

Journal of English Language  
Teaching and Learning  
No.9,2012

**Improvement of Metadiscourse Use among Iranian EFL Learners  
through a Process- based Writing Course**

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**Abstract**

The present study investigated the use of interactive metadiscourse resources (IMRs) in terms of appropriacy during a process- based writing course by applying qualitative and exploratory methods. Moreover, learners' perception was investigated to find out how confident they felt as they were writing and rewriting the drafts. 30 intermediate EFL learners were chosen to participate in this study based on their performance on the OPT. The participants wrote essays on argumentative topics during the period of one semester. Each participant submitted three drafts on a topic, the first draft, the draft after revising and the draft after editing. Experts' appropriacy judgments showed a clear improvement in the appropriate use of IMRs from the participants' earlier drafts to their final drafts. Furthermore, analysis of the interviews' data showed that most of the interviewees had positive views towards this kind of writing and stated that their level of confidence in using IMRs increased through the stages and they felt more confident towards the end of the course. The results of this study seem to have some implications for teachers and practitioners in EFL contexts and could be of major significance for classroom application.

**Keywords:** Appropriacy, Process- oriented approach, Metadiscourse, Interactive Metadiscourse Resources.

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- تاریخ وصول: 1391/4/13 ، تأیید نهایی: 1391/7/15

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## 1. Introduction

Since in the world today English is culturally, politically, economically, and scientifically one of the most widely used languages, there is a growing need for good communication skills in English all around the world. However, whereas English is assumed as the language of international communication and globalization, it is written English that is the predominant medium for much of this communication mainly because today's most ambitious communication tool is the Internet and most of the communication through the Internet is written (Kroll, 2003). Therefore, writing skills assume a much more central position than it occupied before because of the changes in the ways of communication. As Adel (2006) points out, nowadays writing in English plays a significant role not only in the academic context, but in the daily life as well.

However, the ability to write well in a foreign language is even more difficult to achieve than the ability to read, speak, or understand that language because producing a successful written text requires not only the ability to control over a number of language systems, but also the ability to take into consideration the ways the discourse is shaped for a particular audience and for a particular purpose (Kroll, 2001). Writing is, thus, more than just communication of ideas and presentation of ideational meaning; rather, it is viewed as a social engagement which involves writers and readers interaction. However, due to little awareness of interactive and interactional aspects of the target language, much of students' writings seem uncontextualized and incoherent. Therefore, students need to be aware that focus on surface feature accuracy by itself cannot guarantee effective writing and producing good written texts necessitates focus on organization, coherence, development of thoughts, and effective expression of ideas as well (Kern & Schultz, 1992). Nevertheless, many teachers and learners still see writing as an exercise in mastering grammar and

vocabulary ignoring the process and also the interactive and interactional aspects of writing.

A key to effective text production and processing of written discourse according to Faghih and Rahimpour (2009) is conscious awareness of the rules and conventions of rhetorical functions of the target language. One aspect of such awareness is metadiscourse awareness. The awareness of metadiscourse devices helps EFL students contextualize the content of their writing, increase persuasiveness in the text, make text coherent, and develop a sense of audience. Consequently, metadiscourse is an integral part and a central feature of composition (Hyland, 2005).

Definitions of metadiscourse vary from a broad sense to a more narrow sense. In the broad approach, metadiscourse is defined as “linguistic material in texts, written or spoken, which does not add anything to the propositional content, but that is intended to help the listener or reader organize, interpret, and evaluate the information given.” (Crismore&Steffensen, 1993, p. 40). Moreover, Hyland (2005, p. 37) defines metadiscourse as “The cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assist the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community.”

A number of taxonomies of metadiscourse have been proposed since its emergence. Some of the major models of metadiscourse markers are Vandekopple (1985), Crismore et al. (1993), Hyland and Tse (2004), and Adel (2006). Most of the models organize metadiscourse markers under the labels of textual and interpersonal. Textual metadiscourse refers to the organization of discourse and interpersonal metadiscourse reflects the writer’s attitude toward the content and the audience. Hyland and Tse (2004) propose an interpersonal model of metadiscourse believing that all

metadiscourse resources are interpersonal and organize the metadiscourse resources under the headings of interactive (instead of textual) and interactional (instead of interpersonal) metadiscourse.

Interactive resources refer to those features of the text which set out an argument to explicitly establish the writer's preferred interpretations. They are concerned with ways of organizing discourse to anticipate readers' knowledge and reflect the writer's assessment of what should be made explicit in order to constrain and also to guide what can be recovered from the text (Hyland & Tse, 2004). These features are used to organize prepositional information in the ways that the audience finds the text coherent and convincing. They show writer's assessment of the reader's assumed comprehension capacities, understandings of related texts, and need for interpretive guidance, as well as the relationship between the writer and reader (Hyland, 2005). Table 1 summarizes Hyland and Tse's interpersonal model of metadiscourse.

