Research Article

Interactional meta-discourse and phraseology in newspaper editorials during the Russia-Ukraine War

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The massive influence of media in our daily life has led to an increased interest of analyzing media discourse among linguists. A newspaper editorial is a distinctive register of print media that expresses the newspaper's opinion about current issues in the world. The present study showed the results of a linguistic comparative analysis of the language of newspaper editorials that are published recently during the Russia-Ukraine War. The investigation is based on samples taken from leading newspapers in the USA and the UAE. The corpus consists of 24 editorials totaling about 16,673 words written in English. The study aimed to investigate two fundamental principles of language use, namely: meta-discourse and phraseology in the genre of newspaper editorials adapting a quantitative content analysis approach. Hyland's (2005b) interactional model of meta-discourse has been applied in the analysis. Data showed a high level of similarity between the USA and the UAE editorials in terms of frequency of several linguistic markers. Data also showed that stance markers were significantly higher than engagement markers in both corpora. Moreover, results reported a variety of use of collocations, modality, and idiomatic expressions. The study concluded that newspaper editorials are argumentative texts that are distinguished by the use of hedges, attitude markers, and other persuasive devices. The study combines key linguistic concepts and contributes to the field of discourse analysis as it provides useful insights about media discourse and newspaper discourse particularly editorials.

Keywords: media discourse, interactional meta-discourse, editorials, genre analysis |

INTRODUCTION: MEDIA, PHRASEOLOGY, AND META-DISCOURSE

Media refers to various forms of printable and electronic means of communication used to deliver information to a mass audience. It is "an ever-changing and ever-growing entity", which comes under the radar of applied linguistics, as the core of the media is language, communication, and meaning making (O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 67). Media language is distinguished by being extremely informative, easily accessible, and highly authentic materials, which offer a fertile terrain for research. There is no doubt that media language constitutes a rich source of readily accessible data and a broad avenue of discourse to be explored by researchers in different fields.

Media discourse has been the subject of intense research since the last two decades (Bell, 1998; Fairclough, 1995; Talbot, 2007; Van Dijk, 1985). Much media research has been largely conducted on printed media. According to O'Keeffe (2011), "much study of language and the media over the years has focused on the written genres, particularly newspaper" (p. 69). Within the study of newspaper discourse, the field has been flourished by a growing number of quantitative, qualitative, textual, and genre analyses (Afzal et al., 2021; Bednarek, 2006; Bell, 1991; Reah, 2002; Richardson, 2007; Teo, 2000; White, 1997; Yu & Zheng, 2022).

Newspaper discourse is one of the most distinguished varieties of media that comprises various key sections, and editorials lie at the heart of these sections. According to McNair (2011), "the most important voice of a newspaper is its editorial, which embodies its political identity" (p. 70). Editorials or the leading

articles are a typical example of a discourse that is a blend of arguing, narrating, and exposing consisting of pseudo-informative messages (Khalil, 2000, p. 23). They are articles in a newspaper or magazine that combine fact and opinion to interpret news and influence public opinion (Sterling, 2009). They are usually written by an editor and represent the views and the opinions of the newspaper. Editorials generally reflect the newspaper's analysis, discussion, opinion, or verdict on the issues of the day (Bhatia, 2013, p. 170).

According to Hensley (2012), most editorials set out to do one of the four things: support a stance or action, disagree with an issue, laud something or someone, or educate the public about a matter. All editorials are designed to be persuasive, to sway readers to agree with point of view expressed (Sterling, 2009, p. 474). Unlike news reports, editorials are written to provoke some reaction by expressing a strong opinion in which editorial writers use linguistic recourses to create favorable or unfavorable bias (Bhatia, 2013). Newspaper editorials can have an effect in the community particularly when they are well argued and call for specific policy or regulatory actions to deal with pressing problems (Buresh & Gordon, 2006).

Editorials have been an interesting area of investigation and several studies have focused on analyzing newspaper editorials from a linguistic perspective. For instance, using a textual analysis, Hackett and Zhao (1994) looked at the textual characteristics of the USA newspapers articles and editorials that were published during the Gulf War. Hawes and Thomas (1996) investigated thematic structure and its progression in editorials in The Sun and The Times. Westin (2002) also conducted a diachronic study of newspaper editorials covering the period 1900-1993. The study reported that the language of editorials developed towards greater information density and lexical specificity and diversity with greater informality. In addition, Bal (2014) discussed the ongoing efforts towards developing linguistic resources for annotating and consequently analyzing opinions and arguments in editorials and op-eds. More recently, Alghazo et al. (2023) investigated engagement strategies employed in English and Arabic editorials and reported statistically significant differences between the two languages in the use of some types of engagement strategies.

