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Functional Analysis of Reflexive Metadiscourse in Dissertation Defense Sessions

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Abstract

Metadiscourse as one of the pivotal multifunctional linguistic features in spoken and written discourse has been investigated from two points of view; narrow and broad. In narrow point of view of metadiscourse, reflexivity in discourse is focused. Among the two points of view of metadiscourse, reflexivity is mostly used in spoken discourse, thus this study aims to trace the realization of functions of reflexivity metadiscourse in PhD dissertation sessions. To meet this end, four PhD dissertation defense sessions (totally 56837 words) were selected to make the corpus of this study. The transcription of the four sessions were analyzed for reflexive metadiscourse markers functions based on the model that includes four functional categories; *"metadiscourse comments", "discourse organization", "speech act labels",* and *"references to the audiences."* The results showed that disciplinary speaking conventions have the most pivotal and significant impose on speakers to use categories of reflexive metadiscourse. For instance, it was found that in defense session on "Fosil Plant", the *"reference to audience"* was the most frequent category while in defense session on "Music", the *"metalinguistic comments"* has received the greatest attention for speakers. Findings of this study could contribute to the existing literature by helping EFL PhD candidates to understand and appropriately use reflexive metadiscourse markers.

Keywords: defense session, metadiscourse, PhD Dissertation, reflexive metadiscourse, spoken genre, MICASE

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1. Introduction

University students have to deal with several academic skills and illiteracy, such as listening to academic lectures, taking notes, and writing academic essays. The students' success in their academic work depends on their successful undertaking of these skills. However, many students find it difficult to cope with the illiteracy. This difficulty is even exacerbated for students whose mother tongue is not the medium of instruction at the university. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as Second Language (ESL) students may encounter further problems because they lack the necessary skills to comprehend and produce a diverse range of complex academic discourses. In this vain, it is believed that metadiscourse markers could play a pivotal role in production and comprehension of academic discourse.

Metadiscourse has become the interest of academic research since its first appearance in applied linguistics, driven by the function of metadiscourse as a rhetorical resource in relating language to its contexts of use (Hyland, 2017). Defined as linguistic expressions that are used for organizing discourse and expressing stance toward the content or audience, metadiscourse has changed the conventional view of communication as a mere transfer of information and has added aspects such as personalities, attitudes, and assumptions of those involved in the communication, conceptualizing it as social engagement (Hyland, 2005, 2010).

Despite the growing importance of metadiscourse, it still means different things to different people. Some (reflexive view) narrow the term down to the features of textual organization, limiting metadiscourse to aspects of the discourse that help organize the text as text (e.g., Adel, 2010; Mauranen, 2010). Others (interactional view) see metadiscourse as the speaker's or writer's linguistic and rhetorical manifestation in the text to "bracket the discourse organization and the expressive implications of what is being said", as Schiffrin (1980, p. 231) notes (e.g., Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1985).

Adel (2006, p. 47) defines reflexive metadiscourse as instances of metadiscourse that make "direct reference to the writer and/or reader of the current text, either by means of pronouns (primarily I, we, you and their oblique and possessive forms) or nouns (such as writer, author, and reader)." Expressions such as "*as I showed above*", and *"as you will see"* are examples of reflexive metadiscourse. As Adel (2006, p. 20) points out, what is in focus in reflexive metadiscourse is "how writers and readers relate to the world of discourse (or the text), or how they relate to each other within that world. Impersonal metadiscourse, however, refers to those instances of metadiscourse that "does not make explicit reference to the discourse participants" (Adel, 2006, p. 14). In impersonal metadiscourse, instead of using pronominal and nominal references to the writer or the reader, passive voice and other impersonal constructions may be used to avoid explicit self or other presentation. Expressions such as *"as shown above*" and *"to conclude*" are instances of impersonal metadiscourse.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In EFL context, students at different academic levels have to participate in different spoken genres such as academic lectures, class presentations, group discussion, and etc. This participation becomes pivotal when it comes to PhD desseration defense session. The importance of participation is sourced from the fact that the dissertation is high stakes genre at the summit of students' academic accomplishment. It is perhaps the most significant piece of writing that a student will ever do, a formidable task of intimidating length and exacting expectations which represent what is potentially achievable by individuals writing in a language that is not their own. PhD candidates should make the organization of information in the speech clearly presented to the audience and examiners and make their own values and advice accepted by the audience. What makes the organization of information to be challenge could be inappropriate use of linguistic featutres among which are metasicourse markers (Intaraprawat & Steffensen, 1995). Therefore, metadiscourse is an important persuasive power in a commencement speech. Having this challenge in mind, this study intends to investigate the realizations and functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers in dissertation defense sessions extracted from MICASE corpus.

