STANCE AND ENGAGEMENT IN SUPPORT GROUPS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF ONLINE DISCOURSES

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Stance and Engagement in Support Groups: A Corpus-Based Study of Online Discourses** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Stance and Engagement in Support Groups: A Corpus-Based Study of Online Discourses

This study has attempted to discover the Stance and Engagement features of Online Discourses. The researcher chose to study the language of Online Forums. Three domains of Online Forums that were forums for Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues were selected for study. The researcher found that there were no comparative researches conducted on the language of these forums from Metadiscourse perspective. So, this research has been done to fill that gap and, reveal and compare the data of selected forums. To conduct the research, the researcher compiled three corpora, everyone having half a million words. Ant Conc., a corpus software, was used for the analysis of data. To find Metadiscoursal features of corpora Hyland's (2005) Metadiscourse model was applied. This model has two components i.e. Interactive and Interactional. The study investigated the Interactional component which is further divided into Stance and Engagement. Results showed that participants of Mental Health Forums used 1115.4 Stance Markers per ten thousand words. However, the users of Physical Health Forums and Social Issues Forums employed 883.58 and 725.84 Stance Markers per ten thousand words. Frequencies show that in MHC, online users were more committed to what they said and showed personal emotions towards propositions. Regarding Engagement features, results revealed that the participants of Physical Health Forums used 417.64 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words. Whereas the participants of Social Issues Forums and Mental Health Forums utilized 402.24 and 400.32 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words respectively. This means that online users in PHC were slightly keener to drag readers into the discussion using Engagement Markers (Hyland, 2005a). The results show that online users used Stance features more than Engagement features in their writings. The results of this research can be useful for people related to social work, the medical field or welfare. Moreover, it is envisaged that other researchers will also look into the language of online discourses as it has plenty of potential to be investigated.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MHC Mental Health Corpus

PHC Physical Health Corpus

SIC Social Issues Corpus

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved Grand Mother who has passed away but has left us some great memories and love.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with a brief introduction to this research. In this chapter, Metadiscourse has been briefly explained. The overview of Stance and Engagement along with their subcategories have been given. A number of studies conducted to explore the Metadiscourse features of texts have been cited. Support Groups, Online Forums, Stance and Engagement have also been discussed. Moreover, this chapter has given the details of the three corpora under investigation. Research questions and research objectives are also included in this chapter. Lastly, this chapter attempts to explain the significance and delimitation of the study.

Metadiscourse means what writers say about their writings or how they guide the reader to better understand their point or position. Metadiscoursal features are not part of the proposition but they intend to convey the writer's attitude, doubt or belief towards that proposition. Hyland (2005a) says Metadiscourse means that interaction is more than the information being shared; in fact, communication involves the personality, assumption and attitude of the participants as well. Language is the result of interaction and Metadiscourse options are the methods to express and build these interactions. Metadiscourse is a writer's (and a speaker's) overt commentary on the discourse they produce (Adel, 2006). Generally, researchers and applied linguists agree on using Metadiscourse in a wider sense to refer to several linguistic elements used to guide a reader through a text so that both writer's Stance and text is understood (Hyland 2005a). Metadiscourse refers to those linguistic elements which may convey writers' attitude towards a proposition, may express preference out of possible options or may try to personally address readers.

Different Scholars have developed the concept of Metadiscourse and devised different models to analyze texts. Metadiscourse is an increasingly important concept and area of research for the analysis of different texts. Several cross-disciplinary, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies have been conducted applying those models. An overview of studies shows that a wide range of genres have been examined with respect to Metadiscourse features. These genres include casual conversation, school textbooks,

science popularizations, oral narratives, postgraduate dissertations, undergraduate textbooks and company annual reports [see: Schiffrin (1980); Crismore (1989); Crismore and Farnsworth (1990); Norrick (2001); Bunton (1999), Hyland (2004) and Swales (1990); Hyland (2000) and Hyland (1998a)]. However, some of these studies have been carried out using different frameworks due to which sometimes it is difficult to compare results. In recent times, most researchers are adopting Hyland's taxonomy to investigate texts. Those studies investigated Metadiscourse features of research articles, job postings, courtroom opening statements, PhD theses, coursebooks, argumentative essays, student reports, and comments of online educational forums (see: Hyland, 2008; Fu, 2012; Chaemsaithong, 2017; Malik et al., 2020; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012; Hyland, 1998a; Papangkonrn, 2019; Hyland, 2005c; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012). The last mentioned study on online educational forums was conducted on a small corpus. The researcher has decided to analyze and compare the language of Online Support Groups specifically of forums by making a comprehensive corpus.

The Metadiscourse features of three types of Support Groups have been examined. These Support Groups are for Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. These are important discourses of Support Groups but there are no studies on them from Metadiscourse perspective. This study has attempted to fill that gap. The written material on the internet is increasing day by day since people are using the internet for countless purposes. The internet has now become part and parcel of everyone's routine and business. Now, the internet is also a platform and host of hundreds of Support Groups where people ask questions and get replied to by other people voluntarily. The linguistic data of Support Groups is also increasing like other materials on the internet. Hyland's framework has been applied to reveal the Metadiscourse features of the language of Support Groups. Hyland's classification is based on Thompson and Thetela's (1995) distinction 'between *interactive* and *interactional* resources to acknowledge the organizational and evaluative features of interaction' (Hyland, 2005a). In this research Interactional dimension of the framework has been examined which consists of Stance and Engagement.

Stance expresses a textual 'voice'. It is the attitude of the writer towards something, and it includes features that refer to the ways writers present themselves and express their opinions, judgments, and commitments. As Hyland (2005b) has said 'writers intrude to

stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement'. Stance deals with the writer-oriented features in which the writer composes his text to comment on the accuracy of the claim e.g. words like *possible* and *clearly* show that the writer has a strong belief in the accuracy of the fact which he is going to state. Hyland (2005a) has divided the Stance into four elements and explained why these features are used and what purpose they achieve. These elements are *Hedges*, *Boosters*, *Attitude Markers* and *Self-Mentions*. By using Hedges, a writer keeps the room for alternating viewpoints and distances himself from strictly adhering to the fact(s) stated. The writer wants to remain subjective by using Hedges. Boosters help a writer to narrow down the possible options and show their certainty about what they write. Attitude Markers show the writer's attitude towards any proposition. These devices convey obligation, surprise and frustration. Self-Mentions are the technique by which writers project themselves in the text. They are the strongest way of self-representation (Hyland, 2005a).

The second category of interactional features is Engagement. Engagement serves two purposes. First, it acknowledges the need to meet readers' expectations of inclusion. For this purpose, the writer addresses the reader in the text with interjections and reader pronouns. Secondly, to rhetorically position the audience. Here the writer drags the audience into the text by predicting possible objections and guiding them to particular interpretations with Directives and reference to Shared Knowledge and Questions. Engagement is divided into five elements – Reader Mentions, Personal Asides, Appeals to Shared Knowledge, Directives and Questions. *Reader Mentions* are the most direct way to engage readers in a text. *Personal asides* allow writers to address readers directly by shortly interrupting the argument to give a comment on what has been said (Hyland, 2005b). *Appeals to Shared Knowledge* seek to position readers within apparently naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings (Hyland, 2005b). *Directives* direct the reader to perform actions and perceive things in a way that the writer wants. *Questions* are the strategy of dialogic involvement *par excellence*, inviting engagement and bringing the interlocutor into an arena where they can be led to the writer's viewpoint (Hyland, 2002b).

A Support Group is a circle of people that get together voluntarily in order to help one another to overcome any issue of social, psychological or physical nature. In a Support Group, online users help one another by sharing their experiences and techniques, and

showing sympathetic support for others. Support Groups act as safe spaces where people can discuss their issues related to an illness or life struggle that they may be going through with those people who are facing or have faced the same issues. The purpose of Support Groups is to provide aid, information and mutual support to the needy and distressed so that they might not feel lonely.

Support Groups have been affected by new technology. People do not need to go anywhere and participate in a meeting physically if they are not interested or are unable to do so. The Internet provides thousands of Online Support Groups in various formats. For example, online digital Support Groups can be chat rooms, websites, discussion boards, blogs, emails, forums and even smartphone apps (McCarthy, 2017).

The most quoted benefit of Online Support Groups is that they are easy to access and convenient to use. Patients do not need to travel to join an Online Support Group and there is no time-restriction - messages can be posted at any time and can be answered any time (Agnew, 2001). In an Online Support Group, people from time to time exchange resources and information and all of this information is saved in digital form and can also be reached later (Agnew, 2001). The 'corpus' of Support Groups is increasing day by day on the internet as more and more people are turning to the internet for help and guidance. Since the number of internet users is increasing day by day, it is envisaged that more and more people will join Online Forums to find answers and solutions to their problems.

In Online Support Groups, people volunteer their time to comment, reply and post questions. An Internet forum is the most important and dominant form of support interaction on the internet. The most frequently used and participated in Support Groups are online forums. A forum is a place, program or publication where opinions can be expressed and openly discussed (The Chambers dictionary, 2014). An internet forum is a place where people can hold online conversations by posting messages. Internet forums also have some particular jargon e.g. a topic or a question along with all the replies by all people to that topic or question is called a thread. Internet forums have a tree structure: usually, different topics are discussed within different thematic sections and also in sub-sections (Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012). In Online Forums one's privacy is not breached as they can post questions and answers without disclosing their identity.

However, most forums give details about how many people have accessed a certain thread or how many people are online. Over time more advanced features could be added to Online Forums because new features keep adding to existing technology and phenomena.

This is corpus-based research that has aimed to find the differences in the language of three distinct corpora related to Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. In order to build appropriate corpora material from different Online Forums was collected and refined. To collect data for the corpus of Mental Health, Online Forums related to depression, suicide, bipolar disorder and other psychological disorders were visited. For the corpus of Physical Health, the researcher collected data from Online Forums on weight loss, bodybuilding and different diseases. Data was also collected from Online Forums related to marriage, divorce, addiction and crime for the corpus of Social Issues.

The three corpora have been investigated quantitatively and qualitatively. In the chapters of Data Analysis, the results have been compared and displayed. This study has analyzed the Stance and Engagement features of every corpus. After doing that all corpora were compared with one another. In this research, various Stance and Engagement features have been investigated. To find out the features of Stance and Engagement a very comprehensive list provided by Hyland (2005a) was used. The researcher has also relied on other works of Ken Hyland (references are given in the bibliography) to conduct this research.

Three different corpora that are Mental Health Corpus (MHC), Physical Health Corpus (PHC) and Social Issues Corpus (SIC) were built to conduct the study. In every corpus, half a million words were included. For this research, data was collected from reliable and verified websites/forums with a huge number of members, threads and topics. Data was collected from only authentic websites. A few criteria were set for the selection of websites which are as follows. The website should be visited by users regularly. It should not be a dead website that nobody visits anymore. The steps involved in the compilation of corpora have been discussed in detail in the chapter of Research Methodology.

Corpus studies or linguistics is one of the fastest-growing areas in present-day linguistics. It is itself not any branch of linguistics but an approach to analyze linguistic phenomena. This area focuses on methods using computers and software for the analysis

of language. Since computers are utilized for this process, the analysis of data becomes quicker, more effective and faster.

For the analysis of data, a corpus software Ant Conc. was used. This is a piece of software developed to analyze texts in .txt format. It has seven tools to perform different analyses. Moreover, it provides a wide range of options in its setting options where a researcher can set things according to their need. For this research, those options were fully exploited to make the best use of the software and come up with results with a minimum margin of error. The most utilized tool was *concordance tool* which shows a word in its context. Since a lot of words or markers can act differently depending on context of the text, so the context of every marker was manually checked using this tool.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A Support Group is a circle of people that get together voluntarily in order to help one another to overcome any issue of social, psychological or physical nature. Internet forums are the most visited and used Support Groups among other Support Group platforms. Potts (2005) says online Support Groups provide mutual support but the research on them is lagging behind when compared with websites.

Metadiscourse studies have been conducted on several texts and genres, but the research in the field of Online Support Groups is nonexistent; only a few studies have been conducted on limited corpora of Online Forums. An Online Forum is a digital application which brings such people together that are facing problems. In Online Forums people voluntarily help one another. In doing so they are building relationships with one another. So is the case with Metadiscourse which means that interaction is more than the information being shared; in fact, communication involves the personality, assumption, attitude of the participants (Hyland, 2005a) and building relationships (Hyland, 2002a). The research on online discourse can reveal the patterns and peculiarities of the language of Online Support Groups because language is the result of interaction and Metadiscourse options are the methods to express and build these interactions. (Adel, 2006).

Stance and Engagement are two main features of interactive Metadiscourse. The internet users which include bloggers, doctors, psychologists, ordinary people, etc. who

want to participate in helping are not much aware of using Stance and Engagement features. If a patient comes to a doctor, physicist, social worker or psychologist for help and if these professionals are familiar with appropriate use of Hedges, Boosters, Self-mentions and Attitude Markers, they can communicate in a better way. Similarly, some people responding to questioners on online platforms or in any physical situation may not be able engage with the sufferer properly. An analysis of a huge corpus and comparison of sub-corpora in that can show how and when to use Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides. The familiarity with the use of these elements can enhance the communicative process. Hyland (2005a) believes if the Metadiscourse features are removed from any text, the resultant text will be less interesting, less personal and less easy to follow. So, Online Support Groups investigated in this study i.e. forums for Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues can reveal dominant Stance and Engagement features in their respective corpora. The unravelling of these features will help bloggers, netizens, psychologists, etc. how to use appropriate language with clients, patients and audiences.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To study Stance Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues.
2. To conduct a comparative analysis of the use of Stance Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues.
3. To study Engagement Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues.
4. To conduct a comparative analysis of the use of Engagement Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the patterns of Stance Markers used in the corpus of Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues?
2. How is the use of Stance Markers similar or different in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues?
3. What are the patterns of Engagement Markers used in the corpus of Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues?
4. How is the use of Engagement Markers similar or different in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study has explored the Metadiscourse features of three distinctive types of Support Groups. It has explored a new aspect of discourse where researchers need to work on. This study has dug up the Interactional features of Support Groups which will help writers, commenters and students know how to use those features in their writings to make their texts more expressive, persuasive and reader-friendly. The research has explained how one can engage the reader in the text and make him an active participant in the text. This research will also be helpful for those who are working in the field of social work; they can improve their communicative skills. The qualitative analysis of data could tell the learners, teachers, students and scholars how to use Metadiscourse features in their writing. As this is a study based on very natural language instead of purely formal, the quantitative analysis of data will let know instructors, teachers, scholars and students how much to use Metadiscourse features in their writing and speaking. In addition to that, the results of this study can be compared with any other study on Metadiscourse for further research. Moreover, the research has been done on Support Groups for universal issues. These issues and data selected for this study is not limited to any region or people speaking only English language. So, the findings of this study can be helpful for people speaking any language as long as they have to deal with the same issues. In Pakistan, people still do not use forums widely yet. They can also use these forums appropriately if they follow the language style and pattern used by people already using such forums. Those patterns have been revealed in this study.

1.5 Delimitation of the study

Online digital Support Groups can be chat rooms, websites, discussion boards, blogs, emails, forums and even smartphone apps. This study has been delimited to only Online Forums because data in huge quantity is easily and readily available on internet forums. Furthermore, the rest of the support platforms like websites, emails, blogs, etc. are used by a small number of people and available data is in a limited amount.

In addition to that, the study has been delimited to Physical Health Support Groups, Mental Health Support Groups and Social Issues Support Groups. All of these support forums are related to personal issues. Support groups for education, tech, science, etc. are not included in this research.

1.6 Rationale of the Study

The current study is distinctive in its analysis of the language of Online Support Groups as no study has been conducted on the language of Support Groups before from the perspective of Metadiscourse because searching on Google for any such kind of research proved futile. It is a new discourse for linguistic analysis. Previously researches have been done on different internet discourse, but in this research corpus of three different discourses i.e. Physical Health, Mental Health and Social Issues has been built and analyzed. In all of these three discourses, people write comments to help one another in personal matters. So, these discourses are related to one another.

1.7 Chapter Wise Breakdown

This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter gives a brief overview of the thesis. The second chapter deals with the related literature to Metadiscourse, Support Groups, Online Forums and, results and summaries of other studies. The third chapter, Research Methodology, has given the detail of the methods involved in this research. The data analysis was divided into two chapters. The first chapter of Data Analysis deals with the analysis and discussion of the Stance features of corpora. The second chapter of Data Analysis deals with the analysis and discussion of Engagement features of corpora. The last chapter has summarized the findings of this research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Metadiscourse

The term Metadiscourse was coined in the 1950s to suggest a new way of understanding language. Metadiscourse attempts to explain the speaker's or the writer's effort to guide the reader or listener about the text (Hyland, 2005a). This concept has been developed by different scholars like Crismore (1989), Biber (1988), Williams (1981a) and Hyland (2005a & b). These researchers have used a variety of Metadiscoursal features like Engagement, Hedges, Boosters, Stance adverbials, and second-person pronouns to analyze how writers help the readers to become part of the discussion, guide them through text and help in interpretation.

Metadiscourse means that interaction is more than the information being shared; in fact, communication involves the personality, assumption and attitude of the participants as well (Hyland, 2005a). Language is the result of interaction and Metadiscourse options are methods to express and build these interactions. Metadiscourse is a writer's (and a speaker's) overt commentary on the discourse they produce (Adel, 2006). In a text, a writer can directly address the reader by a second person pronoun or by using an imperative. Hyland (2005a) says if the Metadiscourse features are removed from any text, the resultant text will be less interesting, less personal and less easy to follow. By examining these features systematically Metadiscourse provides us with access to the ways that writers and speakers take up positions and adjust themselves with their audience in a specific context. Adel (2006) considers that the discourse function of Metadiscourse is to guide the audience through the text. It focuses on the structure and wording of the text.

Metadiscourse gives a framework to understand that communication is a social engagement. It is based on the view that writing is a social and communicative engagement, and it offers a very powerful way of looking at how writers project themselves into their work to manage their communicative intentions (Hyland, 2005a).

2.1.1 Metadiscourse: Definition and Issues

Metadiscourse has always been a vague term and is often termed as 'discourse about discourse' or 'talk about talk' (Hyland, 2005a). Williams (1981a) says 'writing about

the writing' and Kopple (1985) comments 'communication about communication'. Sometimes Metadiscourse is just an umbrella term to include different sets of interpersonal and cohesive devices that help in relating a text to its context (Hyland, 2005a). The above-mentioned definitions might not do justice to such a concept with huge potential to include features of language which inform us how to organize ideas and how to relate them to the audience. Nash (1992) has also observed that the idea of Metadiscourse is easy to understand in principle, but it is difficult to draw boundaries, and the boundaries are not precisely marked more than those of 'style' or 'rhetoric'.

Michael Halliday (1994) argues that language is a system of meaning. The choices one makes during communication, whether to use a passive or an active structure, an additive or contrastive conjunction, a hedged or categorical conjunction and so on are hence choices motivated by intentions to articulate specific meaning in specific contexts. In fact, these choices construct and get constructed by those contexts. Guiding us to see the relation between the unconscious language choices at times and the social contexts in which we make them is the key contribution of Metadiscourse to the study of language (Hyland, 2005a).

But fuzziness persists since all researchers do not understand the term in the same way. Some researchers have limited this term to devices of the rhetorical organization by including those elements which refer to the text itself, like *now we turn to a different topic* or *it will be mentioned in the third chapter*, naming it is as text reflexivity. Some others have limited this term to explicit illocutionary predicates, such as *they believe that* and *they demonstrate that*. Both ways try to resolve theoretical difficulties with this term and analytical problems by simplifying what is studied (Hyland 2005a).

To remove any ambiguity, examples from Kopple's taxonomy can be useful. Kopple (1985) gives the example of *text connectives*. These elements direct the reader as smoothly as possible through texts and help them build appropriate representations of them in memory. These elements may show sequence (*first, next, in the second place*) or temporal or logical connectivity (*at the same time, nevertheless, however*). Kopple also gave the examples of code illocution markers (*I hypothesize that, I promise to*), validity markers (*perhaps, may, might*), narrators (*according to John, the manager reported that*), Attitude Markers (*he finds it interesting that, you might wish to read the last chapter first*)

and commentary (*most of you will oppose the idea*). He expounded that the purpose of illocution markers is to make clear for the audience for particular action we are performing at a particular time. The function of narrators is to let the reader know who wrote or said something. Similarly, the purpose of validity markers is to communicate our perspective on the validity of propositional material being conveyed, and commentary is used to directly address the reader and draw them into an implicit dialogue. The Attitude Markers show our attitude towards the propositional content. Crismore (1984) believes Metadiscourse elements can be perceived as directives hinted towards readers so they can understand what is meant and said in the discourse and they will know how to 'take' the author.

The above discussion has shown that linguists agree that Metadiscourse features refer to a variety of linguistic elements and assist readers through a text. Hyland (2005a) believes that with the help of Metadiscourse both writer's stance and text are understood, and Schiffrin (1980) has commented that Metadiscourse is the writer's manifestation in the text in order to "bracket the discourse organization and the expressive implications of what is being said" (p. 231).

After explaining Metadiscourse extensively, as several references have been quoted above, Hyland (2005a) came up with this comprehensive definition "the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community" (p. 37). In addition to this, he also defines Metadiscourse as 'the commentary on a text made by its producer in the course of speaking or writing and it is a widely used term in current discourse analysis and language teaching' (Hyland, 2017). Crismore et al. (1993) define Metadiscourse as the linguistic material in written and spoken texts that does not add anything to the propositional content instead it is intended to help the reader or the listener evaluate and interpret the given information. From these definitions and discussion, it is clear that Metadiscourse features do not add any information to the proposition but these elements help understand the proposition and convey a writer's stance and attitude towards the proposition.

2.1.2 Propositional and Metadiscourse Meaning

The commonality in the definitions of Metadiscourse is that it is concerned with meanings apart from propositional ones. Metadiscourse is such 'non-topical linguistic material' which has nothing to do with discourse topic development but it is pivotal to understand the discourse as a whole (Hyland, 2005a). Metadiscourse does not deal with the subject matter under discussion (Williams, 1981a). Metadiscourse does not add to propositional material but helps readers to organize, classify, evaluate, interpret and react to such material (Kopple, 1985). By metadiscoursal elements like *fortunately*, *oddly enough*, etc. authors intrude to comment on the subject matter of the proposition (Crismore, 1984). These views from different researchers can be further understood by examples.

Adel (2006) has given several examples to clarify the distinction between propositional content and metadiscoursal content. The researcher will explain Metadiscourse content and propositional content based on her examples. The researcher will take the following example *they are going to report it* and add Metadiscourse content to it.

If various expressions are added to this proposition as written below, it will add to the writer's or the speaker's perspective to what is being said. By this it will guide the audience on how to interpret the propositional content.

a) *Strangely enough*, they're going to report it.
b) *Without a doubt,* they're going to report it.
c) *I swear to God*, they're going to report it.
d) *Let me make one thing clear;* they're going to report it.
e) *Read my lips*, they're going to report it.
f) *To tell you the truth,* they're going to report it.
g) *To make a long story short*, they're going to report it.
h) *As I mentioned earlier*, they're going to report it.

It is clear from the examples above that the material in italics is Metadiscoursal content while the propositional content has remained unchanged.

Adel (2006) and Hyland (2005a) have mentioned that the term proposition is often left vague and loose in its explanation. In general, it is referred to information about external reality (Hyland, 2005a). Halliday (1994), in his influential book, *an introduction to*

functional grammar, defines propositional material as propositional material is something that can be affirmed or denied, and also doubted, contradicted, insisted on, accepted with reservation, qualified, tempered, regretted and so on. Earlier theorists considered propositional content as primary discourse and Metadiscourse as supportive material to the proposition (Hyland, 2005a).

Participants converse with messages that have combined expressions of three different meanings (metafunctions). The ideational function which means the use of language for expressing ideas and experience. The interpersonal function is the use of language to encode interaction, allowing us to engage with others, to take on roles and to express and understand evaluations and feelings. The third and last function is the textual function in which language is used to organize the text itself, coherently relating what is said to the world and readers (Halliday, 1994). The ideational function nearly corresponds to the *proposition* under discussion in this heading (Hyland, 2005a). In a general sense non-propositional material i.e. Metadiscourse does not involve the ideational function of language instead it deals with interpersonal and textual functions according to the systemic functional linguistics model (Adel, 2006).

So, Metadiscourse can be used to indicate how one determines the probability or veracity of the proposition being expressed or it can be used to show how one is committed to the assessment (Kopple, 1985). This can be exemplified by validity markers mentioned in the previous heading (2.1.1). Metadiscourse also allows one to reveal one's attitude towards propositional material; Attitude Markers are its examples as stated in section 2.1.1. Similarly, with Metadiscourse we can comment on the views and reactions of the readers to our propositional material and let the readers know what to expect (Kopple, 1985). This was also explained in the detail of *commentary* in the previous heading.

2.1.3 Textual Metadiscourse and Interpersonal Metadiscourse

Textual Metadiscourse reveals how one relates and links individual propositions so the resultant text is cohesive and coherent and how individual elements of those propositions make sense in conjunction with other elements of the text (Kopple, 1985) so that the audience may find it convincing (Hyland, 2000). The elements of textual Metadiscourse may refer to other sections of the text so that the reader may access the sections that the writer wants him to see. Hyland (2000) states that writers use it to reduce

the reader's possible processing difficulties and it acts as an interpretative guide. By textual markers, the writer may try to restrict the reader's selection of alternative interpretations (Hyland, 1998a). In Hyland's Model (2005a) these devices (in the category of interactive Metadiscourse – however, as a whole Hyland calls it an interpersonal model) are *logical connectives, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials* and *code glosses* which are discussed in section 2.2.1. For the researchers working in systemic functional linguistics, textual function (function performed by textual Metadiscourse elements) is realized by cohesive devices like pronouns and by choices a writer makes in giving prominence to information as 'new' or 'given' at the start or end of a clause (Hyland, 2005a).

On the other hand, interpersonal Metadiscourse can "help us express our personalities and our reactions to the propositional content of our texts and characterize the interaction we would like to have with our readers about the content" (Hyland, 2005a, p. 26). It is concerned with relation and effect, and influences matters like the author's intimate expression of attitude, the extent of reader involvement and commitment to claims (Hyland, 2000). Thus, this aspect is related to the tenor of discourse, concerned with controlling the level of personality in a text (Hyland, 1998a). Hyland (1998a) identified five categories which are Hedges (*possible*, *might*), emphatics (*it is obvious*, *definitely*), Attitude Markers (*surprisingly*, *unfortunately*), relational markers (*you, your*) (renamed as *engagement markers* in Hyland's 2005 model) and person markers (*I, we*) (renamed as *Self*-M*entions* in Hyland's 2005 model). Interpersonal Metadiscourse shows the writer's attitude and views towards the proposition while in textual Metadiscourse he guides the reader by referring to other sections of the text. Researchers have always been more interested in analyzing the interpersonal aspect of Metadiscourse than the textual aspect of Metadiscourse. In this research, interpersonal Metadiscourse has been studied as well.

2.1.4 Advantages of Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is not employed by text producers without purpose. They seek to achieve some benefits and relevance. Aguilar (2008) gives the following example to explain it: *Remember what we said about the fatigue crack*. By uttering a reminder item like *Remember what we said about fatigue crack* before introducing a new topic linked to *fatigue crack* will have the effect of 'activating the appropriate schema at the right time, so that the interpretation of the following utterances is made within the framework of old

information'. This reminder will minimize efforts to retrieve the information on *fatigue crack*.

From the listener's or reader's side, Metadiscourse can be helpful in aiding understanding of comprehension; from the speaker's or writer's side, Metadiscourse can produce varying effects such as implicitness, explicitness, interaction, etc. (Aguilar, 2008). Several linguists have highlighted the advantages of Metadiscourse which are listed below. Crismore (1983 & 1984) in his influential papers has recounted the following advantages of Metadiscourse from Williams' (1981a) work.

1. to change the topic (*let us turn to*)
2. to conclude something (*in conclusion*)
3. to assert something with or without surety (*certainly, perhaps*)
4. to point out an idea (*it is necessary to consider*)
5. to define a term (*by x we mean*)
6. to acknowledge a difficult argument (*this is a problematic notion*)
7. to note the existence of the addressee (*as you could see, think of that*)
8. to indicate the relationships between ideas (*therefore, for instance*)
9. to continue the discourse (*at the minimum, first of all*)
10. to express an attitude towards an event (*luckily, incredibly*)

Aguilar (2008) has also delineated the following advantages after carefully collecting them from the literature on Metadiscourse.

1. explanations
2. summaries of thought processes and mental states
3. orienting information
4. guidance of readers' expectations
5. guidance of readers' emotional responses
6. harmony between author and reader
7. identification with the author /characters
8. reader involvement with /support for an author caring for readers and text
9. reader involvement with the text

Vande Kopple (1985) has also defined these advantages. This was also discussed in section 2.1.1.

1. Metadiscourse helps in organizing propositional content
2. Metadiscourse helps in classifying propositional content
3. Metadiscourse helps in interpreting propositional content
4. Metadiscourse helps in evaluating propositional content
5. Metadiscourse helps in reacting to propositional content

2.1.4.1 Advantages of Teaching Metadiscourse Features

Hyland (2005a) identifies three main benefits for students from the awareness of Metadiscourse. First, it helps in better comprehending the cognitive demands that content makes on readers and the procedures writers can guide them to process data. Secondly, it equips them with the resources to communicate a Stance towards their statements. Thirdly, it enables them to negotiate their Stance and engage in a well-judged manner with readers. Furthermore, he underlines other gains of teaching Metadiscourse in classrooms and the probable contributions of Metadiscourse to a text such as: providing a context to place propositional content; inserting human presence into a written text – making it more engaged; increasing persuasive ability of a text; aiding in comprehending text; assisting coherence and relating issues clearly to each other; highlighting writer's uncertainties; helping to show writer's Stance on the propositional material in the text; indicating writers attitude towards reader; anticipating structure; linking sections and ideas, etc.

2.1.5 Effects of Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse affects readers, listeners, writers and speakers as stated in section 2.1.4. Metadiscourse helps the audience comprehend a text and helps writers to yield different effects like interaction (Aguilar, 2008). Here is the overview of the comprehensive effects of Metadiscourse on reading, writing, speaking and listening.

2.1.5.1 Effects on Reading

Metadiscourse enhances and facilitates the reading of any text in different ways. Textual Metadiscourse elements, which signal the overall structure, are helpful in processing and inferencing of data (Aguilar, 2008). Devices like *to begin with, for example, this is the problem* have been called *explicit cues* which provide coherence to a text (Schiffrin, 1987). Textual Metadiscourse can act as a strategy to arrange propositional material in context (Aguilar, 2008). It also helps readers to grasp the hierarchical

relationship between new and old content (Crismore, 1983). So, Metadiscourse features help bind the text in order so that the reader will not have difficulty in interpreting data.

Interpersonal Metadiscourse (*Hedges* and *Attitude Markers*) facilitates readers to understand the writer's implicit and explicit tone and intentions, extract facts from views, focus on points delineated by the writer and construe the intricacies of meaning within the text content. By Metadiscourse reader can observe the writer's concern for the content and it is presented (Aguilar, 2008). Metadiscourse is employed to establish contacts and create an interpersonal bond with others (Hyland, 2005a).

2.1.5.2 Effects on Writing

The responsibility for directing readers for expressing relationships among ideas falls on the producer (writer). The producer should try his\her best to assist the reader as much as possible to comprehend the text. To achieve a considerate, trustworthy and persuasive style, writers need to master writing techniques out which one is employing Metadiscourse devices. Interaction with the audience is crucial for writers and Metadiscourse can play an effective role in achieving this (Aguilar, 2008). However, writers should use Metadiscourse features meticulously because excessive and vague use of these elements can bury the original message and can cause readers to react negatively to the text (Williams, 1981b).

2.1.5.3 Effects on Listening

Aguilar (2008) is of the view that Metadiscourse engages the writer, the reader and the text; therefore, we can assume it helps short-term memory as listeners organize the information they are listening to or use knowledge to interpret it. Textual Metadiscourse deals with the macro structure of a lecture or a speech. Different researches have been conducted to know that to which extent Metadiscourse (textual and interpersonal Metadiscourse) has a positive impact on listeners. Most studies have favoured textual Metadiscourse as being more influential.

2.1.5.4 Effects on Speaking

As mentioned earlier, the unnecessary use of Metadiscourse can conceal the actual message. Having said that, the advantages of Metadiscourse are clearly visible through the speaker's viewpoint and the audience's processing of information (Aguilar2008). Aguilar

(2008), after going through several pieces of research in Metadiscourse in the academic environment, has said that lecturers should be trained to give a clear explanation about the lecture, mention when there is a digression in lecture, provide background knowledge, hint discourse structure, differentiate between fact and opinion, make question pauses, use easy vocabulary and avoid colloquialism.

2.1.6 Metadiscourse in Corpus Studies

Corpus linguistics is one of the fastest growing branches in contemporary linguistics. Many research papers use corpora as their primary data, and many use internet data (Gries, 2009). Corpus linguistics is different from most other topics studied in linguistics since it is not about the study of a specific aspect of language. Corpus has widespread applications which try to answer questions which linguists generally ask especially related to phraseology, collocations and lexical bundles and register analysis (Rana, 2015). Owing to its increasing benefits, its potential can be exploited in more areas. The analysis of Metadiscourse features using corpus is yet non-existent. Metadiscourse markers are manually checked by researchers.

Corpus linguistics, as mentioned above, helps linguists to research language in a variety of new ways. Using corpus methods for analysis is a well-established field. Adel (2006) says computer-assisted methods are not used in Metadiscourse. Though all studies including this one use corpus software to count tokens and then manually check every word in context whether it is metadiscursively used or not. This is not direct use of any corpus tool to specifically analyze Metadiscourse elements but a manual approach.

This is because Metadiscourse is a highly context-dependent phenomenon that has discouraged researchers to utilize such methods. However, this is possible to analyze a fuzzy phenomenon like Metadiscourse using corpus methods (Adel, 2006). One advantage of analyzing data in such a way will help analyze more material in a short time, so that generalizations will be made on the base of huge data and conclusions will be safer. This does not mean that human analysts will not be required to interpret data and check the context, but the research can be made more controlled, systematic and on a large-scale (Adel, 2006).

Adel further comments that as Metadiscourse is highly contextual and any analysis requires a human to decide which elements belong to Metadiscourse, it is still possible to overcome context-dependence of certain Metadiscourse elements in the retrieval stage by creating more complex search algorithms. Adel (2006) gives the example of combining verb tense information with some discourse verbs (*argue, discuss, report,* etc.) that might be used for Introducing Topic (e.g. WILL/BE GOING TO + DISCOURSE VERB) and Reminding (e.g. past tense of DISCOURSE VERB).

2.1.7 Models of Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is a loose and open category to which writers produce items according to context. Writers can expose themselves and their intentions in countless ways in texts by a potentially wide range of Metadiscourse items. Studies in Metadiscourse emphasize explicit devices which can easily be identified and observed, and later included in the analysis (Hyland, 2005a).

For some writers, these heterogeneous realizations can include non-verbal signals, e.g. the paralinguistic cues (stress, voice, facial expression, gesture, tone) which accompany spoken messages (e.g. Argyle, 1972). Similarly in written texts underlining, capitalization, scare quotes and exclamation marks are used to emphasize aspects of the text or the writer's attitude towards it.

In written texts, various forms of punctuation and typographical marks such as underlining, capitalization, scare quotes and exclamation marks can highlight aspects of a text or the writer's attitudes towards it (Crismore et al., 1993). Given the breadth of meaning realized by Metadiscourse markers, a variety of Metadiscourse taxonomies have, therefore, been proposed (Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore et al., 1993; Hyland, 2005; Adel, 2006) to precisely address this matter. The researcher will briefly elaborate on these models in the following paragraphs.

Vande Kopple's (1985) classification contains seven types of Metadiscourse markers divided into textual and interpersonal types. Textual Metadiscourse comprised text connectives, validity markers, code glosses, and narrators while interpersonal Metadiscourse constituted illocution markers, commentaries and attitude markers. Hyland (2005a) remarks on this model that categories are slightly imprecise and functionally overlap as it is difficult to distinguish between *narrators* and *attributers* especially in

academic prose where citation serves multiple rhetorical functions. Though, other models existed before Vande Kopple's but it was first comprehensive model through which texts could be analyzed. Ameryousafi (2010) also considers this model as an originator which further initiated advanced classifications.

Crismore et al. (1993) significantly revised Vande Kopple's classification. They reorganized, separated and collapsed Kopple's categories. Crismore removed narrators, moved a few sub-functions to a newly made category i.e. textual markers and shifted illocution markers and code glosses to another new category of interpretive markers. However, the two main categories remained unchanged. The textual contained two categories to explain the textual role of Metadiscourse; textual markers (referring to features helping to arrange text) and interpretive markers (features which help interpret and understand writer's message).

Another Metadiscourse model has been presented by Adel (2006). The previous models (including Hyland's 2005 Model, which has been discussed in detail in section 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4) relied on Hallidayan three-part meta-functions of language (Haliday's metafunctions have been addressed in section 2.1.2). Adel (2006) calls them SFG- inspired models (SFG stands for *systemic functional grammar*). Adel divides Metadiscourse into two categories which are metatext and writer-reader interaction. Metatext has two categories i.e. personal and impersonal while writer-reader interaction has only one category. Metatext explains the reader's or the writer's speech act. Writers may comment on their content by introducing a topic, closing a topic, stating an aim and so on (Ameryousafi, 2010). Writer-reader interaction includes those linguistic devices employed by the writer to engage the reader. Phrases like *let's elaborate on it* or *you might think* embody the writer's awareness of the existence of the reader (Adel, 2006).

2.2 Hyland's Classification of Metadiscourse

Hyland's classification is based on a functional approach that considers Metadiscourse as the procedures writers refer to the text, the reader and the writer. Hyland's classification relies on Thompson and Thetela's (1995) distinction 'between *interactive* and *interactional* resources to acknowledge the organizational and evaluative features of interaction' (Hyland, 2005a). Nevertheless, it incorporates Stance and Engagement

features (Hyland, 2001a) and builds on earlier models by Hyland (1998b & 2000). In figure 2.1, the chart of Hyland's model has been provided.

Category	Function	Example
Interactive resources	**Help to guide the reader through the text**	
Transitions	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
Evidentials	Refer to information from other texts	According to X, Z states
Code glosses	Elaborate propositional meanings	Namely, e.g., such as, in other words
Interactional resources	**Involve the reader in the text**	
Hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	Might, perhaps, possible, about
Boosters	Emphasize certainty and close dialogue	in fact, definitely, it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately, I agree, surprisingly
Engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	Consider, note, you can see that
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author (s)	I, we, my, me, our

Figure 2.1. *Hyland's Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse*

2.2.1 The Interactive Dimension

This is concerned with a writer's awareness of the readers and the ways the writer opts to accommodate the reader's expected knowledge, interests and processing abilities (Hyland, 2005a). Writers aim to meet readers' needs, 'setting out arguments so that they will recover the writer's preferred interpretations and goals'. In this category, the use of resources addresses ways of organizing text which reveal the extent to which text is formed with a focus on readers' needs (Hyland, 2005a).

2.2.1.2 Interactive Resources

As mentioned earlier, these features are used so that the readers find the text cohesive and coherent and convincing. These elements are deployed so that the reader can navigate through the text at ease. Here is a brief description of these devices.

i. Transition Markers

Transitional markers are generally conjunctions and adverbial phrases that aid the reader to comprehend pragmatic connections among ideas by signaling additive, causative and contrastive relations (Hyland, 2000). Addition adds details to an argument and includes items such as *moreover*, *additionally*, etc. Comparison (contrastive) shows argument as similar (*likewise*, *similarly*) or different (*contrary to that*, *but*, *oppositely*). Consequence elements reveal either a conclusion is being drawn or justified (*therefore*, *thus*,

subsequently) or that a claim is being countered (*nevertheless*, *obviously*) (Hyland, 2005a). Transition Markers act as linking elements between different ideas in a text.

ii. Frame Markers

Frame Markers are clear references to text boundaries or items of schematic text structure (Hyland, 1998a). These markers introduce shifts in the text or prepare the reader for the next step in the argument (Hyland, 1998a). These elements are used to sequence (*then, a, b, 1, 2, such as first*), to label text stages (*in sum, to conclude*) and to indicate topic shifts (*now, well*) and to announce discourse goals (*our intention is, I argue here*) (Hyland, 2000).

iii. Endophoric Markers

Endophoric markers are those expressions that refer to other parts of the text (*as noted above, see table 3, refer to the previous chapter*) (Hyland, 2000). These markers make the ideational content of the text salient and help readers 'in aiding the recovery of the writer's argumentative intentions' (Hyland, 1998a). By directing readers through the discussion they help them reach a preferred interpretation or reading of the discourse (Hyland, 2005a).

iv. Evidentials

Evidentials point the source of information in the text which may have origin outside the text. They help guide readers' interpretation and establish intertextuality, capture the need for academics to exhibit knowledge of other texts in the field. While reporting someone else's views often predicts an appraisal of that author (Hyland, 2000).

v. Code Glosses

Code glosses provide additional information to make sure that the reader is able to grasp the writer's intended meaning. It is achieved by explaining, expanding and comparing what has been said. These features show the writer's prediction about the reader's knowledge or ability to comprehend the text material and are introduced by phrases like *for instance, in other words, such as, or* are included in parenthesis (Hyland, 2000).

2.2.2 Interactional Dimension

This dimension focuses on the ways writers 'conduct interaction by intruding and remarking on their proposition' (Hyland, 2005a). A writer's aim is to clarify his views and

force readers to respond to his text. Essentially, Metadiscourse here is engaging, anticipating objections and responding to an imagined dialogue with readers. This category shows the limit to which a writer works to mutually build a text with readers (Hyland, 2005a). Contrary to interactive dimension, this Metadiscoursal aspect is concerned with stimulating a response from the reader.

2.2.2.1 Interactional resources

Interactive resources allow writers to express their views towards their content and readers. These features help control the level of personality in a text as writers acknowledge and connect to others, pulling them along with their argument and focusing their attention (Hyland, 2005a). Below is a brief explanation of these resources.

i. Hedges

Hedges are devices like *perhaps*, *might*, *possible* which indicate a writer's hesitation to evaluate and present propositional information categorically (Hyland, 1998a). The writer recognizes alternative voices and withholds complete commitment to the content (Hyland, 2005a). Hedges help writers to present information as an opinion instead of a fact. Swales (1990) comments that by Hedges writers diplomatically leave space for others to negate the presented facts.

ii. Boosters

Contrary to Hedges Boosters are like *demonstrate*, *obviously* and *clearly* which allow writers to close down alternatives and express certainty in what they say. The use of Boosters reflects that the writer considers potentially multiple positions but has narrowed down from multiple options instead of enlarging it. The use of Boosters strengthens an argument by emphasizing the mutual experiences needed to draw the same conclusions as the writer (Hyland, 2005a).

iii. Attitude Markers

Attitude Markers are devices that describe the writer's affected attitude towards textual content. These devices express obligation, importance and surprise (Hyland, 2000). Attitude can be expressed by the use of punctuation, progressive participles, subordination, comparatives and so on. It is overtly signaled by attitude verbs (e.g. *prefer*, *agree*), adjectives (*logical*, *appropriate*, *remarkable*) and sentence adverbs (*hopefully*, *unfortunately*) (Hyland, 2005a).

iv. Self-Mention

It refers to the degree of explicit writer's presence in the text and is measured by the frequency of possessive adjectives and first-person pronouns (exclusive *we*, *our*, *ours* and *I*, *me*, *mine*). Every piece of writing holds information about the author, but the use of person pronouns for personal projection is probably the most effective means of self-representation. Writers cannot avoid exposing their perceptions and how they feel in regard to their arguments, their community and their readers (Hyland, 2005a).

v. Engagement Markers

Engagement markers are devices by which writers address readers either by focusing their attention or by including them as participants in the discourse (Hyland, 1998a). In addition to the features mentioned above, writers can highlight or downplay the presence of their readers (with the help of engagement markers) in the text (Hyland, 2005a). Engagement Markers concentrate on reader participation and include questions, imperatives, reader pronouns, personal asides and references to shared knowledge (Hyland, 2000).

2.3 Stance

Stance Markers have been briefly explained in the previous section (2.2.2.1). Hyland (2005b) divided Stance into four categories which are Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions. Stance is associated with writer-oriented features of interaction and refers to procedures how writers comment on the credibility of the information they convey, and to what extent they are committed to it, and what their attitude towards that information is. It has three elements: *evidentiality*; a writer's commitment to the reliability of the information, *affect*; involves attitudes towards information including emotions and perspectives, and *presence*; the extent to which a writer projects himself in the text. It comprises four categories i.e. Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions (Hyland, 2005b). These features are the first four categories of the interactional dimension of Hyland's (2005a) model.

2.3.1.1 Hedges

This term, in linguistic vocabulary, was introduced by Lakoff (1972) who defined Hedges as those phrases or words, "whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy" (p.

195). Ever since this term has been applied for linguistic devices used to qualify a speaker's confidence in the truth of proposition with words like *perhaps*, *I think*, etc. (Hyland, 1998b). These words reflect the speaker's or the writer's decision to recognize alternate opinions and to withhold a strong commitment to the content (Hyland, 2005a). This may express doubt and indicate that information as an opinion instead of an accredited fact (Hyland, 1998c). Therefore, 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' (Hyland, 2005a, p. 52).

In some other researches carried out using Hyland's 2005 Model, it was found that text producers mostly used modal auxiliaries as Hedges. These researches were mostly done on academic discourse. Many researchers have applied Hyland's 2005 framework to analyze Metadiscourse features of different texts. Summaries and main findings of some of those studies are being discussed in the next lines. Akinci (2016) in his study of Stance Markers in research articles written by students and experts found that *would* and *could* were the most used Hedges in research articles by writers. In a similar study on Stance Markers in research articles in English and Korean, Yu (2019) also found that writers mostly used modal auxiliaries as Hedges followed by adverbs and lexical verbs. Incharoensak (2018) also found in application essays that *might*, *should*, *may* and *could* were the first choice for Hedges by students. Al-Rubaye (2015) also concluded that *could*, *may* and *would* were the most employed Hedging Markers by writers of research articles. This study was conducted to analyze Metadiscourse in the academic writing of EFL and ESL Arabic- speaking Iraqi graduate students. The results of Darwish's study (2019) carried on Egyptian and British theses showed that researchers preferred modal verbs to lexical verbs and adverbs in their theses. Chaemsaithong's (2017) data, after researching Stance Markers in courtroom opening statements, also showed that modal Hedges were used much more frequently than the other types, whose usage frequency is more or less the same. However, Latif & Rasheed (2020) revealed that researchers mostly used *about* to hedge their claims which was followed by modal auxiliaries. They analyzed gender differences in the use of Metadiscourse Markers in Pakistani academic research articles. In another study on doctoral theses by Ondondo (2020) revealed slightly different results in which most used hedging markers were lexical verbs instead of modal verbs. In a research

on job postings by Fu (2012), it was found that out of four main categories of Hedges i.e. modal auxiliaries, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs, modal auxiliaries were the most used Hedges. Tajeddin's & Alemi's (2012) research outcome on online educational forums also revealed that *might*, *may* and *would* were amongst the Hedges with high frequency.

2.3.1.2 Functions of Hedges

Swales (1990) comments, in academic discourse context, on the ubiquitous use of Hedges as rhetorical devices for projecting modesty, honesty and proper caution in self-reports, and for diplomatically leaving space for other researchers to do their own research or negate the presented facts. Whenever Hedges are discussed or defined their purpose is also defined along with them as the researcher also discussed in the above headings. In this heading Salager-Meyer's (1997) reasons for using Hedges, in the context of scientific discourse, will be delineated.

First, the most accepted purpose of Hedges is to tone down statements to avoid opposition and minimize 'threat to face' that can accompany any communication act. This position associates Hedges with scientific imprecision as those linguistic devices of bias that avoid personal accountability for statements by conveying evasiveness, fuzziness, tentativeness and mitigation of responsibility or certainty to the truth value of the proposition (Salager-Meyer, 1997).

Second, Hedges can be considered as ways of being more precise in reporting results because being too certain can be unwise at times (Salager-Meyer, 1997). Salager-Meyer has stated this referring to scientific discourse because in that context researchers want their readers to understand that this is not the final word as doubt and skepticism are fundamental to science. Moreover, scientific disciplines are interconnected, no scientist would want to claim the whole mastery over any discipline. So, Hedges display the speaker's uncertainty.

Third, Hedges should be understood as positive or negative politeness strategies i.e. strategies used to mitigate two basic positions in scientific writing: one is presenting claims which still require acceptance and second is denying claims made by others. Researchers present their claims and try to convince readers about the relevance of their results. However, no sooner does a claim become part of the scientific literature, it is possible to state it without Hedges.

Fourth, hedging is not only used to avoid face-threatening acts but it is an established writing style. It is the consequence of the above-mentioned reasons. A piece of writing without Hedges may not be considered seriously by journal editors (Salager-Meyer, 1997). The above discussion demonstrates that not only Hedges are employed to serve desired purposes, but their excessive use is part of the communication processes.

2.3.1.3 Classification of Hedges

Mostly Hedges are realized by verbal and adverbial expressions like *should, could perhaps, suggest,* etc. (Salager-Meyer, 1997). Several taxonomies have been proposed by linguists in recent decades which include Skelton's (1988), Salager-Meyer's (1994 & 1997) and Hyland's (1996 and 1998b). This research will mainly apply Hyland's (1998b) features (along with Hyland's 2005a model) which include modal auxiliaries and epistemic categories of verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and nouns.

2.3.2.1 Boosters

Boosters are words like *obviously*, *of course* and *clearly* that permit writers to express conviction and utter statements with confidence, representing a strong claim about a state of affairs (Hyland, 1998c). Boosters suggest that out of many points of view the writer has preferred one and confronted others by single, confident voice (Hyland, 2005a). A generous use of Boosters shows a confident and clear Stance. Contrary to that Hedges are used for measured and cautious tone.

