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## EVIDENTIALITY IN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS BY UPPER-INTERMEDIATE EFL STUDENTS

*The article presents a study that aims at casting light on evidentiality in a corpus of argumentative essays written by a group of upper-intermediate university students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) whose first language is Norwegian (henceforth – participants). The corpus of the participants' essays was examined for the markers of evidentiality, which was operationalised as the source of textual information that originated outside the current text (Hyland, 2005). Specifically, the corpus was searched for reporting verbs associated with evidentiality (for instance, to indicate, to posit, to show, etc.). The results of the corpus analysis indicated that the participants' argumentative essays appeared to be marked by such verbs associated with evidentiality as to argue, to claim, to say and to state. These findings were discussed in the article through the lens of didactic considerations that would be relevant to tertiary EFL contexts.*

*Key words: argumentative essays, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), evidentiality, reporting verbs.*

**1. Introduction.** The article presents a study that aims at discovering how evidentiality is represented in a corpus of argumentative essays written by a group of university students on the upper-intermediate level of proficiency in English, or B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (The Council of Europe, 2011). In the teaching and learning contexts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), argumentative essay writing is considered one of the core skills to be mastered by undergraduate as well as postgraduate student writers (Ha, 2022; Kapranov, 2020a, 2020b). In a widely used approach to argumentative essay writing proposed by Toulmin (1958), an EFL student writer is expected to formulate an argument, provide a counter-argument and ensure that the argument is amply supported by data and/or evidence (Yeh, 1998). Given that an argumentative essay is typically based on the argument to be supported (Chandrasoma & Jayathilake, 2022; Kapranov, 2020b), undergraduate EFL writers should refer to external sources in order to make a point in their argumentation (Huang, 2022). In particular, undergraduate student writers may want to refer to a reputable scientist in the field their argumentative essay is associated with and/or quote another reliable source, such as, for instance, a coursebook (Kapranov, 2019; MacIntyre, 2020). By doing

so, an undergraduate student writer provides textual evidence of where the source of argumentation in the essay originates from. In other words, an undergraduate student's argumentative essay may involve explicit traces of evidentiality, which is conceptualised as "the expression of the source or mode of information" (Almeida & Gil, 2021, p. 13).

The study that is further presented in the article is grounded in the construal of evidentiality, which is argued to be embedded in the argumentative essays written by undergraduate EFL writers. It should be observed that evidentiality in undergraduate EFL writing is amply addressed in the literature (Huh & Lee, 2016; Nuyts, 1999). Whilst there is a substantial bulk of research literature that sheds light on evidentiality in argumentative writing (Gholami, Nejad, & Pour, 2014; Ramoroka, 2014; Shi et al., 2022; Wu & Allison, 2003; Yeh, 1998; Zhao, 2017), there are, however, insufficient studies that problematise evidentiality in argumentative essays written by upper-intermediate EFL writers (Kapranov, 2021a; 2021b). In seeking to provide a deeper insight into this underresearched area of applied linguistics, the present study aims at establishing whether or not evidentiality would be present in the corpus of argumentative essays written by the group of university students on the B2 level of EFL proficiency (further – participants). It is assumed in the study that argumentation in an EFL argumentative essay could be manifested by the reference to external source/sources by means of reporting verbs (Chandrasoma & Jayathilake, 2022; Szczygłowska, 2022). Building upon the assumption, the following research questions (RQs) are formulated in the study:

**RQ 1**: What is the frequency of the occurrence of reporting verbs associated with evidentiality in the corpus of the participants' argumentative essays?

**RQ 2**: Would there be statistically significant differences in the frequency of the occurrence of reporting verbs associated with evidentiality in the subcorpora of essays written in the autumn semester and spring semester?

In order to respond to the RQs, the article is structured as follows. Firstly, theoretical considerations associated with evidentiality are briefly outlined in section 2. Secondly, the review of the literature on evidentiality in argumentative essay writing by undergraduate EFL students is provided in section 3. Thereafter, the present study is introduced and discussed in section 4. Finally, the article concludes with the summary of the major findings and their didactic implications.

**2. Evidentiality: Theoretical Considerations.** According to the Aikhenvaldian (2004) approach to evidentiality, all languages provide a range of resources that point to the source of knowledge in a speech act, either oral or written (Sidnell, 2012). Following Aikhenvald (2004), evidentiality involves linguistic means of encoding an interlocuter's way of knowing the source of the proposition (Fox, 2001; Nebot & Bates, 2018). Evidentiality is thought to be explicated in the language directly or indirectly. In particular, direct evidentiality involves the instances witnessed by the interlocutors themselves, whilst indirect evidentiality refers to the instances that are based on the interlocutors' inference or on evidence provided by other people (Šinkūnienė & Van Olmen, 2012, p. 155).

