

# Metadiscourse revisited: a contrastive study of persuasive writing in professional discourse

## *Regreso al metadiscurso: estudio contrastivo de la persuasión en el discurso profesional*

Emma DAFOUZ MILNE

Departamento de Filología Inglesa I-Universidad Complutense de Madrid  
emma@aldeatour.com

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### ABSTRACT

The research presented in this paper explores the role of metadiscourse in persuasive texts written by professional writers in two leading newspapers: the Spanish *El País* and the British *The Times*. The aim of this cross-linguistic investigation is to compare how professional writers organise their texts, guide their readers through them and build a relationship with their audience. The use of both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse categories is examined from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.

The results suggest that two major variables interact in the choice of metadiscourse categories in newspaper opinion articles: culture-driven preferences and genre-driven conventions. Regarding culture-driven preferences this study shows significant cross-linguistic variation in the frequency of textual metadiscourse categories used, particularly those involved in the construction of arguments and in the inclusion of subsidiary information. As for interpersonal metadiscourse, the analysis reveals that, despite certain interlinguistic variation, there is relative uniformity in the number of interpersonal markers used in English and Spanish newspaper articles. This result, while contravening earlier studies comparing English-Spanish texts, supports the hypothesis that the use of certain metadiscourse markers is also dictated by genre conventions.

### RESUMEN

El trabajo que se muestra en este artículo explora el papel del metadiscurso en textos persuasivos escritos por profesionales en dos periódicos de gran audiencia: el diario español *El País* y el británico *The Times*. El objetivo de esta investigación interlingüística es comparar el modo en que los escritores profesionales organizan sus textos, guían a los lectores y construyen una relación con éstos. La utilización de categorías metadiscursivas textuales e interpersonales se analiza desde una perspectiva tanto cuantitativa como cualitativa.

Los resultados sugieren que dos son las principales variables que interactúan en la selección de las categorías metadiscursivas en los artículos periodísticos de opinión: las

### KEY WORDS

Metadiscourse.  
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discourse.  
Persuasion.  
Contrastive  
rhetoric.  
Genre.  
Corpus  
analysis.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Metadiscurso  
Discurso  
periodístico.  
Persuasión.  
Retórica  
contrastiva.  
Género.  
Análisis de  
corpus.

preferencias culturales y las convenciones dictadas por el género. En cuanto a las preferencias culturales, este estudio muestra una variación interlingüística significativa en la frecuencia de uso de categorías metadiscursivas textuales, especialmente aquellas relacionadas con la elaboración de argumentos y la incorporación de información secundaria. En cuanto al metadiscurso interpersonal, el análisis refleja que, a pesar de cierta variación interlingüística, existe relativa uniformidad en el número de marcadores interpersonales empleados en los artículos periodísticos en inglés y español. Aunque este resultado contrasta con algunos de los primeros trabajos contrastivos en inglés y español, respalda la hipótesis de que el uso de ciertos marcadores discursivos viene dictado por convenciones propias del género.

**SUMARIO** 1. Introduction. 2. Metadiscourse as a pragmatic-rhetorical strategy. 3. Text-type. 4. Research methodology. 5. Metadiscourse taxonomies. 6. Findings and discussion. 7. Conclusions and implications. 8. References.

## 1. Introduction

Most successful writing involves the writer's ability to construct a reader-friendly text, i.e. a text that is cohesive, coherent and shows consideration for the reader. In spite of this general assumption, not all cultures regard reader-friendliness as a crucial characteristic of their texts (cf Hinds 1987). For many years contrastive rhetoric has focused on the language-specific features that different cultures favour in their written products. From initial findings (see Kaplan 1966) to present day research (Connor 1996, 2002) contrastive rhetoric has evolved, proving to be a very useful approach to uncover certain aspects of discourse.

The original impetus for this research came from a need to revise some of the conclusions that early studies contrasting English and Spanish texts put forward (see e.g. Santana-Seda 1974, Chelala 1981, Montañón-Harmon 1991). Montañón-Harmon noted that the L1 writing of the Mexican-Spanish students in her research sample was (1991:423): "a fancy, flowery, formal and complicated presentation of ideas (...) —a presentation totally different from that of the linear, deductive, enumerative compositions written by Anglo-American students".

The methodology in these studies, however, presented several flaws that make the conclusions somewhat questionable. In the first place, the subjects under investigation were novice writers; usually students with little writing experience and writing in their L2 (English) rather than their L1 (Spanish). The features which surfaced from the analysis of these L2 texts were thought to be those present also in their L1 written discourse. As a result, these student texts have often been turned into textual models of the Spanish discourse community and used as reference material. In the second place, some of these early studies were mainly impressionistic and based their conclusions on rater judgement and small-scale research. Finally, much of this work adopted a narrow perspective in the analysis of differences across languages focusing mainly on grammatical features such as sentence length, number of sentences per paragraph, clause-types, use of conjunctions and/or prepositions, and so forth.

Consequently, these pioneer contrastive studies are partly responsible, in my view, for some of the misconceptions regarding Spanish written discourse and for the erroneous characterisation of Spanish texts as digressive, dense and writer-oriented (following Hinds' 1987 terminology). There is an urgent need, as Moreno (1998:551) suggests, "to describe and explain differences or similarities in rhetorical patterns across cultures on the basis of parallel corpora of texts written by native speakers of each particular language".