1.2 Research Questions

To meet the aims of this study, the following questions are put forward:

1. What are the most frequent reflexive metadiscourse markers in the dissertation defense sessions?

2. What are the functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers in the dissertation defense sessions?

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2. Literature Review

Even though many researchers have focused on metadiscourse in a variety of genres (Farnia & Mohammadi, 2018; Hinkel, 2005; Ho & Li, 2018; Hyland & Jiang, 2018, 2019; Kashiha, 2018, 2022; Kashiha & Marandi, 2019; Lee & Casal, 2014; Li & Xu, 2020; Liu & Buckingham, 2018; Thomson, 2020), only some researchers have focused on reflexive metadiscourse (Li & Xu,2020; Kashiha, 2022; Zare & Tavakoli, 2016; Zhu, 2018). In this study only studies that focused on reflexive metadiscourse are reviewed. Zhu (2018) investigated the use of personal metadiscourse in English and Chinese commencement speeches based on Adel's (2010) reflexive metadiscourse. The corpus of his study comprises 60 commencement speeches (30 Chinese and 30 English). She investigated the similarities and differences in the use of reflexive metadiscourse in English and Chinese commencement speeches and the possible reasons behind these similarities and differences. The results showed that on average there was 23 reflexive metadiscourse per 10.000 words in English speeches and eight in Chinese speeches per 10.000 words.

Obviously, reflexive metadiscourse used in English speeches was far more frequent than those in Chinese speeches. As mentioned before reflexive metadiscourse focuses on "how writers and readers relate to the world of discourses (or the text), or how they relate to each other within that world" so according to that personal metadiscourse was more frequently used in English commencement speeches than in Chinese. The reason is that apparently there were far more personal pronouns in English than in Chinese. Chinese is a parataxis language which means it uses fewer linguistic forms to achieve coherence. Besides, Chinese language is looser in structure and has many no-subject sentences. He found that Chinese people are more implicit and indirect in showing their views and thinking, while to some extent, English addressers are opposite. Also, English is a hypotaxis language that needs overt linguistic forms to connect phrases or sentences and to present logical meanings. So, in Chinese speeches, the number of personal pronouns mainly serving as the subject of an utterance is significantly less than in English speeches.

Also, he added that reflexive metadiscourse with different functions that in both speeches the category metatext was more frequently used than audience interaction. This is due to the genre-related factor commencement speech actually can be regarded as a kind of monologue, in which addressers pay much attention to the organization of the discourse. So, in both languages (English and Chinese), metatext was used more frequently. In English language commencement speeches, the three subtypes of reference to the audience, speech act labels and, discourse organization accounted for closely the same percentage and they were the main discourse functions which metadiscourse served in English commencement speeches. In Chinese speeches, discourse organization was the most frequently used type of metadiscourse, which took up to nearly half of all those metadiscourse, and then the speech act labels and reference to the audience took up the rest of all metadiscourse.

Zare and Tavakoli (2016) analyzed 16 academic lectures and discussions for the functions of reflexive metadiscourse expressions, the two data (monologic and dialogic) sets were compared in terms of the use of reflexive metadiscourse functions. The result showed both slight and major differences in the use of personal metadiscourse. Monologues and dialogues were only slightly different in the extent to which repairing, reformulating, clarifying, marking asides, introducing, delimiting, concluding, adding to a topic, arguing, exemplifying, managing audience discipline, anticipating the audience's response, managing the message, and imagining scenarios were performed. Also, the results showed major discrepancies: Managing terminology was much more frequent in monologues because of their abundance of terms, and definitions; enumerating was prevalent in monologic presentations cause of their planning; endophoric markers were typical of monologues because of the presence of handouts or slides; previewing was only common in academic lectures because of the orderly presentation of information; managing comprehension or channel was much less common in monologic lectures than dialogic form because of the active participation of an audience in dialogues (Adel, 2010); managing audience discipline was not in both forms because of the power relations of the participants (Adel, 2010); and managing the message was just utilized in monologues (Bjorkman, 2011).

The researchers also claimed that generally, metatext metadiscourse was more prevalent in monologic lectures than in dialogic speech. This discrepancy is attributable to genre-specific features of monologues, as they are more oriented toward the discourse. As Adel (2010) found, different genres mean different purposes, different audiences, and different addresser-addressee roles. The findings of this study provide that non-native speakers of English ensure each other's correct understanding of the contents by making metalinguistic references to the linguistic forms, meanings, and word choices of other discourse participants and managing comprehension in their dialogues; academic lecturers give clear organization to the contents of their academic presentations by enumerating, reviewing, and previewing; academic lecturers make use of endophoric markers to instruct the addressee's attention to specific portions of their

presentations, and interlocutors try audience discipline only in unequal power relations where the addressee is of a lower rank.