Phraseology is another interesting linguistic concept that is usually associated with lexicology and one that gained interest recently and soon established as a discipline in its own right. It is one of the key concepts in both theoretical linguistics and in the methods of corpus linguistics (Granger & Meunier, 2008). Phraseology refers to the study of phrases, where phrases are "any multi-word expression up to the sentence level" (Pawley, 2001, p. 122). In more specific terms, phraseology is the discipline that studies phraseological units, multiword units, multiword expressions, fixed expressions, set expressions, formulaic language, phrasemes, idiomatic expressions, idioms, collocations, and poly-lexical expressions (Pastor & Mitkov, 2019, p. 5).

Phraseology has been studied with the main linguistic theories and approaches. It has strong links with lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, pragmatics, semantics, semiotics, and translation (Granger & Meunier, 2008). Accordingly, the literature of phraseology is vast, and a lot of research has been carried out in the field (Cowie, 1991; Gray & Biber, 2015; Hunston, 2011; Hunston & Su, 2019; Sinclair, 2008). However, phraseological research has favored the investigation of idioms, collocations, metaphors, and fixed expressions (Anderson, 2006; Everaert et al., 1995; Fellbaum et al., 2007; Howarth, 1996; Mason 1997, 1999). Phraseology has also been investigated in media and newspaper discourses (e.g., Jaki, 2014; Moon, 1998; Stubbs, 2007).

Meta-discourse has been and continues to be an influential approach of studying writer-reader interaction and language communicative functions since the 1980s. It has been applied in a wide range of disciplines and it became an increasingly favorite topic recently in a lot of linguistic, rhetoric, discourse analysis studies. Most of meta-discourse research has been devoted to the academic field (Ädel 2006; Gillaerts & Ven de Velde, 2010; Hyland, 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Hyland & Milton 1997; Hyland & Tse 2004; Mauranen, 1993). Other studies of meta-discourse addressed media discourse and many registers such as editorials, opinion columns, and advertisements have been investigated (Al-Subhi, 2021, 2022; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Fu & Hyland, 2014; Le, 2004). More recent studies have looked at interactional meta-discourse and its specific features such as Khanbutayeva (2019), and Lavid and Moratón (2018). Lavid and Moratón (2018) conducted a contrastive analysis of international meta-discourse markers in a sample of English and Spanish newspaper texts in three genres: *news reports*, *editorials*, and *letters to the editor*. Results reported genre-related and language-specific variation in the distribution of these markers in newspaper genres. Khanbutayeva (2019) investigated hedging devices in English and Azerbaijan economic and political newspaper editorials and found that hedges serve to tone down, reduce the risk, mitigate or soften the meaning of utterances and statements in both languages.

Generally speaking, linguistic studies on the genre of newspaper editorials are relatively few, and the genre of editorials still remains a fertile area for research. Thus, the current study combines the concepts of interactional meta-discourse and phraseology in exploring newspaper editorials. Following Hyland's (2005b) model of interactional meta-discourse, the present linguistic comparative study is basically concerned with investigating patterns of interactional meta-discourse along with phraseological units in the genre of newspaper editorials quantitatively. More specifically, the study aims to explore the use of interactional meta-discourse devices in editorials and identify which stance and engagement devices predominate in editorials selected from the USA and the UAE leading newspapers. The study also aims to consider the phraseology of newspaper editorials and set out to identify the phraseological units, collocations, and idiomatic expressions employed in both corpora. In addition, it investigates possible variations or similarities between the USA and the UAE editorialists in their use of examined linguistic devices. With these aims in mind, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities or differences between USA and UAE editorialists regarding their use of interactional meta-discourse?

2. Which types of stance and engagement markers are most frequently used in the genre of editorials?

3. What are the most frequent lexical bundles and formulaic expressions used in both corpora?

4. What are the linguistic features that distinguish the genre of newspaper editorials?

METHOD

Materials and Data Collection

One of the primary focuses of the study is to investigate the use of interactional meta-discourse: stance and engagement markers and other phraseological units in the genre of newspaper editorials. To this end, samples from newspaper discourse were collected and analyzed. The dataset of the study sampled newspaper editorials that are available online from the official websites of the USA and the UAE newspapers. The corpus is made up of **24** original newspaper editorials written in English. Two parallel corpora, the USA editorials and the UAE editorials from six leading newspapers were compiled and analyzed. 12 political USA editorials were retrieved from the official websites of three popular newspapers: *The New York Times, Los Angeles Times,* and *Washington Times.* These are daily leading newspapers in the USA, and they have been selected due to their status, popularity and the influence they exert in the public opinion nationally and internationally. For example, *The New York Times* is by far the most cited news publisher by other media organizations, the most discussed on Twitter and the most searched on Google, and it has a worldwide readership reported in 2022 to comprise 740,000 paid print subscribers, and 8.6 million paid digital subscribers (Leonhardt et al., 2017).

Following the same fashion, the other 12 editorials were also retrieved online from the official sites of three Emirates newspapers: namely, *Khaleej Times, Gulf Today*, and *The National Gulf.* These newspapers are an English-language daily newspapers based in the United Arab Emirates. They are influential as they reach a wide range of English-speaking audience in the Middle East. For example, *Khaleej Times* reaches out to more than 450,000 multilingual readerships (Buschfeld, 2020). They deliver the latest in news, business, arts, culture, lifestyle and sports, and enjoy indisputable reputation in the region. According to Al-Saied (2020), the English-language press in the UAE caters to the large expatriate communities and the English newspapers are arguably the dominant platform holding about 40% of the advertising spend.

