

# Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in the U.S. House Republican Primary Debate

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims at explaining the types and functions of interactional metadiscourse markers in the U.S. House Republican primary debate. It is a descriptive qualitative method because the data in this study are the form of words. The source of the data in this study is debate transcripts, while the data are the words, phrases, and sentences in the debate which contain the categories of interactional metadiscourse markers. The results of the study show that there are five types of interactional metadiscourse markers. Those are hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. Self-mentions are the most dominant markers used by the candidates which reach a total of 149 data. Meanwhile, the lowest marker is hedges with a total of 62 data. In addition, the writer also found that each marker has its own function. Hedges aim to show that the speaker's statements are more reasonable opinions than facts. Boosters are used to emphasize or clarify a statement. Attitude markers have a function to show the speaker's attitude towards a proposition. Then self-mentions are used to explicitly show the speaker's presence in the discourse. Meanwhile, engagement markers are used to focus the audience attention or involve them in the discourse.

**Keyword:** *Metadiscourse, Priamry Debate, Republican Party*

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## 1. Introduction

Metadiscourse is a general term for words, phrases, or sentences used by speakers to convey their ideas and to engage listeners through their speaking. As explained by Kitjaroenpaiboon & Getkham (2015) that metadiscourse refers to the actions of speakers as they speak or think, or to the actions of understanding and listening by their listeners. Mostly, metadiscourse is used by speakers as a medium in order to communicate and interact with the listeners. Furthermore, metadiscourse can be a bridge for listeners to interpret the text that has been spoken by the speakers (Saputra & Putri, 2021). This bridge is reflected in the form of markers as stated by (Hyland, 2005).

Furthermore, he divided metadiscourse into two categories, one of them is interactional metadiscourse markers. Interactional metadiscourse is the speaker's way of interacting by interrupting and commenting on messages from participants, this makes the focus on this dimension no longer on the content of the text but on the interaction participants. Sanford (2012) argues that interactional metadiscourse markers are described as

evaluative and engaging with the aim of expressing the solidarity of the constructed text with the listeners. Moreover, the aim of the speaker here is to make a clear point of view by involving the listeners and letting them take part through their responses to the ongoing text. From the definitions above, it can be understood that interactional metadiscourse is all about the interaction between the speakers and the listeners.

Within the scope of interaction, humans need language to communicate and build relationships with each other. Good communication depends on how we understand an instruction, how we make requests, ask questions and how we deliver information. In communication, it takes two or more people to interact with each other to channel their ideas. This is in line with the statement expressed by Affifatusholihah & Setyawan (2016) where to achieve good communication requires interaction with other people so that communication goes well and avoids misunderstandings and misinterpretations between speakers and listeners. Many people express their thoughts using language that is poured both in spoken and written form. Both spoken and written language forms have their own structure, function, and benefits.

Written language is a language that is poured in the form of text, magazines, books, journals, newspapers, etc. Sari (2014) while spoken language is a language that is directly pronounced by speakers to listeners. There are some differences between written language and spoken language. In written language the meaning is given directly by the text, in contrast to spoken language where the speaker's meaning is determined by the context. The difference between the two is also expressed by Zhang (2013) that written language usually tends to be used to convey information while spoken language tends to be used to express personal emotions and feelings and to strengthen interpersonal relationships. In addition, written language is widely used for communication that crosses space and time such as Short Message Service (SMS), mail, news or advertisements and many more. While spoken language is mostly used between two or more people who are in the same place. The forms of spoken language that are often encountered are public speaking, oration, speech, and debate.

Debate is an activity to provide arguments carried out as a form of inquiry and advocacy process in order to reach a reasoned assessment of a statement (Freelay & Steinberg, 2013). Debates can be held individually or in groups. Individuals use debate to express and reach decisions that are in their own minds, on the other hand, both individuals and groups usually use it with the aim of bringing other people into their way of thinking. On several occasions, debate has been used as a medium for national and international competitions, but recently most people are more interested in the political debates carried out by members of the government in fighting for seats. Thus, based on this phenomenon, the writer in this study is interested in analyzing debate of the Republican candidates seeking Wyoming's lone seat in The United States House of Representatives on Wyoming PBS and Wyoming Public Media. In this case, the writer considers debate to be an interesting topic to discuss since debate always presents opinions and arguments for each preposition.

Several important aspects need to be considered when delivering an argument such as the theme, purpose, and also the content of the argument itself. Since debate demands critical thinking, debaters need to consider the choice of words used to strengthen the arguments presented (Freelay & Steinberg, 2013). Therefore, this study is conducted to analyze the issues related to the choice of words used by the debaters. The writer focuses on issues related to the types and functions of interactional metadiscourse markers used by the debaters during their argumentation. In addition, since this study focuses on arguments of the debaters where the debaters try to involve the audience in every argument they express, the writer conclude that interactional metadiscourse can be applied in analyzing debates.

