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Is Gender a Factor in Variations in Meta Discourse on Political Matters in Zambia? An Investigation Based on Some Zambian Female and Male Written Discourses in Post Newspaper Opinion Articles

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Abstract:

This study sought to investigate metadiscourse(MD) variations in written discourses on political matters in form of newspaper opinion articles produced by some Zambian females and males in Post newspaper. It compared the frequencies of interactive MD markers as well as interactional MD markers used by females and males in opinion articles. Additionally, it described the interactive MD markers and interactional metadiscourse markers that were unique to females and males in the articles. Maximum variation technique was used to sample a total of 150 articles (75 written by females and 75 written by males) published in Post newspaper during the period 2011 to 2015. A phone camera was used to capture the articles which were later printed out to constitute a corpus of 120 000 words. A mixed methods approach was employed in the collection and analysis of data. The results revealed that females and males exhibited MD variations in their discourses some of which were statistically significant. However, more similarities than differences in the use of MD markers were found. The study concludes that gender is an important variable in the use of MD markers; nonetheless, it is not the only factor that influences MD variations but the genre, the culture of the writers and their writing styles too, play a major role in the choice of MD markers. Therefore, for pedagogy, a genre-specific approach is recommended.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, post newspaper, opinion articles, political matters

1. Introduction

This study is grounded in discourse analysis (DA). In linguistics, DA is a systematic study of naturally occurring communication which can be in form of written or spoken texts (Bevalas, et.al quoted in Knapp and Daly, 2002). Examples of texts, among others include newspaper opinion articles. A discourse analyst is essentially a person who analyses these texts with a view to discovering patterns in the use of linguistic devices, that is, 'who uses language, how, why and when' (van Dijk, 1997c, p. 3). The present study focused on female and male use of linguistic devices called metadiscourse markers (MMs) in discourses in form of newspaper opinion articles on political matters. MMs are linguistic devices used by writers to organize their discourse and express their stance about the content or the reader (Hyland, 2005).

1.1. Overview of Metadiscourse

The term metadiscourse was originally introduced by a structural linguist Zelig Harris in 1959. Nonetheless, it only gained its popularity in applied linguistics in the mid 1980s with the pioneering works of Vande Kopple (1985), Crismore (1989) and Williams (1981). Metadiscourse is a concept based on a view that writing is not a mere exchange of information of various kinds but a social engagement between writers and readers; or speakers and listeners (Hyland, 2005a).

1.2. Hyland's Theory of Metadiscourse

According to Hyland, writing is not all about text production but assessment of the readers' or listeners' resources for understanding the text being produced in order to engage them effectively by organizing the text and commenting on it in such a way that it can be understood as intended by the text producer. Arising from his theorization of MD, Hyland subdivided metadiscourse into two dimensions: interactive and interactional dimensions. Interactive elements are features of a text that index the assumptions a writer makes about his/her reader while the interactional refers to expressions of the writer's position and stance, and therefore, is an expression of 'the writer's voice or community based personality' (Hyland,

2005a). This entails that, the interactive features of a text are concerned more about the organization of the text while the interactional features are concerned more about expressing attitudes towards the text.

1.3. Hyland's (2005) Model of Metadiscourse

In view of his theoretical position on MD, Hyland designed a two-dimensional model for analyzing metadiscourse in texts. Table 1 below shows an outline of the interactive and interactional dimensions of Hyland's Model of metadiscourse.

Dimension	Function	Examples
Interactive	help to guide the reader through the text	Resources
Transition markers	express relations between main clauses	in addition: but; thus; and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts , sequences or stages	Finally; to conclude; my purpose is
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above; see fig. in section 2,
Evidential	refer to information from other texts	according to X; Z states;
Code glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	namely, e.g. such as, in other words, etc.
Interactional	involve the reader in the text	Resources
Boosters	emphasize certainty and close dialogue	in fact; definitely; it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunate; surprisingly; I agree
Self-mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I; we; my; me; our
Engagement markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider; note;you; you can see that
Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps; possible; about