Appropriate use of metadiscourse resources facilitate communication in the way that is both accepted and expected, consequently learning to write well entails learning to use metadiscourse appropriately. In order to be successful writers, EFL learners are required to be competent at using metadiscourse resources; however, Hyland (2003) indicates that foreign language learners experience considerable amount of trouble in using metadiscourse resources and use such devices very differently from their native counterparts. Therefore, students need to receive appropriate instruction which allow them to practice writing process and provide opportunities for increasing metadiscourse awareness.

However, product- oriented approaches to writing do not allow students to see writing as a recursive process; rather they emphasize accuracy of form in single drafts imposing constraints of form on

learners' creativity and leaving out many important aspects of language. In order to improve the learners' written productions, it is not enough to look only at what the learners have produced, rather it is useful to understand how it was produced (Nation, 2008). As a reaction to the shortcomings of the product-oriented approaches, the process approach to the teaching of writing was proposed. According to Zamel (1983, p. 165), process writing instruction model views writing as "a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning." This approach to writing is still regarded as an effective approach.

As Hyland (2003) indicates, the process approaches assist understanding the nature of writing and the way it is taught. Furthermore, Matsuda (2003) states that in the history of pedagogical reform in the teaching of writing, process writing can be regarded as the most successful movement. Atkinson (2003) as an advocate of "post-process" approach to L2 learning asserts that conceptualizing effective writing without process writing is very difficult. The following quotation shows his attitude toward process writing:

The usefulness and power of process writing has been revealed time and again; and if I were suddenly transported into and put in charge of an L2 writing classroom, pre-writing, drafting, feedback, and revising would almost certainly be important classroom activities. As an approach to teaching different kinds of writing at the university level, I personally hold process writing in high regard—it is, in fact, difficult for me to conceptualize the effective teaching of writing without it. My own interest in the concept of "postprocess" is, therefore, not in terms of a basic "paradigm shift," but

rather in expanding and broadening the domain of L2 writing in research as much as in teaching. (pp. 10, 11)

With the above descriptions in mind, there seems to be a crucial need for more productive approaches to teaching of writing which produce a sense of audience, foster creativity, and also allow students to practice composition process. Although research in L2 writing has won more attention than before among the scholars of the field in recent years, many EFL practitioners in Iran are still reluctant to conduct empirical research in order to study the nature of L2 writing, to analyze writing process among Iranian EFL learners, and to investigate appropriate instruction models. While some studies have investigated metadiscourse knowledge and use in students' written products (Intaraprawat&Steffensen, 1995; Cheng &Steffensen, 1996; Adel, 2006; Simin&Tavangar, 2009; VahidDastgerdi&Shirzad, 2010), a lack of empirical workwith a process-based model isquite obvious and up to this point, almost no study has attempted to investigate the development of metadiscourse resources in process-oriented writing contexts.

This work is an attempt to collect updated authentic data for writing classes, provide a rich picture of developing process of interactive metadiscourse resources through drafting, revising, and editing stages and also gain further insights into the Iranian EFL learners' feelings while writing in process-oriented contexts by addressing the following research questions:

1. How does the participants' use of interactive metadiscourse resources change in terms of appropriacy of use from drafting, revising to editing in a process-based writing context?
2. What are the participants' perceptions in the use of interactive metadiscourse resources in a process-based writing context at the end

of the course? Do they feel more confident in the use of interactive metadiscourse resources?

## **1.1 Literature Review**

### **1.1.1 Studies on Metadiscourse**

Significance of metadiscourse is demonstrated in different studies from the descriptive and contrastive perspectives (Crismore et al., 1993; Intaraprawat&Steffensen, 1995; VandeKopple, 1997; Hyland, 1999; Abdollahzadeh, 2001; Abdi, 2002; DaftaryFard, 2002; Beig-mohammadi, 2003; Marandi, 2002; Marandi, 2003; Dahl, 2004; Hyland &Tse, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Adel, 2006; Rahimpour, 2006; Abdollahzadeh, 2007; Parvaresh, 2007; Zarei&Mansoori, 2007; Nemati&Parvaresh, 2008; Abdi, 2009; Faghih&Rahimpour, 2009; Abdi, Tavangar, &Tavakoli, 2010; Noorian&Birria, 2010), or in experimental studies (Camiciottoli, 2003; Amiri, 2007; Jalilifar&Alipour, 2007; Tavakoli, Dabaghi, &Khorvash, 2010, VahidDastjerdi&Shirzad 2010).

For instance, Hyland (2004) examined the purposes and distributions of metadiscourse in a corpus of 240 doctoral and masters dissertations written by Hong Kong students. He proposed a model of metadiscourse as the interpersonal resources which are required to present propositional material appropriately in different disciplinary and genre contexts. Hyland indicated that academic writers use language to represent themselves and their work in different fields, and metadiscourse can be seen as a means of uncovering the rhetorical and social distinctiveness of disciplinary communities.

