AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

AUA Undergraduate Students' Writing Skills Development in the Freshman Year

By

Mariam Ghushchyan

Irena Galikyan, Adviser

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List of Abbreviations

E&C   English and Communications

AUA   American University of Armenia

LA   Linking adverbial

COCA   Corpus of Contemporary American English

Abstract

This study examines a corpus of writing samples produced by undergraduate students in the American University of Armenia (AUA). The corpus is composed of 30 entrance and 30 exit essays written in class for the Freshman Seminar course at the beginning and the end of the 2017-2018 academic year, respectively. The purpose of the study is to explore how the features of the students' written language change in one academic year by focusing particularly on the use of cohesive devices—linking adverbials (LAs) and attended/unattended demonstratives—and the occurrence of subject-verb agreement errors. The results show that the most commonly used linking adverbials in entrance essays were the additive and causal linking adverbials, while in exit essays the most frequent linking adverbials were the sequential and additive linking adverbials. Adversative linking adverbials were the least common linking adverbials used by the students both in entrance and exit essays. In addition, attended and unattended demonstratives appear to have similar frequencies in the two data points, though no errors were found in exit essays compared to several errors in the use of demonstratives detected in entrance essays. The study also focused on subject-verb agreement error occurrences, the frequency of which was found to be almost the same in the two data points. The study concludes with discussing the pedagogical implications of the findings and the directions for future research.

Keywords: corpus study, writing, grammar, cohesion, linking adverbials, demonstratives, subject-verb agreement

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Bachelor's program at the American University of Armenia offers degrees in four fields—BA in Business, English and Communications, Engineering, and Computational Sciences. All the four programs are taught in English only to ensure high levels of students' English language proficiency. Throughout the bachelor studies students are not explicitly introduced to grammar or other kinds of form-based learning, as the courses mainly focus on teaching content writing and introduction to academic writing types (synthesis essays, dialogue journals, argumentative papers). The rubrics of Freshman Seminar students' papers provide several criteria for a good paper, which are drafting (the stages of writing the paper, like choosing the topic, brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing), good content (fully covering the requirements of the assignment in the scope of the word limit, with proper sources), organization (coherent paragraphs and connected ideas), academic ethics (cited sources), and language and mechanics (accurate grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation). These criteria can be appropriate for having a well-grounded academic paper. However, there are some categories of mistakes that still remain unchanged through the academic studies, which can cause fossilization of errors (Crosthwaite, 2017). A solution to this problem can be a corpus study of students' writing samples to detect the most frequent errors and find ways to prevent their later fossilization. Having a clear picture of the most frequent mistakes and occurrences of certain elements in the essays will allow to provide ways to prevent the mistakes from happening and becoming a habit. Accordingly, the research aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the most common types of linking adverbials in AUA freshman students' entrance and exit essays written at the beginning and the end of an academic year?

RQ2: What are the most common errors in the use of demonstratives in AUA freshman students' entrance and exit essays?

RQ3: What are the most common subject-verb agreement errors in AUA freshman students' entrance and exit essays?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

In the academic environment, students are required to complete various writing assignments regardless of their field of study. They are expected to express their ideas, arguments, and reflections using different linguistic features, including grammatical accuracy, use of cohesive devices, stance markers, and many other necessary techniques that can strengthen students' abilities in argumentation in written communication. Therefore, strong writing skills can become a firm foundation for academic success. Some areas in writing that are vulnerable and directly refer to the quality of the text are grammar and cohesion. They need to be closely analyzed in order to identify certain patterns of errors in the students' writing samples.

Grammar is considered the most basic component of language. It is the area where students make errors most of all. In general, form-based errors (91%) are reported to be much more frequent than meaning-based errors (9%) in students' academic writing samples (Jung, 2013). As many studies were conducted in multilingual environments, and the non-native English speakers' writing samples were compared to the native speakers' papers, it was concluded that form-based errors (mainly verb-errors) were found to be more frequent in the papers of bilingual students than in the ones of monolingual students (Gridwold, 2017; Prihantoro, 2016; Rahman, 2013). As the grammatical errors are the most common, they are detected in the writings of even such students who study linguistics particularly. The top three grammatical errors that these students make are the disagreement between the pronoun and antecedent, wrong tense use, and subject-verb disagreement (Pescante-Malimas, 2017). Among these errors, the most common is the overgeneralization of tenses, that is, the interchangeable use of tenses (Nuruzzaman, Islam, & Shuchi, 2018; Phuket, 2015; Singh, Singh, Abd Razak, & Ravinthar, 2017). This error type is common among the non-native

writers as it belongs to the interlingual error category, which means it comes from the negative transfer from L1 (Kaweera, 2013). Fortunately, grammatical errors are believed to be "treatable" through the completion of one course only, as suggested by a study (Crosthwaite, 2017) showing a decrease in lexico-grammatical and morphosyntactic levels in the students' writing samples at the beginning and the end of the course. However, a study conducted in Australia had a different outcome, showing that through only one year of study the students improved their fluency in writing, though no change was noticed in the accuracy and lexical complexity of the students' writing samples (Knoch, Rouhshad, & Storch, 2014). Overall, to decrease the number of errors and develop academic writing skills, it is suggested to synthesize the in-class and online materials in order to practice the target language with the students, or, in other words, give the students opportunity to address the grammatical and other form-related questions during the class without relying only on online sources (Crosthwaite, 2016). In reality, as Ellis (1994) claims the writing skills development in its essence is not valued and emphasized in different academic courses as much as it is valued in the courses particularly focused on writing (as cited in Al-Jamal, 2017). This supposes that grammar and other form-based errors are not addressed in multiple courses, which eventually leads to the occurrence of the above-mentioned errors.

The second problematic area of academic writing for students is cohesion. This area is dependent on the context and may require thorough qualitative examination. However, difficulties with text cohesion can be detected through quantitative analysis by measuring the frequency of the use of cohesive devices. It has been found that non-native speakers overuse linking adverbials (Bolton, Nelson & Hung, 2003; Günes, 2017). The reason why non-native speakers overuse linking adverbials might be because they try to "achieve surface logicality and to disguise their poor writing" (Lei, 2012, p. 268). This "style" of writing might often sound artificial and not deliver the message of the text as effectively as it would if it was

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written in L1 because instead of having a coherent text with argumentations the overuse of linking adverbials might mislead the reader. Aside from the overuse of linking adverbials, students are found to use a certain type of linking ties more than others. Compared to 3rd-year students writing samples, 1st-year students' writing samples were found to rely on more lexical cohesive ties, while the 3rd-year students used a much wider range of different cohesive devices (Rahman, 2013). In other words, 1st-year students were using more repetitions, while 3rd-year students used personal pronouns, demonstratives, and linking adverbials to make their writing more interesting and varied. Thus, the exposure to different academic texts and closer analysis of L2, can improve the cohesion and, moreover, the coherence of students' texts. Before moving any further into the use of cohesive devices, it is important to note the difference between the cohesion and coherence of the text. Cohesion does not necessarily work as a cause of coherence; however, coherence can likely cause cohesion in the text (Khalil, 1989). In other words, by just using linking adverbials one cannot necessarily have a coherent text.