Li and Xu (2020) investigated the use and functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers in 60 Chinese and English research article introduction and discussion sections from discipline of sociology. Based on the findings reported in their study, impersonal metadiscourse markers were more frequent than personal metadiscourse markers. These findings were mostly justified based on the nature of the corpus analyzed. It is believed that in academic writings such as research articles, texts are written with more impersonal taste. They also reported that personal metadiscourse markers were more frequent in discussion section of research article. They concluded that it is necessary to include instructions on how to use reflexive metadiscourse markers in writing research article introduction and discussion sections.

Kashiha (2022) focused on the use and functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers in two spoken genres. He ran his study on a corpus of 40 academic lectures and 20 political speeches. The analysis of the corpus was based on the taxonomy suggested by Adel (2010). He found that in academic lectures, personal metadiscourse markers are more frequent due to the dialogic nature of this kind of speech. In political speeches, less use of personal metadiscourse markers was due to the nature of these speeches in which audiences do not participate actively. He concluded that the role of audiences in speech could determine the use of reflexive metadiscourse markers.

Even the above studies reviewed have focused on the reflexive metadiscourse realizations in spoken genres, it seems that spoken discourse calls for more detailed studies tackling a thorough investigation into other spoken geners such as dissertation defense session. Although most research studies have focused on the use of metadiscourse in written form, a few studies have aimed at pinning the term down in spoken English or across spoken and written discourse (e.g., Adel, 2010, 2012; Lee & Subtirelu, 2015; Mauranen, 2010, 2012; Thompson, 2001). Generally, as Adel (2010) points out, there are two major differences between spoken and written discourse in terms of condition: the amount of time available for planning and revision and the presence of an audience that can contribute to the discourse in real-time.

Adel (2010), investigating spoken and written types of personal metadiscourse in academic settings, presents an empirically based taxonomy of the discourse functions of metadiscourse in academic English. Adel (2010) observes most of the 23 discourse functions in the spoken and written data. The results also show that differences in the conditions of writing and speech including the amount of time available, the presence of an audience, and genre-specific features may cause variation in the use or distribution of metadiscourse functions. As to the importance of this spoken genre to postgraduate students, the findings of this study could add to the knowledge of the postgraduate students, especially EFL students, on how to reflex themselves in discourse.

3. **Methodology**

3.1 Research Design

The design of this study was descriptive using text-analysis as the prime research method with four PhD dissertation defense sessions. Once the data were selected, they were analyzed in terms of the frequency and functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers.

3.2 Corpus

This study was carried out on a corpus of four dissertation defense sessions and collected from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) site. In MICASE, the corpora are transcribed and freely available for researchers. The corpus particulars of these defenses are stated in the following table:

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Table 1. Corpus of this study

	Dssertation Defense	word	time	audience	speaker
1	Social Psycohology	11676	76 minutes	5	5
2	Music	14982	91 minutes	6	6
3	Artifical Intelligence	20621	113 minutes	9	7
4	Fossil Plants	9558	57 minutes	30	9

3.3 Instrument

To analyze the corpus for the functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers, Adel's (2010) taxonomy was used as an instrument. It includes 23 discourse functions, divided into four main categories: *Metalinguistic comments, Discourse organisation, Speech act labels, and References to the audience*. The category of Metatext referred to as Metalinguistic comments includes the discourse functions *Repairing*, *Reformulating*, *Commenting on Linguistic Form/Meaning, Clarifying, and Managing Terminology*. *Repairing* (Example 1) refers to both self-and other-initiated suggestions and alterations which correct or cancel a preceding contribution. *Reformulating* (Example 2) refers to the offering of an alternative term or expression not because the preceding contribution was seen as erroneous (as in the case of Repairing), but because of the added value of expansion. *Commenting on Linguistic Form/Meaning* (Example 3) includes metalinguistic references to linguistic form, word choice, and/or meaning. *Clarifying* (Example 4) is used to spell out the addresser's intentions in order to avoid misinterpretation. Clarifying here does not refer to a specific interactive function, which is why it is not classified as a type of *Reference to the audience*; it involves examples of the addresser wishing to specify what he or she is saying (or not saying) in order to avoid misunderstandings. *Managing Terminology* (Example 5) typically involves giving definitions and providing terms or labels for phenomena that are talked about.

Example 1: So everyone knows that I didn`t mean to say hard real-time system

Example 2: So, if you want rephrase it what happened to this airplane nobody…….

