



**Faculty of Language and Communication**

**METADISCOURSE IN COVID-19 VACCINE OPINION ARTICLES: A  
CONTRASTIVE STUDY BETWEEN AMERICAN AND MALAYSIAN  
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ONLINE NEWSPAPERS**

by

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This final year project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the use of metadiscourse markers in COVID-19 vaccine opinion articles in American and Malaysian online newspapers. The objectives in this study include (1) to identify the metadiscourse categories and sub-categories used in Malaysian and American online newspapers in COVID-19 vaccine opinion articles, (2) to investigate the frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in these two texts, (3) to analyse how interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers are used to achieve persuasion in the two texts, and (4) to investigate if there is any significant relationship between the distribution and use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse in these texts. In this study, descriptive research design with both qualitative and quantitative approach is used. The research framework used in this study is Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse. The findings of this study reveal that both interactive and interactional metadiscourse are present in American and Malaysian COVID-19 vaccine opinion articles. However, there are similarities and differences in the way American and Malaysian writers employ these markers in the writing of COVID-19 vaccine opinion articles.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana penanda *metadiscourse* digunakan dalam artikel pendapat dalam surat khabar dalam talian di Amerika Syarikat dan Malaysia. Objektif kajian termasuklah (1) untuk mengenalpasti kategori dan sub-kategori *metadiscourse* yang digunakan dalam surat khabar dalam talian di Amerika Syarikat dan Malaysia dalam artikel pendapat mengenai vaksin COVID-19, (2) untuk mengenalpasti jumlah dan peratusan penanda *interactive* dan *interactional metadiscourse* yang digunakan dalam artikel pendapat mengenai vaksin COVID-19 dalam surat khabar dalam talian di Amerika Syarikat dan

Malaysia, (3) untuk mengenalpasti bagaimana penanda *interactive* dan *interactional metadiscourse* digunakan untuk mencapai tujuan pemujukan dalam artikel pendapat mengenai vaksin COVID-19 dalam surat khabar dalam talian di Amerika Syarikat dan Malaysia, dan (4) untuk mengenalpasti sama ada terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara penggunaan *interactive* dan *interactional metadiscourse* dalam kedua-dua teks. Kajian ini merupakan kajian deskriptif yang menggunakan kedua-dua kaedah kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Kerangka analisis yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah kerangka *metadiscourse* yang dikemukakan oleh Hyland (2005). Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa kedua-dua kumpulan penulis menggunakan *interactive* dan *interactional metadiscourse* dalam artikel pendapat mereka mengenai vaksin COVID-19. Namun begitu, terdapat persamaan dan perbezaan dalam cara penggunaan penanda metadiscourse dalam artikel-artikel yang ditulis oleh penulis yang berasal daripada Malaysia dengan penulis yang berasal daripada Amerika Syarikat.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Research Problem**

Language and writing are cultural phenomena as each community have their own distinct rhetorical tendencies (Connor, 2002). Some cultures may favour being straightforward and bold when negotiating an argument, while some in other communities regard provisional statements which leave some space for readers to agree or disagree as appropriate and rhetorically persuasive (Hayisama, Shah, & Adnan, 2019). A writer who expresses meaning must take into account its social influence and the influence that it has on the readers who interpret the meaning (Kuhi & Mojood, 2012). The norms and expectations of a certain culture and professional communities influence how writers project themselves, negotiate an argument and engage with their readers (Abdollahzadeh, 2011). To gain a better understanding on cultural particulars and linguistic universals, contrastive studies are important (Kuhi & Mojood, 2012). A contrastive study is one of the means to obtain accurate descriptive knowledge regarding individual languages and cultures and at the same time gain a better insight on general-language based communication (Connor, 1996).

