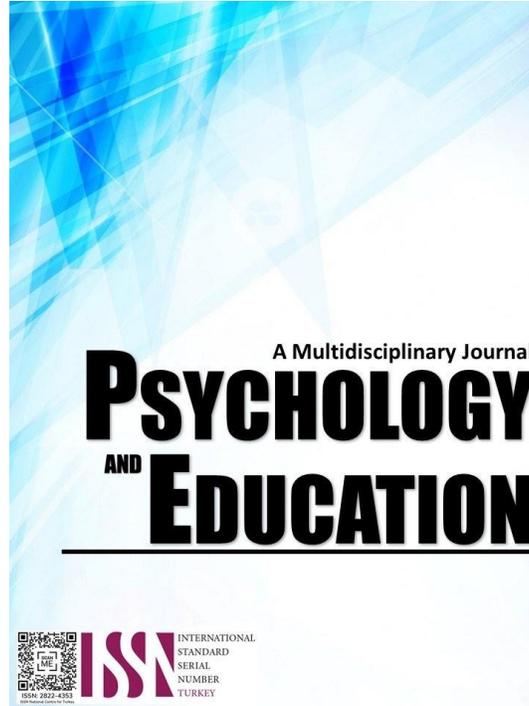


# EXAMINING DISCOURSE STRATEGIES AND STANCE MARKERS IN ESL STUDENTS' REFLECTIVE ESSAYS



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## Examining Discourse Strategies and Stance Markers in ESL Students' Reflective Essays

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the discourse and stance markers in English as a Second Language (ESL) students' reflective essays. A discourse analysis method was used in this study. The quantitative technique was utilized to count the number of instances of discourse and stance markers in reflective essays written by ESL students. Thus, it utilized Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of DMs to classify the function of discourse markers and Knott's (1996) Five Syntactic Category to identify the structure of discourse markers. The study made use of Hyland's (2004) framework of stance to categorize the stance markers and Biber's (2004) general framework of stance markers. As a result of the study, the discourse markers in ESL students' reflective essays were classified into contrastive, elaborative, inferential, and temporal as based on Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of DMs. Based on Knott's (1966) Five syntactic categories, discourse markers in ESL students' reflective essays were analyzed as coordinators, subordinators, conjunctive adverbs, prepositions, and prepositional phrases. Stance markers were categorized into hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions. The grammatical structure of stance markers was identified as modals with a semantic categories stance adverbial and complement clauses. It revealed that elaborative discourse markers were the most commonly used. Modals were the most favorable grammatical categories of stance markers. Moreover, it is recommended that language teachers and researchers may use the concept of discourse and stance markers in analyzing the ways in which learners present their ideas logically and critically.

**Keywords:** *discourse markers, stance, reflective essays, structure, function, ESL students*

### Introduction

Writing is inextricably linked to a person's life, particularly in the case of academics. It does, after all, play a crucial function in formal communication. Humans may convey their emotions, sentiments, and thoughts to one another via writing. Writing is a thinking process because writing is putting ideas down on paper to transform thoughts into words and give them structure and coherent organization (Brown, 2001). This means that writing always needs a critical process that combines the complexity of syntax, mechanics, grammar, and vocabulary. Writing also becomes a part of the discourse. It is called written discourse.

Many scholars have insisted on using writing as a formal medium of communication (Fraser, 1999; Kamali & Noori, 2015; Rahimu, 2011; Sun, 2013). Sanford (2012) emphasizes the necessity of honing one's writing abilities. The primary purpose of education is to strengthen students' writing abilities so that they may be utilized to exhibit complicated intellectual activity in various social circumstances. Similarly, Chow (2007) regards writing as a basic technique that assists pupils in better understanding concepts and ideas. However, Siniajeva (2005, in Yunus & Haris, 2014) points out, that writing is developed from written activity; it involves exceptional or unexpected situations.

For academic purposes, especially in secondary schools, writing reflective essays as one of the paper requirements has to be a requisite for students to complete their school's written works. Furthermore, it develops academic skills, a better understanding of topics being discussed, and enables people to hear thoughts and ideas. A reflective essay consists of some parts, such as an introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction is a part where the writer/speaker reveals the ultimate emphasis of the reflection, either directly or indirectly. The reflective essay's body discusses how the writer has grown or what he or she has learned. It also describes what influenced the writer's decision to alter. In the conclusion of a reflective essay, the writer sums up how he or she has changed or the effect of those changes. As Hudspeth (2020) states, a reflective essay is an essay in which the writer examines his or her experiences in life. The writer then writes about those experiences, exploring how he or she has changed, developed, or grown from those experiences. Moreover, a reflective essay requires the author to inform the reader about his or her attitude, idea, or impression regarding a given topic.