Table 1: Hyland's (2005) Model of Metadiscourse

1.4. An Overview of Males' and Females' Use of Language

Jespersen (1922) is probably one of the earliest studies on men's language. According to him, men use slang, more vernacular forms and use language to defend and establish their personal status and ideas. However, the latest studies on male and female language use dates back as far as the 1970s when Robin Lakoff wrote an article entitled *Language and Women's Place* which was later published as a book in 1975. It triggered decades of debates and research on language and gender (Sunderland, 2006). In this article, Lakoff argued that 'women's language is a distinctive feminine register that is different from men's language and shows up in all levels of the grammar of English (Lakoff 1975, p.45). In her view, this language is characterized by specific features such as the use of overly polite forms, tag questions, avoidance of expletives, great use of diminutives and euphemisms, use of more hedges and mitigating devices and the use of particular vocabulary items such as empty adjectives: *adorable, charming, sweet*, and others.

Lakoff's article spurred linguists on to conduct empirical studies in order to explore and explain claims that males and females speak and write differently. To this end, different corpora such as: higher education written examinations and academic writing, media discourses such as news articles, editorials, and opinion articles have been used (Baron, 2010).

2. Statement of the Problem

Research conducted by linguists such as Lakoff (1975), Tse and Hyland (2008) Waskita (2008), Matei (2011), Subon (2013) and Shirzad and Jamali (2013), Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015), Saadi, (2016), Pasaribu (2017) and others suggests that women and men tend to show some marked or clearly noticeable variations when expressing themselves whether in written or spoken discourses. Some empirical studies have confirmed these claims while others have refuted them. Despite the conflicting findings in this field, very little research has been given to metadiscourse variations in discourses produced by users of English in a Zambian context in general and written discourses involving newspaper opinion articles on political matters written by female and male Zambians in particular. Hence, we do not know whether Zambian female and male writers also tend to show marked or clearly noticeable metadiscourse variations in their written discourses involving newspaper opinion articles on political matters. Stated as a question, the problem of this study was: are there marked or clearly noticeable metadiscourse variations in the written discourses of some Zambian female and male writers on political matters in the *Post* newspaper opinion articles?

3. Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the variations in the frequency of the instances of interactive MMs in some Zambian female and male written discourses on political matters in *Post* newspaper opinion articles?
- What are the variations in the frequency of the instances of interactional MMs in some Zambian female and male written discourses on political matters in *Post* newspaper opinion articles?
- What instances of interactive metadiscourse markers can be considered to be unique to some Zambian female and written discourses?
- What instances of interactional metadiscourse markers can be considered to be unique to some Zambian female and written discourses?

4. Literature Review

4.1. *Studies on Metadiscourse in Zambia*

A survey of existing literature has revealed that there is very little research that has been done in Zambia on metadiscourse involving newspaper opinion articles on political matters. Hence, studies that are grounded in discourse analysis were reviewed. These included: Simwinga (1992), Njobvu (2010), Mwiinga (2015), Mumbi (2017), Mumbi and Simwinga (2018), Mumbi and Simwinga (2019), Kapau and Simwinga (2019a) and Kapau, Chilala and Simwinga (2019b) and Sinkala, Kaira and Simwinga (2020). However, the following gaps were identified in these studies: firstly, they did not give attention to metadiscourse variations in written discourses of Zambian female and male writers of newspaper opinion articles on political matters. The focus of these studies was also not on metadiscourse markers but discourse markers. Additionally, in their analysis of the texts, the studies left out the interactional dimension of metadiscourse. Further, the analytical, as well as the theoretical framework employed in these studies was different from that of the present study. Lastly, the corpus that constituted the samples for the studies was obtained from academic and not journalistic discourses.

4.2. *Studies on Metadiscourse Variations in Female and Male Written Discourses in Newspaper Opinion Articles*

While studies in metadiscourse variations in female and male discourses were numerous globally, very few of them focused on metadiscourse variations in the discourses produced by Zambian female and male writers of newspaper opinion articles on political matters. In any case, Alsubhi's study was considered to be quite relevant to the present study. Alsubhi (2016) investigated gender and metadiscourse in written media texts by analyzing a corpus of British and Saudi newspaper opinion columns. The aim of the study was to investigate gender differences in opinion writings of men and women columnists in order to identify which metadiscourse category predominated in this type of newspaper discourse and how they were distributed according to cross-cultural preferences. Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse was used as a framework for analysis (Alsubhi, 2016). The results showed that men and women showed more similarities than differences in their overall use of metadiscourse especially in the interactive dimensions. However, significant gender based variations among columnists were also found. The study concluded that gender is a significant source of variation that influences the linguistic and stylistic choices of opinion columnists along with genre's conventions. However, the following gaps were identified in Alsubhi's study which the present study attempted to investigate further.