The fundamental element of successful written interaction is the capability to establish an appropriate relationship with readers (Fu & Hyland, 2014). To influence readers' understanding of the discourse produced, writers have to consider the expectations of their readers to involve them in the reading development (Tavanpour, Goudarzi, & Farnia, 2016). A concept which enables the author to involve writers and their readers in reciprocal acts of comprehension and involvement is metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is defined as the linguistic resources employed by writers to convey a discourse or their point of view towards either its content or the reader (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Metadiscourse facilitate writers to create a

coherent text and establish a writer-reader interaction (Rahimpour & Faghieh, 2009). Based on Hyland's (2005) taxonomy, metadiscourse markers are categorised into two categories namely interactive and interactional categories. Interactive metadiscourse markers are markers which facilitate the organisations of ideas in the texts. These markers include transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses. Transition markers facilitate the writer to convey semantic relations between main clauses. Some examples of transition markers include and; in addition; but; and thus. Frame markers is associated with discourse acts, sequences and text stages. For example, these devices include finally; to conclude; and my purpose is. Endophoric markers enable the writer to refer to information in other parts of the text. Some examples include, noted above; see Fig and in section 2. Evidentials assist the writer to include source of information from other texts. For example, according to X and Y states. Code glosses enables readers to understand meanings. Some examples of code glosses include namely; such as; e.g and in other words. Interactional metadiscourse markers are markers which include the audience in the text. These markers include hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self mentions and engagement markers. Hedges retain the author's full commitment or open dialogue. Some examples of hedges include might; perhaps; possible and about. Boosters highlight certainty or close dialogue. Some examples include in fact; definitely and it is clear that. Attitude markers conveys the author's point of view to preposition. Some examples include, unfortunately; I agree and surprisingly. Self mentions shows direct reference to writer(s). For example, I; we; my and our. Engagement markers explicitly show writer-reader relationship. For example, consider; note that and you can see that.

The preference of metadiscourse usage in a discourse indicates that heterogeneity of people's socio-cultural perspectives results in various choices (Hayisama, Shah, & Adnan,

2019). Previous contrastive metadiscourse studies have mostly revolved around the academic genre (Khajavy & Asadpour, 2012; Alshahrani, 2015; Ghadyani & Tahririan, 2015; Farzannia & Farnia, 2016; Munalim & Lintao, 2016, Kahkesh & Alipour, 2017; Capar & Turan, 2019; Mazidah, 2019; Shafique, Shahbaz & Hafeez, 2019; Goltaji & Hooshmand, 2021). Khajavy and Asadpour (2012) focused on how English and Persian writers used interactive metadiscourse features in the discussion section of English and Persian sociological research articles. Meanwhile, Alshahrani (2015) examined doctorate thesis discussion and conclusion chapters written in English by Arab and American apprentice scholars. In Ghadyani and Tahririan (2015)'s study, the researchers investigated interactive markers in medical research articles written by Iranian and native authors of ISI and non-ISI medical journals. Meanwhile, Farzannia and Farnia (2016) studied the usage of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in introduction sections of Persian and English mining engineering articles. Munalim and Lintao (2016) examined interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in book prefaces of Filipino and English authors. Kahkesh and Alipour (2017) compared metadiscourse markers in English and Persian university lectures. Meanwhile, Capar and Turan (2019) investigated how Turkish non-native speakers and native speakers of English employed interactional metadiscourse markers in research article. In another study by Mazidah (2019), the researcher examined the usage of interactive metadiscourse markers in the abstracts of two different journals written by Indonesian scholars and native English scholars. Shafique, Shahbaz and Hafeez (2019) compared Native English and Pakistani English research writings in the employment of metadiscourse markers. Meanwhile, Goltaji and Hooshmand (2021) investigated the role of distribution of interactional markers applied in TEFL textbooks written by native English writers and Persian writers.

Newspaper genre is less studied in terms of the distribution of metadiscourse markers (Lee, 2019). Based on Hyland's (2017) report, newspaper or journalism was not incorporated in the table of most frequent 30 words in the titles of metadiscourse-related articles in Google Scholar. The most popular cluster of keyword associations in Web of Science metadiscourse-related papers is research article; academic writing and academic discourse with 48 papers and homogeneity of 0.637. This indicates that the academic genre is the main focus of metadiscourse research.

