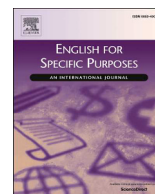


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# The rhetorical legacy of John Swales: Metadiscourse, style, and the construction of an EAP community

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the enduring influence of John Swales on applied linguistics, focusing on how his distinctive authorial style, particularly his use of metadiscourse, contributed to the persuasive power of his scholarship. While Swales is widely celebrated for his theoretical innovations in genre analysis, discourse community, and English for Academic Purposes, we argue that his rhetorical style was of major importance in promoting his ideas and gaining acceptance for his work. Through a diachronic examination of his single-authored journal articles, we trace the evolution of Swales's writing from the 1980s to the 2020s, identifying a growing reflexivity and engagement with readers. His increasing use of metadiscourse not only clarifies complex ideas but also constructs an interactive and collegial authorial persona—one that invites readers into a shared exploration of academic discourse. This stylistic evolution reflects both Swales's professional maturation and helped to model effective scholarly communication. By combining analytical precision with humility and accessibility, Swales demonstrated that influential academic writing is not only a vehicle for ideas but also a form of dialogue that inspires curiosity and participation. His legacy thus lies almost as much in how he wrote as in what he wrote, exemplifying the rhetorical foundations of an evolving EAP discourse community.

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## 1. Introduction

John Swales (1938–2025) was one of the most influential applied linguists of the last 50 years, creating work which has left a profound and lasting mark on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Over more than four decades, his scholarship established genre and community as central concepts in the analysis of academic and professional communication. His seminal works, most notably *Genre Analysis* (1990), *Research Genres* (2004), and *Other Floor Other Voices* (1998) advanced rigorous frameworks for understanding how texts operate within discourse communities. Perhaps most famously, his “Create a Research Space” (CARS) model provided teachers, researchers, and students with a powerful way to understand and participate in the discourses of academic communities. Through these contributions,

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Swales provided a systematic basis for linking linguistic description with pedagogical practice, thereby transforming the ways in which academic and professional English are studied and taught worldwide.

Swales' achievement, then, was to carve out a distinct space for ESP by insisting that language use is always related to social contexts and that practice should always be firmly grounded in theory. These ideas often struggled at first, swimming in a world where prevailing fashions focused on an idealized linguistic competence and psycholinguistic notions of acquisition and learning. The fact that the concepts of *genre*, *discourse analysis*, *textography*, *discourse community* and *consciousness raising* have now established themselves, and, in many cases, supplanted these earlier ideas, is testament to his defining impact on applied linguistics.

Swales also played a significant role in building a leading English language centre, supervising a dozen outstanding students, editing the *Journal of English for Specific Purposes (ESPJ)*, and spearheading the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), and the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP). Both these innovative corpora significantly strengthened the empirical foundations of ESP and EAP research and field's enduring commitment to bridge research and pedagogy. Unusually in applied linguistics, however, Swales has stepped off well-trodden academic paths to experiment with non-academic genres: textbooks and autobiography (e.g. Swales & Feak, 2004; Swales, 2009). Above all, however, Swales is known for his writing and for carving out a distinct space for ESP as a grounded and applicable approach to understanding and teaching specialised language.

But while his work has attracted both acclaim and criticism, less has been said about his writing style and the language he has employed to construct his ideas and reputation. We believe this is an important oversight as even the most significant insights have to be argued for, contextualised, and made accessible to readers in ways they will understand and accept. In EAP, where pedagogy, apprenticeship, and disciplinary enculturation are central concerns, writing style is not merely ornamental but constitutive of how knowledge is shared and scholarly identities modelled. Examining Swales's rhetorical practices therefore allows us to understand how particular ways of writing come to be perceived as authoritative, collegial, and pedagogically valuable. To explore this rhetorical dimension of Swales's writing, we examine his single authored papers over 40 years, focusing on metadiscourse, those parts of a text that help organize the discourse, guide the reader, and express the communicator's stance (Hyland, 2005). While not a concept fully embraced by Swales himself, the deployment of these resources in his own texts allow us to trace something of his developing style and influence on the field.

## 2. Method and analysis

### 2.1. The data for the study

To investigate the evolution of Swales's rhetorical style and research direction, we constructed three specialised corpora of his single authored published articles. It comprises 30 papers divided equally into three blocks of 15 years to roughly represent the 1980s–mid 1990s, mid 1990s through the 2000s, and 2010 to 2015, corresponding to critical junctures in his career. This trajectory is marked by a progression from his foundational years as a lecturer, through his work as a full professor, to his subsequent recognition as a pre-eminent figure in applied linguistics. This tripartite division therefore provides a practical framework for longitudinally analysing shifts in his authorial practices.

Each corpus of ten papers was assembled according to both year of publication and sole authorship, to reflect both the passage of time and to mitigate the confounding variables of collaborative writing, which impact authorial voice and stance (Hyland & Jiang, 2019). A list of the selected papers can be found in the Appendix. In compiling the corpus, we stripped out all non-authorial text, removing examples, reference lists, appendices, and block quotations in order to isolate Swales's original prose. The resulting three-part corpus comprises a total of 167,150 words. As indicated in Table 1, the mean length of the articles shows a marked increase from the 1980s onwards, a trend that aligns with the general growth in the length of articles over the period (Hyland & Jiang, 2019).

