

Use of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Pakistani Newspaper Editorials: A Corpus-Based Study

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ABSTRACT: *Interactional metadiscourse refers to linguistic features that help writers maintain coherence and actively engage readers within a text. This study investigates the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in Pakistani newspaper editorials using Hyland's (2005) framework. A corpus of 1,000 editorials, comprising approximately 473,382 words, was compiled from four major English-language publications, The Dawn, The Frontier, The News, and The Express Tribune, covering the period from January 2020 to December 2022. From this corpus, 250 editorials drawn from The Dawn and The Frontier were selected for detailed analysis, as these two newspapers represent contrasting editorial identities at national and regional levels. AntConc software was used for quantitative frequency analysis, supplemented by manual qualitative examination. Log-likelihood tests confirmed statistically significant variation across the five interactional marker categories: hedges, boosters, engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions. Results indicate that hedges are the most frequently used interactional feature overall, with The Frontier displaying notably higher hedge density than The Dawn. Boosters are more frequent in The Dawn, while engagement markers and self-mentions are more prominent in The Frontier. These findings highlight distinct rhetorical strategies across publications and suggest implications for research on metadiscursive practices in South Asian journalistic writing.*

KEYWORDS: Corpus-Based Study, Hyland's Model, Interactional Markers, Journalistic Discourse, Metadiscourse, Pakistani English.

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1. Introduction

This study investigates how interactional metadiscourse markers are deployed in Pakistani English newspaper editorials. As a genre that both reflects and shapes public discourse, newspaper editorials offer a productive site for examining how writers negotiate stance, credibility, and reader engagement. By analyzing the five interactional marker categories identified in Hyland's (2005) framework (hedges, boosters, engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions) this study seeks to characterize the rhetorical strategies distinctive to Pakistani journalistic writing and to identify variation across publications.

A growing body of corpus-based research has examined metadiscourse in various genres and cultural contexts, including academic writing, political speeches, and journalistic texts. However, Pakistani newspaper editorials remain an underexplored domain, particularly in terms of interactional (as opposed to interactive) features. This study addresses that gap by analyzing a large-scale corpus of editorials drawn from two major Pakistani English-language newspapers that represent meaningfully contrasting editorial positions in terms of national versus regional focus and audience profile.

The study employs a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. AntConc software was used to compute normalized frequencies, and log-likelihood tests were applied to assess whether observed differences between the two newspapers reached statistical significance. Qualitative analysis of representative examples complements the quantitative findings by illuminating the communicative functions of each marker type within their editorial context.

Earlier related work includes Batool, Majeed, and Zahra (2019), who examined hedges and boosters in Pakistani opinion articles, and Siddique, Mahmood, Akhter, and Arslan (2018), who investigated hedges as metadiscourse in Pakistani English newspaper editorials. Siddique, Mahmood, and Qasim (2020) explored attitude markers in the same domain. These studies confirm that metadiscourse research in Pakistani journalistic genres is gaining momentum, though most focus on individual marker types. The present study extends this line of inquiry by examining all five interactional marker categories simultaneously across two editorially distinct newspapers, offering a more holistic picture of the rhetorical landscape of Pakistani English editorial writing.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on metadiscourse and its applications in journalistic and corpus-based research. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including corpus design and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents and discusses quantitative and qualitative findings. Section 5 concludes with a summary of key insights, pedagogical implications, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Interactional metadiscourse markers are self-reflective linguistic expressions that enhance the writer's authority and relational positioning in interaction (Hyland, 2004). Hyland (2005a, p. 37) defines metadiscourse as *"the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community."* As Swales (1990) and Nash (1992) observe, metadiscourse is an umbrella concept that is broadly accepted but resists precise definition. Williams (1981, p. 212) describes it simply as "writing about writing." The operational definition used in the present study treats interactional metadiscourse as the category of language through which writers guide, evaluate, and position readers within a text.

Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model distinguishes five interactional marker types: hedges (which express epistemic caution), boosters (which signal confidence and certainty), engagement markers (which directly address or acknowledge the reader), attitude markers (which convey affective stance), and self-mentions (which signal author presence). This taxonomy has proven productive across diverse genres and disciplines, and it forms the analytical framework of the present study.