When it comes to the type of cohesive devices used in academic discourse, both novice non-native and expert native speakers use interpersonal metadiscourse markers more than textual metadiscourse markers (Yüksel & Kavanoz, 2018). The textual metadiscourse expresses the semantic and structural relationships of the ideas and consists of logical markers (additive and adversative linking adverbials like *moreover, however*), sequential transitions (*first, second, on the one hand*), illocutionary markers (I propose, I hope), etc., while the interpersonal metadiscourse helps to withhold the commitment on certain ideas, which are implemented through hedges (may, might), certainty marker (certainly), attributors (X claims), attitude markers (have to, needs to be, unfortunately), commentaries (rhetorical questions, addressing to the reader, etc.) (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). The dominance of the interpersonal metadiscourse use is supposed to be a good indicator as this category is a

widely-known component of academic writing according to Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen (1993) (as cited in Ramoroka, 2017). As the current study focuses only on the textual metadiscourse, it is important to have a clear taxonomy of linking adverbial use. Thus, a taxonomy compiled by Liu (2008) can come to help by identifying the nature of each linking adverbial. Accordingly, the quantitative analysis can become easier by categorizing the linking adverbials into the following groups: additive, adversative, causal/resultative, and sequential (Liu, 2008). Each type of these linking adverbials appears to have a certain pattern of use in students' academic writing at different stages of the writing proficiency development. In non-native first year students' writing samples sequential linking adverbials seem to be quite common and even overused (Ha, 2016). On the other hand, adversative linking adverbials are considered to be used more in advanced writers' essays (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). Other than preferring certain categories of linking adverbials, some specific linking adverbials are highly preferred by non-native speakers in their academic writings. One of them is the additive LA *for example* which is even overused by lower proficiency level students (Hussein, 2014). Among causal linking adverbials, *thus* and *therefore* seem to be the most frequently used linking adverbials, while *so* and *hence* are less common in academic writing (Phoocharoensil, 2017).

In addition to the abovementioned linking adverbials, another component of a cohesive text is the use of demonstratives (this, that, these, and those) (Banerjee, Franceschina, & Smith, 2007; Dontcheva-Navratilova, Jančaříková, Miššíková, & Povolná, 2017; Rustipa, 2015). Even though demonstratives are categorized as cohesive ties, frequently occurring errors in the demonstrative pronoun use (e.g., that + plural noun) can be categorized as a grammatical error.

In general, the demonstratives are divided into 2 categories: attended and unattended (Rustipa, 2015). A general concern about these two categories is that attended demonstratives

(writing the antecedent with the demonstrative pronoun) are believed to be helpful in avoiding ambiguity, while unattended demonstratives might be confusing for finding the correct referent (Rustipa, 2015). A certain pattern seems to be noticed in the use of demonstratives, as L2 writers gradually replace the demonstratives with lexical ties as their writing proficiency develops (Banerjee, Franceschina, & Smith, 2007). This claim contradicts Rahman's (2013) findings presented above, suggesting that 1st-year students use more lexical cohesive ties, while 3rd-year students use more personal pronouns, demonstratives, and linking adverbials to make their writing more interesting and varied.

It is suggested that demonstratives *this* and *these* are mainly used as determiners in the texts, that is, they are attended demonstratives, while *that* and *those* are more often used as pronominally or, in other words, as unattended demonstratives by standing independently in the sentence (Dontcheva-Navratilova, Jančaříková, Miššíková, & Povolná, 2017). The comparison of the use of demonstratives indicates that the distribution of these two types of demonstratives stays the same and their use does not experience a significant change across different levels (Romer & Wuff, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The research focused on the writing samples produced by AUA students for the Freshman Seminar course, offered in the 2017-2018 academic year. The corpus consisted of 30 entrance essays produced by the students at the beginning of the Fall 2017 semester and 30 exit essays produced by the same students at the end of the Spring 2018 semester. The language of instruction for Freshman Seminar course is English. The study focused on the frequency and variety of linking adverbials, the use of attended and unattended demonstratives, as well as the occurrence of subject-verb agreement errors in the students' essays.

The essays were written in class with no initial drafting and no information about the topic of the essays. The entrance essay required students to answer the following question: "If you could change one thing in your community what would it be and why?" while the exit essay required the students to present their steps in the following situation: "Imagine you are now a successful professional and want to give back to your community. You decide to contribute your time and funds to a non-profit organization. What field do you contribute to? What area in Armenia do you think needs the most development and support? Support your answer with details and examples." The two essay topics are similar in nature and both assignments are designed to be completed in 20 minutes. The average length of the entrance essays is 198 tokens, while the average word count for the exit essays is 203 tokens. All the essays were handwritten, however, for the purposes of this study, they were later typed on a computer.

3.1 Data Collection

The writing samples were obtained through random sampling of 30 essays from the entrance essay bank and corresponding exit essays from the exit essay bank. As the course is

offered for all the programs offered at AUA (BA in Business, English and Communications, Engineering, and Computational Sciences), the essay banks consisted of papers written by the students from all four programs. To maintain total confidentiality, author-identifying information was removed prior to being received by the researcher. The only available information about the students was their gender (15 male and 15 female students).

The delimitation of the study is that the writing samples were taken only from the freshman students from AUA, excluding the essays of the students from other Armenian universities. We made this choice as the focus of the study was to find out how the students' writing skills can change in an English language instructed class. As in other Armenian universities the language of instruction in writing courses is Armenian, the results received from those essays might differ because of the language instruction and differences in teaching methodologies.

3.2 Data Analysis

The corpus analysis was comprised of two stages of examination: qualitative and quantitative analysis of the writing samples to identify the frequency of the use of linking adverbials and demonstratives as well as occurrences of subject-verb agreement errors. The combination of these two different approaches is important as qualitative analysis can show all the individual differences and errors and occurrences in their exact context, while the quantitative approach can give a general picture of the frequency of certain types of error and occurrences (Lastres-Lopez & Manalastas, 2018).

