

Active participation within written and spoken argumentation: The use of engagement markers across different genres

Zorica Trajkova

Cyril and Methodius University

Submitted: 16.04.2014.

Accepted: 16.11.2014.

Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate how writers and speakers actively engage readers and listeners within the argumentation through the use of engagement markers as a metadiscourse category. More precisely, it sets out to explore the function and use of engagement markers, i.e. personal pronouns, directives and questions, in three different genres, one written (editorials from newspapers) and two spoken (excerpts from talk shows and closing arguments from trials) in two different languages, Macedonian and English. The analysis is carried out on nine editorials from American and nine from Macedonian newspapers, nine excerpts from American and nine from Macedonian talk-shows, as well as five closing arguments from American trials and five from Macedonian.

It is essential for writers and speakers to know how to balance the use of these markers in order to avoid being intrusive and appear more persuasive to the readers and listeners. The research shows that there are differences in the use of the markers in the three genres in both languages. They were most frequently used in the English spoken texts (talk shows and closing arguments) and least frequently in the Macedonian closing arguments. As for their use in editorials, they were used moderately in both languages. So, on the whole, the analysis reveals that the choice of markers within the same genre depends on cultural differences, i.e. the format and perception of the type of text by the different societies. Furthermore, it also shows differences in the choice of markers across the three genres in both languages. Finally, although carried out on a relatively small corpus, this research gives insight into the dialogic nature of argumentation and its impact on the persuasive effect of written and spoken texts in different genres and languages.

Key words: metadiscourse, argumentation, engagement markers, editorials, talk shows, closing arguments

Introduction

This article explores the role of engagement markers, as interpersonal metadiscourse markers, in building the writer's/speaker's authority and establishing an appropriate relationship with the readers/listeners. The aim is to see to what extent these markers are used in three different genres (one written and two spoken) in two different societies (Macedonian and American) and how the use of the specific subcategories of these markers defines the types of genres in both societies.

Interpersonal metadiscourse: engagement markers

Metadiscourse offers a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's/speaker's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text (Hyland, 2005a, p. 3). Interpersonal metadiscourse¹ offers a framework for understanding communication as social engagement and refers to the features writers/speakers use to express their views concerning the propositional material and help readers/listeners accept and share their views (ibid, p. 4).

Engagement markers are a type of interpersonal metadiscourse markers employed by speakers/writers to address listeners/readers explicitly and focus their attention to the given arguments and at the same time to include them as direct participants in the discourse. More precisely, according to Hyland (2005a), they help the writers/speakers to express their need to adequately meet readers'/listeners' expectations of inclusion and solidarity, addressing them as participants in the argument with pronouns (*you, your, inclusive we*) and interjections, and at the same time they pull the readers/listeners into the discourse at critical points, predicting possible objections and guiding them to particular interpretations with the use of: questions, directives (*mainly imperatives*) and asides (*references to shared knowledge*) (p. 53). The choice of the markers depends mainly on the aim the speakers/writers want to achieve in the text as well as the expectations of the listeners/readers (Hyland, 2004, p.110). In this paper, the analysis focuses on only three types of engagement markers: pronouns, directives and questions.

Methodology and corpus

¹ When trying to define metadiscourse, linguists followed Halliday's classification (1974), according to which language has three main metafunctions: *ideational* (the proposition itself), *interpersonal* and *textual*, so they mostly classify metadiscourse (Crismore et al., 1993; Hyland, 2005a,b) in two categories: *textual* and *interpersonal*.

The corpus consists of texts from three different genres, one written (editorials from newspapers) and two spoken (excerpts from talk shows and closing arguments from trials) in two languages, Macedonian and English. As for the written genre, the analysis was carried out on nine editorials from American newspapers (*The New York Times* and *The Arizona Republic*) and nine from Macedonian newspapers (*Utrinski vesnik* (Утрински весник) and *Dnevnik* (Дневник)), on similar topics in both languages, i.e. of social interest for both societies.

As for the spoken genres, the analysis included nine excerpts from American talk shows (recorded from various TV shows) and nine from Macedonian talk shows (the talk show *Piramida*), as well as five closing arguments from American trials and five from Macedonian. All the excerpts from the talk shows were two to three minutes long and speakers discussed socially important topics. The closing arguments were about five to seven minutes long and were delivered by either a prosecutor or a lawyer.

