DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 709 FL 024 189

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TITLE Metadiscourse and Text Pragmatics: How Students Write after Learning about Metadiscourse.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 20p.; In: Bouton, Lawrence F., Ed. Pragmatics and Language Learning. Monograph Series Volume 7, p153-70, 1996; see FL 024 180.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Gains; College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Discourse Analysis; Educational Strategies; Higher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Language Research; Linguistic Theory; *Metacognition; *Pragmatics; Second Language Learning; *Second Languages; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Instruction; Writing Processes; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effects of instruction in metadiscourse on composition students' writing skills. Subjects were students in two 100-level college composition classes. A Control Class (CC) was taught using a process approach, and the Experimental Class (EC) had direct teaching of metadiscourse. The CC students worked on the propositional content of their essays while the EC students concentrated on the pragmatic functions of metadiscourse. Posttests written by EC students were significantly better than those of the CC, although pretest results did not differ. Sources of this difference are discussed, including changes in metadiscourse markers, tone of the essays, and topical progression. It is argued that the EC students not only used metadiscourse markers more effectively, but also wrote with more attention to audience needs, thereby making global changes that improved their papers. Contains 13 references. (Author/MSE)

METADISCOURSE AND TEXT PRAGMATICS: HOW STUDENTS WRITE AFTER LEARNING ABOUT METADISCOURSE

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Native speakers of English participated in composition classes using either a process approach (the control classroom--CC) or direct teaching of metadiscourse (the experimental classroom--EC). The CC students worked on the propositional content of their essays while the EC students concentrated on the pragmatic functions of metadiscourse. The posttests written by the EC students were significantly better than those of the CC although the pretests of the two groups did not differ. In this paper, we analyze what made this difference in the EC papers, including changes in metadiscourse markers, the tone of the essays, and topical progression. It will be proposed that the EC students not only used metadiscourse markers more effectively but also wrote with more attention to audience needs, thereby making global changes that improved their papers.

When we write, we attend to the topic we are discussing and what we have to say about it--the propositional content of our text. But there is another part of the text that is of considerable importance--the metadiscourse markers. These markers are the means we use to indicate how the text is structured, to explain difficult words and expressions for readers, and to encode what rhetorical acts we are preforming. Such metadiscourse markers, if used skillfully, make the text easier for our projected readers to process. Metadiscourse markers also perform the important interpersonal function of allowing us to make the interaction between reader and writer a closer one by anticipating our readers' responses to the text, by indicating how certain we are about the truth value of what we are saying, and by expressing our feelings about the propositional content we are presenting.

These important pragmatic functions that metadiscourse performs increase the likelihood that our readers will end up with a message that is fairly close to the one we thought we were writing. Metadiscourse also greatly increases the efficiency of a text (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981), in the sense of making it easier to read and thus more reader-friendly or considerate (Armbruster, 1984). However, in spite of its importance, metadiscourse as a pragmatic system is rarely taught and is typically approached even by skillful writers on an intuitive basis. In this paper, after a brief description of metadiscourse, we will outline a classroom method that was used to teach metadiscourse to university-level native speakers of English. We will then analyze sections of compositions written in class to show how the styles of students in the control class (CC) and the experimental class (EC) differed at the end of the study. While there were many changes in the EC papers, we will discuss differences in (a) the use of metadiscourse markers generally, (b) the use of Hedges in particular, (c) the tone and considerateness of the essays, and (d) the transparency of topical progression.

Metadiscourse

A number of classification systems exist for metadiscourse (Crismore, 1984; Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Vande Kopple, 1985; Williams, 1981). Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen modified Vande Kopple's system to make it more suitable for persuasive essays and, since we were analyzing persuasive essays in this study, that system was the one we used. It consists of two broad categories, textual metadiscourse and interpersonal metadiscourse, which are further subdivided on the basis of particular pragmatic functions. Textual metadiscourse is intratextual, serves to mark the text structure, and consists of two subcategories, Textual Markers and Interpretive Markers. Textual Markers include Logical Connectives, Sequencers, Reminders, and Topicalizers. Interpretive Markers include Illocutionary Markers, which are derived from speech act theory and make explicit what rhetorical acts the writer is performing. Code Glosses, another category of Interpretive Markers, provide the writer a means of simplifying material that they expect might be difficult for their readers, a means of downgrading the information level (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Examples of these categories include the following:

(a) Textual Markers
Logical Connectives (*and, but, in addition, however*)
Sequencers (*first, second, finally*)
Reminders (*as we noted earlier*)
Topicalizers (*there is, there are, as for*)

(b) Interpretive Markers
Code Glosses (*namely, in other words*)
Illocutionary Markers (*to summarize, I wish to reiterate*)

