Evaluation of Interactional Metadiscourse in EFL Textbooks

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Abstract: Textbook evaluation plays a pivotal role in English as a foreign language (EFL) context, and these evaluations are normally conducted from different approaches. One of the approaches is the investigation of metadiscourse (MD) markers in textbooks which claim to be interactive. The current study intends to build on the existing knowledge on MD by examining the specificities in the use of MD markers in two commonly used EFL textbooks in Iran, namely, Top-Notch and ILI series against Hyland's (2004) model of interactional metadiscourse, making up hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. The Top-Notch series includes 29 short communication-facilitation (Rivers, 1981) dialogues while the ILI series contains 24 long grammar-demonstration dialogues. The two textbook series were found especially appropriate for this study as they resort to two different approaches to the presentation of dialogues. The descriptive analysis of the use of metadiscourse types, revealed that all categories of interactional metadiscourse are used in both textbooks. However among the different categories of interactional MD, engagement markers seem to enjoy the highest frequency of use in the ILI series and self-mentions dominate in the Top-Notch series. The findings have implications for teachers to select adequate textbook which facilitates communication in language program.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation; Metadiscourse Markers; Top-Notch series; ILI series

1. Introduction

Materials are defined as any source of input such as the Internet, textbooks, videos and live talks which facilitate the process of learning a given language (Tomlinson, 2003; Waters, 2009). Among the various types of "linguistic, visual, auditory or kinesthetic" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 66) materials, the role of textbooks is of paramount importance as it provides a systematic way to approach language teaching and learning. Indeed, textbooks can be regarded as a framework that regulates and times the language programs (Ur, 1996). The dominance of textbooks in language classes, however, has generated many controversies among scholars, regarding their actual role (Allwright, 1981; Amiryousefi & Ketabi, 2011; Hyland, 2000; Ur, 1996). The proponents believe that textbooks are the most convenient approach to the provision of materials to both learners and teachers. The opponents, on the other hand, argue that textbooks deprive teachers of their creativity and fail to account for learner differences. The dominance of textbooks and the crucial role they play in the process of language learning around the world have launched a multiplicity of research on the usefulness of materials and on how the development of materials can benefit from the research findings in the field of second language acquisition, discourse analysis, conversational analysis and corpus analysis (Richards, 2006; Tomlinson, 2003; Wong, 2002). A good deal of research has been conducted on different aspects of textbook evaluation (Richmond, 2005; Thompson, 1995). No research, however, has addressed the use of metadiscourse in ELT textbooks. The importance of metadiscourse lies in its interactive function. In other words, it can help the interactants better express themselves. Applying a metadiscourse model to ELT textbooks' conversations can, thus, be of significant importance as it can shed some light on whether or not they have been adequately accounted for.

2. Literature Review

Textbooks are the foundational cornerstones of language teaching and learning around which all classroom activities are centered. Since they are deeply ingrained and considered as an inseparable part of language learning

classrooms, the opponents' objections (Tomlinson, 2001) to the dominance of textbooks in the process of language learning did not result in their omission but rather gave birth to the realization that the development of all-encompassing textbooks is a demanding if not impossible undertaking. Thus, materials evaluation was introduced in to the field of language education and became the established way for writing, adopting and adapting textbooks. Tomlinson (2010) suggests that any evaluation of materials should be based on the application of theories of language acquisition, principles of language teaching, some working knowledge of the target language and the knowledge of how the materials are being used. McDonough and Shaw (1993) divide the evaluation process into the external and internal analyses. Visual materials, inclusion of vocabulary list and mentioning of the proficiency level of learners are among the criteria for an external analysis of the textbooks while presentation of the skills, sequencing of materials and the efficacy of the teacher's guide constitute the categories of internal analysis. Tomlinson (2003) enumerates some purposes for materials evaluation. He states that one might evaluate a textbook so as to help a publisher to make certain decisions about a publication, to develop materials him/herself, to select a book or to write a review. Besides, textbook evaluation can be conducted in order to select a particular textbook for a given language program. Selection of a particular textbook for a given language program "signals an executive educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial and even political investment" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237). As it influences the language learning life of the learners, a thorough evaluation of the textbooks available on the market is required before the managerial and teaching staff of language institutes can agree on the adoption of a given textbook. Textbook evaluation could be conducted from various perspectives, namely, the methodology of the textbook, language skills and sub-skills, physical appeal, culture treatment and a comparison of textbook characteristics and naturalistic language use (Gray, 2000; Delen & Tavil, 2010; Gilmore, 2004, Zarei & Khalessi, 2011; Alemi& Jafari, 2012). Corpus-based studies have been especially beneficial in disclosing a linguistic gap between textbooks and actual language use (Harwood, 2010). Romer (2004) conducted a comparative analysis of the use of modal auxiliaries in context, their distribution and meanings among the spoken data taken from a British English corpus in comparison to a number of texts selected from English textbooks. The results of the study revealed a great gap between the frequency of modal verbs in the corpus and the textbooks. The three most frequent modals in the corpus were found to be *will*, *would* and *can,* each of which had occurred more than 45000 times while in the textbooks the most frequent modals were *can* and *will* respectively. Wong (2002) analyzed a corpus of thirty dialogues selected from eight EFL textbooks published during the 1990s in which he compared the telephone dialogues used in the textbooks with the findings from a conversation analysis research, in which actual telephone conversations were selected to be examined. He analyzed four elements of telephone conversation, i.e., summons-answer sequence, identification-recognition sequence, greeting sequence and how-are-you sequence and found the match between the naturalistic and textbook conversations unsatisfactory. Delen and Tavil (2010) evaluated Top-notch series, Summit series and Northstar series in terms of the speech acts of refusal, request and complaint. The most frequently used speech acts in Top-Notch and Summit series were requests, refusals and complaints respectively. They were used mostly in dialogues and speaking and listening sections of the book. Only requests were adequately addressed, while the frequency of refusals was much less than requests with complaints occurring only a couple of times. Regarding the Northstar series, only requests and refusals were used.