The analysis was carried out both manually and with the help of computer software. First, a list of all the uses of a certain word/phrase in the corpus was obtained. Then, the ones that had a metadiscourse function in the texts were selected and analysed semantically and then formally.

Distribution and analysis

The analysis showed that engagement markers were most frequently used in the talk shows in both languages. As for their use in each genre separately, they were more frequently used in the Macedonian editorials compared to the English, and in the English talk shows and closing arguments compared to the Macedonian.

Table 1 and Table 2 below show the separate distribution of engagement markers in both languages. As it can be seen, the biggest discrepancy in use was found in the closing arguments as a genre.

Table 1. Distribution of engagement markers in the English corpus

English corpus		editorials		talk shows		closing arguments	
		<i>n</i>	freq. per 1000 words	<i>n</i>	freq. per 1000 words	<i>n</i>	freq. per 1000 words
we (inclusive)		9	1.62	61	14.7	17	3.93
us (inclusive)		3	0.54	14	3.38	1	0.23
our (inclusive)		8	1.44	14	3.38	-	-
you		8	1.44	93	22.47	104	24.05
your		7	1.26	25	6.04	8	1.85
folks/ ladies & gentlemen		-	-	1	0.24	6	1.39
one		-	-	1	0.24	-	-
questions	rhetorical	5	0.90	10	2.42	37	8.55
	short/tag	-	-	2	0.48	3	0.69
directives	cognitive	6	1.08	3	0.72	17	3.93
	physical	-	-	6	1.45	10	2.31
	textual	-	-	-	-	1	0.23
Total		n=46	8.26	n=230	55.57	n=204	47.17

Table 2. Distribution of engagement markers in the English corpus

Macedonian corpus		editorials		talk shows		closing arguments				
		<i>n</i>	freq.per 1000 words	<i>n</i>	freq.per 1000 words	<i>n</i>	freq.per 1000 words			
Inclusive we (<i>hue</i>)	explicit we	3	0.55	6.24	9	2.69	12.26	-	-	0.26
	1p.sg. coded in the verb form	31	5.69		32	9.57		1	0.26	
you (<i>mu, vue</i>)	explicit you	-	-	1.10	-	-	2.99	-	-	-
	2p.sg. coded in the verb	6	1.10		10	2.99		-	-	

form										
you (<i>ваш/а,е, и</i>)		-	-		2	0.60		-	-	
our (<i>наш/а,е, и</i>)		5	0.92		14	4.19		1	0.26	
us (<i>нас не/ нам ни</i>)		7	1.29		7	2.10		-	-	-
directives (<i>директиви</i>)	cognitive	-	-	0.18	-	-	-	-	-	-
	physical	1	0.18		-	-		-	-	
	textual	-	-		-	-		-	-	
questions (<i>прашања</i>)	rhetorical	19	3.50	3.68	5	1.50	3.89	1	0.26	0.26
	short/tag	1	0.18		8	2.39		-	-	
Total		n = 73	13.43		n = 87	26.02		n = 3	0.78	

In the next part, the analysis of the separate categories of engagement markers in the corpus is presented.

Personal reference

Personal pronouns for first and second person are considered personal reference (or personal metadiscourse) because they are used by the writers/speakers to refer to the members in the communication.

A. First person plural pronoun 'we' (*ние*)

The *inclusive we* includes both the speaker/writer and listener/reader in the discourse. When presenting information, its use lowers the potential risk of the listeners'/readers' rejection of arguments. The analysis² showed that the *inclusive we* was most frequently used in the talk shows in both languages. Furthermore, it was used more frequently in the Macedonian corpus of editorials compared to the English, and in the English corpus of closing arguments, compared to the Macedonian.

Example 1(a) below is from the corpus of talk shows and it presents the way in which speakers in both languages include the listeners in the discourse as if they already agree with them. So, speakers create this, so called, relationship of solidarity, in which they make the listeners share the responsibility for the arguments.

² It should be noted that all the uses of the pronouns in citations and indirect speech were excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, in the analysis of the Macedonian texts, both the examples of the first-person pronouns as well as the examples in which the person is coded in the form of the verb (*како што видовме*) were included.