It is argued that evidentiality is mandatory in a number of non-Indo-European languages (Aikhenvald, 2004; Bergqvist, 2015; Forker, 2018; San Roque, Floyd, & Norcliffe, 2017; Straughn, 2011), where it forms a separate grammatical category "that refers to the perceptual and/or epistemological basis for making a speech act" (Cornillie, 2009, p. 45) and manifests itself by a defined set of morpho-syntactic devices (Aikhenvald, 2004). For example, in Turkic languages evidentiality as the

source of knowledge is expressed explicitly by verbal affixes, clitics, and separate lexical means (Yildiz & Turan, 2021, p. 125). In non-Indo-European languages (e.g., Korean, Turkish, etc.), evidentiality is assumed to encode perceptual as well as cognitive experiences by explicit morpho-syntactic means in a pragma-communicative situation (San Roque, Floyd, & Norcliffe, 2017, p. 121).

Unlike the languages with the compulsory marking of information sources, a number of languages without grammatical markers of evidentiality employ discursive-pragmatic means to convey the reference to the source of information (Aikhenvald, 2004; Figueras Bates & Kotwica, 2020). For instance, evidentiality in English is marked by a variety of linguistic and discursive means rather than morpho-syntactic devices (Aikenvald, 2004; Fetzer, 2014). One of the means of marking evidentiality in English is associated with the use of perception verbs, i.e. the verbs that denote sight, sound, touch, and smell (Whitt, 2009). The point is illustrated by Papafragou and her colleagues (2007), who provide the following examples of perceptual verbs as the markers of evidentiality, which are also referred to as evidentials, in the colloquial register of English:

a. **I saw** John sing.
b. **I heard** John sing.
c. John was **allegedly** singing.
d. John was **apparently** singing. (Papafragou et al., 2007, p. 256)

Papafragou et al. (2007, p. 256) argue that the perceptual verbs *to see* and *to hear* in (a) and (b) allude to the sensory manner of evidentiality that marks John's singing, whereas in (c) and (d) evidentiality is either indirect (e.g., *allegedly*) or unspecified (e.g., *apparently*). In contrast to the perceptual verbs associated with evidentiality as emblematised by (a) and (b), evidentiality in academic writing in English is often manifested by reporting verbs (Kapranov, forthcoming; Lazić, 2018; Romero, 2022), such as, for example, *to show,* e.g. "Previous studies **show** that attention plays an important role in second language (L2) phonetic attainment" (Carlet & Cebrian, 2022, p. 271). Furthermore, reporting verbs in academic writing in English appear to be associated with evidential strategies, which are operationalised as rhetorical strategies that are employed by an academic writer to point to the source of information per se concurrently with facilitating persuasiveness of the stretch of discourse it occurs in (Bašić, 2020).

In addition to being expressed by grammatical categories as in a number of non-Indo-European languages and, predominantly, by semantic and pragmatic categories as in English (Melac, 2022), evidentiality is thought to be mediated by its interaction with epistemic modality (in other words, where the knowledge in the broad sense comes from). In this regard, evidentiality is deemed to be subsumed under the aegis of epistemic modality (Palmer, 2001; Papafragou, 2006). Furthermore, the literature argues that the construal of evidentiality seems to be intertwined with epistemic modality as its integral part (Dendale & Tasmowski, 2001). As far as the interplay between epistemic modality and evidentiality is concerned, it is posited that epistemic modality modulates the proposition in terms of possibility, necessity, and desirability, whilst evidentiality modulates it in terms of the source of information (Holvoet, 2018, p. 243).

The discussion concerning the boundary, or, perhaps, boundaries, between evidentiality and epistemic modality remains open in the current linguistic thought (Bardenstein & Ariel, 2022). Likewise, there are other contested issues associated with evidentiality in academic writing that attract substantial scientific interest, such as the manifestation of evidentiality by the academic author's discursive strategies

(Dendale & Tasmowski, 2001), the relationship between evidentiality and citation practices (MacIntyre, 2020), and the academic author's stance that conveys the authorial commitment to the proposition (Bednarek, 2006; Hyland, 2005). The latter manifestation of evidentiality is regarded by some scholars (see, e.g., Hyland (2005)) as a facet of textual metadiscourse. Its place in the Hylandian (2005) view of metadiscourse in academic writing in English is summarised by Gholami, Nejad, and Pour (2014, p. 581) as follows:

