

## BOOK REVIEW

---

---



### DOING DIGITAL METADISCOURSE: MOVING FORWARD

**Larissa D'Angelo, Anna Mauranen and Stefania Maci (Eds.).** METADISCOURSE IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: NEW RESEARCH, APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES (2021), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 158 pp., ISBN 978-3-030-85813-1 (HBK); ISBN 978-3-030-85814-8 (EBK).

Digital discourse has already proved to be a highly interesting object of study, a kaleidoscopic construct which is open to as many perspectives of analysis as challenges it offers. Exploring digital communication involves new models, new concepts, new assumptions and, more often than not, new, or reformulated, methodological perspectives (Bondi & Cacchiani, 2021; Georgakopolou & Spilioti, 2016; Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2018). Metadiscourse, from an analytical perspective, escapes neither from the alluring challenge that the study of digital practices involves nor from the strain that doing so means (Consonni et al., 2020; D'Angelo & Consonni, 2020). With a handful of selected papers, the present volume highlights the complexities of academic and non-academic digital discourse, and shows how metadiscourse, as an analytical framework, may make significant (and promising) contributions.

Although the range of objects of study is small, the volume manages to exemplify various digital practices which include the academic context, such as blogs (Mauranen and Malavasi) and the graphical abstract (Sancho-Guinda), and non-academic contexts, such as video games (Ädel), advertising (Delibegović Džanić & Berberović) and social media (Biri). Moreover, two divergent perspectives on metadiscourse are here well represented. The reflexive view of metadiscourse, understood as discourse about ongoing discourse, is adopted in the chapters by Mauranen, Ädel, and Biri, while the interpersonal approach to metadiscoursal analysis (Hyland, 2005) is applied by Malavasi and Sancho-Guinda to their studies

on blogs and graphical abstracts respectively. Both perspectives seem to have something to contribute when digital discourse is under study, and the two of them seem to require refinement to cater for such a complex, polyhedric phenomenon. The study of visual metadiscourse cuts across this divide and steps in as a welcoming area of application of metadiscourse studies in the chapters by Sancho-Guinda, and Delibegović Džanić and Berberović. In all the cases, hybridity seems to be a constant feature, which from a lesser (i.e., blogs) to a greater extent (i.e., vlogs, social media) characterizes digital discourse, as Kuteeva and Mauranen (2018) claim.

The volume opens with an up-to-date introduction by two of the editors (D'Angelo & Maci) on digital discourse analysis, which offers an overview of the development of metadiscourse studies, aligning here with Ädel in claiming for a turn of metadiscourse toward reflexivity as a way to approach the challenges emerging in the study of online discourse. Six contributions follow. The first one, by Anna Mauranen (Chapter 2), focuses on the under-researched field of metadiscourse in dialogic discourse, with the eye set on digital interaction. There are two starting points for Mauranen's discussion of discourse reflexivity: one is the view that the evidence drawn from lingua franca discourse is "particularly fitting for discovering vital, possibly universal aspects of discourse" (p. 14); the other is that research on metadiscourse seems to be most suitable for the exploration of digital discourse, which combines the dual perspective of the dialogic with the written mode. Based on the spoken and written English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) corpora collected at the University of Helsinki and attending to certain categories introduced in the paper, Mauranen carries out two comparative analyses: monologic vs. dialogic discourse, and written vs. spoken dialogue. While the first comparative analysis yields highly significant differences, the second shows that spoken dialogue and written dialogue (blogs) display similar tendencies as regards the metadiscoursal uses investigated. Mauranen puts forward possible answers to essential questions such as why monologues and dialogues are so different, and spoken and written dialogues so similar, pointing to the role played by communicative (a)symmetry and recipient design in the similar/different uses of discourse reflexivity. Finally, and very relevantly for the volume, some methodological questions are raised, such as the need to replace the monologue bias with adequate models for the study of digital (dialogic) discourse. The role of the co-text in metadiscourse research is also highlighted, as well as the claim that metadiscourse is a discourse universal, based on the suitability of ELF data for the analysis undertaken.