**Table 1**  
The Swales article corpus.

Words	1980–1994	1995–2009	2010–2024	Overall
Total	51,177	56,907	57,066	167,150
Per paper	5,117.7	5,690.7	5,706.6	16,715

### 2.2. The analytical lens: metadiscourse

The concept of metadiscourse has been a key feature of discourse analysis since the 1980s (e.g. Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore, 1989) but has exploded since the mid-2000s (Ådel, 2006; Hyland, 2005). It is now one of the most commonly employed methods for approaching specialist written texts, so that a Google search produces over 350,000 hits and Google Scholar returns some 34,500 documents with metadiscourse in the title.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mid-September, 2025.

Metadiscourse helps describe how we use language out of consideration for our readers or hearers based on our estimation of how best we can help them process and comprehend what we are saying. It conveys a writer's orientation to his or her material and his or her readers informed by “recipient design”, or how we intend a message to be understood by offering a running commentary on it. By drawing attention to the text in this way, it reveals a writer's awareness of readers and the extent of their need for elaboration, clarification and guidance. Here we follow Hyland's (2005) model which recognizes a distinction between interactive and interactional metadiscourse resources:

**Interactive metadiscourse** refers to the writer's management of the information flow to guide readers through a text, structuring arguments, marking the beginning and end of topics, and indicating the order of points to help readers follow text flow, interpret complex ideas, and understand the author's intended meaning.

**Interactional metadiscourse** concerns the writer's interventions to comment on material, signalling his or her presence, indicating attitudes and conveying the degree of certainty they have about statements, managing the writer-reader relationship and facilitating a more interactive and personalized communication.

Table 2 summarises the features of these metadiscourse types and their functions.

**Table 2**

A model of metadiscourse in academic texts (Hyland, 2005).

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive	Guide readers through the text	
Transitions	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	Finally/to conclude/my purpose is
Endophoric mrkrs	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above/see Fig/in section 2
Evidentials	Refer to source of information from other texts	According to X/(Y, 1990)/Z states
Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely/e.g./such as/in other words
Interactional	Involve readers in the argument	
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	Might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	Emphasise force or writer's certainty in proposition	In fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately/I agree/surprisingly
Engagement mrkrs	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Consider/note that/you can see
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I/we/my/our

This interactive/interactional distinction recognises the interpersonal character of metadiscourse and, because their successful deployment helps achieve immediate social and communicative objectives, they also reveals something of the writer. The use of metadiscourse suggests the degree of familiarity an author has with an audience and how the writer understands the community being addressed. This is important here as Swales' eminence relies not only on his insights into specialized language use but also his ability to “read an audience” and make his ideas accessible. How he deploys metadiscourse, then, is likely to be a significant factor in his influence on the field.

### 2.3. Analysis of features

To understand Swales use of metadiscourse we were guided by Hyland's (2005) inventory of some 400 items, undertaking a close manual reading of the entire corpus to identify all features which served metadiscourse functions. This helped to overcome the criticisms levelled at corpus approaches which simply prioritise surface features and make the formal expression rather than pragmatic function the object of analysis (Hyland, 2017; Sun & Jiang, 2024). The list was only ever intended to be a starting point, a first fix on high frequency items that commonly function as metadiscourse in a particular register rather than a comprehensive catalogue. Examining every item in context allowed us to adopt a more exhaustive and nuanced identification of metadiscourse than a simple list-based retrieval method. It enabled us to capture context-specific realisations not included in the inventory, such as *as we shall shortly see* in example (1) and *This question will be held over until the conclusion* (2).

- (1) *As we shall shortly see*, the resolution of what is seen as Adam Smith's puzzle offers certain rhetorical opportunities to writers of economics textbooks. (2020)
- (2) *This question will be held over until the conclusion.* (1995)

It also meant that we were able to examine all items in context to ensure they were performing metadiscourse functions. In other words, reading concordance lines is more important than recording frequency counts. To ensure analytical rigour, both authors independently coded each potential instance of metadiscourse. A high level of initial inter-rater agreement was achieved (Cohen's  $\kappa > 0.86$ ), and all remaining discrepancies were subsequently resolved through discussion. During this process, items functioning solely to convey propositional information, rather than to organise the discourse or engage the

reader, were excluded. Compare the non-metadiscursive (underlined>) and metadiscursive (bolded) use of the same marker *first* in (3) and (4).

- (3) In fact, I first became aware of this... when, on a college promotion committee...
- (4) Let us **first** consider how all the datable citations for Hyon (1996) in Google scholar are distributed over time...

Finally, we determined the statistical significance of frequency differences across the three sub-corpora, Log-Likelihood (*LL*) tests were conducted using Rayson's (2016) online calculator. Following convention, an *LL* value of 3.8 or greater was considered significant at a *p*-value of < 00.05. In addition to significance, we measured the effect size using the percentage difference statistic (%*DIFF*), which indicates the magnitude of divergence between two normalised frequencies (Gabrielatos, 2018).

### 3. Metadiscourse in Swales writing

#### 3.1. An overview

We identified 12,598 instances of metadiscourse in the corpora across time, averaging 419.9 cases per paper and 762.82 cases per 10,000 words. This normalised frequency is higher than that reported for a general corpus of applied linguistics research by Hyland and Jiang (2018), which suggests that Swales's writing is exceptionally rich in rhetorical investment. In addition, although unsurprisingly, in all three periods, he employs interactional metadiscourse significantly more than interactive features (*LL* = 449.29, *p* < 0.001). This marked preference for building a personal connection with the reader (interactional) over organising the text (interactive) is the source of his distinctively dialogic style, which Hyland (2008) characterised as "highly personal, modest and interactive" (p.144).

