

Use of Discourse Markers in Master's Theses of Linguistics at a Peruvian University

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Abstract—This study analyzes the role of discourse markers in the rhetorical structures of the discussion and results sections of master's theses in linguistics. The primary focus is to assess their contribution to the coherence and cohesion of academic texts. Discourse markers, including connectors and discourse operators, are examined for their semantic properties and contextual functions. Using a qualitative approach rooted in discourse analysis, a sample of 29 master's theses was selected through non-probabilistic sampling. Findings reveal that 94% of discourse marker instances were appropriately used, with additive connectors being the most frequent. Conversely, digression markers were the least used.

Index Terms—discourse markers, coherence, cohesion, thesis

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of discourse markers plays a crucial role in academic writing, as these invariable linguistic units contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the text. In this regard, Cañada and Bach (2022) assert that academic writing does not occupy the place it rightfully deserves in curricular frameworks, which often results in students lacking the necessary background when tasked with writing their theses. As Swales (1996) states, cited by these authors, students who are required to submit their final theses are confronted with a "hidden genre" for which they are insufficiently prepared.

Often, fully understanding a text can prove challenging, requiring multiple readings to unravel its complexities and connect seemingly disjointed elements into a coherent whole. Connectors and discourse markers serve as tools to enhance text cohesion and accessibility, ensuring semantic interdependence among its components. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion stems from this semantic interplay, emphasizing the indispensable role of discourse markers in crafting coherent and cohesive texts. Errázuriz (2012) confirms that there is a correspondence between the relevance of discourse markers and the logical progression in which they are deployed.

Several studies on the use of discourse markers offer explanations for the results of the present research from various perspectives. For instance, González and Perdomo (2023) acknowledge a preference for conversational discourse markers. Errázuriz (2012) describes and analyzes the function of discourse markers in argumentative texts produced by university students, concluding that the use of these discourse units represents a "key strategy" for assessing students' argumentative production and achieving clarity and coherence in their writing. Domínguez (2016) aimed to identify the common markers that organize both colloquial conversations and formal discourses, whether oral or written. The results indicate a preference for the use of information-structuring markers in written discourses and conversational markers in oral discourses. Furthermore, the study highlights the frequency of closure markers in colloquial conversations and evidential conversational markers in written texts. Quintero (2015) found that the most frequently used connectors in over 300 sports articles from various Spanish-language newspapers were those of purpose. The author, seeking to contribute to the characterization of this genre of discourse, notes the need for further studies to attribute intrinsic features to this discourse type. Benavides (2017) conducted research on the pragmatic and lexicographic aspects of the marker "verdad" in Costa Rican Spanish, with the aim of contributing to the corpus of a dictionary of discourse markers of the informal register, useful in the teaching of Spanish as a second or foreign language. Similarly, Rodríguez and Ruiz (2017) analyzed the frequency of use of discourse operators related to concretization and argumentative reinforcement in learners of Spanish as a foreign language. Kusumayati (2020) investigated the use of discourse markers in expository essays written by EFL students with varying levels of proficiency in English. The sample consisted of 10 undergraduate students, divided into two groups: high and low writing proficiency. The results revealed that writing proficiency levels influenced the use of

discourse markers. Finally, Cuba et al. (2022) analyzed the proper and improper use of discourse markers and connectors in undergraduate theses, concluding that the proper use of these invariable linguistic units predominated.

The present research seeks to identify the characteristics, frequency, and relevance of discourse marker usage in master's theses in linguistics, specifically in the rhetorical moves of results and discussion, with the aim of characterizing the performance of discourse markers, connectors, and operators.

Discourse Markers

A text that economizes on markers risks its coherence and cohesion; similarly, a reader who neglects these particles in their perception and attention will encounter significant difficulties in constructing meaning, as the context will immediately become blurred. Moreover, the text will transform into a collection of disjointed information. Considering of the foregoing, the semantic and pragmatic functions of markers are undeniable. Martín and Portolés (1999) recognize both functions yet emphasize an additional function that operates beyond the utterance level, intervening in the interpretation of communicative processes. Thus, Blakemore (2004), cited by Asenjo and Nazar (2020) and Portolés (2001), regards discourse markers as elements that prioritize procedural meaning over lexical meaning, which, in turn, guides the reader in generating inferences. Montolío (2018), for her part, explains the functions of markers with a graphic analogy: road signs, marks anticipated by the writer to illuminate the hermeneutic path of the reader. Discourse markers, then, are traces that, in addition to logically connecting ideas, enable the elucidation of communicative intentions and multiple implicit ideas arising from an infinite array of logical relationships derived from explicit ideas, exemplifying the heuristic work of reading and writing. Consequently, markers operate both at the level of the utterance and at the level of enunciation.

