
Evidentiality in Opinion Articles on South African's Case Against Israel at the International Court of Justice: A Metadiscourse Approach

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Abstract: Many studies have been carried out on the employment of evidentiality as a linguistic resource that helps in adding credibility to the information presented by writers. However, while evidentiality has been explored as a metadiscourse device being employed in academic writings, little is known about its employment as a persuasive strategy in argumentative texts such as opinion articles. The aim of this study is to examine the employment of evidentiality by South African opinion article writers regarding Israel-Gaza War and South African's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice regarding the war. Ten opinion articles were selected from four South African online newspapers and Dehkordi and Allami's (2012) classification of evidentiality was used for the analysis. Findings reveal that in the texts analysed, South African opinion article writers employed evidentiality as metadiscourse marker in their texts, and that three of the five identified categories of evidentiality were employed while the other two categories were not employed. Also, specific direct and specific indirect evidentiality were more significantly used than the other categories of evidentiality. This indicates that South African opinion article writers value the employment of evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker to reference and attribute their claims in order to persuade their readers.

Keywords: evidentiality; metadiscourse device; persuasive strategy; opinion article; attainment of persuasion

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EDITORIAL DATES

Received: 24 June 2025

Revised: 02 September 2025

Accepted: 13 September 2025

Published: 22 October 2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v7i2.3052>

Introduction

Newspaper is believed to be one of the most popular written discourses (Sukma & Sujatna, 2014). It can be argued that the transition from paper to digital has greatly contributed to its popularity as many readers now have access to various newspapers through internet accessibility and subsequent subscription. Usually, most newspapers have dedicated opinion sections where features such as columns, cartoons, letters to the editor, editorials can be found. Editorials and opinion articles, also known as columns, are two kinds of newspaper writing where views and positions of writers on topics of societal concerns are expressed. The major difference between editorials and opinion pieces is that while editorials are written by writers or editorialists that are employees of a particular newspaper company and always present the views of the newspaper, opinion articles are written by expert writers, and their views are

personal and not that of the newspaper. The aim of an opinion article is to persuade the readers to reason and agree with the view of the writer. As a result, opinion articles are seen as a sub-genre of persuasive text (Van Dijk, 1988). Opinion article writers are then expected to possess the writing skills to organise arguments, persuade the readers from the position of authority by stating the sources of their claims and making their presence felt in their writings. One of the linguistic resources that opinion article writers employ to achieve this is the metadiscourse element (i.e., a linguistic feature that helps guide readers through a text), known as evidentiality or evidentials. In metadiscourse studies, it helps the readers to know the source of the writer's claims. To enhance accessibility for interdisciplinary readers, brief glosses are provided in parentheses when technical linguistic terms are introduced.

Metadiscourse as a linguistic field of enquiry "is used to investigate how texts are organised and produced in order to persuade and guide the readers through the texts" (Ojo, 2019, p.28). This is because it views writing and speaking as not only "the communication of ideas and presentation of ideational meaning," but also "as social acts which involve writers, readers, speakers and listeners to interact with each other to affect the ways ideas are presented and understood" (Amiryousefi & Rasekh, 2010, p. 159). Different linguistic devices known as metadiscourse markers are collected under two headings or categories by proponents of metadiscourse taxonomies: textual and interpersonal categories (Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore et al., 1993; Dafouz-Milne, 2008) and interactive and interactional categories (Hyland, 2005). One of these linguistic devices is evidentials (Hyland, 2005). In other taxonomies, it is referred to as *narrator* (Vande Kopple, 1985), *attributer* (Crismore et al., 1993) and *attributor* (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). As Dalbergenova et al. (2018) posit, evidentials show "the speaker's source of knowing the observed events, the degree of statement reliability, and the speaker's subjective confidence in the truthfulness of the statement" (p. 856). Through evidentials, the writer's stance is distinguished from the source of the information as they "distinguish *who* is responsible for a position and while this may contribute to a persuasive goal, it needs to be distinguished from the writer's *stance* towards the view" (Hyland, 2005, p. 51). It should be explained that while evidentials do not clearly function as ideological or political tools, they subtly function as such as they are employed to give credence to the writer's stance.

However, the employment of evidentials to achieve a persuasive goal as Hyland suggests has not been explored in opinion articles as it has been in academic writings. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the employment of evidentials as metadiscourse resources in South African opinion articles concerning the Israel-Gaza war and South African's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. It also aims to explore how South African opinion writers use evidentials to influence public perception on the Israel-Gaza conflict. This will help to know if South African opinion articles are reliable and authoritative in terms of claims presented.

