Analysis of Transitional Marker Usage in Expository Essays by First-Year Criminology and Hospitality Management Students at Saint Columban College

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Coherence and cohesion are observed when ideas run smoothly with the use of correct transitional markers. This study examined the use of transitional markers in the essays of first-year Criminology and Hospitality and Management students at Saint Columban College. This study used the quantitative type of research with a purposive sampling technique where the researchers have the freedom to choose those who will be suitable to be part of the study. Analysis of 70 essays, written in response to a standardized prompt on procrastination, reveals limited usage and variety of transitional markers, with Criminology students using eight different markers 33 times, and Hospitality and Management students using nine markers 39 times. Transitional markers primarily served to introduce additional ideas, list ideas in time order, introduce opposing ideas, and conclude. However, Hospitality and Management students demonstrated more accurate usage, while Criminology students often misused markers, particularly "however." Both groups showed a notable absence of markers to introduce examples. These findings highlight a need for enhanced instruction in the effective use of transitional markers to improve academic writing skills.

Materials and Methods: The researcher used a descriptive quantitative research design for this study, where the researcher focused mainly on the transitional markers used by college students in writing academic essays. According to Grove et al. (2013), descriptive designs "may be used to develop theory, identify problems with current practice, justify current practice, make judgments, or determine what others in a similar situation.

Results: Findings revealed that both Criminology and Hospitality and Management first-year students have a limited range of transitional markers in their essays, with Criminology students using eight and Hospitality and Management students using nine. The primary functions of these markers were to introduce additional ideas, sequence thoughts, present contrasts, indicate results, provide examples, and conclude arguments. While Hospitality and Management students generally used transitional markers appropriately, Criminology students struggled, particularly with the contrastive marker "however." Based on these findings, a lesson plan focusing on the proper use and variety of transitional markers can be developed to enhance students' coherence and cohesion in writing.

Conclusion: The results of the study showed that students' understanding of transitional markers was limited, and their knowledge scope was determined. The findings show that the absence of transitional markers and their improper application are.

Keywords: Coherence, Cohesion, Transitional Marker, Expository Essay

Introduction

Writing is one of the four macro skills in language learning and is widely regarded as the most difficult to teach and learn (Ceylan, 2019). It plays a central role in developing learners' communicative competence alongside reading, speaking, and listening (Wissinger & De La Paz, 2020). According to Moses and Mohamad (2019), the mastery of English necessitates the balanced development of all four language skills, with writing requiring deliberate, sustained instruction. Writing facilitates the clear articulation of ideas, arguments, and perspectives, making it essential for academic and professional success. Hidayat et al. (2019) emphasize that students' ability to communicate effectively through writing significantly impacts their interactions with instructors, employers, and peers. Moreover, research by Noori (2020) suggests that a lack of writing proficiency can hinder academic performance, limit critical thinking, and restrict participation in meaningful academic discourse.

Effective writing depends largely on the presence of coherence and cohesion—two interrelated features that ensure the logical progression and clarity of ideas (Farida & Rosyidi, 2019). Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical links within a text, while coherence involves the logical sequencing of thoughts. Transitional markers, also known as discourse markers or linking devices, play a key role in establishing these connections by signaling relationships between sentences and guiding the reader through the text (Masadeh, 2019; Lili, 2021).

Despite their importance, transitional markers are frequently misused or underused by learners of English as a second language (Alharbi, 2021; Giddi et al., 2022). Walková (2020) found that poor control of these markers can lead to fragmented and confusing writing. Similarly, Ahmed (2019) noted that inconsistencies in transition use negatively affect the overall unity and coherence of students' texts. These issues are especially problematic in academic writing, where clarity and logical structure are paramount.

This study investigates the use of transitional markers in expository essays written by first-year Hospitality Management and Criminology students at Saint Columban College. Specifically, it examines the types, functions, and common errors in transitional marker usage to identify key challenges and inform instructional practices in Purposive Communication courses. The findings are expected to support the development of targeted pedagogical interventions that enhance coherence and cohesion in students' academic writing.

Objectives

The study aimed to describe the Transitional markers used by College Students in Writing Expository essays. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What specific types of transitional markers are frequently or infrequently used by first-year Criminology and Hospitality Management students in their expository essays?

2. What are the specific communicative functions (e.g., addition, contrast, sequence, conclusion) that these transitional markers serve in students' written outputs?

3. What are the common patterns and types of errors committed by students in the use of transitional markers, including issues of placement, selection, and grammatical correctness?

4. How can the findings be used to design a targeted lesson plan that addresses students' difficulties in using transitional markers to improve coherence and cohesion in academic writing?

Literature review

Writing and Its Role in Academic Literacy

Writing is widely recognized as a cornerstone of academic literacy, especially in higher education contexts, whereby students must submit texts that are logically structured and linguistically cohesive. According to Putra and Marlina (2021), academic writing requires students not simply to master language mechanics, but also to organize discourse, a skill that usually presents a considerable obstacle for students working in non-native English contexts. Recent investigations agree that writing is a lot more than accuracy at the sentence level; it is a combination of rhetorical control, genre knowledge, and coherence (Tran, 2020). Such consolidation of the components presents a rather

formidable challenge to first-year university students still shifting gears from general communicative tasks to formal discipline-based academic writing.

In applied linguistics, writing is no longer seen simply as a tool for expressing predefined ideas; rather, it is seen as an act of generating knowledge, coherently arguing, and negotiating meaning in the academic discourse communities (Usman & Saleh, 2023). This means that academic writing is indeed an educative process, and its success rests on the acquisition of instruments for reasoning and logic, proper use of transitional devices being one such tool.