This helps explain the very strong sense of personal investment we get from Swales' writing. It is not the faceless, objective discourse we still see all too often in academic prose, but a style of writing infused with the subjectivity of a writer making decisions, weighing evidence and drawing conclusions.

- (5) there is **little compelling** evidence that these kinds of projection **actually** coincide with **most** writers' conscious thoughts and deliberative actions. **Certainly**, audience awareness figures **prominently** in love letters, family letters and in various other missives to a single recipient. (2019)
- (6) These explorations of the genre add up to a **useful** and **important** body of literature, but their **admirable** search for generality does not quite fit my purpose of working towards **some** provisional set of ancillary materials for engaging students with the rhetoric of economics textbooks. (2020)

We also found a significant increase in Swales's use of metadiscourse over his career. Figure 1 shows a rise from 744.1 per 10,000 words in the 1980s to 804.5 in the 2010s (*LL* = 12.72, %*DIFF* = 7.51, *p* < 0.001). This change suggests a rhetorical evolution as he gains professional experience and status.

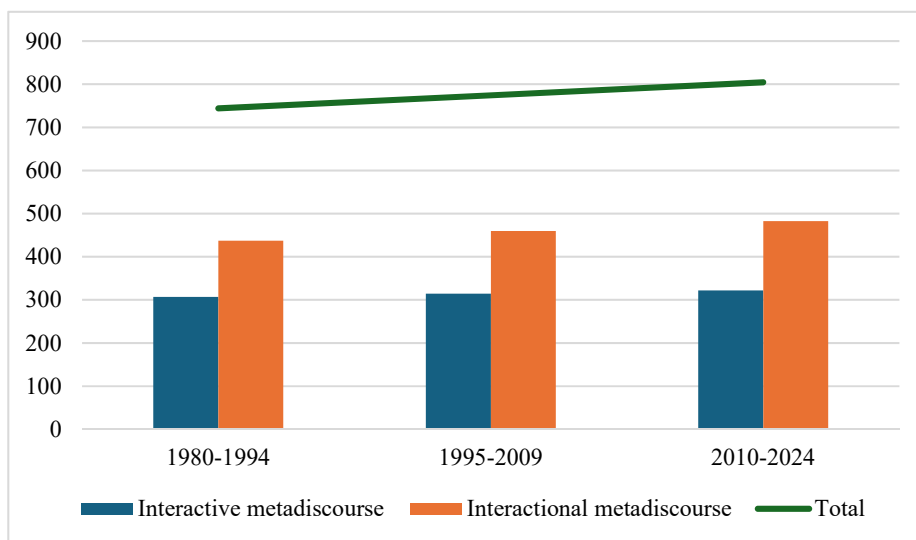


Figure 1. Distribution of metadiscourse in Swales' writing across time (per 10,000 words).

We see a sustained and statistically significant increase in interactional forms over the three decades ( $LL = 12.04$ , % $DIFF = 9.39$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with interactive resources measuring only a slight rise. This suggests that as Swales gained seniority, and perhaps confidence in his role and influence, he became increasingly aware of how he might influence his audience. Conveying a real human voice is integral to his style of argument, providing a sense that we are being engaged by an actual, accountable person with his own clear views and not simply an anonymous academic animator or AI bot. The personal conviction expressed in these claims both engages the reader in the argument and acts a strong persuasive force, investing his rhetoric with the personal and experiential, often informed by his own teaching practices. These give a strong flavour of his efforts to engage readers through personal reflection and shared experience.

- (7) In **my** own case, **I** used the person who knows **my** work the best to act as an ‘interlinear commentator’ on **my** drafts. In each case, in order to keep each account to about 10,000 words, **I** selected one facet of a writerly life for special attention. For Bill, the director of the Herbarium, **I** concentrated on his massive Flora Novo-Galiciana project... (1994)
- (8) **I** Originally wrote this current paper in the best way **I** could, revising it more than once to try and strengthen **my** arguments... (2019)

The period between 2010 and 2024 represents Swales at the zenith of his career, a stage where he has the assurance and reputation to express what Hyland (2008) terms “the freedom of established disciplinary celebrities” (p. 158). This freedom allows for a more overtly personal, reflective, and dialogic style, which is realised through a greater deployment of meta-discoursal resources.<sup>2</sup> The significant increase in metadiscourse in this final period is thus evidence of a senior scholar fully embracing an authorial persona as a “cautious and inquiring colleague” (Hyland, 2010, p. 174), confident in his standing to engage more directly and personally with his readers. We may have a taste of his rhetorical skill in the following extracts (9 & 10).

- (9) **In other words**, the better textbooks are at transmitting a canon of knowledge (**one good**), the worse they are at fostering critical reading (**another good**). (2020)
- (10) However, **I** am beginning to wonder whether these kinds of juxtapositions are more a predilection of English-language cultures rather than universals of **effective** argumentation. (**My occasional reading of academic Italian suggests that there is less of it there.**) (2019)

More importantly, this diachronic increase in interactional metadiscourse suggests a qualitative change in how Swales positions himself in relation to his readers. Rather than simply refining the organization of his texts, his later writing increasingly foregrounds a more interpersonal dimension of argumentation. This shift reflects a growing willingness to treat readers as interlocutors rather than passive recipients of knowledge, a stance that aligns closely with Swales’s long standing pedagogical commitment to apprenticeship and guided participation (Swales, 2009; Swales & Feak, 2012). The evolution observed here therefore does not simply signal stylistic elaboration, but a reorientation towards a more openly dialogic conception of academic communication.