Some studies on Boosters by different researchers have revealed varied results of the most used Boosters in texts under investigation. In Akinci's (2016) study on Stance Markers in research articles written by students and experts, it was revealed that authors predominantly used *show* and *find* in their writings. Yu (2019) found in his cross-linguistic and cross-cultural study of Stance Markers in research articles that writers mostly used *suggest* and *show* in their writings. In a study on application essays, Incharoensak (2018) found that the most used Booster was *realize*. However, *know*, *think* and *find* were also most used Boosters after *realize* in her results. Darwish's study (2019) on Metadiscousre Markers conducted on Egyptian and British theses revealed that the most used Marker was *show.* Latif & Rasheed (2020) also revealed that most used Boosters in their corpus were

find and *show*. Al-Rubaye (2015) studied the academic writing of EFL and ESL students and found that the most used Booster in his corpus was *always*.

2.3.2.2 Functions of Boosters

The function of Boosters is to stress shared information, enhance group membership and engage with readers (Hyland, 2005b). Boosters are used to eliminate possible alternatives, focusing on one to maximize certainty and thus creating a rapport to show solidarity with the audience (Hyland, 2005a). In discourse, Boosters exaggerate the actual state of affairs, highlight the truth value of the content and spotlight a section of or the entirety of the claim (Hinkel, 2005).

2.3.2.3 Classification of Boosters

Boosters (same patterns apply to Hedges, Hyland, 2012) can be realized by grammatically, through clauses (*as we all know*) or lexically through words (*likely*, *definitely*) and by phrasal forms (*seems obvious that*) (Hyland, 2012). Other than this general classification Eli Hinkel (2005) has provided a detailed taxonomy of Boosters which slightly differs from Hyland's works on Boosters. Moreover, Eli Hinkel has used the term *Intensifiers* for *Boosters*. He divided Boosters into three categories: The First is Universal and negative pronouns which include all, every, everyone, everybody, none, nothing; the second are amplifiers which constitute a lot, absolutely (+ comparative adjective), always, completely, etc., (+ adjective/noun), ever, extremely (+ comparative adjective), greatly, highly (+ adjective), etc.; the third is emphatics which comprise of certain(+ly), real(+ly), indeed, complete, etc. (Hinkel, 2005).

2.3.2.4 Relation between Hedges and Boosters

From the functions of Hedges and Boosters mentioned above, it is clear that Hedges are used to keep room for alternative opinions while Boosters are employed to narrow down the diversity of opinions. Hinkel (2005) writes that Boosters have textual functions that are opposite to functions of Hedges. However, the common factor between Hedges and Boosters is that they are communicative strategies for reducing or increasing the force of statements (Hyland, 1998c). Both of these present a writer's response to the potential viewpoints of readers (Hyland, 2005b).

The textual function of Boosters cannot always be opposite to of Hedges as they can perform the function of Hedges when serving to project politeness or sincerity (e.g. *you were a great help, and I am really thankful*) (Hinkel, 2005). The balance of both of these strategies in a text thus indicates 'to what extent 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).

2.3.3.1 Attitude Markers

Attitude Markers are linguistic elements that show the writer's attitude to the propositional content instead of showing commitment to the truth value (Crismore et al., 1993 & Kopple, 1985). Attitude Markers show writers' affective attitude towards content instead of epistemic attitude. This attitude is expressed by using comparatives, progressive particles, subordination, text location, punctuation, and so on. It is most explicitly demonstrated by attitude verbs (e.g. *prefer*, *agree*), adjectives (e.g. *remarkable*, *important*) and sentence adverbs (Hyland, 2005a). These words in examples indicate importance and surprise. These words try to hint what the reader should find important and surprising about the content. Hyland (2012) also comments that writers, by employing Attitude Markers, unequivocally express their take towards the issues under discussion 'to augment their involvement and strengthen their views' (p. 148).

Some other studies have also been conducted on Attitude Markers on different corpora. The results of those are being cited here. Akinci (2019) studied Stance Markers in research articles written by students and experts and found that *important*, *even*, *interesting* and *expected* were the most used Attitude Markers articles. Overall, *important* and *even* were two Attitude Markers that were employed by students and expert writers but their frequency level differed. In a similar study on Stance Markers in research articles in English and Korean, Yu (2019) also found that writers mostly used *important* and *even* in their articles. He concluded that researchers who used *important* excessively seem to employ those expressions to put value on their work or others' work, with an emphasis on its importance and usefulness. Hyland & Jiang (2016b) diachronically studied research articles and found that *important* and restrictive *even* remained the top two choices across articles belonging to four different fields. *Even* was used to convey an attitude by focusing attention on the writer's assessment of the relative unexpectedness of something being the

case. Darwish (2019) also found in theses that most used Attitude Markers were *important*, *even* and *significant*. The thesis writers believed that the word *important* was used to describe their feelings about certain content so that readers would take more notice of these. *Interestingly* and *even* functioning as sentence adverbials predefining adjectives were used by research participants to provide an assessment of expectations of the results or data collected in their studies. While studying interactional Metadiscourse in doctoral thesis writing, Ondondo (2020) found that *contrary* was the most used Attitude Marker. This marker helped researchers to express a contrary opinion of what other researchers in their field have expressed before. The overall use of Attitude Markers was less. He concluded that writers wanted to avoid showing their attitude in the research which may be taken to be personal and hence subjective.

2.3.3.2 Functions of Attitude Markers

The primary function of these markers is to express attitude towards content rather than certainty or doubt (Crismore et al., 1993). For example, these markers enable authors to reveal their attitude about the importance of something, about any interest in something, about its appropriateness and about the personal emotional concomitants of linguistic material (Adel, 2006). Azar & Hashim (2019) has compiled the following functions of Attitude Markers from Hyland's works: (1) these markers express the importance of the content, (2) they can justify research, (3) they can evaluate any writer's research positively or negatively i.e. criticize or praise (4) they can point limitations and niche, (5) and by comparing and contrasting they put stress on the originality of a writer's research.

2.3.3.3 Classification of Attitude Markers

Attitude Markers are achieved through attitude verbs, sentence adverbs, adjectives (Hyland, 2005a), complement clauses (Hyland, 2012). Azar & Hashim (2019) have included attitudinal nouns (*lack, issue, limitation*) too in their research. They have further divided Attitude Markers into four categories according to their function which are: expressing importance; indicating limitations, gaps, issues; comparing and contrasting; and praising and criticizing. Other than this older classifications of Attitude Markers also exist such as Halliday & Hassan (1976), Schiffrin (1987), Blagojević (2009).

2.3.4.1 Self-Mention

Self-Mentions include first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present interpersonal and propositional information. To present a discoursal self is fundamental to the process of producing a text and writers inevitably project their impression in the text and reveal how they stand in relation to their arguments, their field and their readers (Hyland, 2005b). Self-Mentions can be measured by the frequency of possessive adjectives and first person pronouns in a text; it will reveal the degree of an author's presence in the text (Hyland, 2005a). The use of first person pronouns permits authors to emphasize and to seek agreement, for their own contributions (Hyland, 2002a). The use of these pronouns is usually a conscious choice by authors to adopt a particular Stance and authorial identity (Hyland, 2005b). Self-Mentions affect ideational meaning and the impression of the writer on the reader, and it is a powerful strategy for emphasizing a writer's contribution (Hyland, 2001b).

Here are brief details of the results of different studies on Self-Mentions. In Akinci's (2019) study on research articles, the use of *I, my* and *me* was almost non-existent. However, the usage of *we* and *our* was high in Akinci's Study. However, Yu (2019) revealed in his study on across cultural and across languages research articles that *I* was the most used Marker of Self-Mention followed by *we*. Darwish (2019) found that *I* and *my* were the most used Self-Mention Markers in his corpus. Chaemsaithong (2017) found that the use of the first person singular i.e. *I* was more than that of the first person plural i.e. *we*. In Fu's (2012) study conducted on job postings, he found that the use of the first person plural (*we*) is far more than the use of the first person singular (*I*). He quoted Bhatia (1993) that by using first person plural forms, the writer may mix his or her private intentions with socially recognized communicative purposes. Tajeddin & Alemi (2012) found that the most used Self-Mention Marker was *I* in their research on comments of online educational forums.

2.3.4.2 Functions of Self-Mentions

Harwood simplifies the functions of pronouns and possessive adjectives in academic writing by saying that they aid the writer to organize a text and direct the reader through it (e.g. *First of all I shall explain a and then b*), voice opinions and knowledge claims (*on the basis of my research I would claim*), narrate experimental procedure and

methodology (*we interviewed 10 people in last two months*) and acknowledge individuals that contributed to study (*I thank my colleagues*) (Harwood, 2005). The use of Self-Mentions gives the impression that readers are being personally addressed (Hyland, 2005a).

2.3.4.3 Classification of Self-Mentions

Self-Mentions include first person pronouns and possessive adjectives i.e. *I, me, my, mine*, exclusive *we, our, ours*. Other than that words like *the author, the author's, the writer and the writer's* are also included in it (Hyland, 2005a).

2.4 Engagement

Engagement Markers are items that explicitly address the reader to make them attentive or include them as discourse participants (Hyland, 2005a). Writers can make predictions about readers based on experience, know what they will find persuasive and know where readers will need help in interpretation. This audience evaluation assists writers to produce texts accordingly. Here writers use Engagement features that have two main purposes: first in order to meet readers' expectations of inclusion, writers address readers with reader pronouns and interjections and the second purpose is to rhetorically position the audience. The writer drags the reader into discourse, predicts objections and guides them to a specific interpretation with Directives, Questions and Shared Knowledge (2005b). These Engagement Markers are divided into five elements which are discussed in detail below.

2.4.1.1 Reader Mentions: Explanation and Functions

Reader Mentions are probably the most explicit way to address readers and bring them into the discourse. The use of *you* and *your* is the clearest way of acknowledging readers' presence. Hyland (2005a) says in academic discourse *you* and *your* are rarely used, instead, there is enormous emphasis on binding the reader and the writer together by using inclusive *we* – the most commonly used Engagement item in academic prose (Hyland, 2005b). Writers take a position of an imaginary reader to suggest that what any reasonable, thinking member of the community might conclude or do so. Instead of separating readers, there is a focus on uniting readers and writers together specially by using inclusive *we*. This is mostly used to show peer solidarity and membership of a disciplinary in-group. The

inclusive pronoun invites the reader into the argument and presupposes a certain commonality and a set of mutual understanding (Hyland, 2001a). Reader pronouns also claim authority as well as communality, addressing the reader from a position of confidence at the same time as they set up a dialogue (Hyland, 2005a). Hence, in order to create an atmosphere of dialogue and personally talk to readers, writers mention them by second person pronouns. Moreover, by using inclusive pronouns, writers try to make a bond of commonality with readers.

Several studies have been conducted on Reader Mentions in different areas. The researcher will summarize some of them and compare the results of these studies with this study in the Data Analysis chapter. Xiaoqin (2017) compared letters of shareholders of American and Chinese financial companies. She found that in her both corpora that inclusive *our* and *we* were the most used markers of Reader Mentions. Their frequency was roughly ten and twenty-five times more than *you* and *your* respectively. Mameghani & Ebrahimi (2017) analyzed eleven student presentations and found that students mostly used *you* in their presentations. Kramar (2019) analyzed Engagement Markers in lectures of Physics of a scientist and found that inclusive *we* was predominantly used with a share of 95%. In another study, conducted by Papangkorn (2017) on Engagement features in argumentative essays by English and Thai speakers, it was found that English speakers preferred inclusive *we* while Thai speakers preferred *you*. Malik et al. (2020) reported that in PhD theses of Pakistani academic discourse Reader Mentions were the most frequently used Engagement Markers. In corpora of Social and Natural sciences, the frequency of inclusive *we* was same. However, *you* and *your* showed a difference in frequency. Alotaibi (2021) observed that the most used Engagement Markers in letters of recommendation were *you* and *your*. This study compared the Metadiscursive Markers of males and females. He & Rahim (2019) compared Engagement Markers in economic research articles and opinion pieces and found that in research articles inclusive *we* and *one* had a high frequency as compared to *you* and *your*. In opinion pieces *you* and *your* were used mostly and inclusive *we* were absent. Hyland (2008) conducted research on 240 research articles from eight disciplines and came to the conclusion that *you* and *your* are rare in academic writing because they imply a separation between the writer and the reader. Instead, there is a huge emphasis on binding participants together through the use of inclusive *we*.

2.4.1.2 Classifications of Reader Mentions

We can derive four categories of reader pronouns from Hyland (2005a). Reader pronouns (mentions) include inclusive first person pronouns and possessives i.e. *we*, *our* and *us*. It also includes second person pronouns and possessives that are *you* and *your*. Indefinite pronoun *one's* is also a marker of Reader Mentions. Lastly, such items which refer to readers are also included in Engagement Markers of this category which is the word *reader* itself.

2.4.2.1 Questions: Explanation and Functions

Questions are a technique of dialogic involvement, inviting engagement and bringing the interlocutor into an arena where they can be lead to the writer's opinion (Hyland, 2005b). Questions raise interest and motivate readers to explore with the writer as an equal, sharing his inquisitiveness and following where the argument leads (Hyland, 2005a). In conversation analysis, Questions are considered as a major structural and topical sequencing device, while in pragmatics their role has been revealed in eliciting obligatory verbal responses and resulting in the marking of power relations in asymmetrical discourses like a teacher-student conversation or courtroom examinations (Hyland, 2002b). Considering discourse as social action, it seems questions have an interactional and persuasive purpose. In order to be convincing, arguments must predict readers' expectations, responses and difficulties, as writers seek to balance their claims for the significance, certainty and originality of their work against the probable confusions and convictions of their audience (Hyland, 2002b).

In this paragraph some researches dealing with Questions will be cited and later compared in the Data Analysis chapter. In a research on PhD theses of natural and social sciences, Malik et al. (2020) explored questions by using keywords like *where*, *why, how, do*, *does* and *did*. Their research showed that in the corpus of social sciences, Questions were more frequently used to involve readers to engage in a dialogic relationship with the writer. In another study conducted on research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019), researchers revealed that there were more Questions (0.8 per 10,000 words) in research articles than those in opinion pieces (0.7 per 10,000 words). Hyland (2008) conducted research on 240 research articles from eight disciplines and concluded that eighty percent Questions were rhetorical, presenting an opinion as an interrogative so the

reader appears to be the judge, but expecting actually no response. Papangkorn (2019) analyzed a corpus of essays by native speakers containing 229,607 words. She found 171 Questions in them. It shows that Questions had a frequency of 7.44 per ten thousand words in essays.

2.4.2.2 Classification of Questions

Questions are divided into two categories: direct questions and rhetorical questions. Regarding direct questions, a straightforward answer is expected from the listener or reader (e.g. *what is your name?, Where do you live?).* On the other hand, rhetorical questions do not expect an answer. It is a way of saying something. Take the example of this utterance, c*an't you do anything right?*. The purpose of this question is to tell the listener about his inability to do anything properly. Hyland (2002b) claims that in academic discourse rhetorical questions outnumber direct questions. Rhetorical questions present an opinion as an interrogative so the reader appears to be the judge, but actually expecting no response (Hyland, 2005a).

2.4.3.1 Directives: Explanation and Functions

A Directive is an utterance that expresses an obligation on the reader either to do something or not do something (Hyland, 2002c). Directives instruct readers to do an action or consider things in a way determined by the writer (Hyland, 2005a). Directives are used to guide readers' reasoning. Directives position readers by leading them through an argument to the writer's claim. Sometimes a writer wants readers to understand a point in a certain way, focusing on what readers ought to attend to in the argument (Hyland 2005a). Directives can be divided into three categories according to the main form of activity they direct readers to engage in certain acts. First is *textual acts* in which writers guide readers by referring to other parts of the text or any other text. The second is *physical acts* in which writers direct readers to perform physical actions in the real world. Third, directives can steer readers to certain *cognitive acts*, where readers are involved in a new domain of argument and led through a line of reasoning (Hyland, 2005b).

Some other researchers have also investigated Directives in corpora. Their major findings will be given in this paragraph. Xiaoqin (2017) compared letters of shareholders of American and Chinese financial companies. She found that *should* was the most used

Directive in both corpora though there was a difference in frequency. It was followed by *need to, must* and *have to*. In another study conducted on student presentations, Mameghani & Ebrahimi (2017) found that *see* was the most used Directive by students. Kramar (2019) analyzed Engagement Markers in lectures of Physics of a scientist and found that most used Directives were *suppose*, *consider*, *see, look*, *imagine* and *notice*/*note* respectively. Papangkorn (2017) found in argumentative essays that most used Directives were modal verbs. The most used Directives were *should*, *must*, *have*/*has to* and *need*(*s*) *to*. Imperative sentences were almost missing. Malik et al. (2020) found in their study on PhD theses that after Reader Mentions, Directives were the most frequently used Engagement Markers. *Should*, *must, define, develop, find* and *imagine* were the most frequently used Directives in the corpus of social sciences. Comparatively, in the natural sciences, Directives were less frequently employed by writers. He & Rahim (2019) compared Engagement Markers in economic research articles and opinion pieces and found that *see* and *consider* were the most used Directives in both corpora. The overall frequency of Directives was high in research articles. Markovic (2013) showed that in introductory textbooks the most employed Directives were *note* and *compare,* followed by *notice* and *consider.* Other verbs like *take, think* and *contrast* appeared sporadically in the corpus.

2.4.3.2 Classification of Directives

Directives can be classified into three categories with respect to their surface structures: imperatives, necessity modals and predicative adjectives followed by *to-* clause. Imperatives are simply imperative sentences which have verbs like *follow, look at, mention, find, go,* etc. (e.g. *<u>follow</u> my instructions, <u>look</u> at him*). Hyland (2002c, 2005a) has provided the list of most common imperatives. Obligation modals or necessity modals are *should, ought to, have to, must,* etc. (e.g. *you <u>should</u> work hard, he <u>must</u> respect his parents*). The last category is of predicative adjectives which are like *it is necessary to, It is important to, It is essential to,* etc. (e.g. *<u>it is essential to</u> the growth of a plant, <u>it is important to</u> note the sequence of events*).

2.4.4.1 Appeals to Shared Knowledge: Explanation and Functions

Appeals to shared knowledge intend to place readers within naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings. The idea of ‘sharedness’ is invoked by authors to smuggle

contested ideas into their argument. The presence of explicit markers is being referred here where readers are asked to recognize something accepted or familiar. Readers can be made to agree with the writer by making on some kind of implicit contract concerning what can be accepted, but sometimes these markers of solidarity involve clear calls demanding from readers to identify with specific views. To do so, a writer actually constructs a reader by presupposing that a reader has such beliefs, the writer assigns the reader a role in creating the argument, acknowledges the contribution of the reader while moving the focus of the discourse away from the writer to shape the role of the reader (Hyland, 2005b). Appeals to Shared Knowledge are perhaps a very manipulative form of Engagement as they try to direct readers into accepting the conclusions of an argument through presupposing their argument with its assumptions (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a).

Here are the results of some studies on Appeals to Shared Knowledge. Kramar (2019) found in his study on lectures of Physics of a scientist that the most used marker of Appeals to Shared Knowledge was *of course.* It was used to refer to the disciplinary knowledge that students are required to have, especially that is related to the methods, procedures and limitations of Physics. Papangkorn (2017) found in argumentative essays that most used markers of Appeals to Shared Knowledge were *of course*, *obviously* and *definitely* in his both corpora. Malik et al. (2020) found in their study on PhD theses of Pakistani academic discourse that Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a very low frequency in their both corpora of social and natural sciences. In another comparative study between research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) revealed that *common* and *typically* were most used markers of Appeals to Shared Knowledge in both genres. *Of course* and *obvious* were used less number of times.

2.4.4.2 Classification of Appeals to Shared Knowledge

Appeals to shared knowledge can be grouped into two categories according to surface structure i.e. single word expressions (e.g. obviously, familiar) and multiword expressions (e.g. of course, as a rule). However, Hyland & Jiang (2016a) has made a further classification on the base of knowledge they appeal to. Appeals to shared knowledge are categorized into three categories: Logical reasoning; concerned with coherence of the argument, routine conditions; concerned with casual circumstances or behavior of real-

world objects and familiarity with tradition; concerned with casual community practices and beliefs.

2.4.5.1 Personal Asides: Explanation and Functions

Personal Asides allow authors to briefly interrupt the argument to offer a comment on what has been said. Personal Asides not only show something of the writer's personality and desire to explicitly intervene to give an opinion, but they can also be considered as a key to reader-oriented strategy. By turning to the reader in the middle of the argument, the writer acknowledges the audience and responds to it, often to start a brief interpersonal dialogue. Such interventions add more to the writer-reader relationship than to the propositional development of the discourse (Hyland, 2005b). Asides make a relation between participants independent of an assessment of what material needs to be made explicit: they are intervention to connect. They function to demonstrate that both reader and writer are involved in the same thing and are in a position to draw on shared understandings. While all writing needs to solicit reader collusion, this kind of Engagement is far more common in the soft fields as readers must be drawn in and involved as participants in a dialogue to a greater extent than in the sciences (Hyland, 2005a).

Malik et al. (2020) found in their study on PhD theses of Pakistani academic discourse that Personal Asides along with Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a very low frequency in both corpora of social and natural sciences. Papangkorn (2019) also reported that in argumentative essays by native English speakers the frequency of Personal Asides was 2.44 items per ten thousand words. In non-native corpus, the frequency was 0.09 per ten thousand words. Both frequencies were quite low when compared with other elements of Engagement. The results of a study conducted on economic research articles and opinion pieces showed that there are more Personal Asides in economic research articles than those in opinion pieces. However, the statistical analysis does not show a significant difference in the use of the markers between economic research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019).

2.4.5.2 Classification of Personal Asides

Personal Asides are mainly achieved by punctuation marks. The first punctuation mark is *dash* by which a writer briefly intervenes to comment on what has been said. The second is *parenthesis* by which the writer tries to further explain the content. Other than this personal asides can be given by words like *by the way* and *incidentally* (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a)

2.5 Internet

Internet is a system that allows various computers across the world to interconnect. It has made communication faster and cheaper, and it has impacted every aspect of human society. This research also testifies and highlights one of the several aspects of the internet as it aims to investigate Support Groups that are created because of the internet and on the internet. Crystal (2001) has quoted another author's, John Naughton, comments about the impact of the internet in his book – 'the Internet is one of the most remarkable things human beings have ever made. In terms of its impact on society, it ranks with print, the railways, the telegraph, the automobile, electric power and television. Some would equate it with print and television, the two earlier technologies which most transformed the communications environment in which people live' (p. vii). The impact of the internet is observed in everyday life. In the next headings literature review related to the internet, language and this research is discussed. However, the researcher will avoid giving statistics about how many people use the internet and how many people access internet forums or any other stat related to this research which are abundant in the research literature. These statistics change at a very fast pace and the statistics mentioned in the literature cannot be upgraded, so they are inevitably outdated; therefore, quoting such statistics is impertinent.

2.5.1 Internet Linguistics

Internet linguistics is the area of language which deals with the language forms and styles that have emerged under the influence of the internet. Though the material on internet linguistics is not as much available as in other fields of linguistics, researchers have started to investigate this vacant area for research. David Crystal has written two influential books related to this field: *Language and Internet* (2001) and *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide* (2011). He believes that the internet is increasingly being viewed from a social

perspective; therefore, the role of language becomes central to it. If the internet is a revolution, then a linguistic revolution is also expected. He mentioned five important internet-using situations which have the potential to make language of internet significantly different from other written discourses. These new areas are e-mail, chat groups (further divided into two categories), virtual worlds, World Wide Web. Language being a sensitive indicator of social change, it would be amazing if such an innovative phenomenon (internet) did not bring a corresponding impact on the ways we communicate (Crystal, 2001).

Crystal (2011) has tried to eliminate some misconceptions about the effect of the internet on language. He criticizes those who think any new technology will deteriorate the standard spoken and written language. These kinds of issues were also raised on the arrival of SMS, but all of these concerns are based on myth. He believes that one should rejoice to investigate the written language provided by means of the internet (Crystal, 2005). However, there will be some challenges to researches being held in the language of the internet. First of all, the amount of material is huge to explore as the internet contains more written language than all the libraries of the world put together. Secondly, it is a diverse platform in terms of stylistic range as it has a huge quantity of material found in webpages, chatrooms, instant messaging, blogging, texting, tweeting, emails, etc. all of these areas have different communicative properties, strategies and perspectives. So, it will be difficult to find linguistic generalizations that apply to internet language as a whole (Crystal, 2011). One more challenge is the speed of change on the internet. Crystal (2001) did not need to mention blogging and instant messaging as they were not prevalent at that time, but in the 2006 edition, he included a section on them. Similarly, there is no mention of social networking sites in the 2006 edition of his other book (2011), but he had to mention them later. Hence, linguistic researches of the internet are always at risk of being outdated no sooner they are written (Crystal, 2011). Such trends are expected in the coming time when new areas for linguistic research will keep emerging on the platform of the internet. That rapid increase of linguistic data on the internet might cause a rapid transformation of language or emergence of new varieties of language.

2.5.2 Scope of Internet Linguistics

Crystal (2005) says that a new branch of any academic discipline does not emerge very often, but the advent of the internet has had such an impact on language that it is the right time to explore and research 'internet linguistics' because the scope of internet linguistics is very huge. It is also possible to witness the fast evolution of comparative internet linguistics, as the medium is becoming increasingly multilingual. Crystal (2005) has highlighted three points to do with the medium; its formal character, its use, and its exploitation.

As for its formal character is concerned, the internet has allowed evolving a new medium of interaction that is fundamentally different from traditional conversation speech and writing. The characteristics which differentiate it from speech are simultaneous feedback, the non-existence of nonsegmental phonology and its trait to hold multiple interactions at the same time. The characteristics which differentiate computer mediated communication from writing are its dynamic dimension, ability to frame message and hypertextuality. These features are more important than the little effect CMC is having on the apparent properties of language i.e. introducing new grammar features, vocabulary and spellings (Crystal, 2005).

Crystal (2005) has mentioned three perspectives of using this medium: sociolinguistics, educational and applied. From a sociolinguistics perspective, the internet has provided new stylistic varieties which have worried some people due to its informality thinking that it may cause deterioration in a language. Crystal counters them by saying 'rather than condemning it, therefore, we should be exulting in the fact that the internet is allowing us to once more explore the power of the written language in a creative way'. From an educational perspective, the internet is changing our sense of responsibility toward language use, making people to consider their role as communicators. Owing to the emergence of informal varieties, a new relationship between standard and non-standard English is likely, and this may have immediate educational implications. Children have to learn appropriate use of language in all aspects that are reading, writing, speaking and listening. Teachers will have to make sure the informal style SMS abbreviations do not turn up in formal essays because these features were designed for only electronic communication style. From a stylistic perspective, of particular interest are the processes

in which the internet is fostering new kinds of creativity through language, most importantly in literature. For example, blogging is providing a new genre of diary writing, which was considered to be dying out a literary domain. The language of blogs is in its 'naked' form – without the presence of proofreaders or copy-editors. It is a new stage in the evolution of written language and a motivation for adult and child literacy.

Lastly, researchers can exploit this medium that may be called applied perspective. The Internet provides a platform of multilingualism- a situation that will become diverse as multiple lingual communities come online. In particular, minority languages can benefit from it. This platform helps in easy documentation as digital techniques allow easy recording. Secondly, the internet helps in language revitalization, by allowing speakers separated by space to have a virtual contact by means of chat, instant messaging and emails (Crystal, 2005).

2.5.3 Language of Internet Discourse

The advent of the internet and rapid growth of communication has created a new variety of language. It considerably changed the language used on the internet. Several pieces of research have been conducted on the language of internet discourse under different terminologies. AbuSa'aleek (2015) has quoted the following terms used by different researchers: *electronic discourse, electronic language, Computer Mediated Communication, Netlish, Weblish, interactive written discourse, Internet language, cyberspeak, netling, netspeak, cyberlanguage,* and *virtual language.*

Lee (2002) commented that the existence of electric discourse features like unconventional punctuation, misspellings and abbreviations is because of spontaneity, hence, writers like to write briefly and informally. The easy attitude leads to spelling errors and the use of non-standard pronunciation and punctuation. One more significant feature found in another research carried out in the field of electronic discourse is the linguistic economy. The research pointed out several methods of economical use of language in electronic discourse e.g. clippings, abbreviations, orthographic reduction, ellipses and shortenings (Ferrara, Brunner, & Whittemore, 1991).

Segerstad (2002) found that netizens use capital letters, emoticons, repetition of letters, asterisks and symbols replacing words as paralinguistic cues in English. Internet conversation lack physical phenomena like gestures, body postures and facial expression

therefore writers have to use emoticons, bold and block letters (Kadir, Maros, & Hamid, 2012). In order to make up for paralinguistic features, internet users have invented abbreviations (e.g. *btw* for by the way, *lol* for lot of laughter) and keyboard symbols using smiley faces (e.g. ☺) (Lee, 2001).

Another group of researchers found the following common patterns in electronic communication i.e. Shortenings (e.g. *lang* for *language*), contraction (e.g. *gd* for *good*), *g* clipping (e.g. *goin* for *going*), other clippings (e.g. *hav* for *have*), acronyms and initialism (e.g. *v* for *very*), letter/number homophones (e.g. *1* for *one*) and non-conventional spellings (e.g. *sum* for *some*) (Thurlow & Brown, 2003).

2.6 Support Groups

A Support Group is a circle of people that get together voluntarily in order to help one another to overcome any issue of social, psychological or physical nature. In a Support Group, online users help one another by sharing their experiences, copying the techniques and showing sympathetic support for others. McCarthy (2017) says Support Groups act as safe spaces where people can discuss their issues related to an illness or life struggle that they may be going through with those people who are facing the same issues. The purpose of Support Groups is to provide aid, information and mutual support to the needy and distressed so that they might not feel lonely.

2.6.1 Online Support Groups

Support Groups have been affected by new technology. People do not need to go anywhere and physically participate in a meeting if they are not interested and are unable to do so. The Internet provides thousands of Online Support Groups in various formats. For example, online digital Support Groups can be chat rooms, websites, discussion boards, blogs, emails, forums and even smartphone apps (McCarthy, 2017).

Online Support Groups date back to at least 1982 and possibly the late seventies (Potts, 2005). In some ways, online support existed even before the Internet as the entity really began in the form of electronic bulletin board systems which pre-date the Internet (Agnew, 2001).

Support Groups involve mutual support and information provision. The research on Online Support Groups despite being numerous has lagged behind as compared to

Websites (Potts, 2005). Online Support Groups are hugely diverse. Some are linked to organizations and many have an independent existence. Most of the groups are created by people facing problems rather than by professionals in healthcare, which means what they cover and who they are for is defined by the users, not clinicians. These groups exist for everything from alcoholism to Zollinger-Ellison syndrome and deal with several issues beyond medical conditions (e.g. parenting, victims of professional misconduct, bereavement). Some online groups are set up for particular social groups with problems (Potts, 2005). Support Groups typically target particular issues or ailments. For example, there are Support Groups for those who are living with grief, those who have received chronic illness diagnosis, like HIV or cancer. Support Groups for mental health are also very common and are very effective in helping those going through any condition like depression or anxiety (McCarthy, 2017). The ubiquitous presence of Support Groups is itself a signal of their success. The existence of Support Groups on a wide range of issues proves that they are helpful for patients.

2.6.2 Types of Support Groups

Two major types of Support Groups have been identified in related literature i.e. professionally led Support Groups and volunteer Support Groups. Volunteer Online Support Groups (OSGs) have been further bifurcated into peer Online Support Groups and self-help groups (Strobel, Adams, & Rudd, 2014).

Professionally led Support Groups are therapeutic in nature; they stress on developing treatment objectives within a group setting. These groups focus on sharing experiences, giving feedback, providing awareness through the aid of trained people. These Support Groups are facilitated by qualified individuals like nurses, social workers, mental health specialists, etc.

Volunteer OSG are divided into two categories: peer OSG and self-help OSG. Dennis (2003) has defined peer support as ‘the provision of emotional, appraisal and informational assistance by a created social network member’. The social network member should have experience in the health field to offer support. The aims of peer Support Groups are to offer a remedy, establish interaction and encourage personal growth. On the other hand, self-help Support Groups are created by individuals who come together to address a particular issue, manage a problem or bring about change through discussing

coping strategies. This is different from self-help resources like books and videos. In these groups, communication is slightly informal and every person can get insight into any one's personal issue. These groups are not run by professionals (Strobel, Adams, & Rudd, 2014).

2.6.3 Benefits of Online Support Groups

The most important benefit of Support Groups is convenience and accessibility. Patients do not have to travel to participate in a Support Group. In addition to that, there is no temporal restriction; messages can be posted and responded at any time. In case of a rare disease, the travel to an on-site Support Group would be unreasonable because that might exist too far. Secondly, sick people or elderly people and caretakers may not feel well emotionally and physically to commute and present themselves in a face-to-face environment (Agnew, 2001). So, accessing an Online Support Group is much easier than reaching to a physical Support Group.

Some benefits come from the nature of the online medium of exchange. In a Support Group, there is a continuous exchange of information and resources. All of this material is saved, indexed and archived resulting in a huge bank of material that can be retrieved at a later date. In face-to-face conversation patients have to write down information and later copy them for other group members (Agnew, 2001). People can benefit from that material too which has been posted for other people. In fact that can be even more helpful as online users have shared their experience after going through treatments suggested by other users to them. Such experience can act as 'reviews' for new users.

Many people are shy and hesitant to communicate in a face-to-face environment. They might feel free to communicate with others remaining stealth. Some diseases can cause changes in physical appearance and patients may not like to leave their homes. Other patients having sensitive diseases may not want anybody to know about their disease in fear of being negatively judged. One study revealed that men feel comfortable in remaining anonymous in online communication (Agnew, 2001).

2.7 Online Forums

When it comes to Online Support Groups, internet forums are the most visited and used Support Groups among other Support Group platforms. A forum is a place, program

or publication where opinions can be expressed and openly discussed (The Chambers dictionary, 2014) and an online forum is web-based (digital) application bringing people together with shared interests and problems (Biriyai & Thomas, 2014). One of the reasons for the popularity and increasing use of online forums is that they are easily accessible and users do not require prior registration most of the times to read posts on forums. Online discussion forums can be categorized into three groups depending on their display format: non-threaded, semi-threaded and fully threaded forums (Indrova, 2011). Non-threaded forums basically serve as notice board instead of encouraging a discussion. Messages are divided on the basis of topics; they generally appear in chronological order. Semi-threaded forums are most widely used. In this kind of forum, the initial message is displayed on the top and this allows users to reply to it. The replies then line up one under another below the initial message. The reply order is chronological, with the most recent messages appearing under the older ones. Users who intend to react to one of the later messages can indicate it either by linking or quoting. In the case of fully threaded forums, their layout is similar to semi-threaded forums, but in fully threaded forums users can reply to the replies on the initial message, not only to the message itself (Indrova, 2011). The overall structure of a forum facilitates users to reply to comments or see relevant material. Moreover, search options can also be very useful for online users.

2.7.1 Structure of a Forum

Internet forums usually have a tree-like structure. The top end has categories that represent a major topic of discussion. These categories comprise sub-forums and these sub-forums can have further division. The lowest level is of *thread* which is a topic or a question including all the replies under it posted by members. Forums are organized into a limited set of generic topics driven and updated by a group called members, and governed by a group called moderators. A forum can have a graph structure. So, a forum is made up of user groups which are different users that can access the forum. *Posts* are the messages submitted to forums by different users and *threads* are topics for which a user can submit a post (Biriyai & Thomas, 2014).

2.7.2 Common Features of Forum

Some of the common features of forums are the following. A *private message* is a message sent by a member to any other member in private. An *attachment* is a file being attached to a post and which is saved in the forum's server. Usually, forums limit the size and kind of file being uploaded. An emoticon is a symbol or combination of symbols to convey any feelings especially emotional content. Forums implement a system through which some of the text representations of emoticons (e.g. xD, :p) are rendered as a small image. Forums can also conduct opinion polls and options can be a single choice or multiple choice and individual voters' choices can be displayed privately or publicly (Biriyai & Thomas, 2014).

2.7.3 Research Potential of Online Forums

Online forums are a rich resource of material for the analysis of different researches in different fields. Research forums can be run by NGOs, religious organizations, political parties, and so on. Generally, these forums are run by and used by members and supporters of different organizations or communities for discussing matters of concern of the respective interest group. Hence these forums allow for the analysis of typical discourses taking place within such communities. A clear benefit of these forums is that they provide an unlimited amount of data for analysis. Some forums, with thousands of users, feature millions of postings in several thousands of threads. Even small forums can provide ample material for any type of social scientific analysis. As the material exists already in digital format, it saves the researcher from labour-intensive procedures of the transcription of audio data (Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner, 2012).

Internet forums provide relatively authentic and natural data for research. People interact in research forums without any interference of a potential researcher so the possibility of influence on the expression of thoughts is diminished (Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner, 2012). Contrary to face to face conversation, users knowing that their identity will not be revealed are more open. In the forums of radical or ideologically communities, users will disclose their opinions more freely and will be little concerned with social desirability (Glaser, Dixit, & Green, 2002).

2.7.4 Corpus Construction of Online Forums

A corpus is an electronically saved and searchable collection of texts of a language (Jones & Waller, 2015) and can contain either complete texts or extracts from huge texts (Hunston, 2006). In order to make a proper representative corpus for analysis Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner (2012) have given a few steps and methods for the construction of a corpus of online forums. First of all relevant forums should be selected. This means determining potentially appropriate websites and then analyzing whether that particular forum would provide enough material for research.

After the selection of one or more forums, the researcher would mark suitable sections and threads according to research questions. Generally, it is preferable to collect more data than is needed, for it is possible to skip irrelevant and repeated data. When comparing different forums, it may not be possible to analyze all potentially pertinent material. In such a case, sampling techniques could be applied but the researcher should succinctly define and justify sampling strategies. A problem may arise in small forums in case responses to a thread are few. The researcher should prefer threads with more responses. The researcher should also prefer threads featuring postings of a large number of different users (Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner, 2012).

Even though data derived from online forums is in digital format, it still requires rigorous refinement for analysis. The following steps can prove fruitful to ensure a smooth procedure. These steps should be applied to a copy of the original text because the researcher should be able to reach the original layout if they need so. First, the researcher should determine the format, then remove irrelevant elements of the website (pictures, emoticons, user information and names, header, footer) and then apply a uniform layout (Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the methods employed by the researcher to conduct this research. This chapter gives detail about corpora which were examined. The methods and steps involved in the construction of corpus have been explained in detail. This chapter also gives a description of websites that were the source of data collection. This chapter also gives details about the research framework and tools used for this research.

3.1 Introduction to Corpus of Current Study

This research aimed to compare the corpora of Social Issues Forums, Physical Health Forums and Mental Health Forums. For the collection of data for Social Issues, the data from forums for marriage, divorce, addiction and religious affairs was collected. Whereas for Physical Health Corpus, data was collected from forums for weight loss, different diseases and bodybuilding. Similarly, the source of data for Mental Health Corpus was from various forums dedicated to depression, suicide, bipolar disorder and other psychological issues. All of the three corpora are related to one another though they deal with different personal issues. There are hundreds of other Online Forums which deal with plethora of issues like technology, education, social media, news, science, etc. but they were not selected for this research because they are not linked to physical, social or mental health issues. The researcher intended to research and analyze the latter mentioned categories.

A corpus of 1.5 million words was built for this study. It contained three sub-corpora every one of which included 500,000 words. These words were collected from five websites each for every corpus. The description of every website has been provided in this chapter. Every website was the source of one hundred thousand words.

3.2 Corpus Compilation

For this research, the data was collected from reliable and verified websites/forums with a huge number of members, threads and topics. Unverified websites were not chosen for the data selection. A few criteria were set for the selection of websites which are as follows. The website should be visited by users regularly i.e. active. It should not be a dead

website that nobody visits anymore. Moreover, it should host several discussion topics instead of confining to a few only. It should also facilitate the users by providing search tools that make it easier to navigate the website. Those websites/forums were selected which provided proper set rules or a thread on the rules of forum to participate in discussion. In addition to all this, those websites were preferred which were constantly monitored by moderators and administrators to keep the content user-friendly and avoid any abusive language. In addition to that websites with good layout and simple design were preferred. Moreover, websites with easy to use interface and easy to navigate were selected in which index of threads could be located easily and topics were labeled appropriately. In the data collection procedure, the research tools provided by the websites were utilized.

For the collection of data, specific threads which were closest to the fields under investigation were selected. For instance, a website may provide platform to Physical Health Issues and Mental Health Issues. In such cases if data was being collected for PHC, threads related to weight loss, disease, different physical pains and bodybuilding were selected. Those threads were selected which had the maximum number of replies which made data collection easier and faster. This also provided proper and representative data for the analysis. Threads with only a few replies were not selected. For this research categories for different topics and sub-forums in websites were not selected instead at the lowest level division i.e. threads were specified for data collection. Comments/replies under those threads were copied for corpora. To analyze corpora data was cleaned. The procedures for cleaning that data have been mentioned in the next section. The researcher followed steps necessary in the construction of corpus from Support Groups outlined by Holtz, Kronberger and Wagner (2012). This has also been discussed in section 2.7.4 of Literature Review.

3.3 Steps in Corpus Making

Data was refined in a number of steps.

1. First of all, the data was copied from the website and pasted in Microsoft Word. The original data was copied in another folder. Here the pruning of the data began. All the names of the online users who asked questions and those who

replied to the questions were removed. Dates and times were also removed which are always mentioned along with the name of the questioner.

2. Every kind of image and simile was also removed from the data using a tool in Microsoft Word. Page and reply numbers were removed. Joining dates written along with names of online users were removed. If the time of last activity of members on website or online/offline status was mentioned on the website, such words were also excluded. Repeated material and quotations were taken out. Websites were frequently mentioned in replies by users and their links were given in their replies. So, all website links in all three corpora were deleted to get the actual words of online users.
3. As there can be hundreds of replies to a single question, a discussion among the online users begins. So to facilitate the interaction websites provide an option, in which one user can answer a specific comment of another person, by which one can mention the reply of another person. In such cases that reply is rewritten. Sometimes re-mentioned statements exceed the actual content. For example, five persons can mention the comment of one person. To make the data reliable and true representative of the questions regarding Support Groups under study every re-mentioned statement was meticulously removed. In order to achieve 100,000 thousand words of every website, nearly 300,000 words from every website were collected.
4. All of this data was copied in the third folder where data was reduced to only 100,000 words. Only a few hundred additional words were kept.
5. In the last step, all Microsoft Word files were converted to .txt format since AntConc. processes files in only plain format.

3.4 Method of Analysis

Data analyses for Stance and Engagement were done in a few steps. Those steps are the following. The same pattern was followed for both Stance and Engagement though analyses for them were conducted in different chapters. Furthermore, wherever a frequency any marker has been given, it has been given per ten thousand words.

Stance and Engagement Markers were separately analyzed in chapter four and five respectively. Here the procedure of fourth chapter have been given.

1. First of all markers of Stance in Mental Health Corpus, (MHC from onwards), Physical Health Corpus (PHC from onwards) and Social Issues Corpus (SIC from onwards) were presented. MHC was analyzed first and it was followed by PHC. Lastly, SIC was analyzed.
2. The frequencies of Stance elements i.e. Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions were given in separate sections (e.g. section 4.1.1.1, 4.1.1.2, 4.1.1.3 and 4.1.1.4).
3. These quantitative data was analyzed in respective sections.
4. Moreover, the most used markers of these elements were compared with the most used markers of other studies in the same sections.
5. The frequencies of Different elements of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC were compared with one another (e.g. section 4.1.1.5). The percentage and pattern of Stance elements were compared within MHC, PHC and SIC.
6. These frequencies were compared with those of other studies in same sections.
7. In the second part of the chapter overall frequencies of Stance Markers were compared across all three corpora (section 4.2).
8. It was followed by qualitative analysis of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions respectively. Stance elements were qualitatively compared and appropriate examples from the corpora were illustrated.

The same analysis procedures and pattern was followed in chapter five which dealt with Engagement Markers.

3.5 Description of Websites

This section gives the detail of websites from where data was collected. A total of fifteen websites were selected for the complete corpus.

3.5.1 Websites for Mental Health Forums

This section briefly explains the five websites which were selected for Mental Health Corpus. Table 3.1 shows the number of words for every website for Mental Health Forums along with their addresses.

Table 3.1

Websites for Mental Health Forums

Website Name	Address	Number of words
City-data	https://www.city-data.com/forum/	100,287
Mental Health Forum	https://www.mentalhealthforum.net/	100,090
Patient Info	https://patient.info/forums	100217
Psych Central Forums	https://psychcentralforums.com/	100088
Beyond Blue	https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/online-forums	100600
	Total	501282

i. City-data

City-data is an American-based huge website. It provides data about American cities from crime rates to weather patterns. The website claims it collects data both from government and private sources. It is a well-developed website. It is among the top thousand websites visited in the United States. It also provides data for every state separately. This website has two million members and 15000 posts every day. City-data/forum is one of its subdomains that allows people to ask questions. They are answered by its members. These questions and answers are accessible to everyone and like other sites in order to ask a question or reply to a question one must register. The forum is divided into three categories: one is the U.S. forum, which deals with US states' topics and issues; the second is the World forum, which discusses issues regarding different countries; the third is the general forum; miscellaneous issues are discussed in this forum. Data was collected from this website from the Mental Issues section for this research. The forum is updated every second and provides a live preview of that.

ii. Patient Info

Patient info is a website run by professional doctors. It provides details about several diseases and their medication. It was established in 1996. The about-us section of the website states Patient empowers everyone to take charge of their health. Our trusted clinical information, written and reviewed by an extensive network of doctors and healthcare professionals, helps people to feel better and live longer. This website provides 1300 condition leaflets, 1800 articles and 1500 medicine leaflets. This makes it one of the biggest professional online support websites on the internet. It deals separately with child health. Men's health, women's health and infection, nervous system, heart disease, etc. Patientdata/forum is a sub-domain and one of the most visited sections of the website. Data from this website was selected from the mental issue section only according to the requirement of the study.

iii. Mental Health Forum

As the name suggests this website provides a forum for mental issues. The website aims to be the friendliest forum for support with mental health issues. Its main sub-forums include anxiety, depression, bipolar, PTSD, hearing voices, schizophrenia, phobia, personality disorder and borderline personality forum. Messages in one of its subforums like the depression forum can go above one hundred fifty thousand. Along with the forum – the main section- it has other three sections. In one section online users can share personal stories, in another section information about mental health issues is available and the remaining section provides guidance for any treatment. This forum is monitored by the forum safety team which ensures that guidelines are being followed. It also has moderators and administrators who perform different functions.

iv. Beyond Blue

Beyond Blue is an Australian-based organization that also runs its website. It primarily deals with the Australian population and provides statistics about Australia. The website states that anxiety, depression and suicide affect millions of people in Australia and this website seeks to help those people. They say their mission is to promote good mental health. It gives information about mental health issues and hosts hundreds of articles

related to that. A separate section gives information about different categories of people like men, women, multicultural people, aborigines and older people. The website also provides a 24/7 telephone helpline, online chat and email service for those who are pursuing mental health support. It is run by an organized board of directors. Data was collected from the forum section of the website.

v. Psych Central

This website asserts that it is the oldest and largest mental health online resource. It is operational since 1995 and is founded and run by mental health professionals. It is an award-winning website that provides over 250 Online Support Groups for struggling people. Support groups in the website like Bipolar and psychotherapy have over 40,000 threads and every thread can have hundreds and thousands of replies. Other important Support Groups include *relationship and communication, creative corner, addictions, anxiety, panic, phobias, depression, self-injury* and *survivors of abuse.* It is based in Massachusetts, USA. Over six million people visit this website every month and it has over half a million registered users. One needs to register before accessing special features of the website like chatting with other members or privately contacting them.

3.5.2 Websites for Physical Health Forums

This section briefly explains the five websites which were selected for Physical Health Corpus. Table 3.2 shows the number of words for every website for Physical Health Forums along with their addresses.

Table 3.2
Websites for Physical Health Forums

Website Name	Address	Number of words
Body Building	https://forum.bodybuilding.com/	100,579
Pain Discussion	https://www.paindiscussion.com/	100,306
Weight Loss Banter	http://www.weightlossbanter.net/	100,111
Talk Health Partnership	https://www.talkhealthpartnership.com/forums/	100,012
Cancer Research UK	https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-chat	100,141
	Total	501149

i. Body building

Bodybuilding.com is a subsidiary of a big parent organization. It is based in Idaho, USA. This website deals in dietary supplements, bodybuilding supplements and sports supplements. It also claims to be the world's largest online fitness store and the most visited fitness site worldwide. The site map section reveals the wide range of things they deal in. It has 3000 plus exercise videos, over 19000 articles and over 1700 recipes. In the site map, main categories are workouts and exercises, supplement store, bestselling products, protein, fitness accessories, nutrition and top supplement brands. The website also has a huge forum where users ask queries and receive answers. Data was downloaded from this section. Bodybuliding.com forums statistics show that it has over seven million threads, over 140 million posts and more than 18 million members. Statistics show that it is one of the most visited sites on the internet.

ii. Cancer Research UK

It is a UK-based registered organization that was formed in 2002 by the merger of two organizations. . It researches in almost all kinds of cancers. It is also a charity organization. It has hundreds of employees, proper organizational structure. It also publishes its annual reports and accounts. The sitemap section is a huge one that

demonstrates the colossal amount of research and statistics available on cancer on this site. This website is run and monitored by doctors, professors and researchers. Information is available on different kinds of cancers. It also provides a forum for people suffering from cancer or seeking information about cancer. Data was collected from that sub-domain. Forum is divided into several sub-forums where one can post or read posts according to their need.

iii. Weight Loss Banter

Weight loss banter was established in the year 2000. It is the forum for the people who seek online help to reduce their weight. People share their stories, difficulties and issues on this forum. They are replied to by other visitors on the website. The website also provides a list of authors – the people who reply to the threads. The website has 60,000 threads, over 400,000 posts and 11,000 authors. Authors can also individually chat with one another. Moreover, online users can also subscribe to new posts. The most popular section after the general discussion is low carbohydrates diets. In this section, online users seek the best diet plan to reduce weight. Other sections include *WeightWatchers*, *medications related to weight control*, *low-fat diets* and *low calorie*.

iv. Talk Health Partnership

Talk Health Partnership is a UK-based website that was initiated in 2000. The website states that '*talkhealth* is a team of like-minded individuals, who are keen to provide the latest health information and support that is currently available. The team's primary aim is to make health support easily accessible to everyone, offering interactivity between health professionals, charities and fellow patients and their caregivers'. The website also states that it was initiated because there was no proper support for people with eczema on the internet. Later this platform became the host of several other health conditions. Support Group sections of other health issues are acne, allergy, arthritis, bladder, bowel, psoriasis, respiratory, weight and wound care. The website gives detailed information about these issues along with providing support and chat platform.

v. Pain Discussion

Paindiscussion is a discussion board and forum on health topics. This website is not as big as others included in the research. This website has more than two thousand posts for more than five hundred topics. It has eleven thousand members. Some threads do not have a lot of replies. However, this is a formal website and monitored by administrators. Major forums on the website are stomach and abdominal pain discussion, back and hip pain discussion, neck pain discussion, eye pain discussion, foot and heel pain discussion, liver and kidney pain discussion, chest and heart pain discussion, shoulder and elbow pan discussion, and neuropathic pain discussion. There are also forums on home remedies and treatment, and on health guide.

