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Learning to write at university level in Italy: A longitudinal corpus-based study of interpersonal and textual metadiscourse

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Introduction

What is metadiscourse? As we all know, nowadays English is culturally, politically and economically one of the most important languages in the world. As a consequence, the linguistic abilities and communicative competences of writers play a major role, including the ability to present facts effectively and to manage the issue of writer and reader visibility. In the last few years a considerable number of studies have been conducted on academic English. To be precise, some of them have attempted to clarify the characteristics of different text types in terms of structural, discoursal and metadiscoursal properties.

Language is often used for multiple reasons, including persuasion, information or entertainment. The use of language to talk about our experiences and our ideas is obviously a key purpose of communication. Metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just an exchange of information, and that it also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating (Hyland 2005:3). Therefore, language is used to convey information about the world through the organisation of the text itself. What the writers do is try to use language to offer a representation of themselves in their work and to negotiate social relations with their readers.

Metadiscourse awareness can motivate the writer to explicitly organize his/her discourse, involve the reader in it and signal his/her attitude properly. There is a need for ESL/EFL learners to understand how to structure their texts, in order to help them guide their readers through the texts and avoid any possible misunderstanding.

The overall aim of the present study is to compare and analyze the use of metadiscourse in texts written by first- and second-year students studying *Mediazione Linguistica e Culturale* at the University of Padova. It mainly provides an investigation for which both qualitative and quantitative methods are used. First of all, it sets out to explore how "metadiscourse markers" can impact on first- and second-year EFL learners' perceptions of written texts. The design of the project itself has required quite a large amount of data, in order to gain a general picture of how

linguistic features, such as metadiscourse markers, are used and understood by university students. Markers have been divided into textual and interpersonal: the former category comprises elements that have to do with the organization of discourse, while the latter reflects the writer's stance towards both the contents presented in the text and the potential reader.

In order to develop this research I have adapted Hyland's model of metadiscourse. Textual metadiscourse markers were distinguished as: transition markers, frame markers, endophoric, evidentials, announcements, and code glosses. Furthermore, as regards interpersonal metadiscourse markers, they were divided into five categories: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention, and engagement markers. Finally, the study also looks into how native speakers and learners of English use connectors in their writing. The use of connectives such as *"in fact", "indeed", "hence", "thus"* and *"moreover"* is explored.

I became interested in the field of metadiscourse last year, while I was on my Erasmus+ project exchange at the University College, Cork. Being in contact with native speakers made me realize that writing and speaking are more than just the simple communication of ideas. Rather, they are social acts which involve writers, readers, speakers and listeners who try to cooperate with each other to affect the ways ideas are presented and understood. What is more, nowadays metadiscourse is a very interesting field of inquiry which is believed to play a crucial role in organizing and producing persuasive writing.

This dissertation is composed of four main chapters. Chapter one, which is divided into three sections, lays out an overview of second language acquisition research, and then offers a reflection on the possible goals of language teaching. There follows a presentation of the variables on which SLA research has mainly focused on: age, motivation, sex, social class, and ethnic identity. Finally, the chapter explores how the theories of SLA range along a continuum from "nativist" through "interactionist" and "environmentalist".

The second chapter is concerned with the current interest in academic discourse, and in particular in the increasingly important role of metadiscourse phenomena. First of all, a general introduction to metadiscourse issues is given, followed by a presentation of the various features that are part of metadiscourse. Furthermore, an entire section is devoted to how metadiscourse has been categorised in the present study. Another section is concerned with the fact that several factors may account for the differences in the use of metadiscourse, including genre, register awareness, cultural conventions and community. Finally, the last section reflects on the importance that metadiscourse is gradually gaining in language teaching.

Chapter three provides a description of learner language as an important source of data within SLA. It is then followed by a section devoted to the process of interlanguage as a way of explaining L2 acquisition. Another section provides a clear presentation of the pertinence of error analysis, as a way to explore not only the types of errors learners make, but also the sources of these errors. Finally, the last section reflects on the importance of learner corpus research, which attempts to create a link between the fields of corpus linguistics and that of foreign/second language research.

Chapter four introduces the methodology used for this study and then, as already pointed out, presents and discusses the results obtained from the exploration of the Italian learners' use of metadiscourse features. Finally, a short section is devoted to the use of some types of connectives by native speakers and EFL learners.

CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH

It is generally agreed that in the twenty-first century the majority of people in the world speak more than one language. Second (or foreign) languages are learnt at school, at university, in the workplace, as well as at home through informal self-study. As a matter of fact, English, a second language for most of the people of the world, has become the international language for business and commerce, science and technology, international relations and diplomacy. As Macaro (2010:4) states, as an object of learning, a second language has no rival. Learning to use a second/foreign language is a process that not only involves noticing something new, but also questioning something already known.

It is interesting to notice that what comes to mind for many people when they encounter the phrase "second language acquisition", is their experience as students when they were engaged in the study of one or more foreign languages. However, as I mentioned before, second languages do not only have a place in school, but they affect many other aspects of people's lives. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:2) point out, "in the interdependent world of today, second language acquisition and use are ubiquitous". An example could be that of the migrant worker situation: in fact, migrant workers typically do not speak or understand the language of their new environment, which can create a number of social problems. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:2) claim, this problem has nevertheless offered SLA researchers a great opportunity to study how language is acquired.

Another instance where second language acquisition becomes an issue is the arrival and assimilation of immigrants. In other words, given the large inflows of migrants, it is important to try and explain how these newcomers tried to adapt to their new surroundings. Park and Burgess (1921, in Guajardo 2008: Vol 5) talk about assimilation, defining it as a "process consisting of fusion meaning that both groups, natives and newcomers, shared experiences, memories and sentiments", thus becoming

one in a common cultural life. Furthermore, Gans (1992, in Guajardo 2008: Vol 5) proposes a "straight-line assimilation" theory which describes a process that takes place across generations: each new generation represents a new level of adjustment to the host society towards a more complete assimilation. Moreover, the segmented assimilation theory describes "a set of different results arising from migrant integration" (in Guajardo 2008: Vol 5). In other words, while certain migrants experience social mobility, others find themselves in the lower levels of society. It could be argued that the purpose of this theory is to try to explain which factors may cause this divergence, such as for example education, place of birth, socioeconomic background, etc. Finally, as we will see in the final paragraph of this chapter, a very important theory is that of "acculturation", investigated also by Schumann (1975, 1978a). This linguist argues that the fewer the social and psychological distances between the newcomers and the people of the host society, the more successful the former are likely to be in acquiring the target language.

1.1 What is Second Language Acquisition (SLA)?

To answer this question, a number of concepts will be introduced. First of all, it is important to notice that the aim of SLA scholars is not to describe a language as descriptive linguistics would do, but to "look for relationships between a language and the people who are speaking it or attempting to speak it" (Macaro 2010:4). Therefore, they try to investigate the complex influences that contribute to the outcomes of second language learning. Researchers claim that what is worth studying is the fact that people are able to learn a language in addition to the one they are confronted with from the moment of their birth.

A number of points related to the meaning of the term "second language acquisition" should be examined. Firstly, the concept of second vs. third language acquisition. Many learners are considered to be multilingual in the sense that "in addition to their first language they have acquired some competence in more than one non-primary language" (Ellis 1994:11). However, when one wants to refer to any

language they speak which is different from their first one, the term "second language" is generally used. Another distinction that can be made is the one between second vs. foreign language acquisition, even though it must be noticed that in SLA "second" is not intended to contrast with "foreign". Usually second language learning takes place when the language has an "institutional and social role in the community" (Ellis 1994:12), whereas foreign language learning takes place when a language plays no major role in the community and is learnt primarily in the classroom. This distinction might be interesting in the sense that it can reveal important differences in terms of what is learnt and how it is learnt. Finally, a definition of the term "acquisition" is needed. It is quite complicated to find a suitable definition, because "acquisition" can mean different things. Krashen (1981), for example, distinguishes between "acquisition" and "learning". As we will see later in the chapter, "the former refers to the subconscious process of picking up a language through exposure and the latter to the conscious process of studying it" (in Ellis 1994:14).

As regards the origins of the study of SLA, some people would point out that it has been informally studied for centuries. However, we can say that in the late 1960s authors began to investigate many fields of learning, focusing in particular on language learning. Then in the 1980s, thanks to the expanse of the English language world-wide, SLA research underwent a great expansion. This was in part a result of a crucial debate which has remained at the heart of SLA research: whether learning to speak an L2 is as natural as learning the L1, or whether it involves different processes.

The first step in the exploration of SLA research is to establish a clear understanding of what the object of the field of study is.

1.1.1 Why study second language acquisition?

It is believed that the study of SLA is fascinating in its own right: it requires knowledge of linguistics, sociology, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics in order to be fully understood. It goes without saying, that the language teaching profession is the first that can take advantage of an increased understanding of SLA and therefore,

through teachers, learners themselves. As Ellis (1994:4) points out, the study of SLA "affords a learning- and learner- centred view of language pedagogy, enabling teachers to examine critically the principles upon which the selection and organization of teaching have been based". As a consequence, when teachers make decisions about the teaching process they should be informed by knowledge not only of the subject matter they are teaching, but also of the group of people they are working with and also of the language learning process itself. As Ellis (1994:4) explains, "unless we know for certain that the teacher's scheme of things really does match the learner's way of going about things, we cannot be sure that the teaching content will contribute directly to language learning". In fact, there are mainly two ways in which the study of SLA may help teachers: it can help them to develop their own ideas of how their learners acquire an L2 and also it can provide them with information they can use when making future pedagogic decisions. In other words, this kind of research leads not only to a greater teacher awareness of the acquisition process, but also to an increased sensibility towards learners. Furthermore, as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:4) maintain, learners who are aware of the findings of SLA research report that their awareness of the SLA process facilitates their attempts at language learning, as well as having an impact on other educational programmes that can involve language acquisition, such as for example bilingual education.

As we have mentioned before, the knowledge of certain disciplines can help understand SLA research. However, it is interesting to notice that SLA itself can contribute greatly to some of these disciplines. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:4) suggest that SLA can provide linguists with findings pointing to language universals and psychologists with observations on differences between individual learning styles. In addition, sociolinguists can use SLA research to expand their understanding of when speakers prefer one speech style over another.

1.1.2 SLA research and learner language

It is useful to distinguish between two main branches of enquiry within SLA: one focuses on learning and the other on the language learner. The former focuses on identifying the universal characteristics of L2 acquisition, whereas the latter focuses on the different ways in which individual learners learn an L2. Moreover, one of the main goals of SLA research is to find out what learners actually do when they try to learn an L2. One of the best ways to do this is to collect samples of learner language and analyse them, with the aim of describing what learners know about the target language (the language they are trying to learn) and how their language changes over time.

As Ellis (1994:38) explains, there are two main goals of SLA research: description and explanation. The aim of the former is to provide a clear account of the learner's competence and, in particular, to uncover the regularities in the learner's development and control of L2 knowledge. The first goal of explanation is to reveal how learners are able to develop their knowledge of an L2. A second goal consists in identifying the external and internal factors that account for why learners acquire an L2 the way they do.

The next step might be focusing on what SLA research applies to. As matter of fact, there are many levels and aspects of teaching: looking at the learner and the language acquisition processes provides information on what learners normally do or do not do and what can and cannot be taught. It must be noticed that SLA research is mainly concerned with such aspects of teaching as the components of language and language learning. However, the goals of teaching are not determined by SLA researchers, but by the individual student, the individual teacher and the society. As Cook (1992) points out, the crucial aspect of the classroom is that it provides the input and the context for language learning. What learners hear is the "vital source of their ideas about the L2" (Cook 1992). As a consequence, the language taught has to reflect the type of language the student is aiming at and the teacher has to provide the student with the appropriate language input to learn from. It is generally agreed that the purposes of language teaching are far from straightforward: they could include benefits for the learner's future career and opportunities to emigrate, or it could have

effects on the society through the integration of minority groups or the growth of international trade. For example, Cook (2002) makes a list of the possible goals of language teaching:

- *Self-development:* the student becomes a "better" person through the learning of another language;

- *A method for training new cognitive processes:* by learning another language, students acquire methods of learning;

- *A way-in to the mother tongue:* students become more aware of their first language and its implications;

- *An entrée to another culture:* students can understand and appreciate other groups in the world;

- *A means of communicating with those who speak another language,* both for business or pleasure;

- *Promotion of intercultural understanding and peace:* to foster negotiation and changes in the society.

It is interesting to notice that these goals can be divided into two groups: external and internal. The first type of goals relates to the students' use of the language outside the classroom, for example travelling, attending lectures in another country, etc. The second type, instead, relates to the students' mental development as individuals, as they may develop new ways of thinking, or to approach the language itself. It must be added that in much language teaching the implicit external goal has always been that of making students sound like native speakers in all aspects of the language.

To conclude, it could be argued that SLA could benefit from exploring the late stages of the SLA process. As a matter of fact, understanding the late stages of L2 acquisition could contribute to SLA theorists' efforts to develop complete pedagogical and cognitive models of L2 acquisition. As said above, learners can choose to study a

language for a variety of reasons: to travel, to participate in a society, to obtain employment and so on. Therefore, "the scope of SLA research must be sufficiently broad to include a variety of subjects who speak a variety of native languages, who are in the process of acquiring a variety of second languages in a variety of settings for a variety of reasons" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:7). The need to understand and explain how given types of learners accomplish this and why some others fail has continued to motivate SLA research for more than twenty years.

1.2 Social factors and second language acquisition

The relationship between society and second language learning could be examined to answer a few questions regarding the differences as to how quickly learners can learn an L2 and also the type of proficiency they can acquire. Furthermore, a concept which has to be taken into consideration is that of "context": "the different settings in which L2 learning can take place-whether the setting is a natural or an educational one" (Ellis 1994:197). It is important to notice that social factors may not affect L2 proficiency directly, but together with learner attitudes they can shape and influence learning outcomes. As Ellis (1994:198) underlines, learners manifest different attitudes towards the target language, target language speakers, the target-language culture, the social value of learning the L2, particular uses of the target language and themselves as members of their own culture. It could be argued that learners' attitudes may predispose them to make efforts to learn the L2 or may not do so. There are cases in which learners have to face conflicting attitudes: they wish to learn the L2, but at the same time they wish to affirm their own identity through their L1. An example could be the attitude of Irish people towards learning Gaelic. Of course knowing Gaelic was considered important for cultural and ethnic integrity, but at the same time its actual use was quite infrequent and therefore demotivating.

The variables on which SLA research has mainly focused on are: age, motivation, sex, social class and ethnic identity. All these variables are thought to lead to different levels of L2 proficiency.

1.2.1 Age

The process of Second Language Acquisition has been described as occurring in five main stages. According to Haynes (2007, in Stefánsson 2013:5) the first one of these stages is *Pre-production,* that is when learners gradually build up their vocabulary without actually speaking the language, but rather echoing it. Then follows the *Early Production* stage, during which learners are able to use words in short phrases and also use short language forms. Haynes (2007, in Stefánsson 2013:5) talks about the third stage, *Speech Emergence*, when learners should be able to use simple phrases and also engage in conversation and ask simple questions. When arrived at the fourth stage, *Intermediate Fluency,* learners have an active vocabulary and can form complex phrases both spoken and written. They still make grammatical errors, but they have often achieved excellent comprehension skills. The last stage is called *Advanced Fluency*, and at this point learners are considered as near-native. As Haynes (2007, in Stefánsson 2013:6) points out, it takes about 5 to 10 years to achieve advanced proficiency in the acquisition of a second language.

Ellis (1994:201) affirms that age has received considerable attention by sociolinguists. It is believed that children can learn a second language in two ways: simultaneously or sequentially (Stefánsson 2013:6). Simultaneous learners are children under the age of three who are exposed to their mother tongue and also to another language in an educational context such as the kindergarten. These learners also include children from a multi-language home. What happens in both cases is that children learn the two languages the same way, without favouring one or the other. Their brains are able to construct two separate language systems, and after the age of 6 months the child is able to distinguish between the two languages.

Contrary to simultaneous language learning, sequential learning is not related to age, but can be influenced by other factors such as motivation. The child speaks its native language, but is also introduced to a second language. It could be argued that second language acquisition competences among adults are different from the way children acquire another language. The so called Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is described as a "biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired

more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire" (Brown 2007, in Stefánsson 2013:10). According to Chambers and Trudgill (1980, in Ellis 1994:201), after the age of about 15 years learners are less likely to acquire a native-speaker accent or to develop consistent grammatical ability. Furthermore, Preston (1989, in Ellis 1994:201) suggests that children may be more prepared to share external norms, because they have not yet formed stereotypes of their own identities; in other words, younger learners are generally more successful than older learners, possibly because their identity is not threatened by target-language norms.

The question as to what the best age is for second language acquisition seems to be related to the amount of exposure to the target language. It is believed that the amount and the quality of the language input is extremely important to young learners at the early stages of second language acquisition. Munoz (2010, in Stefánsson 2013:12) for example presents results that compare younger and older language learners, and finds that young learners consistently show better language results than those who start second language acquisition as adults. Furthermore, it could be argued that children can benefit much more by participating in the natural environment, where they are naturally exposed to the language input, rather than starting at an early age in classroom environment. Therefore, researchers agree on the importance of the amount of exposure during the critical age of SLA. Also, there is no certainty regarding "the younger the better" if exposure is minimal.

1.2.2 Motivation

It is extremely important to understand the role of motivation in SLA, because many investigations show that motivation plays a significant role in achieving second language proficiency and competence. Pandey (2005, in Stefánsson 2013:14) claims that "motivation, described as the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts, is important because it determines the extent of the learner's active involvement and attitude towards learning". Depending on the types of goal the learner wants to achieve, it is possible to distinguish between integrative and instrumental

motivation. In second language acquisition, instrumental motivation can be considered the kind of motivation of those who want to learn a second language for educational purposes or to be able to seek job opportunities. By contrast, integrated motivation is proper of those learners who want to actively participate and culturally interact with the target language community members. As a consequence, teachers should be aware of the importance of motivation in order to assist learners to reach their language learning goals. It is generally agreed that motivation can really influence and increase the learner's ability to succeed: "implement positive motivation during the learning process will benefit the learner more from learning the target language" (Engin 2009, in Stefánsson 2013:16).

1.2.3 Sex

By taking a close look at the historical development of gender in language studies, it must be noticed that the first one who takes into account feminist linguistic approaches is Deborah Cameron (1995). First of all, she distinguishes three models of language and gender: the deficit model, the dominance model and the cultural difference model (Cameron 1995, in Shakouri and Saligheh 2012:3). In the deficit model, men are seen as the norm, whereas women as departing from that norm and, as a consequence, women's speech is considered deficient when compared to the male norm. The dominance model, on the other hand, asserts that women's deficient speech patterns are not to be considered the result of mental deficiency but rather of "differential experience" (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1998). In other words, men's greater power in society may be a factor in perpetuating women's weaker use of language. Finally, the cultural difference model is based on the idea that women's language is not inferior to men's language, but simply different. Women and men's speech is likely to be different mainly because they grow up in different speech communities.

All these things considered, it is important to notice that a distinction is often made between "sex" and "gender": the former consists of a biological distinction, whereas the latter is a social one. As Labov notes, "there is little reason to think that

sex is an appropriate category to explain linguistic behaviour" (Labov 1991, in Ellis 1994:202). However, when examining the role of gender on the acquisition of language, one must consider that there are various ways in which it can affect language use and development. To Ellis, for example, there was nothing conclusive in studies of gender differences in SLA in achievement, attitudes and strategy of use: "sex is, of course, likely to interact with other variables in determining L2 proficiency. It will not always be the case, therefore, that females outperform males" (Ellis 1994:204). Sociolinguistic research has shown that women appear to "outstrip males in the standardness of their speech and use of prestige forms" (Ellis 1994:204). As Ellis (1994:204) goes on saying, they also tend to be more sensitive to new forms and more likely to incorporate them in their speech, but unfortunately it has also been proven that once they become aware of the change, they are inclined to reject them. Men, on the other hand, appear to be less sensitive to new forms, but once they have started to use them they are less likely to reject them. As a matter of fact, women might be better at L2 learning than men, because they appear to be more open to new linguistic forms in the L2 input. Other studies show that female learners have more positive attitudes towards learning an L2 than men: they are generally more motivated and show more positive attitudes especially towards speakers of the target language. From the social perspective, there is no doubt that different genres may have diverse implications, but sex, of course, has to interact with other variables in determining L2 proficiency and in particular with ethnicity and social class.

1.2.4 Social class

"An individual's social class is typically determined by means of a composite measure that takes account of income, level of education and occupation" (Ellis 1994:204). There are mainly four groups: lower class, working class, lower middle class and upper middle class. For instance, Pishghadam (2011, in López Montero, Quesada Chaves, Salas Alvarado 2014:439) asserts that one important issue that has to be taken into consideration when exploring the field of language learning is the relationship between social class, success and different capitals learners possess. In fact, students

may present different degrees of enthusiasm when it comes to learn English depending on the cultural and social background they have been exposed to. There is evidence of a relationship between social class and L2 achievements: children from middle-class homes regularly outperform those from lower- and working-class homes. In other words, children from lower socio-economic groups are less successful educationally than those from higher groups. Furthermore, these effects can also be produced by the different types of language use or the different experiences of the world that members of different social classes are likely to have.   As Heath (1983, in Ellis 1994:206) shows, the type of language that working- class black children experience at home differs from the one in the classroom and thus puts them in clear disadvantage in comparison to white children. People with good salaries can afford educational expenses, which is why social class and access to resources are thought to have considerable impact on academic achievement.

1.2.5 Ethnic identity

How language shapes and is shaped by identity is a key topic in sociolinguistics. The relationship between identity and language learning is of great interest to scholars in the field of Second Language Acquisition. As Wigglesworth (2005, in Khatib 2011:1702) points out, over the last few decades there has been much debate about the relationship between language and identity and there is some consensus that language is a marker of ethnic identity. Moreover, it is generally agreed that ethnic identity can influence L2 learning: a key concept when considering this relationship is that of the distance between the cultures of the native and target languages. The idea behind this concept is that the more distant the two cultures are, the more difficult L2 learning is. It is interesting to notice that the relationship between attitudes and L2 learning is apparent in works which have examined the effect of ethnic identity on the interactions between members of different ethnic groups. As Giles and Ryan (1982, in Ellis 1994:209) maintain, members of an in-group may adopt different distinctiveness strategies when communicating with members of an out-group. For example, when people want to emphasize solidarity with their own in-group, they tend to prefer

linguistic divergence from the out-group. Moreover, the role of attitudes seems to be particularly important: learners with positive attitudes towards their own ethnic identity and the target culture show higher motivation and therefore high levels of L2 proficiency. As a consequence, identity and language learning are interrelated, each influencing the other.

As Khatib (2011) states, a student's first language and cultural background can be seen to influence the student's second language acquisition. The identity of a person in his second language will always be shaped by the constant feeling of a sort of "lack of ability to communicate" (Khatib 2011:1704) in the second language at the same level as in the first language. Such a situation will inevitably affect the student's view of himself as a speaker of the target language.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the type of context or setting in which learning takes place, because, as we have noticed, learners' choices are shaped by the contexts they find themselves in. In fact, the context provides learning opportunities which give rise to learner's outcomes. First of all, a distinction can be made between "natural" and "educational" settings. On the one hand, informal learning occurs, that is "learning is considered to result from direct participation and observation without any articulation of the underlying principles or rules" (Ellis 1994:214). On the other hand, learning is thought to take place through conscious attention to rules and principles. It is believed that learners in natural settings may deliberately look for opportunities to practise those specific linguistic items they have studied. Furthermore, as Ellis (1994:215) explains, the social conditions that prevail in natural and educational contexts may predispose learners to engage in informal or formal learning strategies. For instance, it is rare to see that teachers and learners engage in spontaneous interchanges. It must be noticed that there is no evidence that naturalistic settings can lead to higher levels of proficiency and of grammatical competence. Once again the relationship between setting and learning outcomes is an indeterminate one, as different social factors might bring considerable variation in each setting.

1.3 Theories in second language acquisition

The main purpose here is to show the value of theory in motivating SLA research. It must be noticed that theories of SLA range along a continuum from "nativist" through "interactionist" to "environmentalist". As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:226) point out, they differ in the "relative importance they attach to innate mechanisms and knowledge, to interactions among innate abilities, learned abilities and environmental factors, and to experientially conditioned learner characteristics and the linguistic input".

1.3.1 Nativist theories of SLA

First of all, nativist theories explain acquisition by "positing an innate biological endowment that makes learning possible" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:227). Numerous linguists and methodologists support this hypothesis. Chomsky, who is the leading proponent, is interested in the nature of language and sees language as a mirror of the mind. In fact, he notes various factors which support the idea that "humans are innately endowed with universal language-specific knowledge, or what Chomsky calls Universal Grammar" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:228). The UG theory considers that the input from the environment is insufficient to account for language acquisition. The main claim is that without such an innate endowment language learning would be impossible, because the input data are not "rich" enough to allow acquisition. In fact, input can be considered inadequate in various ways: for example, it does not contain the so called "negative evidence", that is information from which the learner could understand what is not possible in a language. Furthermore, Chomsky claims that children in every language and cultural community learn to understand and speak at a remarkably early age. He calls this innate ability to acquire and use language a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky's theory led to an entirely new approach in the field of linguistics: he did not study how people acquire a second language, yet other linguists applied his theories to second language acquisition issues.

Influenced by Chomsky's assumptions on language as an innate faculty, Krashen (1976) developed an influential proposal with emphasis on the contrast between learning and acquisition to explain SLA. It is generally agreed that his theory was one of the best known and also one of the most controversial among the theories of SLA in the 1970s and early 1980s. According to Krashen (1976) there are mainly two knowledge systems behind SL performance. The first is the *acquired system*: the product of use made by adult learners of the same language-learning abilities that children employ for first language acquisition. The second is the *learned system,* that is the product of formal instruction (typically classroom language teaching). It comprises knowledge of simple SL grammatical rules. Krashen's (1983) hypothesis is based on the set of five interrelated hypotheses listed below:

1- *The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis*

As Krashen (1983) underlines, a difference can be seen between acquisition and learning. The former is a "subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of a language, not unlike the process used by a child to pick up a language"; the latter, instead, is a conscious process in which "learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process" (Brown 2002, in Hanak-Hammerl and Newby 2003:8).

2- *The Monitor Theory*

Is the learning process with the purpose to "monitor" the learning process and propose improvements to what has already been learned. There are three conditions necessary for monitor use: sufficient time, focus on form, knowledge of the rules.

3- The Natural Order Hypothesis

This hypothesis states that "we acquire the rules of a language in a certain order that is predictable" (Lightbown, Spada 1995, in Hanak-Hammerl and Newby 2003:9). This does not mean that every acquirer will acquire grammatical structures in exactly the same order; it means that certain structures tend to be acquired early and others later.

4- The Input Hypothesis

This hypothesis claims that the language learners are exposed to should be just far enough beyond their current competence: in other words, they can understand most of it, but still it should challenge them to make progress.

5- The Affective Filter Hypothesis

This hypothesis states that it is easier for a learner to acquire a language when s/he is not angry, tense, anxious or bored. As Krashen (1983, in Hanak-Hammerl and Newby 2003:9) states, a low affective filter means that the performer is more open to the input language.

Moreover, Krashen (1983) distinguishes a so called "silent phase" in which the language learner is receiving the input, but s/he is just not yet confident enough to speak. This phase might be shorter or longer depending on the individual learner.

It could be argued that Krashen's ideas have stimulated a great deal of data-based research but have also been highly criticised.

1.3.2 Environmentalist theories of SLA

Environmentalist theories of learning "hold that an organism's nurture, or experience, are of more importance to development than its nature, or innate contributions" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:249). It could be argued that several theories fall into the environmentalist category, because they try to explain acquisition not considering the cognitive processing, but by invoking learner external variables. Some examples of these phenomena could be social distance, as well as language and culture shock.

Schumann's influential study known as *The pidginization process* is a very clear example. As part of the Harvard Project, Schumann conducted a ten-month observation of the untutored acquisition of ESL by Alberto, a 33-year-old working class Costa Rican. He was the least successful of the observed learners and in fact, many aspects of his interlanguage were poorly developed at the end of the ten months. As a consequence, Schumann gradually became interested in trying to understand why Alberto's acquisition was so limited. As a matter of fact, "Alberto's social and psychological distance from speakers of the target language" (Ellis 1994:252) appeared to constitute a possible explanation. According to Schumann, there are mainly eight factors influencing social distance: social dominance, integration pattern, enclosure, cohesiveness, size, cultural congruence, attitude and intended length of residence. For instance, Schumann (Ellis 1994:257) claims that the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which s/he acquires the second language.

Behaviourism contributed to give birth to a stimulus-response theory, which takes into consideration "the linguistic environment and the stimuli it produces" (Menezes 2013:404). In other words, learning is an observable behaviour, which is acquired through stimulus and response in the form of mechanical repetition. It is interesting to notice that this view of language learning gave birth, for example, to research on error analysis, which focuses on the interference of the first language on the target language.

1.3.3 Interactionist theories of SLA

Interactionist theories are thought to be more powerful than the previous ones, because they "invoke both innate and environmental factors to explain language learning" (Ellis 1994: 266). First of all, the aim of Givon's Functional-Typological Theory is a "unified theory of all kinds of language change, including language acquisition" (Ellis: 1994:267). According to Givon, syntactic change is driven by psycholinguistic and pragmatic principles relating to speech perception and production in face- to- face interaction (Ellis 1994:267). One interesting thing to notice is that Long (1981) observes that in conversations between native and non-native speakers there are more modifications in interaction than in the input provided by the native speakers. As Long (1981, in Menezes 2013:405) explains, "negotiation for meaning, especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS [...] facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways". It could be argued that interactionist views are the first to consider language not only as a matter of syntactic structures, but also as a matter of discourse. It must be noticed that the interactionist research uses data recorded from free conversations or controlled conversation tasks.

Another interesting theory concerns the output hypothesis, later named lingualization. Swain (1985, in Menezes 2013:406) claims that practicing the language helps learners observe their own production, which is essential to SLA. In addition, she explains that "learners may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or know only partially" (Swain 1985, in Menezes 2013:406). As a matter of fact, the output may also have a metalinguistic function: it can help learners to reflect upon the language they produce in order to determine what works and what does not.

The sociocultural theory (SCT) is based on Vygotskian thoughts, and claims that "language learning is a socially mediated process" (in Menezes 2013:406). As highlighted by Mitchell and Myles (2004), from a social-cultural perspective, children's early language learning arises from processes of meaning-making in collaborative activity with other members of a given culture. In other words, in the

social world language learners can observe others using language and imitate them: through collaboration they can "move from one stage to another" (in Menezes 2013:406).