South Africa's genocide case against Israel

There have been a series of wars and conflicts between Israel and Arab nations as well as Palestinian armed groups. The latest and most deadly is between Israel and Hamas. Hamas is a militant group that has been designated as a terrorist group by Israel, the US, the United Kingdom, Canada and the European Union. In 2006, it won the Palestinian elections against Fatah, a Palestinian political party and has been ruling Gaza since then, while Fatah has been ruling the West Bank. On 7 October 2023, Hamas fighters launched an attack from Gaza and entered Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages. They claimed their aim was to free Palestinian prisoners, stop Israeli aggression on al-Aqsa Mosque and to break the siege on Gaza. Israel responded by launching a military offensive in Gaza. As reported by the BBC quoting the Hamas-run health ministry, more than 46,700 people have been killed in Gaza since the Israeli military offensive started. Subsequently, South Africa brought a case of genocide against Israel before the International Court of Justice on 29 December 2023 regarding the conduct of Israel in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. South Africa believed and alleged that the humanitarian crisis and the mass killings of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amounted to genocide as they were violations of the 1948 genocide convention adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The South African government then requested that the court should rule to indicate provisional measures of protection and immediate suspension of Israel's military operation against Palestinians in Gaza.

South Africa's support for Palestinians dates back decades due to its similar experiences of occupation, colonisation and apartheid. The support is rooted in Nelson Mandela's Mandela 1997 (1997) famous quote, "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." South Africa's shared experience of apartheid with Palestine is not unconnected with its support for Palestinians. As reported by Bibas (2024), "In 1948, when the Palestinians were dispossessed of part of their land following the creation of the

State of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war, Black South Africans were victims the same year of a general policy of expulsion from their land..." As a result, armed struggle was subsequently organised in South Africa and Palestine in the 1960s and 1970s to fight their oppressors. While South Africa's struggle led to democratic elections that led to Nelson Mandela as the first elected Black South African president, Palestine's struggle has led to Israeli-Gaza wars and conflicts. The Palestinians see South Africa's diplomatic support by dragging Israel to ICJ as a stand against injustice and genocide. Also, the government of South Africa sees their action as a matter of principle. However, opinions about the action of the government are divided among South Africans as expressed in columns, opinion articles and editorials of South African newspapers, both in print and online media. This study examines how columnists and editorial writers employ evidentials as discursal resources to provide evidence to support their point of view.

What is metadiscourse?

The concept of metadiscourse was first coined in 1959 by Zelling Harris (Sukma and Sujatna 2014). According to Hyland (2000) cited in Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 157), metadiscourse is defined "as the linguistic resources that are used to organise a discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader." The linguistic devices that are organised as metadiscourse markers are employed by writers to organise their texts, engage the readers and also express their attitudes to the materials and the readers (Hyland & Tse, 2004). Also, through the efforts of metadiscourse researchers, the linguistic devices have been categorised in the different taxonomies proposed over the years.

Vande Kopple's taxonomy was the first to be introduced. He introduced textual and interpersonal categories as two main categories of metadiscourse that consist of seven metadiscourse markers. The textual category has three metadiscourse markers: text connectives, code glosses, and narrators; the interpersonal category has three metadiscourse markers: illocution markers; attitude markers; and commentaries. According to Hyland and Tse (2004) cited in Ojo (2019, p. 29), Vande Kopple submitted that textual metadiscourse "shows how we link and relate individual propositions so that they form a cohesive and coherent text and how individual elements of those propositions make sense in conjunction with other elements of the text." Also, interpersonal metadiscourse "can help us express our personalities and our reactions to the propositional content of our texts and characterise the interaction we would like to have with our readers about that content." However, the categorisation has been criticised for its vagueness and functional overlapping. There is difficulty in differentiating *narrators* and *attributors*, "particularly in academic writing where citation is used to perform a variety of rhetorical functions" (Hyland, 2005, p. 32). Subsequently, (Vande Kopple, 1997, 2002) has redefined its taxonomy. *Validity markers* have been re-labelled as *epistemology markers* which also subsume *narrators*. Through this, "their function of providing evidential support to statements" is highlighted (Hyland, 2005, p. 33). Notwithstanding the functional overlapping and vagueness of some of the categories, which has been subsequently corrected, Vande Kopple's categorisation has helped others to develop further taxonomies.

To improve on Vande Kopple's (1985) taxonomy, Crismore, et al. analysed the employment of metadiscourse markers in 40 persuasive essays written by US and Finnish students. While they retained the two main categories of textual and interpersonal functions introduced by Vande Kopple, they, however, re-organised and separated the sub-categories. According to Hyland (2005, p. 33), their functions are to "account for the textual role of metadiscourse, with textual markers referring to features which help organise the discourse and interpretive markers" in order to "help readers interpret and better understand the writer's meaning and writing strategies" (Crismore et al., 1993, p. 47). Although Crismore et al. attempted to make changes to their approach as a form of improvement, they have also been criticised for lacking reasonable justification (Hyland, 2005; Latawiec, 2012). The categorisation of illocution markers as having an intertextual function and not an interpersonal function as indicated by Vande Kopple (1985), among others, have been criticised. Ojo (2019, p.32) submits that "it is not clear why Crismore, et al. put *reminders* under textual markers and *announcements* under interpretive markers, which is a different category." He posits that both *reminders* and *announcements* have a similar function.