Table 1. Evidentiality in the Hyland's (2005) Approach to Metadiscourse Presented by Gholami, Nejad, and Pour (2014)

| N | Metadiscursive Categories | Function | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Code glosses | Help readers understand the meaning of ideational material | *namely, e.g., in other words, i.e., say* |
| 2 | Endophoric markers | Refer to information in other parts of the text | *as noted above, see Fig 1, see section 2* |
| 3 | Evidentials | Refer to the source of information from other texts | *according to X, X states that* |
| 4 | Frame markers | Refer to discourse shifts or text stages | *first, finally, to repeat, to clarify* |
| 5 | Logical connectives | Express semantic relations between main clauses | *in addition, but, therefore, thus* |

In addition to the research focus on evidentiality within the parameters of textual metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005), there has been an increase in the studies on evidentiality in argumentative writing (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014). Further, section 3 provides a review of the recent literature on evidentiality in argumentative essay writing by undergraduate EFL students.

**3. Literature Review: Evidentiality in Argumentative Essay Writing by EFL Student Writers.** In general, argumentative discourse is defined as a discursive activity in which a writer attempts to propose an argument and/or arguments in order to affect the readers and ensure the acceptance of the argument by them (Rocci, 2017, p. 2). In EFL settings, argumentative essay writing is considered one of the essential components of EFL writing courses for undergraduate students (Kapranov, 2020a, 2018a, 2018b; Pei et al., 2017). In applied linguistics and EFL literature, argumentative essay writing is thought to foster EFL students' critical thinking and rhetorical reasoning and contribute to the overall development of their writing skills (Huang, 2022; Kapranov, 2019). Given that argumentative essay writing involves an EFL student writer's choices of rhetorical strategies, lexical and syntactic devices, it is quite expected that argumentative essays written by EFL students have provided ample grounds for extensive research on a variety of aspects associated with their peculiarities, inclusive of evidentiality (Šinkūnienė & Van Olmen, 2012).

Recently, several studies have explored how evidentiality is manifested in argumentative essay writing by EFL student writers (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014). In the current literature in applied linguistics, evidentiality is problematised as an EFL student writer's citing and quoting practices that refer to the external source of information (MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014). In other words, evidentiality is deemed to be a surface realisation of how the EFL student writer uses and integrates information sources in their argumentative essay writing.

Assuming that EFL student writers are expected to use external sources to corroborate and/or refute the argument (MacIntyre, 2020), problematising evidentiality through the lenses of citation and quoting in argumentative essay writing seems to be reasonable, especially when we take into consideration that evidence-based argumentation is expected of undergraduate EFL student writers (Kapranov, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). In this regard, Huang (2022) indicates that EFL student writers

> … should exploit external sources to persuade target audience effectively, which is a complex, yet particularly crucial skill as it "situates the writer within a disciplinary framework" (Liardét & Black, 2019, p. 37) and establishes his or her voice as a credible or "informed insider" (Hyland & Jiang, 2019, p. 263). Successful academic arguers shall make their claims against a backdrop of existing perspectives, creating "a balance between introducing their own perspective, acknowledging the existence of other perspectives, and estimating what their audience's assumed perspective will be" (Miller et al., 2014, p. 108). (Huang, 2022, p. 1287)

The embeddedness of evidentiality in EFL writers' citation practices in argumentative essay writing is reported to be affected by the widespread use of digital sources (MacIntyre, 2020). The literature suggests that EFL writers seem to depend exceedingly on the Internet sources as evidentials in their argumentative writing, so that "there is a danger that the student writers rely on their 'machines' rather than actually knowing how and when to cite" (MacIntyre, 2020, p. 73).

Another approach to problematising evidentiality in tertiary EFL contexts involves the exploration of reporting verbs as evidentials in EFL students' argumentative essays (Huang, 2022). Analysing evidentiality through the prism of reporting verbs is logically linked to the view of evidentiality as an EFL student writer's quoting and citation practices, given that reporting verbs are needed in order to incorporate the external sources of argumentation into the essay (Ramoroka, 2014). It could be argued that reporting verbs as evidentials form an essential aspect of the citation practices that EFL student writers should employ in their evidence-based argumentation (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014). By means of investigating reporting verbs as evidentials in EFL student writers' argumentative essays, it appears possible to get insight into the process of evidence-based argumentation, in particular, into an EFL writer's potential difficulties that are associated with the genre-appropriate use of citation and quoting practices in the essay (Huang, 2022; Shi, 2022). In addition, the use of reporting verbs in the EFL student writer's argumentative essay could be reflective of their mastery of the English language and, especially, of their knowledge and mastery of academic vocabulary that pertains to argumentative writing in English (Kapranov, 2019).