A highly theoretical contribution, Annelie Ädel's Chapter 3 stems from the claim that metadiscourse studies have to understand the dynamics of digital communication, and elaborates on the conceptualization of metadiscourse. Applying the reflexive model of metadiscourse (Ädel, 2006), the author explores a vlog (video blog) as a case study to inquire about "what is done in the vlog that we do not/cannot do in academic writing?" (p. 37). She distinguishes between metadiscourse and metacommunication, and finds out that metadiscourse is not significantly present in the digital genre explored. However, she shows how other

semiotic resources, such as paralinguistic cues (i.e., gestures) and visual resources (i.e., words written on screen), so characteristic of digital communication, do support metadiscourse. Ädel also coins the concept of *synchronous intertextuality* to indicate the way simulator games run while the vlogger interacts. Finally, Ädel identifies two of the most controversial issues in metadiscourse studies: the fact that it is a notion far too broad, and also a notion whose fuzziness allows an enormous range of different results. To move forward, the author proposes to go beyond former models based on the non-propositional and the interpersonal and foregrounds reflexivity, along the lines of Mauranen and the volume's editors.

The interpersonal approach to metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005) is adopted by Donatella Malavasi in Chapter 4, where a comparative analysis of metadiscoursal uses is carried out in two genres of knowledge dissemination: the research article and the blog post. For such purposes a selection of the North American economist Paul Krugman's writings is collected to identify variation between the two genres in both interactive and interactional metadiscourse, focusing on the verbal and excluding the multimodal. A combination of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis allows the author to draw quantitative and qualitative insights based on the study of two-word, three-word, and four-word clusters, which point toward the significant use of interactive expressions in research articles. These interactive expressions allow the author to guide the reading process by organizing discourse and establishing textual links. Blogs, in contrast, seem to favour interactional metadiscourse, which reveals Krugman's strategic use of language to engage the audience and share his views with them. In all, Malavasi manages to highlight the multifunctionality and versatility of metadiscursive units and their impact on genre description.

In Chapter 5, Carmen Sancho-Guinda's starting point is a dialogic mode of science, which tries to foster the interaction between science and the lay citizen and focuses on the graphical abstract to investigate the audience-targeting function of metadiscourse in the type of scientific dissemination which is carried out online. Sancho-Guinda applies a very eclectic theoretical and methodological framework to a corpus of graphical abstracts that yields very interesting results, and that includes Critical Genre Analysis, Multimodal and Visual Analysis, Social Semiotics, Narrative Inquiry, and the interpersonal metadiscoursal model proposed by Hyland (2005). The concepts of *regenring* (change in the communicative purpose) and *transduction* (shift of semiotic modes) become central in her study, revealing the existence of macro-metadiscourse items which contain interrelated and overlapping metadiscourse categories. She discusses the typology, function and metadiscourse features of graphical abstracts, highlighting the role that the interactional function plays in this genre as compared to its role in verbal abstracts. In all, Sancho-Guinda manages to identify highly relevant issues in the generic instance of the graphical abstract, which have to do with the lack of consensus about their generic conventions, the need to foster visual literacy among scholars, and the need to increase their familiarity with visual resources.

The perspective of conceptual blending theory is adopted by Nihada Delibegović Džanić and Sanja Berberović (Chapter 6) to explore visual advertising and to demonstrate that it is a valid approach for the exploration of multimodal ensembles, where text and image combine to make meaning. In their study, visual metadiscourse (i.e., images, drawings, colours, layout, etc.) becomes a complementary way of approaching the relationship between visuals and text. For such purposes, Kumpf's (2000) taxonomy of categories for the exploitation of visual metadiscourse proves to be useful. Thus, applying the principles of conceptual blending theory and through the detailed discussion of two case studies, the authors show how various input spaces (i.e., visuals, non-modified phraseology, modified phraseology) interact and relate in ways which reveal a highly cohesive connection, with visuals effectively supporting the textual messages and with various metadiscoursal visual categories such as first impressions (the visual representation influences its reception), chunking (the arrangement of a text into discrete visual parts), and interpretation (the author's control over the interpretative process of the addressee) being more significant than others. On the whole, the authors demonstrate the complementarity of mental space theory with visual metadiscourse as a way to understand the complex discourse of advertising.

