BOOK REVIEW
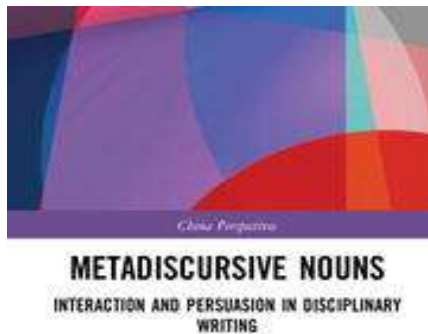
NAVIGATING THE DANCE OF DISCOURSE: A RIVETING EXPLORATION OF METADISCURSIVE NOUNS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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The fabric of academic prose is densely interwoven with nouns, acting as conduits through which authors encapsulate complex processes and actions into tangible entities (Biber et al., 1999). This transformation is not merely a linguistic convenience but a cognitive necessity, facilitating the systematic organization and communication of knowledge (Halliday, 2004; Hyland & Jiang, 2022). The exploration of such nouns, particularly in the realm of metadiscourse, is a pioneering endeavor, as it fills a significant gap in academic research, emphasizing the need to understand the intricate relationship between language and cognition in academic discourse. Despite the central role nouns play, exploration in academic discourse has largely been tethered to their ideational function, with scant attention towards their interactional potential in textual interaction. However, the tide is beginning to turn with the advent of Feng (Kevin) Jiang's illuminating volume *Metadiscursive nouns: Interaction and persuasion in disciplinary writing*, which offers an unprecedented deep dive into this overlooked area. This seminal book carves out a new niche by dissecting the rhetorical anatomy of metadiscursive nouns such as *fact* and *belief*, unearthing their capacity to guide readers through a text, articulate the writer's stance, and engage the audience in disciplinary writing.

The China Perspectives series edited by Routledge has been enriched with a publication that delves deep into the detailed world of metadiscourse, a realm that Ken Hyland has extensively explored in his scholarly pursuits (Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Jiang, 2022). This work is not just an academic exploration; it serves as a conduit

between Chinese intellectual thought and the global scholarly community. Venturing through this publication is like delving into a realm where metadiscourse extends beyond mere linguistic structures, becoming a vibrant dance of communication between authors and their readers. The evolution of metadiscourse, from a linguistic tool to a robust academic concept, is a testament to the ever-evolving landscape of academic writing. It underscores the dynamic nature of academic discourse and its adaptability to changing scholarly needs. Drawing inspiration from Hyland's foundational model, which accentuates both the interactive and interactional facets of metadiscourse, Jiang delves into the elaborate roles of metadiscursive nouns in academic prose. The *interactive* dimension encapsulates the author's methodology in structuring content and ensuring logical flow, while *interactional* underscores the author's intent in presenting their viewpoint and forging a connection with their readers (Hyland & Jiang, 2022).

Introduced with a thought-provoking foreword by Ken Hyland, the book meticulously adopts the IMRD (Introduction-Methods-Results-Discussion) structure across its eight chapters. While each chapter concludes with insightful supplementary reading suggestions, the initial two chapters are particularly noteworthy. They not only lay a foundational understanding of the evolution and significance of metadiscursive nouns but also set a critical context for the in-depth analyses that ensue.

Chapter 1 portrays academic writing through a constructivist prism, depicting it as a dialogue between the writer and the reader. It accentuates the pivotal role of metadiscursive nouns in this dialogue, outlining the study's primary objectives and research queries. This dialogic approach to academic writing underscores the dynamic essence of scholarly discourse, where both the writer and the reader actively participate in meaning construction. While existing literature has delved into concepts like stance, evaluation, and engagement within this constructivist framework, Jiang posits that there remains an uncharted territory concerning the linguistic instruments employed for interaction in academic writing.

Chapter 2 navigates the complex landscape of metadiscursive nouns, highlighting terms like *general nouns*, *shell nouns*, and *signaling nouns*. Through a historical lens, the chapter emphasizes the pressing need for refined definitions and classifications for these nouns. Moreover, it underscores the burgeoning demand for advanced methodologies to extract these nouns from textual datasets. This chapter acts as a linchpin, bridging historical insights with contemporary interpretations, and accentuating the evolving semantics of these terms in academic discourse.