1.3.4 Other approaches to SLA

The communicative approach had its origins in the changes in the British language teaching tradition from the late 1960s. Proponents of this approach state that the main purposes of language teaching are: communicative competence and the development of procedures for the teaching of the four language skills. An important aspect which has to be taken into consideration is the fact that learners would work in pairs or groups to try to solve problematic tasks only using their language knowledge. Furthermore, Howatt (1984, in Hanak-Hammerl and Newby 2003:10) distinguishes a weak and a strong version of Communicative Language Teaching. The former underlines the importance of providing learners with the opportunities to use English for communicative purposes; the latter claims that language is acquired through communication. Generally, Communicative Language Teaching focuses on "communicative and contextual factors in language use and it is learner-centred and experience-based" (Hanak-Hammerl and Newby 2003:10).

The Cognitive approach claims that one of the main features of second language acquisition is the idea of building up a knowledge system. First of all, learners build up a general knowledge of the language they want to learn. After doing much practice and gaining experience, they are able to use parts of their knowledge automatically for understanding and producing the target language. It is a relatively new approach and there have been only a few empirical studies. As a matter of fact, the process of automatizing is central to this approach, however it is not clear neither which structures will be automatized through practice, nor which first language structures will be transferred and which will not. For example, Anderson (1976;1980;1983, in Ellis 1994:388) developed the Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) model that has been very influential on studies of second language acquisition. This theory is based

on the idea that human knowledge can be divided into declarative and procedural knowledge. The former is learned rapidly and stored in long-term memory; the latter refers to the gradual process by which a person learns how to do something successfully. "The central points to grasp are the theoretical claims that learning begins with declarative knowledge which slowly becomes proceduralized, and that the mechanism by which this takes place is practice" (Ellis 1994:389).

Despite all the research, we still do not know how languages are learned. Language learning, like any other type of learning, is not a linear process; therefore language must be understood as a non-linear dynamic system: its different cognitive, sociocultural, historical and political elements enable us to think and act in society. As language is in evolution, so is SLA, constantly developing through dynamic interaction among the various subsystems. As Menezes (2013:408) states, human beings are different, their contexts are different and so are SLA processes which are mediated by different human agents and cultural artifacts.

To conclude, only few theories were mentioned in this context, some of which actually overlap. Sometimes they differ greatly in scope, that is the range of SLA phenomena they treat, or also with regard to the degree of abstraction of the statements they contain. One could claim that it could be dangerous to see the rise of a single dominant theory among the others; as a consequence it is important to "guard against those theorists who feel they have a monopoly of the truth" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:290) and encourage competing points of view. SLA research has been seen as a kind of "ivory tower activity" (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:290): its findings often affect the life changes of "at risk" populations and therefore, as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:290) state, researchers working in SLA who are serious about such issues will value "the unifying effect which a good theory can have on their own research and the work of others".

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS METADISCOURSE?

The current interest in academic discourse, and in particular academic writing, is the result of three major developments: the greater interest given to the importance of writing, the growth of English as the international language of research and the emergence of theoretical perspectives which recognize the centrality of academic discourse (Hyland 2011:172). As we all know, language is often used for multiple reasons such as persuasion, information, or simply for entertainment. No matter how it is used, language also conveys an attitude to what we say which is passed on to the readers. As Hyland (2005:IX) points out, all these functions of language are collectively known as *metadiscourse*: the linguistic expressions which refer to the evolving text and to the writer and imagined readers of that text.

In a wider sense, as Ädel (2006:2) explains, metadiscourse refers to "linguistic items which reveal the writer's and reader's presence in the text, either by referring to the organisation of the text or by commenting on the text in other ways". Thus, metadiscourse helps a writer to "guide, direct and inform" (Crismore 1989, in Ädel 2006:2) his reader. It is generally agreed that the concept of metadiscourse is based on a view of writing as social engagement: it refers to the writer's awareness of how he situates himself and his readers in a text in order to create convincing and coherent writing in particular social contexts. It must be noticed that metadiscourse can take many different forms, from single word forms, phrases, clauses, to strings of sentences: all these different structures are used to represent the ability of writers to control the level of personality in their texts, by offering a representation of themselves and their ideas.

As Hyland (2005:IX) states, for many people metadiscourse is an intuitively attractive concept, as it seems to offer a way of collecting the diverse range of linguistic devices writers use to explicitly organize their texts, engage readers and signal their attitudes to the topics they deal with and to their audience. However, despite their abundance, metadiscourse phenomena are far from fully explored. As a matter of fact, researchers do not agree on what metadiscourse is, how it works in general, or how it can vary across genres or languages. According to Hyland (1998, in

Ädel 2006:3), metadiscourse is "a relatively new concept but one which is increasingly important to research in composition, reading and text structure." Therefore, it can be a useful way to afford insights about the "values, beliefs and assumptions of text users and their communities" (Hyland 2005:X).

To conclude, it could be argued that nowadays English is culturally, politically and economically one of the most important languages of the world. As a consequence, the linguistic abilities and communicative competence of writers have now a major role: it is something that goes beyond basic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; it refers, for example, to the ability to present facts effectively and to manage writer and reader visibility.

2.1 A context of emergence: an overview of metadiscourse issues and definitions

As mentioned above, the term *metadiscourse* has been widely used in current discourse analysis and language education, "referring to an interesting, and relatively new, approach to conceptualizing interactions between text producers and their texts and between text producers and users" (Hyland 2005:1). First of all, it is important to point out that the term *metadiscourse* was coined by Zellig Harris in 1959 as a way of representing a writer's attempts to guide a reader's perception of a text. Furthermore, important developments to the concept of metadiscourse were brought by writers such as Williams (1981), Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore (1989), who tried to put together a range of discourse features and various forms of text commentary to show how writers were able to influence the readers' perception of the text.

The use of language to talk about our experiences and ideas is obviously a key purpose to communication. It is important to take into consideration Sinclair's distinction between interactive and autonomous *planes of discourse* (discussed in Hyland 2005:7). As Hyland (2005:7) explains, Sinclair (1981) takes the representational role of language, its ability to signify matters in the world, as given, and then focuses on how it assists participants to "share their experiences and not just their information". The *autonomous plane* refers to "the gradual unfolding of a record

of experience through the organization and maintenance of text structure" (Sinclair 1981, in Hyland 2005:7). In other words, it is concerned with language only, and not with the ways it is related to the world. It therefore allows participants to share relevant experiences by "recalling previous words and reworking them into new contexts as the discourse progresses" (Sinclair 1981, in Hyland 2005:7). On the other hand, the *interactive plane* concerns the ways people use language to negotiate with others and create a relationship with the reader.

As Hyland (2005:3) states, metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, and that it also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating. Using metadiscourse features can help the writer to involve himself in the text in order not only to convey information more clearly, but also to engage the reader in a deeper way. In fact, Hyland (2005:4) goes on saying that, what metadiscourse does is to illuminate "some aspects of how we project ourselves into our discourses by signalling our attitude towards both the content and the audience of the text."

Through metadiscourse a writer can therefore relate to a given context and convey his or her personality and sensitivity. As Harris (1959, in Hyland 2009:126) underlines, metadiscourse emerged as a way of understanding language in use, representing a writer's attempts to guide a receiver's perception of a text. In other words, metadiscourse options are the way through which interactions are articulated and developed: they represent the decisions writers make to obtain a given effect on their readers. As Hyland states (2009:127), the study of metadiscourse is a reminder of the fact that statements have an orientation to the world outside the text and an orientation to the reader's understanding of that world through the text itself. Therefore, language is used to convey information about the world through the organisation of the text itself. As a consequence, writers try to use language to offer a representation of themselves in their work and to negotiate social relations with readers.

2.1.1 Metadiscourse and audience awareness

As Hyland (2005:4) explains, the idea of audience is a contested notion in discourse studies, but it is generally agreed that knowing who the recipients of a certain text are makes the communicative task easier and increases the chance that the resulting text will meet the writer's goals. Therefore, audience awareness can have a positive influence on the quality of the writing: writers choose different linguistic devices for different audiences. In other words, writers' choices of linguistic and rhetorical devices seem to reflect their understanding of audiences (Krause & O' Brien 2000, in Hyun-Woo 2005:4). As Hyun-Woo (2005:4) states, since audience adaptation is ultimately textually realized, textual analyses of linguistic and stylistic features are useful methods for examining writers' conceptualization of audience.

Therefore, metadiscourse is used to refer to the ways of acknowledging how the presence of the audience is realized in texts, "the forms we use to transform what may otherwise be a lifeless text into discourse that meets the needs of participants" (Hyland 2005:5). In other words, metadiscourse is an important means to facilitate communication, increase readability and in so doing help build a relationship with an audience. Metadiscourse contributes to viewing writing as interactive, which means that it helps understanding the "writer's projection of the perceptions, interests and needs of a potential audience" (Hyland 2005:11). It could be argued that the use of metadiscourse can be useful when managing social relationships in writing, as it can help convey the degree of closeness to the reader, or the extent of background knowledge writer and reader share. As Hyland (2005:13) points out, in order to create a convincing reading-environment, metadiscourse features can be used in a way that makes the final text appear to be co-produced by the author and by the members of the audience. Metadiscoursal resources can mark not only the degree of formality chosen by the writer, but also the power, social status and familiarity encoded in the text itself: all these signals can be useful in providing information about the writer-reader relationship.

As Brown and Levinson (1987, in Hyland 2005:13) state, writers make evaluations of their readers in terms of the social distance between them, the power

difference between them and the scale of imposition being made on the reader. As a consequence, metadiscourse is an important means as it shows "the expectations readers have for certain forms of interactions and engagement" (Hyland 2005:13). This means that a text has to talk to readers in ways they find familiar and acceptable: without metadiscourse, the reader would be unable to contextualize a text and writers would be unable to communicate effectively. Therefore, according to Hyland (2005:14), there is "a social milieu which influences the writer and activates specific responses to recurring tasks", and what metadiscourse does is encourage paying attention to features that can trace social interactions with others.

2.1.2 Definitions of metadiscourse

As Hyland (2005:16) states, metadiscourse has always been something of a fuzzy term: it has been characterized as "discourse about discourse" or "talk about talk". This fuzziness is remarked by authors such as Nash (1992, in Hyland 2005:16), who observes that while the concept is easy to accept, its boundaries are more difficult to be established:

> The word "metadiscourse" may have a reassuringly objective, "scientific" ring, but its usage suggests boundaries of definition no more firmly drawn than those of, say, "rhetoric" or "style". One reader may perceive a clear stylistic intention in something which another reader dismisses as a commonplace, "automatized" use of language.

It could be argued that this is a very partial definition of a concept that has the potential to include linguistic features that describe not only how the writer organizes the text, but also how s/he relates to the readers. Halliday (1994, in Hyland 2005:17) argues that language is a "system of meanings". In other words, when we interact with others, we make certain choices which are "motivated by intentions to express certain meanings in specific situations" (Halliday 1994, in Hyland 2005:17). Therefore, metadiscourse contributes to expressing an awareness of the text and also to revealing "the writer's awareness of the reader and his or her need for elaboration, clarification,

guidance and interaction" (Hyland 2005:17). As a matter of fact, as we speak or write, we negotiate with others, making decisions on the kind of effects we are having on the listeners or readers. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that through the use of metadiscourse, a writer is able to not only transform a dry, difficult text into coherent, reader-friendly prose, but also relate it to a given context and convey his or her personality, credibility, audience-sensitivity and relationship to the message (Hyland 2000, in Hyland & Tse 2004:157).

According to scholars such as Vande Kopple and Crismore there are different levels of meaning that can be found in a text: propositional and metadiscoursal. For example, Vande Kopple (1985, in Amiryousefi 2010:159) explains that on one level, information about the subject of the text is supplied, which contributes to expand the propositional content. On the other hand, the level of metadiscourse does not add propositional material but helps the receivers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate and react to such material. He claims that metadiscourse items are non-propositional: "they do not expand the propositional information of the text. They do not make claims about states of affairs in the world that can be either true or false" (Vande Kopple 1985, in Amiryousefi 2010:159). Also Crismore (1993, in Amiryousefi 2010:159) defines 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".

All these things considered, what remains difficult is how to make a distinction between metadiscourse and propositional content. As Hyland (2005:21) underlines, writers such as Williams (1981) and Dillon (1981) distinguish different *levels of meaning*, with one level supplying the reader with information about a topic, and the other calling attention to the act of writing. As we have already noted above, this view is also shared by Vande Kopple (2002, in Hyland 2005:21): "On one level we expand ideational material. On the level of metadiscourse, we do not expand ideational material but help our readers connect, organise, interpret, evaluate, and develop attitudes towards the material". Hyland (2005:21-22) draws on Myers (1990), who states that sometimes academic papers are rewritten by the editorials for different

audiences. What is important to notice is that when this happens the content is the same, but the meaning may change drastically. Therefore, Hyland (2005:22) claims that the "meaning of a text is not just the propositional material [...] It is the complete package". By "complete package" he means both proposition and metadiscourse content. As Hyland (2005:23) underlines, the point to be made is that Vande Kopple and others are wrong to state that metadiscourse is a separate "level of meaning", and he goes on to say that the meaning of a text depends on "the integration of its component elements, both propositional and metadiscoursal" and he believes that metadiscourse is an essential part of any text, as it "contributes to the ways it is understood and acted upon". In other words, both propositional and metadiscoursal elements occur together: "one concerned with the world and the other with the text and its reception" (Hyland 2005:24).

2.1.3 Generalisations about metadiscourse

First of all, one key issue is whether metadiscourse is a syntactic or a functional category. As Hyland (2005:24) explains, the term *functional* takes on a number of meanings in applied linguistics, but in metadiscourse studies it refers to "how language works to achieve certain *communicative* purposes for users". According to Ädel (2006:22), metadiscourse is a functional category that can be realized in a great variety of ways: it can be represented morpho-syntactically by a range of different forms and structures. Hyland (2005:24) states that metadiscourse is a relative concept, in that "text items only function as metadiscourse in relation to another part of the text."

It is important to notice that metadiscoursive expressions can fill two or more linguistic functions simultaneously, and several researchers have illustrated the potential multifunctionality of these items. For example, Crismore et al. (1993, in Ädel 2006:24) comment on the "multifunctionality of many metadiscourse items, items that may perform more than one function simultaneously in the same context." In other words, this multifunctionality means that "metadiscourse cannot be regarded as a strictly linguistic phenomenon at all, but must be seen as a rhetorical and pragmatic

one" (Hyland 2005:25). We have to identify the strategies that writers and speakers adopt in producing features as metadiscourse at particular points in their discourse. As Hyland (2005:25) points out, in looking at metadiscourse as functional we can see that "metadiscourse is something that we *do*, a social act through which people carry on a discourse about their own discourse for particular rhetorical purposes."

To conclude, another aspect which has to be taken into consideration is the fact that metadiscourse is context-dependent, which means that it is not possible to classify a linguistic form as metadiscourse without taking into account the context of each particular instance. As Ädel (2006:25) stresses, a consequence of multifunctionality is that one linguistic form can fulfil different functions, for example both as metadiscourse and non-metadiscourse, depending on the linguistic context. Thus, metadiscourse "encourages us to look harder at texts to discover the ways that writers make their points and engage with their readers (Hyland 2005:31). Furthermore, Hyland (2005:31) goes on to say that metadiscourse can help reveal meanings in the text, and also suggests that we should go beyond the text to discover how it works.

2.1.4 Features for identifying metadiscourse

It could be argued that researchers do sometimes not pay much attention to the criteria used for identifying metadiscourse. It must be noticed that the features of metadiscourse analysed in this section are the ones pointed out by Ädel (2006) in her quest of trying to specify those features that should be used in classifying expressions as metadiscursive.

The first of these features is "explicitness", which is particularly emphasised by Mauranen (1993). In Mauranen's words (1993, in Ädel 2006:27) "by making reference to the text as a text the writer indicates his or her awareness of the text, and also induces similar awareness in the reader." As a matter of fact, explicitness implies a high degree of self-awareness, which is central to metadiscourse. For some researchers the term explicitness refers to explicit authorial presence, whereas for others it refers to general awareness of the text as a text. It is important to notice that reflexive

metadiscourse refers to the expressions used by writers to negotiate meaning in a text: it is the writer's explicit commentary on his/her ongoing text, and marks the writer's awareness of the text as a text. As a consequence, reflexive meta-text is an explicit expression of a writer's awareness of the current discourse.

The second feature is "contextuality" (term used by Mauranen 1992) or "current discourse" (term used by Ädel 2006:28). This notion is important to metadiscourse since it focuses on how texts refer to themselves and not to other texts. As Ädel (2006:28) explains, a text alluding or commenting on other texts falls within the domain of intertextuality, which is not of concern here. In other words, only those elements which refer to the current text and show awareness of it can be qualified as reflexive metadiscourse.

The features "writer *qua* writer" and "reader *qua* reader", that is references which point to the writer and/or reader of the text also qualify as metadiscursive. It must be noticed that the reference to the writer should "point to the writer in the role of the writer of the current text, and not as an experiencer in the real world" (Ädel 2006:29). In other words, the referents should be the writer persona and the imagined reader and no other person.

To conclude, we can say that metadiscourse comments on the ongoing discourse and takes into account the writer of a text and his/her imagined reader, which are two very important components of the process of writing and their visibility contributes to attracting the attention to the text as text.

2.2 Categorizations of metadiscourse

Halliday (1994, in Amiryousefi 2010:160) believes that when people use language, they usually work towards fulfilling three macro functions:

- give expression to their experience;
- interact with their audience;
- organize their expressions into cohesive discourse.

As Hyland (2005:26) clarifies, as metadiscourse analysis involves taking a functional approach to texts, writers have tended to look to the Systemic Functional theory of language for theoretical support. In other words, Halliday (1994, in Hyland 2005:26) states that language is seen as being organized around three purposes or "metafunctions":

- the *Ideational metafunction:* the use of language to represent experience and ideas. This roughly corresponds to the notion of propositional content;
- the *interpersonal metafunction*: the use of language to encode interaction, allowing us to engage with others, to take on roles and to express and understand evaluations and feelings;
- the *textual metafunction:* the use of language to organize the text itself, coherently relating what is said to the world and to its readers.

Therefore, "the meaning of a text lies in the integration of all three functions, each of which is understood in relation to the others" (Halliday 1994, in Hyland 2005:26).

A large number of metadiscourse analysts have distinguished metadiscourse items as either performing a textual function by "organizing a coherent discourse" (Hyland 2005:26), or performing an interpersonal function by "conveying the writer's attitudes to the text" (Hyland 2005:26). For example, Vande Kopple (1985, in Hyland:26) believes that *textual metadiscourse* "shows how we link and relate individual propositions so that they form a cohesive and coherent text and how individual elements of those propositions make sense in conjunction with other elements of the text." Lyons (1977, in Hyland 2005:26) uses the term *text reflexivity*, that is "the capacity of natural language to refer to or describe itself", in order to underline the idea that parts of a text can function to organize the discourse and make it more comprehensible. Hyland (1999, in Amiryousefi 2010:160) believes that "textual metadiscourse is used to organize propositional information in ways that will be coherent for a particular audience and appropriate for a given context."

On the other hand, *interpersonal metadiscourse* can "help us express our personality and our reactions to the propositional content of our texts, and characterize

the interaction we would like to have with our readers about that content" (Hyland 2005:26). As Hyland (2005:27) reminds us, discourse is a process in which writers are "simultaneously creating propositional content, interpersonal engagement and the flow of text as they write." What is important to acknowledge is that metadiscourse is about interaction in text: it is through metadiscourse that writers can both involve their readers and create a convincing and coherent text.

2.2.1 Models of metadiscourse

As we have already seen, metadiscourse is an open category which can be realized in various ways. This is the reason why a variety of metadiscourse taxonomies have been proposed over the past several decades.

The first model was introduced by Vande Kopple (1985). He introduced two main categories of metadiscourse: the "textual" and the "interpersonal". The former included text connectives (used to show how parts of a text are connected to one another), code glosses (used to help readers to grasp the writer's intended meaning), validity markers (used to express the writer's commitment to the probability or truth of a statement), and narrators (used to inform readers of the source of the information presented). The latter consist of illocution markers (used to make explicit the discourse act the writer is performing), attitude markers (used to express the writer's attitudes to the propositional material) and commentaries (used to address the reader directly) (in Hyland 2005:32). Vande Kopple's model was particularly important in that "it was the first systematic attempt to introduce a taxonomy that triggered many practical studies, and gave rise to new taxonomies (in Khajavy, Asadpour and Yousefi 2012:149). However, as Hyland (2005:32) underlines, the vagueness of the categories and the functional overlaps have created some problems. For this reason, Vande Kopple's taxonomy has been refined by various writers.

Crismore *et al.* (1993, in Gold Sanford 2012:5) define metadiscourse as the linguistic material intended to help the reader organize and interpret information in texts, but does not add any information to the propositional content. It is interesting to

notice that Crismore *et al.* (1993) keep the two major categories, textual and interpersonal, but reorganized the presence of sub-categories. First of all, textual metadiscourse has been divided into textual and interpretive markers. The former category includes logical connectives such as sequencers, reminders and topicalizers (to show connections between ideas, references to previous information or topic shifts), while the latter includes code glosses (to further explain text material), illocution markers (to name the act performed) and announcements (to announce upcoming information). On the other hand, interpersonal metadiscourse includes hedges (to show uncertainty to truth of assertion), certainty markers (to express full commitment), attributors (to give source of information), attitude markers (to display writer's affective values) and commentary (to build relationship with reader) (Crismore *et al*. 1993, in Hyland 2005:34).

Finally, Hyland (2005) further clarifies the classifications of metadiscourse. As a matter of fact, according to Hyland (2005, in Gold Sanford 2012:6) metadiscourse is "the cover term for the self- reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community". Hyland (2005) divides metadiscourse markers into interactive and interactional markers. Interactive markers assist in guiding the reader through the text and include: transitional (to indicate relations between main clauses), frame markers (to indicate discourse acts, stages and sequences), endophoric markers (to indicate information in other parts of the text), evidentials (to indicate information in other sources) and code glosses (to elaborate definitions of words or phrases). On the other hand, interactional markers contribute to involving the reader in the text and are divided into: hedges (to withhold commitment), boosters (to indicate certainty), attitude markers (to express writer's attitude to proposition), self-mentions (explicit reference to the author) and engagement markers (to build relationships with readers).

2.2.2 Key principles of metadiscourse

After discussing the ambiguity regarding the term *metadiscourse*, it could be useful to explore, by using a reliable model, the features that should be included in metadiscourse analyses and how to categorize these. As Hyland (2005:37) stresses, rhetorical features can be understood only in the contexts in which they occur, and as a result metadiscourse must be analysed as part of a community's practices, values and ideals. According to Hyland (2005:38) there are three key principles of metadiscourse:

1- metadiscourse is distinct from propositional aspects of discourse;
2- metadiscourse refers to aspects of the text that embody writer-reader interactions;
3- metadiscourse refers only to relations which are internal to the discourse.

As already seen, metadiscourse can be distinguished between propositional material, that is the "communicative content" of discourse, and material which organizes this content and conveys the writer's attitudes towards it. It is generally agreed that "metadiscourse does not simply support propositional content: it is the means by which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible and persuasive to a particular audience" (Hyland 2005:39). He then goes on to say that metadiscourse is "how we organize our texts and construct a stance to what we say: it is what engages receivers and encourages them to accept the proposed positions" (Hyland 2005:39). It is important to remember that propositional and metadiscoursal elements occur together in texts and they are both essential for meaning. They are related to each other: "one concerned with the world and the other with the text and its reception" (Hyland 2005:41). It could be argued that metadiscourse cannot simply be considered what holds together the most important parts of a text: it helps to relate a text to its context by taking into account its readers' needs, understandings and knowledge. As a consequence, metadiscourse is "an important concept for analysing the ways writers engage with their subject matter and readers, allowing us to compare the strategies used by members of different social groups" (Hyland 2005:41).

As regards the second principle, Hyland (2005:41) suggests that all metadiscourse is interpersonal in that it takes account of the reader's knowledge, textual experiences and processing needs, and that it provides writers with an armoury of rhetorical appeals to achieve this (Hyland & Tse 2004). It could be argued that it is difficult to distinguish a purely textual function for metadiscourse. Some textual features can work to structure the text and keep it together by showing the writer's understanding of the relations between ideas, whereas others function interactionally to elaborate propositional meanings and to engage the reader in the interaction as a participant in the discourse. As Hyland (2005:42) points out, what writers do is more than just creating a cohesive text: they are "manoeuvring themselves into line with community expectations and shaping the reader's role to gain a more sympathetic hearing for their views." It is interesting to notice that Thompson (2001, in Hyland 2005:43) distinguishes between two main types of interaction: the *interactive* and the *interactional*. The former concerns the ways "writers signal the arrangement of their texts based on their appreciation of the reader's likely knowledge and understandings" (Hyland 2005:43-44). Thus, this influences the way in which writers can guide their readers for example by anticipating their reactions and needs. On the other hand, the latter is more personal and "involves the reader collaboratively in the development of the text" (Hyland 2005:44). In other words, it helps display solidarity with readers by showing concern for their processing of the text.

Finally, the third principle is that metadiscourse refers only to relations which are internal to the discourse. As Fa-gen (2012:850) states, an internal relation connects events in the account and is solely communicative, while an external relation connects activities in the world outside the text. As Halliday (1994, in Hyland 2005:45) states,

> "Many temporal conjunctives have an "internal" as well as an "external" interpretation; that is, the time they refer to is the temporal unfolding of the discourse itself, not the temporal sequence of the processes referred to. In terms of the functional components of semantics, it is interpersonal not experiential time."

When considering the distinction between internal and external reference, the determining factor is the "objectivity of the event" (Hyland 2005:48): whether the outcome is related to the speaker's assessments of possibility about something happening or to external circumstances which might make it possible. To conclude, it could be said that describing an experiment or a theoretical model involves the writer in reporting events in the world. However, by constructing an argument "the writer is making choices about presentation and how best to fashion material for a particular readership" (Hyland 2005:47): this is where metadiscourse is used.

2.2.3 The categorization of metadiscourse in the present study

For the present study, as we will see in the final chapter, I have adapted Hyland's model of metadiscourse, however I have maintained the distinction between textual and interpersonal metadiscourse. It is important to acknowledge that both the textual and the interpersonal dimension are expressed through a range of rhetorical features which perform specific functions.

First of all, I will analyse the features included in the textual dimension. As Hyland (2005:49) points out, this dimension concerns the writer's awareness of a participating audience and the ways he or she seeks to accommodate its probable knowledge, interests, rhetorical expectations and processing abilities. In other words, the purpose is to create a text to meet the needs of a particular audience, "setting out arguments so that they will recover the writer's preferred interpretations and goals" (Hyland 2005:49). The following features are used to organize information in ways that an audience is likely to find coherent and convincing. There are six main categories: transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses and announcements.

The first of these features are **transition markers** which "help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument" (Hyland 2005:50). Basically, they signal additive, contrastive and consequential relations, thus expressing relationships between stretches of discourse. There are four sub-categories. *Additive*

markers can add elements to an argument (e.g. *"furthermore", "moreover", "in addition"*); *adversative* can indicate that an argument is being countered (e.g. *"however", "nevertheless")*; *conclusive* and *consecutive* can demonstrate that a conclusion is being drawn or justified (e.g. *"finally", "in conclusion", "thus", "therefore", "consequently").*

The second category includes **frame markers** which signal text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure. As Hyland (2005:51) points out, care needs to be taken to identify features which order arguments in the text rather than events in time. Therefore, frame markers can explicitly label text stages or internally order an argument (e.g. *"firstly", "then", "to summarize", "next"*). They can also indicate discourse goals (e.g. *"my purpose is", "I argue here"*) and topic shifts (e.g. *"right", "now", "let us return to"*).

Endophoric markers are expressions which refer to other parts of the text (e.g. *"as noted above", "as mentioned before", "refer to the next section"*). According to Hyland (2005:51) these markers make additional ideational material salient and therefore available to the readers. As a consequence, by guiding readers through the discussion, these features can often contribute to their comprehension.

The fourth category includes **evidentials**: they are "metalinguistic representations of an idea from another source" (Thomas and Hawes 1994, in Hyland 2005:51), which guide the reader's interpretation and establish command of the subject by distinguishing who is responsible for a particular position or statement (e.g. *"according to", "X states")*.

Code glosses contribute to supply additional information, by rephrasing, explaining or elaborating what has been said, to "ensure the reader is able to recover the writer's intended meaning (Hyland 2005:52). There are four sub-categories: *parentheses, punctuation devices, reformulators (*e.g. *"in other words", "that is"*) and *exemplifiers* (e.g. *"for example", "for instance"*).

Finally, the last category of this textual dimension are **announcements**, which are used to introduce upcoming information (e.g. *"well", "as we'll see later"*).

On the other hand, the interpersonal dimension includes features that involve readers and "open opportunities for them to contribute to the discourse by alerting them to the author's perspective towards both propositional information and readers themselves" (Hyland 2005:52). In other words, these features help control the level of personality in a text and are the means through which writers "engage with the socially determined positions of others" (Hyland 2005:52). There are five main categories: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention and engagement markers.

First of all, **hedges** are used to indicate the writer's decision to recognize alternative viewpoints and so "withhold complete commitment to a proposition" (Hyland 2005:52). According to Hyland (2005:52) hedges emphasize the subjectivity of a position by allowing information to be presented as an opinion rather than a fact and therefore open that position to negotiation. In this case, I have divided hedges into two sub-categories: *probability,* where the speaker "expresses judgements as to the likelihood or probability of something happening or being (Eggins 1994:179) (e.g. *"perhaps", "maybe", "probably"); finite modals,* where modals such as *"could", "should", "might", etc.* are used to imply that a statement is based on the writer's plausible reasoning.

As Hyland (2005:52) states, **boosters** are words which allow writers to close down alternatives and express their certainty in what they say (e.g. *"definitely", "certainly", "of course", "obviously", "clearly").* In other words, they emphasize certainty and "construct rapport by marking involvement with the topic and solidarity with an audience" (Hyland 2005:53). Together with hedges, boosters play an important role in expressing commitment in a text while paying respect to the reader.