Interpersonal markers are extratextual, support the interaction between reader, text, and writer, and comprise five groups of markers. Hedges and Certainty Markers allow writers to indicate how certain they are of the truth value of what they are asserting, while Attributors provide the source of information presented in the text. Attitude Markers allow writers to express their feelings about what they are saying, and Commentaries are used to anticipate the responses of their readers and address them. The following examples will give a sense of these types:

(c) Hedges (*may, might, maybe, perhaps, possibly*)
(d) Certainty Markers (*certainly, it is true that*)
(e) Attributors (*according to X, X says*)
(f) Attitude Markers (*I hope, I find it surprising that*)
(g) Commentaries (*you may not agree, think about X, my friends*)

The Teaching Method

In a semester-long study, Cheng taught two 100-level composition classes of native speakers of English at a large, Midwestern university. One class, the CC, was taught using the dominant strategy in university composition courses, the process method. This method focuses on the importance of propositional content in writing and emphasizes invention and

the generation of ideas. To augment the generation of ideas, the students read materials about the subjects on which they are writing. Students are also taught to emulate the processes of professional writers and are instructed in the techniques of reviewing each other's papers and revising following the suggestions made during these peer review sessions. Thus, the CC students were focusing on the propositional content of their essays through the generation of knowledge by reading and discussion, and on audience reactions and needs through peer review and revision.

In the EC, the time devoted to reading about the topic was reduced and the time saved was spent reading scholarly articles about metadiscourse: Williams' chapter on style (1981), Vande Kopple's first article on metadiscourse (1985), Halliday and Hasan's introductory chapter on cohesion and their chapter on conjunction (1976), and Lautamatti's article on strategies for simplifying texts, which includes a detailed discussion of topical and non-topical material (1978). To increase the level of understanding of these articles, some of which were very technical, students were asked to write summaries and critiques in their journals, which Cheng read on a regular basis. Classroom discussion followed which was based on misunderstandings revealed in the students' summaries. Once the students had some grasp of the concept of metadiscourse, a variety of discrete and holistic exercises were used to increase their understanding of how metadiscourse markers are used in writing. The crucial step, of course, was the use of metadiscourse in their own writing. (See Cheng, 1994; Cheng & Steffensen, forthcoming, for a complete discussion of this method.)

Outcomes were assessed on the basis of a comparison of two sets of papers: (a) an in-class essay on an assigned topic written at the beginning of the semester (pretest) and one written at the end of the semester (posttest), and (b) by the third revision of the first assigned paper written in September and a fourth revision written at the end of the semester. These papers were rated by composition instructors who were not familiar with the classes, the techniques, the hypotheses, or the theoretical constructs. The pretests revealed no significant differences between the EC and CC. However, the EC posttests were significantly better than those of the CC. Furthermore, comments in the experimental students' journals were much more positive about their classroom experience and indicated that they had learned more than the control students had (Cheng, 1994; Cheng & Steffensen, forthcoming). We will propose that the use of metadiscourse greatly increased the student writer's understanding of readers' need. In effect, the writing in the EC slowly changed from writer-based to reader-based writing.

Changes in the Use of Metadiscourse

We now wish to examine in some detail what changes actually occurred to make the differences in the texts of the EC and the CC. We will discuss the in-class papers because all the students wrote on the same topics, making comparisons slightly easier. One predictable set of results involved more effective use of metadiscourse itself. While there has not yet been enough research to establish what optimal rates of metadiscourse are, it is certainly the case that there can be too much or not enough. Williams (1981), for example, discusses texts with excessive use of metadiscourse, which buries the propositional content and makes them very difficult to read. Crismore (1984), on the other hand, found that social studies textbooks use less metadiscourse than trade books, and she argues that this lack of

pragmatic markers makes textbooks more difficult to read. In our data, several of the pretest papers used metadiscourse too heavily as well as ineffectively. Consider the following excerpt from an EC paper. (Examples of metadiscourse are underlined; errors are not corrected):

(1) EC Pretest

> In the beginning the television was posed as a real asset for families with children because it would be a big influence in the home. Basically this is what Marie Winn discussed in her article "The Plug-In Drug". As a young adult today I can safely say that the hours one person sits in front of the television has greatly increased from what it was forty years ago. So, yes Winn is correct in stating that the television is a major influence on children these days.

