

QUANTITATIVE CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF
METADISCOURSE
PROBLEMS IN DESIGN AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

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Introduction

This paper discusses problems encountered in designing and carrying out a research project that could be described as belonging to the field of “contrastive rhetoric”, a term which goes back to Kaplan’s 1966 article *Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education*. Like contrastive studies in general, also contrastive rhetoric has its origins in “pedagogical necessity”, in this case in the experiences of American teachers teaching composition to foreign students. Kaplan (1988:277) claims that these teachers “were able to tell with astonishing accuracy what the native-language of the writer was”. This suggested to Kaplan that there are regularities in the ways foreign students with certain linguistic backgrounds write in English as well as in the way native speakers of English write. Thus, in order to help the foreign students in their composition tasks it seemed logical to find out where their writing deviated from that of native speakers of English. “At this stage in the evolution of contrastive rhetoric”, Kaplan (1988:277) continues, “there was no great interest in understanding the origins of the matters under study, rather, the interest was primarily in finding solutions to an immediate pedagogical problem”. The differences Kaplan was referring to were not syntactic, although they, too, were in evidence, but differences at the rhetorical level. Following Kaplan’s idea, contrastive rhetoric initially involved comparisons of English texts written by non-native students with those written by native speakers. Since then, however, contrastive rhetoric has been expanded to the comparison of texts produced by students in their own native languages, and to texts written by professional writers (see Purves 1988).

Much of the research done in contrastive rhetoric so far has concentrated on exploring the over-all structure of texts, their topic development and argumentative

patterns. However, language used in writing, like language used in oral communication, serves the three major functions which Halliday (1973) calls the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. Thus, also the latter two functions are important from the point of view of teaching composition. In this study, we use the term *metadiscourse* to refer to linguistic items that explicitly serve the interpersonal and textual functions, ie. to the linguistic material which "does not add propositional information but which signals the presence of the author" (Vande Kopple 1988). Metadiscourse helps readers organize, interpret and evaluate the information in a text. It can be assumed that the ways of using metadiscourse in writing may vary from one language and culture to another, that the conventions followed in its use may be different in different cultures. From this it follows that when writing in a foreign language new conventions may have to be adopted. There are some indications of problems in this area in studies on writing in foreign language (for example, Intaraprawat 1988 and Ventola & Mauranen 1990). Considerations like these led us to the idea of starting a contrastive/cross-cultural study of metadiscourse, which at the present involves American English and Finnish, but which it is possible to expand later to include other languages. Briefly, our aim is to find out whether the rhetorical conventions followed in the use of metadiscourse are similar or different in the languages and cultures involved in the project.

Problems in design

In all contrastive studies the fundamental methodological question is how to establish the *tertium comparationis*, the common platform that guarantees the comparability between languages. This requirement naturally affects also the collection of data. In his discussion of the nature of *tertium comparationis* Krzeszowski (1984:303) says that "pragmatic equivalence can serve as TC for contrastive analysis of such matters as the structure of discourse, stylistic properties and quantitative aspects of texts" and concerning quantitative contrastive analysis he suggests that texts "may be chosen for comparison only on the grounds that they represent the same register, or the same style, or the same literary genre, or on any grounds which provide the common platform of reference motivating the comparison" (Krzeszowski 1981:103). We, however, felt the need for a more rigorously defined common platform than the same genre or style. Since written discourse, like oral discourse, is communicative activity, it is constrained by the same basic situational factors, ie. at least by setting, participants, topic and purpose. It seems, then, that keeping these factors constant would guarantee the comparability of texts produced in those conditions. Purves (1988:16-17) talks about similar requirements for data when discussing the principles followed in the IEA study (the international study of written composition by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement). He mentions conditions that "set the controls over the functions and processes by which the texts are produced, and thus enable the analyst of the textual artifacts to be able to make the comparisons and contrasts with greater authority" (Purves 1988:17). His conditions contain the requirement of the *settings* being as similar as possible, eg. examination settings for all groups

of writers. Furthermore, *the writing task* "should be consistently set in its function and cognitive demand as well as in the specific subject matter", by which he means that "it is inappropriate to compare business letters written in one culture with detective fiction in another", ie. a requirement of the same genre. He also mentions that *the language* in which the writers are writing should be defined, ie. whether it is native or foreign. (This requirement is not relevant in our case because our writers all write in their native language.) Further requirements are the similarity of *the occupation of the writers*, by which Purves seems to mean the field of work or study, and *the similarity of their education*.