As we have observed, this increase in interactional forms shows a greater commitment to positioning. Assuming that all decisions made in writing are motivated, Swales appears to be honing a personal stance and a unique authorial voice (Hyland, 2012, p. 35). Examples abound in the corpus, and these are representative.

- (11) Now, let **me** be **clear** about this. **I accept**, and **largely welcome**, discursal attention to such texts as part of a process of familiarizing new graduate students with the ESL/applied linguistics/ESP literature. (2019)
- (12) What is **surprising** is the **curious** conjunction of interests that have been brought to bear on the texts. (2020)

This reflects the greater rhetorical latitude generally afforded to senior figures in the discipline (e.g. Hyland, 2012; Swales, 2004), who perhaps feel less constrained by the pressures of conventional author-evacuated prose and more empowered to perform a distinctive and overtly dialogic identity.

These regular patterns of language choices, we suggest, help Swales, and in fact all writers, to convey coherent and relatively consistent identities. Almost everything we say or write says something about who we are and the kind of relationship we want to create with our interactants. In the following two sections, we look at the expression and role of interactive and interactional metadiscourse in greater detail.

### 3.2. Interactive metadiscourse in Swales writing

Although Swales did not significantly increase his overall use of interactive metadiscourse over the three periods, a more granular analysis reveals a notable evolution in Swales’s rhetorical practice. As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant increase in his use of both endophoric markers ( $LL = 17.37$ , % $DIFF = 47.96$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and code glosses ( $LL = 10.02$ , % $DIFF = 25.93$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that while Swales did not necessarily add more organisational signposts in general as his career progressed, he became considerably more attentive to accommodating his readers’ possible comprehension needs.

<sup>2</sup> Readers, and writers, might welcome Editors and reviewers extending this expression of a personal reflective style to papers they receive from less celebrated authors, especially when our authentic human voice is now more than ever what distinguishes us from AI generated texts.

**Table 3**  
Interactive metadiscourse items in Swales' writing across time.

Category	1980–1994			1995–2009			2010–2024		
	RAW	Normed	SD	RAW	Normed	SD	RAW	Normed	SD
Transitions	766	149.7	16.6	829	153.0	12.9	892	156.3	9.2
Frame markers	386	75.4	8.6	402	74.2	7.2	417	73.1	2.7
Endophoric markers	56	10.9	1.6	88	16.0	1.8	120	21.0	2.0
Evidentials	181	35.4	5.1	158	29.5	2.9	135	23.7	2.3
Code glosses	182	35.6	5.2	228	41.8	4.8	274	48.0	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1571</b>	<b>307.0</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>1704</b>	<b>314.5</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>1838</b>	<b>322.1</b>	<b>13.8</b>

Endophoric markers aid comprehension of detailed arguments by directing readers around the text, pointing them towards examples or other parts of the discourse, as here.

- (13) The dilemma raised in **the previous paragraph** is rarely brought out into the open in the major ESP/EAP textbooks and resource books. (2009)  
 (14) All of the **above findings** are largely what we might expect from a well-cited but non-controversial article in applied language studies. (2012)  
 (15) The **following three examples**, all from G2.02.1, illustrate the way this author engages with the literature. (2014)

By bringing salient material to the reader's notice, Swales not only facilitates their comprehension of the text flow, and so aids the recovery of his meanings, but also steers them to a preferred interpretation or reading of the discourse. Moving forward and back through the text, referring to earlier material or anticipating something yet to come, we see a confident author in control of his arguments.

While Swales' use of endophorics comprises a relatively small proportion of his use of interactive markers, code glosses figure more prominently in the corpus. As the term suggests, these devices supply additional information, by rephrasing, explaining or elaborating what has been said, to ensure the reader is able to recover the writer's intended meaning (Hyland, 2007). They are based on the writer's predictions about the reader's knowledge base and are introduced by phrases like *that is*, *this can be defined as*, *this is called*, *in other words*, *for example*, etc. or are marked off by parenthesis.

- (16) **In other words**, Hyon's frame is reformed again and again as a mechanism for structuring new introductory material (2012)  
 (17) The one exception appeared to be pre-nominal modifiers **such as** "purified liquid hydrogen"; however, "bare" participles occurring after the NP ("the pressure shown") were apparently included... (2004)  
 (18) Reporting verbs can be divided into those that are factive, **that is**, the writer indicates by such a choice that she or he believes that the reported proposition is correct... (2014)

Clearly, code glosses can assist in comprehension, constructing definitions and explanations by reformulating or restating propositional material. But while they reduce ambiguity and convey something of Swales' reader-sensitivity, they nevertheless contribute to the persuasiveness of a text. Reformulating, 'gisting', and exemplifying are all ways of saying something twice, increasing the chances that readers will get the idea. Although this may present two 'versions' of the same idea, alternative formulations rarely constitute identical meanings and go beyond paraphrase to present what the writer considers to be the key elements of a prior utterance.

- (19) 'the students' experience with textbooks may make it harder for them to deal with other text types they encounter later in a scientific career, or with their own writing at university, because they get no sense of how facts are established' (1992: 13). **In other words**, the better textbooks are at transmitting a canon of knowledge (one good), the worse they are at fostering critical reading (another good). (2020)

Here we see an explicitly interpretative reformulation which both restates and draws implications of the argument to ensure that readers do not miss the main point, moving from abstraction to real-world reference.