Within the Pakistani academic and journalistic context, several corpus-based studies have applied Hyland's framework. Batool, Majeed, and Zahra (2019) analyzed hedges and boosters in a corpus of 50 Pakistani newspaper editorials (47,927 words) drawn from five publications, including *The Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology, they found that modal verbs constituted the most frequent hedging and boosting devices, confirming that metadiscourse is a prominent feature of Pakistani journalistic writing.

Siddique, Mahmood, Akhter, and Arslan (2018) examined hedges as metadiscourse in Pakistani English newspaper editorials using a corpus of 250 editorials from each of four newspapers, *Dawn News*, *The News*, *The Express Tribune*, and *The Frontier*. Their analysis using AntConc and Hyland's (2005) model revealed that frequent hedge markers were concentrated in *The Frontier* corpus, a finding consistent with the present study. The authors proposed a revised coding scheme for hedges but acknowledged gaps in tools description and generalizability.

Siddique, Mahmood, Azher, and Qasim (2018) investigated boosters as metadiscourse in the same corpus design, finding that *The Frontier* used boosting devices more frequently than the other newspapers, implying greater persuasive force. Siddique, Mahmood, and Qasim (2020) extended this line of inquiry to attitude markers, applying a corpus-based methodology to the same genre. Together, these studies provide a multi-feature picture of interactional metadiscourse in Pakistani newspaper editorials, though no single study has examined all five categories simultaneously in a single comparative analysis. This study addresses that gap.

Aziz, Kamran, and Ali (2022) studied hedges and boosters in the speeches of Benazir Bhutto using AntConc and Hyland's (2005) model. Their quantitative analysis revealed that hedges appeared more frequently than boosters overall, though boosters were also well represented, reflecting the dual rhetorical demands of political oratory. Yasmin, Mahmood, Jabeen, and Siddique (2020) investigated hedging in Pakistani research dissertations across the sciences and social sciences, finding that social science authors relied more heavily on hedges, a pattern attributable to the greater epistemic uncertainty inherent in the social sciences.

Beyond Pakistan, Hu and Liu (2022) examined interactional metadiscourse in dissertation abstracts from China, finding that engagement markers were the most frequently used devices in both materials sciences and applied sciences corpora, and that applied sciences students used more interactional features overall. Sanverdi (2021) compared boosters in Turkish native and non-native English academic articles, finding that non-native writers overused modal verbs relative to native counterparts. Taymaz (2021) studied hedges and boosters in Turkish MA theses and PhD dissertations, finding that PhD students used more boosters and MA students relied more heavily on hedging devices. Huang, Wang, and Tang (2020) analyzed interactional metadiscourse in Chinese English travel blogs, finding that reader pronouns (254 tokens) and boosters (171 tokens) were the most frequent subcategories. Jin (2015) found that Korean English writers underused engagement devices relative to expert norms, highlighting cross-cultural variation in interactional strategies.

Collectively, this body of research demonstrates that Hyland's (2005) model provides a robust and flexible framework for cross-genre and cross-cultural analysis. The present study builds on this foundation by applying a systematic, large-scale corpus analysis to Pakistani newspaper editorials, incorporating statistical significance testing and contextual interpretation of rhetorical variation.

3. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** To what extent are interactional metadiscourse features used in Pakistani English newspaper editorials?
- **RQ2:** Which interactional marker types (hedges, boosters, engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions) occur most frequently, and do frequency differences between The Dawn and The Frontier reach statistical significance?
- **RQ3:** What communicative and rhetorical functions do interactional markers fulfill in Pakistani newspaper editorials, and how do these functions reflect the editorial identity and audience profile of each publication?

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

Data were collected from the online archives of four major Pakistani English-language newspapers: The Dawn, The Frontier, The News, and The Express Tribune. A total of 1,000 editorials were compiled, with 250 editorials drawn from each newspaper. The editorials were collected covering the period from **January 2020 to December 2022**, ensuring temporal consistency and comparability across publications. This time frame was selected to capture a period of significant political and socioeconomic discourse in Pakistan, providing a rich and contextually grounded dataset. Electronic editions of the newspapers were accessed through their official online platforms. The raw text data were processed using OCR software, Adconverter, and Advanced Renamer to prepare the materials for corpus analysis.

The total corpus comprises 1,000 editorials with a combined token count of 473,382 words. Table 1 presents the composition of the corpus by newspaper.