Example 3: You don`t know exactly what time step you`re gonna do a particular action

Example 4: What does it mean to have a probability of, the action, I mean after all, you`re contr-the action is what…….

Example 5: I`m calling temporally dependent unconditional probability rule function…..

Discourse organization includes a number of discourse functions having to do with topic management: *Introducing Topic* (used to open the topic) (Example 6); *Delimiting Topic* (used to explicitly state how the topic is constrained) (Example 7); *Adding to Topic* (used to explicitly comment on the addition of a topic or subtopic) (Example 8); *Concluding Topic* (used to close the topic) (Example 9); and *Marking Aside* (used to open or close a "topic sidetrack" or digression) (Example 10). *Discourse organization* also includes a series of discourse functions having to do with phonics management: *Enumerating* (Example 11) is used to show how specific parts of the discourse are ordered in relation to each other. *Endophpric Marking* (Example 12) is used to point to a specific location in the discourse; it refers to cases in which it is not clear or relevant whether what is referred to occurs before or after the current point (unlike Previewing and Reviewing), as for example when the audience is instructed to look at a table, or turn to a specific point in a handout. *Previewing* (Example 13) points forward in the discourse while *reviewing* (Example 14) points backward in the discourse; they are used by the addresser to announce what is to come or remind the audience what has already taken place in the discourse and contextualising (Example 15).

Example 6: What we`re gonna do in this part of the defense……..

Example 7: You`re ganna end up in the state that we`ve talked about…….

Example 8: So for each new problem that you add in to your system, I'm, I really……

Example 9: So, we set that originally and in fact in these sets we set it…….

Example 10: I prefer to skip this part because ……

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Example 11: I`m going to talk about two different mechanisms.

Example 12: Therefore as you can see in…….

Example 13: I`ll go all the way around the schedule and……

Example 14: If you remember from the plan. It was not an ordered set of action so……..

Example 15: Right, well, you`re controlling the action but you can`t control where you are in this cycle schedule when you do……..

Speech act labels include the discourse functions *Arguing* (Example 16), which is used to stress the action of arguing for or against an issue; *Exemplifying* (Example 17), which is used when explicitly introducing an example; and a general category of *Other Speech Act Labelling* (Example 18) for those speech acts which are not sufficiently frequent - at least not in the present data set - to have their own label (examples below include giving a hint; suggesting; mentioning; emphasizing).

Example 16: I argue that there`s two basic dimensions……

Example 17: We could have more than one all the examples that I present have ……

Example 18: All the things that you`re prioritizing are things, are the, the ways things could go…….

References to the audience include five discourse functions. *Managing comprehension* (Example 19) functions when the addresser wants to check the participants' understanding of the input. *Managing Audience* (Example 20) involves directly addressing the participants and in some cases complimenting or reprimanding them for their behavior. *Anticipating the audience's response* (Example 21) refers to cases in which the addresser predicts probable reactions of the participants to the information presented. *Managing the message* (Example 22) requires emphasizing the main part of the discussion to be remembered by the participants. *Imagining scenarios* (Example 23) happens when the participants are asked to suppose something in the shared world of the discourse.

Example 19: Would you come up with a different plan if you ordered them in some……

Example 20: So we set your attention please? It is so……..

Example 21: Initially we set that to infinity because we don`t know what it`s supposed to be……

Example 22: And then also we want you to think about making it easy for them to create …….

Example 23: Okay and the probability let`s say we`re computing is very dependent on …….

3.4 Data Analysis

The study was carried out with following procedures: First, the data of the present study were collected from the MICASE corpus. Four Dissertation Defense Sessions (they are the only Dissertation defense sessions in the MICASE corpus) were selected. Second, second personal pronoun ‘’you" and first personal pronoun "I'', "We" were specified. Third, the realizations and the discourse functions of reflexive pronouns were identified using the framework suggested by Adel (2010). Fourth, the findings of the study were discussed and compared with the findings in literature.

4. Results

This part presents the results related to the analyzed data concerning the realizations and discourse functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers. Table 2 presents the results of frequency analysis of metadiscourse markers in the dissertation defense sessions. These results could imply that reflexive metadiscourse markers are frequent linguistic markers that deserve to be included as that they serve different functions in the genre analyzed.

