



## A Needs Analysis of Metadiscourse Features Awareness and Media Literacy in Crisis News

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### ABSTRACT

Metadiscourse serves to direct readers through the text and allows them to understand it better. However, the readers of crisis news frequently misinterpret the news because of the inconsistent sentence formation. Hence, content creators or journalists need to create a message that is understood accurately. Therefore, the study's aim is to ascertain if journalism students are aware of the employment of metadiscourse features particularly in Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) related news before and after an intervention process. COVID-19 news is one of the crisis news. Eleven journalism students took the Metadiscourse Awareness Test twice, once before and once after the intervention process. As part of the intervention process, students were provided with news, with and without metadiscourse as well as writing prompts in order to enhance awareness of the appropriate usage of metadiscourse in crisis news. When compared with their pre-test scores, the results of the post-test revealed that the students had an overall greater awareness of metadiscourse features. Additionally, it was found that the intervention process had a substantial impact on the journalism students' awareness of the usage of metadiscourse in crisis news. Therefore, the results of Metadiscourse Awareness Test might be utilised to grow journalism students' knowledge of metadiscourse and create more effective content creators.

**Keywords:** *COVID-19 news, Crisis News, Metadiscourse, Metadiscourse Awareness Test, News with and without Metadiscourse, Writing Prompts*

## INTRODUCTION

Crisis news is often misrepresented and misinterpreted due to the improper use of word choice, phrases and sentence structure. As found by Fatah (2022), the news media plays a significant role in communicating important information during a pandemic and in shaping the public's opinion. Media platforms were widely acknowledged as the primary factor in the ease with which humans communicate (Nurun Anis & Norshimaa, 2023). These media platforms could also be used to strengthen interpersonal communications (Nur Anis Shazwani & Norshimaa, 2023). Nowadays, the presence of online media and prevalence of communication channels (social media, WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, and so on) has created an environment where speed is of the utmost importance as the latest information garners the most attention putting pressure on journalists to always be first to publish the latest news. Although there may be various reasons on why fake news is created or on how it is spread, it is the opinion of the researcher that a method for combatting this would be to create clear and easily understood messages for public consumption through the use of metadiscourse features as an indicator of media literacy.

Under pressure, journalists may have difficulties elucidating their message effectively. This can also be observed during pandemic induced crisis of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). An example of crisis news is COVID-19 news. This news has become predominant because readers would obtain information about COVID-19. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in late 2019 and slowly developed into a full-blown pandemic affecting the world by early 2020 and declared a worldwide health crisis or pandemic (Ayub et. al., 2022). In the Malaysian context, the arrival of COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by an "infodemic" of fake news which required the implementation of the anti-fake news ordinance by the Malaysian government in 2021 to curb its spread (Al Jazeera, 2021). There were initial roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines (where there was some rejection or hesitancy among the public in taking the vaccines) and misinformation downplaying the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic being circulated. In addition, the oversimplification, misrepresentation or misinterpretation of COVID-19 information was shared by various public figures although they were not qualified or misinformed about the topic being shared (Latif, 2022). Some of the examples observed would be news on the use of Ivermectin to treat COVID-19 and drinking hot water to prevent infection of COVID-19 as the high temperature will kill any viruses residing in the throat.

Mohamed et al. (2023) discovered in a survey of participants who refused the COVID-19 vaccination that, although their knowledge of crisis was reasonably accurate, their perception of COVID-19 was warped by conspiracy theories and disbelief in complicated data provided by local and international health authorities. The public uptake of

COVID-19 vaccination in Malaysia is primarily influenced by the risk of developing severe side effects, the effectiveness of the vaccine, and its Halal status (Abas et al., 2023; Teh et al., 2022). This emphasises the need for metadiscourse features to ensure clarity and allow the public to easily understand the data and information provided to them. It also allows the public to weigh the risk perception against the risk of taking COVID-19 vaccine more accurately. This again reiterates how vital it is that verified information is easily spread and understood with no room for misinterpretation by the public.