Cohesion, Coherence, and Transitional Markers

Cohesion and coherence remain foundational to effective writing. Cohesion refers to the range of surface-level grammatical and lexical devices linking parts of the text, while coherence stands for the arrangements of the logical ordering of ideas below this level of cohesion (Al-Tamimi & Attamimi, 2022). In their study on the cohesion concerning tertiary levels of learners, Bukar and Ndahi (2023) found that adequate student writers tended to use a rather limited range of cohesive devices, with transitional markers often overused or underused, leading to imbalances of redundancy or conceptual gaps. By showing how sentences and paragraphs relate to one another logically: cause-effect, comparison, contrast, addition, or conclusion, transitive markers are great instruments for the establishment of coherence and cohesion.

Nambiar and Tay (2021) furthered this research, claiming that direct instructions on transitional devices significantly increase cohesion in undergraduate essays. Transitions embedded within genre-based instruction—especially in expository and argumentative writing—lead to a better organization of texts and clarity of thoughts presented by students. Cohesive writing cuts down any extra effort on the part of the reader and enhances academic texts' interpretability. The right use of transitions, Yilmaz and Karatas (2023) argue, not only vis-à-vis readability; it also weighs on how the audience perceives the credibility of the writer and their reasoning abilities. This becomes especially relevant for fields such as Criminology and Hospitality, where clearly understood exposition can be a matter of life and death (Hassan, 2021).

Challenges in Using Transitional Markers Among L2 Writers

Despite the recognized importance of transitions, many college-level L2 writers encounter difficulties in mastering their proper usage. Balinas and Magulod (2022) reported that the students often used transitions repetitively (e.g., also, but, because) without investigating the use of other more subtle markers (nevertheless, in contrast, or as a result). This resulted in a mechanically written text without rhetorical reflections. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Ismail and Ariffin (2021) when they reported that the conjunctive adverbs were either misplaced by L2 writers or applied unrealistically in logical incoherence.

In comparison with the present research, Zhang (2023) has found in a study of Chinese and Southeast-Asians undergraduate writings that incorrect use of transitions was one leading causes of incoherent paragraphs. These problems included redundancy and confusion of discourse functions, for instance, the use of however to introduce examples, and also the exclusion of logical connectives. Transition marker errors tend to increase significantly during timed writing tasks, which closely resembles the one featured in this study - essay prompt. Alavi and Alavi (2019) have even suggested that the very same students who know common transitions usually do not realize the functional distinctions, such as additive versus contrastive or sequential devices. In this way, metalinguistic knowledge is being impoverished from these traits since teaching focuses mostly on grammar or vocabulary, neglecting coherence at the level of discourse.

Instructional Interventions and Research Gap

There have been proposed pedagogic solutions, but the implementation of these solutions has been relatively inconsistent across disciplines. Kumar and Lata (2020) support a recommendation for the integration of transitional markers in composition teaching, not as a standalone grammar lesson but as something integrated into genre-based writing frameworks, especially within the context of technical or vocational programs-like Hospitality Management. When students receive instruction on transitions as they pertain to essay structures and their discourse goals, their functions are more likely to be internalized.

However, most of the studies so far have drawn upon either general EFL populations or English majors; not much focused study has thus far been done into transitional marker use in specific disciplines, mostly being Criminology and Hospitality programs. Typically, these students will engage in factual and evidence-based writing wherein clarity and logical flow are of utmost importance. However, not much is known about the way they use transitions in their expository writing tasks or which types of errors are most predominant in their writing.

The present study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing how first-year expository essays of Criminology and Hospitality Management students at Saint Columban College are used, function, and are misapplied by students with special reference to transitional markers. The outcomes will provide insights relevant to targeted writing instruction and can aid in the formulation of a lesson plan geared toward fostering coherence through the explicit teaching of transitional markers in academic contexts.
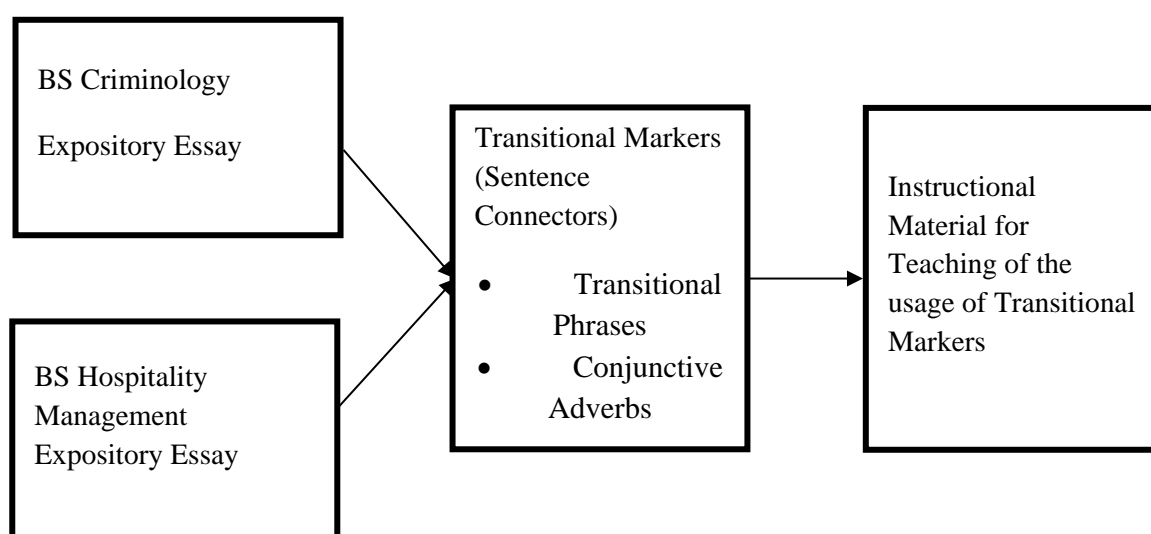
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: The Schematic Diagram of the Study