3.5.3 Websites for Social Issues Forums

This section briefly explains the five websites which were selected for Social Issues Corpus. Table 3.3 shows the number of words for every website for Social Issues Forums along with their addresses.

Table 3.3

Websites for Social Issues Forums

Website Name	Address	Number of words
Centre for inquiry	https://centerforinquiry.org/forums/boards/	100,276
Talk about marriage	https://www.talkaboutmarriage.com/forums/	100,176
International skeptics	http://www.internationalskeptics.com/forums/	100,329
Defending the truth	https://defendingthetruth.com/	100,275
Social anxiety support	https://www.socialanxietysupport.com/forum/	100,146
	Total	501202

i. Centre for inquiry

Centre for inquiry is an organization pursuing a society based on reason, science, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values. This organization is headquartered in New York

and Washington DC. This organization basically advocates atheism. They run a well-organized website where they state their mission, inform about their programs and post news, blogs and articles. The relevant section for this research was the forum section of the website. Only data from relevant threads related to social issues were collected out of hundreds of threads from this website. The main forum groups included religion and secularism, alternative medicine, entertainment and pop culture, philosophy, science and technology and humanism. Data was collected from the Political and Social Issues section only.

ii. Defending the Truth

Defending the truth is a widely visited political forum on the internet. The information available on the website tells the audience that it was founded in 2005 for the open discussion of political topics and current events. The Website primarily discusses political issues but forums also belong to other areas. The main sections are political leaders, opinion polls, political ideologies, political conspiracy theories, political humour, civil rights healthcare and military. Data was collected from the following sections: crime and punishment, immigration and bullying and affirmative action sections. This website is updated every minute and special focus is given to trending issues. The current events section has more than six hundred thousand posts. One needs to register on the website to post anything.

iii. International Skeptics

International skeptics website was established in 2000. It provides a forum for all kinds of topics. The website welcomes the users by this statement “where we discuss skepticism, critical thinking, the paranormal and science in a friendly but lively way”. This website provides a repository of articles authored by its members and a selection of book reviews by its members. General topic forums of the website are skepticism and paranormal; science, mathematics and medicine; economics business and finance; history and literature; religion and philosophy; social issues and current events. A few topics like music, sports, hobbies, humour, computer gaming and TV can be accessed only by members. Data was gathered from the social issues forum for the research. This website

has over 13 million posts and over 30,000 members. This website also provides a 'tag cloud' which gives a list of the 100 most used thread tags. By clicking any one of the tag words, the page of relevant threads of that tag word appears.

iv. Social Anxiety Support

This website was established in 2000 and is owned by a company situated in Toronto, Canada. The website declares in its about-us section "SocialAnxietySupport.com has offered information, articles, and an active forum support community for those who suffer from Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) or Social Phobia. The community has over 220,000 members, with nearly a half-million discussion threads, and more than 7 million posts of support. Numerous resources are available, including treatment reviews, finding therapy, personal stories, understanding group therapy, blogs, helpful book recommendations, and active online groups in the community". Like other websites, this website also hosts a wide range of forum topics like politics, management, arts, religion, etc. data was gathered from social issues' threads only for this research.

v. Talk about Marriage

This website was created in 2007 and has progressed a lot in terms of visits and members ever since. It has above 4.2 million posts and over 90,000 registered members. It is owned by a company based in Toronto, Canada. The website welcomes users by saying "A forum community dedicated to married life between you and your spouse. Come join the discussion about love, romance, health, behavior, conflict resolution, care, and more". The website has some of the following important support forums: The Ladies Lounge, The men's clubhouse, long term success in marriage, coping with infidelity, financial problems in marriage, dealing with grief and loss, the family and parenting forum, life after divorce and reconciliation.

3.6 Research Tools

For this corpus-based research, a corpus software Ant Conc. was used. Ant Conc. is a piece of software designed to carry out corpus linguistics research. This software contains seven tools that can be utilized by clicking on tabs in the tool window. The tools and their features have been explained below.

Concordance tool shows search results in ‘KWIC’ (Keyword in context) format. This shows the preceding and following words of any searched word. This tool was used for the analysis of the list of words provided by Hyland (2005a). The image of the software has been shown in figure 3.1. Another tool is *Concordance plot* tool which is used to get results in ‘barcode’ format. It can show where search results appear in target texts. In order to view the texts of individual files, *File View Tool* is used. It helps study results in detail produced by other tools of this software. The *Clusters Tool* shows clusters based on the search condition. In effect, it summarizes the results generated in the *Concordance Tool* or *Concordance Plot Tool*. The N-Grams Tool, on the other hand, scans the entire corpus for 'N' (e.g. 1 word, 2 words, …) length clusters. This allows you to find common expressions in a corpus. *Collocates* in another important tool that shows collocates of any searched word. It comes up with a list of items. *Wordlist* is another important tool. It counts all the words and orders them according to frequency or alphabetical order. *Keyword List* tool shows which words are unusually frequent (or infrequent) in the corpus in comparison with the words in a reference corpus. This allows you to identify characteristic words in the corpus, for example, as part of a genre or ESP study. Figure 3.1 shows a screenshot of concordance results in AntConc.

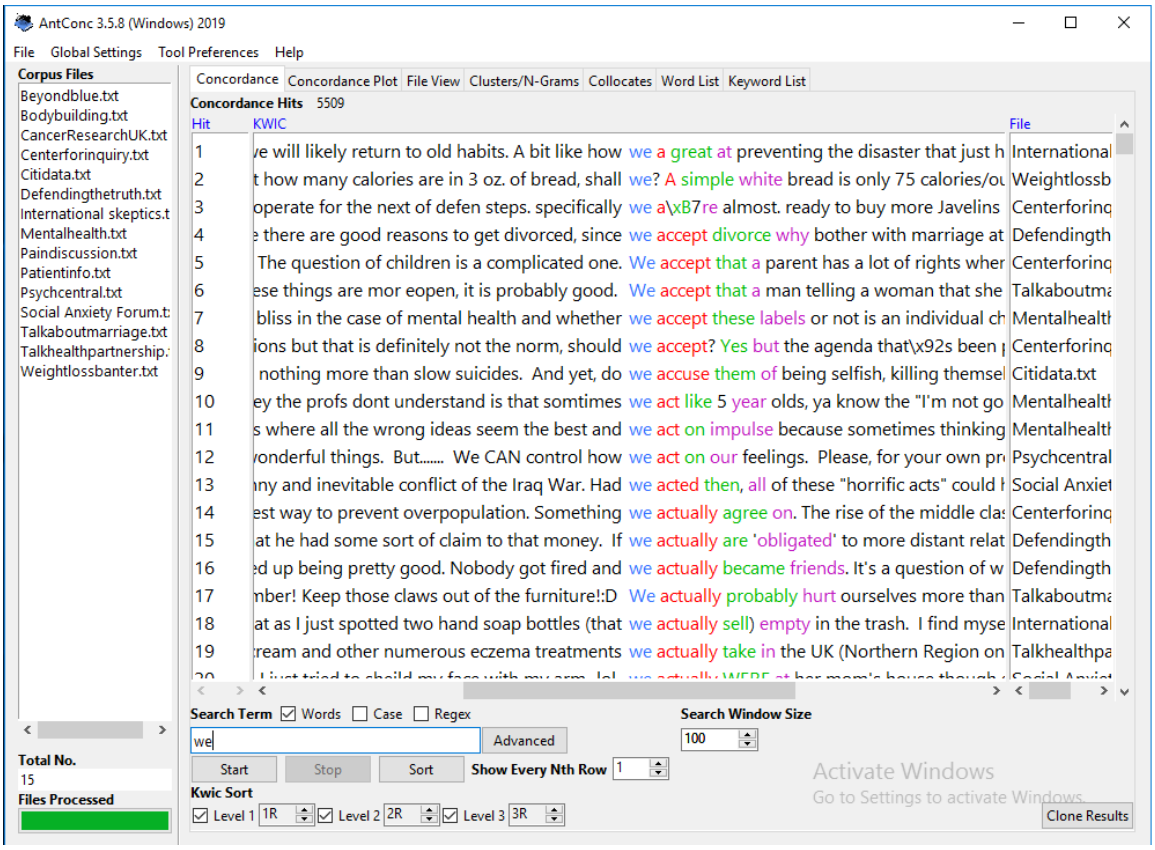

Figure 3.1. *A screenshot of concordance results in AntConc 3.5.8*

3.7 Theoretical Framework

After making the corpora of all three discourses, the researcher applied Hyland's (2005) model for the investigation of Metadiscourse components i.e. Stance and Engagement. It investigated various Stance and Engagement features and to find out these features a very comprehensive list provided by Hyland (2005) was used.

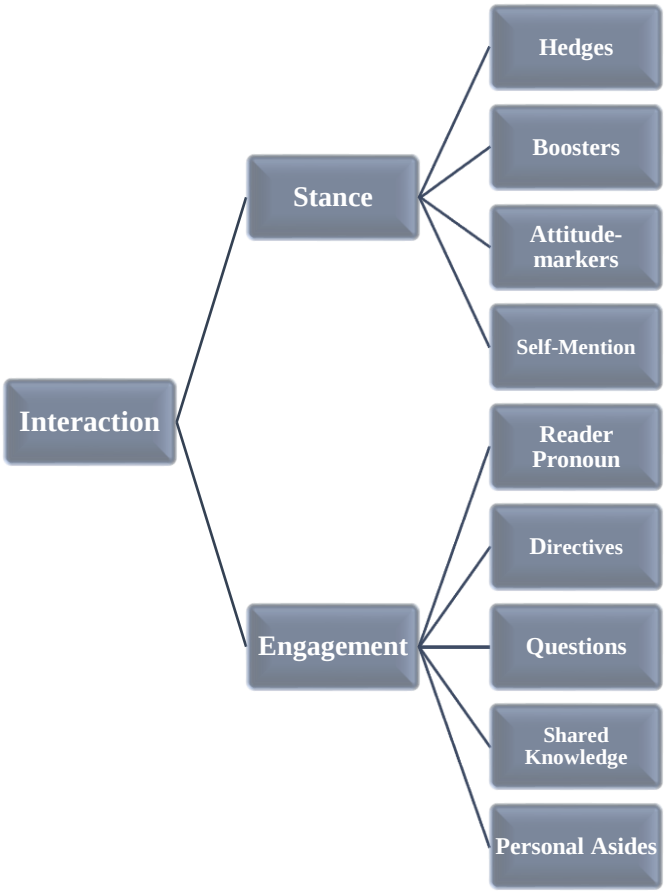

Figure 3.2. *Hyland's 2005 Stance and Engagement Model*

Figure 3.2 shows that the Stance is divided into further four categories, each category consists of different and varying target items. Hedges, the first category, comprises devices such as *possible, perhaps, doubtful, uncertain* and *might*. Boosters are words like *surely, obviously, demonstrate* and *clearly*. The next category is Attitude Markers. Attitude is demonstrated by comparatives, subordination, text location and punctuation. It is most explicitly signaled metadiscoursally by attitude verbs (e.g. disagree, *agree, prefer),* sentence adverbs *(hopefully, unfortunately)* and adjectives *(appropriate, interesting, logical, disappointing, remarkable).* The last category is of Self-Mention which contains possessive adjectives and pronouns (*mine, me, our, ours and I*) (Hyland, 2005).

In figure 3.2, the second major category of interaction is engagement which is further divided into five sub-categories. The first category is reader pronouns which include *you and you.* The directives, second category, are performed by imperatives and obligation

modals. The next is Questions which are a technique of dialogic involvement and invite engagement. Appeals to Shared Knowledge can be grouped into two categories according to surface structure i.e. single word expressions (e.g. obviously, familiar) and multiword expressions (e.g. of course, as a rule). The last element is Personal Asides which are realized by Parenthesis and Dashes.

3.8 Selection of Metadiscourse Markers

Hyland has provided a very comprehensive list of Metadiscourse Markers for the analysis of any text; however, all of these Markers are not always necessarily used as Metadiscourse Markers. As a matter of fact some markers are rarely used as Metadiscourse Markers in a text. The researcher took care of almost every Marker to confirm whether it has been used as Metadiscourse Marker or not.

Moreover, this fact also deserves to be mentioned that the language of Online Support Groups is quite formal. Though it is not as formal as the language of a newspaper or a book, it falls in the category of formal language because the traces of informal language were less.

However, to make it a comprehensive and accurate research even informal forms of Markers were taken into account where it was required e.g. *don't* was a Marker of Directives but *dont* was also taken into account. In the sub-headings below is the further detail of selection criteria of Metadiscourse Markers.

The examples given in the research from corpora were simply copied and pasted. As mentioned above that the language of Support Groups is not as formal as of a book, the errors of capitalization, punctuation, etc. are common in illustrated examples. Sometimes, corrections were made only in spellings when it was needed. Otherwise, every example is in its original form.

i. Hedges

Hyland has provided a list of Hedges containing more than a hundred words and phrases. All of them were not always acting as Metadiscourse Markers. There are a few examples below which demonstrate when a Marker was used as a hedging Marker and when it was not. In examples (1) and (3), *about* and *feel* are not being used as Hedges while in (2) and (4), they are being used as Hedges. In (6) *may,* a modal auxiliary, is a Hedge

while in (5), the same spellings are used for the month of May. The software does not distinguish between entries whether they are hedges or not; they had to be checked manually.

1) *Sorry for taking so long to get back with this information about why families are so important. (SIC)*
2) *… and the depression lasted only about a month. (MHC)*
3) *I have difficult sometimes sleeping as i feel the itching is like burning. (PHC)*
4) *I feel that most people share this opinion because women are typically smaller and less strong than men (SIC)*
5) *My Mum died sequelate of this disease at the end of May this year 2018. (PHC)*
6) *You may lose everything you have when you try to end things. (SIC)*

ii. Boosters

Like Hedges, Boosters were also manually checked. As can be seen in (8), (10) and (12), *clear, find* and *must* are acting as Boosters. However, in (7), (9) and (11), the same words are not acting as Boosters.

7) *Until I find a skin care device which use the light therapy to clear acne and scars (PHC)*
8) *But it is clear to me and to other family members who are close… (MHC)*
9) *… otherwise you could find a doctor and get them to request any medical info they need. (MHC)*
10) *I find it exceedingly hard to believe that the drafters had any concept of an AK-47… (SIC)*
11) *... if you want friendship, it must be reciprocal. (MHC)*
12) *Surely there must be philanthropists that have suffered the vagaries of mood, psychosis, … (MHC)*

iii. Attitude Markers

Care was also taken during the selection of Attitude Markers. The most used Attitude Marker in corpora was the exclamation Mark. Sometimes writers used multiple exclamation marks at the end of a sentence or a phrase as in (13). In such cases, it was counted as only one exclamation mark. The same selection criterion was followed across corpora. Other Attitude Markers were also carefully checked as in (14) *even* is not an Attitude Marker while in (15) it is.

13) *I would have thought a moderate reaction was allergic enough!!!!* (PHC)
14) *I'm giving even odds to poisoned by Lori and food poisoning/illness.* (SIC)
15) *It might well be worth looking at changing your pillows or even your mattress as even that can affect your neck.* (PHC)

iv. Self-Mentions

With regard to Self-Mentions, only exclusive *we, our* and *us* are included in it. So a careful analysis was carried out and every entry was checked in context. In examples (16) and (17), *we* is being used as exclusive *we*, but in (18) and (19), *we* is inclusive.

16) *My daugher is 3 now and has loads of allergies, after 3 years we are getting used to it.* (PHC)
17) *We have 3 kids and we both want them to have parents that are together.* (SIC)
18) *A moral is a matter of cause and effect, and when we know the right thing to do, we are compelled to do that…* (SIC)
19) *We cannot forget past anxiety, the best, again, is to accept what it is…* (SIC)

v. Reader Mentions

Reader Mentions include *you, your,* inclusive *we, our* and *us.* The selection of *you* and *your* was straight forward but while selecting inclusive pronouns context was examined as discussed in the case of Self-Mentions. The above examples (18) and (19) were counted as Reader Mentions.

vi. Questions

With respect to Questions, phrases or sentences ending with a Question Mark were considered as Questions because as mentioned that the language of Support Groups is not as formal as of a book or a newspaper. In some studies (e.g. Malik et al, 2020), researchers select those statements as Questions that begin with question words like *what, where,* etc. and have a question mark at the end. Had this criterion been followed in this study, the majority of Questions would not have been counted since online users rarely posed Questions in such an accurate grammatical structure. So, to perform a comprehensive and accurate analysis of corpora, a statement followed by a question mark was considered as a Question. In (20), both statement are considered Questions despite the fact that the second Question is not in proper grammatical form. From the context it is clear that the second statement is also a Question though it does not start with a question word. Secondly, the selection criterion of Questions was similar to exclamation marks in Attitude Markers when online users used multiple Question marks at the end of the statement as can be seen in the second and the third Question in (21) i.e. it was considered one Question. So, every question mark was manually checked as the software would only provide the actual number of questions marks in the corpus.

20) *How is the stomach pain? The pain appears suddenly?* (PHC)
21) *No wonder your anxious then. Must be something behind it? No ones said anything?? Did it just come out of the blue???* (MHC)

vii. Directives

Directives constituted of verbs and obligation modals (*should, have to,* etc.). To make sure that only words are selected as Directives which are being used as Directives, a thorough analysis was conducted of every marker. In (22) *do not* is not Directive, but *do not* and *don't* are Directives in (23). Similarly, in (24), *go* is not a Directive, but it is in (25).

22) *The flawed re-interpretations of historical fact do not concern me. (SIC)*

23) *Do not assume that your headache is just a headache especially a recurring headache, don't dismiss it as migraine. (PHC)*
24) *I think you need to go through this "fear / paranoia" with your psych if it hasn't cropped up before. (MHC)*
25) *Grab those running shoes and go for a walk or run.* (PHC)

viii. Appeals to shared knowledge

A list of markers of Appeals to Shared Knowledge has also been provided by Ken Hyland, but for that too every marker had to be individually checked. It can be seen in (26) and (29) that *common* and *normally* are serving the purpose of Knowledge Appeals. Nevertheless, in (27) and (28) they are not being used as Appeals to Shared Knowledge.

26) *Acne is the most common skin complaint under the sun.* (PHC)
27) *I think most successful dieters have something close to your common-sense view*.(PHC)
28) *…so I have difficulties breathing normally - muscles spasms when…* (MHC)
29) *They had roles normally held by men and were equal in strength.* (SIC)

ix. Personal Asides

Personal Asides composed of parentheses and dashes. In case of these markers, every marker was manually examined in both Microsoft Word and AntConc. Parenthesis like in (30) which are showing the number of a list were excluded from counting. Only those were selected which is shown in (31).

30) *The reality is: (a) you chose to eat too much and exercise too little; (b) you can choose to eat less and exercise more; (c) this will…* (PHC)
31) *Many suffer as you do (me included) so you must never feel alone ok!* (MHC)

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF STANCE MARKERS

This chapter deals with the scores of the Stance Markers of three corpora under investigation, the analysis of that data and the discussion on the base of that data. This chapter is further divided into two sections. The first and the second section answer the first and second research questions of this study respectively. In the first section, Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC are presented. Section 4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3 give the detail of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC separately. These Stance Markers are compared with one another within the three sub-corpora. In the second section, the Stance Markers of the three corpora are compared. Section 4.2 reveals the overall use of Stance Markers across corpora. Sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 compare Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions respectively across corpora. The frequencies and patterns of Stance markers in MHC, PHC and SIC have also been compared with those of other studies.

4.1 Stance Markers in Corpora

In this section, the first research question is investigated. The first research question intends to find the quantitative values of Stance Markers. So, this section (4.1) provides quantitative results of the Stance Markers in all three corpora separately. In addition to that, the frequencies of Stance Markers of these corpora have also been compared with those of other studies. The analysis of those frequencies has also been done in respective sections.

4.1.1 Stance Markers in Mental Health Corpus

This section investigates the frequencies of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions in Mental Health Corpus. In table 4.1 the frequency of every marker having a frequency of one or more than one has been given. The complete list of all markers has been provided in appendix C. The overall frequency of Stance Markers in MHC was 1115.4 per ten thousand words. There are several other studies which have been conducted using Hyland's (2005) Model. The researcher has selected a few of them belonging to different genres for comparison. It was found that the frequency of Stance Markers in comments of online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012), research articles (Hyland, 2008),

courtrooms opening statements **(**Chaemsaithong, 2017), job postings (Fu, 2012) and course-books (Hyland, 2000) was 1090, 309, 298.04, 234 and 194 respectively per ten thousand words. It shows that the frequency of Metadiscourse Markers in MHC is very close to that of in the comments of online educational forums. It means that authors in MHC and comment writers in educational forums focus more on the possible accuracy of their claims, commit themselves to their texts, exhibit their attitude towards a proposition and project themselves in texts (Hyland, 2005b) than the authors of texts belonging to other genres.

Table 4.1

Stance Markers in Mental Health Corpus

Hedges		Boosters		Attitude Markers		Self-Mentions	
would	28.76	think	38.94	!	36.58	I	484.94
could	16.34	know	35.96	even	4.4	my	126.1
feel	11.4	really	24.84	agree	3.88	me	79.3
maybe	8.94	find	18.52	important	3.08	we	7.92
might	8.88	never	13.12	interesting	1.88	us	4.04
sometimes	8.56	always	10.74	hopefully	1.8	our	2.6
may	8.22	sure	9.18	amazing	1.52	mine	2.42
should	7.32	believe	5.6	unfortunately	1.34		
about	5.72	actually	5.26				
often	5.2	true	3.26				
probably	5.08	show	2.96				
seems	4.72	must(possibility)	2.8				
quite	3.92	of course	2.38				
guess	3.3	truly	2.16				
usually	2.68	realize	2.04				
perhaps	2.48	definitely	1.98				
almost	2.46	certain	1.62				
suggest	1.8	clear	1.24				
suppose	1.66	in fact	1.22				
likely	1.5	certainly	1.18				
tend to	1.26	obviously	1.16				
mostly	1.2	known	1.08				
Total	155.02	Total	190.7	Total	62.36	Total	707.32

Note: 1. This table does not include Stance Markers with a frequency smaller than one per ten thousand words. However, the collective value of all Stance Markers is mentioned in the last row showing totals.

4.1.1.1 Hedges in Mental Health Corpus

After the calculation of Hedges in Mental Health Corpus, it was revealed that a total of 155.02 Hedges per ten thousand words were used by the online users of this forum. Figure 4.1 shows the instances of every marker with a frequency of one or more than one. *Would* was used for the most number of times. Online users used it 28.76 times per ten thousand words. *Could* was the second most used Hedging Marker in the corpus. The first two words belong to the category of auxiliary verbs. The third most used word was *feel* which is a main verb. Only those instances of *feel* were selected in which *feel* was used as a Hedge, as previously explained in Research Methodology (section 3.9). These previously mentioned words were followed by *maybe*, *might*, *sometimes*, *may* and *should*. The analysis also revealed that auxiliary verbs were most frequently used by the online users. Hedges containing more than one word such as *from my perspective*, *in our opinion,* etc. were either completely absent or rarely used. The first twenty-two words (which had a frequency of one or more than one per ten thousand words as mentioned in Table 4.1) accounted for 91% of the total Hedges.

The writers in MHC mostly used modal auxiliaries as Hedges which tone down the effects of criticism (Hyland, 1996). Writers used *would* to express possibility and to hypothesize as it has been discussed in detail in section 4.2.1. Similarly, *could* was used to show possibility; *might* and *may* were also employed to express possibility; and *should* was deployed to refer to obligation. Among lexical verbs, *feel* was the most used Hedging Marker and the use of *feel* in MHC was quite high as compared to that in PHC. Writers employed *feel* to show their perception (Hyland, 1998c) of something or somebody, and it frequently occurred with other modal auxiliaries. Since Hedges exhibit a writer's or a speaker's doubt and uncertainty about the proposition (Salager-Meyer, 1997), the users in MHC also utilized adverbial Hedging Markers such as *maybe, sometimes, often* to express skepticism and to refrain from surety about their claims.

When compared with other pieces of work on Hedges, it was revealed that in most studies modal auxiliaries had a dominant share in Hedges followed by lexical verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Akinci (2016) found in research articles written by experts and

students that writers mostly used *would* and *could*. Similarly, another study (Yu, 2019) on research articles also showed that modal auxiliaries had a significantly high frequency as compared to other categories of Hedges. Incharoensak (2018) studied Hedges and Boosters in college application essays and Al-Rubaye (2015) researched on academic writing of EFL and ESL students and both of them found that *might*, *could* and *may* had the highest frequency. The results of above mentioned studies are in line with that of MHC. Similarly, in other studies on theses (Darwish, 2019), courtroom opening statements (Chaemsaithong, 2017), job postings (Fu, 2012) online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012), it was revealed that modal auxiliaries i.e. *could*, *would*, *may* and *might* had the highest frequency among Hedges. However, a few studies showed different results. Latif & Rasheed (2020) in their study on Metadiscourse markers in Pakistani academic research articles found that researchers mostly used *about* to hedge their claims which was followed by modal auxiliaries. Ondondo (2020) also found slightly different results in his study on doctoral thesis writing in which the most used hedging markers were lexical verbs instead of modal verbs.

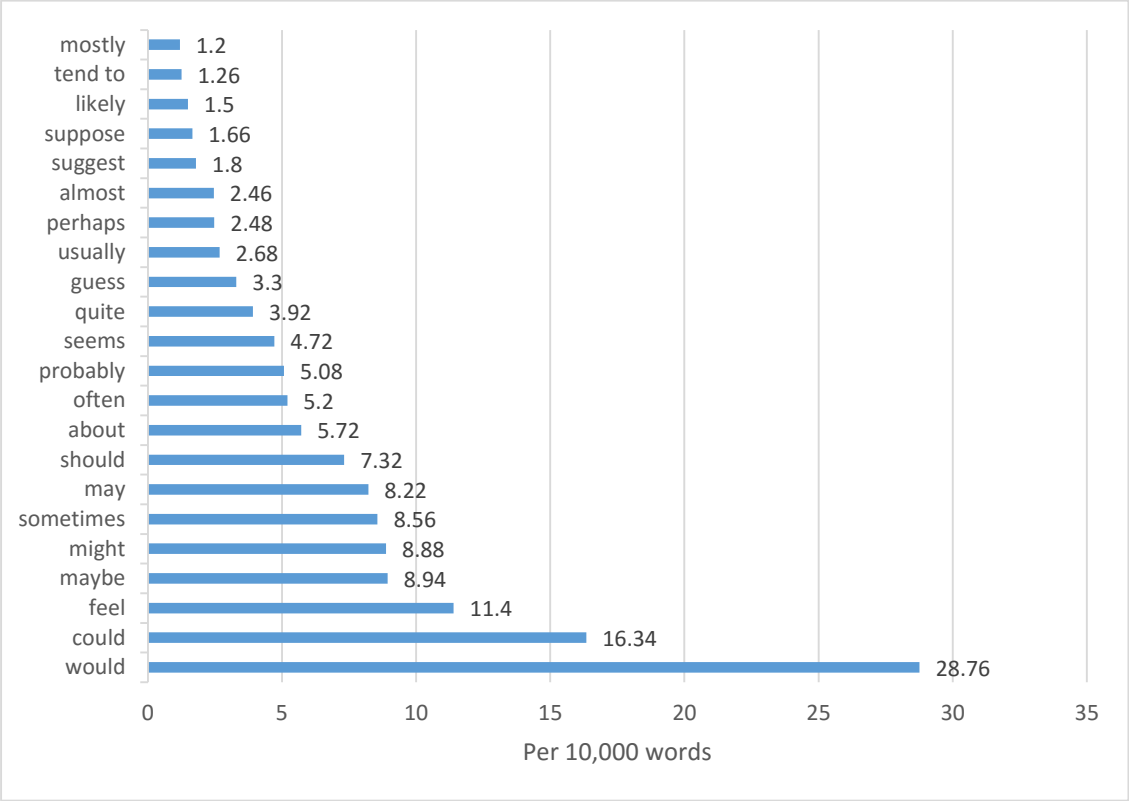

Figure 4.1. ***Hedges in Mental Health Corpus***

4.1.1.2 Boosters in Mental Health Corpus

It was found that the online users of Mental Health Forums used 190.7 Boosters per ten thousand words. The most used Boosters were *think* and *know*. *Think* and *know* were used 38.94 and 35.96 times per ten thousand words. These were followed by an adverb *really*. The next word *find* was employed 18.52 times. It was followed by two common adverbs i.e. *never* and *always*. Moreover, the online users also utilized *sure*, *believe*, *actually* and *true* to strengthen their argument. The Boosters with a frequency of one or more than one per ten thousand words, as displayed in figure 4.2, accounted for 98% of total Boosters. Some Boosters present in the list by Hyland (2005a) were not used altogether. In the annexure, the frequency of every Booster is given.

Boosters are used to eliminate possible alternatives, focusing on one to maximize certainty and thus creating a rapport to show solidarity with the audience (Hyland, 2005a). In MHC, online users, mostly used *think* to give the impression that they have come to the conclusion after ascertaining the facts and situation. Writers also excessively used *know* to add to the truth value of the proposition (Hinkel, 2005). *Know* was followed by *really* which was used to express certainty as described in detail in section 4.2.2. *Find* was also over and over again in the MHC as Booster and those instances when it was not used as Booster were excluded. Writers also used two common adverbs i.e. *never* and *always* to express their commitment to proposition and add force to it to persuade readers.

Comparison of Boosters in MHC with Boosters in other studies have revealed that the choice and pattern of Boosters by online users in MHC is different from Boosters of other studies. Several studies have been conducted on different corpora applying Hyland's 2005 model. The results of those studies will be discussed and compared in this paragraph. Akinci (2016) found in research articles written by experts and students that authors mostly used *show* and *find* in their writings whereas in MHC, the most used Boosters were *think, know* and *really*. Yu's (2019) study on research articles showed that *suggest* and *show* were dominant Boosters. So, patterns of Boosters in research articles is different from that of MHC. Incharoensak (2018) found in college application essays that the most used Booster was *realize*. *Know*, *think* and *find* were also the most used Boosters after *realize* in her results. So, some most used markers are similar to those of MHC. Darwish (2019) and Latif & Rasheed (2020) found in theses and Pakistani academic research articles respectively

that *show* was the most used Booster in their corpora. The frequency of *show* was less in MHC. Similarly, while studying Boosters in Academic Writing of EFL and ESL students, Al-Rubaye (2015) found that the most used Booster in his corpus was *always*. In MHC, *always* was among the most used Boosters but it was not the most used Booster. The results of above mentioned studies has shown that the pattern of Boosters in MHC is significantly different from that of other studies.

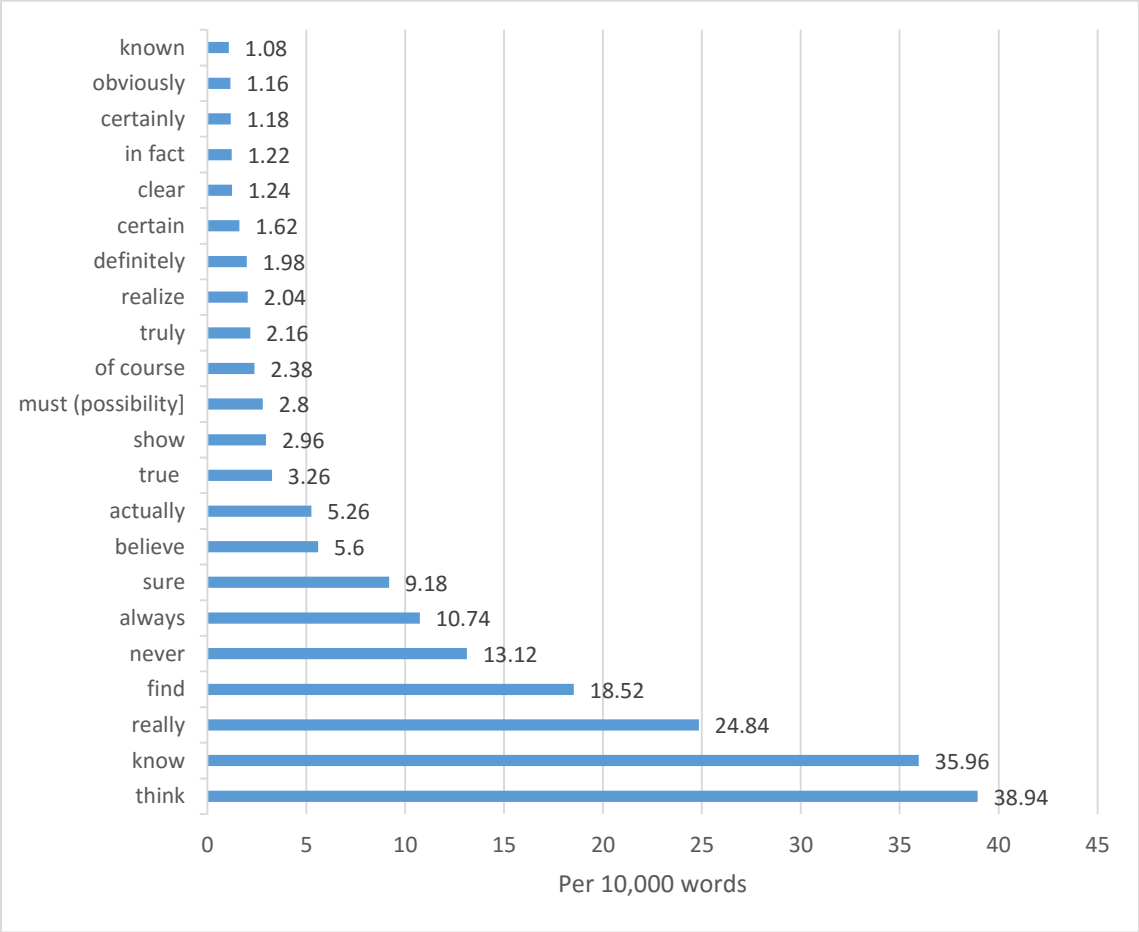

Figure 4.2. *Boosters in Mental Health Corpus*

4.1.1.3 Attitude Markers in Mental Health Corpus

A careful analysis of the data revealed that the users of Mental Health Forum used 62.36 Attitude Markers per ten thousand words. Users excessively employed the exclamation mark to show their attitude towards the topic under discussion. It was used 36.58 times per ten thousand words. Next to this Attitude Marker was *even* which was used 4.4 times per ten thousand words. Similarly, online users used *agree*, *important*, *interesting*

and *hopefully* 3.88, 3.08, 1.88 and 1.8 times per ten thousand words respectively. Out of the list of sixty-two markers, only eight markers were used more than one time per ten thousand words as shown in figure 4.3. These eight items accounted for 87% of total Attitude Markers present in the corpus.

Attitude Markers highlight the value of something or show surprise (Kopple, 1985) since it is an important aspect of Stance towards a proposition. In Hyland's 2005 model, a list has been provided of Attitude Markers which contains one punctuation mark i.e. the exclamation mark. The exclamation mark was mostly used by writers as an expression of admiration or surprise. Crismore et al. (1993) say that the exclamation mark highlights the aspects of a text and a writer's attitude towards it. The second most used Attitude Marker was *even*; in section 4.2.3, it has been revealed that by using *even* online users sought that readers should find information important and surprising. Among adjectives, *important*, *amazing* and *interesting* were the most frequently used which displayed writers' attitude towards information being provided. The use of *important* highlights the importance of proposition which its actual meaning also suggests.

Some other studies have also been conducted on Attitude Markers on different corpora. The researcher would cite a few and compare them with MHC. Akinci (2019) and Yu (2019) separately analyzed research articles of diverse fields and found that *important* and *even* were the dominant Attitude Markers in their corpora. So was the result of a diachronic study (Hyland & Jiang, 2016b) on Stance Markers, which revealed that *important* and *even* are preferred choices of researchers. Darwish (2019) also found in theses that the most used Attitude Markers were *important*, *even* and *significant*. However, Ondondo (2020) found in doctoral thesis writing that *contrary* was the most used Attitude Marker. In most studies clearly *important* and *even* were preferred. In MHC the same Attitude Markers were preferred by online users but the most used marker was exclamation mark. In previously mentioned studies on academic discourses, exclamation mark was almost absent.

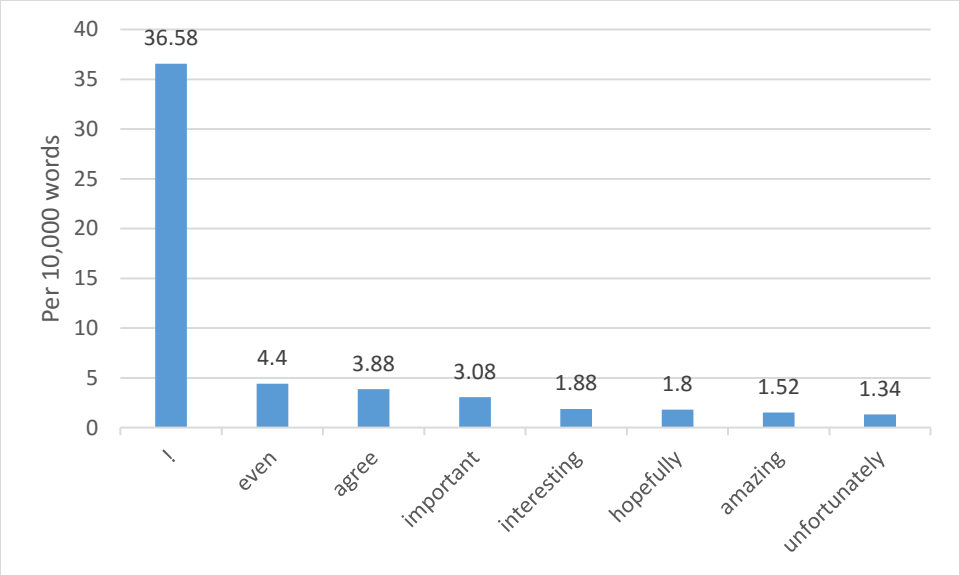

Figure 4.3. *Attitude Markers in Mental Health Corpus*

4.1.1.4 Self-Mentions in Mental Health Corpus

Data analysis revealed that online users in MHC used 707.32 cases of Self-Mentions per 10,000 words. *I* was used more than any other marker in this category. Online users used it 484.94 times per ten thousand words. It was followed by *my* (126.1 per 10,000 words) and *me* (79.3 per 10,000 words). Exclusive *we* was used 7.92 times. Similarly, Exclusive *us* and exclusive *our* were used 4.04 and 2.6 times respectively. *Mine* was used the least number of times.

Self-Mentions reflect that readers are being personally addressed (2005a). In MHC, online users mostly used *I* to share their personal experience and address readers personally as mentioned in section 4.2.4. Since Self-Mentions are used to share personal experience and information, writers also employed *me* and *my* to fulfill that purpose, and to make a bond and show sympathy for readers. The use of exclusive *we* was not high in MHC as compared to other first person pronouns. Its use was even less than that in PHC and SIC though overall use of Self-Mentions was high in MHC. In SIC online users were giving opinions instead of sharing experiences; therefore, they were using exclusive *we* to explain an argument and convey their claims (Papangkorn, 2019).

When other studies were analyzed it was found that Akinci (2019) researched research articles and revealed that the use of *I*, *my* and *me* was almost non-existent. From figure 4.4 it is clear that these Markers of Self-Mention are dominant in MHC. However, the usage of *we* and *our* was high in Akinci's Study. Nevertheless, in another study (Yu, 2019) on research articles, it was revealed that *I* was the most used Marker of Self-Mentions followed by *we*. Chaemsaithong (2017) conducted analysis of Stance Markers on courtroom opening statements and found that the use of the first person singular i.e. *I* was more than that of the first person plural i.e. *we*. Darwish (2019) found that *I* and *my* were the most used Self-Mention Markers in his corpus of theses discussion chapters. In terms of pattern, the results of MHC are close to those of Darwish's study. In Fu's study (2012) on job postings, he revealed that exclusive *we* had the highest frequency. Hence, all studies have different patterns. It has been revealed that in MHC *I*, *me* and *my* dominate as compared to exclusive *we*, *us* and *our*. However, MHC is line with the study (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012) on comments of educational forums in which *I* had the highest frequency.

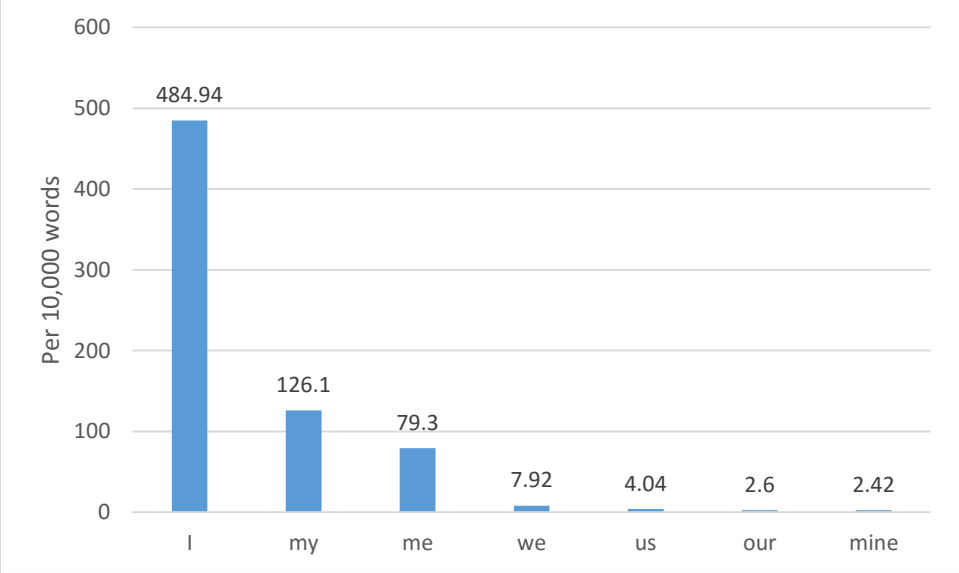

Figure 4.4. *Self-Mentions in Mental Health Corpus*

4.1.1.5 Comparison of Stance Markers in Mental Health Corpus

The analysis of Mental Health Corpus showed that online users employed 1115.4 Stance Markers (per 10,000 words). Self-Mentions were mostly used by online users which accounted for 63.4% of all Stance Markers as displayed in Table 4.2. Boosters made up for

17.1% of total Stance Markers. Boosters were followed by Hedges which constituted 13.9%. Attitude Markers were used only 5.6% in the corpus.

Table 4.2

Overall Stance Markers in Mental Health Corpus

Category	Markers per 10,000 words	% of overall Stance Markers
Hedges	155.02	13.9
Boosters	190.7	17.1
Attitude Markers	62.36	5.6
Self-Mentions	707.32	63.4
Total	1115.4	100

The data analysis has revealed that Self-Mentions were utilized 707.32 times per ten thousand words by the online users of MHC. It was followed by Boosters were used 190.7 times. The frequency of Hedges was less than Boosters i.e. 155.02. The Attitude Markers were employed 62.26 times per ten thousand words. As compared to other elements of Stance, online users were not employing Attitude Markers frequently. Their main focus was Self-Mentioning.

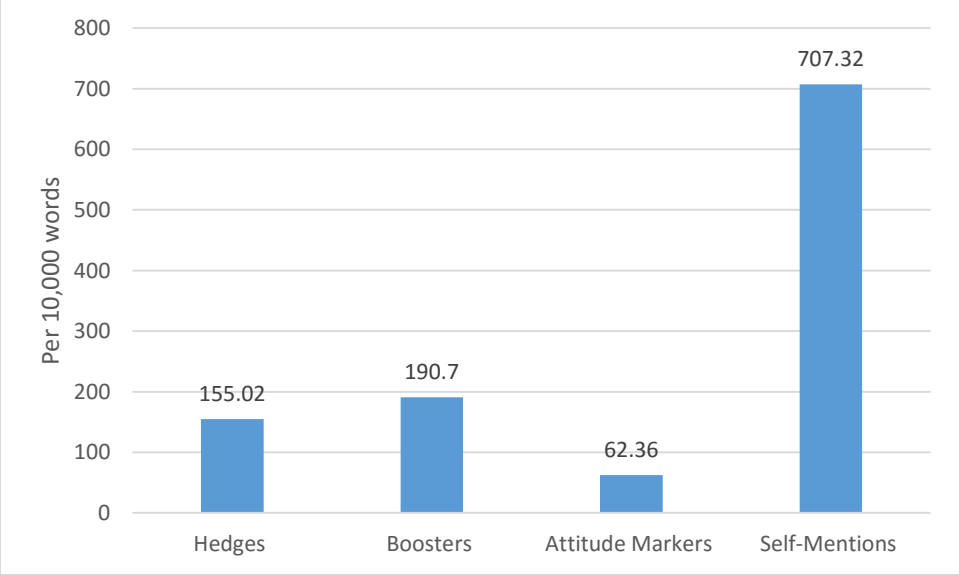

Figure 4.5. *Overall Stance Markers in Mental Health Corpus*

The overuse of Self-Mentions indicates that online users were projecting themselves in their writings by using Self-Mentions excessively in MHC (Hyland, 2005b).

They were expressing their presence in the text. A detailed analysis of Self-Mentions has been done in 4.2.4. Secondly, online users were confident in their talk as the number of Boosters exceeds the number of Hedges (Papangkorn, 2019).

Some other studies related to different genres conducted by Hyland using the same framework or model have indicated a different pattern of Stance Markers. While analyzing and comparing the research articles of soft sciences and hard sciences, Hyland (2008) found that researchers mostly employed Hedges in their articles. They were followed by Attitude Markers and Boosters respectively. However, Self-Mentions were the least used category of Stance Markers. Hedges, Attitude Markers, and Boosters and Self-Mentions constituted 46.6, 20.5, 19.3 and 13.7 percent of Stance Markers respectively**.** This shows that the text of MHC has a different pattern than that of research articles. In research articles, researchers do not highlight their presence as much as the online users in MHC do (Hyland, 2005a). In research articles, researchers leave room for alternative opinions (Vázquez Orta & Giner, 2008) while giving comments or presenting their research as the use of Hedges is significantly more than the use of Hedges in MHC.

Another study, (Hyland, 2000), which follows the same pattern of Hyland's 2005 model, carried on the Metadiscourse features of coursebooks in eight difference disciplines, shows that the percentage of usage of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions was 41.7, 27.3, 22.6 and 8.2 respectively. Again like authors of research articles, the writers of books mostly used Hedges and used Self-Mentions for the least number of times. The pattern of the usage of Hedges, Boosters Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions in MHC was different from that of coursebooks as shown in figure 4.6.

However, another study (Fu, 2012) conducted on the Metadiscourse features of job postings showed that Self-Mentions were employed 63.3% in the corpus. It is almost the same percentage as the percentage of Self-Mentions employed in MHC. From the perspective of the usage of Self-Mentions, the MHC is similar to the corpus of job postings. Moreover, the usage of Hedges in the corpus of job postings was 11%. It was near to the usage of Hedges in MHC. However, the usage of Boosters and Attitude Markers in job postings was 3.3% and 21.5% respectively. The use of Self-Mentions was also high in comments of online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012). In terms of the pattern

of Self-Mentions, the use of Self-Mentions was close to that of in MHC. The pattern of usage of Boosters and Attitude Markers was different from that of MHC. Similarly, while comparing the data of MHC with courtroom opening statements (Chaemsaithong, 2017), it was found that the use of Hedges and Boosters was high in courtroom opening statements. The patterns of Stance Markers in different studies have been shown in figure 4.6.