Also, Crismore, et al. agreed with Vande Kopple that *logical connectives* show the way different parts of the texts are connected, "they nevertheless identify them syntactically rather than functionally" (Hyland, 2005, p. 34). As a result, their assertion is that *coordinating conjunctions* such as *and* and *but* and *conjunctive adverbs*, such as *therefore* and *in addition* are metadiscourse markers but *subordinating conjunctions* such as *because* and *which* are not. They argued that subordinating conjunctions are meant for grammaticality and not for metadiscursal functions. However, Hyland argues that expressing an utterance is more than one way, "and every

realisation can be seen as the expression of a conscious writer choice” (p. 34). Hyland concludes that the same grammatical choices that are employed to “create well-formed sentences” can also “work metadiscoursally” (p. 34). It can then be concluded that while Crismore, et al. made attempt to improve on Vande Kopple’s taxonomy of metadiscourse, some problems remain (Hyland, 2005).

As a departure from previous taxonomies, Hyland (2005) taxonomy comprises two main categories of interactive and interactional metadiscourse. The taxonomy is based on Thompson and Thetela’s (1995) distinction between interactive and interactional resources. However, the taxonomy “takes a wider focus by including both stance and engagement features and by building on earlier models of metadiscourse” (Hyland, 2005, p. 49). The taxonomy is tagged “an interpersonal model of metadiscourse” and each of the two categories has five metadiscourse markers. The interactive category and its resources are employed to help and guide the readers through the text. Under this, the writer considers the readers by trying “to accommodate its probable knowledge, interests, rhetorical expectations and processing abilities” (Hyland, 2005, p. 49). In other words, the employment of the resources is tailored towards discourse organisation and meeting the needs of the readers. On the other hand, the interactional category and its resources are employed by the writer as means of engaging the readers to construct the text together. In the submission of Hyland (2005, p. 49), interactional category is “the writer’s expression of a textual voice, or community-recognised personality, and includes the ways he or she aligns him- or herself with readers.” Therefore, this category helps the writers to express their views and also involve the readers.

Dafouz-Milne continued with the framework of metadiscourse introduced by Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore et al. (1993) by organising her metadiscourse markers under two categories of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse. The first category has seven metadiscourse devices while the second category has five metadiscourse devices. They were employed to contrast texts written by British and Spanish columnists. Forty opinion columns from *The Times* (British) and *El Pais* (Spanish) were analysed to find the employment of metadiscourse markers. Dafouz-Milne posits that “metadiscourse categories are all interpersonal” (Ojo, 2019, p. 32). This shows that she agrees with Hyland’s (2005) position.

Evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker: A theoretical framework

MacIntyre (2020) examined the employment of evidentials in a corpus of research papers written in English by Japanese university students. He found out that the majority of the participants made use of the internet, especially Google, as their source of information. Also, the most employed evidential in the study was “according to” - this represented 47% of the evidentials employed by the participants. He concluded that since the use of the internet by writers to find sources to support their ideas is widespread, digital literacy skills were paramount.

In another study, Guo (2019) carried out a contrastive study of evidentials in 60 selected English and Chinese MA thesis abstracts from different fields of discipline. He found out that “the use of evidentials is in low frequency and lack [of] variety” (p.524). He also found out that the reporting and inferring evidentials were more employed than sensory and belief evidentials in the data. He concluded that in some respects, the employment of evidentials showed that there was similarity in the semantic meanings of evidentials between different languages. Also, Al-Harhi et al. (2022) investigated the frequency and contextual uses of evidentials, code glosses, hedges and boosters as metadiscoursal devices in research articles. They found out that the four metadiscoursal devices were employed more in linguistics and literature than in chemistry and medicine. In addition, it was found out that evidentials were most employed in literature. They attribute this to the fact that “the humanities seem to be more cautious and more concerned with documentation of multiple sources than natural science” (p. 194). The employment of evidentiality as a metadiscoursal device has been investigated mostly in research articles. However, little is known about its employment in opinion articles. The above review is a testament that the employment of evidentiality in opinion articles such as columns, letters to editors and editorials needs to be investigated.

Dehkordi and Allami (2012) came up with a model of classification for evidentials in academic texts. The model is based on the classifications of metadiscourse markers by Hyland and Tse (2004) and Swales (1990) as well as Berkenkotter and Hucken’s (1996) concept of intertextuality in academic writing. Dehkordi and Allami classified evidentiality into two broad categories identified as specific and non-specific (see Figure 1).