The diagram in Figure 1 shows the expository essays written by first-year BS Criminology and BS Hotel and Management students. It functions as a guide for comprehending the usage of transitional markers (sentence connectors) in writing expository essays and their possible use in educational environments.

Transitional words and phrases connect ideas within a paragraph. It indicates whether you are presenting a similar or opposing notion, an example, or a conclusion (Bailey, 2006). Writing without transitions can be rigid and monotonous, making it difficult for readers to follow paragraphs. To ensure readers comprehend the intended meaning of a paragraph, students should learn to utilize proper transitions to connect phrases or ideas (Schorr, 2005). Within this framework, we aim to describe the usage of transitional markers of BS Criminology and BS Hotel and Management expository essays. The horizontal arrow in the Transitional Markers (sentence connector) sections represents the transfer of knowledge and insights acquired through the written expository essays of first-year BS Criminology and BS Hotel and Management to the creation of instructional materials. These materials are specifically created to aid in the instruction of transitional markers as illustrative examples.

Methodology

The researcher used a descriptive quantitative research design for this study, where the researcher focused mainly on the transitional markers used by college students in writing academic essays. According to Grove et al. (2013), descriptive designs "may be used to develop theory, identify problems with current practice, justify current practice, make judgments, or determine what others in

similar situations are doing" (p.215). This research enables the researcher to describe the Transitional Markers used by College students, particularly Criminology and Hospitality Management students, in writing an expository essay. The researchers gathered data from the essays written by the students. A descriptive research design was employed in this study to explain the current phenomenon on which this study is focused.

This study was conducted in one of the private and prestigious schools in the city of Pagadian, Zamboanga Del Sur, which undeniably offers high-quality education while committing to its institutional foundation. This study was participated in by thirty-six (36) first-year students from Hospitality Management and thirty-four (34) first-year students from Criminology. The researchers employed a purposive sampling technique, which is a type of non-probability sampling method that involves the deliberate selection of participants based on specific, predefined characteristics that are directly relevant to the aims of the study. Unlike random sampling, which seeks to generalize results to a broader population, purposive sampling focuses on obtaining rich, relevant, and context-specific data from individuals who are most likely to provide meaningful insights into the research problem.

For data analysis, the researchers utilized AntConc (version 3.5.9), a widely recognized corpus analysis toolkit developed by Laurence Anthony. AntConc was selected for its efficiency, transparency, and accuracy in processing large text corpora, particularly in identifying and quantifying the frequency of specific lexical items—in this case, transitional markers. The tool is highly suitable for linguistic analysis in academic writing, as it can generate concordance lines, keyword lists, collocations, and frequency counts. These features enabled the researchers to isolate instances of transitional markers and examine their patterns of use across the essays.

Results

This section presents the findings on the usage of transitional markers in expository essays written by 70 first-year students enrolled in the Criminology and Hospitality Management programs at Saint Columban College. All essays were written under standardized conditions in response to a prompt titled "The Cause and Effect of Procrastination," with participants allotted one hour to complete their responses. The analysis focuses on the types, frequency, and discourse functions of transitional markers used by students and compares the performance between the two academic groups. The analysis presented in this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these students employ transitional markers in their academic writing. This includes an examination of the types of markers used, their frequency, and their placement within the essays.

A total of 33 transitional markers were identified across the 34 essays submitted by Criminology students. As summarized in Table 1, the most frequently used marker was "also" (12 occurrences), followed by "in conclusion" (7) and "however" (5). Less frequently used markers included "furthermore" and "instead" (3 each), while "ultimately," "in summary," and "additionally" appeared only once each.

Table 1 Common Transitional Markers Used by Criminology Students

Rank	Frequency	Word/Phrase
1	12	also
2	7	in conclusion
3	5	however
4	3	furthermore
4	3	instead
5	1	ultimately
5	1	in summary
5	1	additionally
Total:	33	

Table 1 shows the different transitional markers used by Criminology students. Out of 34 essays made by Criminology students, only eight transitional markers appeared in their essays, with a total of

33 occurrences. Ranked by frequency, *"also"* appears most often (12 times). As has been shown in Mahendra and Dewi (2017), which had a corpus-based study on transitional markers, students in Indonesian EFL at the university level write into academic essays, the current study found "also" to be the most frequently occurring additive marker. In their study by Mahendra and Dewi collected argumentative essays written by students of a major in the English language and reported a result of 159 occurrences of "also", which exceeds the other transitions, including "however" and "moreover".

Their analysis showed that, although students used basic additive transitions frequently, there was not much variation among them, aside from wrong application for contexts necessitating a contrast or example. Present study findings are consistent with the evidence of reliance of first-year Criminology students on familiar markers such as "also" as a sign of their potential overreliance on limited cohesive devices and any underdeveloped knowledge of the functional distinctions of such items.. As described by Oshima & Hogue (1998), *"also"* serves as a transitional marker to introduce supplementary information or ideas, thereby contributing to the coherence and flow of written discourse.