Ngadiron et al. (2021) and van der Linden et al. (2020) found that any misrepresentation is negative and causes problems for the government and society in general to take remedial actions in addressing potential crises such as the pandemic. The ease of access to mass media communication channels allows for the rapid spread of inaccurate information and creates an effect similar to the "broken telephone game" where the same message is slowly distorted beyond recognition as it passes from individual to individual whether intentionally or unintentionally. This can be reduced through the use of metadiscourse features which are widely understood and digested to ensure a uniform understanding of the message presented. Hence, this research aims to add to their repertoire of tools and increase awareness of the existence of metadiscourse features as a vital tool for content creation. Metadiscourse features refer to keywords and phrases that can be used to improve understanding and affect the presentation of information (Bo, 2015; Hyland, 2018; Nash, 2021).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Mass Media Communication**

The development of technology has changed the media landscape and how messages are produced, received, and understood has evolved through the development of new communication channels such as social media, television, and radio. This evolution has grown the reach and influence of any one person, allowing them to spread their message and agenda to a larger audience as compared to previous variations of communication. In the modern day, social media has provided a platform to anyone to spread his or her perceived truth to thousands and even millions of people which highlights a need for the study of how readers and content creators create and perceive messages. This power to spread news on a mass scale (through the use of mass media such as newspapers and social media) creates a potential for unethical communication at all the other levels, as the message is repeated again and again.

The initial encoding/decoding model of communication first stemmed from the work of Shannon and Weaver initially published in the 1948 paper, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" and discussed five basic components of communication: a source, a transmitter, a channel, a receiver, and a destination (Shannon, 1948). It mainly discussed the idea that communication was a multi-step process where the source creates

a message which is sent to the receiver and can be affected by external factors which may dilute the message and views the audience as passive. However, this model was discarded in favour of the encoding/decoding model proposed by Hall (2007) in 1973, which involves only three main aspects and narrows down the aspect of communication to focus on how both sender and receiver actively encode and decode the message which is more relevant to this research.

The development of technology has compounded this problem and allowed the mass production and consumption of media where news can travel nearly instantaneously allowing messages to be broadcasted on a scale that was not possible in the past. In addition, Jones (2013) discussed how communication is no longer limited to just spoken and oral communication and that the use of symbols is becoming more prevalent in modern society (through the use of emojis and memes). This means that it is becoming even more difficult to create messages and reduce misinterpretations of any content.

Communication is a challenge especially when it comes to the mass-media which can be seen to be a one-way conversation with the message being sent out with a very limited ability to respond towards misunderstandings regarding the message. Journalists and other content creators are tasked with encoding a message that can be widely understood even when the audience come from differing backgrounds (education level, life experiences, cultural values) and the same messages may be interpreted differently. In the context of daily communication, these misinterpretations are relatively harmless; but in the context of mass media, it has the potential to create widespread panic or even national economic downturn (Ngadiron et al., 2021; Shantha Gowri & Vedantam Seetha, 2019; van der Linden et al., 2020).

It is vital that the construction of messages is given due consideration. Messages can mean various things to different people and sentences can carry different meaning based on how it is phrased (Bo, 2015). In other words, metadiscourse can affect the understanding of the readers. Hence, Malaysian government would need to be cautious in content creation because it is substantial for any messages disseminated to the public to be accurate and operating in its intended manner. This is because there is a ripple effect that impacts those not exposed to the media messages directly but also in the form of conversational currency and viral messages (Ali & Malaco, 2022; Ayub et. al., 2022). Apart from that, Mahamad et al. (2021) identified that most social media users share news without verifying its legitimacy on social media platforms. This again emphasises the importance of creating clear and easily understood messages to reduce misinterpretations and misrepresentations.

## **Awareness and Media Literacy in Crisis News**

Although emphasis has been placed on the creation and spread of information, a holistic view is also required to tackle the issue of misinformation or fake news. This burden would not be shouldered by the writers and content creators but would also be shouldered by the readers and content consumers themselves as media literacy is now an urgent need (Clayton et al., 2020; Jones-Jang et al., 2021; Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Media use during earthquakes and COVID-19 was also found not to differ significantly in terms of media use which was oriented towards social understanding and information seeking (Vozab et al., 2023). Readers in a crisis have a perceived urgency and need for information. In this haste, to obtain information quickly may affect those with a lower awareness and media literacy. Thus, the skills of the readers to interpret and interact with the news in front of them also have a direct impact on the spread of fake news.

Readers with a high social media literacy can moderate the spread of information and analyse it before spreading it as opposed to those with a lower social media literacy (Wei et al., 2023). However, the practice and education of media literacy are not necessarily taught in the classroom. Swart (2023) found that the practice of news literacy is not necessarily acquired through formal learning but is also something inherent as a form of situated knowledge that is grown through unconscious practice. Hence, the action of processing information and media literacy in general could be seen as not only something that has to be trained but is also something that already exists at some levels for the readers and other content consumers. The use of metadiscourse awareness and education might serve as a good measure for media literacy and media literacy education.

