



COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS' USE OF METADISOURSE IN CLASS: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATIC IDENTITY

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Abstract

This study adopts Hyland's model of metadiscourse to investigate the metadiscourse used in the lectures by the special prize winners in the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contests. Then, based on the results, the pragmatic identities constructed by the college English teachers are analyzed using Chen's theory of pragmatic identity. The results indicate that college English teachers construct their identity as leaning facilitators by using *transitions* and *frame markers*, while they construct their identity as interactional communicators by utilizing *engagement markers*, *self-mentions* and *hedges*.

Key words: metadiscourse, pragmatic identity, college English teacher

1 Introduction

The SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest has been held annually in China for many years. It aims to promote the teaching skills of college English teachers, improve the level and quality of foreign language classes and deepen the reform of foreign language teaching. Research on special prize winners' use of discourse, especially their use of metadiscourse in the contests, can give implications to English teaching.

The definition of metadiscourse was first proposed by American scholar Harris in 1959. Later, some scholars further supplemented the definition of metadiscourse. Williams (1981, p.211) believes that "metadiscourse is discourse about discourse and it is not related to the subject". Hyland (2000, p.109) believes that "metadiscourse is seen as the interpersonal resources used to organize a

discourse or the writer's stance towards either its context or the reader".

Existing studies on metadiscourse mainly focuses on the following aspects: firstly, the introduction to the definition, classification and research methods of metadiscourse (Vande Kopple, 1985; Hyland, 2004; Xu, 2006; Yang, 2007); secondly, the analysis of the functions of metadiscourse in academic texts (Zhou, 2014); thirdly, the discussion of metadiscourse from the microscopic perspective of communication, politics, and advertisement (Guillem, 2009; Wang, 2012); lastly, the application and functions of teachers' use of metadiscourse in class (Yan & Zhang, 2013). Up to now, few scholars at home and abroad conduct studies on college English teachers' use of metadiscourse from the perspective of pragmatic identity. However, college English teachers' use of discourse in class is indeed the use of discourse in a

specific context, and it belongs to the scope of pragmatics. Therefore, it's very necessary to have a study on college English teachers use of metadiscourse in class from the perspective of pragmatics.

Hyland (2004) divides metadiscourse into two categories: interactive resources and interactional resources. This model emphasizes the interactive and interactional functions of metadiscourse. Since teachers' teaching is a way of interaction, therefore, this study adopts Hyland's model of metadiscourse to investigate college English teachers' use of metadiscourse and their identity construction from the perspective of pragmatic identity.

2 Theoretical Framework

Discourse and identity are closely connected and the relationship between them has always been the focus of many scholars (Tracy, 2002; De Fina, 2006). In China, Professor Chen Xinren (2013) proposes the theory of pragmatic identity based on

the contribution of Tracy (2002). In his opinion, "Pragmatic identity refers to those identities represented, utilized or even invented by interlocutors in a specific context" (Chen, 2013, p.27). In other words, pragmatic identities are those identities actually being "in use" in a specific context. This theory holds that pragmatic identity is constructed through discourse. Also, the process of identity construction is dynamic. In a specific communicative event, the pragmatic identity of a speaker or a listener may change with the specific communicative needs, and this process is reflected by the time sequence of the discourse. Chen's theory of pragmatic identity covers the following 5 aspects: (1) the communicative need of the speaker; (2) the speakers' identity choice; (3) the discursive choice related to identity construction; (4) the communicative effect of the discourse; (5) the context of the current discourse. Chen's theory of pragmatic identity is illustrated in the figure below.