However, the limited variety of additive markers (e.g., few occurrences of "additionally" or "moreover") suggests an overdependence on one familiar transition and a lack of stylistic flexibility. Similarly, "in conclusion", used 7 times, often marked the end of an essay or paragraph. While most students used it appropriately, some misapplied it mid-paragraph or without offering a synthesized summary, leading to structural incoherence. For example, one student introduced "in conclusion" but continued to introduce new ideas, indicating a misunderstanding of its summarizing function. "However", a contrastive marker, appeared 5 times but was frequently misused. In some instances, students inserted it without presenting an opposing idea or placed it awkwardly within a sentence, disrupting the flow. This aligns with previous findings (e.g., Lei, 2012; Ahmed, 2019) that second-language writers often struggle with functional alignment, using transitional markers out of context.

The markers "furthermore" and "instead" were used with moderate frequency (3 each). These were generally applied to extend or contrast ideas and were typically positioned at the start of sentences. Nevertheless, grammatical inconsistencies were sometimes present, such as "Instead, they prefer performing more pleasant work through less important work," which reflects semantic confusion. The least-used markers—"ultimately," "in summary," and "additionally"—suggest that students rarely use resultative or summarizing transitions, which are essential in academic writing for drawing conclusions or emphasizing key points. This omission may point to instructional gaps in teaching the full functional range of transitions beyond just additive or contrastive use.

The transitional marker "also" serves a crucial role in connecting ideas and maintaining the flow of information within a written text. It acts as a bridge between sentences and paragraphs, signaling to the reader that additional information or a related point is being introduced. By incorporating "also" strategically, writers can create a smoother and more engaging reading experience, as it helps to establish logical connections and avoid abrupt transitions. The prevalence of "also" in both the current study and the research by Mahendra and Dewi (2017) highlights its significance as a versatile and commonly used tool in academic writing. In the essays from the Criminology students, they wrote:

"It can *also* affect the health of students by delaying their activities or paperwork that has been given to them." – CSP 31

"Procrastination *also* can affect as missed deadlines and incomplete assignments." – CSP 34

"*Also*, procrastination can hinder academic and professional success." – CSP 19

"Physically, procrastination *also* can make the students drained, and it can lead to some disorder or symptoms..." – CSP 31

"Distractions like social media *also* have an impact because they urge students to put things off..." – CSP 6

"…I go to school, my motorcycle will flat and it takes time to vulcanize the tires and *also* it takes time to put it back after finishing its fix." – CSP 14

"It can *also* leave us feeling unproductive, lazy, and ineffectual." – CSP 18

"A lack of motivation can *also* play a significant role in causing students to not feel engaged or interested in the task at hand." – CSP 27

> "They *also* start to doubt themselves about their studies, which causes them to eventually show poor academic performance." – CSP 7
>
> "There are *also* those who are students addicted to virtual games who are so lazy that they neglect their studies." – CSP 12

The transitional marker **"also"** effectively expresses additive relationships between ideas, as supported by Tran (2020). The analyzed examples demonstrate the proper usage of **"also"** in adding information to sentences. In the sentence written by CSP 34, *"Procrastination also can affect as missed deadlines and incomplete assignments,"* the use of **"also"** is effective because it adds to the previously mentioned negative consequences of procrastination. It highlights that not only does procrastination have an impact on an individual's overall well-being, but it also has tangible repercussions in the form of missed deadlines and unfinished tasks.

The second most used transitional marker is **"in conclusion"** with seven appearances. This transitional marker is used to introduce a concluding statement (Ceylan, 2019). Moreover, **"in conclusion"** serves as a clear signpost to the reader that a particular discussion, argument, or section of text is coming to an end. It marks a transition from the body of the text to the final thoughts or summary. In the essays from the Criminology students, they wrote:

> "*In conclusion*, recognizing that procrastination stems from a variety of causes, including distractions and lack of motivation, is the first step towards addressing this common challenge…" – CSP 32
>
> "*In conclusion*, procrastination among college students is a complex phenomenon with multifaceted causes and far-reaching effects." – CSP 34
>
> "*In conclusion*, procrastination is not a sign of a serious problem…" – CSP 28
>
> "*In conclusion*, student frequently procrastinate their academic work due to a variety of reasons..." - CSP 30
>
> "*In conclusion*, the causes and effects of procrastination among college students can sometimes determine their interest in learning or just throwing it away…" - CSP 2
>
> "*In conclusion*, the causes of procrastination can range from fear of failure, lack of motivation, and poor time management skills. - CSP 12

Although **"in conclusion"** is used properly as their ending statement, some essays fail to provide a comprehensive summary of the main points or arguments presented earlier in the text. A strong conclusion should not merely restate the thesis but should offer a thoughtful synthesis of the evidence and insights discussed throughout the essay. Furthermore, one student incorrectly used the transitional marker **"in conclusion."** This marker is specifically intended to introduce a final statement, as noted by Leli (2021). However, there are essays in which **"in conclusion"** was not used to close a topic, for example, below:

> "*In conclusion*, procrastination remains a formidable challenge among college students, affecting their academic performance and overall well-being. This behavior is often influenced by factors such as fear of failure, poor time management skills, perfectionism, and distractions. Ultimately, by addressing procrastination, students can unlock their full potential and thrive in their academic endeavors and beyond.
>
> However, acknowledging the root causes and implementing effective strategies, such as goal setting, prioritizations, and seeking support when needed." – CSP 23

In the provided example, the phrase **"in conclusion"** is misplaced. It appears before the final thoughts on addressing procrastination and implementing strategies, rather than concluding the essay. This creates a disjointed flow, as the reader expects a summary or final statement after encountering "in conclusion." The proper placement of the phrase would be after the sentence discussing addressing procrastination and implementing strategies, effectively signaling the end of the essay and leaving the reader with a sense of closure.