## **Metadiscourse Features**

Metadiscourse features are a method in organising discourse which allows the writer to express their attitudes towards the texts and readers (Wang & Zhang, 2017). It is a compilation of words and phrases that are universally understood to carry the same meaning and allows for a clearer explanation of the content creator's intention in creating the message. Craig (1999) also ascertained that metadiscourse is able to affect the expectations of the readers and their interpretations of the discourse. Metadiscourse features are a linguistic tool which refers to certain keywords or phrases which allows for interaction between the author or speaker and their audience to achieve successful communication (Hyland, 2004). In simple terms, it is a concept on how keywords are used and how those keywords are interpreted by individuals with the idea that metadiscourse features are universally understood to carry the same connotation and meaning when it is used. It is also considered as a central pragmatic construct and allows for interaction between the author or speaker with his or her receivers to achieve successful communication (Hyland, 2004).

Metadiscourse is a relatively new field of discussion in linguistics and is believed to be integral in the presentation of ideational meaning (Amiryousefi & Eslami Rasekh, 2010). It embodies the idea that communication is not just an exchange of information but also showcases the attitudes of the author towards the topic and creates a deeper understanding. There are a few variations of metadiscourse classifications, but the Dafouz-Milne (2008) framework will be the one used for this research as it is more comprehensive than those from other models of metadiscourse and matches the intent of this research which is to investigate newspaper discourse. Other models to classify metadiscourse features also exist (Crismore's model, Salager-Meyer's model, and Vande-Kopple's model) but have been disregarded as they focus on academic writing or other fields of writing.

Dafouz-Milne's (2008) model divides metadiscourse features into two categories which are textual and interpersonal metadiscourse features (see Table 1 and Table 2). These metadiscourse features are used either intentionally or unintentionally by content creators and allow readers to understand the content creators' views and the overall message the content creators are trying to present. Textual metadiscourse features are used to present facts and interpersonal metadiscourse features allow the content creators to express their opinion of the topic (Wang & Zhang, 2017). Amiryousefi and Rasekh (2010) also share this definition of metadiscourse features where textual metadiscourse serves to guide the readers through the text and interpersonal metadiscourse is more persuasive in nature. Hence, an active use of these features would allow journalists and content creators to ensure their messages is understood easily and allow readers to fully understand the intent of the authors.

Categories	Functions
Logical Markers	Express semantic relationships between discourse stretches
Sequencers	Mark particular positions in a series
Reminders	Refer back to previous sections in the text
Topicalisers	Indicate topic shifts
Code Glosses	Explain, rephrase or exemplify textual material
Illocutionary Markers	Explicitly name the act the writer performs
Announcements	Refer forwards to future sections in the text

**Table 1: Textual Metadiscourse Features and Their Functions**

Categories	Functions
Hedges	Express partial commitment to the truth-value of the text
Certainty Markers	Express total commitment to the truth-value of the text
Attributors	Refer to the source of information
Attitude Markers	Express writers' affective values towards text and readers
Commentaries	Help to establish reader-writer rapport through the text

**Table 2: Interpersonal Metadiscourse Features and Their Functions**

Table 1 and Table 2 indicate the various types of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse features, as well as their functions in text. There is currently no complete corpus of metadiscourse features available and the coding is done based on the intent and functions outlined above based on the Dafouz-Milne's (2008) model. As mentioned previously, other models of metadiscourse exist and may have different names for the respective categories with similar functions outlined. Thus, any future researcher should consider the individual definitions when comparing the metadiscourse models as opposed to judging them based on the names.

### **Journalism Education in Malaysia**

In Malaysia, political will and involvement in the media have been a long-standing feature where many local media outlets are tied to either state or national-level political parties with a lack of truly independent media (Nain & Venkiteswaran, 2016). Although this may not seem directly relevant to the current study, it does raise some questions on the freedom of speech and the political will to develop the standards of journalism education in Malaysia. In the 1980's, students were also not encouraged to question the educational standards or to consider any alternatives to these standards that could be more suited to the local context (Nain & Anuar, 1994; Nain & Kirton, 1989).