Table 1. Corpus Composition by Newspaper

Newspaper	Editorials (n)	Token Words	Type Words
The Dawn	250	103,596	10,053
The Express Tribune	250	93,048	9,737
The Frontier	250	172,878	14,812
The News	250	103,596	9,633
Total	1,000	473,382	44,235

The detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis was restricted to **The Dawn and The Frontier** for two methodologically grounded reasons. First, these newspapers represent contrasting editorial identities: The Dawn is Pakistan's oldest and most widely circulated English-language national newspaper, with a historically secular, liberal editorial stance and a readership concentrated among urban professionals and policy communities. The Frontier, by contrast, is a regionally focused publication serving audiences in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and surrounding areas, with an editorial voice that reflects the distinct sociocultural and political concerns of that region. This contrast creates an analytically productive basis for examining rhetorical variation in interactional metadiscourse. Second, a comprehensive detailed analysis of all four newspapers would have exceeded the feasible scope of the present study; The News and The Express Tribune are therefore retained as part of the broader background corpus and inform the overall frequency benchmarking.

4.2 Data Analysis

The analytical procedure was carried out in the following stages. In the first stage, the corpus was loaded into AntConc software (Anthony, 2019), which was used to generate frequency lists and concordance lines for each interactional marker category based on the lexical lists derived from Hyland's (2005) taxonomy (see Section 4.3). Raw frequency counts were recorded for each marker type across The Dawn and The Frontier sub-corpora. To enable meaningful comparison across corpora of different sizes, frequencies were normalized per 10,000 words using the formula: (raw frequency ÷ corpus size in tokens) × 10,000.

In the second stage, log-likelihood (LL) tests were applied to raw frequency counts to determine whether observed differences between The Dawn and The Frontier were statistically significant (Rayson & Garside, 2000). Log-likelihood is the preferred significance measure in corpus linguistics as it is more reliable than chi-square for frequency data with unequal corpus sizes. Significance thresholds were set at $LL > 3.84$ ($p < 0.05$), $LL > 10.83$ ($p < 0.01$), and $LL > 15.13$ ($p < 0.001$).

In the third stage, a manual qualitative review of concordance lines was conducted to identify the communicative functions of each marker type within their editorial context. This stage was necessary because corpus tools identify potential marker tokens but cannot distinguish metadiscursive from propositional uses of the same lexical items (e.g., modal verbs used in reported speech rather than as hedging devices). Each token flagged by AntConc was reviewed in its sentential context before being confirmed or excluded as an interactional marker.

Inter-Coder Reliability: To ensure the reliability of the manual coding, the annotation of interactional metadiscourse markers was conducted independently by two trained coders following a structured coding protocol based on Hyland's (2005) taxonomy. Each coder was provided with a detailed codebook containing definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and annotated examples for each of the five marker categories. An initial coding round was completed on a randomly selected 10% subset of the corpus (approximately 100 editorials). Inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa = 0.87$), indicating near-perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). The small number of disagreements were resolved through discussion between the two coders before proceeding to full corpus annotation.

4.3 Metadiscourse Marker Taxonomy

The lexical items used to identify each interactional marker category were primarily derived from Hyland's (2005) model. Where concordance review revealed additional items functioning metadiscursively in the editorial genre, particularly hedging modals and engagement directives not explicitly listed in Hyland's original taxonomy, these were included following contextual verification. The expanded lists therefore represent an operationalization of Hyland's framework as applied to the specific genre of Pakistani English newspaper editorials, rather than a wholesale departure from his taxonomy.

Engagement Markers

One-word expressions: about, allow, add, apply, analyse, assess, arrange, assume, choose, calculate, classify, connect, compare, consult, contrast, consider, define, determine, demonstrate, develop, employ, estimate, ensure, evaluate, follow, find, go, incidentally, imagine, increase, input, insert, integrate, key, let, mark, mount, measure, note, must, observe, notice, order, picture, pay, recall, recover, prepare, regard, refer, remove, remember, see, review, set, select, show, should, suppose, state, think, use, us, we, your, you

Two-word expressions: the reader's, do not, have to, look at, need to, think about, turn us, think of

Three-word expressions: by the way, take as example, take a look

Boosters

One-word expressions: always, actually, believe, apparent, beyond doubt, certain, certainly, clear, certainty, conclusively, clearly, definite, decidedly, demonstrate, definitely, determined, doubtless, establish, essential, evident, established, find, evidently, found, incontestably, incontrovertibly, indeed, indisputably, know, must, never, obvious, obviously, proved, proved, realized, should, shown, sure, surely, truly, undeniably, undoubtedly