Generally, four common problems often happen in academic and creative writing, including reflective essays. They are content, organizing, vocabulary, and grammar (Nagabo, 2003). Based on the second problem (organizing), he explained three sub-problems: the unity of the paragraph, the coherence of the paragraph, and the transitions between paragraphs. It means that some writers struggle to organize their written products in such a way that they cannot compose an efficient or decent paragraph that describes the material easily and logically so that the reader understands it.

Appropriately using discourse markers is an essential component of academic writing, and a lack of them is seen as a huge error among second language authors. Discourse markers are a linguistic tool that helps pupils write more successfully. It function as structural features that help the reader's comprehension of the text. Furthermore, discourse markers aid in the construction of coherent discourse, which is the character and content of academic writing (Karaata et al., 2012). According to Martinez (2004), discourse markers are a series of signals that add coherence and cohesiveness to a conversation. Thus, Zhao (2013) discovers that discourse markers not only

allow for unimpeded communication but also offer consistency to the conversation.

Discourse markers, according to Kamali and Noori (2015), are concerned with cohesiveness in the writing operation. Many of the issues that ESL students have with writing coherence may be resolved. They also demonstrate that students in English classes are more concerned with word and sentence construction than textual coherence, despite the fact that the latter is vital in essay writing, particularly the reflective essay.

Swan and Smith (2005) define a discourse marker as "a word or expression which shows the connection between what is being said and the wider context." This definition implies that certain linguistic units either connect a sentence to what comes before or after it or imply a speaker's attitude toward what he or she is saying, enhancing textual cohesion and comprehensibility. Swan and Smith's viewpoint is backed up by Kopple (1985), who claims that discourse markers are linguistic items that occur in both spoken and written language and aid the listener or reader in organizing, interpreting, and evaluating content. Based on Kopple's viewpoint, Blakemore (1992) states that "every speaker must make some decision about what to make explicit and what to leave implicit, and that every speaker must make some decision about the extent to which the linguistic form of his utterance can direct the interpretation process." Blackmore's observation is applicable for both written and spoken discourse.

Discourse markers signal the listener or reader of text continuity or the relationship between the previous and subsequent texts. They connect the various text elements to help the reader predict the direction of the discourse flow. This observation might explain why Brown and Levinson (1987), cited by Barnabas and Adamu (2012), state that skillful use of discourse markers also suggests a higher level of fluency and ability to make and understand authentic language. Similarly, Litman (1996), cited by Barnabas & Adamu (2012), are linguistic devices that enable a writer to structure a discourse by signaling to the reader the relationship between the current and previous discourses. In this regard, as cited by Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002) and Sperber and Wilson (1995), discourse markers limit the implicatures a listener can derive from a conversation, while a conversation without them is open to more than one form of implicature, potentially leading to confusion.

According to Fraser (1990), "a discourse marker is a lexical expression which signals the relation of either contrast (James is fat but Mary is thin), implication (John is here, so we can start the party), or elaboration (John went home. Furthermore, he took his toys) between the interpretation of segment two and segment one. "In essay writing, DMs are linking words that may be described as the "glue "that holds a piece of writing together and holds the various parts of the text together" Gerard (2010). Thus, it builds cohesion in writing and conveys ideas meaningfully to the readers.

Stance markers are linguistic elements that enable speakers to communicate their opinions, personal behaviors, and feelings, as well as their degree of commitment to ideas. The writer's stance can be described as his or her attitude toward the subject of his or her message.

The importance of discourse and stance markers is based not only on semantic or syntactic aspects of the structural component, but also on pragmatic elements of message formation, which arise in the use of communicative background. Appropriate use of discourse and stance allows writers to organize and present their written pieces of discourse consistently and coherently by informing an audience (reader) of the writer's intentions and attitudes toward the text. Therefore, the present study could likewise be helpful in writing several essays and applying the proper discourse and stance markers to provide comprehensive written output.

This study is therefore an attempt to investigate the use and structure of discourse and stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays. The main reason for this choice of written discourse is related to the fact that reflective essays are one of the most frequently used by ESL learners in their academic and written tasks. However, from the researcher's experience as a language teacher, she observes that ESL students find it difficult to construct organized and coherent reflective essays in English. Furthermore, in conducting the research, the researcher will examine the use and structure of discourse and stance markers applied in ESL students' reflective essays. The current study, therefore, wanted to establish an awareness that discourse and stance markers play a vital role in any spoken and written discourse, thus promoting the correct organization of the sentence, unity, and coherence of paragraphs as well as transitions between paragraphs.

