STUDIES IN METADISCOURSE

亚言语研究

成晓光—【著】

辽宁师范大学出版社

STUDIES IN METADISCOURSE

亚言语研究

成晓光 著

辽宁师范大学出版社

亚言语研究

成晓光 著

出版发行：辽宁师范大学出版社　　社址：大连市黄河路 850 号
电话：(0411)4206854　　邮编：116029
经销：新华书店　　印刷：辽宁师范大学印刷厂
责任编辑：穆　杰　　责任校对：童　娇
开本：850×1168　1/32　　字数：200 千
印张：8.5　　插图：3
版次：1997 年 6 月第 1 版　　印次：1997 年 6 月第 1 次印刷

ISBN 7-81042-223-5/H · 32　　定价：12.00 元

STUDIES IN METADISCOURSE

XIAOGUANG CHENG

LIAONING NORMAL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Preface

I became interested in metadiscourse in late 80's when I was working on my doctoral degree in the United States. I was also teaching Language and Composition in the department then. My students were all native speakers of English. Therefore, the traditional method of teaching grammar and editing in the composition class did not prove very effective with them. It happened that at the time when I was teaching, the paradigm changed from teaching writing as a product to teaching writing as a process under which teachers were supposed to teach strategies for invention and revision and help students generate content and discover their purposes, but when applied to the classroom, this new theory left us composition teachers baffled: if we did not offer our students something tangible and specific, how could we help them produce better papers?

Then I came across the theory of metadiscourse.

The study of metadiscourse started in late 70's and early 80's. It began to take shape as a theory in mid-80's. Up till now only a few devoted scholars are working at it, and they are mainly concerned with establishing theoretical models for it. (What limited applications which have been attempted were directed at how metadiscourse affected the reading process.) A few scholars had explored the correlations between the use of metadiscourse and the quality of writing, but no one had actually tried to teach metadiscourse in the classroom and help students use it in their

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

composing process. After exploring and synthesizing different theories of metadiscourse, I said to myself: why shouldn't I give it a try in my class? I did.

My concern was practical: I wanted to help my students produce better writing and I wanted to see if metadiscourse could be used as a good tool in the composition class. The result of my experiment was affirmative.

Then I thought, what about the Chinese students of English? Could they also benefit from the study of metadiscourse? So I came back to China and did some preliminary experiments on my Chinese students; it seemed that metadiscourse was a significant variable in their achievements, too. There is no doubt that more experiments need to be done and much leaves to be explored because there are a lot of differences between Chinese students and American students, for example, their language proficency, their linguistic backgrounds, their cultures, etc.. Specific questions can be asked such as: Can metadiscourse help improve students' proficiency of English? On what proficiency levels should metadiscourse be taught? Is there metadiscourse in Chinese? If there is, how does it affect the EFL process? How does one culture affect the learning of another culture? After all, metadiscourse is a fruitful area of research, and I am sure that more explorations into it will yield more evidence, positive or negative.

As a theory metadiscourse is informed by many disciplines: linguistics, philosophy, psychology, pragmatics, communication theories, etc.. For us language teachers, the significance of metadiscourse is its pragmatic applications. Metadiscourse will not only help students learn to become better communicators but also

change the composition teachers' traditional ideas and provide them with a brand-new teaching theory and an effective teaching method, thus changing the overall situation in our composition classroom. That after the results of my American experiment were published on the National Reading Conference in 1993 and on the Ninth Annual International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning in 1994 many researchers became interested and even tried to replicate the study was a proof.

I have been working in a team as well as well as alone. My program advisor was Dr. Steffensen. Several of us advisees of hers have been working and publishing on different areas of metadiscourse, and without her brilliant intelligence, profound knowledge, and positive encouragement, alll these efforts and achievements would have been impossible. For example, what the reader will read in this book has been read and revised again and again by her and much of it was literally written by herself. Therefore, I would like to devote this book to Dr. Steffensen, my respectable advisor and dear friend.

I would also like to thank Liaoning Normal University and Liaoning Normal University Press for their support in the publication of this book. LNU provided the funding and my editor, Mr. Mu Jie, gave me a lot of advice and did a lot of work in the editing of this book.