A definition of markers that synthesizes the aforementioned functions:

Invariable linguistic units [that] do not perform a syntactic function within the framework of sentence predication and have a common purpose in discourse: that of guiding, in accordance with morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic units, the inferences made in communication. (Portolés, 2001, pp. 25-26)

Regarding the nomination and classification of these constructions, no consensus exists, as it depends on the researcher's approach. Martín and Montolío (1998) distinguish, among other perspectives, those derived from Grammar, Text Linguistics, Argumentation Theory, Relevance Theory, and Conversation Analysis. This diversity is also reported and further developed by La Rocca (2011) in her study of discourse markers. The present work has adopted a more pragmatic or discursive approach rather than a purely grammatical one; consequently, the contributions of Martín and Portolés (1999), Calsamiglia and Tusón (2018), Pons (1998), and, naturally, Al-khazraji (2019) have been particularly illuminating. Likewise, Nogueira (2011) emphasizes the usefulness of a semantic-pragmatic approach for the interpretation and construction of meaning in communicative acts. On the other hand, the difficulty in systematizing these constructions due to the variety of grammatical categories with which they appear (Benavides, 2017), and their flexibility in diverse contexts, has resulted in diversified taxonomies. Some authors prefer to use the term "connectors," while others opt for "markers." The latter has been considered the most suitable term, as it accounts for the various functions these units can perform (Errázuriz, 2012).

Sánchez (2012), cited by Giraldo-Giraldo (2017), defines the rhetorical move as a semantic-discursive unit that fulfills certain functions to achieve a communicative purpose; thus, each discursive genre demands congruence between communicative intentions and discursive structures. Swales (2004, p. 228), as cited in Quintanilla and Kloss (2019), provides a more detailed account by stating that a move is a discursive unit whose primary function is to articulate the specific communicative purpose of the segment with the overarching purpose of the discursive genre. Since this research has focused on the results and discussion segments of postgraduate theses, a dual predominant communicative intention has been observed, as anticipated: one expository in the results section and another persuasive in the discussion section. In other words, the purposes of the segments demand alignment with the general intention of the genre. Furthermore, both purposes are made explicit through, among other resources, discourse markers. Based on these considerations, the typology of markers proposed by Martín and Portolés (1999) has been adopted, as it addresses the "discursive functions" (p. 4080) and, consequently, the context of use, which aligns with the approach taken by the authors of this research, with some adjustments. Thus, the inclusion of causative connectors, the omission of distancing reformulators, the renaming of argumentative operators as discourse operators, and, finally, the exclusion of conversational markers has been incorporated, as summarized in Table 1.

TABLE I
DISCOURSE MARKERS
REFORMULATED BASE ON DE MARTÍN AND PORTOLÉS (1999)

Information structuring Markers	Commentators Organizers Digressors
Connectors	Additives Consecutives Causals Counter-argumentatives
Reformulators	Explanatories Rectifiers Summarizers
Discursive Operators	Argumentative Reinforcement Concretion

Due to the noticeable presence of a significant number of connectors establishing cause-consequence relationships, particularly in the discussion segments, this research incorporated causative connectors to distinguish them from consecutive connectors, which explicitly indicate the inverse relationship. Distancing reformulators could have proven useful for thesis writers in assuming a specific stance within the discussion segments; however, they were not utilized in the analyzed corpus, leading to their exclusion. The reclassification of argumentative operators as discourse operators was implemented to avoid associating these operators exclusively with the discussion segment, which is inherently argumentative in nature. Consequently, a more neutral adjective was chosen. Lastly, considering the register and type of text analyzed in this research, it was deemed unnecessary to analyze conversational markers, which are more pertinent to informal and oral communication, although their use is not limited to such contexts and conditions.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach, aligning with the research line of discourse analysis, as it investigates the use of discourse markers in master's theses in linguistics. The analytical procedure followed a synchronic-diachronic text analysis method (Soich & Mireles, 2021; Pardo et al., 2020; Sayago, 2014). To analyze discourse markers, the rhetorical moves of the results and discussion sections in the theses were initially segregated, followed by the categorization of markers into information structurers, connectors, reformulators, and discourse operators.

The primary objective of this research was to identify the characteristics, frequency, and relevance of the use of discourse markers, connectors, and discourse operators in master's theses in linguistics.