**4. The Present Study.** As observed by Chandrasoma and Jayathilake (2022), evidentiality in argumentative essay writing by EFL student writers is, to a great extent, underresearched. Indeed, the current studies on evidentiality are not numerous (see section 3 of the article). Taking into consideration the existing gap in the state-of-the-art literature, the present study seeks to bridge the obvious gap by means of uncovering how evidentiality is manifested by reporting verbs in the corpus of argumentative essays written by the participants, who are university students on the B2 level of EFL proficiency.

In total, the study involves 20 participants (7 males and 13 females, mean age = 22.4, standard deviation = 7.4), who are speakers of Norwegian as their first

language (L1). English and Norwegian are the only languages that the participants speak. The participants are enrolled in a tertiary programme in English linguistics designed for the future EFL teachers at a university in Norway. Given that the participants are on the B2 level of EFL proficiency, they should be able to produce argumentative essays in English that, according to CEFR (The Council of Europe, 2011), are characterised by the set of competences and skills that are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Writing Skills on B2 level according to CEFR (The Council of Europe, 2011)

| N | Competence | Descriptor |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1 | Production / written production: Overall written production | Can produce clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to their field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources |
| 2 | Production / written production: Creative writing | Can give clear, detailed descriptions on a variety of subjects related to their field of interest. Can give a review of a film, book or play |
| 3 | Production / written production: Reports and essays | Can produce an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Can synthesise information and arguments from a number of sources |

Whilst an EFL student writer on the B2 level of proficiency should be able to write a logical and well-argued essay that is based upon evidence, i.e. external and, importantly, reliable sources, it remains to be elucidated whether or not the participants' argumentative arguments would involve explicit instances of evidentiality that is manifested by reporting verbs. Hence, one of the aims of the present investigation involves the identification and quantification of reporting verbs as evidentials in the corpus of argumentative essays written by the participants. In conjunction with the aim, the RQ 1 is formulated (see the introductory part of the article).

Another aim of the study involves the contention whether or not the frequency of the-to-be-identified reporting verbs as evidentials would be stable over time. Let us specify this contention further in more detail. The design of the study comprises two semesters of argumentative writing, the autumn semester and the spring semester. During the autumn semester the participants are provided with i) explicit instruction as far the genre conventions of argumentative essay writing are concerned and ii) feedback by the course teacher, who is the author of the present article, that the participants receive in the course of one semester of study. The spring semester, however, is characterised by the absence of the direct involvement of the course teacher in the participants' argumentative writing. It is assumed that the participants would be able to transfer their argumentative writing skills that they acquired in the autumn semester to argumentative essay writing in the spring semester. It remains to be elucidated, however, whether or not the participants would make use of reporting verbs as evidentials in the spring semester as they did in the autumn semester. Following these considerations, the RQ 2 is devised in the article's introduction. Further, the article proceeds with the description of the corpus, methodology, results and their discussion in relation to the RQs in the study.

**4.1. Corpus.** The corpus of the study is comprised of 40 argumentative essays that are written at the end of the autumn (Round 1) and spring (Round 2) semesters, respectively. The descriptive statistics of the corpus are computed in the software program Statistical Package for Social Sciences, SPSS (IMB 2011) and summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. The Descriptive Statistics of the Corpus

| N | Descriptive Statistics | Round 1 | Round 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Total number of words | 26196 | 26082 |
| 2 | Mean | 1309.8 | 1304.1 |
| 3 | Standard deviation | 115.1 | 315.7 |
| 4 | Minimum | 1059 | 602 |
| 5 | Maximum | 1538 | 2372 |

It is evident from Table 3 that the subcorpora of the essays written at the end of the autumn semester and at the send of the spring semester are fairly comparable in terms of the total number of words. The comparability of the subcorpora is explained by the essay requirements that involve the course teacher's explicit instruction to the participants to write an argumentative essay of at least 1200 words, with longer essays up to 1600 words being allowed.