Author

CONTENTS

A Study of Metadiscourse:

Its Theory and Pedagogical Impact …… (1)

Ⅰ. Introduction …… (1)

Ⅱ. Review of Related Literature …… (30)

Ⅲ. Research Procedure …… (66)

Ⅳ. Results and Discussion …… (96)

Ⅴ. Conclusion and Implications …… (181)

Metadiscourse and Text Pragmatics …… (213)

Teaching Metadiscourse in the Chinese EFL Classroom … (240)

References …… (256)

A Study of Metadiscourse: *Its Theory and Pedagogical Impact*

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Discourse and Metadiscourse

We use our language to communicate. In any form of language communication, two levels or planes of discourse are involved: the primary discourse level, which consists of propositions and referential meanings, and the metadiscourse level, which consists of propositional attitudes, textual meanings, and interpersonal meanings (Crismore, 1989).

Let us use an example from Jerome Bruner (1984):

> *First, a tour of the horizon of modern linguistics better to locate our problem. It will be familiar to most of you. Generally speaking*, when one studies language, one's aim is constrained by three kinds of criteria. (p. 969) (Italics mine)

The referential meaning of the propositional message in this quote is "when one studies language, one's aim is constrained by three kinds of criteria." However, the writer wants us to know more than that: by "*generally speaking*," Bruner expresses his attitude towards his propositional content, by "*First, a tour of the horizon of modern linguistics better to locate our problem*," he tries

to organize his text to make it easier for us to understand, and by *"It will be familiar to most of you,"* he is talking to us readers directly in order to establish a writer-reader relationship.

In the paragraph above, I also used metadiscourse. For example, *"however"* is used as a Logical Connective to join the earlier and the following text materials. Even the colon after "the writer wants us to know more than that" is used implicitly as an interpretative marker: it signals a following explanation.

Thus we always use language to communicate on two levels: on the level of primary discourse, we supply information about the subject of our text and expand propositional content, and on the level of metadiscourse, we project ourselves into the text, guiding and directing our readers to organize, interpret, evaluate, and react to our propositional content. Metadiscourse is thus defined by Williams (1981) as "the writing about writing, whatever does not refer to the subject addressed" (p. 212).

Metadiscourse and Spoken/Written Discourse

Metadiscourse can be observed in both speech and writing, the two basic forms of discourse.

The study of any aspect of human language began first of all with speech (Leech, 1974). The study of metadiscourse is no exception. This is true not only because speech came historically and logically before writing but also because writing is the written manifestation of speech, hence a carryover from speech. Sangster (1987) points out that in building a taxonomy for the theory of metadiscourse, we would have to put metadiscourse used in oral language at the top of the hierarchy. This taxonomy would begin

with oral texts and end with written texts. We would first of all find unplanned oral metadiscourse leading to planned oral metadiscourse, and uncircumscribed oral texts with metadiscourse leading to circumscribed oral texts with metadiscourse. We then move down the continuum from oral texts to written texts that have a great deal of both unplanned and planned metadiscourse. In speech metadiscourse is called "metacommunication" by Rossiter, Jr., "gambits" by Keller, and "metatalk" by Schiffrin.

Rossiter (1974), as a speech communication theorist, points out that all messages about communication are metacommunications and that they are present, whether verbally or nonverbally, in all spoken communicative interactions. For example, the tone of voice provides the listener with the information of how to interpret the speaker's underlying message — whether the speaker is joking or talking seriously. In written communication, however, the tone of voice can be replaced by punctuation, a nonverbal cue.

Keller (1979), from a psycholinguistic point of view, points out that "gambits," his term for metadiscourse, have four major functions: speakers use gambits (1) to structure their presentation of topics; (2) to structure their turn-taking during the conversation; (3) to indicate their state of awareness with respect to information, opinion, emotion, or action; and (4) to check whether the communication channel between the speaker and the listener is open. Keller believes that we can identify these signals used by speakers as part of their conversation strategies.