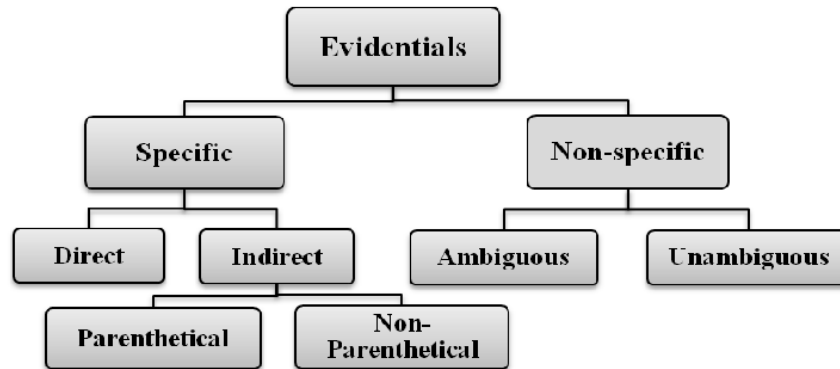


Figure 1. Dehkordi and Allami’s classification of evidentiality in academic texts

Specific category includes the devices that have the function of “providing a link between the author’s own statements and other authors’ statements, thus creating intertextuality” (Dehkordi & Allami, 2012, p. 1901). The specific category is also categorised into two: direct and indirect evidentiality. Direct evidentials are direct quotations from other sources, and they are inserted in quotation marks. On the other hand, indirect evidentials refer to “the paraphrases or summaries of other authors’ utterances” (p.1901). They are further categorised into two: parenthetical and non-parenthetical. Indirect evidentials that are parenthetical appear between parentheses and at the end of statements and they do not play any “explicit grammatical role in the sentence” (p.1901). The non-parenthetical indirect evidentials do “play an explicit grammatical role within a sentence and usually come at the beginning of the statements” (p.1901). The non-specific evidentials have two categories: ambiguous evidentials and non-ambiguous evidentials. The former refers to the evidentials that focus on the facts that have been established and not on the particular source nor the writer’s view or stance towards the evidentials. According to Dehkordi and Allami (2012), “metadiscourse in this class of EVs (Evidentials) is omitted, and unspecified sources replace citations” (p. 1901). Unambiguous evidentials on the other hand are ambiguous apparently as their details as well as their sources are not given within the text but at the end.

Methodology

The data for this study comprises ten opinion articles selected from 4 South African online newspapers: *Independent Online*, *Sowetan Live*, *Business Day* and *Mail & Guardian*. Apart from having articles relating to South Africa’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), they were selected based on their popularity and readership and not on the ideological stance or political alignment of the newspapers. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that article selection may still reflect implicit biases. Newspapers choose which pieces to publish and how prominently to feature them, and individual columnists bring their own perspectives. Although this study controlled for topic by focusing only on articles concerning South Africa’s ICJ case, it did not explicitly control for ideological leaning. Future studies should therefore examine how different political alignments of newspapers or writers influence the frequency and type of evidentials employed. Regardless of whether they are pro-Israel or pro-Palestine, evidentials are still going to be employed to support a writer’s stance. With the rise of digital media, the selected newspapers have experienced different readership trends. *Independent Online* has a substantial digital audience as it reported 714,000 online readers in 2022. *Sowetan live* also have a significant digital presence as it reported in 2020 that it attracted about 2.5 million unique browsers, showing a strong online readership. While both *Business Day* and *Mail & Guardian* have not reported significant increase in their readership, they still have substantive readership.

Three articles written by Reneva Fourie, one article written by Ricardo Maarman and one article written by Alvin BotesBotes 2024 were selected from *Independent Online*, one article written by Don Makatile Makatile 2024 and two articles written by Kenneth Mokgathle Mokgathle 2024 were selected from *Sowetan Live*, one article by Nicole Fritz(Fritz 2024) in the *Business Day* and one article by Nontobeko HlelaHlela 2024 in the *Mail & Guardian*. They were accordingly tagged as texts 1 to 10. The topics of the opinion articles that were explored were Israel-Gaza War and South African’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. The reason for this is that there is need to control the topic variable. “When the topics are not controlled, the type, frequency of occurrence and distribution of metadiscourse markers used in the texts may be affected” (Ojo, 2019, pp. 35–36). This study focused specifically on the employment of specific and non-specific categories of evidentiality as classified by Dehkordi and Allami (2012) in the data. All the subsequent subcategories were also explored in the analysis. The model was chosen because it presented types and subcategories of evidentials in detail. In Hyland (2005) for instance, *evidentials* is a resource

under *interactive* category, and its types or subcategories are not presented. To avoid subjectivity in identifying evidentials in the data, attributions, quotations and expressions that function as resources that trigger or introduce evidentials are explored. As no study, to our knowledge, has explored the use of evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker in South African opinion articles, this study helped in identifying the categories of evidentiality that were employed in the data.

Presentation of data

This section presents the data analysis of the five categories of evidentiality identified in the classification presented in the theoretical framework. The categories are *Specific Direct Evidentiality*, *Specific Indirect Parenthetical Evidentiality*, *Specific Indirect Non-parenthetical*, *Non-specific Ambiguous Evidentiality* and *Non-specific Ambiguous Evidentiality*.

