

A Meta Discourse Analysis of the Palestine-Israel Narratives: Framing Conflict in Malaysian Digital Sphere

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ABSTRACT

The Israel–Palestine conflict has been a focal point of international media attention, whereby media coverage transcends the mere communication of fact to the construction of counter-narratives (Alsaafin, 2023; BBC, 2024; Hope et al., 2024). Along with the advent of the internet era, the contribution of internet media has increased as well: their choice of words, rhetorical appeals, and framing are capable of influencing how people comprehend, construct ideological positions on, and influence intercultural openness towards human tragedies (Choi, 2021; Chow et al., 2024). Covering such conflicts is rarely neutral because it entails a subtle balance of stance and assessment that can implicitly affect the way readers read events as they occur (Choi, 2021).

Although meta discourse analysis has been widely applied to scholarly writing and argumentative texts, its application to online crisis news coverage is still an underexplored territory. According to studies by Arrosyid and Halwati (2021), Heni and Chandra (2022), and Ali et al. (2024), news media produce varied constructions of the crisis through employing certain framing choices, rhetorical strategies, and linguistic resources. With that, this paper aims to further examine the way interactional metadiscourse such as hedges, boosters, hedges, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mentions are used in online coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Through the identification of these interactional markers, the study aims to explore how online crisis news discourse signals institutional stance and shapes public perception in the online world.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge of media studies and discourse analysis by providing deeper insights as to how interactional metadiscourse markers are used in Malaysian hard news reporting, especially in politically sensitive crises such as the Palestine-Israel conflict. Furthermore, this study further adds to the communicative and ethical worth of metadiscourse, especially when subtle linguistic cues, depending on how it is used, can assist in prejudice, reinforce ideological beliefs or introduce more balance in online crisis news reporting. Therefore, by highlighting these strategies, the study not only enriches understanding on metadiscourse markers and its function in online news media articles but also encourages ethical reporting and media literacy towards neutrality and factual accuracy. Ultimately, this would better equip media practitioners and the public with the skills to critically read crisis news articles in Malaysian digital sphere.

Keywords: metadiscourse, journalistic narratives, Palestine-Israel conflict, cultural narratives

INTRODUCTION

The Palestine–Israel conflict has become a focal point of international media attention, where media coverage extends beyond the mere transmission of facts to the construction of counter-narratives (Alsaafin, 2023; BBC, 2024; Hope et al., 2024). With the advent of the internet era, the contribution of internet media has also become more important: their choice of words, rhetorical attempts, and framing can influence how people comprehend, construct ideological positions on, and impact intercultural sensitivity to humanitarian catastrophes (Choi, 2021; Chow et al., 2024). Reporting on such conflicts is rarely neutral as it is a subtle

balance of stance and evaluation that can tacitly control the way readers are likely to read events as they unfold (Chaudhry & Riaz, 2024; Choi, 2021).

Although metadiscourse analysis has been widely applied in academic and argumentative writing, its application in online crisis news reporting is still under-researched. Studies by Arrosyid and Halwati (2021), Heni and Chandra (2022), and Ali et al. (2024) highlight that news outlets shape varied portrayals of the crisis by employing framing choices, rhetorical strategies, and linguistic resources. That gap is filled in this article by examining how interactional metadiscourse markers—hedges, boosters, attitude markers, features of engagement, and self-mentions—are used when the Palestine–Israel conflict is covered online. Through the foregrounding of these interactional resources, the research demonstrates how discourses of crisis are constructed so as to reflect institutional positioning and shape public engagement in the digital space.