In another study, Tavakoli et al. (2010), attempted to investigate the degree of students' achievement in reading comprehension in English as a foreign language through explicit instruction in metadiscourse markers among 80 intermediate EFL learners.

Instruction on metadiscourse revealed a positive effect on the participants' achievement in reading comprehension in English. From the overall findings, it can be figured out that instruction on metadiscourse awareness not only affected the reading comprehension, but the overall language abilities as well.

### **1.1.2 Metadiscourse and EFL/ESL Writing Studies**

Only when the readers' resources for interpretation of a text and their likely responses to it are correctly assessed, the arguments can be constructed effectively in the text. Metadiscourse, according to Hyland (2005), is the most supportive resource for such an assessment. It seems vital, therefore, that students receive appropriate instruction in metadiscourse. EFL/ ESL writing, as Adel (2006) points out, is one of the areas in which studies of metadiscourse are lacking. Whereas a number of studies have been conducted in this respect, little empirical work has been done on this topic in EFL/ ESL contexts.

Intraprawat and Steffensen (1995) analyzed metadiscourse in persuasive essays written by ESL university students. Half of the essays received good ratings and half received poor ratings. Differences between the two sets were found in the number of words, number of T-units, and density of metadiscourse features. It was revealed that the good essays showed a greater variety of metadiscourse features within each category than the poor essays.

Cheng and Steffensen (1996) conducted an experimental research to investigate the effect of explicit instruction of metadiscourse on the writing performance of native speaker university students. They concluded that the experimental group produced compositions that earned significantly higher scores than those of a control group, which had received no instruction on metadiscourse.



Simin and Tavangar (2009) looked at the foreign language learners' written products with a focus on the use of metadiscourse markers; further they investigated the relationship between students' proficiency level and the level of their metadiscourse use. The sample essays of 3 proficiency groups of Iranian EFL students, i.e., upper-Intermediate, intermediate, and lower-Intermediate, were collected during a period of one semester and analyzed in terms of metadiscourse use. They concluded that the differences in metadiscourse use were significant for different levels of proficiency, namely, the more proficient learners were, the more they used metadiscourse markers. In addition, they indicated that metadiscourse instruction has a positive effect on the correct use of metadiscourse markers.

Adel (2006) compared the use of metadiscourse in the written production of Swedish advanced learners of English with that of British and American native speakers through a contrastive interlanguage analysis. He concluded that the three groups, the Swedish, the British, and the American writers, were considerably different qualitatively and quantitatively. He further indicated that a pattern of overuse of the metadiscourse markers was obvious in non-native writing products.

In another study, VahidDastgerdi and Shirzad (2010) examined the influence of explicit instruction of metadiscourse on the writing performance of 94 EFL learners at the University of Isfahan. They concluded that after instruction, students' performance on post-writing test was significantly better than their performance on the pre-writing test, especially in the intermediate group.

It seems that all the studies reviewed follow a product-based approach to writing; whereas, such approach to EFL/ ESL writing has been proved to have many drawbacks. Second, all studies that have

been conducted so far applied the explicit instruction model without any attempt to investigate more productive ways to instruct metadiscourse.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Design of the Study**

The present study is an empirical research which generally applies qualitative and exploratory methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of the writing processes of and metadiscourse use among Iranian EFL learners.

### **2.2 Participants**

The population from which the participants of this study were selected were 63 male and female EFL learners whose age ranged between 17 and 33 and enrolled for the summer courses at a private language center. To commence the study, an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. Based on the OPT scores, 30 intermediate EFL learners, 17 male and 13 female, were chosen to participate in this study. The intended level was the intermediate level because the beginners couldn't write essays and the advanced students had already developed essay writing skills, therefore they couldn't produce reliable data for the purpose of this study.

### **2.3 Instruments**

#### **2.3.1 Oxford Placement Test**

As to the purpose of the present study, an OPT (Dave Allan, 1992) test was used at the beginning of the study to ensure participants' homogeneity in terms of their proficiency level. The OPT included 100 multiple choice items on vocabulary and grammar. The rationale behind the application of the OPT was firstly the fact that compared to

the other tests, the participants of the study were believed to be more familiar with the structure of this test; therefore, they were expected to take the test better. Secondly, this test appeared to fully serve the purpose of the researcher to include homogenous participants in the study.

### **2.3.2 Interview**

In order to investigate the fourth research question, that is, inquiring into the participants thought processes and feelings about their writings and their perceptions in the use of interactive metadiscourse resources in a process-based writing context and also to find out how confident they felt as they were writing and rewriting the drafts, 10 participants were chosen randomly, every 3<sup>rd</sup> person was chosen, and interviewed at the end of the course. Because of the unpredictable direction and unsystematic information of the unstructured interviews, a semi- structured interview format was used in this study. The interviews were conducted in Persian, the learners' native language, in order to give the interviewees the best chance to explain their thought processes and feelings about their writings. Since using a guide facilitates the interviews and saves time, an interview guide (see Appendix A) was used. The students' voices were recorded during the interviews and then the recorded retrospective data were transcribed, translated into English, and analyzed.

