Metadiscourse Markers in English and Arabic Opinion Columns: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract: Metadiscourse markers are crucial in opinion columns, enabling writers to engage readers and present persuasive arguments. However, their usage varies across languages for several reasons. Our study investigates the differences in the use of metadiscourse markers in English and Arabic opinion columns. Using Hyland's (2005) taxonomy, we analyze 80 opinion columns through a mixed-method approach. While both languages exhibit similar patterns in interactive markers, notable differences emerge in interactional markers. English columnists employ more frequent hedging and direct self-reference, whereas Arab columnists favor boosters and collective pronouns. Although both groups prioritize engagement markers, their implementation varied. English columnists use explicit imperatives and questions, whereas Arab columnists prefer culture-specific references and implicit commands. These findings provide important theoretical and pedagogical implications for language teaching and translation training between English and Arabic, highlighting the need to account for cultural and rhetorical preferences.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, culture-specific writing conventions, interactional, interactive, metadiscourse markers, rhetorical preferences

1. Introduction

Media is a powerful tool for disseminating information, raising awareness, and sharing opinions. Although there are various forms of media, newspapers remain an influential genre and one of the most widely consumed forms of public media. This is because newspapers provide coverage of certain events and address various issues of interest to the community through commentaries, editorials, and opinion columns.

Opinion columns represent a distinctive genre where columnists engage with readers to analyze, interpret, and comment on current events and societal issues. Columnists use this genre not only to inform but also to express their perspectives and influence public opinion through reasoned arguments and persuasive language (Van Dijk 1988; Connor 1996). One of the linguistic features that writers deliberately employ to build relationships with their readers is the use of metadiscourse markers (MMs) (Alshbeekat and Awaad 2024). These are linguistic devices that allow for understanding language as a social activity (Hyland 2005). Through MMs, both the writer and the reader engage in a mutual act of communication. In other words, MMs explain how writers interact with their readers through language (Hyland 2005).

From a contrastive rhetorical perspective, writing is a cultural activity that varies across cultures and languages (Connor 1996). This suggests that while the use of MMs is universal, the specific ways these markers are employed differ according to linguistic and cultural conventions. Like English, Arabic utilizes distinct patterns to establish relationships between writers and readers. Such variations may pose rhetorical transfer challenges for second language learners and translators as they navigate appropriate metadiscoursal conventions.

Variation in the use of MMs across languages and cultures is especially evident in editorials and opinion columns, where writers tend to employ MMs that align with their writing conventions to engage their audiences and influence their opinions (Hyland 2005). Unlike editorials, opinion columns are authored by non-anonymous subject experts who are not affiliated with any news agency. Consequently, their writing style reflects not the stance of the newspaper itself but rather the conventions of their native language. Furthermore, the passive reception of ideas presented is less likely to occur in these types of discourse. Therefore, columnists extensively employ MMs as key engagement devices to contribute their opinions compellingly and persuasively (Dafouz 2008). With this in mind, opinion columns serve as authentic resources for gaining a comprehensive understanding of MM usage across languages such as English and Arabic, a topic that has not been extensively investigated within the newspaper genre, particularly in opinion discourse.

Guided by this perspective, our study aims to identify the similarities and differences in the usage of MMs in English and Arabic opinion columns. The significance of our study lies in its contrastive nature, as contrastive studies provide deeper insights into cross-linguistic patterns and contribute to identifying language universals (Hyland 2005). Our study is expected to reveal specific preferences in metadiscourse usage, which could inform second language teaching and translation training between Arabic and English. Furthermore, it contributes to understanding how English and Arabic achieve similar communicative goals through distinct rhetorical patterns.

2. Research questions

The present study poses three research questions as follows:

1. How does the use of interactive and interactional MMs differ between English and Arabic columnists?
2. How does the frequency of interactive and interactional MMs vary between English and Arabic columnists?
3. To what extent do English and Arab columnists show a preference for specific types of MMs?

3. Literature review

3.1 The concept of MMs

The concept of MMs has always been somewhat ambiguous because it signifies ‘discourse about discourse’ or talk about talk (Hyland 2005: 27). Various definitions

have been offered to better understand this concept. Vande Kopple (1985) viewed MMs as linguistic elements that extend beyond conveying referential meaning to help readers organize, interpret, and evaluate the presented information. Crismore (1983) defined MMs as linguistic features that add nothing to the propositional meaning but assist readers and listeners in organizing and making judgments about the propositional material. Both definitions reflect the idea that communication operates on two levels: the propositional level and the metadiscoursal level. Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore (1983) argued that at the first level, writers merely present a proposition to their audience. At the second level, writers meaningfully use these elements to guide their readers and facilitate understanding.

In contrast, Hyland and Tse (2004) challenged this dual-level perspective, arguing that all MMs are inherently interpersonal because they are integral to the readers' knowledge, processing needs, and textual experience. Consequently, Hyland (2005: 37) offered a more comprehensive definition, viewing MMs as 'self-reflective expressions' that help writers present their opinions and engage with their community. He maintained that writing is not only a method for communicating information but also a means of conveying the writer's values, attitudes, opinions, and emotions. This broader understanding also applies to multimodal contexts where metadiscourse operates visually as well as textually (Aguilar Pérez 2017).