Specific direct evidentiality

The evidentials under this category are regarded as specific quotations from other sources. Writers employ quotation marks to indicate this category. The following examples from the data are presented.

1. Text 3: A UNICEF statement this month states, “The life of a child in Gaza, in month 10 of this conflict (is) not a life. We cannot say it enough- there is no safe place, and everything is running out- food, water, fuel, medicine.”
2. Text 4: Netanyahu reiterated that any criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic: “The outrageous slanders that paint Israel as racist and genocidal are meant to delegitimise Israel, to demonise the Jewish state, and to demonise Jews everywhere.”
3. Text 5: It was Nelson Mandela who said, “To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”
4. Text 5: “What I reject strongly is this narrative, this obsession, as if the entire problem begins and ends with October 7,” Ibrahim said.
5. Text 6: Writing in *The New York Times* a few years ago, Thomas Friedman said: “If the volunteers for Israel programme had travel brochures, they might read, ‘come to Israel, meet the people, see the land and learn how to repair the engine of a tank or wash dishes for 1,000 soldiers’ ... They live in a regular barracks get all the food they can eat and all the Hebrew and Israeli culture they can soak up.”
6. Text 6: In his book *Soul Mandate*, published last year, property mogul Lew Geffen shouts from the roof tops about being Jewish and going to Israel. He writes that this was after “the Zionist federation in Johannesburg sent out recruitment messages for the young Jewish South African men to go to Israel.”
7. Text 7: George Orwell, author of the popular classic *Animal Farm*, once said, “All the war propaganda, all the screaming and lies, and hatred, comes invariably from people who are not fighting.”
8. Text 8: UCT has fallen into the trap of Hamas propaganda, portraying the group as a victim while consistently labeling Israel as the “bad guy.”
9. Text 9: As Aryeh Neier, a doyen of the international human rights movement wrote recently: “Hamas leaders knew when they planned the attack that Israel had the most right-wing government in its history, at immense cost to the civilian population of Gaza. Hamas’ operatives do not wear uniforms, and they have no visible military bases... Even if Israel’s bombers were intent on minimising harm to civilians, they would have had difficulty doing so in their effort to destroy Hamas.”
10. Text 10: Netanyahu was very clear about this when in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks he said: “It’s the battle of civilisation against barbarism. And we don’t win here; this scourge will pass.”

In the examples above, the quotation that serve as evidentials are attributed to individuals: Netanyahu (the Israeli Prime Minister) in example 2 and example 10, Nelson Mandela in example 3, Ibrahim (the Malaysian Prime Minister) in example 4, George Orwell in example 7 and Aryeh Neier in example 9; an organisation: UNICEF in example 1 and an institution: the University of Cape Town (UCT) in example 8. In example 5 and example 6, the evidentials are presented in two ways: they are attributed to the speakers and where they are sourced from. For instance, in example 5, the quotation is attributed to Thomas Friedman while it is sourced from *The New York Times*. Also, example 8 shows that the *Specific Direct Evidentiality* does not necessarily need to be “long.” What matters is for it to be attributed to a source. In addition, the quotations are introduced after colons and with or without reporting verbs such as *say, report, write, mention, reiterate, conclude*, etc.

Following the discussion of specific direct evidentiality, specific indirect parenthetical evidentiality refers to paraphrased statements in which the source of information is placed in brackets at the end of a sentence. Although this form contrasts with the direct evidentiality examples previously presented, no instances of specific indirect parenthetical evidentiality were identified in the data.

Specific indirect non-parenthetical evidentiality

Evidentials in this category are statements, messages or writings of other people that have been paraphrased or summarised by a writer. Here, the writer is re-packaging words or expressions of others, but quotation marks are not employed.

11. Text 1: This is primarily because two of his coalition partners, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and his Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, have indicated that they may reconsider their government participation if concessions are made to Hamas.
12. Text 2: For instance, in one day- February 2 – according to a report in the *New York Times*, the US carried out airstrikes on over 85 targets in Syria and Iraq.
13. Text 2: Besides massive media support, humanitarian aid and the imposition of sanctions on Russia and Belarus, the US Department of State reports that it has supplied Ukraine with over \$55.4 billion in military aid since the war began.
14. Text 3: The report found that there were 9,623 Palestinians incarcerated in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, 4,781 of whom were detained without trial... It highlights that some children are frequently separated from their families, sometimes for extended periods. Others have to cope with the detention of one or both parents or siblings, and even classmates.
15. Text 4: Rabbi Goldstein visited the US in March 2024 and addressed AIPAC, where he stated that SA has the potential to become one of the most steadfast allies of Israel; further, he extended an invitation to AIPAC to visit SA.
16. Text 5: According to UN agencies and the Gazan health ministry, the estimated 300,000 Palestinians who remain in the north of Gaza are the most vulnerable to famine.
17. Text 5: The UN has reportedly said that Gaza is facing imminent famine, and it is widely acknowledged that starvation is being used as a weapon of war.
18. Text 6: Food is weaponised in the basest of wars, as reports from the Sudan are suggesting.
19. Text 8: Instead, they rely heavily on sources like Al Jazeera, which has consistently portrayed Israel negatively.
20. Text 10: This was despite the UN and UNRWA stating that those claims were false and the fact that Israel had previously made baseless allegations against the UN refugee agency.