A convenience or non-probability sampling method was employed to conduct this study. A corpus of 29 master's theses in linguistics and its various subfields was selected, all available in the virtual repository of a Peruvian university. The sub corpus consists of 22 theses, categorized as follows: 10 in applied linguistics, 7 in text linguistics, and 5 in English linguistics. The inclusion criteria for the theses were: they were written in Spanish, they corresponded to the period between 2017 and 2021, and they contained the rhetorical moves of discussion and results, or at least one of these moves.

The primary criterion for selecting the rhetorical moves included in the study was based on the research team's teaching experience, specifically the task of linking research results with the theoretical framework and existing investigations. These tasks, fundamental to the results and discussion sections, require considerable effort from thesis writers, as they often involve applying their highest-level competencies for producing formal and academic texts in these sections.

The research instruments consisted of a checklist for verifying the selected rhetorical moves and two documentary observation forms: one for confirming the presence of discourse markers, connectors, and discourse operators, and another for assessing the improper use of these identified elements in the sub corpus, with corresponding analytical comments. The second form established three evaluation criteria for identifying inappropriate uses: recurrence, duplication, and errors in the function of the discourse marker/connector/operator. The criteria for determining a particular use as inappropriate were identified by the researchers analyzing the sub corpus. Both documentary observation forms were initially validated through pilot testing, followed by necessary adjustments. Subsequently, they were validated by expert judgment from specialists in linguistics, who also validated the analysis of the results.

The research procedure was carried out in two stages. The first: the research design, including the problem statement, objectives, selection of the corpus and sub corpus, development and validation of data collection instruments, and compilation of relevant literature on the study problem. The second stage centered on the organization, systematization, and analysis of the selected sub corpus. A process was carried out to search for, identify, quantify, and record the discourse markers included in the discussion and results sections of the 22 theses constituting the sub corpus. Then, the frequency of use of the identified markers was established, and the most frequently used markers were determined. Subsequently, an individual analysis of the observed markers was conducted, followed by an evaluation of their usage in each case. Cases in which discourse markers, connectors, and operators were used appropriately were separated from those in which inappropriate use occurred. The inappropriate cases were analyzed according to the documentary analysis form. Both appropriate and inappropriate uses were interpreted based on the relevant theoretical framework. Finally, the results obtained were reported.

III. RESULTS

A. Frequency of Use of Discourse Markers, Connectors, and Discourse Operators

In Figure 1, the identification of the frequency of use of discourse markers in the rhetorical moves of the results and discussion sections of the master's theses and their various denominations is displayed. Additive connectors are the most frequently used, appearing 577 times (43%) (asimismo, además, también, más, incluso, más aún, etc.), followed by informational structuring markers used to order discourse, appearing 238 times (18%) ((primero, luego, seguidamente, finalmente, después, etc.), consecutive connectors 211 times (16%) (puesto que, por tanto, por lo tanto, en efecto, pues, etc.), counter argumentative connectors 157 times (12%) (pero, sin embargo, aunque, en cambio, mas no, etc.), explanatory reformulators 116 times (9%) (es decir, o sea, esto es, de tal manera, dicho en, en otras palabras, etc.), summarizing reformulators 18 times (+1%) (en resumen, en conclusión, en síntesis, después de todo, etc.), discourse operators of specification 9 times (-1%) (por ejemplo, en concreto, en particular, etc.), causal connectors 7 times (-1%) (porque, ya que, debido a que, etc.), commentary information structuring markers 6 times (-1%) (dicho esto, pues bien, dicho eso, etc.), distancing reformulators 5 times (-1%) (en todo caso, en algunos casos, es el caso, etc.), and digressive information structuring markers 2 times (-1%) (a propósito y a todo esto).