3.2 Metadiscourse taxonomies

The evolution of metadiscourse from a purely textual element to a social interactive tool has led scholars to develop various classification systems (e.g., Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore et al. 1993; Ädel 2006). Most MM taxonomies were influenced by Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics theory, which emphasizes the dual nature of language in expressing both propositional content and interpersonal meanings. Therefore, MMs were classified into two broad categories: textual and interpersonal. Textual metadiscourse refers to features that organize the discourse and create textual coherence, while interpersonal metadiscourse encompasses elements that express the writer's attitudes and engage with readers (Dafouz 2008).

However, Hyland (2005) argued that these two levels of metadiscourse are closely intertwined, as they play a crucial role in textual coherence and cohesion. Therefore, he relabeled the traditional categories, using 'interactive' in place of 'textual' and 'interactional' instead of 'interpersonal' metadiscourse. Hyland (2005) developed his taxonomy based on the premise that writing is fundamentally a reader-oriented activity where writers actively seek to engage their audience. With this in mind, we adopted Hyland's (2005) model because we found it particularly appropriate for studying MMs in the opinion column genre which represents one of the most explicit forms of engaging writing (Connor 1996).

3.3 Related studies

Metadiscourse plays a key role in shaping writer-reader interaction, especially in newspapers where journalists aim to inform, persuade, and engage (Crismore et al. 1993). Contrastive studies across languages and cultures have highlighted varying uses of metadiscourse in this genre. Yazdani et al. (2014) analyzed 30 articles

covering 9/11 from English and Persian newspapers. Their study found that American journalists used more interactional markers than Iranian journalists, who tended to avoid self-mention and engagement markers—perhaps to maintain an impersonal tone and objectivity. In contrast, the deliberate use of interactional features in English texts suggests a greater emphasis on reader engagement during sensitive reporting. Kuhi and Mojood (2014) examined 60 English and Persian editorials, finding more interactional than interactive markers in both corpora. The results pointed to a writer-oriented style in both languages, highlighting the role of metadiscourse in guiding readers and building solidarity to enhance persuasion.

Similarly, Djonda (2022) studied 30 editorials from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The Jakarta Post* using Hyland's (2005) model. Both Filipino and Indonesian editorialists favored interactional markers, particularly attitude markers. The findings suggest that while attitude markers may be common in editorials across cultures, the degree of metadiscourse use varies due to cultural and institutional norms. Focusing on English proficiency, Al-Anbar et al. (2023) compared native and non-native English editorialists. Native writers used more hedges, boosters, and engagement markers, indicating greater awareness of English rhetorical conventions and the need to interact with readers. In contrast, non-native writers appeared less confident in employing these features, potentially limiting reader engagement. Alghazo et al. (2024) explored stance in 80 editorials from Arabic and English newspapers. Arabic texts heavily used attitude markers, followed by boosters, hedges, and self-mentions, while English editorials favored hedges. Both groups used hedges strategically to moderate claims. These patterns reveal language-specific preferences in expressing stance and interacting with readers.

In the context of opinion columns, Van Dijk (1988) maintained that this type of discourse forms a distinct subgenre of persuasive writing aimed at shaping public opinion. Several studies have examined metadiscourse use in this context. Chen and Li (2023) analyzed 60 opinion columns from Chinese and English newspapers. English writers employed more interactional markers—especially hedges, self-mentions, and engagement markers—suggesting a more overt and personal style compared to their Chinese counterparts. Dafouz (2008) studied 40 opinion columns from Spanish and British newspapers, supported by reader surveys. Spanish writers used more textual elements, reflecting a preference for explicit text organization. British writers leaned toward reader engagement strategies. Readers found texts with a balanced mix of textual and interpersonal markers to be most persuasive. Together, these studies underscore the central role of metadiscourse in shaping how writers communicate opinions, negotiate stance, and engage readers across cultures and languages.

The previously reviewed literature has explored metadiscourse in newspaper genres across various language pairs, including English and Persian (e.g., Kuhi and Mojood 2014; Yazdani et al. 2014), English (e.g., Al-Subhi 2023), Filipino and Indonesian (e.g., Djonda 2022), British and Spanish (Dafouz 2008), and English and Chinese (e.g., Chen and Li 2023). This aligns with Hyland's observation (2017)

that the most frequently analyzed languages in terms of metadiscourse usage are English, Persian, Chinese, and Spanish. However, there remains a significant research gap in the comparison of metadiscourse usage between English and Arabic. Current Arabic-English metadiscourse studies have predominantly concentrated on editorial texts (Alghazo et al. 2024; Al-Anbar et al. 2023; Alghazo et al. 2023). However, opinion columns in the English-Arabic context have received insufficient attention from a metadiscourse perspective, despite being widely consumed and influential in shaping public discourse (Van Dijk 1988). This gap is particularly meaningful as second language instruction often prioritizes text organization over interactive writing skills (Dafouz 2008).

