Transition Markers and Coherence in L2 English and German Argumentative Essays

J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Višnja Pavičić Takač, Full Professor

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 U Osijeku, 10.7.2020.

Andreja Oberling, 0122222219
ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

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Abstract

Metadiscourse markers are fundamental elements of the spoken and written discourse, which help writers transfer information, feelings, and opinions to the reader, organise their writing, and lead the reader through the text. The present study explores a specific group of metadiscourse markers, that of transition markers and their relationship with the coherence of a text. For the purpose of this study, two sets of corpora were used, one consisting of 26 essays in English, written by Croatian undergraduate students of the English language at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, and the other consisting of 27 essays in German, written by undergraduate students of the German language and literature at the same Faculty. The results reveal that students quite often incorporate transition markers in their essays, but use a rather narrow set, as well as tend to overuse them. The analysis of essays has revealed that, in both corpora, the most common subcategory of transition markers is transition markers of comparison. Additionally, the analysis has shown that there is no statistically significant difference in the usage of transition markers in the English and German corpora. Through the analysis it was also determined that there is no statistically significant correlation between the usage of transition markers and the coherence of the text.

Keywords: metadiscourse, transition markers, coherence, discourse competence, L2 writing, L2 English, L2 German

Sažetak

Metadiskursni označivači temeljni su elementi govornog i pismenog diskursa, uz pomoć kojih pisci čitateljima prenose informacije, osjećaje, mišljenja, organiziraju svoje pisanje i vode čitatelja kroz tekst. U ovom se radu istražuje specifična skupina metadiskursnih označivača, označivači prijelaza i njihov utjecaj na koherenciju teksta. Za potrebe je ovog istraživanja provedena analiza dvaju korpusa, jednoga koji se sastoji od 26 eseja na engleskom jeziku koje su napisali studenti preddiplomskog studija Filozofskog fakulteta u Osijeku koji studiraju engleski jezik i književnost, te drugoga koji se sastoji od 27 eseja na njemačkom jeziku koje su napisali student njemačkog jezika i književnosti na istome fakultetu. Rezultati otkrivaju da studenti često u svoje eseje uključuju označivače prijelaza, ali se koriste ograničenim rasponom i imaju tendenciju pretjerano se koristiti tim označivačima. Analiza eseja pokazala je da su u oba korpusa najčešća potkategorija, označivači prijelaza čija je funkcija usporedba. Uz to, analiza je pokazala da ne postoji statistički značajna razlika u uporabi označivača prijelaza u engleskom i njemačkom korpusu. Analizom je također utvrđeno da ne postoji statistički značajna povezanost između korištenja označivača prijelaza i koherencije teksta.

Ključne riječi: metadiskurs, označivači prijelaza, koherencija, diskursna kompetencija, pisanje na stranom jeziku, strani jezik

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the fundamental aspects of second language (L2) learning. Through writing learners offer information, state their opinion, feelings and considerations. Hammill and Larson (1996, as cited in Sanford, 2012) claim that in order to master the task of writing three basic skills will be needed: (a) the ability to write using the accepted standards of conventions, such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization; (b) the linguistic ability to use syntactic, morphologic, and semantic components; and (c) the cognitive ability to express feelings, preferences, and ideas in a creative and mature manner. From that we can conclude that writing is not just "the basic skill of punctuation and grammar" (Sanford, 2012:1), but a far more complex process than considered by many.

One aspect of the writing process that is highly important is metadiscourse. According to Hyland (2017), metadiscourse is the way in which the writers or speakers interact through their use of language with readers and listeners. Therefore, the use of metadiscourse markers contributes to the quality of the written text, as it betters its coherence. Sanford (2012:1) claims that coherence is considered as an essential element in effective and comprehensible, as well as the elusive, abstract element in writing which is difficult to learn and teach. Coherence is considered an essential element in effective and comprehensible writing. As Georgievska (2019) states, previous research has shown that a clear higher-order rhetorical structure with the correct discourse markers helps the reader understand the text.

There are various studies on metadiscourse markers in second and foreign language learner writing but there are fewer studies that explore the relationship between metadiscourse markers and coherence. Therefore, the present study will attempt to investigate whether the usage of metadiscourse markers, more specifically transition markers, contributes to the coherence of the written text. The study will be conducted on two sets of argumentative essays written by L2 learners, one written in English, and the other in German.

This paper is organised in two parts. The first part reviews the theoretical background, which serves as the basis for the present study. It is divided into three sections. The first section aims to define and classify metadiscourse with emphasis on Hyland and Tse's model (2004) of metadiscourse. It is followed by a closer look at the definition and classification of transition markers. This section also discusses potential problems that may occur in the metadiscourse

analysis. The second section defines coherence and describes the role it servers in writing. The third section of the theoretical part is dedicated to the relationship between metadiscourse and coherence in academic writing and gives an overview of relevant studies and their results. The second part reports on the present study. It includes the aim, research questions, the description of the data collection, and the analysis procedure. This is followed by the results of the analysis and their discussion. The conclusion, suggestions for further studies, and implications for teaching and learning about metadiscourse round out the paper.

2. On metadiscourse

2.1. Defining metadiscourse

Metadiscourse, a term coined by Zelling Haris in 1959, refers to "a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's or speaker's attempt to guide a receiver's perception of a text" (Hyland, 2005:3). Metadiscourse is considered by many to be a fuzzy term and simply described as "discourse about discourse". But it is also known as an umbrella term, which is used to include a supposedly heterogeneous array of cohesive and interpersonal features that help relate a text to its context (Hyland 2005:16). Metadiscourse is explained in different ways. For example, Crismore et al. (1993), Ädel (2006) and Hyland (2005) all understand metadiscourse in a slightly different way.

Crismore et al. (1993) describe metadiscourse as "linguistic material in texts, written or spoken, which does not add anything to the propositional content but that is intended to help the listener or reader organize, interpret and evaluate the information given" (p. 40).