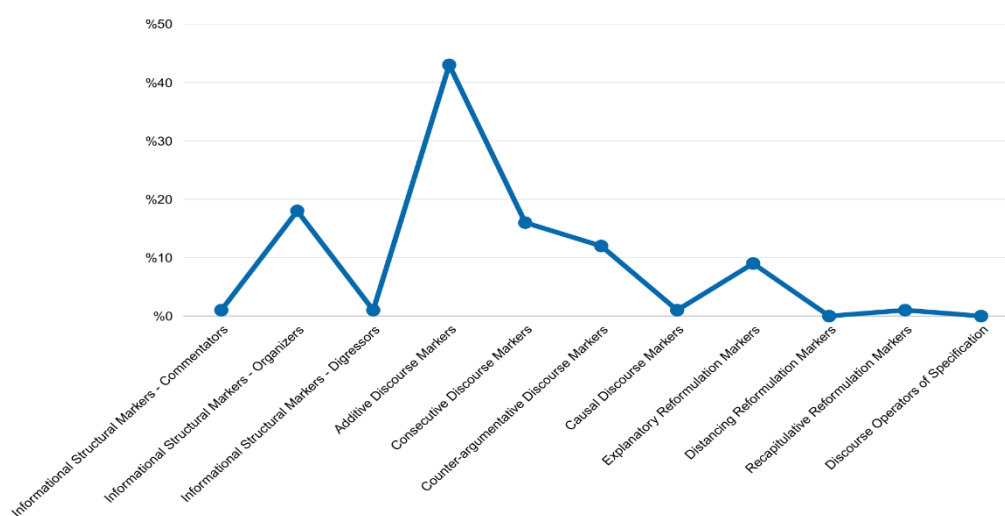


Figure 1. Frequency of Discourse Markers, Connectors, and Discourse Operators

B. Relevance of the Use of Discourse Markers, Connectors, and Discourse Operators

Regarding the relevance of the use of discourse markers, the analysis was divided into cases of appropriate and inappropriate use. The research findings indicated a predominance of appropriate use (94%) of these units over inappropriate use (6%).

C. Analysis of the Appropriate Use of Discourse Markers, Connectors, and Discourse Operators

CASE 1: “En la tabla 15 se hace referencia al uso de los signos de interrogación y admiración al igual que en [sic] anterior indicador de uso tildes, se puede evidenciar que también los alumnos omiten casi en su totalidad el uso de estos signos; sin embargo, existe una reinterpretación de los signos de admiración al final del mensaje, considerando dos signos al final de la oración, ello supone una influencia del inglés, este fenómeno también puede tener una explicación lógica, **puesto que** los dispositivos móviles solo tienen la función de signo de interrogación de cierre, un detalle que sucede también con las computadoras e incluso las antiguas máquinas de escribir inglesas que no tenían la tecla de la «ñ»” (Tesis 2, p. 64).

In this case, the causative connector **puesto que** is appropriately employed, as it is preceded by the prior consequence: the use of exclamation marks at the end of the sentence, and the cause or reason is the fact that mobile devices only possess the function of a closing question mark. Therefore, the connector **puesto que** is preceded by the consequence and followed by the explanatory cause. Montolio (2018) discusses causal connectors within the framework of focalization between cause and consequence (p. 67). Calsamiglia and Tusón (2018) assert that connectors serve to establish logical-semantic relationships between textual segments, and within the causal grouping, causatives introduce the causal relationship between these segments (pp. 292-293).

CASE 2: “El cuadro [sic] estadísticos descriptivos por edad, nos muestra la cantidad de alumnos del curso de Inglés intermedio de la Escuela de sociología del segundo año grupos Ay B, que respondieron a la encuesta del anexo, que en total fueron 66 alumnos, **además** nos detalla la edad mínima que es 18 años y la edad máxima que es 32 años” (Tesis 12, p. 41).

The use of *además* in this paragraph is categorized as appropriate. This additive connector is commonly employed, as it is observed to link two discourse units that share the same argumentative orientation (Martín & Portolés, 1999). In the segment introduced by the connector, additional information is provided relative to the first segment.

CASE 3: “El cuadro estadístico descriptivos por edad nos muestra la cantidad de alumnos del curso de Inglés intermedio de la Escuela de Sociología del segundo año grupos A y B, que respondieron a la encuesta del anexo, que en total fueron 66 alumnos, además nos detalla la edad mínima que es 18 años y la edad máxima que es 32 años. **Así** tenemos que la edad promedio es de 21 años” (Tesis 12, p. 41).

The use of *así* in this case is appropriate because it follows the prior unit, with the commentator *así* introducing a new situation. In this context, the following unit provides a new comment related to the same subject matter. According to Portolés, the function of "commentators" is to present the discourse unit as a distinct commentary from the previous one, which is understood as a shift, preparing the way for the new comment introduced by the marker (2001, pp. 137-138).