In more modern times, there has not been much development in journalism education in Malaysia. Ng and Lim (2008) interviewed educators and staff representing notable newspapers and news agencies to understand the landscape of journalism students in Malaysia. They found that journalism students were lacking in their language competency and industry players in Malaysia were of the opinion that the journalism students needed to improve their language abilities to be more effective as journalists (Ng & Lim, 2008). Ismail et al. (2015) received feedback that Western standards of journalism education could not be applied to the Asian context as there were various differences between the various cultures. This could be an indication of a lack of development of journalism educational standards over the years. Yusof et al. (2018) also discovered in

their interviews with other experts that industry and academia need to collaborate extensively to ensure quality journalism graduates as the curriculum did not fulfil the requirements of the industry. The role of journalists and the process of creating a message is both tricky and arduous, the training required to create competent journalists is also another issue. Journalists need to be able to reorganise complex information into easily digestible information for content consumers (Ismail et al., 2015).

Journalists are not isolated, and their work affects various levels of society. The source, purpose, as well as the news angles need to be considered to ensure their news reports are suitable for publication (Nor, 2022). Hence, further development of training standards is paramount to their development and to close the gap between industry and educational standards (Suwannasom, 2023). To date, there is a lack of training or training standards available as stated by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Minister Tan Sri Annuar Musa (Bernama, 2022). There currently are no consistent and continuous training guidelines, unlike other professions such as accounting or finance and this research may help with the development of future training programmes. Thus, this research aims to answer a research question, which is "To what extent are the journalism students aware of the use of metadiscourse features before and after the intervention process?" is framed in this current study.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design and Samples**

A needs analysis was applied in this research to evaluate the journalism students' awareness in the use of metadiscourse where students were asked to answer a Metadiscourse Awareness Test and the results were tabulated and analysed. This study is a small part of a larger study. Lecturers teaching journalism course were asked to recruit their students, but unfortunately, not many students were interested to participate in this research. There were six students who responded and these six students invited their friends from the journalism course via the snowball sampling method to venture into the research. Henceforth, 11 Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) students from the journalism course became the participants of this research. Creswell and Creswell (2023) and Kim et al. (2017) mentioned that the sample size of 11 was sufficient for the study recruitment since this current study forms a part of a bigger research, which employed the mixed-method research design. A total of seven female journalism students and four male journalism students participated in this research. The main research design consists of a pre-test, intervention process and lastly, a post-test.

### **Analytical Framework**



As mentioned previously in the literature review section, Dafouz-Milne's (2008) framework was utilised as the analytical framework for this research. There are multiple similarities between Dafouz-Milne's (2008) framework and analysed editorial news similar to the analysis of COVID-19 news articles. The framework consists of the division of metadiscourse into two main categories which are textual and interpersonal metadiscourse. Textual metadiscourse aimed to emphasise on the writers' stance or identity by ensuring that the text would be coherent for the readers, while interpersonal metadiscourse aimed to stress on the readers' engagement or involvement to the text by guiding the readers throughout the text. This is pertinent to ensure the written texts could be understood, a balance of the writers' stance or identity and readers' engagement or involvement to the text would need to be done. This framework is used to create questions and answers in the Metadiscourse Awareness Test.

The Dafouz-Milne's (2008) model divides metadiscourse into two main categories which are textual metadiscourse and interpersonal metadiscourse. There is a total of seven textual metadiscourse features and five interpersonal metadiscourse features. Textual metadiscourse is mainly used to organise discourse and mainly serves to make the text more structured, interpersonal metadiscourse allow the content creators to insert themselves into the text and express their opinions or feelings in the text. Although the Dafouz-Milne framework also discusses various sub-categories for each of the metadiscourse features, only the main categories were utilised to prevent convolution.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The Metadiscourse Awareness Test (MAT) that consisted of 12 objective questions were designed to test the students' ability to identify the use of metadiscourse features in various COVID-19 news articles by choosing the correct metadiscourse feature to fit into the gap created by the researcher. Two versions of this test were created for the purpose of being the pre-test and post-test administered to the students before and after an intervention process. Each Metadiscourse Awareness Test session had a time limit of 30 minutes. This test did not require them to identify or name the metadiscourse features but just to choose the metadiscourse feature among other possible answers not containing metadiscourse features to fill in the gaps.