By examining metadiscourse in English and Arabic opinion columns, we hope our findings provide valuable insights into how Arab and English writers effectively employ metadiscourse to engage their readers. We also hope that our study assists translators in developing more effective and engaging cross-cultural translation practices. Furthermore, this study highlights some rhetorical differences and preferences between Arabic and English. Finally, the study proposes a modified version of Hyland's model to better accommodate the linguistic features and patterns unique to Arabic opinion-based writing.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection procedures

The corpus of this study comprises 80 opinion columns in English and Arabic (40 from each). The collection of English opinion columns was restricted to American English newspapers, since writing conventions differ not only across languages but also across varieties of the same language (Ädel 2006). The English columns were retrieved from the official websites of The New York Times, The Washington Post, and USA Today. The Arabic columns were collected from the official websites of Al-Arabiya, Al Jazeera, Al-Ahram, Al-Ittihad, and Al-Mada. The data were retrieved over three months from August 2024 to October 2024. This timeframe was crucial to avoid any impact of diachronic changes in language use. Additionally, we ensured that all collected opinion columns were written by professional native Arab and English authors. All articles were saved in Microsoft Word format for analysis. The selected columns covered a variety of topics, including political, social, environmental, economic, educational, and technological. Nevertheless, topics might dictate the type and frequency of MMs. Therefore, we ensured that the selected columns were matched by topic between the Arabic and English corpora to ensure comparability.

4.2 Data analysis procedures

We adopted a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses based on Hyland’s (2005) model of MMs. This model was chosen for its comprehensive and functional classification, especially its inclusion of both stance and engagement features, highlighting MMs as active tools of communication rather than passive elements. We used Hyland’s inventory (2005: 118–202) as our analytical guide, translating and cross-validating the English items into Arabic. We

also remained open to identifying Arabic-specific MMs beyond the original framework, allowing for a bidirectional, culturally sensitive analysis.

Recognizing that MMs can have both propositional and metadiscoursal meanings, we carefully analyzed each potential marker within its sentential context and only included those with clear metadiscoursal functions. All identified markers were independently reviewed by the researchers, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. To ensure accuracy, we applied the metadiscourse identification criteria proposed by Hyland (2005) and Ädel (2006). These include three dimensions: (1) referential—whether the expression refers to the text or external reality; (2) functional—whether it organizes or comments on discourse; and (3) interactional— whether it involves the writer-reader relationship or external participants. Finally, we presented the findings using cross-tabulation and illustrative examples from both English and Arabic corpora.

4.3 Theoretical model

Unlike earlier scholars who viewed metadiscourse as passive commentary (e.g., Vande Kopple 1985; Crismore et al. 1993), Hyland (2005) introduced a functional approach that emphasizes its active, interpersonal role in writer-reader interaction. He proposed the Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse, asserting that all metadiscourse serves to connect writers with their audience. Hyland's model (2005) distinguishes between two dimensions: interactive and interactional. The interactive dimension focuses on how writers guide readers through the text, organizing content in ways that accommodate the audience's background, expectations, and needs. It involves structuring arguments to support comprehension and coherence.

The interactional dimension reflects how writers engage readers by expressing stance, evaluating claims, and involving readers in the discourse. This includes the use of features such as hedges, boosters, and engagement markers that help establish the writer's presence and foster a dialogic relationship with the reader. By addressing potential responses and highlighting their own position, writers shape meaning collaboratively with their audience. Hyland's model thus presents metadiscourse as a key rhetorical tool that writers use to both organize their texts and build solidarity with readers. Figure 1 outlines the subcategories within each dimension.

Hyland (2005) emphasized that these markers indicate how writers interact with their audience. Using these markers creates the impression that the writer is considering their audience and is eager to involve them. Conversely, removing these markers may suggest that the text is less personal and more difficult to follow. Therefore, this model is particularly valuable for analyzing English and Arabic opinion articles, as this genre is one of the most interactive forms of writing, where writers actively seek to engage readers and express their stance on various issues.

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive resources	Help to guide reader through the text	
Transitions	Express semantic relation between main clauses	in addition / but / thus / and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	finally / to conclude / my purpose is
Endophoric mrkrs	Refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above / see Fig / in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to source of information from other texts	according to X / (Y, 1990) / Z states
Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	namely / e.g. / such as / in other words
Interactional resources	Involve the reader in the argument	
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	might / perhaps / possible / about
Boosters	Emphasise force or writer's certainty in proposition	in fact / definitely / it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately / I agree / surprisingly
Engagement mrkrs	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider / note that / you can see that
Self mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I / we / my / our

Figure. Interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland 2005: 60)

5. Findings

The quantitative analysis of our study revealed notable variations in the usage of MMs in English and Arabic opinion columns. Table 1 illustrates these variations in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 1. Distribution and percentages of metadiscourse resources in English and Arabic opinion columns

MMs	**English**		**Arabic**	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Interactive Markers	**509**	41	**408**	**45**
Frame Markers	136	11	88	10
Transitions	138	12	123	14
Code Glosses	94	7	64	7
Evidentials	99	8	85	9
Endophoric	42	3	48	5
Interactional Markers	**744**	59	**483**	**55**
Hedges	160	12	53	9
Boosters	106	8	70	13
Attitude Markers	122	10	55	10
Self-mentions	112	9	35	7
Engagement Markers	245	20	89	16
Totals	**1253**	**100**	**891**	**100**

Overall, both English and Arab columnists employed MMs with varying frequencies, indicating that columnists in both languages are aware of the important role these features play in guiding and engaging readers with their arguments. However, the total number of MMs was higher in the English corpus (1,253 items) compared to the Arabic corpus (891 items).