CASE 4: “Por otro lado, si rescatamos los valores ascendentes en estos resultados, podemos deducir que tanto en las evaluaciones de pretest y post-test existen diferencias estadísticamente significativas y al 95% de confianza. **Por consiguiente**, el programa experimental de aplicación de estrategias metacognitivas ha contribuido significativamente en un breve tiempo, a la superación de la situación problemática de deficiencias en la producción de textos en los estudiantes del tercer grado de secundaria de la I.E. INA-103 “Antonio Raymondi” del distrito de Coyllurqui, 2018: sabiendo que un problema de esta naturaleza no se logra resolver de manera inmediata, ya que requiere su aplicación en un tiempo prolongado para obtener resultados satisfactorios” (Tesis 17, p. 74).

Causal relationships are recognized in all classifications of discourse markers. Martín and Portolés (1999) classify consecutive connectors as those that logically link an antecedent with its consequent. In this instance, the connector *por consiguiente* (consequently) functions as a transition marker between, on one hand, the antecedent or cause: the statistically significant differences observed between the pre-test and post-test evaluations; and, on the other hand, the consequent: the significant contribution to overcoming deficiencies in text production among the students. This serves as a pertinent illustration of the intention, as Montolío (2018) asserts, to emphasize the consequence for argumentative purposes. Consequently, the use of this connector is deemed appropriate.

CASE 5: “El informante no pudo decodificar las preguntas uno, dos y cinco del examen. Es decir, que durante el proceso de la lectura, lo más probable es que no identificó varias palabras del texto, **por ende** no pudo entender el significado parcial o total de las preguntas que se le presentó, asimismo demostró bajo nivel de corpus léxico, **en consecuencia**, no hubo aprehensión del mismo” (Tesis 12, p. 99).

The use of *por ende* (therefore) and *en consecuencia* (consequently) in this case is considered appropriate; both consecutive connectors establish a cause-effect relationship between the discourse units they connect and the preceding units, thereby enhancing textual cohesion. As indicated by Martín and Portolés (1999), each of these consecutive connectors introduces a discourse segment that serves as a consequence of the preceding segment.

CASE 6: “De la tabla 14 y gráfico 13, ventajas más importantes, el 38.2% indica que la mayor ventaja es la de desarrollo de actividades en la Plataforma al igual que el grupo control con un 70.9%, **sin embargo** [sic] la percepción de ventajas más importantes es diferente entre los grupos de estudio. Mientras en el grupo control no hay convicción de las ventajas de la plataforma, no reconociendo ninguna ventaja significativamente, en el grupo experimental se identifica el reconocimiento de las ventajas de desarrollo de actividades, (70.9%), mejora el nivel de inglés (61.8%) y que permite la comunicación con el docente (40%)” (Tesis 24, p. 77).

The counter argumentative connector *sin embargo* (however) appropriately links two discourse units, with the second unit serving to mitigate the conclusion drawn from the first. Counter argumentative connectors "link two discourse units, such that the second is presented as a mitigator or suppressor of a conclusion that could be drawn from the first" (Portolés, 2001, p. 140). It is notable that this connector exhibits grammatical characteristics, as it is not integrated into the syntactic structure of the sentence (i.e., it maintains syntactic independence) and is preceded and followed by commas or semicolons, categorizing it as a parenthetical connector (Montolío, 2018). The Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, 2019) considers this connector to be an adversative argumentative connector, which "marks differences or semantic relationships between two parts of the discourse" (p. 75).

CASE 7: “Como ya se precisó en los métodos de análisis de los datos estadísticos se presentan en orden a los objetivos, comenzando por los objetivos específicos para terminar en el objetivo general; tanto en tablas como en gráficos según la pertinencia del caso. La fuente de toda información es la base de datos del estudio (anexo 2).

La información se dispone de la siguiente manera: **primero** se presenta la tabla y la interpretación, y le sigue el gráfico. Con respecto al contenido de los datos estadísticos, se precisa que cada tabla y gráfico contiene la información expuesta completa. En la interpretación se da realce a los valores que más responden a la solicitud de los objetivos con el propósito de evitar cualquier redundancia” (Tesis 8, p. 32).

The use of the connector *primero* in this segment is deemed appropriate. The justification for this is based on the role of connectors in organizing discourse, which indicates the position of various discourse elements. In this instance, *primero* serves to initiate a sequence within the discourse. Later in the segment, the expression *le sigue* appears, which essentially fulfills an ordering role, though it is not strictly categorized as an information structuring element. Nonetheless, this aligns with the assertion made by Martín and Portolés (1999, p. 19), where such particles indicate the position of discourse segments within an enumerative sequence.