The student begins with the statement that television was first considered an asset for children. In the second sentence, she provides a source for this information, an Attributor. She then moves to a new topic, TV viewing time. She bases the claim that viewing time has increased over the last forty years on her personal experience, a second Attributor, which is ineffective since the writer is not forty or fifty years old and thus does not have the experience necessary for such a claim. In the final sentence of her introductory paragraph, she includes four metadiscourse markers bundled together--a Logical Connective *so*, a Certainty Marker *yes*, an Attributor and an Attitude Marker, *Winn is correct in stating that* to lead into her assertion that television is a major influence on children. Since this final sentence is simply a reiteration of the proposition in her first sentence, her first paragraph has a low level of informativity (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981).

A pretest essay written in the CC shows a similar high level of metadiscourse:

(2) CC Pretest

> After experiencing this phenomena, as myself has, one would have to say that Winn is totally correct with her assumption. One would also have to say that her proposition of correcting this television based life we live in is indeed necessary to keep family life as we know it, if not to improve it.
>
> As Winn has understated in her article, concern for change should be high among family members. People should be concerned for quite a few reasons.

The student begins his essay by establishing himself as an Attributor on the basis of personal experience, the same strategy used by the EC student above. The expression, *one would have to say*, is odd because it is fundamentally a Certainty Marker, but it includes the modal *would* used as a Hedge. (Contrast this with the statement, *After experiencing this phenomenon, as I have, one has to say that Winn is totally correct in her assumption.*) An Attributor referring to Winn and a Certainty Marker are also included in the first sentence, a tangled web of metadiscourse. His second sentence repeats the Certainty Marker, which involves the awkward use of a third person indefinite pronoun, includes a Logical

Connective, *also,* and an Attributor, *her proposition of,* before he gets to the proposition that our use of television must be changed if we are to preserve family life. His second paragraph, which also comprises introductory material, begins with another Attributor. Two uses of the Attitude Marker *should* follow in the proposition that concern is high and that this concern is appropriate. As in the case of the EC pretest, the use of metadiscourse is excessive and ineffective because it adds little but verbiage, obscuring the small amount of propositional content in each essay and contributing to low informativity.

In the final in-class essays, we find clear differences between these two writers in the use of metadiscourse. The EC writer still uses quite a bit of metadiscourse in her final in-class paper, but uses it much more skillfully, as the following introductory paragraph shows:

(3) EC Posttest

Language And The View of Reality

> In the article "Nuclear Language and How We Learned To Pat The Bomb" Carol Cohn describes the issue of language and reality after having spent a year in a world of nuclear strategists. She argues how the language that surrounds us changes our views on reality, and nuclear war is one subject that brings about such changes. I have to agree with Cohn after reading her article. It provides many convincing examples that lead you into believing.

The writer begins by referencing the source of her information about the relationship of language and reality with an Attributor, then, with another reference to Cohn, introduces the thesis of her essay--that language changes our view of reality. She states her opinion about the propositional content she is developing with an Attitude Marker, and leads into the body of her essay with a statement that the article is convincing because of the evidence Cohn cites. Here, the amount of metadiscourse is reduced and its more judicious use offers the reader insight into the source of the ideas and into the author's position on the claims in the essay. In the body of her essay, the writer uses a wider variety of metadiscourse markers which are appropriate to the assertions she is making.

The final in-class paper from the CC certainly shows improvement in the use of non-propositional material, with some of the metadiscourse being used effectively, but there is still some wordiness involved:

(4) CC Posttest

Language: The Art of Deception

> After reading "Nuclear Language And How We Learned to Pat the Bomb", one finds that Cohn's main thesis is how language is used to deceive people and distort reality. I would, after reading this essay, have to strongly agree with her.

> Today, if one were to go home and read a daily newspaper one would easily find that every article would in some way or other be guilty of using language to cover up reality. Take for example an article on a burglary. Though this is totally fictional, the article would probably have the same traits. Let's suppose that there was a gun involved, in the article, the gun wouldn't simply be a gun, it would be "a menacing machine capable of causing a horrifying death".

The source of the claim that language is used to distort reality is based on authority through an Attributor. We find that this writer continues to use the third person indefinite pronoun in *one finds* instead of a reference to himself or to the reader, an awkward expression which has the disadvantage of creating distance and diminishing the level of interaction in the text. His position is then clearly given in a sentence-long Attitude Marker. (Although the Attitude statement is not a subtle way to state one's position, it is much better than trying forcing the reader to infer the thesis.) In the second paragraph, the writer attempts to draw the reader into a dialogue through two Commentaries (the imperative, *take*, and a first person plural imperative, *let's suppose*), followed by a Topicalizer, *there was*. He also uses an Interpretive Marker, *for example*, and two Hedges, *though this is totally fictional* and *probable*. While the use of the Attributor and the imperative are effective, the Hedge and the second imperative weaken the author's position. It should be noted that both writers were using titles by the end of the semester, a small but significant step in giving their readers some help.