The higher occurrence of MMs in English compared to Arabic suggests that English columnists rely more heavily on explicit metadiscourse strategies to guide their readers and construct their arguments. This pattern exemplifies the Anglo-American rhetorical tradition, which favors a linear argumentative structure. In this approach, writers explicitly mark logical connections and deliberately guide readers through their reasoning (Gunnarsson 2001). This is particularly manifest in academic and journalistic English writing, which typically follows this linear organization by clearly making transitions and connections explicit for readers to follow (Gunnarsson 2001 and Hyland 2005). This is evident in the frequent use of MMs such as 'firstly,' 'secondly,' 'in contrast,' and 'in conclusion' that overtly organize the text and signal shifts in the argument. This practice reflects what Swales (1990) calls writer responsibility— the principle that writers, not readers, bear the primary obligation to ensure clarity and accessibility in communication.

Conversely, Arabic rhetorical patterns often depend on the reader's ability to infer relationships between ideas through context and shared cultural knowledge (Almehmadi 2012). This aligns with Alghazo et al.'s (2023) findings that Arabic editorials employ less explicit metadiscourse. Such patterns exemplify Swales' (1990) concept of reader responsibility, wherein readers are expected to actively interpret textual relationships and construct meaning from more implicit connections between ideas.

As illustrated in Table 1, interactional markers were more frequent than interactive markers in the English corpus (744 items compared to 509 items). This may indicate that English columnists place more emphasis on establishing writer-reader relationships and engaging their readers. This finding aligns with Kuhi and Mojood (2014), who noted that English editorials utilized interactional markers more than interactive markers to make their arguments more persuasive. Similarly, Arab columnists demonstrated a higher preference for interactional markers compared to interactive markers (483 versus 408 items). This suggests that Arab columnists, like their English counterparts, prioritize engaging with readers over organizing text content.

However, the disparity between the English and Arabic corpora is more pronounced in interactional markers than in interactive markers. Specifically, the difference in interactive markers between English and Arabic texts is relatively small, with a difference of 101 items, while the gap in interactional markers is substantially larger at 261 items. This might suggest that while both groups of columnists share relatively similar approaches to text organization (as evidenced by the smaller gap in interactive markers), they demonstrate markedly different strategies for writer-reader interaction. A similar finding was also revealed by

Dafouz (2008) and Chen and Li (2023), who found that English columnists used more interactional markers than their counterparts.

Nevertheless, comparing only the general categories of metadiscourse does not provide a complete picture of how English and Arab columnists differ in their use of metadiscourse features. A deeper understanding requires a detailed examination of the frequency and usage patterns of each subcategory to identify specific rhetorical preferences between the two languages. Therefore, we compiled a comparative ranking of all metadiscourse subcategories. Table 2 highlights the predominant metadiscourse features in each language.

Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that both English and Arab columnists exhibited relatively similar ranked frequencies of MMs, though some variations were noted. Interestingly, engagement markers were the most predominant subcategory of MMs used by both groups. The prominence of engagement markers suggests that English and Arab columnists prioritize building writer-reader relationships and maintaining reader involvement throughout their texts. However, we found that English and Arab columnists demonstrate notably distinct rhetorical preferences in their use of these engagement markers, as our qualitative findings elaborate.

Hedging was the second most predominant MM used in English columns, while it ranked sixth in Arabic. The higher frequency of hedging suggests that English columnists are more cautious in making commitments and assertions. This finding aligns with Babapour and Kuhi (2018) and Yazdani et al. (2014), who found that English journalists showed a greater tendency to use hedges compared to their counterparts. A similar result was found by Chen and Li (2023), who discovered that English columnists utilized hedging more frequently than Chinese columnists.

Our analysis revealed that English columnists frequently employed qualifying phrases to avoid absolute claims. This tendency aligns with the Anglo-American academic tradition that emphasizes maintaining a careful balance between assertiveness and diplomatic expression. Importantly, the use of hedging devices does not necessarily indicate uncertainty in the writer's stance; rather, it serves multiple rhetorical functions. It helps writers avoid appearing overly assertive, allows them to present approximate information when precision is not required or possible, and protects against potential criticism or questioning (Crystal 1988). Conversely, boosters demonstrate an opposite pattern, ranking third in Arabic columns with a frequency of 13 percent, while appearing eighth in English columns with a frequency of 8 percent. A similar pattern was observed by Babapour and Kuhi (2018), who found that English columnists used fewer boosters than their counterparts.

As Table 2 indicates, the higher frequency of boosters in the Arabic corpus (13%) compared to hedges (9%) suggests that Arab columnists demonstrate a stronger commitment to their statements, presenting them as facts rather than opinions. This may be attributed to cultural conventions in Arabic writing, where authors often adopt a more writer-oriented approach than a reader-oriented one by establishing credibility through conviction and certainty in their assertions (Almehmadi 2012). Our findings support those of Al-Anbar et al. (2023), who

found that boosters were the second most common markers used by Arabic editorial writers to signal their stance.