### Research Questions

The study aimed to identify and analyze the discourse and stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays. It further explores the function, structure, and classification of discourse and stance markers. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the discourse and stance markers found in ESL students' reflective essays?
2. What are the functions of discourse markers in ESL students' reflective essays in terms of:
  - 2.1 contrastive markers;
  - 2.2 inferential markers;
  - 2.3 elaborative markers; and
  - 2.4 temporal markers?
3. How may the discourse markers in ESL student's reflective essays be described using Five Syntactic Categories such as:
  - 3.1 coordinate conjunctions;
  - 3.2 subordinate conjunctions;

- 3.3 conjunctive adverbs;
- 3.4 prepositions; and
- 3.5 prepositional phrases?
4. What are the classifications of stance markers in ESL student's essays in terms of:
  - 4.1 hedges;
  - 4.2 boosters;
  - 4.3 attitude markers; and
  - 4.4 self-mentions?
5. How may stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays be described in terms of grammatical and semantic categories?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study is descriptive in nature and employed quantitative approach to count the discourse and stance markers used in ESL students' reflective essays and qualitative for the analysis of functions of discourse and stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays. The quantitative approach shows the number of occurrences of discourse and stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays. Thus, it identifies patterns of discourse that characterize the account of collective insights of ESL students' reflective essays. Using language-analysis approaches established by variation theory to account for the use and distribution of features in discourse by Fraser (1999), Knott (1996) and stance by Hyland (2005) and Biber (2004).

Generally, the study uses in-depth discourse analysis and its functions to fully gain a clear understanding of the application of discourse and stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays. As Kamali and Noori (2015), discourse markers emphasize organization in the writing process. Stance markers are linguistic choices to express thoughts and feelings in a text, engage their audience, and signal a relationship (Hyland, 2005). Many of the issues that ESL students have in terms of writing coherence and expressing their own ideas may be resolved. They also show that in English classrooms, students are more concerned with word and sentence level than textual coherence, despite the fact that the latter is required when writing an essay.

### Sources of Language Data

For analysis of discourse and stance markers, ESL reflective essays are chosen. It is related to the examination of discourse markers in essay writing in an ESL classroom (Al-khazraji, 2019) and stance analysis of corporate social responsibility (Wai, 2006). The analysis depicted on ESL students' reflective essays in Marcial B. Villanueva National High School. There are 78 reflective essays gathered from Senior High School Grade 12 students who wrote reflective essays. Their first languages are Bisaya and Tagalog, while English is taught as a second language.

### Sampling Design and Procedures

The reflective essays are gathered from Senior High School Grade 12 students. This study follows the methodology of one of the pioneers of linguistic research, Al-khazraji (2019) of British University in Dubai. Essays from intermediate ESL students in grade 9 were collected for his data analysis method. The qualitative data was thoroughly evaluated and classified depending on its functions. The current study conducted the same thing, but it concentrated on grade 12 ESL reflective essays while taking the following inclusion criteria into account: 1) reflective essays for grade 12 ESL students are 100-word essays on the given topic, with titles such as "A Day in My Life During the Pandemic," "Education During the Pandemic Situation," and "The Spirit of "Bayanihan" amidst the Pandemic;" 2) reflective essay are given as a subject assignment; 3) the essays are handwritten with a time constraint, and topics are brainstormed in class. Written output was collected but randomly chose for analysis.

### Assumptions

An investigation of the discourse and stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays demonstrates relevant and intelligent analysis of the identified features that characterize ESL students' reflective essays with regard to the function, syntactic and semantic category of discourse and stance markers. The following assumptions are put forth in this study:

1. In this study, it is assumed that the ESL students demonstrate essential competencies in writing reflective essays as part of their academic written tasks.
2. The taxonomy of Fraser (1999) and Knott (1996) five syntactic categories are able to manifest quality evaluation in students' written discourse like reflective essays.
3. The Hyland (2005) analysis model and Biber (2004) grammatical constructions and semantic classification are visible and apply in ESL students' written discourse and reflective essays.
4. There are some common characteristics in the ESL students' reflective essays written using discourse and stance markers.

### Data Analysis Plan

For data collection, reflective essays collected from Grade 12 students of Marcial B. Villanueva National High School, following the

set of criteria stated in sampling design and procedures. It is done to reflect the students' grasp and use of discourse and stance markers.

After data gathering, it is ready for data analysis. Before doing the hand-coding analysis, the researcher examined the data several times. The data was examined based on how ESL students employ discourse and stance markers appropriately. Frequencies of the discourse and stance markers found in ESL students' reflective essays were converted to percentage. Further, the data were interpreted and classified according to the functions based from Fraser's (1999) taxonomy. These are Contrastive Discourse Markers (CDMs), Elaborative Discourse Markers (EDMs),

Inferential Discourse Markers (IDMs) and Temporal Discourse Markers (TDMs). It also identified the five syntactic categories of discourse markers such as coordinators, subordinators, conjunctive adverbs, prepositions and prepositional phrases. Hyland's model of analysis and Biber's semantic classification framework of analysis were employed to classify and analyze the stance markers presented in ESL students' reflective essays.