Bearing the aforementioned limitations in mind, this study attempts to carry out a contrastive investigation, using professional newspaper writers (i.e. experienced writers) writing in their L1 (British-English and Peninsular-Spanish)<sup>1</sup>. By doing this, I attempt to identify some of the characteristics of Peninsular-Spanish newspaper discourse and revise early assumptions regarding written Spanish discourse. Although some previous studies also adopted a cross-linguistic perspective (see e.g. Crismore, Markkanen and Steffensen 1993, Luukka 1994, Ädel 1999 for Finnish-English comparisons) very few have focused on a Peninsular-Spanish context (with the exception of Valero-Garcés 1996, and Moreno 1997, 1998) and none of the Spanish studies reviewed have adopted both a textual and a rhetorical approach or used newspaper discourse as their source of data<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, this research adopts a corpus-driven approach which allows for the analysis of more data and a wider range of subjects, in order to avoid the impressionistic nature of previous studies. Finally and most importantly, this study follows a metadiscursive analysis of texts in order to obtain a global perspective of both qualitative and quantitative differences and/or similarities between newspaper discourse in British-English and Peninsular-Spanish. A metadiscourse analysis will allow us to study a wide range of items which have been usually studied in isolation (e.g. hedges, connectors, topicalisers, certainty markers, punctuation devices, rhetorical questions ...) while offering a rhetorical framework to explain the presence or absence of certain items and their co-occurrence in discourse.

## **2. Metadiscourse as a pragmatic-rhetorical strategy**

Initial interest in metadiscourse dates back to the 1980s when a number of researchers and writing instructors (Williams 1981, Vande Kopple 1985, Crismore 1989, etc) focused on the role that certain linguistic categories played in the organisation of discourse and in the expression of interpersonal values. Although the definitions and the taxonomies provided were varied, most researchers agreed on the importance of metadiscourse categories for the appropriate pragmatic construction of any text.

Williams (1981: 211) first defined metadiscourse as 'writing about writing'. Vande Kopple (1985: 83) also provided a useful definition which has been repetitively quoted in many studies:

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<sup>1</sup> Since there may be wide varieties within the broad notions of English language and Spanish language, I prefer to use this distinction in order to be more precise.

<sup>2</sup> These studies used research articles on Business and Economics as data.

(...) as we write, we usually have to write on two levels. On one level we supply information about the subject of our text. On this level we expand propositional content. On the other level, the level of metadiscourse, we do not add propositional material but help our readers to organize, classify, interpret, evaluate and react to such material. Metadiscourse, therefore, is discourse about discourse or communication about communication.

Other definitions (Crismore 1989, Beauvais 1989, Mauranen 1993, Mao 1993, Hyland 1998a, *inter alia*) have gradually moved from a purely linguistic level to a pragmatic/rhetorical one in which the choice of metadiscourse is closely related to the context in which it operates and the writer's communicative intention. In Mao's words (1993: 269) "metadiscourse addresses fundamental communicative problems, that is, problems of how to establish interpersonal bonds and maintain interpersonal contact".

Metadiscourse has a double function (following Halliday's 1973 distinction): namely, to structure a text guiding the reader through it (textual function) and to support a writer's argument while building a relationship with the reader (interpersonal function). Although the use of metadiscourse units is partly dependent on an author's stylistic preference, there is no doubt that the presence or absence of certain metadiscourse categories is closely linked to the rhetorical context in which they operate and the pragmatic function they fulfil (Mauranen 1993, Hyland 1999). As Hyland (1999:6) points out: "the meaning of metadiscourse only becomes operative within a particular context, both invoking and reinforcing that context with regard to audience, purpose and situation. Its use therefore reflects differences in the various forms of organised cultural communication recognised and employed by distinct academic disciplines for particular purposes." This means that when adopting a metadiscourse perspective we are not merely analysing surface structures but, more importantly, addressing the rhetorical conditions in which metadiscourse appears and the communicative functions it carries out in a text.

This study adopts a rhetorical perspective and views metadiscourse as a rhetorical strategy whose primary macrofunction is to have a persuasive effect on readers. In other words, metadiscourse categories, both textual and interpersonal, ultimately intend to convince readers of the validity of the arguments presented in the text. Purves' definition of rhetoric (1988:9) is followed here: "We might define rhetoric as the choice of linguistic and structural aspects of discourse - chosen to produce an effect on the audience. Rhetoric, therefore is a matter of choice with respect to the uses of languages as opposed to those uses that are determined by lexical and grammatical structures". We add to Purves' definition of rhetoric that choice is also strongly dependable on context and the cultural preferences of a particular community as Mauranen (1993) suggests.

In order to persuade, writers have to present propositional material in a form that the potential audience will find most convincing. Moreover, they have to create a credible textual persona and develop an appropriate attitude both towards their readers and their arguments

(see Dafouz 2002). Metadiscourse becomes then one of the possible tools that a skilled writer may use to obtain persuasion. This research (following closely Mauranen's 1993 model) claims that all metadiscourse categories ultimately fulfil a persuasive aim. Persuasion, however, is a matter of degree and, consequently, the different metadiscourse units described in this study carry different levels of persuasion. Figure 1 illustrates the placement of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the persuasion continuum:

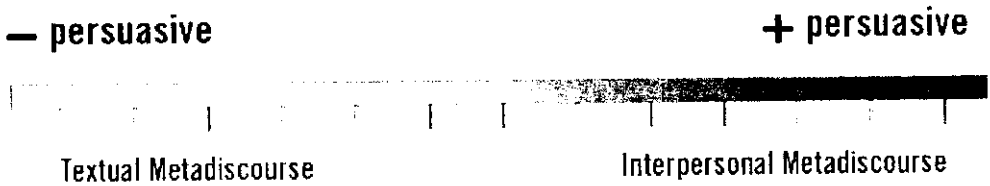


Figure 1. Degree of explicit persuasion in the metadiscourse continuum.