The research in general focused on two aspects—grammar (subject-verb agreement error occurrences and the use of attended and unattended demonstratives) and cohesion (the use of additive, adversative, casual, and sequential linking adverbials). All the errors and occurrences were coded. Qualitative analysis focused on manual checking of essays in order to identify the occurrences of linking adverbials and put them into categories. The qualitative

analysis also included the detection of subject-verb agreement errors and demonstrative use along with errors.

Quantitative analysis followed this phase. In this stage, the study focused on the occurrences of cohesive devices by using AntConc software which showed the frequency of a given linking adverbial in the context. This step of the study strengthened the qualitative analysis and helped to double-check the results achieved in the previous phase.

In case of linking adverbial use, the only focus of the quantitative research was to identify the frequency of the use of additive, adversative, casual, and sequential linking adverbials and the change in their use between the two data points, while for subject-verb agreement the only focus was on error occurrences. On the other hand, the use of attended and unattended demonstratives was examined both for their frequency and error occurrences.

For linking adverbials, in this study we employed Liu's (2008) taxonomy of linking adverbials (Appendix) designed for a corpus study and as explicated by Lei (2012). This taxonomy is validated by various researchers, like Lei (2012) and Gao (2016), who have used it in their studies. The categories are presented below:

1. **Additive:** emphatic, appositional/reformulation, similarity comparative (e.g. above all, besides, alternatively, similarly);

2. **Adversative:** proper adversative/concessive, contrastive, correction, dismissal (e.g. nonetheless, in comparison, after all, rather);

3. **Causal/Resultative:** general causal, conditional causal (e.g. accordingly, hence);

4. **Sequential:** Enumerative/listing, simultaneous, summative, transitional to another topic, etc. (e.g. first of all, at the same   time, in short).

In order to detect whether a certain LA is common in academic or spoken context, we applied the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) which is a word corpus of

American English developed by Mark Davies. Its aim is to provide the researchers with the frequency of the use of words and expressions in spoken and written English in different disciplines. The website indicates which word or expression is more commonly used in different contexts (Davies, 1990).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results and Discussions

The main focus of the research was the examination of the possible development of the students' writing skills in one academic year in the area of linking adverbial use, the use of demonstratives, and the occurrences of subject-verb agreement errors. The results gained from the data analysis did not particularly focus on detecting the misused or underused linking adverbials and demonstratives; its main aim was to identify the frequency of the LAs and demonstratives used by the students and present the increase and decrease of their use in an academic year.

4.1 Frequency and Usage of Linking Adverbials

The results of qualitative and quantitative analysis indicated that the essays had a total of 213 linking adverbials, 102 and 111 linking adverbials occurring in entrance and exit essays respectively. Figure 1 presents the comparison of the use of LAs in entrance and exit essays.
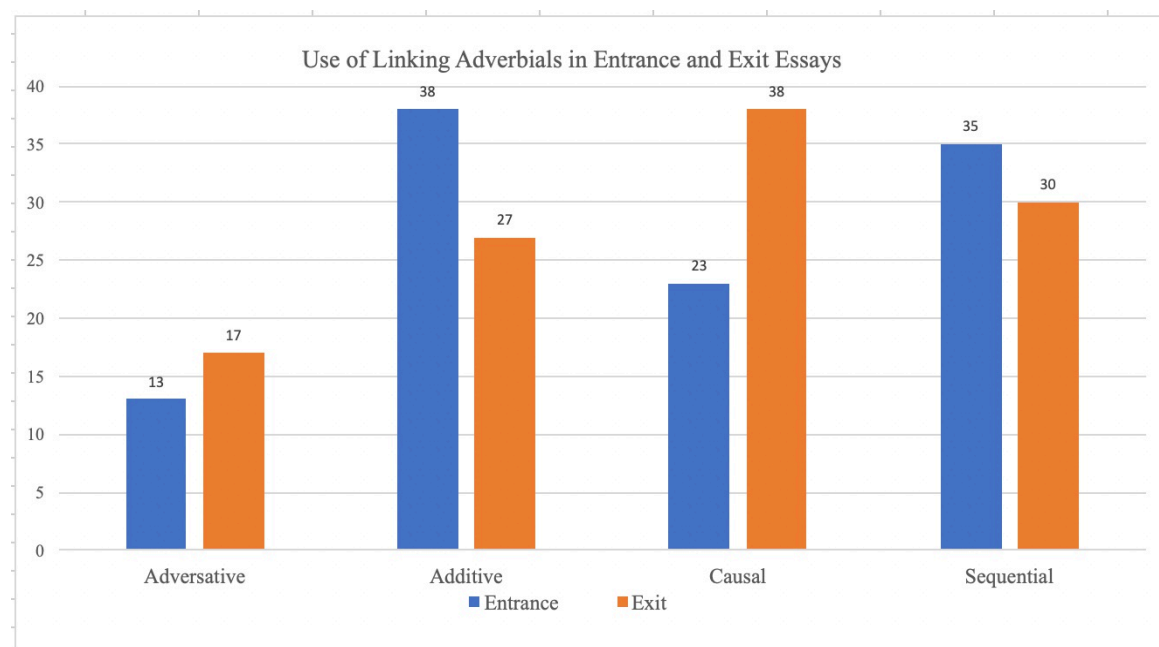

Figure 1: The frequency of adversative, additive, causal, and sequential linking adverbials in entrance and exit essays.

Note. The numbers on the top of each column indicate the total number of LAs belonging to that particular category.

As Figure 1 shows, the LAs that have been almost equally used with high frequency both in entrance and exit essays are sequential LAs (35 and 30 LAs in entrance and exit essays respectively). As for the LAs with the biggest change in frequency, the causal adverbials seem to have increased almost twice in use during one academic year reaching to 38 uses from 23. On the other hand, additive LAs have decreased in use, while the adversative LAs have kept being the least preferable connectors of the Freshman students through the year keeping the consistency of being used only 13 and 17 times in entrance and exit essays respectively.

Table 1

The total number of LA occurrences in entrance and exit essays (N=30).