Two-word expressions: by far, certain that, even if, I believe, in fact, no doubt, of course, without doubt, well known

Three-word expressions: it is clear, the fact that

Four-word expressions: it is known that

Attitude Markers

One-word expressions: amazingly, admittedly, appropriately, agrees, agree, amazing, appropriate, amazed, astonishing, astonished, correctly, curiously, disappointing, curious, disagree, desirably, desirable, disappointed, disappointingly, disagrees, dramatically, dramatic, essential, essentially, expected, fortunately, fortunate, hopefully, important, hopeful, importantly, interestingly, pleased, preferably, preferred, remarkable, remarkably, surprisingly, shocked, shocking, striking, surprised, surprising, unfortunate, unfortunately, unusually, understandably, unbelievably, unexpectedly

Two-word expressions: have to, even x

Self-Mention Markers

I, me, mine, my, we, our, us

Hedges

One-word expressions: perhaps, admittedly, might, possibly, likely, probably, predominantly, presumably, think, sometimes, often, around, roughly, fairly, usually, can, could, may, might, should, will, would, appear, argue, assert, assume, attempt, believe, claim, conclude, consider, doubt, estimate, expect, feel, hypothesize, imply, indicate, interpret, maintain, note, offer, observe, perceive, presume, propose, prove, report, seem, suggest, suppose, suspect

Three-word expressions: to some extent, so to speak

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents quantitative findings from the corpus analysis and qualitative discussion of the rhetorical functions of each interactional marker type. Frequencies are normalized per 10,000 words to enable comparison between The Dawn (103,596 words) and The Frontier (172,878 words) sub-corpora.

5.1 Quantitative Findings

Table 2 presents raw frequency counts, normalized frequencies per 10,000 words, and log-likelihood values for each interactional marker category across both newspapers.

Table 2. Frequency and Statistical Significance of Interactional Markers in The Dawn and The Frontier

Marker Type	The Dawn Raw (f)	The Dawn (per 10K)	The Frontier Raw (f)	The Frontier (per 10K)	LL Value	Significance
Hedges	468	45.2	1,069	61.8	33.1	p<0.001***
Boosters	339	32.7	491	28.4	4.0	p<0.05*
Engagement Markers	208	20.1	612	35.4	54.4	p<0.001***
Attitude Markers	147	14.2	339	19.6	11.0	p<0.001***
Self-Mentions	121	11.7	430	24.9	60.9	p<0.001***
Total	1,283	123.8	2,941	170.1	—	—

*Note: LL = log-likelihood. Significance thresholds: * p<0.05 (LL>3.84); *** p<0.001 (LL>15.13). Raw frequencies are derived from AntConc corpus analysis. Normalized values = (raw frequency ÷ corpus size) × 10,000.*

The results demonstrate that hedges are the most frequently used interactional devices in both corpora, appearing significantly more often in The Frontier (61.8 per 10K) than in The Dawn (45.2 per 10K; LL = 33.1, $p < 0.001$). Boosters represent the second most frequent category in The Dawn (32.7 per 10K) and appear significantly more often there than in The Frontier (28.4 per 10K; LL = 4.0, $p < 0.05$). Engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions are all significantly more frequent in The Frontier, with self-mentions showing the largest relative gap (24.9 vs. 11.7 per 10K; LL = 60.9, $p < 0.001$).

Taken together, The Frontier exhibits a higher overall density of interactional metadiscourse (170.1 per 10K combined) compared to The Dawn (123.8 per 10K), suggesting a more relationally engaged and interpersonally intensive editorial voice. The Dawn's relatively higher booster frequency, by contrast, points toward a more assertive, authoritative rhetorical mode.

