 33.96%, followed by Self-mentions 31.45%, Hedges, 20.16%, Attitude markers at 11.32%, and Boosters 3.14%.

**Table 3.** *Generated Themes*

Themes	Themes Description	References/ Codes	Percentage
1. Advantages of Vaccination	social-economic sustainability, public protection, and education security	AV 1-14	2.10%
2. Effects of COVID-19	altered lifestyle, impacted economy, and education	EC 1-15	3.65%
3. Government's intervention to mitigate COVID	implementation of safety protocols, realignment, and reprogramming of budget	GI 1- 10	1.90%
4. Issues on mandatory vaccination	vaccine as a requirement for employment, vaccine anxiety, refusal to be vaccinated is a human right	IM 1- 14	4.22%
5. Rebut statements	to prove it is untrue by presenting a different point of view	RB 1- 12	3.03%
6. Refute statements	to provide evidence to attest it is untrue	RF1- 10	2.75%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>17.65%</b>

**Table 3.** shows that the predominant theme from the computer-mediated British parliamentary debate is the Issues on mandatory vaccination with 4.22%, followed by the Effects of COVID-19 3.65%, Rebut statements 3.03%, Refute statements 2.75%, Advantages of Vaccination 2.10%, and Government’s intervention to mitigate COVID 1.90%.

## Discussion

Interactional markers or indicators focus on the participants’ interactions and attempt to convey the speaker's identity and a tone compatible with the norms (Hyland 2005). This section explores the interactional metadiscourse markers utilized in the arguments constructed from the generated themes, together with excerpts from the transcribed British parliamentary debate.

### Engagement markers

Based on Table 2. Engagement markers are revealed as the most prevalent subcategory of Interactional metadiscourse markers with 33.96%. Engagement markers denote the representation or inclusion of a speaker or a writer in the context of discourse. These markers construct a relationship or sense of belongingness between the sender and receiver of a message. According to Hyland (2005), engagement markers are employed to appeal to readers by bringing them into agreement with themselves through shared knowledge. This is accomplished by establishing clear signals that urge listeners to recognize something as familiar or accepted.

As evident in the following extracts, the government side used engagement markers ‘We’ and ‘our’ to rebut and refute the arguments of the opposition on the mandatory legalization of vaccination against COVID-19. Extract EC-2 emphasized a shared knowledge that the pandemic affected human behavior, the economy, and education. The predominance of engagement markers or indicators in argumentative discourse such as debates, highlights the importance of messages appealing to listeners' shared knowledge.

Code	Extract
RF- 1	<i>“...as mentioned by Secretary Duque, it could greatly contribute to the gradual opening of restrictions at the same time the increased mobility so that we can open up <b>our</b> economy.</i>
EC- 2	<i>“The covid-19 pandemic has changed the world due to the nature of the virus, particularly how <b>we</b> witness it has altered human behaviors, relations, lifestyles and had profound impacts on the economy, political-cultural landscape of society and most especially the education process across the world.”</i>
RB- 1	<i>“...to be fully privileged of human rights <b>we</b> should acquire universal protection against the covid-19 global pandemic”</i>

Moreover, according to Sahragard & Yazdanpanahi (2017), one way to include the readers into the critical points is by using Reader pronouns as engagement markers; and according to them, ‘we’ and ‘our’ are the most frequently used in academic writing. As a result of this present study, the prominence of engagement markers ‘we’ and ‘our’ in the computer-mediated British parliamentary debate of grade 11 students supports Sahragard & Yazdanpanahi's claim; hence it is parallel to argumentative discourse.

### Self-mentions

Argumentative discourse conveys opposing views that carries representation of a writer or speaker. Self-mentions suggest the extent of the author's presence in terms of first-person pronouns and possessives. As is shown in the first excerpt AV-2, the term “we” suggests an exclusive government claim emphasizing that the primary benefit of vaccination is the preservation of public health. In extract RB-12, the usage of the pronoun “I” disproves the forced vaccination on the grounds that the effectiveness of vaccinations is questionable. Furthermore, extract RB-3 employed the pronoun “I” to convey personal opposition to mandatory vaccination.

Code	Extract
AV- 2	<i>“We stand firmly to the fact that these vaccines are essential under the public health necessity.”</i>
RB-12	<i>“I believe in old vaccine supremacy but now it’s quite hard for me to believe because it gives me fear not only for today, but also to my future health.”</i>
RB- 3	<i>“...I oppose if everything is mandatory.”</i>

In this research, the frequency of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘I’ indicates the debaters' confidence in presenting their arguments to counter and disprove those of their opponents. In the same line, Alyousef and Alotaibi (2019) found that the most common realizations linked with the usage of self-mention devices were declaring facts or claims.

### Hedges

Sometimes, hedges are referred to as ‘caution language’ signals. According to Hyland (2005), the use of hedges reveals the author's reluctance to categorize propositional truths. In order to differentiate between facts and claims, it is necessary to use caution in argumentative discourse. Hedging is the use of linguistic techniques to indicate doubt or uncertainty with courtesy and abstractness.

Based on Table 2, Hedges is the third most common interactional metadiscourse marker utilized by students in their discourse, accounting for 20.16%. This study's findings contrast those



of Yoon (2021), who found that EFL students underuse hedges and overuse reader pronouns in their argumentative writing.