Linking adverbial	Entrance essay	Proportion *(Percentage of the share of LA in comparison with the overall word count)*	Exit	Proportion *(Percentage of the share of LA in comparison with the overall word count)*
Adversative				
However	5	0.8	8	0.15
Actually	2	0.3	5	0.09
Yet	0	0	1	0.04
Though(although)	4	0.7	3	0.05
Despite	2	0.3	0	0
Additive				
Moreover	3	0.5	5	0.09
Not only, ...but	2	0.3	7	0.13
And also	5	0.8	2	0.04
Of course	4	0.7	2	0.04
In addition	0	0	2	0.04
For example	12	0.20	3	0.05
For instance	4	0.7	1	0.02
As well	3	0.5	5	0.09
What is more	2	0.3	0	0
What I mean is	2	0.3	0	0

Causal				
So	17	0.28	14	0.26
Therefore	0	0	12	0.22
Hence	2	0.3	3	0.05
Thus	2	0.3	8	0.15
If, ...then	2	0.3	0	0
Sequential				
First of all	7	0.12	6	0.1
First	2	0.3	5	0.09
Firstly	1	0.02	2	0.04
Second	0	0	3	0.05
Secondly	6	0.10	5	0.09
To conclude	2	0.3	3	0.05
Finally	0	0	2	0.04
Then	0	0	2	0.04
Last but not least	2	0.3	0	0
To sum up	4	0.7	1	0.02
In conclusion	4	0.7	1	0.02

4.2 Causal Linking Adverbials

The study shows that there are several LAs that are preferred by most of the students. The linking adverbial used the most and in almost the same frequency both in entrance and exit essays is *so*. It was used 17 and 14 times in entrance and exit essays respectively. The analysis of the use of *so* shows that this LA is mainly used by the students to state their concluding points in the essays after they provide several arguments taking into consideration its nature as a causal linking adverbial. It is important to note that this linking adverbial can function as different parts of speech, thus the occurrences of *so* not functioning as conjunctions were excluded beforehand through manual checking. Some excerpts from the essays with the use of LA *so* are presented below:

1) *__So__ I'd like the people in my community to understand this, and to live happy, not judgementary lives.* (Entrance essay)

2) *Nowadays it is a common mistake not to think about surrounding environment, **so*** *it would be much better to think about changing our transportation system.* (Entrance essay)

3) ***So***, *this little step, this little change in our society is going to make so much people happier the cities will be more knitty, and the life will be easier.* (Entrance essay)

4) ***So***, *organizing seminars concerning gender equality will give me the chance to give back to the community.* (Exit essay)

5) ***So*** *the non-profit organizations may look at this field.* (Exit essay)

As mentioned earlier, causal LAs appear to be the type of adverbials that had the highest increase in use. However, Table 1 indicates that even though exit essays stand out with noticeably more frequent use of causal adverbials, in both corpora there is an equal variety of causal linking adverbials. The new causal LA incorporated and used quite often in the exit essays with no occurrence in the entrance essays is *therefore* (12 occurrences in exit essays). Another change that happened in the use of causal adverbials is the linking adverbial *thus,* which has increased in use by having 8 occurrences as opposed to only 2 occurrences in entrance essays. On the other hand, the linking adverbials *hence* and *If, …then* haven't had a significant change in use. Figure 2 gives the general picture of the most frequently used causal adverbials.
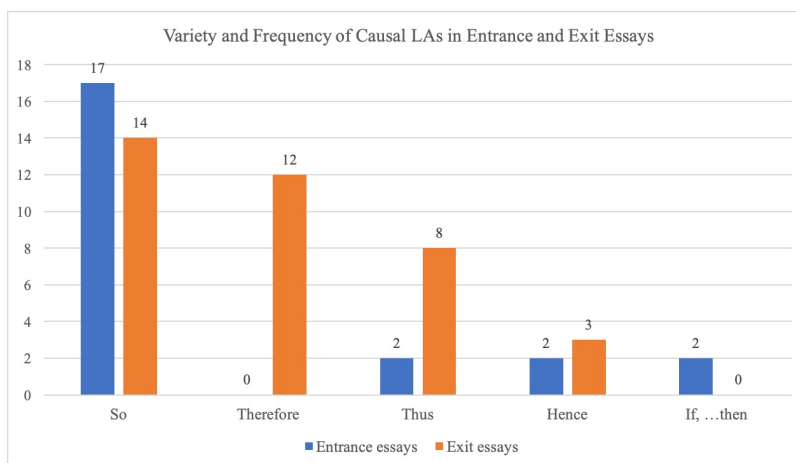

Figure 2: Variety of causal LAs in entrance and exit essays.

After the calculation of all the occurrences of each linking adverbial provided in Figure 2, their occurrences were examined with reference to COCA. The website indicates that *so* is more commonly used in spoken English than in academic contexts (Davies, 1990). The opposite is observed in case of *therefore*, *thus*, and *hence.* A similar conclusion about the use of these linking adverbials is presented in another study, which examined written academic English corpora using the COCA database, concluding that in written academic English among the four linking adverbials (*so*, *thus*, *therefore*, and *hence*) *thus* and *therefore* were the most frequently used ones, while *so* and *hence* were quite behind (Phoocharoensil, 2017). From Figure 2, it appears that through one academic year the students adopt LAs that are more common for academic writing.

4.3 Sequential Linking Adverbials

One of the linking adverbial types that had the highest use in both sets of essays is sequential adverbials. The most commonly used sequential LAs in entrance and exit essays were *first*, *first of all, secondly, to sum up,* and *in conclusion*. An interesting finding relates to the distribution of sequential LAs in the essays of male and female students. It appeared that sequential LAs were much more commonly used by male students than female students. In entrance essays 64% of sequential LAs were used by male students and 36% of them were used by female students, while in exit essays 63% of sequential LAs were used by male students and 37% of them were used by female students.
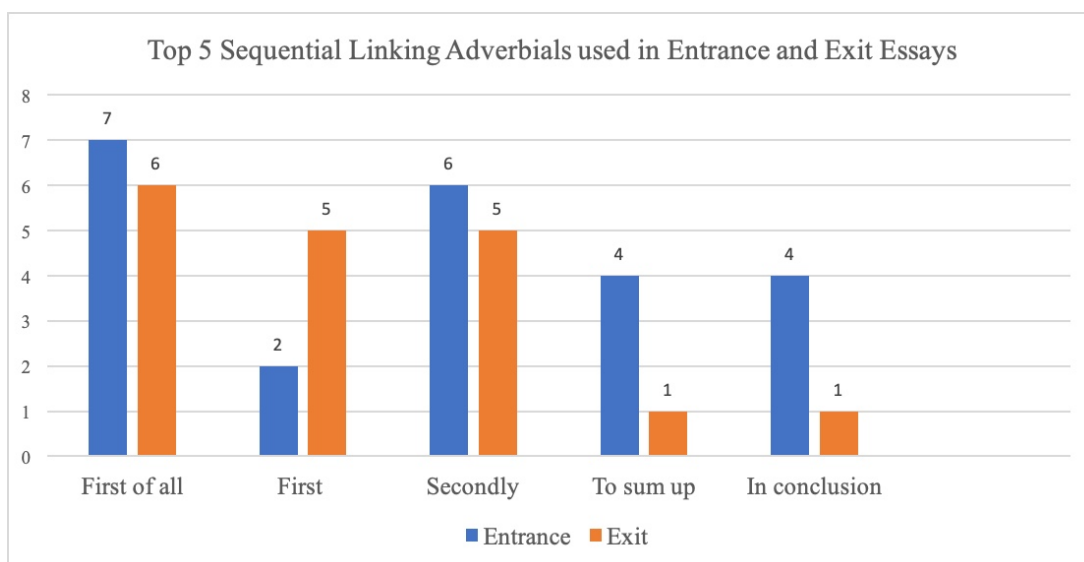
Figure 3: Five most frequently used sequential linking adverbials used by the freshman students in Freshman Seminar entrance and exit essays.