Despite Swales becoming increasingly more invested in ensuring his arguments were transparent through greater use of textual navigation and clarification, we found a concurrent and significant decrease in his use of evidentials ( $LL = 12.67$ ,  $\%DIFF = 49.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Evidentials typically function to support the legitimacy of claims by locating them within a recognized disciplinary literature. This reduction therefore reveals an important shift in how Swales constructs his arguments over time, perhaps reflecting both his growing disciplinary authority and an increasing expectation that readers will recognize the evidential bases of his claims. On one hand there is perhaps greater reliance on his own interpretive voice as his views become more established and widely recognized, with less need to explicitly align with the work of others. On the other hand, EAP was developing quickly as a community with a growing awareness of the corpus-based, community-informed genre analysis Swales was pioneering. The field was becoming mainstream and accepted, perhaps allowing him to adopt a certain confidence that readers might not need the same support as earlier.

In this sense, then, citation moves from a primary legitimising resource to a more selective means of contextualising discussion. This pattern is particularly striking given the growth of literature and the expansion of referencing in academic writing more generally. Hyland and Jiang (2019), for example, report a substantial increase in the length of reference lists over the previous 50 years, even when controlling for article length. Swales's work is therefore an outlier, although we

would hesitate to label this divergence as disengagement from the literature, but as a rhetorical practice itself. An expression of growing confidence in speaking from within the field he helped to shape.

Interactive metadiscourse markers also include transition signals which are mainly conjunctions used to mark additive, contrastive, and consequential relations. These have also remained more or less stable as Swales rather narrative style of exposition requires a relatively heavy use, and greater range, of such markers, particularly those signalling addition and contrast.

- (20) This **also** is an impressive volume: large, comprehensive, almost encyclopedic, and full of the kind of careful exposition that a useful handbook requires. We felt, **however**, that it focused more on technical than academic communications and, **while** rhetorical and functional in orientation, would differ radically from AWG in the way it engaged students in rhetorical tasks. (1995)

Finally, frame markers. These extend transitions by helping to organise the text and reduce the reader's processing effort by explicitly marking the structure of the argument. They announce the writer's goals in the text, often combined with self-mention (*I argue here, my purpose is, the paper proposes, I hope to persuade*) or indicate a shift in its direction (*right, OK, now, let us return to, with regard to*). In a study of research articles, however, Hyland and Zou (2020) found that 92% of frame markers comprised *sequencers*: used to internally order an argument (example 21) and *labellers*, which explicitly name the function of upcoming text (22). Swales also makes considerable use of these devices.

- (21) **Finally**, we turn to the question of textbook authors' motivations (1995)

- (22) **The next question to ask** is where it was cited, and more particularly which journals carry the most citations. (2012)

By communicating a clear purpose and direction, signposting lines of argument and holding the components of a text together, the writer makes explicit the rhetorical acts pushing the text forward. Swales, moreover, has a particular penchant for regularly highlighting and summarizing his argument, through devices such as *Overall, all in all, and as we have seen*.

- (23) **Overall, as I hope the extracts have communicated**, we have taken pains to ensure that AWG - for all its undoubted weaknesses - "looks like" a careful scholarly product. (1995)
- (24) **So, where do we stand?** (2016)
- (25) **All in all**, this subgroup of graduate papers demonstrates considerable variation in citational patterning, with rare but rhetorically marked use of the three alternate usages discussed in this section. (2019)

This regular reviewing of outcomes, and the attention Swales gives them with explicit labels, again illustrates Swales metadiscoursal concern for framing his discussion with readers in mind. An interesting aspect of this regular gisting of material is Swales' fondness for introductory prefaces like *it turns out that* and *as it happens* which cataphorically alert the reader to events and findings which do not necessarily follow from the preceding discourse or which might be considered unexpected.

- (26) **As it happens**, over the last 2 years or so, the ELI Testing Division has been developing a new graduate-only placement test. (1995)

- (27) **It turns out that** standalone singular proximal demonstratives are more likely to occur if they are followed by verbs that are syntactically and semantically simple. (2025)

These expressions, not only help readers to navigate the discussion, but do so by lending a strong interpersonal element to it. They inject an attitude of conviviality into the text as Swales shares a certain surprise with readers at the unfailingly interesting nature of academic writing and human behaviour. Once again, he is not just informing us of his findings and reflections, but inviting us to explore the wonders of academic discourse. We see once more that his rhetoric, as much as his ideas, is informed by a strong sense of social engagement.

We might begin to understand, if not resolve, the apparently contradictory trends in Swales use of interactive metadiscourse by considering his evolving academic identity. The increased use of endophorics and glosses aligns with what Hyland (2010, p. 174) describes as an "inquiring colleague": a writer demonstrating reader considerateness by carefully scaffolding the reader's journey through his prose. The sharp decrease in citations, however, signals a shift in reputational status with a voice which takes on greater authority, reducing the need to constantly borrow from external sources. This reflects the wider range of rhetorical options available to established academics within a discipline (Tardy, 2009), who increasingly move from reporting the field to shaping it.

### 3.3. Interactional metadiscourse in Swales writing

While changes in Swales' use of interactive metadiscourse reveals something of his preferred ways of setting out his arguments over time, his writing is perhaps best known for its interpersonal tenor. Interactional metadiscourse signals the level of personality a writer seeks to invest in a text and, as we noted earlier, this both increases significantly over the 40 years and exceeds his use of interactive forms (Figure 1). A closer examination reveals this trend is driven by a remarkable and statistically significant rise in Swales's use of self mention ( $LL = 19.51$ ,  $\%DIFF = 30.84$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and engagement markers ( $LL = 40.25$ ,  $\%DIFF = 30.90$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (see Table 4). This trend is central to understanding the evolution of his authorial identity, as it highlights a growing commitment to his personal and reader-oriented style over time.