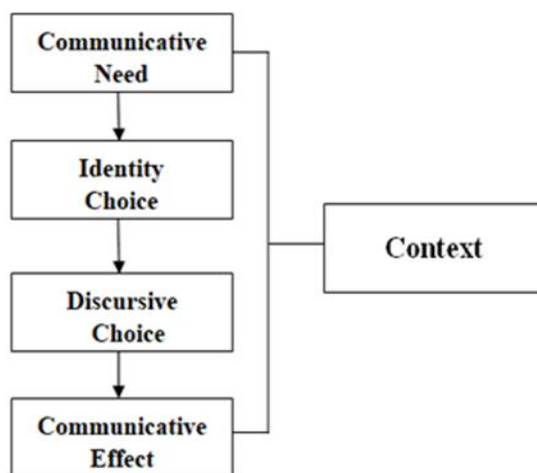


Figure 1: Dynamic Choice of Pragmatic Identity (Chen, 2013)

In order to further understand the discursive choice interlocutors use to construct identities, Chen also proposes some discursive practices connected with identity construction based on Tracy's (2002) study. Discursive practices include the choice of code, the choice of style, the

choice of discourse content, and the choice of speech acts and so on. This paper concentrates on one specific type of discursive practice—the choice of metadiscourse related to identity construction. What's more, this paper adopts Hyland's model of metadiscourse.

Table 1: Hyland’s model of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2004)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive resources	Help to guide reader through the text	
Transitions	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition / but / thus / and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	Finally / to conclude / my purpose is
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above /see Fig / in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to source of information from other texts	According to X / Z states
Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely / e.g. / such as / in other words
Interactional resources	Involve the reader in the argument	
Hedges	Withhold writer’s full commitment to proposition	Might / perhaps / possible / about
Boosters	Emphasize force or writer’s certainty in proposition	In fact / definitely / it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer’s attitude to proposition	Unfortunately / I agree / surprisingly
Self-mentions	Explicit references to author(s)	I / we / my / our
Engagement markers	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Consider / note that / you can see that

3 Research Method

3.1 Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following questions.

- (1) What kind of metadiscourse do college English teachers use in the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contests? What is the distribution of different types of metadiscourse?
- (2) What kind of identities do college English teachers construct? How these identities are realized through the use of metadiscourse?

3.2 Research Subjects

The subjects of the study were six teachers who won special prizes in the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest from 2013 to 2018. In the contests, teachers needed to use multimedia teaching equipment to have an English class of about 20 minutes, and there were students cooperating with teachers. Since the six teachers have got good feedback from the judges and won special prizes, their teaching has some referential value for foreign language teaching.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Firstly, the author copied the teaching videos of the six special prize winners from CDs to her computer and then tried her best to transcribe these videos which were about 120 minutes in the process of listening and watching. After that, the author read the transcription carefully and marked the metadiscourse used in the lectures on the basis of Hyland’s model of metadiscourse. Then, the quantitative method was applied to calculate the frequency of metadiscourse used by the college English teachers and qualitative method was adopted to analyze college English teachers’ use of metadiscourse. Lastly, the paper focused on discussing how college English teachers use metadiscourse to construct different identities in class.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The results indicate that two types of metadiscourse, namely, the interactive resources and the interactional resources can be found in the data. There are 2,763 occurrences of metadiscourse. Interactive resources appear 1,012 times and they account for 36.63% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse, while interactional resources appear 1,751 times and they take up 63.37% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse. Also, the frequency of interactional resources is higher than that of interactive resources.

The most frequently used interactive resources are *transitions* which occur 788 times and account for 28.52% of the overall distribution of college English teachers’ use of metadiscourse. *Frame markers*, with 92 occurrences, taking up 3.33% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse, rank second to *transitions* among the interactive resources. *Transitions* and *frame markers* together account for 31.85% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse.

Among the interactional resources, the frequency of *engagement markers* ranks first, with 1297 occurrences, accounting for 46.94% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse. It is noteworthy that the frequency of *engagement markers* is higher than that of the interactive resources. *Self-mentions* and *hedges* rank second and third, with the frequency of 6.59% and 4.74% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse, respectively. *Engagement markers*, *self-mentions* and *hedges* account for 58.27% of the overall distribution of metadiscourse.