**4.2. Procedure and Methods.** In terms of the procedure, the following should be reiterated. Having received explicit instruction associated with the genre-appropriate conventions of argumentative essay writing in the autumn semester, the participants were instructed to write one argumentative essay of ca. 1200 words on a topic in EFL didactics. Round 1 of essay writing took place at the end of the autumn semester. At the end of the spring semester, Round 2 of argumentative essay writing eventuated. Identically to Round 1, the essay topics in Round 2 were on various aspects of EFL didactics. In other words, the study was comprised of two essay rounds, Round 1 and Round 2, that shared similar problematics of argumentative essay writing. Each round involved one argumentative essay per participant (i.e., two argumentative essays in total per participant or 40 argumentative essays per group). It should be observed that the study formed a part of a larger research project that sought to cast light on the use of metalinguistic markers, such as hedges and boosters by the participants (Kapranov, forthcoming).

As far as the methods in the study were concerned, it should be explained that each individual essay in the corpus was examined for the presence of reporting verbs as evidentials, which were operationalised as the verbs that pointed to the source of textual information that originated outside the argumentative essay at hand (Hyland, 2005). The identification of reporting verbs was conducted manually. The identification of the reporting verbs as evidentials took into consideration all forms of the verb, for instance, *to indicate*, *indicate*, *indicates*, *indicated*, and *indicating*. Once reporting verbs inclusive of their forms were identified in each essay, their numerical representations were entered in the statistical program Statistical Package for Social Sciences, or SPSS, version 20.0 (IBM, 2011) in order to compute their respective means and standard deviations in the corpus per group. Thereafter, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the mean values of reporting verbs as evidentials in SPSS (IBM, 2011). The results of the calculation were summarised and discussed in the subsequent sections of the article.

**4.3. Results and Discussion.** The quantitative analysis of the corpus has yielded the following descriptive statistics that are summarised in Table 4 below. In Table 4, reporting verbs as evidentials are presented as the total number (N) in

absolute values, means (M) and standard deviations (SD) per round (i.e., Round 1 and Round 2, respectively) per group.

Table 4. The Descriptive Statistics of Reporting Verbs as Evidentials in the Corpus

| N | Reporting Verbs as Evidentials | Total N, M and SD in Round1 | Total N, M and SD in Round 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Appear | - | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 2 | Argue | Total N 7 M 1 (SD 0) | Total N 6 M 1.2 (SD 0.4) |
| 3 | Assert | Total N 2 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 4 | Assume | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 3 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 5 | Base | Total N 6 M 1 (SD 0) | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 6 | Believe | Total N 3 M 1 (SD 0) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 7 | Cite | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 8 | Claim | Total N 9 M 1.5 (SD 0.8) | Total N 3 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 9 | Conclude | Total N 4 M 1.3 (SD 0.5) | - |
| 10 | Conduct | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 11 | Confirm | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 3 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 12 | Consider | Total N 6 M 2 (SD 0.8) | - |
| 13 | Define | Total N 7 M 2.3 (SD 1.9) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 14 | Demonstrate | - | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 15 | Describe | Total N 6 M 1.5 (SD 0.5) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 16 | Develop | Total N 2 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 17 | Discuss | - | Total N 2 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 18 | Emphasise | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 19 | Employ | - | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 20 | Establish | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 21 | Explain | Total N 6 M 2 (SD 0.8) | Total N 3 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 21 | Find | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 22 | Focus | - | Total N 3 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 23 | Illustrate | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |

Table 4 (continued)

| N | Reporting Verbs as Evidentials | Total N, M and SD in Round1 | Total N, M and SD in Round 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Include | Total N 2 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 25 | Indicate | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 4 M 1.3 (SD 0.5) |
| 26 | Inform | Total N 3 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 4 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 27 | Mean | Total N 4 M 1.3 (SD 0.5) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 28 | Quote | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 29 | Point | Total N 9 M 2.6 (SD 1.1) | Total N 6 M 2 (SD 1.4) |
| 30 | Posit | - | Total N 2 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 31 | Propose | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 32 | Prove | - | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 33 | Put forward | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 34 | Quote | - | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 35 | Recommend | - | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 36 | Refer | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 37 | Report | - | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 38 | Say | Total N 8 M 2 (SD 1) | Total N 7 M 1.8 (M 0.8) |
| 39 | Show | Total N 6 M 1.5 (SD 0.9) | Total N 4 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 40 | State | Total N 7 M 1.4 (SD 0.5) | Total N 9 M 1.5 (SD 0.5) |
| 41 | Stress | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 42 | Suggest | Total N 4 M 1 (SD 0) | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 43 | Support | Total N 3 M 1.5 (SD 0.5) | Total N 3 M 1 (SD 0) |
| 44 | Suppose | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 45 | Tell | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) | - |
| 46 | Think | Total N 6 M 3 (SD 0) | - |
| 47 | View | Total N 4 M 1.3 (SD 0.5) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |
| 48 | Use | - | Total N 1 M (SD 0) |
| 49 | Write | Total N 2 M 1 (SD 0) | Total N 1 M 0 (SD 0) |