Attitude markers are a very important category, and are used to indicate "the writer's affective, rather than epistemic attitude to proposition" (Hyland 2005:53). Based on Eggins (1994), I have divided these features into three sub-categories: *comment adjuncts, mood adjuncts* and *objective modality*. First of all, *comment adjuncts* function to express an assessment of the clause as a whole (Eggins 1994:168). They add an expression of attitude and evaluation such as *"frankly", "honestly", "really", "luckily", "hopefully", "generally",* etc. It is interesting to

notice that mood adjuncts can be divided into low (e.g. *"I reckon", "I guess"*), median (e.g. *"I think", "I suppose", "in my opinion"*) and high (e.g. *"I know", "I'm sure"*). As a matter of fact, mood adjuncts like these are examples of what Halliday (1985a, in Eggins 1994:181) calls grammatical metaphor, in this case metaphors of modality. By using these features the writer can get into the text and express a judgement about something happening or currently being. As can be seen, these adjuncts, in a way, make the source of the statement explicit through the first person singular pronoun. However, as Eggins (1994:182) points out, writers can also pretend that the judgement they are expressing is not "just their own" but has some objective status. Indeed, the final sub-category is *objective modality*, which refers to expressions such as *"it is possible", "it is probable", "it is debatable", "it is important",* which in a way allow the writer to "hide behind an ostensibly objective formulation" (Eggins 1994:182).

As we all know all writing contains information about the writer: **self-mention** refers to the "degree of explicit author presence in the text measured by the frequency of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives" (Hyland 2005:53). In other words, when writing writers always project an impression of themselves and how they relate to their topics and their readers. Some examples of these features are: *"as far as I'm concerned", "from my perspective", "within my personal experience",* etc.

Finally, **engagement markers** are devices that "explicitly address readers, either to focus their attention or include them as discourse participants" (Hyland 2005:53). These features have been divided into *imperatives* (e.g. *"consider", "note"*) and *question forms.* As Hyland (2005:54) points out, the main purpose of these devices is to pull readers into the discourse, predicting possible objections and guiding them to particular interpretations.

In summary, metadiscourse tools assist the writer in influencing his o her readers by appearing credible and convincing to their eyes. Indeed, according to Gold Sanford (2012:10), successful writing depends on the writer understanding of the community of the reader and presenting a considerate text in order to achieve the intent of the discourse.

2.3 Variation in metadiscourse use

As noted above, metadiscourse is closely related to the purposes of writers. As Hyland (2005:63) explains, it allows them to project their interests, opinions and evaluations into a text and to process and refine ideas out of the concern for their readers' possible reactions. It could be argued that metadiscourse pursues persuasive objectives: as we have already seen, it helps writers to engage with their audience, signal relationships and guide readers in their understanding of a text. It is generally agreed that several factors may account for the differences in the use of metadiscourse, and the potential causes of variation can be: genre, register awareness, cultural conventions, and community.

As Hyland (2005:87) maintains, a central aspect of metadiscourse is its context-dependency, which is "the close relationship it has to the norms and expectations of those who use it in particular settings." It is this contextual specificity that is particularly evident in the ways in which metadiscourse is distributed across different genres. A second factor is register awareness, which refers to "the degree of familiarity with argumentative writing and mastery of the appropriate writing skills" (Ädel 2006:141). Furthermore, as Ädel (2006:141) points out, while context involves differences between genres when they are executed appropriately, register awareness involves failure to execute the target genre appropriately. Another factor that could account for the differences found in the use of metadiscourse concerns cultural conventions, which in recent years have become particularly of relevance in that globalization has increased intercultural and intralingual contacts. As a consequence, researchers have started to explore metadiscourse in different languages and also how the speakers of those languages use it when writing in English (Hyland 2005:113). Finally, the importance of community is linked to the interest researchers have in "the ways genres are written, used and responded to by individuals acting as members of social groups" (Hyland 2005:138). In other words, community can help explain writing differences and furthermore it can help to better interpret metadiscourse use.

2.3.1 Metadiscourse and genre

It could be argued that genre can affect the use of metadiscourse. Vande Kopple (1985, in Ädel 2006:142) raised the issue of the relation of metadiscourse and genre variation as follows: "Are some kinds of metadiscourse more appropriate than others – or even necessary – in some kinds of texts?" As we have already seen, metadiscourse represents the social purposes of writers and, as a consequence, "its use will vary enormously depending on the audience, the purpose and other aspects of the social context" (Hyland 2005:87). It is important to notice that only a few studies map the use of metadiscourse across genres; in fact, most of them have focused on differences between disciplines rather than genres.

As Hyland (2005:87) states, *genre* is a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations. Therefore, genre theorists assume that every successful text will "display the writer's awareness of its context and the readers who form part of that context" (Hyland 2005:88). One of the ways in which genres vary, internally and in relation to other genres, is in the features of their metadiscourse. The term *metadiscourse continuum* was coined by Crismore (1989, in Ädel 2006:142), with the aim of describing the variation of metadiscourse in texts. It assumes that the amount of metadiscourse varies across genres with respect to linguistic signals of interaction between writer and reader. While in certain genres it is customary for the writer to be visible, in other genres it is not appropriate for the writer to be visible at all. It could be argued that metadiscoursal features of genre "can help show how language choices reflect the different purposes of writers, the different assumptions they make about their audiences, and the different kinds of interactions they create with their readers" (Hyland 2005:88-89). Hyland (2005) examines academic texts of various kinds and elaborates the role that metadiscourse plays in a number of key genres.

First of all, Hyland (2005) presents the use of metadiscourse in academic research articles. According to him (2005:90), it is in research articles that writers exhibit both the relevance and the novelty of their work to colleagues. As a matter of fact, research articles are concerned with knowledge-making, which is achieved "by

negotiating agreement with colleagues about interpretations and claims" (Hyland 2005:90). In other words, what the writer of an academic article aims at is that his or her argument is both understood and accepted. It could thus be argued that metadiscourse "is one indication of a writer's response to the potential negatability of his/her claims, an intervention to engage the reader and anticipate possible objections and difficulties of interpretation" (Hyland 2005:90). What matters most is that writers' claims have to display a plausible relationship with reality and in this respect, metadiscourse helps signal relationships that the audience is likely to find appropriate and convincing. As Hyland (2005:91) underlines, it represents the writer's assessment of readers and his/her assumptions about their processing needs, rhetorical expectations and background understandings. In this way the writer can address the audience with skill, and exhibit a professional competence that can influence the effectiveness of the argument. To conclude, the writer adopts "a professionally acceptable persona and a relationship with readers which seeks a balance between the researcher's authority as expert-knower and his/her humility as disciplinary servant" (Hyland 2005:91).

Furthermore, having different purposes and audiences, popular science articles use language differently. As Hyland (2005:94) states, research articles are central to scientific knowledge constructed through the negotiation of claims with reviewers, editors and readers, while "pieces written for the general public seek to link issues in the specialist domain to those of everyday life". As a matter of fact, these differences are realized through metadiscourse. In other words, metadiscourse becomes an effective way of framing scientific work for a non-science audience. For example, engagement markers such as questions are used to make real-world relationships clear to non-specialist readers. It must be added that popularizations differ from academic articles because they tend to be shorter and so frame markers are less used to guide readers through a complex text. Moreover, as Hyland (2005:100) points out, in popularizations writer's metadiscourse choices are used to invest information with factual status, relate it to real-life concerns and present it as relevant to readers.

Finally, another interesting area of analysis is the use of metadiscourse in textbooks. As a matter of fact, these are regarded as "repositories of codified facts and disciplinary orthodoxy, the place where we find the tamed and accepted theories of a discipline" (Hyland 2005:101). As Hyland (2005:101) explains, the purpose of textbook writers is to set out the established views and theories of the discipline and to claim sufficient authority to initiate learners into a new world of cultural competence. It must be noticed that the most common metadiscourse features used in textbooks are transitions, as they guide the reading process by clarifying relationships and connections. Furthermore, textual metadiscourse is largely used as a sign of the writers' attempt to keep readers informed: this is clear in the use of frame markers to structure the discourse and endophoric markers to refer readers to illustrations and arguments. To conclude, as Hyland (2005:112) states, metadiscourse contributes to "a writer's voice which balances confidence and circumspection, facilitates collegial respect and seeks to locate propositions in the concerns of the discipline". It is through metadiscourse that it is possible to explore the way writers construct their texts and how they respond to their audience.

2.3.2 Metadiscourse and register awareness

It could be argued that a speaker of English has "a repertoire of varieties according to field and switches to the appropriate one as occasion requires. The number of varieties that speakers command depends on their profession, training and interests" (Ädel 2006:144-145). It is believed that the use of metadiscourse is strongly influenced not only by the degree of training, but also by the level of writing skills. It has often emerged from research that non-native speaker writers tend to express their personal opinion about the topic: they "emphasise their individual experiences and feelings and display an immediacy and audience awareness close to that of spoken interaction" (Ädel 2006:145). On the other hand, native speakers tend to keep a certain distance from the subject matter, and thus conduct a much more impersonal discussion. It must be noticed that learners should be aware of how native speakers might interpret their writing if they choose to write in a certain way. As Ädel (2006:146) points out,

conducting argumentative writing on the basis of a personal opinion rather than a more objective one may be a very different approach from that which is considered valid by native speakers.

As Ellis (1994:183) explains, learners may prefer to maintain their own ethnic identity or they may wish to establish a separate identity as an L2 learner/user. In other words, learners may consciously decide not to behave in accordance with native-speaker norms. To better express this idea, Ellis (1994:183) states that "the distinctive pragmatic features evident in the language of even very advanced L2 learners may reflect not so much a failure to achieve target language norms as the attainment of a mode of behaviour compatible with the learners' chosen sense of identity […]". However, as Ädel (2006:147) highlights, intended deviance from the norm is one thing, and unintended learner behaviour is another, which means that learners have to reach a high level of linguistic awareness in order to be able to consciously make decisions about their writing style.

2.3.3 Metadiscourse and cultural conventions

It is generally agreed that the use of metadiscourse is likely to vary across cultures. Raymond Williams (1983) described *culture* as one of the most complex words in the English language, and there is still no single broadly agreed definition of it today. What the different communities do is construct and share cultural models, which are the result of continuous negotiations of everyday life. It could be argued that linguistic and cultural factors may distinguish first and second language writers, however it is necessary not to underestimate the influences of individual experiences. As Hyland (2005:155) states, writers have individual identities beyond the language and culture they were born into, and the tendency to stereotype individuals according to cultural dichotomies should be avoided.

In this respect, Thompson (2013) puts forward a critical approach to transcultural communication through narrative enquiry. This author starts form Garson's (2012, in Thompson 2013) statement according to which narratives can help

us understand "how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past, and how both shape perceptions of the future." As a matter of fact, narrative enquiry requires the researcher to "engage in a form of *dialogic communication* to develop a deeper understanding of how language, culture and identity interact and evolve over time" (Thompson 2011, in Thompson 2013). What is interesting about this approach is that it really focuses on the participants, giving them the opportunity to personally evaluate the experiences they are describing. As Bell (2002, in Thompson 2013) states, "one of the ways in which a culture can be defined is in relation to the kinds of story structures people use to make sense of their worlds." In a nutshell, Thompson's (2013) research focuses on connections between language, culture and identity. One case in point that she describes is the experience of a student who stresses that she feels she has to adapt her accent to be part of a social group, and she did so because "speakers can use the indexical function of language to indicate their membership within a cultural group" (Kramsch 1998, in Thompson 2013). That is, speakers perform "cultural acts of identity through the language they use [...]. They identify themselves and are identified by others according to accent, vocabulary and discourse patterns" (Kramsch 1998, in Thompson 2013). To conclude, it can be said that language and identity interact together and by following Thompson's approach, for example, it is possible to deeply explore and reflect on linguistic and cultural diversity.

Referring to the influence of culture on language, *Contrastive Rhetoric* (CR) uses the notion of culture to explain differences in written texts and written practises. As Kaplan (2000, in Hyland 2005:115) explains, CR seeks to "build a research base to identify the fact that there are differences between languages in rhetorical preferences." As a matter of fact, L2 and L1 writers organize their texts in different ways and sometimes cultural preconceptions may influence communication. It must be noticed that these ideas have been supported by a range of studies over the past decade. Connor (2002, in Hyland 2005:115) has put forward the use of the term *intercultural rhetoric* rather than contrastive rhetoric to refer to the dynamic models of cross-cultural research, which focuses on contexts as well as texts, and which seeks to acknowledge the ways in which "small" cultures (e.g. classroom cultures, youth

cultures […]) interact with national cultures in any intercultural situation. It is important to acknowledge that while an L2 writer is writing from his/her own familiar culture, the reader is reading from another context, and therefore, as Hyland (2005:116) states, a possible explanation for any difficulties of comprehension may be related to "the amount of effort the writer expects the reader to invest in the text." In other words, while in some languages writers are expected to be responsible for effective communication and have to produce well-organized statements, in others "writers compliment their readers by not spelling everything out" (Hyland 2005:116), and thus readers are the ones who have to "dig out" meanings.

Another point which has been discussed in the literature on cultural conventions is "how much responsibility the writer requires the reader to take in reading/understanding the text" (Ädel 2006:149). In this respect, Hinds (1987) distinguishes between languages that are "reader-responsible" and "writer responsible". According to Hinds (1987, in Ädel 2006:149), in English-language cultures there is a tendency to stress that it is the writer's responsibility "to make clear and well-organized statements", while in Japanese culture, for example, it is "the responsibility of the reader to understand what it is that the author has intended to say." Therefore, looking at the metadiscourse used in a text can be a useful indicator of how "writers craft their texts with this kind of orientation to the reader" (Hyland 2005: 116). It must be noticed that it is the writer's job to bring the reader into the text, for example by providing transition statements when moving from one topic to another or by indicating how certain ideas should be understood. As a consequence, learners should always be aware of how the conventions for writing may differ across cultures. According to Markkanen (1993, in Ädel 2006:150) "it can be assumed that the ways of using metadiscourse in writing may vary from one language to another, that the conventions followed in its use may be different in different cultures."

To conclude, it can be said that one's first language and culture influence one's writing in a second language: in a fast-changing world like ours, teachers should become aware of the influences of the writer's specific cultures when they teach writing skills. As Canagarajah (2002, in Hyland 2005:136) states, "teachers must keep

in mind that no one needs to be held hostage by language and culture": teachers can see the variations in metadiscourse use as a way of offering explanations for L2 students' writing practices, for example as to their decisions to guide their readers through a text or to leave parts of a text more commonly implicit.

2.3.4. Metadiscourse and community

In recent years the concept of community has been largely explored by discourse analysts. Back in the 1990s, work done by Swales focused on concepts such as discourse community, genre and language-learning tasks. According to Swales (1990:VII), the work that members of a discourse community are engaged in "involves the processing of tasks which reflect specific linguistic, discoursal and rhetoric skills." Given this first definition, a clarification of the term "discourse community" is needed. As Herzberg (1986, in Swales 1990:21) states, "use of the term discourse community testifies to the increasingly common assumption that discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups." It could be argued that "speech" community has been an evolving concept in sociolinguistics, yet Swales (1990) believes that there are a number of reasons for separating it from the concept of "discourse" community. To give an example, the need to distinguish between a *sociolinguistic* grouping and a *sociorhetorical* one. As Swales (1990:24) states, in a "sociolinguistic speech" community, the communicative needs of the group, such as socialization or group solidarity, are predominant, and therefore the primary determinants of linguistic behaviour are social. On the other hand, in a sociorhetorical discourse community, the primary determinants are functional, since "a discourse community consists of a group of people who link up in order to pursue objectives that are prior to those of socialization and solidarity" (Swales 1990:24).

Furthermore, Swales (1990: 24/26) identifies six characteristics which are necessary for identifying a group of people as a discourse community:

1- *A discourse community has a set of common public goals*;

2- *A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members;*

3- *A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms to provide information and feedback;*

4- *A discourse community utilizes and possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims:* as Swales (1990:26) underlines these may involve for example appropriacy of topics or the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community;

5- *A discourse community has acquired some specific lexis:* for example the development of community-specific abbreviations and acronyms;

6- *A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.*

To further explore this topic, it is interesting to notice the role that the communicative purpose plays in Bhatia's definition of genre: "genre is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs [...]" (Bhatia 1993:13). Like other categorisations of discourse, genres are socially constructed and are controlled by social practices. As Bhatia (1997:360) explains, genres are the media through which members of certain communities communicate with each other. As a matter of fact, "genres are socially authorized through conventions, which [...] are embedded in the discursive practices of members of specific cultures" (Bhatia 1997:360). This is to say that a clever writer always makes use of what is conventionally available to a discourse community, and creativity becomes effective "only in the context of the already available and familiar" (Bhatia 1997:361).

Focusing on the concept of community, Hyland (2005:138) states, the notion of community is central to our appreciation of metadiscourse, as it draws attention to the fact that communication is always situated in social context. What is important to acknowledge is that community together with genre contribute to providing a framework of "how meanings are socially constructed, considering the forces outside

the individual which help guide purposes, establish relationships and ultimately shape writing" (Hyland 2005:138). As we have already seen, the concept of *discourse community* refers to the idea that generally we use language to communicate with individuals and other members of our social group and not with the world at large (Hyland 2005:139).

It could be argued that the idea of community is also linked to some key aspects of context: the *situational context* in terms of what people "know about what they can see around them"; the *background knowledge context,* including cultural and interpersonal knowledge of what people know about the world; and the *co-textual context* in terms of what people "know about what they have been saying" (Cutting 2002, in Hyland 2005:139). In other words, what the concept of community does is provide us with a means of analysing communication "as a joint accomplishment, uniting social, psychological and cognitive factors relevant to a particular purpose and site" (Hyland 2005:140). The importance of this notion lies on its influence in drawing attention to the fact that discourse is socially situated and in underlying what writers can bring to a text.

Furthermore, community is also important in studies of academic writing providing insights "into how disciplinary-situated argument practices work to construct knowledge" (Hyland 2005:141). Becher (1989, in Hyland 2005:141) describes disciplinary communities as tribes each with its own norms, categorizations, bodies of knowledge, sets of conventions and modes of inquiry which comprise a separate culture. As Hyland (2005:141) underlines, within each culture individuals acquire an ability to organize data into meaningful patterns for readers. This is to say that messages have to be designed in order to accomplish socially recognized purposes: as a matter of fact, "we are more likely to persuade readers of our ideas if we frame our messages in ways which appeal to appropriate community-recognized relationships" (Hyland 2000, in Hyland 2005:142). As we know, writing is a community-situated activity, and therefore the use of metadiscourse "depends on the writer's observation of appropriate interpersonal and intertextual relationships" (Hyland 2005:142). Metadiscourse implies the fact that knowledge is the justification

of ideas and therefore writers must take into account their intended receivers' norms, expectations and responses, which are inevitably part of the community they belong to (Hyland 2005, in Amiryousefi 2010:161). It must be noticed that metadiscourse practices are closely related to social activities and the beliefs of academic communities: they contribute to exhibiting a "more explicitly interpersonal colouring, building a relationship with readers, drawing them into the discourse, and establishing a clear stance and attitude to arguments" (Hyland 2005:170).

As Hyland (2009:54) states, current conceptions of identity see it as forged through discourse as "we construct representations of ourselves in particular contexts and places". In fact, everything we write or say tells something about us or the kind of interaction we would like to establish with our readers or listeners. However, it must be noticed that "our identities are only successful to the extent that they are recognized by others, and this means adopting, constructing and transforming recognizable discourses" (Bloemmaert 2005, in Hyland 2009:54). As Hyland (2009:56) explains, communities are institutions where actions and understandings are influenced not only by the personal and the biographical, but also by the institutional and sociocultural: as a matter of fact, "differences in worldview or language usage intersect as a result of the myriad backgrounds and overlapping memberships of participants."

2.4 Teaching metadiscourse features

It is generally agreed that the importance of metadiscourse is gradually gaining recognition in language teaching. As Hyland (2005:175) argues, until recently academic writing was seen as a limited textual practice, taught, "either through imitating the writing processes of experts or by concentrating on grammatical patterns which, if executed correctly, produced successful texts." Clearly, what has been missing is a focus on those features that make texts work within and for specific contexts and audiences. It could be argued that it is not always easy for a writer, especially second language students, to adapt a text for readers. Writing is indeed something that has to do with conventions writers should be familiar with, and which

are related to their communities and cultures. EFL textbooks sometimes ignore the importance of metadiscourse, treating it in a rather piecemeal and superficial way. Therefore, it is quite rare for metadiscourse "to be either explicitly taught or adequately covered in writing materials in a way which either shows the systematic effect of particular options or reveals the important interactive nature of discourse" (Hyland 2005:178). This is why students should be properly guided in learning how to use metadiscourse features successfully.

It is interesting to notice that the teaching of metadiscourse features can have several advantages to students. First of all, a better awareness of metadiscourse can help them realize and understand the "cognitive demands" that texts can make on readers (Hyland 2005:178): in other words how important it is to guide readers through the text and help them process information. Moreover, it gives them the resources that can allow them to take a stance towards what they say: by doing so they can engage directly with their readers. While underlying the importance of teaching metadiscourse in the classroom, Hyland (2005:178-179) highlights the potential contribution that metadiscourse can make to a text:

1- It provides a context in which to place propositional information;

2- It makes students more present and engaged with the text itself;

3- It increases persuasiveness;

4- It helps comprehension;

5- It assists coherence relating issues clearly;

6- It makes readers aware of the "subjective interpretation of truth";

7- It contributes to showing the writer's position on the information presented in a text;

8- It indicates the writer's attitude towards the reader of the text;

9- It guides the reader through the text by highlighting important points, giving a specific structure, linking ideas, etc.;

10- It reveals that the writer recognizes the needs of his/her readers and is aware of the conventions of a certain community.

To conclude, an appropriate use of metadiscourse can help not only to reveal the writers' awareness of their audience, but also their ability to see their texts objectively and comment on them in various ways. Metadiscourse resources can help produce language which is appropriate to a particular audience and genre: by understanding how language works, writers can communicate appropriately and successfully in their communities.

2.4.1 Metadiscourse in the classroom: teaching principles

It could be argued that only through the teaching of metadiscourse students can learn how to engage with an audience properly. As Hyland (2005:181) underlines, when reading a text, readers expect it to be organized in a certain way, with sufficient signals of the writer's intentions and they also expect their views to be acknowledged. It is generally agreed that only by engaging in their own discourse analysis, students can become curious and develop an exploratory attitude towards texts. It must be noticed that when teaching how to use metadiscourse effectively teachers need to take into consideration a few key elements.

First of all, since writing is a cultural activity, it is fundamental to consider the writer's target needs. In other words, it is necessary to "identify the kinds of writing that learners will need to do in their target situations" (Hyland 2005:182). It is important to provide students with examples that show the ways writers use metadiscourse across different genres. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that students can bring different writing and learning experiences to the classroom. As a consequence, Hyland (2005:182) states that students from different backgrounds will have their own ideas of what appropriate interactions and engagement are in writing, based on their prior educational, cultural or social experiences. Therefore, teachers should be able to acknowledge those differences and provide clear models, appropriate writing strategies and useful feedback. Another aspect that needs to be considered is that students can use metadiscourse features as a way to "make meanings when they write" (Hyland 2005:183). It is believed that when learning to use a language, students

also "develop an understanding of how language itself works, acquiring a vocabulary they can use to talk about language and its role in texts" (Hyland 2005:183). By engaging in a variety of writing experiences students can see how texts relate to certain contexts and ways of using language. As a matter of fact, it is true that metadiscourse features function "to convey information about those who write the texts, their relationship to their audience and the culture of the community in which they are written" (Hyland 2005:184). In other words, they contribute to give an insight on how texts are produced and used in certain contexts and how to engage with readers "in ways they expect and understand" (Hyland 2005:193).

To conclude, the teaching of metadiscourse can be useful to help students understand how "people interact with each other and in constructing contexts and identities" (Hyland 2005:184). It can also encourage students to develop some sort of critical engagement: they need to be aware of their personal relationship with their readers in terms, for example, of social distance and power differences.

2.4.2 Metadiscourse in the classroom: teaching strategies

It is generally agreed that there are several strategies that teachers can use to emphasize a better awareness of metadiscourse features and help students interact more effectively with their readers. As Hyland (2005:185) points out, first of all apprentice writers need to explore expert writers' interactive strategies, they can learn how to practise them and finally students can be asked to produce writing tasks to "weave appropriate forms into their work."

First of all, students can start by familiarizing with metadiscourse features for example by searching for relevant examples in real texts using a concordancing program. According to Hyland (2005:185), concordance output provides authentic data for materials that concentrate attention on metadiscourse forms widely used in target genres. This can be an interesting means of stimulating curiosity and "encouraging independent engagement with the language" (Hyland 2005:185). Furthermore, students can also examine text fragments in order to highlight

"interactional and interactive effects of particular metadiscourse items" (Hyland 2005:186). For example, learners can analyse texts and try to identify all transitions and classify them; they can also compare texts written for different audiences or they can distinguish those statements in which the author is asserting his/her personal view or those attributed to other people.

After focusing on what metadiscourse features are and the different roles they display, learners can "work on these features, changing and altering texts to achieve different meanings" (Hyland 2005:187). By doing this, students can manipulate metadiscourse items and see how they can be used for different purposes. As Hyland (2005:187-188) suggests, in this second class several tasks can be included. For example, students can complete a gapped text from which metadiscourse features have been removed; they can also rewrite a text for a different audience or they can add or remove all frame markers from a text and comment the effect that this can produce on a text.

As said above, metadiscourse has to do with the interaction that the writer is able to build with his/her audience. As Hyland (2005:188) points out, being able to use it effectively depends "on the writer's understanding of who is likely to read the text, what they know and don't know, their expectations of engagement and negotiation, their relationship to the writer and so on." It is important to notice that there are several ways to teach audience awareness. According to Schriver (1992, in Hyland 2005:189) expert readers can be asked to give their impressions and reactions when reading a student text. By doing this, students can then discuss "what metadiscourse features may have been successful or caused difficulties, and where additional metadiscourse might have been helpful" (Schriver 1992, in Hyland 2005:189). Furthermore, students can also be asked to write a text for different audiences in order to understand how to change metadiscourse in their texts accordingly. Finally, students can be given the task to research real audiences: as Hyland (2005:189) states, by talking to people who use a genre regularly in the contexts in which it is typically found, learners can understand the social forces that can affect writing and how writers try to negotiate them. The key issue here is to involve students in the analysis of

communicative events so that they can notice the relationship between the genres they are learning and real-world situations.

Finally, it could be argued that "students only learn to write effectively by actually writing" (Hyland 2005:190). Extended writing practice is fundamental to help students become more familiar not only with the process of writing itself, but also to provide them with opportunities to write for an audience. Moreover, it offers students "the chance to develop and express ideas in response to a real-world, or at least realistic, situation, and to develop their skills in crafting an interactively successful text" (Hyland 2005:190). Teachers can use several tasks to encourage their students to consider the role of metadiscourse in writing, and consequently their intended audience. Teachers should provide students with a variety of writing experiences, varying the audience and purposes; students could then be given writing tasks which involve interviewing writers and readers to better understand the role of interaction and the importance of taking into account the interests and values of real audiences (Hyland 2005:192).

To conclude, it could be argued that learning how to use metadiscourse can encourage not only a functional approach, "emphasizing what language can be used to achieve" (Hyland 2005:193), but also the importance audience has and therefore the importance of writing as a way of engaging with other members. This kind of awareness allows students to become responsible for the choices they make in particular contexts and, as Hyland (2005:193) stresses, it provides them with the skills they need "to create their own meanings".

CHAPTER 3: THE STUDY OF LEARNER ENGLISH

Learner language refers, in a strict sense, to the oral or written language produced by learners, i.e. to learners' output (Brown:2000; Ellis & Barkhuizen:2005). Describing learner language is a primary objective and a crucial approach to the study of second language acquisition. As Færch, Haastrup and Philipson (1984:4) point out, learner English is by no means a homogeneous variety of English, as it differs according to the linguistic background of the speakers, the nature of the situation in which the language has been learnt and to the competence level of the speaker. As a matter of fact, analyses of learner language are an essential starting-point: they allow focusing not only on the learner, but also on the situations in which the foreign language is learnt and used. It is interesting to notice, as Richards (1974) stresses, that there are different linguistic and sociolinguistic factors which may influence and characterize second language learner systems.

The first of these factors is language transfer: sentences in the target language may present some interference from the mother tongue. It could be argued that there has been a debate as to whether "transfer" should be considered a valid concept for discussing language acquisition. In fact, extreme views range from Lado (1957), who affirmed that second language learners rely almost entirely on their native language in the process of acquiring a new one, to Dulay and Burt (1974), who suggested that transfer was almost unimportant in the creation of interlanguage.

The second factor is what Richards (1974) calls intralingual interference. It refers to "items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language" (Richards 1974:6). In other words, when the second language learner is exposed to certain data, s/he tries to derive the rules behind those data and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor the target language.

One last factor may be the sociolinguistic situation, which refers to the fact that different socio-cultural settings may result in different types of language learning. In fact, these settings may alter the way in which the learner engages in the target

language community, thus modifying the process of language learning. Furthermore, the sociolinguistic situation is also linked to the motivational variables which influence language learning. As Richards (1974) explains, there are two types of motivation: the instrumental and the integrative. The former motivates the learner to study a language only for utilitarian purposes, whereas the latter as a means for integration with members of another cultural community.

As we have seen, there are a number of variables that can affect learner's performance, and therefore only a close study of learner English can provide the basis on which predictions about learning can be made. As Richards (1974:18) argues, viewing language learner systems as necessary stages in the acquisition of the target language may result in "a deeper understanding of language in general".

3.1 Describing learner language

It is generally agreed that within SLA research samples of learner language are collected and studied in order to gain insights into the learners' developing knowledge of the second language. As a matter of fact, only learners' speech and writing can provide clear evidence of their linguistic knowledge. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:6) argue that the way learners perform some kind of language task serves as the "principal source of information about what they know about the language." At this point the inevitable issue that emerges regards the kind of performance that provides the most reliable source of information. As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:6) point out, some researchers rely on learner intuitions to discover what they know, whereas others prefer to collect samples of learner language.

It could be argued that the importance of learner language as a source of data within the SLA research field raises the issue of quality of the learner language data used to make claims about L2 competence and therefore L2 acquisition. According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:7), it is acknowledged that these data should "reflect as closely as possible 'natural' language use", however given the considerable problems linked to the collection of such data, researchers often have to opt for "clinically

elicited data (for example, by using pedagogic tasks)." What the authors want to emphasize is that researchers should "specify what kind(s) of data have been collected and [...] justify the validity of these data in terms of [...] the relationship between performance and competence" as regards their specific research goals.

Another important distinction that needs to be made is that of learner language as expression and as content. On the one hand, "learner language as expression" refers to viewing learner language as "providing evidence of what learners know about an L2 by examining the linguistic forms they produce" (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:7). On the other hand, "learner language as content" refers to the set of propositions connected to the topic that are being communicated by the linguistic expression. Another important consideration is that while learner language as expression is used as a source of data for the investigation of the universal properties of language acquisition, learner language as content has given information to examine factors responsible for individual differences in language learning, such as for example language learning beliefs, attitudes to the target language and to the target language community. Undoubtedly, learner language should be viewed in both ways in order to provide a full account of L2 acquisition.