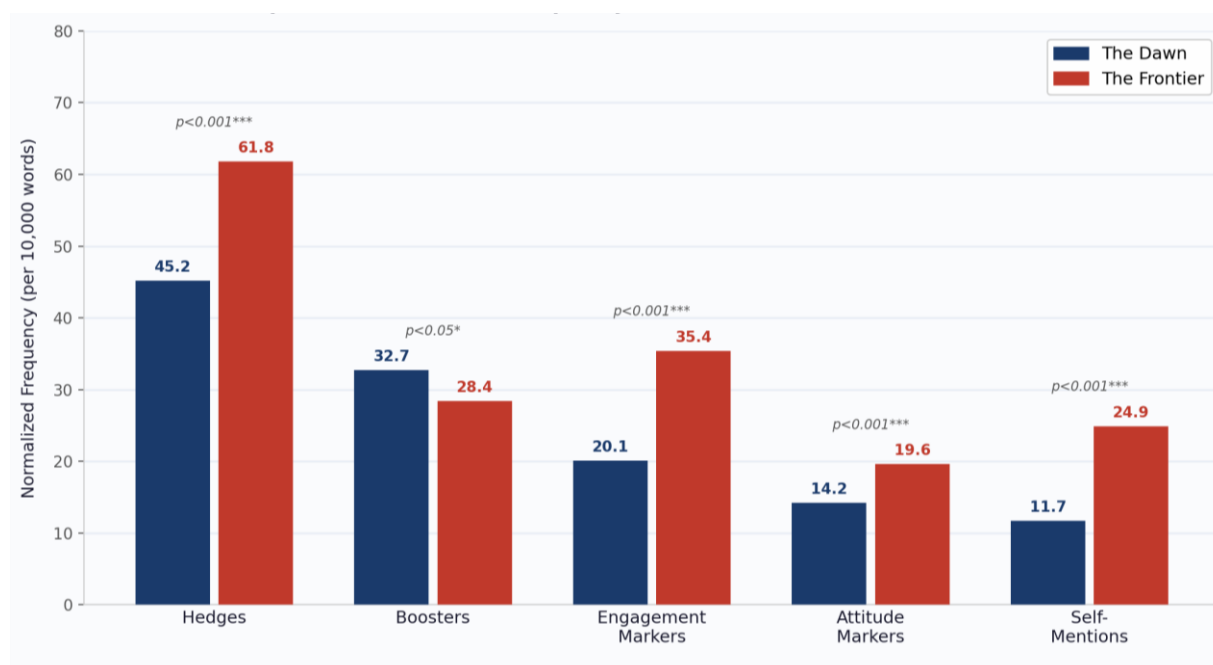


Figure 1. Comparative normalized frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers in The Dawn and The Frontier (per 10,000 words). *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$ (log-likelihood test).