A newspaper constructs a discourse which propagates knowledge and belief in the minds of people (Fairclough, 1992). According to Abdollahzadeh (2007), the newspaper is a socio-cultural activity in which the writer uses metadiscourse to organise their texts and project their personality, credibility and consideration towards their readers when writing summaries and important events to the public. The language of newspaper discourse is worth noting since the authors try to persuade anonymous readers who might agree with the author's point of view or who might not (Shahid, Qasim & Hasnain, 2020). In a newspaper, there are different types of text, such as news reports, feature articles and editorials, columns and opinion articles (BBC, n.d.) Opinion articles are typically written by experts and do not represent the newspaper's official viewpoint. Due to this attribute, opinion article is recognised as an adequate example of persuasive writing which sets the standard for written persuasion (Connor, 1996). In a similar vein, Van Dijk (1988) described opinion article as a subcategory of persuasive text that aims to convince their audience through their writing. Thus, opinion articles in newspapers serves an essential role to increase the likelihood of vaccine acceptance. An example of linguistic feature that is closely related to persuasive writing is metadiscourse as it focuses on the interpersonal relationship and interaction between reader and writer (Sukma & Sujatna, 2014). The study of metadiscourse as an

effective tool in public health communication in informing, influencing and motivating the public on getting COVID-19 vaccine is vital when we consider communication as a way of our social engagement.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) or also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a disease caused by a novel coronavirus (Cennimo, 2021). COVID-19 is usually transmitted through respiratory droplets and is highly contagious (Mohapetra, Pintilie, Kandi, Sarangi, Das, Sahu, & Perekhoda, 2020). Common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, malaise, headache, and myalgia, and in some cases, breathing difficulties. In severe cases, COVID-19 leads to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and death (Stewart, Connelly, & Robinson, 2021). Hence, it is vital to get the COVID-19 vaccine to reduce risk of infection, getting seriously ill and dying from COVID-19 (Lum, 2021). A vaccine is a biological substance that triggers an individual's immune system to produce immunity to a specific disease. Vaccines are typically given through needle injections, but can also be given by mouth or sprayed into the nose (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018). When an individual is vaccinated, their immune system can defend itself against the targeted disease (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020). Some examples of COVID-19 vaccine brand name are Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca and Novavax (CDC, 2021)

In the study of the use and distribution of metadiscourse within newspaper genre, little is known about how journalists from different cultures employ metadiscourse in writing opinion articles regarding COVID-19 vaccine. There were several research which examined metadiscourse in terms of distribution of metadiscourse markers and use in newspaper genre (Kuhi & Mojood, 2014; Tavanpour, Goudarzi & Farnia, 2016; Moghadam, 2017, Nugroho,



2020; Shahid, Qasim & Hasnain, 2020). However, none of these studies focused on COVID-19 vaccine. Kuhi and Mojood's (2014) study covers a wide range of topics including social, political, economic, cultural, and world events in editorials. Tavanpour, Goudarzi and Farnia (2016) studied the usage of interactional metadiscourse markers in American and Iranian sports news column. Moghadam (2017)'s main theme revolved around the Middle East issues which include Iran nuclear talks, ISIL, Syria, Israel and Palestine. Meanwhile, Nugroho (2020) investigated the use of metadiscourse markers by American and Indonesian writers in opinion and business articles. In another study by Shahid, Qasim and Hasnain (2020), the chosen topics revolved around politics (both national and international), health, genre issues, governance, and Kashmir issue.

Although there were a few studies on metadiscourse in the area of study of COVID-19 as a linguistic phenomenon, little is known about the usage of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in COVID-19 vaccine opinion articles written by native English speakers and Malaysian EFL writers. Previous study by Abdullah, Rahmat and Zawawi (2020) explored the usage of interactional metadiscourse markers by a Malaysian and a South Korean online newspaper authors about online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Aroge and Olayinka (2020)'s study examined the language, metadiscourse elements, and tenor of discourse of President Muhhamadu Buhari's COVID-19 pandemic speeches. In another study by Kadir, Rahmat, Wahid and Dzuradeen (2020), the researchers explored the usage of interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers in a personal blog. However, the corpus used in this study is limited to only one personal blog, which is online documents from Azlan's article on his personal blog entitled "COVID-19 Exposes Us, In A Good Way".

To fill this gap in the current literature, this study attempts to investigate if there is any possible difference in the distribution of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers between English articles written by Malaysian writers and those written by native writers of English when writing opinion articles on COVID-19 vaccine.