To ascribe persuasive functions to interpersonal metadiscourse categories such as attitudinal markers (*it is important, it is obvious...*), attributors (*the Prime Minister believes...*) or even rhetorical questions (*What is Europe's future?*) does not come as a surprise, given their explicit persuasive nature. In other words, interpersonal metadiscourse categories construct a textual persona that appears attractive, convincing and reliable to the reader and uses identifiable resources to do so. Textual metadiscourse, however, is less explicit in its means but also aims at persuading the reader. When a writer uses connectors, sequencers, topicalisers or any other organisational device to guide the reader through the text, he/she is trying to transmit a sense of conviction, authority and rationality, all of which are rhetorical effects. The main difference between interpersonal and textual metadiscourse is the degree of explicitness with which they pursue their aim. In other words, while textual metadiscourse appears to be less explicit in its search of persuasion and uses indirect methods to do so, interpersonal metadiscourse clearly states the authors' attitudes. Nevertheless, this does not entail that interpersonal metadiscourse is more effective than textual metadiscourse, since explicitness and directness are not necessarily strategies to achieve automatic persuasion. A text which is well-structured, cohesive and progresses smoothly from one paragraph to the next (through metadiscourse categories) is possibly in the first stage of the persuasion continuum. Mauranen (1993:167) claimed in her study of connectors that the effect that these items had on her readers was not only one of readability or coherence but one of persuasion:

The immediate reaction reported by the subjects was that they felt a dramatic difference between the two versions [of the text]. The emphasis was seen to have changed, and the text was said to be not only easier to read, but more logical and more convincing. It was also perceived to have more authority.

By and large then, both textual and metadiscourse categories carry out a rhetorical function in that they try to persuade their readers, and in order to do so, they utilise different resources. It could be said that in the case of textual metadiscourse the devices are more limited and partly conditioned by linguistic constraints (e.g. there is a limited number of additive markers in any language). Thus, the writer's choice is less ample. Conversely, in the case of interpersonal metadiscourse the range of expressions is wider and, consequently, the writer's choice is also broader. Overall, it is the perfect combination of these two aspects that makes a text persuasive.

### 3. Text-Type

Although there have recently been a considerable number of empirical studies on metadiscourse markers (see Crismore et al. 1993, Hyland 1998 a, b, Arcay-Hands and Cossé 1998), none of these investigations have focused on newspaper discourse as their source material.

The corpus studied here consisted of 40 articles collected from *El País* and *The Times*, two prestigious newspapers in Spain and Great Britain respectively. The reason why this text type was chosen in this analysis is closely related to the importance that newspapers have in present day society (Bell 1991, Reah 1998). In the first place, newspaper articles are probably the most widely read genre and reach a relatively heterogeneous audience. Fowler (1991) also notes that readers acquire much of their knowledge of the world precisely through newspapers and the media in general. Secondly, the genre conventions which newspaper articles present are tremendously influential and thus are often used as text models for teaching writing both in an L1 and an L2 (see Lunsford and Connors 1999, for example).

Within the wide choice of text-types that a newspaper offers, this study focused on opinion articles. Opinion articles are a subgenre of persuasive texts (van Dijk 1988), their final aim being to convince the audience by means of logical (i.e. textual metadiscourse) and emotional strategies (i.e. interpersonal metadiscourse). Opinion articles are normally written by experts on a particular topic and, unlike editorials, are signed, which means that authorship is known to the reader. As Connor (1996:143) points out: "Editorials, perhaps more than any type of writing, reflect national styles regarding modes of persuasion".

An additional reason for choosing this discourse responds to pedagogical implications. Persuasive texts have been somewhat avoided in ESL/EFL writing contexts since they are regarded as structurally and cognitively complex (Freedman and Pringle 1984, Connor and Lauer 1985, 1988). Nevertheless, these texts are constant in our daily life and their mastery

necessary for literate individuals. Moreover, the presence of certain metadiscourse categories (especially interpersonal) has proved to be considerably high in persuasive texts but their presence has been largely ignored, misrepresented or simplistically depicted in style guides or writing materials in general. It is well-known that interpersonal categories play a crucial role in the successful outcome of a text and, in general, there seems to be a clear relationship between metadiscourse presence and text quality (Intaraprawat and Steffensen 1995, Cheng and Steffensen 1996).

#### 4. Research methodology

Of the 193 texts randomly collected from *El País* and *The Times*, 40 texts (20 in English and 20 in Spanish) were finally chosen for the study since there was a need to control the different variables involved in the writing of the texts, mainly length and topic. As other discourse analysts have suggested (Crismore and Farnsworth 1990, Hyland 1999) the topic covered in a text may affect the type and frequency of metadiscourse categories found; hence, choice of theme was carefully controlled. On the whole, these articles (collected from 1997 to 1999) deal with news on international affairs, economy and European matters. The newspapers chosen, and especially the texts that conform this corpus, address a fairly broad audience, cover a wide variety of topics and treat the news with sufficient plurality to allow for cross-linguistic comparison. The average length of the opinion article was 1,000 words, and the number of words in total for both corpora was 46,815, the British-English corpus containing 22,397 words and the Peninsular-Spanish corpus 24, 418 words.

Regarding the research methodology, this investigation like other earlier studies (Crismore et al. 1993, Hyland 1998b) focuses on *explicit* textual devices, that is, items which can be clearly identified in the text. This means that only those relationships between sentences or parts of texts which are *observable* (i.e. expressed via a metadiscourse unit) were included in this analysis. Implicit connections cannot be counted as metadiscourse categories and thus, cannot be measured. I also excluded qualifying adjectives (e.g. *crucial*, *important*, *terrible*, etc) in sentences like *This important issue*, or *A crucial matter has appeared*, and also emphasizing expressions (e.g. *very*, *so*, *too*) as in *A very important issue* or *Too ridiculous to be true*, since I believe they belong to the propositional level of discourse. By ruling out these elements, I hypothesise that the number of metadiscourse categories obtained in this study will be considerably lower than in others (see Hyland, 1998b, for example).

I categorised the different metadiscourse instances bearing in mind *multifunctionality*, since it is very unlikely that a language utterance is used to fulfil one single function to the total exclusion of another. Thus in this study I have chosen to analyse metadiscourse markers basing my decision on the *primary* function (see Markkanen, Steffensen and Crismore 1993) of the item in its particular context. This does not mean, nevertheless, that there have not been cases in which the typical function of an item did not coincide with the

particular use in this concrete corpus. Hence, there was a need to analyse all the metadiscourse categories individually and manually before introducing them into an electronic database.