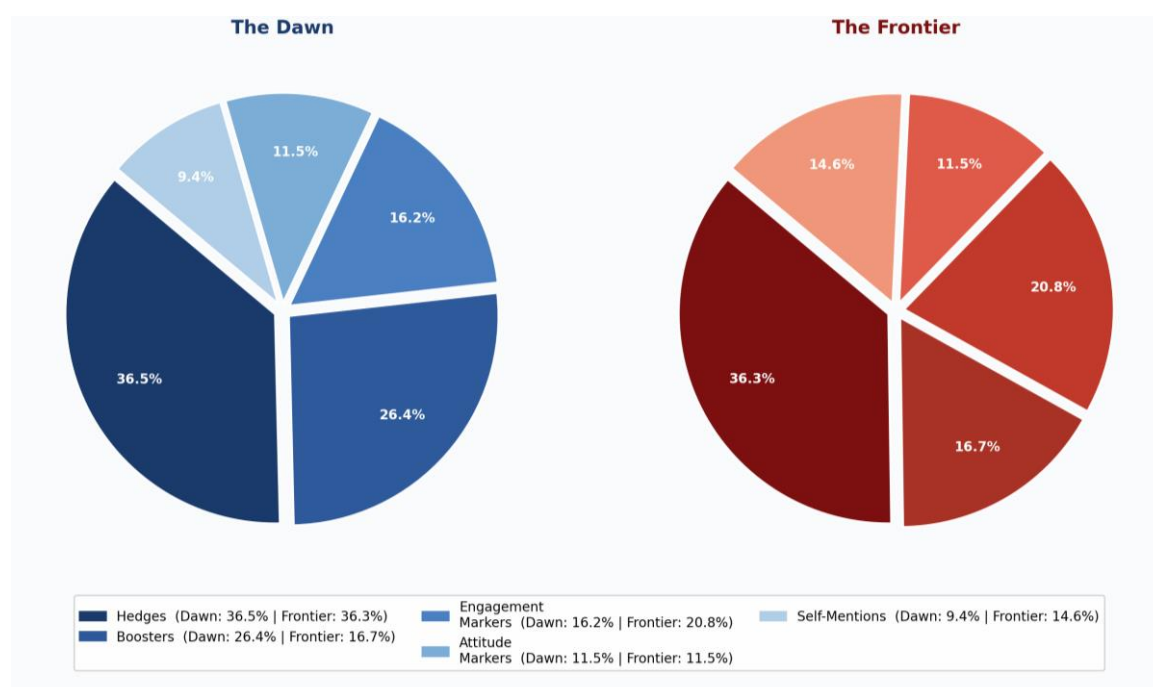


Figure 2. Proportional distribution of interactional metadiscourse categories within *The Dawn* and *The Frontier* (percentage of total interactional markers per corpus).

5.2 Qualitative Analysis and Functional Discussion

5.2.1 Engagement Markers

Engagement markers create interactional space between writer and reader through inclusive pronouns and reader directives. In *The Frontier*, first-person plural forms, *we* ($f = 438$) and *us* ($f = 411$), dominate, positioning the writer as a participant in a shared civic community:

“We must rethink our approach to governance if progress is to be sustained.” (The Frontier, editorial on administrative reform, March 2021)

This inclusive strategy invites reader solidarity and reflects an editorial tradition of speaking on behalf of a regional community. The *Frontier*'s significantly higher engagement marker frequency (35.4 vs. 20.1 per 10K; $LL = 54.4$, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with its role as a regional publication oriented toward collective civic engagement. The *Dawn*, by contrast, employs more institutional engagement expressions such as *state* ($f = 257$), which convey authority and distance rather than solidarity — a rhetorical posture appropriate to a publication addressing national policy elites.

5.2.2 Boosters

Boosters signal certainty, confidence, and evaluative commitment. Modal verbs (*should*, *must*) and adverbs (*clearly*, *certainly*) are the most frequent boosting devices in both corpora. The *Dawn*'s significantly higher booster frequency (32.7 vs. 28.4 per 10K; $LL = 4.0$, $p < 0.05$) reflects its characteristic assertive editorial stance:

“The civil-military dynamic has clearly affected the trajectory of the Pak-US relationship.” (The Dawn, editorial on foreign policy, November 2021)

The Dawn's heavier use of boosters is consistent with its institutional position as Pakistan's newspaper of record, which carries expectations of confidence and analytical authority. This finding also aligns with the editorial policy of The Dawn, which has historically engaged directly and critically with national security, governance, and constitutional issues — domains that call for a strong, declarative rhetorical register.

5.2.3 Hedges

Hedges express epistemic caution, indirectness, and politeness. The Frontier's significantly higher hedge frequency (61.8 vs. 45.2 per 10K; LL = 33.1, $p < 0.001$) reflects a pattern of carefully mitigated editorial commentary:

“There could be little disagreement with the minister when he emphasized the need for reform.” (The Frontier, editorial on regional governance, July 2020)

This high degree of hedging in The Frontier is interpretable in its socio-political context. As a publication operating within a region characterized by complex security conditions, tribal governance structures, and sensitivity around civil-military relations, The Frontier's editorial writers appear to navigate political critique through linguistic moderation, hedging strong claims to avoid direct confrontation while still registering evaluative positions. This finding aligns with Siddique et al. (2018), who also found elevated hedge frequencies in The Frontier corpus.

5.2.4 Attitude Markers

Attitude markers express personal evaluation and affective stance, guiding readers' emotional interpretations of events. Words such as even, important, remarkably, and unfortunately appear across both corpora, though The Frontier uses a wider variety at higher frequency (19.6 vs. 14.2 per 10K; LL = 11.0, $p < 0.001$):

“More remarkably, in attendance were avowed anti-democrats.” (The Dawn, editorial on political gatherings, October 2020)

The Frontier's higher attitude marker frequency reflects a more emotionally engaged commentary style, consistent with its role in advocating for regional interests and addressing issues that have direct, tangible effects on its readership. The Dawn, while also employing attitude markers, does so more sparingly, preferring analytical detachment over affective engagement as a mode of establishing credibility.