The third most used transitional marker of Criminology students is *"however,"* which appeared five times in their essays. The transitional marker *"however"* is used to introduce an opposite idea (Zhang et al., 2022). The transitional marker *"however"* functions as a conjunctive adverb and can appear in the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence. It indicates a contradiction, qualification, or contrast between the ideas expressed in the two clauses. In the essays from the Criminology students, they wrote:

> "Procrastination manifests in various ways, depending on the situation. *However*, fundamentally, it is the act of delaying tasks." -CSP 20
>
> "This behavior is widespread in the college environment. *However*, even though most students are cautioned against this habit…" – CSP 20
>
> "Procrastination is a problem that affects many people. *However*, it doesn't have to be this way, we can overcome procrastination by taking action and trusting in God, in all circumstances, because God provides all our needs." – CSP 28
>
> "*However*, procrastination is not related to the fear of failure since postponing is simply a natural manifestation of a person's desire to experience short-term pleasures." – CSP 9
>
> "However, acknowledging the root causes and implementing effective strategies, such as goal setting, prioritizations, and seeking support when needed." – CSP 23

Among the five appearances of the transitional marker *"however,"* only one was used correctly. The correct usage is found in the first example written by CSP 20: "*Procrastination manifests in various ways, depending on the situation. However, fundamentally, it is the act of delaying tasks."* In this instance, *"however"* effectively introduces a contrasting idea while maintaining a smooth flow within the sentence. The other examples either misuse *"however"* by using it as a concluding statement or by introducing a contrasting idea that lacks a clear logical connection to the previous statements. Furthermore, a lot of grammatical errors are present in their statements.

The fourth most used transitional marker is *"furthermore,"* despite being a common transition in writing appeared only three times in the essays. The transitional marker *"furthermore"* is also used to add information or emphasize a point that supports the preceding statement (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). It indicates a continuation or progression of thought, suggesting that the following information is an extension or elaboration of the previous idea. In the essays from the Criminology students, they wrote:

> "*Furthermore*, procrastination has a cycle of procrastination, where students delay passing their task." – CSP 34
>
> "*Furthermore*, students may put off studying or finishing tasks until the last minute due to a lack of desire or interest in the subject matter." – CSP 6
>
> "*Furthermore*, these causes of procrastination will have an effect, a very bad effect when it comes to study, because we cannot focus, study, and learn properly because of these causes." – CSP 28

The transitional marker *"furthermore"* is used properly in their statements. In each instance, it successfully introduces additional information or supporting details that build upon the previous idea, effectively demonstrating a continuation of thought. In the example written by CSP 28, "Furthermore, these causes of procrastination will have an effect, a very bad effect when it comes to study, because we cannot focus, study and learn properly because of this causes," the use of "furthermore" is appropriate as it signals a continuation of the discussion on the negative consequences of procrastination. It smoothly transitions from the previously mentioned causes to the elaboration on their detrimental impact on studying and learning.

Moreover, the transitional marker *"instead"* also appeared four times. *"Instead"* is primarily used to indicate a substitution or alternative (Walková, 2020). It signifies that one thing is being chosen or done in place of another. In the essays from the Criminology students, they wrote:

> "Distractions, such as social media, play a role, tempting students to procrastinate by engaging in non-essential activities *instead* of focusing on their academic responsibilities." – CSP 34

"Individuals may delay fulfilling a task because they are not interested in it and have no essential reasons for doing it. *Instead*, they prefer performing more pleasant work through less important work." – CSP 21

"Second is lack of motivation, students may not feel motivated to do more enjoyable things *instead*." – CSP 15

The transitional marker *"instead"* is correctly used in all three provided examples. In each case, it effectively introduces an alternative option or choice, contrasting with a previously mentioned or expected action. In the example written by CSP 21, *"Instead, they prefer performing more pleasant through less important work,"* the use of *"instead"* is fitting as it introduces a contrasting action to the previously mentioned avoidance of a task due to a lack of interest. It communicates that individuals opt for more enjoyable activities in place of the task at hand.

Lastly, *"ultimately"*, *"in summary"*, and *"additionally"* were the least used transitional markers, all appearing only once. *"Ultimately"* signals a conclusion or outcome, often after considering various factors or perspectives. *"In summary"* provides a concise overview of the main points discussed. *"Additionally"* introduces supplementary information or strengthens a point. The limited use of these markers might indicate missed opportunities to reinforce key ideas, draw conclusions, or provide further elaboration.

Table 2 The Transitional Markers Used by Hospitality and Management Students

Rank	Frequency	Word/Phrase
1	11	also
2	7	in conclusion
3	6	instead
3	6	however
4	4	lastly
5	2	therefore
6	1	additionally
6	1	furthermore
6	1	second
Total:	39	

Table 2 presents the frequency and types of transitional markers found in the essays of Hospitality and Management students, revealing the use of nine distinct markers with a total of 39 occurrences. As with the Criminology group, "also" was the most frequently used marker, appearing 11 times, which highlights a shared tendency among both groups to rely on basic additive transitions when elaborating on ideas. However, while "also" was generally used appropriately to extend points, the Hospitality students demonstrated slightly more syntactic control and contextual fit, such as when introducing supporting details in the body of the essay. The second most frequent marker, "in conclusion" (7 occurrences), was commonly placed at the end of the essays to signal final thoughts, showing a foundational awareness of paragraph and essay structure. Nonetheless, some students misused the marker by following it with new ideas, which weakened its summarizing function.