The use of metadiscourse by the six college English teachers is similar with *engagement markers* ranking first and *transitions* ranking second. The least frequently used metadiscourse covers *code glosses* (2.42%), *endophoric markers* (1.92%), *attitude markers* (0.62%) and *evidentials* (0.43%).

Table 2: The Distribution of College English Teachers’ Use of Metadiscourse

Category		Year						Total	Frequency
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018		
Interactive resources	Transition markers	154	152	114	118	103	147	788	28.52%
	Frame markers	15	27	10	16	18	6	92	3.33%
	Endophoric markers	30	1	6	9	6	1	53	1.92%
	Evidentials	2	0	2	5	0	3	12	0.43%
	Code glosses	13	7	10	17	9	11	67	2.42%
	Total	214	187	142	165	136	168	1,012	36.63%
Interactional resources	Hedges	31	24	35	4	17	20	131	4.74%
	Boosters	37	23	32	11	8	13	124	4.49%
	Attitude markers	3	3	1	1	3	6	17	0.62%
	Self-mentions	35	50	28	21	25	23	182	6.59%

	Engagement markers	272	279	182	170	261	133	1,297	46.94%
	Total	378	379	278	207	314	195	1,751	63.37%
Total		592	566	420	372	450	363	2,763	100.00%

4.2 Discussion

The results reveal that two types of metadiscourse, namely, the interactive resources and the interactional resources can be found in the data, which indicates that college English teachers consciously use both interactive resources and interactional resources to construct different pragmatic identities in order to achieve the communicative need of teaching students effectively and constructing harmonious teacher-student relationship.

4.2.1 Constructing Learning Facilitators

One of the teaching objectives of teachers is to use appropriate teaching methods to guide students to learn so teachers need to construct their identity as learning facilitators to guide students to learn in the context of classroom teaching. Teachers also need to lead students to understand the teaching content and procedures of the lecture as well as to explain the difficult teaching points in order to consolidate students' understanding of the lecture. In addition, letting students build bridges between the new knowledge and old knowledge is also one of teachers' tasks. In this way, students can have a better understanding of what they have learned, which is conducive to improving their learning ability. By this means, teachers actually have a discursive choice—the choice of interactive resources, and then they construct their identity as learning facilitators by using interactive resources to achieve their expected teaching objectives.

Extract 1

Good, it is the first sentence, the transition, and <T.> also <T.> what is the topic sentence that would be easier because <T.> the transition sentence introduces the sentence or <T.> the topic sentence, so <T.> it must be this one "Wisdom is knowing the ends of human life."

The above data comes from the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest in 2018. The

teacher is an excellent woman who desires to lead students to find the topic sentence of the text by letting them focus their attention on the transition sentence. Therefore, she needs to construct her identity as a learning facilitator. To achieve her goal, she uses *transitions* such as "and", "because", "or", and "so". The use of "and" and "or" shows that this teacher wants to further guide students to concentrate on the topic sentence. "Because" demonstrates the causation between sentences and the use of "so" shows the result. The application of the above *transitions* enables this teacher to add useful information and lead students to notice the logical sequence of the teaching content. In this way, this teacher actually constructs her identity as a leaning facilitator by using *transitions* so as to achieve her expected teaching objectives.

Extract 2

In the end <F.>, he projected into the future of the relation between AI and human history, and human society.

Extract 3

So, while you are reading each paragraph, please try to find out two things. First <F.>, examples using numbers. Second, <F.> technical terms.

Extract 2 and 3 cover sentences from the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest in 2016. The teacher is an energetic woman who dedicates to demonstrating the teaching procedure so as to guide students to understand the structure of the text. Therefore, the teacher needs to construct her identity as a learning facilitator. In order to achieve her purpose, she utilizes *frame markers* such as "in the end", "first" and "second". She uses "in the end" when explaining the outline and structure of the text that she is having. The use of "first" and "second" shows that she wants to emphasize the assignment. Students are given 2 tasks: find out examples using numbers and

technical terms. The application of these *frame markers* shows her teaching procedure so that she can guide students to further understand the text. Under this circumstance, this teacher actually constructs her identity as a leaning facilitator by using *frame markers*.