Ädel (2006) defines metadiscourse as "text about the evolving text, or the writer's explicit commentary on her own ongoing discourse. It displays an awareness of the current text or its language use per se and of the current writer and reader *qua* writer and reader" (p.20). Ädel (2006:20) divides metadiscourse into two types – 'metatext' and 'writer-reader interaction' – and claims that the basic functions of metadiscourse is to guide the reader through the text as well as comment on the usage of language in the text. Georgievska (2016:18) states that successful writing does not entail simply following the rules of grammar and vocabulary, but also adhering to a wide range of discourse norms and conventions.

Hyland and Tse (2004:159) suggest a new model of metadiscourse in academic writing, one built on three key principles. These are as follows:

1. that metadiscourse is distinct from propositional aspects of discourse;

2. that the term "metadiscourse" refers to those aspects of the text that embody writer-reader interaction;

3. that metadiscourse distinguishes relations which are external to the test from those that are internal.

Hyland (2005) refers to metadiscourse as a relatively new approach of conceptualizing interaction between the text producer and reader, as well as the text producer and their text. However, metadiscourse is not just the interaction between the text writer and the reader or the "exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating" (Hyland 2005:3). Through writing, as well as speaking, we are deciding on affect we want to transfer on the readers and listeners.

In addition, Hyland (2005:4) states that by including metadiscourse elements, they help the writer involve himself/herself in the text to engage the reader as a fellow enthusiast and to convey information more clearly. On the contrary, by not including metadiscourse features, the text will be harder to follow, less organised and interesting. Hyland and Tse (2004), following Hyland (2000), state that with the reasonable addition of metadiscourse, the writer can not only transform a difficult, dry text into a coherent one, but also relate it to a given context and transfer his/her credibility, personality, audience-sensitivity, and relationship to the message. As established in many studies, conducted by Ädel and Hyland, metadiscourse is a fundamental element in writing. It is especially important for students while writing larger texts like essays, research articles, or master's theses. It is, as mentioned, recognised "as an important means in facilitating communication, supporting a writer's position and building a relationship with the audience" (Hyland and Tse 2004:159), studies on metadiscourse are difficult to find.

The classification and the understanding of metadiscourse in this paper will be based on Hyland and Tse's (2004) and Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse.

2.2. Classification of metadiscourse

Hyland and Tse (2004), following Thompson and Thetela (1995), organized metadiscourse into two dimensions of interaction: the interactive and interactional dimension, as shown in table 1.

Interactive resources "refer to features which set out an argument to explicitly establish the writer's preferred interpretation" (Hyland and Tse, 2004:168). According to Hyland (2005), in the interactive dimension the writer's purpose is to shape and constrain a text so it meets the needs of particular readers, setting out arguments so they recover the writer's favoured interpretation and goals. Also, interactive metadiscourse guides the reader through the text, and it refers to an organizing discourse (Pavičić Takač, 2018:15). Hyland and Tse (2004) classify interactive metadiscourse into

five major categories: transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses.

Transition markers, being mainly conjunctions and adverbial phrases, mark additive, contrastive, and consequential relations in a writer's thinking and steps in the discourse (Hyland, 2005:50). Frame markers mark text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure, which sequence, label, predict and shift arguments, clearing the discourse to the reader (Hyland, 2005:51). With the help of endophoric markers the writers point out other parts of the text, such as figures or sections or other materials (Hyland, 2005:51). Evidentials guide the reader's interpretation and set a command of the subject (Hyland, 2005:51). Lastly, code glosses give additional information by explaining and rewording what has been said, so the reader can ascertain the meaning intended by the writer (Hyland, 2005:52).

The interactional resources "involve readers in the argument by alerting them to the author's perspective towards both propositional information and readers themselves" (Hyland and Tse, 2004:168). Hyland and Tse (2004:168) also state that these resources evaluate and engage, influence the intimacy, express attitude, judge epistemically, comment and involve the reader to a certain degree. It alerts the readers of the author's point of view towards both propositional information and the readers themselves and in the way that involves the reader. Interactional metadiscourse is also organized, by Hyland and Tse (2004), in five main categories: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers. Hedges signal the writers decision to not completely commit to a proposition and emphasize subjectivity (*might, possible, perhaps*) (Hyland, 2005:52). Boosters help the writer to express the certainty of a proposition in what they are saying (*clearly, obviously*) (Hyland, 2005:52). Indicating a rather affective attitude to propositions are attitude markers (Hyland, 2005:53). Self-mentions, pronouns in the first person and possessive adjectives, show the explicit presence of the author in the text (Hyland, 2005:53). Devices that explicitly address readers are engagement markers (Hyland, 2005:53).

Since the present study is concerned with transition markers from the interactive dimension, they will be described in more detail in the next section.

Table 1: Classification of metadiscourse (Hyland and Tse 2004:169)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive resources	**Help to guide reader through the text**	
Transitions	express semantic relation between main clauses	in addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	finally/to conclude/my purpose here is to
Endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above/see Fig/in section 2
Evidentials	refer to source of information from other texts	according to X/(Y,1990)/Z states
Code glosses	help readers grasp functions of ideational material	namely/e.g./such as/ in other words
Interactional resources	**Involve the reader in the argument**	
Hedges	withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	in fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately/I agree/surprisingly
Engagement markers	explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	consider/note that/ you can see that
Self-mentions	explicit reference to author (s)	I/we/my/our

2.2.1. Transition markers

This master's thesis focuses on one group of interactive metadiscourse markers, i.e. transition markers. Transition markers are primarily adverbial phrases and conjunctions, which "help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument" (Hyland 2005:50). They guide the reader through the text and make the text more coherent. Sanford (2012) claims that the key point of transition markers is that they must complete the links between ideas internal to the text versus external to the text, such as comparing similarities or differences. These markers "perform a role internal to discourse rather than external, i.e. help reader interpret links between ideas" (Mehrnaz Gholami et al. 2014:5). Transition markers signal additive, causative and contrastive relation between the main clauses or ideas as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Transition marker subcategories (Mina and Biria 2017:13)

Macro category	Subcategory	Examples
Transitions	addition	and, furthermore, moreover, also, in addition anyway
	comparison	in contrast, however, but, on the other hand, on the contrary
	consequence	consequently, after all, then, therefore, as a consequence

If signalling the additive relation, as shown in example 1, transition markers "add elements to an argument and potentially consists of items such as *and, furthermore, moreover, by the way*, etc." (Hyland 2005:50).

