

## Exploring the Use of Metadiscourse Markers in Algerian's Abstracts of Articles across Disciplines

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### Abstract

Journals across different fields of study have started publishing articles in English as an initial step towards adopting English language for scientific research. However, writing a well organized discourse is not an easy task, especially when the researchers are not proficient in English. Undeniably, well written discourse requires knowledge of how to make discourse communicative and understood to the target audience. One major device that helps achieve communicative function of the discourse is the use of the metadiscourse markers. The study aims to find out the difference in the use of metadiscourse markers among the researchers' abstracts from distinct fields of study, namely Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies, English Language Studies and Law. The two main research questions raised in this study are: Does the use of metadiscourse markers vary in the Algerian abstract of articles across disciplines? And how does the use of metadiscourse markers vary in the Algerian researchers' abstracts across disciplines? To answer these research questions, the explanatory sequential design was adopted. Fifteen Articles' abstract from the aforementioned disciplines were downloaded from the Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP) and constitute the data for this study. The abstracts were first analyzed quantitatively using AntConc version 4.1.4 developed by Anthony (2022). The results obtained from the qualitative analysis were then qualitatively analyzed using the metadiscourse framework proposed by Hyland (2005). The results revealed that the writers of three disciplines differ in their use of interactive resources; however, they concord in the use of interactional resources. In addition, transitions emerged as the most frequent metadiscourse markers employed by the researchers in abstract writing. Understanding the use of metadiscourse markers makes discourse more communicative and understandable to the reader; accordingly, developing English writing proficiency among the researchers across disciplines helps improve the quality of the journal articles.

**Keywords :** Discourse ; Metadiscourse ; Interactional Ressources ; Interactive ressources ; Communicative Function.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing in academic English is becoming increasingly important for Algerian postgraduate students and teachers from different disciplines who are writing theses and articles as part of their educational and professional development especially after the recent reforms undertaken by the ministry of education which have imposed English as a main language of instruction in the Algerian Universities. Accordingly, the researchers' academic and professional career depends on the researchers' ability to write research papers that adhere to the conventions of academic English.

Undeniably, writing in academic English is daunting and demanding skill for foreign language researchers across disciplines especially in fields where English is not used as the main language of instruction. Foreign language writers often struggle in producing coherent discourse that adheres to the conventions of academic writing. Due to their limited proficiency in English, these writers usually focus on sentence and text structure, or some of them may resort to translating their discourse from the language they were instructed in; either French or Arabic in the case of Algeria, to English which can potentially impact the meaning of their discourse.

Definitely, the major purpose of the written discourse is to achieve the communicative purpose. However, this requires the writer to go beyond the simple sentence level to think on what constitutes a well organized and communicative discourse. Celce Murcia and Olshtain define a piece of discourse as "is an instance of spoken a written language that has describable internal relationships of form and meaning (e.g., words, structures, cohesion) that relate coherently to an external communicative function or purpose and a given audience/ interlocutor" (2000, p.4). Accordingly, the writer has to consider three major foci: the first focus is text organization which makes ideas hang together and form a coherent whole. The second one is to achieve communicative function that makes discourse interactional between the writer and the reader, and the third focus is the audience who the discourse is addressed to.

In fact, many EFL writers prioritize text organization believing that the quality of a good text is determined on how well it is structured. This emphasis on the final product often leads them to ignore the social aspect of the writing activity. In other words, while text organization highly contributes to achieve the communicative function, writers should consider other aspects of discourse that makes it interactional.

Research in the field of discourse analysis and pragmatics has introduced highly prominent concept known in the literature as metadiscourse. According to Hyland and TSE (2004, p. 156) metadiscourse "refers to the range of devices writers use to explicitly organize their texts, engage the readers, and signal their attitudes to both their material and their audience." Currently great emphasis has been placed on the use of metadiscourse markers and their importance in making the discourse more comprehensible.