**Table 4**

Distribution of interactional metadiscourse in Swales' writing across time.

Category	1980–1994			1995–2009			2010–2024		
	RAW	Normed	SD	RAW	Normed	SD	RAW	Normed	SD
Hedges	919	179.6	17.9	958	177.1	15.8	997	174.71	7.7
Boosters	431	84.2	7.1	459	84.8	5.9	487	85.34	6.7
Attitude markers	194	37.9	4.4	172	32.2	3.3	151	26.46	1.5
Self mentions	227	44.4	4.7	296	54.2	3.7	366	64.14	3.6
Engagement markers	466	91.1	8.6	609	111.4	6.9	752	131.78	5.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2237</b>	<b>437.1</b>	<b>23.7</b>	<b>2495</b>	<b>459.8</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>2753</b>	<b>482.42</b>	<b>25.3</b>

Swales profuse use of self-mention has been identified as the most “striking feature” of his discourse (Hyland, 2008, p.146). Hyland found both *I* and *my* occurring in the top ten keywords of a (different) corpus of Swales work, occurring 9.1 times per 1,000 words in Swales work compared with 5.2 per 1,000 words in a larger applied linguistics reference corpus. His sustained use of first person, and indeed, his increasing use of the feature demonstrates how he actually leant more heavily into an explicitly authorial presence over his career.

- (28) I therefore decided, in a preliminary survey of economics textbooks, to look for a manageable minor topic through which I could effect a comparative assessment of both covert and overt rhetorical action. In the end, I selected for comparative analysis textbook treatments of the ‘paradox of value’. (2020)
- (29) Even though I have to confess, in **my** heart of hearts, I felt that there was little actually wrong with that old earlier characterization. **My** rationale for retreat was a little forced, or so it now seems to **me**. (2009)

This conscious act of positioning distinguishes him from many writers who seek to neutrally convey disciplinary knowledge. Instead it project his personal role in interpreting what he discusses as a visible, thinking, individual within the text. The diachronic increase in his use of self-mention suggests that Swales seems increasingly confident in his willingness to foreground his personal investment in his work.

A significant aspect of this personal involvement in Swales writing is the extent he infuses his texts with commentary on the accuracy of claims and his stance towards them. His use of self-mention is a key aspect of this, and particularly its frequent co-occurrence with self-deprecatory remarks. As Hyland observes:

Swales does not duck the fact that research involves uncertainties and failures, perhaps encouraging novice researchers by admitting that even the field’s most illustrious figures have their setbacks. (Hyland, 2010)

While we did not expressly analyse this connection, Hyland’s concordance of the first person in Swales’ writing shows how far agency is explicitly associated with a deliberative, often self-critical attitude. He found the most frequent main verbs co-occurring with *I* were *think*, *believe*, *suspect*, *hope* and *tried*, all of which point to some degree of tentativeness and care in handling claims and readers. These are also abundant in our data.

- (30) I think we have now reached a stage when many people do not see very clearly where and how English has become a tyrant, but I think we need to do so. (1998)
- (31) This study has produced a fair amount of information, much of it I suspect new, about the occurrence of this in research articles written in English. (2005)

Overall, then, we see self-mention as a significant aspect of his writing which distinguishes his work from others.

Also emblematic of Swales personal involvement in his work is the extent he infuses his texts with commentary on the accuracy of claims and his stance towards them. Both hedges and boosters characterize his writing, with the former comprising by far the highest proportion of interactional metadiscourse features with twice as many occurrences as boosters. As Table 3 above indicates, both have been prominent in his writing since the beginning of his publishing career, with neither showing significant changes in frequency over the years. Swales considerable use of hedges helps to permeate his work with a sense of contingency and reader awareness. So, by marking statements as provisional in this way, Swales is able to both express his views and involve readers in their ratification, conveying respect for colleagues and their positions.

- (32) The kinds of citation analysis I have so far alluded to do not, **in my opinion**, make any direct claim on the professional interests of applied linguists. Colleagues **would**, **I imagine**, respond to the evaluative use of citations mentioned in the preceding paragraph in **roughly** the same way... (1986)
- (33) This structure **would** then fall into the category of general-specific discourses, such as we **typically** find in extended definitions (Swales, 2009), encyclopedia entries, and introductions to empirical research articles (e.g., Hill, Soppelsa, & West, 1982; Samraj, 2002). A second option **would** be to adopt a specific-general discursual arrangement... (2016)

As these examples suggest, demonstrating respect for any alternative views his readers might hold does not preclude a persuasive strategy which draws them into a dialogue where they might be led to his perspective.

Similarly, Swales considerable deployment of boosters helps to display stronger commitments to claims and attitudes. By underlining the strength of his view, they serve to reinforce his personal involvement and professional investment, inviting readers to share his understandings and subscribe to his take on matters.

- (34) **Certainly**, audience awareness figures prominently in love letters, family letters and in various other missives to a single recipient. (2019)  
 (35) Second, it is **undoubtedly true** that when students first learn to use references in their academic writing, they will be using integral forms... (2014)

Boosters, then, are the flip side of hedge as rather than mitigate claims they help present work with the writer's assurance and seek to shut down opposing voices. They are often used in Swales work to stress an implied sharedness of information and group membership, seeking connections with the audience by implying what they might see as reasonable and convincing.