3.2 Interlanguage and language learning

The use of the term "interlanguage" presupposes that during his/her learning career the language learner has indeed "a language": his/her behaviour is "rule governed and therefore, in principle, describable in linguistic terms" (Corder 1981:56). The term "interlanguage" was coined by the American linguist Larry Selinker (1972) to refer to the fact that "L2 learners construct a linguistic system that draws, in part, on the learner's L1 but is also different from it and also from the target language" (Ellis 1997:33).

Saville-Troike (2006:18-21) named interlanguage as "transfer", meaning a transition of prior knowledge from L1 to L2, as one of the processes that is involved in interlanguage development. She identifies two different types of transfer: positive

transfer and negative transfer. The former occurs when an L1 structure or rule is used in an L2 utterance and that use is appropriate or "correct" in the L2. The latter, instead, occurs when an L1 structure or rule is used in an L2 utterance in an inappropriate way.

According to Selinker (1972, in Richards 1974:37-40) there are five processes that are central to second language learning:

1- Transfer
2- Transfer of training
3- Strategies of second language learning
4- Strategies of second language communication
5- Overgeneralization of TL linguistic materials

What happens in the first process is that some of the rules in the interlanguage system may be the result of transfer from the learner's first language. Learners use their mother tongue to create their own language system. In the second process, some of the components of the interlanguage system may be the result of the transfer of specific elements through which the learner is taught the second language: in other words transfer of training occurs when the second-language learner applies rules learned from instructors or textbooks. As regards the "strategies of second language learning", the rules in the learners' interlanguage may instead result from the application of language learning strategies as an attempt to reduce the TL to a simpler system. In the next process, interlanguage system rules may be the result of strategies employed by the learners in their attempt to communicate with native speakers of the target language. Finally, the last process takes place when learners over-generalize rules of the target language and use them in contexts where they do not fit. It must be noticed, that several researchers have pointed out that the language of L2 learners is systematic, which leads to rule-governed behaviour (White:2003, in Doughty and Long 2003:19). Interlanguage is then based on the hypothesis that L2 learners have internalized a mental grammar, a natural language system that can be described in terms of linguistic rules and principles.

Saville-Troike (2006:41-42) further argues that an interlanguage has the following characteristics:

1- *Systematicity:* At any particular stage of development the IL is governed by rules which constitute the learner's internal grammar. These rules can be discovered by analyzing the language that is used by the learner at that time.

2- *Dynamicity:* The system of rules that learners have in their minds changes frequently.

3- *Variability:* Although the IL is systematic, differences in context result in different patterns of language use.

4- *A reduced system* (both in form and function): reduced forms refer to the less complex grammatical structures that typically occur in an IL compared to the target language. Reduced function refers to the smaller range of communicative needs typically served by an IL (especially if the learner is still in contact with members of the L1 speech community).

To conclude, as Ellis (1997:35) suggests, the concept of interlanguage can really work as a metaphor of how L2 acquisition takes place. It could be argued that the so called computational model of L2 acquisition can be described as follows: the learner is exposed to input which is then processed in two stages. First, parts of it, the so called *intake*, are taken into short-term memory. Then some of the intake is stored in long-term memory as L2 knowledge. It must be noticed that it is in the learner's mind, that is where the interlanguage is actually constructed, that the processes for creating intake and L2 knowledge take place. Finally, what the learner does is use L2 knowledge to produce spoken and written output.

Input ➡ intake ➡ L2 knowledge ➡ output
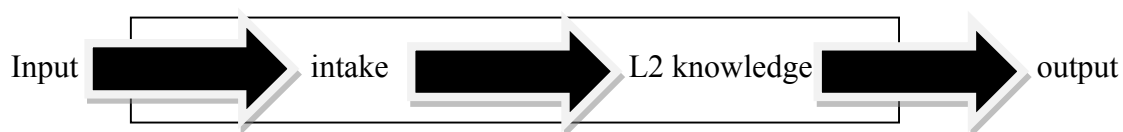
Figure 3.1: A computational model of L2 acquisition

Having briefly defined the term "interlanguage", in the next section the same concept will be introduced in historical perspective and then elaborated in terms of systematicity, variability, L1 interference and of how social factors may determine the input that learners use to construct their interlanguage.

3.2.1 Historical background to interlanguage studies

The idea that the language of second-language learners is in some sense autonomous and crucially distinct from both native and target language was developed at about the same time in the work of several different researchers, such as Selinker, Nemser and Corder. As Tarone (2006:747) states, prior to the development of the idea of interlanguage, contrastive analysts had asserted that only transfer from the native language could shape learners' language. According to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), it was possible to predict the interference errors students would make, by simply comparing the first language with the second. These claims were, however, not supported by reference to data obtained from the systematic study of learner language itself, but only by utterances that analysts noticed and recorded. As a consequence, in the late 1950s and 1960s there were virtually no systematic attempts to observe learner language and to document how learner language developed. Growing empirical research resulted in increasing interest in the "internal cognitive structures and processes involved in language learning" (Fialová 2012:7). In other words, language learners began to be considered as creative beings actively building their own language systems. Corder (1967) was the first to propose conducting research involving "the analysis of learner errors gathered longitudinally" (in Tarone 2006:748). According to him, second-language learners' errors could be useful data to reveal the real problems of language learners. As Corder (1967) points out, when learners produce correct sentences, they may simply be repeating something they have heard. Instead, when they produce sentences that deviate from the norms, these sentences may show the learners' understanding of the rules and patterns of the target language. It could be argued that Error Analysis originated as an attempt to "validate the predictions of contrastive analysis by systematically gathering and analysing the

speech and writing of second-language learners" (Tarone 2006:747). The errors that learners make in the learning process were considered to be a major source in trying to understand what shapes learner language. As a consequence, as Tarone (2006:748) recalls, Corder proposed a framework for analysing these errors.

Furthermore, as we have seen, Selinker (1972) was the first one to introduce the term *interlanguage.* It must be noticed that this term has been widely used by applied linguists in recent years: the study of interlanguage refers to the study of the language systems of language learners, or simply to the study of learner language (Corder). As Tarone (2006:748) points out, the interlanguage hypothesis was intended to "stimulate systematic research into the development of the language produced by adult second-language learners, with a view to objectively identifying psycholinguistic processes that shaped learner language." In his 1972 article Selinker used the term "interlanguage" to refer to a learner's interim grammar, stressing its structurally intermediate status between a person's first and second language. Interlanguage theory can be summarized as follows (Ellis 1997: 33-34):

1- A learner's interlanguage primarily comprises implicit linguistic knowledge.

2- A learner's interlanguage knowledge constitutes a system in the same way as a native speaker's grammar is a system. This system accounts for the regularities that are apparent in the learner's use of the L2.

3- A learner's interlanguage is permeable, i.e. the system is open to influence – it is easily penetrated by new linguistic forms from the outside (through input) as well as inside (through internal processing).

4- A learner's interlanguage is transitional. The learner restructures their interlanguage grammar as they revise their hypothesis about the new language. This development involves a series of stages.

5- A learner's interlanguage is variable. At any stage of development the learner employs different forms for the same grammatical structure.

6- A learner's interlanguage is the product of various learning strategies. One such strategy is L1 transfer but other strategies are intralingual, e.g. overgeneralization or simplification.

7- A learner may supplement their interlanguage by means of communication strategies (e.g. paraphrase or requests for assistance) to compensate for gaps or difficulty in accessing L2 knowledge while performing.

8- A learner's interlanguage may fossilize, i.e. the learner may stop developing and thus fail to achieve a full native-like grammar.

It could be argued that the concept of interlanguage has contributed to raising many questions as to the nature of L2 acquisition and its explanations. As we will see in the next sections, some of the proposed features of interlanguage theory have attracted particular attention of SLA researchers, such as for example the systematicity of interlanguage development, variability of interlanguage and the role of the first language in interlanguage development.

3.2.2 Developmental patterns in interlanguage

The investigation of the developmental patterns in learner language was motivated by the desire to investigate learner language as a set of rules that "learners constructed and repeatedly revised" (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:109). In other words, researchers have recognized the need to consider learner language in its totality, in order to uncover the systems of rules or interlanguages that learners construct at certain stages of development. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:73) point out, one of the most powerful ideas that emerged from this work was that L2 acquisition "proceeds in a regular, systematic fashion". To support the evidence of the existence of regular developmental patterns in L2 acquisition, it is necessary to explore a few research questions. Two of these are: "Do learners acquire some target-language features before others?" and "How do learners acquire a particular target-language linguistic feature?".
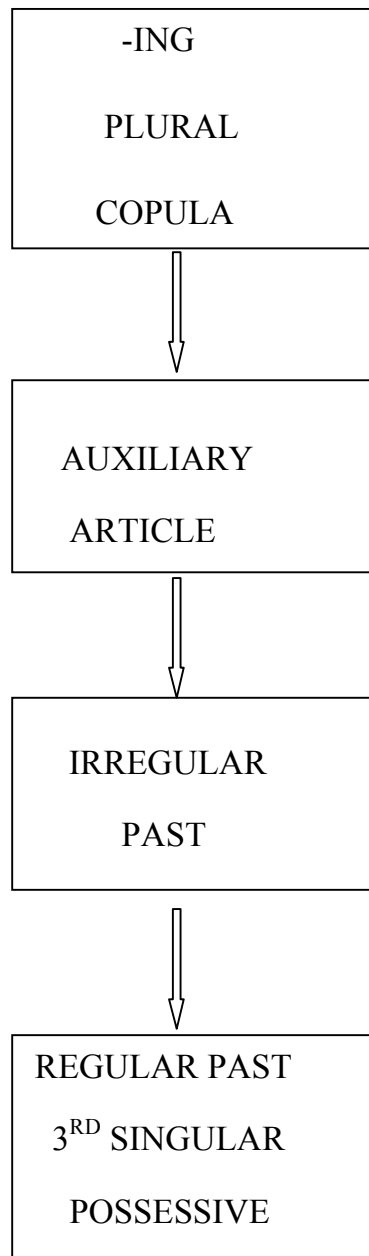
We will start with an explanation of the main methods that have been used to study developmental patterns in language acquisition. As Ellis (1994:74) suggests, one way to do so is to examine whether learners' errors change over time; yet error

analysis has not succeeded in providing clear evidence of developmental patterns. Another way is to examine samples of learner language collected over a period of time in order to see when specific linguistic features emerge.

It is generally agreed that *obligatory occasion analysis* is a common method used for describing developmental patterns. It has been clearly described in Brown (1973, in Ellis 1994:74): first of all, samples of "naturally occurring learner language are collected". Subsequently, "obligatory occasions for the use of specific TL features are identified in the data", and then the percentage of accuracy in the use of the feature is calculated. It must be noticed that the acquisition of a given feature requires "mastering not only when to use it, but also when not to use it" (Ellis 1994:75). For this reason researchers have put forward a procedure known as *target-like use analysis* which takes into account the over-use or misuse of certain features.