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Table 2. Frequencies of metadiscourse markers (per 1000 words)

Categories	Word count	Reflexive pronoun (per 1000)	Non-metadiscourse (per 1000)	Metadiscourse (per 1000)
Music Dissertation Defense	14982	698 (46.58)	341 (22.76)	357 (23.82)
Fossil Plant Dissertation Defense	9558	460 (48.12)	130 (13.60)	330 (34.52)
Artificial Intelligence Dissertation Defense	20621	1182 (57.32)	717 (34.77)	465 (22.55)
Social Psychology Dissertation Defense	11676	860 (73.65)	395 (33.83)	465 (39.82)
Total	56837	3200 (56.30)	1583 (27.85)	1617 (28.44)

Table 3 presents the results of frequency analysis of reflexive pronoun types in the dissertation defense sessions. The results in Table 3 could clearly show that the genre of dissertation defense session is an interactive genre in which both speakers and listeners participate actively in the discourse. The results also pointed that the pronoun "I" was the most frequent pronoun suggesting that PhD candidates are aware of the fact that PhD dessertation is candidate oriened discourse, thus requires taking the resoponsibility of content.

Table 3. Frequencies of reflexive pronouns types (per 1000 words)

	I	You	We	Total
Music Dissertation Defense	219 (14.61)	126 (8.41)	12 (0.80)	357 (23.82)
Fossil Plant Dissertation Defense	95 (9.94)	166 (17.36)	69 (7.22)	330 (34.52)
Artificial Intelligence Dissertation Defense	157 (7.62)	191 (9.26)	117 (5.67)	465 (22.55)
Social Psychology Dissertation Defense	314 (26.89)	143 (12.24)	8 (0.68)	465 (39.82)
Total	785 (13.81)	626 (11.01)	206 (3.62)	1617 (28.44)

Table 4 reports the results of the quantitative analysis of the use of reflexive metadiscourse functions. These results clearly show that the reflexive metadiscourse markers identified in the corpus have served different functions that are possibly related to the nature of dissertation discussion sessions. These functions could create interactive discourse by not only organizing the discourse but also making the discourse to be easy to comprehend.

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Table 4. Frequencies of four categories of reflexive metadiscourse markers (Percentage)

Function	Music Dissertation Defense	Fossil Plant Dissertation Defense	Artificial Intelligence Dissertation Defense	Social Psychology Dissertation Defense	Total
Metalinguistic comments	106	68	126	250	550 (34.01%)
Discourse Organization	80	96	158	68	402 (24.86%)
Reference to audience	164	161	176	135	636 (39.33%)
Speech Act Labels	1	2	12	14	29 (1.80%)
Total	351	327	472	467	1617 (100%)

Table 5 reports the results of the quantitative analysis of the use of metalinguistics reflexive metadiscourse functions. It could be easily seen that in the dissertation defence sessions analyzed in this study, speakers were more inclined to clarify their arguments, comments, and claims using metalinguistic reflexive metadiscourse markers. This function helps them to convince audiences among which are examiners to make the discourse to be easy to continue and follow.

Table 5. Frequencies of metalinguistics reflexive metadiscourse markers (percentage)

Function	Music Dissertation Defense	Fossil Plant Dissertation Defense	Artificial Intelligence Dissertation Defense	Social Psychology Dissertation Defense	Total
Repairing	3	6	3	6	18 (3.27%)
Reformulating	0	0	0	2	2 (0.39%)
Commenting on linguistic form/meaning	24	15	63	23	125 (22.72%)
Clarifying	78	45	60	217	400 (72.72%)
Managing Terminology	1	2	0	2	5 (0.90)
Total	106	68	126	250	550 (100%)

Table 6 reports the results of the quantitative analysis of the use of discourse organization reflexive metadiscourse functions. The results in Table 6 intend to signify the fact that the discourse organization reflexive metadiscourse markers are used to serve some intended discourse functions. Thus, it worth to include functions of metadiscourse markers in the preparatory sessions designed for students to have a better dissertation defense session. The results in Table 6 also intend to present that PhD candidates are more inclined to review their comments, answers, and arguments to make sure about the audiences and examiners' comprehension.

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Table 6. Frequencies of discourse organization reflexive metadiscourse markers (percentage)

Function	Music Dissertation Defense	Fossil Plant Dissertation Defense	Artificial Intelligence Dissertation Defense	Social Psychology Dissertation Defense	Total
Introducing Topic	3	5	9	4	21 (5.22%)
Delimiting Topic	-	4	3	3	10 (2.48%)
Adding to Topic	1	1	1	1	4 (1%)
Concluding Topic	3	13	1	9	26 (6.16%)
Marking Asides	-	2	-	1	3 (1%)
Enumerating	2	8	18	3	31 (7.61%)
Endophoric	-	3	-	-	3 (1%)
Previewing and Reviewing	71	56	126	46	299 (74.33%)
Contextualizing	-	4	-	1	5 (1%)
Total	80	96	158	68	402 (100%)

Table 7 reports the results of the quantitative analysis of the use of audience reflexive metadiscourse functions. These results display that speakers in dissertation defense session use this type of reflexive metadicourse markers in order to help create interactive relation with other participants in the session. Thus, it worth to include such discourse functions in courses dedicated for teaching how to have a comprehensible defense session.