In the final chapter, Ylva Biri approaches the study of metadiscourse in what is, perhaps, the largest area explored in digital discourse: social media, more specifically on Twitter, Reddit and Tumblr. The reflexive view of metadiscourse is applied here to the study of informal writing, showing that the boundaries of the model need to be expanded to fit the idiosyncrasies of dialogical discourses in social platforms. The study focuses on personal metadiscourse, oriented towards the interaction between writer and reader, and impersonal, text-organizing, metadiscourse. Another line of research in this contribution is a comparative study of the impact that platform affordances have on discourse itself, that is, on the way users engage with the platform and interact with each other, as well as on the affordance of searchability. Personal metadiscourse, more frequent on all the platforms, relies on the use of pronouns to refer to writers and readers by way of self-mentions, audience-mentions, and collective-mentions. Differences in terms of frequency are explained based on the technological affordances that organize the discussion, and also on the type of genre favoured by each platform. In all, reflexive metadiscourse seems to contribute to enhancing the interactive and text managing functions that the various social media platforms analysed possess.

Overall, this volume manages to illustrate how metadiscourse as an analytical framework can be applied to modes beyond the written (dialogic), including non-academic discourses (gaming and advertising) and multimodal (not only monomodal) texts (graphical abstracts, vlogs and social platforms). Various chapters as well as the Introduction offer a view of what metadiscourse is and what direction metadiscourse should take, thus providing this encompassing perspective to novice scholars in the field, but also offering a critical view to more knowledgeable readers. Moreover, the book may be of great interest to digital

discourse analysts and researchers, as it contains good examples of how various digital practices can be explored from the vantage point of metadiscourse.

Although the arguments and literature review provided in the Introduction are steered mainly towards scientific and scholarly digital discourse, the studies collected in this volume display a wider variety of objects of study than the editors seem to portray. Thus, their claim that the six contributions which make up the volume investigate “progressively hybridized academic genres that have migrated from analogue to digital format” is questionable (p. 4). Surely, the genre of the vlog (Chapter 3) is not an academic practice in itself. Nor is advertising (Chapter 6). Despite these caveats, which have a certain impact on the rationale of the volume, the contributions collected show that metadiscourse is a valid framework, able to open paths that allow it to adapt to new practices, new genres and new ways of interacting, and, in that sense, also in need of reconceptualization. In all, the volume reads as a versatile, promising window into what metadiscourse might offer to digital discourse analysis.

[Review submitted 23 Jun 2022]  
 [Revised version received 24 Mar 2023]  
 [Accepted for publication 3 Apr 2023]

Reviewed by **ROSA LORÉS**  
 Department of English and German Studies  
 Universidad de Zaragoza  
 Spain  
 rlores@unizar.es

421

### References

- Ädel, A. (2006). *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. John Benjamins.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.24>
- Bondi, M., & Cacchiani, S. (2021). Editorial: Knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination in a digital world. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 186, 117–123.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.10.003>
- Consonni, S., D’Angelo, L., & Anesa, P. (Eds.). (2020). *Digital communication and metadiscourse: Changing perspectives in academic genres*. Cerlis.
- D’Angelo, L., & Consonni, S. (2020). A tale of three waves: Or, concerning the history and theory of metadiscourse. *Ibérica*, 40, 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.17398/2340-2784.40.13>
- Georgakopolou, A., & Spilioti, T. (Eds.). (2016). *The Routledge handbook of language and digital communication*. Routledge.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
- Kumpf, E. P. (2000). Visual metadiscourse: Designing the considerate text. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 9(4), 401–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10572250009364707>
- Kuteeva, M., & Mauranen, A. (2018). Digital academic discourse: Texts and contexts: Introduction. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 24, 1–7.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2018.06.001>