This test was converted into a softcopy format using Google Forms to aid in the scoring process and facilitate the involvement of the participants who took this test virtually. Based on the articles published during the pandemic period, the MAT was developed through the removal of metadiscourse features in selected articles. The developed test was then checked by the inter-raters and amended accordingly. The journalism students' answers and ability to identify the metadiscourse features served as a pre-test for their awareness on the use of these features. The intervention process comprised exposing the students to news articles with and without metadiscourse as well as writ-

ing prompts to allow the students to practise using these metadiscourse features. Students were exposed to articles with and without metadiscourse features and questions regarding metadiscourse. These articles were COVID-19 news articles selected from two prominent news portals in Malaysia: *The Star* and *The Edge*. The selected news was on a recent topic, such as the direction where Malaysia is heading, which was taken from the January 2022 issue of *The Star*. Another current news that was chosen was on the decision of Malaysia reviving COVID-19 immunity passport to travel. This current news was taken from the February 2022 issue from *The Edge*. The intervention process took around two hours to complete.

Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 was used to collect, assemble and compute the findings from the pre-test MAT to ascertain the students' initial awareness. In order to ascertain their post-intervention awareness, the findings from the post-test MAT were collected, assembled and computed using SPSS. The mean test results were computed using SPSS, and the intervention process' relevance was ascertained. The scores and percentages would be determined using descriptive statistics. To examine if there was an improvement in the students' knowledge of detecting metadiscourse elements following the intervention procedure, a paired samples t-test was used to compare the pre-test and post-test.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As a whole, the journalism students' average scores increased after the intervention process. The average overall score for the pre-test is 5.90/12 and the average score for the post-test is 7.09/12. The overall pre-test result had a mean score of 5.42 (45.14 %) which was lower than 50 per cent and could indicate a lower ability to identify metadiscourse features and a lack of awareness towards metadiscourse features. Subsequently, the average percentage after the intervention process was increased to 6.50 (54.17 %) which reveals that the intervention process had an overall positive effect.

Each metadiscourse category had a maximum score of 11 points based on the number of students who successfully answered the respective question with each student representing one point. The researcher has opted to set a threshold of 50 per cent or 5.5 points to show a high awareness of metadiscourse where students who had scored greater than 5.5 points were assumed to have a good ability of identifying the respective metadiscourse features. Table 3 and Table 4 will only show the metadiscourse awareness test scores for each type of metadiscourse feature based on the two main categories of metadiscourse which are textual metadiscourse and interpersonal metadiscourse features. Table 5 will highlight the changes in the scores from the pre-test to post-test for each metadiscourse category.

Textual metadiscourse		
Categories	Pre-test	Post-test
Announcements	8.00	10.00
Reminders	7.00	7.00
Code glosses	6.00	7.00
Logical markers	5.00	7.00
Sequencers	4.00	8.00
Topicalisers	4.00	4.00
Illocutionary markers	3.00	4.00
Total	37.00	47.00
Mean score	5.29/11.00	6.71/11.00

**Table 3: Textual Metadiscourse Awareness Test Scores for Pre-test and Post-test**

As seen in Table 3, the pre-test mean score of 5.29 for textual metadiscourse, but this was improved to 6.71 which was an indicator of significant improvement in the context of this research. There was an increase of 1.42 points in the mean score for identifying textual metadiscourse features. Nearly every textual metadiscourse category (announcements, code glosses, logical markers, sequencers, and illocutionary markers) had an improvement from pre-test to post-test with only two categories remaining stagnant in their scores (topicalisers and reminders).

Table 3 sorted the textual metadiscourse features in descending order based on their pre-test scores. In the pre-test, the metadiscourse feature with the highest score was displayed by announcements with a score of 8.00 and it was also the highest scoring metadiscourse feature in the post-test as well with a score of 10.00. Reminders exhibited the second highest score with a pre-test score of 7.00 which did not change during the post-test (7.00 during the post-test). Code glosses took the third spot during the pre-test with a score of 6.00 and this was increased to 7.00 during the post-test. Logical markers took the fourth place in terms of pre-test scores with a score of 5.00 that subsequently increased to 7.00 during the post-test. Sequencers and topicalisers both had a score of 4.00 during the pre-test but students scored higher on identifying sequencers with a score of 8.00 when compared with topicalisers where the score remained at 4.00 during the post-test. Illocutionary markers had the lowest score with a score of 3.00 on both the pre-test and post-test. Among the seven textual metadiscourse markers, it can be observed that only two categories (topicalisers and illocutionary markers) were under 50 per cent after the intervention process (post-test scores) meaning that more focus should be given to these categories during the intervention process.