Essentially, the aim of this study is to explore the use of metadiscourse devices employed by Algerian academic researchers from different disciplines, namely: Law, Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies, and English Language Studies, in their articles' abstracts, and then compares them. In addition, the study seeks to explain how the use metadiscourse markers vary among these researchers in the aforementioned disciplines. To achieve these objectives, the following research questions are raised:

- Does the use of metadiscourse markers vary in the Algerian abstract of articles across disciplines?
- How does the use of metadiscourse markers vary in the Algerian researchers' abstracts across disciplines

The significance of this study lies in the fact that exploring Algerian researchers' use of the metadiscourse devices may reveal about how Algerian researchers employ metadiscourse devices when they write abstracts in their articles and how these devices differ from one discipline to another. The study gives more understanding about the use of metadiscourse and their importance in maintaining a coherent work.

## **2. Literature Review**

Different fields of studies have contributed to writing effective discourse, namely the field of linguistics and the field of pragmatics (Hatch E. 1992; Celce Murcia and Olshtain 2000). Accordingly, writers can benefit from the research findings of these fields of studies on how meaning is achieved in discourse.

According to Hatch E., meaning in linguistics, is “achieved from syntax and semantic” (1992, 260). Among the main contributions of linguistics to the field of discourse analyses more particularly in discourse organization is the concept of cohesion. Cohesive ties, according to Celce Murcia and Olshtain (2000), are the most obvious structural features of a connected discourse which are used to link together the propositions in a text. However, understanding spoken or written discourse goes beyond the simple structural organization and relying solely on cohesive devices to understand discourse is not certain. Although cohesive ties help achieve discourse coherence, spoken or written discourse can be misinterpreted by the reader as structural organization is not sufficient to reveal the writer's intention.

Apart from the textual organization, another prevalent concept which emerged in the field of discourse analysis is the concept of context. The concept of context is considered as one of the major contributions of pragmatics to the field of discourse analysis referring “to all the factors and elements that are nonlinguistic and nontextual but which affect spoken or written communicative interaction” (Celce Murcia and Olshtain 2000, p. 11) Accordingly, by introducing the concept of context, pragmatics went beyond

the structural interpretation of the discourse to deal with the writer's intention to interpret meaning. According to Celce Murcia and Olshtain (2000, p.20), "Pragmatics studies the context within which an interaction occurs as all as the intention of the language user."

However, these two major concepts are not conclusive to fully describe the interactional feature of the discourse.

Johns stated that writing is considered as "a social act that takes place only within and for a specific context and audience." (1990, p. 27). In fact, the social view of writing is found in social constructivism which considers the communicative function as the ultimate goal of writing activity (Johns 1990, Clarks 2003, Williams D. 2003). In this view, Celce Murcia and Olshtain assert that discourse analysis "entails a more cognitive and social perspective on language use and communication exchanges." (2001, p. 4).

Undeniably, the discourse is considered communicative when interaction happens between the writer and the reader. Hyland (2005) asserts that texts do not have a communicative function when they are written but rather when they have to anticipate the readers' reaction to what is written. However, not all texts are well written which hinders the interpretation of the text. Accordingly, to prevent text misinterpretation that may occur during the reading process, writers have to address their audience in an organized discourse that makes their stance clear and by taking position and attitudes.

Based on the view that writing is social and communicative engagement between the writer and the reader (Hyland and TSE 2000, p. 156), the concept of metadiscourse emerged in the field of discourse analysis. Metadiscourse, according to the same reference "focuses our attention on the way the writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitude towards both the content and the audience of the text."

According to Hyland (2017), the term metadiscourse was introduced by Zellig Harris in 1959 to refer to the "linguistic resources used to organize discourse or the writer stance towards its content or the reader". Hyland and TSE 2000 cited in Hyland 2004, p. 157)

Hyland and TSE (2004) explained that metadiscours goes beyond simple text organization to facilitate reader's involvement in the writing activity. They state that metadiscourse is "a self-reflective linguistic material referring to evolving text and to the writer and to the imagined reader of that text" (2004, p. 156). Furthermore, Hyland (2005) noted that metadiscourse cannot be restricted to text organizing elements but looks outside the text to how the writers address their readers making the discourse more interactive. Accordingly, the use of metadiscourse helps "in raising the writer's awareness of the reader and the type and extent of his or her need for elaboration, clarification, guidance and interaction."(Hyland 2017, p.2).