As it is seen from Figure 3, the most common sequential LA is *first of all*, followed by *secondly*. These adverbials are seen to be consistent and quite common in use in two data points. However, the analysis of the structure of the essays suggested that the students started to vary the use of linking adverbials in their concluding points by sometimes giving preference to linking adverbials other than the sequentials (Table 2).

Table 2

Sequential, causal and adversative linking adverbials used in the concluding points of the entrance and exit essays.

	Entrance essay	Exit essay
Sequential		
To conclude	2	3
In conclusion	3	2
To sum up	4	1
In summary	0	1
Causal		
So	3	6
Thus	0	2
If…, then	1	2
Therefore	0	2

Adversative		
Actually	0	2
Yet	0	1
Not only…, but also	0	3

Note. The table contains only those LAs that have been used more than once.

Table 2 indicates that the variety of both sequential and causal linking adverbials is the same, as they both have four commonly used LAs in two data points. However, in exit essays the students increase the use of causal LAs, and also new adversative linking adverbials *actually, yet* and *not only…, but also* start to be used.

Even though this study does not focus on the overuse of the linking adverbials, the results show that sequential linking adverbials are quite often used both in exit and entrance essays. In general, sequential LAs are found to be overused in the essays of first year non-native speakers (Ha, 2016). However, both sequential and causal LAs are more commonly used in spoken language than in academic (Liu, 2008). Despite that, as we check the specific LA uses in COCA, sequential adverbials like *to conclude*, *to sum up* and *in conclusion* turn out to be more common in academic writing. The occurrences of these particular LAs appear to be not that common in this corpus. In addition, Liu (2008) identifies adversative linking adverbials as the most frequently used LAs in academic writing, and as it is presented in Table 2 a tendency of using adversative LAs in concluding points is seen in exit essays. This is an indicator that the students gradually grasp the idea of diversifying the use of LAs.

4.4 Additive Linking Adverbials

Entrance essays seem to be richer in the use of additive LAs than the exit essays. It is important to note that the variety of LAs has not changed much, with only two new LAs (*in addition*, and *as well*) being used in exit essays. A noticeable change happens in the frequency of additive adverbial *for example,* which has been used four times more often in entrance essays than in exit essays. This is in line with findings suggesting that non-native

writers' samples had significantly more additive LAs than the ones of native speakers, especially the LA *for example*, which was even overused by non-native speakers (Hussein, 2014). On the other hand, the LAs that have increased in use between the two data points are *moreover* and *not only…, but also* which are both predominantly used in academic context according to COCA.

Like sequential LAs, this LA type has an unequal distribution between genders as well. The results show that in entrance essays 71% of additive LAs were used by male students, while 29% of them were used by female students. In exit essays the distribution had some balance and 59.2% of additive LAs were used by male students, and 40.8% of them were used by female students.

Table 3

Variety of additive LAs in entrance and exit essays

Entrance essays	Exit essays
For example (12)	For example (3)
And also (5)	And also (2)
Of course (4)	Of course (2)
Moreover (3)	Moreover (5)
For instance (4)	In addition (2)
What I mean is (2)	As well (5)
Not only, …but also (2)	Not only, …but also (7)
What is more (2)	

The analysis of the occurrences of the most common additive LA *for example* showed that in all of the cases the students used this LA as a supportive follow-up to their main arguments in the essays. Below some excerpts are presented from the essays:

1) *People from my community try to cheat in every field of life: it can be in school, university and so on. **<u>For example,</u>** in school students do not appreciate the knowledge that they can get, they just worry about their grades. (Entrance essay)*

2) *First of all from economical perspective, we lack in professionals, therefore we lack in motivation and ambition as well. **<u>For example,</u>** many Armenians now who want to be educated and who have opportunity to get it, seek to find it abroad.*

However, in some cases the students do not use *for example* in a full sentence by starting the sentence with *for example* and omitting other necessary components of a full sentence. The examples are as follows:

1) *Community for me are the people who surround me everyday. **<u>For example</u>** my family, friends and neighbours. **(missing verb)** <u>Entrance essay</u>*

2) *For many people it is absolutely fine to be like them but they show a lot of disrespect towards others. **<u>For example</u>** religion as ninety percent of our population is apostolic christians, being an atheist or muslim affects how people react to you. **(using a clause with no verb)** <u>Entrance essays</u>*

3) *...the most successful countries are those countries that have competition in every single aspect of their lifes. **<u>For example</u>**, Japan or China which are the leading countries in the world by having professionals and highly educated workers in every sphere. **(using a dependent clause as a complete sentence)** <u>Exit essay</u>*

This phenomenon might be present because of the fact that *for example* is more specific to spoken context where people usually omit the verbs and give examples by using only nouns or phrases. Besides that, the more frequent use of *for example* in entrance essays and the errors connected with this LA might be an indicator of the students' lower writing proficiency. This can also explain the idea stated by Lei and mentioned earlier in this study that non-native speakers overuse linking adverbials because they try to "achieve surface

logicality and to disguise their poor writing" (2012). Thus, by often using the additive LA *for example* the students were trying to enrich their writing, which eventually made it less professional and even resulted in having erroneous sentences. This popularity of additive linking adverbials appears to be widespread as they have been the most common linking adverbial used by non-native students (Ha, 2016; Hussein, 2014; Lei, 2012; Liu, 2008).

4.5 Adversative Linking Adverbials

Adversative LAs are the least common linking adverbials found in the entrance and exit essays. However, the comparison of their frequency in entrance and exit essays suggests that they have had some increase in use in exit essays (Table 4), especially the linking adverbials like *however* (reaching to 8 uses from 5*)* and *actually* (reaching to 5 uses from 2).

Table 4

Variety of adversative LAs in entrance and exit essays.