- 1(a) *We don't have enough... so that the little that we have we hold on to it so tightly. That our hands literally are not open to receive that which is meant to come our way.* (ETS³-2)

In editorials, the use of the *inclusive we* is a significant metadiscourse strategy employed by the journalists to help them establish a relationship with the readers, especially because there is no direct contact between the writers and readers. The use of the *inclusive we* shows the readers that their opinions, desires and attitude are taken into consideration.

The analysis of the closing arguments showed that American lawyers/prosecutors use this metadiscourse strategy much more frequently than their Macedonian counterparts, with the purpose of involving the jury in their argumentation as if the members already agree, and in this way persuade them to accept it. So, in example 1(b), for instance, the lawyer in a way 'manipulates' the jury by involving them actively in the discourse, and 'making' them responsible in case they do not reach a decision in favour of his client (*all the jury can do is to recompense his client for his injury caused by the company Ford*).

- 1(b) *We can't do that. We can't give that to him. All we can do is compensate for the loss...* (ECA⁴-3)

B. Second person pronoun 'you' (mu/ vue)

The second-person pronoun 'you' has a metadiscourse function and can refer not only to the imagined reader/listener but can also be used generically and be replaced with *we* or *one*. Both uses of this pronoun were included in the analysis, the one for direct address to the readers/listeners and the generic use, because we believe that they both include the audience: in the first case to directly address them, and in the second one to hint at them. The analysis showed that the use of these pronouns was more frequent in spoken texts.

For instance, in the English closing arguments, *you* was frequently used by the lawyers/prosecutors to directly address the judge and jury and try to convince them that they should reach a decision in favour of their client. In the Macedonian closing arguments, on the other hand, this pronoun was not used at all. In 1(c), for instance, the prosecutor directly addresses the members of the jury, as if he is an expert, 'telling' them what they should do and what decision they should reach.

³ ETS – English talk show

⁴ ECA – English closing arguments

1(c) Use **your** collective memories and think inside when **you** get in that jury room. (ECA-4)

In the excerpts from talk shows, the use of *you* was mostly generic, as in example 1(d). Here, *you* refers to all the people in general, and not only to the listeners and it can be replaced with *one/човек(a)*. In this example the second person is coded in the form of the verb (e.g. *да научите (you must learn)*). We believe that this use has a metadiscourse function because it indirectly includes the listener in the group of those who should learn, understand, etc. In comparison, in 1(e), *you, your*, refers to the listeners.

1(d) *За да **будете** толерантен треба првенствено да научите да живеете самите со себе за да можете да ги разберете и другите.* (MTS⁵-7) // *If you want to be tolerant, then **you** must primarily learn to live with yourselves so **you** could be able to understand others.*

1(e) *Listen, would **you** rather a heroin addict break into five houses a day [...]then not break in **your** home to steal everything **you**'ve got and then...* (ETS-2)

In the editorials, this marker was mostly generic and it was used rarely, probably because in written genres there is no direct contact between the writer and reader and the writer uses other ways to involve the readers in the discourse.

Directives

Directives are another type of engagement marker. By using them, the writers/speakers are trying to take control over the text and the readers/ listeners and to show authority (Hyland 2005b: 371). This analysis follows Hyland's classification (Hyland 2002b) of three main functions of directives: **textual**, **physical** and **cognitive** (depending on whether they are used to lead the listeners/readers towards some textual (understand parts of text), physical (do a physical activity) or cognitive act (use their common sense to understand some point) (Hyland, 2005b, p.372; 2004, p.101). Hence, directives should not be treated as simple commands, but as complex rhetorical strategies used by the writers/speakers to build a relationship with the readers/ listeners and direct them as to how they should understand the text.

⁵ MTS - Macedonian talk show

The results of the analysis showed that directives as a metadiscourse strategy were almost not used at all in the Macedonian corpus, which shows that Macedonian speakers/writers avoid directly addressing the listeners/readers, compared to the English, who consider it an efficient strategy for establishing a closer relationship with the listeners/readers and persuading them to accept the presented arguments.

In the English editorials, all the directives had a cognitive function, i.e. they were used to urge the listener/reader to think clearly and understand the speaker's/writer's point of view (see 2 (a) where the writer tries to persuade the readers to think properly and accept his/her arguments). In the talk shows there were both physical and cognitive directives used. In example 2(b), for instance, the writer urges the listeners to engage in a physical activity i.e. to be generous whenever they can.