Several previous studies have shown that interactional metadiscourse in debate has been investigated. Istiani & Puspita (2020) analyzed the use of interactional metadiscourse in the Bloomberg international debate. Next, Dichoso et al. (2022) investigate the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in computer-mediated British parliamentary debates. After that, Albalat-Mascarell & Carrió-Pastor (2019) analyzed Self-representation in political campaign talk: a functional metadiscourse approach to self-mentions in televised presidential debates. Then, Farghal & Kalakh (2020) conducted a study under the title Engagement in Translation: Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in American Presidential Debates. Next, Sukma (2017) analyzed interpersonal metadiscourse markers as persuasive strategies in Barack Obama's 2012 campaign speeches. Then, Liu & Liu (2020) analyzed A Comparative Study of Interactional Metadiscourse in English Speeches of Chinese and American Stateswomen. The last is Tashi & Suksawas (2018) with the title entitled An Analysis of Interactional Metadiscourse in Public Speaking: A Case Study in English Speeches of the Prime Minister of Bhuta

After reviewing the existing literature, it can be seen that no one has conducted research on the use of interactional metadiscourse markers on the same object as this research. Debate, as the object of this research, is interesting to analyze because it is conducted by the House of Representatives from the Republican Party, which is one of the two major political parties in The United States besides the Democratic Party.

## 2. Literature Review

Interactional metadiscourse is the first classification of metadiscourse markers by Hyland. It is concerned with engaging speakers to make content explicit and engaging listeners by enabling them to react, interpret, and analyze the material. It can be understood that this interactional function helps the speaker in guiding the listener to enter and engage in the text so as to make it more interactional. Nasiri (2012) added that in addition to these functions, the speaker also gives the listener some kind of clues regarding the speaker's commitment to the proposition and helps the listener to understand a text well.

Based on Hyland (2005) interactional metadiscourse consists of five sub-categories; hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. These five sub-categories will be used as a theoretical basis by researcher in analyzing the objects in this study. Therefore, the five sub-categories will be explained in detail in order to add insight into interactional metadiscourse.

Hedges are words, phrases, or sentences that are used to indicate the uncertainty, possibility, tendency, or limitation of a statement being made. In other words, hedges is used to show that what is said or written is not entirely certain or definite. Hedges are concerned with the speaker's decision to recognize alternative voices and viewpoints and so withhold complete commitment to a proposition. It has function to withhold commitment and open dialogue.

Boosters are words, phrases, or sentences that are used to increase or strengthen the meaning of a sentence or clause. The main function of booster is to make the speaker's statement sound more powerful and convincing to the listener. Moreover, booster also used to indicate that the speaker wants to narrow down the complex position rather than expand this. In other word, booster is used to emphasize certainly and close dialogue. The example of this marker; *actually, apparent, always, very, completely, I believe, certainly, clearly, in fact, definitely, undoubtedly, without a doubt, without question* etc.

Attitude markers in the interactional metadiscourse are signs used to indicate the speaker's attitude or evaluation of a topic or statement. Attitude markers can consist of words, phrases or sentences that express the attitude, emotions or beliefs of the speaker towards the topics discussed in his speaking. Besides that, attitude markers are used to suggest the speaker's attitude to proposition. Attitude markers are conveyed through verbs of attitude (*agree, choose*), adverbs of sentences (*hopefully, sadly, surprisingly, unfortunately*), and adjectives (*logical, exceptional, acceptable*).

Self-mentions are the use of words or phrases that refer to the speaker himself in speeches. These markers are used to provide information about the perspective and experience of the speaker, as well as to indicate engagement or interaction with the listeners. Self-mentions can also be used to show changes in the attitude or views of the speaker, as well as to show the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the listeners. Besides that, self-mentions show the degree of explicit speaker presence in the discourse measured by the frequency of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives (*I, me, mine, exclusive we, our, ours*). Other categories that can be used to self-mention are *the author, the writer, the author's* and *the writer's*.

Engagement markers are words or phrases used by speakers to express their involvement in conversations. In other words, engagement markers are devices that explicitly address listeners, either to focus their attention or to include them as participants in the discourse. These markers show the speaker's attitude towards the topic being discussed, their opinion on the topic, and also how they relate to their listeners. In addition, engagement markers can also help build and maintain good social relationships with other people, because they show that we value and pay attention to what other people have to say. Such as the use of reader pronoun (*you, your, inclusive we*), interjections (*by the way, you may notice*), imperatives (*see, note, consider*), and obligation modals (*should, must, have to*).