In example 12 and example 16 above, “according to...” is employed by the writer to indicate the source of the information but without quoting the information directly. In example 12, the report about the number of the airstrikes that has carried out by the US in Syria and Iraq is sourced from “*The New York Times*.” In example 16, the information about the estimated number of Palestinians that remain in the north of Gaza is sourced from “UN agencies and Gazan health ministry.” In the other examples, “reporting verbs” such as “indicated” (example 11), “reports” (example 13) “found” (example 14), “stated” (example 15), “said” (example 17) and “stating” (example 20) are employed by the opinion article writers to paraphrase statements and information from other sources.

Non-specific Ambiguous Evidentiality (claims presented without a clear or named source)

Under this category, the focus is not on the source of information but on the information or the claims being presented by the writer. As such, the claims are not linked to any source, and the evidentials are being referred to ambiguous. The following are examples from the data.

21. Text 1: It has been suggested that Netanyahu is placing the stability of his far-right coalition government above the freedom of the hostages.
22. Text 1: The brutality of the apartheid Israeli regime following October 7 has resulted in a death toll in Gaza that exceeds 40,000 plus more than 600 fatalities in the West Bank.
23. Text 3: Of the now close to 40,000 fatalities since October 7, it is estimated that at least 16,456 of the accounted for bodies are children.

24. Text 3: The estimated direct infrastructural destruction in Gaza is valued at approximately USD \$33 billion.
25. Text 7: Subsequent independent investigations have supported the IDF’s stance that a misfired rocket by PIJ, which was meant to hit Israel, hit the hospital instead.
26. Text 7: As for the claim that Israel is denying food, medicine, electricity and other basic necessities.
27. Text 9: There was the invective to which SA (South Africa) must now have become accustomed: that SA perpetrates a blood libel, that it is prompted by anti-Semitic leanings, that it is “the legal arm of Hamas” and that it seeks to obtain it “military advantage.”
28. Text 9: But there was also this time at least some level of striking details: the contention that as recently as May 11, SA hosted a Hamas delegation in Johannesburg to discuss their “coordinated campaign against Israel at the court and on the ground.”
29. Text 10: We were told that Al-Shifa hospital was being used by Hamas as its headquarters.
30. Text 10: We were told a ceasefire was in the works, that Israel has made a ‘generous’ proposal, and that Hamas was the holdout and should agree to the ceasefire.

In the examples above, claims, facts and figures are presented by the opinion writers as evidentials. However, their sources are not provided, and they are not linked to a particular person. They are therefore categorised as not being specific and being ambiguous. In example 21, the person or persons that suggests that the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu “is placing the stability of his far-right coalition government above the freedom of the hostages” is not stated, nor where the suggestion is stated. In example 22 and example 23, the sources of the estimated figures that serve as evidentials are not stated. Again, the sources of the claim in example 25, the invective in example 26, the striking details in example 27 and the figures presented in example 30 are not stated. Also, in example 28 and example 29, “we were told” is employed by the opinion article writer to present claims. However, the sources of the claims are not stated. Therefore, they are not specific and are ambiguous.

Building on the discussion of Non-Specific Ambiguous Evidentiality, Non-Specific Unambiguous Evidentiality refers to information whose source is not disclosed in the main text but instead appears in the references or endnotes. Unlike the previous category, the source is ultimately identifiable even though it is withheld from the body of the text; however, no examples of this form were identified in the data.

Discussion of data

The analysis of the data that constituted this study has further revealed that the employment of evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker is important in opinion articles. This is because facts, statements or submissions are presented by the writers for the purpose of supporting their conclusions and for persuasion to subsequently take place. In the submission of Dafouz-Milne (2008) cited in Ojo (2019, p. 2–43), “to succeed, writers need to create a credible textual persona or ethos and develop an appropriate attitude towards their readers and the claims they present.” This further lends credence to the fact that readers need evidence to believe the submissions and conclusions of opinion article writers.

The analysis of the evidentiality employed in the selected data for this study revealed that there were 73 instances of evidentials being employed.