- (36) **Of course**, intellectual and linguistic empires have so far been no more permanent than other kinds. (1998)  
 (37) This little incident is, **I am sure**, neither unexpected nor uncommon. (2011)

For Swales they seem to strengthen the reliability of a proposition and encourage its acceptance rather than challenge the views of readers.

The early establishment of a personal style with hedges and boosters, strengthened over the years with a meaningfully increased use of self-mention, is tempered somewhat by a significant decrease in the use of attitude markers ( $LL = 11.08$ ,  $\%DIFF = 43.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as seen in Table 4 above. Swales's writing, of course, is peppered with attitudinal lexis but our diachronic data suggests this is more characteristic of his earlier work. Attitude markers are features which convey affective, rather than epistemic, perspectives, conveying surprise, agreement, frustration, etc. and Swales is not shy in expressing affect when he wants to.

- (38) Another **interesting** piece of map-making is Coupland's (1989) introduction to *Styles of Discourse* wherein he **usefully** compares a discourse analysis... (1990)  
 (39) Since this body of literature is **uncomfortably** large, the discussion of it here is **extremely** selective. (1987)

The reduction in such explicit markers of attitude may indicate a shift towards a more subtle form of authority. Maturing into the status of a senior scholar, Swales perhaps feels less need to overtly signal the value of his points; his reputation, and increasingly willingness to get behind his interpretations with first person subjects, ensure his claims will be noticed.

In addition to the very clear and personal authorial stance Swales projects through his metadiscourse choices, we also found a 70% increase in his use of engagement features over the period. Unlike other interactional metadiscourse devices which convey how the author wishes to set out his or her stall, expressing a position to the material discussed, engagement markers convey a relationship to an audience. They are part of the apparatus for acknowledging the presence of an interested and intelligent reader.

Swales always treats his audience with respect and consideration while inviting them to go along with his always reasonable and apparently community sanctioned views.

- (40) **Consider** again the concept of the university clocks moving at different speeds that was discussed in the opening section. Or **reflect on** how DCs evolve rotas and rosters. (2016)  
 (41) So **imagine, if you will**, that **you** are submitting an article to a journal that has a distinctive and idiosyncratic referencing system. **Your** options are to study the rules in the style sheet or to use the quoted examples as **you** go about revising **your** bibliography. (2011)  
 (42) Finally, **we need** to recognize that the various sections of introductions provide well-motivated opportunities for undertaking language work... (1987)

Here we see Swales directly talking to readers as fellow researchers exploring the always fascinating mysteries of language and how academics use it, inviting them to *consider*, *reflect*, and *imagine*, and addressing them directly with second person and inclusive pronouns. Together these features work to encourage inclusion and strengthen the proximity between writer and community. At the same time, of course, they also urge compliance and compel agreement.

By increasingly including the reader as a participant in an unfolding exploration of academic writing, Swales performs an identity that is not just individual, but also communal and collegial. This rhetorical evolution demonstrates a writer who, with growing confidence and burgeoning reputation, more fully embraces a personal, dialogic style that simultaneously asserts his own unique voice.

#### 4. Some conclusions and final thoughts

The passing of John Swales is a significant loss to applied linguistics yet his influence endures through his transformative contributions to the field. His pioneering work on genre, research writing, and academic discourse continues to shape both scholarship and pedagogy, providing enduring frameworks for understanding and teaching specialized English. While we don't wish to weaken these achievements in any way, we have sought to argue that Swales's distinctive and accessible style was not simply incidental to his influence but was, indeed, instrumental to it. Through his extensive and growing use of metadiscourse we can see how he presented his ideas, taking personal responsibility for them while recognizing nuance and

subtlety in what he analysed. His convictions never overwhelmed his sense of humility, however, and he always treated his audience with consideration for their unfamiliarity with a subject or alternative views.

The explicitly individual and interactive character of his discourse, then, is a key part of the experience of reading Swales' work. As authors of academic works, we identify with Swales writing. We get a sense of a writer who is someone like us, attempting to come to terms with the complexities of academic language and the difficulties it might present for students and other writers. He colludes with us in exploring texts and practices, implying a common curiosity as we engage in what is essentially a *collective* endeavour. In so doing, he is not only presenting his interpretations of the workings of language, but also a view of how these understandings should best be presented. In doing so, he modelled a form of engaged communication which both draws on the resources of a young and growing scholarly field and his own predilection for a less rigidly anonymized style of argument. He is involved, in other words, in constructing the rhetorical basis of an EAP discourse community.

We have focused here on the use of metadiscourse in Swales' writing not only its centrality to effective argumentation but also its critical importance in establishing a strong connection with his readers. Essentially, metadiscourse is a self-reflective matter which refers to the evolving text or to the writer and imagined reader of that text. It therefore acts to connect, organise and interpret material with regard to the understandings and values of a particular discourse community. It underlines the fact that we monitor our production as we speak or write, often unconsciously, by making decisions about the effects we might be having on our listeners or readers. Can they follow? Will they agree? What opposing arguments might they offer?

A finished text is an outcome of this awareness of the reader and metadiscourse captures something of this constant reflection. The creation of an authorial persona is clearly both disciplinary and personal, where the influence of individual personality, confidence, experience, and ideological preference all enter the mix to influence our writing style. We have traced an evolution in Swales' writing which may signal some of these personal factors, with evidence of a greater willingness to guide readers around his texts, clarify potentially uncertain concepts or ideas, take personal responsibility for his claims, and engage more directly with readers. These are, we might note, indications of the increasing assurance of an academic growing in the confidence of his ideas and trusting in the mounting control of words.