## Results and Discussion

This part presents the interpretation and analysis of ESL students' reflective essays. This section discusses the discourse and stance markers found in ESL students' reflective essays, functions of discourse markers in ESL students' reflective essays, analysis of the syntactic categories of discourse markers in ESL students' reflective essays, and classifications of stance markers in ESL students' reflective essays.

To facilitate discussion of the discourse and stance, markers, instances, prototypes, and exemplars are provided. Comparison and distinction of the outcomes with the existing literature and readings are additionally put forth to strengthen, challenge, or create new pathways to the corpus of knowledge.

### Discourse markers found in ESL reflective essays

Table 1. *Discourse Markers in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Discourse Markers</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
And	462	50.11
Because	118	12.80
But	105	11.39
As	46	4.99
So	36	3.90
Or	34	3.69
Like	23	2.49
Before	22	2.39
Since	17	1.84
Despite	12	1.31
Still	10	1.08
After	10	1.08
However	8	.87
Yet	7	.76
For example	6	.65
As a result	6	.65
Total	922	100

Table 1 presents the different discourse markers found in ESL students' reflective essays. The results showed that from the three groups of corpora, discourse marker and ranked first and has the greatest number of uses with a frequency of 462. This was due to the fact that discourse marker and was used to signal a quasi-parallel relationship between S2 and S1 (Fraser, 1999). As such, it was in the case in the written text of the Philippine English and serves as the marker used by Filipino in writing their personal insight about certain things.

On the other hand, discourse markers for example and as a result had the lowest number of occurrences with a frequency of .65. This means that these discourse markers were not commonly used in ESL students' reflective essays.

Discourse markers were described as the 'glue' that binds together a piece of writing, making the different parts of the text 'stick together'. But it was also mentioned that it does not necessarily be abundant in a spoken and written text. Though it was used as connectors, it is not a requirement to be too heavy on discourse markers (Chuang, 2017).

Table 2 presents the stance markers categories in ESL students' reflective essays. The results showed that stance marker I ranked first and has the highest number of uses with a frequency of 18.22. This was due to the fact that stance marker I is a first-person pronoun that serves to signal the author's visibility explicitly and their willingness to take responsibility for their actions (Hyland, 2002). This means that ESL students' reflective essays writers expressed their personal claim and explore how they grown from those experiences.

On the other hand, stance marker unfortunately had the least number of occurrences with a frequency of .42. This suggests that this stance marker was not often employed in the reflective writings of ESL students.

Table 2. *Stance Markers in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Stance Markers</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
I	86	18.22
Will	82	17.37
Can	78	16.53
We	42	8.91
Could	38	8.05
May	36	7.63
Must	34	7.20
Us	28	5.93
Should	23	4.87
Our	18	3.81
Always	5	1.06
Unfortunately	2	.42
Total	472	100

Wang and Zeng (2021) suggested that stance markers help authors project their identities in writing. Furthermore, it is the expression of personal sentiments, attitudes, and the worth of judgements or evaluations by the speakers and authors.

### Functions of discourse markers in ESL reflective essays

Table 3. *Contrastive Discourse Markers (CDMs) in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Functions</i>	<i>Discourse Markers</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Contrastive	But	105	73.94
	Despite	12	8.45
	Still	10	7.04
	However	8	5.63
	Yet	7	4.94
Total		142	100

Table 3 shows that all discourse markers that function as contrastive obtained a frequency of 142 occurrences composing of 100 percent of the total contrastive discourse markers in ESL reflective essays.

In discourse markers classifications, Calhoun (2009) stated that contrastiveness is an important feature of discourse which lies at the intersection of prosodic, semantic and pragmatic systems. The contrastiveness occurs when a speaker has an intention to make the salient contrast between a particular element in an utterance and other entity or concept. The discourse marker found in ESL reflective essays for this classification include the following: but, despite, still, however and yet.

The gathered data showed that the discourse marker but has the highest number of instances or 73.94 percent which was followed by despite with a frequency of 12 and discourse marker still on being the third rank with 10 occurrences. These are shown as follows:

*As a student, I am experiencing hardship in terms of our learning process nowadays but I realized that this kind of learning system made me more resilient and tough student.*

*The pandemic era makes my life boring but a lot of realization like appreciating and spending more time with my family.*

*We can overcome this challenge and be successful despite this pandemic that we are facing right now.*

*Everyone is suffering emotionally, physically and mentally in this time of pandemic still the spirit of 'bayanihan' remains among us.*

These only indicated that these contrastive discourse markers (CDMs) were commonly used in writing essays as they are forming contrastive ideas between or among context or sentences.

While discourse markers however (f=8) and yet (f=7) had few occurrences in the ESL reflective essays. Examples of CDMs using however and yet are shown below:

*Schools were forced to close due to the pandemic. However, education must continue through modular learning.*

*It was very challenging yet interesting one because I tried to do school work alone.*

As such, CDMs however and yet were less familiar and seldom encounter in the ESL students' reflective essays. Contrastive discourse markers signal the explicit interpretation of S2 contrasts with an interpretation of S1 (Fraser, 1999).