The size of the corpus of editorials from the USA newspapers is **9,708** words, whereas the corpus from UAE newspapers contains **6,965** words (**Table 1**). A total of **16,673** words were analyzed manually and searched for all the interactional meta-discourse makers along with other linguistic devices considered in the study. The articles considered for the study were published between the end of February till the end of April 2022, and their length ranged approximately between 600 to 1,350 words.

Table 1. Details of the corpus

Corpus	Newspaper names	Size of corpus	Number of editorials
The USA newspapers	New York Times Los Angeles Times Washington Times	9,708	12
The UAE newspapers	Khaleej Times Gulf Today The National Gulf	6,965	12
Total		16,673	24

Data Analysis

The current study aims to provide a detailed comparative analysis of the language of newspaper editorials in two corpora regarding their use of stance and engagement markers, in addition to other lexical bundles such as collocations, and idiomatic expressions. It is based on a quantitative content-analysis approach that identifies the frequencies of various linguistic features in the corpus. The study adopted Hyland's (2005b) model of interactional meta-discourse. The model embraces two main dimensions of interaction: stance and engagement. The analysis was carried out in two stages: in the first one the selected samples of editorials were searched manually line-by-line and word-by-word for all the subcategories of stance and engagement resources and all the frequencies have been counted and the results have been tabulated. All frequencies were normalized to a common 1,000 word basis to ensure accurate comparability between the USA and the UAE newspaper editorials. In addition, the Chi-square test was applied to check for any statistically significant differences between the two corpora. Similarly, in the second stage the whole corpus was analyzed, and all the lexical bundles, evaluative modals, collocations, and idiomatic expressions were identified, and results were recoded and tabulated.

MODEL OF ANALYSIS

This study adopts Hyland's (2005b) model of interactional meta-discourse in order to explore the linguistic features in the genre of newspaper editorials. Hyland's (2005b) model is chosen as it is considered to be one of the most groundbreaking contributions in the field of discourse analysis, and his work on meta-discourse is among the most applied theoretical frameworks in recent research: "Ken Hyland is possibly the meta-discourse researcher par excellence in contemporary research" (Aguilar, 2008, p. 86). Hyland's (2005b) meta-discursive model was also selected as it clearly delineates stance and engagement features, whereas the functions of these features may overlap in other meta-discursive taxonomies.

Hyland's (2005b) model of 'stance and engagement' draws on systematic functional linguistics principles and attempts to capture how the discoursal preferences can construct both writer and reader. Hyland's (2005b) model provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the linguistic resources attending to both stance and engagement. **Stance** "the attitudinal dimension" includes features, which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions, and commitments (Hyland, 2005b, p. 176). It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement (Hyland, 2005b). **Engagement**, on the other hand, is the alignment dimension, where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognize the presence of their readers, pull them along with their argument, focus their attention, acknowledge their uncertainties, include them as discourse participants, and guide them to interpretations (Hyland, 2005b, p. 176). Both types of interactional meta-discourse are shaped into a number of textual resources: stance is achieved through the use of *hedges, boosters, attitude markers*, and *self-mentions*; whereas engagement encompasses the use of *reader pronouns, questions, directives, appeals to shared knowledge*, and *personal asides*. Each subcategory of writer stance and reader engagement will be referred to in detail in the findings section.

FINDINGS

Interactional Meta-Discourse (Stance & Engagement Markers)

Generally speaking, the analysis showed that there is a high range of similarity in the frequencies of interactional meta-discourse in both groups of editorials, and this is probably due to the generic nature of editorials. Both the USA and the UAE editorialists have used higher stance markers over engagement markers in the editorials. Results reported that there are 594 tokens of stance markers (61 per 1,000 words) in the USA corpus, whereas the corpus contains only 34 tokens of engagement markers (three per 1,000 words). Interestingly, an almost identical result was obtained in the UAE corpus, which contains 526 stance markers (75 per 1,000 words) and 46 engagement markers (six per 1,000 words) (**Table 2** and **Figure 1**).