## 5. Metadiscourse taxonomies

A wide variety of metadiscourse taxonomies have been proposed since the term was first coined (see Lautamatti 1978, Williams 1981, Vande Kopple 1985, Crismore 1989, Nash 1992, Mauranen 1993, Stainton 1996 or Hyland 1998a). Some classifications seem to give more importance to the taxonomy per se than to the function the metadiscourse marker actually performs in the text. In other words, there has been a certain fixation with the need to classify and organise linguistic devices that may function from a metadiscourse point of view rather than to provide a thorough analysis of the overall rhetorical/pragmatic function that metadiscourse develops in a text. Furthermore, there are some taxonomies which have been presented in a rather decontextualised manner with no real life examples, making it fairly difficult to verify their discursive function (e.g. Stainton 1996).

In spite of minor differences, the majority of the operating taxonomies have divided metadiscourse markers into the aforementioned textual and interpersonal functions (with the exception of Beauvais 1989, and Nash 1992)<sup>3</sup>. However, within this division there have been important variations mainly due to the type of text or the rhetorical context in which metadiscourse appears.

The classification followed in this research is loosely based on Crismore, Markannen and Steffensen's (1993) but modified considerably during analysis to accommodate to the particular characteristics of the languages contrasted and the over-ruling rhetorical function of the corpora used (persuasive texts). This taxonomy is discussed in detail elsewhere (Dafouz 2000) but is summarised in Table 1.

By and large, this classification offers a wide variety of subcategories within the main macro-category. The purpose was to discover which metadiscourse categories prevailed in Peninsular-Spanish opinion articles and which in British-English while, at the same time, finding out which linguistic devices are used to carry out a particular rhetorical function.

This analysis also includes other aspects not considered in previous taxonomies. For example, some punctuation devices and typographical markers such as colons and parentheses were incorporated in this study under the category of *Code glosses*, the reason being that such elements signal clarification, explanation or exemplification. Examples of these punctuation devices from both corpora are the following:

<sup>3</sup> Beauvais (1989) follows a classification based on Speech Act Theory which uses very different terminology; Nash (1992) changes the functions 'textual' and 'interpersonal' for the terms 'tactical' and 'lexical'.



Table 1A: Metadiscourse categories and their functions

Macro-category	Subcategory	Examples (English/Spanish)
<b>Textual metadiscourse</b>		
Logical markers	Additive	and / furthermore y / además / es más
Express semantic relationships between discourse stretches	Adversative	or / however / but o / sin embargo / pero
	Consecutive	so (as a result) / therefore / as a consequence por tanto / por ello / así pues / de ahí que
	Conclusive	finally / in any case en todo caso / en definitiva
Sequencers		first/second/on the one hand,... on the other
Mark particular positions in a series		por un lado.... por otro / primero / después
Reminders		<u>Let us return</u> to / as we <u>mentioned before</u>
Refer back to previous sections in the text		como <u>dijimos antes</u> / como <u>he dicho</u>
Topicalisers		<u>in political</u> terms / <u>in the case of</u>
Indicate topic shifts		a <u>este respecto</u> / en lo que se refiere a
Code glosses	Parentheses	When (as with the Tories now)... El consejo Europeo de Berlín (diciembre 1996)
Explain, rephrase or exemplify textual material	Punctuation devices	Tax evasion; it is deplored in others but not in oneself. Sanidad; un paso para la mejora
	Reformulators	in other words / that is es decir / en otras palabras / o mejor
	Exemplifiers	for example / for instance por ejemplo / digamos
Illocutionary Markers		I <u>propose</u> / I <u>hope</u> to persuade
Explicitly name the act the writer performs		yo <u>prometo</u> / <u>declaro</u>
Announcements		there are many <u>good reasons</u>
Refer forwards to future sections in the text		existen 'x' <u>motivos</u> / por varias <u>razones</u>

Table 1B: Metadiscourse categories and their functions

Macro-category	Subcategory	Examples (English/Spanish)
<i>Interpersonal metadiscourse</i>		
Hedges	Epistemic verbs	May / might / it <u>must</u> be two o'clock Puede / parece / tener que
Express partial commitment to the truth-value of the text	Probability adverbs	Probably / perhaps / maybe Quizás / tal vez / probablemente
	Epistemic expressions	It is likely Es probable
Certainty Markers		Undoubtedly / clearly / certainly
Express total commitment to the truth-value of the text		Sin duda / ciertamente
Attributors		'x' claims that...
Refer to the source of information		como es sabido / según el testimonio de 'x'
Attitude Markers	Deontic verbs	Have to / we <u>must</u> understand / needs to Hay que / deben / hace falta
Express writers' affective values towards text and readers	Attitudinal adverbs	Unfortunately / remarkably / pathetically Por desgracia / sorprendentemente
	Attitudinal adjectives	It is absurd / it is surprising Seria exagerado / es difícil
	Cognitive verbs	I feel / I think / I believe Creo / pienso
Commentaries	Rhetorical questions	What is the future of Europe integration or disintegration? Europa ¿tortuga o cangrejo?
	Direct address to reader	<u>You must understand, dear reader</u> <u>Estimado lector</u>
	Inclusive expressions	<u>We all</u> believe Como <u>nosotros</u> / con <u>nosotros</u>
	Personalizations	What the polls are telling <u>me</u> / <u>I</u> do not want Como es <u>mi</u> caso / por <u>mi</u> parte
	Asides	<u>She seemed (ironically for a Spencer) not of the Establishment</u> Respetuoso yo de las situaciones en país que no es el mío ( <u>y al que tengo en altísima estima</u> )...

- (1) Europe's fascist spectre.

All but one totalitarian regime (China) are now defunct, though the Japanese Emperor is still head of state.

- (2) Maastricht en la hora de la izquierda

Ahora bien, fórmulas como las redactadas en Dublín con sanciones que alcanzan un porcentaje (hasta el 1% o el 1,5%) del PNB son increíbles (...)