In fact, this definition stems from view that writing is social and that the text can best be understood when the writer addresses special audience in specific context. In addition, the writer's use of the metadiscourse helps the reader interpret his ideas. According to Hyland and TSE, "Metadiscourse thus

provide us with broad perspectives in a way academic writers engage their readers; shaping their propositions to create convincing, coherent text by making language choices in social contexts peopled by readers, prior experiences, and other texts” ( 2004, p. 167). Accordingly, this social aspect of the discourse is achieved by the appropriate use of the metadiscourse as it reflects an interaction between the writer, the reader, and the text.

To explain how metadiscourse markers make discourse communicative, Hyland (2004) distinguished two main categories of the metadiscourse markers that he called: interactive and interactional metadiscourse items. First, the interactive resources, according to Hyland and TSE (2004), refer to “features which set out an argument to explicitly establish the writer’s preferred interpretation (p.168). It is clear that this category of metadiscourse markers is responsible for discourse organization and help in text progression and sequencing ideas. The interactive metadiscourse markers, thus, help guide the reader through the text and include the following categories: Transitions, endophoric markers, frame markers, evidential, code glosses. (Hyland, 2005)

The second category is interactional. The interaction resources on the other hand, aim to involve the reader in arguments. According to Hyland and TSE “metadiscourse here is evaluative and engaging, influencing the degree of intimacy, the expression of attitudes, epistemic judgments and commitment, and the degree of the reader involvement” (2004, p. 168). These resources, thus, are used to create the interaction by engaging the reader and building up relationship with him. This category includes: Hedges, Boosters, Attitude markers, engagement markers, self mentions. The table below summarizes and explains these categories and their function:

**Table 1: A model of metadiscourse in academic texts**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Interactive Resources</b>	<b>Help to guide reader through the text</b>	
Transitions	express semantic relation between main clauses	in addition / but / thus / and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages refer to information in other parts of the text noted	finally / to conclude / my purpose is
Endophoric mrkrs	refer to source of information from other texts	above / see Fig / in section 2
Evidentials	help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	according to X / (Y, 1990) / Z states
Code glosses		namely /e.g./such as / in other words
<b>Interactional Resources</b>	<b>Involve the reader in the argument</b>	
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
Engagement mrkrs	explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider / note that / you can see that
Self mentions	explicit reference to author	I / we / my / our

**Source: Hyland ( 2005, in Hyland 2017, p.7)**

### 3. Methodology

the aim of this study is to explore the use of metadiscourse devices employed by Algerian academic researchers from different disciplines, namely: Law, Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies, and English Language Studies, in their articles' abstracts, and then explain how the use metadiscourse markers vary among these researchers in the aforementioned disciplines. To reach this objective, an explanatory sequential design was adopted. The design consists of two phase design where data were first collected and analyzed quantitatively and then qualitatively. In the first phase, the quantitative data were collected using freeware corpus analysis AntConck toolkit version 4. 1. 4 (2022) for text analysis developed by Lawrance Anthony. The aim of this phase is to present the numerical results of the frequency of metadiscourse markers use. The second phase consists of analyzing qualitatively data obtained from the first phase following Hyland (2005) metadiscourse framework. The aim of this phase is to explain the difference in the metadiscourse markers' use in the abstracts of articles of the aforementioned disciplines.