### **2.4. Data Collection Procedure**

As mentioned earlier, the present study was conducted to investigate the development of interactive metadiscourse resources during a process-based writing course. The use of interactive metadiscourse resources in terms of appropriacy was analyzed throughout drafting, revising, and editing stages. Furthermore, learners' perception was investigated to find out how confident they

felt as they were writing and rewriting the drafts. For this purpose, during the period of one semester, 3 argumentative topics of students' interest and need were assigned to the participants to write about them. The topics were of argumentative nature to fulfill the requirements for the research questions. Table 2 demonstrates the topics assigned.

Each participant submitted three drafts on a topic, that is, the first draft, the draft after revising, and the draft after editing within two weeks. The first drafts of their writings were then reviewed and formative feedbacks were provided on their drafts; in process-based approaches to writing feedback is an essential element because it prompts the revision and editing of texts and gives a sense of audience (Keh, 1990). Then, the participants went through the revision process. After revision, students' drafts were reviewed once again and the final feedbacks were provided. At this point, the participants edited their writings and submitted the final drafts. Finally after editing, each student's writing process was checked to see how much he / she had improved during such processes.

The first research question was addressed by analyzing the use of interactive metadiscourse resources in terms of appropriacy in 3 drafts of each essay. To do so, two experts in the field were asked to check the degree to which the use of an interactive metadiscourse resource was natural or acceptable in a particular context. At the end of the course, through verbal retrospection 10 participants were interviewed to investigate their thought processes and feelings about the writings and to find out how confident they felt in using interactive metadiscourse resources so as to address the second research question. The students' voices were recorded during the interviews, and then were transcribed and translated to be analyzed.

### 3. Results

To address the first research question and also to provide answer to it, two experts in the field checked the degree to which the use of an interactive metadiscourse resource was natural or acceptable in a particular context in each draft of the 3 topics. They judged the use of a device as appropriate or inappropriate, the total number of the appropriate uses and also the total number of inappropriate uses was later summed up separately in each draft and for all 30 participants. The given numbers by the two judges were further averaged. Moreover, since the number of IMRs was different in each draft of students' writing, the raw numbers were standardized, that is, they were calculated per 100 words and expressed in percent to be compared directly. Table 3 summarizes the results of the appropriacy judgments by the two experts.

As it is represented in table 3, in general, the appropriateness rate shows a steady increase from drafting, revising to editing for the 3 topics, while the inappropriateness rate decreases gradually at a similar rate. The appropriate rate is quite low after the first draft of topic1; only 26.95 % of the IMRs are assigned as appropriate by the judges. After revising, this number increases to 32.36 % and indicates 5.41 % improvement. During the next stage, editing, this increase continues and reaches 34.05 percent in the final draft, this time with 1.69 % improvement. Therefore, for topic one the most noticeable improvement in appropriateness happens from drafting to revising.

This increase goes on with topic 2 drafts. As it is represented in table 3, the appropriacy percentage is 47.00 % in the first draft of topic 2 and increases to 53.84 % in the second draft with 6.84 % improvement comparing to the first draft. After revising, there is still increase in appropriacy percentage, with 57.20% appropriate use and 3.36 % improvement comparing to draft 2, however, the increase in

appropriacy of use from revising to editing is less than the increase from drafting to revising.

The same manner of increase from drafting, revising to editing for topics 1 and 2 is repeated for topic3. That is, the appropriacy percentage starts with 61.86 % in drafting stage and by 8.18 % increase reaches 70.04 % after revising and with 2.44 % increase ends with 72.48% in final draft. As for topics 2 and 3, the increase in the percentage of appropriate uses is more visible from drafting to revising than from revising to editing.

Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of how the use of IMRs in terms of appropriacy changes through the three stages of drafting, revising, and editing for the 3 topics. Figure 2, further, demonstrate the changes in appropriacy and inappropriacy of the use of IMRs over time, that is, across the 9 drafts written by the participants.

Figure 2 shows a clear improvement in the appropriate use of IMRs from earlier drafts to the final drafts. In the initial writing task, less than 30 % of the IMR tokens were considered as appropriate, whereas this rate increased to above 70% at the end of the course. On the other hand, the inappropriacy rate went down gradually from 73.04% to 27.51% over the course. The most noticeable increase in appropriacy of use happened from topic 1 to topic 2 where appropriacy from 34.05% in the third draft of topic 1 increases to 47.00% in the first draft of topic 2 with 12.95% improvement.