In these two examples the parentheses act as a clarification device for the reader. In the first example, the reader is told which of the totalitarian governments in the world is still operative (*China*), while in the second example, the writer offers concrete figures (*hasta el 1% o el 1,5%*) to illustrate the economic sanctions that some EU countries have to pay. By providing the reader with an explanation or example of what is expressed previously he/she can fully understand the information transmitted and is able to follow the text adequately. Parentheses, therefore carry out a rhetorical function in that they address the reader's presence in the text and the need to guide him/her in order to understand its propositional content. However, parentheses also play a rhetorical function in that they persuade the reader by providing the information needed and the right degree of knowledge. Their presence in the text is never arbitrary but responds to an artful combination of propositional content and persuasive effect (see Dafouz 2001 for a further study of the persuasive function of parentheses in English and Spanish).

As can be seen in table 1, under textual metadiscourse I included seven categories, following closely Crismore et al.'s (1993) classification: *logical markers*, *sequencers*, *reminders*, *topicalisers*, *code glosses*, *illocutionary markers* and *announcements*; and eight subcategories. As for interpersonal metadiscourse, this research included five categories: *hedges*, *certainty markers*, *attributors*, *attitude markers* and *commentaries*, and twelve subcategories. While the macro-categories (i.e. textual and interpersonal) have been defined following a functional classification, that is, based on their communicative purpose in the text, the subcategories adopt a linguistic profile. In other words, they have been designed following a grammatical criterion such as adverbial constructions, prepositional phrases or modal verbs. It is well-known that the functions of a metadiscourse macro-category in one language can be performed by a variety of grammatical units in another. Thus, by following first a functional criterion and then a grammatical one, qualitative differences in the use of certain linguistic devices may be identified.

In order to differentiate parentheses (*code glosses*) from asides (*commentaries*), which adopt the same surface appearance but have a different pragmatic function, it was necessary to focus on the type of information transmitted. As mentioned before, one purpose of parentheses is to clarify information which the writer thinks necessary to include in the text but with no interpersonal meaning attached. Asides, on the contrary, serve primarily an interpersonal function, since they give the writer's opinion towards the particular issue. In spite of this

distinction, sometimes it is not easy to decide whether a particular item acts as a *code gloss* or a *commentary* or, given the aforementioned multifunctionality of metadiscourse, a combination of both. An example of the metadiscourse marker *commentary* found in the corpus is the following:

(3) Will Kohl's day of reckoning be next?

The EMU project has also encouraged the leaders of Europe to break their electoral promises, and to preach arrogantly (and falsely) to their voters.

In this example the use of the parentheses clearly serves an interpersonal function, not only due to the opinion adverb included inside the parentheses but mainly because of the dialogic relationship between writer and reader<sup>4</sup>. The writer shows strong criticism which he hopes to share with the reader. By using this device, the information gains relevance and notoriety and possibly even complicity since it suggests that writer and reader are maintaining a one to one conversation through the text and finally agree on the same stance.

## 6. Findings and discussion

Given the large number of categories and subcategories included in this study, results will only focus on the metadiscourse markers which offer significant differences cross-linguistically<sup>5</sup>. The quantitative analysis reveals that, on a global level, the Peninsular-Spanish writers in this corpus use more textual than interpersonal metadiscourse while the British-English writers use more interpersonal than textual. Comparing the total number of metadiscourse categories used by both sets of writers it is found that the mean is very similar (0.334 % English vs. 0.341 % Spanish)<sup>6</sup> and it is not statistically significant ( $p > 0.3575$ ). This shows that, at least numerically, both corpora use metadiscourse expressions to the same extent. This preliminary finding partially supports the hypothesis that metadiscourse is a universal concept and that it is present in different cultures and genres. Table 2 displays the global results:

<sup>4</sup> Following other studies (Crismore et al. 1993, or Hyland 1998) I count as metadiscourse units the actual use of parentheses or dashes, that is, the typographical devices and not the information provided inside them, which would account for propositional content.

<sup>5</sup> For a complete account of the metadiscourse categories followed in this study and the quantitative results, see Dafouz 2000.

<sup>6</sup> The results have been standardised to a common basis (mean per 1,000 words/average length of text) to compare the frequency of occurrence, since the corpora contrasted are not of identical size.

Table 2: Global results for metadiscourse categories

	English			Spanish			Comparison
Total no. of metadiscourse categories	758			827			
	Total no.	Mean (%)	s.d.	Total no.	Mean (%)	s.d.	p < 0.05
Textual metadiscourse	334	1.461	0.520	496	2.016	0.934	0.0133
Interpersonal metadiscourse	424	1.888	0.962	331	1.400	0.598	0.0481

### 6.1. Textual metadiscourse

In this study the percentage of *logical markers* was similar in both groups. The presence of *logical markers* is natural since these items function as connectors providing cohesion to the texts. Probably, without this first level of textual organisation texts would be unreadable.

In spite of this quantitative similarity, there is nevertheless an interesting difference in the distribution of the logical subcategories included in this study. Statistically speaking, differences in the use of both subcategories are clearly significant (see table 3). While the Peninsular-Spanish texts abound in the use of *additive markers* to link ideas (e.g. *y, además, aún más/and, moreover, furthermore...*), the British-English texts prefer the use of *adversative markers* (e.g. *but, however, in contrast ...*). A grammatical explanation for the high presence of additive markers in the Peninsular-Spanish corpus could be the average length of the sentences. That is, while the Spanish writers prefer to produce longer sentences coordinated by *additive markers*, the British-English writers use shorter sentences separated by full stops. The following two examples (4 and 5) illustrate this difference. In the English text the writer describes the political situation in Great Britain before the 1997 elections and tries to persuade readers to vote conservative since the Labour government is not 'up to the job'.

#### (4) Major is just not up to the job itself

People are not starving on the streets. The country has not been defeated in war, pace the Eurosceptics. The economy may not be performing brilliantly but it is certainly doing no worse than five years ago. (...) Politicians must, of course, set priorities, but their most important and challenging task, especially in a period of ideological consensus, is not to put forward programmes but to deal with the unexpected.

The Spanish text provides an account of why some European leaders seemed to be ambiguous about the future of the European Union. To do so, the writer lists a set of reasons via additive relationships.