5.2.5 Self-Mention Markers

Self-mentions (I, we, our) reveal author presence and signal active authorial intervention in argumentation. Their markedly higher frequency in The Frontier (24.9 vs. 11.7 per 10K; LL = 60.9, $p < 0.001$) reflects a more dialogic, first-person editorial style:

“I explain below why economic decline continues.” (The Frontier, editorial on regional economy, April 2021)

This self-referential voice positions the editorial writer as an accountable, named commentator rather than an anonymous institutional voice. The Dawn's lower self-mention rate is consistent with the conventions of prestige national newspapers, where the editorial voice is typically constructed as collective and institutional.

5.3 Summary and Contextual Interpretation

Across all five categories, The Frontier displays a higher overall density of interactional metadiscourse than The Dawn. This pattern reflects two interrelated factors: the sociopolitical positioning of the newspapers and their respective audience profiles. The Frontier serves a regional readership with strong community bonds and high sensitivity to local governance issues; its editorial writers draw on hedges and engagement markers to build solidarity and navigate political risk. The Dawn, as Pakistan's preeminent national English-language newspaper, constructs its editorial voice through assertive boosters and measured attitude markers. This rhetorical mode suits to an audience of policy professionals and national-level readers who expect analytical authority.

These findings extend and confirm the conclusions of Siddique et al. (2018) and Batool et al. (2019), establishing that hedging is a dominant feature of Pakistani journalistic discourse broadly, while also demonstrating that statistically significant variation exists between publications in ways that are interpretable through their editorial identity and audience profile.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in Pakistani English newspaper editorials through a combined quantitative and qualitative corpus-based methodology. Drawing on Hyland's (2005) framework and a corpus of 1,000 editorials (473,382 words) from four major publications, with detailed analysis of The Dawn and The Frontier, the study has established several key findings.

Hedges are the most frequently used interactional markers in both newspapers, appearing significantly more often in The Frontier than in The Dawn. Engagement markers and self-mentions are also significantly higher in The Frontier, while boosters are modestly but significantly more frequent in The Dawn. Log-likelihood testing confirmed that all five category differences between the two newspapers are statistically significant. These patterns are interpretable through the contrasting editorial identities of the two newspapers: The Frontier's regional, community-oriented editorial voice employs hedges, engagement markers, and self-mentions to build solidarity and navigate political sensitivity, while The Dawn's national, institutional editorial voice relies more heavily on boosters to signal analytical authority and confidence.

These findings contribute to the growing literature on metadiscourse in South Asian journalistic writing and demonstrate that interactional markers are not distributed uniformly across publication. In fact, their use is shaped by audience, editorial policy, and socio-political context. The study's pedagogical implications are also meaningful: the systematic variation in metadiscourse strategies across these two publications offers valuable material for teaching academic and professional writing in applied linguistics classrooms, helping learners understand how language choice constructs stance, credibility, and reader engagement in editorial genres.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is restricted to the editorial genre within four English-language Pakistani publications; findings should not be generalized to other genres, languages, or national contexts without further investigation. Second, while The Dawn and The Frontier were selected for detailed analysis on principled

methodological grounds, future studies would benefit from extending the detailed analysis to all four newspapers in the corpus to provide a more comprehensive comparative picture. Third, although inter-coder reliability was satisfactory overall, some ambiguity remains in the classification of modal verbs functioning in reported speech contexts rather than as hedging devices; future work could address this through automated disambiguation tools. Finally, the time frame of January 2020 to December 2022 encompasses the COVID-19 pandemic period, which may have introduced topical skews in editorial content that affect metadiscourse use in ways not fully accounted for here. Longitudinal corpus designs that track metadiscourse use across multiple time periods would help disentangle topical from genre-level effects.

8. Implications

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it demonstrates that Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse model is productively applicable to journalistic genres in South Asian English contexts, and that statistically significant rhetorical variation exists across publications in ways that are systematically tied to editorial identity and audience profile. This finding encourages future researchers to treat newspaper editorials not as a homogeneous genre but as a field of rhetorical differentiation.

Practically, the findings are relevant to educators and students in applied linguistics, journalism studies, and academic writing. The study illustrates how hedges, boosters, engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions each contribute distinct rhetorical effects — from epistemic modesty and persuasive authority to reader solidarity and authorial accountability. Raising awareness of these functions can help writing instructors equip students to make deliberate, context-appropriate metadiscourse choices in their own professional and academic writing. Future research could extend this work to compare Pakistani English editorial writing with editorials from other South Asian countries, or to examine how metadiscourse use in the same newspaper shifts across different editorial topics, political periods, or authorial identities.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Author Contributions

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