Examples of appropriacy and inappropriacy judgments are provided below (All errors are retained in the students' writing excerpt.):

**Topic 1**

In my idea telling the truth and being truthful is important and (Inappropriate: A device showing contrast is needed here.) I felt that sometimes in some situation it is better not to tell the truth because (Appropriate) telling the truth can lead to you various problems. I have to say that I agree with this sentence. I believe that there's nothing wrong in telling a little white lie there are several reasons I feel this way.

**Topic 2**

The third (Appropriate) reason is that we need family more than friends because they lead us to best way and want our successes. So, (Appropriate) spending time with them make us a perfect person and also the more we spend with family the more you enjoy life. Likewise (Inappropriate: A device showing consequence is needed here.) you'll have strong relation in family and a life without stress.

**Topic 3**

The first (Appropriate) lesson is that all the traditions are not true. Because what they had done before wasn't true so (Inappropriate: *So* is not needed here.) we shouldn't listen to all them. Nowadays most of olders don't have enough information about technology and they don't use them.

### 3. 2. The Second Research Question

In order to address the second research question, at the end of the course, 10 participants were chosen randomly, every 3<sup>rd</sup> person was selected, and through verbal retrospection were interviewed to investigate their thought processes and feelings about the writings and to find out how confident they felt in using interactive metadiscourse resources.

The interviews were conducted in Persian in order to give the interviewees the best chance to explain their thought processes and feelings about their writings. To facilitate the interviews and save time, an interview guide was used. The students' voices were recorded during the interviews, and then were transcribed and translated to be analyzed. Every interview took about 10 to 15 minutes. Afterwards, the themes that emerged from the data were identified. Two major extracted themes were *writing achievement and metadiscourse awareness*, and *increase in confidence* as explained below.

#### 3.2.1 Writing Achievement and Metadiscourse Awareness

During the interviews, the students mentioned their ideas about their improvement in writing in general and awareness of IMRs in particular. Some students felt they had improvement in their overall writing ability and could write with more ease after such a writing practice. For instance, Mahnaz said:

I really benefited from this course to improve my writing in general and to increase my knowledge of interactive metadiscourse resources in particular.

Vahid also said:



This kind of writing provided me not only with the opportunity to practice writing, but also helped me use interactive metadiscourse markers more appropriately and variously. Actually, there was always something new to learn during different stages.

Ali expressed the effectiveness of this course this way:

Up to this course, I had to write paragraphs or essays as assignment, but writing in this course was quite different. I think rather than assignment, it was mostly practice in writing, so I liked it.

Some students further believed that this course helped them overcome writing apprehension and caused them to write with more ease. As Hossein said:

I think apart from providing the opportunity to learn new resources and to reinforce what was learnt gradually, such a practice reduced the stress I experienced in previous courses for writing.

Mahnaz also said:

The fact that I had the chance to rewrite the first draft reduced my stress when writing.

Moreover, most of the interviewees said that before this course, they had no or little knowledge of IMRs and were not aware of their role and of their significance in writing. This is manifested in the following excerpts taken from the participants' conversation transcripts.

Before writing in this course, I didn't have any explicit knowledge of interactive metadiscourse resources and

their function. I just knew that *and* is used to connect two similar sentences, *but* is used to connect two different sentences, and *because* is used to give reason. Now, I know many things about them. I also have learnt about some new categories and I know new words or phrases for such categories. (Elham)

I had little knowledge of interactive metadiscourse resources and how to use them effectively in my writing. By writing a lot in this course, I learnt many things about them. (Ali)

Before attending this course I wasn't aware of the importance of such devices before attending this course. And when I wrote, I just used things like *and*, *but*, *so*, ... haphazardly without knowing anything about their role in improving text or without being aware that there are many other words I can use instead of them. (Maryam)

Most of the students believed that writing and rewriting the drafts and also the feedbacks provided on their drafts helped them improve the use of IMRs in terms of appropriacy and diversity, and further caused the previously learnt items to be reinforced and motivated them to search for new items as shown in the interview data below:

This kind of writing caused metadiscourse markers to be stuck to my memory and whenever I want to write something I know I can use them with more ease and also more effectively. For example, I always used *although* and *but* together, for example, *Although it was difficult, but I liked it*. I repeated this inappropriate use for two times as I was writing the drafts for the first

topic, but, later due to the teacher's feedback I got aware of this inappropriate use and now, I'm sure that I will never again repeat it. (Samira)

I learnt many things in this course. I learnt some new markers, I also learnt where and how to use them; moreover, the teacher's comments, writing and rewriting the drafts helped me use the previous learnt markers more appropriately and easily. (Navid)

This kind of writing provided me not only with the opportunity to practice writing, but also helped me use interactive metadiscourse markers more appropriately and variously. Actually, there was always something new to learn during different stages. (Vahid)

Now, apart from knowing many interactive resources, I'm sure about their appropriate use. (Maryam)