In our case the easiest way of guaranteeing the similarity of the occupational and educational backgrounds of the writers was to have university/college students provide us with the data. By using students as writers of the texts to be analysed we also hoped to get pedagogically interesting results. Having as subjects students who either were currently taking or had recently taken composition courses in their native languages made possible the assumption that their writing would reflect the conventions emphasized in the teaching of composition in each country. Thus, our decision was to have students in both countries write an essay in a classroom situation, as part of their regular courses involving writing tasks.

As the "genre" of the essays to be written we chose the argumentative or persuasive text type, which can be defined as having the illocutionary point of convincing readers about some issue (cf. for example Aston 1977). Many of the previous studies in contrastive rhetoric based on essays written by students have concentrated on expository texts. Our choice of the argumentative text type was made on the basis of the assumption that this text type would contain more metadiscourse, particularly of the interpersonal kind, than other types of texts would (see Crismore 1989:70).

Our first thought was to give an identical topic to both groups of students to insure comparability. But when we had a number of possible topics evaluated by students, the results turned out to be quite different in the two countries. The students were asked to rate the topics according to how much they knew about them and how interesting they found them. The most popular topic among the American students was *Smoking should be banned everywhere except in private homes and apartments*, among the Finns it was *Industry should be made economically responsible for environmental damage*. Since we believe that interest and knowledge are important variables in writing, we felt that the topics must be high in both these categories to produce comparable essays. Having a topic of low interest or knowledge level would create more variation than different topics would. We therefore decided to give each group their favourite topic. Thus, our common platform, as far as data collection was concerned, was to have university students in both countries write a persuasive essay in which they were expected to argue about an issue of importance in their society. This we felt would be enough to guarantee the equivalence requirement for data in this type of study.

Out of the fifty essays written in each country, twenty were selected for closer analysis (ten male and ten female students). The selection was made on the basis

of a questionnaire which the students had been asked to complete. In addition to certain background information, the students were also asked to evaluate their own competence as writers and their confidence in writing about the particular topic given to them. As selection criteria we used age, year at university and the students' competence and confidence levels, i.e. the scores of their competence and confidence ratings summed and averaged. These criteria were used because it could be assumed that age and year at university as well as high values in the self-reported ratings of competence and confidence would indicate (not necessarily guarantee) mature, experienced writers. There were differences in the average scores between the groups: the Finnish students' average age and year at university were slightly lower than those of the American students for the simple reason that they tend to take the composition courses in their second year and no graduate students are involved in these courses. Also the competence and confidence levels of the Finns were lower than those of the Americans, which can be explained by the well-known fact that Finns have the tendency to rather underestimate than overestimate themselves. Thus, no "equivalence" was to be found here except by taking those with highest scores. But it will be interesting to see whether the differences, especially the one in the competence/confidence ratings, are reflected in their use of metadiscourse. It could for example be assumed that the difference in the confidence levels would show in the use of interpersonal metadiscourse.

Our aim in the first place is to carry out a quantitative analysis of the use of metadiscourse in the data, i.e. to count the overall amounts of metadiscourse and its different types, followed by a comparison between the two groups of writers. The numbers are of course not automatically comparable: they have to be seen in relation to the average lengths of the essays. However, measuring the length of the essays in typologically different languages like English and Finnish is not a straightforward task. Word-count is obviously out of the question due to the fact that in an agglutinating language like Finnish words typically consist of several morphemes where English would have several monomorphemic words. Counting morphemes would be a time-consuming task and could easily lead to subjective decisions as to how many morphemes a particular word contains, at least in English. Counting T-units seems the most reasonable way because they capture the main propositional content of the passages. However, counting T-units is not totally satisfactory either: the number of T-units in two essays may be the same although there is a considerable difference in their concrete over-all lengths. We have therefore decided to use, in addition to the T-unit count, a very concrete way of measuring: the essays have been typed using the same type and number of characters on each line and then the lines are counted. The number of the instances of metadiscourse items will then be considered in relation to both this concrete length and the number of T-units.