One key aspect to consider is that although ILs are highly variable, they tend to be systematic: developmental patterns show indeed a high degree of uniformity. Early empirical evidence of that sistematicity was provided by the so called "morpheme studies" (Dulay and Burt 1973, 1974), which established the acquisition of a subset of English grammatical morphemes by learners in various environments, at different ages and from different first language backgrounds (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:88). Basically, in these studies researchers employed obligatory occasion analysis in order to "establish the accuracy with which learners of L2 English performed a range of morphemes" (Ellis 1994:91). The overall results of the studies suggested an order which was similar among second language learners from different first language backgrounds. Based on these results, Krashen (1977) postulated a "natural order" of the acquisition of grammatical morphemes , as can be seen in Figure 3.2.

```
                    ┌─────────────────┐
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                    │                 │
                    │     PLURAL      │
                    │                 │
                    │     COPULA      │
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             │
                             ▼
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │   AUXILIARY     │
                    │                 │
                    │    ARTICLE      │
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             │
                             ▼
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │   IRREGULAR     │
                    │                 │
                    │     PAST        │
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             │
                             ▼
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  REGULAR PAST   │
                    │  3RD SINGULAR   │
                    │   POSSESSIVE    │
                    └─────────────────┘
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Figure 3.2: Krashen's (1977) summary of second language grammatical morpheme acquisition sequence (in Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:90).

The diagram is meant to show that learners produce verb inflectional morphemes in the higher boxes with higher accuracy than those in the lower boxes. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:89) put it, "no claims were made for the order of items within a box, but items in boxes higher in the order were regularly found accurately supplied in obligatory contexts before those in boxes lower in the order."

Although the similarity among learners from different language backgrounds seems to suggest that transfer does not influence the accuracy order, it could be argued that other studies have shown that second language learners do acquire a second language in different orders depending on their native language. Nevertheless, these studies have contributed to providing empirical evidence of common accuracy orders thus demonstrating one important aspect of the systematicity of interlanguage development.

To conclude, learners do acquire a grammatical structure gradually: for this reason, "the acquisition of a particular grammatical structure [...] must be seen as a *process* involving transitional constructions" (Ellis 1997:23). As a matter of fact, learners pass through different stages and their acquisition follows a "U-shaped course of development": the so called "restructuring" takes place when learners might show some kind of regression when they try to "reorganize their existing knowledge in order to accommodate new knowledge" (Ellis 1997:23). What the work on developmental patterns has indeed shown is that some linguistic features are actually easier to learn than others. Of course, this has implications for language teaching: as Ellis (1997:25) argues, one key question for language teaching could be whether the sequences of acquisition can be altered through formal instruction.

3.2.3 Interlanguage Variability

Like all natural languages, ILs are variable: the research on variability in interlanguage use has shown that learner language is indeed a highly variable phenomenon. However, what researchers have been trying to explore is how much of this variation can be explained and predicted, and therefore how systematic it can be, and how much of it represents free variation. According to Ellis (1997:25) at any given stage of development, learners have access to two or more linguistic forms for realizing a single grammatical form and therefore sometimes they employ one form and sometimes another. This means that one type of error may alternate with another type, or an error may alternate with the correct target-language form. Another interesting

thing to notice is that variability in learner language is also evident when no error has been committed: learners can indeed vary in "their complexity of grammatical constructions under different conditions" (Fialová 2012:14).

Ellis (1997:26-27) underlines how context can be a crucial category when exploring the variability in learner language. First of all, he describes how learners can vary in their use of the L2 according to the *linguistic context*: one linguistic form can trigger the use of another form. Moreover, learners can also vary the linguistic forms they decide to use in accordance with the *situational context*. Like native speakers, they are more likely to vary the language they are using depending on who they are speaking to or the formality of the situation. Finally, Ellis describes the variation according to the *psycholinguistic context*: when learners have the opportunity to plan their production they are more likely to use correct target-language forms.

Based on her research in the area of contextual variability, Elaine Tarone (1985, in Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:84) formulated a theory called "continuum paradigm" arguing that learners develop a capability for using the L2 in a number of different styles. This continuum ranges from a "careful" style speech to a "vernacular" one : the former accounts for "situations when learners are consciously attending to linguistic forms as they feel the need to be correct" (Fialová 2012:15), whereas the latter is used when "least attention to form is paid" (Tarone 1985, in Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:84) and so it is at work in spontaneous production.

Furthermore, Ellis (1997:28) reflects on how learners manifest variability in their production of an L2. He explains that learners build variable systems "by trying to map particular forms on to particular functions", ideally by mapping one meaning on to one form. However, as Ellis points out, the resulting systems are often very different from the target-language system. Only with time they become more target-like. To illustrate this, Ellis (1997:28) describes the interlanguage of a learner (J) who possessed two forms for expressing negatives at one stage in his development: "no +verb" and "don't + verb". At the beginning he seemed to use these randomly, but at this stage he displayed a certain consistency: "no + verb" was used to make negative statements, while "don't + verb" was used in negative requests.

As regards the issue of free variation in learner language, it appears that learners may sometimes use two different forms in close proximity to each other to express the same meaning in the same context while speaking to the same person (Ellis 1997:29). However, as Ellis (1997:29) goes on saying, this free variation might actually form an essential stage in the acquisition of particular grammatical structures. In fact, a learner might begin with a single form and use it for a variety of functions, then he might progress to a stage where other forms are acquired but used interchangeably, that is in free variation, and only then he might start to differentiate between the forms and use them systematically.

It is important to acknowledge that this sequence of acquisition applies to "specific grammatical features" and so, as Ellis (1997:29) explains, it is possible for individual learners to be at different stages in the sequence for different grammatical features. To give an example, a learner might be at the final stage for past tense, but be at the free variation stage for the articles "a" and "the". As a matter of fact, not all learners reach the completion stage for every grammatical structure: the phenomenon of "fossilization" occurs when learners stop developing the same mental grammar as native speakers and continue to show non-target language variability. To conclude, it can be said that "variability plays an integrative part in the overall pattern of development, with learners moving through a series of stages that reflect different kinds of variability" (Ellis 1997:30). It is true that learner language variability is a topic that still contributes to generating new research, however it could be said that although learner production may exhibit some free variation, variability in learner language is systematic, or rule-governed.

3.2.4 L1 Influence on Interlanguage Development

The interest in L1 transfer can be attributed to the fact that the influence of learners' mother tongue on their L2 performance is more than apparent to most teachers and researchers. As a consequence, given this fact, the notion of L1 transfer was reconceptualised within the cognitive framework and included in the concept of

interlanguage. Basically, according to this view, transfer should be considered as a cognitive process contributing to the construction of L2 rules. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:97-107) point out, the task of researchers was to identify the cognitive constraints that govern L1 transfer: this means identify when and how L1 influence can be expected to take place.

Wardhaugh (1970) was one of the first to address the issue of L1 influence. He proposed a distinction between a strong and a weak version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. The strong version was rejected, whereas the weak one recognizes that interference exists and can explain difficulties, but does not predict them a priori. In other words, teachers can use their knowledge of the target and native languages to examine the sources of error once they have appeared.

Another interesting contribution were the findings of Eric Kellerman's research in the mid-1980s regarding learners' perceptions of what is transferable from their first language into another. According to him, learners perceive some features of their native language as more basic and therefore as potentially transferable as "opposed to those that they view as unique to their language" (in Fialová 2012:19). For example, they do not transfer idiomatic uses of words.

Other studies on L1 transfer have shown that learners are sensitive to "degrees of distance" between their first and second language. To give an example, when analysing Swedish-Finnish and Finnish-Swedish bilinguals learning English, Hakan Ringbom (1986) found out that the source of interference errors was mostly Swedish. This might be attributed to the fact that Swedish and English are closely related and share many features, thus leading learners to believe that a certain structure in Swedish would work also in English. Learners who perceive a greater distance between the two languages are less likely to make interference errors, however they might also lack the facilitative support of positive transfer.

Moreover, according to Ellis (1997:53) the learner's stage of development has also been found to influence L1 transfer: this is evident in the way learners acquire speech acts like requests, apologies and refusals. At first, learners rely only on a few

simple formulas, but as their L2 competence develops, they may try to perform a wider range of speech acts according to their L1 norms. As Ellis (1997:54) states, transfer is governed by learners' perception about what is transferable and by their stage of development.

To conclude, transfer is surely another metaphor for explaining L2 acquisition, and as we have seen it manifests itself in unexpected ways. Some researchers have proposed a different term to refer to the effects of the L1: "cross-linguistic influence" (Ellis 1997:54). It is a more appropriate label to refer to a wide range of phenomena that result from language contact: "Cross-linguistic influence implies much more than simply the effect of one's first language on a second: the second language also influences the first; moreover, subsequent languages in multilinguals all affect each other in various ways" (Brown 2000).

3.2.5 Social aspects of Interlanguage

From the social angle, Ellis (1997:37-42) introduces three different approaches to L2 acquisition:

1- The first views interlanguage as "consisting of different styles which learners call upon under different conditions of language use".
2- The second has to do with how social factors determine the input that learners use to create their interlanguage.
3- The third concerns how the "social identities that learners negotiate in their interactions with native speakers shape their opportunities to speak and, thereby, to learn an L2".

As regards the first approach, as we have previously seen, Elaine Tarone (in Ellis 1997:37) argues that interlanguage involves a stylistic continuum: learners develop a capability for using the L2 which underlies "all regular language behaviour". As mentioned above, this view recognizes two different styles: the careful style takes

place when learners are consciously involved in the choice of linguistic forms as they need to be correct; the vernacular style, on the other hand, occurs when learners make spontaneous choices of linguistic forms, as it happens in free conversation. However, some research has shown that sometimes learners appear to be more accurate in the vernacular style, for example when a specific grammatical feature is of special importance (Ellis 1997:38). Furthermore, L2 acquisition is also influenced by a learner's social group. In this regard, Howard Giles' accommodation theory (in Ellis 1997:39) is based on the idea that when people interact with each other, they either try to emphasize social cohesiveness through a process of convergence by making their speech similar to that of their addressee, or they emphasize social distinctiveness through a process of divergence by making their speech different. What Giles wants to show is that the importance of social factors lies on the "impact they have on the attitudes that determine the kinds of language use learners engage in".

The second approach considers a similar perspective on the role of social factors in L2 acquisition. In this respect, as we have seen in Chapter 1, John Schumann has proposed the so called acculturation model: according to him fossilization in L2 acquisition is a result of the fact that learners fail to acculturate to the target-language group, in other words when "they are unable or unwilling to adapt to a new culture" (Ellis 1997:40). The main reasons for this failure are social distance and psychological distance. The former concerns "the extent to which individual learners become members of a target-language group and therefore achieve contact with them" (Ellis 1997:40). This is to say that a "good" learning situation is one where there is little social distance. When social distance is indeterminate, Schumann suggests a psychological distance by identifying a number of psychological factors, such as language shock and motivation.

Finally, the notion of social identity is central to the third approach. According to Peirce (in Ellis 1997:42) learning is successful when learners are able to "construct an identity that enables them to impose their right to be heard and thus become the subject of the discourse". L2 acquisition involves a "struggle" and "investment": there is "struggle" because learners have to struggle to assert themselves, and there is

"investment" because they are also investors who expect a good return on their efforts. As Ellis (1997:42) concludes, successful learners are those "who reflect critically on how they engage with native speakers and who are prepared to challenge the accepted social order by constructing and asserting social identities of their own choice".

3.3 The pertinence of analysing errors

It is generally agreed that when learning a second language, learners make mistakes and produce utterances that are ungrammatical or not acceptable by the rules of the language. There are several ways in which learner errors can be regarded: on one hand they can be the simple result of human fallibility, such as luck of attention or poor memory on the part of the learner. One the other hand, they can be the result of the interference of the mother tongue on the learning process. As Corder (1981:66) underlines, errors are regarded as useful evidence of how the learner is setting about the task of learning, what sense he is making of the target language data to which he is exposed and being required to respond. In other words, making errors can be seen as a necessary step towards the complete mastery of a language. It could be argued that by analysing these errors the teacher might "get insight into the learner's state of knowledge at any particular time and also into the strategies of learning that the learner may be using" (Corder 1981:66). Of course, this means that learners' errors are in some way systematic: at any particular stage in the course of learning a second language these errors appear to be regular and consistent.

As a matter of fact, Corder (1985, in Mourssi 2013:249) was the first to draw attention to the significance of learners' errors and their systematic nature: they must be viewed positively as they reflect the learner's systematic attempt to master the new system of the target language. He believed that errors are "an inevitable and indeed necessary part of the learning process" (Corder 1985, in Mourssi 2013:250).

As we have understood, learners' errors have always been an important feature in the process of second language learning. The study of learner errors within the field of SLA, commonly known as Error Analysis, explores the types of errors learners

make, as well as the sources of these errors in order to offer insights into the processes of second language acquisition. Therefore, it could be argued that language teaching could be another reason that justifies the analysis of errors: the truth is that this type of analysis can really offer great advantages for improving language pedagogies. As a matter of fact, EA results can show those areas of language that teachers need to focus on (e.g. grammar, discourse, lexis) as well as provide them with feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching materials and techniques.

3.3.1 Defining Errors

Brown (1987, in Mourssi 2013:250) defined error analysis as a process through which researchers observe, analyze and classify learner errors in order to elicit some information about the system operating within the learner. Corder (1985, in Mourssi 2013:250) distinguishes between errors of performance and errors of competence by referring to the former as *mistakes* and the latter as *errors*. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:59) describe the term *mistake* as "a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc., and therefore can be readily self-corrected", whereas an *error* is a "systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of the L2." As the authors go on saying, a learner cannot self-correct an error, because it is a product of his or her current stage of L2 development. As Corder (1974, in Heydari and Bagheri 2012:1584) states, the purpose of Error Analysis is to find "what the learner knows and does not know" and to "ultimately enable the teacher to supply him not just with the information that his hypothesis is wrong, but also, importantly, with the right sort of information or data for him to form a more adequate concept of a rule in the target language."

The studies in EA have for the most part dealt with linguistic aspects of learners' errors: identifying and describing the origin of the learners' errors is now an activity that has received much attention during the last three decades. One of the first studies conducted in the field of Error Analysis was the one done by Richards (1971, in Mohamed 2012:32), who distinguishes three sources of errors:

1- *Interference errors:* errors resulting from the use of elements from one language while speaking/writing another;

2- *Intralingual errors:* errors reflecting general characteristics of the rule learning such as incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply;

3- *Developmental errors:* errors occurring when learners attempt to build up hypotheses about the target language on the basis of their limited experience.

Moreover, as Richards (1971, in Mohamed 2012:32) explains, intralingual errors can be subdivided into:

1- *Overgeneralization errors:* the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language (e.g. "*He can sings*");

2- *Ignorance of rules restrictions:* the learners applies rules to context where they are not applicable (e.g. "*He made me go to rest*");

3- *Incomplete application of rules:* the learner fails to use a fully developed structure (e.g. "*You like to sing*?");

4- *False hypothesis:* the learners do not fully understand a distinction in the target language (e.g. the use of "was" as a marker of past tense in "*One day it was happened*").

As it is possible to understand, error is defined in terms of a sort of discrepancy between learner language and native-speaker norms, implying a comparison between the two. However, one problem could be the large variation among those that could be considered native speakers even with regard to Standard English, which is usually considered as the model for foreign language learners. As James (1998, in Fialová 2012: 36) claims, even with clearly set criteria for determining an error, there is still a high degree of inconsistency between native-speaking judgers as regards the non-standard features, or errors, in learner language.

At this point, it should be mentioned that other problems surrounding the definition of error concern the criteria according to which it can be determined whether a particular feature of learner language is an error or not (whatever variety of the target

language is chosen as the norm). According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:56), the crucial issue in this context is to decide whether grammaticality or acceptability should serve as the criterion.

First of all, grammaticality means "well-formedness" (James 1998, in Fialová 2012:37). In this case, an utterance is considered ungrammatical and thus erroneous when there are no imaginable circumstances under which it could be considered well-formed. This means that the language is judged regardless of the context in which it is used. Moreover, James argues that this reference to grammaticality is actually meant to prevent the judgement of error from subjectivity: "It is the grammar (not you or I) who decides whether something said by a learner is grammatical. Appeal to grammaticality is an attempt to be objective, to take decisions such as whether some bit of language is erroneous or not out of the orbit of human whim" (James 1998, in Fialová 2012:38).

On the other hand, acceptability takes into account the use of language in context. When there are some "non-linguistic factors that prevent us from using a certain form or set of forms, we can attribute this to unacceptability" (James 1998, in Fialová 2012:38). Acceptability is a property of texts and therefore the decision of whether an utterance should be considered erroneous or not according to this criterion will depend on "its appropriacy and naturalness in the given context as well as on its capability of utilization [...]" (Fialová 2012:38). Therefore, as it is possible to see, this criterion for determining errors involves much more subjectivity.

To conclude, it could be argued that the concept of "error" is itself quite fuzzy: it creates problems above all when it needs to be applied in practice. As a matter of fact, in the next section an outline of the procedures of error analysis will be provided.

3.3.2 The Procedures of Error Analysis

Error Analysis consists of a set of procedures for identifying, describing and explaining learner errors (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:51). According to Corder (1967, in Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:51) learner errors can be significant in three ways: they serve

a "pedagogic purpose" as they show teachers what learners have learned and what they have not mastered yet; they serve a "research purpose" as they provide evidence of how languages are learned; they serve a "learning purpose" as they act as devices by which learners can discover the rules of the target language. Conventionally, following Corder (1974), we can distinguish the following steps in conducting an Error Analysis:

1- Collection of a sample of learner language;
2- Identification of errors;
3- Description of errors;
4- Explanation of errors;
5- Error evaluation.

First of all, collecting a sample of learner language is what provides the data for the Error Analysis. However, the researcher needs to be aware of the fact that "the nature of the sample that is collected may influence the nature and distribution of the errors observed" (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:57). It must be noticed that there are several factors regarding learner (e.g. proficiency level, language learning background), language (e.g. medium, genre, content) and production (e.g. unplanned, planned) that may influence the sample collected.

Once a corpus of learner language has been collected, the errors have to be identified. Clearly, a starting point for error identification is a definition of error: the analyst has to choose the criteria by which errors will be determined. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:58) recommend the following steps for the identification of errors:

1- Make a reconstruction of the sample as this would have been done by the learner's native speaker counterpart;
2- Assume that every utterance produced by the learner is erroneous and systematically eliminate those that are correct based on comparison with the reconstructed version. The remaining utterances contain errors;
3- Identify which part(s) of each learner utterance differs from the reconstructed version.

It could be argued that difficulties often arise at the reconstruction stage, as the learner's utterances might have several possible interpretations. Corder (1974) suggests that one solution is to seek an *authoritative interpretation* by asking learners what they meant to say. However, also this might not work since "errors are often indeterminate, making it impossible for learners to specify which particular construction they were attempting to use" (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:59).

According to Lennon (1991), in the course of error identification it can be useful to distinguish two dimensions of errors: their domain and extent. The domain of an error can be defined as "the breadth of the context (word, phrase, clause, previous sentence, or extended discourse) that needs to be considered in order to identify an error". On the other hand, the extent of an error refers "to the size of the unit that needs to be reconstructed in order to repair the error" (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:59). Moreover, to facilitate the subsequent analysis, Lennon suggests specifying the domain and extent of each error.

Corder (1974, in Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:60) writes that "the description of errors is essentially a comparative process, the data being the original erroneous utterances and the reconstructed utterance." The whole descriptive process involves two main steps (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:60):

1- The development of a set of descriptive categories for classifying the errors that have been identified;
2- Recording the frequency of the errors in each category.

Following James (1998), two kinds of categories (referred to as a taxonomy) have been used: a *linguistic taxonomy* and a *surface structure taxonomy*.

A linguistic taxonomy describes learners' errors in terms of linguistic categories– in terms of where the error is located in the overall system of the target language. It must be noticed that a linguistic taxonomy is usually developed on the basis of a descriptive grammar of the target language. Moreover, when using a linguistic taxonomy to categorize the identified errors, Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:60)

suggest errors should be classified in terms of the target language categories that have been violated rather than the linguistic categories used by the learner.

The surface structure taxonomy presents four principal ways in which learners modify target forms (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, in Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:61):

1- Omission – an obligatory element is missing (e.g. omission of the subject in *Is very hot)*;

2- Addition – the inclusion of an element that does not appear in a well-formed utterance. It can be subcategorized into:

   a. Regularization (for example, *eated* for *ate*)

   b. Double-marking (for example, *He didn't came*)

   c. Simple additions – all other additions not describable as regularizations or as double-markings;

3- Misinformation – the use of the wrong form of a structure or morpheme. It can be subdivided into:

   a. Regularization (for example, *Do they be happy*)

   b. Archi-forms (for example, the learner uses *me* as both a subject and object pronoun)

   c. Alternating forms (for example, *Don't + v* and *No + v)*;

4- Misordering – the incorrect placement of an element in an utterance so that sentence components are in the wrong order (e.g. **She fights all the time her brother*);

James (1998) suggests one further category:

5- Blends – errors that reflect the learner's uncertainty as to which of two forms is required.

As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:61) state, the surface structure taxonomy is guilty of the comparative fallacy, as learners do not set out to modify target language norms. As they go on saying, it is possible that learners carry out their cognitive comparisons by noticing how they have simplified, added, misinformed or misordered elements in their utterances.

The stage of error explanation focuses on identifying the sources, or causes, of learners' errors. Assuming that the identified errors reflect actual gaps in the learners' knowledge, the analyst and the learner look into the strategies behind these errors, and thus attempt to offer insights into the processes of L2 acquisition. It could be argued that it is not always easy to identify the source of an error: most errors are ambiguous and can be explained in more than one way. As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:65) suggest, to explain errors we need to ask what processes learners invoke when they do not know the target-language form.

As we have seen in the previous subparagraph, interlingual errors are the result of mother tongue influences, whereas intralingual errors reflect "the operation of learning strategies that are universal, i.e. evident in all learners irrespective of their L1" (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:65). James (1998) provides a summary of these strategies:

1- False analogy (for example *boy-boys; child-childs);*
2- Misanalysis (for example, the learner wrongly assumes that the singular possessive pronoun *its* is plural because of the *–s*);
3- Incomplete rule application (for example, the failure to utilize indicative word order in "*Nobody knew where was Barbie"*);
4- Exploiting redundancy – omitting grammatical features that do not contribute to the meaning of an utterance – (for example, 3rd person *–s* in "*Martin like tennis"*);
5- Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions (for example, failing to recognize that although "*quick"* and "*fast"* are synonyms, "*quick food"* is not a possible collocation);
6- System-simplification (for example, the use of *that* as a ubiquitous pronoun).

It could be argued that an error only offers a small indication of its source with the result that many errors are ambiguous. As Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977, in Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:66):) suggest, it is necessary "to be extremely cautious when claiming to have identified the cause of a given error": many errors, in fact, are likely to be explicable in terms of multiple sources.

Finally, error evaluation is more of a supplementary procedure. Error evaluation studies were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Planning for an error evaluation study involves the following steps (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005:67):

1- Select the errors to be evaluated;
2- Decide the criterion on which the errors are to be judged: the most common is "gravity" (i.e. "seriousness");
3- Prepare the error evaluation instrument: a set of instructions, the erroneous sentences or text, and a method for evaluating the errors;
4- Choose the judges: the more, the better, as this increases reliability of the results.

To conclude, one could say that one possible limitation of Error Analysis is that it only examines what learners do wrong and does therefore not provide a complete picture of learner language. Nevertheless, the study of learner errors remains of practical significance to language pedagogy.

3.4 Learner Corpus Research

Learner corpus research is a relatively new area of applied linguistics (dating back to the late 1980s) which has created a very important link between the fields of corpus linguistics and foreign/second language research. What learner corpus research does is to employ electronic collections of spoken and written texts produced by second language learners, i.e. learner corpora, as a resource for interlanguage analysis. As Granger (2002:4) points out, it exploits the methodology of learner language for various purposes within SLA research and language pedagogy.

It must be noticed that corpus linguistics is a linguistic methodology which is founded on the use of electronic collections of "naturally occurring texts" (Granger 2005:4). The power of computer software tools together with the amount of language data has and will continue to reveal important linguistic phenomena. It is true that corpora are one source of evidence among many, however, as McEnery & Wilson (1996, in Granger 2002:4) point out, they are "the only reliable source of evidence for

such features as frequency." In fact, frequency is a key aspect when analysing many linguistic applications which require knowledge of what is likely to occur in language.

In order to understand the improvements of learner language description when using learner corpora, a definition of a computer learner corpus is necessary. As Granger (2002:7) clarifies, not all electronic collections of learner language data qualify as learner corpora, and therefore she suggests a more restrictive definition:

"Computer learner corpora are electronic collections of authentic FL/SL textual data assembled according to explicit design criteria for a particular SLA/FLT purpose. They are encoded in a standardised and homogeneous way and documented as to their origin and provenance".

Typically, learner corpora are composed of written language data: Nesselhauf (2004, in Díaz-Negrillo, Ballier and Thompson 2013:11) observed that the majority of learner corpora consist of academic essays, mainly because this text type can easily be acquired by university researchers. However, there is an important growth in the number of learner oral language corpora being produced. Some of the key notions shaping the definition of learner corpus data will be discussed in the following sections.

3.4.1 Characteristics of learner corpora