A similar problem to using an excessive amount of metadiscourse is that of using one particular marker excessively. One form that is frequently overused is the Hedges. Consider the follow excerpt:

(5) EC Pretest

> Americans watch television a lot. Adults probably spend at least five hours in front of the t.v., watching prime time, the news and maybe a show or two after that. Children spend many more hours than that watching television. A child could spend the entire day in front of the t.v.
>
> I'm not so sure that a child watching t.v. all day is a very good idea. Children are very influential. Most parents work all day so they aren't always around to moniter what they watch. Children pick up many of their habits from t.v. I agree totally with Winn when he says that t.v. is the important influence in childrens lives.

Here we find four Hedges, the Connective *so*, and one long authorial intrusion that includes a strongly stated Attitude Marker combined with an Attributor. The Hedges make the introduction vague and ineffective, particularly the statement *I'm not so sure that*. This is quite different from a Hedge such as *I think* because the latter indicates that what follows is the writer's own opinion (that may or may not be correct) while the former indicates that the writer is not sure what he/she is thinking. It is possible to Hedge without sounding unsure, but unfortunately, this young writer does not succeed in these first two paragraphs. These

hedged statements are interspersed with one or two statements that should be qualified, producing a disconcerting mix of odd contrasts in tone.

In his posttest, the writer strengthens his assertions by using more Attributors, which indicate the source of information. He includes one Attitude Marker in this excerpt:

(6) EC Posttest

> In her article "Nuclear Language and How We Learned to Pat the Bomb" Carol Cohn tells of the year she spent as a visiting scholar at a university defense study center. She says that as she learned the nuclear language, her views began to change. She started thinking less about the people that would be killed by a nuclear bomb and more about the politics involved and the weapons themselves. Cohn claims that using the language affected her views of reality.
>
> I believe that learning all the vocabulary of nuclear language did affect her views. The reason for this is the language itself.

He uses metadiscourse effectively to provide the source of his information and to mark his beliefs about the propositional content that he is developing. This is followed up with a clear position statement and a lead-in to the body of the essay. It seems to us this is a much stronger introduction than that of his pretest.

Now consider two papers written by a CC student:

(7) CC Pretest

> The observation Winn stated that "through the changes it has made in family life, television emerges as the important influence in children's lives today" seems to hold true in most cases. In the past this may not have been a correct statement, but in today's society it holds true.
>
> In the past, families seemed to spend more time together, and tended to go on outings together. However, today it seems like families crowd around the television together or watch television in separate rooms, any spare time they have.

In the first part of her essay, the writer hedges a Certainty Marker, then hedges the negation of a Certainty Marker, then affirms her original hedged statement. This is followed by three more Hedges and a Connective. In her one-page paper, which is less than 250 words, she uses eleven Hedges. This usage conveys a lack of commitment to the position she is attempting to develop.

There is certainly improvement in her posttest. However, she does not seem to have a conscious awareness of the category of Hedges or their function because, in her final

example, which should present the strongest statement of her position, she reverts to a heavy use of Hedges:

(8) CC Posttest

Language Affecting Reality

In the article "Nuclear Language And How We Learned to Pat The Bomb", written by Carol Cohn, the subject of language reflects one's view of reality is discussed. The author contrasts the different outlooks of when a person is familiar with a certain subject's language and when that person is not. In this article, Cohn uses the subject of nuclear weapons and how when she learned the specific language of nuclear weapons she began to think in a totally different way than before. The acquisition of this language gave the author a new outlook on the topic and also made the topic more interesting and fun for her to talk about. After reading this article, I agree with the statement that language affects one's view of reality. . . .

For a person who is was brought up in a wealthy community, his or her language will tend to be more advance and their views will be different from those who were brought up in a different environment. An example of this would be someone growing up in a city where most people are living in poverty. For the person who grew up in a wealthy community, he or she may have developed a sophisticated language, and with that language, a sophisticated attitude may have developed. That person views on life may deal with where they want to go to college or which country club to belong to. For the person who grew up in a poverty-stricken area, there language may be less developed. Instead of where to go to college, the person from the poor area may think of the world of a cruel and hard place to survive.

From a sociolinguist's point of view, it is a good thing the writer hedged these ethnocentric claims. But the fact remains that she was trying to use these claims to develop her thesis, and her heavy use of Hedges completely undercuts her argument. If she had had greater awareness of the pragmatic function of *may* and what she was doing with that form, she might have recognized the fallacies in this paragraph and selected better support for her position.