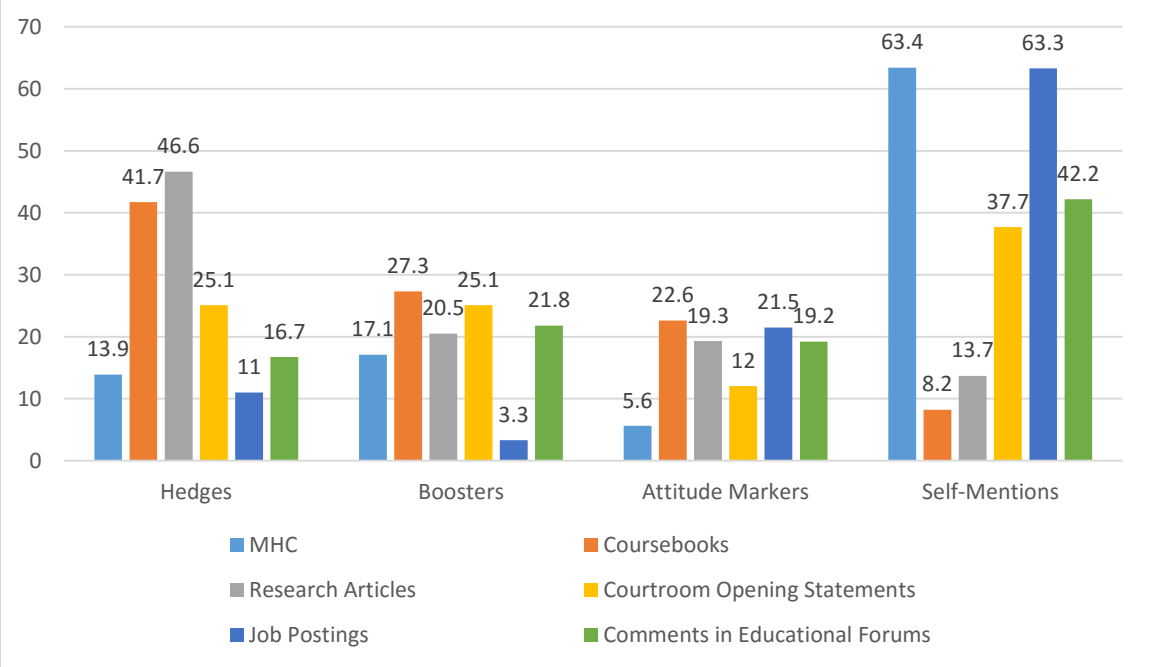

Figure 4.6. *Comparison of Stance Markers in MHC with different studies*

4.1.2 Stance Markers in Physical Health Corpus

This section investigates the frequency of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions in the Physical Health Corpus. In table 4.3, the frequency of every Stance Marker with a frequency of one or more than one in PHC can be seen. The complete list has been given in appendix C. The total number of Stance Markers in PHC were 883.58 per ten thousand words. The researcher has selected a few of them belonging to different genres for comparison. It was found that the frequency of Stance Markers in comments of online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012), research articles (Hyland, 2008), courtrooms opening statements **(**Chaemsaithong, 2017), job postings (Fu, 2012) and course-books (Hyland, 2000) was 1090, 309, 298.04, 234 and 194 respectively per ten thousand words. It is clear from the revealed data of these researches that the frequency of

Stance Markers in PHC was closer to the frequency of Stance Markers in comments in online educational forums. Though the frequency of Stance Markers in PHC is less than in comments in online educational forums, it is still closer to this study on online discourse than any other study on other genres. It shows that online users in PHC emphasize on possible accuracy of their claims, commit themselves to their texts, exhibit their attitude towards a proposition and project themselves in texts (Hyland, 2005b) than that of text producers in research articles, courtroom opening statements, job postings and course-books; however, the emphasis of online users in PHC on above mentioned strategies was less when compared with comments of online educational forums.

Table 4.3

Stance Markers in Physical Health Corpus

Hedges		Boosters		Attitude Markers		Self-Mentions	
would	28.56	think	27.68	!	32.66	I	350.08
could	14.58	know	25.04	important	3.8	my	104.92
should	12.2	really	20.98	even x	3.72	me	42.58
may	10.82	find	16.62	agree	2.32	we	10.74
might	6.76	sure	8.82	hopefully	1.72	our	2.68
about	6.24	always	8.74	amazing	1.4	us	2.36
sometimes	5.16	never	8.74	unfortunately	1.36	mine	1.92
maybe	5.06	actually	7.34	interesting	1.04		
seems	5.04	believe	4.14				
probably	5	show	3.82				
usually	4.88	clear	3.44				
often	4.72	definitely	3.32				
quite	4.62	of course	2.78				
feel	3.94	true	2.5				
almost	3.22	certain	2.44				
suggest	2.76	known	1.52				
around	2.74	obviously	1.52				
guess	2.3	must(possibility)	1.44				
tend to	2.16	certainly	1.36				
likely	1.94	realize	1.08				
generally	1.72						
mostly	1.68						
possible	1.58						
suppose	1.34						
perhaps	1.14						
Total	154.04	Total	158.6	Total	55.66	Total	515.28

Note: This table includes Stance Markers only which have a frequency of more than one per ten thousand words. However, the collective value of all Stance Markers is mentioned in the last row showing totals.

4.1.2.1 Hedges in Physical Health Corpus

In the corpus of Physical Health, online users used 154.04 Hedges per ten thousand words. Results have shown that, like Mental Health Corpus, the most frequently used hedging marker was *would.* It was used 28.56 times (per 10,000 words) in the corpus. It was followed by *could* which was used 14.58 times. Next to these markers, there were again modal auxiliaries i.e. *should, may* and *might* which were utilized 12.2, 10.82 and 6.76 times respectively by the users. It was followed by two commonly used adverbs *sometimes* and *maybe*. On the ninth position was a lexical verb *seems.* Next to this was *probably* and then two adverbs of frequency i.e. *usually* and *often*. Out of seventy-eight words and phrases twenty-five words were used more than one time per ten thousand words as shown in figure 4.7. These markers accounted for 91% of total Hedges in PHC.

In PHC, the most used Hedging Marker was *would* which frequently co-occurred with other Hedges. Writers mainly used *would* to hypothesize; Coates (1983) also mentioned that hypotheticality receives its chief expression through *would*. *Would* was followed by *could, should, may* and *might.* All of these are modal auxiliaries and are used to convey the meaning of possibility, doubt and obligation. The most used adverb was *about* which is used to give an estimate of something (when used as Hedge) and avoid uttering a precise amount. Examples and detail of this have been given in section 4.2.1. Among lexical verbs, *seem* and *feel* were mostly used. Writers used these verbs when they were not sure about the proposition. Such verbs allowed online users to avoid from giving straightforward statements and negotiate some degree of flexibility in claims (Salager-Meyer, 1994).

Analysis of Hedges in other studies has shown that writers mostly use *would, could, should, may* and *might*. In PHC online users also used these modal auxiliaries as Hedges followed by lexical verbs, adverbs and adjectives. In two different studies on research articles by Akinci (2016) and Yu (2019) revealed that researchers mostly used *would* and *could*. Incharoensak (2018) and Al-Rubaye (2015) also found in college application essays

and academic writing of EFL and ESL students respectively that *might*, *could* and *may* had the highest frequency. Studies have also been conducted on theses (Darwish, 2019), courtroom opening statements (Chaemsaithong, 2017), job postings (Fu, 2012) and online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012) which also showed that modal auxiliaries i.e. *could*, *would*, *may* and *might* had the highest frequency among Hedges. So, the pattern of Hedges in PHC is in line with these studies. Nevertheless, some studies have also shown different results e.g. Latif & Rasheed (2020) studied Hedges in Pakistani academic research articles and found that researchers mostly used *about* to hedge their claims which was followed by modal auxiliaries. In addition to that Ondondo (2020) revealed lexical verbs had a higher frequency than modal auxiliaries in doctoral theses writing.

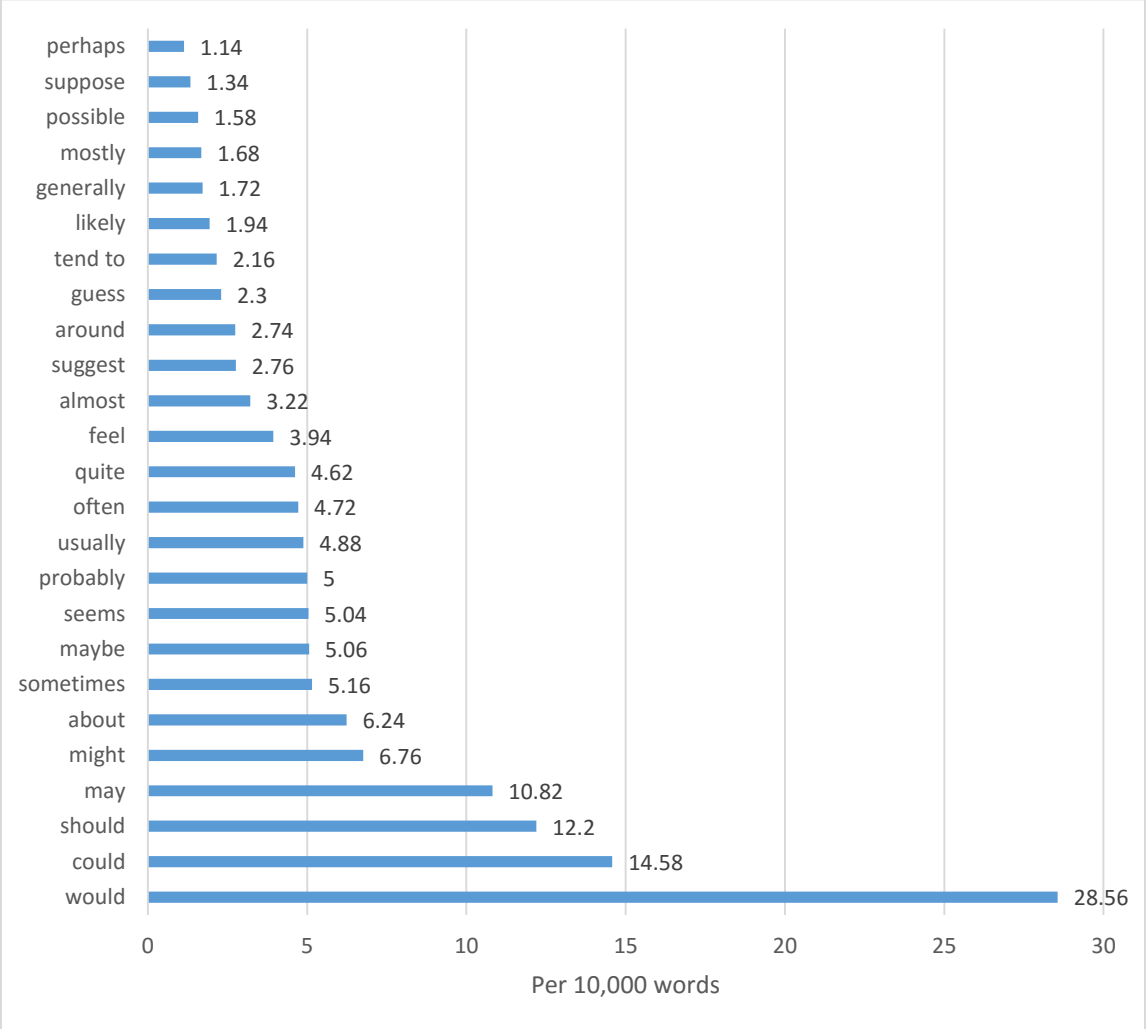

Figure 4.7. *Hedges in Physical Health Corpus*

4.1.2.2 Boosters in Physical Health Corpus

Results revealed that in Physical Health Corpus 158.6 Boosters were present per ten thousand words. The most frequently used Booster was *think* which was utilized 27.68 times (per 10,000 words). It was followed by *know* with a frequency of 25.04. Next to this was an adverb *really* which was employed 20.98 times. *Find* was present with a frequency of 16.62. The next word *sure* had the frequency of 8.82, almost half the number of the frequency of the previous word. After this, there were two adverbs *always* and *never* with the same frequency of 8.74. Out of forty-eight Boosters, only twenty were used more than one time per ten thousand words as shown in figure 4.8. These Boosters accounted for 97% of total Boosters.

Boosters are used to eliminate possible alternatives, focusing on one to maximize certainty and thus creating a rapport to show solidarity with the audience (Hyland, 2005a). The frequency of Boosters in PHC was low as compared to the frequency of Boosters in MHC. However, the pattern of most used Boosters was similar. The most used Booster was *think* used by online users to show that they opined their views after 'thinking' so they are important and true. *Think* was followed by *know* which was employed by writers to exaggerate the actual state of affairs and add to the truth value of proposition (Hinkel, 2005). *Really* was used to express certainty in the corpus. Like in MHC, *always* and *never* were also excessively used in PHC to express commitment and to convince readers.

In this paragraph, the most used Boosters in PHC will be compared with the most used Boosters in other studies. After doing comparison it was revealed that in other texts writers preferred Boosters different from that in PHC. While studying research articles Akinci (2016) found that authors mostly used *show* and *find* in their writings. Yu's (2019) studied research articles and revealed that *suggest* and *show* had the highest frequency. Moreover, Incharoensak (2018) found in college application essays that the most used Booster was *realize*. Darwish (2019) and Latif & Rasheed (2020) found in theses and Pakistani academic research articles respectively that *show* was the most used Booster in their corpora. As compared to other Boosters, the frequency of *show* was less in PHC. Al-Rubaye (2015) analyzed Boosters in Academic Writing of EFL and ESL students and found that the most used Booster in his corpus was *always*. *Always* stood at sixth position

in PHC. Considering the results of above mentioned studies it is clear that the pattern of Boosters in PHC is not similar to other studies.

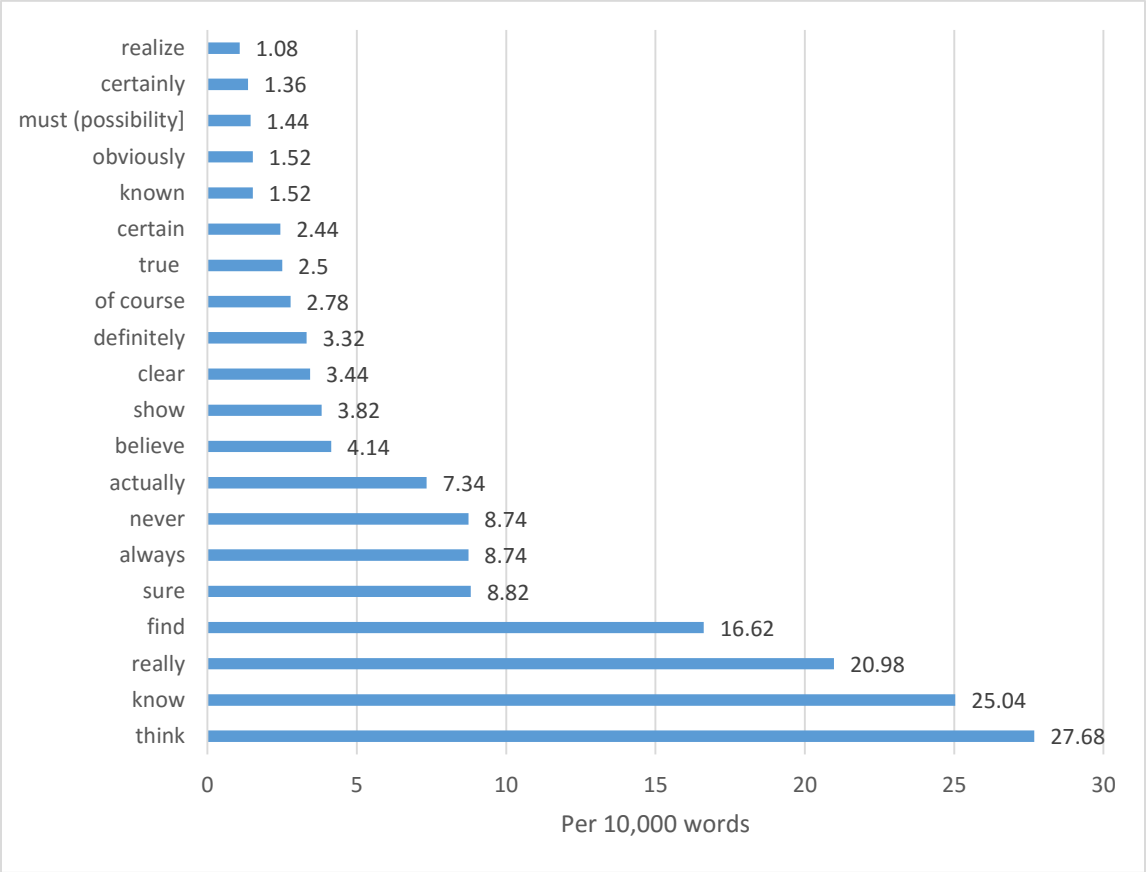

Figure 4.8. *Boosters in Physical Health Corpus*

4.1.2.3 Attitude Markers in Physical Health Corpus

In PHC, 55.66 Attitude Markers were used per ten thousand words. As shown in the chart, the most used Attitude Marker is the exclamation mark which has been used 32.66 times per ten thousand words. It was followed by *important* and *even* with a frequency of 3.8 and 3.72 respectively. Next to this was a verb *agree.* The next words had a frequency of less than 2. *Hopefully*, *amazing*, *unfortunately* and *interesting* had the frequency of 1.72, 1.4, 1.3 and 1.04 respectively.

Attitude Markers enable authors to reveal their attitude about the importance of something, about any interest in something, about its appropriateness and about the personal emotional concomitants of linguistic material (Adel, 2006). Since Hyland's 2005 model has been followed to conduct this research, every Marker provided in that model

was searched in the corpus using a corpus software. It turned out that the exclamation mark, which is the only punctuation mark considered as Attitude Marker in the model, was significantly overused by online users to emphasize the aspects of a text and the writer's attitude towards it (Crismore et al., 1993). The exclamation mark was followed by *important*. *Important* did not have as much frequency as the exclamation mark had. However, in section 4.2.3, it has been revealed that writers' used *important* to accentuate the value of their pieces of advice. Similarly, online users used other adjectives like *amazing* to reflect their favourable or unfavourble attitude towards proposition (Soler, 2002). *Even* also had a high frequency which can be construed as the writer was seeking that the reader ought to find this information important and surprising.

When compared with other studies, it was found that the most used Attitude Markers in those studies were also the most used markers in PHC. However, the difference lied in the usage of the exclamation mark. The exclamation mark was nearly absent in those studies but overly used in PHC. Akinci (2019) and Yu (2019) revealed that in research articles *important* and *even* had the highest frequency among Attitude Markers. Similarly, another diachronic study (Hyland & Jiang, 2016b) on research articles yielded the same results. Darwish (2019) also found in theses that most used Attitude Markers were *important* and *even*. Therefore, PHC is very similar to these studies if the exclamation mark is excluded.

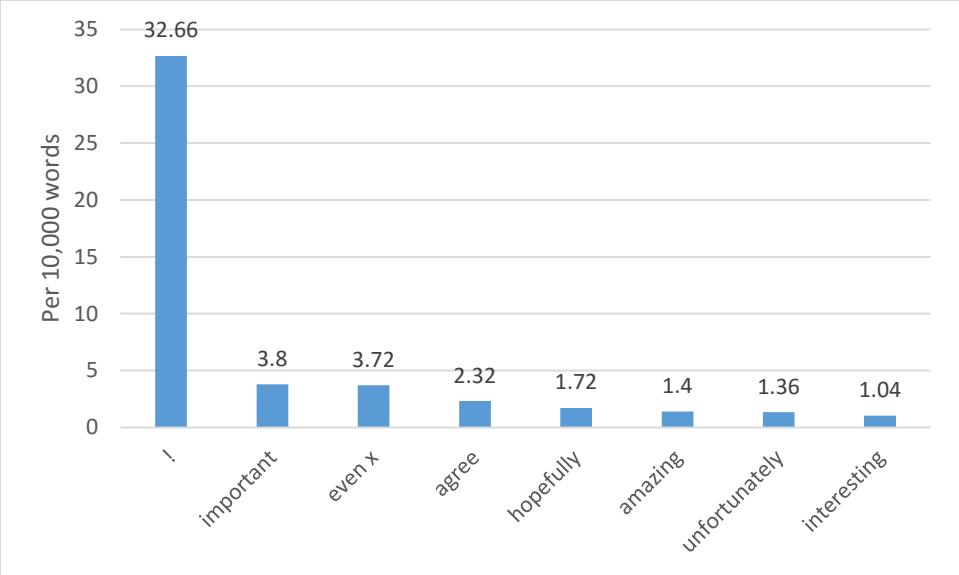

Figure 4.9. *Attitude Markers in Physical Health Corpus*

4.1.2.4 Self-Mentions in Physical Health Corpus

The examination of PHC showed that a total of 515.28 cases of Self-Mentions occurred per ten thousand words. Similar to MHC, the personal pronoun *I* was the most used marker of Self-Mentions. It was followed by *my* and *me* with the frequency of 104.92 and 42.58 respectively. Exclusive *we* was only used 10.74 times (per 10,000 words). *Our* and *us* had even less frequency i.e. 2.68 and 2.36 respectively. *Mine* was the least used marker in this category.

Self-Mentions include first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present interpersonal and propositional information. Online users in PHC preferred *I* to project themselves in the text (Hyland, 2005a). It was observed that in PHC, online users were sharing their experiences and that is why they had to use *I* multiple times in some replies. *I* was followed by *my* and *me*. The high use of *I* resulted in the high use of *my* and *me*. Analysis of examples in section 4.2.4 showed that writers used *my* and *me* to share personal experiences and make a bond with readers. The frequency of exclusive *we* in PHC was higher than in MHC and lower than in SIC.

Comparison of Self-Mentions in PHC with those of other studies showed that PHC was similar to some and different from some also. It showed mixed results. Akinci (2019) and Yu (2019) analyzed research articles. In the former study, *I*, *me* and *my* were absent.

However, in the latter study, exclusive *we* and *our* had a high frequency. Like in PHC, *I* was the most used marker of Self-Mentions in courtroom opening statements (Chaemsaithong, 2017) and theses (Darwish, 2019). In another study (Fu, 2012) on job postings the results were different as exclusive *we* was the most used marker in the corpus. Tajeddin & Alemi (2012) found that the most used Self-Mention Marker was *I* in their research on comments of online educational forums. So, regarding Self-Mentions PHC is similar to some studies which showed the high usage of *I.*

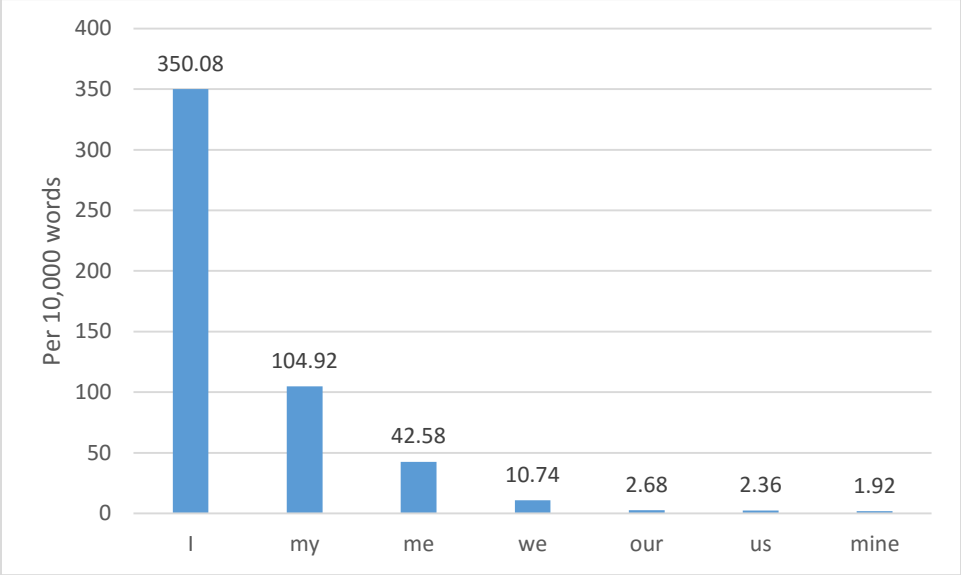

Figure 4.10. *Self-Mentions in Physical Health Corpus*

4.1.2.5 Comparison of Stance Markers in Physical Health Corpus

After calculating all of the Stance Markers, it was revealed that 883.58 Stance Markers per ten thousand words were used in the corpus of Physical Health. Online users mostly used Self-Mentions. Self-Mentions constituted 58.3% of Stance Markers in the corpus. Boosters and Hedges represented 17.9% and 17.4% of Stance Markers in the corpus respectively. The least represented category of Stance Markers was of Attitude Markers which accounted for only 6.3% of total Stance Markers in the corpus. Table 4.4 shows the percentage of every different Stance Markers in PHC.

Table 4.4

Overall Stance Markers in Physical Health Corpus

Category	Markers per 10,000 words	% of overall Stance Markers
Hedges	154.04	17.4
Boosters	158.6	17.9
Attitude Markers	55.66	6.3
Self-Mentions	515.28	58.3
Total	883.58	100

In terms of frequency, Self-Mentions were employed 515.28 times per ten thousand words by the online users of PHC. The frequency of Boosters and Hedges was close to each other i.e. 158.6 and 154.04 respectively. Attitude Markers had only a frequency of 55.66 per ten thousand words. Like MHC, the use of Self-Mentions is considerably high in this corpus compared with other elements of Stance as shown in figure 4.11.

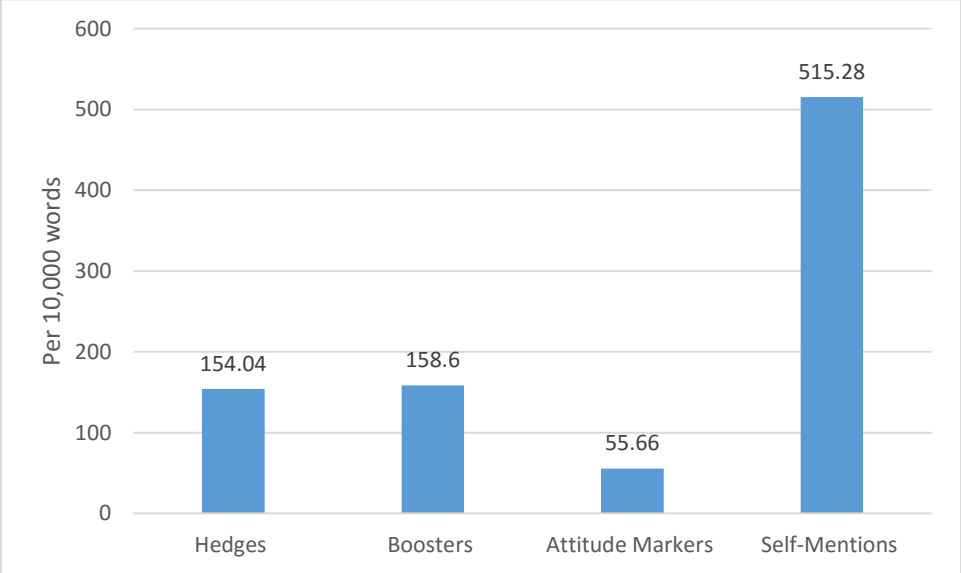

Figure 4.11. *Overall Stance Markers in Physical Health Corpus*

This data has revealed that online users in Physical Health Forums mostly used Self-Mentions to give an impression of their presence. However, a balanced approach in the use of Hedges and Boosters was observed. The frequency of Hedges and Boosters was nearly similar. When online users were leaving a room for another claim (Swales, 1990)

by using Hedges, they were equally strengthening their arguments (Hyland, 2005a) by employing Boosters. Attitude Markers show the importance of something or surprise towards a proposition. The Online users in PHC were less likely to show surprise but were oriented towards making their presence prominent by the use of Self-Mentions. The frequency of different Stance Markers can be seen in figure 4.11.

Comparison with two studies by Hyland (with which MHC was also compared) showed a different pattern of the usage of Stance Markers. In PHC online users mostly used Self-Mentions even more than fifty percent of total Stance Markers. However, the results of Stance Markers in coursebooks (Hyland, 2000) and research articles (Hyland, 2008) revealed that writers and researchers mostly used Hedges in their writings; Self-Mentions were used the least number of times. In course-books, after Hedges, Boosters were most used Stance Markers followed by Attitude Markers. However, in research articles, Attitude Markers were followed by Boosters. Among PHC and these two mentioned studies, it is clear after analysis that there is not much difference in the usage of Boosters percentage-wise, but the usage of Attitude Markers was significantly low in PHC than in coursebooks and research articles. Above all the most remarkable difference was in the use of Self-Mentions which were used sixteen times and forty-two times per ten thousand words in coursebooks and research articles respectively; in PHC Self-Mentions were employed 515 times per ten thousand words.

It is worth noting that the usage of Hedges and Boosters in PHC is well balanced. The online users was strengthening their arguments by Boosters and leaving space for disagreement by using Hedges equally. This pattern was similar to another study **(**Chaemsaithong, 2017) conducted on ‘stance taking in courtroom opening statements’ in which lawyers used Hedges and Boosters equally (Hedges: 74.90, Boosters 74.82 per 10,000 words). The least employed Stance Markers were Attitude Markers in that study and the most used Stance Markers were Self-Mention. So, the pattern of Stance Markers, with respect to Boosters and Hedges, in MHC is very similar to the pattern in opening statements in courtrooms. Figure 4.12 shows the percentage wise distribution Stance features across different genres. From it is clear that the use of Self-Mentions is high both

in job postings and PHC. It indicates that in both corpora writers wanted to foreground their presence in texts (Hyland, 2005b).

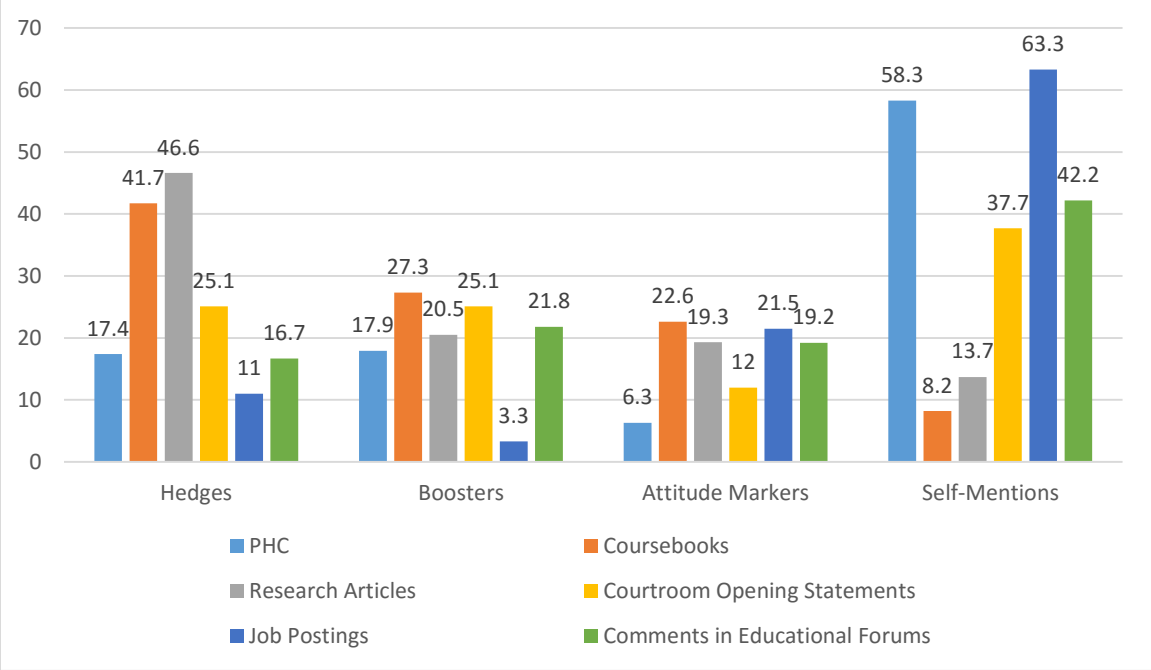

Figure 4.12. *Comparison of Stance Markers in PHC with different studies*

4.1.3 Stance Markers in Social Issues Corpus

This section investigates the frequency of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions in Social Issues Corpus. In table 4.5 the frequency of every Marker having a frequency of one or more than one has been given. The complete list of all Markers has been provided in appendix C. The overall frequency of Stance Markers in SIC was 725.84 per ten thousand words. Several other studies have been carried out on different genres applying Hyland's (2005) framework. Out of these studies, the researcher has selected a few for comparison. Studies conducted on comments of online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012), research articles (Hyland, 2008), courtrooms opening statements **(**Chaemsaithong, 2017), job postings (Fu, 2012) and course-books (Hyland, 2000) showed that the frequency of Stance Markers in them was 1090, 309, 298.04, 234 and 194 per ten thousand words respectively. It shows that the frequency of Stance Markers in SIC is only lesser than that in comments in online educational forums. Although online users in PHC are committed to their views, stress on the exactness of their statements (Hyland, 2005b) than text producers in research articles, coursebooks, job postings and

courtroom opening statements, they are not so committed to their views and stress on the accurateness of their statements as online users writing online comments in educational forums.

Table 4.5
Stance Markers in Social Issues Corpus

Hedges		Boosters		Attitude Markers		Self-Mentions	
would	37.26	think	35.58	!	19.2	I	234.98
could	14.76	know	22.08	even x	6.16	my	47.8
should	14.32	really	14.86	agree	5.54	me	33.52
may	8.18	never	12.72	important	3.9	we	11.46
maybe	7.14	believe	12.24	interesting	1.94	our	2.88
might	6.64	find	10.54	disagree	1.4	us	2.68
probably	5.58	actually	8.4	expected	1.1	mine	1.04
seems	5.18	always	8.14	usual	1.02		
claim	4.48	sure	7.94				
likely	3.74	true	6.02				
about	3.6	show	4.8				
often	3.52	of course	4.08				
feel	3.38	certain	3.32				
guess	3.38	certainly	2.36				
quite	3.18	realize	2.18				
suppose	2.8	clear	2.14				
almost	2.68	prove	2.12				
perhaps	2.56	in fact	2.1				
sometimes	2.26	obviously	2.04				
apparently	2.18	known	1.9				
usually	1.86	clearly	1.84				
assume	1.62	truly	1.58				
mostly	1.6	definitely	1.54				
argue	1.56	must(possibility)	1.36				
doubt	1.56	obvious	1.3				
tend to	1.56						
suspect	1.48						
in general	1.46						
possibly	1.44						
possible	1.4						
suggest	1.4						
generally	1.26						
appear	1.14						
Total	165.72	Total	176.4	Total	49.36	Total	334.36

Note: This table includes Stance Markers only which have a frequency of more than one per ten thousand words. However, the collective value of all Stance Markers is mentioned in the last row showing totals.

4.1.3.1 Hedges in Social Issues Corpus

Results showed that online users utilized 165.72 Hedges per ten thousand words in the corpus. The most used hedging element was *would* which was used 37.26 times (per 10,000 words). *Would* was used two and half times more than the auxiliary *could* which was second in the list with the usage of 14.76 times (per 10,000 words). *Should* and *may* were employed 14.32 and 8.18 times. It was followed by an adverb, *maybe*. On the sixth position, there was again an auxiliary verb *might*. Next to this was *probably* which is a commonly used adverb. After this there were two lexical verbs i.e. *seems* and *claim* with the frequency of 5.18 and 4.48 respectively. There were thirty-three words and phrases which were used more than one time per ten thousand words in the corpus as shown in figure 4.13.

In SIC, Writers excessively used *would*, *could*, *should*, *may* and *might*. Hyland (1996) has mentioned that modal auxiliaries soften the effect of criticism. In SIC *would* was used 30% more than it was used in PHC. Nevertheless, in all three corpora, the most used hedging marker was *would*. Writers used *would* to show probability and hypothesize about possible outcomes. *Could* was also used to show tentative possibility. Among lexical verbs, seems had a high frequency in SIC. Writers used this marker to speculate something instead of saying anything with surety. *Seems* also co-occurred with *could* frequently which is also a main Hedging marker. In SIC, among adverbs, the most used marker was *maybe.* online users used this marker to give suggestions to readers after assessing a person's condition but they were not completely sure about outcomes.

Results of other studies have shown that modal auxiliaries had the highest frequency among Hedges. So was the case with SIC. In studies on research articles (Akinci, 2016; Yu, 2019), college application essays (Incharoensak, 2018) and academic writing of EFL and ESL students (Al-Rubaye, 2015), it was found that *would*, *could* and other modal auxiliaries had the highest frequency followed by other Hedges. Similarly, in other studies on theses (Darwish, 2019), courtroom opening statements (Chaemsaithong, 2017), job postings (Fu, 2012) online educational forums (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012), it was revealed that modal auxiliaries i.e. *could*, *would*, *may* and *might* had the highest frequency among Hedges. However, a few studies showed different results. Latif & Rasheed (2020) in their

study on Metadiscourse markers in Pakistani academic research articles found that researchers mostly used *about* to hedge their claims which was followed by modal auxiliaries. Ondondo (2020) also found slightly different results in his study on doctoral thesis writing in which most used hedging markers were lexical verbs instead of modal verbs. Hence, SIC results are in line with most of the studies conducted on Hedges.

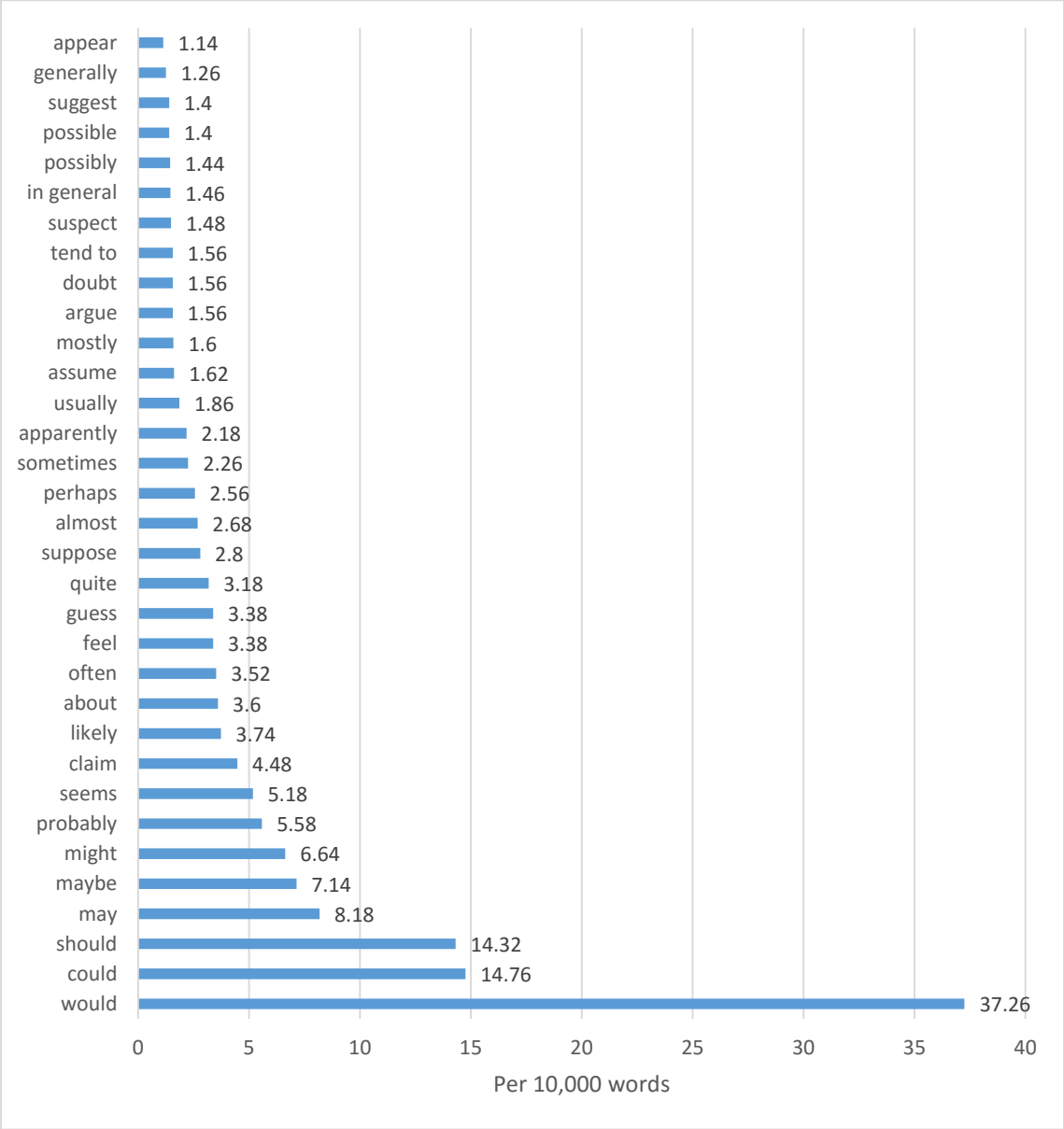

Figure 4.13. *Hedges in Social Issues Corpus*

4.1.3.2 Boosters in Social Issues Corpus

The analysis of data in Social Issues Corpus showed that online users used 176.4 Boosters per ten thousand words. Like the other two corpora, the most frequently used Booster in the corpus was also *think.* It was used 35.58 times per ten thousand words. The next word *know* was present with the frequency of 22.08. *Really* was used 14.86 times. *Never* was used 12.72 times. It was followed by *believe* which had a frequency of 12.24. The next Boosters were *find*, *actually*, *always*, *sure* and *true*. A total of twenty-five Boosters were existent more than one time (per 10,000 words). These Boosters constituted 98% of overall Boosters.

Boosters are used to eliminate possible alternatives, focusing on one to maximize certainty and thus creating a rapport to show solidarity with the audience (Hyland, 2005a). Writers in SIC also used Boosters with the pattern of usage of the most used Boosters similar to that of MHC and PHC. In SIC, online users also used *think, know*, *really*, *never*, *find* and *always* mostly. The interpretation of *think* can be the same which was for *think* in MHC and PHC. Users were using *think* overly to give the impression that they have come to the conclusion after ascertaining facts and the situation as explained in section 4.2.2. Online users also wrote *know* several times in their replies to add to the truth value of the proposition (Hinkel, 2005). The third most used Booster was *really* which expressed a writer's surety about his claim. Like MHC and PHC, *always* and *never* were also used many times to show commitment to the proposition.

Comparison of Boosters in SIC with Boosters in other studies has revealed that the choice and pattern of Boosters by online users in SIC was different from Boosters of other studies. Several studies have been conducted on different corpora applying Hyland's 2005 model. The results of those studies will be discussed and compared in this paragraph. Akinci (2016) found in research articles written by experts and students that authors mostly used *show* and *find* in their writings whereas in SIC the most used Boosters were *think, know* and *really*. Similarly, Yu's (2019) study on research articles showed that *suggest* and *show* were dominant Boosters. Incharoensak (2018) found in college application essays that the most used Booster was *realize*. *Know, think* and *find* were also the most used Boosters after *realize* in her results. So, some most used markers are similar to those of

SIC. Darwish (2019) and Latif & Rasheed (2020) found in theses and Pakistani academic research articles respectively that *show* was the most used Booster in their corpora. *Show* was not even in top ten Boosters in SIC. Similarly, while studying Boosters in Academic Writing of EFL and ESL students, Al-Rubaye (2015) found that the most used Booster in his corpus was *always*. *Always* stood at the eighth position among Boosters in SIC. It can be concluded that the pattern of Boosters in SIC is not similar to above-mentioned studies.

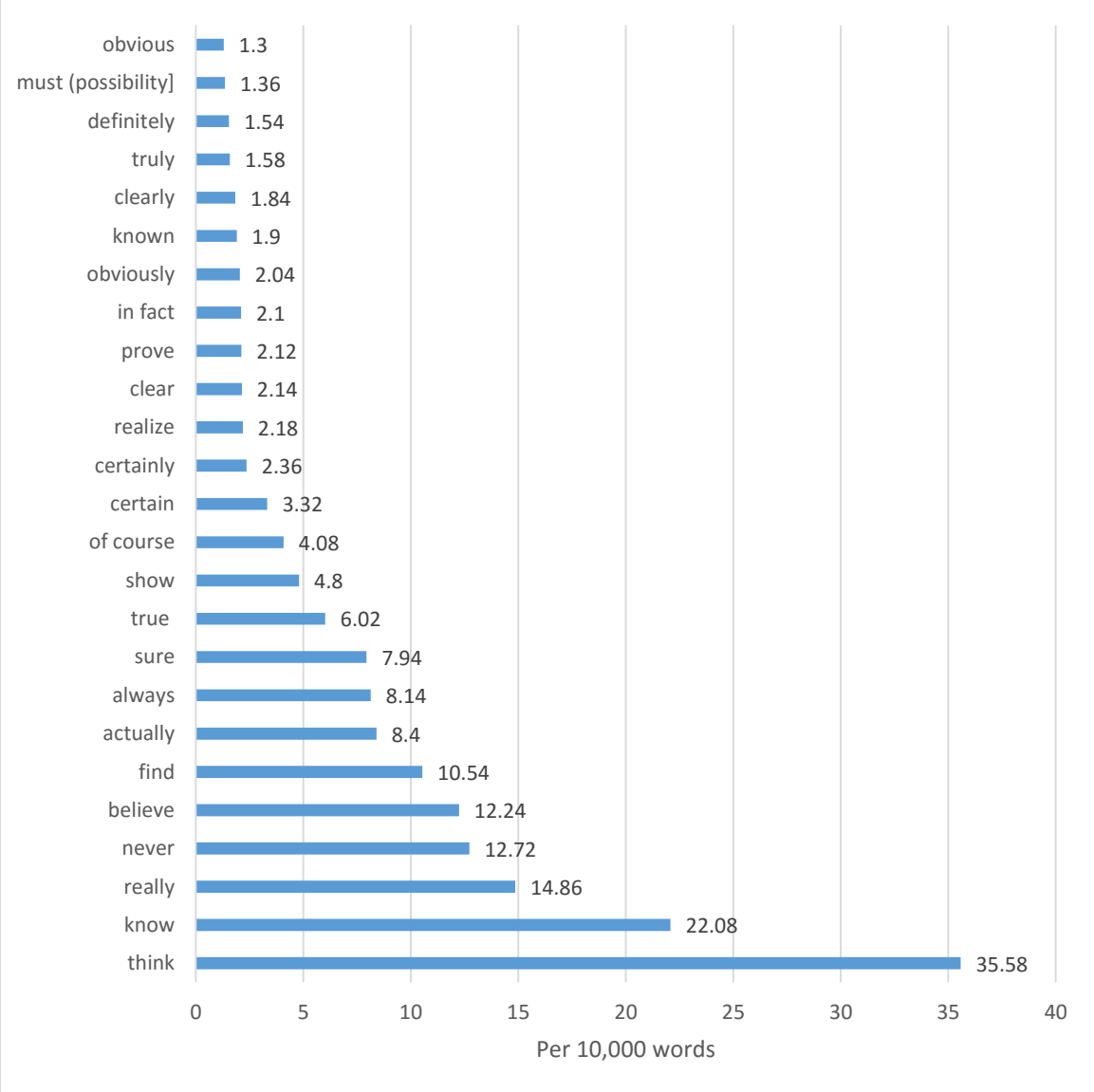

Figure 4.14. *Boosters in Social Issues Corpus*

4.1.3.3 Attitude Markers in Social Issues Corpus

The analysis revealed that in SIC, 49.36 instances of Attitude Markers per ten thousand words were used. In order to demonstrate some attitude regarding the proposition, online users used the exclamation mark. The exclamation mark was the most used Attitude Marker and was utilized 19.2 times. *Even* had the frequency of 6.16. It was followed by *agree* with a frequency of 5.54. *Important* and *interesting* were used 3.9 and 1.94 times respectively. Other than these markers, *disagree, expected* and *usual* had the frequency of more than one per ten thousand words.

The frequency of Attitude Markers in SIC was low than that in MHC and PHC. As discussed in previous sections, Attitude Markers show doubt or uncertainty towards a proposition; writers use Attitude Markers to highlight the importance of something or show surprise (Kopple, 1985). Like the previous two corpora under investigation, the most used Attitude Marker was the exclamation mark. Online users used the exclamation mark to emphasize the aspects of a text and the writer's attitude towards it (Crismore et al., 1993). The exclamation mark was followed by *even* whose high frequency can be interpreted that online users wanted their information to be considered important. The frequency of *agree* was high in SIC than in MHC and PHC. By using *agree* writers were conforming (Hyland, 2005a) to others' views and then giving their opinions. *Agree* was followed by two adjectives i.e. *important* and *interesting*. As Attitude Markers are used to express the importance of the proposition; therefore, users utilized these adjectives notably.

Some other studies have also been conducted on Attitude Markers on different corpora. The results of those are being cited and compared here. Akinci (2019) studied Stance Markers in research articles written by students and experts and Yu (2019) studied Stance Markers in research articles in English and Korean and found that *important* and *even* were the most used Attitude Markers. Similarly, Hyland & Jiang (2016b) diachronically studied research articles and found that *important* and restrictive *even* remained the top two choices across articles belonging to four different fields. Darwish (2019) also found in theses that most used Attitude Markers were *important, even* and *significant*. In SIC, the exclamation mark was the most used Attitude Marker. It was followed by *even, agree* and *important*. So, the major difference in SIC and other studies

was the exclamation mark which had a very high frequency in SIC but it was almost absent in other studies.

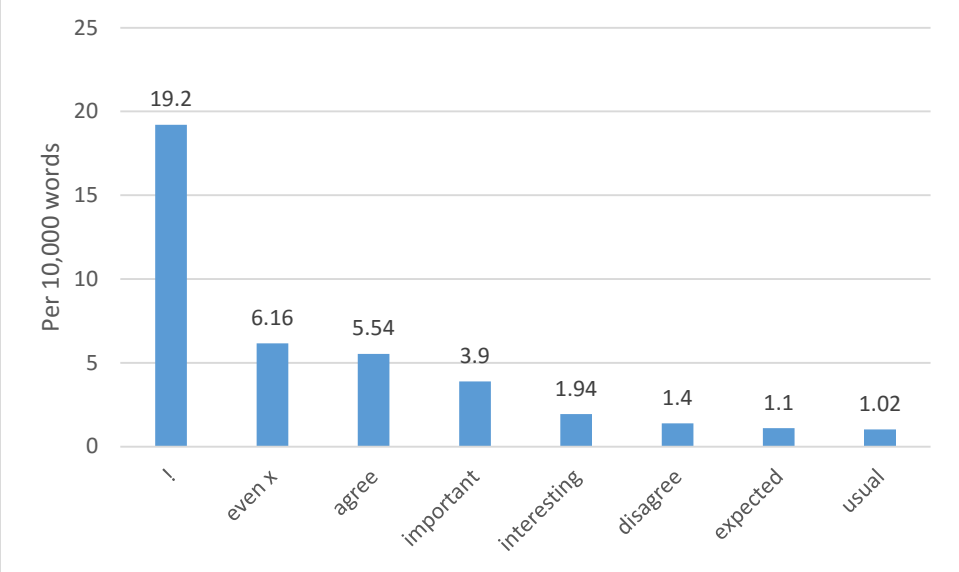

Figure 4.15. *Attitude Markers in Social Issues Corpus*

4.1.3.4 Self-Mentions in Social Issues Corpus

A total of 334.36 cases of Self-Mentions per ten thousand words were present in SIC. The personal pronoun *I* had the frequency of 234.98. It was followed by *my* and *me* which had the frequency of 47.8 and 33.52. While exclusive *we* was used 11.46 times per ten thousand words. *Our, us* and *mine* showed the least usage of 2.88, 2.68 and 1.04 respectively.