Table 7. Frequencies of references to audience reflexive metadiscourse markers (percentage)

Function	Music Dissertation Defense	Fossil Plant Dissertation Defense	Artificial Intelligence Dissertation Defense	Social Psychology Dissertation Defense	Total
Managing Comprehension	1	3	4	16	24 (3.77%)
Managing Audiences	-	-	-	-	-
Anticipating the Audience Response	127	131	83	91	432 (67.93%)
Managing the Message	36	4	85	9	134 (21.07%)
Imagining Scenarios	-	23	4	19	46 (7.23%)
Total	164	161	176	135	636 (100%)

The speech act labels category received little attention from the speakers in the dissertation defense sessions.

5. Discussion

This part presents the discussion of results related to the analyzed data. The results in Table 1 indicate that reflexive pronouns are among the important linguistic features which are worth investigating as they are frequently used in an

academic context such as dissertation defense context (Example 1-2). Table 2 also suggests that about half of the reflexive pronouns are used to serve metadiscourse functions that stress the significance of this study. The results in Table 2 are greater than what has been found in Li and Xu (2020) and Zare and Tavakoli (2016). They found that 60% to 75% of metadiscoursive pronouns are not used for the sake of metadiscoursive functions. This result could suggest that in dissertation defense session, participants are more inclined to speak about their encounters in the world of discourse. The differences between the results of this study and the results of Li and Xu (2020) and Zare and Tavakoli (2016) could suggest that in the dissertation defense sessions, speakers care more about the interpretations of listeners than only presenting information and they are more careful about the comprehensibility of their texts. It seems that in the results of this study, speakers are about to draw the listeners` attention to discourse and influence their understanding.

> Example 1: and what ***I*** did is for several layers, for several stratigraphic layers like h- here where, two plant localities were very close together stratigraphically, ***I*** combined, the species, in each one, so that ***I*** would have higher species total and I did that up here too. (Non-metadiscourse reflexive pronouns)
>
> Example 2: … basically because I had to take into account the error of the temperature and evaluation both, but ***I*** will point out as we are looking at this that um ….. (Metadiscourse reflexive pronoun)

As shown in Table 3, among three reflexive pronouns, *I* received the greatest attention and *we* received the least attention (Example 3-5). There are several possible justifications for this result; first, speakers mainly Ph.D. candidates, are more inclined to take responsibility for the study, thus they prefer using first- person pronoun and present their stance about different aspects and issues of their study. Second, it is commonly accepted that in dissertation, the candidate has to accept the responsibility completely. The second more frequent reflexive pronoun is *you*. A possible explanation for this result is that the speakers intend to take the listeners' attention to the intended discourse. Here, we can see that the speakers want to help the listeners to have a better interpretation of presented information about their study. The last pronoun of the list is *we*. This result could be justified based on the fact that the speakers (Ph.D. candidates in this study) see themselves to be at least one level below the examiners thus they do not use pronoun which could put Ph.D. candidates and examiners at the same level, as they are academically treated as experts in the academic community and Ph.D. candidates as novice members in the community.

> Example 3: ***I*** mean if you assume that the standard of politeness is such that you do not direct criticisms …..
>
> Example 4: let me give ***you*** an example, it is not a really good analogy but it sort of close…..
>
> Example 5: yes, **we**'ve been talking about the again problem …

Table 4 reports the results of the quantitative analysis of the use of reflexive metadiscourse functions. As it can be seen, the reference to audience function was received the greatest attention among the reflexive metadiscourse functions. These results are in line with Zhu (2018) and in contrast with the results reported in Zare and Tavakoli (2016). The result could suggest that the genres such as dissertation defense sessions are dialogic in nature. In such genres, speakers prefer to refer to the audience to guarantee to catch the attention of the audiences as they are playing a major role in the session`s final assessment. Among the audiences, we have the examiners and the chairperson of the defense session which the candidate needs to catch their attention through presentation. Thus, it seems that interaction with the audiences helps in better interpretation of the presentations and results in better assessment of the dissertation (Example 6-7).

> Example 6: could i ask a procedure question? Um, should **we** interrupt throughout, this or how do **you** how do **you** wanna proceed?
>
> Example 7: **you** know there there seem to be so many changes in his career, uh, of position and interest and so forth, so that when, for instance i came to this uh this portion.