4.2.2 Constructing Interactional Communicators

In the context of classroom teaching, another objective of teachers is to build interaction with students so that students' interest in learning can be aroused. Therefore, teachers need to construct their identity as interactional communicators when having classes so that teachers can attract students' interest in learning by means of interaction. A variety of methods can be adopted by teachers to enhance their interaction with students, such as asking questions and finding answers to questions with students, or participating in class discussions. As a result, the connection between students and teachers has deepened. In this way, teachers actually have a discursive choice—the choice of interactional resources, and then they construct their identity as interactional communicators by using interactional resources to achieve their expected teaching objectives.

Extract 4

So Fang Zuming was in prison now because he has drugs addiction. Then what is addiction? <Eng.> What is addiction? <Eng.> Could you <Eng.> tell me something about addiction? <Eng.>

Extract 5

And, you <Eng.> see, Jason asked his parents. Could you <Eng.> read out to your <Eng.> answer, please? <Eng.>

Extract 4 and 5 cover sentences from the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest in 2014. The teacher intends to build interaction with students and attract their attention so that the teaching process can continue and students can actively learn something. To achieve her teaching objectives, she needs to construct her identity as an interactional communicator. Therefore, she uses *engagement markers* such as wh-question, yes/no

question, the second person pronoun “you” and the possessive adjective “your”. The use of wh-question and yes/no question enables this teacher to ask questions so that students can think actively and carefully, and then give their own answers. Under this circumstance, the connection between the teacher and students is established. In addition, the teacher tries to use the second person pronoun “you” with the aim to attract students' attention to the topic they are discussing. The use of “your” is to lead students to show their answers. The application of these *engagement markers* helps teachers to build bridges with students so as to arouse their interest in learning. In this way, the teacher actually constructs her identity as an interactional communicator by using *engagement markers* so as to achieve her teaching objectives.

Extract 6

Does Bertrand Russell agree with this idea or with this hierarchy of information, knowledge and wisdom? Think about it and I <S.> would like you to share your ideas and compare them and we might, you know, talk about it when we finish the discussion of the whole text.

Extract 7

Good, so my <S.> question, ask yourself, is Bertrand Russell's argument complete?

The above data comes from the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest in 2018. The teacher is also an excellent woman who wants students to answer her question and intend to build interaction with students. In order to achieve her expected teaching objectives, she constructs her identity as an interactional communicator by using *self-mentions* such as “I” and “my”. The use of “I” reveals that she intends to let students think the question she has asked, and give their own answers and compare their answers with other classmates. In this way, she not only shows her presence and identity but also builds interaction with students so that students are willing to think and answer the question. Also, the application of “my” demonstrates the teacher's another question. After knowing questions clearly, students can focus their attention on discussing

questions. The utilization of *self-mentions* enables teachers to connect with students and attract their attention. Under this circumstance, the teacher actually constructs her identity as an interactional communicator by using self-mentions.

Extract 8

Ok, here is a question. Some people may <H.> feel sad, some people may <H.> feel frustrated, some people will probably <H.> feel angry because they are the only one. Here is a thing. Do you detect a negative feeling after reading this passage?

Extract 8 cover sentences from the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contest in 2015. The teacher is an energetic man whose intention is to ask students whether they have a negative feeling after reading the passage. With the aim to achieve his teaching objectives, he needs to construct his identity as an interactional communicator so he chooses to use *hedges* such as “may” and “probably”. When using *hedges*, this teacher actually offers some possible answers to his

next question and his authority is weakened. The utilization of “may” and “probably” makes students feel that they can have a more open view so that they are willing to answer the question. What’s more, the link between students and teachers is established. In this way, the teacher actually constructs his identity as an interactional communicator by using *hedges* in order to achieve his expected teaching objectives.