One of the prerequisites for learner corpus data is their authenticity. As a matter of fact, "authentic" data can be defined as "all the material [...] gathered from the genuine communications of people going about their normal business" (Sinclair 1996, in Granger 2002:8). What Granger is trying to underline is that data obtained under experimental conditions simply do not qualify as learner corpus data. However, as we all know foreign language teaching inevitably involves a degree of artificiality and therefore learner data is rarely fully natural. For instance, as Granger (2002:8) states,

free compositions are "natural" in the sense that they represent "free writing": they are free to write what they like and not what the investigator is interested in.

Another important characteristic of learner corpora is their textual nature. That is, learner corpora can only comprise continuous stretches of discourse. In fact, Granger (2002:9) notes that it is misleading to use expressions such as "corpora of errors", which is sometimes used to refer to collections of erroneous sentences taken from learner texts.

Furthermore, another key feature of learner corpora is their compilation according to explicit design criteria. Barlow (2005:2) notes that the collection of data for a learner corpus typically involves the sampling of language production along with descriptions of the setting and a description of the variables for each learner, as shown in Table 3.3.

Setting	**Task:** A description of the nature of the task that provides the language sample. It could be a written prompt for an argumentative essay, a picture, or cartoon. Additional details may be furnished, depending on the particular nature of the task.
	Audience/Interlocutor: Identification of the person(s) interacting with the student, along with their role (teacher, tester, etc.).
	Time Limit: If the task is timed, what is the time allowed?
	Use of reference materials: Are dictionaries and other reference materials allowed?
Learner	**Mother tongue:** The primary language of the student.
	Other languages: Languages that the student knows with an assessment of competence with respect to speaking/writing/listening/reading
	L2 level of proficiency: An assessment of the level of the student. Such assessments are sometimes difficult to equate across institutions and across countries.
	Location: The country or region that the students come from.
	Education: This variable may include general information about education as well as an indication of the nature of language classes
	Age:/Sex:/… and other attributes of the learner

Table 3.3: Examples of task and learner variables

These variables associated with the learners' texts enable one to provide data for appropriate interpretations in relation to the L2 acquisition processes. As we can see,

these variables include information regarding both the setting and the individual learner: they must be recorded for each text and "these metadata [should be] made available to researchers in a way that allows them to compile subcorpora according to their research purposes, which might include comparisons based on some of these variables" (Barlow 2005 in Fialová 2012:61).

A great advantage of computerised learner data is the possibility to enrich them with different kinds of linguistic annotation. Leech (1993, in Granger 2002:16) defines corpus annotation as:

> "the practice of adding interpretative (especially linguistic) information to an existing corpus of spoken and/or written language by some kind of coding attached to, or interspersed with, the electronic representation of the language material itself".

It must be noticed that learner corpora might include either the same types of annotation that are common for native speaker corpora, or they might require specific kinds of annotation, such as error tagging. However, any aspect of linguistic structure can be coded using an annotation scheme developed for that specific research purpose.

It is interesting to notice that in some cases the process of corpus annotation can be fully automated, in others semi-automated and still in others almost entirely manual: as said above, any linguistic feature can be annotated with tags developed for a particular research purpose. Moreover, once the tags have been inserted, they can also be searched for and sorted using standard text retrieval software (Granger 2002:16-17).

3.4.2 Corpus analysis as a tool for language learner and teachers

Taking into consideration the characteristics of learner corpora outlined above, it could be argued that this source of learner language data have great potential for SLA research. As Granger (2002:5) underlines, learner corpora provide a new type of data which could be useful for both SLA research, which tries to understand the

mechanisms of foreign/second language acquisition, and also for FLT research, which tries to improve the learning and teaching of foreign/second languages.

First of all, it must be noticed that the importance of corpus-analysis for language teachers has been emphasized in several studies. In particular, several studies have looked at the use of corpora and of the concordancer as useful resources for teachers. According to Gavioli (2005:23) these studies suggest that corpus analysis can be of great help to the teacher in at least two ways:

1- Selecting items to be included in the course syllabus;
2- Supporting the teachers in teaching those items which do not seem adequately dealt with in traditional teaching materials.

It could be argued that in the teaching of English, concordance analysis has always been of great help in supporting the teacher to deal with those areas where descriptions provided by grammars seem inadequate. For example, Partington (1998, in Gavioli 2005:25) shows a number of types of "language teaching problems" which can be dealt with using instruments based on corpora and concordancing tools. He shows examples of semantic problems, lexico-syntactic constructions, textual features, creative uses of language, and also shows how concordance lines generated from a corpus of newspaper texts can support teachers' intuitions.

According to Gavioli (2005:26), Partington study is interesting for two main reasons. First of all, it explores a varied set of features of language use which can be useful for teachers for language teaching purposes. Secondly, it is interesting to notice that Partington's analyses include both "classic" language teaching problems, but also examples of more "local" students' needs. These might include the issue of translation equivalence and false friends, or those problems related to the interaction between the mother tongue and the foreign language.

It could be argued that corpus analysis might also be a useful tool for language learners: as a matter of fact, concordance data can be analysed by students and used as a source of learning materials. Johns (1991a, in Gavioli 2005:27) suggests that

students should have access to concordance materials in order to examine meanings and functions of words in their authentic context. The approach is called "Data-Driven Learning" and has the purpose of "contextualising [...] the language and of making available to the learner information about authentic usage" (Johns 199a, in Gavioli 2005:27). Johns' assumption is that "effective language learning is itself a form of linguistic research": in other words, the possibility of accessing linguistic data may actually improve students' analytical skills. According to him, learners should behave "as researchers" and try to find out solutions to their own language learning problems. However, as Bernardini (2000a) suggests, while the initial stimulus for starting corpus work might be curiosity about the meaning of an expression, or an attempt to find a way to express a particular concept, etc., "the interest of the analysis itself should not be conceived in rigorous linguistic-research terms" (in Gavioli 2005:31). Students might be attracted to all sorts of features and this is where students and language researchers' interest might not coincide. It could be argued that the "power" of concordances in language research is that of describing interesting or unknown features of language, whereas the "power" of concordances from a pedagogic point of view is that of stimulating the linguistic intuition of learners (Gavioli 2005:31).

In conclusion, within the developing field of learner corpus research, increasing attention has been paid to several aspects of interlanguage, such as lexis, phraseology, discourse features and other aspects of learner language. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that learner corpus research can reasonably be expected to contribute to piecing together a more comprehensive picture of interlanguage.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the results of my research, also providing figures and graphs in order to help the reader understand the data. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the methodology used for this research: first of all, a presentation of the main aim of the research is provided, followed by a description of the participants, the texts, the features analysed and the different corpora that have been used. The second section discusses the results obtained from the exploration of the NNS students' use of metadiscourse features and by focusing on the different categories analysed. Finally, the third section is devoted to a comparison of native and non-native students' use of connectives, such as *"in fact", "indeed", "hence", "thus"* and *"moreover"*. To provide the reader with some clear examples of native speakers' use of these connectives, comparisons with data from COCA will be drawn, the Corpus of Contemporary American English, in order to understand and also analyse some possible types of misuse of connectives.

4.1 The data and the research methodology for studying learner language longitudinally

It is believed that longitudinal data can help reinforce the knowledge of language acquisition processes. Many efforts have been made to support longitudinal research on L2 learning and teaching. As Ortega and Byrnes (2008:3) state, the lack of an explicit or sustained focus on longitudinal issues has meant that, after some 40 years of disciplinary history, we know little about the longitudinal pace and pattern of development in second language and literacy. For this reason, it is important to adopt approaches that can help future researchers to investigate the longitudinal trajectory towards L2 advancedness.

The case for longitudinal methodology has long been acknowledged: L2 learning takes a long time and it is only by investigating the phenomenon overtime that it is possible to gain better insights into L2 learning and the development of advanced capacities (Ortega and Byrnes 2008:4). Even though it is not easy to determine what

counts as longitudinal in L2 research, it is possible to affirm that the longitudinal outlook of studies might help mapping the development of aspects of second language knowledge and use. As Ortega and Byrnes (2008:6) claim, a longitudinal study deserves serious consideration just for "its projected ability to uncover interesting phenomena regarding the attainment of intermediate or beginning levels in the development towards mature meaning-making capacities."

The overall aim of the present study is to compare and analyze the use of metadiscourse in written texts by first- and second-year learners of English at the University of Padova. The possible objectives are to contribute to a) the theory of metadiscourse, b) the application of computer-assisted methods to the study of metadiscourse and c) the knowledge of the use of metadiscourse. Metadiscourse awareness helps the writer to imagine himself/herself as a reader or a "self-reflective linguistic material referring to the evolving text and to the writer and imagined reader of that text" (Hyland &Tse 2004 in Attarn 2014:63). In other words, metadiscourse is "writing about the evolving text rather than referring to the subject matter" (Swales 1990 in Attarn 2014:63-64); as a consequence, the writer is motivated to explicitly organize his discourse, engage the reader and signals his attitude properly (Hyland 1998 in Attarn 2014:64). This is to say that there is a need for ESL/EFL learners to understand how to organize their texts properly, in order to guide their readers through them and avoid any possible misunderstanding.

As Ädel (2006:3) points out, an increasing number of studies of metadiscourse have been conducted, which is not to say that we are anywhere near having a full account of what metadiscourse is and how it works and varies across texts. It must be noticed that one of the many areas in which studies of metadiscourse are lacking is L2 writing, which is exactly where the present study enters the picture. It is interesting to notice that this research points to metadiscourse markers as important means of facilitating communication, increasing readability and building a relationship with an audience. If we remove metadiscourse features, texts are likely to appear less personal, less interesting and less easy to follow. Having understood that, metadiscourse markers are fundamental in guiding the interpretation of a text, and therefore research

on the way they are used can contribute to the understanding of their meanings and appropriate usage.

4.1.1 The Participants and the texts

This study benefited from the participation of 136 EFL students majoring in Linguistic and Cultural Mediation at the University of Padova. The texts used for the study are essays written by the students in their first and second year of university, the reason being that the lengthened amount of exposure to academic discourse was thought to bring about increased levels of sensitivity and awareness as to the academic language, structure, coherence and style.

While attending "Mediazione linguistica di inglese" courses in their first and second year of study, students were asked to write the same essay:

"It is debatable whether language learners can achieve native-like competence in a second language. Some scholars even question whether a standard English should be taught. What are you views on these issues? What are your expectations for your own level of English by the end of your degree course?"

The learner material amounts to 272 essays. They were collected in a corpus by the professor, who then offered me the opportunity to use and analyse them for further research.

It must be noticed that the use of corpora is central to this present investigation, and recent advances in computer technology have made it possible to systematically analyse large amounts of texts. The possibility to use computerized methods has provided linguists interested in finding empirical evidence for their hypotheses about language with many new possibilities. As Ädel (2006:10) underlines, in any computer-assisted study – particularly of discourse phenomena – a human analyst will always be needed to interpret the data, but the search can be made more systematic by means of computational tools. With the exception of very few cases, computer-assisted methods have not been used in research into metadiscourse, nevertheless they could help gain

new insights into this phenomenon. What is important to acknowledge is that going through a large number of examples can help recognize patterns more clearly and consistently, which can of course benefit the research process itself.

4.1.2 Procedures, Methods of Data Analyses and Software used

The first part of the study sets out to explore how metadiscourse markers have any effect on first- and second-year EFL learners' perception of written texts. As Altenberg (1997, in Ädel 2006:7) points out, at this advanced level, the focus of research has to be on "overuse" and "underuse" of linguistic phenomena, rather than error analysis. The design of the project itself has required quite a large amount of data, in order to have a general picture of how linguistic features, such as metadiscourse markers, are used and understood by university students.

Traditionally, metadiscourse features have been divided into textual and interpersonal. Hyland (2005:37) has defined metadiscourse as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community". To develop this research I have adapted Hyland's model of metadiscourse, however I have maintained the initial distinction between textual and interpersonal metadiscourse.

As already mentioned, textual metadiscourse enables the writer to establish his or her preferred interpretations clearly. As Hyland (2004, in Khajavy and Pooresfahani 2012:90) states, they deal with ways of organizing discourse to predict readers' knowledge and manifest the writer's evaluation and consideration of what needs to be made explicit to guide the reader himself. In this case, textual metadiscourse markers have been divided into:

- Transition markers
- Frame markers
- Endophoric

- Evidentials
- Code Glosses
- Announcements

It must be noticed that "transition markers" comprise a range of devices, and the ones I have focused on are: additive, adversative, consecutive and conclusive, used to denote for example additive, contrastive and consequential steps in the discourse. Also "frame markers" which refer to text boundaries or elements of text structure, include discourse act, text stages and topic shift, which are used to announce discourse goals, to sequence, to mark text stages and to show topic shifts. As already pointed out in the second chapter, "endophoric markers" make additional material attainable to the reader by referring to other parts of the text. On the other hand, "evidentials" are used to reveal the source of information which derives from outside the text itself. Then I have divided "code glosses" into: parentheses and punctuation devices, used to better explain certain concepts and ideas; reformulators, used to indicate the restatement of certain information; and exemplifiers, that is examples used to help the reader better understand the contents. Finally, I have also included textual metadiscourse markers "announcements", as they are used to announce upcoming information.

On the other hand, as regards interpersonal metadiscourse markers, they consider the writer's effort to control the level of personality in a text and establish a suitable relationship to his or her data, arguments and audience, thus marking the degree of intimacy, the expressions of attitude, the communication of commitment, and the extent of reader involvement (Hyland 2004, in Khajavy and Pooresfahani 2012:90). I have divided these resources into five categories:

- Hedges
- Boosters
- Attitude markers
- Self-mention
- Engagement markers

As we already know, hedges depict the writer's unwillingness to describe propositional information categorically (Hyland 2004, in Khajavy and Pooresfahani 2012:90). In this case a distinction has been made between probability and finite modals. Boosters, on the other hand, are used to communicate certainty and contribute to underline the force of a certain proposition. Attitude markers, which show the writer's evaluation of propositional information, have been divided between comment adjuncts, mood adjuncts and objective modality. As a matter of fact, mood adjuncts have also been divided in low, median and high, according to the degree of judgement of the writer. Moreover, self-mentions propose the "extent of author presence", in particular in terms of first person pronouns and possessives (Hyland 2004, in Khajavy and Pooresfahani 2012:90). Finally, engagement markers are used to include readers as participants in the text through imperatives and question forms.

As regards the software used, I have decided to conduct this part of my research using the UAM Corpus Tool[1], as it allows to search texts for words or certain features and it provides statistical analysis of data. It has been developed by linguist Mick O' Donnell, who has also developed the application Systemic Coder for text markup. However, in contrast to its predecessor, the UAM Corpus Tool provides functionalities for coding several documents at multiple annotation layers. It is interesting to notice that the UAM Corpus Tool comprises a set of tools for linguistic annotation of texts which can be done manually or semi-automatically. To create a new project it is necessary to provide a name for the project itself; the project folder contains several folders where analysis, texts, schemes and results are organized. First of all, files must be added, and it is possible to add one single file or a whole folder. The files, which are added to the corpus, are listed in the project window, and then they must be added to the project itself. In a next step it is also possible to edit the data describing the file. The UAM Corpus also calls an annotation a layer, and the first step implies categorizing it.

As the figure below shows, before starting the research I had to create a personal layer in order to apply the annotation scheme on the corpus.

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[1] Link to UAM Corpus Tool: http://www.wagsoft.com/CorpusTool/
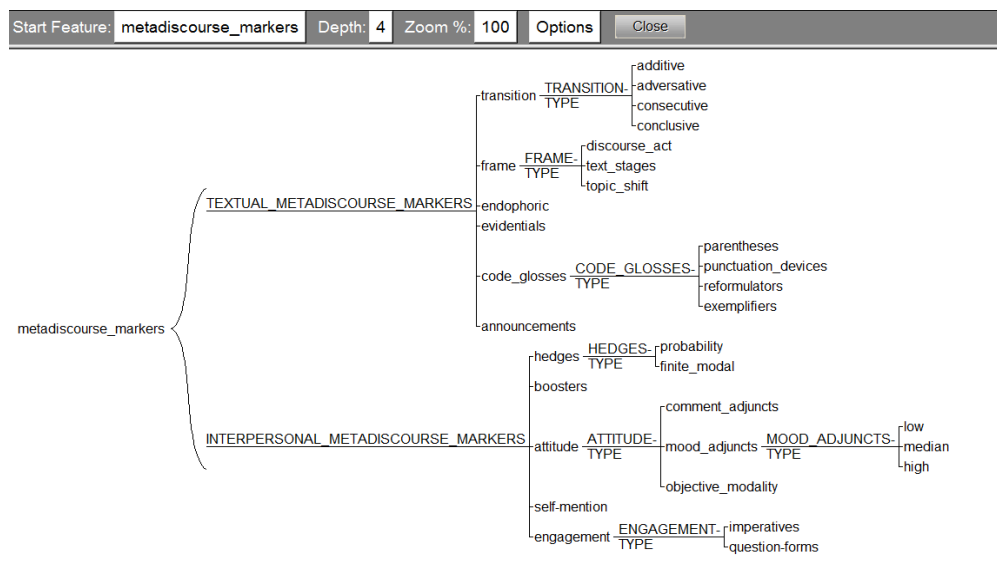
Figure 4.1: The label created to conduct the research

At first one has to select a text segment by swiping the mouse over the text and then assign features of the annotation scheme by double-clicking on the appropriate feature in the box in the middle. There is also the possibility to add a comment for a single annotation. Furthermore, coded features can be searched by selecting the feature one is interested in using the query box.

An interesting aspect of the UAM Corpus Tools is the section "Statistics", which allows one to analyze the annotated data without having to use an external statistics software. To analyze the data one has to decide what should be compared and in what manner. As a matter of fact, by using this software it is possible to describe a dataset, compare two datasets or describe multiple files. Different types of statistical output are provided: general text statistics and feature statistics. The former provide basic statistics about the corpus (e.g. number of tokens and types, sentence length), whereas the latter focus on the distribution of the features marked with the tagging process. To sum up, UAM Corpus Tools provides a platform to mark up texts effectively, to categorise data, and to analyse them statistically.

The second part of the research looks into how native speakers and learners of English use connectors in their writing. As will be seen, the examples provided regard the use of connectives such as *"in fact", "indeed", "hence", "thus"* and *"moreover"*. It is believed that the reasons behind NNS students' use of connectives are worthy of

discussion. As explained in the third chapter, language corpora have started to play an increasingly important role in determining how languages are learnt and how they should be taught. Corpus analysis is a form of text analysis which allows one to make comparisons between textual objects at a larger scale. It is particularly useful, for example, for finding patterns of grammatical use or for testing intuitions about texts.

It must be noticed that different software and various corpora have been used to extract data for this section of study. As previously anticipated, for this part data were collected from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA[2]). I have decided to conduct my research using this corpus as it is the largest freely-available corpus of English. It was created by Mark Davies of Brigham Young University, and it is currently used by thousands of users. The corpus contains more than 520 million words of text, and is equally divided among spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic texts. Thanks to its online interface it is possible to limit searches by frequency and compare the frequency of words, phrases and grammatical constructions in at least two ways: by genre (comparisons between spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and academic, or even between sub-genres such as sports magazines, newspaper editorial or scientific journals) or over time (compare different years from 1990 to the present time).

As regards the non-native speakers' use of connectives, that is the third part of the analysis, data have been gathered using AntConc[3], a corpus analysis tollkit. The central tool of this corpus analysis software is the Concordancer, which can be used as an effective aid in the acquisition of a second language, facilitating the learning of vocabulary, collocations, grammar and writing styles. The main purpose of the Concordancer Tool is to show how a search term is used in a target corpus. Furthermore, research has shown that collocations and other multi-word units are particularly difficult for learners to acquire. In AntConc, multi-word units can be investigated using the Word Clusters Tool, which displays clusters of words that surround a search term, and orders them alphabetically or by frequency. AntConc is a

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[2] Link to COCA: http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/ (last visited on 24.01.2016)
[3] Link to AntConc: http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html (last visited on 24.01.2016).

simple and easy corpus analysis toolkit that has shown to be extremely effective: it includes many of the essential tools needed for the analysis of corpora, with the added benefit of an intuitive interface.

4.2 Exploring NNS students' use of metadiscourse markers

As already stated, metadiscourse markers can link arguments in an effective manner, thus creating credibility and influencing the audience. The following figures are meant to compare different patterns of occurrence of metadiscourse in texts of students in their first and second year respectively. Figure 4.2 shows that overall students used more interpersonal than textual metadiscourse markers, and that attitude and transition markers were by far the most frequent devices in the corpus.

Category	first year	second year	All	Category	first year	second year	All
Transition Markers	146	343	489	Hedges	316	371	687
Frame Markers	66	100	166	Boosters	69	111	180
Endophoric	3	19	22	Attitude Markers	639	654	1293
Evidentials	10	40	50	Self-mention	16	39	55
Announcements	2	0	2	Engagement Markers	25	52	77
Code Glosses	209	208	417				
Textual Metadiscourse	436	710	1146	**Interpersonal Metadiscourse**	1065	1227	2292

Table 4.2: The frequency of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers

The most frequent sub-category in the corpus are attitude markers, which comprise comment adjuncts (e.g. "*Unfortunately up to now I've never spent time in a country where English is the official language*"), low (e.g. "*I hope I will succeed in this too*") median (e.g. "*In my opinion, standard English should be taught at least at the beginning*") high mood adjuncts (e.g. "*I know I will always sound Italian")* and objective modality (e.g. "*it is important to protect the original language from external "contaminations""*"). Also a large number of transition markers occur in the corpus, as illustrated by the following example:

> e.g. "*As a consequence, this person won't have the appropriate cultural knowledge and collection of linguistic features to really think and perceive words and expressions as a native speaker*

They consist of connectives, which are very important as they assist readers in recovering how students decide to link their arguments. It must be acknowledged that to qualify as metadiscourse these conjunctions have to mark transitions in the argument, which means that they have to link sequences in the argument and not just express relations between processes. For example:

> "*e.g. To sum up, I think that people can achieve a good command of a second language by experiencing a long period abroad immersed in that reality so as to be completely involved in that different language, as well. Nevertheless I believe that learning a second language and reach a native-like competence is quite difficult [...]*".

It could be argued that it is not surprising to find variations across first- and second-year texts. As a matter of fact, the second-year students' texts contained more metadiscourse overall, and almost double the amount of textual metadiscourse markers. Having developed a certain degree of maturity in their academic writing, in their second year students try to use more textual devices in order to structure their texts with more discursively elaborate arguments. However, it must be noticed that not always does more metadiscourse equal better writing. It can however be seen as a sort of greater awareness of readers and self. In a way, metadiscourse represents a reflective awareness of self, text and audience: students try to present themselves as totally immersed in the ideologies of their arguments. For instance, it is interesting to

notice how the second year students made far more use of evidentials. Clearly, citation is a key element, as it enables one to provide justification for arguments, but it could be argued that for second year students it is much more than this. It also allows them to give credit to their knowledge of the literature of the field and so to underline the credibility of a disciplinary research tradition (e.g. "*As Kachru said, there are a large number of English speakers with different levels of knowledge [...]*"). On the other hand, first year students seemed less concerned about establishing their academic credentials: their desire to demonstrate their familiarity with the literature on the topic may be less pressing. Moreover, the second year students' attempt to address their audience in more credible ways is also apparent in their greater use of transitions and frame markers (e.g. "*First of all, I think that learning a language is a very long process*").

As regards interpersonal metadiscourse markers, it is interesting to notice that there are particularly large differences in the use of engagement markers and self-mentions. Students in their second year made far more use of these resources: in a way they chose to "metadiscoursally" announce their presence in the text to promote themselves and their contributions and also to focus their attention on their readers, so as to include them as discourse participants, such as in:

> "*Talking about myself, here at university I am improving my skills day by day and I am learning English at a high level*".

In the next sections the single metadiscourse markers will be analysed. Figures will also be provided, in order to better understand the data.

4.2.1 Transition Markers

As Figure 4.3 shows, given the distinction between additive, adversative, consecutive and conclusive, transition markers were certainly more common in the second year students' texts. A possible explanation for this could be that students in their second year have begun to learn to attach prime importance to the organization of the texts,

which is the reason why they try to be more consistent in connecting different bits of information in their texts.
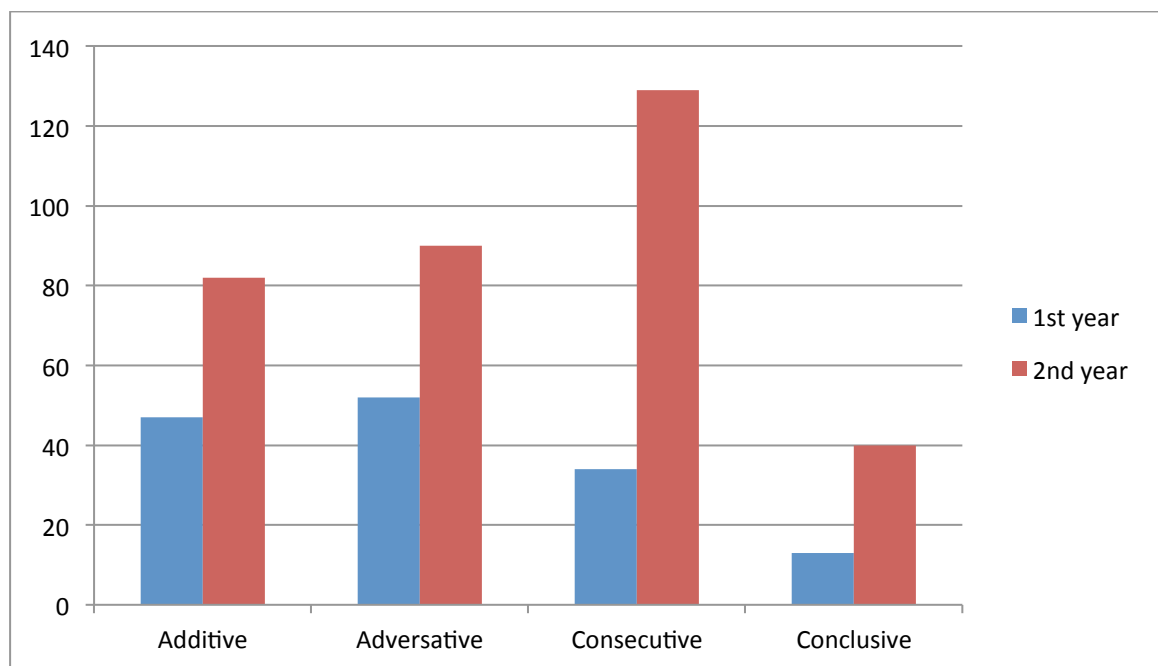
Figure 4.3: graph showing the frequency of use of Transition Markers

As regards *additive* markers, for example, students in both years seem to prefer more or less the same linking adverbials, namely "*in addition*", "*furthermore*", "*moreover*". As we will see in the next section, there is a difference in the way native and non-native speakers use a connective such as "*moreover*", which in the analysed texts appears to be quite common among the markers used. Furthermore, students in their first year show a certain lack of attention, as they use expressions such as "**in addiction*" instead of "*in addition*". Even though it is less common than the others, first year students also happen to use another expression such as "*plus*", which, like the previous markers, stresses the intention of adding information, but which is at the same time less formal and less appropriate. An example is provided by the following extract:

> *"Only when these rules are learned and understood, it's possible to learn all the variety of the language and all the non-standard usages. <u>Plus</u>, if it is taught from the very beginning of everyone's school experience [...]".*

As regards the category of *adversatives*, it is interesting to notice that even though first year students use fewer markers to indicate that an argument is being countered, they seem to be able to differentiate more when compared to second year students. In other words, while the latter display even an exaggerated use of expressions such as "*however*" and "*nevertheless*", the former try to use also adversative markers such as "*anyway*" and "*unless*". Furthermore, first year students also use "*but*" as an adversative marker by putting it at the beginning of the sentence as an opening marker (e.g. "*[...]because it's the main and without it is difficult to learn the other. <u>But</u> I think that teaching English [...]*").

It could be argued that the students are quite different in their choices when it comes to *consecutive markers.* As a matter of fact, first year students prefer to use rather simple expressions to justify a given point they make: "*for this reason/these reasons*", "*consequently*", "*as a consequence*", and in some rare cases we begin to also notice the expression "*thus*". On the other hand, second year students, who have been learning how to use more complex structures, use for example "*thus*" and "*hence*" quite often. "*Therefore*" seems also to be another common expression they have started to become familiar with, and once again expressions such as "*for this reason*" (e.g. "*<u>For this reason</u>, I frankly don't expect to reach a C2 level of my foreign language*") and "*consequently*" (e.g. "*<u>Consequently</u>, they start speaking with an L2 accent, which is difficult to abandon, even with the continuation of the studies*") are still quite common.

Similarly, as regards *conclusive markers,* students in their first year use basic and quite common expressions, such as "*in conclusion*", "*finally*", "*in any case*", which convey the idea that a conclusion is being drawn, but which are also quite simple and therefore not deeply sought-after. On the contrary, second year students, due to the typologies of texts they were required to write in class and the theoretical lessons and the language classes they were exposed to, also try to expand the range of expressions they use: "*in conclusion*", "*finally*", "*to draw a conclusion*", "*to sum up*", "*to conclude my essay*", "*to conclude*". The ability to choose among different types of

expressions and to use them accordingly is what allows students to develop their argumentation not only in a clearer way but also more concise.

4.2.2 Frame Markers

Frame markers are expressions that signpost how the text is organized, including markers indicating what the writer is doing at a particular stage in the text, what s/he has done in an earlier part of the text or what s/he will be doing later in the text, when s/he changes the subject or when s/he sequences the points. Used appropriately, they make the text flow easily. As Figure 4.4 shows, frame markers include the categories *discourse act, text stages* and *topic shift.*
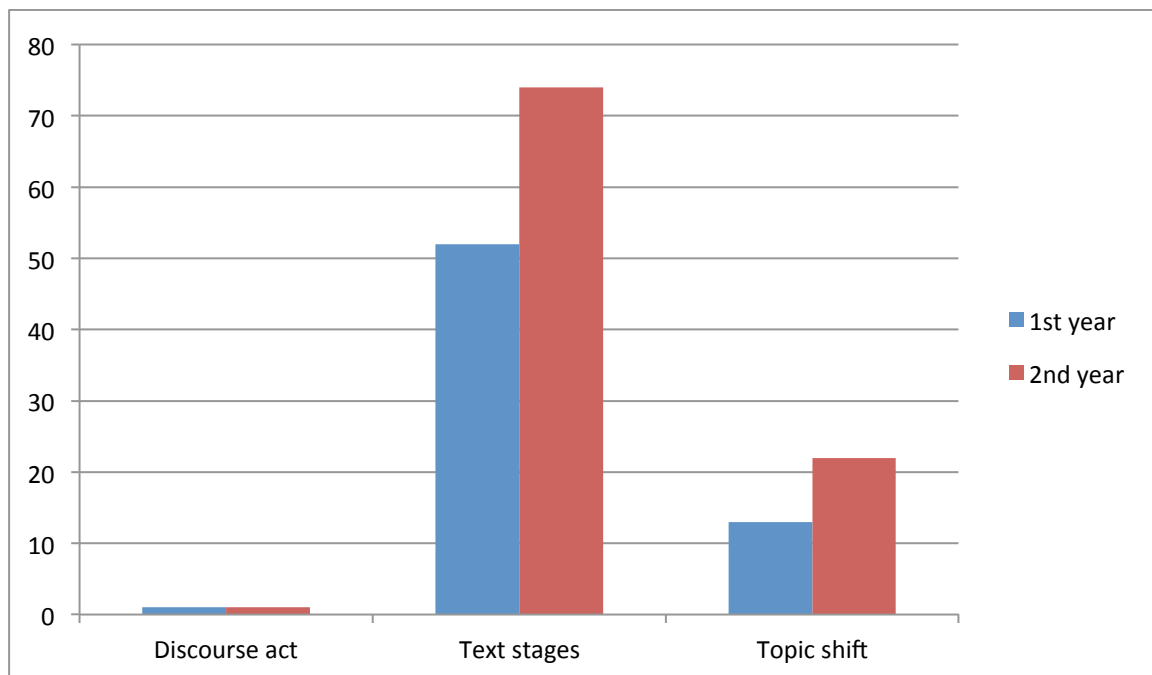
Figure 4.4: graph showing the frequency of use of Frame Markers

Except for the category *discourse act* that presents only two occurrences, second year students tend to refer to sequences or stages more frequently than first year students. As regards *text stages*, both first- and second-year students show their ability to internally order their arguments by using this kind of expressions. The former, for example, preferred expressions such as "*firstly*", "*secondly*", "*on the contrary*", "*then*", "*on the other hand*", "*on the contrary*", whereas the latter, which

produced more instances of them, also included expressions such as "*the main reason*", "*the second reason*", "*to begin with*" , "*another thing is*", "*another important point is*".

As can be seen, being able to master these constructions allows students to structure their essays appropriately and to make them more readable. The so called *topic shifts* are used to indicate a change in the topic being discussed. In this case, it must be noticed that both first- and second-year students used almost the same expressions, however the occurrences produced by the latter were almost twice as many. Some examples of linking adverbials used as frame markers are "*as regards*", "*anyway*", "*regarding the issue/fact*", "*moving on to*". Some examples of their uses are the following ones:

> "*However I think that everybody should know Standard English in order not to be excluded. As regards my expectations by the end of this degree course [...]*";