Table 2. Ranked frequency of metadiscourse resources in English and Arabic editorials

English	**Arabic**
1. Engagement Markers (20%)	**1. Engagement Markers (16%)**
2. Hedges (12%)	2. **Transitions** (14%)
3. Transitions (12%)	3. **Boosters** (13%)
4. Frame Markers (11%)	4. Frame Markers (10%)
5. Attitude Markers (10%)	5. Attitude Markers (10%)
6. Self-Mentions (9%)	6. **Hedges** (9%)
7. Evidential (8%)	7. Evidential (9%)
8. Boosters (8%)	8. Code Glosses (7.5%)
9. Code Glosses (7%)	9. Self-Mentions (6.5%)
10. Endophoric (3%)	10. Endophoric (5%)

Notably, there was considerable variation in the subcategory of self-mention. English columnists used self-mention more frequently than their Arab counterparts. This finding aligns with those of Chen and Li (2023), who reported that English columnists used self-mention more frequently than their Chinese counterparts. In fact, this category ranked almost last among all subcategories in the Arabic corpus. Similar results were found by Yazdani et al. (2014) and Kuhi and Mojood (2018), who noted that, unlike English writers, Iranian journalists tend to avoid self-mention.

The low frequency of self-mention in Arabic might be attributed to the collective nature of Arab culture. This argument aligns with Almakrob (2023), who noted that Arab writers tend to use 'نحن' (we) more than 'أنا' (I), considering individual self-reference less appropriate in formal discourse. This could explain why we found that, in most cases, Arab columnists referred to themselves using the plural pronoun 'نا' (our/we) instead of singular pronouns like 'I' or 'me.' The low frequency of self-mention in Arabic might also explain the higher frequency we observed in the use of reader pronouns as one of the engagement markers, which we explore in the qualitative findings.

Our quantitative findings revealed that English and Arab columnists demonstrated similar patterns in their use and frequency of interactive markers. However, the analysis uncovered notable differences in their use of interactional markers. Specifically, English columnists showed a stronger preference for hedges over boosters, while Arab columnists displayed the opposite tendency. Additionally, English columnists exhibited greater comfort with self-mention compared to their

Arab counterparts. Furthermore, while engagement markers were the most preferred MMs by both English and Arab columnists, our analysis revealed the most pronounced distinctions in the use of these markers between the two groups. Therefore, the following section will highlight these differences through illustrative examples from our corpus.

5.1 Engagement markers used by English and Arab columnists

Engagement markers are interactional metadiscourse features explicitly employed by writers to draw readers' attention or make them active participants in the text (Hyland 2005). Our quantitative analysis revealed that engagement markers were the most prominent features in both English and Arabic columns. However, qualitative findings highlighted variations between English and Arab columnists in their use of reader pronouns, questions, references to shared knowledge, and imperatives. Below is a detailed discussion of how English and Arab columnists employ each engagement marker.

5.1.1 Reader pronouns

Reader pronouns are among the most explicit markers used by writers to involve their readers in the text (Hyland 2005). This reader-centered strategy focuses on establishing a relationship with the audience rather than organizing the text (Hyland 2005). In English, reader pronouns are commonly expressed through the inclusive "we" or the second-person pronoun "you," while in Arabic, they can be realized through the attached plural suffixal pronoun "نا" (na) and the independent pronoun "نحن" (nahnu).

Both English and Arab columnists frequently used reader pronouns to engage their audiences and make their opinions more persuasive. However, we noted that the use of reader pronouns was more common in the Arabic corpus than in the English one. This finding is consistent with Alghazo et al. (2023), who reported that reader pronouns were 4.5 times more prevalent in Arabic newspapers than in English ones. Almakrob (2023) also reached a similar conclusion, noting that Arab writers tend to engage their audience using personal plural pronouns.

The prominent use of reader pronouns in the Arabic corpus may be attributed to Arabic culture, which is characterized as collectivist and favors first-person plural pronouns over other forms (Chibi 2021). In contrast, English culture tends to be more individualistic, emphasizing personal autonomy and individual expression (Na and Choi 2009). This variation in the use of reader pronouns might explain the higher percentage of self-mention in the English corpus compared to the Arabic corpus (see Tables 1 and 2). Nevertheless, even with an individually-oriented approach, English columnists frequently employed reader pronouns to engage their readers. This could be attributed to the opinion genre, which serves as a fundamental engaging writing style. Below are some illustrative examples taken from the English and Arabic corpora.

E1: **We** have a chance to save millions of lives, or **we** can say we're busy.
E2: **Our** decisions over the next five to ten years will determine which path **we** take.

E3: "وأنا أقرأ ما كتب **عنّا** نحن النساء، تذكرت كتاب "التخلف الاجتماعي

Literal translation (LT3): As I was reading what was written about **us, we women**, I remembered the book *"Social Backwardness."*

E4: إن **صحتنا** وصحة **أبنائنا وأحفادنا** هي بالتأكيد اليوم بيد وزارة الصحة .

LT4: Our health, our children's health, and our grandchildren's health is certainly now in the hands of the Ministry of Health.

In both examples (E1-2), the English columnists strategically employ reader pronouns to engage their audiences. In E1, the use of the inclusive first-person plural pronoun fosters a sense of shared responsibility and solidarity. Similarly, in E2, the writer uses "our" and "we" when discussing wage inequality in America. These pronouns transfer ownership of the issue to the readers, suggesting that the power to change lies in their hands, not just with the government. In both cases, the writers transform seemingly distant issues—famine in Sudan and wage inequality in America—into immediate concerns that require direct reader involvement and action. The inclusive nature of these pronouns breaks down the barrier between the writer and reader, creating a shared space of responsibility and potential for change.