Entrance Essay	Exit Essay
However (5)	However (8)
Though (4)	Though (3)
Despite (2)	Yet (1)
Actually (2)	Actually (5)

Looking at some of these linking adverbials in context, it might become clear that in almost all of the cases *however* is used in the beginning of the essays while presenting the problem. Here is an example:

> *It is known that in the states or in the middle east education is considered a big deal and is given to students in a very difficult way. **However** in our community, that is not the case.*

Another adversative LA that emerges only in the exit essay and is used only once is *yet*. As it might be noticed from the context, it is not used in a full sentence.

*So, especially, considering the situation with stray dogs and cats, I'd like to see more funds, taking care about that issue. **Yet**, not in the way, that it is done these days.*

The overall lack of the use of adversative linking adverbials both in entrance and exit essays might be because adversative LAs "mark incompatibility between information in different discourse units or that signal concessive relationships" (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). This may be a challenging task for the students to accomplish in their writing, which is why adversative LAs do not seem to be common in non-professional writers' essays. In a study by Lei (2012), adversative linking adverbials were found to be more common in high proficiency writers' works than in the works of undergraduate student writers. Therefore, the increase in adversative LA use in exit essays can be an indicator that one academic year can already show some improvement of writing proficiency.

4.6 Frequency of Attended and Unattended Demonstratives

The next area of the research focuses on the use of attended and unattended demonstratives, as these can be categorized as a component of cohesion and can be problematic resulting in pronoun and antecedent agreement errors.
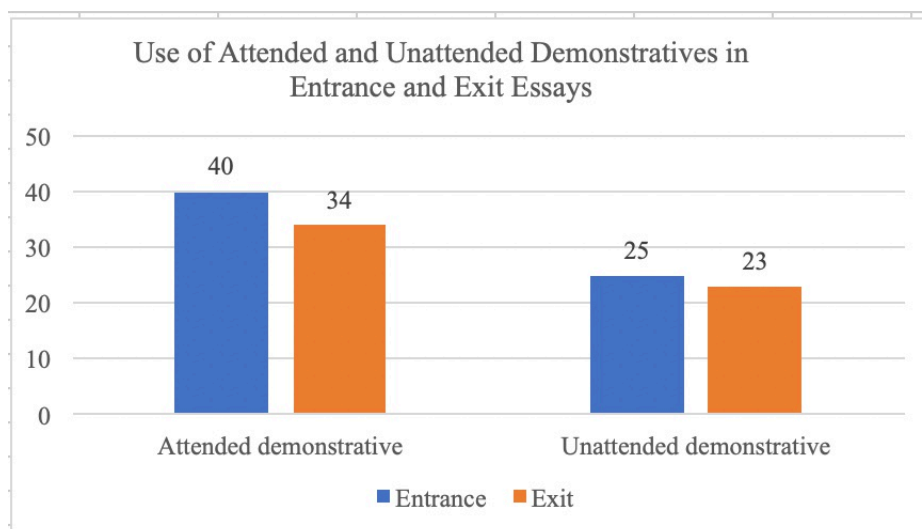

Figure 4: Frequency of the use of attended and unattended demonstratives in entrance and exit essays.

Note. The number on the top of each bar indicates the total number of the use of a particular pronoun in the according essay.

As it can be inferred from Figure 4, there is a slight decrease in the use of attended demonstratives, and almost no change in the use of unattended demonstratives. The comparison of the ratio of attended and unattended demonstratives in two data points shows that the percentages of these two demonstratives have not changed much. In entrance essays, 61.5% of all the demonstratives were attended demonstratives, while 38.5% were unattended. In exit essays, 59.6% of all the demonstratives were attended, while 40.4% were unattended.

The consistency in the ratio between the attended and unattended demonstratives across different levels seems to be a common occurrence, as it has been shown to have stable distribution in different data points in a study by Rustipa (2015). His study demonstrated that the distribution of the attended and unattended demonstratives stayed the same in ratio across different data points, i.e. 2:1. The same consistency was observed in another study by Romer and Wuff, where the ratio of the unattended and attended demonstratives in three data points kept being 3:1 (2011).

As we compare the use of each demonstrative separately in the two data points (Figure 5), it becomes evident that in case of attended demonstratives there is not a big difference in the frequency of their occurrence between the two data points, except for *that* which is found to be more common in the exit essays. In case of unattended demonstratives, the demonstrative *this* seems to be consistently used with the same frequency, while the use of *that* decreases almost twice by going down from 13 to 7 uses in the exit essays. The demonstrative *these* has zero occurrence as an unattended demonstrative both in entrance and exit essays, while the use of *those* increases and is used four times in the exit essays (Figure 5).
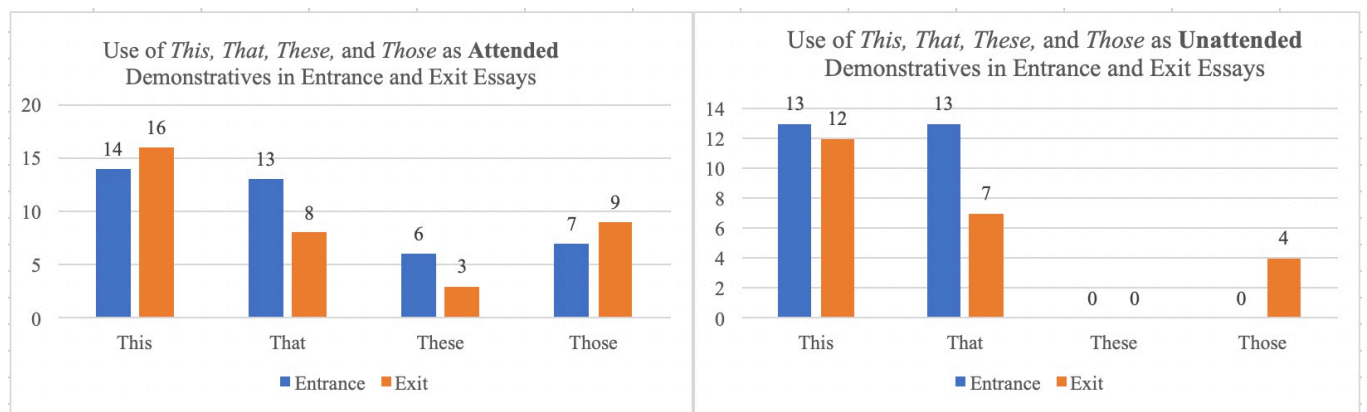
29

Figure 5: The total number of the use of *this, that, these* and *those* in entrance and exit essays.