This research has two significant contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to discourse analysis and media studies through greater insight into the work of interactional markers in Malaysian hard news reporting, particularly in a politically charged foreign crisis. In practice, it is highlighting metadiscourse's communicative and ethical potential: imperceptible linguistic cues can add to prejudice, reinforce ideological narratives, or introduce greater equilibrium into reporting. By indicating these tactics, the study not only adds to scientific fact but also supports responsible journalism and media competence, empowering professionals and the public at large with the tools to critically read crisis news in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hyland's metadiscourse model (2005) provide a strategic means for an author to ensure that readers understand the message intended by textually structuring the text or by adding their own voice (Hyland, 2005; Vande Kopple, 1985). Metadiscourse elements indicate the presence of the writer, manage reader relationships, and manage interpretation (Yanfei et al., 2025; Yang, 2021). It provides writers with the ability to comment on their message and guide how it is interpreted.

This model has two main categories of metadiscourse features: interactive and interactional (Chen & Li, 2023; Hyland, 2017; Kan, 2021; Putri et al., 2023). Hyland (2005) describes interactive metadiscourse as focused on organising content in a way that facilitates reader comprehension, characterised as having textual metafunctions (Kirişçi & Duruk, 2022; Putri et al., 2023; Zali et al., 2021). Some examples of interactive metadiscourse markers are transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. These markers guide the reader along the text, create meaning, and show how ideas are connected to each other (Hyland, 2005; Putri et al., 2023).

On the other hand, interactional metadiscourse is used when the author wants to put himself in the discourse by expressing his attitude and stance or by talking to the readers in terms of phrasal expressions (Hyland, 2005; 2017). It shows how the author embeds himself in the discourse. Interactional metadiscourse markers include hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and personal markers. Hyland's (2005) model is especially relevant in the analysis of media discourse, whereby authors may show their stances and attitudes or engage with the readers through phrasal expressions (Aszeli et al., 2021; Chen & Li, 2023). Hyland's framework is particularly relevant to media discourse, where journalists may assert their stance, align with ideological positions, or invite reader alignment (Assalia, 2024; Aszeli et al., 2021; Hooi, 2023).

In crisis news reporting, such as coverage of the Palestine–Israel conflict, metadiscourse plays a critical role—not only in what is reported but in how it is presented. Studies applying Hyland's model have shown that interactional metadiscourse markers can frame ideological positions in news contexts. For instance, Chen & Li (2023) conducted a corpus-based study of COVID-19 commentaries by China Daily and The New York Times and found that the New York Times employed significantly more hedges, self-mentions, and engagement markers, suggesting a stronger alignment with readers, while China Daily focused more on stance construction (Chen & Li, 2023). Media coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict shows how terms such as “occupied territories” versus “disputed territories,” or “terrorist” versus “freedom fighter” can shape audience perception, illustrating interactional metadiscourse's role in projecting ideological stance (Ali et al., 2024)

Interactional metadiscourse also emphasises the writer's engagement with the reader (Hyland, 2005). Hyland (2005) further categorises interactional metadiscourse into five subcategories—hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. Hedges usually provide a buffer from being too bold or harsh, as they dampen the expression. This can also be an act of politeness (Aszeli et al., 2021; Chen & Li, 2023). Unlike hedges, boosters are expressions that emphasise certainty. Attitude markers indicate the writer's feelings or attitudes towards the content while engagement markers involve direct addresses to the reader (Moavia et al., 2023). Finally, self-mentions are references to the writer or their work, while various scholars (e.g., Zali et al., 2021; Liu, 2025) have applied and contextualised these definitions in different genres, this study adopts Hyland's original framework to analyse the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in news discourse. In crisis news reporting, framing is especially crucial because journalists play a key role in shaping public attention and conflict reactions (Ali et al., 2024; Arrosyid & Halwati, 2020). This study, thus, aims to conduct an interactional metadiscourse analysis of hard news reporting of the Palestine-Israel conflicts. By concentrating on interactional metadiscourse markers, this study hopes to shed light on the rhetorical moves made by journalists to express stance, position towards or away from readers, and construct stories.