Table 2. Interactional meta-discourse (IM-D) (stance & engagement markers)

IM-D	The USA editorials			The UAE editorials		
Feature	Raw occurrences	Per 1,000	Percentage	Raw occurrences	Per 1,000	Percentage
Stance	**594**	**61.18**	**94.58%**	**526**	**75.52**	**91.95%**
Hedges	316	32.55	50.31%	257	36.89	44.93%
Boosters	87	8.96	13.85%	54	7.75	9.44%
Attitude markers	186	19.159	29.61%	207	29.72	36.18%
Self-mentions	5	0.51	0.79%	8	1.14	1.39%
Engagement	**34**	**3.50**	**5.41%**	**46**	**6.60**	**8.04%**
Reader pronouns	8	0.82	1.27%	12	1.72	2.09%
Questions	6	0.61	0.95%	11	1.57	1.92%
Directives	0	0.00	0.00%	0	0.00	0.00%
Shared knowledge	8	0.82	1.27%	14	2.01	2.44%
Personal asides	12	1.23	1.91%	9	1.29	1.57%
Total	**628**	**64.68**	**52.33%**	**572**	**82.12**	**47.66%**
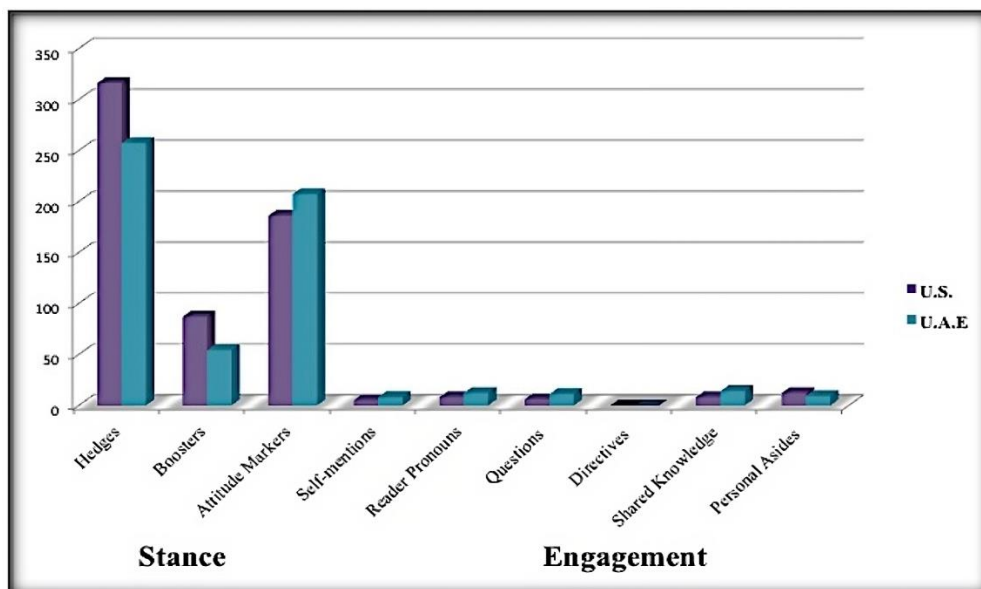
Figure 1. Distribution of interactional meta-discourse in the newspaper editorials (Source: Author)

Results revealed that in both corpora editorialists have used significantly higher stance markers than engagement markers. In order to test the significance of this difference of use of stance and engagement markers, the Chi-square test was run.

As shown in **Table 3**, the Chi-square value (X_2=11.9213) is meaningful at α level (α=0.05) with one degree of freedom (df=1). This indicates that there is a highly statistically significant difference between the use of stance and engagement markers in both corpora in the genre of newspaper editorials. More detailed results and the frequencies of all the subcategories are presented in the following sections.

Table 3. Results of the Chi-square test of use of interactional meta-discourse in the USA & the UAE editorials

p-value	df	Test statistic	p-value	X^2
0.05	1	11.9213	0.999445	<3.84

Note. Number of valid cases=1,200

Stance

Hedges: Hedges are devices like *possible, might*, and *perhaps*, that indicate the writer's decision to withhold complete commitment to a proposition, allowing information to be presented as an opinion rather than accredited fact (Hyland, 2005b). By using hedges, the author will demonstrate his/her subjectivity towards the proposition and will emphasize that his/her words are more of opinion rather than facts (Rokoee, 2021). According to Hyland (2005a), hedges imply that a statement is based on the writer's plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, indicating the degree of confidence it is prudent to attribute to it. Results revealed that hedges were the most frequent type of interactional meta-discourse with 573 occurrences: 316 in the USA corpus and 257 in the UAE corpus and they accounted for 50% and 44%, respectively. Hedges were widely employed by both groups of writers as the following examples display:

> Russia, meanwhile, probably would discover that its actions would drive more nations into seeking the protection of the NATO umbrella (the USA editorial no. 5).

> A war could be the beginning of the end of modern civilization (the UAE editorial no. 6).

> The United Nations may not be the most effective world organization in matters of war and peace (the UAE editorial no. 2).

> Some commentators say Moscow is worried about Kyiv joining NATO, which may be partly true (the UAE editorial no. 6).

> It was always possible that Russian President Vladimir Putin might stop short of an invasion of that country (the USA editorial no. 6).