Teacher's comments and rewriting the essays were very beneficial because I found some of my mistakes and tried not to repeat the mistakes again. Furthermore, during the course I learnt many new markers because the teacher's notes caused me to refer to dictionary and ask others about such resources. (Amin)

### **3.2.2 Increase in Confidence**

Almost all participants being interviewed believed that, in general, the course had positive influence on increasing their confidence in using IMRs more appropriately. The reasons they emphasized for such an increase were mostly the formative feedbacks provided by the teacher and the recursive model of the course, that is, the opportunity

to write, revise, and edit the drafts. These views are represented in the interview excerpts below:

In the beginning, when I received feedback from the teacher, it made me somehow disappointed with my knowledge of such markers because there were many things that the teacher had noted in my writing. Then, I tried to use the notes during revising, but still I was very doubtful about the appropriate word or usage. When for the second time I received feedback, I saw that there are fewer mistakes this time and I told myself well, you had improved. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> topics, I tried to use what I had learnt during writing on the previous topics. And for the third topic, I felt really confident about 80 percent of the markers I used. Overall, I think my confidence increased as time passed. (Maryam)

Mahnaz also said “... every time I received feedback, I could use the markers more confidently.”

Every time the teacher provided me with comments, I felt more confident. For example, when the first draft of the first topic was reviewed, I tried to employ what the teacher had noted, but I was not sure that what I was writing was correct or not and when I received feedback I felt more confident, so I used what I had learnt before in writing on the next two topics, this time more easily and with less doubt. (Hossein)

Overall, there was a positive relationship between writing and rewriting the drafts and increase in the students' level of confidence, in other words, their level of confidence in using IMRs increased little

by little through the stages. In fact, the more they wrote the more confident they became. Almost all of the interviewees said that they felt more confident when they wanted to write the third draft of each topic and toward the end of the course. The interview data below illustrates these findings:

When my draft was reviewed for the second time I became more confident about my level of awareness of such resources because this time fewer devices were marked inappropriate by the teacher. (Vahid)

The first time I received my writing, I was quite confused and had no idea about how to deploy the teacher's comments. So, my level of confidence was very low in this stage. During the second stage I had a sense of improvement and I got more confident in using metadiscourse markers in the third draft. Improving through the stages increased my confidence. (Samira)

Each time I wrote a draft and the draft was reviewed and I did the correction, I gained confidence in using metadiscourse markers. For me there was a positive relationship between receiving comments, rewriting the drafts and the level of confidence. I mean, the more I wrote, the more confident I became. (Amin)

I felt more confident when I wanted to write the third drafts because I had received the teacher's feedback two times. Now, I'm 100% confident about some of the markers which I wasn't familiar with before writing in this course, for example, I know

where and how to use things like furthermore, however, therefore, overall, thus... (Navid)

I think I am now more confident with my choice and use of interactive metadiscourse resources. When my writing was sent back to me for the first time, I was motivated to improve it and when I saw that my effort had not been useless and the inappropriate uses were reduced for the second time that the teacher reviewed my essay, I gained more confidence in my knowledge of such resources. (Ali)

I got improved and more motivated through the stages, but I didn't feel 100 % confident until the end of the course. My level of confidence increased bit-by-bit through the stages. (Elham)

Besides the positive aspects, some students pointed some negative aspects as well, for instance, Maryam indicated:

... sometimes, writing and rewriting the drafts took time and made me tired. Maybe, if I did revision and editing together, I mean, only one time, I liked it more.

Naser also said:

Although this course had something new compared to the previous courses I had passed, it was really time-consuming and boring to me to send three drafts for each topic and I think the teacher could tell me everything just in one time of correction.

And finally Samira emphasized that “the negative point was that it took me too much time to revise and edit my drafts.”

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

As Kroll (1990) indicates, the ability to write well in a foreign language is a difficult and demanding task to master for EFL students because producing a successful written text requires not only the ability to control over a number of language systems, but also the ability to take into consideration the ways the discourse is shaped for a particular audience and for a particular purpose (Kroll, 2001).

However, this fact was neglected until recently in the area of writing research and pedagogy and practitioners of the field mostly emphasized the propositional content over the textual and interpersonal features and strategies. While explicit knowledge of rules is necessary for writing, it cannot be enough for writing effectively and coherently. The writers need to show desirable command of textual and interpersonal resources of the target language in order to make the text work within the given contexts. This study aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the development of IMRs during a process-based writing course by applying qualitative and exploratory methods. The use of IMRs in terms appropriacy was analyzed throughout drafting, revising, and editing stages. Moreover, learners' perception was investigated to find out how confident they felt as they were writing and rewriting the drafts.