CASE 8: “El examen oral posestrategia estuvo compuesto por la misma lista de grafías de las 40 palabras evaluadas en la preestrategia con la diferencia que en esta última etapa junto a la grafía de cada palabra se mostraba la transcripción fonológica respectiva. Los pasos de evaluación en esta fase fueron similares a los empleados en la evaluación preestrategia, **es decir** el alumno pronunciaba la palabra a la vez que grababa el audio respectivo para su posterior análisis y reflexión” (Tesis 21, p. 75).

The explanatory reformulator *es decir* appropriately introduces a reformulation that clarifies the preceding discourse element (the pre-strategy evaluation). In this example, the use of *es decir* is deemed appropriate. Montolío (2018) characterizes this reformulator as explanatory because it signals to the reader that the following information serves to clarify or restate the prior discourse element. Similarly, Portolés (2001) asserts that the reformulator *es decir* provides a clarification of the preceding unit, which may have been unclear or imprecise (p. 142). According to the RAE (2019), reformulating connectors "serve to explain or restate what has been presented in a different manner" (p. 75).

D. Analysis of Inappropriate Uses of Discourse Markers and Connectors

A total of 75 instances of inappropriate usage were identified in the rhetorical moves of the discussion and results sections of master's theses in linguistics. The classification of these occurrences as inadequate was grounded in the premise that errors in the function of discourse markers engender ambiguity or imprecision, both in the transmission of the author's communicative intent and in the reader's interpretative process. The role of discourse markers is crucial in explicitly delineating logical relationships between ideas, a fundamental mechanism in reading and writing processes, as well as in the 'urbanization of the text' (Montolío, 2018, p. 11). This study undertook a systematic analysis of the inappropriate use of discourse markers and connectors, with such instances being categorized into three distinct groups.

(a). Recurrence of the Same Marker/Connector

This phenomenon is defined as the repetition of the same discourse marker or connector within a single argumentative sequence, paragraph, or sentence. The recurrence of such markers and connectors is regarded as inappropriate, as it not only fails to facilitate the coherent structuring of the text and the seamless comprehension of the reader but also signals lexical insufficiency and compromises the clarity of the prose.

CASE 9 “Las hojas de cálculo son importantes cuando hay que trabajar con cuadros, cifras, etc. **por lo tanto** [1] son muy necesario [sic] para las distintas áreas incluida Comunicación, **por lo tanto** [2] deberían saber este tipo de programas” (T 7, p. 69).

While the use of *por lo tanto* a consecutive connector, is appropriate in the first instance [1] as it establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between the discourse segments, it is considered inappropriate in the second instance *por lo tanto* [2] due to its recurrence. This could have been avoided by replacing it with another consecutive connector. Thus, the recurrence of a marker or connector refers to its unnecessary repetition within the same argumentative sequence, paragraph, or sentence.

Although pragmatic or discursive repetition aims to achieve textuality (Alcaraz & Martínez, 1997), when it becomes relevant enough to impoverish the prose, it constitutes a writing flaw that makes it monotonous, insipid, and even cacophonous (Cassany, 1995). Reyes (2008) argues that repetitive style arises from the clash between what one wants to express and the limited resources to convey it, a phenomenon that is frequent and excusable in oral language. However, in written language, the "drafts" of oral expression should be eliminated, as there is ample time to plan and organize the discourse. Sánchez (2005) concurs in a study on writing among Costa Rican students, confirming Rodino and Ross's (1985) hypothesis of a transfer from oral to written registers and a lack of differentiation between the characteristics of unplanned orality and planned writing. On the other hand, as Ducrot (1980a) states in Martín and Portolés (1999), it is essential to note that markers do not carry conceptual meaning but processing meaning. This means they guide the inferences the reader makes from the discourse segments. Therefore, the proper use of a marker should consider the cognitive effort the reader or listener makes to understand the discourse. If comprehension is not achieved or requires excessive effort, the text is deemed "costly" to comprehend.

(b). Duplication of Markers/Connectors

This refers to the consecutive use of two or more discourse markers or connectors within the same line of text, which renders their function either redundant or contradictory. As a result, their use is deemed inappropriate.

CASE 10: “...activamente en la discusión de las ideas y argumentos matemáticos, y la resolución de problemas matemáticos a través de varios métodos. Además, el desarrollo de competencias comunicativas en el estudiante para que sustente las ideas y argumentos matemáticos. En ese sentido, en la investigación realizada, los estudiantes señalaron que siempre tienen dichas competencias. **Sin embargo, también** es relevante señalar que la investigadora incluyó una competencia comunicativa adicional con respecto al estudio mencionado, aquella que está orientada a que las ideas y argumentos matemáticos contribuyan a clarificar, refinar y consolidar el pensamiento matemático, que aparece en la tabla 4” (T 3, p. 145).