Another way metadiscourse can be used to strengthen an essay is shown by a second set of papers from the EC. In her first paper, the writer was direct and blunt in the expression of her opinions. She begins:

(9) EC Pretest

I believe Winn is one hundred percent correct, even more so in the past couple of years since the invention of cable. TV is used as a sort of pacifier for a child. When a child is upset or whining, parents find it a solution to stick the child in front of the t.v. and let him have reigns over the channel

selector. And it does become a pacifier--momentarily--until the t.v. is shut off and the problems come flooding back to both the parents and child. This is one influence it has on the child--to make them want to escape reality and not face the truth.

Now, to even further expand on the idea of escaping reality, let's look at the program shown on t.v.. They certainly far depict reality. . . . we have shows depicting violence, like "Miami Vice", "L. A. Law", not to name all the nightly movies that are broadcasted. Children see this and see a grown man shooting a woman and will think, "Hey, this man is shooting someone. I guess it's ok." They are not taught that this type of program is wrong because this type of program is a "norm" for t.v., and the child is being socialized into this kind of viewing. . . . Stick the kid in front of the t.v., and he'll shut up. The kid watches t.v., and the mom and dad go about their own business. It is really a factor in the breaking up of the relationship between child/parents. Gone are the days when families sat around the dinner table and shared conversations. Here is the day of the surrogate mothers and fathers--T.V!

There are a number of problems with this paper, including the fact that the reader is never told what Winn's position is. In terms of metadiscourse, the main problem is the dogmatic tone that the writer adopts toward the propositions she is presenting. While we might generally agree with her positions, most readers would find them too strongly stated and would reject the writer's conclusions on the basis of such extreme claims. If she had hedged her strong judgments, such as, "They are not taught that this type of program is wrong. . . ." and provided some openings so the reader could entertain a somewhat different slant on the propositional content being presented, it is more likely that her thesis would be accepted.

After a semester of training in the use of metadiscourse, and the resulting focus on the reader, we find a dramatic change in this student's writing:

(10) EC Posttest

"Language in the World of Nuclear Arms"

Penetration aids. Cookie cutter. Shopping list. What comes to mind upon hearing these words? Certainly not nuclear warfare! These words are just a few of the many euphemisms that nuclear arms specialists use among themselves to discuss their own little "subculture." When used, these words soften the horror of nuclear arms race and don't convey the truth of the matter--the actual amount of destruction taking place. Let's take a look at some of the words or phrases that "distort" reality.

Here she begins with a short series of noun phrases, then addresses a rhetorical question to her readers, a Commentary. She expresses strong certainty that the reader would not expect them to refer to nuclear warfare (*certainly* and an exclamation mark), then moves into a statement of her thesis. Her skeptical attitude toward content is expressed with quotes

(*"subculture"*). She ends her introduction with an invitation to the reader to join her in examining the lexicon of the military professions, let's. Throughout her final paper, the writer uses a variety of metadiscourse markers, including other Commentaries to engage her reader (*as one may expect*), Attitude Markers to reveal her own affective responses to the text (*surprisingly*), and a Commentary and a Reminder, which brings the readers back to her opening series (*And what about the euphemisms like "cookie cutter" and "shopping list?"*). Her new-found attention to her reader is perhaps best demonstrated when she concludes with an Attitude Marker and an Illocutionary Marker, *"I believe I have justified my argument--these words certainly cover up the serious effects of what nuclear warfare is. . .* . They reflect a significant change, in our opinion, both toward her reader and to the underlying purpose of writing--communicating to persuade.

There are many ways an essay can "go wrong" in tone. None of the CC writers adopted such a judgmental tone as the EC pretest just quoted, but many of them produced inconsiderate texts that closed out the reader. Consider the following CC pretest:

(11) CC Pretest

> The harmful effects of television, particularly on children has been the interest of Marie Winn for many years. I completely agree with the author that it is improper and unhealthy for children and families to watch to much TV.
>
> Today television is becoming an real asset in every home where there is children. This statement is true, because I have two younger brothers and my family has six television sets in our home.
>
> Watching television as far as a child is concerned is obviously unhealthy for someone to sit in front of day after day. The fiction type movies could corrupt a child's ideas on reality. Television as a means of communication is all right in my mind but abuse like anything else could have negative effects.

In his essay, repeated here in its entirety, the writer uses two Certainty Markers, an Attributor, two Attitude Markers, and--in his concluding statement--two Hedges. This is not a bad mix, but the text still comes across as quite inconsiderate, partly because of the inferences the reader must make (for example, that Marie Winn is the author), partly because of the serious syntactic and lexical errors. The Hedges are misplaced: Rather than using them to moderate some of the sweeping statements at the beginning of his essay, the author has used them to hedge his final statements--which should be given more forcefully in order to sway the reader.