About a third of the reflexive metadiscourse pronouns are used to serve the function of metalinguistic comments (Examples 8-10). It seems that speakers prefer the orientation toward the discourse itself. This metadiscourse function refers to the efforts made by the Ph.D. candidates to clarify and correct their discourse or repair their expressions. As the comprehension of the information presented in such sessions might result in better grades and assessment, thus the presenters prefer to use reflexive metadiscourse markers to make their discourse more interpretive and understandable.

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Example 8: Well it it. It's possible ***I I I*** don't ,um, ***I*** wouldn't say that it's wrong though necessarily., I think.

Example 9: Uh ***I I*** mean they're just they're just, it's absolutely full of them

Example 10: -so he call it dialectical reasoning coined the term, but ***i*** use interactionism so, for your understanding you can equate interactionism, with dialectical reasoning.

The discourse organization function was accounted for a quarter of the reflexive metadiscourse pronouns (Examples 11-13). This result is less than what have been reported in Li and Xu (2020) and Zare and Tavakoli (2016) and Zhu (2018). These differences could be due to the genre differences. Within this function, presenters can manage their text in a way to be easy for audiences to follow and understand, for example they sometimes get back to what have been said to create a link between parts of their discourse. This function is treated as discourse facilitator as the speaker could move through their discourse well by introducing, delimiting, adding, and concluding topics. These functions along with other functions of this category make an important variety of functions that aid speakers to have organized and interpretive discourse.

Example 11: so, ***we***'ll get into the um, talk now. Obviously every, dissertation, that you go through as a graduate student you hafta thank a lot of people who get you there.

Example 12: so what ***we*** do is we, use that relationship between the, shapes and sizes the leaf morphology of these leaves and climate to determine what the climate was in that area.

Example 13: ***We***'ll say, could result in failure by a temporal transition to failure so, we have to guarantee actions for those.

The results in Table 4 clearly report that the speech act labels category is not a norm in the genre of dissertation defense session. As shown in Table 5, the clarifying metadiscourse function was accounted for around three quarters of metalinguistic reflexive metadiscourse pronouns (Examples 14-15). This finding is in line with findings reported in Zare and Tavakoli (2016). This result is not uncommon as there is a kind of relationship between speaker and listeners in real context which could signal the need for clarification to guarantee comprehension in the listener's side. Listeners in the dissertation defense session are mostly expert in the topic of presentation, thus it important to make the discourse as clear as possible to convince examiners (listeners) that PhD candidates (speakers) are familiar with the topic of their dissertations. It seems that this function could help PhD candidate to convince not only examiners but also other possible listeners, students, attending the session.

Example 14: i i'm still curious why, um, you wanted to do the, thing you brought up just at the end about uh making, different cultures look, equally good since it didn't have anything to do with your thesis. i mean as far as i can tell. ***i i*** don't understand the connection, uh there and i wondered why <S3: LAUGH> you wanted to, um do that.

Example 15: ... ***i*** mean ***i*** didn't, mean that, Western thinking is better, in all sense it's better for s- doing modern science... but some of my, you know.

Other metadiscourse function that received a noticeable attention from the PhD candidates is the commenting on linguistic forms/meanings (Example 16-17). This result is also in line with Zare and Tavakoli (2016). This similarity could be considered as in both studies the data are from spoken discourse. This discourse function seems necessary as in each dissertation we have some key terms that need to be made clear for better follow up of listeners. It could be noted that having a clear applied definition in each dissertation is a necessary section and PhD candidates have to make them clear in their presentations.

Example 16: but ***i*** wonder if you'd just comment on it was th- th- the date of the quote was sixty-nine, which is quite a bit before, that particular concert and, i just wonder the extent to which, with somebody who's been so, uh, publicly available and who has made so many pronouncements.

Example 17: just a couple of of details here uh... uh ***i*** wonder if you'd comment, uh uh d- page one-sixty-five i uh, please, i- i- it was one of those uh, sort of moments, where, you know i was reading, reading through your stuff and you were <S2: LAUGH> you were talking.

Other three functions received little attention suggesting that they are possibly not a norm to be used in PhD dissertation. Two of the functions are the repairing and reformulating functions (Example 18-19). It seems that PhD

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candidate treats this function as a negative signal in discourse suggesting their lack of authority regarding topic of dissertation.

> Example 18: i mean i didn't, mean that, Western thinking is better, in all sense it's better for s- doing modern science... but some of my, you know.