## **1.2 Aim and objectives of the study**

This contrastive study sought to examine the use of metadiscourse markers in COVID-19 vaccine opinion articles in Malaysian and American online newspapers based on Hylands's (2005) model. The objectives of this study are:

- (1) To identify the metadiscourse categories and sub-categories used in Malaysian and American online newspapers in the reporting of COVID-19 news
- (2) To investigate the frequency of interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers in the two texts
- (3) To analyse how interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers are used to achieve persuasion in the two texts
- (4) To investigate if there is any significant relationship between the distribution and use of interactive and interactional metadiscourse in these texts.

## **1.3 Operational definition of terms**

### **1.3.1 Metadiscourse**

Metadiscourse is defined as the linguistic resources employed by writers to convey a discourse or their point of view towards either its content or the reader (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

Metadiscourse facilitate writers to create a coherent text and establish a writer-reader interaction (Rahimpour & Faghieh, 2009).

### 1.3.2 Metadiscourse categories and sub-categories

Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of metadiscourse markers consists of two categories, which are interactive and interactional. In this study, metadiscourse categories refer to interactive and interactional categories.

Metadiscourse sub-categories refer to all of the metadiscourse resources under the interactive and interactional categories which include: code glosses, endophoric markers, evidentials, frame markers, transition markers, attitude markers, self-mention, engagement markers, hedges and boosters.

### 1.3.3 Interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers

Interactive metadiscourse markers are markers which facilitate the organisations of ideas in the texts. (Hyland, 2005). In this study, the interactive metadiscourse markers studied are code glosses, endophoric markers, evidential, frame markers and transition markers.

Interactional metadiscourse markers assists writers to engage the readers in the texts. (Hyland, 2005). In this study, the interactional metadiscourse studied are: attitude markers, self mention, engagement markers, hedges and boosters.

### 1.3.4 Opinion articles

Opinion article is a subcategory of persuasive text that aims to convince their audience through their writing (Van Dijk, 1988). Opinion articles are typically written by experts and do not represent the newspaper's official viewpoint (Connor, 1996). In this study, the opinion

articles studied revolves around COVID-19 vaccine with topics such as vaccine liability, herd immunity, vaccine resistance, vaccine safety, vaccine mandate, experience taking the vaccine, and vaccine as the way to end the pandemic.

#### 1.3.5 COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) or also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a disease caused by a novel coronavirus (Cennimo, 2021). Common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion, malaise, headache, and myalgia, and in some cases, breathing difficulties. In severe cases, COVID-19 leads to pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and death (Stewart, Connelly, & Robinson, 2021).

#### 1.3.6 Vaccine

A vaccine is a biological substance that triggers an individual's immune system to produce immunity to a specific disease. Vaccines are typically given through needle injections but can also be given by mouth or sprayed into the nose (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018). Some examples of COVID-19 vaccine brand name are Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca and Novavax (CDC, 2021)

#### 1.3.7 Contrastive study

A contrastive study is one of the means to obtain accurate descriptive knowledge regarding individual languages and cultures and at the same time gain a better insight on general-language based communication (Connor, 1996). Contrastive rhetoric investigates similarities and differences in ESL and EFL writings across languages and cultures (Connor, 2002). In the

present study, a contrastive study is conducted between Malaysian and American online newspapers.

### 1.3.8 News articles in Malaysian online newspapers

News articles in Malaysian online newspapers in this study refer to The Star ([thestar.com.my](http://thestar.com.my)) and Malaysiakini ([malaysiakini.com](http://malaysiakini.com)).

### 1.3.9 News articles in American online newspapers

News articles in American online newspapers in this study refer to USAToday ([usatoday.com](http://usatoday.com)) and The New York Times ([nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com)).