In his posttest, we find about the same mix:

(12) CC Posttest

Nuclear Language

I agree that language has a big effect on a persons view of reality. This article by Carol Cohn is about the nature of nuclear strategic thinking and a specialized language called "technostrategic." This language has enormous destructive power.

Technostrategic language articulated only the perspective of the users nuclear weapons, not the victims. Speaking the expert language not only offers distance, a feeling of control, and an alternative focus for ones energies, it also offers escape from thinking of oneself as a victim of nuclear war.

It is tempting to attribute this problem to the words themselves, the abstractness, the euphemisms, the santizied, friendly, sexy acronyms. One would only need to change the words themselves, the abstractness, the euphemisms, the santizied, friendly, sexy acronyms. One would only need to change the words: get the military planners to say "mass murder" instead of "collateral damage," and there thinking would change. The problem, however, is not simply the defense intellectuals use abstract terminology that removes the realities of what they speak.

Language that is abstract, santizied, full of euphemisms; language that is sexy and fun to use; paradigms whose referant is weapons.

This text, like the pretest, has a reasonable mix of metadiscourse markers--two Attitude Markers, an Attributor, two Connectives, and a Commentary. The connection between the first sentence, in which he states his thesis, and the second, which refers to the source article, requires inferencing but is reasonably transparent. The Attitude Marker, *it is tempting*, should be leading to a counterargument and refutation, and this does seem to be the case at the conclusion of the third paragraph. But in the fourth paragraph, the paper falls apart with a bewildering fragment reiterating examples of technostrategic language. This paper shows exactly the problems in writing that we were trying to correct--an absence of a sense of audience and an absence of any ethics in writing. By teaching the pragmatics of metadiscourse, we intended to instill awareness of audience in our EC writers as well as attention to their own belief systems as it was reflected in their essays. What we find in this CC paper, in contrast, is a collage of concepts from the material he had read, a pastiche of chunks of proposition content that has no development and little persuasive power. The lack of development shown in these two CC essays contrasts with the development in the use of metadiscourse forms and attention to their pragmatic functions on the part of EC students.

It is not surprising that we find more appropriate use of metadiscourse in the EC papers. After all, the experimental treatment involved teaching students what metadiscourse is, how to recognize it, and how to incorporate it into their papers. However, something more

seems to have been going on here because it is unlikely that just the use of metadiscourse would count for an average difference between the two classes of almost one letter grade. To understand what made this difference, we must consider another feature of the texts, topical progression.

Simplified Topical Progression

One way of analyzing a text is through topical progression, which describes how authors develop the subjects and predicates of their sentences to introduce different topics on which they comment. Lautamatti (1978) discusses two types of progression, parallel and sequential. In parallel progression, the author introduces a topic in subject position, and continues to use it as a topic, as in the following example:

My cat loves to eat mice. She's ten years old, and she's still an excellent hunter.

"My cat" is introduced in the first sentence, then remains the given information as additional information is provided about her in the predicate. The reader thus keeps the same topic in mind as a richer concept of the cat is developed over the three sentences. In sequential topical progression, the topic changes. The first sentence presents a topic and a predication. The second sentence introduces a new topic from the predicate of the preceding sentence, and provides information about this second topic in the predicate. A third topic is selected from the predicate of the second sentence and is developed, and so on. An example of sequential predication follows:

> My cat ate a mouse. The mouse was in the barn. The barn is old and is a never-ending source of food for her.

Cat is the first topic, followed by *the mouse* as the second topic, and *the barn* in the third. The last two topics are definite because they have occurred in the previous predicate.

If topical progression is not fairly orderly, the reader must inference in order to follow the development of the text:

> My cat loves catnip. Our nursery is ordering some so she will have a never-ending supply.

In such a sequence, *my cat* is the first topic. A new second topic is introduced, *our nursery*, and the reader must make a series of simple inferences (but inferences nevertheless) that the writer is going to buy catnip plants at the nursery and plant them in order to have a continuous supply on hand for the cat. Inference becomes more problematic as the text introduces more information for which the reader does not have the appropriate background knowledge.

In analyzing how English teachers simplified texts for EFL students, Lautamatti (1978) found that one strategy involved topical progression. She proposes that some of the teachers she studied intuitively made the topical progression simpler and more explicit as a way of making the text easier to follow. The simplifying effect of transparent topical progression

can be seen in the writing of Hemingway. Consider the use of topical progression (indicated in boldface) in the first paragraph of The Sun Also Rises (Hemingway, 1954):

> **Robert Cohn** was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn. **He** cared nothing for boxing, in fact **he** disliked it, but **he** learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton. There was **a certain inner comfort** in knowing he could knock down anybody who was snooty to him, although, being shy and a thoroughly nice boy, he never fought except in the gym. **He** was Spider Kelly's star pupil. **Spider Kelly** taught all his young gentlemen to fight like featherweights, no matter whether they weighed one hundred and five or two hundred and five pounds. But **it** seemed to fit Cohn. **He** was really very fast. **He** was so good that Spider promptly overmatched him and got his nose permanently flattened. **This** increased Cohn's distaste. . . .