Problems in analysis

In a contrastive study in which the aim is to compare the ways of using linguistic items to serve certain functions and in which the data consists of texts which are

not translations of each other, individual items are comparable only on the basis of their function, in this particular study on the similarity of their functions in metadiscourse. This means that instances of metadiscourse have to be identified and their functions analysed separately for each set of data. From this it follows that most of the problems in analysis are not contrastive in nature, although, as the following discussion will show, there are also cases in which this aspect has to be considered to guarantee that corresponding items are treated equally.

Metadiscourse vs. propositional content

The concept of metadiscourse was defined above rather loosely as the linguistic material in texts which "does not add propositional information but which signals the presence of the author" (Vande Kopple 1985). It was also said to serve the textual and interpersonal functions of language, as defined by Halliday (1973). Metadiscourse thus allows the writer to intrude in the text by organizing what is being said (textual function) and by expressing personal feelings and attitudes and interacting with readers (interpersonal function). What we call "metadiscourse" has been discussed under other headings that cover the same area either partially or completely. For example, Keller (1979) uses the term "gambits", Schiffrin (1980) the term "metatalk" for partially corresponding phenomena in spoken discourse. In discussions of written texts Enkvist (1978) talks about "metatext" and "the modalities of text", Lautamatti (1978) refers to metadiscourse as "non-topical material", Meyer (1975) as "signalling".

In the analysis of metadiscourse the initial problem is its separation from the actual discourse, the propositional content of the text. No linguistic criteria can be used in the identification of metadiscourse items since it can be realized through all kinds of linguistic units, ranging from affixes to whole clauses. When discussing "metatext" Enkvist (1978:116) says that metatextual elements (our textual type of metadiscourse) form an open category, to which new items can be added indefinitely according to the needs of the situation. Enkvist also points out that the concept of metatext is relative: some part of a text counts as metatext only in relation to another part of it. The same applies also to the interpersonal type of metadiscourse ("modalities of the text" in Enkvist's terminology). Thus, we should in each case decide what constitutes the propositional part relative to which some other part is metadiscourse. In many cases the separation is easy, as in the following Finnish example, in which the underlined items can be regarded as metadiscourse and the propositions can be recognized:

Sitä en kiellä, että tehdas työnantajana on elintärkeä paikkakunnalle. Mutta ehkäpä voitaisiin luoda muutama työpaikka lisää - nimittäin puhdistamojen-kin rakentamiseen ja valvomiseen tarvitaan työntekijöitä.

(I don't deny that the factory as a provider of work is essential to the community. But perhaps a few more jobs could be created - namely also the building and maintenance of purification plants need workers.)

But the following English example illustrates the problems in the identification of metadiscourse:

Whether this particular issue is as relevant as, say, proposals to curb the skyrocketing number of homeless people in this area, *is not a point upon which I wish to elaborate*

If we consider the underlined part as metadiscourse, ie. the writer's expression of her intention, what is the propositional content of the sentence? It seems more likely that the whole sentence should be considered as metadiscourse in relation to the whole paragraph in which it is embedded, or maybe even the whole text:

As part of his campaign for the state senator, local political Robert Farnsworth spoke recently on this campus. His speech addressed the issue of smoking, which Farnsworth apparently abhors; he proposes that smoking be banned everywhere except in private homes and apartments. *Whether this particular issue is as relevant as, say, proposals to curb the skyrocketing number of homeless people in the area, is not a point upon which I wish to elaborate.* However, his proposal raises much skepticism: does he, or anyone else, have the right to override the rights of the smoking public?