And so to limitations. As shown in the Appendix, the distribution of topics in Swales's scholarship is consistent across the decades, with subtle shifts in emphasis. His research, of course, remains firmly anchored in the broad areas of ESP, genre theory, and the analysis of academic and scientific discourse, all of which provide a stable thematic foundation for our diachronic analysis, despite a subtle evolution in focus. Articles from the 1980s establish the foundations of his work, exploring topics such as materials development, citation, and the initial theorisation of genres and discourse communities. The second period (1995–2009) builds on this, introducing more specific analytical concepts like 'textography' and examining linguistic features in finer detail, while adopting a more critical perspective on the global role of English (e.g., 'Tyrannosaurus rex'). By the final period (2010–2024), Swales returns to some of his earlier conceptualisations with a more critical eye, reflecting upon, historicising, and projecting the future of concepts he pioneered. One potentially confounding influence of our analyses is the possible impact of Swales' research topics on his rhetorical choices, a variable which may not directly correlate with career progression.

Our analyses also ignore the substantial body of work which Swales produced as monographs, book chapters, conference proceedings and so on. We feel, however, that our focus on single-authored published articles justifies this omission, helping to ensure a greater consistency in voice. There is, however, a subtle change in his approach to this genre, particularly in the final period of 2010–2024, where he subtly modified the conventional research article format to represent more reflective, personal forms of discourse incorporating elements such as 'envoi' and 'coda'. At the same time, this strengthens our observation that these shifts in rhetorical practice are likely attributable to his evolving authorial maturity and professional status rather than to substantive changes in research focus.

Overall, in this paper we hope to have mapped something of Swales trajectory as a publishing academic and unpacked at least some aspects of what make his writing so persuasive. While the profound impact of his scholarship on the study of academic and professional English is indisputable. We have argued that the work of John Swales demonstrates that effective academic writing does not only promote interesting ideas and plausible interpretations of bits of reality but ropes us in, excites our curiosity, and captures our imaginations.

### **CRedit authorship contribution statement**

**Ken Hyland:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Feng (Kevin) Jiang:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

### **Data availability**

No data was used for the research described in the article.

### **Appendix: The corpora of Swales articles**

#### **1. 1980–1994**

Swales, J. (1980). ESP: The textbook problem. *The ESP Journal*, 1(1), 11–23.

Swales, J. (1983). Developing materials for writing scholarly introductions. *Case Studies in ELT*, 188–200.

- Swales, J. M. (1985). English language papers and authors' first language: Preliminary explorations. *Scientometrics*, 8, 91–101.
- Swales, J. (1986). Citation analysis and discourse analysis. *Applied Linguistics*, 7(1), 39–56.
- Swales, J. (1987). Communicative language teaching in ESP contexts. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 8, 48–57.
- Swales, J. (1987). Utilizing the literatures in teaching the research paper. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(1), 41–68.
- Swales, J. (1988). Discourse communities, genres and English as an international language. *World Englishes*, 7(2), 211–220.
- Swales, J. (1988). Language and scientific communication: The case of the reprint request. *Scientometrics*, 13(3–4), 93–101.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). Discourse analysis in professional contexts. *Annual Review Of Applied Linguistics*, 11, 103–114.
- Swales, J. (1993). The English language and its teachers: Thoughts past, present, and future. *ELT Journal*, 47(4), 283–291.

## 2. 1995–2009.

- Swales, J. M. (1995). The role of the textbook in EAP writing research. *English for Specific Purposes*, 14(1), 3–18.
- Swales, J. M. (1997). English as Tyrannosaurus rex. *World Englishes*, 16(3), 373–382.
- Swales, J. M. (1998). Language, science and scholarship. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 8, 1–18.
- Swales, J. M. (1998). Textography: Toward a contextualization of written academic discourse. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 31(1), 109–121.
- Swales, J. M. (2000). Languages for specific purposes. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 59–76.
- Swales, J. M. (2001). Metatalk in American academic talk: The cases of *point* and *thing*. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 29(1), 34–54.
- Swales, J. M. (2004). Then and now: A reconsideration of the first corpus of scientific English. *Iberica*, 8, 5–22.
- Swales, J. M. (2005). Attended and unattended “this” in academic writing: A long and unfinished story. *ESP Malaysia*, 11(1), 1–15.
- Swales, J. M. (2009). When there is no perfect text: Approaches to the EAP practitioner's dilemma. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 8(1), 5–13.
- Swales, J. M. (2009). Worlds of genre: metaphors of genre. *Genre in a changing world*, 8(1), 3–16.

## 3. 2010–2024.

- Swales, J. M. (2011). Reflections on the future of genre and L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 20(1), 83–85.
- Swales, J. M. (2012). A text and its commentaries: Toward a reception history of “Genre in three traditions” (Hyon, 1996). *Ibérica*, 24, 103–115.
- Swales, J. M. (2014). Variation in citational practice in a corpus of student biology papers: From parenthetical plonking to intertextual storytelling. *Written Communication*, 31(1), 118–141.
- Swales, J. M. (2016). Configuring image and context: Writing ‘about’ pictures. *English for Specific Purposes*, 41, 22–35.
- Swales, J. M. (2016). Reflections on the concept of discourse community. *Asp: la revue du GERAS*, 69, 7–19.
- Swales, J. M. (2017). Standardisation and its discontents. In *Publishing research in English as an additional language: Practices, pathways and potentials*, 239–253.
- Swales, J. M. (2019). The futures of EAP genre studies: A personal viewpoint. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 38, 75–82.
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