Table 4 indicates the elaborative discourse markers found in the ESL reflective essays. All discourse markers function as elaborative gained a frequency of 525 and these are and, or, like and for example. Fraser (1999) distinguished elaborative discourse markers

(EDMs) as one which Elaborative discourse markers (EDMs) signify that the information included in the discourse segments that contain them is an amplification of earlier segments' content.

Table 4. *Elaborative Discourse Markers (EDMs) in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

Functions	Discourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Elaborative	And	462	88
	Or	34	6.48
	Like	23	4.38
	For example	6	1.14
Total		525	100

The most dominant among the elaborative discourse marker is and with a frequency of 462 or 88 percent, or constitutes 6.48 percent, like is used 23 times of the entire corpus. Examples of EDMs and, or and like are presented below:

*Social distancing must be observed and followed every time we go outside.*

*I am not smart or gifted with talents that's why I find difficulty in modular distance learning.*

*I hope that the delivery of teaching like face-to-face schooling will be back soon.*

Meanwhile, elaborative discourse marker for example got only 6 occurrences in the whole ESL reflective essays. Prototypes are as follows:

*The spirit of "bayanihan" remains in this time of pandemic. For example, the community pantry, which was built by our "kababayan," its main goal is to help and give food to the poor.*

This means that for example used to emphasize and introduce something that shows that something is true.

Table 5. *Inferential Discourse Markers (IDMs) in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

Functions	Discourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Inferential	Because	118	52.92
	As	46	20.63
	So	36	16.14
	Since	17	7.62
	As a result	6	2.69
Total		223	100

Table 5 presents the inferential discourse markers found in ESL reflective essays. Inferential discourse marker because ( $f=118$ ) is of the highest frequency. Because usually used in relating sentences and stating cause and effect (Fraser, 1999). The IDMs as is identified with 46 occurrences, so with a frequency of 36, since is used 17 times in the ESL reflective essays while as a result ( $f=6$ ) is of the lowest frequency among the inferential discourse markers, to wit:

*I am so grateful because I am here fighting against COVID-19 for my dreams and future.*

*This pandemic is difficult for me because my family is enduring financial difficulties.*

*As a millennial, I encountered different kinds of 'bayanihan' and they did it with a heart.*

*Modular learning is not an easy way of studying so I need to work harder and give my best effort in answering my modules.*

*I must continue my studies since I need it in my future*

*Because of pandemic the government ordered to close all the schools, as a result modular distance learning implemented.*

According to Fraser (1999) Inferential discourse markers indicate that the second phrase argues with others and needs to complete the first. It also differentiates subclasses of supplemental discourse markers, which identify the second phrase to explain the material available in the preceding one such as because, since, and as a result.

Table 6. *Temporal Discourse Markers (TDMs) in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

Functions	Discourse Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Temporal	Before	22	68.75
	After	10	31.25
Total		32	100

Table 6 displays temporal discourse markers found in ESL reflective essays. Temporal Discourse Markers before utilized 22 times in the entire corpora and after got 10 occurrences. This means that temporal discourse markers were not often used by the ESL students in their written output or essays. Examples are listed below:

*I just stayed home because of the pandemic. I help my mother doing different household chores before I answer my modules.*

*I wish that face-to-face classes would be back after this pandemic.*

Knott (1996) described temporal discourse markers such as before and after as triggers for discourse relations expressing a temporal relation.

Table 7. *Functions of Discourse Markers in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Functions of discourse markers</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Elaborative discourse markers (EDMs)	525	56.94
Inferential discourse markers (IDMs)	223	24.19
Contrastive discourse markers (CDMs)	142	15.40
Temporal discourse markers (TDMs)	32	3.47
Total	922	100

Table 7 illustrates the functions of discourse markers in ESL reflective essays. The results showed that the discourse markers which is commonly used by the ESL students in writing reflective essays is elaborative discourse markers with a frequency of 525 or 56.94 percent. Followed by inferential discourse markers which is used 223 times or 24.19 percent, contrastive discourse markers (f=142) is on the third rank and temporal discourse markers which is used 32 times (3.47%).

Nunan (1993) and Dulger (2007) described discourse markers are words or phrases that classify, comment on, or define what people say and write. They help to show how the present utterance relates to preceding discourse. As such, discourse markers have important role to organize the essays effectively, they connect the sentences like a bridge and as the result the message from the writer can be understood clearly.