As an important criterion for deciding what counts as metatext Enkvist mentions explicitness, ie. those elements are metatext whose function in the first place is to describe the text in which they are located. Even greater are the difficulties with the modalities of the text, ie. interpersonal metadiscourse. If we simply say that it refers to those linguistic elements in the text whose function is to denote the writer's attitude to the propositional content or the potential readers, its recognition becomes impossible because the choice of almost every lexical item could be claimed to express the writer's attitude. As Enkvist (1978:117) says, attitudes are only partially expressed through explicit linguistic markers.

It seems, then, that explicitness is an important criterion in the identification of metadiscourse, ie. those elements belong to metadiscourse whose function in the first place is to allow writer intrusion between the propositional content and the reader. Thus, for example *really* when used as a sentence adverbial, as in *Really, it was an intelligent answer* is clearly part of metadiscourse, whereas its metadiscursive function in *It was a really intelligent answer* is not as clear, because we can claim that its function in the first place is to intensify the following adjective. In other words, we could make a distinction between sentence external and sentence internal modification and consider only the former as metadiscourse. However, these two functions of the corresponding Finnish adverb *todella* are not always separable because it is not normally placed at the beginning of the sentence and Finnish has no article to show when an adverb is inside a noun phrase. Consequently, *Se oli todella älykäs vastaus* is ambiguous: *todella* can be considered as modifying either the whole sentence or the following adjective. Because in a contrastive analysis corresponding items should be treated in the same way, it seems

logical that we should not make the sentence external - sentence internal distinction in the English adverb either.

Difficulties like those above mean that it is in some cases necessary to make decisions that may look artificial or forced in this extremely fuzzy area of language use. As to the decisions we have made so far, we have decided for example not to include modifying adjectives within the proposition although they can express the writer's attitude. This decision means that the modifying adjective *obvious* in *The obvious results would be ...* is not metadiscourse, whereas the adjective in the sentence initial phrase *It is obvious that* is metadiscourse. Another decision has been to include coordinators but not subordinators in metadiscourse, because subordinators basically perform a syntactic function, changing the grammatical relationship between clauses, whereas coordinators make explicit the semantic relationship between clauses while keeping their status as independent clauses. We have also decided to include certain types of punctuation, not those that are grammatically determined like commas, periods and question marks, but exclamation marks, dashes, colons, parentheses etc., in other words those that the writer chooses for a particular purpose or effect.

Classification of Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse covers such a wide area of language use that it requires sub-classification; saying that some item in a text is metadiscourse does not tell much. One division, of course, is into the textual and interpersonal types since metadiscourse, as we use the term, serves these two functions. But even this division is still too general. There have been some suggestions for its subcategorization, among which the most carefully thought out so far is that by Vande Kopple (1985), who has expanded the earlier ones by Lautamatti (1978) and Williams (1981). Vande Kopple divides metadiscourse into the following types, among which the first four are textual and the remaining three interpersonal :

1. TEXT CONNECTIVES, which help readers recognize how texts are organized and how different parts of the text are connected to each other functionally and semantically (eg. *first, next, however, but*).
2. CODE GLOSSES, which help readers grasp and interpret the meanings of words and phrases (eg. *X means Y*).
3. ILLOCUTION MARKERS, which make explicit what speech act is being performed at certain points in the text (eg. *to sum up, to give an example*).
4. NARRATORS, which let readers know who said or wrote something (eg. *according to Einstein*).
5. VALIDITY MARKERS, which assess the truth-value of the propositional content and show the author's degree of commitment to that assessment, ie. HEDGES (eg. *perhaps, might*), EMPHATICS (eg. *clearly, obviously*), ATTRIBUTORS (eg. *according to Einstein*), which are used to guide the readers to judge or respect the truth value of propositional content as the author wishes.

6. ATTITUDE MARKERS, which are used to reveal the writer's attitude toward the propositional content (eg. *surprisingly, it is fortunate that*).
7. COMMENTARIES, which draw readers into an implicit dialogue with the author (eg. *you may not agree that, dear reader, you might wish to read the last section first*).