2(a) **Think about it properly**, and it leads you to a profound critique... (EE⁶-2)

2(b) *So, just don't give once. Give once a month for the rest of your life!* (ETS-2)

Directives were not used at all in the Macedonian closing arguments, but were frequently used in the English. Obviously, lawyers and prosecutors believe that this strategy can help them persuade the members of the jury to vote in favour of their client. The directives used in the English corpus were mostly cognitive, although there were few physical, which were used to urge the listeners to see or do something in order to understand it (cognitive). For instance, in 2(c), the speaker uses directives to persuade the listeners to take a physical activity (*send a message*) but in fact refers to a cognitive act (*make Ford understand that their cars can damage people's lives by making it pay a huge amount of money and admit its mistake*).

2(c) *I suggest that you come up with a significant amount for every day he's been hurt for the rest of his life. Make it fair. Then send the message to Ford [...]. Send them a message that it is not acceptable to make junk sardine cans [...] Award three to five times to compensate for the damage.* (ECA-3)

Questions

Questions⁷ are one more type of engagement marker used by the writers/speakers to connect with the readers/listeners and invite them to answer a question, while

⁶ EE – English editorial

⁷ The use of rhetorical questions is only presented here.

suggesting the right answer (Hyland, 2005b, p.373). In this way, they indirectly try to persuade them to accept the presented arguments.

The analysis showed that questions were frequently used in all the three genres, although their use was most significant in the English closing arguments. As for their use in the other two genres, it can be noted that rhetorical questions were much more frequently used in the Macedonian editorials compared to the English (significant 3.68 versus 0.90 – frequency per 1,000 words), while in the talk shows, they were used more or less the same in both corpuses.

The writers/speakers used rhetorical questions as an efficient strategy for directing the attention of the readers/listeners towards some specific stance. There were examples in which the writers gave the correct answer – the one that should be accepted as one and only (as in 3(a)), or they just indirectly hinted at it (as in 3(b) where, the prosecutor tries to persuade the jury that the defence has given no substantial proof, but some statement by an amateurish dermatologist).

3(a) *Why does all this matter? Because just as the United States has relied on foreigners...* (EE-8)

3(b) *And what does the defense have against this? They brought in, with all due respect to Dr. Underwood, a dermatologist, whose last autopsy was 18 years ago?* (ECA-5)

Conclusion

The research showed that there were differences in the use of personal pronouns, directives and questions as engagement markers in the three genres in both languages. They were most frequently used in both types of English spoken texts and least frequently in the Macedonian closing arguments. They were used moderately in the editorials in both languages. So, on the whole, the analysis revealed that the choice of markers within the same genre depends on the format of the text, i.e. the perception of the type of text by the different societies. So, in this sense, the greatest discrepancy in the use of engagement markers was found in the closing arguments. It seems that they have a completely different format in the two societies. English lawyers/prosecutors perform a whole show by engaging the jury in their speech as much as they can with the *inclusive we*, by addressing them directly with the second-person pronoun, by employing directives or by asking them questions. On the other hand, the Macedonian closing arguments employ set and fixed phrases and the speakers mostly summarize everything that has been mentioned during the trial. They don't try to involve the judge (or jury) at all. So, overall, although carried out on a relatively small corpus, this research gives insight into the dialogic nature of

argumentation and its impact on the persuasive effect of written and spoken texts in different genres and languages.

References

- Crismore, A., Markannen, R., Steffensen, M. (1993). Metadiscourse in persuasive Writing. A Study of Texts Written by American and Finnish University Students. *Written Communication* 10 (1): 39-71.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1974). *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.
- Hyland, K. (2002a). Authority and invisibility: authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics* 34, 1091-1112.
- Hyland, K. (2002b). Directives: Power and engagement in academic writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 23(2): 215–239.
- Hyland, K. (2002c). What do they mean? Questions in academic writing. *Text*, 22(4), 529–557.
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary Discourses: Social Interactions in Academic Writing*. The University of Michigan Press.
- Hyland, K. (2005a). *Metadiscourse. Exploring Interaction in Writing*. MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall.
- Hyland, K. (2005b). Representing readers in writing: Student and expert practices. *Linguistics and Education* 16, 363-377.
- Vande Kopple, W. (1985). Some explanatory Discourse on Metadiscourse. *College Composition and Communication* 36, 82-93.