In order to further contribute to the wealth of research on materials evaluation, the present study attempts to gauge the dialogue sections of two commonly used EFL textbooks in an EFL context, namely, Top-Notch and ILI series against Hyland's model of metadiscourse. According to Hyland and Tse (2004), discourse is composed of metadisocourse and propositional aspects. Propositional content deals with the core idea of the discourse while metadiscourse is often employed to ensure the intelligibility of the text to the reader. Metadiscourse is defined by Crismore (1985, p. 2) as the "author's presence in the text". Hyland (2004) also defines metadiscourse as "an important means of facilitating communication, supporting a writer's position, and building a relationship with an audience" (p. 136). Different categorizations and sub-categorizations of metadiscourse have been suggested (see for example, Abdi, Tavangar Rizi & Tavakoli, 2010; Dafouz, 2008; Hyland, 2004; Kumph, 2000). Based on the most frequently mentioned categorization, metadiscourse falls into the two types of textual (or interactive) and interpersonal (or interactional). Textual metadiscourse refers to those linguistic devices to which the writer resorts in order to organize a smooth text. Using the interpersonal metadiscourse, on the other hand, the writer can express his/her perspectives and build rapport with the reader. Hyland (2004) classifies metadiscourse into two major categories, namely, interactive and interactional

metadiscourse. Interactive metadiscourse is further sub-categorized into transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential and code glosses. In the same vein, the interactional metadiscourse includes hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mentions.

Table 1: Interactive Metadiscourse

Sub-categories	Definition	Examples
Transitions	*Devices marking additive, contrastive and consequential steps in discourse*	and, furthermore, or however,
Frame markers	*Devices referring to discourse acts, sequences or stages*	firstly, finally, next
Endophoric Markers	*Devices referring to other parts of the text*	in section 2, see fig 1
Evidentials	*Devices referring to the source of information outside the text*	according to Hyland (2004)
Code glosses	*Devices signaling the restatement of information in the text*	namely, that is,

Table 2: Interactional Metadiscourse

Sub-categories	Definition	Examples
Hedges	*Items indicating the writer's decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition*	perhaps, probably, believe
Boosters	*Items expressing certainty on the part of the writer*	certainly, in fact
Attitude Markers	*Items expressing the writer's attitude toward a proposition*	unfortunately, must,
Engagement Markers	*Items explicitly referring to build rapport with the reader*	as you can see, please note that
Self-Mentions	*Items explicitly referring to the author*	I, mine, ou