#### (5) Contra Europa

¿Por qué Europa provoca más temores que esperanzas? En primer lugar, porque se considera un proceso tan irreversible como incontrolable o imprevisible en sus efectos.

(...) Además, esta Unión Europea nació clandestinamente, se ha desarrollado en la opacidad de las decisiones y su futuro aparece a la vez inevitable e incierto. Sus instituciones están faltas de legitimidad, y los ciudadanos, los colectivos sociales y económicos no perciben el espacio europeo como un ámbito de participación sino de arbitrariedad de unos pocos y de impotencia de la gran mayoría.

A rhetorical explanation could be related to the way in which different discourse communities build a persuasive text. Cassany (1993) suggests that in the case of Peninsular-Spanish writers may construct their arguments adding warrants to the original idea but always moving in the same direction, hence the use of *additive markers*. The English community, however, tends to build arguments contrasting the pros and cons of an idea which necessarily implies the use of *adversative markers* (Lunsford and Connors 1999). This interpretation definitely requires further research but constitutes an interesting starting point for contrastive rhetoricians. It also supports some of the findings that earlier comparative studies in English and Spanish presented. Montaña-Harmon (1991: 421) concluded after analysing the writing of Anglo-American and Mexican students that "(...) the compositions in Mexican-Spanish tended to be organized via additive relationships. Once the writers had expressed their main idea or opinion in a topic sentence, they proceeded to add ideas to that statement (additive relationships) or to explain their reasons for their statements (explicative relationships)". Reaching a conclusion regarding whether this difference is purely impressionistic or based on cultural preferences demands far more contrastive research; otherwise, one runs the risk of falling into the same generalisations that were criticised above.

The metadiscourse marker *sequencers* is very frequent in this Peninsular-Spanish corpus, questioning somewhat earlier findings (see Montaña-Harmon 1991) that claimed that Spanish writers seldom use this device, and that they prefer to link their ideas through loose coordination, (that is, through additive and causative markers). In spite of the high number of examples which appeared in this corpus (see table 3), it is true that the use of this device was not evenly distributed among texts. There were authors who included a high number of *sequencers* all throughout their texts (in text Spa06, for example, there are 21 occurrences) while others hardly used them at all. This preliminary finding deserves further attention since it would question the assumption that Spanish texts do not present their arguments sequentially and that they prefer to develop cohesion through lexical means. Further research is needed on the use of *sequencers* by a larger number of professional writers in order to obtain more conclusive findings.

A third category which proved to be statistically significant across the two languages compared was *code glosses*. Out of the four subcategories included in this study, three (*parentheses/dashes*, *punctuation devices* and *reformulators*) were statistically significant. On the whole, the Spanish texts used all three subcategories much more frequently than the English group. In the case of the *parentheses*, for example, table 3 shows that the Spanish writers used this device three times more than the English writers.

Table 3: Results for textual metadiscourse categories (%)

Category	English		Spanish		Level of significance (p)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Total Textual	1.461	0.520	2.016	0.934	0.0133
Additive	0.352	0.267	0.450	0.276	0.0394
Adversative	0.495	0.212	0.341	0.231	0.0128
Sequencers	0.032	0.065	0.262	0.323	0.0019
Code glosses	0.351	0.266	0.771	0.506	0.0016
Parentheses	0.142	0.191	0.426	0.395	0.0008
Punctuation	0.186	0.199	0.288	0.184	0.0266
Reformulators	0.007	0.023	0.033	0.042	0.0417

As was mentioned earlier, *parentheses* and *punctuation devices* (such as colons) act as clarifiers of information. They allow the writer to incorporate pieces of information in the text without having to restructure the whole paragraph while at the same time condense certain information.

Regarding the use of *parentheses*, it could be argued that Spanish writers are prone to introduce complementary information, which they present inside parentheses. This could very well suggest that Peninsular-Spanish opinion articles exhibit much greater freedom than English opinion articles in the inclusion of extraneous material, as in example 6:

(6) Maastrich en la hora de la izquierda

Estos supuestos ideológicos y estas impresiones se basan en un hecho: la difuminación de la izquierda como poder en varios países, su dificultad para diseñar una estrategia que tomase en cuenta los datos (globalización, carácter difícilmente revisable en Maastrich) y contagio del personal socialdemócrata por los dogmas liberales (existencia de un único pensamiento correcto y una sola política posible).

In addition to these culture-driven assumptions, this use of *code glosses* could also be genre-driven. In newspaper articles there is a permanent need to include a lot of information but very little space to do so. As Neff et al.'s study (in press) concerning newspaper writers concluded: "the professionals (...) may be constrained by space and stylistic concerns with newspaper articles, in which it might be considered less elegant to specify the semantic relationships between propositions with external signals".

It seems then that linguistic economy may function as a crucial criterion in newspaper writing and that *parentheses* and other subtypes of *code glosses* help to condense information to the maximum while using minimum space. The Spanish texts abound in the use of this resource as the following example illustrates:

## (7) Sanidad cautiva

Naturalmente, en esta complaciente sanidad cautiva del miedo, el descontrol del gasto se institucionaliza. Hay (si) afán por la eficiencia (ajustes internos que no inquietan), pero con la tranquilidad de que cualquier exceso del presupuesto será, antes o después, aceptado y pagado. Las nuevas de financiación (alcohol, tabaco) sólo pueden ser respiros momentáneos y, para la sociedad, quizá tan inconvenientes como el déficit.

As for the choice of *parentheses* vs. *dashes*, after analysing these results it was noticed that although traditionally Spanish texts did not favour the use of dashes to clarify or add information (Seco 1986, Marsá 1986), in this corpus 25 of the 40 texts analysed used this typographical marker. Thus, it seems that dashes are becoming more frequent at least in Spanish newspaper articles. In this sample, however, writers were not consistent in their use of one or another typographical resource and combined indistinctively *parentheses* and *dashes* without any visible specialised function. Since the data are mainly numerical, current interpretations can only be tentative.