To begin with, the corpus used was not newspaper opinion articles on political matters only but also social, educational, and other matters. Additionally, Alsubhi's was a cross-cultural study involving discourses produced by females and males of Saudi and British culture while the present study only focused on discourses produced by females and males from the Zambian culture and writers to one Zambian newspaper - *The Post*. Therefore, even if Alsubhi's and the present study are similar in some ways, that is, used newspaper opinion articles and Hyland's 2005 model of metadiscourse as their analytical framework in their investigations, Alsubhi's study did not account for variations in metadiscourse in the context of a homogenous culture, a homogeneous genre of the discourse and homogenous subject matter; this is what the present study tried to interrogate: do gender variations exist in discourses produced by females and males of one culture writing on the same subject matter?

4.3. *Studies on Metadiscourse and Gender Variations in Written Discourses in General*

Other studies in metadiscourse did not focus on newspaper opinion articles on political matters but academic discourses. These are: Tse and Hyland (2008) focused on gender and metadiscourse variations in written discourses. Yaganeh & Ghoreyshi (2015) studied the role of gender differences in the application of metadiscourse markers in abstract and discussion sections of articles written in English by native speakers of Persian. Pasaribu (2017) investigated metadiscourse markers in academic essays written by male and female students.

As can be seen from the literature reviewed above, research in the field of metadiscourse variations in female and male discourses in newspaper opinion articles is scanty and that there still remains a gap that this and other researchers can fill with new knowledge as the subject can be explored from different angles.

5. Methodology

5.1. *Research Participants*

The participants for this study were 150 writers (75 female and 75 male) of opinion articles on political matters for *Post* newspaper of Zambia. Their articles published during the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 were sampled purposefully to constitute a corpus of 120,000 words of which 60,000 were gathered from the female articles while the other 60,000 were gathered from the male articles. Each article was restricted to a word count of 800. This sampling procedure was followed in order to draw a representative sample. The researcher worked from the assumption that for the type of analysis this study sought to undertake, a stretch of discourse long enough to generate a reasonable number of the metadiscourse markers was needed for the purposes of answering the research questions. The span of years was equally justifiable in that the researcher was only interested in opinion articles on political matters written by both females and males. For this, the researcher worked from suspicions that male articles would outnumber female articles; in order not to disadvantage either gender but most especially the female, the long span of years was justifiable.

5.2. Data Generation

The process began by systematically searching the *Post* newspapers published in the years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 for opinion articles on political matters. The articles meeting the conditions elaborated earlier were photographed by using an infix note 4 cell phone camera. Thereafter, the details of the articles which included: the name of writer, the sex, the publication date and the number of words it contained were written in a notebook.

After the identification of all the relevant articles in the period defined, they were divided into two groups according to gender. Those articles exceeding 800 words were excluded from the sample. After this process, the female and male articles left were counted in order to find out how many they were so that sampling could be done from the groups accordingly. This procedure was followed in order to allow for a fair and valid comparison of the metadiscourse markers used by female and male writers in the articles.

5.3. Data Analysis

5.3.1. Data Analysis Procedure

A four-stage procedure was followed in the analysis of data. The first stage was a qualitative process which involved a systematic reading of the articles by the researcher in order to identify the metadiscourse markers used. Different colour codes were used to mark the possible metadiscourse resources used.

The second stage of data analysis involved the categorization of the metadiscourse markers identified in the texts into interactive and interactional categories in following with Hyland's Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005). This process was also qualitative as the researcher determined the categories of the metadiscourse markers by scrutinizing the context in which the linguistic items were used.

The third stage was a quantitative approach which involved coding of all the metadiscourse markers that were identified in the second stage. Thereafter, the coded data were entered into an SPSS application in readiness for running of statistical tests: descriptive analyses as well as inferential analyses.