Self-Mentions can be measured by the frequency of possessive adjectives and first person pronouns in a text; it will reveal the degree of an author's presence in the text (Hyland, 2005a). The use of first person pronouns permits authors to emphasize and to seek agreement, for their own contributions (Hyland, 2002a). the pattern of Self-Mentions was the same in SIC as in PHC and MHC. However, the frequency of Self-Mentions in SIC was significantly low as compared other two corpora. The most used marker of Self-Mention was *I*. Analysis in section 4.2.4 has shown that, unlike in PHC and MHC, online users in SIC were sharing their views about Social Issues not experiences. So, while explaining their views they did not need to use first person pronouns overly. Before giving an opinion, they mention themselves by using *I* but later they focus on opinion instead of

highlighting themselves. The low density of *I* also lead to in low density of *my* and *me*. However, the frequency of exclusive *we* was high in PHC and MHC. In SIC, online users were generally giving their opinions therefore they were using exclusive *we* to explain an argument and convey their claims (Papangkorn, 2019).

Similar to PHC and MHC, SIC had the same pattern of most used markers of Self-Mentions. Comparison with other studies revealed mixed results. When other studies were analyzed it was found that Akinci (2019) investigated research articles and revealed that the use of *I*, *my* and *me* was almost non-existent. The usage of *we* and *our* was high in Akinci's study. However, in another study Yu (2019) on research articles, *I* was the most used Marker of Self-Mentions followed by exclusive *we*. Chaemsaithong (2017) and Darwish (2019) conducted an analysis of Stance Markers in courtroom opening statements and theses discussion chapters respectively and found that the high use of the first person singular i.e. *I*. In terms of pattern, the results of SIC are close to those of Darwish's and Chaemsaithong's study. In Fu's study (2012) on job postings, he revealed that exclusive *we* had the highest frequency. Tajeddin & Alemi (2012) studied comments of online educational forums and found a high frequency of *I*. So, SIC is in line with most of the mentioned studies.

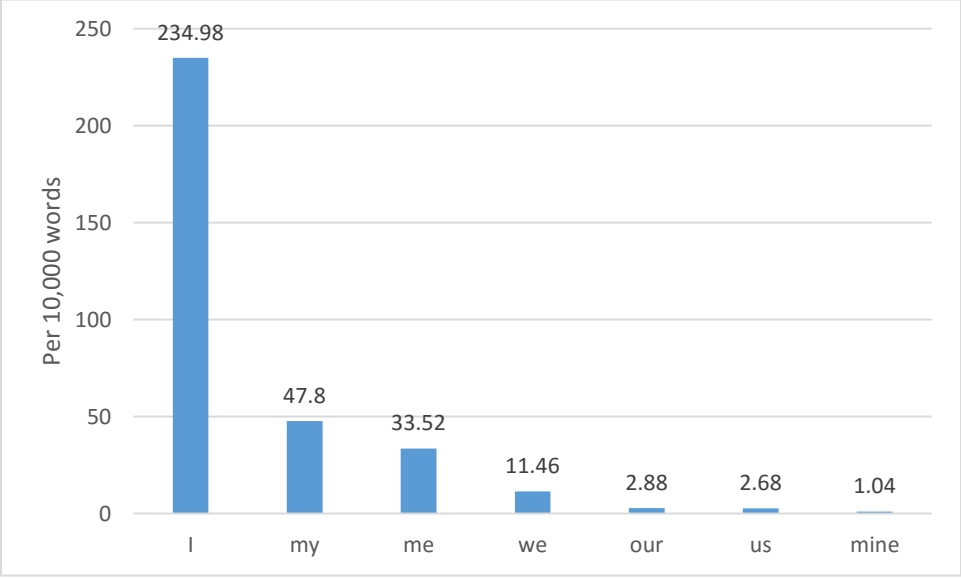

Figure 4.16. *Self-Mentions in Social Issues Corpus*

4.1.3.5 Comparison of Stance Markers in Social Issues Corpus

Data analysis has revealed that online users in SIC mostly used Self-Mentions which accounted for 46% of overall Stance Markers. Second to Self-Mentions were Boosters which constituted 24.3% of total Stance Markers. The share of Hedges was 22.8%. Attitude Markers were the least used which only constituted 6.8%.

Table 4.6

Overall Stance Markers in Social Issues Corpus

Category	Markers per 10,000 words	% of overall Stance Markers
Hedges	165.72	22.8
Boosters	176.4	24.3
Attitude Markers	49.36	6.8
Self-Mentions	334.36	46
Total	725.84	100

In terms of frequency, Self-Mentions were used 334.36 times per ten thousand words. The frequency of Self-Mentions was 1.9 times more than Boosters which were the most used Stance Markers after Self-Mentions. Boosters had a frequency of 176.4 while Hedges had 165.72. Attitude Markers were only used 49.36 times per ten thousand words as shown in figure 4.17.

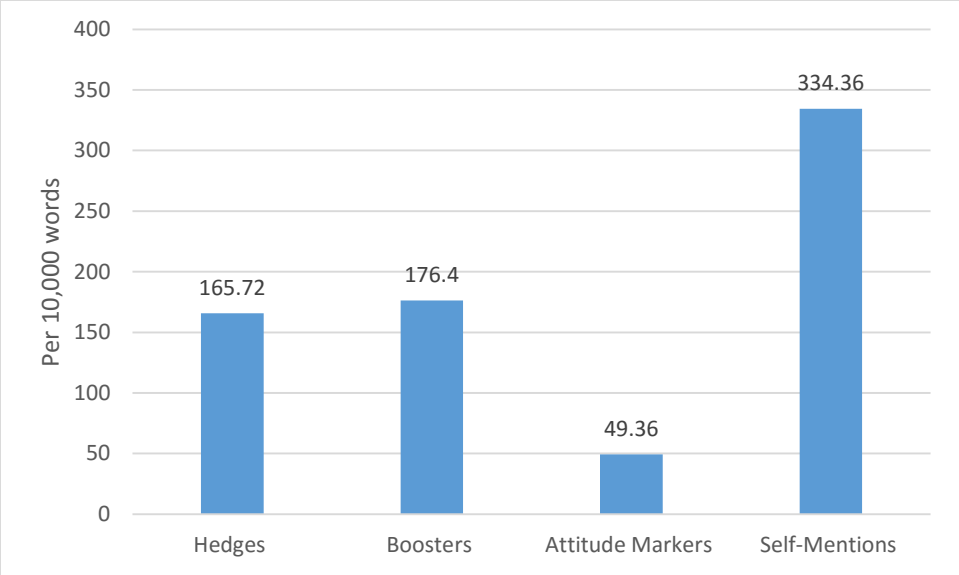

Figure 4.17. *Overall Stance Markers in Social Issues Corpus*

Though the most employed Stance Feature was of Self-Mention, its usage with respect to percentage was less than its usage in MHC and PHC. The usage of Hedges and Boosters was balanced as the usage of later was slightly more than the former. Like the other two corpora, the frequency of Attitude Markers did not exceed 7%. The high value of Self-Mentions indicates that online users in SIC were trying to personally address the questioners as pointed by Hyland (2005a). Though the overall usage and percentage-wise usage of Self-Mentions in SIC were less than that in PHC and MHC, they are still the most used Stance Markers in SIC as compared to other Markers. In another study conducted on Metadiscourse Markers in online educational discussion forums showed that online users used forty-two percent Self-Mentions in their comments. From this perspective, the usage of Self-Mentions in SIC is very close to that in comments of educational forums. However, the usage of Self-Mentions was most different from that of coursebooks which only had a share of 8.2% (Hyland, 2000). The pattern of usage of Hedges and Boosters in SIC is similar to Stance patterns in courtroom opening statements (Chaemsaithong, 2017) as both Hedges and Boosters are equally used. Since Hedges and Boosters are communicative strategies to increase or reduce the force of statements(Hyland, 1998c), their pattern of similar usage in SIC shows that online users were willing to entertain alternatives and so playing an important role in conveying a commitment to text and respect for readers

(Hyland 2005a). Attitude Markers were least used in SIC when compared with other studies. Attitude Markers express an attitude towards a proposition (Crismore et al., 1993), hint towards the importance of proposition and personal emotional concomitants (Adel, 2006). As the share of Attitude Markers was only 6.8% in SIC, it shows that online users showed less surprise and emotions towards the proposition. The percentage-wise distribution of different Stance features has been displayed in figure 4.18.

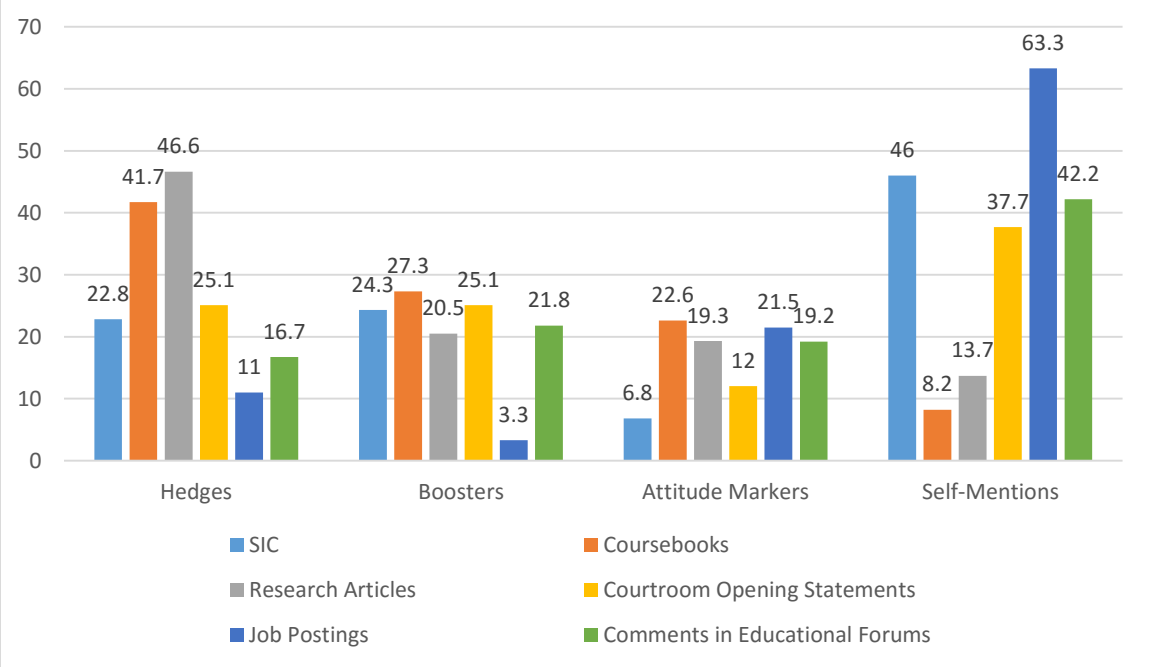

Figure 4.18. *Comparison of Stance Markers in PHC with different studies*

4.2 Comparison of Stance Markers in Corpora

In this section, the qualitative analyses of Stance Markers have been carried out. This section aims to answer the second research question of this study which intends to discover what similarities/differences are in the use of Stance Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues.

This study has uncovered that the highest number of Stance Markers were used in MHC. The frequency of Stance Markers in MHC was 1115.4 per ten thousand words. In PHC, the frequency of Stance Markers was 883.58. The least number of Stance Markers were present in SIC which had only 725.84 Stance Markers per ten thousand words as shown in table 4.7. This means that online users in MHC intended to display their

dedication to the importance of the knowledge they were offering as compared to online users in PHC and SIC (Papangkorn, 2019). Online users in PHC and SIC showed a lesser degree of commitment and emotions towards the proposition (Hyland, 2005a, 2005b, 1998a; Papangkorn, 2019). The overall frequencies of Stance Markers per ten thousand words have been shown in table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Comparison of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC

	MHC	PHC	SIC
Hedges	155.02	154.04	165.72
Boosters	190.7	158.6	176.4
Attitude Markers	62.36	55.66	49.36
Self-Mentions	707.32	515.28	334.36
Total	1115.4	883.58	725.84

As figure 4.19 shows the frequency all Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC, It is clear from the figure that there is a significant difference in the frequency of Self Mentions among corpora. The frequency of Self-Mentions in MHC (707.32) is even more than double than that in SIC (334.36). However, the frequency of Self-Mentions in PHC stands between MHC and SIC. The online users in MHC were definitely mentioning and projecting (Hyland, 2005a & 2005b) themselves in writing and trying to maintain active voice (Papangkorn, 2019) more than the online users of other corpora. The qualitative analysis of data (see: section 4.2.4) has shown that they were sharing their personal experiences so the frequency of Self-Mentions was increased in corpora especially in MHC. With respect to Hedges there was not much difference in their frequency. The frequency of Hedges in SIC, MHC and PHC was 165.72, 155.02 and 154.04 respectively. The number of Hedges employed by online users in SIC was marginally more than the other two corpora. So, the online users in SIC were a bit more modest and honest while giving opinions and took proper caution while reporting any claim (Swales, 1990). The frequency of Boosters in MHC, PHC and SIC (190.7, 158.6 and 176.4 respectively) shows that online users in MHC were more confident while giving statements in contrast to other

corpora. The least number of Boosters were used in PHC. The high frequency of Boosters is associated with persuasive texts like advertising and newspaper editorials (Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Dafouz-Milne, 2008). Hence, In MHC online users were trying to be persuasive and influential. The use of Attitude Markers was highest in MHC as shown in figure 4.19. The frequency of Attitude Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC was 62.36, 55.66 and 49.36 respectively. So, online users in MHC showed more surprise towards the proposition and frequently mentioned its significance (Kopple, 1985).

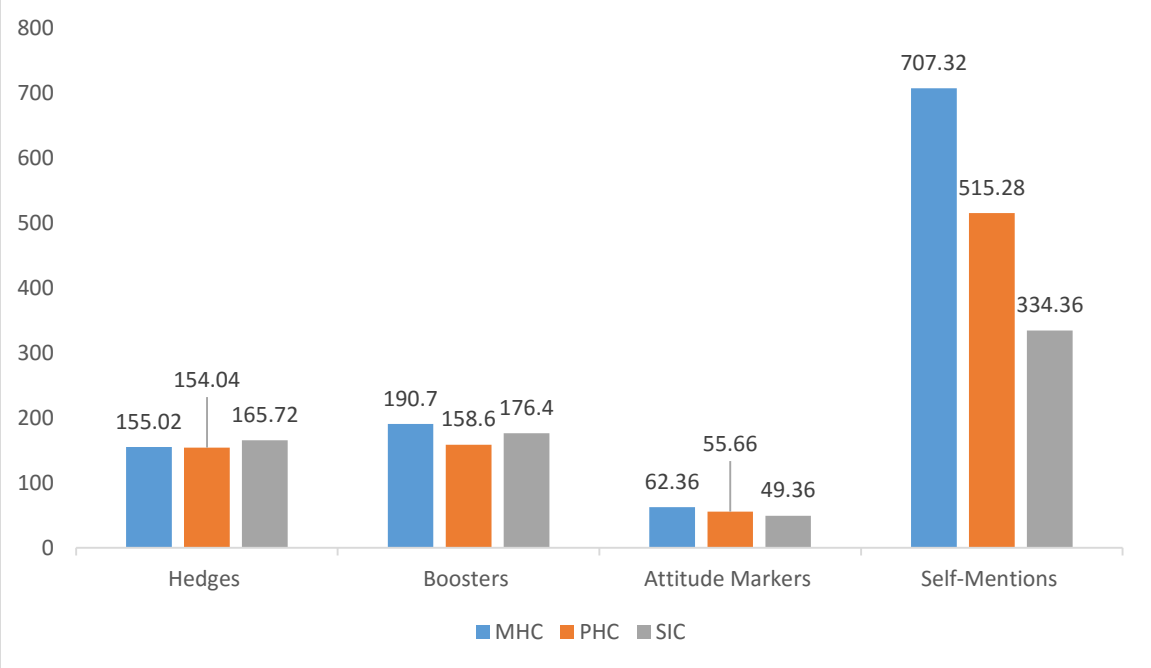

Figure 4.19. *Comparison of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC*

4.2.1 Comparison of Hedges in Corpora

The results showed that the frequency of Hedges was more in SIC than PHC and MHC. In SIC, the frequency of Hedges was 165.72 per ten thousand words while in MHC and PHC, the frequency of Hedges was 155.02 and 154.04 per ten thousand words respectively. As indicated in section 4.2 that the online users in SIC were a bit more modest and honest while giving opinions and took proper caution while reporting any claim (Swales, 1990).

The most commonly used hedging markers were modal auxiliaries. Writers made use of *would*, *could*, *should*, *may* and *might*. Hyland (1996) has pointed that modal auxiliaries

soften the effect of criticism. In the corpora under investigation, much difference lay in the frequency of *would*. In SIC *would* was used 30% more than it was used in PHC. However, in all three corpora, the most used hedging marker was *would*. As shown in (1) the writer is showing probability by using *would*. It is also being used in the place of *might* which softens the force of assertion (Hyland, 1998c). Similarly, in (2), the writer is hypothesizing about the possible outcomes by using *would*. Coates (1983) also observes that hypotheticality receives its chief expression through modals like *would*. In this example, *would* is serving the purpose of a Hedge, as writers are using it as a defensive strategy from straightforwardly giving a statement. Leech (1971) has also suggested that hypothetical auxiliaries add diffidence and tact to what is being said. Example (3) and (4) show that the writer is not sure about the real fact but they are using *would* to leave some room for uncertainty. In (2) and (4), *would* is co-occurring with other Hedges *seem* and *imagine.*

1) *Especially some of the hyper-liberal artsy kind of people that would think that having a day job is conceding your soul to 'the man.' Or the kind of hyper-conservative people that would think that all non-traditional modes of society or relationships were somehow evil.* (SIC)
2) *It seems that if Idaho wanted them extradited it would have to pay to do so, so it would seem that an earlier guess that Idaho would wait and try to make a case for a more severe crime that would stick would be correct.* (SIC)
3) *I tend to eat things that many bodybuilders would consider taboo on a daily basis.* (PHC)
4) *I would imagine they would be the best people to be of help to you.* (MHC)

In (5), (6) and (7), online users utilized modal auxiliary *could* to show possibility as they did not give upfront statements and kept margin for other options and alternatives. Hyland (1998b) has pointed that *could* is used to express tentative possibility. Similarly, *could* also expresses a writer's doubt towards the proposition (Hyland, 1998c) that other claims and reasons could also be possible. *Could* was more used in MHC than the other two corpora.

5) *Apart from reducing sadness, this could also include reductions in: anxiety, lack of interest in activities…* (MHC)
6) *It could be some obscure disease or disorder most people have never even heard of.* (PHC)
7) *Because that could be a problem later on if the truth comes out...* (SIC)

Should is another modal auxiliary with a high frequency in SIC. It was used 14.32 times in SIC as compared to 12.2 and 7.32 times in PHC and MHC. *Should* typically refers to the future and expresses a less confident assessment of facts known to the writer (Hyland, 1998b) and express assumption (Coates, 1983). In (8) and (9), *should* is used for obligation and hints towards the assumption of the writer. In (10) the user is advising the reader to do a specific thing but he is not imposing it on the reader. It is also evident from the preceding phrase *I think* which is itself another Stance Marker.

8) *The government should protect its citizen by making laws against child abuse.* (SIC)
9) *Maybe we should all join bands for freedom of fashion and expression.* (SIC)
10) *I think you should all ask yourselves what is more logistically possible and profitable for short term goals of current world trends.* (SIC)

Hyland (1998b) calls *may* and *might* as prototypical Hedges as they mostly perform the function of Hedges. In corpora under investigation *may* and *might* were most used Hedges after *would, could* and *should*. *May* and *might* indicate possibility which generally mean *I believe/perhaps* (Coates, 1983). *May* and *might* had a collective frequency of 17.1, 17.58 and 14.82 in MHC, PHC and SIC respectively. In the examples mentioned below online users are using *may* and might along with their opinions and taking a safe position. It shows that they are concerned about the inquirer but they are not doctors so they cannot say with certainty. These statements lack in confidence that a professional doctor may have. All of these statements mean that *it is possible that it could be caused by this (Hyland, 1998c).* Similarly, in example (15) from SIC, it is clear that the online user is predicting about future but he is not sure about that. He is saying on the basis of his knowledge or sixth sense. Instead of using *will,* he is preferring *may*. Also in (11), (12), (13) and (14)

authors are opting for *may* or *might* instead of *can*. *Be* was the most co-occurring form with *may* and *might* in all three corpora as can be seen in examples except (15).

11) *Recently something else has happened that I suspect might be a symptom of anxiety too.* (MHC)
12) *Arthritis may also be associated with neuropathic pain, a confusion of the nervous system in which nerves become more sensitive than usual.* (PHC)
13) *Even with the increased intake of carbohydrates, regular physical exercise may be the key factor that counteracts these metabolic adaptations to weight loss.* PHC
14) *If you are introverted, or depending on which personality test you do, your personality type might be more susceptible to anxiety or depression.* MHC
15) *If anything, people's fears for everything "foreign" will increase instead of decrease, and closed borders may become normal again.* SIC

The list of Hedges also includes lexical verbs such as *feel*, *suggest*, *suppose*, etc. These markers indicate the doubt of the speaker. The most used markers from this category were *feel*, *seems* and *guess* in corpora. In MHC *feel* was used almost three times more than it was used in the other two corpora. However, in PHC and SIC *seems* was mostly used. From the examples (16), (17) and (18) given below, it is clear that writers are speculating and not completely sure about the proposition. Hyland (1998a) has pointed that *guess* and *feel* are verbs that are used a hundred times more in speech than writing and the results of his research on research articles are also in line with this fact. However, the results of this research show that these words have a high frequency in Online Support Groups which is a written discourse. Underlined words in the examples below are referring to perception and apprehension (Hyland, 1998c) of online users instead of a strong assumption. Another fact worth noting is that in all these examples *feel*, *guess* and *seems* are co-occurring with *could* which is also a main hedging marker. These mentioned verbs allow writers to avoid making categorical statements and negotiate some degree of flexibility in claims (Salager-Meyer, 1994).

16) *I feel that I could somewhat meet my communication needs by just talking with street people.* (MHC)

17) *It seems like a result of a trauma due to accumulation of fluid as a result of sleeping on one side or it could be as a result of a localised infection.* (PHC)
18) *I guess there could be a danger of overdiagnosing bipolar if docs give meds too soon.* (MHC)

Among adverbs, *maybe, sometimes, probably, about, often, quite* and *usually* were used mostly in corpora. Analysis of corpus revealed that the online users cautiously advised (Swales, 1990) the questioners by using various adverbial Hedges. They were skeptical about their opinions and did not show much confidence while advising. The researcher will explain a few adverbs and give some appropriate examples. The most used adverb was *maybe.* It showed high frequency in SIC and MHC. In (19) it can be seen that the online user is suggesting something after assessing another person's condition and in (20) the online user is not sure about his views. *About* had a frequency of 5.72 and 6.24 and 3.6 in MHC, PHC and SIC respectively. Clearly in SIC online users didn't utilize *about* as much as users did in other corpora. In (21) the user is not sure about the exact duration so he is using a Hedge to compensate for this. Similarly, in (22) the user is trying to avoid an exact amount.

19) *Apathy like you're experiencing can be a sign of depression, so maybe a trip to the doctors' would be a wise idea, even just to vent.* (MHC)
20) *Now women cheat as often as men, or maybe it just gets reported more honestly now and maybe it has always been pretty equal.* (SIC)
21) *Luckily, I didn't try, and the depression lasted only about a month.* (MHC)
22) *Also remember that it is not healthy to be at too low of a bodyfat percentage (I think about 7-8% is about as low as you would want to be on a permanent basis), so…* (PHC)

Sometimes, usually and *often* are those hedging markers which show frequency or degree. Although the overall frequency of Hedges was high in SIC, the frequency of these markers was high in MHC and PHC.

23) *It often causes whiteheads, blackheads or pimples, and usually appears on the face, forehead, chest, upper back and shoulders.* (PHC)

24) *Often, people choose vengeance as a way to help mitigate their emotional pain, and rarely does it solve the problem.* (MHC)

25) *All I can say now it can be a tough road, and sometimes you feel that no one can identify with you and everyone around you their life is so perfect, their marriage etc.* (SIC)

In the category of nouns, *claim* was mostly used in corpora. *Claim* was also used as a verb. *Claim* had a high frequency in SIC than MHC and PHC. It might be because in SIC online users usually give opinions too along with pieces of advice. That is why they had to use this marker frequently. As it can be seen in (26), which is an example from Social Issues Corpus, the writer has used *claim* before giving his opinion. The writer is leaving room for alternative claims. Vázquez Orta & Giner (2008) state that 'in this way, a possible confrontation between the writer and the readership is avoided. By allowing the possibility of alternative viewpoints, the author's propositions will not be immediately negated whereas new pieces of knowledge might be built upon these modulated statements, allowing a more assured flow of information.'

26) *My claim is that the civil rights legislation was MUTATED into "hate crime" legislation -- for all the wrong reasons.* (SIC)

4.2.2 Comparison of Boosters in Corpora

The results revealed that the users of Mental Health Forums used the highest number of Boosters i.e. 190.7 per ten thousand words. While the users of Social Issues forums and Physical Health Forums used 176.4 and 158.6 Boosters per ten thousand words. It means that the users of Mental Health Forums were more confident about their opinions and wanted to eliminate other possible views (Hyland, 2005a). The functions of Boosters have been discussed in the literature view in detail.

The most frequently used Booster was *think* in all three corpora. In Mental health Corpus, it was used 38.94 times while in SIC and PHC it was employed 35.58 and 27.68 times. As Hyland (1998c) has mentioned that the main purpose of Boosters is to convince and persuade the reader about the facts being provided. In (27) the online forum user is

motivating the reader by using a Booster *think* in order to show that he has come to this conclusion after ascertaining the situation. Similarly in (28) the person is endorsing his recommendation by using the same Booster. In both (27) and (28), writers are presenting their pieces of advice with assurance while effecting interpersonal solidarity (Hyland, 2005b). In (29) the online user is showing that his opinion is based on his research.

27) *That would be so excellent...good luck with your mission there. I think you'll succeed.* (MHC)
28) *I think 200 cals per day increase is a perfect amount. And don't worry about gaining fat fast.* (PHC)
29) *I think the social stigma came from the fact that this was a difficult position for a woman to be in so it became a cultural value.* (SIC)

Know was the second most used Booster in the corpus. From (30) it is clear that the writer is saying *I know* before giving his opinion in order to add to the truth value of the proposition (Hinkel, 2005). The writer feels the need to convince the reader, and he is deploying linguistic resources according to the requirement. In (31) and (32) the statements are also accompanied by the same Booster. In MHC the use of this Booster was higher than the other corpora.

30) *I know anxiety / depression when it is severe, can manifest itself as paranoia, because this was suspected with me.* (MHC)
31) *When you work out your cortisol levels start rising...we all know this.* (PHC)
32) *I was merely clarifying my post and position so you could possibly reach the conclusion that I just may know a bit more than the average layperson regarding bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, DNA, etc.* (MHC)

In all three corpora *really* stood at the third position in the list of Boosters in terms of frequency. It had a higher frequency in MHC than PHC and SIC. The analysis shows that in (33) and (34) *really* is serving the purpose which Hyland (2005b) calls ‘to express certainty in what writers say and to mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with their audience’. Results demonstrate that the users in Mental Health Support groups were more likely to show certainty using this Booster.

33) *Professional help can <u>really</u> assist you to feel wonderful about your life and about yourself.* (MHC)

34) *…but I think you <u>really</u> need to go to your doctor about it, to see if one, it is serious enough to warrant medical intervention…* (PHC)

Never and *always* are common adverbs that show that writers are committed to their statements and these words add to the force of their statements in order to persuade readers. Regarding these markers, the users of Mental Health Support Groups seem to be more concerned for the people seeking help. In (35) and (36), online users are urging the person seeking help to realize certain facts by adding Boosting Marker to statements. In (37) the online user is directing the reader and uttering *always* so that the reader would realize the importance of their advice.

35) *There will <u>never</u> be a 'right' time...you just have to accept it and go with it. You seem so deadset that you do not have OCD, so why not confirm it for yourself by seeking a professionals opinion??* (MHC)

36) *Yes, I see, many people <u>never</u> realize how important a strong overall cover is when it comes to the police, even in nice neighborhoods.* (SIC)

37) *<u>Always</u> consult with your physician if you suspect an ear infection, and use these natural Remedies only in conjunction.* (PHC)

When it comes to other adverbs (showing certainty) such as *truly*, *definitely*, *certainly*, *clearly* and *obviously*, they had more frequency in SIC than MHC and PHC. These Boosters enhance the effect of statements and downplay the alternative options (Hyland, 2005a). In (38), *obviously* is even preceded by other Boosters like *think* and *really* which shows the writer is trying hard to increase the truth value of their statement by using Boosters in clusters. Words like *obvious* signal writers' assumption that the proposition presented by them carries the status of mutual pre-existing knowledge in order to strategically align their claims with knowledge of any field (Hyland, 1998c). In (39) and (40), Boosters are stressing the information and showing writers certainty towards a proposition. Hyland (1998c) considers such use of Boosters as the demonstrators of a writer's authority. In (41) and (42) Boosters are showing writers' commitment and confidence towards what they is saying. Secondly, they are motivating readers by adding

force to their advice and opinion. The collective frequency of these adverbs in SIC was 9.36 while in PHC and MHC it was 7.46 and 7.4 respectively. Since regarding Social Issues Forums people were giving more opinions than other corpora that is why they were using more Boosters in their conversation to eliminate the probability and validity of other opinions as in (38) and (39), but in (43), an example from MHC, a piece of advice is accompanied by a Booster.

38) *So I think basic feminism is still really important. Obviously all groups have splinters and extremists who spout nonsense.* (SIC)
39) *You mentioned possible stress too.....That can definitely be a part of what you have been experiencing.* (MHC)
40) *I'm not anti-immigration, and I'm certainly not against helping people who are fleeing from war, famine or other disasters…* (SIC)
41) *Several weight loss plans include isolation systems and those plans remain popular so clearly it's a strategy that works for some people.* (PHC)
42) *You are not truly alone, because we can all understand you, even if your life experience is different from ours.* (MHC)
43) *You truly need to refocus your energy on something constructive and allow your body to heal itself naturally.* (MHC)

Among other lexical verbs, *find*, *show* and *believe* were mostly used by online users. The frequency of *believe* was 12.24 in SIC, but it was low in both MHC (5.6) and PHC (4.14). In SIC online users frequently used *believe* before giving their opinion on social values and practices. In fact, they were self-endorsing their opinion, as in (44), with this Booster and manipulating the reader into believing what online users believed. Secondly, since it is the writer's point of view, he is trying to enhance the truth value of the proposition which can be subject to interpretation (Vázquez Orta & Giner, 2009) and prone to contradiction. However, the frequency of find and show was high in MHC and PHC. In (45) and (46) *show* is reflecting conviction and certainty on the part of writers. Verbs like *show* are employed by writers to make claims (Papangkorn, 2019). In (47) writers are sharing their concerns and views with assurance.

44) *On the other hand, I <u>believe</u> conservatism has lost it's way when it comes to the social stuff.* (SIC)

45) *These reports also totally disregard thousands of years of history of the product that <u>show</u> contrary results.* (SIC)

46) *A really interesting comment was left on one of my posts that there are studies out there that <u>show</u> benzoyl peroxide can actually deplete vitamin E within the skin.* (PHC)

47) *As an only child, I <u>found</u> myself bearing all emotional responsibility as my elderly parents had no idea how to deal with this.* (MHC)

4.2.3 Comparison of Attitude Markers in Corpora

After extraction of Attitude Marker from the corpora it was revealed that in MHC, PHC and SIC 62.36, 55.66 and 49.36 Attitude Markers were present respectively. Clearly, users in MHC deployed more Attitude Markers. Unlike Hedges and Boosters which show doubt or uncertainty towards a proposition, writers use Attitude Markers to highlight the importance of something or show surprise (Kopple, 1985) as it is one aspect of Stance towards a proposition. The functions of Attitude Markers have been explained in the literature review.

The list of Attitude Markers provided by Hyland (2005a) contains one punctuation mark i.e. the exclamation mark. The exclamation mark follows an expression of admiration or surprise, or shows strong feelings or it comes after interjections. Exclamation marks can also highlight aspects of texts and writers' attitude towards them (Crismore et al., 1993). After the examination of data one anomaly was observed that users excessively used exclamation marks to express their attitude towards the proposition. In MHC and PHC, exclamation marks constituted 58% each of the total frequency of Attitude Markers. However, in SIC exclamation marks constituted 38% of total Attitude Markers.

In examples (48) and (50), the writer has used exclamation marks multiple times by which they are showing disappointment towards a certain behavior and displaying disagreement. In examples (49), (51) and (53), the writers are stressing the importance of things they have mentioned. Exclamation Mark can be interpreted in multiple ways and in some writings which are not strictly formal writers may overuse this punctuation mark.

The interpretation in this research is in the context of Metadiscourse. The researcher interprets that in (49) the writer has advised the reader to do something and added an exclamation mark to highlight the importance of his advice. Similarly, in (51) which is an excerpt from SIC, the writer is highlighting the inevitable existence of social phenomenon i.e. poverty by putting an exclamation mark in front of it. The writer did the same thing in the next line. The same pattern followed in (53) where the writer is advising and ending that advice with an exclamation mark. Attitude Markers also show surprise towards a certain proposition which is represented in (52). As mentioned above the exclamation mark is used to express surprise and admiration and it can easily be observed in (52).

48) *While all of this is true...most people do not have a whole lot of knowledge about mental illnesses. It's embarrassing! There is social stigma attached! Mistakes! Errors! Defects! OMG! Welcome modern medicine....and the many pills …* (MHC)

49) *Nature is beautiful. Feeling anxious? Go and take a walk amongst the ferns in a forest! Feeling sad? Go and do some gardening. Truly magnificent!* (MHC)

50) *And even though university and especially college education was virtually free back then/compared to now, I had absolutely no interest in spending any more time in a classroom!* (SIC)

51) *Poverty!! That's what keeps together! We couldn't afford to get a divorce. Now 52 yrs later we got the money, and don't want to waste it on a divorce.* (SIC)

52) *I'm impressed by you fitness regime, you put me to shame , I've been watching far too much day time telly ! !* (PHC)

53) *Sorry for not writing sooner , lifes been a little hectic since hubbys diagnoses !.... anyway here whats been, happened & gone! "BRIEFLY"!! "could never tell you everything on here ! "if your advised to have a peg ..please do so!".. it really is a life saver !!* (PHC)

The second most used Attitude Marker across corpora was *even*. In SIC and MHC it was most used Attitude Marker after the exclamation mark. However, in PHC the second most used Attitude Marker was *important* which was followed by *even*. In (54) and (55)

even has been used and its use can be interpreted as the online user is seeking that the reader should find this information important and surprising.

54) *So - how does one determine whether or not a person with bipolar disorder is one of the lucky 15 percent of patients who also are genetically predisposed to schizophrenia? I mean, even a DNA test wouldn't be conclusive.* (MHC)

55) *See in Europe even 2 people shot dead would be a pretty big deal. Not sure if we would call it a mass shooting but it would be shocking. In the USA it is just Friday.* (SIC)

Important, *amazing* and *interesting* were the most frequently used adjectives which displayed writers' attitude. The use of *important* highlights the importance of something which its literal meaning also suggests. As Attitude Markers are used to express the importance of the proposition; therefore, users utilized this adjective exceedingly. In PHC it was the most used Attitude Marker after the exclamation mark. In (56) and (57) online users are trying to emphasize the value of their pieces of advice. While in (58) and (59) the writers are conveying surprise to the proposition. Moreover, these adjectives show writers' favourable and unfavourable position towards modified words (Soler, 2002) as can be seen in (59).

56) *I know that you're not feeling comfortable with sharing details about what's upsetting you. It is important that you talk to SOMEONE in some detail.* (MHC)

57) *Tempo runs will develop general fitness. They are also very important for recovery from high intensity training.* (PHC)

58) *Whats interesting with feminism is that its a movement tha is only against white males and christianity/christians, all other have got a "you are good" pass.* (SIC)

59) *Yes the connections we make are sometimes uncanny and places like this amazing forum have allowed me to make so many wonderful connections and support people who in fact I have never seen.* (MHC)

Attitude Markers are also demonstrated by attitude verbs like *agree* and *prefer*. In the corpora, it was observed that *prefer* was not as much utilized as was *agree*. Though the frequency of Attitude Markers was less in SIC, the frequency of *agree* was high in this

corpus. In (60) the writer is conforming (conveying agreement) (Hyland, 2005a) to someone else's views and then giving his opinion. In (61) the writer is showing a positive attitude towards some proposition and endorsing that. Secondly, these verbs are often preceded by Self-Mentions as in (60) and (61) which help contribute to the development of a relationship with the reader (Hyland, 2005a).

60) *I agree the industrial age has improved life, however, might it be a good thing to be conscious of what it did to families?* (SIC)

61) *I agree that by & large we have to try & create the necessary conditions for healing & recovery ourselves.* (MHC)

The most used sentence adverbs, which are markers of attitude, were *hopefully* and *unfortunately.* They had a combined frequency of 3.14, 3.08 and 1.5 in MHC, PHC and SIC respectively. Writers in MHC and PHC showed their concern and positive feelings toward the people seeking guidance by adding *hopefully* before the sentences – as in (62), (63) and (64). In (65) and (66) online users are showing displeasure on some facts.

62) *Hopefully your psych is great.* (MHC)

63) *Hopefully you get to talk to your psychiatrist soon*. (MHC)

64) *Hopefully, now you know his allergies things may start to improve as you eliminate them form his diet.* (PHC)

65) *Some people are prone to more gum problems unfortunately but it is usually something that can be maintained with proper homecare.* (PHC)

66) *Unfortunately anxiety can take on so many different forms. The more you concentrate on one particular area the worse it will become.* (MHC)

4.2.4 Comparison of Self-Mentions in Corpora

Results revealed that in MHC 707.32 cases of Self-Mentions per ten thousand words were present. While in PHC and SIC the frequency was 515.28 and 334.36. It is clear that in MHC users excessively used first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives. Meanwhile in SIC online users used even less than fifty percent of the cases of Self-Mention as compared to the cases in MHC. In MHC people were more involved with the reader than people in the other two corpora and as Hyland (2005a) mentioned that Self-Mentions reflect that readers are being personally addressed. However, when compared

with other researches such as Hyland (2001b), Hyland (2005b) and Harwood (2005) which concluded that writers use Self-Mentions for self-citation, self-promotion, personal prominence, voice knowledge claims, etc., this research revealed that the primary purpose of Self-Mentions in Online Support Groups is sharing personal experience and addressing readers personally. These researches were carried on academic discourses. After doing research on argumentative essays, Chang (2015) found that Self-Mentions served following purposes: essay commentator, experience provider and opinion provider. So, the purpose of Self-Mentions in Online Support Gropus was similar to that of in argumentative essays. In the next paragraphs and the examples will reveal the same thing that online users used Self-Mentions to share their experiences and give their views.

In the current study the first person singular pronoun *I* was the most employed Self-Mention Marker in all three corpora. This is in line with other studies on argumentative essays (PapangKorn, 2019), classroom speeches (Siribud, 2016) and university lectures (Lee & Subtirelu, 2015) in which the most used Self-Mention marker was *I.* By using first person singular pronoun *I* writers directly project themselves into the text (Hyland, 2005a). It indicates the author's presence explicitly. In MHC online users used *I* for 484.94 times per ten thousand words. The frequency of this marker in PHC and SIC was 350.08 and 234.98 respectively. In MHC, the use of *I* was 38% and 52% more than in PHC and SIC respectively. It indicates that in MHC people were more likely to project themselves in the text and using *I* several times in one reply. The individual analysis of cases revealed that in MHC people used to share their experience and tell the readers that they had also faced the same problem previously. While sharing their ordeals they had to mention themselves and thus the frequency of *I* was quite high in MHC. As in (67) we can see that the writer is encouraging and motivating the other person who posted a query by telling their own story and experience, and they are using first person singular pronoun over and over again. In (68) the writer is making a bond (Hyland, 2005a) with the person he is talking to by using *I* to show that he cares for the person and is personally interested in the wellbeing of the questioner. From the data, it is clear that the online users of MHC are more concerned with the people who are posting their issues on different forums.

In examples (69) and (70) which are from PHC online users are again sharing their experiences and that is why they have to use *I* multiple times. The pattern of MHC is being observed in PHC. The online users are using first person pronoun several times and then giving a piece of advice to the reader. Following examples (71) and (72) are from SIC the analysis of data showed that the pattern of *I* is different from that of PHC and MHC.

In SIC the usage of *I* was less. From (71) and (72) it is clear that users are sharing their views about Social Issues not experiences. So, while explaining their views they do not need to use first person pronoun overly. Before giving an opinion, they mention themselves by using *I* but later they focus on opinion instead of highlighting themselves. Tang & John (1999) also considered *'I' as the opinion holder* (along with other functions) which is realized while sharing views, attitudes and opinions.

67) *I'm new here too & also suffering with depression & anxiety. There are times when lots of us struggle for various reasons, but it doesn't reflect on you as a person. I have never even met you or seen a post from you but I felt compelled to reply, I'm sure others will too when the next visit the forum.* (MHC)

68) *I hope you are doing well!*

I just wanted to let you know that while I have read your posts and replies to me, I noticed that you are getting lots of other support from the forums which is why sometimes I haven't replied back. I often do this with members and step back if I think they are getting other support. (MHC)

69) *Now I feel compelled to go back to the gym (I've already been to the gym this morning) and do 45 minutes worth of cardio! I'm starting to feel guilty.*

I thought I've conquered that problem. I've been doing VERY well with my weight training/cardio/diet program. I've made gains in muscularity and loss a lot of weight because of my consistency. (PHC)

70) *I get pressure in my eye from time to time. When that happens I will have a watery discharge and then have a lot of crust around my eye. Usually, it's just one of my eyes. I did go to my annual eye exam, and the doctor didn't seem to think it was anything serious. Based on my exam, I was fine.* (PHC)

71) *This marriage is different than before, it is far better and far more fulfilling. I guess the biggest question and the biggest unknown is, will it endure. will it stand the test of time....will this R work? ....I think so, I hope so!* (SIC)

72) *I don't deny that there are some people coming over from the Middle East who are exploiting this situation excessively for their own gain. Mostly I'm trying to provide balance …* (SIC)

The same pattern was observed in the usage of *my* and *me* in the three corpora. Both of these markers of Self-Mention were most used in MHC. They were least used in SIC. In (73), which is an excerpt from an answer to a query, the online user is replying in which they have to use first person pronoun *me* and possessive adjective *my*. In (74), the writer is sharing personal information with the other user to make a bond and show sympathy for the other person. In order to do so, they have to use *me* and *my*. In (73) and (74) *I* has not been underlined which is also part of Self-Mention as mentioned in previous examples.

73) *But this has knocked me off my feet. I don't work anymore, I moved home to my mother. I see a psychologist once a week and a physiotherapist twice a week to train my upper chest and back muscles. (MHC)*

74) *I had heard of colorectal cancer, my whole family is medical so have been aware of these things all my life. But never in a million years did I think it would affect me or my family!!! I even said to my sister a few weeks …* (PHC)

As it has been mentioned that first person pronouns and possessive adjectives were used more in MHC and PHC than SIC but an anomaly was observed in the usage of exclusive *we*, which is also a marker of Self-Mention, as its frequency was high in SIC. In SIC its frequency was 11.46 while in PHC and MHC its frequency was 10.74 and 7.92 respectively. As mentioned earlier that in SIC online users were giving opinions therefore they were using *we* to explain an argument and convey their claims (Papangkorn, 2019). In (75) the online user is sharing information that may be unknown to the reader while in (76) the online user is sharing personal experience to motivate others. Both excerpts are from SIC in which exclusive *we* can be observed. In (77), the author is sharing experience and Self-Mentioning by using exclusive *we.* Meanwhile other markers of Self-Mention *our* and *us* can also be seen in (76) and (77).

75) *Unfortunately, Australia does not have a constitutional right to free speech, nor do we have a Bill of Rights. We are the only liberal democracy without one. But, we do have anti hate speech laws. I do not support them.* (SIC)

76) *My marriage was in peril. It was, or so we thought, over with. Our counselor and EI considered us "to far gone". True, we are not there yet, but we are certainly on the road to a happy and successful.* (SIC)

77) *I did receive an elimination diet that helped us find food triggers that made the excema worse. We also switched our household to safer products that do not harm the immune system and we added in some excellent supplements …*(PHC)

Mine was the least used Self-Mention marker. In (78) it can be seen that *mine* has been used only once to agree with other first person pronoun *I* while *I* has been used six times.

78) *I'll describe mine - The first panic attacks I had I would be aware that people were aware I was 'losing it', I'd feel myself going red, and I would literally shake from head to toe and couldn't talk - it was that bad.* (MHC)

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF ENGAGEMENT MARKERS

This chapter examines the scores of Engagement Markers and their qualitative analysis in MHC, PHC and SIC. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, Engagement Markers of the three corpora are presented and compared within three sub corpora. Sections 5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 give the quantitative values of Engagement Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC respectively. In these sections, the frequency and the pattern of every corpus have been compared with those of other studies also. In the second section, Engagement Markers of three corpora are compared with one another. Section 5.2.1 reveals the overall use of Engagement Markers across corpora. Section 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.2.4 and 5.2.5 compare Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides respectively across corpora.

5.1 Engagement Markers in Corpora

In this section, the third research question is investigated. The third research question intends to find the quantitative values of Engagement Markers in corpora. So, this section provides quantitative results of the Engagement Markers in all three corpora separately. Moreover, in this section, the results of these corpora have also been compared with other studies.

5.1.1 Engagement Markers in Mental Health Corpus

This section examines the frequency of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides in Mental Health Corpus. Table 5.1 shows every Engagement Marker having a frequency of one or more than one. After the extraction of Engagement features in the MHC, it was revealed that a total of 400.32 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words were present in the corpus. The frequency of Engagement Markers is significantly high in MHC when compared to the frequency of Engagement Markers revealed in other studies and genres. Papangkorn (2019) compared the Engagement features of English and Thai writers' argumentative essays. The frequency of Engagement Markers of overall essays was 196.75 per ten thousand words. The

frequency of Engagement Markers in MHC is even more than double than in argumentative essays. Hyland (2001b) examined 240 research articles and found that the frequency of Engagement features was 58.9 per ten thousand words. Malik et al. (2020) found 49.7 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words in PhD theses of social sciences and natural sciences of Pakistani researchers. In another research conducted by Hyland (2005c) on student reports showed that a small number of Engagement Markers i.e. 23.9 per ten thousand words were used by students. Comparison of Engagement Markers in MHC with those in other researches has shown that online users in MHC excessively used Engagement Markers in their replies. This means that online users in MHC are very keen to drag readers into the discussion using Reader-Mentions and other Engagement Markers (Hyland, 2005a). The higher frequency indicates that writers tried to emphasize and oversee the role of readers in the text (Papangkorn, 2019).

Table 5.1

Engagement Markers in Mental Health Corpus

Reader Mentions		Questions		Directives		Appeals to Shared knowledge		Personal Asides	
You	188.96	?	41.18	has/have to	8.08	of course	2.38	Parentheses	27.5
Your	54.66			need(s) to	7.14	common	1.36	Dashes	1.98
We	25.4			should	5.4	obviously	1.16		
Our	8.42			do not	4.76				
Us	6.02			must	2.6				
				go	1.94				
				let's	1.34				
				see	1.3				
Total	283.92	Total	41.18	Total	37.42	Total	8.32	Total	29.48

5.1.1.1 Reader Mentions in Mental Health Corpus

Data analysis has revealed that in MHC 283.92 cases of Reader Mentions per ten thousand words were present in the corpus. Online users mostly used *you* whose frequency was 188.96 (per 10,000 words). It was followed by *your* which showed a frequency of 54.66. Online users used inclusive *we* 25.4 times per ten thousand words. Inclusive *our* and *us* had a frequency of 8.42 and 6.02. *One's* was used the least number of times which was used only 0.4 times per ten thousand words (not displayed in figure because of a frequency less than one). The frequency of these markers has been shown in figure 5.1.

Reader Mentions are probably the clearest way to address readers and bring them into the discourse. The most used marker in MHC was *you*. *You* is a feature of informal writing (Petch-Tyson, 1998). The use of *you* and *your* is the clearest way of acknowledging readers' presence. The frequency of *your* was also high in MHC because high use of *you* results in high use of *your*. Section 5.2.1 has shown that users were using *you* and *your* to address a situation or giving a universal message. *You* and *your* were followed by inclusive *we*. By using this marker writers build relationship with readers and pretend that they share membership of common group with readers (Hyland, 2001a). The purpose of inclusive *our* and *us* is similar to that of inclusive *we* as described in section 5.2.1.