#### 3.1 Tools for data collection and analysis

Fifteen articles were downloaded from different Algerian's e- journals available on the Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP) with five articles randomly chosen from each of the following field of studies: Law, Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies, and English Language Studies .All the downloaded articles were written in English; however, only the abstract section was analyzed. It is worth mentioning that apart from the field of English Language studies, English is not the main language of instruction for the other disciplines namely: Law and Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies. For the discipline of Law, Arabic language is used as the main language of instruction; however, French is used for Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies which means writers' English proficiency differs from one discipline to another. The choice of these disciplines stems from the fact that they belong to different research areas: Humanities and Social Sciences and Natural Science in order to compare the researchers' choice and use of metadiscourse in their abstracts. Thus, the study aims to examine whether the writers of these

disciplines differ in their use of the metadiscourse markers when they write in English. In other words, the research study seeks to find out whether the difference of the metadiscourse correlates with the disciplines and what are the most frequent metadiscourse markers used by the Algerian researchers in their research papers.

To analyze the frequency of use of metadiscourse, the writer used AntConc toolkit version 4. 1. 4 (2022). AntConc is a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for text analysis developed by Lawrence Anthony. In Addition, Hyland (2005) metadiscourse framework was used to qualitatively analyze the metadiscourse markers used in the abstracts.

### **3.2 Data analysis procedure**

The procedure of data analysis went through two major steps. In the first step, the researcher downloaded fifteen articles' abstract across various Algerian Journals of different fields of studies, namely, Law, English Language Studies, Pharmaceutical engineering utilizing the Algerian Scientific Journal Platform to download these articles. The abstracts were then converted from PDF to Word format and inserted into the antConc programme for analysis. In the second step, the researcher, identified the metadiscourse markers used in the abstract following the metadiscourse framework proposed by Hyland (2005), and then classified them into two categories: interactive and interactional. Additionally, the researcher used the word lists obtained from the programme to determine the frequency of use of the metadiscourse markers. At last, the comparison between three different fields of studies was built upon the frequency of the metadiscourse markers used in the abstracts

## **4. Results and discussion**

This section examines the findings regarding the use of metadiscourse in articles abstracts across the disciplines: namely Law, English Language Studies, and Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies. The analysis is made with reference to the research questions asked above.

The first question addressed in this study seeks to explore the difference in the use of metadiscourse markers in different abstracts of articles taken from the different disciplines namely, Law, Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies, and English Language Studies.

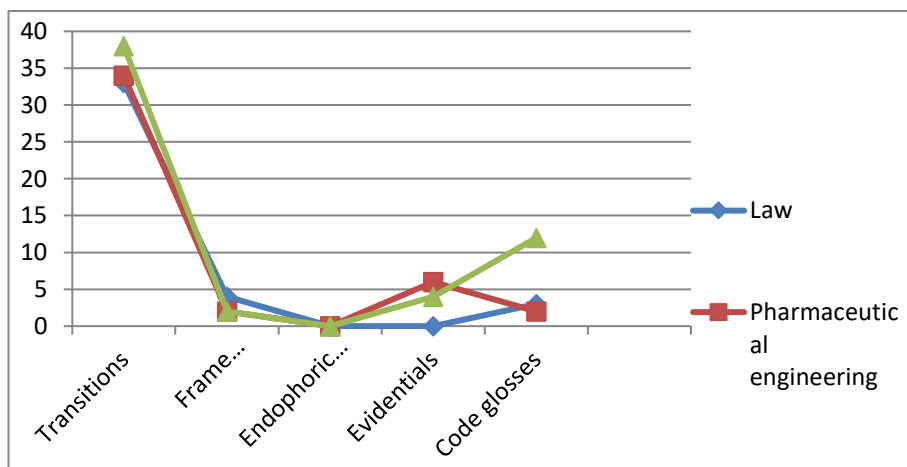
The results of the analysis brought about many conclusions at the level of the categories and the subcategories of the metadiscourse markers used in abstracts of articles in the aforementioned disciplines.