Table 8. *Analysis of the Structure of Discourse Markers in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Syntactic Categories</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Coordinators	12	40.00
Subordinators	8	26.67
Conjunctive Adverb	5	16.67
Prepositions	3	10.00
Prepositional Phrases	2	6.66
Total	30	100

Table 8 presents analysis of the structure of discourse markers in ESL reflective essays. The results showed that coordinators category received 12 occurrences of discourse markers which is 40 percent highest among the total number of discourse markers. On the other hand, prepositional phrases category got 2 occurrences which is the lowest percentage of the total discourse markers according to structure. The discourse markers analyzed using coordinators category included the following discourse markers and, but. Examples are listed below:

*When the government ordered the closing of schools, I felt sad and I tried harder to answer my modules.*

*I spent more time with my family and my siblings were happy to play inside the house.*

*This pandemic season gave a huge impact on our lives both positive and negative.*

*Every time I answered my modules, I thought I should stop my studies, but my mother pushed me to continue and told me that it was for my own sake.*

*They announced that the classes will start again but in new normal, modular classes.*

Coordinators linked the clauses which are equal constituents of a sentence. They always appear in between the clauses they link.

The sentences above indicated the discourse marker and and but as a coordinators that connect clauses, sentences or words of equal syntactic importance (e.g. and, or, for). In exemplar 1, the discourse marker and was used to connect two independent clauses "I felt sad" and "I tried harder to answer my modules".

Similarly, in exemplars 22 and 23, a connection between words of equal syntactic importance, "my family" and "my siblings" and "positive" and "negative".

The exemplars 24 and 25, discourse marker but used to link and connect ideas that are contrasted. It showed the contrasting point of view of two persons/ scenario portrayed in fourth and fifth sentence.

And and but as a discourse marker served discourse connectives (Blakemore, 1987, 1992). Discourse markers were done under a variety of labels including, but not limited to cue phrases (Knott and Dale, 1994).

Meanwhile, the discourse marker analyzed using subordinators category included the following discourse markers: because, as.

Subordinators functioned as exemplifications of particular types of clauses. It was used in real conditional clauses, are either finite or non-finite (depending on the form of the verb). They have a syntactic function in another clause, and are thus syntactically dependent. They cannot function on their own as complete, independent sentences.

*Because as Filipinos we need to keep the culture of “bayanihan” and I always tried to help others in my own little ways.*

*Because of the pandemic our family experienced financial problems.*

*As a student, the pandemic situation is difficult for us because of the new normal in education.*

*Many parents have a hard time taking care of their children and acting as home tutors.*

The discourse marker because was portrayed in exemplars 26 and 27. In this context, because was a subordinate conjunction that was used at the beginning of subordinate clauses. Both exemplars 26 and 27 used because at the initial position in the sentence that showed the subordinate clause.

Exemplar 8 displayed the discourse marker as in the initial position of the sentence and introduced the subordinate clause. Unlike in exemplar 29, discourse marker as placed in the last part of the sentence. This means that discourse marker as use to introduce two events happening at the same time.

Another discourse marker was analyzed using conjunctive adverb category, it included the following discourse markers so, still.

*“Bayanihan” spirit is present amidst the pandemic, so immediately an individual who has a good heart gives some donations for the poor.*

*Education in the new normal has implemented modular learning, so technically it can be obtained from printed materials given by the teachers.*

*Everybody is still suffering emotionally, physically and mentally.*

Exemplars 30 and 31 presented discourse marker so as conjunctive adverb which was preceded by another adverb. Discourse marker so is a connective that connects a word or phrase that plays a role in managing the flow and structure of discourse.

Exemplar 32 comprised discourse marker still which indicates that something continues up to a time in the past, present and future. It goes in the front of the main verb.

According to Bolden (2009), the discourse marker so is most commonly described as indexing inferential or casual connections.

Furthermore, the analyzed discourse markers using the prepositions category included the discourse marker despite.

*I believed in the spirit of “bayanihan” despite the pandemic.*

*Despite the circumstances and hardship that we are having right now, there are some people who have a good heart and help others who are in need.*

In exemplar 33, it showed the discourse marker despite is used to connect two contrasting ideas. It is presented at the middle of the sentence. Exemplar 34 indicated that discourse marker despite illustrated the link of two different sides that showed that one fact makes the other surprising and is presented in the beginning of the sentence. The discourse marker despite was utilized as preposition that expresses a relation to another word or element in the clause.

Lastly, the discourse markers analyzed using the prepositional phrases included the discourse marker as a result.

*Our education has drastically changed, as a result, learning whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms and modular.*

*Pandemic causes a lot of uncertainties in our life, as a result, many people lost their job and suffer.*

Exemplar 35 displayed the discourse marker as a result as prepositional phrase which consist of the object it governs “learning”.

Exemplar 36 discourse marker as a result is used to modify a clause “many people lost their job and suffer”.