In MHC, it is clear that *you* and *your* are preferred choices of online users. This pattern is similar to the results of Mameghani's & Ebrahimi's (2017) research in which they analyzed eleven student presentations and found that students mostly used *you* in their presentations. Moreover, Alotaibi (2021) also observed that the most used Engagement Markers in letters of recommendation were *you* and *your*. Similarly in opinion pieces *you* and *your* were used mostly (He & Rahim, 2019). In another study, conducted by Papangkorn (2017) on Engagement features in argumentative essays by English and Thai speakers, it was found that non-native speakers i.e. Thai speakers preferred *you* to *we.* Reader Mentions in MHC follow the pattern of these mentioned studies. However there are some researches which show a different pattern than that of MHC. It was found that inclusive *we* was predominantly used in letters of financial companies (Xiaoqin, 2017),

lectures (Kramar, 2019) and economic research articles (He & Rahim, 2019; Hyland, 2008) as compared to *you* and *your*.

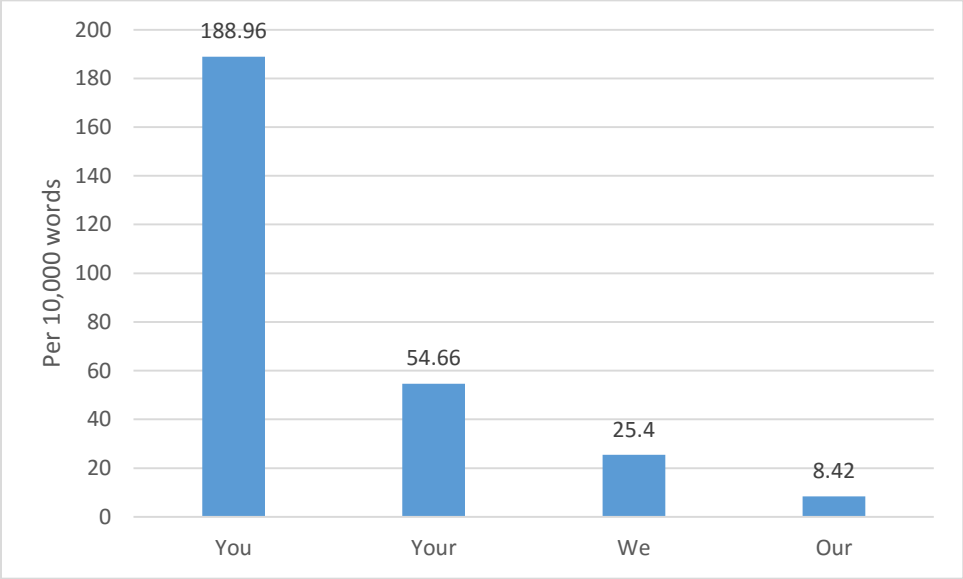

Figure 5.1. *Reader Mentions in Mental Health Corpus*

5.1.1.2 Questions in Mental Health Corpus

After the careful analysis of data, it was revealed that a total of 41.18 Questions were present per ten thousand words in the corpus of Mental Health Forums. The procedure of determining a statement whether it was a question or not is given in the Research Methodology (see section 3.8). The number of Questions has also been presented in figure 5.2.

Questions initiate a dialogue between a writer and a reader. In order to keep readers engaged and stimulate curiosity in them, writers often pose Questions (Hyland, 2005b). Questions were more in number in SIC than in MHC and PHC. By questioning, online users tried to seek information about the history of patients before giving any suggestion as described in section 5.2.2. In all three corpora online users did not put Questions in a formal way by starting statement with Question words instead they put question marks at the end of simple statement. Malik et al. (2020) analyzed PhD theses in which Questions began with question words formally. As far as the frequency of Questions in MHC is concerned it is far more than frequency of Questions in other studies. He & Rahim (2019) found that the frequencies of Questions in economic research articles and opinion pieces

were 0.8 and 0.7 respectively per ten thousand words. In argumentative essays the frequency of Questions was 7.44 per ten thousand words (Papangkorn, 2019). This indicates that MHC was more dialogic and engaging than other corpora of different fields.

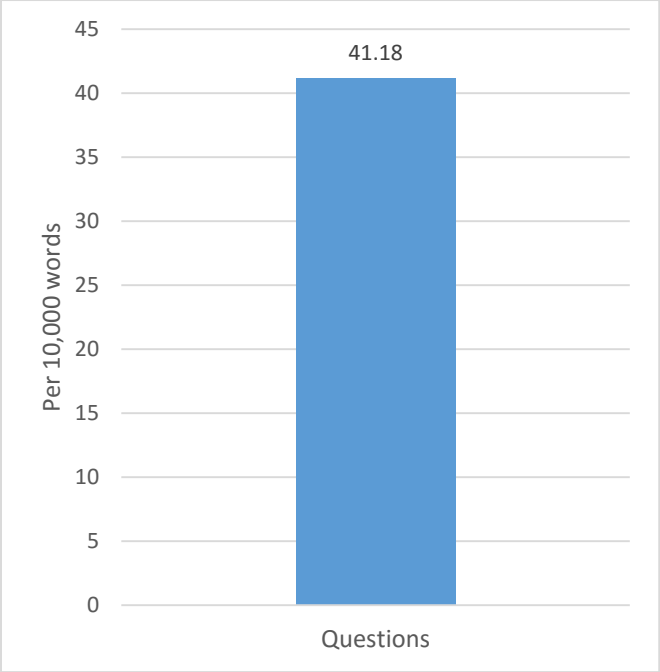

Figure 5.2. *Questions in Mental Health Corpus*

5.1.1.3 Directives in Mental Health Corpus

The overall usage of Directives in MHC was 37.42 per ten thousand words. As shown in figure 5.3, online users mostly used *has/have to* in the forums. These two phrases had a collective frequency of 8.08. It was followed by *need(s) to* which had a frequency of 7.14. Next to this was again a necessity modal *should* which was utilized by online users 5.4 times per ten thousand words. Online users also used *do* 4.76 times. Next to this was *must* which had a low frequency of 2.6. Other imperatives such as *go, let's* and *see* had a frequency of 1.94, 1.34 and 1.3 respectively. Out of sixty-nine markers, only eight markers were used one or more than one time per ten thousand words in the corpus as shown in the figure. The first ten markers accounted for 90% of total Directives in the corpus.

Directives instruct readers to do an action or consider things in a way determined by the writer (Hyland, 2005a). Directives force readers to perform three acts i.e. textual

acts, physical acts and cognitive acts. These acts have been explained in section 2.4.3.1 of the Literature Review. The most used marker was *has/have to* in MHC. These phrases emphasize the actions which a writer deems necessary for the reader. The next marker *need(s) to* also served the same purpose in the corpus as mentioned in section 5.2.3. Among necessity modals, *should* was the most used marker in MHC. However, its frequency was low as compared to that of in PHC and SIC. *Do not* (includes *dont* and *don't*) was the most used imperative in MHC. Its frequency in MHC was high than in SIC and low than in PHC.

Other studies conducted on Directives showed different results. In argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019), letters of financial companies (Xiaoqin, 2017) and PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) *should* was mostly used by authors. Other most-used Directives were *need*(s) *to* and *must*. *Has/have to* were not the most used Directives in these studies like in MHC. Similarly, in student presentations (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017), lectures of Physics (Kramar, 2019), economic research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019), and introductory textbooks (Markovic, 2013), the most used Directives were *see*, *suppose*, *see* and *note* respectively. So, the choice of Directives by online users of MHC was different from the authors of above mentioned texts.

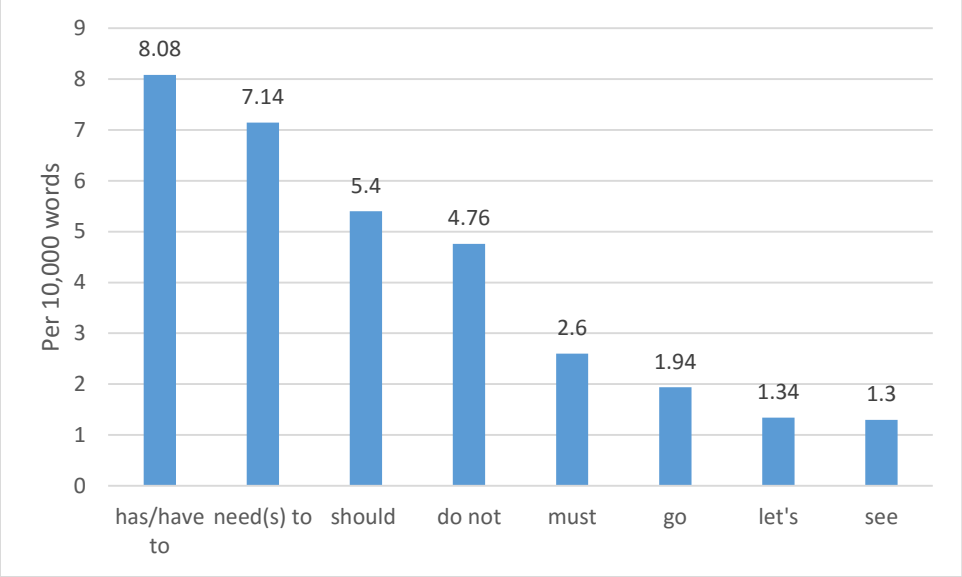

Figure 5.3. *Directives in Mental Health Corpus*

5.1.1.4 Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Mental Health Corpus

Regarding Appeals to Shared Knowledge twenty markers provided by Hyland (2005a) were studied. The overall frequency of Appeals to Shared Knowledge in MHC was 8.32 per ten thousand words. Only three markers had a frequency of more than one per ten thousand words as shown in the figure. *Of course* had a frequency of 2.38 per ten thousand words. *Common* showed a frequency of 1.36. *Obviously* was used 1.16 times in the corpus. Other most-used words include *usual*, *apparently*, *normally*, *obvious* and *typical*, but their frequency was lower than one. Figure 5.4 shows markers with a frequency of one or more than one.

Appeals to Shared Knowledge are those markers that a writer employs to show the reader that both of them share the same ideas. Writers try to leave little space for disagreement for readers when they use markers like *of course*, *obviously*, etc. In the analysis done in section 5.2.4, it was revealed that writers used *of course* to show solidarity with patients by conforming to their views. Similarly, *common* was used by online users to refer to ideas that were shared by everyone.

Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a very low frequency as compared to other Engagement Markers. This is in line with other studies like on PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) in which Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a minimum frequency. The most used marker was *of* course. In other studies on argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2017) and lectures (Kramar, 2019), the most used Marker was *of course.* Hence, MHC is similar to these studies in this Engagement Marker. However, in economic research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) the most used markers were *common* and *typically*.

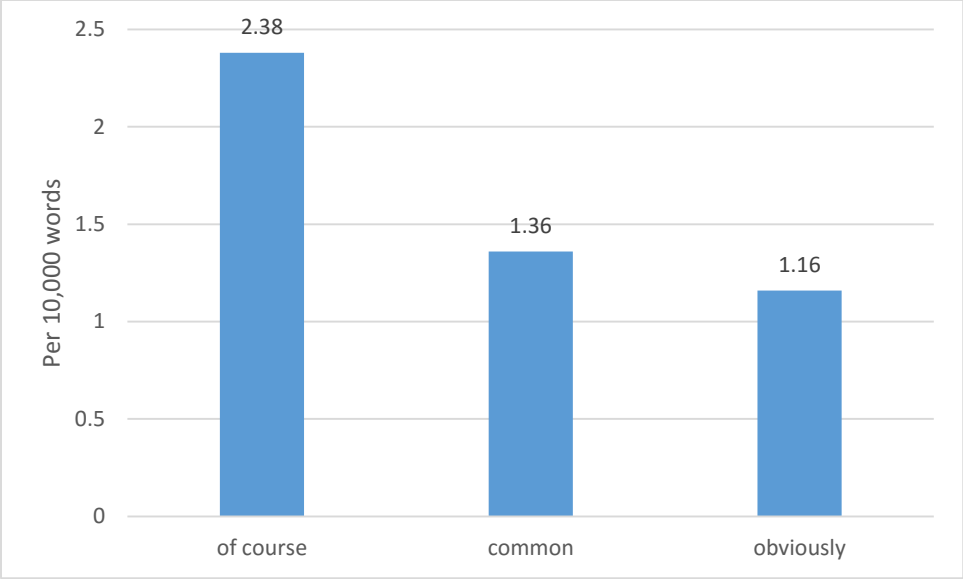

Figure 5.4. *Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Mental Health Corpus*

5.1.1.5 Personal Asides in Mental Health Corpus

Analysis of data has shown that the frequency of Personal Asides in MHC was 29.48 per ten thousand words. Only two markers were included in Personal Asides i.e. Parentheses and Dashes. The frequency of parentheses was 27.5 per ten thousand words as shown in figure 5.5. However, the frequency of Dashes was quite low as compared to parenthesis. Dashes were utilized 1.98 times per ten thousand words.

Personal Asides briefly intrude into the text (Hyland, 2005b). Generally, they guide the reader by giving them extra information. Personal Asides have only two markers which are parentheses and dashes. In MHC, online users used Personal Asides to give additional information and explanation as explained in section 5.2.5. Personal Asides had a share of 7.3% of total Engagement Markers in MHC which is a small share. Studies conducted on PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) and argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019) also reported a low frequency of Personal Asides. Papangkorn (2019) revealed that the frequencies of Personal Asides in essays by native and non-native speakers were 2.44 and 0.09 per ten thousand words respectively. This shows that Personal Asides have a high frequency in MHC i.e. 29.48 per ten thousand words as compared to the results of these studies.

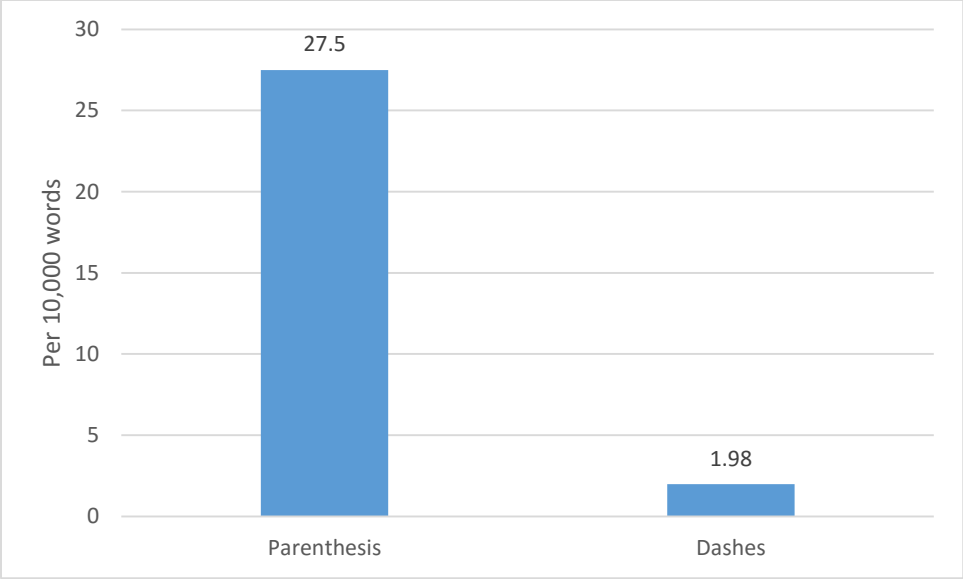

Figure 5.5. *Personal Asides in Mental Health Corpus*

5.1.1.6 Comparison of Engagement Markers in Mental Health Corpus

The scores of Engagement Markers in MHC have revealed that online users in forums of Mental Health excessively used Reader Mentions to engage with readers. Table 5.2 shows that in MHC online users overly used Reader Mentions which constituted 70.9% of total Engagement Markers. Questions and Directives made up 10.3% and 9.3% of Engagement Markers in the corpus. Personal Asides had a share of 7.3% of total Engagement Markers. The least employed Engagement element was Appeals to Shared Knowledge which only accounted for 2%.

Table 5.2

Overall Engagement Markers in Mental Health Corpus

Category	Markers per 10,000 words	% of overall Engagement Markers
Reader Mentions	283.92	70.9
Questions	41.18	10.3
Directives	37.42	9.3
Appeals to Shared Knowledge	8.32	2
Personal Asides	29.48	7.3
Total	400.32	100

Overall, online users used 400.32 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words in the corpus. The frequency of Reader Mentions was 283.92 which is significantly more than the frequencies of the other four elements of Engagement as shown in figure 5.6. Questions showed a frequency of 41.18 which is nearly seven times less than that of Reader Mentions. There was not much difference among the frequency of Questions, Directives and Personal Asides as can be seen in figure 5.6. However, Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a frequency of only 8.32.

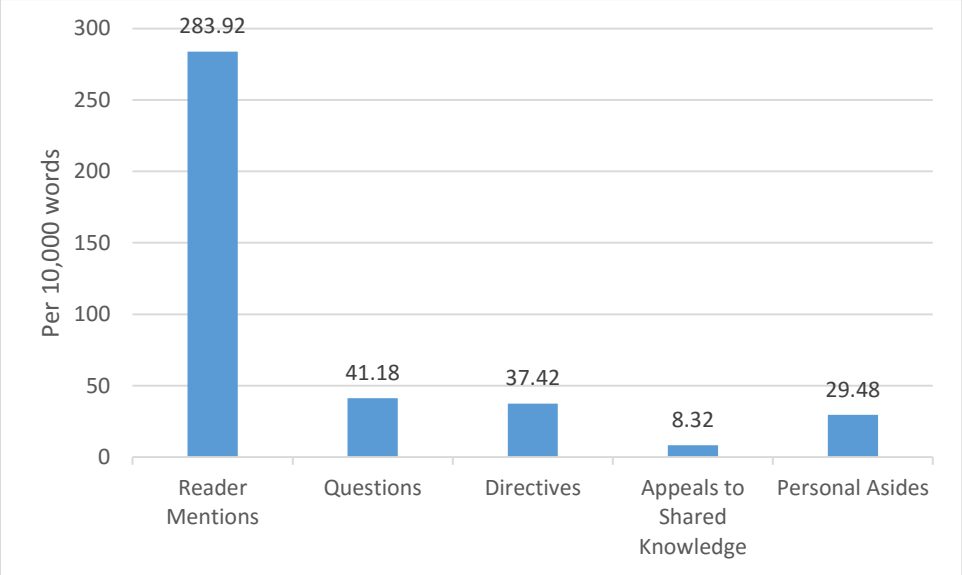

Figure 5.6. *Overall Engagement Markers in Mental Health Corpus*

This research has revealed that in MHC online users mostly used Reader Mentions. Their share was significantly high than the share of Reader Mentions in other researches. The closest study to MHC in terms of percentage of Reader Mentions was of argumentative essays (Papangkonrn, 2019). In MHC, online users were showing solidarity with questioners (Hyland, 2001b) in order to sympathize with them. As online users voluntarily try to help other people in Support Groups, this kind of attitude was expected. Reader Mentions are the most explicit way to acknowledge the presence of the audience in the discussion (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a), so online users empathize with people having mental issues by using second-person pronouns and Inclusive pronouns. MHC characteristics are most different from student reports (Hyland, 2005c) in this Engagement feature where the

researcher has concluded that students may find it (use of, *you*, *yours*) too personal or informal, and students might avoid it because they are representing reports to seniors. Another important finding of the research was the share of Personal Asides in MHC. They made up 7.3% of total Engagement Markers. In research articles (Hyland, 2008), the share of personal Asides was 1.8% and in other studies, the share of Personal Asides was even less than this as shown in figure 5.22. Hyland (2005c) says that Personal Asides, Reader Mentions and Appeals to Shared Knowledge tend toward a solidarity end of this cline, focus on common goals and bring readers into Discourse. Considering this it can be said that online users in MHC are very much inclined towards showing solidarity for people in distress. This view is also supported by the fact that in MHC, online users used the least percentage of Directives as compared to other studies; the percentage of Questions was also less i.e. 10.3. In PhD theses, Questions had a share of 24.1% (Malik et al., 2020). Hyland (2005c) also says that contrary to Reader Mentions, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides, Questions and Directives are altogether 'more explicitly persuasive and are employed to manoeuvre readers into accepting the writer's viewpoint or follow a particular line of argument'. Hence, a high value of Reader Mentions and Personal Asides than Questions and Directives in MHC indicates that online users were cooperative and caring rather than authoritative and manipulative. Figure 5.7 shows the percentage of different Engagement Markers of above mentioned studies.

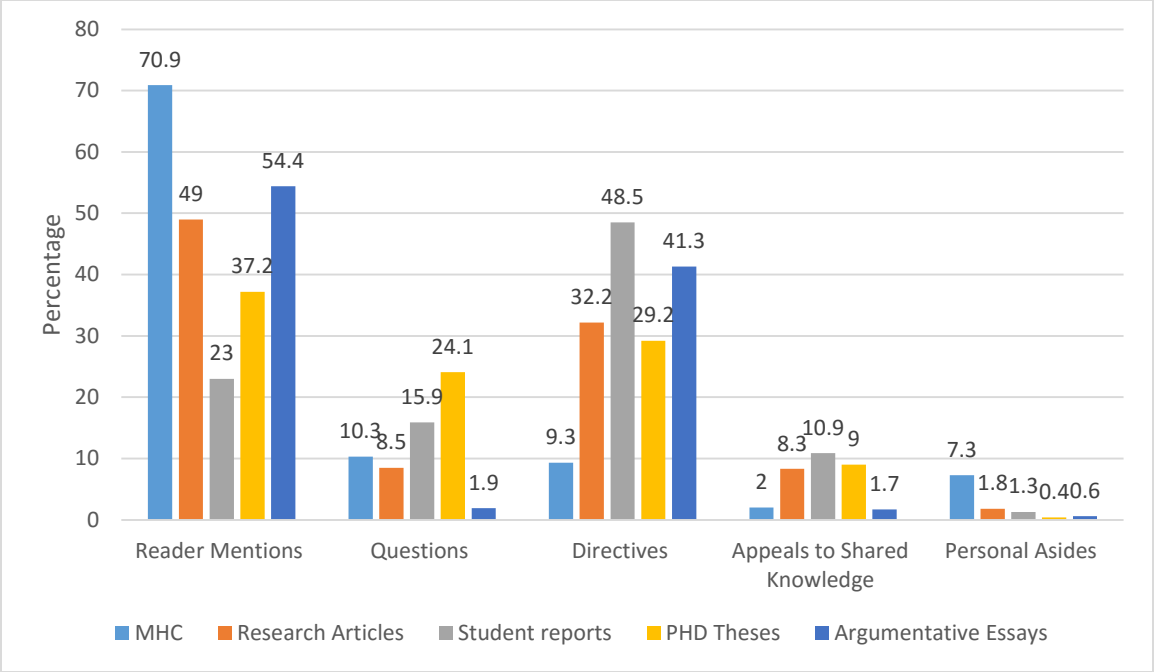

Figure 5.7. *Comparison of Engagement Markers in MHC with other studies*

5.1.2 Engagement Markers in Physical Health Corpus

This section gives the frequency of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides in Physical Health Corpus. The frequency of every Engagement Marker having a value of one or more than one has been given in Table 5.3. After the analysis of data, a total of 417.64 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words were present in the corpus of Physical Health. The frequency of Engagement Markers in PHC was not only more than the frequency of Engagement Markers revealed in other studies, it was also more than that in MHC and SIC. The value of Engagement Markers was more than double than that in argumentative essays (196.75 per 10,000 words) (Papangkonrn, 2019). The researcher also compared the data of PHC with other studies which had applied Hyland's framework. It was found that the frequency of Engagement Markers in research articles (Hyland, 2008), PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) and student reports (Hyland, 2005c) was 58.9 49.7 and 23.9 respectively. The considerably high use of Engagement Markers in PHC shows that online users acknowledged the existence of readers and were trying to bring readers into the discussion (Hyland, 2005a).

Table 5.3

Engagement Markers in Physical Health Corpus

Reader Mentions		Questions		Directives		Appeals to Shared Knowledge		Personal Asides	
You	172.34	?	46.16	should	10.42	of course	2.78	Parenthesis	45.48
Your	72.1			has/have to	8.16	common	2.74	Dashes	1.14
We	13.64			need(s) to	6.48	obviously	1.52		
Our	4.58			do not	5.16	normally	1		
Us	3.4			must	2.26				
				see	1.82				
				go	1.52				
				use	1.26				
				let's	1.2				
				add	1.06				
Total	266.54	Total	46.16	Total	45.82	Total	12.5	Total	46.62

5.1.2.1 Reader Mentions in Physical Health Corpus

The analysis of data has shown that in PHC online users used 266.54 cases of Reader Mentions per ten thousand words. The most used marker was *you* which had a frequency of 172.34 (per 10,000 words). Second to this was *your* which was used 72.1 times (per 10,000 words). It was followed by inclusive *we* which showed a low frequency of 13.64. Inclusive *our* and inclusive *us* had even less frequency i.e. 4.58 and 3.4 respectively. Lastly *one's* had a frequency of only 0.38. The frequency of Reader Mentions has also been displayed in figure 5.8.

Reader Mentions are a direct way to address the reader in a text. A writer tries to show that they are aware of the reader's presence (Hyland, 2005a). In PHC, the most used marker of Reader Mentions was *you*. *You* is a feature of intimate registers like casual conversations (Biber et al., 1999). So, online users in PHC overly used *you* to establish a friendly bond with questioners or patients. When *you* is employed by a writer, it is accompanied by *your* also at times because that is the demand of text and context. Hence, the second most marker was *your* in PHC. Its usage served the same purpose as performed by the usage *you*. The next marker in the list was inclusive *we*. By using inclusive *we* writers build a relationship with readers. Writers display that they along with readers belong to the common group sharing membership (Hyland, 2001a). The frequency of inclusive *our* and *us* was not so high in PHC. However, online users employed these markers to make the tune of their language as soft as possible as mentioned in detail in section 5.2.1.

In PHC, it is clear that *you* and *your* are favourable choices of online users. This pattern is similar to the results of studies mentioned in section 5.1.1.1. These studies are as follows. Mameghani's & Ebrahimi's (2017) analyzed eleven student presentations and found that students mostly used *you* in their presentations. Alotaibi (2021) also observed that the most used Engagement Markers in letters of recommendation were *you* and *your*. Similarly in opinion pieces, *you* and *your* were used mostly (He & Rahim, 2019). In another study, conducted by Papangkorn (2017) on Engagement features in argumentative essays by English and Thai speakers, it was found that non-native speakers i.e. Thai speakers preferred *you* over *we.* Reader Mentions in MHC follow the pattern of these mentioned

studies. However, there are some researches that show a different pattern than that of MHC. It was found that inclusive *we* was predominantly used in letters of financial companies Xiaoqin (2017), lectures (Kramar, 2019) and economic research articles (He & Rahim, 2019; Hyland, 2008) as compared to *you* and *your*.

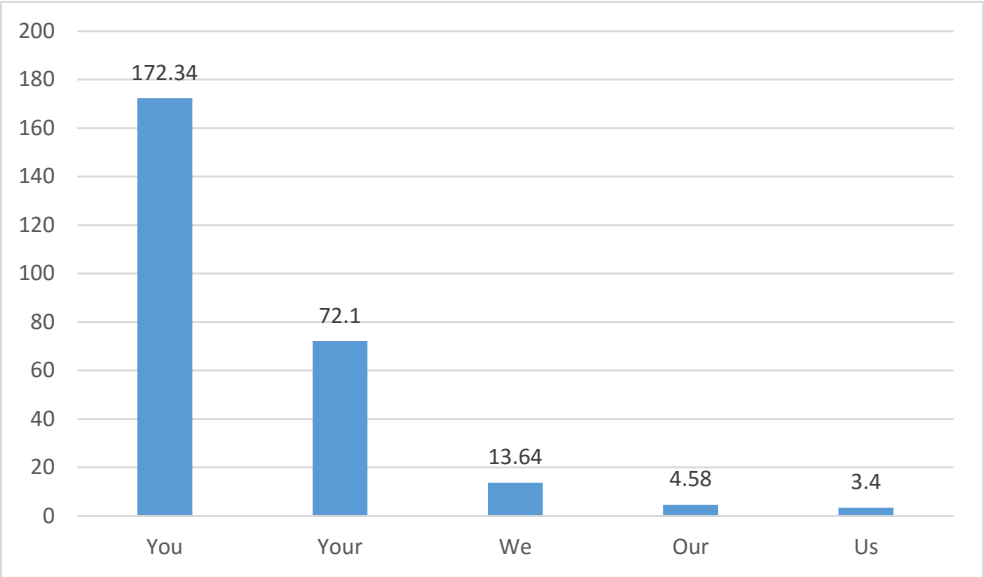

Figure 5.8. *Reader Mentions in Physical Health Corpus*

5.1.2.2 Questions in Physical Health Corpus

It has been uncovered that in the corpus of Physical Health Forums 46.16 questions per ten thousand words were posed by authors. The number of Questions in PHC has been graphically presented in figure 5.9.

Questions are a technique of dialogic involvement, inviting engagement and bringing the interlocutor into an arena where they can be lead to the writer's opinion (Hyland, 2005b). Questions raise interest and motivate readers to explore with the writer as an equal, sharing his inquisitiveness and following where the argument leads (Hyland, 2005a). The frequency of Questions in PHC was higher than that in MHC but lower than that in SIC. In PHC and MHC, online users generally sought patients' medical history to know about them and then advised. Questions were asked in informal way by just putting a question mark at the end of a simple sentence. The frequency of Questions in PHC was higher than the frequency of Questions in other researches. For instance, He & Rahim (2019) found that the frequencies of Questions in economic research articles and opinion pieces were 0.8 and 0.7 respectively per ten thousand words. In argumentative essays, the

frequency of Questions was 7.44 per ten thousand words (Papangkorn, 2019). Clearly, online users posed a very high number of Questions in their writings.

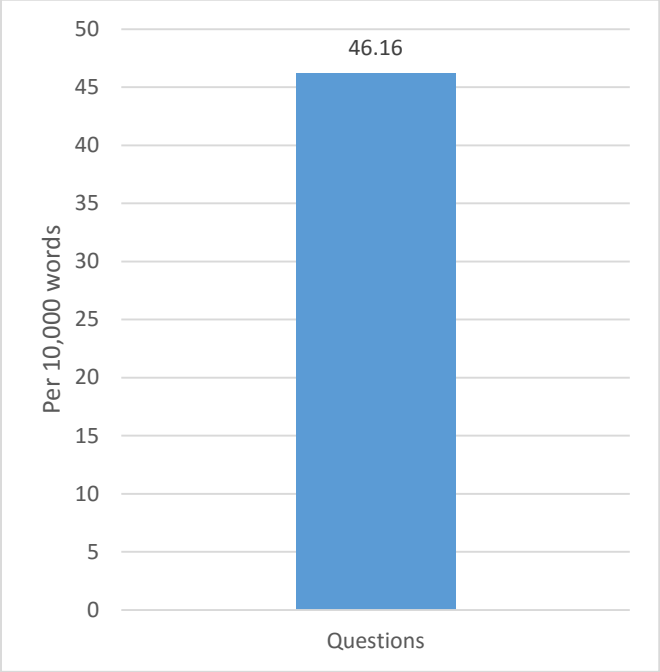

Figure 5.9. *Questions in Physical Health Corpus*

5.1.2.3 Directives in Physical Health Corpus

It has come to light after the analysis of data that 45.82 Directive per ten thousand words were used by the online users of Physical Health Forums. The first three markers in the list belonged to the category of necessity modals. *Should* was the most used marker to direct readers which was employed 10.42 times by writers. It was followed by *has/have to* and *need(s) to* which showed the frequency of 8.16 and 6.48 respectively. After these markers, the first imperative in the list came i.e. *do not*. It had a frequency of 5.16. *Must* had a frequency of 2.26. Other than these markers, as shown in figure 5.10, only five markers displayed a frequency of one or more than one per ten thousand words. These first ten markers constituted 86% of total Directives.

Directives are utterances which direct the listener or reader to perform or not perform an action (Hyland, 2002c). By using this marker writers directly order the reader

to perform a specific action. *Should* which is a necessity modal was the most employed Directive in PHC. Hyland (2002c) believes that *should* is a weaker Directive than *must*. It was observed that users preferred *should* over *must* in MHC, PHC and SIC. It was used to give pieces of advice instead of orders as explained in section 5.2.3 also. *Should* was followed by *has/have to* and *need(s) to* respectively. Writers used these markers to explain a procedure to guide readers. Among imperatives, *do not* (includes other forms in the corpus such as *don't* and *dont* as well) was used mostly by online users of Online Forums. Its frequency was highest in PHC as compared to that in other corpora. Other imperatives with high frequency were *see, go, use, let's* and *add*.

The pattern of Directives in PHC was different from that of MHC. In PHC, the most used Directive was *should.* This usage of *should* is in line with other studies in which *should* was the most employed Directive e.g. argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019), letters of financial companies (Xiaoqin, 2017) and PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020). *Has*/*have to* were second most used Directives but they were sporadically used in previously mentioned studies. In terms of the most used Directive, studies on student presentations (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017), lectures of Physics (Kramar, 2019), economic research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) and introductory textbooks (Markovic, 2013) showed that most used Directives were *see*, *suppose*, *see* and *note* respectively. So, the pattern of Directives in PHC is different from above mentioned pieces of research.

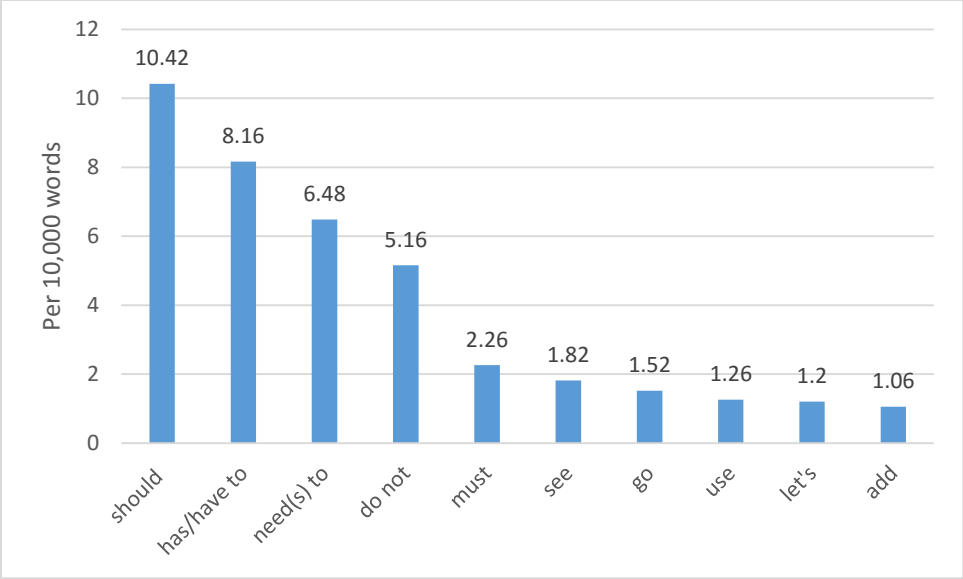

Figure 5.10. *Directives in Physical Health Corpus*

5.1.2.4 Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Physical Health Corpus

The frequency of Appeals to Shared Knowledge in PHC was 12.5 per ten thousand words. The most used marker was *of course* with a frequency of 2.78. It was followed by *common* which had nearly the same frequency as *of course* i.e. 2.74. *Obviously* and *normally* were used 1.52 and 1 times per ten thousand words respectively. Out of twenty markers only these four markers were utilized one or more than one time per ten thousand words in PHC as shown in figure 5.11. Markers having a frequency of less than one but more than 0.5 include *apparently*, *typically*, *obvious* and *usual*.

Appeals to shared knowledge intend to place readers within naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings. The idea of 'sharedness' is invoked by authors to smuggle contested ideas into their argument. In PHC, writers mostly used *of course* before giving statements to show solidarity. By using *of course* writers tried to bring readers into an agreement by showing that their statement is not disputed. Similarly *common* was employed by writers to refer to ideas which were shared by everyone as explained in section 5.2.4. Writers also used *obviously* to presuppose notions on the part of readers and to influence readers to accept the conclusion writers have come to.

Appeals to Shared Knowledge were the least used Engagement Markers in PHC. They had a share of only three percent. Other researchers e.g. Malik et al. (2020) also

reported that Appeals to Shared Knowledge were the least deployed markers in their corpus. However, in terms of the most used marker, PHC was similar to argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2017) and lectures (Kramar, 2019) because *of course* was the most used marker in these studies too.

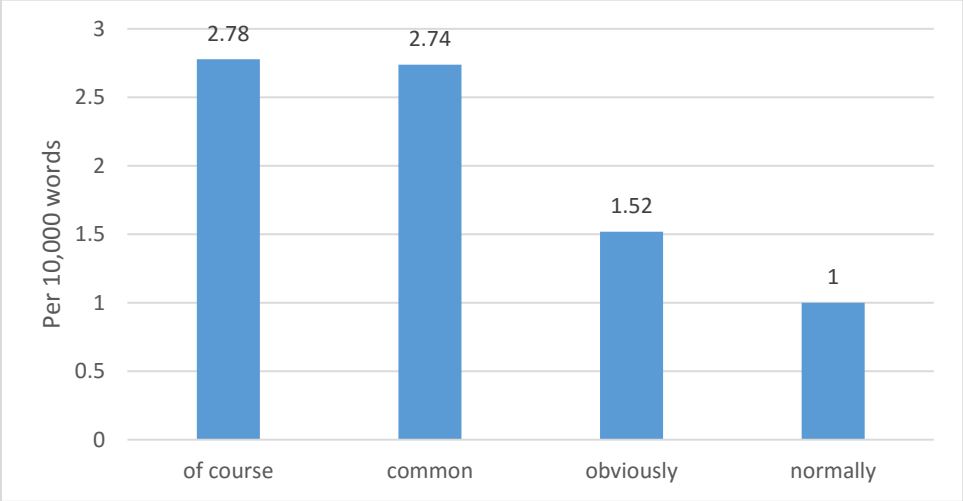

Figure 5.11. *Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Physical Health Corpus*

5.1.2.5 Personal Asides in Physical Health Corpus

Personal Asides were used 46.62 times per ten thousand words in the corpus of Physical Health Forums. Parentheses had a frequency of 45.62 per ten thousand words. Contrary to that Dashes had a very low frequency of 1.14 in the corpus. Parentheses were employed forty times more than Dashes. The values of Parentheses and dashes have also been presented in figure 5.12.

Personal Asides allow authors to briefly interrupt the argument to offer a comment on what has been said. Such interventions add more to the writer-reader relationship than to the propositional development of the discourse (Hyland, 2005b). The frequency of Personal Asides was high in PHC as compared to that in MHC and SIC. In PHC, as can also be shown in table 5.4, the percentage of Personal Asides is only 0.1 percent more than that of Questions and Directives. The share of parentheses was significantly high. In PHC the online users employed parentheses to give an explanation and additional information about the instruction they were giving and trying to be precise in writing. Some other

researches (Malik et al., 2020; Papangkorn, 2019) showed a very low share of Personal Asides in corpora. Papangkorn (2019) found that in argumentative essays by native English speakers the frequency of Personal Asides was 2.44 items per ten thousand words. In the non-native corpus, the frequency was 0.09 per ten thousand words. As compared to this study the frequency of Personal Asides in PHC is quite high.

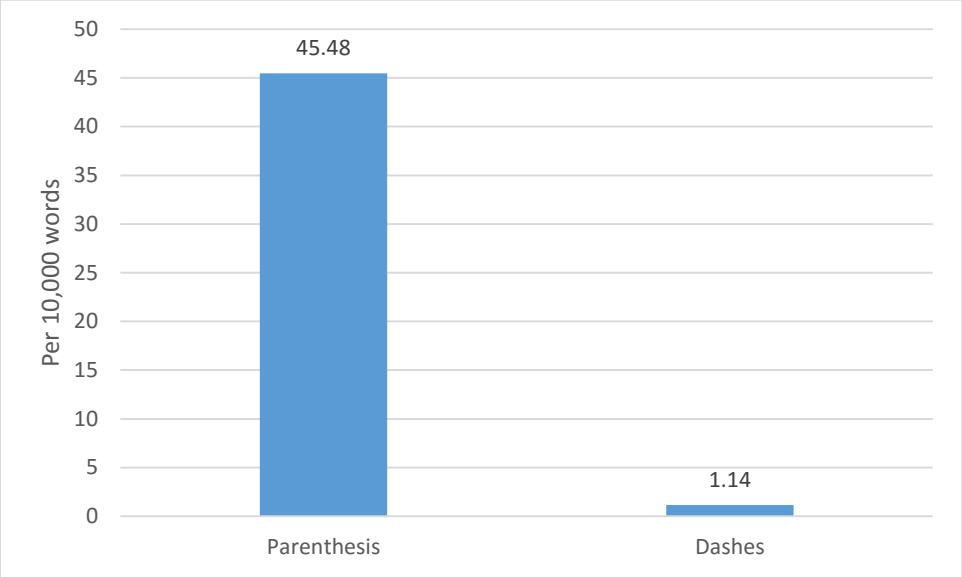

Figure 5.12. *Personal Asides in Physical Health Corpus*

5.1.2.6 Comparison of Engagement Markers in Physical Health Corpus

The analysis of data has shown that in PHC online users mostly used Reader Mentions in their writings as they composed 63.8% of overall Engagement Markers. Reader Mentions were followed by Personal Asides which accounted for 11.1% of overall markers. The share of Questions and Directives in the corpus was 11% each. Appeals to Shared knowledge were least written by online users in their writings. They only constituted 3% of overall Engagement Markers as shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Overall Engagement Markers in Physical Health Corpus

Category	Markers per 10,000 words	% of overall Engagement Markers
Reader Mentions	266.54	63.8
Questions	46.16	11
Directives	45.82	11
Appeals to Shared Knowledge	12.5	3
Personal Asides	46.62	11.1
Total	417.64	100

The overall cases of Engagement Markers in PHC were 417.64 per ten thousand words. There were 266.54 instances of Reader Mentions in the corpus. While the frequency of Questions, Directives and Personal Asides was nearly similar as shown in Figure 5.13. Appeals to Shared Knowledge were only used 12.5 times per ten thousand words.

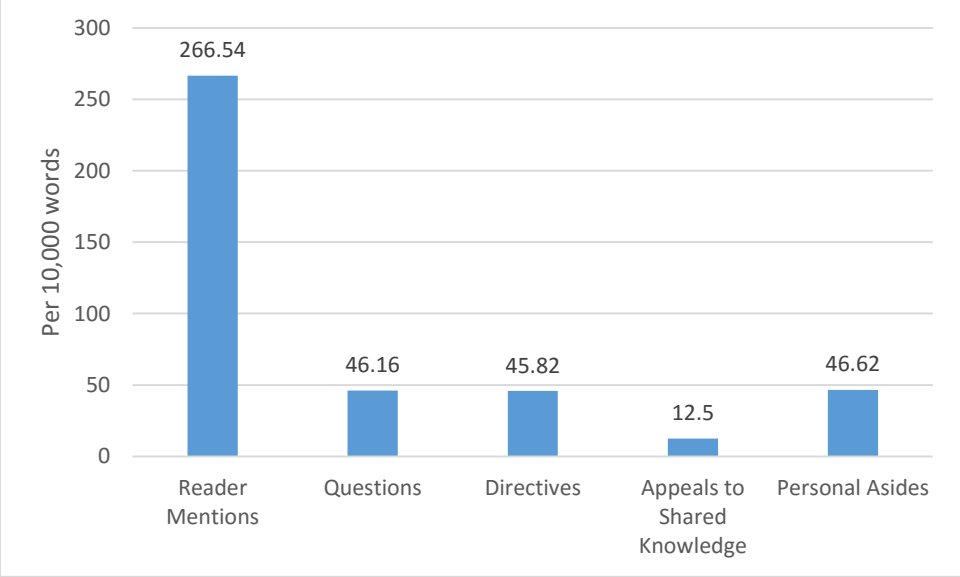

Figure 5.13. *Overall Engagement Markers in Physical Health Corpus*

As mentioned in 5.1.2, the frequency of Engagement Markers in PHC was not only more than the frequency of Engagement Markers revealed in other studies, it was also more than that in MHC and SIC. However, in this section, the pattern of the usage of Engagement Markers will be discussed. Like MHC, the closest study to PHC in terms of Reader

Mentions was of argumentative essays in which writers used 54.4% Reader Mentions (Papangkonrn, 2019). Though the overall frequency of Reader Mentions was significantly low in argumentative essays, it is similar to PHC in Pattern and percentage. Another noteworthy observation was that the percentage of Directives was least in PHC. Hyland (2001a) states that Directives seek to engage and position readers while carrying strong connotations of imbalanced power, claiming greater authority for the writer by requiring readers to act or see things in a way determined by the writer. Directives could be risky (Hyland, 2005a) and face-threatening (Papangkorn, 2019) towards readers as they try to assert authority. The pattern of Directives can be attributed to the fact that online users were replying to people to help them not to express authority; they were trying to be humble. The use of Questions was mild in PHC as the usage of Questions in half of the studies was higher than in PHC and in the remaining studies, the usage was lower. In PhD theses, Questions had a high share of 24.1% (Malik et al., 2020). Hyland (2005c) has commented that questions are a key Engagement feature and can have an authoritative impact. Furthermore, Questions are an effective engagement strategy but in the hands of experts (Hyland, 2005c). Therefore, PhD scholars used more Questions than other text producers. Like Reader Mentions, Personal Asides are an important feature of addressing readers. Writers briefly interrupt the readers and provide some information or comment (Hyland, 2005b). In PHC, writers frequently employed Personal Asides. The frequency of Personal Asides was very low in other genres like research articles (Hyland, 2008) and student reports (Hyland, 2005c). The high percentage of Personal Asides in PHC means that online users were acknowledging and responding to questioners by offering interpersonal remarks; moreover, online users also wanted to involve readers in the discussion and build a relationship (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a). Hyland & Jiang (2016a) further says that it is an intervention to connect, to show that writers and readers are alike and pursuing the same goal. In qualitative analysis, similar observations were made. Figure 5.14 shows the usage of different Engagement Markers in different studies in terms of percentage.

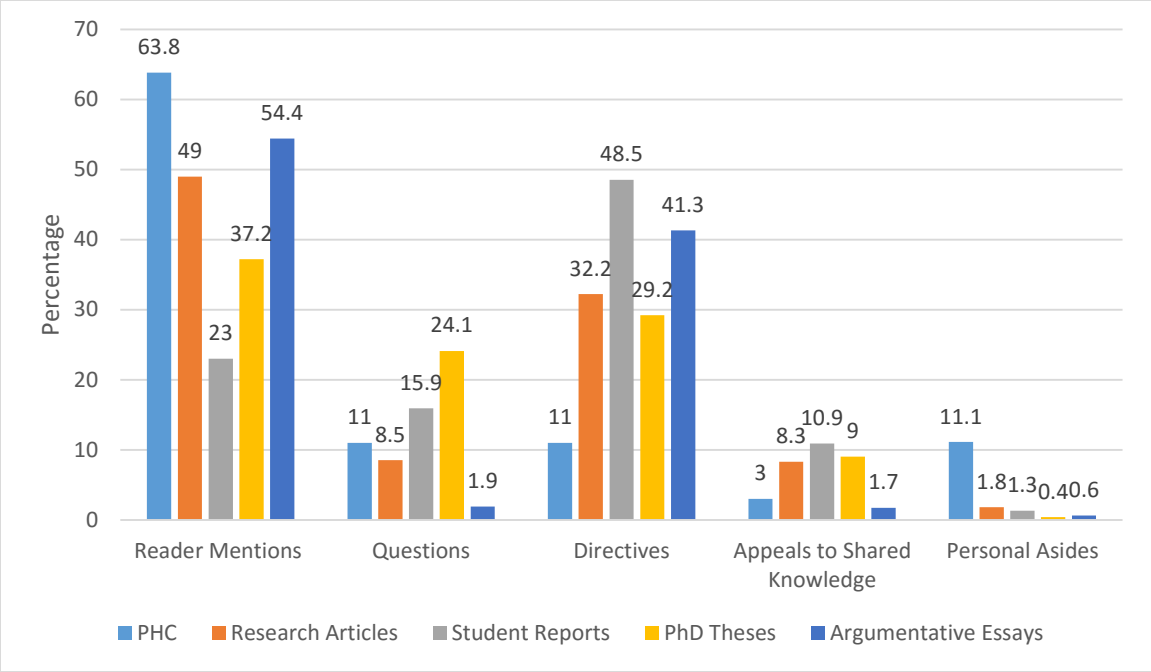

Figure 5.14. *Comparison of Engagement Markers in PHC with other studies*

5.1.3 Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus

This section examines the frequency of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides in Social Issues Corpus. The frequency of every Engagement Marker having a value of one or more than one has been given in Table 5.5. After the analysis of data, a total of 400.32 Engagement Markers per ten thousand words were present in the corpus of Social Issues. The frequency of Engagement Markers in SIC was almost similar to MHC. Other studies on argumentative essays (Papangkonrn, 2019), research articles (Hyland, 2008), PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) and student reports (Hyland, 2005c) revealed that the total number of Engagement Markers in these studies were 196.75, 58.9, 49.7 and 23.9 respectively. The high use of Engagement Markers in PHC shows that online users acknowledged the existence of readers and were trying to bring readers into the discussion (Hyland, 2005a). So, online users in SIC were more engaging than the writers of these mentioned studies.