Admittedly, Vande Kopple's classification is based on the analysis of texts written in English and is therefore not automatically applicable to texts written in other languages nor automatically suitable for a common platform for a contrastive study of metadiscourse. However, it is a functional classification, and similarity of function of linguistic items in metadiscourse is the criterion for their comparability in this type of contrastive analysis. We have therefore adopted this classification for our initial analysis of the data but have left it open to any changes that might turn out to be necessary.

The subcategorization of metadiscourse items is problematic because metadiscourse items often operate "in ambiguous, fuzzy and subtle ways" (Crismore 1989:74). This means that they can be multifunctional, not only because they perform different functions in different contexts but also because they sometimes seem to perform more than one function at a time. Therefore, deciding in what function a writer has used a particular item is at times impossible. The analysts then have to decide on an interpretation that is the most likely one in that particular context.

On the whole, the analysis of textual metadiscourse, both its identification and classification, is less problematic than that of the interpersonal type, at least in our data. There is also quite a lot of similarity between English and Finnish in the actual linguistic items used in this function. For example, among the text connectives both groups of writers frequently use equivalent logical connectors like *and, but, however, therefore, moreover* in English and *ja, mutta, kuitenkin, siksi, lisäksi* in Finnish. Both groups also use semantically equivalent sequencers like *firstly, secondly* and *ensiksi, toiseksi*. There are also a number of phrases used by both groups which are easily recognizable as being part of textual metadiscourse, eg. the following phrases, which according to Vande Kopple's classification would be Illocution Markers:

To state the problem bluntly, smokers are hooked - addicted to drugs ...

I am arguing that there are ...

Hyvänä esimerkkinä voisi mainita

(As a good example one could mention ...)

Eryteisesti korostaisin että ...

(Particularly I would emphasize that ...)

Punctuation also often serves as textual type of metadiscourse. For example, a colon signals in both languages that an explanation is to follow, as in the following:

Suomessakin ollaan joutumassa uuteen tilanteeseen: emme voi enää vedota vanhoihin muistoihin ja uskomuksiin.

(Also in Finland we are getting into a new situation: we cannot any more appeal to old memories and beliefs.)

Pork became something more than itself, something more than sacred: it became something untouchable, unclean, proscribed.

Quotation marks often seem to signal that the reader should not take a word or phrase at its face value, ie. it would be a Code Gloss, as in the following:

First there are the expensive clinics that only the rich can afford. These are posh places that are populated by only the best of society. They receive the best care possible and come out "healed".

Tavallisesti vedotaan kustannusten suuruuteen. Toisaalta teollisuus investoi joka vuosi moninkertaisia määriä laitehankintoihin, automaatioon ja muuhun "tärkeämpään".

(Usually they plead that the cost is too high. On the other hand industry invests every year manifold amounts in the purchase of equipment, automation and other "more important" things.)

However, all instances of textual metadiscourse are not equally clear. There are cases in which it is difficult to decide whether the clearly metadiscursive items are textual or interpersonal or whether they perhaps are multifunctional and serve both types of functions simultaneously. A good example of this type are the Finnish clitics, of which *-kin, -kaan/kään, -han/hän* occur in the data. Hakulinen and Karlsson (1979:327) say about the clitics that in texts they connect the sentence in which they occur to the surrounding text, ie. they function as cohesive ties, which would suggest that in our classification they would belong to Text Connectives. However, Hakulinen and Karlsson later add that the clitics "have textual-pragmatic, modal and emotive roles", which suggests that they could also belong to the interpersonal type of metadiscourse. In some cases the decision is fairly easy: for example, in the following *-kin* can be classified as a logical connector, corresponding to the English also, whose function is to connect what is being said to what precedes:

Jo kauan sitten rikollinen joutui vastaamaan teoistaan. Nykyaikanakin

(today-also) sama periaate pätee ...

(Already a long time ago a criminal was made responsible for his crime.

Also today the same principle holds good ...)