The usage of the word 'may' in the following extracts plainly suggests that the debaters' statements are questionable, notably on the argument that aged and terminally sick people are at danger when given the COVID vaccination. The term "may" was included in the second excerpt to indicate ambiguity over the duration of the swelling after immunization. On the third passage, an opposition member asserted that mandatory vaccination may violate a human right by using Article 11 section 2 of the constitution.

Code	Extract
IM- 7	<i>“The Norway government has warned that Corona Virus Vaccine <b>may</b> be too risky for the old and terminally ill.”</i>
IM- 8	<i>“...swelling at the injection site which <b>may</b> last a few hours.”</i>
IM- 11	<i>“Filipinos have the constitutional right to refuse the vaccine as it <b>may</b> violate Section 11 Article 2 of the 1987 constitution...”</i>

Using the word 'may' before stating a fact or piece of evidence in a discussion weakens the assertion since it conveys doubt. When it comes to rebuttal and refutation, debaters are aggressive when underlining points. Thus, excerpt IM-11 confirms Buddhima Karunarathna's (2020) assertion that beginner L2 learners see hedges as difficult literary devices to use, given that hedges may express many meanings concurrently. In summary, hedges should be used less in argumentative discourse.

### **Attitude markers**

Attitude markers as Interactional metadiscourse markers express appraisal of propositional information. To reinforce an argument, we employ attitude indicators as a mitigating factor. The purpose of these markers is to express the writer's attitude and behavior toward a conceptual content. In the research conducted by Mahmood et al. (2017), it was observed that Pakistani learners employ attitude markers less often. In the same way, Table 2 shows that the people who took part in this debate used attitude markers less with only 11.32%.

As shown in the following extracts, the attitude markers used are ‘should’, ‘agree’, and ‘have to’ which demonstrate the compelling attitude of the debaters on the mandatory vaccination. The extracts RB-1 and RB-10 stress that vaccination is the key to achieve universal protection against COVID-19. Moreover, RB -10 highlight that vaccination is the key to ensure the safety of learners and teachers for the re-opening of face-to-face classes. Mahmood et al. (2017) suggest that ESL teachers need to teach the use of attitude markers to improve the learners’ outcomes in argumentative discourse.

Code	Extract
RB- 1	<i>“...to be fully privileged of human rights we <b>should</b> acquire universal protection against the covid-19 global pandemic...”</i>
RB- 5	<i>“Therefore, we <b>should agree</b> for the implementation for having a face-to-face classes, in doing so let us be sure that the everyone <b>should</b> be protected from the covid-19 virus and its transmission from one another...”</i>
RB -10	<i>“...we <b>have to</b> be vaccinated to protect ourselves from the said virus.”</i>

### Boosters

Boosters as interactional markers, according to Hyland (2005), transmit clarity and enhance an argument. However, in this research, based on Table 2, only 3.14 percent of the transcribed debate relates to boosters, which is much less than Hedges, which equates to 20.16 %. Moreover, of the subcategories of Interactional metadiscourse markers, Table 2 also indicates that boosters are the least frequently used in the computer-mediated debate.

Boosters according to Recski (2005) stress certainties in a discourse. In addition, Mokhtar et al. (2021) assert that boosters help people to communicate their opinions and solidarity with the audience, and they observed that boosters are less often utilized in academic discourse. Thus, according to the findings of this present study on Boosters as interactional discourse markers, students need to be taught on how to employ boosters in academic writing as well as in argumentative speech.

Code	Extract
AV- 5	<i>“<b>The fact</b> that increasing investments of vaccination can potentially help people...”</i>
AV- 2	<i>“We stand firmly to <b>the fact</b> that these vaccines are essential under the public health necessity.”</i>
RF- 9	<i>“...forcing a person to be vaccinated against his or her will is a <b>clear</b> violation of this right.”</i>

In extracts AV-5 and AV-2, the use of the phrase "the fact" demonstrates the speakers' conviction on the benefits of mandatory COVID-19 vaccination. In addition, RF-9 refutes the policy, and the word "clear" strengthens the focus on the right of every person to oppose obligatory vaccination.

#### IV. Conclusion

The computer-mediated British parliamentary debate stands as an affirmation on the crucial role that interactional discourse markers play in the formation of argumentative discourse and the establishment of connections between the speaker and the audience. Notably, students' communication abilities are demonstrated in their rebuttal and refutation. Their interactional discourse is generally marked at most through Engagement markers with 33.96%, followed by Self-mentions 31.45%, Hedges, 20.16%, Attitude markers at 11.32%, and Boosters 3.14%. The use of interactional metadiscourse in computer-mediated debate exhibits prominence of engagement markers 'we' and 'our'. They draw the audience into the argument. Self-mentions in facts or statements show speakers' confidence. The students' frequent use of hedges indicates their doubt about their arguments. In computer-mediated debates, attitude markers and boosters should be emphasized since they show the debaters' appealing attitude and establish claim concreteness. In conclusion, teachers are advised to include Metadiscourse markers in subjects like English for Academic and Special Purposes and other English subjects, focusing on their categories and functions. In addition, learners need to be reminded to use fewer hedges in argumentative discourse. Teachers are further advised to teach the use of boosters and engagement markers to appeal to audience using shared knowledge.

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