Boosters: In contrast to hedges, boosters emphasize certainty and the strength of the writer's commitment to claims. Boosters are emphatic devices such as *clearly, obviously, actually*, and *demonstrate,* which allow writers to close down alternatives, head off conflicting views and express their certainty in what they say (Hyland, 2005a, p. 52). Their function is implied in emphasizing certainty towards a proposition, showing the writer's confidence and shutting down other alternative views. As Hyland (2005a) clearly stated that, "by closing down possible alternatives, boosters emphasize certainty and construct rapport by marking involvement with the topic and solidarity with an audience, taking a joint position against other voices" (p. 53). Results showed that boosters, compared to hedges, do not enjoy high frequency of occurrence in both corpora with 87 tokens in the USA corpus and 54 tokens in the UAE corpus. Below are some examples of boosting devices:

> The human factor should always guide decision-makers and leaders who have expansionist tendencies (the UAE editorial no. 8).

> Posterity must know what really happened. Justice must be given a chance (the USA editorial no. 10).

> YouTube is the surest way for Russian citizens to keep abreast of what's happening in the world, both just over its border and far away (the USA editorial no. 1).

> After just one day of fighting there is no longer any doubt that Europe has descended into potentially the most dangerous conflict since the Second World War (the UAE editorial no. 9).

> It is evident from the fighting of the last four days in Ukraine, that Russia will not be a victor and that Ukraine cannot fully repel the Russian attack (the UAE editorial no. 1).

Attitude markers: The third subcategory of interactional meta-discourse of stance is the attitude markers, which are used to indicate the writer's affective attitude towards the propositions and the textual information. Attitude markers convey surprise, agreement, importance, obligation, frustration, and so on (Hyland, 2005b, p. 180). According to Hyland (2005a, p. 53), while attitude is expressed throughout a text by the use of subordination, comparatives, progressive particles, punctuation, text location and so on, it is most explicitly signaled by attitude verbs (e.g., *agree* and *prefer*), sentence adverbs (*unfortunately* and *hopefully*), and adjectives *(appropriate, logical,* and *remarkable).* Analysis revealed that attitude markers were frequently used in editorials, and they ranked second after hedges in terms of frequency with 186 tokens in the USA corpus and 207 tokens in the UAE corpus. Some of the attitude markers employed are shown in the following examples:

> What <u>we do know</u> is that he is enjoying this battle of wits with the West (the UAE editorial no. 6).

> For now, as things work themselves out, <u>we are fortunate </u>to see the Western powers rally to Ukraine's side (the USA editorial no. 1).

> Even if the process is <u>difficult </u>and stretches into months and years, <u>it is important</u> that history be left a <u>forensic, credible, verified</u> and judicially processed record of the specific crimes in Ukraine (the USA editorial no. 10).

Self-mentions: Self-mentions is the final subcategory of stance, which refers to the degree of explicit author presence in the text measured by the frequency of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives (I, me, mine, exclusive we, our, and ours) (Hyland, 2005a, p. 53). Results revealed that self-mentions were the least used type of stance in both corpora, which accounted only for 13 tokens. As a matter of fact, this result is expected since an explicit reference to the author can violate the conventions of writing editorials, as editorials present the official view of a newspaper written without identifying the author. An example of self-mention markers is provided below:

> Ordinary citizens, conscripts, and soldiers who have stepped up as journalists to tell the tale of a war that has been thrust on <u>our</u> common humanity. But for what? Land and resources? It breaks hearts and speaks to <u>our </u>conscience (the UAE editorial no. 8).

Engagement markers

The second category of interactional meta-discourse markers is alignment resources of engagement. Engagement markers explicitly address readers to selectively focus their attention or to include them in the text (Hyland, 2005a, p. 100). Results showed that engagement markers were considerably far less frequent than stance markers as they accounted for only 5%-8% in both corpora.

Reader pronouns: Reader pronouns are perhaps the most explicit way that readers are brought into a discourse (Hyland, 2005b, p. 182). They address the reader directly and include them as participants with the use of pronouns (*you, your, inclusive we*) and interjections *(by the way* and *you may notice). You* and *your* are the clearest way a writer can acknowledge the reader's presence (Hyland, 2005a, p. 151). Data showed that there is a minimum use of reader pronouns. Below is an example:

> <u>We</u> do not know the true extent of today's and yesterday's losses and uncovering them will be difficult (the UAE editorial no. 10).

Questions: The second category of engagement markers involves the use of questions in which the writer requests an explicit participation of the reader. Questions arouse interest and encourage the reader to explore an issue with the writer as an equal, sharing his or her curiosity and following, where the argument leads (Hyland, 2005a, p. 153). Just like other engaging features, results obtained showed a limited use of questions in both corpora. Questions were the least frequent engagement in the editorials, below are some examples:

> What can be done to help Ukraine? And what kind of relationship should Western nations maintain with an increasingly belligerent Russia? (the USA editorial no. 1).

> Why talk of war when no one knows if Russia would indeed spark one? The key players know the result: a cataclysmic event for Europe and for Russia (the UAE editorial no. 6).

Directives: Another important category of engagement meta-discourse is directives. Directives instruct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer (Hyland, 2005a). They are signaled mainly by the presence of imperatives; by modals of obligation addressed to the reader; and by predicative adjectives expressing the writer's judgment of necessity/importance (Hyland, 2005b). Data showed that the use of directives was not by any means a feature of editorials, as there was a complete absence of the category of directives in the whole corpus.