**Table 1. Discourse markers used in abstracts of articles from three disciplines**

	Law	Pharmaceutical Engineering	English	Sum of the resources
<b>Interactive resources</b>				
Transitions	33	34	38	105
Frame markers	4	2	2	7
Endophoric mrkrs	0	0	0	0
Evidentials	0	6	4	10
Code glosses	3	2	12	17
<b>Sum of interactive resources</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Interactional resources</b>				
Hedges	4	2	4	10
Boosters	4	4	2	10
Attitude markers	8	2	5	15
Engagement mrkrs	2	10	9	21
Self mentions	1	0	1	2
<b>Sum of interactional sources</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>58</b>

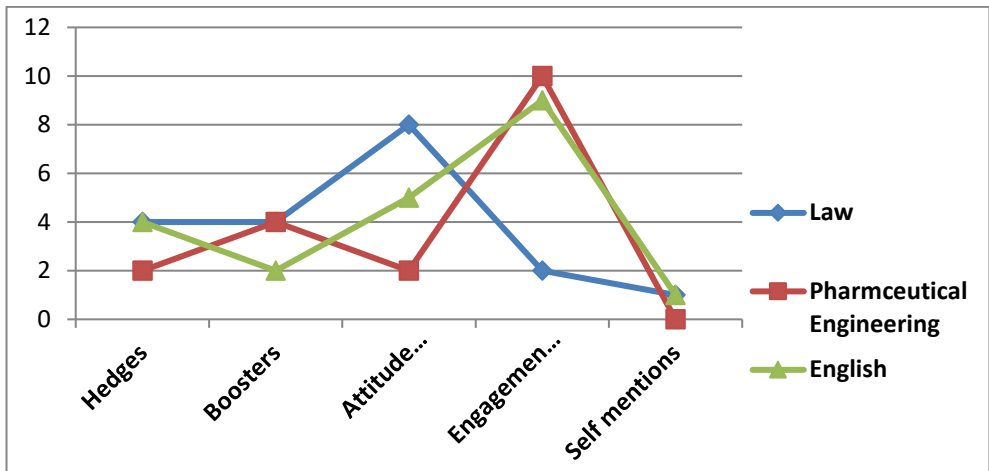
First, at the level of the main categories, the results of Table 1 indicate that the use of interactive markers exceeds the use of the interactional resources across the three disciplines. In addition, the results indicate a difference in the frequency of the interactive markers and a concordance in the use of interactional resources among the three disciplines.

For a better visualization of the metadiscourse use, the results are presented in the graphs below:

**Fig.1. :** The presentation of the results of the interactive resources.



**Fig.2:** Presentation of the results of the interactional resources



As indicated in the table 1 above, the results showed that there were 139 interactive markers employed in the abstracts of articles in three disciplines; however, only 58 interactional markers were found. The significant difference in the writers' use of the interactive and the interactional resources can be attributed to the two following major reasons: The first reason for the writers' preference of the interactive sources over the interactional sources is explained by their focus on the organizational aspect of the discourse. All the writers in the three disciplines employed the interactive sources to organize their discourse as a means to address their readers. The second major reason stems from the nature of the discourse. This study relies on is the abstracts of articles as a discourse to be analyzed. The abstracts are a short report of the content that summarizes the main parts of the research paper and obeys to a specific organization. This characteristic results in the writers not including specific details or expressing his attitudes. Accordingly, the writers use less interactional devices in this section of the research paper.

The results in Table 1 also show that writers of English Language Studies employ more interactive resources compared to writers of Law and Pharmaceutical Engineering studies. The results in the table indicate that 58 interactive metadiscourse markers are used in abstracts of articles in the English Language Studies discipline while 44 are found in Pharmaceutical Engineering studies and 40 in Law. These findings suggest that interactive metadiscourse markers are highly used in English discipline. It is clear that the high use of the interactive markers in English studies over the other disciplines can be attributed to the language instruction. Writers in the field of English Studies use English language more frequently in their writing since they have been instructed in English, as a result, they show more command on the language and are more knowledgeable of the use of these devices. In contrast, writers in the other disciplines received less instruction in English as they mainly use either Arabic or French language in their studies resulting

in a less frequent use of these devices. Another reason for the disparity in the use of the metadiscourse markers emanates from the nature of the disciplines. Writers in natural Sciences tend to use less metadiscourse markers because their discipline requires more scientific evidence rather than showing the logical connection between ideas as it will be explained later.