Table 9. Stance Markers Categories in ESL Students’ Reflective Essays

Stance Markers Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Self-mentions	174	36.86
Hedges	157	33.26
Boosters	105	22.25
Attitude markers	36	7.63
Total	472	100

Table 9 indicates the stance markers categories in ESL students’ reflective essays, self-mention (f=174) is of highest frequency. Self-

mention refers to the use of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present propositional, affective and interpersonal information (Hyland, 2001). As Wang and Zeng (2021) point out that student writer use self-mention with hedges and boosters. The stance markers for this category include the following I, we, us, our, to wit:

*I always think that all the challenges that came into my life will make me a strong person.*

*I always listen to my parent's advice.*

*We will survive and pass this pandemic season.*

*The spirit of "bayanihan" starts on us, by helping each other to survive.*

*I am grateful that our teachers have compassion and consideration for their students.*

The most visible and prominent presence of authorial identity is the first-person pronoun as it is perceived as "a significant means of gaining acceptance for one's idea" (Hyland, 2002). In addition, studies show the use of first-person pronoun has undergone a dramatic increase in writing particularly, I and we are identified as the most commonly used self-reference among all.

Stance marker hedges gained a frequency of 157 or 33.26 percent. Hedges are used to express probability or caution rather than full accuracy and certainty. Stance markers in this category consists of the following: could, can, may and always.

*I always pray that one this pandemic would end.*

*As an independent learner, I can manage to answer my modules.*

*We may not able to go to school because of pandemic that's why modular learning implemented.*

Hedges are considered as linguistic devices to express hesitation or uncertainty. This signifies that the writer's decision to refrain from making a full commitment to a proposition, allowing information to be viewed as an opinion rather than a proven fact.

Boosters are the stance markers that comprises 105 occurrences in ESL students' reflective essays. It provides the writer the opportunity to express certainty and emphasize specific point in the writing. Stance markers in this category includes the following: will and must.

*Despite the fact that modular learning is difficult, I will continue my studies because it's for my own future.*

*We must maintain the culture of "bayanihan" even in the middle of pandemic.*

Another category of stance marker is the attitude markers which obtained a frequency of 36 occurrences or 7.63 percent. Attitude markers show the writer's viewpoint, perspective or behavioral attitude regarding assertions conveying significance, surprise, and agreement. These includes the following: must, should and unfortunately.

*COVID-19 scares a lot of people but we should see the good through bad.*

*We must follow the safety protocol to avoid the COVID-19 virus.*

*Before we have a traditional way of education like face-to-face classes, unfortunately, the government ordered the closing of schools because of pandemic.*

Attitude markers are words which assist writers to convey their evaluation, feeling and attitude towards the discussion in the written text. Besides, these stance markers inform readers about the author's point of view and his position in the text.

**Table 10. Stance Markers Grammatical Category in ESL Students' Reflective Essays**

<i>Grammatical Categories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Modals	257	97.35
Complement clauses	5	1.89
Stance adverbials	2	.76
Total	264	100

Table 10 presents stance markers grammatical category in ESL students' reflective essays. Grammatical stance consists of two independent language components, one of which presents the stance and the other of which presents a proposition framed by the stance (Biber et al. 1999). Three common devices: modals, stance complement clauses and stance adverbials.

Modals are the most commonly used grammatical categories of stance markers with a frequency of 257 or 97.35 percent. In grammar and semantics, modals refer to linguistic devices that indicate the degree to which an observation is possible, probable, likely, certain permitted or prohibited. These includes the following: could, can, may, will, should and must.

Complement clauses have 5 occurrences, but stance adverbials ( $f = 2$ ) are far less common than the other grammatical categories.

Table 11 indicates the semantic categories of modals in ESL students' reflective essays. There are three major kinds of modals, each of which performs a different set of semantic-pragmatic tasks. These are the modals of prediction/volition, obligation/necessity, and

permission/possibility/ability. (Biber et al. 1999).

Table 11. *Semantic Category of Modals in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Semantic categories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Possibility/permission/ability	154	59.92
Prediction/volition	77	29.96
Logical necessary/obligation	26	10.12
Total	257	100

The most dominant among the semantic categories of modals verbs is modals marking possibility/permission/ability with a frequency of 154 or 59.92 percent. These includes the following: can, could, and may. The exemplars of this category is shown as follows:

*The government believes that we can surpass this pandemic if we follow the safety protocol.*

*I can help my siblings in answering their modules since I am the eldest in the family.*

Exemplar 50 stance marker can used to express possibility. The stance marker can is frequently employed to denote "possibility," i.e. as derived from an inherent capability of the topic rather than as a speaker's qualification of a statement.

The word can is used to signify consent. It is also realized as the subject's capacity in relation to dynamic conditions and perceptions. Can be used to demonstrate ability in Exemplification 51.

The modals marking prediction/ volition follows occurring 77 times, mainly due to the contribution of will in ESL students' reflective essays. Will is widely employed to signify a forecast (about the future) and a personal volition. In ESL reflective essays, students seek to project into the future and foresee growth and development. These are illustrated as follows:

*As a Filipino youth, I will do my best to help others and government to end this pandemic.*

*The spirit of "bayanihan" will give a positive vibe in our life.*

According to Collins (2005), will usually stipulates that we are taking about forthcoming incident or condition. Exemplar 52 will state a personal volition. The subject "I" or "we" express personal intentions in a declarative sentence (Collins 2005).