## 3. Method

This study is descriptive qualitative method in which it studies the phenomenon of language in society and is used to analyze non-statistical data. it describes the role of interactional metadiscourse markers in political debate and how each of the interactional metadiscourse markers is used by the candidates in delivering their arguments during debate. the source of data is debate transcripts taken from the online website, <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/u-s-house-of-representatives-gop-primary-debate-6-30-22-transcript>. The data are in the form of words, phrases and sentences which can be categorized into interactional metadiscourse markers in the transcripts of the U.S. House Republican primary debate. In collecting the data, the researcher uses document analysis in which it is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents. Data are examined and interpreted in order to obtain meaning, gain understanding, and develop

empirical data knowledge. To analyze the data in this study, it is applied the interactive data analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014). Data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

There are five types of interactional metadiscourse markers based on Hyland (2005) namely hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. The writer finds all of the types of interactional metadiscourse markers those are: hedges are 62 data, boosters are 89 data, attitude markers are 141 data, self-mentions are 149 data, and engagement markers are 103 data. The writer uses tables to present the data which are found. All the data can be seen in the table 1 below.

**Tabel 1.** Types and Functions of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers

Types	Function	Markers	Frequency
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue.	Might	2
		Possible	2
		Probably	2
		May	2
		Would	11
		Could	8
		If	32
		Unless	1
		Almost	1
		Often	1
Boosters	Emphasizing or clarifying a statement.	In fact	19
		Never	8
		Definitely	3
		Of course	2
		Actually	34
		Always	7
		Certainly	6
		Clearly	4
		Obviously	1
		Exactly	2
		Completely	3
		Unfortunately	2
		Need to	45
Attitude Markers	Reflects speaker's affective towards the proposition.	I agree	2
		I think	40
		Choose	3
		Hopefully	1
		Only	6
		Important	24
		Totally	1
		Better	4
		Necessary	1
		Absolutely	12
Self-mentions	Explicitly reference to speaker(s).	I	48
		We	34
		My	13
		Me	6
		Our	35
		Us	10
		Mine	3
Engagement Markers	Explicitly address readers either to focus their attention or include them in the discourse.	You	35
		Your	8
		By the way	3
		See	15
		Should	16
		Have to	23

There are five markers in the interactional metadiscourse that are used by the five candidates in their arguments such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. The researcher takes one example for each marker that appeared more than once to be discussed because the marker has the same function as the data explained.

#### a) Hedges

Based on the finding there were 10 hedges markers in the U.S. House Republican primary debate. There were **might, possible, probably, may, would, could, if, unless, almost, often**. The example of the use of hedges markers is presented below.

- (1) "Joe Biden is a horrible president. The people he's put in positions of power are causing serious damage to Wyoming. And while the state of Wyoming **might** have increased revenue, the citizens of Wyoming are the poorer for it." (485/C1/S6/Hs)

The word "**might**" in the excerpt (1) above is categorized as hedge marker in interactional metadiscourse. That marker shows the speaker's decision to make an opinion based on her understanding and not by evidence. In this case, Harriet Hageman as one of the candidates wants to convey that the people of Wyoming are becoming poorer as a result of the policies issued by Joe Biden. Here, the speaker tries to give her judgment from her point of view by looking at the policy constraints that destroy the middle class and low income Wyoming residents. This is in line with Hyland (2005, p. 52) that hedge recognizes alternative voices and viewpoints and so withhold commitment to a preposition and it allows the speaker to present their opinion rather than certain knowledge.

#### b) Boosters

Based on the finding there were 11 boosters marker that shows in the U.S. House Republican primary debate. There were **in fact, never, definitely, of course, actually, always, certainly, clearly, obviously, exactly, completely**. The example of the use of boosters markers is presented below.

- (2) "We are, **in fact**, a nation of laws. And we are a nation of laws only if we defend our constitutional republic." (034/C3/S1/Bs)

In the sentence (2) above, the phrase "**in fact**" can be categorized as booster markers in interactional metadiscourse because in this case "**in fact**" has a function to emphasize the certainty of information. It is in line with the statement stated by Hyland (2005, p. 53) that boosters in interactional metadiscourse are used by speakers to emphasize their arguments with certainty. This allows Liz Cheney as the speaker to convey the original meaning of the discourse. Here, Liz Cheney used the phrase "**in fact**" to strengthen the validity of her argument that Wyoming is a state of law.