The studies having been conducted in the field of metadiscourse have mainly focused their attention on the written text and in line with this, the researchers have been mostly preoccupied with either the identification of use of metadiscourse in different genres (Hyland, 1999; Hu and Cao, 2011; Mur-Duenas, 2011) or with the teaching of metadiscourse (Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Jalilifar & Jafarpour, 2007). Dafouz-Milne (2008) enumerates a number of contexts such as textbooks, student writings, science popularization advertisements and research articles in which the use of metadiscourse has been investigated. In fact, he has attempted to explore the role of metadiscourse markers in the construction and attainment of persuasion. He examined a corpus of 40 opinion columns, taken from *The Time* and *El Pais* newspapers published in England and Spain respectively, in order to investigate the use of textual and interpersonal metadiscursive devices. He also sought the opinions of a group of informants regarding the effectiveness of metadiscourse in establishing persuasion. The results showed that both types of metadiscourse were used in English and Spanish newspaper columns though some variations were found in the use of logical markers and code glosses. The informants also stressed on the importance of a balanced use of both categories of metadiscourse for persuasion to be established and maintained. Similarly, Gilaerts and Van de Velde (2010) investigated the distribution of three interactive metadiscursive devices, namely, hedges, boosters and

attitude markers, in the abstract sections of research articles in the field of applied linguistics in a matter of three decades. They concluded that the use of hedges, boosters and attitude markers has decreased to some degree over the years. Moreover, according to Crismore and Abdollahzadeh (2010), metadiscourse studies in the Iranian context have mainly focused on metadiscourse in writing, cross-linguistic comparison of Persian and English and metadiscourse in reading comprehension texts. In a similar vein, Jalilifar and Alipour (2007) studied the effect of explicit instruction of metadiscourse on EFL learners' reading comprehension. Nighnty pre-intermediate EFL learners were selected and divided into three experimental groups after taking a pre-test. The pre-test was constituted of three versions, namely, "original, modified and unmodified metadiscourse-free texts". Emphasizing the role of metadiscourse in building up cohesion, the results also proved the usefulness of explicit metadiscourse instruction in improving reading comprehension. Although the balance of research up to now has almost exclusively focused on written texts (Abdollahzadeh, 2011; Crismore, 1990; Hyland, 2004; Marandi, 2002), it is never limited to the written mode and, arguably, the same degree of importance could be attached to the spoken mode as well. The current study contributes both to the literature on materials evaluation and metadiscourse studies by applying Hyland's model of metadiscourse to the evaluation of two ELT textbooks, namely, Top-Notch and ILI series. To this end, the following research question is posed:

Do Top-Notch and ILI series differ significantly in terms of frequency of use of interactional metadiscourse?

3. Methodology

In the following section, a brief description is provided with regard to different parts of the study, including the corpus, the instrumentation, the data collection procedure and the data analysis.

3.1 Corpus

The corpus used in this study includes 53 conversations taken from the Top-Notch and ILI series at the intermediate level. Top-Notch includes 29 short communication-facilitation dialogs while the ILI series includes 24 grammar-demonstration dialogs which are a little longer than those of Top-Notch.

3.2 Procedure

The dialog sections of the two textbooks were obtained and the frequencies of different categories of interpersonal metadiscourse were counted by the researcher. The obtained data was, then, submitted to SPSS for statistical analyses. The statistics for each and every sub-category of interactional metadiscourse was also obtained.

4. Results

The analyses of the content of the two textbook series, i.e. the ILI and Top-Notch, revealed that all types of interactional metadiscursive devices are used in both series and that they are different only in terms of engagement markers and self-mentions. As can be seen from tables 1 and 2, engagement markers and self-mentions are the most frequently used subcategories of metadiscourse occurring almost twice as many times as other subcategories. The frequency of use of these two metadiscursive devices could mainly be attributed to the interactive nature of conversations.

Table 1: Interactional Metadiscourse in the Top-Notch Series and the ILI Series

	Hedges	Boosters	Attitude markers	Engagement markers	Self-mentions
Frequency of use **(Top-Notch)**	19	31	59	187	106
Frequency of use **(ILI series)**	25	45	51	125	165

In order to further analyze the findings, the obtained data was submitted to SPSS and the chi square was run in order to investigate any significant differences among the subcategories of metadiscourse in both textbook series.

Given the subcategory of hedges, Chi-square was run in order to investigate whether there were any significant differences in the proportion of hedges identified in this study. The results, as shown in table 1, do not show any statistically significant value (Chi square $(1, n =44) = .36$, *p*

> .05), which signifies that there was found to be no significant differences in the two textbook series, in terms of the frequency with which hedges have been observed.

Table 1: Hedges in Both Textbooks

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1.00	19	22.0	-3.0
2.00	25	22.0	3.0
Total	44		

Test Statistics

	groups
Chi-Square	.818a
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.366

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 22.0.

The same procedure was followed as for the boosters, in order to investigate whether there were any significant differences in the proportion of boosters occurred in the data. It could be observed form table 2 below that the results are not statistically significant (Chi square $(1, n = 76) = .108$, $p > .05$), which in turn indicates that the two series of textbooks are not statistically different in terms of their use of boosters.