METHOD

The study employed qualitative discourse analysis in investigating how Palestine-Israel conflicts were reported in the selected Malaysian news reports. A coding process was carried exploring how the news reports were framed using interactional metadiscourse. The purpose of the study is to investigate how language is used to assert writers' stance, develop events, and engage audiences, and therefore deemed appropriate for the focus of the study on metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005; Ninan & Sergeeva, 2023). Five news articles were meticulously identified for the study to identify the types of metadiscourse markers in reporting the Palestine-Israel crisis. The five types of interactional metadiscourse as identified by Hyland (2005) used in the coding scheme were hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. The coding process of step-by-step guidelines was systematically carried out as suggested by Saldana (2016). The study employed purposive sampling in selecting specific news reports and news agency to facilitate the analysis. The five selected articles were published online in Malaysia during the initial period of temporary ceasefire spanning from January 2025 to March 2025. The selection of the news reports was made based on four criteria. The first, all were written in English. Second, all reported events related to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Third, all taken within the specified time frame. Fourth, all published by the selected news agency. All news reports were taken from the website, accessible for the public, therefore, informed consent were unnecessary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interactional metadiscourse markers identified in the five chosen articles is presented. The analysis adopted Hyland's (2005) five interactional markers: hedges, boosters, attitude engagement and self-mentions. The markers were identified, coded and analysed. Table 1.0 below presents the frequency and percentage of these markers examined in the news reports.

Table 1.0: Frequency of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers

Interactional Metadiscourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Hedges	14	31.1%
Boosters	14	31.1%
Attitude Markers	17	37.8%
Engagement Markers	0	0.0%
Self-mentions	0	0.0%
Total	45	100%

Table 1.0 illustrates the frequency of interactional metadiscourse markers used in the news articles on the Palestine-Israel crisis. It was found that 31.18% (14 instances) of boosters were identified in the news report. These findings suggest that a level of certainty was observed in the reporting of the news, to assert the truth of the narratives. Boosters such as “must,” “confirmed,” and “fully prepared” were often used to produce firm statements or to confirm validity of the reported information. Next, attitude markers were identified to be the second most common category with 14 (30.4%) occurrences. According to Hyland (2005), attitude markers are words or phrases reflective of the author’s attitudes. These attitude markers - “heinous,” “significant,” and “urgent served to convey emotions and standpoint, explicitly when accusing or asserting evaluating stance on the consequences of humanitarian war. Hedges were found 10 times (21.7%), representing the total amount of identified interactional metadiscourse markers. This is a relatively lower frequency compared to boosters and attitude markers. Hedges such as “nearly,” “roughly,” or “allegedly,” were used to indicate a restraint or uncertainty, specifically in noting casualty numbers or assigning reports with source identification. The findings revealed that there were no engagement markers and self-mentions markers used. This is possibly due to the author’s traditional and objective form of writing style used in reporting the news. This aligns with the claim by Ali et al. (2024) who describe journalists to be keen in avoiding direct visible writing style, while producing narratives that are more neutral and objective.

The study continued to discover that boosters and attitude markers were used exclusively and extensively which suggest a style of reporting with higher certainty and more evaluative in nature. The findings further revealed that hedges were also used moderately to indicate cautionary style of writing with the use of some tentative statements. In addition. Neither engagement markers nor self-mentions were observed.

Hedges

According to Hyland (2005), hedges can be defined as linguistic devices employed by writer to indicate some level of reluctance in ownership to definitive statements. This possibly an indicative of limited knowledge as well to avoid generalisation. Thus, the portray a style of writing that is non comital. Writers often use hedges to reduce certainty thus reflecting tentativeness. Hyland’s (2005) model of metadiscourse defines hedges such as such as using words like “might,” “perhaps,” “possible,” and “about.” to be employed to breakdown the impact of stances made in the news reporting. In reporting news, hedging is used to maintain journalistic credibility by weakening statements, objectivity, and lowering the potential for bias, especially in cases of conflict or uncertainty.