> "*[...]it would be easier for them to interact if they had the same basis even if they live in different parts of the world. Anyway I also think that every person should have the opportunity to study the variety of English he/she is most interested in and not be forced to learn only the standard language*";

> "*Another problem which has to be exceeded is that which concerns words colligation. Regarding the issue of whether should be taught a standard English or a non-standard English [...]*");

> "*My personal though about this issue is that having a correct grammar and a good standard English pronunciation will always be the best and more proficient choice. Moving on to something more personal, as a second-year language student at Padua University, I can say that I am noticing some improvements since my very first year*".

To conclude, it could be argued that while on the one hand frame markers do not rank very high in the corpus, on the other it is a positive sign that these markers appear in EFL learners' texts. A lack of frame markers, in fact, may result in a completely

unstructured text, which has no clear direction and which is therefore difficult to follow and understand.

4.2.3 Endophoric

As Figure 4.5 shows, endophoric markers are significantly more frequent in second year essays. As previously outlined, these markers make additional "material" available, often facilitating comprehension by referring to earlier material or anticipating something yet to come.
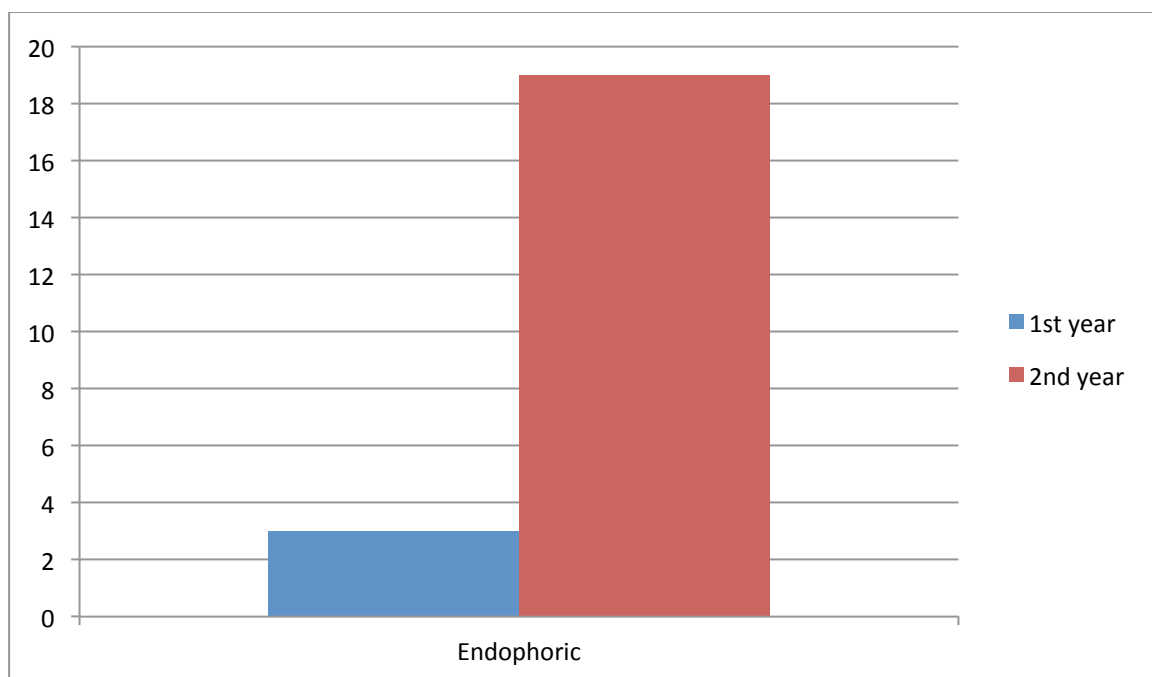
Figure 4.5: graph showing the frequency of use of Endophoric Markers

The most common example of endophoric marker used by the students both in the first and second year is "*as I said before*": the use of this type of marker may be explained by the need to direct the readers' attention to a particular point which has already been discussed or mentioned, but which is about to be analysed in a deeper way. An example is given by:

 "*[...]I am learning how to write complex and various texts, using synonyms and uncommon words. <u>As I said before</u>, my main goal is that of achieving native-like competences in writing skills*".

Students in their second year also show a greater master of this type of metadiscourse markers, for example, by using expressions such as "*in the light of the above observation*", "*as I mentioned before*". For example:

> "*Hence achieve native-like competence for English learners imply a great effort. In the light of the above observation in my opinion, according to many scholars opinion, it is hard to say whether or not a language learner can achieve a native-like competence, it depends on various circumstances*";

> "*By the end of the degree course I hope to reach the CEFR C1 level of English and I'm planning on getting a recognized language certification just because I want to put myself to the test. As I mentioned before, having the opportunity to spend few time in another country, like going on an exchange or just working abroad, is the fastest and best way to improve the language abilities*";

> "*Firstly, because of the beauty of the language itself. Then, as I said previously, I found extremely useful to compare the way native speakers write to the learners' one [...]*".

In order to structure the text and provide and anticipate what they are going to discuss, second year students also use expressions like "*this essay will explain*" (e.g. "*[...] this essay will explain why it is obvious that the proper answer is "yes"*"). As Hyland (2005:51) points out, it can be said that by guiding readers through the discussion, in a way endophoric markers help steer readers themselves to "a preferred interpretation or reading of the discourse".

4.2.4 Evidentials

As Figure 4.6 shows, there is a significant difference between first- and second-year students in their use of evidentials. As a matter of fact, these markers are clearly more frequent in the second group of essays, thus underlying that second year students are more keen to refer to information from other texts.
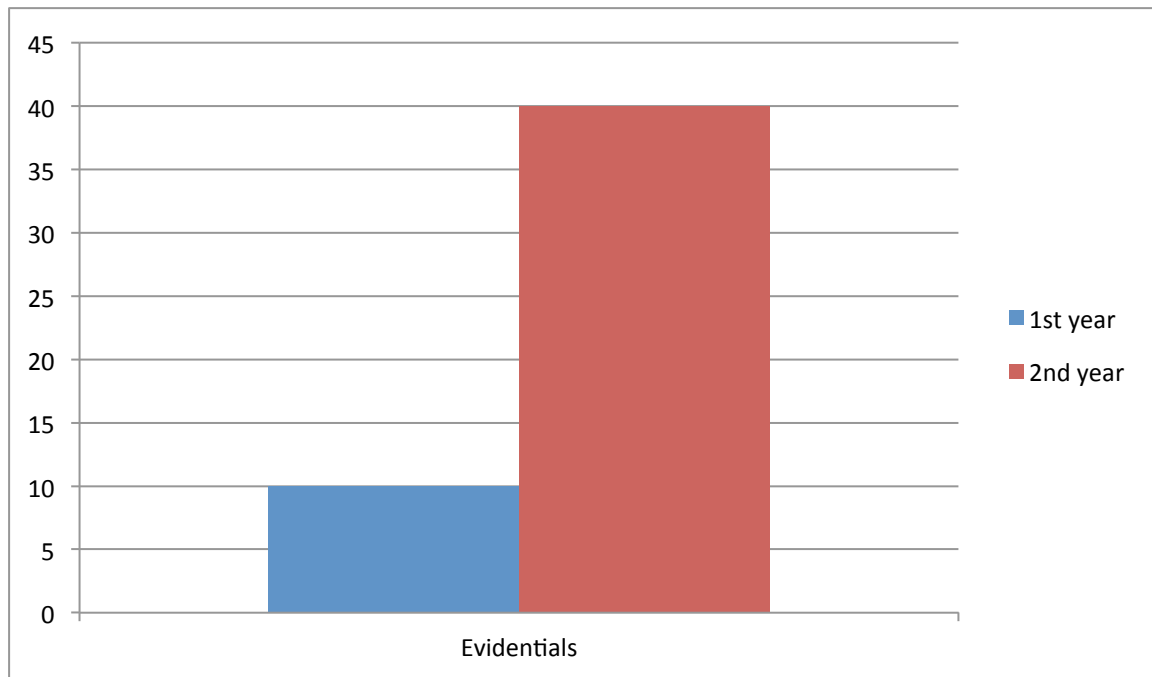
Figure 4.6: graph showing the frequency of use of Evidentials

By using a larger number of evidentials, a firmer and more reasonable contextualisation of what is said is established, besides helping to "guide the reader's interpretation and establish an authorial command of the subject" (Hyland 2005:51). To give a concrete example of how first- and second-year students differ in their use of this type of metadiscourse markers, it could be argued that the former prefer using expressions such as *"most people share the opinion that"*, *"according to some scholars",* or *"some scholars think".* Some instances of this use are the following:

"Although you study a lot and you know all grammar rules your English won't be like a native speaker. <u>Most people share the opinion that</u> you can easily achieve this skills";

"[...]but it's recognized in its own right as part of the so called "World Englishes". <u>According to some scholars,</u> as varieties of English, they are not inferior, just different, therefore in their opinion there should be no norm";

"<u>Even if some scholars think</u> it is not a good idea, I agree with the standard use of the language".

Second years, on the other hand, manage to provide important support for their arguments by making reference to actual reliable sources, such as *"as Kachru said"*, *"according to Barbara Seidlhofer"*, *"according to the teaching tradition"*. The following extracts exemplify how they quote external sources in their texts:

> *"<u>As Kachru said</u>, there are a large number of English speakers with different levels of knowledge, for instance I have met people from Singapore that speak a different standard English compared to mine";*

> *"<u>According to Barbara Seidlhofer</u>the term 'English as a lingua franca' (ELF) has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages";*

> *"<u>According to the teaching tradition</u> the English standard taught at school are British and American one, but in this way it is likely that other varieties (such as Indian, Australian or Scottish) would be not considered".*

In other words, the second year students base their arguments more strongly in the disciplinary field, and, as a result, readers can gain a better understanding of the knowledge on which writers base their arguments.

4.2.5 Announcements

The lowest use of textual metadiscourse markers is announcements, i.e. only two occurrences by first year students. As we have seen, announcements such as *"well"*, are used to introduce upcoming information (e.g. "<u>*Well, this is an interesting topic*</u>").
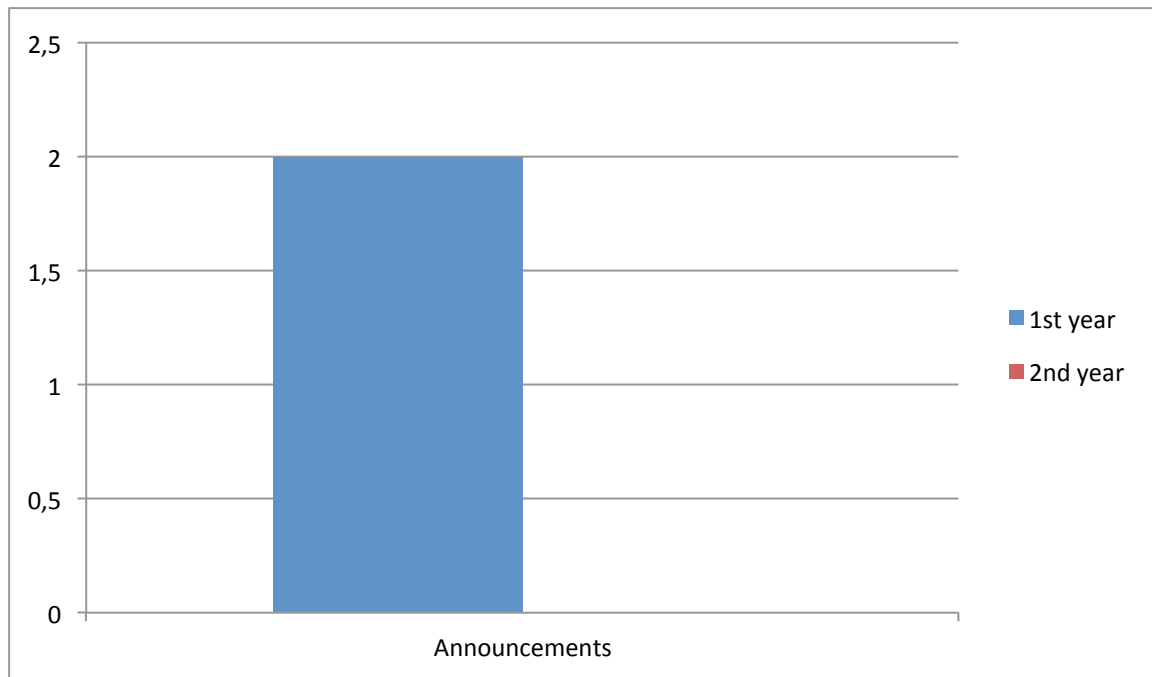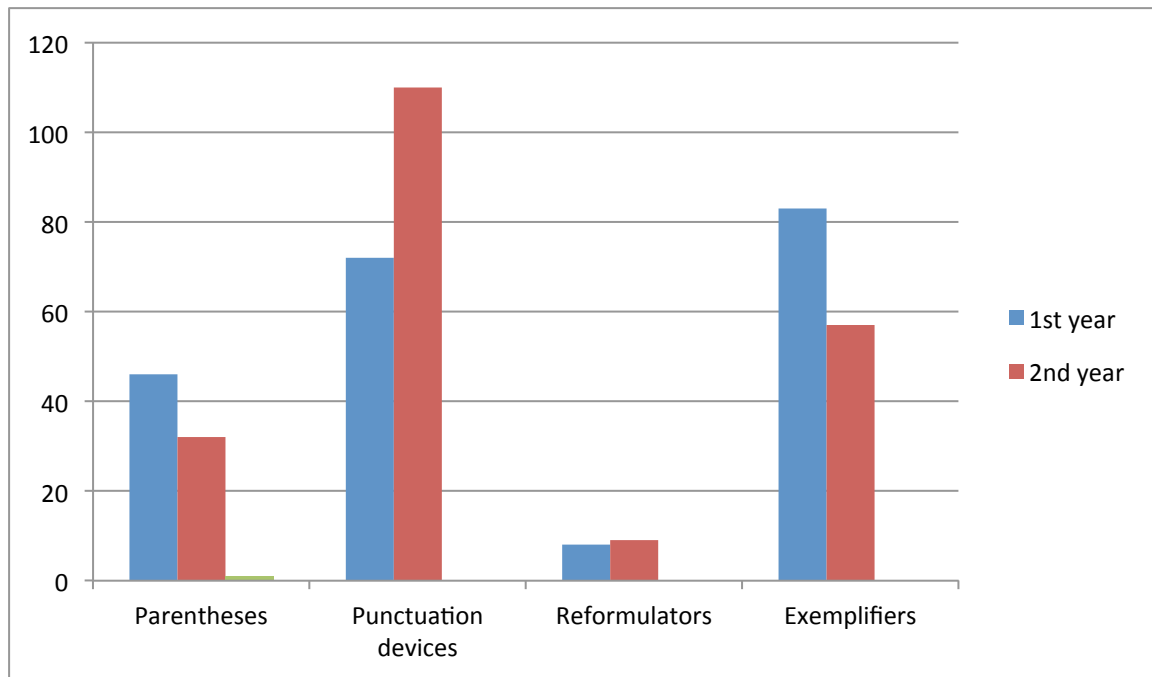
Figure 4.7: graph showing the frequency of use of Announcements

In this case, the lowest number of occurrences is probably due to the fact that students prefer employing other types of metadiscourse markers, such as endophorics . An example of an endophoric item is "*this essay will explain*", which allows one to give a sort of anticipation of what will be discussed after in a more formal way.

4.2.6 Code Glosses

As Figure 4.8 shows, there is quite a significant inconsistency in the use of code glosses, that is devices that elaborate the propositional material. Writers use them to help readers recover their intended meanings: they can explain difficult terms or concepts and also provide examples to illustrate one's point. The interesting thing about these markers is that they are useful for defining new terms, giving examples, and reworking a complex idea into a simpler form. This is given to help readers follow the arguments with ease.

Figure 4.8: graph showing the frequency of use of Code Glosses

Both the first- and the second-year students use markers such as *parentheses* and *punctuation devices* to provide additional information that can help clarify what has previously been said.

As regards the categories of *reformulators* and *exemplifiers*, it must be noticed that especially the former were rarely used by students. To be precise, first year students seem to use only one type of reformulator, that is *"I mean"*, e.g.:

> *"[...]I think that it is really difficult to reach a native-like competence in a second language. I mean, that we can learn a lot to speak perfectly a foreign language, but it will be always different from a native-like knowledge".*

On the other hand, students in their second year show a greater familiarity with this type of markers, as suggested by the use of expressions like *"in other words", "what I mean is", "it means".* There follow some examples of the use of these markers:

> *"Consequently, they start speaking with an L2 accent, which is difficult to abandon, even with the continuation of the studies. In other words, it is quite clear that interacting with native speakers is fundamental to manage to sound like them";*

"In my opinion, if you want something, you can achieve it. <u>What I mean is</u> that if a student is willing to get a native-like competence in a second language, he/she will have to use any tool to reach his/her aim";

"Moreover I personally think English people should be proud of them. <u>It means</u>, in my opinion, that English culture has arrived there and has changed something in those people's language".

What is interesting to notice is that first year students feel the need to use more *exemplifiers,* and thereby elaborating more on the propositional meaning of their texts. They use expressions such as *"for example"*, *"in particular"*, *"especially",* as illustrated by the following examples:

"Talking about personal purposes I would like to achieve the highest level of English a language learner could reach despite being conscious of the hard work that waits for me as <u>for example</u> spending some years abroad far away from the family";

"[...]I'm trying to improve my grammar skills and obviously trying my best to develop my production skills, <u>in particular</u> oral interaction [...]";

"[...]I'd like to write and speak correctly from the grammar point of view, <u>especially</u> in the formal register".

On the contrary, second year students use fewer *exemplifiers*, possibly because they feel little need to give examples to make their ideas more accessible.

4.2.7 Hedges

It could be argued that interpersonal metadiscourse is more personal, direct and evidently related to inter-personality. In this case, hedges are one of the main means of showing commitment and detachment in written texts. As Figure 4.9 shows, they were

grouped into two. The first category, called *probability*, consists of probability adverbs like *"probably"*, *"maybe"*, and *"perhaps"*. The second category consists of modal verbs with low degree of commitment such as *"could", "might", "should"*.
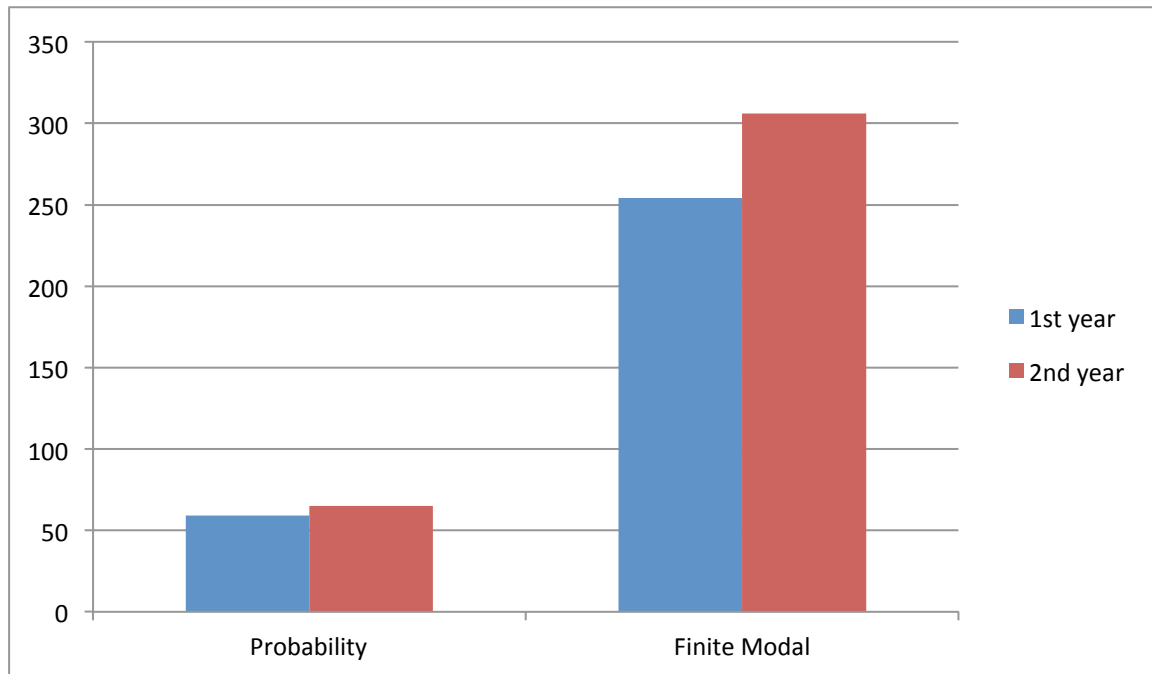
Figure 4.9: graph showing the frequency of use of Hedges

As we will see in the next section, when students are convinced about the certainty of their claims or when their statements contain ideas that they believe to be true and universally proven, they use markers such as boosters to support their arguments such as in:

> *"All these points make us recognizable as non-native speakers, so we will never join the native level, but <u>of course</u> we can get really close to it through an accurate study of the native way of using the language".*

Hence, students opt for hedges in an attempt to tone down their statements and reduce the risk of opposition. As the results show, students prefer using modal auxiliaries when showing detachment to their claims. As a matter of fact, these verbs often serve to mark possibility and likelihood, strategic vagueness and also politeness in discourse. In the corpus, students use such modals to refer mainly to matters of personal beliefs and knowledge which served as a basis for writers to express their judgements (e.g. *"In order to improve more and more my language and to extend my skills, I <u>could</u> do an*

experience abroad [...]"). By using this type of verbs the students detachedly get their readers to know that they do not claim to have the final word on the subject.

Hedges are by far very useful resources that students can utilize in their academic writing. Students proved to be quite aware of the usefulness of these metadiscoursal devices in presenting their claims on topics that can be controversial. It could be argued that the high use of hedges is an indication that students took great care against making overstatements: they were well aware of the need to support their own claims using an appropriate tone. To conclude, hedges enhance the writers' attempts at producing reader-friendly texts as they enabled writers to present their arguments as accurately as possible while also not showing overconfidence. For instance, the general impression given by the results obtained was that students would prefer not to sound assertive lest their assertiveness be misinterpreted for undue overconfidence.

4.2.8 Boosters

Regarding the use of boosters, Figure 4.10 indicates that second year students tend to use lexical chunks as boosters more frequently than first year students (111 occurrences vs. 69 occurrences). It could be argued that markers such as boosters allow readers to find out something more about the writer's opinion, and also contribute to making the texts more persuasive.
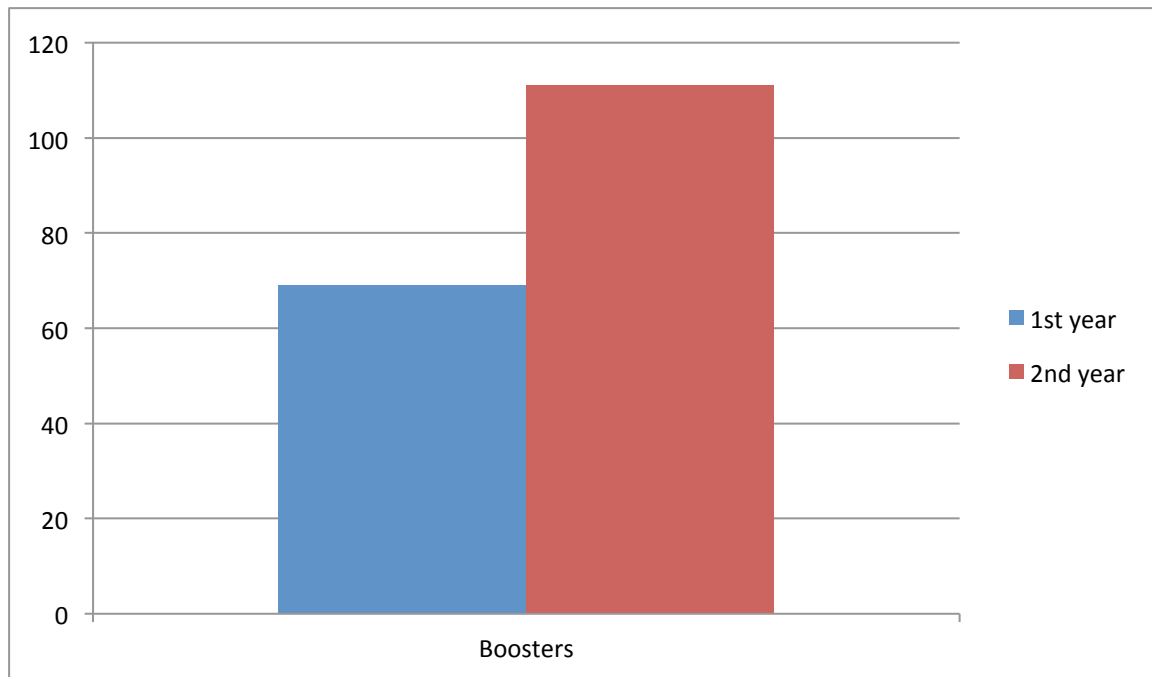
Figure 4.10: graph showing the frequency of use of Boosters

It must be noticed that in the first year the students prefer expressions such as *"in fact", "of course", "as a matter of fact"* (e.g. *"As <u>a matter of fact</u>, it is very difficult to understand all the shades of a language studying it in class or through books and exercises"),* or adverbs such as *"surely", "obviously" or "certainly"* as in:

> *"<u>Obviously</u>, also the age plays an important role, for example if you start learning a language since childhood, your chance to speak it very well increases considerably".*

The interesting thing about the second-year students' texts is that together with the expressions outlined above, they also present structures such as *"it is obvious"*, *"it is clear"*, *"it is perfectly clear"* (e.g. *"<u>It is obvious</u> that a NS of English generally has a higher language competence compared to a NNS of English"*). One possible explanation could be the fact that in doing so they aim to achieve a certain degree of objectivity, without losing the assertiveness of their arguments. As a matter of fact, it is true that boosters are commonly used to express the writer's certainty in proposition, however as previously underlined they can also be used to project a personal opinion as an objective truth. The examples of boosters examined in the corpus are mainly used in order to:

a) make generalizations, e.g.:

> "*Surely living abroad is not simply an option, but should be a must: only by following this path the various shades of any language can be learned and mastered [...]*"),

b) provide personal opinion, e.g.:

> "*Of course, I am perfectly aware that I will never achieve a native-like competence, but I will try to do my best in order to reach a good level, if not in pronunciation, at least in written production*"

and c) provide emphasis, e.g.:

> "*A great debate is open about whether language learners can achieve native-like competence in a second language or not. It's obvious that this question has not a right answer and the opinions about it will always be various and quite different*".

On the whole, their function is to try to establish solidarity with the audience and to express an opinion. By means of the second function (b), writers defer commitment to the stated proposition and present it as a commonly accepted fact (e.g. "*[...]it is clear that studying abroad provides a more efficient strategy to achieve good results in learning a second language*"). The main aim of this act is to try to minimise disagreement on the part of the audience.

4.2.9 Attitude Markers

The use of attitudinal markers is a key strategy to convey the writer's affective values towards the propositional content, to express the writer's opinions and feelings in a personal way. As anticipated above, attitude markers have been divided into *comment adjuncts, mood adjuncts* and *objective modality*. Instead of commenting on the status of information, attitude markers convey such feelings and attitudes as surprise, agreement, importance and so on. As Figure 4.11 shows, attitude can be signalled metadiscoursally by sentence adverbs (e.g. *unfortunately, hopefully*), which in this case have been called *comment adjuncts* (based on the terminology proposed by Eggins 1994).

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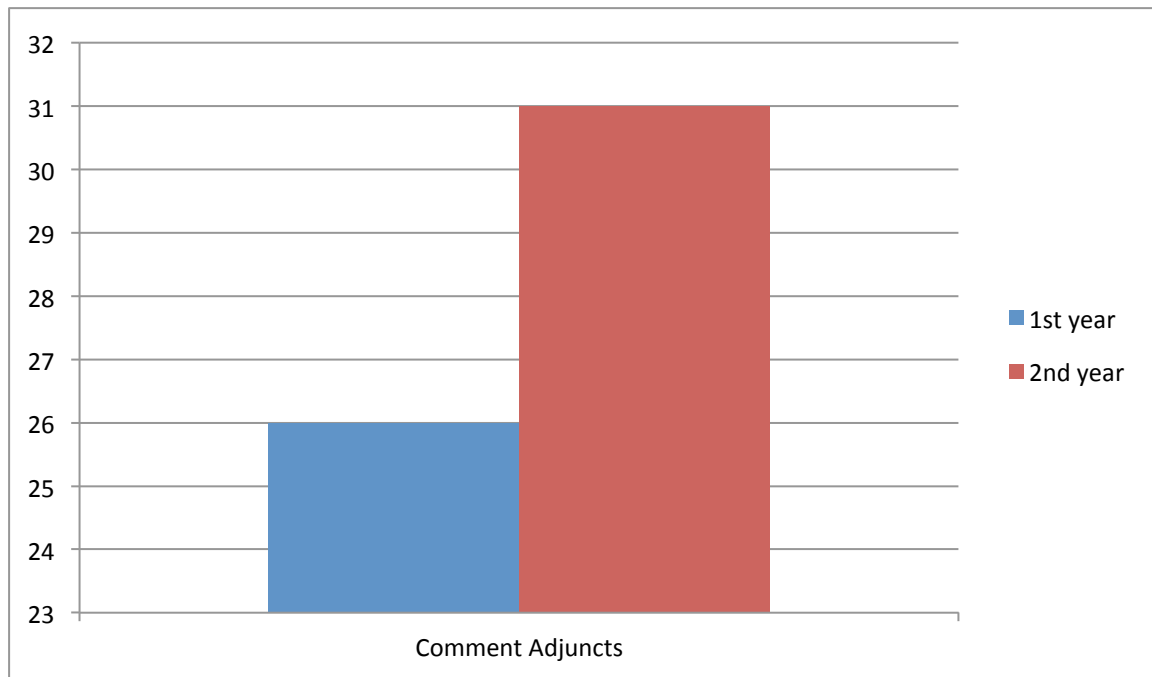
Figure 4.11: graph showing the frequency of use of Comment Adjuncts

Comment Adjuncts are an important resource for the writer, which enables him/her to convey his/her attitude towards a part or the whole of a proposition. In other words, through these linguistic items students can express their value judgement towards the statement which is presented by the sentence. As it is possible to see, there is not a huge discrepancy between first- and second-year students in the use of *comment adjuncts*. In both cases they are realized by adverbs and occur at the beginning of the clause. However, it must be noticed that students in their first year use mainly one type of *comment adjunct*, that is *"personally"*, such as in:

> *"Personally, I would like to know something more about standard English: learn variations both in grammar and vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation, and some typical expressions too".*

After making sense of how these expressions can contribute to express their attitudes towards the propositional content and/or the readers, second year students have enriched their choices of vocabulary with such adverbs as *"unfortunately", "hopefully", "honestly",* and *"undoubtedly"*. Some examples of their use are the following:

> *"Speaking a foreign language like a native speaker is the dream for many language learners. Unfortunately, not many learners have been able to achieve this goal";*

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"[...]I hope to improve all my English skills by the end of my degree course, thanks to the lessons and all the work I usually do for my English classes. <u>Hopefully</u> I will also take part in an Erasmus project during my third year, in order to try and develop my competences";

"[...]it is also important to be elastic in order to be able to understand people who do not speak standard English. <u>Honestly</u>, I find the existence of these different forms very interesting [...]";

"It is questionable whether it is more important that a language learner achieves native-like competence in a second language or that he/she focuses on standard English. <u>Undoubtedly</u> it is not a simple question".

As Figure 4.12 shows, *mood adjuncts* are very frequent in NNS writing. It could be argued that the large number of these subjective interpersonal metaphors is mainly due to an excessive use of *"I think",* which "reflects the writers' concern to express a high degree of involvement with the issue discussed" (Aijmer 2001, in Aijmer 2009:113). There appears to be quite a heavy foregrounding of personal opinions and attitudes, as a tendency can be noticed in NNS writing to foreground their opinions and express evaluative comments by using self-reference, that is direct reference to the writer as the participant in what is being discussed.
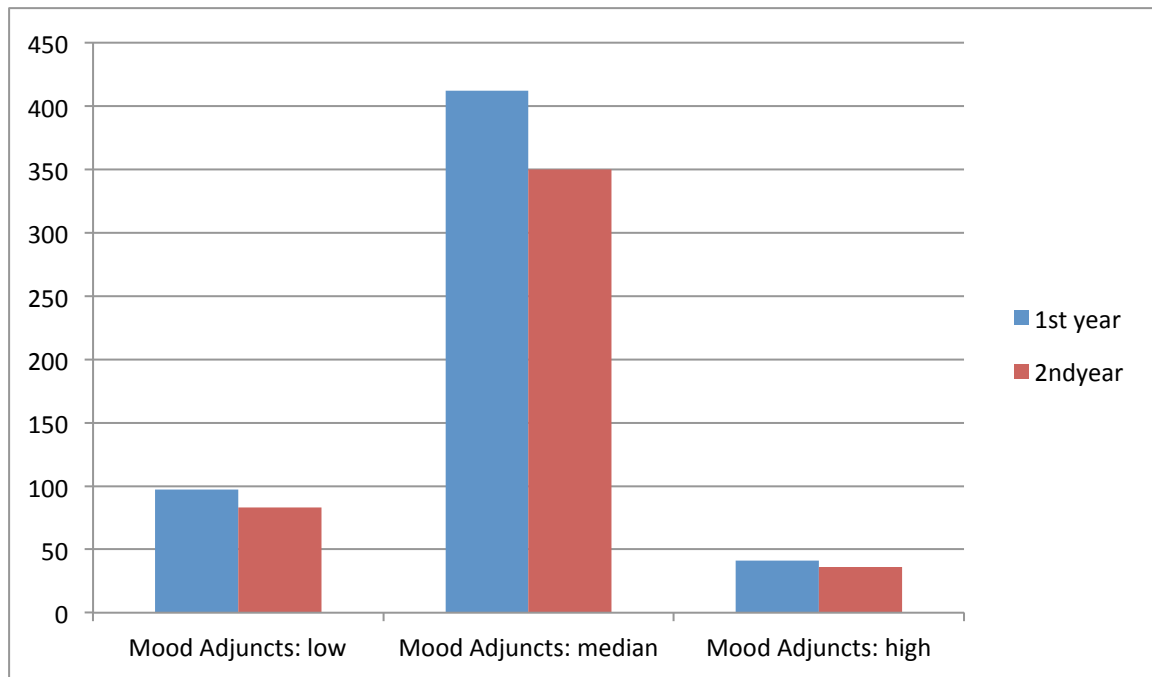
Figure 4.12: graph showing the frequency of use of Mood Adjuncts

Even though there is not a significant difference between first- and second-year students in the number of occurrences of *mood adjuncts*, when first year students choose these constructions, they "thematize themselves as well as their subjective perspective on a state of affairs": as Aijmer (2009: 132) points out, one possible explanation for this could be that the essay questions may invite personal views, thus triggering the thematization of the writer as the source of an opinion. As the graph shows, *mood adjuncts* have been divided into low, median and high. This distinction has mainly to do with the meanings of these patterns of subjective stance, which can be described as follows:

a) belief/assumption *("I hope/I wish"),* e.g.:

   "I hope to achieve the C1 level at the end of my degree course because it's a great level";

b) prefacing one's own opinion *("I think/in my opinion/I believe/I consider/according to me/I am of the opinion that/I nurture the idea that")*, e.g.:

*"I think that is possible for language learners to achieve native-like competence in a second language");*

c) truth/fact *("I know/I am aware/I am convinced that/I am sure/I firmly believe/I strongly believe")*, e.g.:

"I know that achieving the perfection in 3 years is almost impossible. I also know that in order to speak English fluently time abroad should be spent in a country where English is the official language".

It could be argued that the main function of these expressions is "to talk about the writer within the context of the piece of discourse, either saying something about the writer functioning within the text or what the writer thinks" (Petch-Tyson 1998, in Aijmer 2009:133). As regards the frequency of these subjective stance expressions, it can be said that the most frequent ones were median *mood adjuncts*: *"I think", "in my opinion", "I believe".* It must be noticed that these markers are a very persuasive tool in the eyes of the reader and, as we have noted above, they are mainly used as a strategy to express the writer's opinions in a personal way. Unfortunately, in the texts the occurrences of these markers are sometimes redundant. Given their lack of knowledge and their little experience in arguing for their point of view and making their points clear to the reader, first year students, in particular, often happen to overuse some of these expressions.

Research on EFL learner language has found that Italian learners of English might find it challenging to use metadiscoursive features properly and efficiently, including *it*-extraposition constructions (Castello 2015:179). To be more precise, *it*-extraposition constructions can be described as "clauses (*it*-clauses) containing two subjects: the formal or anticipatory subject and the extraposed, postponed, logical or

notional subject, which take the form of an extraposed embedded clause" (Kaltenböck 2003, in Castello 2015:183). As Figure 4.13 shows, it is in the second year that the students have begun to employ and master *objective modality.*
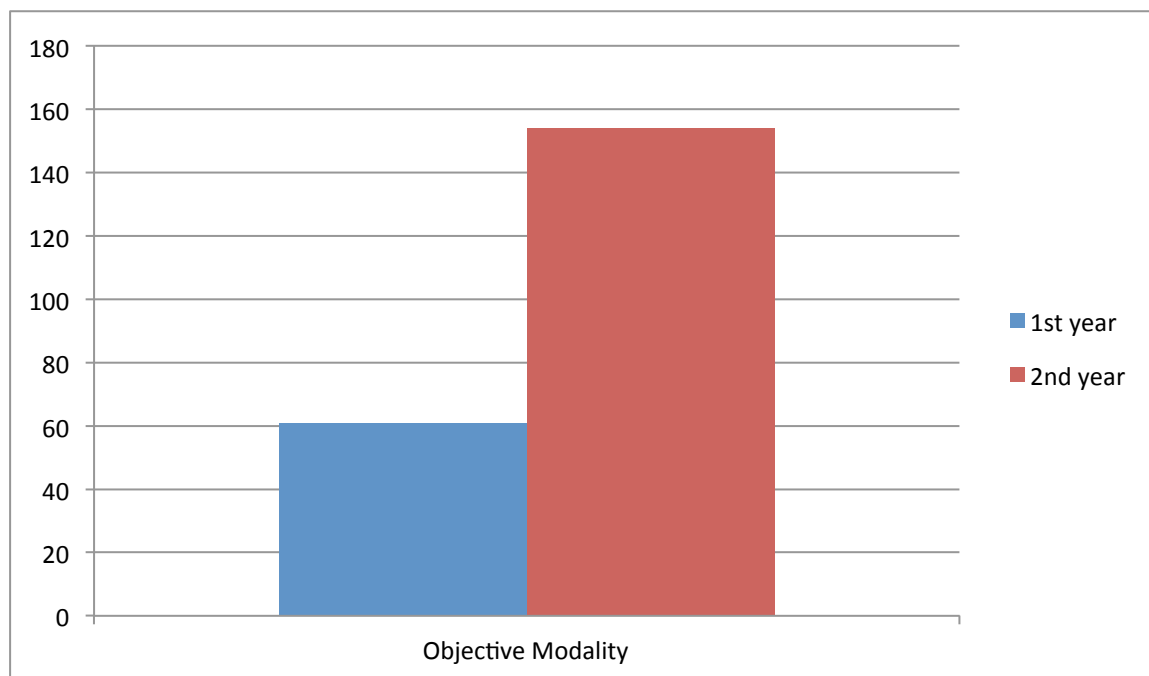
Figure 4.13: graph showing the frequency of use of Objective Modality

It could be argued that objective interpersonal metaphors such as *"it is possible", "it is necessary"*, and *"it can be said"* can be considered subjective opinions dressed up as more objective ones. As a matter of fact, other expressions such as *"it is true that"* function as a means of presenting the writer's opinion explicitly without revealing its source (e.g. *"It is true that English as a Lingua Franca is in fact the most spoken one, yet it has developed only recently")*. What happens in these cases is that it is the writers' opinions that are expressed, yet they are presented in a more objective manner. It must be noticed that the extraposition constructions produced by the students typically evaluate degrees of difficulty, importance, expectedness and appropriateness. If we take a closer look at the examples of *objective modality* used by the second year students, we are able to distinguish between different patterns and meanings. To be precise:

a) evaluation/opinion *("it is important/it is essential/it is not realistic/it is fundamental")*, e.g.:

> *"It is important to have a consistent language background and know properly the grammar";*

b) possibility/necessity *("it is possible/it is likely/it is necessary/it might be probable"),* e.g.:

> *"But nonetheless it is possible to learn to speak a language with fluency [...]";*

c) truth/fact *("it is true that/it is undoubtedly true that/it is known"),* e.g.:

> *"It is known that English is the global language, used worldwide as Lingua Franca";*

d) external source/evidence *("it could be argued/it is debatable/it is arguable/it is reasonable/it can be said that/it is often suggested that/it is stated that"),* e.g.:

> *"Yet, it could be argued that studying is not enough and that living abroad is the best (and maybe only) way towards native-like competence".*

It must be noticed that the main function of these expressions is to "convey an attitudinal meaning while making it seem objective" (Aijmer 2009:130). It could be argued that students choose these types of expressions to avoid subjective forms, and thus use them as substitutes for expressions such as *"I think".*

As Castello (2015:190) points out, because of L1 influence, *it*-extraposition can be a problematic area of English lexicogrammar: for example even in their second year students mistakenly extrapose noun phrases, which is normally not allowed in English, but perfectly possible in Italian (e.g. *"... it is necessary a real contact with native-speakers..", "...it is necessary a period of academic studies of language..").* The total number of objective modality constructions has largely increased over the two years, while the repertoire of adjectives and past participles employed in extraposed

constructions (e.g. "*important*", "*vital*") has become more varied. This is likely due to the typologies of texts learners were exposed to in class in the second year and also to the language modules they attended, some parts of which were focused on these aspects. However, there are still some cases of second year students who are still in the process of learning how to master such constructions successfully.

4.2.10 Self-mention

In this section the category *self-mentions* will be discussed. This category comprises items with different discourse functions. When the first person pronoun *I* is used, it clearly refers to the writer of the text, as does the possessive pronoun *my*. It could be argued that learner writers often find it difficult to know when it is appropriate to use *I* in academic writing.

A significant difference can be noticed in Figure 4.14 in the frequency of use of *self-mentions* between first- and second-year students.
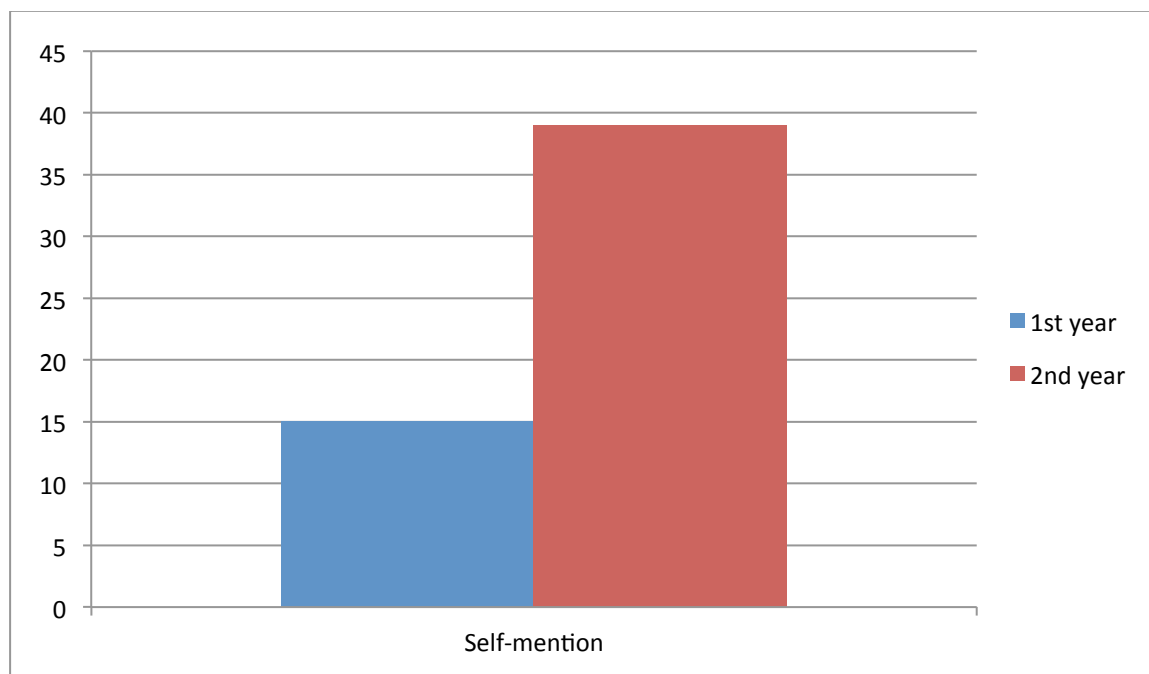
Figure 4.14: graph showing the frequency of use of Self-mention

As can be seen, the use of the self-mention *I* is used in expressions such as "*as far as I am concerned*", "*these are the views I hold*", "*I dare say*", of which some examples are:

> "*As far as I am concerned language learners cannot achieve the same competence of native speakers*";

> "*These are the views I hold now, while I'm still studying English at school and I'm still living in Italy, because I do expect to reach a high level of English by the end of my degree course*";

> "*Some, and I dare say many, can reach a native-like level, although they don't have any close relative (a mother or a father) speaking that language [...]*".

The use of the self-mention *my* was widely represented in the corpus as part of the following patterns: "*from my own experience*", "*concerning my personal expectations*", "*with regard to my expectations*", "*talking about myself*", "*for what concerns my personal experience*", "*in reference to my experience*". The following are some examples of these patterns:

> "*From my own experience, I can confirm that a friend of mine who had an English mother and an Italian father, succeeded in learning perfectly both the languages, with the proverbs and the particular way of saying that every language (and also every culture) has*";

> "*Concerning my personal expectations for my own level of English by the end of my degree course, I would like to increase my English level, reaching a C1 level*";

> "*With regard to my expectations for my own level of English by the end of the degree course, I think I will achieve very good grammar competences, but unfortunately I believe that I'll still have some difficulties as far as the oral interaction is concerned [...]*";

"Talking about myself, here at university I am improving my skills day by day and I am learning English at a high level";

"For what concerns my personal experience, I've felt like I knew a language pretty well from self-study, TV series and films, language exchanges and conversation groups [...]";

"In reference to my experience, I think it is almost impossible for a student to achieve native-like competence".

As Hyland (2001: 210) points out, "writers cannot avoid projecting a particular impression of themselves and how they stand in relation to their arguments, their discipline, and their readers, and this can have an important impact on the outcome of their discoursal purposes". Self-mention markers signal the presence of the writer in the text, and stress the fact that s/he is expressing his/her personal judgement. By using this type of marker, students might want to differentiate their own work and views from those of others. That is, they opt for first person pronouns and possessive determiners to promote themselves and take credit for their contributions. It must be noticed that *self-mention* is a very powerful rhetorical strategy marker: it allows writers to express their opinion in a more personal way, and also contributes to guiding readers to easily find out about the writers' stance.

4.2.11 Engagement Markers

Students use engagement markers such as *imperatives* and *question forms* to create and maintain a relationship with their readers, in order to influence them by addressing them directly in various ways. As we already know, engagement markers are meant to stress the writers' recognition of their potential readers. In this way writers acknowledge the presence and role of their readers, involve them in their texts, focus their attention on some specific aspects, and finally lead them to the right

interpretations. Figure 4.15 shows that in both the first and second year materials there is a considerable difference in the number of occurrences of *imperatives* and *question forms*. Both these engagement markers were used to convey information more clearly and engage the reader's attention, treating him/her as a kind of fellow enthusiast.
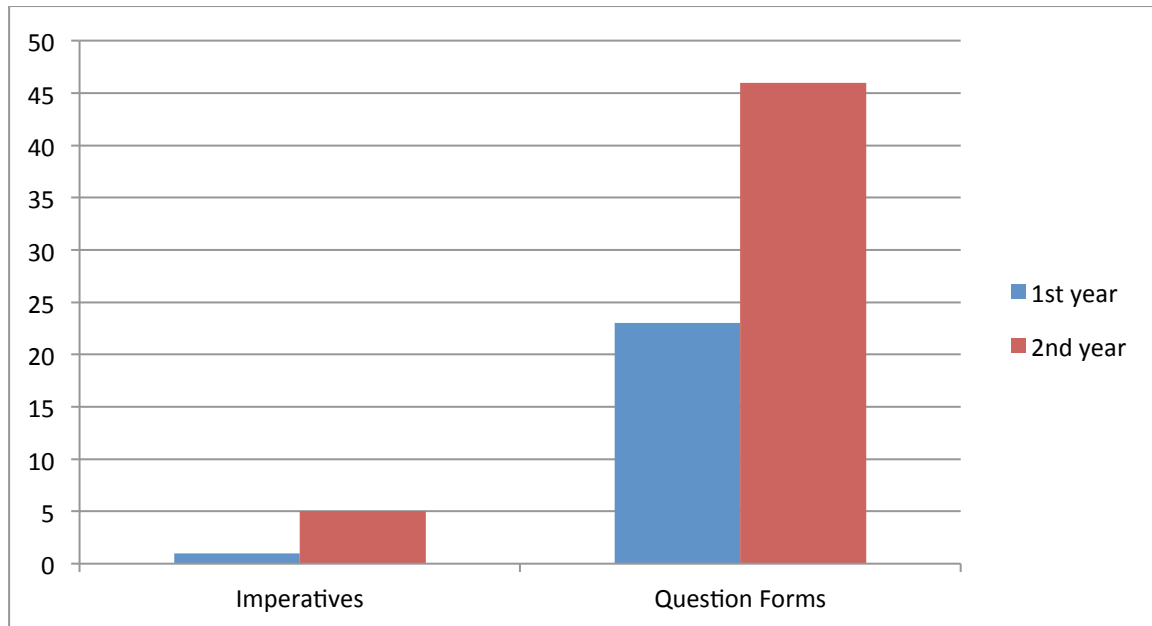
Figure 4.15: graph showing the frequency of use of Engagement Markers

The results suggest that second year students used more engagement markers than first year students. As can be seen, the higher use of engagement markers consisted in the use of *questions* (e.g. *"But… is it a truly good choice?")*. Also *imperatives* were used. Jussive exclusive imperatives with *"let's"* (e.g. *"Let's think about the children's situation or L2 learners [...]")* is used as a sort of invitation to the reader, that is a way of strongly expressing the writer's level of conviction.

To conclude, it can be said that only second year students had the linguistic proficiency to fully understand the purpose of engagement markers and to use them in a more extensive and effective way. As regards the category of *question forms*, the difference in the number of occurrences is quite significant. In Hyland's (2002:2) framework they are considered as the strategy of dialogic involvement par excellence, often used to express an imbalance of knowledge between participants, but also to create intimacy. Thus, through questions writers can project the interests and needs of

a potential audience: they can serve as an invitation for readers to orientate themselves to the argument presented in a given way. However, it could be argued that not all writers are comfortable with the directness and possible impact that questions can have. Therefore, while on the one hand *question forms* can help one build a relationship with readers, on the other they must be used with caution: the presence of too many questions may indeed give the idea of a text which is lacking in argumentation. As a consequence, it is true that questions can play an important role in academic writing, inviting as they do the readers to engage with the argument, however it is important to remember that this type of markers can contribute to arouse readers' curiosity only if used to a certain extent, because an excessive number of occurrences of *question forms* can have as a result a text which is not only poor in argumentation, but also quite repetitive and banal.

4.3 A comparison of native and non-native students' use of connectives

As already anticipated, this section of study will zoom on how native speakers and learners of English use connectors in their writing. As Karahan (2015:325) points out, pragmatic competence in foreign language learning depends on appropriate and correct use of the target language. Textual competence is concerned with a particular competence, that is the ability to produce coherent texts thanks to the appropriate and correct use of connectives.

Cohesion is a very important aspect of academic writing, and second language writing researchers continue to investigate ways in which cohesion may be more effectively taught to English language learners. There follows a definition of cohesion by Halliday and Hasan (1976, in Yuhas 2013:8):

> The concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the INTERPRETATION of some element in the discourse id dependent on that of another. The one PRESUPPOSES the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text.

Of course, the concept of cohesion must be situated within the notion of *text*, and according to Halliday and Hasan (1976, in Yuhas 2013:10) a text is "a semantic unit". They also affirm that "the unit that [a text] has is a unity of meaning in context, a texture that expresses the fact that it relates as a whole to the environment in which it is placed."

Connectives are defined by several researchers in different ways. They are identified as conjunctions by Halliday & Hasan (1976), cohesive devices by Schiffrin (1987), and discourse markers by Fraser (1999). Brown and Yule (1983) explain that in written texts connectives are formal markers which indicate explicitly marked relationships, and thus help readers to relate what has been said to what is going to be said (Karahan 2015:326). All these things considered, it must be acknowledged that connectives are useful for signalling logical or semantic relations between units of discourse: they contribute to making writing more powerful by helping the reader move smoothly from one point to another. As a matter of fact, an important characteristic of a reader-friendly text is the coherence that can be achieved by the use of connectors, that is explicit markers of relationships between ideas.

Having already introduced the different types of software used for the present research, in the next sections the use of connectives such as *"in fact", "indeed", "hence", "thus"* and *"moreover"* will be investigated.

4.3.1 Use of *"in fact"* and *"indeed"*

"In fact" and *"indeed"* are two linking adverbials which are closely related in meaning, because of their meaning of "actuality" and reinforcement of statements. They can occur in similar contexts, but with subtle differences in meaning in most cases. Biber at al. (1999:858) point out that stance adverbials can also have a connective function, like linking adverbials. The use of *"in fact",* for example, not only shows actuality and in so doing expresses a kind of stance, but clearly also

connects the current proposition to a preceding stretch of discourse, which it strengthens or makes more specific. An example is provided by the following extract from Biber et al. (1999:858):

> *"Irrigation implies not only an adequate and controlled water supply, but also efficient drainage of excess water when desirable. The supply and control of water, <u>in fact</u>, is the most important aspect of irrigated paddy cultivation".*

In his grammar "Practical English Usage" (2005:246), Swan gives a definition of *"indeed":* it can be used after *be* or an auxiliary verb in order to suggest confirmation or emphatic agreement. It is rather formal, and is common in short answers. An example is given by:

> *"Henry made a fool of himself. He did <u>indeed</u>".*