In Chapter 3, Jiang provides an exhaustive exploration of metadiscursive nouns, elucidating their definition, distinctive attributes, lexico-grammatical patterns, and diverse functions. These nouns are uniquely characterized as markers that emphasize the discourse structure or the writer's interpretation, distinguishing themselves from other abstract nouns due to their deliberately ambiguous semantic essence. This demarcation is pivotal, highlighting the dynamic nature of metadiscursive nouns and their adaptability across varied contexts and objectives. Jiang opts for the term *metadiscursive nouns* to emphasize their crucial role in not just

structuring the discourse but also in conveying the author's stance and actively engaging the readers. The definition, selection criteria, and retrieval method of metadiscursive nouns presented in the book challenge the emerging views that metadiscourse itself is static and that the words and lemmas on the metadiscourse list are seen as inherently metadiscursive and decontextualized units (Mauranen, 1993). This chapter is a cornerstone of the book, addressing and clarifying the ambiguities and confusions surrounding these nouns, especially those introduced in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 details the data and methodology, explaining how the corpus was built and analyzed. Jiang created a 1.7-million-word corpus from 160 research articles across eight diverse disciplines, ensuring equal representation from each. This range, from hard sciences to humanities, upholds the principle of representativeness in corpus linguistics. The inclusion of diverse disciplines underscores the universality of metadiscursive nouns and their applicability across different fields of study. The chapter emphasizes the innovative approach Jiang took in data retrieval, showcasing his commitment to rigorous research methodologies.

The subsequent trio of chapters delineate the study's findings on metadiscursive nouns. Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive breakdown of the frequency, distribution, and types of metadiscursive nouns in the corpus. This chapter sets the stage, offering readers a panoramic view of these nouns' prevalence in academic discourse and their distribution across texts. Chapter 6 focuses on the interactive function of metadiscursive nouns. Jiang elucidates how these nouns are instrumental in fostering cohesion within the text, either by referring back (anaphoric) or pointing forward (cataphoric). This interactive function transcends mere linguistic attributes; it is a strategic instrument that authors wield to ensure clarity and coherence in their discourse. Chapter 7 delves into the interactional function of metadiscursive nouns. The spotlight here is on how these nouns convey stance and engage readers. Jiang emphasizes patterns like *determiner + N* and *N + post-nominal clause*. These patterns are not arbitrary linguistic constructs; they are strategic instruments that authors utilize to interact with their readers, guiding them towards specific interpretations and viewpoints. The variations in the usage of these patterns can be attributed to multiple factors, including disciplinary differences, the intent of research article sections, and these patterns' positioning within the text.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 8) recapitulates the research's core tenets and concludes with several theoretical and pedagogical implications. The implications underscore the fluid nature of academic discourse and the imperative for educators to recalibrate their teaching methodologies to cater to the shifting demands of scholarship. The chapter also highlights the study's limitations, emphasizing the need for more expansive corpora and the inclusion of other genres. While the study offers a comprehensive analysis of metadiscursive nouns, it is paramount to recognize that the findings are rooted in a specific corpus and might not have universal applicability. Nonetheless, these limitations also herald opportunities for future research, presenting a myriad of avenues for scholars to further explore the domain of metadiscourse.

Metadiscursive nouns: Interaction and persuasion in disciplinary writing offers a profound exploration into the intricacies of academic knowledge construction and communication, focusing on the often-overlooked linguistic element: metadiscursive nouns. Echoing the emphasis on the interactive nature of academic discourse by Hyland (2005) and Hyland & Jiang (2022), this book underscores the pivotal role these nouns play in shaping writer-reader interactions. The study has also made substantial contributions to the existing metadiscourse-oriented research. As stated by Hyland in the foreword, by focusing on metadiscursive nouns, a recognized but previously unexplored dimension of metadiscourse patterning, the book refutes the serious misconception about metadiscourse analysis that only a finite and predefined set of lexical items could express metadiscourse functions.

However, the book is not without its limitations. A potential shortcoming may lie in the lack of clarity in the description of the classification process of metadiscursive nouns. As described in Chapter 3, Jiang claims that the expressive classification of metadiscursive nouns has been developed after a large number of passes through qualified concordance lines in the self-built corpus and the academic genres of the British National Corpus. Despite the substantial workload, no convincing concordance examples or statistical data are provided to substantiate this classification, which may undermine its credibility. Secondly, as Jiang admits, many of the data interpretations are based on *personal speculation* with the risk of overlooking the real opinions of experts from different disciplines. As a segue to further research, metadiscursive nouns could be scrutinized using an emic approach to compensate for the loss of insider information from writers across diverse disciplines.

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In essence, Jiang's work is a monumental contribution to the exploration of metadiscursive nouns, serving as a guiding light for scholars in academic discourse. This book is not only essential for ESP researchers, language educators, and students but also enhances readers' comprehension of textual rhetoric. The combination of rigorous research and clear exposition makes it an invaluable asset for those in applied linguistics and discourse analysis.

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