Shared knowledge: Shared knowledge items are devices in which the writer appeals the reader to similar knowledge and understandings in the support of his/her arguments. According to Hyland (2005b), appeals to shared knowledge seek to position readers within apparently naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings. Results revealed that there is a rare occurrence of explicit appeals to shared understandings in the editorials. Below are some examples:

> It is possible, of course, that the combination of threatened sanctions and diplomacy will not deter Putin from further aggression in Ukraine (the USA editorial no. 8).

> What we do know is that he is enjoying this battle of wits with the West (the UAE editorial no. 6).

Personal asides: The last category of engagement meta-discourse also appeals directly to the reader and offer some inside information that assist the arguments. Personal asides refer to language within the text that is used to deliver extra and tangential information to the reader (Curry, 2021). They allow writers to address readers directly by briefly interrupting the argument to offer a comment on what has been said (Hyland, 2005b).

Similar to shared knowledge, results showed that asides were infrequently used in the corpus. Asides were used in the editorials in both corpora to draw readers in and provide them with comments essential to the understanding of the proposition as the following examples display:

> But Vladimir Putin's decision to launch a many-pronged attack–an audacious operation the USA predicted but was unable to prevent–is also a devastating assault on international norms and potentially a harbinger of a wider war in Europe (the USA editorial no. 7).

> Russia, the country with the highest number of nuclear warheads, has launched what appears to be an invasion of the interior of Ukraine (the UAE editorial no. 10).

> Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, and the Czech Republic–member states that have received the highest number of Ukrainians in proportion to their national populations–would get that increase as well (the USA editorial no. 12).

Bundles, Collocations, and Idioms in the USA and the UAE Editorials

The second research goal was concerned with investigating the frequency of lexical bundles, the most used collocations, and recurrent idioms in the newspapers editorials. According to the results presented in **Table 4** and **Table 5**, the analysis of the data showed that there are many three-word, four-word, and five-word bundles that recur about 250 times in the 16,673 corpus (15 per 1,000 words) across 24 editorials. 134 lexical bundles were employed by the USA editorialists and 116 were found in the UAE editorials.

Table 4. Three-word, four-word, & five-word lexical bundles in the USA newspaper editorials

Three-word	Frequency	Four-word	Frequency	Five-word	Frequency
according to the	6	on the other hand	3	play an important role in	5
that should be	9	at the same time	4	There is also a good reason	6
on the alert	5	There are ways to	4	In the words of the	4
There is room	4	the fact that the	6		
as well as	6	a price to pay	11		
It is possible	5	in the hope of	4		
the number of	6	It would be good	5		
the time of	5	As a matter of	6		
It should be	9	An array of	4		
This could be	6				

Table 5. Three-word, four-word, & five-word lexical bundles in the UAE newspaper editorials

Three-word	Frequency	Four-word	Frequency	Five-word	Frequency
according to the	4	on the other hand	6	play an important role in	6
that should be	3	at the same time	5	There is also a good reason	7
on the alert	6	There are ways to	6	In the words of the	5
There is room	5	the fact that the	7		
as well as	2	a price to pay	4		
It is possible	3	in the hope of	6		
the number of	4	It would be good	6		
the time of	4	As a matter of	6		
It should be	9	An array of	5		
This could be	6				

A Chi-square test was run to see if there is any significant difference between the USA and the UAE editorialists regarding their use of lexical bundles, statistical results revealed that the value of the Chi-square (X^2=0.256) is not significant at α level (α=0.05) with a degree of freedom of one (df=1). This shows that there is no significant difference between the USA and the UAE editorialists in the use of lexical bundles and both display a close similarity in employing these linguistic units.

To be more specific, the three-word bundles were more frequently used in both corpora than four-word, and five-word ones. For example, the phrases '*a price to pay*' and '*this could be*' were among the most recurring word combinations in the corpus. More examples of lexical bundles are shown in **Table 4** and **Table 5**.

The analysis also revealed that the use of modals was common in the corpus with 250 tokens in the USA editorials and 87 in the UAE texts. The Chi-square test, at α=0.05 with one degree of freedom (df=1) showed no statistically significant difference between editorialists in their use of modals (**Table 6**).

Table 6. Results of the Chi-square test of use of modals in the USA & the UAE editorials

p-value	df	Test statistic	p-value	X^2
0.05	1	0.0150	0.901300	>3.84

Note. Number of valid cases=337

In addition, the analysis of the data tackled another type of phrasemes in newspaper editorials, which is collocations. Results revealed that these restricted word combinations were relatively frequent in the corpus with 312 collocations (18.71 per 1,000 words) and they belong to five grammatical categories (**Table 7** and **Table 8**).