Interestingly, "instead" and "however" tied for third with six occurrences each. These markers reflect an attempt to introduce contrast or alternatives; however, accuracy varied. While "instead" was mostly used correctly to signal preference or substitution, "however" was sometimes misapplied without presenting a logically opposing idea, or placed incorrectly within a sentence, similar to errors observed in the Criminology group. "Lastly," with four occurrences, was typically used to introduce a final supporting point, suggesting some students' awareness of sequencing techniques within paragraphs. The markers "therefore" (2), "furthermore" (1), "additionally" (1), and "second" (1) were used infrequently, pointing to a limited lexical variety and a narrow range of transitional functions. The minimal use of "therefore," for instance, suggests the underdeveloped ability to signal cause-effect relationships—an important feature of expository writing. In the essays from the Hospitality and Management students, they wrote:

> *"The cause of procrastination is mostly to those people who are really into the social world, mostly teenagers, and *also* to those who have problems with their mental health, like depression..."* - HMSP 9
>
> "And a student *also* becomes lazy when it comes to homework."
> –HMSP 31
>
> "It is *also* a blocking form that blocks your inner thoughts from getting up and makes you more lazy than you were before." – HMSP 24
>
> "It can *also* lead many students to a lack of motivation." – HMSP 27
>
> "Procrastination can cause, such as poor time management, fear of failure, perfectionism, lack of motivation, and *also* students nowadays are lazy due to all the distractions around them." – HMSP 27

In these examples, although **"also"** was used correctly, the sentence construction is still very poor, leading to confusion among the readers. In the sentence written by HMSP 27, *"Procrastination can cause, such as poor time management, fear of failure, perfectionism, lack of motivation, also students nowadays were lazy due to all the distractions around them,"* the word **"also"** is used correctly to introduce an additional factor contributing to procrastination.

"In conclusion" ranks as the second most frequently used transitional marker, appearing seven times in both the Hospitality and Management students' essays and the Criminology students' essays. However, the Hospitality and Management students demonstrated more effective usage of this marker. They wrote:

> "*In conclusion*, procrastination among college students with multiple causes and effects. It stems from various causes, including fear, perfectionism, poor time management, lack of motivation, and environmental distractions. Addressing these issues is the key to enhancing students' academic performance, mental well-being, and inclusive college experience." – HMSP 13
>
> "*In conclusion*, the cause and effect of this topic will lead to college students having problems with their mental health. The solution will be that the students must get used to doing their task on time, and with they can grow as students." – HMSP 9

In both examples, "in conclusion" is used properly to signal the final thoughts and summarize the main points of the essays. It acts as a clear indicator to the reader that the writer is wrapping up their discussion and offering a closing statement. This helps to provide a sense of closure and reinforces the key takeaways for the audience.

In contrast, **"instead"** and **"however"** were both used seven times, ranking them third. Additionally, the transitional marker **"lastly,"** generally used to introduce a final point or a summary (Sun, 2021), was found four times in the essays, making it the fourth most common transition. Notably, this word was not used in the essays of the Criminology students. In the essays from Hospitality and Management, they wrote:

> *Lastly*, the feeling of anxiety and fear of failure that comes with being in college can paralyze students and keep them from completing their work. Procrastination can lead to stress, health issues, and poor academic performance." – HMSP 6
>
> "*Lastly*, the time management issues, some of us are working students, we cannot manage our time, we are not able to fully participate in school activities." - HMSP 26

The transitional marker **"therefore"** appeared only twice within the essays. Lastly, the words **"additionally," "finally,"** and **"second"** were each used only once. Overall, this suggests that there may be a limited understanding or application of transitional markers among both groups of students, as evidenced by the relatively low number of distinct markers used and the overall frequency of their occurrence in the essays.

Table 3 Different Functions of Transitional Markers Used by Criminology and Hospitality, and Management Students

	CRIM	HM
Function	Frequency	Frequency
To introduce an additional idea	16	13
To list ideas in time order	-	4
To introduce an opposite idea	8	12
To introduce a result	-	2
To introduce an example	-	-
To introduce a conclusion	9	8
Total	33	39

Table 3 presents a comparison of the functional purposes for which transitional markers were used by Criminology and Hospitality Management students in their expository essays. The most common function in both groups was to introduce additional ideas, with Criminology students doing so 16 times and Hospitality Management students slightly less often, at 13 instances. This finding is consistent with prior observations from Tables 1 and 2, which showed "also" as the most frequently used marker across both groups, indicating a shared reliance on basic additive transitions to extend thought or develop paragraphs.

However, more nuanced differences emerge when comparing the range and diversity of transitional functions. Hospitality Management students demonstrated a broader functional application, using transitions not only for addition and conclusion, but also to sequence ideas in time order (4 occurrences) and to signal results (2 occurrences)—functions that were absent from the Criminology group. Their use of time-ordering transitions like "second" and "lastly" suggests greater rhetorical awareness of essay structure, while the use of resultive markers such as "therefore" reflects an ability to express causal reasoning—an important feature in expository writing. When it comes to contrastive transitions, Hospitality students again outperformed their Criminology peers, using such markers 12 times compared to the latter's 8. This may indicate a stronger grasp of how to present and navigate conflicting ideas, although earlier results suggest that even with higher usage, misapplication of contrastive markers such as "however" still occurred in both groups.