In this paragraph, the connectors *sin embargo* (a counterargument) and *también* (an additive) appear consecutively. It should be noted that each connector serves a different function. Moreover, there is no contradiction between the statement made before the counterargument (possession of skills) and the one following it (inclusion of an additional skill). In this case, the use of the additive *también* would suffice.

(c). *Error in the Function of the Marker/Connector*

Errors in the functional use of discourse markers give rise to ambiguity or imprecision, affecting both the transmission of the author's communicative intent and the reader's interpretative process. The role of discourse markers is crucial in explicitly delineating logical relationships between ideas, a fundamental mechanism in the reading and writing process.

CASE 11: “Del gráfico N°2 concluimos que de un total de 22 alumnos matriculados en el nivel intermedio de inglés del programa de BECAS EBR el 91% es decir la mayoría de la población de estudio considera que el idioma inglés es muy importante. **Es decir**, todos los alumnos consideran que es fundamental el saber pronunciar el idioma, ningún alumno participante piensa que la pronunciación es irrelevante” (T 21, p. 57).

Montolío (2018) argues that reformulators allow for the explanation, clarification, or expansion of the information preceding the marker. The use of the marker *es decir* in this case is inadequate because there is no semantic identity between the idea before the reformulator and the idea after it. These are, in fact, two distinct ideas. The statement "The majority of the study population believes that the English language is very important" differs from "all the students consider it fundamental to know how to pronounce the language..." because asserting that 91% of students found it useful to learn English is not the same as saying that all of them considered good pronunciation in this language to be important.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this research reveal a predominant appropriate use of discourse markers, with 1,271 instances (94%) of correct application. This suggests that the graduate students, having completed a postgraduate degree in linguistics, possess a sound understanding of the functions and types of these invariable linguistic units. These findings are consistent with the study by Cuba et al. (2022), which also identified a predominance of appropriate discourse marker use in undergraduate theses. In line with Al-Khazraji (2019), who emphasizes the importance of analyzing discourse markers in writing, the evaluation of their quality is crucial for facilitating the comprehension of ideas within the text. Consequently, understanding and recognizing the functions of discourse markers is essential for achieving cohesion and coherence in written discourse. When employed effectively, these units enable the seamless flow of communication. As noted by Alshammary (2021), the appropriate use of discourse markers for connectivity, optionality, and conditionality is advantageous for readers, as it requires less cognitive effort to infer pragmatic meaning. Similarly, Choemue and Bram (2021) highlight that the use of discourse markers reflects the ability of university-level EFL students to express ideas in both academic and non-academic writing tasks, thereby ensuring cohesion and coherence. These findings agree with the results of this study.

Conversely, inappropriate use of discourse markers was identified in 75 instances, accounting for 6% of the total. These inappropriate occurrences were categorized and analyzed according to recurrence, duplication, and errors in the functions of markers/connectors. Al-Khazraji (2019) also identifies inappropriate and excessive use of discourse markers, while Crible and Degand (2021), in their study on the co-occurrence and ordering of discourse markers, assert that no discourse marker should coexist with another, nor should they appear in an arbitrary order. Furthermore, Kusumayati (2020) observes that low writing competence leads to the restricted and redundant use of discourse markers, negatively affecting their syntactic function. Thus, improper use results in a lack of cohesion and diminished coherence in the text.