In the four cases that do not involve parallel progression of the topic introduced in the first sentence, *Robert Cohn*, there are two cases of sequential progression (*Spider Kelly, it*), one case of sequential progression to a predicate introduced in a metadiscursive expression (*a boxing title*), and a topic introduced with the Topicalizer *there was*. In this example, topical progression is predominantly parallel with only a few cases of sequential, and in the one case in which a new topic is introduced, it is by means of the Topicalizer, *there was*. A reader would have to work hard to lose the structure of this opening.

If writers become more aware of audience and the value of making texts easier to follow, some of them (like Lautamatti's teachers) would be expected to intuitively focus on topical progression as a way of improving the clarity of their essays. The following two excerpts show how topical progression was handled by a CC student (numbers indicate topics):

(13) CC Pretest

1. ...**the majority of young people** ...center their lives around the television.
2. **Television** has changed family life drastically and will do so even more in the future unless we can direct our children's attention away from the set
1. . . . **our future adults** are going to know more about the first caucasian rapper to appear on MTV than the meaning of the common ideas learned in a healthy family setting.
3. **These ideas** would include love...
4. **Children** today know what programs will be on from the minute they walk in the door from school....
5. **Mealtime** doesn't seem to see a break in television either.

In this CC pretest, we find five different topics in the introduction, if we consider young people to be a different group than children. (Those people we have informally polled do; for them, children are school kids, young people are teenagers.) Parallel progression is used

when *the majority of young people* is paraphrased as *our future adults*. Sequential progression occurs when the second topic, *television*, follows its mention in the predicate of the first sentence, and when the predication, *common ideas learned in a healthy family setting*, is paraphrased as the topic, *these ideas*. *Children*, the fourth topic, might be traced back to the possessive in the second sentence and *mealtime* certainty requires some inferencing on the part of the reader.

There is some improvement in the writer's posttest:

(14) CC Posttest

1. . . . Carol Cohn demonstrated . . . **the reality of nuclear wars** was changed by learning the language.
2. . . . **she** hadn't needed to deal with the acronyms and phrases used in discussing nuclear war.
3. She believed that **nuclear war** was dangerous and irrational and associated with insanity or evil with our decision makers.
4. . . . Cohn found it hard to believe that **the defense professionals** could speak of nuclear war without taking into account. . . .
4. **They** rattled off terms and nick-names. . . .
2. **Cohn** was astounded by this. . . .

In her final paper, the writer uses one less topic. There are two cases of parallel progression (*she* and *Cohn, the defense professionals* and *they*) and one case of sequential progression (*nuclear war* in the predicate of the second sentence and as the subject of the following sentence). It is not clear whether *the defense professionals* is a paraphrase of *our decision makers*. It may be, but the fact that it can not unambiguously be so analyzed points out a problem in this paragraph. Another problem is the way the topical progression flows in the second sentence from the metadiscourse in the first sentence. One has to infer that Carol Cohn was learning the language, not simply reporting about the effect of learning the language on someone else's perception of reality in the first sentence. Generally, the topical development is less straightforward than in her pretest.

When we consider a sample from the EC, we find a similar high number of topics in the pretest, embedded in considerable metadiscourse. There is one case of sequential progression, between the predicate of the first sentence and the subject of the next to last sentence, which is followed by a case of parallel progression in the last sentence. Besides these cases, readers are faced with several inferences as they make their way through this paragraph, although it could be argued that the four remaining topics (*today's family, Americans, family time, children*) all show lexical cohesion, as described by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Even if this is the appropriate analysis, some inferencing is still involved.

(15) EC Pretest

1. It is true that **today's family** has less time for doing things together but it is not all together fair to put the blame only on television.
2. Studys have shown that . . . **Americans** . . . are working more . . . .

3. This fact alone shows that **family time** is greatly reduced.
4. **Children**...would be likely to feel alone.
5. In this instance **the television** becomes a friend....
5. It is true that **television** greatly influences children...

In his Posttest, after a less-than-perfect first sentence, this writer uses one less topic, with one topic occurring three times. A tighter structure is also developed by two clear cases of sequential progression and possibly a third, if we consider *the people who hold the fate of the world in their hands* to be referring to the same set as *military advisors*. Another thing contributing to the clarity of this introduction is the fact that proposition content is not buried in excessive metadiscourse, as in the first, and what there is is used more effectively.