#### c) Attitude markers

Based on the finding there were 12 attitude markers that shows in the U.S. House Republican primary debate. There were **unfortunately, need to, I agree, I think, choose, hopefully, only, important, totally, better, necessary, and absolutely**. The example of the use of attitude markers is presented below.

- (3) "And as far as the Republican Party goes, we need to stand firm, yes, but we are divided, **unfortunately**." (024/C2/S9/AMs)

Excerpt (3), **unfortunately**, shows the subjectivity of the speaker, therefore, these adverbs are included as attitude markers in interactional metadiscourse. This is in agreement with Hyland (2005, p. 53) that attitude marker is about how the speaker expresses his feelings towards a preposition. In the sentence above, Robyn Belinsky as the speaker used the word "**unfortunately**" to say something that she thinks is disappointing or has a bad impact. By using this attitude marker, Robyn Belinsky told the audience that she regretted the condition of the Republican Party, which was increasingly divided. It could be argued that, here, Robyn Belinsky used the adverb "**unfortunately**" to express how she feels about the conditions she has observed.

#### d) Self-mentions

Based on the finding there were 7 self-mentions that shows in the U.S. House Republican primary debate. There were *I, we, my, me, our, us, and mine*. The example of the use of attitude markers is presented below.

- (4) "In **my** travels around Wyoming, and **I** have put in the miles, too, the folks that are here in Wyoming could really care less about the January 6th situation." (109/C2/S1/SMs)

Possessive adjective "**my**" and the first person pronoun "**I**" in the excerpt (4) above can be recognized as self-mentions in interactional metadiscourse. The first person pronoun "**I**" and the possessive adjective "**my**" explicitly refer to the speaker's position in the debate. Self-mention in the sentence above highlighted Robyn Belinskey's presence as the speaker in delivering the statement. Besides that, through self-mention, the speaker tries to present her own experience for argumentation. This is in line with Hyland (2005, p. 53) statement that speakers use self-mentions to show their presence in the text explicitly which is shown by using first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives. In the sentence above, Robyn Belinskey provided her experience when she traveled around Wyoming to find out what the people of Wyoming are really focusing on right now. In this regard, the personal experience used by speaker serves to provide additional arguments on this topic. Therefore, in her argument above, Robyn Belinskey used the pronoun "**I**" and the possessive adjective "**my**" which refers to herself.

#### e) Engagement markers

Based on the finding there were 8 engagement markers that shows in the U.S. House Republican primary debate. There were *you, your, by the way, see, should, have to, how...?, why...?*. The example of the use of attitude markers is presented below.

- (5) "I think ultimately, at the end of the day, what **you** learn across the dinner table, what **you** learn from your parents, what **you** learn at home, those are the important lessons."  
(420/C3/S2/Ems)

The engagement marker is in excerpt (5). It is clear from the speaker's used of the word "**you**". The engagement marker "**you**" in the sentence above explicitly refers to the audience. Liz Cheney as the speaker used this engagement marker to include the audience as participants in her argument. This is in agreement with Hyland (2005, p. 53) that engagement markers are used explicitly by the speakers to address the audience in their arguments to focus their attention or include them in the discourse. In addition, the word "**you**" in the sentence above is meant to build relationships and interaction with the audience and it can be found easily in debates. In the previous sentence, Liz Cheney gave her argument about parents' rights regarding their children's education because according to her family is the basic building in our society. Then, she continues her argument where she includes her audience as discourse participants using pronouns. It means that the speaker more explained to the audience that everything they learn where there is parental involvement in it is an important lesson.

## 5. Conclusion

There are five types in the U.S. House Republican primary debate with a total of 544 data. Those are 62 data for the hedges category, 89 data for boosters, 141 data for attitude markers, 149 data for self-mentions, and 103 data for the engagement markers category. Hedges are used to show the speaker's caution, doubt, or even uncertainty about the claims or arguments they convey to show that the arguments they present are subjective and have not been supported by facts. Boosters, in addition to emphasizing or clarifying a statement, can also be used by speakers to create the impression that the arguments they convey have high truth supported by facts and strong evidence. Then, attitude markers have the function of expressing the attitude, beliefs, or emotions of the speaker towards prepositions. After that, self-mention is used by the speakers to show their presence explicitly in the discourse. Not only that, but in debates self-mentions are also used to give the impression that the speakers has a deep understanding of the topic being discussed which the speaker has relevant experience with that phenomenon. The last is engagement markers, this marker aims to build a relationship with the audience so that their focus is on the speaker and to involve them in the discourse. Apart from that, in debates, engagement markers can also be used to provide additional information that is relevant to the topic being discussed in order to strengthen the speaker's argument.

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