Schiffrin (1980), a sociolinguist, calls metadiscourse in conversations "metatalk." She finds that many speakers talk about the ongoing talk. For example, "Well," "That's what I mean,"

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

"I'm telling you," are all metalinguistic expressions used by the speakers to organize and evaluate the conversation. Schiffrin classifies metatalk into two broad categories, organizational and evaluative: "Metatalk functions in a referential, informational plane when it serves as an organizational bracket, and on an expressive, symbolic plane when it serves as an evaluative bracket"(p. 231).

Many scholars have studied metadiscourse in writing. Meyer, as early as in 1975, defined signaling, a concept synonymous with certain types of metadiscourse. According to her, signaling is a non-content aspect of writing, which does not add new topical content but simply accents information already contained in the content structure. She also points out that signaling is used by the writer to show his/her perspective on the content written about in the primary discourse. Meyer identified four major types of signaling and gave examples: (1) Specification of structure of relations in the content structure (*e. g. Two problems exist. One is the problem of money, and the other is the problem of motivation*); (2) Prospectively revealed information abstracted from the content occurring later in the text (*e. g. These three types of schools are urban, suburban, and rural*); (3) Summary statements (*e. g. In short, a wonderful vacation is available for those with time, money, and the proper equipment*); and (4) Pointer word (*e. g. This is an important point*).

Lautamatti (1978a; 1978b) studies topical development in simplified texts and found that written discourse has two levels of what she calls topical material and non-topical material. Non-topical material, her term for metadiscourse, forms a framewok for the topical material because it tells the reader how to relate the content

matter of the discourse to a larger framework of knowledge and how to understand the internal organization of the discourse. Lautamatti notes that non-topical material is very important in the study of discourse as a whole though it is irrelevant to the study of discourse topical development. She distinguishes five kinds of metadiscourse in writing: Discourse Connectives, Illocution Markers, Modality Markers, Attitude Markers, and Commentary Markers.

Williams (1981a) was one of the first to use the term "metadiscourse." He discusses metadiscourse as a stylistic variable and claims that it is an important level of structure in a description of a writer's style. According to Williams, writers conduct their discourse on two levels: they mention the content of their primary discourse but embed it in metadiscourse:

> Many writers stay out of their text almost entirely, relying on shorter discourse signals such as those that indicate cause (*e. g. therefore*)... or contrast (*e. g. on the other hand*)... or the continuation of the discourse (*e. g. indeed, next*).
>
> An even less obvious presence is felt in words that comment on the probability of the proposition expressed in a sentence (*e. g. probably, it is obvious...* Other words express an attitude toward an event (*e. g. It is fortunate that*). (p. 196)

Williams suggests that writers use metadiscourse wherever and whenever they are concerned with how readers will take their ideas in their discourse. In argumentative writing, for example, writers use metadiscourse to refer to the state of the argument, to guide the readers' understanding of it, and to inform them about the primary topic.

Dillon (1981) also talks about metadiscourse as a stylistic

variable. Metadiscourse, for him, is "writing about writing," and like Williams, he distinguishes two levels in the writing-reading situation: the first level represents a writer providing information to the reader about the subject of the text and expanding the propositional content, and the second level represents a writer-reader relationship in which a writer is writing and a reader is reading. On this second level, the writer uses metadiscourse to help both him/herself as a writer and the reader to organize, evaluate, and react to the content of the text, and as a result, both the writer and the reader benefit from the use of metadiscourse on this level.

Crismore (1984) did a descriptive study of metadiscourse in school and nonschool texts. Assuming that language functions to transmit referential information as well as to create and sustain expressive meanings, she argues that not only primary discourse but also metadiscourse is used for both referential (informational) and expressive (attitudinal) ends. Metadiscourse functions on the referential plane when it serves to direct readers how to understand the author's purposes and goals and the primary message by referring to its content and structure. Metadiscourse also functions on the expressive plane when it directs readers to understand the author's perspective toward the primary message. She distinguishes three sub-types of informational metadiscourse (Goals, Pre-Plans, and Post-Plans) and four sub-types of attitudinal metadiscourse (Saliency, Emphatics, Hedges, and Evaluations).

