

Metadiscourse in EFL, ESP and Subject-Teaching Online Courses in Higher Education

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Abstract : Propositional information in discourse is made coherent, intelligible, and persuasive through metadiscourse. The linguistic and rhetorical choices that writers/speakers make to organize and negotiate content matter are intended to help relate a text to its context. Besides, they help the audience to connect to and interpret a text according to the values of a specific discourse community. Based on these assumptions, this work aims to analyse the use of metadiscourse in the spoken performance of teachers in online EFL, ESP, and subject-teacher courses taught in English to non-native learners in higher education. In point of fact, the global spread of Covid 19 has forced universities to transition their in-class courses to online delivery. This has inevitably placed on the instructor a heavier interactional responsibility compared to in-class courses. Accordingly, online delivery needs greater structuring as regards establishing the reader/listener's resources for text understanding and negotiating. Indeed, in online as well as in in-class courses, lessons are social acts which take place in contexts where interlocutors, as members of a community, affect the ways ideas are presented and understood. Following Hyland's Interactional Model of Metadiscourse (2005), this study intends to investigate Teacher Talk in online academic courses during the Covid 19 lock-down in Italy. The selected corpus includes the transcripts of online EFL and ESP courses and subject-teachers online courses taught in English. The objective of the investigation is, firstly, to ascertain the presence of metadiscourse in the form of interactive devices (to guide the listener through the text) and interactional features (to involve the listener in the subject). Previous research on metadiscourse in academic discourse, in college students' presentations in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) lessons, as well as in online teaching methodology courses and MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) has shown that instructors use a vast array of metadiscoursal features intended to express the speakers' intentions and standing with respect to discourse. Besides, they tend to use directions to orient their listeners and logical connectors referring to the structure of the text. Accordingly, the purpose of the investigation is also to find out whether metadiscourse is used as a rhetorical strategy by instructors to control, evaluate and negotiate the impact of the ongoing talk, and eventually to signal their attitudes towards the content and the audience. Thus, the use of metadiscourse can contribute to the informative and persuasive impact of discourse, and to the effectiveness of online communication, especially in learning contexts.

Keywords : discourse analysis, metadiscourse, online EFL and ESP teaching, rhetoric

Conference Title : ICLLT 2021 : International Conference on Linguistics, Literature and Translation

Conference Location : Vienna, Austria

Conference Dates : July 29-30, 2021