In other cases the connecting function of *-kin* is less explicit and sometimes almost impossible to see. In some cases *-kin* seems to be a kind of emphazier rather than a connector, in which case it would not have a textual function. This is the case in the following examples:

Olemmeko tulleet ajatelleeksi erästä yksinkertaista seikkaa - me ihmisetkin (we people-even) olemme osa luontoa?

(Have we considered a simple fact - also/even we human beings are part of nature.)

Onko näin ajatellen teollisuudella jokin erityisasema tässä järjestelmäs-

sä, jossa pieninkin (smallest-even) ihminen asetetaan vastuuseen teoistaan?

(Does industry have a special position in this system in which even the smallest person is made responsible for his deeds?)

Also the English *even*, which seems to be the best translation for *-kin* in the last of the above examples, often has an emphatic function rather than a connective one:

Speaking on a purely aesthetic basis, smoking in public places is often viewed as unpleasant, and *even* offensive ...

Sometimes *-kin* seems to have no meaning or function whatsoever; apparently, its use can become a kind of mannerism for some writers, of which the following is an example:

Voimme keskustella paljonkin vaihtoehtoisista energiamuodoista.
(We can talk much-even about alternative forms of energy.)

It is even more difficult to see the Finnish clitic *-han/hän* in the role of a text connector in many instances of its occurrence in the data, of which the following are typical examples:

Oletkohan sittenkään edes sinä valmis siihen ...
(Are-I wonder after all even you ready to ...)
Olisikohan kuitenkin niin, että ...
(Would-it-be-I wonder after all so ...)

If translated at all, the English equivalent for *-han* would in these cases be "I wonder", which suggests that it is a softener, ie. an attitude marker. The Finnish clitics in any case show that every instance of metadiscourse has to be considered separately, ie. there are very few metadiscourse items which can be classified automatically, without taking the context into account.

Further examples of similar difficulties could be mentioned: for example, both languages have semantically equivalent adverbs which pose similar problems for interpretation between textual and interpersonal metadiscourse: eg. *especially* and *particularly* in English and *varsinkin* and *erityisesti* in Finnish. Both pairs of adverbs seem to perform the same function of indicating that what is being said applies above all to the thing that is mentioned, as in the following examples:

Mielestäni ympäristön saastuminen, *erityisesti* metsäkuolemat, on vakava asia.

(In my opinion the pollution of environment, *especially* the dying forests, is a serious matter.)

Our established form of government, and *especially* the Bill of Rights in our Constitution ...

In both cases classification is problematic: are these items emphatics, ie. part of interpersonal metadiscourse or is their function textual, ie. comparable to the

function of *namely* or *for example*, in which case they would be Code Glosses or Illocution Markers? Similar difficulties were encountered also with *actually* in the English data: it is difficult to decide whether its function is textual or interpersonal. Collins Cobuild Dictionary lists among its uses the indication of the fact that a situation or event happens or exists in real life and not in theory or imagination, which seems to be its function in the following:

... but I cannot sit back and let people *actually* believe in what he is saying.

But the dictionary also says that *actually* is used to indicate that you are giving exact details about a particular situation, which seems to be its function in the following:

Recently, Robert Farnsworth ... gave a very disturbing speech on smoking.

Actually a better way to put it is to say that he gave a speech on not smoking

We seem to have here again a multifunctional item, which has to be classified differently according to the contexts in which occurs.

Problems in the analysis of the interpersonal type of metadiscourse are similar but even greater than those faced with the textual type. One whole problematic area is the ways that modality can be expressed within the verb phrase, ie. the modal auxiliaries in English and in Finnish the modal verbs and the moods of the verb, particularly the conditional mood (marked by the affix *-isi-* in the verb).