Excerpt 1

Nearly 47,000 people have been killed, mostly women and children, and over 110,700 others injured in Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza since Oct. 7, 2023, according to local health authorities. (Article 1)

In this excerpt, the use of the hedge “**nearly**” reflects an approximation rather than a definite number. In line with Hyland’s (2005) framework, hedges are used to withhold full commitment to a claim to allow room for alternative interpretations or as a disclaimer. In this excerpt, the word “**nearly**” suggests that the figure is close to but not precisely 47,000, allowing for the fact that casualty numbers may still be changing or difficult to confirm exactly due to the ongoing crisis. The hedge serves a dual purpose: to preserve the factual integrity of the report while avoiding overstatement and to acknowledge the provisional nature of wartime data (Aini & Ekawati, 2022; Chen & Li, 2023). This cautious presentation is especially important in crisis reporting, where precision can be both ethically and politically sensitive (Firdaus & Shartika, 2020). Thus, “**nearly**” in this context qualifies as a hedge.

Excerpt 2

The Gaza ceasefire agreement took effect at 11.15 am local time (0915GMT) on Sunday after a few hours’ delay due to Israeli **accusations** of Hamas delaying the release of a list of captives set to be released. (Article 2)

In this excerpt, the word “**accusations**” introduces an element of uncertainty regarding the cause of the delay. It

implies that rather than asserting that Hamas definitively caused the delay, the term reflects that this is Israel's claim. This choice of language distances the journalist from the claim and avoids attributing direct blame, which aligns with Hyland's (2005) framework. It also provides room for alternative interpretations, which is one of the main functions of hedging in news discourse (Chen & Li, 2023; Gad, 2023). This hedging strategy shifts the responsibility away from the journalist and onto the source, thereby distancing the report from the factuality of the claim (Hyland, 2017; Mei et al., 2024).

Excerpt 3

However, Israel has refused to proceed with the second phase, which **was expected to** include further prisoner exchanges with Hamas. (Article 5)

The phrase “**was expected to**” signals a degree of uncertainty or speculation about the terms or outcomes of the ceasefire's second phase. It reflects what might have been anticipated by observers or parties involved but does not confirm it as an established fact. In line with Hyland's (2005) definition of hedges, this mitigates the reporter's commitment to the claim and frames it as a projected or assumed development, rather than a confirmed agreement. Therefore, “**was expected to**” is considered a hedge because it softens the definitiveness of the stated details in the second phase of the ceasefire. Such language is useful in avoiding misinformation, especially when reporting on future or conditional actions (Hastomo & Aminatun, 2023).

Based on the findings, the use of hedges in allows the journalist to balance factual reporting with caution, especially in the context of fast-changing events and politically sensitive content. The use of words such as “**nearly,**” “**accusations,**” and “**expected**” indicates careful modulation of stance, allowing for journalistic integrity without making absolute claims. These hedges help maintain the perceived objectivity while still conveying the scope and severity of the crisis (Hooi et al., 2022; Hooi, 2023).

Boosters

Hyland (2005) defines boosters as linguistic resources used to express certainty, emphasise information, and present propositions with a high degree of confidence. Such boosters include “in fact,” “definitely,” and “it is clear that.” In selected news articles on the Palestine-Israel crisis, boosters are often used to underscore the factuality or significance of events, convey urgency, or evoke emotional impact. These elements assert specific details, while indirectly reported statements with authority or emotional resonance.

Excerpt 1

The media office said ministries and government institutions “are fully prepared to start work under a government plan to ensure the return of life to normal as soon as possible.” (Article 1)

A booster can be observed in the excerpt 1 above. The phrase “**fully prepared**” is used here as a booster to indicate a high degree of preparedness on the part of local ministries and institutions. The adverb “fully” strengthens the level of readiness, thus takes away any room of doubts. This aligns with the purpose of boosters as described by Hyland (2005). Furthermore, the clause “**as soon as possible**” implies urgency and firm intent. This expression amplifies the government's efforts of returning life to its norm in Palestine, which also qualifies it as a booster. Together, these elements reinforce confidence in the government's capacity and intent to restore normalcy, which can offer reassurance to readers and demonstrate control amidst crises.