Example 1

*Second of all, there are many people employed in towns, **and** if they are living in one, they don't have to travel to work for too long.*

Hyland (2005:50) states that transition markers of comparison, (example 2, Khedri 2013:323) mark arguments as similar (*likewise, similarly* etc.) or different (*in contrast, on the other hand* etc.).

Example 2

***However**, my model includes two periods, with demand growth between periods.*

As shown in example 3, transition markers of consequence either tell the reader that a conclusion is drawn or justified (*thus, therefore* etc.) or that an argument is countered (*nevertheless, of course*, etc.) (Hyland 2005:50).

Example 3

*Overall, I prefer living outside the city **because** it is definitely healthier and more relaxed than living in a polluted hectic big city.*

In the study conducted by Mehrnaz Gholami et al. (2014), the aim was to compare and contrast metadiscourse markers in an English medical text and the translation of the same text into Persian, that is to investigate if these markers function identically in the original and translated text, as well as if there was a difference in the number of the metadiscourse markers used. This study has shown that the most commonly used metadiscourse markers were transition markers with the percentage of 40.6 in the original English text, and 44.6 in the Persian translation.

Also, the study by Mina and Biria (2017), where the researchers tried to identify interactional and interactive metadiscourse in a corpus of 100 research articles by Iranian writers, yielded the same result: transition markers were also the most frequently used category of metadiscourse markers, with a total of 2207 markers in the whole corpus. All in all, it can be stated that transition markers are a category commonly used in writing.

A list of transition markers, shown in table 3 and provided by Hyland (2005), shows the markers that most frequently occurred in the corpora before.

Table 3: List of most frequently used transition markers (Hyland 2005:220)

Transition markers		
accordingly	conversely	on the other hand
additionally	equally	rather
again	even though	result in
also	further	similarly
alternatively	furthermore	since
although	hence	so
and	however	so as to
as a consequence	in addition	still
as a result	in contrast	the result is
at the same time	in the same way	thereby
because	leads to	therefore
besides	likewise	though
but	moreover	thus
by contrast	nevertheless	whereas
by the same token	nonetheless	while
consequently	on the contrary	yet

2.3. Potential problems in metadiscourse analysis

As already mentioned, metadiscourse is not a clear-cut category and has been defined and categorized in different ways. The analysis of metadiscourse markers in corpora is often criticized. Some researchers state that the emphasis on the form is based on an erroneous assumption that corpus studies do not prioritise the surface features, "but make the formal realisation rather than the discourse function the object of analysis" (Hyland 2017:18). In that way, the frequency count does not show the accurate overall number of metadiscourse in a corpus. Hyland (2017) argues that researchers who are using corpora in their studies may begin with a list of potential metadiscourse markers, but these are just the starting point for their analysis.

According to Hyland (2017:17), all metadiscourse items should be examined in their sentential context to see if they are fulfilling metadiscourse functions, because sometimes it is more important to read concordance lines than count the frequency, a notion sometimes forgotten.

Furthermore, Pavičić Takač and Ivezić (2019) also comment on the multifunctionality of metadiscourse items. What that means is that a metadiscourse marker, in a different text or context, can have a different function. To illustrate it, example 4 from the present study's corpus shows that the word *while* is used as an adverbial of time rather than a transition marker. Whereas, example 5 shows a transition marker that takes the function of comparison.

English corpus

Example 4

*On the other side, there are also disadvantages **while** living in a city.*

Example 5

*Some people may prefer life in the countryside **while** others may prefer life in the city.*

The same can be found in the German corpus, where *während*, in example 6, shows a function of time. On the contrary, example 7 shows a transition marker of comparison.

Example 6

*Dort kann der Lärm nur Tags dauern, sondern auch noch **während** der Nacht.*

Example 7

*Der Durchschnitt der Lieferzeit liegt bei etwa 3-6 Werktagen, **während** die Lieferung, auf z.B. eBay ein bis zwei Monate dauert.*

Also, in order to analyse metadiscourse properly, it is important to recognise that metadiscourse is very often realised by signals that can be stretched to clause and sentence length (Hyland, 2017).

So, the potential problems in metadiscourse analysis are firstly the multifunctionality of metadiscourse items, where if the item's function is not determined correctly, it can come to a false result. The classification of metadiscourse markers into subcategories could also be potentially problematic as one item can take more functions, so it has to be decided to which category it will

belong to. The analysis itself is sometimes problematic as each analyst can comprehend an individual metadiscourse item in several ways. One analyst will consider one item a metadiscourse marker, whereas the other will not. Also, mistakes that learners make in their writing make the analysis more problematic. Learners sometimes use the incorrect subcategory of metadiscourse markers, and then that marker cannot be counted in the result as it does not fulfil the correct function in the sentence.

To conclude this part of the thesis, it can be said that, by analysing metadiscourse, the quantitative method is not simply the counting of metadiscourse items, but each metadiscourse item should be closely examined in their context to be classified as a transition marker.

3. Coherence in writing

According to Lee (2002), there have been attempts to define the term coherence since the nineteenth century but its definition is still not clear-cut. Canale (1983:9) refers to coherence as "the relationship among the different meanings in a text, where these meanings may be literal meanings, communicative functions, and attitudes". Johns (1986:247) states that "coherence in written text is a complex concept, involving a multitude of reader- and text-based features". According to Cheng and Steffensen (1996:150), coherence "refers to the knowledge that provides the conceptual undergirding of a text". Coherence can also be defined as the "glue" that holds a text together and is a *sine qua non* in written discourse (Bamberg, 1983). Sanders and Spooren (1999:235) state that coherence is what makes a discourse more than just the amount of interpretations of the individual statements. They also comment that a set of sentences is coherent only if all the segments in the discourse somehow connect with each other. It is some kind of a bridge between different words, sentences and paragraphs. Furthermore, it connects the ideas and arguments in a text, as well as guides the reader through the text itself. If the writer does not achieve a certain level of coherence, the communication between the writer and the reader could fail. Karadeniz (2017:94) describes coherence as a semantic and logical link between sentences.