The meanings of the English modals are often described in terms of epistemic and deontic modality, although for example Palmer (1979) distinguishes a third type, dynamic modality, and Coates (1983) uses the distinction between epistemic and root modality. What makes the interpretation of the modals difficult is that the same modals can be used with an epistemic or deontic meaning and thus they have to be interpreted in every context separately. In their epistemic meaning they express the speakers commitment to the truth-value of what is being said, "the speakers confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition being expressed" (Coates 1987:112) and would thus be Validity Markers in our terminology. In their deontic meaning they denote the speakers attitude toward the desirability of an action or event (Simpson 1990:67), which makes them Attitude Markers in metadiscourse terms. There are different degrees in both confidence and desirability. Thus, in its epistemic meaning *must* denotes necessity and is a Certainty Marker. Since *may* and *might*, *can*, *could* when used epistemically denote possibility, they belong to Hedges. So does also *should*, which denotes probability and is a middle term between certainty and possibility.

Making a distinction between the epistemic and deontic meanings of the modals is not the only difficulty in their analysis. The fact is that they cannot always automatically be included in metadiscourse. For example, the modal *can* in its root meaning denotes the ability of the surface subject of the sentence, as in *He can*

speak English, which is a simple statement of his ability and does not involve writer/speaker intrusion in the metadiscourse sense. The same applies to *could* when it refers to the subjects ability in the past, as in the following example from our data:

When the man was wheeled into the emergency room, we *could* tell what the crisis was.

For similar reasons, *would* is not part of metadiscourse in the following example, in which the writer is referring to the past habit of the subject:

It stems, according to the famed mythographer, from an age when pork and rodents tended to be seen as a sacred dish. The faithful *would* gather secretly in private gardens and grottoes to devour the sacred dish.

Nor does it have a metadiscourse function in the following example, in which it denotes the subjects willingness:

We must not utilize the scare tactics of the past, but rather employ positive techniques ... rehabilitative technologies to he or she who *would* quit ...

However, *would* is metadiscursive when used hypothetically, which was very common in our data, due to the nature of the writing task:

Completely prohibiting smoking *would* raise a furor among the smoking public which *would* undoubtedly foul the air worse than their cigarette smoke.

It can be claimed that hypothesizing about what could happen, as the writer does in the above example, means expressing an attitude, and *would* is then an Attitude Marker. On the other hand, it could also be claimed that *would* denotes the writers uncertainty, in which case it should be called a Hedge.

Should denotes probability when epistemic and obligation when deontic and is therefore either a Hedge or an Attitude Marker, except when it cannot be considered metadiscursive at all, as in the following examples in which it does not express the writer's own attitude but that of a person mentioned in the text:

In response to Robert Farnsworth's claim that smoking should be banned ... He proposes that smoking *should* be banned ...

In Finnish many of the modal verbs, which are full verbs and not auxiliaries, are also used with both an epistemic and deontic meaning, eg. *pitää*, *täytyy*, *tulee* (necessity or obligation), *saattaa* (possibility, permission or ability), and thus they can also pose problems in deciding which meaning they have in a particular context. However, they were not used much with the epistemic meaning in the present data and thus caused fewer problems than the English modals. Instead, what caused problems in connection with these modal verbs was that the conditional suffix (-*isi*-) was frequently attached to them, as in the following examples:

Asiasta *tulisi* mahdollisimman nopeasti tehdä kauaskantoiset ja velvoittavat kansainväliset sopimukset.

(On the issue *should* be made as soon as possible far-reaching and binding international agreements)

Ympäristön saastuttamisen vähentämiseksi *pitäisi* tehdä jotakin ...

(Something *should* be done to decrease the pollution of the environment...)

What the conditional -*isi*- does in these cases is to soften the force of the obligation expressed in the modal verb. These cases, however, pose the problem of whether they should be considered as being two instances of metadiscourse or just one. Their English translational equivalent *should* is only one and maybe they should be treated equally. Yet Finnish native speaker intuition says that eg. *pitäisi* is *pitää* (obligation) plus -*isi* as a softener (see also Hakulinen 1989).

In the following examples the conditional is clearly a softener or politeness marker and thus belongs to Attitude Markers:

Aluksi *haluaisin* tähdentää sitä ... (First, I would like to emphasize)

Ratkaisuna *näkisin* ... (As a solution I would see ...)