Interpersonal metadiscourse		
Categories	Pre-test	Post-test
Attributors	8.00	6.00
Hedges	7.00	8.00
Attitude markers	5.00	4.00
Commentaries	4.00	8.00
Certainty markers	4.00	5.00
Total	28.00	31.00
Mean score	5.60/11.00	6.20/11.00

**Table 4: Interpersonal Metadiscourse Awareness Test Scores for Pre-test and Post-test**

In Table 4, it can be observed that the mean score for identifying interpersonal metadiscourse increased by 0.60 points from 5.60 in the pre-test to 6.20 in the post-test. Three categories (hedges, commentaries, and certainty markers) had an increase in their post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores and two categories (attributors and attitude markers) actually had a decrease in their post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores. It would mean that more attention needs to be given to improve the intervention process for the beforementioned interpersonal metadiscourse features which suffered a decrease in score.

Table 4 sorted the interpersonal metadiscourse features in descending order based on their pre-test scores. In the pre-test, the category with the highest score was attributors (8.00 points) but this score decreased to 6.00 during the post-test. Hedges had the second highest score in the pre-test with a score of 7.00 and increased to 8.00 during the post-test. Attitude markers had a pre-test score of 5.00 which decreased to 4.00 during the post-test. Lastly, commentaries initially scored 4.00 during the pre-test and had a higher score of 5.00 during the post-test. The decrease in the post-test scores for attitude markers and attributors was concerning as it could indicate that there were some issues with the intervention process, and this would need to be considered in future research especially since the awareness of attributors was initially high at 8.00 points which was tied for the highest score in the metadiscourse awareness pre-test. On top of that, attitude markers and certainty markers were still under the 50 per cent after the intervention (post-test scores) which showed that more focus would need to be given to these categories as well in future intervention processes.

Categories	Change
Sequencers	4.00
Commentaries	4.00
Logical markers	2.00
Announcements	2.00
Illocutionary markers	1.00
Code glosses	1.00
Hedges	1.00
Certainty markers	1.00
Topicalisers	0.00
Reminders	0.00
Attitude markers	-1.00
Attributors	-2.00

**Table 5: Changes in Total Metadiscourse Awareness Test Scores for Each Metadiscourse Feature**

As observed in Table 5, there was a significant increase of four points from pre-test to post-test in the students' ability to identify sequencers and commentaries. A notable increase of two points from pre-test to post-test in the ability to identify logical markers and announcement can also be observed. The ability to identify illocutionary markers, code glosses, hedges, and certainty markers was mildly increased by one point from pre-test to post-test. Though most categories (8 out of 12 metadiscourse categories) had an increased score from pre-test to post-test, some categories had no improvement or poorer performance. The metadiscourse awareness scores for identifying topicalisers and reminders had no change from pre-test to post-test, a mild decrease of one point was observed in the score to identify attitude markers, and a notable decrease of two points was observed in the score to identify attributors.

This would illustrate that there is a need to amend the intervention process for these categories (topicalisers, reminders, attitude markers, and attributors) for a more positive effect. The decrease in the metadiscourse awareness of attitude markers and attributors echoes the research done by Tan and Wong (2014), which found that there was a low awareness of evidentials (the equivalent of attributors in this research) and attitude markers to be among the categories of metadiscourse with the lowest use by Malaysian undergraduate students. The lack of use could be an indicator that it is a more challenging metadiscourse feature to use, and the students have a lack of exposure towards these metadiscourse features which cannot be remedied in a short intervention. This reveals that the students were unaware that they would have to employ attitude markers to describe the actual situation for the readers to know the exact truth

of the situation. The students were also unaware that they would need to use attributors to ensure that important people would be quoted, evoking the readers' curiosity about the content of the text, hence, making the text more reader-friendly. Nonetheless, the awareness of other metadiscourse features can be trained in a relatively short period.

In a study conducted by Hooi et al. (2022), it was demonstrated that journalists were able to identify both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse with a high awareness of these features. This is an interesting contrast as the students investigated in this research were not found to have a very high awareness towards metadiscourse features and could indicate that most journalists would pick up this awareness during their work as opposed to learning it during their studies. This is because the participants of this current research were journalism students, and they were not exposed to real life language from the workplace. Comparing with Hooi et al.'s (2022) study, the participants were journalists from two prominent news portals, namely *The Star Online* and *Focus Malaysia*, as well as they had at least one year of working experience. In other words, the participants from Hooi et al.'s (2022) study attempted to use textual and interpersonal metadiscourse in their writings; consequently, they were aware of the use of metadiscourse features in business news.