Coherence can be separated, according to Johns (1986), into two parts: text-based and reader-based. Text-based means that coherence can be said to be internal to the text, by adding to our understanding of what a text is (Lee, 2002:137). Halliday and Hasan (1976) state that text-based coherence has two characteristics: cohesion, cohesive ties between sentences, and register, a

coherence which has a context. But other modern text analysts concentrate on "sticking to the point" as a feature of coherence (Johns, 1986:249). Reader-based coherence is described as inseparable from the reader and one that requires a successful interaction between the reader and the discourse to be processed (Carrell, 1982; Johns, 1986; Rummelhart, 1997).

Lee (2002:138-9) emphasises the importance of the text, with the writer and the reader all interacting in the construction of coherence and, based on the literature lists features after which coherence is operationally defined:

1. Connecting the text with cohesive devices. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

2. An information structure which helps the reader in understanding the text but also contributes to the topical development of the text. (Connor and Farmer, 1990)

3. Underlining content connectivity achieved by relation between propositions and the contribution of these relations to the discourse and organization overall. (Kintsch and Dijk, 1978)

4. A macrostructure with a characteristic pattern or shape appropriate to its communicative purpose and context of situation. (Hoey, 1983)

5. Metadiscoursal features which signal reader-based writing. (Crismore et al, 1993)

Georgievska (2016) states that students have problems with connectedness not just on the sentence, but at the entire discourse level. Students often put focus on the sentence connectedness and have a narrow understanding of coherence (p. 19). Therefore Lee (2002:140) suggests teaching coherence in the following order:

1. Purpose, audience, and context of situation – i.e., how explicitness of purpose, and awareness of audience and context contribute to coherence.

2. Macrostructure – i.e., overall structure of texts.

3. Information distribution and topical development – i.e., how information can be best organized to contribute to overall topic development.

4. Propositional development and modification – i.e., how propositions can be made more explicit by means of elaboration, illustration, exemplification, etc.

5. Cohesion – i.e., references, substitution, conjunctions, etc.

6. Metadiscourse – i.e., certainty markers, topicalizers, announcements, attitude markers, etc.

Lee (2002:140) explains that this helps the students understand the nature of successful textualizations and how they can achieve coherence in a text.

When it comes to the assessment of writing, Watson et al. (2004) state that text coherence is one of the most problematic aspects it is of rather subjective nature. They also claim that a suitable method of coherence analysis must meet three criteria (Watson et al., 2004:88):

1. It has to be relatively objective.

2. It should unequivocally measure coherence rather than some other construct.

3. It should focus on the type of coherence that is most commonly found in writing.

4. Metadiscourse and coherence: overview of relevant studies

As stated by Pavičić Takač (2018), the empirical studies addressing the question of how metadiscourse contributes to achieving coherence are still rare. But the following few studies offer an overview of the connection between metadiscourse and coherence.

Jones (2011) conducted a case study, where he analysed a single essay written by a South American student in a subject called "Academic English". The aim was to analyse the essay on two levels: grammar and coherence. The results of the study, Jones hopes, may enhance the understanding of the problem of learning and teaching coherence to students. Jones (2011:5) pointed out that transition signals are the most important manifestation of achieving coherence and cohesion. He emphasized the importance of metadiscourse in achieving coherence as it guides the reader through the text. As the analysed essay from the study is not coherent on a satisfactory level, the researcher provided some guide-lines as to how to improve the coherence of a text, in both short and long term.

A study done by Pavičić Takač (2018) in Croatia, as a part of the *KohPiTekst* research project, explores the use of sentence-initial interactive metadiscourse and how it contributes to the coherence of the text. Pavičić Takač (2018) compares English foreign language writers' and native speakers' texts and concludes that sentence-initial interactive metadiscourse may contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the text. She also states that the significant correlation between the text cohesion and

coherence and the sentence-initial metadiscourse may affect the way coherence and cohesion are evaluated, as the evaluators may rate texts, where sentence-initial metadiscourse is conspicuously prominent, as more coherent.

Another corpus study within the *KohPiTekst* project was done by Pavičić Takač and Ivezić (2019), analysed frame markers in L2 argumentative essays. The researchers compared the usage of frame markers in Croatian L2 learners' essays and the English native speakers' essays. They also analysed the correlation between frame markers use and text coherence in L2 writers' argumentative essays. Pavičić Takač and Ivezić (2019) concluded that L2 learners often select and overuse sets of frame markers, most often those for labelling and sequencing stages. Contrary to Pavičić Takač's previous study (2018), this study did not show a significant correlation between the use of frame markers and coherence.

Because of the rarity of such studies, the present study aims to explore the relationship between the coherence and the usage of metadiscourse markers in argumentative essays written by L2 learners of English and German language.

5. Transition Markers and Coherence in L2 English and German Argumentative Essays: research report

5.1. Aim and research questions

The aim of this research is to analyse the use of transition markers in academic argumentative essays written by Croatian undergraduate L2 learners of English and German. The research also aims to explore the relationship between the usage of interactive metadiscourse, more specific transition markers and the coherence in the essays written by Croatian undergraduate L2 learners of English and German. Additionally, the research will compare the usage of transition markers between these essays in English and German.

In order to meet the aim of this study, the research questions are as follows:

1. What is the frequency of L2 writers' usage of transition markers in argumentative essays in English and German?

2. Which subcategory of transition markers is the most frequent subcategory in L2 writers' argumentative essays in English and German?

3. Are there any differences in the usage of transition markers between argumentative essays in English and German?

4. Is there a correlation between transition markers use and text coherence in L2 writers' argumentative essays in English and German?