The conditional is also used to express a hypothetical attitude, which was as common in the Finnish essays as in the American ones. It was typical of the essays that the writer first expressed that something should be done and then hypothesized about what would follow or expressed a suggestion for future action. In cases like the following the conditional then is an Attitude Marker or a Hedge, like the English *would*:

Toinen teollisuuden varojenkäyttökohde *olisi* myös jo olemassa olevien ympäristötuhojen kartoittaminen ja laajempien tuhojen ehkäiseminen. Teollisuuden taloudellinen vastuu *tarkoittaisi* siis varojen siirtoa näihin toimintoihin. Näillä toimilla *voitaisiin* pelastua laajemmilta metsätuhoilta.

(Another area on which funds could be spent *would be* to chart the already existing damage and to prevent further damage. The economic responsibility *would mean* thus transferring funds to these operations.

With these we *would be able* to avoid greater damage in the forests.)

Another group of items within the interpersonal metadiscourse that caused problems were the verbs of cognition or mental state, which occurred with a first person subject in both the American and the Finnish data, although more frequently in the former. Some of them are clearly Hedges, eg. *I feel*, *I suppose*, *I presume*, because they show that the writer thinks of the proposition as only possibly true. Others like *I know* and *I realize*, are Certainty Markers because they are factual verbs and presuppose that what follows is true. But some are problematic, like *I believe* and *I think*, which in studies on the expressions of modality are often included in hedges (eg. Simpson 1990). But at least in spoken language *I believe* can be uttered with such emphasis that it could be taken as a Certainty

Marker. Unfortunately, written language does not offer the kind of clues spoken language does. Evidence for the two-fold interpretation of *I believe* could be provided by the fact that Finnish has two verbs that can both be translations of *believe*: *uskoa* and *luulla*. Finnish native speaker intuition says that the former is much stronger (a certainty marker) than the latter (a hedge). There are still other verbs of the same type, like *I agree*, *I disagree*, *I admit* and their Finnish equivalents (*olen samaa mieltä*, *olen eri mieltä*, *myönnän*), which it seems best to include in Attitude Markers.

The above examples of difficulties faced in the classification of metadiscourse items show that there is need for a reconsideration of the categories used. For example, the category of Attitude Markers becomes easily a rag-bag into which items are placed because they do not fit elsewhere. Dividing it further is, however, problematic because it contains a lot of semantically diverse expressions, which could not all have their own subtype. Besides having fewer categories seems advantageous in a contrastive study that aims in the first place at an over-all description of the use of metadiscourse by writers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The above examples also illustrate the problems caused by the multifunctionality of some metadiscourse items, which forces the analyst to make decisions with which other native speakers may not agree. The reliability of the analysis can, of course, be increased by using several native speakers in the interpretation.

Conclusion

The problems connected with a quantitative contrastive study of metadiscourse are partly concrete problems of design, partly theoretical problems centered round the concept of metadiscourse itself, its definition and classification. We believe that these problems are an inevitable consequence of working at a pragmatic/functional level of analysis and anyone who wishes to do cross-cultural analysis at this level will face similar problems. The difficulties in the design of this type of study are mainly concerned with guaranteeing the comparability of the two sets of data needed in a contrastive study. These problems can be solved by controlling as many of the variables as possible in the situations in which the data are collected.

Most of the problems in the analysis of the data arise from difficulties with the language-independent concept of metadiscourse. There is no totally satisfactory way of separating it from the propositional content, which sometimes leads to artificial and forced decisions. Its classification is made problematic by the multifunctionality of many metadiscourse items, which makes it necessary to consider every occurrence of individual items separately. Moreover, the multifunctional items do not only vary in function from one context to another but they also allow different interpretations in the same contexts, which forces the analysts to choose the most likely interpretation in each case. Although most of the problems are not contrastive in nature, solving them is crucial for the actual comparison. Only if the problems can be solved at least in a fairly satisfactory way is it possible to carry out the quantitative analysis of comparing the use of metadiscourse in general

and its various subtypes by the different groups of writers. The possible differences will then lead to the necessity of looking for what causes them, of considering whether they could be due to different emphasis in teaching or caused by different cultural conventions in general.

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