The second main conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is the frequency of use of the sub-categories of interactive resources. As mentioned earlier, the use of the interactive resources is to guide the reader through the text and includes all of the following categories: Transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses. However, the frequency of use of the sub-categories of the interactive resources among the disciplines differs in their categories.

First, transition signals are the most frequently employed devices used by the writers in all the disciplines. Transitions, also referred to logical markers, are used to express semantic relation between main clauses (Hyland, 2005). The table shows that 75, 35 % of the interactive sources are transition signals. All the writers display a high use of transition signals in their writing. Hyland and PSE (2004) explained that the use of the transition signals, representing internal connection in discourse, is clearly an important feature of academic arguments.

However, while writers in English and Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies concur in their use the evidential, no use of evidential has been identified in the field of Law. The frame markers are used with the same frequency across all the disciplines with 2 frame markers being used in each.

One noticeable remark can be made about the use of code glosses. English Language Studies scored the highest frequency of code glosses with 12 instances. In contrast, only 3 code glosses have been use in Law and 2 in Pharmaceutical studies' articles' abstracts. According to Ismail, code glosses, "are markers that explain, rephrase, expand or exemplify propositional content. Overall, they reflect the writer's expectations about the audience's knowledge or ability to follow the argument (that is, in other words, for instance)" (2012, p. 1263). Again, writers English language Studies exceed those in the other disciplines in the use of code glosses. Once more, the reason appears to be the specific focus of this discipline on the language as opposed to the domain of Law and Pharmaceutical Engineering Studies which prioritize the content over the language. In addition, in academic English, writers use often illustrations to support their ideas and appear more objective. This explains the overuse of the code glosses in English Language studies when compared to Law which corroborates by showing logical connection between ideas, and to Pharmaceutical Engineering which relies on statistics and experiments to substantiate.

In fact, the results of the study concurs with the findings of a study conducted on Metadiscourse analysis of Pakistani English Newspaper Editorials. In this study, the researchers analyzed 1000 editorials from a renowned Pakistani Newspapers. The findings revealed that all the corpora

used more interactive than interactional markers and there are variations in the use of metadiscourse markers among those newspapers. The researchers concluded that some newspapers used more interactive resources than other newspapers which make them more reader-friendly according to them. (Siddique A., Mahmood M. and Javed 2018 p.146)

The second question in the study seeks to explain how does the use metadiscourse marker used by the Algerian researchers differ across disciplines.

The answer to this question is clearly displayed in the table 1. The results of the analysis show clearly that writers in the three disciplines use transitions more frequently than the other markers. As mentioned earlier 75, 35 % of the interactive sources used by the writers in the three disciplines are the transition signals. In addition, the frequency of the transitions use is nearly similar in the three disciplines. Thus, transitions are important devices that writers use to organize their abstracts.

In fact, these results align with the findings of the research undertaken by Hyland and PSE (2004). In a study based on the analysis of 240 L2 postgraduate students' dissertations, Hyland and PES found out that L2 writers use the transitions extensively. The research of the study revealed that transitions represent more than the fifth of all the devices.

A similar study was undertaken by the Indonesian researcher Nugroho (2019) at the University of Banda Mulya in Indonesia regarding the use of metadiscourse in theses abstracts written by Indonesian EFL learners and American students both native and nonnative English speakers . In his article entitled Exploring Metadiscourse Use in Thesis Abstracts: A cross- Cultural study, the researcher investigated the use of metadiscourse across cultures and compared the Indonesian students' use of metadiscourse in their theses abstract to the Native Americans. The results of the study showed that the transitions are the most frequently used devices in both native and nonnative speakers' theses abstracts. These findings confirm our earlier explanation regarding the use of these metadiscourse in the written text and which supports the idea that metadiscourse use is highly affected by the type of the text analyzed.