Further in the article, the findings are discussed through the lenses of RQs, namely RQ 1 that seeks to cast light on the frequencies of the occurrence of the reporting verbs as evidentials in the corpus and RQ 2 which aims at establishing the differences in the frequency of reporting verbs between Round 1 and Round 2 of argumentative essay writing.

### 4.3.1. The Discussion of RQ 1

As previously mentioned, RQ 1 problematises the frequency of the occurrence of reporting verbs as evidentials in the corpus. The results of the quantitative analysis summarised in Table 4 indicate that the participants manifest evidentiality by the frequent use of the following reporting verbs to argue, claim, consider, define, describe, explain, point, say, and state.

Figure 1 below illustrates the distribution of the reporting verbs to *argue, claim, point, say*, and *state* in Round 1 per participant, whilst Figure 2 exemplifies their distribution in Round 2 (also per participant). Figures 1 and 2, which are based upon the individual participant's data, provide a more nuanced picture of the distribution of the most frequent reporting verbs in the corpus in contrast to the group means summarised in Table 4.
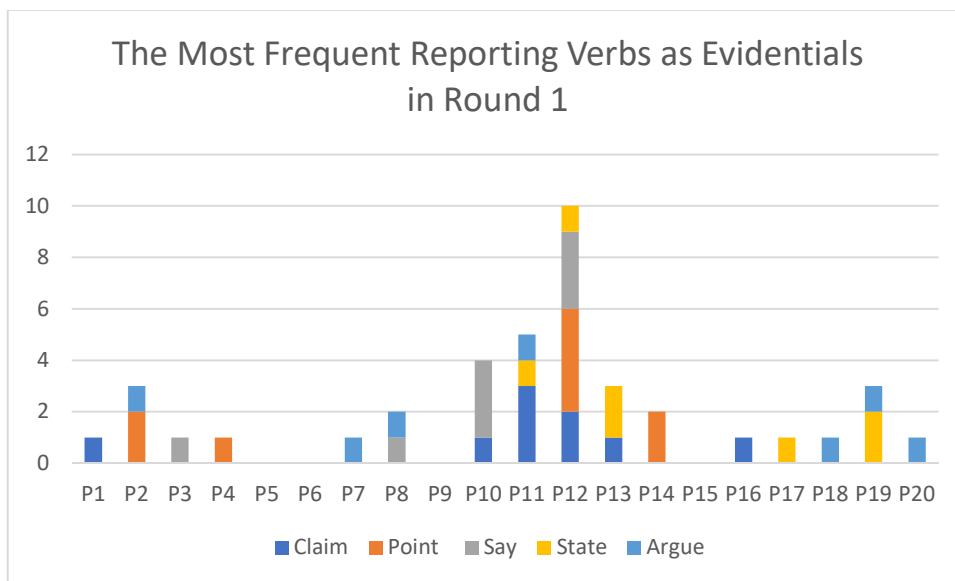


Figure 1. The Most Frequent Reporting Verbs as Evidentials per Participant
in Round 1

It is evident from Figure 1 that participants P5, P6, P9 and P15 do not use the most frequent reporting verbs as evidentials in Round 1, whilst the same can be said about participants P1, P3-P5, P8 and P19 in Round 2. Arguably, the uneven distribution of the most frequent reporting verbs as evidentials in the rounds is suggestive of the individual writing styles by the participants and, more specifically, individual preferences in terms of the use of the reporting verbs, as well as non-use of them by some of the participants.

The analysis of the corpus indicates that the most frequent reporting verbs as evidentials (e.g., *argue*) tend to occur in the main sections of the argumentative essays, where the participants introduce their arguments and/or provide counter-arguments. The occurrence of the most frequent reporting verbs in the main sections accounts for 80% of argumentative essays in Round 1 and 70 % in Round 2, whereas there are no occurrence of them in the introductory parts in the rounds.

However, there are instances of the reporting verbs in the conclusions sections both in Round 1 (20%) and Round 2 (30%).