Regarding the fourth type use of *code gloss, reformulators* (e.g. *that is, in other words...*), their presence is very scarce in this particular corpus. However, the differences between the two groups are again significant (0.0417), as they are found more frequently in the Spanish group than in the English. I believe that the absence of this subcategory is closely linked to the aforementioned linguistic economy that newspaper opinion articles require and is also balanced by the presence of other aclaratory devices such as parentheses and colons. One must remember that these items can perform the same pragmatic function as *reformulators* but require less space, a crucial aspect of newspaper discourse.

6.2. *Interpersonal metadiscourse*

In the case of interpersonal metadiscourse, the present data reveal that *hedges* are the most frequently used interpersonal marker in both corpora. These items are equally important in both groups, being slightly more numerous in the English corpus. Of the three subcategories considered within the macro-category *hedge*, the one most widely used by both groups was *epistemic verbs* (*may, might, can/poder, podría...*). *Epistemic verbs* are used to soften a statement while helping to create a sense of solidarity with the reader. In other words, with the presence of these verbs the writer's discourse does not come across as being too assertive, but rather dialogic. That is, the reader-writer relationship becomes one of identification and not of submission (Enos 1990, Thompson 2001).

These numerical results regarding *hedges* coincide with many studies (Holmes 1984, Crismore et al. 1993, Hyland 1998b) in which this marker always comes in the first place of all the metadiscourse units analysed irrespective of the genre or the type of writers analysed.

This finding holds important pedagogical implications for the teaching of reading and writing in L1 and EFL/FSL contexts, since it seems that, in spite of their constant presence in



Table 4: Results for interpersonal metadiscourse categories (%)

Category	English		Spanish		Level of significance (p)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Total Interpersonal	1.888	0.962	1.400	0.598	0.0481
Hedges	0.782	0.466	0.514	0.342	0.0361
Modal epistemic verbs	0.617	0.393	0.445	0.344	0.0925
Probability adverbs	0.114	0.147	0.057	0.079	0.0166
Probability epistemic expressions	0.051	0.073	0.012	0.029	0.0591
Certainty markers	0.179	0.186	0.173	0.196	0.2666
Attributors	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.*
Attitudinal markers	0.493	0.372	0.397	0.247	0.2537
Commentaries	0.434	0.363	0.292	0.222	0.1196

\* Non-Applicable

formal writing, learners do not tend to include *hedges* in their texts. As some studies show (Hyland and Milton 1997) the academic writing of many L2 learners is characterised by firmer assertions, more authoritative tone and stronger writer commitments when compared with their L1 discourse. The ability to know exactly where and how to hedge effectively and successfully is a relatively difficult skill but one which must be attained by proficient writers. Given that it is a complicated task for native speakers it is not surprising that complexity doubles for EFL/ESL learners (Hyland and Milton 1997). In order to recover the total meaning of a text, the reader/writer must be sensitive to the hedging conventions employed in the discourse. By misreading the hedging the reader is liable to misinterpret the importance of a particular statement or the writer's attitude towards it.

In the light of these conclusions, hedging is probably the mark of the experienced and professional writer and a clear differentiating feature of writing expertise. As Hyland points out (1998b: 445), "This reflects the critical importance of distinguishing fact from opinion in academic writing and the need for writers to evaluate their assertions in ways that are likely to be persuasive to their peers, presenting claims with the appropriate caution and deference to the views of the discourse community".

In the case of opinion articles, *certainty markers* also play an important role in the construction of an ethos. If *hedges* mitigate an author's statement in a text while allowing the reader to disagree, *certainty markers* perform the opposite function: firstly, they ratify the writer's position so that the reader is aware which side the argument is taking and secondly, they restrict the dialogic space available to the reader and allow the writer to enact interpersonal solidarity and an idea of group membership. In newspaper opinion articles *certainty markers* are a requirement: readers expect to find the writer's opinion overtly stated

and emphasised by the use of these intensifying items. According to Hyland (1998a:368) *certainty markers* (which he calls boosters) develop a sense of solidarity with the reader and appeal to him/her as an intelligent co-player through the text. With *certainty markers* "the argument is strengthened by claiming solidarity with the community and the mutual experiences needed to draw the same conclusions as the writer".

Following previous observations (Hyland 1998a), it is also noticeable in this corpus that *hedges* and *certainty markers* tend to cluster following patterns of co-occurrence.

(8) The Tories, Europe and the people

As the election develops, the Government could strengthen its case at home and abroad by telling us how it wishes to secure our interests in the negotiations. ~~Of course it should not~~ give away its bargaining strategy, but it would be reassuring to know what kind of monetary and financial arrangements it would like to see in Europe.

(9) Major is just not up to the job itself

Most of these achievements would probably be maintained if the Tories were re-elected, despite the infighting and political chaos that would undoubtedly ensue.

(10) En defensa de Maastrich

Tanto desde el punto de vista jurídico como económico, parece claro que una cierta flexibilidad interpretativa en el criterio de déficit público es acorde con la letra del tratado, y desde luego con su espíritu que nunca pretendió que la formación de la unión monetaria fuera algo automático y técnico, sin ningún margen para la decisión política.

It is this competent combination of weakening and strengthening expressions that make opinion articles persuasive to the reader. By and large, the secret of a successfully persuasive text seems to lie in the intermingling of these two devices so that the final outcome is neither too assertive nor too vague. Hyland summarises this idea in the following lines: "... academics gain acceptance for their research claims by balancing conviction with caution, either investing statements with the confidence of reliable knowledge, or with tentativeness to reflect uncertainty or appropriate social interaction" (1998a: 349). Like academic writing, newspaper opinion articles base their success on balancing the right degree of conviction and doubt, always providing the reader with the adequate degree of freedom to differ.

In second place we find *attitudinal markers*. Both corpora show a very similar frequency in the use of these metadiscourse categories (Table 4). It seems that along with *hedges*, these items play an essential role in the construction of a persuasive text. The writer's personal feelings, agreement, disagreement, commitment or distancing towards the propositional content of the text and to the audience addressed reflects a textual persona that proves to be a persuasive tool in the eyes of the reader.