Acquiring IMRs is more than just acquiring new forms. It is also about gaining mastery over forms which have been learned, this means, knowing more about the IMRs and about where and when to use them. Appropriacy judgments by the two experts and analysis of the judgments revealed that there was a clear improvement in the appropriate use of IMRs from the participants' earlier drafts to their final drafts. In the initial writing task, less than 30 % of the IMR tokens were considered as appropriate, whereas this rate increased to above 70% at the end of the course. The appropriateness rate shows a

steady increase across the drafts, while the inappropriateness rate decreased gradually at a similar rate. This suggests that the participants' improving mastery of IMRs was not a case of jumping from inappropriate use directly to appropriate use. Rather, the process was one of gradually improving. For each topic this increase was more noticeable from drafting to revising than from revising to editing. As for the frequency changes, it can be concluded that the major corrections happened during the second stage, i.e., revising, in terms of appropriacy as well. The improvements in appropriacy are in line with findings of Simin and Tavangar (2009) that metadiscourse instruction had a positive effect on the correct use of metadiscourse markers. Moreover, as intermediate learners' in VahidDastgerdi and Shirzad's (2010) study who showed improvement in the use of metadiscourse markers due to explicit instruction, the intermediate learners of this study also showed clear improvements in terms of appropriacy of the use of IMRs through a process-based writing instruction model. However, this study's point of departure from the studies mentioned above is that they only took into consideration the products of the students' writings, whereas, this study investigates improvement through the process of text production. In addition, they view metadiscourse instruction as a means to improve writing, while, in this study, metadiscourse awareness is increased by writing and rewriting the texts along with an overall improvement in writing ability as well.

Learning and using IMRs is only partly about gaining explicit knowledge about them; it is also about having the confidence to use those items. The analysis of the interviews' data showed that most of the interviewees had positive views towards this kind of writing because the course caused them to write with more ease and less stress. The participants said that because they knew they had the opportunity to correct what they wrote two times and every time the



teacher would guide them to improve the text, they didn't experience the writing apprehension of the previous courses. On the whole, the participants believed that their metadiscourse awareness and knowledge increased during the course. They pointed out that they not only learnt many new items, but also learnt how to use the previously partially learnt items more appropriately. Overall, almost all participants said that their level of confidence in using IMRs increased little by little through the stages and they felt more confident when they wanted to write the third draft of each topic and towards the end of the course. Therefore, there was a positive relationship between the recursive model of the course and the increase in the participant's level of confidence. This appears to show the benefits of a sustained and well-organized writing program in facilitating the acquisition of IMRs and to indicate the drawbacks of excessively narrow product-based approaches and explicit instruction.

From the theoretical point of view, the qualitative and quantitative findings of this research could add to the body of data provided by previous studies in the field. Moreover, this study can open up possibilities for further research in the area of L2 writing to investigate metadiscourse and writing process competence to produce coherent and effective texts in English among Iranian EFL learners. On the practical level, these findings seem to be of major significance for classroom application. Since many students have little awareness of interactive and interactional aspects of the target language, their writings seem uncontextualized and incoherent. Therefore, more appropriate and productive instruction models should be integrated into the EFL writing courses to help students become more successful writers in English. The results of this study led to this conclusion that process-based approach to writing can be a productive writing instruction in developing metadiscourse awareness and knowledge among Iranian EFL learners. Consequently, the Iranian EFL teachers

can help their students develop metadiscourse knowledge and use by applying what was suggested in this study. Apart from that, they may reduce their student's negative attitudes toward writing and also their stress as some participants in this study stated that the course was really effective in reducing their stress. Overall, the results of this study not only can increase our understanding of writing process, but also can provide more effective instruction models for developing the appropriacy of metadiscourse use in L2 writing. In other words, writing can be practiced and metadiscourse knowledge can improve by actually writing.

Certainly, this study was not able to capture all aspects of this broad topic. Therefore, further research into this area could lead to more insight. Given the fact that the study examined only 30 students' writings, they may not have been a true representation of the larger population of EFL Persian learners. Although rigorous care was taken by the non-native experts in the field to judge appropriacy of IMRs by referring repeatedly to the resources available, native English experts' judges could assure the reliability of appropriacy judgments, however, it was not possible for the researcher to get help from native speakers in this study. This study only focused on the development of interactive metadiscourse resources, future studies might study the development of interactional metadiscourse resources as well and even there could be comparison between the developments of these two categories. The present study was limited to the genre of essay; other studies could study the other genres of communication, for example, letters or academic genre like research articles. Gender variations among the participants were not taken into consideration in this study; it might be interesting to consider gender to find out about any differences and similarities.

### **Appendix (A): Interview Guide**

1. What did you like most or least about this writing program?
2. Do you think your level of confidence in using interactive metadiscourse resources changed after different stages such as drafting, revising, and editing?
3. Give your final comments about the efficiency of this course in your learning of interactive metadiscourse resources.