According to the studies already done, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. L2 learners tend to use a limited range of transition markers in their argumentative essays.
2. Transition markers of addition is the most frequent subcategory in argumentative essays written by L2 learners of English as well as those written by L2 learners of German.
3. There will be a difference in the usage of transition markers between English and German. Essays in English will contain a larger number of metadiscourse markers.
4. There will be a positive correlation between the usage of transition markers and text coherence in L2 writers' argumentative essays in English and German.

5.2. Corpus – participants and data collection

The present study was conducted using two small corpora. The first one consisted of 26 essays in English written by Croatian undergraduate students of English language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek. The second corpus consisted of 27 essays in German written by Croatian undergraduate students of German at the same Faculty. The English corpus consists of 6,416 words and the German corpus of 6,356.

All essays from these two corpora were collected within the *KohPiTekst* project conducted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. J. Strossmayer University in Osijek. As described on the website, the project aims to describe and compare coherence and how coherence is developed in texts written by foreign language learners of English, German, French, Hungarian, and Croatian. Thereafter, these are compared with coherence dimensions and the development of coherence in texts written in their first language.[1]

The students were asked to write an argumentative essay consisting of 200-230 words on the given topic. The topic of English essays was *Life in the city.* On the other hand, the topics in the German essays were similar to English ones, *Das Leben in der Stadt* and *Onlineshopping*. The students had to list the advantages and disadvantages on the given topics.

5.3. Data analysis procedure

The students wrote the essays by hand, after which they were typed up. All misspelled transition markers were manually corrected in the essays. No other mistakes were corrected.

Regarding the tools applied in the analysis, the essays were first processed in the corpus tool SketchEngine (http://www.sketchengine.eu), and manually analysed one by one after that. This step was done in order to check the corpus one more time for metadiscourse markers. Concerning the analysis of metadiscourse markers itself, it was based on the list of metadiscourse markers provided by Hyland (2005).

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[1] For further information about the *KohPiTeks* project, see http://www.ffos.unios.hr/projekti/kohpitekst/en/.

Firstly, the corpus was examined in line with potential transition markers from Hyland's list which was used as the starting point for the analysis of transition markers in the present study. For the analysis of German L2 argumentative essays, translational counterparts in German were used. Other transition markers that occur will be determined through a detailed qualitative analysis of both corpora.

Determining whether a conjunction or an adverbial phrase is a transition marker or not is not easily done, as it requires a detailed analysis of the words in their context, assuming that not every marker from the list will be a transition marker (see section 2.3). By fulfilling the function of connecting the author's main arguments or ideas and guiding the reader through the text, they will be labelled as transition markers. To help determine their function, we can try to replace a transition marker with another one from the same category. Also, the position of the marker can help in determining the function, as transition markers usually take the initial position the sentence. After all markers from Hyland's list were analysed, every essay was read in order to find which conjunctions or adverbial phrases functioned as transition markers, but were not on the list Hyland provided. After all transition markers from the essays in English and German were retrieved form the corpus, their raw and relative frequencies were calculated.

To answer the final research question, the relationship between coherence and transition markers, all essays were evaluated by members of the *KohPiTekst* project. The essays were evaluated according to two sets of criteria. In the first set there were three elements: the text type (20 points), cohesion (10 points) and coherence (10 points). The second set included the following criteria: task achievement (10 points), vocabulary and punctuation (15 points) and grammar (10 points). The achieved points were taken to indicate the overall quality of the text. The maximum of 10 points for coherence indicated the low or high level of coherence. All data, including relative and absolute frequencies of each group of transition markers and grades for coherence, were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

What was tested first is the statistically significant difference between the two concerned corpora in the usage of transition markers, using the Mann-Whitney test in the SPSS. After that, the correlation between the usage of transition markers and the coherence of the text in both corpora was calculated with the help of Spearman's rho correlations.

5.4. Results

5.4.1. Raw and relative frequency of transition markers

In order to answer the first research question, the type and token frequency of transition markers was calculated. Table 4 shows the raw frequency of transition markers in types and tokens found in the two corpora. The German corpus contained 36 types of transition markers, whereas the English corpus contained fewer, amounting to 29 types. However, the English corpus contained 171 tokens and the German one 31 tokens less, a total of 139.

Table 4: Type and token raw frequency of transition markers in English and German corpora

Transition markers	Raw Frequency			
	Types		**Tokens**	
	English corpus	**German corpus**	**English corpus**	**German corpus**
addition	10	10	67	46
comparison	14	16	76	61
consequence	5	10	28	32
Total	**29**	**36**	**171**	**139**

In terms of relative frequencies, as shown in table 5, in the English corpus there were in total 26.65 transition markers in every 1.000 words. Similar to that, in the German corpus 21.87 transition markers in every 1.000 words were found. Shown in more detail, in the English corpus there were 11.85 transition markers of comparison and 10.44 transition markers of addition per 1.000 words. In contrast, there were just 4.36 transition markers of consequence in 1.000 words. On the other hand, in the German corpus in 1.000 words there are 9.60 transition markers of comparison, 7.24 transition markers of addition, and 5.03 transition markers of consequence. All in all, the English corpus displayed a higher number of transition markers. It can be seen from table 5 that the most frequent subcategory used in both corpora were transition markers of comparison, which "mark the arguments as similar or different" (Hyland 2005:50).

Table 5: Relative frequency of transition markers in English and German corpora

Transition markers	Relative frequency (per 1.000 words)			Total
	Transition markers of addition	**Transition markers of comparison**	**Transition markers of consequence**	
English corpus	10.44	11.85	4.36	26.65
German corpus	7.24	9.60	5.03	21.87

Further, table 6 and 7 display the raw and relative frequencies of transition markers of comparison found in the English and German corpora. In the English corpus, *but* with 33 appearances was the most frequently used transition marker of comparison. In terms of relative frequency, this means that *but* appeared around 5.14 times in 1.000 words. Next was the marker *on the other hand,* which appeared 2.34 times in 1.000 words. Taking into account the entire corpus, it appeared 15 times. An example of a rarely used transition marker was *although*, which appeared twice times in the entire English corpus and was used 0.31 times in 1.000 words. There were a few transition markers that were used only once (e.g. the combination *but on the other side*).