(16) EC Posttest

1. In Cohn's article, **she** had the opportunity to study and be with the people who hold the fate of the world in their hands.
2. When someone mentions the phrase nuclear war, **the first thing that comes to mind** is the terrible destruction...
3. However, when Cohn was in the presence of military advisors **they** didn't quite regard nuclear war in the same way...
3. It was clear that **the military** had their own system of slang when talking about weapons of mass destruction.
4. **These** are violent, dangerous weapons that need to be respected for their power.
3. **Military analysts** however, would talk of "patting the bomb"...

This is a significant improvement over his pretest.

CONCLUSION

There are other facets of the text that could be examined, such as the development of the argument and the structure of paragraphs. However, the changes in metadiscourse and those in topical progression represent two important developments that occurred more frequently in the writing of the EC. The first type, more effective use of metadiscourse markers, would be expected as an effect of direct teaching. (If the use of these markers did not change, it would be surprising if there were any differences between students in the EC and in the CC.) Classroom discussion and interactions during peer review sessions suggested that as the EC students became aware of the pragmatic/rhetorical function of metadiscourse through direct teaching, they moved away from regarding metadiscourse markers as empty fillers with low informativity to recognizing their pragmatic functions. On the basis of their comments and journal entries, they realized that when Hedges are used too frequently, they significantly weaken authorial voice and render an argument ineffective. Conversely, they recognized that there are times when a Hedge must be used if the writing is to be ethical and reflect what is truly known about the propositional content. They understood how Hedges and Attributors interact: When a proposition is not generally known or accepted, it can be hedged or an authority can be cited as a source. They gradually realized that one of the

functions of Hedges is to allow readers some latitude so they can enter a dialogue with the text/writer in a way that is not possible if all propositions are stated so baldly that no other position can even be entertained.

They also seemed to be questioning some of the techniques and restrictions they had been taught about writing, and began to effectively express their own opinions and feelings about what they were saying, through Attitude Markers, to their audience. Similarly, they realized that devices exist which can be used to reach readers (Commentaries), and that they did not have to rely on the force of their arguments alone to persuade. They consciously began to allow their personalities to intrude into the text as a strategy of persuasion.

The second type of change was global rather than local and resulted, we believe, from a shift from writer-based to reader-based prose. As the students became more aware that they were writing to be read, they began to consider what sort of information their readers might need and how to present that information to them. They became aware of their audience, and this affected aspects of the text, such as topical progression, which were not taught but rather improved as the writers attempted to reach their readers.

Most students begin their first university-level composition course with a naive sense of audience--a real reader, a flesh and blood person who gives some sort of response to the text (Wilson, 1981). We believe a significant number of students write for their teacher, who is perceived as having an abnormal concern with grammatical correctness and the superficial structure of the text and who, of course, gives them a grade. We suggest that, over the course of the semester, many of the EC students developed a more adequate understanding of audience as a discourse community. According to Porter (1992), in a discourse community, the distinctions between composer and audience are blurred. When writers become members of a discourse community, they adopt the conventions of the community, incorporating them into their writing, and they judge that writing as a member of the community. Let us consider how this might have worked with our method of teaching metadiscourse.

The instructor (Cheng) began to shape the emerging culture of the classroom by introducing the concept of metadiscourse. As the students began to understand the concept, it became an expected facet of their written texts and one of the characteristics of their developing discourse community. The process of discovering meaning through writing was facilitated because metadiscourse made it easier to identify fallacies and infelicities in the emerging texts. Cases that demanded too great an inference or which needed further elaboration were more apparent. Overall, there was greater attention on the part of the student writers to saying what they really believed and to developing support for their positions. Such attention resulted in better texts.

Thus by teaching metadiscourse in terms of its pragmatic functions, two important changes occurred in student writing. Most expected was the greatly improved use of the metadiscourse forms themselves. We found fewer cases of overuse or underuse, as well as fewer incorrect or infelicitous examples. Perhaps more important, the students began to critique their own and others' essays at a much higher level. They moved from problems of mechanics and grammar to problems of rhetorical structure, the development of argumenta-

tion, and clarity and logic of expression. An awareness of the importance of the interpersonal function of text emerged, and the focus of attention turned from writer as writer to writer as reader. Metadiscourse as a subject of direct study and metadiscourse as a way of evaluating text resulted in changes in the propositional content that made the EC texts more effective than those texts written by CC student writers, who focused on propositional content by reading about it, discussing it and learning about it. This may seem to be a contradictory result, but once we accept what the purpose of writing is and what the pragmatic functions of metadiscourse are, this is also a predictable result.

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	Date: 6/19/96

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