The fourth and last stage of data analysis was a qualitative process which involved the scrutiny of the data produced in stage three of the data analysis process in order to search for patterns and discover what was important in answering research questions three and four of the present study, that is, metadiscourse markers that could be considered unique to female and male writers. The results from this process were sorted according to themes that emerged in order to make sense out of them.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Comparison the Frequencies of the Instances of Interactive Mms in Female and Male Articles.

The study revealed that there were variations between females and males in their use of interactive metadiscourse markers in the newspaper opinion articles. Statistical analyses also showed that some variations were statistically significant while others were not. Also, more similarities than differences were seen in the use of interactivemetadiscourse markers. Table 2 below shows the frequencies of the female and the male use of interactive metadiscourse markers in the subcategories.

Interactive MD Markers in the Subcategories	Frequencies of MD by Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Transition markers	2034	2179	4213
Code glosses	241	252	493
Frame markers	117	129	246
Evidentials	103	149	252
endophoric markers	12	25	37
Total	2507	2734	5241

Table 2: Frequencies of Interactive MD Markers by Gender in the Subcategories

Variations in the use of metadiscourse markers is in line with some earlier studies such as Lakoff (1975); Tse and Hyland (2008); Waskita (2008); Matei (2011); Subon (2013) and Shirzad and Jamali (2013); Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015); Saadi (2016); Pasaribu (2017) and others, who found that women and men tend to show some marked variations when expressing themselves whether in written or spoken discourses. Hence, the study can partly confirm the claim that females and males tend to exhibit variations in their written or spoken discourses. However, the present study yielded sufficient evidence not to fully attribute the variations in discourses to gender alone. On the contrary, other factors such as genre conventions and individual preferences or writing styles were seen to contribute to the variations exhibited in the type and quantity of metadiscourse used. For example, as table 1 females and males showed heavy use of transition markers and low use of endophoric markers. The use of high frequencies in transition markers by both genders is consistent with: Francis et al. (2001), Tse and Hyland (2008) and Alsubhi (2016), Pasaribu (2017) who found that transition markers were the highest interactive MD markers used by female and male writers.

According to Hyland (2005a) text-structuring devices such as transition markers, foster cohesion and coherence of texts thus aid readers' comprehension. Therefore, extensive use of transition markers by female and male writers in *Post* newspaper indicates that the primary concern of these writers is to communicate their propositions clearly and

coherently in order to guide their readers through the discourse so that they are able to comprehend the propositions they make in a way they intend. In newspaper opinion articles, writers' main aim of writing is to persuade readers to adopt a certain view point and influence them to take a particular action (Tapia, 2019; Dewi 2017 and Seglin,2013). This, however, cannot be achieved if the discourse lacks cohesion and coherence. Hence, it is not surprising to see that both genders in *Post* newspaper relied heavily on transition markers to organize their discourses. This entails that regardless of whether the writer is male or female; arguments in a newspaper opinion article have to be presented in a cohesive and coherent manner in order for them to have the effect that the writer intends on the readers. Therefore, it can be argued that significant a factor though gender may be in the use of transition markers; it does not seem to override the genre conventions of opinion article writing.

The low use of endophoric markers is further evidence that genre conventions and not gender per se is taking an upper hand in the choice of metadiscourse used in the articles by females and males. Conventionally, the length of opinion articles does not usually exceed 1000 words (AlKholami, 2010; Tapia, 2019; Seglin, 2013). which entails that these pieces of discourse are not long enough to warrant a large number of endophoric markers as the case may be in academic discourse and textbooks; hence, Hyland (2005a, p. 51)'s claim that 'endophoric markers are largely a feature of science and engineering texts and writing of hard disciplines' can be confirmed. It can thus be argued that endophoric markers are not a major feature of newspaper opinion articles. A possible explanation for this is that writers do not have to rely heavily on them as they do not have bulky stretches of discourse to refer readers to in order to guide them.

Similar ranking of markers in both groups as shown in table 1 above is another indication that gender is not the only factor that influences the metadiscourse choice by females and males. For instance, in both groups, transition markers were used more frequently than any other markers in the subcategories while endophoric markers were the least used. This implies that regardless of the variations in the frequencies of interactive metadiscourse markers used in their writing, females and males follow a similar pattern in the choice of the type and quantity of what markers to use. A similar pattern in the use of interactive markers entails that regardless of their gender, writers in opinion article writing are more concerned about the reader's comprehensibility which can be achieved if the text is highly cohesive and coherent. This can be largely enhanced by appropriate and sufficient use of text-structuring devices such as interactive markers.