From what has been discussed above, we may find that college English teachers use different types of metadiscourse to construct different pragmatic identities. Specifically, college English teachers use *transitions* and *frame markers* to construct their identity as leaning facilitators while they use *engagement markers*, *self-mentions* and *hedges* to construct their identity as interactional communicators. On the basis of the above discussion, the author builds the framework of college English teachers’ use of metadiscourse from the perspective of pragmatic identity, as shown in the figure below.

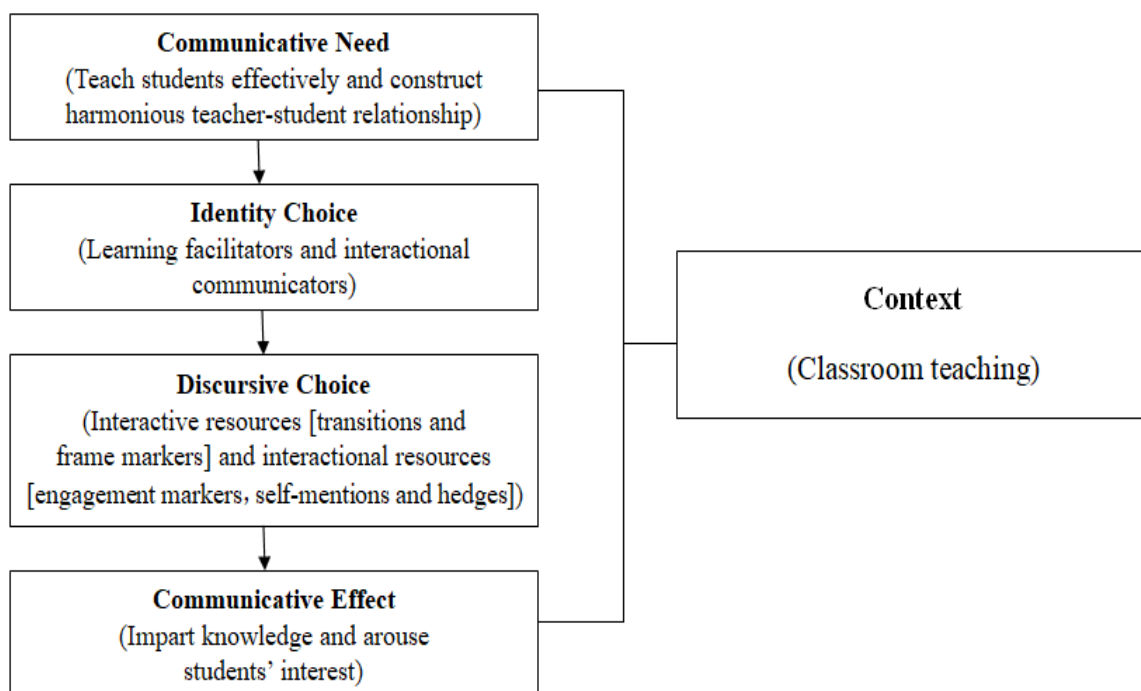


Figure 2: The Framework of College English Teachers’ Use of Metadiscourse from the Perspective of Pragmatic Identity

5 Conclusion

The study investigates the metadiscourse used in the lectures by the special prize winners in the SFLEP National Foreign Language Teaching Contests from the perspective of pragmatic identity. The results indicate that two types of metadiscourse, namely, the interactive resources and the interactional resources can be found in the data and the frequency of interactional resources is higher than that of interactive resources. In addition, the frequently used metadiscourse includes *engagement markers, transitions, self-mentions, hedges* and *frame markers*, and these five categories of metadiscourse are closely concerned with the identity construction of college English teachers. More specifically, college English teachers construct their identity as leaning facilitators by using *transitions* and *frame markers*, while they construct their identity as interactional communicators by using *engagement markers, self-mentions* and *hedges*. The lectures by the special prize winners have got good feedback from the judges so analyzing these teachers' discourse can help us describe how they use metadiscourse to construct different identities so as to achieve the communicative need of teaching students effectively and construct harmonious teacher-student relationship. This study may shed some light on English teaching.

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