Notably, neither group used transitional markers to introduce examples, such as "for instance" or "such as," which points to a significant pedagogical gap. Example-based elaboration is crucial for clarity and argument support in academic writing, and its absence limits students' ability to persuade or illustrate ideas effectively. As Masadeh (2019) argued, incorporating examples through appropriate transitions strengthens coherence and enhances persuasiveness skills, both groups currently lack.

Discussion
The analysis of the students' essays reveals a clear preference for using transitional markers that serve additive and conclusive functions, such as "also" and "in conclusion," across both Criminology and Hospitality Management cohorts. This heavy reliance on a narrow set of familiar markers suggests that while students demonstrate a basic awareness of cohesion, their understanding of the full range of transitional functions, such as contrast, cause-effect, exemplification, and sequencing, is underdeveloped. Notably, transitions used to introduce examples (e.g., "for instance," "such as") were absent, and causal markers like "therefore" appeared only minimally. These patterns point to a limited repertoire and possibly insufficient instructional exposure to a broader set of discourse strategies.

This outcome has important pedagogical implications. First, the findings highlight the need for instruction that moves beyond treating transitional markers as surface-level grammatical items and instead integrates them into teaching cohesion and rhetorical intent at the discourse level. Writing activities should be designed to help students understand not just which transitional markers to use, but also when and why they are appropriate in specific argumentative, expository, or reflective contexts.

For teachers, this study underscores the importance of tailoring writing instruction to specific learner needs. Teachers can scaffold writing instruction by incorporating genre-based approaches that

demonstrate how transitional markers function differently depending on the rhetorical purpose of a text. In particular, emphasis should be placed on underused functions—such as presenting examples, signaling contrast, and introducing results—through the use of authentic models, guided practice, and peer review activities. Teachers may also consider the development of formative assessment tools that evaluate not just accuracy but the appropriateness and effectiveness of transitional marker usage.

For students, mastering a wider range of transitions can significantly enhance their ability to present logically ordered arguments, thus improving both clarity and persuasiveness in academic writing. This skill set is particularly critical in disciplines like Criminology and Hospitality Management, where future professionals must write reports, proposals, and analyses that require clear explanation and evidence-based reasoning.

For curriculum planners and administrators, these results point to the necessity of embedding targeted lessons on discourse markers into the Purposive Communication course or related writing-intensive subjects. Professional development opportunities should also be provided to instructors to equip them with the tools and frameworks needed to teach cohesive devices effectively within the context of academic writing.

While this study offers valuable insights into students' transitional marker usage, it is not without limitations. One limitation lies in the exclusion of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (e.g., "but," "so," "although," "because"), which also function as crucial cohesive devices. Their omission may have resulted in a partial view of students' overall ability to signal logical relationships in writing. Additionally, the sample size was limited to 70 essays from two academic programs at a single institution. As such, the results may not be generalizable across other disciplines or educational settings. Future research could address these limitations by (1) incorporating a broader range of cohesive devices, (2) expanding the scope to include multiple institutions or disciplines, and (3) exploring longitudinal patterns in students' writing development over time.

Knowledge Contribution

Our study findings enable us to create new theoretical understandings that will advance academic writing instruction approaches for second-language students. The conceptual syntheses presented in this study develop from its empirical findings and theoretical ramifications.

1. Transitional Marker Dependency (TMD)

Students demonstrate Transitional Marker Dependency by depending too much on common transitional markers such as "also" and "in conclusion" rather than exploring diverse transitional options. TMD shows shallow utilization of cohesive techniques and limits writers' ability to adapt rhetorically. The research demonstrated that Criminology and Hospitality students relied heavily on a limited set of transitional markers which they repeated frequently thereby restricting their ability to express themselves fully.

2. Functional Misalignment in Discourse (FMD)

The term FMD describes how transitional markers often fail to fulfill their intended rhetorical purpose when students employ them incorrectly in their writing. Students demonstrated their misunderstanding of marker usage through the incorrect application of "however" without contrasting ideas and by misplacing "in conclusion" within the middle of paragraphs. The concept reveals a divide between grammatical understanding and rhetorical skill especially in second language writers.

3. Cohesive Range Deficiency (CRD)

The Cohesive Range Deficiency (CRD) highlights student writing's restricted use of transitional functions by showing both the almost complete lack of exemplification markers (such as "for instance") and the minimal employment of cause-effect connectors (such as "therefore"). Writing instruction overlooks cohesive strategies critical for academic argumentation because it concentrates solely on basic transitional elements.

4. Instructional Transferability Gap (ITG)

The concept reflects how classroom teaching fails to equip students with cohesive writing strategies needed for timed independent writing situations. While students received classroom instruction on transitions the research indicates they demonstrate poor application in real-world writing

assignments. ITG proposes that durable learning requires practice-based instruction together with genre-integrated teaching methods.

5. Rhetorical Awareness Development (RAD)

RAD illustrates student development from basic syntactic transition use to mastering discourse-level transition functions including reader guidance and argument structure reinforcement. In terms of RAD Hospitality Management students demonstrated stronger abilities than Criminology students through their expanded application of functions like sequencing and cause-effect. The data reveals distinct differences in writing awareness development across academic disciplines.