Excerpt 2

He also **confirmed** that efforts are underway to facilitate the entry of more humanitarian aid to meet the needs of the population in Gaza (Article 2)

The verb “**confirmed**” in excerpt 2 is a classic booster because it implies that the information is verified and trustworthy, elevating the statement from a possibility to a fact, which is concurrent with Hyland’s (2005) model of metadiscourse. This reinforces the reliability of the report and assures readers that action is being taken (Xiaoqin, 2017; Yang, 2021). The statement not only highlights the logistical response to the crisis but also signals the reporter’s commitment to presenting validated facts rather than speculation (Kan, 2021).

Excerpt 3

Among those released is **the oldest** Palestinian prisoner in Israeli prisons, Mohammad AlTous, 67, from the village of Al-Jabaa, south of Bethlehem. (Article 3)

The reference to “the oldest” functions as a booster by emphasising the symbolic magnitude of AlTous’s release. This adjective intensifies the emotional and political impact of the event, suggesting a significant development in the prisoner exchange. Hyland (2005) includes adjectives that emphasise the following nouns as boosters because they strengthen the impact. Thus, “the oldest” can also be considered a booster. In the context of the article, the description of the Palestinian prisoner as such is strategically used to boost the narrative weight of the article by portraying the release as a momentous or long-overdue justice, heightening its emotional resonance.

Excerpt 4

More than 150 Palestinians have been killed by Israel since the ceasefire agreement took effect on Jan 19 this year, including 40 in the past two weeks, Anadolu Ajansi reported, citing the Gaza Media Office on Saturday. (Article 5)

The phrase “**more than 150**” is a numerical booster that elevates the perceived severity of the situation (Hyland, 2005). Rather than reporting a fixed number, the use of “more than” amplifies the magnitude of the violence and suggests that the actual figure may be higher. The phrase “**more than**” strengthens the impact of continued attacks despite the ceasefire and draws the reader’s attention to the intensity and urgency of the humanitarian toll (Gad, 2023). This is a clear characteristic of a booster, in line with Hyland’s (2005) framework.

Boosters used in the reporting affirm certainty, highlight significance, and assert control or urgency. Words and phrases like “fully prepared,” “confirmed,” “the oldest,” and “more than” are not merely factual descriptions but strategic rhetorical tools. They reinforce the writer’s confidence in the claims, contribute to the emotional tone of the reporting, and help shape public perception of the events as urgent, credible, and consequential (Birhan, 2021; Hastomo & Aminatun, 2023).

Attitude Markers

Attitude markers are expressions that indicate the writer’s affective, emotional, or evaluative stance towards a proposition. According to Hyland (2005), they reflect the speaker’s values, judgements, or personal stance, often expressed through evaluative adjectives, emotive language, or value-laden reporting. The analysis revealed that in the coverage of the Palestine-Israel crisis, attitude markers were frequently observed, particularly in excerpts that feature reported speech or descriptions of events with moral or emotional framing. These markers indicate ideological alignment, influence reader perceptions, and amplify the seriousness of the reported content.

Excerpt 1

During the release process, Israeli **occupation forces** declared the area near Ofer Prison a closed military zone, dispersing families of detainees and supporters with **live ammunition and tear gas**. (Article 3)

This excerpt conveys distinctive critical tone due to the used of emotive choice of words. The term “**occupation forces**” has strong negative connotation, as it describes Israel as colonisers who are occupying

Palestinian land, reflecting a delegitimising stance toward Israeli military authority. This standpoint aligns with pro-Palestinian narratives, thus, it can be considered as an attitude marker. Meanwhile, the mention of “**live ammunition and tear gas**” being deployed against families and supporters adds to the image of brutality and aggression. These are not mere words describing actions but label them as unjust and oppressive, acting as attitude markers that shape the reader's emotional response.