As we will notice when analyzing examples of NNS students' use of these connectives, some of them have not yet mastered how to use such connectives successfully. First of all, it is generally agreed that *"in fact"* is used when one wants to contradict the previous statement with facts. On the other hand, *"indeed"* is generally used when one wants to reinforce the previous statement, adding certainty to it with actual facts. As a matter of fact, as stated in the *Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary* (2005:546), *"in (actual) fact"* is used to emphasize a statement, especially one that is the opposite of what has just been mentioned, such as in:

> *"I thought the work would be difficult. In (actual) fact, it's very easy".*

As regards *"indeed"*, it is used to emphasize a positive statement or answer (*Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary* 2005:788). For example:

> *"Was he very angry? Indeed he was".*

Some examples obtained from the Corpus of Contemporary American English show that native speakers have understood the difference between these two connectives perfectly. As regards *"in fact"*, some examples of its use are the following:

> *"I wrote about past and present experiences that could potentially influence my perspective and judgment of the phenomenon of female voice change or manipulate my interpretation of data: In middle school, I was not really aware of my voice changing. In fact, it never crossed my mind..";*

> *"However, evidence is lacking that this should be the only instructional approach used, especially when too many college students passively sit in classrooms while pretending to pay attention. In fact, an increasing wealth of evidence confirms how active engagement significantly impacts student learning, understanding, and critical thinking".*

The use of *"indeed"* is illustrated by the following examples:

> *"In these constraining institutional times, the temptation is to look only backward not forward, but we need not do so. Indeed, as we reimagine English and language arts curricula to engage with the texts and literacies of our times, games occupy an important place as challenging but important hybrid textual forms that are inextricably linked with action";*

> *"[...]those which I want to call conscious learning, or explicit learning, but as we have argued in this paper embodied, or implicit, learning probably constitutes our more frequent form of learning in everyday life. # Indeed, we frequently recognise that our perception of reality is socially constructed but we do not always recognise that there are other phenomena in the situation which are not included in our social construction -- but it is these that we experience in a non-cognitive manner".*

It is interesting to notice that if we take a look at the bilingual dictionary *Grande Dizionario Hoepli* (2011:436) there appears to be a lack of examples of the use of *"in fact"* in the entry for the word *"fact"* in the English>Italian section of the dictionary. As a consequence, if someone looks up "fact" in this dictionary, s/he would not be able to actually work out the meanings and functions of "in fact".

As a matter of fact, only some first year students show to have understood how it should be used, such as in:

> *"First of all, in my view, Standard English is more practical to teach and learn. Furthermore, it is more useful. In fact, if you learn native-English then you will be able to speak only one variety of English, as it would be almost impossible to speak more varieties of English like a native speaker".*

On the contrary, probably influenced by the Italian expression *"infatti"*, others have mistakenly interchanged *"in fact"* with *"indeed"*, as illustrated by the following example:

> *"In my opinion, a language learner could actually achieve a native-like competence in his/her second language. *In fact, especially by living in the country where their second language is commonly spoken, language learners have good possibilities of reaching a high level in that language".*

In second-year students' essays, the occurrences of the connective *"in fact"* are almost twice as many. However, there are still cases of students who clearly have some difficulties in understanding how to use this connective. For example:

> *"It depends only on the passion that people have for the study of a language, how hard they work in order to reach a certain language level, how much time they dedicate to study and finally it depends on abroad experiences. *In fact, living abroad would be the best way in order to achieve this competence because in this way you can be in contact with a new culture, a new way of speaking, of acting and with new expressions and everyday you would hear and speak a foreign language that sooner or later would become yours".*

As regards the connective *"indeed"*, in the bilingual dictionary (*Grande Dizionario Hoeply* 2011: 640) it is associated with expressions such as *"anzi"*, *"in effetti"*, *"per meglio dire"*, thus emphasizing a positive statement. For example:

> *"We are pleased, indeed delighted with the decision".*

It must be noticed that the difference in the number of occurrences between first- and second-year students is remarkable (3 vs. 70 occurrences). Also in this case, explicit teaching is likely to have helped students learn about these connectives and how to use them. Two examples follow:

> *"This kind of study not only is lighter and funnier, but also enriches the vocabulary and allows everyday real language to be learnt. This, indeed, is one of the main issues of learning English: we are often taught a language not spoken";*

> *"Language learners who study in their own countries will never achieve a native-like competence but they could achieve a good level of English. Indeed at university there are*

many opportunities to improve language skills for example tandem learning project, lessons with Native Speakers and the Erasmus project".

As the examples above show, some of the students are still in need to work on how to use these two types of connectives. What the students should do in particular is consider them in terms of how they relate to the discourse that surrounds them. As a matter of fact, they can take on rather different meanings, such as adversative meanings or the strengthening of argumentation. The interesting thing to notice is that in this case neither Biber at al. (1999) nor Swan (2005) have focused on the actual difference in the use of connectives such as *"in fact"* and *"indeed".* That is to say that sometimes specific linguistic structures are not analysed in detail in grammar books. Therefore it might be necessary for students to look somewhere else in order to understand how those structures work.

4.3.2 Use of *"hence"* and *"thus"*

"Hence" and *"thus"* are adverbial connectives that are used to show that what is said follows logically from what was said before. It is generally agreed that they have basically the same meaning, however there is a slight difference. To better understand their use it could be interesting to make reference to some examples provided by the *Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary* (2005:727*):*

> *"We suspect that they are trying to hide something, <u>hence</u> the need for an independent inquiry".*

As regards the use of *"thus" (Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary* 2005:1603)*,* two possible meanings are outlined:

1- In this way. For example: *"The universities have expanded, thus allowing many more people the chance of higher education";*
2- As a result of something just mentioned. For example: *"we do not own the building. Thus, it would be impossible for us to make any major changes to it".*

It could be argued that *"hence"* should normally be used to indicate future use, such as in:

> *"The situation is getting more and more complicated. <u>Hence</u> we will have to proceed with caution".*

"Thus", instead, should normally be used to refer to the past or to indicate a conclusion. For example:

> *"Both sides played well, <u>thus</u> no winner was declared".*

However, it is true that examples provided by bilingual dictionaries could be difficult to interpret and they may not always reflect the different shades of meaning behind specific words. As a matter of fact, in the *Grande Dizionario Hoepli* (2011:587), the use of *"hence"* is linked to expressions such as *"pertanto", "quindi", "perciò", "per tale ragione"* and therefore not particularly clear, especially if students do not make reference to a learner dictionary. An example could be given by:

> *"Wages have gone up, hence prices increase".*

In the same dictionary (*Grande DizionarioHoepli* 2011:1418), the connective *"thus"* is linked to expressions such as *"pertanto", "così", "di conseguenza"*. For example:

> *"Administration was centralized, thus reducing costs".*

If we take a closer look, it is interesting to notice that even though the majority of native speakers use the connective *"hence"* correctly, such as in:

> *Of course, this example only works if a teacher tends to favor tests over other assessments such as papers, lab reports, or projects. <u>Hence</u>, the first step of grading subjectively comes into play again: subjective categories should be in alignment with the objective tools being used",*

Some of them do not always respect the previously outlined distinction, as illustrated by the following example:

> *"Further, cold treatment is known to enhance microspore embryogenesis in Brassica napus and B. oleracea anthers inside the buds (Gu et al., 2004; Yuan et al., 2011). *<u>Hence</u>, the*

current study was initiated to explore anthers of cultivar Faisalabad long for their genotypic potential to develop embryogeniccalli on different media and culture conditions".

Also for the connective *"hence"* the considerable difference in the number of occurrences needs to be outlined (1 vs. 28 occurrences). It could be argued that the types of texts that second year students were exposed to in class, could have encouraged them to use more complex structures. For example:

"Indeed my actual expectations for my own level of English by the end of the degree course, are focused on filling my loops in topical fields. <u>Hence</u> I actually direct my attentions towards specific areas of the language, in order to better understand the way native speakers think, act and speak and eventually gain that kind of competence".

However, there are also cases of students who mistakenly use this connective, instead of *"thus"*, to indicate a conclusion. An example is provided by:

"People from different countries with a different first language simply find in standard English a common point in order to communicate: it is quite apparent that the priority is to understand each other. *<u>Hence</u>, the interest to achieve native-like competence takes second place".

As regards the use of *"thus"*, examples taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English show that native speakers know how to use this marker in academic writing. For example:

"[...]including their families and friends through whom they develop social capital and acquire a habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). <u>Thus</u>,' social capital is important for learning, and learning is important for social capital' (Field, 2005, p. 110)";

"For a number of them, this experience represented their first time travelling abroad. <u>Thus</u>, many discussed the personal growth they experienced as a result of stepping outside of their comfort zones, far from the safety nets of campus and home, friends, and family".

As for NNS, only the second year students used the connective *"thus"* in their essays, mainly as a way of justifying a certain argument. Some examples of its use are the following:

"As a matter of fact, learning a language only by studying it in a book is not so profitable, in particular for pronunciation and common language used in everyday life. <u>Thus</u>, living abroad can help you to high your knowledge and to interact in any situation";

"For this reason, non- Standard English should not be considered as a wrong language, on the contrary it is a different use of English language. <u>Thus</u>, I think that Standard English should be used in specific fields such as academic writings, media, work environments, political circles and others where a standard correct and technical terminology is required".

To conclude, it must be noticed that a common mistake among NNS students is to forget that *"thus"* is an adverb and not a conjunction: it cannot join two independent clauses, such as in:

*"Overall, English is internationally known as the leading vehicle for internet, business relationships, <u>thus</u> it is compulsory whether any person is going to work in any of these contexts".

4.3.3 The use of *"moreover"*

First of all, it could be argued that a connective like *"moreover"* is somewhat archaic and that there are other connectives which can be used. Anyway, it is generally agreed that *"moreover"* can be used for parallel confirmation, i.e. it indicates that the proposition it introduces should be processed in parallel with some other contextually manifest assumption leading to the confirmation of the same conclusion. As outlined in the *Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (*2005:992), the connective *"moreover",* could also be used to support what has previously been said, such as in:

"A talented artist, he was, moreover, a writer of some note".

In the same way, in the *Grande Dizionario Hoepli* (2011:821), the connective *"moreover"* is associated with words such as *"inoltre", "per di più", "d'altronde", "per giunta",* as illustrated by the following example:

"I know who stole the necklace. Moreover, I saw him take it".

All these things considered, native speakers show to be able to use this connective appropriately when they are structuring their texts:

> "*Straightforward comparisons between database usage and vendor-supplied usage statistics could not be made in any meaningful way. The poor quality of available citations was also a challenge. Moreover, the process of gathering and checking the citations was extremely time consuming*";

> "*The discussion needs to move beyond the evidence of the neurological impact of music to focus on the multiplicity of reasons why music is crucial to the development of the whole child. Moreover, we need to determine how to reach children through music*".

As regards first year students, even though the number of occurrences is quite low, they show a great accuracy in the use of such a marker, as illustrated by the following examples:

> "*A wide vocabulary and a fluent pronunciation are at the base of this process. Moreover students should get in touch with the English culture, because it affects the way they speak*";

> "*They can express their opinion without problems, even if the ideas they have are difficult to explain. Moreover, they can talk about their feelings and their emotion which, to me, are the most difficult concepts a person can talk about*".

On the other hand, as regards second year students' use of "*moreover*", even though the frequency of use of this marker is clearly bigger, there are cases of students who have not managed to use it successfully. For example:

> "*I also consider travelling and entering in contact with native-speakers as the most efficient way of learning a language, because in this way you have the chance to fully understand how the language works in everyday life. *Moreover, an important part of this language is standard English*";

> "*People need a language to communicate with other cultures and the result of this modern necessity is that English has become a 'contact language' between people from different countries. *Moreover, we know that today a large number of movies, songs and also the majority of the contents that we can find on the internet are in English*".

To conclude, it could be argued that corpora can provide a useful and stimulating addition to second and foreign language learning. As a matter of fact, examples of authentic language use can contribute to provide students with a more vivid picture of the language that they want to learn. In particular, advanced students can really benefit from working with corpora: it can be an extra stimulus for them, a way to use their creativity while trying to discover facts about the language they are studying.

Conclusions

To conclude this study, I would, first of all, suggest that good writing is surely a process of self-discovery and that teaching the rhetorical functions of metadiscourse can be seen as a first step towards supporting the idea that metadiscourse itself can have a positive influence on setting up a relationship between readers and writers. As has been shown, metadiscourse items can contribute to utterance interpretation in significant ways, as they create the linguistic infrastructure to maximise the effective communication of ideas.

As stated in Chapter 4, the main purpose of this study was to determine whether the students improved on their use of metadiscourse in texts they wrote in their first and second year of university respectively. As regards textual metadiscourse, one of the most significant findings to emerge is that the second year students' texts contained almost double the amount of textual metadiscourse as the first year ones. By mastering transition and frame markers, students were able to show their degree of maturity in academic writing, in particular their increased ability to structure their texts with more discursively elaborate arguments. A remarkable result which has emerged from the analysis is that second year students made a larger use of evidentials. It could be argued that this is something that goes beyond the simple fact of providing justification for arguments: what students did was to show their desire to give credit to the literature in the field by making reference to reliable sources.

As regards interpersonal metadiscourse, the most frequent sub-category was that of attitude markers, which, as we have seen, contribute to expressing the writer's affective values towards the propositional content. As we have noticed, *mood adjuncts* such as *"I think", "in my opinion"* can be a very persuasive tool, but at the same time their excessive use can make the texts sound boring and redundant. Very revealing was also the difference in the use of *objective modality*, and according to the results, second year students felt the need to present their opinions in a much more objective manner. It was also interesting to notice how students used markers such as self-mentions and engagement markers. As regards the former, second year students used this type of marker to promote themselves and their opinions. The latter instead was

used by students as a way to build a relationship with readers by inviting them to engage with the argument.

This study has also shown that the use of connectives can help achieve a high degree of coherence in one's texts, which is needed for a text to be reader-friendly. Connectives contribute to making writing more powerful by signalling relationships between units of discourse. In this respect it is important to stress that even in the second-year students' texts there are still cases of students who have some difficulties in understanding how to use certain connectives successfully. For example, some learners proved to have some problems in properly using the connectives *"in fact"* and *"indeed"*. Grammars of English hardly focus on the subtle differences in meaning that the two connectives can present. As has been shown, also bilingual dictionaries seem to lack in clear examples about their usage, which could be one reason why it was so challenging for students to understand how to properly use these connectives. Overall, it must be acknowledged that a comparison with examples of authentic language use can be stimulating when talking about second language learning: by working with corpora, students can have direct access to the language that they want to learn.

I have found the exploration of L2 writing particularly challenging, especially with a view to looking for evidence to demonstrate that metadiscourse markers are fundamental in guiding the interpretation of a text. They facilitate communication, increase the readability of a text, and help build a rapport with the audience. This research has allowed me to understand that without such features, texts are more likely to appear less personal and interesting. Writers do not simply produce a text to convey information, but want to make sure that such information is understandable and acceptable. In this regard, writers try to motivate their addressees to follow along.

I hope that this research can have useful implications for learners who could not only learn about metadiscourse, but also start to view it as a kind of social engagement. Metadiscourse is more than just writing, it is engaging with the audience and also signalling the writer's attitude. I also hope that it can be of interest to those who want to explore the implications that metadiscourse can have for language teaching. As a matter of fact, until recently language teachers have mainly focused

their attention on grammatical points or application of rules, without paying too much attention to rhetorical features and strategies.

One source of weakness in this study is the fact that no actual comparison between NS and NNS students' use of metadiscourse markers has been made. In this respect, unfortunately, while I was in Cork I experienced some technical problems in collecting the native data I needed to complete this research. As a consequence, further research should explore and examine how metadiscourse awareness can change the way native speakers and Italian learners of English organize their discourse, engage with their readers, and signal their attitude.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that this study can be seen as an attempt to show how crucial the role of metadiscourse can be when it comes to students' awareness of their readers. The emphasis on metadiscourse and the explorations into its effects can influence students, and help them become more reflective about what they are saying and how they are saying it. It can be a way for them to realize that readers might have different needs from their own. Such an insight can therefore encourage them to undertake revisions that can help them improve the readability and effectiveness of their texts.

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Summary in Italian

A fronte del ruolo rilevante che oggigiorno la lingua inglese ricopre in ambito economico, politico e culturale, è necessario riconoscere l'importanza delle capacità linguistiche e della competenza comunicativa e svilupparle sia nella forma orale che in quella forma scritta. In particolare, nel momento della scrittura, giocano un ruolo fondamentale la capacità di presentare i fatti in modo efficace e quella di gestire il problema della visibilità dell'autore e del lettore. Negli ultimi anni, sono stati condotti numerosi studi volti ad approfondire la conoscenza della lingua inglese a livello accademico; in particolar modo, si è cercato di chiarire quelle che sono le caratteristiche di diversi tipi di testi, in termini di proprietà strutturali, di discorso e di metadiscorso.

Con il concetto di "metadiscorso" si vuole esprimere l'idea che la comunicazione consista in molto di più di un semplice scambio di informazioni tra due parti; nell'atto comunicativo si instaura una relazione diretta tra le personalità, gli atteggiamenti e le opinioni di coloro che comunicano. Di conseguenza, l'organizzazione del testo deve essere modellata in modo tale da riuscire a realizzare lo scopo per cui si intraprende un particolare atto comunicativo, sia questo scopo intrattenere, persuadere o informare. In altre parole, coloro che scrivono utilizzano il linguaggio per offrire una rappresentazione di se stessi e del proprio lavoro che possa permettere loro di mediare le relazioni sociali con i propri lettori.

La consapevolezza dell'importanza di uno strumento come il metadiscorso è ciò che spinge l'autore di un testo a strutturare in modo esplicito il proprio discorso, ad interessarsi ai propri lettori ed, infine, a segnalare in maniera appropriata il proprio modo di pensare. È dunque necessario che gli studenti di ELF apprendano a strutturare i propri testi in modo tale da guidare i lettori nella comprensione degli stessi, evitando possibili incomprensioni. L'obiettivo principale della presente ricerca è proprio quello di confrontare ed analizzare come le diverse forme di metadiscorso siano state utilizzate in testi scritti da studenti di inglese come seconda lingua (ELF) del primo e

del secondo anno del corso di Mediazione Linguistica dell'Università di Padova, col fine di stabilire se, ed eventualmente quali, miglioramenti si possono rilevare.

Per analizzare il corpus di testi raccolti per questo progetto di tesi sono stati utilizzati criteri qualitativi e quantitativi. La ricerca si propone, innanzitutto, di esplorare come i "marcatori del metadiscorso" possano aver influenzato il modo in cui gli studenti del primo e del secondo anno percepiscono i propri testi. Per ottenere risultati rappresentativi, si è ritenuto necessario raccogliere un consistente numero di dati, in modo tale da ottenere un quadro generale di come strutture linguistiche specifiche, in questo caso i marcatori del metadiscorso, siano interpretate ed utilizzate dagli studenti universitari.

Per sviluppare il presente studio è stato applicato il modello di metadiscorso sviluppato da Ken Hyland (2005). In primo luogo sono stati identificati i marcatori testuali ed interpersonali: i primi si riferiscono all'organizzazione strutturale del discorso, mentre i secondi riflettono sulla presa di posizione di chi scrive nei confronti sia del contenuto del proprio testo, che dei potenziali lettori. Successivamente sono state fatte ulteriori distinzioni: i marcatori testuali sono stati divisi in connettivi logici, marcatori di *frame*, marcatori endoforici, evidenziatori, annunciatori e pratiche di glossa; i marcatori interpersonali, invece, sono stati divisi in attenuatori, intensificatori, marcatori di atteggiamento, marcatori personali e marcatori relazionali. Infine, si è cercato di fare chiarezza su come nativi e discenti della lingua inglese possano differire nell'utilizzo di determinati connettori testuali. In particolare, questo studio si è focalizzato sui connettori *"infact", "indeed", "hence", "thus"* e *"moreover"*.

La decisione di portare avanti questo lavoro di tesi si fonda principalmente su due ragioni. La prima è legata alla mia esperienza personale: ho iniziato ed interessarmi e ad esplorare il concetto di "metadiscorso" lo scorso anno, durante la mia esperienza Erasmus presso l'University College Cork, in Irlanda. Il contatto quotidiano con parlanti nativi, mi ha permesso di riflettere sulla complessità degli atti comunicativi, sia orali che scritti: al di là della mera trasmissione linguistica di informazioni ed idee, ogni atto comunicativo è anche un atto sociale che lega enunciatori ed ascoltatori, o autori e lettori. Ho dunque sperimentato in prima persona

l'importanza di sviluppare altre capacità, oltre a quelle strettamente linguistico-grammaticali, per poter comunicare in modo efficace e adeguato in una lingua straniera. L'altra ragione che ha motivato questo studio è legata alla crescente attrattiva che gli studi sul metadiscorso hanno attualmente in ambito di ricerca linguistica. Da una prima fase di esplorazione, sembra che l'analisi del metadiscorso possa avere un ruolo chiave nello sviluppo e nella produzione di una scrittura in EFL che sia il più possibile persuasiva.

Il presente lavoro è strutturato in quattro capitoli. Il primo capitolo è costituito da una introduzione alla *SLA research* (la ricerca sull'acquisizione di una seconda lingua) e degli obbiettivi che l'insegnamento di una lingua straniera deve proporsi. Segue poi una presentazione delle variabili socio-anagrafiche sulle quali si è particolarmente focalizzata la suddetta ricerca: età, motivazione, sesso, classe sociale ed identità etnica. Infine, si presentano brevemente le principali teorie che si sono succedute nel tempo nell'ambito della *"SLA research"*.

Il secondo capitolo, invece, introduce il concetto di "metadiscorso" e presenta i modelli di classificazione delle forme metadiscorsive proposti in letteratura, con particolare attenzione alla categorizzazione utilizzata per svolgere la presente ricerca. Vengono inoltre analizzati i principali fattori che possono determinare differenze di utilizzo del metadiscorso: genere, consapevolezza di registro, convenzioni culturali e comunità di appartenenza. Infine, l'ultima parte riflette sull'importanza che il concetto di "metadiscorso" sta gradualmente acquisendo nell'insegnamento delle lingue.

Il terzo capitolo esplora il concetto di "interlingua" nel processo di acquisizione di una seconda lingua, dando particolare rilevanza all'analisi degli errori commessi dai discenti, la loro tipologia e le loro cause. Infine, il capitolo riflette sulla crescente importanza della *"learner corpus research"*, cioè l'applicazione della linguistica dei *corpora* alla ricerca sul processo di acquisizione di una seconda lingua.

Infine, nel quarto capitolo, a seguito della dettagliata descrizione della metodologia utilizzata nella presente ricerca, si dà spazio all'analisi vera e propria del corpus e alla discussione dei risultati.

A questo punto, è necessario comprendere come l'insegnamento di funzioni retoriche di metadiscorso possa rappresentare un primo importante passo verso una presa di coscienza dell'importanza del concetto stesso di metadiscorso: esso può avere un'influenza positiva nel creare un vero e proprio rapporto tra autori e lettori. Quello che gli elementi del metadiscorso consentono di fare è creare l'infrastruttura linguistica che permette di massimizzare il grado di efficienza nella comunicazione delle idee.

Come già anticipato, l'obiettivo principale di questa ricerca era quello di determinare se ci fosse stato un miglioramento nell'utilizzo del metadiscorso nei testi scritti da studenti universitari del primo e de secondo anno. Per quanto riguarda il metadiscorso testuale, una delle scoperte più interessanti riguarda il fatto che i testi degli studenti del secondo anno contengano quasi il doppio delle occorrenze di suddetti tipi di marcatori. L'uso corretto di connettivi logici e marcatori di *frame* da parte degli studenti del secondo anno sembra testimoniare una maggiore maturità nella gestione della scrittura accademica e, in particolar modo, una migliore capacità di strutturare il testo con più elaborate argomentazioni. Inoltre, è degno di nota il significativo aumento del numero di evidenziatori usati dagli studenti del secondo anno: ciò dimostra, al di là della volontà di fornire adeguate giustificazioni alle proprie argomentazioni, il desiderio degli studenti di dare credito alla letteratura dell'ambito studiato, facendo di fatto riferimento a fonti effettive ed affidabili.

Per quanto riguarda il metadiscorso interpersonale, la categoria più frequentemente impiegata è risultata essere quella dei marcatori di atteggiamento, vale a dire quelli che contribuiscono ad esprimere i valori emotivi di chi scrive rispetto al contenuto proposizionale del testo. In particolare, si è notato come i cosiddetti *"mood adjuncts"* (ad esempio *"I think", "in my opinion"*), pur essendo uno strumento di persuasione importante, possano far apparire i testi noiosi e ripetitivi se usati in modo eccessivo. Nell'ambito della *"objective modality"* si è osservato che gli studenti del secondo anno sembrano aver avvertito la necessità di presentare le proprie opinioni in maniera molto più oggettiva. Differenze significative sono state rilevate anche nell'utilizzo sia dei marcatori personali che di quelli relazionali. Per quanto riguarda i

primi, gli studenti del secondo anno li hanno utilizzati soprattutto come forma di promozione di se stessi e delle loro idee. I secondi, invece, sono stati utilizzati come strumento per stabilire una effettiva relazione con i lettori, invitandoli ad interessarsi alle argomentazioni presentate.

È stato inoltre dimostrato che l'uso di connettori può contribuire a raggiungere quel grado di coerenza testuale necessario affinché un elaborato scritto possa incontrare le esigenze dei suoi lettori: i connettori, infatti, contribuiscono a rendere la scrittura molto più fluida segnalando le diverse relazioni tra le unità del discorso. A tale proposito, è importante sottolineare che, nonostante tutto, sono ancora presenti casi di studenti del secondo anno che non utilizzano correttamente determinati connettori. Per esempio, si sono riscontrati casi di studenti che dimostrano di non avere chiaro l'uso di *"in fact"* ed *"indeed"*. È necessario sottolineare che le grammatiche di lingua inglese difficilmente si focalizzano sulle sottili differenze di significato che due connettori possono avere e, allo stesso modo, anche i dizionari bilingue sembrano offrire pochi esempi concreti riguardo all'uso effettivo di queste due strutture. L'assenza di precise indicazioni di uso in testi normativi ed opere di consulta può essere una causa della difficoltà dimostrata dagli studenti. A tal proposito, è importante sottolineare che l'osservazione di reali esempi di utilizzo della lingua può essere un modo stimolante ed efficace per apprendere ad usare correttamente particolari strutture, soprattutto nell'apprendimento di una seconda lingua: lavorando con i corpora, gli studenti possono entrare in diretto contatto con la lingua che desiderano imparare.

Da un punto di vista personale, è stato particolarmente stimolante esplorare un ambito così vasto come può essere quello della scrittura accademica in una seconda lingua, con particolare attenzione ai marcatori del metadiscorso e alla necessità di dimostrare come essi possano avere un ruolo chiave nel guidare l'interpretazione di un testo. Questa ricerca mi ha permesso di capire che in assenza di queste strutture, un testo rischia di apparire meno personale, attrattivo ed interessante agli occhi del lettore. Gli autori, infatti, non scrivono semplicemente per trasmettere informazioni, ma vogliono fare in modo che tali informazioni siano comprensibili ed accettabili,

cercando di motivare ed incentivare i propri lettori ad accogliere il loro punto di vista. Spero che questa ricerca possa essere utile agli studenti per capire la reale importanza del concetto di "metadiscorso": esso è molto di più della semplice scrittura, è relazionarsi con i lettori, è segnalare i propri punti di vista e le proprie prese di posizione. Spero inoltre che possa essere utile per coloro che vogliono esplorare le possibili implicazioni che lo studio del metadiscorso può avere per i corsi di lingua. Infatti, fino a poco tempo fa, gli insegnanti hanno focalizzato la propria attenzione soprattutto su aspetti grammaticali o sull'applicazione di regole e norme, tralasciando quindi strutture e strategie relative alla retorica.

Sicuramente, una possibile debolezza del presente studio è il fatto che non offra un effettivo confronto tra nativi e non, per quanto riguarda l'utilizzo dei marcatori del metadiscorso. A questo proposito, sfortunatamente mentre mi trovavo a Cork, ho avuto dei problemi tecnici nel raccogliere i dati necessari per sviluppare una possibile ricerca in tale direzione. Inoltre, una addizionale ricerca dovrebbe essere condotta in modo tale da esplorare ed esaminare come l'effettiva consapevolezza del metadiscorso possa modificare il modo in cui nativi e studenti italiani di ELF organizzano e strutturano il proprio discorso, si relazionano con i lettori e segnalano il proprio punto di vista.

Infine, vorrei concludere dicendo che questa ricerca può essere interpretata come un tentativo di dimostrare quanto cruciale possa essere il ruolo del metadiscorso quando si vogliono sensibilizzare gli studenti di fronte all'importanza dei potenziali lettori. L'enfasi posta sul concetto di metadiscorso e sull'analisi dei suoi effetti può realmente influenzare gli studenti ed aiutarli ad essere più riflessivi e ponderati rispetto a quello che vogliono comunicare e, soprattutto, a come vogliono comunicarlo. È sicuramente un modo per comprendere che i lettori possono avere bisogni differenti dai loro: una così profonda presa di coscienza può quindi incoraggiarli a mettere in atto cambiamenti tali che possano aumentare la chiarezza dei loro testi.

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