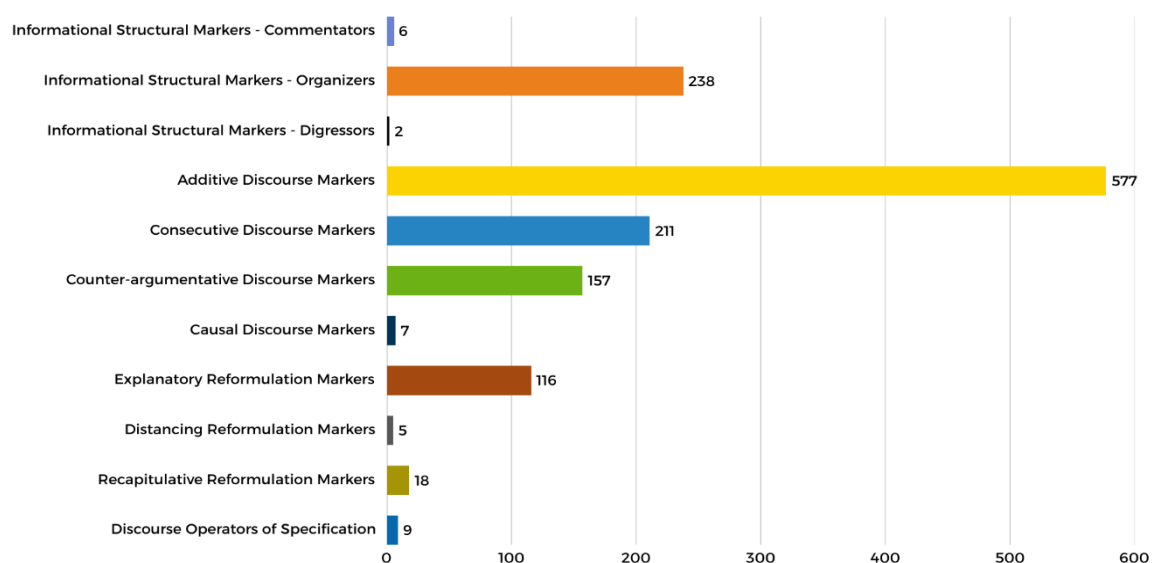


Figure 2. Frequency of Recurrence of Markers, Connectors, and Discourse Operators

The analysis illustrates that the additive connector is the most frequently used connector in the rhetorical moves of the results and discussion sections of the master's theses, with 577 occurrences (e.g., 'asimismo,' 'además,' 'también,' 'más,' 'incluso,' 'más aún'). Another frequently used marker is the structuring and ordering marker, with 238 occurrences (e.g., 'en primer lugar,' 'en segundo lugar,' 'primero,' 'por otra parte,' 'por último,' 'finalmente'). The least frequent markers are the distancing reformulators and digressors, with 5 and 2 occurrences, respectively.

As observed, additive markers are the most frequently used in the analyzed master's theses. Choemue and Bram (2021), in their study on the use of discourse markers in academic and non-academic essays, found that the most commonly used markers among their participants were 'y' (and) and 'además' (furthermore), which aligns with the findings of this study.

Kusumayati (2020), based on Fraser's (2009) classification of discourse markers, found that in her research on the use of discourse markers in the written discourse of English as a foreign language student at an aviation institute, the most frequently used markers were 'y' (and) and 'además' (furthermore). These markers accounted for 61.6% of the occurrences among higher-competence students and 83% among those with lower competence. Kusumayati also highlights the overuse of 'y' (and), noting instances of redundancy.

According to Cervera (2020), the use of discourse markers is essential in argumentative discourse. Additive or summative markers significantly contribute to cohesion by maintaining the expository relationship, adding elements, and linking statements. Cervera identifies 'y' (and) as the most representative additive connector, with its semantic value depending on context.

On the other hand, Cuba et al. (2022), in their analysis of discourse markers and connectors, concluded that while additive connectors were not the most frequently used by thesis writers (only 11% of them employed them), they were the ones most frequently misused, likely due to students' lack of awareness regarding their functions.

The high degree of formalization in academic essays, and especially in master's theses, is also evident, as affirmed by Ciapuscio and Kuguel (2002), cited by Lapegna (2020), in their adherence to specific conventions and rhetorical structures aimed at achieving clear, objective, and reasoned discourse. The infrequent use of structural information markers for digressive content observed in the master's theses can be attributed to the rhetorical procedures involved in their use. Although such markers are valuable in a defense context, they are more commonly found in oral discourse, as they involve temporal deviations from the main thematic line.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that all assessments of discourse marker use have considered both lexical and procedural aspects (Blakemore, 2004; in Asenjo & Nazar, 2020; Portolés, 2001). As Verschuere (2002) asserts in Landone (2021), discourse markers are traces of a consciousness that transcends the pragmatic level, making their evaluation a delicate task, as the boundaries between markers can be ambiguous or overlap in their pragmatic functions.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The rhetorical moves in the results and discussion sections of master's theses in linguistics and their various subfields were analyzed, revealing a total of 1,346 discourse markers. The additive connector was the most frequently used (577 occurrences), fulfilling the function of introducing new information within the same thematic line (Montolío, 2018). In contrast, structural information markers of digressive content were the least frequently used, with only 2 occurrences.

The study found that 94% (1,271 instances) of discourse marker use was appropriate, demonstrating the writers' competence in effectively employing these linguistic units. This suggests a strong understanding of their semantic and pragmatic roles, essential for ensuring cohesion and clarity in academic writing.

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