In E3, the Arab columnist demonstrates a deliberate shift from the first-person singular pronoun 'I' to the first-person plural pronoun (نحن). She employs the first-person plural pronoun twice: first as a suffix and then as an independent pronoun. This strategic employment indicates the writer's intentional use of this engagement marker to address societal criticism of women. The shift from 'I' to 'we' aligns with Harwood's (2005) assertion that reader pronouns serve as fundamental engagement devices to challenge prevailing social practices and strengthen argumentative positions on behalf of a given community. The columnist's specific use of (عنًّا نحن) "us, we women" works to create solidarity by directly addressing and including all women readers, making each individual feel personally involved in the discourse. This engagement marker effectively transforms a personal observation into a collective concern, establishing a stronger writer-reader relationship and fostering a sense of shared experience and unity among women readers. Similarly, the Arab columnist in E4 deliberately employs the suffixal pronoun (نا) 'our' repeatedly to engage readers in addressing a critical health issue: obesity. This triple use of the possessive suffix creates a powerful engagement effect by transforming what might be seen as an individual issue into a collective responsibility that affects not just the present but also future generations.

5.1.2 Questions

Questions are powerful engagement markers that draw readers into discourse by simulating a face-to-face dialogue (Hyland 2017). Notably, we found that questions were the most common engagement marker used by English columnists (66 instances), compared to 22 instances in the Arabic corpus. This finding is consistent with the results of Alghazo et al. (2023), who noted that The *English Guardian* used more questions than The *Arabic Al-Dustur newspaper*. This higher frequency in English articles compared to Arabic may reflect a more direct writer-reader

relationship in the English opinion genre. Below are examples extracted from the English and Arabic corpora.

E5: Want More Inflation? Go Ahead.

E6: What Happens if China Stops Trying to Save the World?

E7: فماذا ننتظر من طفل تربى على يد أم هي الأخرى طفلة؟

LT7: What can we expect from a child raised by a mother who is, herself, still a child?

The above examples (E5-E6) illustrate how English and Arab columnists approach their readers through questions. In E5, the columnist provokes thought and engages readers in reflective thinking about what might happen if presidents were allowed to meddle in monetary policy. Such a rhetorical question serves as a powerful engagement tool that transforms complex economic concepts into an accessible dialogue with readers. Similarly, in E6, the writer creates an interactive dialogue with readers and encourages them to actively consider the consequences of China's potential withdrawal from environmental initiatives. This engagement marker not only captures readers' attention but also positions them as active participants in exploring the implications of China's role in global environmental efforts. This strategic use of questioning is also demonstrated by Arab columnists. In E7, the columnist engages readers in contemplating the consequences of child marriage. The rhetorical question functions as an engagement marker by inviting readers to reflect on the social implications and creates a sense of shared concern about this societal issue.

5.1.3 Reference to shared knowledge

This is an engagement marker where the writer attempts to connect with readers by making them active participants through shared knowledge (Hyland 2005). We found that this marker was the most frequently employed by Arab columnists. One way to appeal to shared knowledge is by using familiar phrases or widely recognized cultural terms (Hyland 2005). Notably, Arabic columns prominently feature religious and cultural expressions. This marker may indicate that Arab columnists aim to engage their readers by fostering a sense of connection and solidarity through shared cultural and religious references.

A clear variation observed between Arabic and English columns is that English columnists tend to employ universal references that can be understood across cultural boundaries. In contrast, Arab columnists often use culture-specific references that are more familiar to Arab readers, reflecting their cultural context and shared understanding within the Arab world. Below are illustrative examples from the English and Arabic corpora.

E8: "The Jews are known **as the people of the book**."

E9: تعرّضتْ ولاية فلوريدا الأميركيّة الساحليّة الشهيرة إلى إعصارين كبيرين مدمّرين، **ولولا لطف القدير**

LT9: The famous coastal state of Florida in the United States was struck by two major, devastating hurricanes. **Were it not for the grace of the Almighty**.

E10: وردت **آيات كثير ة** في النفاق والمنافقين، بل ثم **سورة بحالها في القرآن الكريم، تسمى سورة المنافقون**

LT10: There are **many verses in the Qur'an** concerning hypocrisy and the hypocrites; there is an entire chapter in the **Qur'an called Surat Al-Munafiqun** (The Chapter of the Hypocrites).

In E8, the columnist appeals to widely shared knowledge about the Jewish people's historical connection to literature and learning. He uses this common understanding as a foundation to engage readers in his argument about the counterproductive nature of boycotting Israeli cultural institutions. On the other hand, the Arab columnist in E9 approaches the topic of the Florida hurricanes using the expression "Were it not for the grace of the Almighty," which reflects a shared understanding among Arabs. Within Arab cultural discourse, when potential disasters are averted or their impact is lessened, there is a collective tendency among Arab readers to interpret such outcomes through the lens of divine intervention and mercy. This instance of engagement activates readers' emotional and spiritual connections to similar experiences, making the discourse more personally relevant and engaging. Such a finding aligns with Van Dijk's (1988) perspective that cultural-cognitive connections in discourse help activate shared mental models and experiences among readers, thereby strengthening the writer-reader relationship and enhancing the text's persuasive power.

Similarly, in E10, the columnist addresses a social phenomenon: duplicity. He employs shared religious knowledge by referencing the Qur'an, considered the divine source of knowledge in Islamic culture. The columnist establishes a connection with Muslim readers who share this religious knowledge. This type of engagement is particularly effective in Arabic discourse as it taps into shared cultural beliefs, making the text more persuasive and relatable to its audience.