6.2. Comparison the Frequencies of the Instances of Interactional Mms in Female and Male Articles

Table 3 below shows the frequencies of interactional metadiscourse markers in the subcategories by females and males.

Interactional MD Marker in the Subcategories	Female	Percent	Male	Percent	Total	Percent
Hedges	803	54	685	46.0	1488	100.0
Self-mentions	681	48.5	724	51.5	1405	100.0
Attitude markers	564	49.3	581	50.7	1145	100.0
Boosters	521	47.1	585	52.9	1106	100.0
Engagement Markers	200	48.9	209	51.1	409	100.0
Totals	2769	49.9	2784	50.1	5553	100.0

Table 3: Frequencies of Interactional Mms in the Subcategories by Gender

Table 3 above shows that there are variations in the frequencies of metadiscourse markers used by females and males. These results imply that females made more use of hedges than their male counterparts. In like manner, males seem to use more of self-mentions than any other markers in the subcategories compared to females. Another implication of these results is that both genders use attitude markers, boosters and engagement markers in slightly similar ways as evidenced by the frequencies used by both groups.

Higher frequencies in the instances of hedges in females' writing is in line with Yaghaneh and Ghoreysh, (2015) and D Angelo, (2008) who found that females used more hedges than males in their writing; thus, seem to confirm the widespread belief that women use more hedges than males in their discourses (Lakoff, 1975). However, the findings of the present study are not in line with other studies, such as Alsubhi (2017); Hyland and Tse (2008) Crismore et al., 1993), who found that male writers used more hedges than their female counterparts.

According to Hyland (2005) writers use hedges to express tentativeness and caution while Lakoff (1975) postulates that women use hedges as a mark of lack of self-confidence or inferiority. Markkanen and Schroder (1997) support Lakoff's view by espousing that the use of hedges confirms the notion that women's language is a powerless language. The present study does not fully support the views held by Lakoff (1975) and Markkanen and Schroder (1997) as it has revealed that regardless of their gender, females or males used hedges to exercise tentativeness and caution in *Post* newspaper and not because the writers lacked confidence in their propositions or felt inferior. For this reason, Hyland (2005) who postulates that writers use hedges to exercise caution and tentativeness is supported because in the present study, variations in the use of hedges appear to be more dependent on the genre of the text and individual styles of writing rather than being female or male; therefore, it cannot be attributed to the inferiority or lack of confidence of the writer. The genre of the text being newspaper opinion articles seems to override the writer's gender. As Lynch (2012) postulates, when writing opinion articles, one cannot be very emphatic. Dewi (2017); Tapia (2019) and Seglin (2013) also add that in an opinion article, a writer is expected to give an opinion which he or she would like his or her readers to adopt

but it has to be done tactfully in order for him or her to gain acceptance from the audience he or she is targeting. In fact, Abdallahzadeh (2011) says that the community has a certain level of knowledge that the writer does not want to override hence exercises caution when writing. This is what the writers of *Post* newspaper opinion articles were seen to be doing regardless of their gender.

Thus, it can be argued that the use of hedges in the delivery of propositions is one of the conventions of opinion article writing hence it cannot be attributed to lack of confidence by the writer. In the present study, writers whether male or female used hedges to deliver their propositions to their target readers who are Zambians from divergent educational, religious, social and economic backgrounds and possess a certain level of knowledge on the subject of the discourse; consequently, the writers are cautious not to override this knowledge. To be effective therefore, the writers actually blend the use of hedges and boosters in order to strike a balance in the forcefulness of their propositions. The following extracts illustrate how females and males used hedges but also how they blended hedges and boosters to strike a balance in the forcefulness of their propositions:

6.2.1. An Illustration of Female and Male Use of the Hedging Strategy

I believe there are two issues here that need to be separated and which are mutually exclusive-the message and the messenger. The message does not become faulty or wrong just because the messenger has fallen out of grace. I believe many of the opponents are tying the message/declaration to the man who is said to have declared it,... Chiluba is not the declaration. Maybe if those that are currently opposed to the declaration took him out of the picture when reflecting on this issue, they would come to a different conclusion. The fact that the behavior of Zambians/government does not appear to have changed for the better since the inclusion of the declaration in the constitution is not an indication that we can never attain Christian values as a nation. (*Christian Nation* by Mary Ncube)

6.2.2. An Illustration of the Hedging and Blending Strategy by Females and Males

She felt quite strongly that I, in the said and earlier article, in criticizing the British press' reportage of African issues was indulging in a case of not very respectable scape-goating. (*Electoral Bill* by Laura Miti)
This lot included some MPs but then perhaps we shouldn't be surprised after a critical look at who these MPs are. (*Misinforming the nation* by Lucy Muyoyeta)

The extract in 6.2.1.illustrates the use of hedges to show tentativeness, that is, the writer leaves room for her readers to have alternative views on the matter. This should not be viewed as a sign of weakness but rather, as Hyland (2005), Lynch (2012), Dewi (2017), Tapia (2019) and Seglin (2013) put it, it is a sign of respect for the knowledge the audience has on the matter. Thus, instead of being very emphatic, caution is exercised in order to tactfully persuadethemto adopt her view.

In 6.2.2., the extracts illustrate how tactfully hedges and boosters are blended for the same purpose of persuading readers. Instead of expressing themselves forcefully, the writers consciously choose to lessen the forcefulness of their propositions by blending hedges and boosters by saying; 'she felt quite strongly...'instead of 'she felt strongly ...' and '...perhaps we shouldn't...' instead '...we shouldn't ...'

The use of boosters by both groups is another interesting finding that this study has used to argue that other factors apart from gender do influence the choice of metadiscourse markers. A stable 2shows, the frequencies of boosters were lower than those of hedges for both genders. The use of fewer boosters than hedges by both groups indicates that regardless of their gender, females and males are more interested in persuading their readers in a cautious manner as opposed to being very forceful. According to Hyland's theory of metadiscourse, writers use boosters to express themselves more emphatically; in other words, they use boosters to show that they are certain and confident about the propositions they are making. By using fewer boosters, however, the writers are trying to advance their propositions cautiously in order not to override the knowledge that their readers have on the subject of discourse but also to gain their acceptance. To cite Lynch (2012) again, when writing opinion articles, one cannot be very emphatic. On the contrary, when writing an opinion article, a writer is expected to give an opinion which he or she would like his or her readers to adopt but it has to be done tactfully in order for him or her to gain acceptance from the audience he or she is targeting.Dewi (2017); Tapia (2019) and Seglin (2013).

Despite being confident and certain of their propositions, females and males in *Post* newspaper opinion articles chose to tread cautiously in following with the genre conventions. This finding ran againstAlsubhi (2017) and Lakoff (1975) who found and asserted respectively, that political matters are mainly a male-dominated subject; hence, men feel more confident to express themselves than females due to factors some of which may include political, cultural and religious inclinations. Alsubhi (2017) actually found that in an Arab setup, British and Saudi male columnists were more inclined to write about political subjects than their female counterparts. In the context of the present study, however, these findings and claims cannot be fully supported mainly because the studies were conducted in different cultural and religious backgrounds thus writers cannot be expected to portray similar writing styles as regards the use of boosters. For example, Saudi writers, both genders, boosted less often due to socio-cultural and religious regulations such as the restriction on freedom of expression especially since 'Saudi press opinion writers and columnists have the greatest influence along with those expressing free opinion' (Thompson, 2014, p.140 in Alsubhi 2017, p.293).

