

A Corpus-based Study of Adjuncts in Colombian English as a Second Language (ESL) Argumentative Essays

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Abstract : Meeting high standards of writing in a Second Language (L2) is extremely important for many students who wish to undertake studies at universities in both English and non-English speaking countries. University lecturers in English speaking countries continue to express dissatisfaction with the apparent poor quality of essay writing skills displayed by English as a Second Language (ESL) students, whose essays are often criticised for their lack of cohesion and coherence. These critiques have extended to contexts such as Colombia, where many ESL students are criticised for their inability to write high-quality academic texts in L2-English, particularly at the tertiary level. If Colombian ESL students are expected to meet high standards of writing when studying locally and abroad, it makes sense to carry out specific research that can perhaps lead to recommendations to support their quest for improving argumentative strategies. Employing Corpus Linguistics methods within a Learner Corpus Research framework, and a combination of Log-Likelihood and Bayes Factor measures, this paper investigated argumentative essays written by Colombian ESL students. The study specifically aimed to analyse conjunctive adjuncts in argumentative essays to find out how Colombian ESL students connect their ideas in discourse. Results suggest that a) Colombian ESL learners need explicit instruction on specific areas of conjunctive adjuncts to counteract overuse, underuse and misuse; b) underuse of endophoric and evidential adjuncts highlights gaps between IELTS-like essays and good quality tertiary-level essays and published papers, and these gaps are linked to prior knowledge brought into writing task, rhetorical functions in writing, and research processes before writing takes place; c) both Colombian ESL learners and L1-English writers (in a reference corpus) overuse some adjuncts and underuse endophoric and evidential adjuncts, when compared to skilled L1-English and L2-English writers, so differences in frequencies of adjuncts has little to do with the writers' L1, and differences are rather linked to types of essays writers produce (e.g. ESL vs. university essays). Ender Velasco: The pedagogical recommendations deriving from the study are that: a) Colombian ESL learners need to be shown that overuse is not the only way of giving cohesion to argumentative essays and there are other alternatives to cohesion (e.g., implicit adjuncts, lexical chains and collocations); b) syllabi and classroom input need to raise awareness of gaps in writing skills between IELTS-like and tertiary-level argumentative essays, and of how endophoric and evidential adjuncts are used to refer to anaphoric and cataphoric sections of essays, and to other people's work or ideas; c) syllabi and classroom input need to include essay-writing tasks based on previous research/reading which learners need to incorporate into their arguments, and tasks that raise awareness of referencing systems (e.g., APA); d) classroom input needs to include explicit instruction on use of punctuation, functions and/or syntax with specific conjunctive adjuncts such as for example, for that reason, although, despite and nevertheless.

Keywords : argumentative essays, colombian english as a second language (esl) learners, conjunctive adjuncts, corpus linguistics

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