The contrast between Arab columnists' culturally specific references and English writers' universal approach mirrors the fundamental translation challenge described in Venuti's (1995) domestication and foreignization framework. Just as Arab columnists use culturally specific expressions to create solidarity with readers, translators are confronted with the dilemma of whether to prioritize a similar connection with the target audience (domestication) or preserve the cultural identity of the source text (foreignization). Although foreignization might create distance for non-Arab readers, it maintains cultural authenticity. Venuti (1995) argued that this approach respects the values of the source culture and resists ethnocentric dominance in translation practice.

5.1.4 Imperatives

Imperatives are expressions used by writers to urge readers to act or adopt a particular viewpoint (Hyland 2005). They serve several functions, including providing instructions to readers and, most relevant to our analysis, engaging readers and guiding them (Hyland 2005). Imperatives can be expressed in various forms, including modal verbs and predicative adjectives that convey the writer's stance on the necessity or importance of something.

Our analysis revealed that English columnists used imperatives more frequently than Arab columnists. This finding aligns with the research of Alghazo

et al. (2023), which highlighted significant differences in the use of imperatives favoring English texts. It also resonates with Alshbeekat and Awaad's (2024) findings that directive metadiscourse serves as a powerful persuasive tool in English writing. This observed variation may be explained by the observation that imperatives establish higher authority for the writer over the reader. Put differently, imperatives pose a threat to the reader's face, undermining their sense of autonomy, competence, or respect. In Arab culture, suggesting higher status or undermining someone's autonomy is generally considered inappropriate. Alghazo et al. (2023) argued that the way writers use linguistic features, particularly imperatives as a means of direct communication with their readers, is shaped by their understanding of cultural norms and values. This may explain why Arab columnists use imperatives less frequently than their English counterparts, as they seek to avoid threatening the reader's face, especially in opinion articles where engagement and persuasion are primary goals. Below are examples from both English and Arabic corpora.

E11: We **must** work harder to control what we can control.
E12: Climate Change **Should** Make You Rethink Homeownership.
E13: **علينا** أن نوقظ الصمود الفلسطيني داخلنا ونعبئه لنخبر المجتمعات الأخرى بأننا هنا .
LT13: We **must** awaken the Palestinian resilience within us and mobilize it to tell other communities that we are here.
E**14:** **وجب** علينا الكتابة عن هذا الموضوع للتنبيه إلى خطره الجسيم
LT14: We **must** write about this topic to raise awareness of its grave danger.
E15: ولعل الاستجابات المتنوعة من أركان العالم المختلفة **يجعلنا نفكر** في قيمة ومكانة الطوفان
LT15: Perhaps the diverse responses from various parts of the world **make us reflect** on the significance and status of the Flood.
E16: وإذا ما تذكرنا أن الحرب التي تم شنها عالمياً باسم الحرب على الإرهاب
LT16: And **by recalling** that the war was waged globally under the name of the "War on Terror."

The above examples (E11-16) illustrate how English and Arab columnists employed imperatives to engage their readers. In E11, the writer uses the modal of obligation "must" to convey a sense of urgency, urging media representatives to adhere to the highest standards of credibility to gain public trust. The use of the first-person plural pronoun "we," along with the directive, creates a strong engagement effect. Similarly, the author in E12 employs the modal verb "should" to emphasize the necessity of reconsidering homeownership decisions in light of climate change.

In contrast, our qualitative analysis showed that Arab columnists used imperatives implicitly. Notably, we found that the modal of obligation "must" appeared explicitly only twice in the Arabic corpus (see E13 and E14). In other instances of directives, we noted that Arab columnists employed a tone of inviting or suggesting what their readers should do, rather than giving explicit commands (see E15 and E16). Specifically, in E15, the phrase "makes us reflect" (يجعلنا نفكر) demonstrates a more implicit directive approach, where the writer gently guides readers to contemplate the significance of the event rather than explicitly

commanding them to do so. Similarly, the expression "by recalling that..." (وإذا ما تذكرنا) in E16 represents another instance of implicit direction, as the author prefers to invite readers into a shared reflection process through conditional phrasing rather than issuing direct commands. These rhetorical preferences suggest that Arab columnists favor a more collaborative and inclusive approach to reader engagement. This aligns with the findings of Kerkam (2015:224), who explained that Arab speakers tend to use strategies to mitigate the impact of direct commands and avoid being labeled as ‘strong- faced.’

5.2 Proposed modifications to Hyland’s model

Although Hyland's model (2005) provided a robust analytical framework for examining English columns, our study identified opportunities for methodological refinement to improve its applicability to Arabic columns. This aligns with Hyland's acknowledgment (2005) that neither his model nor any other linguistic framework can fully represent the complex nature of communicative practices. Based on our findings, we propose two avenues for the development of the model: (1) incorporating Arabic-specific linguistic markers within existing metadiscourse categories and (2) identifying potential metadiscourse subcategories that emerge from Arabic columns. Table 3 illustrates the proposed modifications to Hyland's model (2005).