Table 1. Evidentiality category and number and percentage of occurrence

Evidentiality Category	Number and Percentage of Occurrence
Specific Direct Evidentiality	32 (43.8%)
Specific Indirect Parenthetical Evidentiality	0 (0%)
Specific Indirect Non-Parenthetical Evidentiality	31(42.5%)
Non-Specific Ambiguous Evidentiality	10 (13.7%)
Non-Specific Unambiguous Evidentiality	0 (0%)

As shown in Table 1, out of those instances, 32 (43.8%) were *specific direct evidentiality*, 31 (42.5%) were *specific indirect non-parenthetical evidentiality*, 10 (13.7%) were *non-specific ambiguous evidentiality*, while both *specific indirect parenthetical* and *non-specific unambiguous evidentiality* were not employed. This indicates that both specific direct and indirect evidentiality were more employed in the data than the non-specific evidentiality. The implication is that the opinion article writers are aware that the statements being presented to support their arguments need to be attributed to convince and persuade the readers. In addition, evidentials are also employed as hedging devices. According to Ojo (2022, p. 57), “this lexical device (evidentials) can also be used to express total conviction for a claim, but its main function is to lessen the force of the commitment of a

writer to a claim.” As such, evidentials are employed by the writers in order not to be held liable for the evidence presented as facts to support their propositions.

Concerning the employment of *specific direct evidentiality*, the analysis revealed out of 32 occurrences, there were 24 (75%) instances of verbs being employed to introduce direct quotations, 2 (6.25%) instances of colon as a punctuation device being employed and 6 (18.75%) instances of no particular verb being employed.

Table 2. Frequency of occurrence of verbs in specific direct evidentiality

Verbs	Number and Percentage of Occurrence
Says/said	12 (50%)
Writes/wrote	3 (12.5%)
Concludes	1 (4.17%)
Reports	1 (4.17%)
Reiterated	1 (4.17%)
Labeling (it)	1 (4.17%)
Told	1 (4.17%)
Mentions	1 (4.17%)
Calling (it)	1 (4.17%)
Noting (that)	1 (4.17%)
Was (that)	1 (4.17%)
Total	24 (100%)

As shown in Table 2, “says/said” had the highest frequency of occurrence of the 24 verbs employed by opinion article writers to introduce quotations. While “writes/wrote” had 3 occurrences, other verbs employed had an occurrence each. The implication is that “say,” either being accompanied by a colon or “that” is favoured by opinion article writers to introduce direct quotations. Regarding the employment of *specific indirect parenthetical evidentiality*, the data analysis showed that the category was not employed by the opinion article writers in the data explored. This may not be unconnected with the fact that inserting a clause, phrase or words within parentheses for an explanation or amplification is common to academic texts and not opinion articles.

There were 31 occurrences of *specific indirect non-parenthetical evidentiality*. Verbs were employed as evidentiality to introduce the paraphrased statements 26 times (84%), “according to” was employed as evidentiality 3 times (10%) and there were 2 instances (6%) of the category of evidentiality without verbs or “according to” to signal the paraphrased statements. As shown in Table 3 below, the analysis of the verbs employed under this category indicated that many verbs were used in the data for the purpose. However, “says/said” was the most employed as it had the highest number of occurrences: 5 (19.23%).

Table 3. Frequency of occurrence of verbs in specific indirect non-parenthetical evidentiality

Verbs	Number and Percentage of Occurrence
Says/said	5 (19.23%)
Reports	2 (7.69%)
Stated/stating	2 (7.69%)
Confirms	1 (3.84%)
Indicated	1 (3.84%)
Reflected	1 (3.84%)
Comprehend	1 (3.84%)
Found	1 (3.84%)
Called	1 (3.84%)
Spoke	1 (3.84%)
Have (been)	1 (3.84%)
Issued (an order that)	1 (3.84%)
Suggesting (that)	1 (3.84%)
Is (that)	1 (3.84%)
Guarantees (that)	1 (3.84%)
Made	1 (3.84%)
Told (that)	1 (3.84%)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

Verbs	Number and Percentage of Occurrence
Provided (that)	1 (3.84%)
Shows	1 (3.84%)
Total	26 (100%)

The *non-specific unambiguous evidentiality* category was not employed in the data. Under this category, both the statements and their sources are not stated within a text but at the end of it. This is not obtainable in opinion articles but in academic texts. However, there were ten occurrences of *non-specific ambiguous evidentiality* in the data. These ambiguous claims were introduced by non-specific phrases and clauses. As shown in Table 4 below, there were four instances of phrasal and six instances of clausal non-specific ambiguous evidentiality.

Table 4. Occurrences of Phrasal and Clausal Non-Specific Ambiguous Evidentiality.

Phrasal Non-Specific Ambiguous Evidentiality	Clausal Non-Specific Ambiguous Evidentiality
1. The estimated direct infrastructural destruction in Gaza...	1. It has been suggested that...
2. Subsequent independent investigations...	2. It is estimated that...
3. As for the claim that...	3. There was the invective to which SA must now have become accustomed:
4. Some level of striking details...	4. We were told that...
	5. We were told that...
	6. The brutality of the apartheid Israeli regime following October 7 has resulted in a death toll in Gaza that...
Total 4 (40%)	Total 6 (60%)

This shows that a phrase or a clause can be used by opinion article writers to present evidentiality under this category. While not stating the sources of their subtle evidentials, the writers do not attribute the statements to themselves, and the readers know that the statements are not made by the writers. Thus, evidentials indicate information that are inferred or assumed. Therefore, in giving credence to their propositions, the writers are cautious by employing hedging expressions, and persuasive goals are subsequently achieved (Hyland, 2005). While this study did not select articles on the basis of ideology, it is important to recognise that the use of evidentials often interacts with political framing. By attributing claims to aid authoritative figures or institutions, writers may subtly reinforce broader ideological positions, such as pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli narratives. For example, citing humanitarian organisations may implicitly frame Israel as an aggressor, while referencing Western leaders may legitimise Israeli positions. In this way, evidentials not only strengthen arguments linguistically but may also function as rhetorical devices that align readers with particular political standpoints.