According to Figure 5, the assumption that *these* and *this* are mainly used as attended demonstratives, while *those* and *that* are more common as unattended demonstratives proves to be partially true. *This* and *these* were found to be more commonly used as attended demonstratives both in entrance and exit essays in a study by Dontcheva-Navratilova, Jančaříková, Miššíková, and Povolná (2017). However, the demonstrative *these* has no use as an unattended demonstrative, while *that* is seen to be equally used both in the exit and entrance essays and *those* is more commonly used as an unattended demonstrative.

Since according to Rustipa (2015) demonstratives are considered to be cohesive devices as well, to gain insight into their occurrences as unattended demonstratives functioning as sentence connectors in our corpus, we identified such occurrences and categorized them. It turns out that the unattended demonstrative *this* has been equally used in the essays both for presenting the problems of the essay and giving solutions to the problems. From the point of the distribution of the unattended *this* in the essay, the problem presentation with the pronoun *this* mainly occurs in the introduction and the middle part (body) of the essays, while the solutions are presented in the body and concluding parts.

Turning to the use of the unattended *that* as a cohesive tool, we see a similar result as it is almost equally used both in problem and solution statements. However, in case of

distribution in the text, *that* is predominantly used for problem statements in the body of the text, while solution points are equally distributed in the body and the concluding points.

Problem (Unattended demonstrative *this*)

1) ***This*** is a problem that is very important for the society and it needs to be changed. (Introduction)

2) ***This*** also connected to professors salary. (Body)

3) *The reason for **this** is that they are made to study subjects they do not like.* (Conclusion)

Solution (Unattended demonstrative *this*)

1*) I would do **this**, because there are a lot of issues that everyone citizens have to deal with and identify those issues is the first step towards eliminating them.* (Introduction)

2) *I'm certain that **this** will bring more awareness in the society.* (Body)

3) ***This*** *is a good way of raising independent children for the future.* (Conclusion)

Problem (Unattended *that*)

1) *However in our community, **that** is not the case.* (Introduction)

2) *If someone poor does something like **that** they will get arrested and etc, because they can't pay to get help.* (Body)

Solution (Unattended *that*)

1) *And **that** is exactly what I would change in my community if I had the chance, because in that way our future generation will value more the received education and by seeing that nothing comes easily they will be able to deal with much harder situations in the future.* (Body)

2) *We can achieve **that** by making educational system more flexible.* (Conclusion)

Overall, the frequency of demonstrative use did not have a drastic change, which from cohesive point of view means that the students did not switch to using demonstratives instead of linking adverbials, as suggested by Rahman's study (2013). However, Rahman's study

examines 1st and 3rd year students' essays, where the gap between the two data points is bigger. The findings of the current study are closer to Banerjee, Franceschina and Smith's (2007) findings, as the frequency of some demonstratives even decreases to some degree by being replaced with other cohesive ties.

4.7 Errors in the Use of Demonstratives

Errors in the use of demonstratives were found to be present only in entrance essays. No errors in the use of attended and unattended demonstratives were detected in exit essays. The only erroneous area was in the use of attended demonstratives in entrance essays. As the total number of such errors is not big and no other errors related to the use of demonstratives were found, they are all presented below:

1) *I will use all **that buses***

2) *...one of **that little steps***

3) ***This difficulties**...*

4) *...**these type** of people*

5) *If **those thing** were done*

The frequency of the use of attended demonstratives was found to be the same across the two data points. Thus, it can be concluded that the students were able to learn to use attended demonstratives correctly through an academic year, as they seem to have no problem with their use in the exit essays. This error can be considered interlingual as a possible reason for these errors in entrance essays might be the negative transfer from L1, because demonstrative pronouns do not have plural forms in Armenian (there are no equivalents for *these* and *those* in Armenian). This difference between the two languages may cause the grammatical errors of the non-native students (Lastres-Lopez & Manalastas, 2018).

4.8 Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

The results of the analysis of the essays indicate that the whole corpus consists of 527 sentences and overall 24 of these sentences have subject-verb agreement errors, including the omission of verbs. One of the most common errors in subject-verb agreement was found in complex sentences in which the distance between the subject and the verb was big, or in other words, a dependent clause stood between the subject and the verb. Another common error is connected with the use of verbs with collective nouns which might seem controversial and in some cases, could be considered incorrect, as the choice of using singular or plural verb can depend on how the writer observes the collective noun— a group acting as an individual, or as one collective unit (Wallwork, 2013). The former requires a plural verb, while the latter requires a singular verb. And the last vulnerable area of sentence writing is *There is/There are* sentences. Some excerpts from the essays show the occurrence of the above-mentioned errors.

Complex sentences

1) *My community unfortunately has lots of big and little __problems, that needs__ to be solved*. (Entrance essay)

2) *__Gossiping__ is one of the most unbearable things that __exist__ in the world.* (Entrance essay)

3) *They discuss **all the things** that **goes** on in that person's life.* (Entrance essay)

4) *The smallest thing a successful person can do is financing __the field__ s/he thinks __need__ a development, in my case in orphanages but I would not stop on this**.** (Exit essay)*

Collective noun problem

1) *__Community__ always __try__ to stay the same.* (Entrance essay)

2) *__Arminia__ do have a good medicine.* (Exit essay)

3) ***People****, who **respects** the rights of others…* (Exit essay)

There is/There are

1) *There are **lot's of things that needs** to be changed.* (Entrance essay)

2) ***There are many reason*** *why schools can't keep up with the changes occurring in the world but my point of view it's the psychology that the knowledge they have is a fact (one truth) that can't be changed.* (Entrance essay)

3) ***There are an abundance of fields*** *in Armenia that need to be improved and developed, however orphanages and institutions like "Orran" are always the main centre of my attention.* (Exit essay)

4) *To conclude I would like to repeat that **there are a lot of this which need** changes in our community.* (Entrance essay)

Missing Verb

1) *One reason for this that many of them believe in various things blindly.* (Entrance essay)

2) *In order to make it easier for people to have better driving experience, companies to deliver goods etc.* (Exit essay)

3) *At first, that I would like to change in my community is to give unemployed people work which not require any profession.* (Entrance essay*)*

4) *This also connected to professors salary.* (Exit essay)

5) *Yet, not in the way, that it is done these days.* (Exit essay)

6) *They rebelling against the system and the deputies in the parliament, but no one really against whom exactly or what part of the total population is actually rebelling.* (Exit essay)

The number of subject-verb disagreement occurrences are the same in both data points (12 subject-verb errors in each data point). Even the occurrences within the types of

errors (complex sentences, there is/there are, a missing verb, and collective noun problems) are nearly the same, which proves that no progress has been noticed in this area within one academic year. Thus, in this case, even though the fluency of the students might have improved during one academic year, their accuracy has not developed in two semesters of study which is in line with findings of Knoch, Rouhshad, and Storch (2014). These results contradict the suggestion that it is possible to decrease the amount of grammar errors with one course only (Crosthwaite, 2017). Subject-verb disagreement occurrences particularly are considered to be one of the most common in the field of grammar (Nuruzzaman, Islam, & Shuchi, 2018; Pescante-Malimas, 2017). Therefore, some emphasis needs to be put on decreasing the frequency of these errors within more than one writing course, as only the latter focuses on the writing skills development, that is, other academic courses do not prioritize the writing skills improvement that much (Al-Jamal, 2017).