## 1.4 Significance of Study

The theoretical significance of this study is that the findings will examine potential culturolinguistic differences in terms of norms and expectations against EFL/ESL writings in circulation of information regarding COVID-19 vaccine. Little is known about how journalists from different cultures employ metadiscourse to circulate information regarding COVID-19 vaccine through newspaper articles. In the study of the use and distribution of metadiscourse within newspaper genre, there were several research which examined metadiscourse in terms of distribution of metadiscourse markers and use in newspaper genre (Tavanpour, Goudarzi & Farnia, 2016; Kuhl & Majood, 2014; Mardani, 2017 & Moghadam, 2017). However, none of these studies focused on COVID-19 vaccine. Kuhl and Mojood's (2014) study covers a wide range of topics including social, political, economic, cultural, and world events in editorials. Tavanpour, Goudarzi and Farnia (2016) studied the usage of interactional metadiscourse markers in American and Iranian sports news column. Moghadam (2017)'s main theme revolved around the Middle East issues which include Iran nuclear talks,

ISIL, Syria, Israel and Palestine. Meanwhile, Nugroho (2020) investigated the use of metadiscourse markers by American and Indonesian writers in opinion and business articles. In another study by Shahid, Qasim and Hasnain (2020), the chosen topics revolved around politics (both national and international), health, genre issues, governance and Kashmir issue.

There are several practical significances that can be brought on from this study. It is important to identify the metadiscourse markers used in American and Malaysian media to inform, influence and motivate the public on getting COVID-19 vaccine. Opinion articles, particularly the ones on COVID-19 vaccine has a very powerful role in persuading its readers to increase the likelihood of vaccine acceptance. Through this study, it is hoped that journalists, editors, and columnists could employ metadiscourse strategies to continue promoting data-driven and informed vaccine content to their readers.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Covid-19 As A Linguistic Phenomenon**

In this section, previous studies on how Covid-19 is studied as a linguistic phenomenon are reviewed to show the areas focused on and the findings obtained. The findings showed that there is currently no study on contrastive metadiscourse from journalists of different cultures in how information regarding COVID-19 vaccine is circulated in newspaper genre.

Rafi (2020) conducted a study entitled “Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia” which aims to investigate the impact of the language used to report about COVID-19 in perpetuating the discourse of fear and eventually raising anti-Chinese sentiments. The research questions are (1) what kind of linguistic structure is deployed by journalists while reporting about COVID-19? and (2) Does the language of COVID-19 generates the discourse of fear and Sinophobia? The research design in this study is both qualitative and quantitative. There are two phases in the data. For the first phase, narrative, descriptions and memoirs published in “The New York Times (TNYT)” were used. In addition, a sample of 30 male and female university students narrated their experiences of COVID-19. In the second phase, 103 male and female university students took part in a questionnaire to investigate the significant value and correlation among the discursive themes. One hundred and three male and female university students of various demographic backgrounds responded to the survey. As for instrument description, the stories on the virus from the perspective of its correspondents located in various countries were purposively selected. The topics include the spread of the virus, ban on healthy life, pressure on health

care, economic slowdown, the lockdown of schools, and security emergency. The sample of 30 male and female students narrated their lived experience about COVID19 were required to email their responses to the researcher in the word file. Likert scale questionnaire was also used in this study based on the discursive themes: language of COVID-19, the discourse of fear and Sinophobia, that emerged from the qualitative data. The survey included 18 affirmative statements, six statements for each variable, to investigate the impact of an independent variable (the language of COVID-19) on dependent variables (discourse of fear and Sinophobia). The qualitative data was analysed through discursive themes which are language of COVID-19, discourse of fear, and Sinophobia. The focus of the researcher's interpretation was on headlines, subject matter, and lexical constructions that were primarily used by journalists to persuade readers. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS). Independent sample t-test and oneway ANOVA were measured to find a statistically significant difference between gender and among various age groups. Multi regression was calculated to investigate the impact of the language of COVID-19 on the discourse of fear and Sinophobia. The results show that the linguistic expressions such as social distancing, individualism, nationalization, restriction, war analogies, and so on, were utilized abandonedly by journalists to report about the pandemic. The multi-regression analysis predicts a statistically significant impact of the independent variable (the language of COVID-19) on the dependent variables (discourse of fear and Sinophobia) with a 95% confidence interval.

A study entitled "Axiology of COVID-19 as a Linguistic Phenomenon in English Mass Media Discourse" by Katermina and Yachenko (2020) examines the linguistic phenomenon of Covid-19 on the material of English mass media texts. The objectives of this