The Most Frequent Reporting Verbs as Evidentials in Round 2

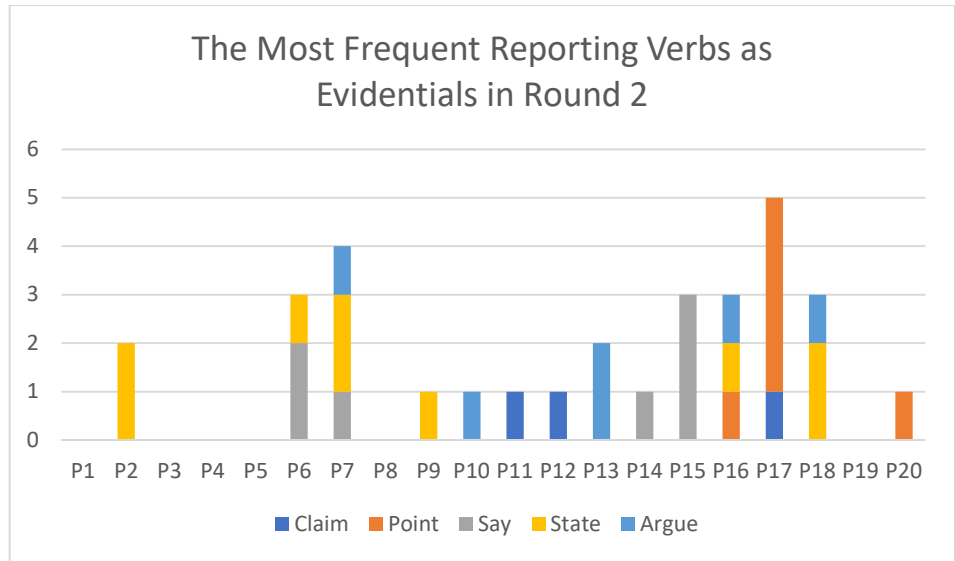■ Claim  ■ Point  ■ Say  ■ State  ■ Argue

Figure 2. The Most Frequent Reporting Verbs as Evidentials per Participant in Round 2

As noted above, the majority of the most frequent reporting verbs are found in the main sections of the essays. This finding is illustrated by Excerpt (1), which is taken from the participant's essay written in Round 1:

(1) Studies **show** that grammar-translation methods can be looked at as an academic exercise rather than something to help learners to communicate and use the target language (Bowen, 2012). It is also **claimed** that there is too much focus on grammar in the grammar-translation method and that grammar and other language rules will eventually come to learners that use the target language in communication (Bowen, 2012). (Participant P 19)

In (1), the reporting verbs as evidentials *to show* and *to claim* seem to occur in the so-called chains, i.e. in two adjoining sentences with, at least, one reporting verb per terminal unit, or T-Unit, which is defined as the smallest word group that could be considered a grammatical sentence, regardless of punctuation (Hunt 1965). It should be noted that the chains of evidentiality in the main sections appear to be rather common in the corpus. Presumably, this finding could be interpreted as the participants' response to the need of producing evidence-based argumentative essays that involve references to external sources. The ample presence of the reporting verbs in the corpus and, moreover, their occurrence in chains as in (1) provide support to the prior literature (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014; Shi, 2022) that emphasises undergraduate EFL students' attention to the role of evidentiality in argumentative essay writing.

Whilst the present findings are in line with the literature (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014; Shi, 2022), this study, however, has uncovered a novel aspect, which is not reported in previous research. In particular, the literature (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014; Shi, 2022) neither specifies that EFL student writers make use of reporting verbs as evidentials nor points to the reporting verbs that occur frequently in argumentative essay writing. In addition, the prior research literature does not aim at unpacking whether evidentiality, which is

manifested by reporting verbs, would be stable or change over time in argumentative essays that are written by EFL student writers in different semesters of study. Further, in subsection 4.3.2 of the article, we will dwell upon this issue by means of discussing RQ 2.