Vande Kopple discusses metadiscourse as early as 1980:

> Many discourses have at least two levels. The primary level is made up of the propositional content. But often there is also discourse about the act of discoursing, discourse which does

not add propositional information but which signals the presence of the author. This kind of discourse calls attention to the speech act itself, often marking stages in the development of the primary discourse, displaying the author's position in the primary discourse, or molding the readers' attitude about the primary discourse. This is metadiscourse. (pp. 50-51)

In a later description (1985), Vande Kopple identifies seven kinds of metadiscourse: Text Connectives, Code Glosses, Illocution Markers, Validity Markers, Narrators, Attitude Markers, and Commentary. He further points out that although these kinds of metadiscourse do not expand the propositional information of the text, they do have the potential for affecting the reader's interaction with the text. Basing his three kinds of meaning — ideational, interpersonal, and textual — on Halliday (1973, 1975), Vande Kopple claims that the seven kinds of metadiscourse can convey either interpersonal or textual meanings in that they can either "help us express our personalities and our reactions to the propositional content of our texts and characterize the interaction we should like to have with our readers about that content," or "help us show how we link and relate individual propositions so that they form a cohesive and coherent text" (p. 87).

Linda Flower (1987) provides a rhetorical model for metadiscourse in writing. She identifies three variables of metadiscourse: narrative structure; hedges, emphatics, and evaluatives; and a personal quality. Narrative structure is narrative discussion of a writer thinking through a problem instead of analyzing a problem. Inexperienced writers use it to talk about the history of their mental processes in their writing and thus produce

what Flower called "writer-based" prose. Experienced writers use this structure, however, for rhetorical purposes; they bring themselves into the text to talk with the reader, but the structure is not a dominant one in their writing. Flower points out that the prose of beginning student writers is writer-based because, instead of analyzing a problem for the reader, they rely on the narrative structure to walk through the problem. The second variable — hedges, emphatics, and evaluatives — is for the writer to take positions in the text. And the third personal quality variable is a rhetorical strategy that the writer uses to bring herself into the text as a thinker. All the three variables of metadiscourse, according to Flower, must be additive and cumulative; they work together and no one of them alone is enough for a rhetorical move. In the prose of inexperienced writers, however, the narrative structure is the dominant pattern, and they do not use the rest of variables along with this one. Unlike other theorists, however, Flower does not agree that metadiscourse should be distinctive from discourse. In her opinion, metadiscourse is embedded in what it is doing, so it is not a linguistic but a rhetorical phenomenon. She argues that it will be more productive to analyze metadiscourse rhetorically by asking who the writer is and who the audience is, than analyzing it linguistically.

Despite their different approaches, whether communicative, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, semiotic, stylistic, or rhetorical, and despite their different focuses, whether speech or writing, all these scholars identify the existence of metadiscourse, and all their studies move beyond the sentence level to the discourse level and beyond the grammatical approach to the rhetorical approach. In addition, they

all point out that the properties of metadiscourse implicitly or explicitly signal various dimensions of the communicative situation, such as the speaker/hearer, writer/reader, and the goals of the speaker/writer. However, since metadiscourse features are more prominent in written texts, scholars and composition teachers are more concerned with how metadiscourse is used in written texts and how the study of and research on metadiscourse will shed light on an understanding of text precessing and help improve the text's readability. It is with these purposes that, in recent years, a lot of research has been done in written discourse.

Metadiscourse and Writer/Reader Relationship

All language use, including written language use, is a social, communicative, and interactive act that involves two parties: the writer and the reader. We write to be read, and in order for communication to be successful, the writer and the reader must work together through the medium—the text.

One of the basic issues concerning text characteristics is the position of the reader: how does the reader read? Practically all the literary and composition theories before 1960's were concerned with the question "What does this text mean?" and, therefore, could be subsumed under the Continuum Theory (Bogdan, 1992), which espouses a deterministic relation between the word and the world. According to this theory, all the meaning lies in the text and the reader's task is essentially to submit him/herself to the text in order to discern the meaning there, which is quite independent of either the author or the reader. Mark Schorer (1948) as a Structuralist and Formalist critic, for example, claims that the text reverberates

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com