Zambia, on the other hand, is politically democratic and culturally diverse and there is no taboo about what women cannot write about (Brown, 2013). This means that in the Zambian setting, females are as free as their male counterparts to write about political matters and express themselves as confidently as their knowledge can allow them. There is enough evidence from the use of boosters by females in the present study to confirm that females are equally

confident and certain about the propositions they are putting across in the opinion articles. For example statements such as the following illustrate how confidently females as well as males were able to express themselves on political matters:

This is an election year, it is obvious that the power hungry leaders that we have in our country shall manipulate things, therefore let us see these documents in place. (*K40 billion youth fund* by Bernadette Deka)

Clearly six months are not enough to pass judgement on performance of any government and this exercise is not meant to do that. I am certain that there are people who will look at the comments and offer different perspectives. (*Six months down the line: how is PF govt doing?* by Leonard Chiti)

It can be argued, therefore, that by using fewer boosters, males as well as females cannot be said to lack confidence but are simply using an interactional strategy that involves incorporating their readers in the discourse in order to persuade them to adopt their stance on the propositions being delivered and allow for alternative views. Like Hyland says, 'the writer is willing to entertain alternatives and so plays an important role in conveying commitment to text content and respect for readers' (Hyland, 2005a, p.53). According to Hyland, the expression of conviction and caution, of certainty and doubt, is at the heart of the interaction of writing and is a major component of the rhetorical expression of the relationship between the writer and the reader. This combination of hedging and boosting aids persuasion and results in 'objective information, subjective evaluation and interpersonal negotiation, and this can be a powerful factor in gaining acceptance for claims' (Hyland, 2005b, p.180).

We can see, therefore, that although gender seems to be a factor, the field of discourse also is an important factor in the choice of boosters by females and males.

6.3. Variations in the Instances of Interactive Mms That Are Unique to Female and Male Articles

There were few instances of metadiscourse markers that could be considered unique to males and females. Table 4 below shows instances of interactive metadiscourse markers unique to female and male written discourses on political matters.

Interactive MD Categories	Interactive MD Markers Unique to Female and Males	
	Females	Males
Code glosses	I mean, basically, i.e., etc.	To drive the nail home, in the same vein, in another breath
Endophoric markers	As noted before, as stated earlier, mentioned earlier, I have said before,	the aforementioned,
Evidentials	direct quotations (spoken sources)	direct quotations (written sources)
Frame Markers	Well, anyway (topic shift)	after all is said and done, on another front, going forward
Transition Markers	again, among, far much better than	Owing to, with a view to

Table 4: Instances of Interactive MD Markers Unique to Female and Male Written Discourses on Political Matters

The presence of interactive markers that are unique to females and males is consistent with the claims made by: Lakoff (1975); Waskita (2008); Matei (2011) and Subon (2013) that women and men tend to favour distinct language features when expressing themselves either in written or spoken discourses. This claim, however, cannot be fully supported by the present study owing to the fact that the instances of interactive markers that could be considered to be unique to females and males were very few compared to those that both genders shared in the corpus. This implies that in the interactive category, the gender of a writer is not as much a factor as the genre of the discourse in the choice of linguistic devices because the main preoccupation of writers is to enhance text organization and readers' comprehensibility of their propositions. This finding coincides with that of Pasaribu (2017) who found that gender is not the only factor which influences the choice of metadiscourse makers in writing.

Another finding that consolidates our argument that gender is not the only factor influencing the choice of interactive metadiscourse markers by writers of opinion articles in *Post* newspaper is that the interactive metadiscourse markers considered to be unique to females and males were not unusual. For instance, the use of abbreviations *i.e.* and *e.t.c.* by female writers only in the corpus of the present study cannot be considered to signify gender influence in journalistic discourses or indeed in other types of discourses. On the contrary, the use of abbreviations or reduced forms is a common feature for newspaper style of writing and is highly used in newspaper articles because it is convenient for newspaper language (Essay, 2018). This means that regardless of gender these linguistic devices can be used—it is a matter of individual preferences and writing styles; that probably is the reason why men seem to prefer using the full forms of *i.e.* (that is) and *e.t.c.* (et cetera) while females prefer to use the reduced forms. In the same way, the use of idiomatic expressions such as *in the same vein*, *to drive the nail home* which were identified to be unique to males are not unusual as they are a common feature of newspaper articles and any writer regardless of gender can use them as journalistic writing requires concrete style of writing and includes a number of stylistic devices such as direct speech, idioms and other (Essay, 2018).