Table 5.5

Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus

Reader Mentions		Questions		Directives		Appeals to Shared Knowledge		Personal Asides	
You	137.72	?	72.04	should	13.66	of course	4.08	Parenthesis	31.82
We	41.02			has/have to	8.88	common	2.36	Dashes	1.12
Your	34.42			need(s) to	6.92	apparently	2.18		
Our	14.84			do not	3	obviously	2.04		
Us	7.32			must	2.98	obvious	1.3		
				let's	1.64	usual	1.02		
				see	1.24				
				go	1.12				
Total	235.8	Total	72.04	Total	44.32	Total	17.14	Total	32.94

5.1.3.1 Reader Mentions in Social Issues Corpus

Results have revealed that the frequency of Reader Mentions in SIC was 235.8 per ten thousand words. Online users mostly used *you* to address the readers. *You* had a high frequency of 137.72 (per 10,000 words). Unlike the pattern in MHC and PHC, *you* was followed by inclusive *we* instead of *your*. Inclusive *we* was used 41.02 times (per 10,000 words). After this marker, *your* was utilized 34.42 times in the corpus. It was followed by inclusive *our* and inclusive *us* which had a frequency of 14.84 and 7.32 respectively. The least used marker in the corpus was *one's* which is not shown in figure 5.15 because of its frequency was less than one.

Reader Mentions are a direct way to address the reader in a text. Writers intend to show that they are aware of readers' presence (Hyland, 2005a). Like MHC and PHC, the most used marker of Reader Mentions was *you*. As already stated in sections 5.1.1.1 and 5.1.2.1, *you* a feature of informal writing (Petch-Tyson, 1998) and casual conversations (Biber et al., 1999). Its high frequency in all three corpora indicates that online users were trying to build a friendly bond with readers. In SIC the second most used marker was inclusive *we* instead of *your*. The density of *we* was high in SIC (41.02) as compared to MHC (25.4) and PHC (13.64). The analysis in section 5.2.1 has shown that the high frequency of inclusive *we* can be attributed to the notion that writers are generally expressing their views and they want to convince readers into believing what writers believe.

Like in MHC and PHC, online users overly used *you* in SIC. Different studies have revealed different patterns of Reader Mentions in corpora. *You* also had a high frequency and it was the most used marker of Reader Mentions in student presentations (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017), letters of recommendation (Alotaibi, 2021), opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) and argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2017). However, following studies on letters of financial companies (Xiaoqin, 2017), lectures (Kramar, 2019) and economic research articles (He & Rahim, 2019; Hyland, 2008) showed that writers preferred inclusive *we* to *you*.

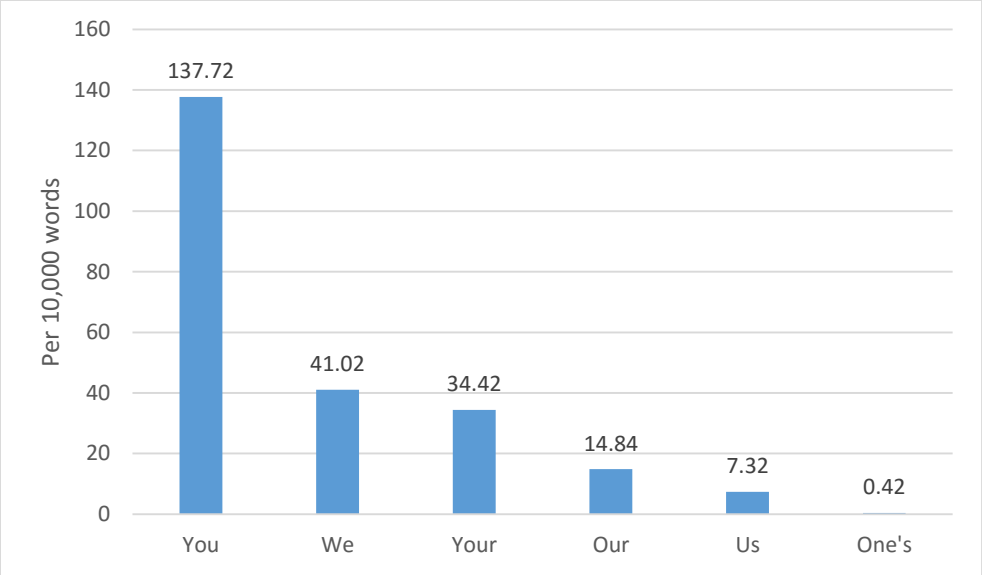

Figure 5.15. *Reader Mentions in Social Issues Corpus*

5.1.3.2 Questions in Social Issues Corpus

The use of questions to engage readers in the text was high in the corpus of Social Issues forums. In SIC 72.04 Questions were asked by online users per ten thousand words as shown in figure 5.16.

Questions raise interest and motivate readers to explore with the writer as an equal, sharing his inquisitiveness and following where the argument leads (Hyland, 2005a). In conversation analysis, Questions are considered as a major structural and topical sequencing device, while in pragmatics their role has been revealed in eliciting obligatory verbal responses (Hyland, 2002b). However, Questions can serve even more purposes than this. In SIC, the frequency of Questions was quite higher than that in PHC and MHC. SIC had also more share of rhetorical Questions than that in PHC and MHC. The frequency of Questions in SIC was also more than Questions found in other pieces of research e.g. in economic research articles, opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) and argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019). It was observed in examples from MHC and PHC that the purpose of Questions was to get more information; however, the purpose of Questions in SIC served more than this purpose. Online users mostly asked Questions that were rhetorical and were intended to convince readers into what writers believed.

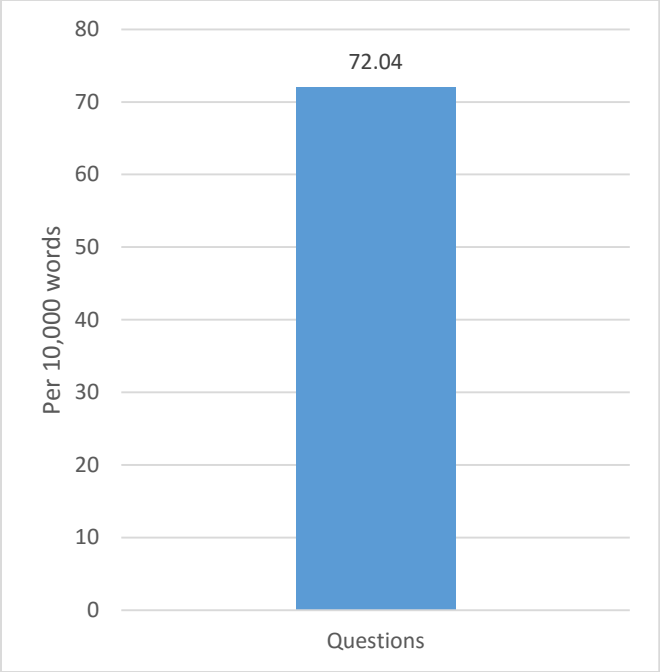

Figure 5.16. *Questions in Social Issues Corpus*

5.1.3.3 Directives in Social Issues Corpus

The frequency of Directives in SIC was 44.32 per ten thousand words. The most used marker of Directives was *should. Should* had a frequency of 13.66 per ten thousand words. Next to this were *has/have to* and *need(s) to* with the frequencies of 8.88 and 6.92 respectively. These necessity modals were followed an imperative i.e. *do not* which was used 3 times per ten thousand words in the corpus. *Must* had nearly the same frequency as *do not* had. It was followed by *let's, see* and *go* which had frequencies of 1.64, 1.24 and 1.12 respectively. Eight markers in the corpus showed frequency greater than one or more than one per ten thousand words as shown in figure 5.17. These eight markers accounted for 89% of Directives in SIC.

A directive is an utterance that expresses an obligation on the reader either to do something or not do something Hyland (2002c). Directives are used to guide readers' reasoning. Directives position readers by leading them through an argument to the writer's claim. Like in PHC, the most used Directive in SIC was *should*. It is a necessity modal. *Should* serves the purpose of *must* but it is a weaker directive than *must* (Hyland, 2002a). Hyland (2002a) has mentioned that Directives like *should* can show the authority of a writer, but they can be used cautiously as illustrated in section 5.2.3. The pattern of first

five Directives in SIC was similar to that of in PHC. *Should* was followed by *has*/*have to*, *need*(*s*) *to*, *do not* and *must*. The purpose and usage of these Directives has already been discussed in section 5.1.2.3. Writers also used imperatives like *see* and *go* for readers to perform cognitive and physical actions.

The pattern of Directives in SIC was different from that of MHC but similar to that of PHC. Like PHC, in SIC, the most used Directive was *should*. This usage of *should* is in line with other studies in which *should* was the most employed Directive e.g. argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019), letters of financial companies (Xiaoqin, 2017) and PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020). *Has*/*have to* were second most used Directives but they were occasionally used in previous mentioned studies. In terms of the most used Directive, studies on student presentations (Mameghani & Ebrahimi, 2017), lectures of Physics (Kramar, 2019), economic research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) and introductory textbooks (Markovic, 2013) showed that most used Directives were *see*, *suppose*, *see* and *note* respectively. So, the pattern of Directives in SIC is different from above mentioned pieces of research. However, in argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019), the most used Directives were similar to the most used Directives in SIC i.e. *should*, *must*, *have*/*has to* and *need*(*s*) *to*.

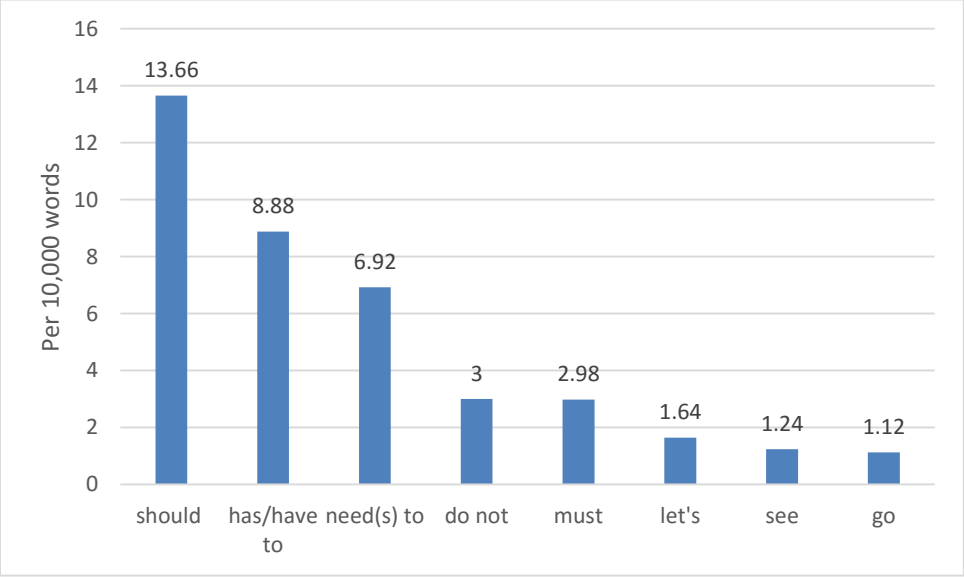

Figure 5.17. *Directives in Social Issues Corpus*

5.1.3.4 Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Social Issues Corpus

The frequency of Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Social Issues Forums turned out to be 17.14 per ten thousand words. Six markers had a frequency greater than one (per 10,000 words). The most used marker by the online users was *of course.* It was used 4.08 times per ten thousand words. After *of course*, *common* was the most used marker with a frequency of 2.36. It was followed by *apparently* and *obviously* which had frequencies of 2.18 and 2.04 respectively. *Obvious* was used 1.3 times. The last marker with a frequency of one or more than one (1.02) was *usual*. The frequencies of these markers have also been shown in figure 5.18.

Appeals to Shared Knowledge intend to place readers within naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings. Appeals to Shared Knowledge are perhaps a very manipulative form of Engagement as they try to direct readers into accepting the conclusions of an argument through presupposing their argument with its assumptions (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a). The frequency of Appeals to Shared Knowledge markers was high in SIC. A total of six markers showed a frequency of more than one per ten thousand words. The most used marker was *of course*. Online users used *of course* before giving opinions. They wanted to show solidarity with the patient and wanted to bring readers into an agreement by hinting that their statement is not disputed. In the same way, *common* was employed by online users to refer to ideas shared by everyone. The third most used marker was *apparently*. Analysis in section 5.2.4 has shown that writers used it to presuppose ideas on the part of readers and to influence readers into accepting the conclusion writers have come to. Online users also wrote markers like *obviously*, *obvious* and *usual* to assume that readers are also familiar with the things they are talking about.

Similar to MHC and PHC, in SIC Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a very low frequency as compared to other Engagement Markers. This is in line with other studies like on PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) in which Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a minimum frequency. Mostly *of course* was employed by online users in SIC. In other studies on argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2017) and lectures (Kramar, 2019), the most used Marker was *of course.* So, SIC is similar to these studies in this Engagement Marker.

However, in economic research articles and opinion pieces (He & Rahim, 2019) the most used markers were *common* and *typically*. These markers were rarely used in SIC.

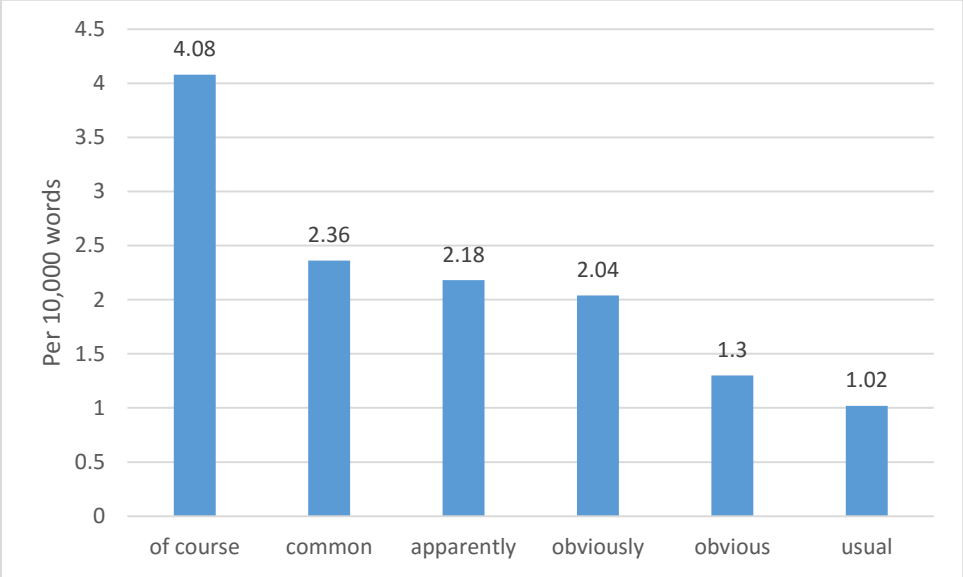

Figure 5.18. *Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Social Issues Corpus*

5.1.3.5 Personal Asides in Social Issues Corpus

The frequency of Personal Asides in SIC was 32.94 per ten thousand words. Personal Asides had only two markers: parentheses and dashes. The frequency of parentheses was 31.82 per ten thousand words, but the frequency of dashes of quite low i.e. 1.12 as shown in figure 5.19.

Personal Asides briefly intrude into the text (Hyland, 2005b). Generally, they guide the reader by giving them extra information. Personal Asides have only two markers which are parentheses and dashes. In SIC, online users used Personal Asides to give additional information and explanation. Studies conducted on PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020) and argumentative essays (Papangkorn, 2019) also reported a low frequency of Personal Asides. Papangkorn (2019) revealed that the frequencies of Personal Asides in essays by native and non-native speakers were 2.44 and 0.09 per ten thousand words respectively.

This shows that Personal Asides have a high frequency in SIC i.e. 32.94 per ten thousand words as compared to the results of these studies

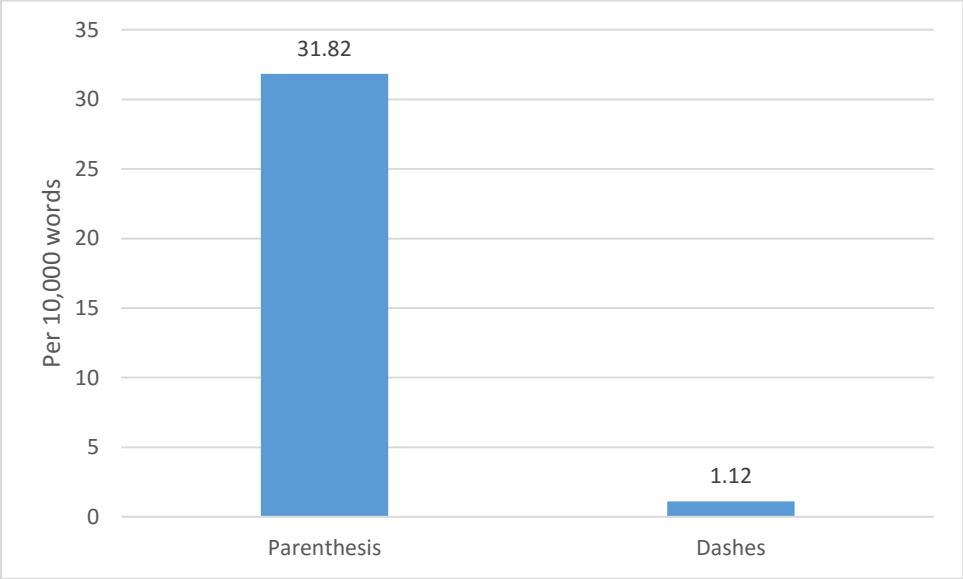

Figure 5.19. *Personal Asides in Social Issues Corpus*

5.1.3.6 Comparison of Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus

Data analysis of Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus has shown that online users mostly employed which constituted 58.6% of overall Engagement Markers. Questions comprised 17.9% of total Engagement Markers. Directives and Personal Asides had a share of 11% and 8.2% of markers. The least used element of Engagement was Appeals to Shared Knowledge. This feature was limited to 4.3% of total Engagement Markers as shown in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6

Overall Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus

Category	Markers per 10,000 words	% of overall Engagement Markers
Reader Mentions	235.8	58.6
Questions	72.04	17.9
Directives	44.32	11
Appeals to Shared Knowledge	17.14	4.3
Personal Asides	32.94	8.2
Total	402.24	100

In terms of frequency, Engagement Markers were used 402.24 times per ten thousand words. Reader Mentions were used 235.8 times. They were followed by Question which had a frequency of 72.04. Directives had a frequency off 44.32. Personal Asides and Appeals to Shared Knowledge had a frequency of 32.94 and 17.14 respectively as shown in figure 5.20.

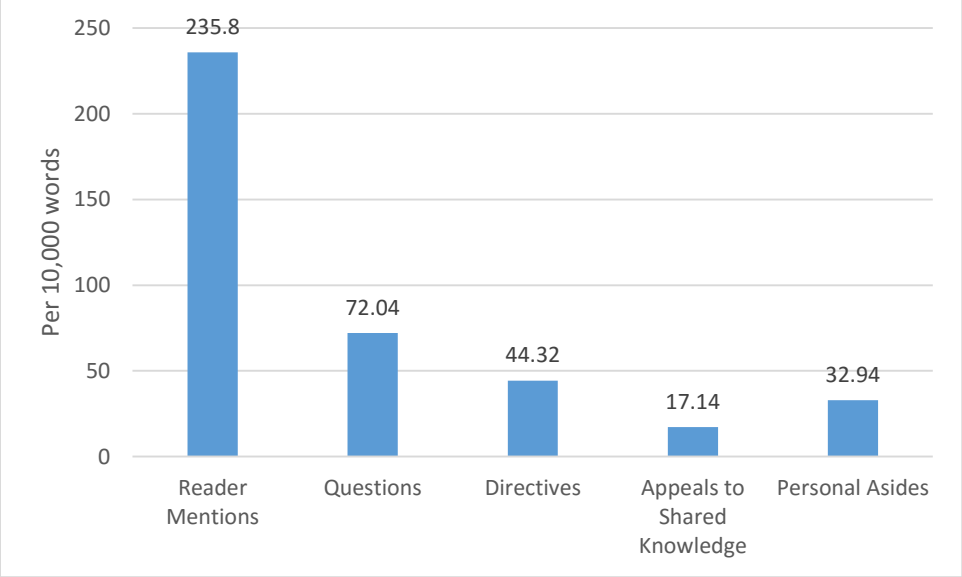

Figure 5.20. *Overall Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus*

The researcher has also tracked other studies which have been conducted applying Hyland's Model (2005a). The percentage of Reader Mentions was high in SIC i.e. 58.6%. The closest genre to this value was of argumentative essays in Reader Mentions comprised 54.4% of total Engagement Markers. So, in both SIC and argumentative essays writers were clearly engaging and mentioning readers by second-person pronouns and inclusive pronouns (Hyland, 2005a). Like MHC and PHC, SIC is most different from student reports in which Reader Mentions had a share of only 23% of total Engagement Markers. As mentioned earlier students seemed shy to mention readers due to their junior status (Hyland, 2005c). With respect to Questions, in SIC online users posed Questions, but they were not employed as much as in PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020), but they were more when compared with other studies (Papangkorn, 2019; Hyland, 2005c; Hyland, 2008).

In SIC the percentage of Directives was quite low when compared with studies. It was probably that online users did not want to show authority towards other online users as Directives 'convey a very definite attitude, establishing control both over one's material and one's reader, and can therefore claim an authority' (Hyland, 2005c). So, in terms of pattern and percentage, online users in SIC were sensitive towards readers (Hyland, 2005c).

The frequency of Personal Asides was quite high in PHC as compared to other studies shown in figure 5.21. It means in PHC writers frequently turned to readers and provide a meta-comment on just what is being said (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a). The online users in PHC were much aware of readers and wanted to acknowledge and respond to an active audience, offering a remark that is largely dialogic and personal (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a).

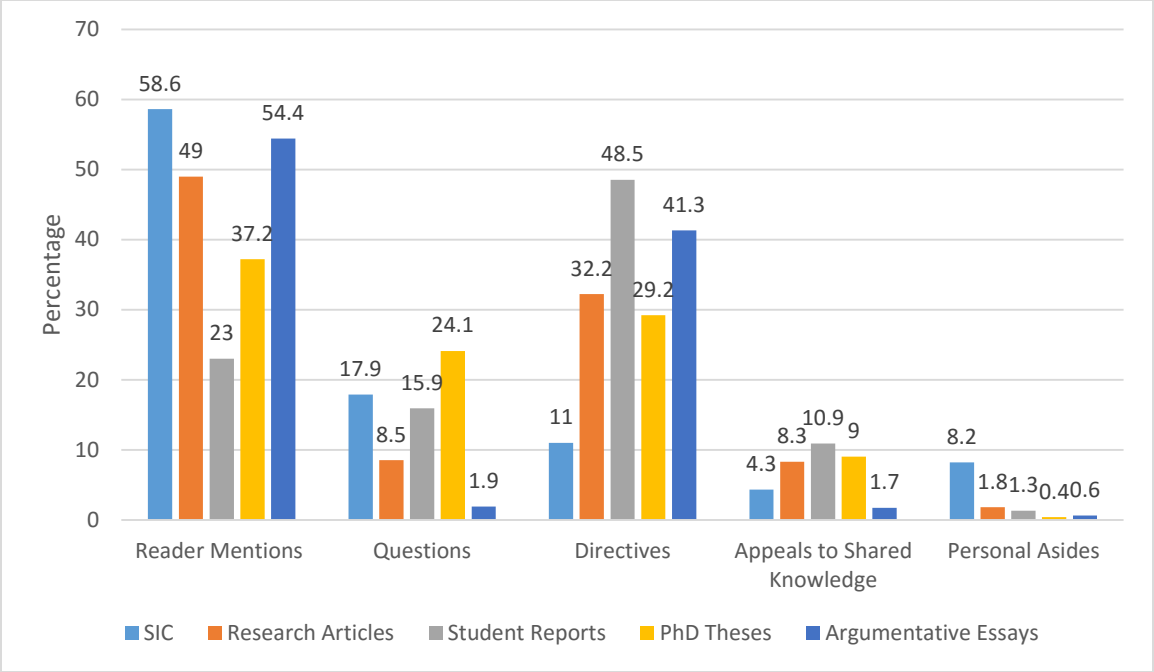

Figure 5.21. *Comparison of Engagement Markers in SIC with other studies*

5.2 Comparison of Engagement Markers in Corpora

In this section qualitative analyses of Engagement Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC have conducted. The overall frequencies of Engagement elements have also been compared across corpora. This section investigates the fourth research question which intends to find the similarities/differences in the use of Engagement Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues.

This study has revealed that the most number of Engagement Markers were used in PHC i.e. 417.64 per ten thousand words. There was not much difference in the frequency of Engagement Markers in MHC and SIC. The frequency of Engagement Markers in SIC and MHC was 402.24 and 400.32 respectively. As explained and compared in 5.1.1, 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 that the frequency of Engagement Markers in all three corpora was significantly higher than that in other genres which implies that online users in Support Groups are more likely to engage readers in the discussion than other text producers. Language is used to acknowledge, construct and negotiate social relations. Readers not only need to follow an argument set out in a way they expect but want to feel that they are being taken into consideration too (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a). The higher values of Engagement Markers show that online users in Support Groups were much concerned with readers and frequently

engaging with them. The frequency of Engagement Markers in PHC was slightly high indicating the corpus being more engaging than the other two corpora. In table 5.7, the overall values of all elements of Engagement have been given.

Table 5.7

Comparison of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC

	MHC	PHC	SIC
Reader Mentions	283.92	266.54	235.8
Questions	41.18	46.16	72.04
Directives	37.42	45.82	44.32
Appeals to Shared Knowledge	8.32	12.5	17.14
Personal Asides	29.48	46.62	32.94
Total	400.32	417.64	402.24

The frequencies of Engagement elements in corpora have been displayed in figure 5.22. From the figure, it is clear that Reader Mentions had the highest frequency in MHC. Next to MHC was PHC in terms of frequency of Reader Mentions. In SIC the least number of Reader Mentions were employed by online users. It shows that in MHC users were more involved with the patients and questioners. The frequency of Questions was highest in SIC. PHC and MHC stood at the second and the third rank in the frequency of Questions. Generally, Questions engage readers and arouse curiosity in them (Hyland, 2005a). The highest frequency of Directives was in PHC (45.82) which was followed SIC (44.32) and MHC (37.42). Apparently, as the general function of Directives suggests, online users in PHC were slightly more authoritative while writing than those in other corpora. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis showed (see: section 5.2.3) that instead of being authoritative, they were trying to build a relationship (Hyland, 2002a). There was not much difference in the frequency of Directives in PHC and SIC. Appeals to Shared Knowledge were the least used Engagement Markers in all three corpora. Its highest frequency was in SIC i.e. 17.14 (per 10,000 words). It was followed by PHC and MHC which showed frequencies of 12.5 and 8.32 respectively. So, in SIC writers repeatedly made readers agree with them on some kind of implicit contract on what can be accepted (Hyland, 2005b). The frequency of Personal Asides was high in PHC i.e. 46.62. It was followed by SIC and MHC

which had a frequency of 32.94 and 29.48 respectively. It means that in PHC writers more frequently interrupted to give a personal comment on the proposition or give additional information about the proposition than online users in other corpora.

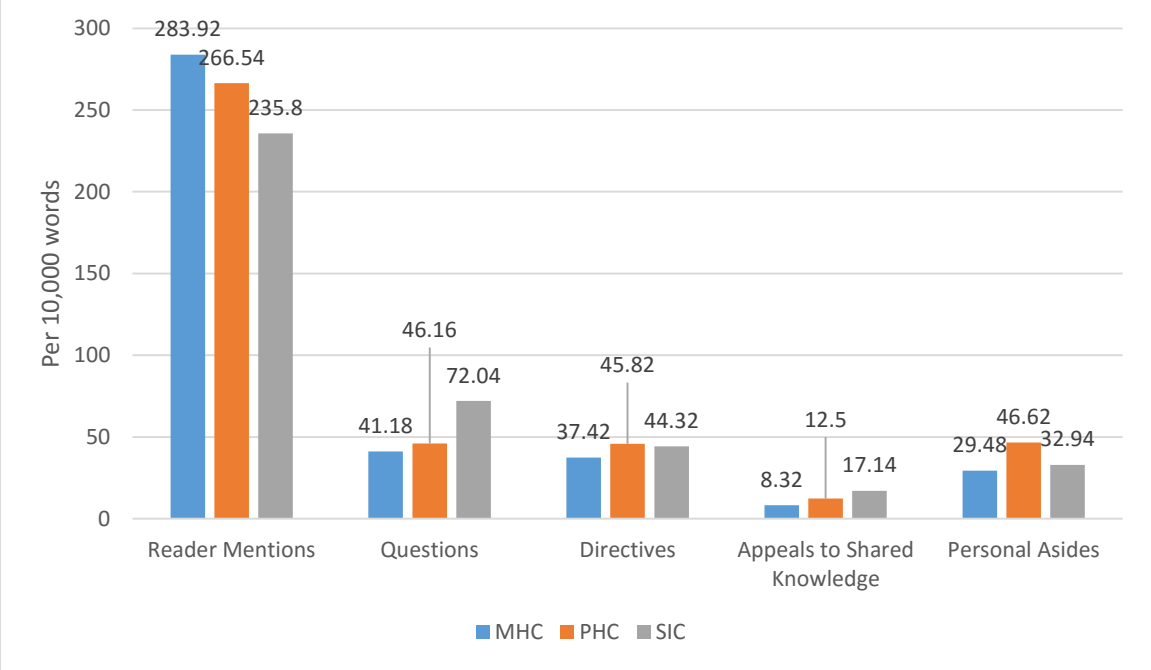

Figure 5.22. *Comparison of Engagement Markers in Corpora*

5.2.1 Comparison of Reader Mentions in Corpora

Reader Mentions are a direct way to address the reader in a text. Writers intend to show that they are aware of readers' presence (Hyland, 2005a). Results have shown that the online users of Mental Health Forums used more cases of Reader Mentions than the online users of Physical Health Forums and Mental Issues Forums. In MHC, the frequency of Reader Mentions was 283.92 per ten thousand words while in PHC and SIC the frequency was 266.54 and 235.8 respectively. It indicated that in MHC users were more involved with the audience than the other corpora.

You was the most used Marker of Reader Mentions in all three corpora. *You* is usually a feature of informal writing (Petch-Tyson, 1998). Moreover, *you* and *your* is the most recognizable way to address readers and a symbol of personal and informal writing (Hyland, 2005c). Its frequency was high in MHC i.e. 188.96 (per 10,000 words). In PHC

its frequency was slightly low i.e. 172.34. *You* was least used in SIC where it had a frequency of 137.72. As it can be seen in (1), (2), (3), (4), (5) and (6), the density of *you* is quite high in the replies to questions. It can also be observed that in (1), (2), (3) and (6) the writers are showing concern for the people seeking help and boosting their morale so that they could get out of their situations. By addressing them with *you,* they want to advise them and sympathize with them by personally addressing them. Hyland (2005a) has mentioned the same thing that by the use *you* writers personalize the discourse and display close involvement. In Mental Health forums the tune of online users was more caring and soft than in other forums. From examples (1) and (2), which are from MHC, it is clear that online users are also sharing their own experiences. Since they have gone through the same experience, they feel for other people suffering from the same situation. *You* is a feature of intimate registers like casual conversations (Biber et al., 1999) that is why online users in Support Groups overly used it to establish a friendly bond with questioners or patients.

The usage of *you* in (4) and (5) is different from other examples. Here the online users are generally addressing a situation. The tune of the online users is authoritative and the message is universal. This shows the confidence of the writers about what they are saying to the readers. In PHC and SIC online users used *you* for this purpose too instead of showing a sense of compassion for the reader. In (4) and (5), *you* is being used as an indefinite pronoun *one* (as shown in examples: 17, 18 and 19). Such use of *you* has also been observed in academic writing (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a).

Your was the second most used marker of Reader Mentions in the corpora. However, unlike *you*, the frequency of *your* was high in PHC i.e. 72.1, and in MHC and SIC, its frequency was 54.66 and 34.42 respectively. The use of *your* was more than twice in PHC than SIC. When *you* is employed by a writer, it is accompanied by *your* also at times because that is the demand of text and context as can be seen in (2), (3) and (4). Since the use of *you* low in SIC, the use of *your* was also low consequently.

1) *Hey..Great to have <u>you</u> on Annabays thread and thank <u>you</u> for <u>your</u> post..<u>You</u> mentioned an interesting point "The symptoms of anxiety seem to be so broad its hard to know if its something else physical wrong or not" <u>You</u> are spot on*

here as anxiety symptoms can also be a sign of a physiological problem... (MHC)

2) *Hey Sareus....Really good to see you again on the forums and thank you for your valued input too. Your symptoms are the same as what I'm used to have....the sweaty palms and those awful night sweats...ugh! You are not alone experiencing these horrible symptoms...* (MHC)
3) *…if you want me to send you a catalogue to have a look then please let me know. I think that you would benefit from it not just with your skin but also the diet side.* (PHC)
4) *Losing weight is done through using up more calories than you take in. So, in theory, eating a little less food than you normally would eat at your current weight, should result in you losing weight on the scale.* (PHC)
5) *You don't eat if you don't pay. You guys don't believe in God but expect manna to fall from Heaven. America's free market is brutal enough; and yet, you would push for a secular society separating church from state.* (SIC)
6) *If you divorce, I highly doubt she would be able to take the kids across the country away from you. Again, something I know nothing about, but I think you need to stay close to each other if you have joint custody, unless you both agree otherwise...* (SIC)

Regarding the use of inclusive *we*, it was the third most used Reader Mentions marker. The pattern of inclusive *we* across corpora was different from the pattern of *you*. The density of *we* was high in SIC (41.02) as compared to MHC (25.4) and PHC (13.64). By using inclusive *we* writers build a relationship with readers. Writers display that they along with readers belong to the common group sharing membership (Hyland, 2001a). The same pattern is being followed in (7), (8), (9) and (10) where writers are conveying the notion that all of us have the same problems. The major idea one can get from the examples given below is of collective responsibility. In SIC, the high frequency of inclusive *we* can be attributed to the fact that writers are generally expressing their views and they want to convince readers into believing what writers believe. A similar pattern was observed by Rasti (2011) who found that using inclusive *we* face-threatening is reduced because responsibility for the attitudes and opinions that writers convey is shared between readers

and writers. However, in PHC and MHC writers are not giving their views as much as in SIC. Though the overall usage of Reader Mentions is high in MHC and PHC, the usage of inclusive *we* is high in SIC. In SIC inclusive *we* was the second most used marker of Reader Mentions. Contrary to that inclusive *we* was the third most used marker in MHC and PHC.

7) *But, if we stop paying rent, the building doesn't fall down. If we stop using so much gas, gas actually gets cheaper. The machine that we're feeding is giving money to banks…*(SIC)
8) *It's like immigration here. I think we'll have to accept that some people will exploit the system and we can't make it 100% cheat-proof.*
   As long as we help people in need, there'll be ways to cheat the system, and we definitely shouldn't stop helping people in desperate need.
   We do need to crack down on the cheating where we find it though, and maybe be more direct in who we want to help… (SIC)
9) *Mendel wisely mentioned I think that feeling of hopelessness is an anxious symptom in itself' Yes...when we feel vulnerable (or fearful of upcoming anxiety) we can sometimes leave the gate open for more anxiety*
   The more frequent we see our doc...the less hopeless we feel... (MHC)
10) *The way we live, the way we dress and the amount of time we put into researching the types of detergents we use around our homes can play an amazingly positive part in controlling eczema.* (PHC)

As it was observed above in the use of *your* that the high frequency of *you* in a corpus resulted in a high frequency of *your* in the same corpus. A similar pattern is observed here where the high frequency of inclusive *we* in a corpus has brought in the high frequency of inclusive *our* and *us* in the same corpus. The frequency of inclusive *our* in SIC, MHC and PHC was 14.84, 8.42 and 4.58 respectively. While the frequency of inclusive us in SIC, MHC and PHC was 7.32, 6.02 and 3.4 respectively. In (11) and (12), examples from SIC, online users are not separating themselves from readers and addressing the situation as if online users are equally concerned with their fears. In (13) and (14), examples from MHC and PHC, online users are acting as if they have been going through the same mental and physical conditions. Instead of directly addressing by *you*, online users

are using *our* so that the questioner does not feel lonely. Online users are trying to make the tune of their language as soft as possible. In (15) and (16), online users are again attaching themselves with readers by using inclusive *us.*

11) *How about our society legislating hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines for downloading music?* (SIC)
12) *Where we get into trouble is when our partner doesn't appreciate our qualities, or worse, takes advantage of them.* (SIC)
13) *… we all perceive our acne as worse than others see it.* (PHC)
14) *The breathing can be a pain....It can be scary yet its only our system being so oversensitised our adrenaline makes our muscles tighten which has a direct effect on our breathing....In a nutshell.....Our feelings/symptoms are making our breathing worse for us.* (MHC)
15) *STOP corporate farming. It is just killing us both physically and fiscally.* (SIC)
16) *You are so very right in that really, the only person who is responsible for making us happy and who can make us truly happy is ourselves. It is so very important to do things that make us feel good, to remind us that we do need some attention too…* (MHC)

One's is also a marker of Reader Mentions though not often used in the corpora under investigation. Its frequency was almost the same in the three corpora. A few examples have been listed below. Hyland & Jiang (2016a). has said in regard to *one's* that by using *one's* writers try to pull readers into the text as partners to solve a complex problem together.

17) *Entering marriage means making a lifelong commitment to one's new family. This means that even if one hates one's spouse for a period of time, it should make absolutely no difference regarding one's commitment to one's family.* (SIC)
18) *And yes, the whole idea is a high-carbohydrate breakfast, with a great deal of fibre to ensure one's breakfast lasts until lunchtime and one does not have that sugary cake with one's mid-morning coffee!* (PHC)

19) *To have one's baby taken forcibly and adopted is to have a part of one's soul taken too. There is grief, despair, hopelessness and often guilt, or so I would imagine, plus an endless wondering of how the baby is*. (MHC)

5.2.2 Comparison of Questions in Corpora

Questions are intended to initiate a dialogue between writer and reader. In order to keep readers engaged and incite curiosity in them, writers often pose Questions (Hyland, 2005b). This is an important element of Engagement in Hyland's Model of Metadiscourse. This research has revealed that the density of Questions was high in the forums of Social Issues. The frequency of Questions in SIC was 72.04 per ten thousand words. Whereas in PHC and MHC, the frequency of Questions was 46.16 and 41.18 respectively. Questions can be asked in the text for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons have been unearthed after the analysis of data.

In MHC and PHC, it was observed that online users were seeking information about the history of patients before giving any suggestion. They were concerned if they had taken any professional help in the past. This pattern can be seen in examples (20) and (21). The writer in (20) has asked a major question to the questioner about their medical history, and then the writer came up with possible causes of the questioner's problem. In (21) it can be seen that the writer is trying to dig into the problem of the patient. The writer is not satisfied enough by the description provided by the questioner. These are straightforward questions, not rhetorical questions. So, it is clear that in PHC and MHC people ask questions to know more about the patient so that they could give pertinent advice according to need. In addition to that, they are also recommending them to professional consultants or asking if they had ever visited a doctor. Implicitly, they are acknowledging their lack of knowledge to give any piece of advice with certainty.

20) *Have you asked a doctor to consider you might have epilepsy? Changes in hormones can be a trigger for epilepsy in some people. It can be very treatable. Worth considering?* (MHC)
21) *Which kind of vegetables did you ate? How is the stomach pain? The pain appears suddenly? Is a progressive kind of pain? It is mild, moderate or*

intense? Please be specific or just go see a doctor. Because I can't think of anything with the description you gave. (PHC)

In (22), the pattern of questions is not much different from (20) and (21); the online user has asked a complete set of questions to get complete awareness about the situation of the questioner. This whole reply is composed of Questions.

22) *If you don't mind me asking, does your fiance have a close relationship with his parents? Would it be difficult for him to be firm with them over this? Just how much intervening in the wedding plans are they making? Do you feel they are hijacking the whole planning or are they just insisting on some things?* (MHC)

The frequency of Questions was higher in SIC than PHC and MHC. It was observed in examples from MHC and PHC that the purpose of Questions was to get more information; however, the purpose of Questions in SIC served more than this purpose. Online users mostly asked Questions that were rhetorical and were intended to convince readers into what writers believed. In (23) the author is unsure about their opinion that is why they have used a Question mark at the end of the last phrase. This Question is not intended to ask anything from the reader but as a way to show their skepticism about something.

23) *Naysayer has connotations of pessimism; I don't think that is accurate description of my position. Realist perhaps?* (SIC)

Sometimes the tune of Questions is aggressive in SIC opposite to the pattern of MHC and PHC. It can be seen in (24) the writer has inserted four questions into his reply. The online user is raising a question that if his opinion is wrong, then what could be the other possible opinion. The third question in the reply is serving the rhetorical purpose just to add force to his views (Hyland, 2005c). The online user is questioning the knowledge and awareness of the questioner and other online users by using multiple questions in the answer. In example (22) from MHC, the online user also asked several questions but all of them were in friendly tune, not aggressive, and the online user also started with a careful approach so that the questioner did not mind. Contrary to that in SIC online users are using Questions in an argumentative style. It is also visible in (25) which is a message in reply

to (24) in SIC corpus. In (25), the answer contains three question marks; the first question is a rhetorical question. The second and third questions are meant to question the knowledge and perception of the reader. So, these questions are not asking for information about any kind of condition of the questioner but challenging their views and ideas. These questions are intended to convey the claim forcefully and to express an evaluation (Hyland, 2005c). Furthermore, it was also observed and that is also visible from the frequency of Questions in SIC that online users ask numerous questions in replies attempting to engage readers by leading them in a certain direction (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a).

24) *You didn't even read the quotation from the CNN article, did you? Haven't you heard Trump and his cronies talk about old people 'volunteering' to save big (as well as small) businesses?*
Did anybody mention sin? Why do the affluent areas appear to be the ones that are hit the hardest ... at first ... instead of the areas where the "not-so-well-off" people live? (SIC)

25) *None of which extrapolated to being a capitalist virus. There was a bartender at the resort who tested positive, yes? Are we blaming the greedy service industry who comes to work to take in those juicy tourist tips?*
Is CNN condemning the capitalist Chinese market where it originated? (SIC)

This study has revealed that the number of Engagement Markers was high in PHC (417.64) than in SIC (402.24) and MHC (400.32). The difference in overall figures was not significant. In fact the frequency of Engagement Markers in MHC and SIC is nearly similar. The notable differences, however, lay in the frequency of elements of Engagement Markers. Out of these elements, Questions showed a much more noticeable difference. In SIC the online users asked 43% and 36% more questions than asked in MHC and PHC. The intention and style of questions were also different as mentioned above.

5.2.3 Comparison of Directives in Corpora

Directives are utterances which direct the listener or reader to perform or not perform an action (Hyland, 2002c). Directives are an important marker of Engagement. By using this marker writers directly order the reader to perform a specific action. Directives can be divided into three categories according to the main form of activity they direct

readers to engage in. First is *textual acts* in which writers guide readers by referring to other parts of the text. The second is *physical acts* in which writers direct readers to perform physical actions in the real world. Third, directives can steer readers to certain *cognitive acts*, where readers are involved into a new domain of argument and led through a line of reasoning (Hyland, 2005b). As explained in the literature review, Directives are divided into three categories depending on their surface structures: imperatives, necessity modals and predicative adjectives. In this research imperatives and necessity modals will be examined since the frequency of predicative adjectives (*it is essential, it is imperative,* etc.*)* was too low to be considered.

The analysis of corpora has shown that the frequency of Directives in PHC, SIC and MHC was 45.82, 44.32 and 37.42 respectively. The use of Directives was high in PHC and SIC than MHC. So, online users were less authoritative in Mental Health Forums (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a). Though Directives are considered as a risky strategy and having an authoritative tone (Hyland, 2005c), writers employ Directives to build relationships (Hyland, 2002a).

Data analysis has revealed that online users usually employed necessity modals to direct readers to do something. *Should* was the most used marker of Directives in the corpora overall. Its frequency was high in SIC (13.66 per 10,000 words) and PHC (10.42 per 10,000). However, in MHC online users did not utilize it much. It was the third most used marker in Mental Health Forums, instead of the first, with a frequency of 5.4 per ten thousand words. *Should* is a weaker directive than *must* (Hyland, 2002a). Online users preferred *should* over *must* in all three corpora. The examples below show that writers are using *should* in a sense of a piece of advice, not an order. Hyland (2002a) has mentioned that Directives can show the authority of a writer, but they can be used cautiously as in the following examples (26), (27), (28) and (29).

26) *Children are at an important stage of development, so they <u>should</u> always be told the truth.* (SIC)
27) *I agree this should be changed, but we <u>should</u> first recognize where the root of that discrepancy lies first...* (SIC)

28) *A patient should consult a doctor when they observe an abnormal hair loss on the skin or scalp…* (PHC)
29) *It isn't necessarily a symptom of anything else but if you fear it is, you should consult your GP. If you have physical checks and they eliminate the problem (ECG for heart, etc) then you should put it down to anxiety.* (MHC)

Online users also used *has/have to* during the conversation. The frequency of these phrases was nearly similar in all three corpora but their position was different. In MHC writers mostly used *has/have to* to direct readers but in SIC and MHC these phrases were the second most used markers of Directives. These phrases emphasize the actions which writer deems necessary for the reader as in (30) and (31). In (32), the writer is using one of these phrases to explain a procedure in order to guide the reader. *Need(s) to* serves the same purpose in the text. Its frequency was also near to *has/have to*. In (33), (34) and (35) writers are insisting readers what should be done while using necessity modal *need(s) to.*

30) *Well yes your right and no I'm not trying to fix him. He has to do that himself.* (MHC)
31) *Now, I'm not telling you you have to run out and get married;* (SIC)
32) *Yes, the steroid cream does have to be applied a little longer, even after rash subsided..* (PHC)
33) *She needs to learn mindful meditation techniques to help get through the attack without going to the emergency room.* (MHC)
34) *What needs to be done is to suspend capitalism until the virus has passed. Sic*
35) *You need to boost you metabolism and drinking pure chimp super tea is helpful in this way.* (PHC)

Among imperatives, *do not* (includes other forms in the corpus such as *don't* and *dont* as well) was used mostly by online users of online forums. In PHC the frequency of *do not* was 5.16 while in MHC its frequency was 4.76. In SIC the frequency of *do not* was low i.e. 3. In (36) and (38) writers are directing readers to cognitive acts whereas in (38) which is an example from PHC the writer is guiding the reader to perform physical acts. In PHC online users are giving multiple pieces of advice to readers; therefore, the use of *do not* is high in this corpus. In (37) the writer has given a set of instructions (to reduce

weight); all of them are in the form of imperative sentences. *Do not* has been used thrice in a single reply.

36) *Dont except that as an anxiety rule. Do not allow that.it happens with panic disorder …* (MHC)

37) *if you really want to loss weight, ...*
Eat more and more proteins
Drinks water as much as you can
Do not skip breakfast
Skip junk food
Do not consume alcohol
Do not Smoke (PHC)

38) *Do not get me wrong, a responsible immigration program along with border security is necessary for our nation.* (SIC)

Online users also used *go* to order the reader to do something. The frequency of *go* was high in MHC (1.94) than in PHC (1.52) and SIC (1.12). In (39) along with other Engagement Marker *you*, the writer is persuading and motivating the reader to have a certain attitude. Here *go* is being used to stimulate a cognitive action. However, in (40) the writer literally wants the reader to go and do what he is saying. Again, the directives are being used to perform physical actions in PHC.

39) *You are NOT alone. You WILL be okay. Go and live your life and don't forget to have fun.* (MHC)

40) *Go out and run a few miles every day, gradually increasing your mileage as you go on.* (PHC)

In PHC mostly Directives are meant to guide the reader to do a physical action, but it is not always the case. In (41), which is an excerpt from MHC, the writer means to physically go by the imperative *see.* Contrary to (41), in (42), which is an example from PHC, the writer is referring to a cognitive action. The next example (43) from SIC also follows the pattern of (42).

41) *If you are disintegrating, please see a therapist who is trained and qualified to help you.* (MHC)
42) *Eat boiled vegetables and drink green tea and avoid junk food. See the result in a few weeks.* (PHC)
43) *After all, there's plenty of other ways to divide labor and oppress people. See: racial inequality in America, the caste system in India, etc.* (SIC)

Let's (including *let us*) was also among the most used markers of Directives in the corpus. Its frequency in MHC, PHC and SIC was 1.34, 1.2 and 1.64 respectively. Examples (44) and (45) show that writers are forcing readers to get on their side and then leading them into the interpretation. The example (46) from MHC follows the style of (45) while the example (47) is following the pattern of (44); additionally, the example (47) is also accompanied by another engagement marker i.e. a Question. In all of these examples, writers are seeking cognitive action from readers.

44) *Let's see some examples of gender roles for men in society... Men can't show emotions, cry, seek help for depression, earn more, then there's child custody...and worst of all...* (SIC)
45) *For the sake of definition, let's remember that geography and race are two different concepts.* (SIC)
46) *Let's not downplay the seriousness of a bipolar disorder diagnosis.* (MHC)
47) *For example, let's say I bench 400... DE protocol would have me doing sets of speed reps at 200 lbs. But will that really improve my hand speed?* (PHC)

It has been revealed that Directives are not simply orders but they can be used for complex rhetorical strategies by writers (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a) as it has been found in the corpora. The above analysis has shown that the tone of the online users was not face-threatening. Writers preferred *should*, a weaker Directive (Hyland, 2002a), instead of *must*, which conveys a powerful sense of obligation (Papangkorn, 2019). Secondly, the high usage of Directives in PHC was the result of physical instructions which online users were giving to questioners rather than online users manipulating the questioners.

5.2.4 Comparison of Appeals to Shared Knowledge in Corpora

Appeals to Shared Knowledge are those markers that a writer employs to show the reader that both of them share the same ideas. The idea of 'sharedness' is invoked by authors to bring disputed ideas into their argument (Hyland, 2005b). Writers try to leave little space for disagreement for readers when they use markers like *of course*, *obviously*, etc.

In the corpora under investigation, Appeals to Shared Knowledge was the least used element of Engagement Markers. Its frequency was highest in SIC i.e. 17.14. In MHC and PHC the frequency of Appeals to shared knowledge was 8.32 and 12.5 respectively. The frequency of this engagement element in SIC was more than double in MHC.