> Example 19: i mean as far as i can tell. i i don't understand the connection, uh there and i wondered why <S3: LAUGH> you wanted to, um do that. (1.p7)

The results in Table 6 indicate that among the variety of metadiscourse functions related to discourse organization category, only the previewing and reviewing function has received a noticeable attention (Example 20). This result is not in line with Kashiha (2022), Zare and Tavakoli (2016) and Zhu (2018). This difference could be due to the difference in genre or nature of genre explored in these studies. This discourse function is mainly used to serve the function of linking parts of discourse to add to its textuality. Textuality or cohesion and coherence could increase understanding and result in better interpretation of discourse. Thus, PhD candidate prefers to use reflexive metadiscourse markers for the sake of being fully understood by examiners and audiences to good grade.

> Example 20: so uh, at this point i'll briefly mention the show-and-tell, device that i've brought here. which uh, ***i'***m going to be talking about airplane flight and um, i'm going to claim that airplane flight is inherently dangerous(3.p5)

Other functions of this category received little attention possibly that in spoken discourse speaker is in the context could understand signals send by listener about misunderstanding and immediately correct themselves and make discourse to be understandable.

As shown in Table 7, the anticipating the audiences' responses is the most frequent sub category of the references to the audiences' metadiscourse function (Example 21-22). This function refers to situations in which presenters predict the possible responses or reactions of the audiences. Such metadiscourse function could help to guarantee that audiences are following the presenters and the discourse is comprehensive. Presenters through such a metadiscourse function could be sure about the understanding and comprehension of the intended meaning by the audiences.

> Example 21: This belief you know there is ups and down…… .

> Example 22: i think uh you're also right in, detecting that that process of wanting to, um, wanting to describe the effects and wanting to describe the process, uh of these phenomenons uh, takes away from, the impulse uh of the, the aesthetic commitment.

Next most frequent sub category is the managing the message metadiscourse function (Example 23-24). This function is possible frequent as in spoken discourse we need to emphasize on the key parts of the discussion to be remembered by the audience to be able to create a clear image of presented information and easily follow the relationship between key parts of the discourse. In spoken discourse listener cannot get back and check the information, thus such a metadiscourse function could aid speakers well to serve the purpose.

> Example 3: But we consider it to be, at last advantageous if you're going to ignore things to ignore unlikely things.

> Example 4: many cases if the issue is complex then you say oh you know, i i guess both are right (and he sees this he sees that) and gee- i m- i mean why would that be a great advantage?

While the managing audiences metadiscourse function was totalyy neglected by the presenters, other two metadiscourse functions. In relation to the speech act labels category (Example 25), among the three functions, the exemplifying function has received the greatest attention as this function could add to clarification function. Other functions possibly are not a norm in discourse such as dissertation defense session.

> Example 25: let me see if i can come up with an example a better, description of... it often bothers at least in my experience.

6. Conclusion

This study intended to investigate the realizations and functions of reflexive metadiscourse markers in dissertations defense sessions extracted from the MICASE corpus. This study analyzed the gathered corpus using the taxonomy of

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reflexive metadiscourse pronouns suggested by Adel (2010). The results showed that around half of the reflexive pronouns used in the corpus were metadiscourse in function. This could help to conclude that reflexive pronouns are important to be investigated as they are not only used to present authority or self-mention, but they could also perform other functions that ESL students need to be aware of. Among the reflexive pronouns, speakers in dissertation defense sessions prefer using "I" more than other reflexive pronouns concluding, that in this genre, the speaker (Ph.D. candidate) is completely taking the responsibility for their study. Thus, the use of the first- person pronoun here is considered a norm imposed by the nature of the genre under investigation. ESL students, possibly treating this genre as other academic genres (such as research articles) in which using the first- person pronoun "I" is not a norm. Thus, conscious raising of students about this conclusion is deemed necessary.

In regards to the categories of reflexive metadiscourse, the reference to audiences and the speech act labels have received the highest and lowest attentions from the speakers respectively. This result could help concluding that reflexive metadiscourse markers are mostly used for the sake of creating relationships with audiences among which are examiners. Thus, this conclusion should bring to the courses like seminars in which the students are taught how to present their dissertations. Regarding subcategories of reflexive metadiscourse markers, the clarifying, the reviewing/previewing, the exemplifying, and the anticipating audience response were more frequent than other subcategories. It can be concluded that reflexive metadiscourse was mostly used for the sake of creating speakers-listener discourse and increasing comprehension of discourse for the audience, listeners. Thus, we can notify ESL students about the issue that in dissertation defense session, it is necessary to act as responsible for the comprehension, interpretation, and understanding of the discourse to guarantee reaching the best possible grade. Findings of this study have important implications for developing knowledge of students and instructors on how to present the functions of metadiscourse and also how to engage the listeners in the discourse to encourage them to pay attention to the presentations and make sure that they focus on the content.

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