This ideological dimension underscores the persuasive power of evidentiality in contexts where opinion articles are deeply enmeshed with political discourse. The sparse employment of *non-specific evidentiality* is an indication that opinion article writers value referencing and attributing their claims in order to persuade the readers. The main aim of any opinion article writer is to persuade his or her readers to believe in and agree with their submissions. It is therefore important in persuasive texts for writers to employ evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker to appeal to their readers. Beyond its academic contribution, this study also has practical implications. For readers, recognising how evidentials are deployed can enhance media literacy by making them more aware of how authority and credibility are constructed in opinion writing. For journalists and editors, the findings highlight the need for transparent and responsible sourcing practices. By being deliberate in how evidentials are framed, media practitioners can strengthen the integrity of public debate and reduce the risk of uncritical reproduction of partisan narratives.

Conclusion and direction for future research

This paper has focused on the presence and employment of evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker in opinion texts written by South African opinion article writers. The study establishes that the writers made use of three categories of the five identified in the employed model. Of the three categories employed, *Specific Direct Evidentiality* and *Specific Indirect Non-parenthetical Evidentiality* are significantly more employed. This indicates that South African opinion writers, like any other opinion writers, are cautious of the claims being presented for them to be properly attributed. Owing to the two categories that were not employed because they are meant for academic texts, the model should be modified by removing them for the model to be

subsequently meant for opinion articles. The employment of evidentiality by the writers indicates that matters of truth, certainty, reliability, doubt, validity, circumstantial inference and evidence were looked at by the writers and should always be considered by opinion article writers in their quest to persuade and convince the readers. Regarding the findings, there is a significant difference in the use of verbal evidentiality and other evidentiality markers in the data. This may imply that opinion article writers find it easier to employ verbs rather than other expressions in attributing their claims and seemingly facts for the purpose of persuasion.

In addition, there is a significant difference in the employment of specific and non-specific evidentiality. Out of 73 instances of evidentiality, 63 (86.30%) were specific and 10 (13.7%) were non-specific. This is a testament to the fact that the hallmark of evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker is for the writers of opinion articles to be specific in referencing and attributing their claims with “detailed evidence.” Significantly, when specific evidentials are presented by the writers, it helps in persuading the readers to “accept” the conclusions of the writers. However, this is not always true as there are readers that cannot be persuaded to accept any other view due to their religious or ethnic affiliation, irrespective of the evidence presented by the writers to support their *stance*. Meanwhile, this study is without limitations. One limitation, the ideological stance and framing such as victimhood or aggression, is not considered. Another limitation concerns the size of the dataset. The analysis was restricted to ten opinion articles drawn from four South African newspapers, which necessarily constrains the generalisability of the findings. A larger corpus, preferably across a wider range of outlets and over a longer timeframe, would provide a more robust basis for comparison. Future research could also adopt longitudinal or cross-national designs, or triangulate textual analysis with interviews of journalists and editors, to capture the broader dynamics of evidentiality in media discourse. The reason for this stems from the fact that the newspapers and the opinion articles considered for this study were not selected on the basis of being *pro-Israel* or *pro-Palestine* or any ideological stance.

As such, the study evidentials employed in the data are not explored to ascertain whether or not they are being used to support a particular narrative. Again, more metadiscourse markers can be analysed in opinion articles. As shown in the metadiscourse models reviewed, there are different markers that are available for analysis; those markers would possibly provide more findings on the employment of metadiscourse in different persuasive texts. Also, apart from the fact that evidentiality can be analysed contrastively, its employment can also be explored cross-culturally for possible “cultural” differences. For instance, texts written by South African opinion article writers can be analysed cross-culturally with those written by Israeli writers on a similar topic for differences which may be cultural or linguistic. Finally, the study has not considered non-linguistic factors such as the gender of the writers, the level of their education and their years of experience. When such extra-textual factors are considered, there may be further differences identified. Thus, studies and cross-cultural studies that explore other metadiscourse markers and extra-textual factors may be further investigated.

Declarations

Interdisciplinary Scope: This study adopts an interdisciplinary scope by drawing insights from linguistics, discourse analysis, media studies, and political communication to investigate the use of evidentiality as a metadiscourse marker in South African opinion articles.

Author Contributions: Sole-authored.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Availability of Data: All relevant data are contained within the article. Additional materials may be made available upon reasonable request from the author.

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