The most used marker of Appeals to Shared Knowledge was *of course* across corpora. Its frequency in SIC, PHC and MHC was 4.08, 2.78 and 2.38 respectively. From (48), (49), (50) and (51) it can be noticed that writers are using *of course* before giving statements. In example (52) the writer is showing solidarity with the patient by conforming to his views. Since these excerpts are taken from the mid of conversations, writers are trying to convince readers into believing what writers think during a contested debate. By using *of course*, writers are trying to bring readers into an agreement by showing that their statement is not disputed; in fact, both writer and reader already believe that (Hyland & Jiang, 2016a). This marker had a high frequency in SIC because regarding social issues online users were more likely to endorse their views by pulling readers in discourse.

48) *And <u>of course</u> Sickle Cell Anemia as well as many other diseases which affect blacks. Then, <u>of course</u>, there is the factor of intelligence between races.* (SIC)

49) *Steady and consistent exercise should be a part of every person's routine, but <u>of course</u> we all know that this is not the case. When this happens we get rusty and the more the joints just sit there the weaker they get and we get more pain. <u>Of course</u> the other side of the argument is that too much stress can also cause damage, so <u>of course</u> it is a delicate balance.* (PHC)

50) *<u>Of course</u>, if minorities are being racist, they should also remember that there are poor white people too, and that it's no one alive's fault that racism or slavery existed. It's never good when the abused becomes the abuser*. (SIC)

51) *Of course racism against whites is more acceptable. The media and people here seem to go crazy for white on minority crime but the opposite are rarely reported or cared about.* (SIC)

52) *Keep in mind there are all different types of people, some not good in nature otherwise. Add the bipolar and of course it is a disaster.* (MHC)

Hyland & Jiang (2016a) has mentioned three types of Appeals to Shared Knowledge: logical reasoning; concerned with coherence of the argument, routine conditions; concerned with usual circumstances or behaviour of real world objects, and familiarity with tradition; concerned with usual community practices and beliefs. Examples (48) and (49) can be attributed to routine conditions while examples (50) and (51) to familiarity with tradition. Example (52) belongs to the category of logical reasoning. So, in the corpora, online users were employing Appeals to Shared Knowledge of all types.

The second most used marker of Appeals to Shared Knowledge was *common.* Its frequency SIC, PHC and MHC was 2.36, 2.74 and 1.36 respectively. In (53) and (55) writers are referring to ideas which are shared by everyone. However, in the forum of Physical Health the writer is using *common* to refer to a physical problem.

53) *It's a common misconception. Focusing only on the violence in the news can bias a person into believing …* (SIC)

54) *Acne is the most common skin complaint under the sun. And it is not restricted to teenagers. Adult acne is a common but rarely discussed complaint ...* (PHC)

55) *Also health anxiety is a very very common effect of anxiety, so doctors know that the real.issue is the anxiety in general and not our current fixation.* (MHC)

In MHC and PHC, the third most used marker was *obviously.* In SIC its frequency was higher than those in MHC and PHC, but it was followed by *apparently.* In examples (56), (57) and (58) writers are presupposing notions on the part of readers and influencing readers to accept the conclusion writers have come to. By writing a marker of Appeals to Shared Knowledge, writers are not giving room to the opinions of readers. As it has been observed over and over again in this research that in SIC online users usually give opinions rather than pieces of advice, they use linguistic features which add to the truth value of

their statements (Hinkel, 2005), so is the similar pattern being observed here in the use of Appeals to Shared Knowledge.

56) *Obviously, complicated and enduring mental illnesses like depression or chronic anxiety and panic, are far more difficult to relieve than by just going to a movie.* (MHC)

57) *Good luck with it! another option for the lumps is athritic psoriasis obviously you'd have to assume that your ezecma was misdiagnosed psoriasis not good but a less worse option than mycosis fungoidis.* (PHC)

58) *Obviously 'trickle down' economics has not worked when the company owners are banking billions of dollars a year and their employees earn little enough that they qualify for social aid.* (SIC)

Other than the above mentioned markers of Appeals to Shared Knowledge, the following markers *apparently, normally, usual* and *obvious* were present in the corpus. Examples listed below reveal that writers are assuming that readers are also familiar with the things they are talking about.

59) *From a few news articles from Fox 10 Phoenix, Alex apparently attacked Joe Ryan because he believed Joe had hurt Tylee. ...* (SIC)

60) *When people who normally drink coffee stop altogether, they normally get pain from caffeine withdrawal.*(PHC)

61) *This grief and fear is too raw and the fact that it was oh so very real, not the maybe's of our usual anxiety riddled brains, that is hardest to process through.* (MHC)

62) *So, if women stopped having babies (like Japanese women have largely done because of lack of support) that makes an obvious impact on society at large!* (SIC)

5.2.5 Comparison of Personal Asides in Corpora

Personal Asides briefly intrude into the text (Hyland, 2005b). Writers achieve several purposes by using them. Generally, they guide the reader by giving them extra information. Personal Asides have only two markers which parentheses and dashes. The analysis of data has uncovered that the frequency of Personal Asides was highest in PHC.

PHC had the frequency of 46.62 Personal Asides per ten thousand words. Next to this was the corpus of Social Issues which displayed the frequency of 32.94. The least number of Personal Asides were used in MHC with the frequency of 29.48.

In PHC the online users employed parentheses to give an explanation and additional information about the instruction they were giving and trying to be precise in writing. In (63), a user is suggesting the questioner a set of weekly instructions; in giving instructions he is trying to remain short. Instead of giving information in complete sentences, they are adding parentheses. Since in the corpus of PHC people discuss physical issues, they recommend different exercises and plans. The things of secondary importance are provided in Parentheses. This caused the frequency of Personal Asides to become high in PHC. So, online users were employing Personal Asides in PHC to remain concise. In MHC and SIC online users also used Personal Asides to give additional information and explanation. In (64), the online user is sharing his medical history and giving the secondary information in parenthesis. In (65), the online user is using parentheses to suggest another possible outcome.

63) *You can start off by doing a set up like this:*
day 1: acceleration work (8-10x 20-30m sprints) @ 100% speed
day 2: top speed (8x60m) @ 100% speed + plyos + weights (squats/bench/pull ups) … (PHC)

64) *I don't know whether it is time and rest or the amount of tests I have had ruling out serious nerve issues (MRI's, bloodtests, Nerve Conduction Studies, all seemed fine).* (MHC)

65) *Or to place them in the position that they might feel morally compelled to place themselves in harms way to actively engage an attacker (or, potentially shooting another teacher or student in the stress and confusion of the moment)?* (SIC)

Dashes are also used for Personal Asides but the usage of dashes was quite low in all three corpora. The purpose of dashes is similar to that of parentheses. The frequency of dashes in MHC, PHC and SIC was 1.98, 1.44 and 1.12 respectively. In examples (66), (67) and (68) online users are further explaining their views and points.

66) *Our founding fathers, including Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton and others wrote – put their signatures on documents stating – that the masses are not fit to govern themselves. True then, true today. SIC further explanation*

67) *Ironically, my friend who had BP1 - with no diagnosis of schizophrenia - also has the same symptoms. MHC Further explanation*

68) *If dieters aren't getting the results they want — anticipated weight loss — they drop out. PHC explanation*

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, research findings and their conclusion has been drawn. This chapter has restated research questions, research methodology and framework for this research. The results and analyses of Stance Markers of the three corpora have been mentioned. Similarly, the results of Engagement Markers of the three corpora under investigation have been given as well.

This study intended to find the Stance and Engagement features of three corpora as stated in research questions. The three corpora belonged to Online Forums for Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. This research aimed to compare the data of those corpora quantitatively and qualitatively. Furthermore, the researcher intended to unearth the patterns of Stance and Engagement across corpora.

In order to conduct the intended research of Online Support Groups, three corpora were built belonging to forums of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. For every corpus data was collected from five websites each. It was ensured that those websites must be run by professional people and have huge users so that a representative sample could be built for the analysis. After refining the data and removing unnecessary material in files, the files were converted into .txt format. As this is a corpus-based study, Ant Conc. (a corpus software) was used to extract relevant and required data. With the help of this software, every marker of Stance and Engagement was also checked in context to ensure that that marker was being used as Metadiscourse Marker.

To conduct this research Hyland's (2005) Metadiscourse Model was followed. It was one of the latest models. It was comprehensive but still simple. A list of Markers has been provided by Hyland. This model has two categories: Interactive dimension and Interactional dimension. For this research, Interactional dimension was selected. It is further divided into two major components i.e. Stance and Engagement. Stance expresses the attitude of a writer or a speaker towards a certain proposition. It has four elements: Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions. The second constituent of Interactional dimension is Engagement. By Engagement, writers directly address the reader

and acknowledge the presence of readers. It has five elements: Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Personal Asides and Appeals to Shared Knowledge.

This research has unearthed the patterns of Stance and Engagement in the corpora of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. It has been found that the frequency of markers of Stance and Engagement was different across corpora. Though sometimes the overall frequency of Stance and Engagement was close, but the usage of elements like Hedges or Questions was different. This research can be helpful for those who are related to Social work, the medical field or even the political field, as they can equip their language with more convincing power. Moreover, the online discourse is not yet explored much; it is envisaged that other researchers will also take interest in this area and conduct further detailed researches. Researchers can also compare their results with the results of this research; they can analyze and compare data with a wide range of researches in this field and from the perspective of Metadiscourse.

6.1 Major Findings of the Study

In the following paragraphs, major findings of the study are discussed. The frequencies are given per ten thousand words.

- It was found that MHC had the highest number (1115.4) of Stance Markers followed by PHC (883.58) and SIC (725.84). The difference in the frequency of Hedges, Boosters and Attitude Markers across corpora was small. The major difference lied in the frequency of Self-Mentions.
- *Would* and *could* were the most used Hedges in all three corpora. In most of other studies modal auxiliaries like *would*, *could* and *should* had the highest frequency. The results revealed that SIC, PHC and MHC are similar in pattern with other studies though the frequency of Hedges in other studies might differed [e.g. Akinci (2016), Yu (2019), Incharoensak (2018), Al-Rubaye (2015), Darwish (2019), Chaemsaithong, (2017), Fu (2012) and Tajeddin & Alemi(2012)].
- In all three corpora, the first three Boosters were the same i.e. *think*, *know* and *really* respectively. Unlike Hedges, the pattern of Boosters was different from that in other studies. The most used Boosters in other studies showed different results [e.g.

Akinci (2016), Yu (2019), Incharoensak (2018), Darwish (2019) and Al-Rubaye (2015)].

- The exclamation mark was the most used Attitude Marker in MHC, PHC and SIC. It also had a very high frequency and was a favourite choice of online users. However, no other piece of research mentioned in this study, which applied Hyland's 2005 model, showed even a mild usage of the exclamation mark [e.g. Hyland & Jiang (2016b), Darwish (2019) and Yu (2019)]
- Regarding Self-Mentions, in all three corpora, the order of the first four most used markers of Self-Mention was *I*, *me*, *my* and exclusive *we* respectively. So, the pattern was the same across corpora. However, the frequency of Self-Mentions was significantly high in MHC than in PHC and SIC. Of all Stance elements, Self-Mentions had the highest share in MHC, PHC and SIC.
- Unlike Stance Markers, there was not much difference in the frequency of Engagement Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC. The highest frequency of Engagement Markers was in PHC (417.64). The frequency of Engagement Markers in SIC (402.24) and MHC (400.32) was nearly similar.
- *You* was the most used marker of Reader-Mentions in every corpus. In MHC and PHC *you* was followed by *your* but in SIC *you* was followed by inclusive *we*. The frequency of inclusive *we* was considerably high in SIC as compared to that in MHC and PHC. The high density of inclusive *we* in SIC was because writers generally expressed their views and wanted to convince readers into what writers believed. By using inclusive *we* face-threatening is reduced as the responsibility of opinion is shared between readers and writers.
- The concentration of Questions in SIC was high as compared to that in MHC and PHC. In MHC and PHC, online users usually asked Questions to get information about the history of patients before giving any suggestions. In SIC, a lot of Questions were rhetorical in nature were intended to challenge the views and ideas of others.
- Directives had the highest frequency in PHC. It was followed SIC and MHC respectively. The most used Directives in every corpus were *should*, *has*/*have to* and *need*(*s*) to. However, in SIC and PHC online users mostly used *should*;

however, in MHC, *has*/*have to* had the maximum frequency. Comparison with other researches revealed mixed results.

- In the corpora of this study, Appeals to Shared Knowledge was the least used element of Engagement Markers. It had the highest presence in SIC followed by PHC and MHC respectively. In all corpora, of *course* and *common* had the highest frequency. These Markers were also common in other researches mentioned in this study [e.g. Papangkorn (2017), Kramar (2019) and He & Rahim (2019)].
- The frequency of Personal Asides was the highest in PHC, followed by SIC and lastly MHC. Personal Asides had only two markers i.e. parenthesis and dashes. The share of parenthesis was more than ninety percent in every corpus. Though the frequency of Personal Asides was low in every corpus, it was significantly high as compared to other studies [e.g. Malik et al. (2020) and Papangkorn (2017)].

6.2 Conclusion of the Study

The first research question of the study dealt with the quantitative values and analysis of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC. In the next three paragraphs, the quantitative values of Stance Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC have been summarized respectively.

The data analysis has shown that in MHC there were 1115.4 Stance Markers per ten thousand words. Stance Markers constituted of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions which showed frequencies of 155.02, 190.7, 62.26 and 707.32 (per 10,000 words) respectively. The percentage-wise distribution Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions in MHC was 13.9, 17.1, 5.6 and 63.4 respectively. Self-Mentions were excessively used by online users in MHC which manifests that writers were mentioning themselves over and over again in forums. The qualitative data analysis showed that they had to do this to share their personal experience. The use of Boosters was high than Hedges which indicates that online users were confident and committed to their words and showed a lesser degree of hesitation towards propositions (Hyland, 2005a, 1998a; Swales, 1990). The online users in MHC used fewer cases of Attitude Markers in writings which suggests that online users showed less surprise and emotions towards propositions (Crismore et al., 1993).

After calculating all of the Stance Markers, it was discovered that 883.58 Stance Markers per ten thousand words were used in the corpus of Physical Health. The four Stance elements that are Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions had frequencies of 154.04, 158.6, 55.66 and 515.28 respectively. Their percentage-wise share was 17.4, 17.9, 6.3 and 58.3 respectively. The online users gave an impression of their presence by using Self-Mentions frequently (Hyland, 2005a, 1998c). The use of Hedges and Boosters was balanced which indicates that online users confident in giving statements and leaving room for alternative opinions equally (Swales, 1990; Hyland, 2005a). However, online users in PHC did not hint too much towards the importance of proposition (Adel, 2006) and surprise towards propositions (Hyland, 2005a) as the share of Attitude Markers was only 6.3%.

Data analysis has shown that a total of 725.84 (per 10,000 words) Stance Markers were used in SIC. The frequency of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude Markers and Self-Mentions was 165.72, 176.4, 49.36 and 334.36 per ten thousand words respectively. The percentage-wise distribution was 22.8, 24.3, 6.8 and 46 respectively. %. The high frequency of Self-Mentions than other elements of Stance indicates that online users in SIC were trying to personally address the questioners (Hyland, 2005a). As far as the use of Hedges and Boosters was concerned, the frequency of Boosters was slightly more than Hedges. It meant that the online users in SIC were marginally more confident than being hesitant. The small share of Attitude Markers in SIC has shown that online users were not inclined to show any attitude towards the proposition and highlight its importance (Crismore et al., 1993; Kopple, 1985; Hyland, 2005a).

The second research question of the study by the researcher intended to analyze corpora qualitatively. Moreover, to how much degree these markers differ was also investigated. This research question sought to find the similarities/differences in the use of Stance Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. In the next paragraph, the overall values of Stance Elements have been compared and their most used markers have also been mentioned.

This study has shown that the highest number of Stance Markers were used in MHC. The frequency of Stance Markers in MHC was 1115.4 per ten thousand words.

While In PHC and SIC, the frequency of Stance Markers was 883.58 and 725.84 respectively. Frequencies show that in MHC, online users were more committed to what they said and showed personal emotions towards the proposition (Hyland, 2005a; 2005b; 1998a; Papangkorn, 2019). Regarding separate elements of Stance Markers, Self-Mentions, Boosters and Attitude Markers had the highest occurrence in MHC. Hedges showed the highest frequency in SIC. Regarding Hedges, online users mostly used modal auxiliaries in all three corpora. *Could, would, should, may* and *might* were used by online users. However, in MHC, *feel* which is a lexical verb was also among the most used hedging markers. *Think* and *know* were the most used markers of Boosters in corpora. The frequency of *think* in MHC, PHC and SIC was 38.94, 27.68 and 35.58 respectively (per 10,000 words). The frequency of *know* in MHC, PHC and SIC was 35.96, 25.04 and 22.08 respectively. So, the most used Boosters in all three corpora were the same markers. The data analysis also revealed that online users excessively used exclamation marks in their writings. The Exclamation mark was the most used Attitude Marker in corpora. The frequency of exclamation marks was so high that in MHC and PHC, exclamation marks constituted 58% each of the total frequency of Attitude Markers. However, in SIC exclamation marks constituted 38% of total Attitude Markers. In all three corpora first person singular pronoun *I* was the most used marker of Self-Mentions. The frequency of *I* in MHC, PHC and SIC was 484.94, 350.08 and 234.98 respectively. Again the same one marker was the most used in all three corpora.

The third research question of the study dealt with the quantitative values and analysis of Engagement Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC. In the next paragraphs, the quantitative values of Engagement Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC respectively have been given. Moreover, their frequencies have also been compared with those of other studies.

The data analysis has revealed that overall 400.32 (per 10,000 words) Engagement Markers were present in MHC. The frequency of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides was 283.92, 41.18, 37.42, 8.32 and 29.48 respectively. The percentage-wise share of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides was 70.9, 10.3, 9.3, 2 and 7.3 respectively. It shows that online users mostly used Reader Mentions in their replies to

Questions. It means online users were focusing on showing sympathy for patients and questioners by mentioning them over and over again (Hyland, 2001b). The less use of Directives and Questions than Reader Mentions could be attributed to the fact that people who voluntarily help patients on online forums were less likely to maneuver readers and show authority by using Questions and Directives (Hyland, 2005c). Furthermore, when compared with other studies on argumentative essays (Papangkonrn, 2019), student reports (Hyland, 2005c), research articles (Hyland, 2008) and PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020), the frequency of Engagement Markers was more than that of in mentioned studies. This shows that online users in MHC were eager to drag readers into the discussion using Reader-Mentions and other Engagement Markers (Hyland, 2005a).

The overall cases of Engagement Markers in PHC were 417.64 (per 10,000 words). In PHC, the frequency of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides was 266.54, 46.16, 45.82, 12.5 and 46.62 respectively. Concerning percentage, the share of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides was 63.8, 11, 11, 3 and 11.1 respectively. The most used element of Engagement in PHC was Reader-Mentioning. The usage of Questions, Directives and Personal Asides was nearly similar. Appeals to Shared knowledge were least written by online users in their writings. A very high value of Reader and Personal Asides than Questions and Directives indicates that in MHC online users were cooperative and caring rather than authoritative and manipulative (Hyland, 2005c). The results of PHC were also compared with other studies on argumentative essays (Papangkonrn, 2019), student reports (Hyland, 2005c), research articles (Hyland, 2008) and PhD theses (Malik et al., 2020). The frequency of Engagement Markers was more in PHC than the frequency of Engagement Markers in previously mentioned studies. The high use of Engagement Markers in PHC shows that online users acknowledged the existence of readers and were trying to bring readers into the discussion (Hyland, 2005a).

Data analysis has shown that the frequency of Engagement Markers in Social Issues Corpus was 402.24 (per 10,000). The frequency of Reader Mentions, Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides in SIC was 235.8, 72.04, 44.32, 17.14 and 32.94 respectively. The percentage-wise share of Reader Mentions,

Questions, Directives, Appeals to Shared Knowledge and Personal Asides was 58.6, 17.9, 11, 4.3 and 8.2 respectively. As the usage of Reader Mentions was high in SIC, Online users in SIC were explicitly mentioning and involving readers in the discussion; they were acknowledging their presence in the discussion (Hyland, 2005a, 2005b). After Reader Mentions, Questions were the most used Engagement feature in SIC. Online users employed Questions to initiate dialogue and arouse curiosity (Hyland, 2005a) and also maneuvering readers into believing what writers believed (Hyland, 2005c). The use of Reader Mentions in SIC was close to that of in argumentative essays (Papangkonrn, 2019). The use of Directives in SIC was least when compared with argumentative essays, student reports, research articles and PhD theses (see: Papangkonrn, 2019; Hyland, 2005c; Hyland, 2008; Malik et al., 2020). However, the use of Personal Asides in SIC was more than any other study mentioned above.

As stated in the fourth research question, the qualitative analysis of Engagement Markers in MHC, PHC and SIC was conducted. In addition to that their overall frequencies were also compared to find that to how much extent they differ from one another. This research question intended to find the similarities/differences in the use of Engagement Markers in the Online Support Groups of Mental Health, Physical Health and Social Issues. In the next paragraph, the overall values of Engagement elements have been compared and their most used markers have also been mentioned.

Results have shown that in the corpus of Physical Health the frequency of Engagement Markers was 417.64 per ten thousand words. The highest number of Engagement Markers were present in PHC. The frequency of Engagement Markers in SIC and MHC was 402.24 and 400.32 respectively. There was not much difference in the frequency of Markers in these two corpora. This means that online users in PHC were slightly keener to drag readers into the discussion using Engagement Markers (Hyland, 2005a). The highest frequency of Reader Mentions was in MHC. Most numbers of Questions and Appeals to Shared Knowledge markers were found in SIC. Personal Asides and Directives had the highest frequency in PHC. Regarding Reader Mentions, *you* was the most used Reader Mention marker in all three corpora. Its frequency in MHC, PHC and SIC was 188.96, 172.34 and 137.72 respectively (per 10,000 words). *You* is a feature of

informal writing (Petch-Tyson, 1998) and casual conversation (Biber et al., 1999). In all three corpora, online users tried to establish a friendly bond by using *you.* The frequency of Questions in SIC was 72.04 per ten thousand words. Whereas in PHC and MHC, the frequency of Questions was 46.16 and 41.18 respectively. In SIC, online users often employed rhetorical questions. In PHC and SIC, *should* and *has/have to* were the most used and the second most used Directives respectively, but in MHC, *has/have to* were mostly utilized by online users. *Has/have to* were followed by *need(s) to* in MHC. The most used marker of Appeals to Shared Knowledge was *of course* in all three corpora. Its frequency in SIC, PHC and MHC was 4.08, 2.78 and 2.38 respectively. The second most used marker of Appeals to Shared Knowledge in all three corpora was *common.* Its frequency SIC, PHC and MHC was 2.36, 2.74 and 1.36 respectively. So, the most used Appeals to Shared Knowledge markers were the same ones across corpora. The frequency of Personal Asides was highest in PHC. PHC had the frequency of 46.62 Personal Asides per ten thousand words. The frequency of Personal Asides in SIC and MHC was 32.94 and 29.48 respectively. Personal Asides had only two markers i.e. parentheses and dashes. Both of these are punctuation marks. The share of dashes in these frequencies was very small in all three corpora.

It has been observed after completing the research of Metadiscourse Markers of Stance and Engagement that there was not much difference in the overall frequencies of Engagement Markers in corpora. However, there was a significant difference in the overall frequencies of Stance Markers in corpora. In MHC, the overall frequency of Stance Markers was higher than the other two corpora. The major difference lied in the frequency of Self-Mentions. The online users in MHC excessively expressed themselves in their writings. However, there was not much difference in the use of Boosters, Attitude Markers and Hedges. The average of the overall frequencies Stance Markers in corpora was 908 while the average of the overall frequencies Engagement Markers in corpora was 406. This indicates that Stance Markers had a high share of Metadiscourse in corpora as compared to Engagement Markers.

6.3 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

The research has dug up some distinctive and vital aspects of Online Internet Forums. The patterns of Metadiscourse elements were different in different corpora. The markers with high frequency should be opted by people who are associated with fields of helping others. Such people like doctors, psychologists, social workers, etc. should be taught these Metadiscourse features so that they can communicate in a better way with a distressed person. The research has been done on forums of only English but its findings can be utilized by any person belonging to non-English context e.g. a doctor or psychologist speaking Urdu or Hindi language can also benefit from this. He can also improve his communication skills. Similarly, language instructors can also use the results of this study as it can help them to teach persuasive writing effectively.

Based on these findings of this study, the researcher can propose some recommendations for future research.

- First of all this research has been done on a corpus of one and a half million words. Future researchers can increase the size of the corpus to obtain better results. In addition to that, it was observed that websites hosting online forums have plenty of material available in them. Researchers can compare individual websites with one another instead of making the corpus from multiple websites.
- As this study was delimited to forums for health and social issues. There are also other forums dealing with tech, education, science, politics, news, etc. These forums also need to be investigated so that their important Stance and Engagement features will be unearthed.
- Online Support Groups also exist in other forms like blogs and apps, these platforms also require investigation of Metadiscourse features. The results can be compared with Online Forums.
- This study has been done on the corpus like most studies. However, to get more insights into a writer’s mind follow-up interviews can be conducted with online users. They can be easily contacted on forums as a forum is a platform that enables interaction and communication. Some users can agree

to reply to the queries of researchers. Interviews may reveal further aspects of Stance and Engagement.

- Moreover, across cultural, across languages, gender-based and diachronic studies on Support Groups can also be conducted as such studies on academic prose have been conducted profusely.
- In addition to that in-depth analysis of selective elements of Stance and Engagement can also be conducted. It can give a comprehensive overview of Hedges, Boosters and other elements. These elements can be grammatically and functionally analyzed further. Furthermore, lexical bundles of different Metadiscourse features can also be investigated.

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APPENDIX A: STANCE MARKERS

Hedges

About Almost Apparent Apparently Appear Appeared Appears Approximately Argue Argued Argues Around Assume Assumed Broadly Certain Amount Certain Extent Certain Level Claim Claimed Claims Could Couldn't Doubt Doubtful Essentially Estimate Estimated Fairly Feel Feels Felt Frequently From My Perspective From Our Perspective From This Perspective Generally Guess Indicate Indicated Indicates In General In Most Cases In Most Instances In My Opinion In My View In This View In Our Opinion In Our View Largely Likely Mainly May Maybe Might Mostly Often On The Whole Ought Perhaps Plausible Plausibly Possible Possibly Postulate Postulated Postulates Presumable Presumably Probable probably Quite Rather X 23 Relatively Roughly Seems Should Sometimes Somewhat Suggest Suggested Suggests Suppose Supposed Supposes Suspect Suspects Tend To Tended To Tends To To My Knowledge Typical Typically Uncertain Uncertainly Unclear Unclearly Unlikely Usually Would Wouldn't

Boosters

Actually Always Believe Believed Believes Beyond Doubt Certain Certainly Clear Clearly Conclusively Decidedly Definite Definitely Demonstrate Demonstrated demonstrates Doubtless Establish Established Evident Evidently Find Finds Found in Fact Incontestable Incontestably Incontrovertible Incontrovertibly Indeed Indisputable Indisputably Know Known Must (Possibility) Never No Doubt Obvious Obviously Of Course Prove Proved proves Realize Realized Realizes really Show Showed Shown Shows Sure Surely Think Thinks Thought Truly True Undeniable Undeniably Undisputedly Undoubtedly Without Doubt

Attitude Markers

! Admittedly Agree Agrees Agreed Amazed Amazing Amazingly Appropriate Appropriately Astonished Astonishing Astonishingly Correctly Curious Curiously Desirable Desirably Disappointed Disappointing Disappointingly Disagree Disagreed Disagrees Dramatic Dramatically Essential Essentially Even X Expected Expectedly Fortunate Fortunately Hopeful Hopefully Important Importantly Inappropriate Inappropriately Interesting Interestingly Prefer Preferable Preferably Preferred Remarkable Remarkably Shocked Shocking Shockingly Striking Strikingly Surprised

Surprising Surprisingly Unbelievable Unbelievably Understandable Understandably Unexpected Unexpectedly Unfortunate Unfortunately Unusual Unusually Usual

Self-Mention

I We Me My Our Mine Us The Author The Author's The Writer The Writer's

APPENDIX B: ENGAGEMENT MARKERS

(1) Reader mentions

your Your you You one's One's the reader The reader We Our Us our reader Reader

(2) Questions

?

(3) Appeals to shared knowledge

apparently as a rule common commonly conventional conventionally established familiar normally obvious obviously of course prevailing prevalent traditional traditionally typical typically usual routinely

(4) Directives

add allow analyse analyze apply arrange assess calculate choose classify compare connect consult contrast define demonstrate determine do not develop employ ensure estimate evaluate follow go have to review increase input insert integrate key let us look at mark measure mount must need to ought observe order pay picture prepare recover refer regard remember remove see select set should show suppose state think of turn use take consider find imagine let let's note notice assume think about recall remember let us let’s let need to should ought to do not have to must has to

(5) Asides

Parenthesis Dashes

APPENDIX C: FREQUENCIES OF ALL STANCE MARKERS IN CORPORA

Hedges

Hedges in MHC		Hedges in PHC		Hedges in SIC	
would	28.76	would	28.56	would	37.26
could	16.34	could	14.58	could	14.76
feel	11.4	should	12.2	should	14.32
maybe	8.94	may	10.82	may	8.18
might	8.88	might	6.76	maybe	7.14
sometimes	8.56	about	6.24	might	6.64
may	8.22	sometimes	5.16	probably	5.58
should	7.32	maybe	5.06	seems	5.18
about	5.72	seems	5.04	claim	4.48
often	5.2	probably	5	likely	3.74
probably	5.08	usually	4.88	about	3.6
seems	4.72	often	4.72	often	3.52
quite	3.92	quite	4.62	feel	3.38
guess	3.3	feel	3.94	guess	3.38
usually	2.68	almost	3.22	quite	3.18
perhaps	2.48	suggest	2.76	suppose	2.8
almost	2.46	around	2.74	almost	2.68
suggest	1.8	guess	2.3	perhaps	2.56
suppose	1.66	tend to	2.16	sometimes	2.26
likely	1.5	likely	1.94	apparently	2.18
tend to	1.26	generally	1.72	usually	1.86
mostly	1.2	mostly	1.68	assume	1.62
possible	0.94	possible	1.58	mostly	1.6
generally	0.92	suppose	1.34	argue	1.56
somewhat	0.86	perhaps	1.14	doubt	1.56
doubt	0.84	claim	1	tend to	1.56
possibly	0.78	mainly	0.98	suspect	1.48
around	0.74	apparently	0.9	in general	1.46
apparently	0.68	assume	0.88	possibly	1.44
assume	0.68	fairly	0.84	possible	1.4
claim	0.68	appear	0.8	suggest	1.4
rather x	0.6	frequently	0.72	generally	1.26
in general	0.58	doubt	0.7	appear	1.14
appear	0.52	possibly	0.7	fairly	0.9
argue	0.52	typically	0.64	around	0.88
mainly	0.44	relatively	0.5	typically	0.6
suspect	0.44	suspect	0.5	essentially	0.58

in my opinon	0.32	somewhat	0.48	indicate	0.56
typical	0.32	in general	0.46	typical	0.54
largely	0.3	typical	0.42	unlikely	0.52
fairly	0.26	indicate	0.4	somewhat	0.46
essentially	0.24	in my opinon	0.34	relatively	0.44
frequently	0.24	unlikely	0.32	rather x	0.42
apparent	0.18	rather x	0.3	in my opinon	0.4
indicate	0.18	essentially	0.24	mainly	0.4
in most cases	0.16	argue	0.2	largely	0.34
relatively	0.16	in most cases	0.2	frequently	0.32
unlikely	0.16	apparent	0.18	presumably	0.3
typically	0.12	approximately	0.18	ought	0.26
roughly	0.1	estimate	0.12	plausible	0.26
uncertain	0.1	ought	0.12	apparent	0.2
on the whole	0.08	roughly	0.12	in most cases	0.14
certain amount	0.06	largely	0.1	approximately	0.12
certain extent	0.06	uncertain	0.1	certain amount	0.12
estimate	0.06	on the whole	0.08	estimate	0.12
ought	0.06	plausible	0.06	roughly	0.12
broadly	0.04	presumably	0.06	in my view	0.08
in my view	0.04	probable	0.06	on the whole	0.08
unclear	0.04	unclear	0.06	plausibly	0.08
approximately	0.02	certain level	0.04	broadly	0.06
doubtful	0.02	broadly	0.02	uncertain	0.06
from my perspective	0.02	certain amount	0.02	doubtful	0.04
in our view	0.02	in most instances	0.02	in our view	0.04
plausible	0.02	in my view	0.02	probable	0.04
uncertainly	0.02	certain extent	0	certain level	0.02
certain level	0	doubtful	0	postulate	0.02
from our perspective	0	from my perspective	0	to my knowledge	0.02
from this perspective	0	from our perspective	0	unclear	0.02
in most instances	0	from this perspective	0	certain extent	0
in this view	0	in this view	0	from my perspective	0
in our opinion	0	in our opinion	0	from our perspective	0
plausibly	0	in our view	0	from this perspective	0
postulate	0	plausibly	0	in most instances	0
presumable	0	postulate	0	in this view	0

presumably	0	presumable	0	in our opinion	0
probable	0	to my knowledge	0	presumable	0
to my knowledge	0	uncertainly	0	uncertainly	0
unclearly	0	unclearly	0	unclearly	0

Boosters

Boosters in MHC		Boosters in PHC		Boosters in SIC	
think	38.94	think	27.68	think	35.58
know	35.96	know	25.04	know	22.08
really	24.84	really	20.98	really	14.86
find	18.52	find	16.62	never	12.72
never	13.12	sure	8.82	believe	12.24
always	10.74	always	8.74	find	10.54
sure	9.18	never	8.74	actually	8.4
believe	5.6	actually	7.34	always	8.14
actually	5.26	believe	4.14	sure	7.94
true	3.26	show	3.82	true	6.02
show	2.96	clear	3.44	show	4.8
must (possibility]	2.8	definitely	3.32	of course	4.08
of course	2.38	of course	2.78	certain	3.32
truly	2.16	true	2.5	certainly	2.36
realize	2.04	certain	2.44	realize	2.18
definitely	1.98	known	1.52	clear	2.14
certain	1.62	obviously	1.52	prove	2.12
clear	1.24	must (possibility]	1.44	in fact	2.1
in fact	1.22	certainly	1.36	obviously	2.04
certainly	1.18	realize	1.08	known	1.9
obviously	1.16	in fact	0.84	clearly	1.84
known	1.08	indeed	0.76	truly	1.58
clearly	0.92	clearly	0.64	definitely	1.54
indeed	0.68	truly	0.62	must (possibility]	1.36
prove	0.5	obvious	0.6	obvious	1.3
obvious	0.4	prove	0.52	indeed	0.7
surely	0.32	surely	0.52	surely	0.56
no doubt	0.24	establish	0.28	demonstrate	0.54
establish	0.12	demonstrate	0.18	establish	0.54
demonstrate	0.1	definite	0.12	no doubt	0.3
evidently	0.06	no doubt	0.08	evidently	0.14
conclusively	0.04	decidedly	0.04	evident	0.12
definite	0.04	evident	0.02	decidedly	0.06
evident	0.02	evidently	0.02	undoubtedly	0.06

undoubtedly	0.02	undoubtedly	0.02	beyond doubt	0.04
beyond doubt	0	without doubt	0.02	doubtless	0.04
decidedly	0	beyond doubt	0	conclusively	0.02
doubtless	0	conclusively	0	definite	0.02
incontestable	0	doubtless	0	incontrovertibly	0.02
incontestably	0	incontestable	0	indisputable	0.02
incontrovertible	0	incontestably	0	indisputably	0.02
incontrovertibly	0	incontrovertible	0	without doubt	0.02
indisputable	0	incontrovertibly	0	incontestable	0
indisputably	0	indisputable	0	incontestably	0
undeniable	0	indisputably	0	incontrovertible	0
undeniably	0	undeniable	0	undeniable	0
undisputedly	0	undeniably	0	undeniably	0
without doubt	0	undisputedly	0	undisputedly	0

Self-mentions

Self-Mentions in MHC		Self-Mentions in PHC		Self-Mentions in SIC	
I	484.94	I	350.08	I	234.98
my	126.1	my	104.92	my	47.8
me	79.3	me	42.58	me	33.52
we	7.92	we	10.74	we	11.46
us	4.04	our	2.68	our	2.88
our	2.6	us	2.36	us	2.68
mine	2.42	mine	1.92	mine	1.04

Attitude Markers

Attitude Markers in MHC		Attitude Markers in PHC		Attitude Markers in SIC	
!	36.58	!	32.66	!	19.2
even	4.4	important	3.8	even x	6.16
agree	3.88	even x	3.72	agree	5.54
important	3.08	agree	2.32	important	3.9
interesting	1.88	hopefully	1.72	interesting	1.94
hopefully	1.8	amazing	1.4	disagree	1.4
amazing	1.52	unfortunately	1.36	expected	1.1
unfortunately	1.34	interesting	1.04	usual	1.02
usual	0.74	essential	0.72	unfortunately	0.82
surprised	0.58	prefer	0.64	hopefully	0.68
expected	0.56	surprised	0.6	surprised	0.66
prefer	0.5	usual	0.54	essentially	0.58
disagree	0.48	curious	0.5	curious	0.52

curious	0.46	expected	0.48	amazing	0.5
unusual	0.42	correctly	0.3	prefer	0.48
appropriate	0.34	fortunately	0.3	appropriate	0.42
essential	0.26	disagree	0.28	essential	0.38
fortunate	0.26	appropriate	0.26	correctly	0.34
inappropriate	0.26	essentially	0.24	disappointed	0.26
essentially	0.24	unusual	0.24	shocking	0.2
hopeful	0.22	shocked	0.22	importantly	0.18
shocked	0.22	importantly	0.2	shocked	0.18
understandable	0.22	dramatic	0.18	unfortunate	0.18
correctly	0.2	surprisingly	0.18	unusual	0.18
unexpected	0.2	dramatically	0.14	fortunately	0.16
importantly	0.18	fortunate	0.14	inappropriate	0.16
disappointing	0.14	unexpected	0.14	unbelievable	0.16
unbelievably	0.1	preferred	0.12	fortunate	0.14
unfortunate	0.1	hopeful	0.1	surprising	0.14
disappointed	0.08	unbelievable	0.1	amazingly	0.12
dramatic	0.08	understandable	0.1	dramatically	0.12
fortunately	0.08	amazed	0.08	preferable	0.12
preferred	0.08	appropriately	0.08	striking	0.12
remarkable	0.08	unfortunate	0.08	understandable	0.12
surprisingly	0.08	amazingly	0.06	desirable	0.1
unbelievable	0.08	desirable	0.06	dramatic	0.1
amazed	0.06	disappointed	0.06	remarkable	0.1
appropriately	0.06	disappointing	0.06	unexpected	0.1
dramatically	0.06	interestingly	0.06	appropriately	0.08
preferable	0.06	preferably	0.06	hopeful	0.08
preferably	0.06	remarkable	0.06	preferred	0.08
shocking	0.06	remarkably	0.06	unexpectedly	0.08
amazingly	0.04	striking	0.06	amazed	0.06
remarkably	0.04	admittedly	0.04	astonishing	0.06
surprising	0.04	shocking	0.04	disappointing	0.06
unexpectedly	0.04	surprising	0.04	interestingly	0.06
admittedly	0.02	unbelievably	0.02	admittedly	0.04
astonishing	0.02	astonished	0	remarkably	0.04
desirable	0.02	astonishing	0	strikingly	0.04
inappropriately	0.02	astonishingly	0	inappropriately	0.02
interestingly	0.02	curiously	0	preferably	0.02
shockingly	0.02	desirably	0	unbelievably	0.02
astonished	0	disappointingly	0	understandably	0.02
astonishingly	0	expectedly	0	unusually	0.02
curiously	0	inappropriate	0	astonished	0
desirably	0	inappropriately	0	astonishingly	0

disappointingly	0	preferable	0	curiously	0
expectedly	0	shockingly	0	desirably	0
striking	0	strikingly	0	disappointingly	0
strikingly	0	understandably	0	expectedly	0
understandably	0	unexpectedly	0	shockingly	0
unusually	0	unusually	0	surprisingly	0

APPENDIX D: FREQUENCIES OF ALL ENGAGEMENT MARKERS IN CORPORA

Reader Mentions

Reader Mentions in MHC		Reader Mentions in PHC		Reader Mentions in SIC	
You	188.96	You	172.34	You	137.72
Your	54.66	Your	72.1	We	41.02
We	25.4	We	13.64	Your	34.42
Our	8.42	Our	4.58	Our	14.84
Us	6.02	Us	3.4	Us	7.32
One's	0.4	One's	0.38	One's	0.42
Reader	0.06	Reader	0.1	Reader	0.06

Directives

Directives in MHC		Directives in PHC		Directives in SIC	
has/have to	8.08	should	10.42	should	13.66
need(s) to	7.14	has/have to	8.16	has/have to	8.88
should	5.4	need(s) to	6.48	need(s) to	6.92
do not	4.76	do not	5.16	do not	3
must	2.6	must	2.26	must	2.98
go	1.94	see	1.82	let's	1.64
let's	1.34	go	1.52	see	1.24
see	1.3	use	1.26	go	1.12
remember	0.7	let's	1.2	look at	0.82
think about	0.64	add	1.06	remember	0.58
find	0.48	remember	0.98	use	0.4
look at	0.32	apply	0.88	imagine	0.32
use	0.3	find	0.56	find	0.3
imagine	0.28	look at	0.44	ought	0.26
add	0.26	consult	0.4	note	0.2
think of	0.26	imagine	0.38	think about	0.2
allow	0.24	follow	0.3	add	0.16
consider	0.2	note	0.28	consider	0.16
follow	0.2	consider	0.26	show	0.16
note	0.16	think about	0.22	suppose	0.14
show	0.14	choose	0.2	think of	0.1
set	0.1	allow	0.16	allow	0.08
turn	0.1	remove	0.16	assume	0.08
suppose	0.08	increase	0.14	compare	0.08
ought	0.06	take (a look/as example)	0.12	pay	0.08

consult	0.04	ought	0.12	take (a look/as example)	0.08
define	0.04	compare	0.1	analyse	0.06
notice	0.04	think of	0.1	insert	0.06
pay	0.04	set	0.08	notice	0.06
choose	0.02	show	0.08	turn	0.06
demonstrate	0.02	ensure	0.06	connect	0.04
evaluate	0.02	measure	0.06	follow	0.04
increase	0.02	pay	0.06	observe	0.04
insert	0.02	suppose	0.06	recall	0.04
picture	0.02	insert	0.04	remove	0.04
remove	0.02	observe	0.04	set	0.04
select	0.02	select	0.04	apply	0.02
state	0.02	arrange	0.02	define	0.02
analyse	0	determine	0.02	demonstrate	0.02
apply	0	notice	0.02	develop	0.02
arrange	0	order	0.02	increase	0.02
assess	0	picture	0.02	mark	0.02
assume	0	recall	0.02	order	0.02
calculate	0	refer	0.02	picture	0.02
classify	0	review	0.02	refer	0.02
compare	0	analyse	0	review	0.02
connect	0	assess	0	arrange	0
contrast	0	assume	0	assess	0
determine	0	calculate	0	calculate	0
develop	0	classify	0	choose	0
employ	0	connect	0	classify	0
ensure	0	contrast	0	consult	0
estimate	0	define	0	contrast	0
input	0	demonstrate	0	determine	0
integrate	0	develop	0	employ	0
key	0	employ	0	ensure	0
let x = y	0	estimate	0	estimate	0
mark	0	evaluate	0	evaluate	0
measure	0	input	0	input	0
mount	0	integrate	0	integrate	0
observe	0	key	0	key	0
order	0	let x = y	0	let x = y	0
prepare	0	mark	0	measure	0
recall	0	mount	0	mount	0
recover	0	prepare	0	prepare	0
refer	0	recover	0	recover	0
regard	0	regard	0	regard	0

review	0	state	0	select	0
take (a look/as example)	0	turn	0	state	0

Questions

Questions in MHC		Questions in PHC		Questions in SIC	
?	41.18	?	46.16	?	72.04

Appeals to Shared knowledge

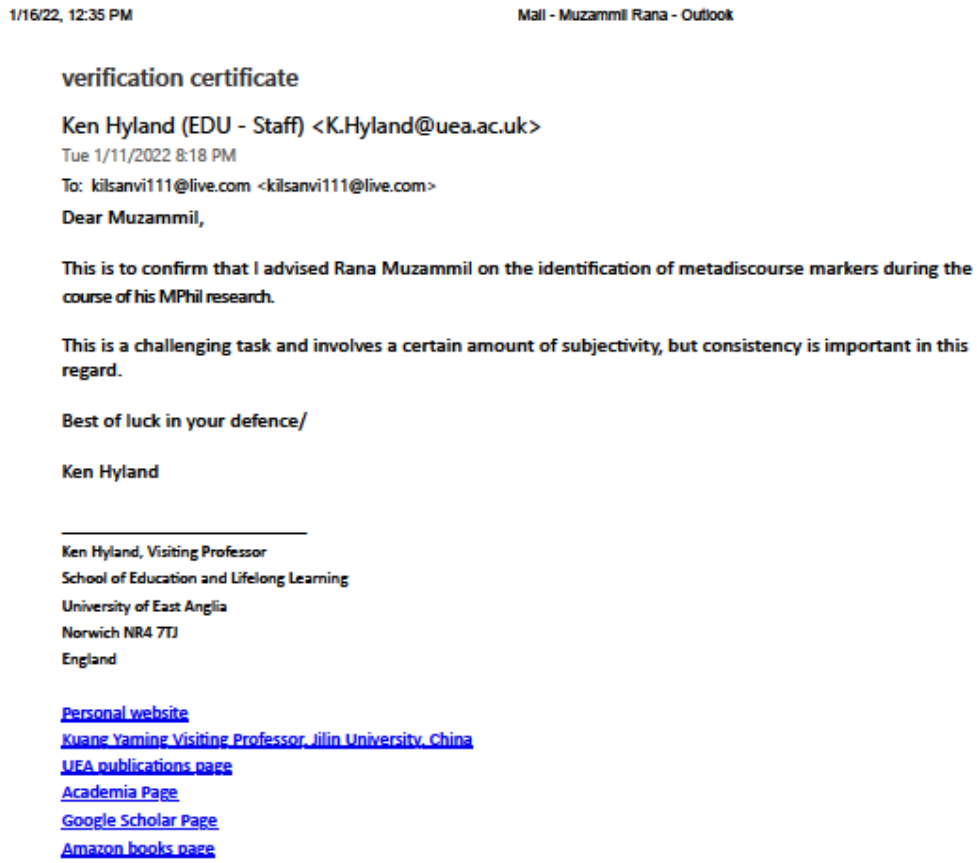
Appeals to Shared Knowledge in MHC		Appeals to Shared Knowledge in PHC		Appeals to Shared Knowledge in SIC	
of course	2.38	of course	2.78	of course	4.08
common	1.36	common	2.74	common	2.36
obviously	1.16	obviously	1.52	apparently	2.18
usual	0.74	normally	1	obviously	2.04
apparently	0.68	apparently	0.9	obvious	1.3
normally	0.54	typically	0.64	usual	1.02
obvious	0.4	obvious	0.6	traditional	0.72
typical	0.32	usual	0.54	typically	0.6
commonly	0.16	typical	0.42	normally	0.56
familiar	0.16	conventional	0.38	typical	0.54
traditional	0.12	traditional	0.3	familiar	0.36
typically	0.12	commonly	0.2	established	0.3
conventional	0.06	familiar	0.16	conventional	0.28
traditionally	0.04	established	0.14	prevalent	0.26
routinely	0.04	prevalent	0.12	traditionally	0.22
conventionally	0.02	routinely	0.04	commonly	0.16
established	0.02	traditionally	0.02	prevailing	0.12
as a rule	0	as a rule	0	as a rule	0.02
prevailing	0	conventionally	0	routinely	0.02
prevalent	0	prevailing	0	conventionally	0

Personal Asides

Personal Asides in MHC		Personal Asides in PHC		Personal Asides in SIC	
Parenthesis	27.5	Parenthesis	45.48	Parenthesis	31.82
Dashes	1.98	Dashes	1.14	Dashes	1.12

APPENDIX E: VERIFICATION CERTIFICATES FROM EXPERTS ABOUT THE SELECTION OF METADISCOURSE MARKERS

Verification certificate from Ken Hyland



1/16/22, 12:35 PM Mail - Muzammil Rana - Outlook

verification certificate

Ken Hyland (EDU - Staff) <K.Hyland@uea.ac.uk>
Tue 1/11/2022 8:18 PM
To: kilsanvi111@live.com <kilsanvi111@live.com>

Dear Muzammil,

This is to confirm that I advised Rana Muzammil on the identification of metadiscourse markers during the course of his MPhil research.

This is a challenging task and involves a certain amount of subjectivity, but consistency is important in this regard.

Best of luck in your defence/

Ken Hyland

Ken Hyland, Visiting Professor
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Verification certificate from Dr Moazzam Ali Malik

Certificate of Verification

Moazzam Ali Malik <moazzam.ali@uog.edu.pk>
Thu 1/13/2022 2:01 PM
To: kilsanvi111 <kilsanvi111@live.com>

To Whom it may Concern

I verify that Rana Muzammil has remained in contact with me at different stages of his research project. No doubt, the identification of Stance and Engagement markers from the corpus data is a challenging process as it may involve the subjective judgement of the researcher. So, quite often, Mr Muzammil discussed such challenges in our face-to-face meetings and telephonic conversations. He also shared the preliminary data of his analysis with me and asked for reviewing the files for more reliable identification of Stance and Engagement markers. It was an interesting experience to assist him in his analysis. He possesses good research acumen and I believe he must have finalized his research project in a commendable manner.

I wish him the best of luck for his thesis defense.

Dr Moazzam Ali Malik
Assistant Professor
Department of English
University of Gujrat