CHAPTER FIVE: LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research

The main limitation of the study is the small size of the corpus. The sample consists of 30 pairs of essays, which might not be as perfectly representable for the whole population as it could be expected in case of a bigger population. Another possible limitation for this study can be the controversies and debates of different grammarians over the classification of linking adverbials, thus in future studies several taxonomies and sources can be taken into consideration for the corpus study.

Future studies may focus more on the qualitative aspect of the essays and examine not only the subject-verb relations in the sentences, but also the overall syntax of the sentences. Particularly, future studies could focus on identifying the reasons for error consistency in order to understand whether this consistency might be due to the use of more complex structures. As for the use of linking adverbials, future research may put more emphasis on the misuse of certain LAs and the detection of LA error patterns commonly used by students.

CHAPTER SIX: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Pedagogical implications

The analysis of the data shows that even though there are signs of writing proficiency improvement in the exit essays, some suggestions can be helpful for the instructors in conducting their writing classes. An important step can be reading some authentic texts written by accomplished writers, as using readings for writing classes can be helpful in improving the writing proficiency, unlike teaching cohesive devices in isolation (Hirvela, 2004). It would also be helpful to put emphasis on the use of adversative linking adverbials, as according to the results received from the exit essays these linking adverbials have a potential to increase. Thus, encouraging students to use this type of LAs in the right context and in a logically correct way can improve the students' writing proficiency.

Subject-verb disagreement occurrences and their consistency across the two data points signal the need to adopt an approach to solve this problem. Even though the essays used for this study were written on the spot within 20 minutes, there is no guarantee that take-home essays will be completely free of any type of grammar errors. Thus, a solution to this problem can be the use of peer corrective feedback, as students themselves can comment on each other's essays and notice the errors missed by their peers. Overall, there seems to be a need to add more form-based teaching tools to content teaching, as the latter requires a firm knowledge of grammar in order to have good written production. A solution can be synthesizing in-class and online materials by providing some time to the discussion of several grammatical points that are not clear for the students (Crosthwaite, 2016). In addition to that, instructors can provide students with grammar reference guides which they can always rely on while writing their papers.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The aim of this corpus study was to find out the extent to which one academic year can be effective for the improvement of academic writing development. As it was previously discussed in the paper, students' writing skills go through different changes through academic years, and in most of the cases these changes are positive. In case of linking adverbials, AUA freshman students have managed to adopt some new LAs that are more common and appropriate for academic context. They have also decreased the use of more colloquial LAs in their academic writing. More specifically, the quantitative analysis showed that they have increased the use of causal and adversative LAs which are more widely used in academic contexts.

Regarding the use of demonstratives, it has been found that AUA freshman students have progressed in the use of demonstratives in a way that they have not made any errors in the area of pronoun-antecedent use in the second data point. On the other hand, the only field that has remained nearly unchanged is the subject-verb agreement errors. These errors have been found to be hard enough to be fixed in one academic year, which supposes that more attention could be provided to this particular area during the writing classes and through corrective feedback. The findings of this study help to identify the areas of difficulty among AUA students in their first academic year and build a platform for finding solutions to prevent the fossilization of certain error patterns.

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Taxonomy adopted by Liu (2008) and used in this study:

Additive LAs	Adversative LAs	Causal/Resultative LAs	Sequential LAs
above all	*at the same time*	*accordingly*	*afterwards*
additionally	*(with and, but, yet, and while)*	*as a consequence (of)*	*eventually*
again (sentence initial)	*however*	*(with of)*	*(sentence initial)*
also	*nevertheless*	*(without of)*	*first/firstly*
(sentence initial)	*nonetheless*	*as a result (of)*	*(first)*
(in "and also")	*of course*	*(with of)*	*(firstly)*
(in "not only...but also")	*then again*	*(without of)*	*first and foremost*
(in "but also" independently)	*though*	*because of it/this/that*	*first of all*
as i/they/you say	*(including "contrastive" meaning)*	*consequently*	*in the first place*
as well	*yet*	*in consequence*	*(sentence inital)*
as a matter of fact	*(sentence initial)*	*hence*	*to begin with*
besides	*(after a comma)*	*naturally*	*second/secondly*
in addition (to)	*(in "and yet...")*	*(sentence initial)*	*(second)*
(with "to")	*(in other positions)*	*so*	*(secondly)*
(without "to")	**Contrastive**	*(sentence initial)*	*third/thirdly*
further	*actually*	*(after comma)*	*(third)*
furthermore	*as a matter of fact*	*(in "and so" sentence initial)*	*(thirdly)*
moreover	*conversely*	*(in "and so" sentence initial)*	*fourth/fourthly*
not to mention	*in/by comparison*	*therefore*	*(fourth)*
of course	*in/by contrast*	*thus*	*(fourthly)*
to crown it all	*in fact*	**Conditional causal**	*finally*
to cap it all	*in reality*	*all things considered*	*(sentence initial)*
too		*in such a case/cases*	*last/lastly*
			(last)

what's (is) more

Apposition/reformulation

i.e.

that is

that is to say

in other words

for example

for instance

for one thing

(together with"
for another")

namely

to put it another way

to put it bluntly/mildly

what i'm saying is

what i mean is

which is to say

Similarity Comparative

alternatively

by the same token

correspondingly

likewise

similarly

on the other hand

Correction

Instead

On the contrary

Rather

Dismissal

admittedly

after all

all the same

(often used with but)

anyhow

anyway

at any rate

despite n/this/that

(despite this)

(despite that) in any case

in spite of this/that/ etc

still

in that case

otherwise

then (often used with "if")

(lastly)

(last but not least)

last of all

next

then

(sentence initial)

(in "and then" sentence initial)

(in "and then")

Simultaneous

at the same time

in the meantime

(sentence initial)

meanwhile

Summative

all in all

in a word

in conclusion

in short

in summary/sum

to conclude

to sum up

to summarize

Transitional to another topic, etc.

by the by

by the way

incidentally