However, further conclusions can be drawn from this study. It is worth mentioning that the use of the transitions differs among the researchers in the different disciplines. According to Hyland and TSE (2004), "transitions comprise the rich set of internal devices used to mark additive, contrastive and consequential steps in a discourse as opposed to the external world." (p.168). In other words they express the semantic relationships between ideas helping the reader understand the logic of the writers' ideas. As explained previously, there are four types of transitions: namely: additives (and, in addition, furthermore...), adversative (but, however...etc.), Causatives (because, for...etc.) and conclusive (finally, in sum.. Etc). Upon analyzing

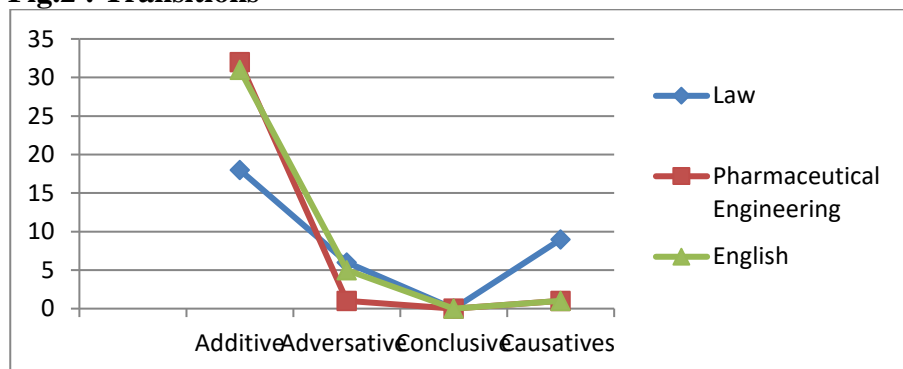
the different abstracts' articles, table 2 revealed an inconsistency in the use of the transitions both within the same disciplines and across the disciplines.

**Table 2: Transitions**

	Law	Pharmaceutical Engineering	English	Sum of the resources
<b>Transition</b>	33	34	38	<b>105</b>
<b>Additive</b>	18	32	31	<b>81</b>
<b>Adversative</b>	6	1	5	<b>12</b>
<b>Conclusive</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Causatives</b>	9	1	2	<b>12</b>

For a better visualization of the use of the transitions in the three disciplines, the results are presented in the graphs below:

**Fig.2 : Transitions**



The first noticeable result to be drawn from table 2 is the writers' overuse of the additives in the three disciplines. 77.14 % of the transitions are additives. However, the frequency of their use differs among the disciplines. The highest use of the additives is in English Language Studies and Pharmaceutical engineering disciplines while Law discipline records the least use of the additives. In fact, additives are used to express the writers' continuation (Schiffrin, 1987 cited in Ismail 2012). However, the results are reversed in the use of causatives where Law recorded the highest use of causatives compared to English Language Studies and Pharmaceutical engineering disciplines. In fact, the use of causatives is to show the cause between the events (Ismail 2012). Thus, the high use of causative in the discipline of Law stems from the fact that the researchers establish causation between events as evidence

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Writing in Academic English is essential for academic development and requires knowledge of the features of academic writing. One major feature that contributes to successful writing is producing a discourse that functions communicatively; a discourse that engages the reader and show one's position and attitude towards the content.

In fact, knowledge of the appropriate use of metadiscourse markers helps build an interactive relationship between the writer and the reader ultimately achieving the communicative function of the discourse. Thus, being aware of the use of metadiscourse markers makes the writer's position clearer and the discourse more understandable to the reader who is absent during the writing process. Metadiscourse serves as essential devices that facilitate interaction between the writer and the reader and help prevent any misinterpretation that may arise from the reader absence during the writing activity. The reader is guided to the writer intentions through the use of both interactive and interactional resources. Accordingly, raising awareness about the importance of these metadiscourse markers helps the writers in effectively communicating with their readers.

Developing proficiency in the English language is crucial for a better understanding and effective use of metadiscourse. For that reason, Algerian researchers should be equipped with knowledge of when and how to use metadiscourse markers to enhance communication and interaction with the reader. Such proficiency can be achieved through training in English language skill, especially in academic writing.

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