Exemplar 53 will be used to express logical prediction. The writer tried to predict future result that is related to a person's life.

The modals marking logical necessary/obligation occurs 10.12 percent. It comprises stance markers must and should. Must is used externally to imply that a certain circumstance is definitely real and that this may be deduced from a set of facts. Prototypes are presented below:

*Despite of pandemic, education must continue and deliver to every child.*

*I should help my parents in doing household chores that's how I spent my day during the pandemic.*

In exemplar 54, must is used to emphasize the extrinsic need of meeting specific criteria. Stance marker must in exemplar 54 used intrinsically to denote personal obligation.

Must is most commonly used in conversation to indicate rational necessity, although it is somewhat more commonly employed in academic writing to indicate personal responsibility. (Biber et al. 1999).

Table 12. *Semantic Category of Complement Clauses and Stance Adverbial in ESL Students' Reflective Essays*

<i>Semantic categories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Factive	2	40
Attitudinal	2	40
Likelihood	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 12 displays the semantic category of complement clauses in ESL students' reflective essays. Complement clauses are a form of dependent clause that is used to fulfill the meaning connection of a higher clause's related verb or adjective (Biber et al. 1999).

Factive and attitudinal semantic categories recognized 40 percent of the total semantic categories by means of that-complement clause. These are the most common among the four semantic classes.

Semantic category likelihood denoted 20 percent while non-factive category does not exist in the ESL students' reflective essays. Examples are illustrated below:

*Because of pandemic I realize that we need to be thankful for the blessing of life.*

*I learn that "bayanihan" is important just like the saying goes "No man is an island"*

*I hope that face to face classes will be back soon.*

*Our family believes that we can survive this pandemic.*

In the examples listed, that-complement clauses controlled by verbs realize and learn (factive), hope (attitudinal) and believe (likelihood). That-complement clauses in post-predicate position are significantly more prevalent than that-clauses in subject position or extra posed that-clauses. “First person pronoun + stance verb + that-clause” is an extremely common structural pattern to express writer’s thoughts and attitudes in various semantic domains.

Only attitudinal semantic category of stance adverbial exists in the reflective essays of the ESL students. Examples are as follows:

*Before we have a traditional way of education like face-to-face classes unfortunately the government ordered the closing of schools because of pandemic.*

*I had a normal life and always go outside with my friends unfortunately the government mandated not to go out of the house.*

Exemplars 60 and 61, attitudinal stance adverbial unfortunately convey the speaker’s and writer’s perspective or importance of judgment about the proposition content.

Biber et al. (1999) suggests that attitudinal adverbials express the writer's or speaker's attitude toward a statement through providing an evaluation, value, judgment, or appraisal of anticipation.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

**Discourse markers functions and classifications.** Elaborative discourse markers are commonly employed in the development of reflective essays by ESL students to emphasize that the information provided in the discourse segments that contain them is an enhancement of the information communicated by the preceding segment. Inferential discourse markers were used to signal that the current utterance transmits a message that is, in some way, consequential to the prior phrase. Furthermore, contrastive discourse markers were utilized to illustrate that they may operate on their own or follow, connecting two segments of speech as sentence components or independent utterances. Temporal discourse markers were also employed to identify time-based linkages in the sentence's notion.

**Discourse markers syntactic categories.** Deductively investigated, and was the most common coordinator, mainly due to the frequent use of it in ESL reflective essays. Furthermore, it linked clauses which are equal constituents of a sentence and appear in between the clauses, phrases and words they link. On the other hand, subordinators had a syntactic function in another clause and part of a sentence that adds information to the main clause. Because was the most favorable subordinate conjunction that were used at the beginning of dependent clause. ESL students’ reflective essays applied discourse markers such as conjunctive adverbs to indicate a connection between two independent clauses in one sentence. Prepositions and prepositional phrases were used to modify the object in the sentence and composed of group of words consisting of preposition.

**Stance markers categories/classifications.** Stance markers were used to express personal feelings, attitudes, values, and assessments on ESL students’ reflective essays. The grammatical structure that is commonly applied in ESL reflective essays is modals.

Based on the findings and the conclusions, the following recommendations were made: For language researchers: Conduct comparative research of discourse structures and functions, as well as stance markers, employing different genres of essays, such as explanatory, descriptive, and so on. For Language Instructors: Language teachers can apply the concept of discourse and stance markers to analyze how students communicate their ideas rationally and critically, as shown by the usage of discourse and stance markers. Examine the learners' writing abilities, paying great attention to how they demonstrate replies, open and close themes, share information, summarize topics, make linkages and elaborations, and convey their thoughts in different ways.

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