From table 7 it can be seen that the most frequent transition marker of comparison in the German corpus was *aber* with 21 appearances. So, in 1.000 words there was around 3 of them. Transition markers such as *trotz*, *während* or *ebenso* appeared only once in the corpus and there were found 0.16 of them in every 1.000 words.

The next subcategory of transition markers according to frequency were markers of addition, which "add elements to an argument" (Hyland 2005:50). Their raw and relative frequency in the English corpus is shown in table 8, while table 9 shows it in the German corpus.

Table 6: Transition markers of comparison in the English corpus (raw and relative frequencies)

Transition markers of comparison	English corpus	
	raw frequency	**relative frequency**
but	33	5.14
on the other hand	15	2.34
while	7	1.09
however	4	0.62
on the other side	3	0.47
on the one hand	3	0.47
whereas	2	0.31
on one hand	2	0.31
although	2	0.31
and, in the plus side	1	0.16
but on the other side	1	0.16
on the other hand, however	1	0.16
but since	1	0.16
though	1	0.16

Table 7: Transition markers of comparison in the German corpus (raw and relative frequencies)

Transition markers of comparison	German corpus	
	raw frequency	**relative frequency**
aber	21	3.30
andererseits	7	1.10
auf/an der anderen Seite	6	0.94
doch	6	0.94
einerseits	6	0.94
aber auch	2	0.31
allerdings	2	0.31
an anderer Seite	2	0.31
obwohl	2	0.31
aber doch	1	0.16
an einer Seite	1	0.16
auf der einer Seite	1	0.16
ebenso	1	0.16
infolgedessen	1	0.16
trotz	1	0.16
während	1	0.16

In the English corpus the most commonly used transition marker is *and* (40 occurrences). In terms of relative frequency, *and* appeared 6.23 times per 1.000 words. Other more commonly used transition markers of addition are *also* and *furthermore*. By contrast, markers as *besides* or *further* appear once in the corpus. When it comes to the German transition markers of addition, the most frequent one is *und* (30 occurrences). Other markers such as *also* and *ferner* were not used frequently and appear once or twice in the German corpus.

Table 8: Transition markers of addition in the English corpus (raw and relative frequencies)

Transition markers of addition	English corpus	
	raw frequency	**relative frequency**
and	40	6.23
also	11	1.71
furthermore	7	1.09
moreover	3	0.47
further	1	0.16
besides	1	0.16
plus	1	0.16
and since	1	0.16
what is more	1	0.16
and because	1	0.16

Table 9: Transition markers of addition in the German corpus (raw and relative frequencies)

Transition markers of addition	German corpus	
	raw frequency	**relative frequency**
und	30	4.72
auch	5	0.79
darüber hinaus	2	0.31
ferner	2	0.31
und dass	2	0.31
also	1	0.31
genauso	1	0.31
außerdem	1	0.31
weiter	1	0.31
weiterhin	1	0.31

Tables 10 and 11 show the results for the subcategory of transition markers of consequence, which were the least frequently used transition markers in both corpora. These markers either tell the reader that a conclusion is drawn or justified, or that an argument is countered (Hyland 2005:50). As seen in table 10, the most frequent transition marker of consequence in the English corpus was *because* (19 occurrences). The least used markers were *thus* and *since*, with only one appearance in the entire corpus.

Table 10: Transition markers of consequence in the English corpus (raw and relative frequencies)

Transition markers of consequence	English corpus	
	raw frequency	**relative frequency**
because	19	2.96
so	5	0.78
therefore	2	0.31
thus	1	0.16
since	1	0.16

Table 11: Transition markers of consequence in the German corpus (raw and relative frequencies)

Transition markers of consequence	German corpus	
	raw frequency	**relative frequency**
weil	16	2.52
so	4	0.63
denn	3	0.47
deshalb	2	0.31
und so	2	0.31
damit	1	0.16
und dabei	1	0.16
und damit	1	0.16
und deshalb	1	0.16
und deswegen	1	0.16

Concerning the German corpus, the least frequently used transition markers were *und damit, und deswegen*, which are a combination of an addition and consequence marker, but in these cases functioned as transition markers of consequence. The most frequently used marker, on the other hand, was *weil*, with a relative frequency of 2.52 in 1.000 words.

5.4.2. Statistical difference in the usage of transition markers between corpora

A Mann-Whitney test indicated that that there was no statistically significant difference in the usage of transition markers of comparison between the English (Mdn = 1.2) and German corpus (Mdn = 0.89) (U = 244.5, p > 0.05). Furthermore, there was also no statistically significant difference in the usage of transition markers of addition between the English (Mdn = 0.83) and German corpus (Mdn = 0.89) (U = 268.5, p > 0.05). There was no statistically significant difference in the usage of transition markers of consequence between the English (Mdn = 0.43) and the German corpus (Mdn = 0.43) (U = 337.5, p > 0.05), either. Finally, no statistically significant difference was found in the overall usage of transition markers in the German (Mdn = 2.23) or the English (Mdn = 2.52) corpora (U = 256, p > 0.05).

5.4.3. Correlation between transition markers and coherence

By applying Spearman's rank correlation, it was examined whether there was a correlation between the coherence of the text and the overall use of transition markers, but also the use of all subcategories of transition makers. This was calculated for each corpus separately. The results in table 13, show that in the German corpus there was no statistically significant correlation between the overall usage of transition markers, as well as each individual subcategory, and the coherence of the text. No statistically significant correlations between the usage of transition markers text coherence were found in the English corpus either (Table 14).

Table 13: Spearman correlation between transition markers and coherence in the German corpus

			Coherence
Transition markers		Transition markers of comparison	0.124
		Transition markers of addition	0.051
		Transition markers of consequence	0.207
		Transition markers in total	0.223

p > .05

Table 14: Spearman correlation between transition markers and coherence in the English corpus

			Coherence
Transition markers		Transition markers of comparison	0.092
		Transition markers of addition	-0.041
		Transition markers of consequence	-0.018
		Transition markers in total	0.056

p > .05

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the use of transition markers and explore their correlation with coherence in academic argumentative essays written by Croatian undergraduate L2 learners of English and German.