Table 2: Boosters in Both Textbooks

groups

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1.00	31	38.0	-7.0
2.00	45	38.0	7.0
Total	76		

Test Statistics

	groups
Chi-Square	2.579a
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.108

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 38.0.

Chi-square was also run in the case of attitude markers, the results of which are summarized in table 3 below. According to this table, no statistically significant value was obtained given the proportion of attitude markers used

in the conversations of the two series (Chi square (1, n =110) = .446, $p > .05$). This entails the conclusion that apparently there is no significant difference between the two textbook series with respect to the frequency of attitude markers occurring in their conversations.

Table 3: Attitude Markers in the Two Textbook Series

groups

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1.00	59	55.0	4.0
2.00	51	55.0	-4.0
Total	110		

Test Statistics

	groups
Chi-Square	.582a
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.446

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 55.0.

The statistical analysis was also carried out regarding the subcategory of engagement markers. Table 4 below illustrates the results of the Chi-square (Chi square (1, n =312) = .000, $p < .05$). It is evident from the results that there appears to be a statistically considerable difference between the frequencies with which each of the two series tended to make use of engagement markers in their dialogue section. In fact, it was observed that the frequency of occurrence of engagement markers in the conversations taken extracted from the Top Notch series was much higher than that of its counterpart, i.e. the ILI series.

Table 4: Engagement Markers in the Two Textbook Series

groups

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1.00	187	156.0	31.0
2.00	125	156.0	-31.0
Total	312		

Test Statistics

	groups
Chi-Square	12.321a
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies

less than 5. The minimum expected cell

frequency is 156.0.

The next subcategory to be investigated was that of self-mentions, for which the Chi-square results are reported in table 5 below. As could be observed from the table, the findings provide support for a statistically significant difference in the proportion of self-mentions enumerated in the conversations of the two series (Chi square (1, $n = 271$) = .000, $p < .05$). Unlike the previous category, however, it was revealed that in the case of self-mentions, the ILI series exceeds Top Notch.

Table 5: Self-mentions in the Two Textbook Series

groups

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1.00	106	135.5	-29.5
2.00	165	135.5	29.5
Total	271		

Test Statistics

	Groups
Chi-Square	12.845[a]
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 135.5.

5. Discussion

The results of the statistical analyses revealed that the two textbook series differ marginally in terms of hedges, boosters and attitude markers. Major differences, however, exists between them when it comes to engagement markers and self-mentions with engagements more frequently found in the Top-Notch series and self-mentions in the ILI series. The reason why engagement markers are more frequent in the Top-Notch series and self-mentions in the ILI series, may be attributed to the type of dialog advocated by the two textbooks. In communication-facilitation type of dialogs, used in the Top-Notch series, the emphasis is placed on meaningful communication. Therefore, the use of engagement markers in this type of dialog presentation is expected to outnumber that of grammar-demonstration dialogs advocated by the ILI series. The same is true in the case of self-mentions. The fact that self-mentions are more frequent in grammar-demonstration dialogs than in communication-facilitation ones implies that engagement markers play only a secondary role in grammar-translation dialogs. This is also evident in the use of attitude markers. Unsurprisingly, expressing attitudes is expected to occur more frequently when the interlocutors are involved in meaningful communications. That could also be why engagement markers in communication-facilitation dialogs are trivially more frequent than in grammar-translation dialogs. In fact, one reason accounting for the almost equal number of attitude markers in both types of dialogs could be, in all likelihood, the fact that grammar-demonstration dialogs used in the ILI series were much longer than the communication-facilitation types, almost twice as long. Taking this into consideration, one can reinterpret the results as the inequality of the types of dialogs in length could affect the frequencies of each of the interactional metadiscursive. If dialogs were equal in length, the use of

hedges, boosters and attitude markers would probably be much more frequent in communication-facilitation dialogs than in grammar-demonstration dialogs. In addition, the differences found in self-mentions in this study would, in all likelihood, be less marked. It seems that no transparent reason can account for the unexpected and probably contradictory differences found between the two types of conversations, i.e., grammar-demonstration and communication facilitation as all of the categories of metadiscourse are focused on interactions. The results run counter to expectations since it was predicted that interactional markers occur more frequently in communication facilitation dialogs, which center around interaction, rather than grammar-demonstration dialogs, in which interaction plays only a secondary role. One reason, however, might be the unequal length of the two types of dialogs, as discussed earlier in this section.

To conclude, according to the observations made in the present study, significant differences were found between the two types of dialogs only in terms of the two categories of engagement markers and self-mentions, each one occurring more frequently in one type of dialog. Other metadiscourse devices, however, appeared to be not significantly different.

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