From a contrastive perspective, the Spanish and English corpora do not show significant differences. Both sets of writers are aware of the importance of these items in the achievement of their persuasive objectives. Nonetheless, of the four subcategories analysed (*deontic verbs*,

*attitudinal adverbs*, *attitudinal adjectives* and *cognitive verbs*) there is a slight difference in the use of *attitudinal adjectives* cross-linguistically (0.0630).

Turning to the rest of the interpersonal categories included here, *attributors* and *commentaries*, our analysis revealed that from a quantitative perspective differences were not significant. It is interesting, however, to remark on the near absence of *attributors* in our corpora (4 cases in Spanish vs. 0 in English). *Attributors* have a double function in the text: on the one hand, they mention explicitly the source of textual information (e.g. *Crismore claims that...*) and on the other, they use these same references with an authoritative value with persuasive goals. However, given the particular authorship (i.e. topic experts) and the genre constraints that we briefly mentioned above (i.e. linguistic economy), *attributors* are not a metadiscourse category that characterises this text type. It seems that the authoritative force is condensed in the writer of the text himself/herself, not needing outside references to reinforce their argument. Moreover, constant mentioning of other sources or individuals might even become counterproductive and diminish the text's final persuasive effect.

Finally, *commentaries*, although not as frequent as the previous categories, also have their place in persuasive newspaper articles, since their aim is to establish interpersonal bonds with the reader. Of the subcategories studied, the most outstanding difference refers to the use of *rhetorical questions*. The use of *rhetorical questions* invokes a personal appeal to the reader and gives force to the writer's argument. In other words, they help to persuade the reader by establishing a personal bond. In this particular corpus *rhetorical questions* were more frequent in the English than in the Spanish texts. Nevertheless, there is not an even distribution in the texts which means that in this finding has to be analysed with caution. Although this subcategory has been placed under the interpersonal heading, I believe that *rhetorical questions* are multifunctional and can perform various tasks such as introduce a new topic (i.e. *topicaliser*), refer to earlier information in the text (i.e. *reminder*) or to forthcoming material (i.e. *announcement*). On the whole, then, these subcategories should be analysed further.

The rest of the *commentary* subtypes also address readers in even more explicit ways (e.g. second person pronouns, imperatives) and help to construct a sense of solidarity and shared endeavour. However, given their low frequency of occurrence they are not analysed in depth here.

Before concluding this section it is interesting to note an informal finding regarding the distribution of metadiscourse categories in the text. On the whole, it seems that certain metadiscourse categories such as *hedges* or *attitudinal markers* and specifically deontic verbs (*must*, *should*, *have to*, etc) have a tendency to appear in fixed sections of the opinion article. For example, *hedges* are usually included in the body of the text when the author presents the situation and constructs his/her argument. On the other hand, deontic expressions normally appear in the conclusion section, when the author recommends means of action. The reader expects the writer to offer a solution to the problem as well as instructions, something which is partly done through deontic expressions.

In the light of the above, further metadiscourse studies should approach the distribution of metadiscourse categories in the text in order to account not only for numerical presence but also for its placement in newspaper discourse.

## 7. Conclusions and implications

This paper has explored the rhetorical use of metadiscourse categories in Peninsular-Spanish and British-English newspaper opinion articles from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. On the whole, the results suggest that two major variables interact in the choice of metadiscourse categories: on the one hand, culture-driven preferences and on the other, genre-driven conventions. Regarding culture-driven preferences, this study presents significant differences in the use of textual metadiscourse, in particular in the case of *logical markers* and *code glosses*. The use of logical markers points to different preferences in the construction of arguments while the abundance of *code glosses* may be related to the inclusion of complementary information. As this empirical study shows, Spanish newspaper writers have a tendency to include more subordinate information within the main text than their English colleagues.

On the other hand, genre-driven conventions may be reflected in the relative uniformity of the interpersonal markers used, especially in the use of *hedges* and *attitudinal markers*. As was mentioned earlier, the skillful combination of mitigation and opinion in this type of newspaper articles is essential to persuade the potential audience. The discourse community (i.e. newspaper writers) authorises the use of certain elements and sanctions others. And as Hyland (1998b:448) points out: "It would be surprising indeed if such constraints applied only to propositional aspects of discourse and ignored the encoding of textual and interpersonal meanings".

In addition to a quantitative analysis, this study has attempted to question some of the prevailing assumptions that described Spanish written discourse as flowery, dense and writer-oriented. Findings show that, as far as this corpus is concerned, newspaper opinion articles written in Peninsular-Spanish use a high number of textual metadiscourse categories to guide the reader through the text (in fact higher than the English texts). Thus, the notion of writer-oriented texts, as far as use of metadiscourse units is concerned, does not apply. Furthermore, this investigation reveals that metadiscourse may also be a useful strategy for genre characterisation and that the Spanish texts share many characteristics with British-English newspaper articles.

Before concluding, it is important to note that a linguistic analysis comparing the grammatical composition of the metadiscourse categories used in English and Spanish still remains to be done. Informally, it can be said that several differences have already been underlined such as the English preference for adverbial expressions to formulate opinion (e.g. *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*, *pathetically*) vs. the Spanish use of prepositional clauses (e.g. *por*

*desgracia, de manera sorprendente, por fortuna*), or the distribution of these expressions at an intrasentential level?

In order to draw any firm conclusion, future research in this area could advisably take into account other types of discourse, use professional and non-professional subjects, or expand corpus size. To conclude, and agreeing with Connor (2002), I also believe that to ensure impartial and reliable comparisons across languages, an important task within the particular framework of metadiscourse is to develop coherent models and offer detailed accounts of the methodology used in the research.

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7 Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) noted that while in English these expressions can appear almost in any position, the normal position for most is initial. Surprisingly, in the Spanish examples found in our corpus most of these items occupy a medial position in the sentence.

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