Excerpt 2

Despite earlier warnings by the Israeli army, the crowd gathered to receive the prisoners, who raised victory signs in defiance of Israeli orders. (Article 4)

In Excerpt 2, the phrase “**raised victory signs in defiance**” is also an emotion-laden expression because it frames the released prisoners as resilient and triumphant. The words “raised victory signs in defiance” suggest emotions of pride and rebellion of the Palestinians in response to the prisoner exchange. The evaluative adjective “defiance” conveys a strong attitude of resistance and moral strength against an oppressive authority. This is in line with pro-Palestinian sentiment and works to cast the released detainees as symbols of steadfastness, thus functioning as an attitude marker by the moral and emotional stance of the subjects.

Excerpt 3

Condemning the attack as a “**heinous massacre**”, the Gaza Media Office accused Israel of escalating its **aggression** amid reports of increased military directives from Israeli leadership. (Article 5)

In excerpt 3, the phrase “**heinous massacre**” is a highly evaluative expression, conveying moral outrage and strong condemnation. Although the term is cited from a separate source, the Gaza Media Office, the emotive language used without balancing perspectives implicitly identifies with the author's stance. The same can be said for the term “**aggression**,” which also constructs a negative portrayal of Israel's actions that are clear attitude markers by expressing condemnation and moral disapproval, in addition to setting the narrative tone.

Excerpt 4

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) must take urgent action against Israeli **war crimes**, including those committed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the statement added. (Article 5)

Excerpt 4 also contains attitude markers. The phrase “**war crimes**” is among the strongest evaluative labels available in international crisis discourse. Its use here, especially with application to a specified leader, is a way of intensifying moral judgment and asserting blame. While attributed to an official source, the repetition of such allegations in the absence of other explanations or denials tacitly endorses the critical stance. This framing portrays Israel as a perpetrator of grave injustice, hence a strong attitude marker that calls for the reader's condemnation.

The data supports that attitude markers are realised through emotive lexis and evaluative reporting that aligns frequently with Palestinian perspectives. Lexical items such as “occupation forces,” “heinous massacre”, and “war crimes” create strong negative impressions of Israeli actions. These attitude markers serve to construct a narrative that foregrounds the Palestinian sufferings and attributes blame to Israeli thereby guiding readers' understanding and knowledge about the events.

Engagement Markers

The analysis of the 5 articles revealed no evidence of engagement markers. Engagement markers are typically the author's explicit attempts at engaging the reader in the text through directives, rhetorical questions, or invitations to shared knowledge (Hyland, 2005). With minimal use of engagement markers, news reporting is more objective and formal. This reflects less focus on reader engagement which aligns with the need for

objectivity in reporting controversial issues, where accuracy, objectivity and information are given more focused (Kan, 2021; Nugrahani & Bram, 2020).

Self-mentions

Self-mention markers were not observed in the analysis which is consistent with the findings of engagement markers. Self-mentions are adopted in writing to sound more authorial. This is illustrated with the use of self-referential pronouns such “we believe,” and “I argue” (Hyland, 2005). the absence of such markers in news reporting may be strategically employed to reduce authorial visibility, to assert or facilitate impersonal tone. When reporting crisis, it is expected for writers to be impersonal, with minimised visibility identity in deference to institutional objectivity and credibility (Kan, 2021; Nugrahani & Bram, 2020).

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, reporters select choice of words to frame how readers respond to the Palestine-Israel crisis. Indirect use of embedded cues and strategic choice of interactional metadiscourse markers not only reports events but also assert the power to frame how readers feel, think, receive and respond to the news.

The findings showed that the news agency employed several rhetorical strategies in reporting the conflict, which was reflective of the ideological affinities and national interests. Boosters were used highly by the news agency to demonstrate humanitarian framing, by assertively empathetic with certainty. Minimised use of engagement and self-mentions suggests a shared commitment to institutional voice, regardless of ideological stance.

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