Overall, students had a better natural awareness for identifying interpersonal metadiscourse features (mean pre-test score of 5.60 points) when compared with textual metadiscourse features (mean pre-test score of 5.29 points). In contrast, this was reversed after the post-test where students scored higher in identifying textual metadiscourse features (mean post-test score of 6.71 points) when compared with identifying interpersonal metadiscourse features (mean post-test score of 6.20 points). This was also shown in the improvement of scores from pre-test to post-test where there was an increase of 1.42 points for textual metadiscourse features when compared with an increase of only 0.6 points for interpersonal metadiscourse features.

On the other hand, a low awareness of these features does not necessarily mean a low use of the metadiscourse features. As seen in the research by Aliyu and Korau (2020) regarding Nigerian undergraduate students, the majority of the participants had a low awareness of metadiscourse features but actually used them in moderation unconsciously in their academic writing.

Mean score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)	df
1.18	1.08	0.33	-3.634	0.005	10

**Table 6: Overall Statistics and Paired Samples t-test**

From Table 6, the paired samples t-test revealed a positive mean score, which showed that generally, there was a greater improvement in the post-test when compared with

the pre-test. The Standard Deviation score (Std. Deviation) of 1.08 also demonstrated that the students' scores were more closely clustered after the intervention, which means that the results were consistent across all the students studied. This also revealed that students who initially scored poorly on the pre-test were able to catch up with their peers, despite the higher average score on the post-test. Besides that, the standard error of the mean (Std. Error Mean) of 0.33 indicated that the sample mean is unlikely to significantly differ from the true population mean. The t-test score of -3.634, coupled with a significant value [Sig. (2-tailed)] of 0.005, indicated that the intervention process was statistically significant and suggests that the intervention process is an effective treatment for enhancing metadiscourse awareness.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the Metadiscourse Awareness Test pre-test show that the students exhibited limited awareness of metadiscourse features, as evidenced by their initial scores on the assessment. Nonetheless, their awareness could be enhanced through the implementation of interventions, such as incorporating writing prompts and utilising news articles both with and without metadiscourse to raise their awareness and allow them to practise using metadiscourse features. Furthermore, the results can add on to the theoretical framework for future studies in this domain, particularly in the context of the journalism students' awareness of metadiscourse features. Results obtained from the MAT will provide the base line results of the journalism students' awareness of metadiscourse. The tools employed in this research can serve as pedagogical resources in writing instruction, aiding students in developing proficient writing skills that effectively engage readers while ensuring accuracy and preventing misrepresentation or misinterpretation of news. In addition, metadiscourse can serve as a teaching tool for learners of the English language by providing them with a better understanding of the English language (Al-Khafajy & Al ma'moori, 2023; Aliyu & Korau, 2020; Yoon & Kim, 2022). The results showed that the targeted education (intervention process) had a positive impact on students' ability to employ rhetorical devices effectively. The results also suggested that integrating metadiscourse training into education was possible as even a small and short intervention process was able to develop more adept communicators capable of leveraging metadiscourse to enhance the quality of their writing.

Despite its limitation of having a small sample size of 11 journalism students, it is recommended to explore the metadiscourse awareness of other student populations, as well as media practitioners involved in mass communication. By analysing a broader range of participants, a more comprehensive understanding of metadiscourse awareness in general can be achieved. The Metadiscourse Awareness Test can serve as a baseline for subsequent investigations, facilitating the measurement of metadiscourse awareness in various contexts. Aside from that, the participants in this research could be selected from different language backgrounds to see if differing levels of English

mastery could affect the impact of metadiscourse features especially in a multi-cultural environment such as Malaysia. The development of machine learning and "natural language processing" (NLP) via computer programming could also help in the development of a corpus which would help greatly in the identification and analysis of metadiscourse use. At the time of writing, there is no comprehensive corpus of metadiscourse features. The researcher strongly believes that the development of such a corpus would greatly advance the field of metadiscourse research. This study can also replicated to other genres of crisis news, as well as to academic texts, political news and crime news.



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