6. Functional Pedagogy for Transitional Proficiency (FPTP)

The FPTP method advances an educational approach that teaches transitional words through context-rich writing tasks instead of simply providing lists of them. The method combines genre-based instruction with authentic models and discourse analysis to boost students' proficiency with cohesive devices. The teaching method supports integrating transitions into rhetorical structure lessons instead of limiting them to grammatical connectors.
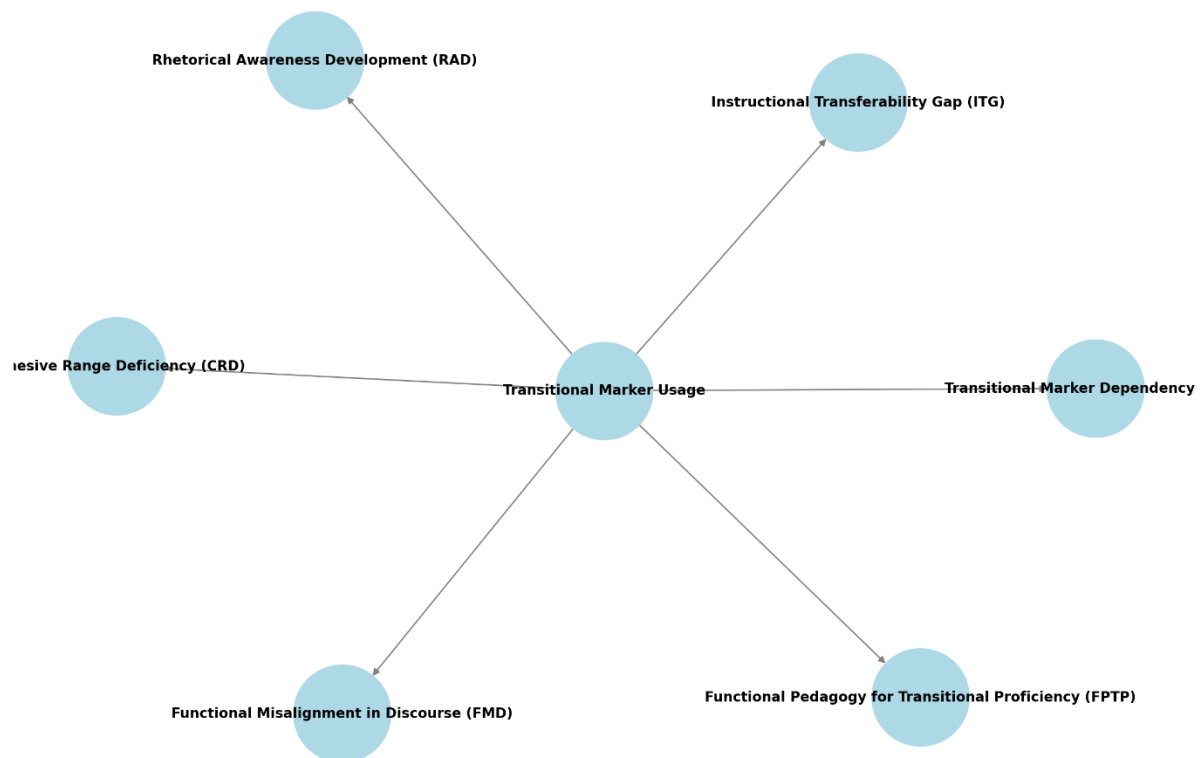

Figure 2 Theoretical understandings that will advance academic writing instruction approaches for second-language students

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the use of transitional markers in the expository essays of first-year Criminology and Hospitality Management students at Saint Columban College. Through corpus-based analysis using AntConc, the researchers identified both quantitative and functional trends in students' use of transitional devices. The findings revealed that both groups relied heavily on basic additive and conclusive markers, such as "also" and "in conclusion," while showing limited usage of transitions that express contrast, sequence, result, or exemplification. Notably, transitional markers to introduce examples were absent, and causal or sequencing transitions were either misused or underutilized. These results suggest that while students possess a foundational awareness of how transitions contribute to cohesion, they lack depth in applying a diverse range of markers appropriately and contextually.

These findings carry significant implications for teaching and curriculum development. For students, there is a clear need to expand their repertoire of cohesive devices and deepen their understanding of how each transition functions within the structure of academic writing. Encouraging reading of well-structured texts, practicing targeted writing tasks, and applying transitions purposefully can help students enhance clarity, coherence, and critical thinking in their essays. For teachers, the study recommends integrating explicit instruction on transitional markers into writing lessons, not as isolated grammar drills but as part of a larger effort to develop rhetorical awareness and discourse-level competence. Lessons should include authentic models, error analysis, and revision-based writing tasks focused on cohesion strategies.

From an administrative perspective, the results point to the value of institutional support for writing development. Schools should implement programs that prioritize writing instruction across disciplines, including workshops, writing centers, and regular professional development for teachers focused on academic discourse strategies. Empowering teachers with the tools and frameworks to teach transitional markers contextually will contribute to improved student outcomes in both academic and professional writing.

Finally, the study recognizes its limitations. The exclusion of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions from the analysis may have restricted a fuller understanding of students' cohesive strategies. Additionally, the focus on a relatively small sample of essays limits the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers are encouraged to build on this work by exploring transitional marker usage in other academic essay genres such as argumentative, narrative, and persuasive writing. Expanding the scope to include students from varied disciplines and institutions would also allow for deeper comparisons across fields, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of discourse competence among tertiary-level learners.

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