Table 3. Proposed modifications to Hyland’s model

Category	Examples
Interactional Markers	
Hedges - Arabic/Culture-specific items	/qad/ (might/perhaps), /wa‿llaːhu ʔaʕlam/ (and God knows best).
Boosters - Arabic/Culture-specific items	/qad/ (indeed/certainly), /laːm at.tawkiːd/ (emphatic lam/), /ʔin/ (indeed/verily), /wa‿llaːh/ (and God/by God), /ʔin ʃaːʔa‿llaːh/ (God willing/if God wills), /bi‿ʔiðn‿illaːh/ (with God's permission/by God's leave).
Self-mentions - First-person plural pronouns for one author	/naħnu/ (we), /naː/ (us/our).
Engagement Markers	
Imperatives - Explicit strong imperatives	/jaʤib/ (must/it is necessary), /ʕalajnaː/ (upon us/we must), /laː budda min/ (it is necessary/there is no avoiding), /taʔammul/ (reflect/consider).

- Implicit soft imperatives	/janbaɣiː/ (it is proper/it should be/it is fitting) /min al.mustaħsan/ (it is preferable/it is recommended),/ħariː binaː/ (it behooves us/we ought to), /daʕuːnaː/ (let us).
Reference to shared knowledge - Universal knowledge	The knowledge that is recognized by Arab and non-Arab recipients
- Culture-specific knowledge	Qur'anic and Hadith references, Islamic proverbial expressions

Our findings revealed that Arab columnists demonstrated a notable preference for Arabic/culture-specific terms, particularly in hedges and boosters. We observed that Arab columns often indicate uncertainty about a propositional statement using the expression (الله أعلم) "God knows best," reflecting a Muslim Arab cultural convention that ultimate knowledge belongs to God. Conversely, writers employed expressions such as بإذن الله ("God willing"), والله ("By God"), and إن شاء الله ("If God wills") to express certainty. Notably, the particle قد (qad) was used to indicate both hedges and boosters. This aligns with Hyland's assertion (2005) about the multifunctionality of MMs and the difficulty of establishing discrete linguistic categories. The analysis also uncovered specific Arabic markers of certainty, including إن (Inna) and لام التوكيد (emphatic Lam). These findings highlight how even small linguistic elements in Arabic can perform communicative functions that require entire English words or phrases. This linguistic nuance offers critical insights for translation students, highlighting the importance of culturally informed translation strategies that capture the pragmatic and communicative essence rather than pursuing literal equivalence.

While Hyland (2005) explained the subcategories of engagement markers, we propose a more integrated approach within the same model to enhance the visibility of engagement markers and potentially yield valuable insights for future research. Our findings revealed notable patterns of engagement markers among Arab columnists, prompting us to consider further expansions of these categories. Based on our observations, we propose two key sub-categorizations: imperatives divided into explicit and implicit types, and references to shared knowledge categorized as universal and culture specific. Such nuanced subcategorization could provide deeper linguistic and cultural insights, facilitate greater understanding of communicative writing across cultures, and create a more flexible and adaptable analytical framework.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the use of MMs in English and Arabic opinion columns. The first and second research questions examined how English and Arab columnists differed in their usage and frequency of interactive and interactional markers. The findings revealed comparable patterns in the use of interactive markers between

both groups. However, notable differences emerged in the use of interactional markers, with English columnists employing these resources more frequently than their Arab counterparts. The third research question investigated specific metadiscourse preferences. The analysis revealed distinct patterns. English columnists showed a stronger preference for hedges, while Arab columnists favored boosters. Notably, Arab columnists demonstrated a distinct preference for culture-specific expressions, particularly "بإذن الله" (God willing) to indicate certainty and "الله أعلم" (God knows best) to reflect uncertainty. Additionally, English columnists more readily employed direct self-reference, while Arab writers tended to use first-person plural pronouns even when referring to themselves individually.

Furthermore, while engagement markers emerged as the most preferred metadiscourse resource for both groups, our analysis revealed notable rhetorical differences. English columnists showed a stronger tendency to engage readers through questions, while Arabic columnists preferred inclusive first-person plural pronouns to foster reader participation. Both groups utilized references to knowledge as engagement markers. However, English columnists referenced globally recognized concepts, while Arab columnists employed culturally specific religious terms and verses from the Qur'an. Similarly, both groups varied in their use of imperatives: English columnists employed them more frequently and explicitly, while Arab columnists preferred implicit commands through soft modals of obligation and invitations that carefully consider the reader's status.

Our findings have theoretical and pedagogical implications. First, they demonstrate the model's adaptability across different languages and cultures. The proposed refinements to Hyland's model indicate that MMs, though universal, are deeply influenced by cultural considerations. We acknowledge, however, that these refinements do not constitute a comprehensive taxonomic framework. Instead, they serve as a foundational exploration that potentially opens avenues for future research, encouraging scholars to adopt a more adaptive approach to existing theoretical models. Second, these findings offer valuable implications for second language instruction and translation. Language teachers should highlight the distinct rhetorical differences between English and Arabic. Translators, in turn, must prioritize functional equivalence over literal translation and adapt their translations to meet target language expectations. By emphasizing theoretical refinements and practical applications, we hope our study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of cross-linguistic communication. However, we must acknowledge certain limitations. First, the sample size of 80 opinion columns may not fully represent broader writing patterns. Second, the three-month data collection period may not capture potential seasonal variations in writing styles. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size over a longer period and investigating additional genres of journalistic writing.

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