Table 7. Grammatical patterns (GPs) of collocations in the USA newspaper editorials

GP	Examples USA	Frequency	GP	Examples USA	Frequency
Verb + noun	Pay the price	6	Noun + noun	a declaration of war	4
	Play a role	5		Violation of norms	6
	Endorse an agreement	3		laws of war	5
	Propose a ban	3		an array of laws	3
	Launch an attack	6		War crimes	21
	Muster a response	5		War laws	4
	Establish relationship	4		Man and woman	2
	Impose sanctions	10		Mothers and fathers	2
	Deter the enemy	5	Adj + noun	International norms	5
	Open an investigation	5		Financial/economic sanctions	37
Verb + adv/adj	rely heavily	5		Distant future	2
	deeply regret	3		Public support	10
	show clearly	4		Russian troops	7
	consider carefully	3			

Table 8. Grammatical patterns (GPs) of collocations in the UAE newspaper editorials

GP	Examples UAE	Frequency	GP	Examples UAE	Frequency
Verb + noun	Pay the price	5	Noun + noun	Merits of the issue	3
	Play a role	6		Control of the planet	4
	Exhaust all efforts	2		A pall of silence	2
	Issued a tender	4		A flood of weapons	3
	Launch a war	5		Food supply/food security	8
	Make sense	4	Adj + noun	Cold/ nuclear war	29
	Achieve its goal	5		Turning point	4
	Reach an agreement	7		Similar fashion	3
	Set an example	3		Russian troops	11
	Feel the pain	4			
Verb + adv/adj	become evident	7			
Adj + adj	Black and white	4			
	Good and evil	3			
	Hot and cold	3			

The most frequently used collocational combinations belong to the grammatical patterns of *Verb+Noun* and *Adj+Noun*. The majority of them are war collocates such as *launch a war/ an attack*, *cold/nuclear war*, *impose sanctions*, *war crimes, deter the enemy,* etc. It is worth mentioning that writers of the USA editorials used more collocations than the UAE writers.

The total numbers of grammatical collocations used by both writers in the corpus are shown in **Table 9**.

Table 9. Overall frequency of collocations in the USA and the UAE editorials

Heading 1	Verb + noun	Verb + adv/adj	Adj + adj	Noun + noun	Adj + noun	Total
The USA editorials	52	15	0	47	61	175
The UAE editorials	45	7	10	28	47	137
Total	97	22	10	75	108	312

The frequencies of collocations were tested statistically for any significant difference. After applying the Chi-square test at α=0.05 with one degree of freedom (df=1), results showed that the difference between editorialists in the use of collocations is considered to be statistically significant as displayed in **Table 10**.

Table 10. Results of the Chi-square test of collocations in the USA & the UAE editorials

p-value	df	Test statistic	p-value	X^2
0.05	1	4.6282	0.031451	<3.84

Note. Number of valid cases=312

The analysis of the data also considered the use of idiomatic expressions in both corpora. The analysis identified idioms and idiomatic expressions whose meanings cannot be deducible from its individual components. Results revealed that the texts of the UAE editorials contain a total of **28** idiomatic expressions. Some of these used are *black-and-white story*, *beat the drums*, *put a full stop*, *hang in the balance*, *the silver lining*, etc. On the hand, results revealed that idioms were less frequently used in the USA editorials as they contained a total of **13** idiomatic expressions such as *the sky is falling*, *pack its bags*, and *opening the doors*.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the linguistic structure of one significant variety of media discourse, the editorial, within the frameworks of interactional meta-discourse and phraseology. It has analyzed and compared two corpora of articles that editorialized the Ukraine war published recently in the USA and the UAE newspapers. Generally speaking, a key finding was the high level of similarity between the USA and the UAE editorials in relation to the use of meta-discourse, linguistic devices, lexical bundles, and idiomatic expressions. No significant difference was recorded in both corpora as both sets of editorials displayed a strikingly similar use of stance and engagement markers in terms of frequencies. This can be justified by the fact that these editorials adhere to the norms and the practices of accuracy, factuality, objectivity of the genre itself. Editorials are the "best known genres", which are both rhetorically and linguistically distinct from any other genre (Pennock, 2000. p. 16). They are argumentative texts, which aim at persuading the readers with the opinion of the newspaper based on real facts using a variety of strategies. This result of similarity mirrors the results of previous research, which confirmed a degree of similarity in writing newspaper editorials (García et al., 2013; Zarza & Tan, 2016).

Regarding more specific results, hedges were clearly the most frequent type of interactional meta-discourse across both corpora; meaning that they are achieving a persuasive function, which allows writers to reduce the force of their commitments and convey respect for alternative views (Hyland, 2005a). Editorialists through the use of hedges express the newspaper's opinions more cautiously, reduce commitment to the truth of their claims, and avoid responsibility of certainty of arguments. Since hedging was the most frequent subcategory of stance in the genre of newspaper editorials, it is possible to say that hedging and uncertainty is quite common and a prevailing feature in editorials and this criterion has been reported in much previous research (Khanbutayeva, 2019; Zarza, 2018). According to Markkanen and Schröder (1997), "lexical forms and phrases can take on a hedging function because of the specific functional intent of a given text; this is consistently apparent in the annual business reports and in the newspaper editorials" (p. 164).