The first research question of the present study aims to determine the usage frequency of transition markers in the English and German corpora. Based on the result (tables 4 and 5) it can be concluded that learners use transition markers quite often in their essays, but they use a limited set of them, especially those for comparison and addition. A more detailed analysis showed that the markers were unevenly distributed, which means that in one essay there were 10 transition markers, whereas in the other there were just 3.

Transition markers like *and, but, on the other hand, because* in the English corpus or *und, weil, aber* in the German corpus were used far more often than the others, which indicates their overuse. This is perhaps because L2 learners are more exposed to these transition markers, as they tend to appear in books, articles, or textbooks more frequently than others. Another reason could be that in class, the teachers put more emphasis on a specific set of transition markers. In both corpora there were some conjunctions or adverbial phrases that were used with the intention to mark a transition, but were used incorrectly. Learners either did not understand the function a transition marker should serve or they sometimes piled up a couple of markers in one sentence unnecessarily. Also, learners sometimes make their own variations of the transition markers, as it is shown in example 8 and 10. Further, as shown in examples 9 and 11, learners also combined transition markers from different subcategories. Sometimes this combination was unnecessary and it creates a confusion in understanding the writer's ideas.

English corpus

Example 8

And, on the plus side*, you are more likely the find a job in the city, and there is no harm walking or cycling to work and you save yourself from the stress of moving from land to city for work.*

Example 9

*All in all the countryside is more peaceful, **but since** I´m young and ambitious and I was born and raised in the city I would not want to live in the countryside, but I believe I will change my mind when I grow older and want to settle down.*

German corpus

Example 10

***An anderer Seite** gefällt es das Leben in der Stadt manchen Menschen nicht.*

Example 11

***Aber auch** eine solche Art von Einkaufen hat ihre Vor- und Nachteile.*

As already mentioned, and shown in table 5, the most frequent group of transition markers in both corpora are transition markers of comparison, and not the assumed addition markers, which are the second most frequent one. But this should not come as a surprise as these two groups of transition markers are characteristic and important in writing argumentative essays. The usage of transition markers of comparison is high when listing advantages and disadvantages of the topic. Learners used these markers the most at the beginning of paragraphs, as it is shown in examples 12 and 15, in order to connect them. The marker that was used in almost every English essay was *but*. However, transition markers as *in addition* or *in contrast* were not found in the English corpus. When it comes to the German corpus, *aber* was used quite often, but markers like *trotz* or *während* were really low in number.

And and *und* were the most frequently used transition markers of addition in the two corpora. These transition markers occur far more often than the other addition markers. In the English corpus *and* appears 199 times, but a detailed analysis showed that only 40 of them were transition markers. Example 13 illustrates *and* as a transition marker, whereas in example 14 it does not function as a transition marker. Similarly, *und* appears in the German corpus 198 times, but only 30 times as a transition marker. In example 16 we can see *und* as a conjunction connecting two words, but in example 17 *und* plays the role of a transition marker. These examples point to the vital role of a qualitative analysis in identifying metadiscourse markers.

English corpus

Example 12

On the other hand, *life in the city has it´s disadvantages too.*

Example 13

*Shopping centres, bars, avenues are just a few of those, **and** those cannot be found on the countryside.*

Example 14

*Also, in cities everything is so hectic, the pace of life is very fast, which is not a nice way to live **and** grow up.*

German corpus

Example 15

Auf der anderen Seite *kann Onlineshopping sehr gefährlich sein.*

Example 16

*Auf der anderen Seite ist die Stadt sehr laut und die Menschen sind oftmals unfreundlich **und** verschlossen.*

Example 17

*Einerseits, gibt es in einer Stadt immer Lärm **und** die verpestete Luft und es ist nicht so ruhig wie auf dem Dorf.*

Looking at the transition markers of consequence, in both corpora, it can be stated that learners do not use them often, and that they use quite a narrow set. As this group of transition markers is not characteristic for argumentative essays, the low findings are justifiable. In the German corpus, as seen in table 11, learners often combine the additive transition marker *und* with consequence markers like *deshalb* or *damit*. In such cases it is sometimes hard to determine to which group one marker belongs, according to the relation they are signalling in the specific context.

When we compare the two corpora in this study, we can conclude that there is no significant difference in the raw frequency of transition markers that occur, as can be seen in table 5. The English corpus has a slightly higher number of transition markers per 1.000 words. This can be due to the

students' more prominent exposure to the English language and the emphasis on the metadiscourse markers in school classes. As already stated, the group of transition markers which occurs the most in both corpora is comparison markers, as this group of markers is characteristic for this type of text. Each corpus contains a large set of various transition markers of comparison, although the majority of them occur once or twice in the whole corpus. As writing an argumentative essay in the foreign language is a mandatory part of the final examination at the end of high school in Croatia, learners are explicitly taught metadiscourse markers. They are mostly presented with a limited set of metadiscourse markers which they use in writing their essays. In the usage of transition markers of addition, as already mentioned, there is a slight difference. In the German corpus these markers occur less often than in the English corpus. Transition markers of consequence are used rather sparsely in both corpora.

On the other hand, as the results in table 12 show, there is no statistically significant difference between the two corpora. This means that the usage of transition markers does not differ in the concerned languages and that learners probably have the same habits in using transition markers.

Tables 13 and 14, showed that there was no statistically significant correlation between the usage of transition markers and the coherence of the text in the English and German corpora. This implies that L2 learners did not use transition markers in an effective way, and that the transition markers used did not add to the coherence of the text. One reason could be that L2 learners use these markers simply because they know that by using them, they can create a coherent text. Also, they may not have thought about how these transition markers connect the text, but they simply used them to increase the word count. These results could mean that the learner used other elements of metadiscourse to achieve the requested coherence of the text.