6.4. Variations in the Instances of Interactional Mms That Are Unique to Female and Male Articles

Interactional metadiscourse markers that could be considered unique to written discourses of females and males in *Post* newspaper opinion articles were present in the corpus. However, their occurrences were very few. Table 5 shows the interactional markers unique to female and male written discourses

Interactional MD Categories	Interactional MD Markers Unique to Female and Males	
	Females	Males
Attitude Markers	wow! ha! oh! Alas! Immaculate, depressing, afraid, fondly, <i>awe!</i> (a linguistic item in a Zambian local language that means-no!)	insane, impunity, backward, folly, bad, good
Boosters	very true, absolute certainty,	beyond any reasonable doubt, cannot be overemphasized, no one can doubt
Hedges	Kind of, maybe, pretty sure Quite often	wouldn't
Self-mentions	myself	the author, the writer
Engagement Markers	<i>Banabahesu</i> , Well, o.k., come on!	<i>Banabahesu</i> (a linguistic item in a Zambian local language that means my people/my clan), o.k. come on!

Table 5: Instances of Interactional Markers Unique to Female and Male Written Discourses

The presence of interactional markers that are unique to females and males in the corpus is a possible indication that there are variations in the way these genders express themselves in written discourses. Hence, the findings of Adel (2006) Lakoff (1975), Tse and Hyland (2008) Waskita (2008), Matei (2011), Subon (2013) and Shirzad and Jamali (2013), Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015), Saadi, (2016) and Pasaribu (2017) which suggest that women and men tend to show some marked or clearly noticeable variations in the way they use language when expressing themselves whether in written or spoken discourses can be partly supported. For instance, the use of exclamations as *wow! ha! oh! alas!* by female writers seem to indicate that such markers are a feature of female and not male language. These markers were used to express strong emotions such as anger, surprise or excitement. Nowhere in the entire corpus which comprised 120 000 words, did males use these markers

The choice of these linguistic devices further implies that females, unlike their male counterparts, are so sensitive to their environment that they are ready to express their attitudes openly based on how they are feeling at that moment. This view is consistent with Guo (2009) and Adelaide (1979) who found that women tended to use words that imply feeling more than males. This expression of strong emotions such as those of surprise, anger or excitement is also in line with: Quirk et al. (1985); Lakoff (1990), Lakoff (1975); Colley and Todd (2002) and Amir et al. (2012) who postulate that 'Women make more use of expressive forms.... those expressing emotional rather than intellectual evaluation. Nonetheless, the scarcity of interactional markers that are unique to females and males imply that the variations in their written discourses are not very distinctive and might not necessarily be a result of gender differences but other factors as well. For instance, the choice of the reflexive pronoun *myself* by the female writers and expressions such as *the writer, the columnist* and *the author* by the male writers does not signal gender differences; rather, they indicate personal preferences in writing styles. By using these pronouns, both genders seek to create an appropriate authorial identity in their discourse, which is, projecting a competent and reliable image. As Halliday (1978) puts it, authorial identity can be projected in three different ways; namely, the detached self, the individual self and the collective self. It seems that females in the present study preferred projecting an individual self while males preferred projecting a detached self. By using the detached self, males are trying to appear impersonal but also project a formal image while the females seek to champion their personal beliefs or subjective perception of propositions in their discourse which is more of individual preferences or writing style than gender.

6.5. Implications

The findings from the present study raise the following implications: firstly that gender is an important but not the only factor that influences the use of metadiscourse markers in writing. Secondly, that metadiscourse is a feature of media discourses. Thirdly, that the choice of metadiscourse is partly dependent on the genre of a text.

6.6. Conclusion

The present study has provided enough evidence to conclude that there are more metadiscourse similarities than variations in the written discourses in form of newspaper opinion articles on political matters produced by some Zambian female and male writers. Additionally, gender is not the only factor that influences the choice of metadiscourse markers but other factors such as the genre of the text and individual writing styles or preferences as well. Lastly, the study concludes that metadiscourse is a major feature in newspaper discourses involving opinion articles on political matters thus are deployed in the text regardless of the writer's gender in order to enhance coherence which aids the readers' comprehensibility as intended by the writer.

6.7. Recommendations

The study recommends that future studies can consider studying other type of newspaper articles such as editorials, news reports as well as opinion articles on topics other than political matters in order to investigate metadiscourse variations between female and male writers. Secondly, it is recommended that metadiscourse variations studies should be extended to other genres such as to literary texts in order to depart from giving extensive focus on academic texts.

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