As reveled in the results, the use of attitude markers and boosters were also frequent in both corpora. Attitude markers presented a higher frequency of stance markers in the corpus and were employed effectively to convey credibility of facts and strengthen the persuasiveness of the editorials regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, thus gauging public opinions. "Editorials are bound to contain a high number of attitude markers, especially those marking agreement and disagreement on what has been done and what has happened" (Le, 2006, p. 218). Attitude markers contribute to the overall attitude and the tone of each editorial in the corpus and progressively help in constructing the public reaction towards the ongoing issues. Similarly, boosters were also used to provide certainty, emphasize the truth of arguments, and thereby convince the reader of the newspaper's opinion.

Through the use of hedges, boosters, and attitude markers writers of editorials adopt a stance to both to the newspaper opinion and to the readers. The fact that there was significantly higher stance markers than engagement markers in the corpus can be attributed to the journalistic nature of the editorials, which does not require real engagement with readers. This predominance of stance markers over engagement markers in both the USA and the UAE editorials has been reported by previous research (Lavid & Moratón, 2018).

The current study also considered the phraseology of newspaper editorials through the investigation of phraseological units, collocations, and idiomatic expressions. As a matter of fact, newspaper editorials are basically argumentative texts that adopt a rhetorical style, which is achieved through phraseology and evaluative modality (Blackledge, 2005). Results showed that editorials under study in both corpora enjoyed a high frequency of lexical bundles and evaluative modality. Most of these lexical bundles and modals were employed as persuasive devices contributing significantly to the argumentative nature of newspaper editorials. "Modality is often more insistent in editorials stating what 'should' or 'ought' to be done about a particular issue or policy" (Blackledge, 2005, p. 82). It is a common interpersonal feature of newspaper editorials, mediating personal roles and social relationships (Fowler, 1991). This finding echoes the results reported by Ahmed et al. (2020) who stated that modals as stance markers are a common feature of newspaper editorials. This is also in line with (Morely, 2004) who argues that newspaper editorials as a journalistic genre is distinguished by the use of linguistic elements such as modal verbs and stance adverbials.

Other word recurrent combinations such as collocations and idioms were less frequent. Editorials in both corpora displayed a minimum use of these formulaic expressions due to their essentially argumentative nature that are mostly based on facts. Though less frequent, collocations and idiomatic expressions were employed as persuasive strategies assisting editorialists in building their arguments of issues under spotlight.

On the basis of findings, it can be argued that newspaper editorials constitute a persuasive genre par excellence that employs a variety of rhetorical and argumentative structures written by professional journalists on current issues and events aiming to influence public opinion and expressing the institutional voice of a newspaper.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has brought into focus the use of interactional meta-discourse and phraseology in newspaper discourse. It has considered the type and the frequency of certain linguistic devices used by journalists in newspaper editorials across two corpora. Findings proved a higher frequency of stance markers over engagement markers, use of a variety of phraseological units such as modality, collocations, and idiomatic expressions. In addition, findings reported a higher similarity of language use between the USA and the UAE editorials, and such result confirmed that all the texts are constructed according to the stylistic and the ideological conventions of writing newspaper editorials.

This study contributes to the field of discourse analysis and provides useful insights about media discourse and newspaper discourse. More specifically, results of the current study have some pedagogical implications for media and journalism students. The study may benefit media and journalism students by raising their awareness of the uses of meta-discourse markers in editorials and how such patterns of interaction and engagement can reveal much about how editorialists express their stance and influence public opinion. Media and journalism students should understand that meta-discourse devices can be employed effectively as persuasive strategies, and this will have an impact on their writing practices. The study provides them with useful clues about the language of editorials and its argumentative features that define editorials as a unique form of persuasive writing. Knowledge of the concept of meta-discourse will help students understand interaction in newspaper discourse, express their stance appropriately, convey information coherently, engage with their readers in many ways, and consequently achieving effective communication.

In spite of that, as in all research, the current study has several limitations. One limitation is the corpus size, which is relatively small, and accordingly it is not possible to generate results drawn from the analyzed data. For example, the study of specific linguistic features as collocations and modality requires very large samples of texts in order to get reliable results that enable making confident generalizations. Thus, future research should consider working on larger corpus in order to generalize about the genre of newspaper editorials. Another limitation is that this study has tackled only one genre of newspaper discourse, which is editorials. Further research may consider other genres of newspapers such as opinion columns, letters to the editor, and news reports and investigate genre-specific differences between them. A final limitation is that all the editorials in both the USA and the UAE newspapers have tackled one universal theme that lies at the heart of politics: Russo-Ukraine war. More studies could be conducted to investigate newspaper editorials of different themes and types to spot the differences on the language use. In addition, further studies could investigate the rhetorical structure and the persuasive strategies of newspaper editorials across various cultures and languages.

Finally, newspaper editorials represent a distinctive genre of argumentative structure in newspaper discourse and undoubtedly, this genre will continue to be one of the most interesting areas of media language that offers researchers a rich source of linguistic data and many unexplored aspects of language to investigate in the academic world.

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