These results corroborate the results of the study conducted by Pavičić Takač and Ivezić (2019). Another shared conclusion is that L2 learners tend to overuse particular sets of metadiscourse markers, and that they do not use a wide range of markers from different subcategories. So, L2 students may achieve coherence with the help of other metadiscourse elements.

While analysing the two corpora, it is noticeable that learners have more problems compiling sentences with metadiscourse markers in German than in English. The general greater exposure to the English language than to the German language could be the answer to this. On the other hand, in the English corpus there was an unnecessary overuse of some conjunctions, for example, the conjunction

and, as shown in example 18. From all potential conjunctions in the sentence only one *and* is a transition marker. Another conclusion that cropped up is that in the German corpus there are a lot of grammar mistakes, misspelling, and writing nouns lowercase, as shown in examples 19 and 20. These can also decrease the quality of a text.

English corpus

Example 18

*All in all the countryside is more peaceful, but since I´m young **and** ambitious **and** I was born **and** raised in the city I would not want to live in the countryside, but I believe I will change my mind when I grow older **and** want to settle down.*

German corpus

Example 19

*Die **Schpaziergänge** in der Stadt machen **nich** so viel spaß wie die **Schpaziergänge** auf dem Land und es ist leichter Tiere zu haben wen man einen großen Hoff besitzt, **anstadt** einer kleinen Wohnung.*

Example 20

*Es gibt sehr viele Einkaufszentren und **möglichkeiten** um **Schpaß** zu haben.*

7. Conclusion

Writing texts in today's classrooms is an important element of foreign language learning. This is also the case in English and German L2 learning. Writing a quality text includes the ability to use the grammar conventions correctly, as well as morphological, semantic, and syntactic norms. This is only furthered by the ability to convey ideas, feelings and arguments in a coherent way. The present study set out to contribute to the research of that field as it aimed to analyse the usage of transition markers and their relationship with coherence of the text in Croatian undergraduate L2 learners of English and German. Furthermore, it also aimed to explore the difference in the usage of transition markers in English and German.

To answer the first research question, the results suggest that L2 learners use transition markers quite frequently in their essays, but use a rather limited set. This means that they do not use a wide range of transition markers, but that they also tend to overuse specific transition markers. This is the case in both corpora and so confirms the set hypothesis.

When it comes to the most frequently used subcategory in the two corpora, the answer to the second research question is transition markers of comparison, which diverges from the hypothesis set at the beginning of this thesis.

Concerning the difference between the usage of transition markers in argumentative essays in English and German, there is a slight difference between the German and English corpora, especially considering the raw frequency of appearance. Also, it can be stated that there is a slightly higher usage of transition markers of addition and comparison in the English than the German corpus. But, in terms of the statistical analysis, the results did not show significant differences between the two corpora. By contrast, there is a difference in the correct usage of transition markers. In the German corpus more problems while connecting sentences can be found, whereas in the English one, it often came to the point that certain markers were cluttered or overused. Therefore, the hypothesis that there will be a difference in the usage of transition markers in English and German is false, while the hypothesis that the English corpus will contain a bigger number of metadiscourse markers has proven to be true. In this sense, the answer to the third research question is that there is no difference in the usage of transition markers between the two corpora.

To answer the fourth research question, the Spearman correlation test has shown that there is no statistically significant correlation between the usage of transition markers and the coherence of the text in the English and German corpora.

The limitation that the present study has is that the analysis is directed to just one set of markers from the interactive category of metadiscourse, that of transition markers. The learners are perhaps focused on other groups of metadiscourse markers and achieved coherence in a quality text through them. Another limitation of this study is the small sample size used. More voluminous sample would yield more reliable results. Something that could also be considered a limitation is that some of the essays in the two corpora were written by the same learners as they are students of both English and German, so the learners could have the same habits by using metadiscourse elements. Therefore, if we had one group of learners write just the essays in English and the other just in German, the results would perhaps be more diverse. Concerning further study, it should be done on a larger sample to generate more reliable and more generalizable results.

Transition markers, as well as other groups of metadiscourse markers, are an important element in writing as they help achieve coherence and cohesion in a text. Through these a writer guides the reader through the text, organises the discourse and transfers the favoured interpretation over to the reader. Pavičić Takač and Ivezić (2019) point out that learners often learn just a couple of markers from each group of metadiscourse markers and use these randomly, without exactly knowing what function those markers have. Finally, the problem could also be in the teaching of metadiscourse, as the function and meaning of metadiscourse markers is not fully explained and exemplified.

8. Implications for teaching and learning metadiscourse

The results of this study show that L2 Croatian learners do not use metadiscourse elements in an effective way. Considering that writing a coherent essay is a part of the final high school exam in Croatia, there should be a focus on teaching learners how to achieve a high level of coherence and cohesion in their writing by using metadiscourse elements. Thus, if the acquisition of metadiscourse is to be bettered in the future, some changes have to be made in teaching, as well as learning metadiscourse. "Teaching metadiscourse means sensitizing students to rhetorical effect and features that exist within a given genre and community, and equip them with enough resources to interact with their readers in their own world" (Amiryousefi, 2010:163).

First of all, teachers should be acquainted with the learner's needs; what genre of text they will write or with whom they will interact (Amiryousefi, 2010). While teaching metadiscourse, teachers should focus on explaining both the function and the meaning of metadiscourse items, so the learners can see what each category of metadiscourse items offers. However, each explanation should be followed with examples, so that learners can see the items in a context. Simply giving learners lists of metadiscourse items does not help the acquisition of metadiscourse. The learners should be taught that the presented metadiscourse items can be more than connectors, as well as encouraged to create their own variations of metadiscourse items. Teachers should also urge their learners to think about the readers of their texts, in what way would they like for the reader to comprehend the written text, or in what way they would like to transfer it the reader. According to Amiryousefi (2014), authentic texts should also be incorporated into teaching metadiscourse items, so that learners have an overview of metadiscourse items in a relevant context. The learners can, for example, be given the task to identify and analyse metadiscourse items in authentic texts. Lastly, the learners themselves should always strive to improve their knowledge of metadiscourse in general, as it is a very important element of communication.

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