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**Table 1:** *Model of Metadiscourse Proposed by Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 169)*

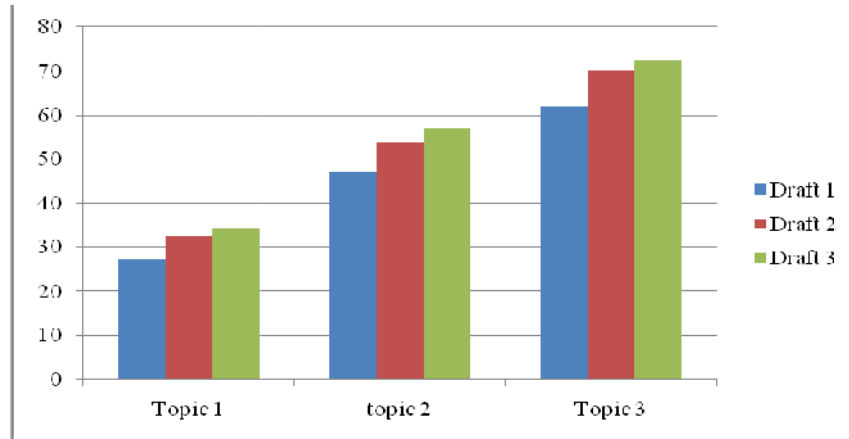
Category	Functions	Examples
<b>Interactive</b> Transitions Frame markers Endophoric markers Evidentials Code glosses	<b>Help to guide the reader through the text</b> express relations between main clauses refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages refer to information in other parts of the text refer to information from other texts elaborate propositional meaning	<b>Resources</b> in addition; but; thus; and finally; to conclude; my purpose is noted above; see figure; in section2 according to X; Z states namely; e.g.; in other words
<b>Interactional</b> Hedges Boosters Attitude markers Self-mentions Engagement markers	<b>Involve the reader in the text</b> withhold commitment and open dialogue emphasize certainty and close dialogue expresses writers' attitude to proposition explicit reference to author(s) explicitly build relationship with reader	<b>Resources</b> might; perhaps; possible; about in fact; definitely; it is clear that unfortunately; I agree; surprisingly I; we; my; me; our consider; note; you can see that

**Table 2.** *Topics Assigned*

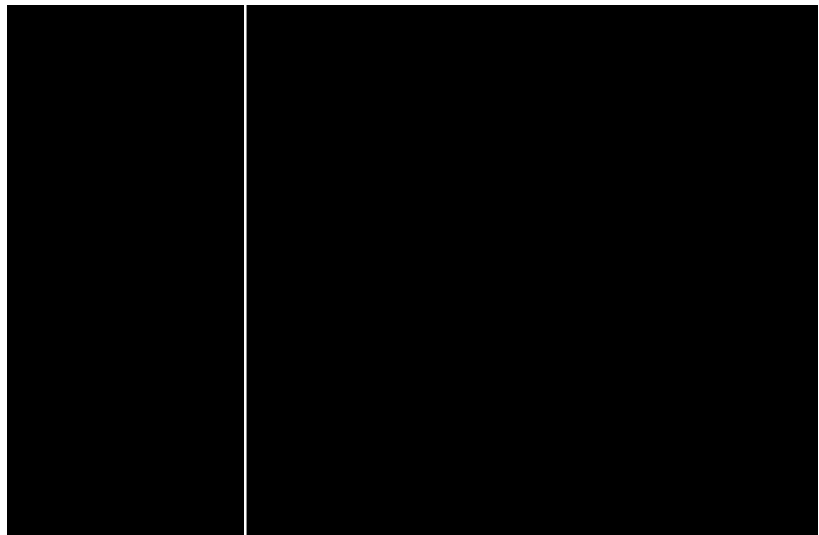
1	Weeks 1 & 2	Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Sometimes it is better not to tell the truth. Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.
2	Weeks 3 & 4	Some people prefer to spend most of their time alone. Others like to be with friends most of the time. Do you prefer to spend your time alone or with friends? Use specific reasons to support your answer.
3	Weeks 5 & 6	Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is nothing that young people can teach older people. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

**Table 3.***Summary of Appropriateness Judgments*

Topic	Draft	Total Number of IMRs	Appropriate		Inappropriate	
			Raw Number	Percentage	Raw Number	Percentage
1	1	141	38	<b>26.95</b>	103	<b>73.04</b>
	2	173	56	<b>32.63</b>	117	<b>67.63</b>
	3	185	63	<b>34.05</b>	122	<b>65.94</b>
2	1	217	102	<b>47</b>	115	<b>52.99</b>
	2	234	126	<b>53.84</b>	108	<b>46.15</b>
	3	243	139	<b>57.2</b>	104	<b>42.79</b>
3	1	236	146	<b>61.86</b>	90	<b>38.13</b>
	2	247	173	<b>70.04</b>	74	<b>29.95</b>
	3	258	187	<b>72.48</b>	71	<b>27.51</b>



**Figure 1.** *Appropriacy changes through the three stages.*



**Figure 2.** *Changes in appropriacy of IMRs use.*