**4.3.2. The Discussion of RQ 2**

As indicated in the introduction, RQ 2 in the study seeks to provide insight into possible differences in the frequency of reporting verbs as evidentials that occur in Round 1 and Round 2 of the argumentative essay writing. Specifically, RQ 2 is concerned with whether or not there would be statistically significant differences between reporting verbs as evidentials in the participants' argumentative essays written in the autumn semester (i.e., Round 1) and in the spring semester (i.e., Round 2). In line with RQ 2, reporting verbs as evidentials that are present both in Round 1 and Round 2 essays have been subjected to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in SPSS (IBM, 2011). To reiterate, the reporting verbs that are found both in Round 1 and Round 2 are *argue, assume, base, believe, claim, confirm, define, describe, explain, find, illustrate, indicate, inform, mean, point, propose, put forward, refer, say, show, state, suggest, support, view* and *write* (see Table 4). The application of the one-way ANOVA to the reporting verbs as evidentials in the corpus has revealed that they are similarly distributed between Round 1 and Round 2, because the result is not significant at $p < .05$ [$F(1) = 2.43$, $p = .1256$]. This finding is novel per se, given that the previous studies (Huang, 2022; MacIntyre, 2020; Ramoroka, 2014; Shi, 2022) do not juxtapose argumentative essay writing written by the same groups of EFL student writers at different points in time, for instance, in different semesters.

The absence of the statistically significant differences in the frequencies of reporting verbs as evidentials between the rounds can be accounted by the following consideration. Presumably, the participants, who are on the B2 level of EFL proficiency, managed to transfer successfully their argumentative writing skills that they had acquired in the autumn semester to their essay writing in the spring semester. Let us be reminded that the autumn semester is characterised by explicit instruction as far as the genre conventions of argumentative essay writing are concerned. Importantly, explicit instruction in the autumn semester pays attention to genre-appropriate citation and quoting practices that are pivotal in evidence-based argumentative essay writing.

Arguably, the participants managed to sustain and develop creatively the use of reporting verbs as evidentials in the spring semester, which, as outline in section 4 of the article, was not characterised by the course instructor's direct involvement in argumentative essay writing. In light of the minimal instruction of argumentative essay writing in the spring semester, it follows from the data and, especially, from the results of the ANOVA test, that the participants employ genre-appropriate reporting verbs as evidentials in Round 2. Moreover, the participants exhibit a creative approach to their use, which is seen from the novel reporting verbs that they do not employ in Round 1. In particular, the participants use the following reporting verbs as evidentials in Round 2: *to appear, demonstrate, discuss, employ, focus, posit, prove, quote, recommend, report*, and *use*. Given that the aforementioned reporting verbs are employed by the participants in the context of minimal interventions on the part of the course instructor, the presence of these evidentials is suggestive of the participants' awareness of the critical role of evidentiality in argumentative essay writing that, canonically, should be based on reliable external sources. Judging from the data analysis, it is possible to summarise that the participants have mastered the genre-appropriate linguistic means of expressing evidentiality, which is manifested in their argumentative essays by reporting verbs.

**5. Conclusions.** The article introduced and discussed a quantitative study that aimed at shedding light upon the frequency of the occurrence of evidentials, in particular, reporting verbs associated with evidentiality that were identified and quantified in the corpus of the participants' essays. The results of the quantitative investigation revealed that there were certain reporting verbs (for instance, *to argue*, *to assume*, etc.) that the participants used in the both rounds of argumentative essay writing in the autumn semester that was facilitated by the direct involvement of the course instructor and in the spring semester that was characterised by the minimal feedback from the course instructor. The presence of the identical reporting verbs as evidentials in the rounds of argumentative essays was indicative of the participants' awareness and successful use of reporting verbs as evidentials, which were employed, predominantly, in the main parts of the essays.

In light of the linguo-didactic suggestions, the present study offered the following recommendations that could be applied in the tertiary contexts of argumentative essay writing in EFL. First, it could be suggested that EFL writers on the B2 level of proficiency should be offered explicit instruction in order to raise their awareness of evidentiality in argumentative essay writing. Second, it could be argued that EFL writers on the B2 level of proficiency should be taught about evidence-based argumentative essay writing that is characterised by the genre-appropriate citation and quoting practices, which could be manifested by the use of reporting verbs as the marker of evidentiality. Third, undergraduate EFL student writers on the B2 level of EFL proficiency could develop, maintain and transfer argumentative writing skills associated with evidentiality that they could avail of in their argumentative essay writing on their own, that is independently. Hopefully, the aforementioned suggestions could be integrated into tertiary EFL writing modules designed for B2 and, presumably, C1-C2 levels of EFL proficiency.

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**Резюме**

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## ЕВІДЕНЦІЯ В АРГУМЕНТАЦІЙНИХ ЕСЕ СТУДЕНТІВ EFL UPPER-INTERMEDIATE[1]

**Постановка проблеми.** Дослідження, представлене у статті, ґрунтується на теоретичному підході до евіденції, запропонованому Айхенвальд (2004), яка стверджує, що евіденційна семантика проявляється через мовні засоби, які вказують на джерело пропозиції.

**Мета.** Враховуючи те, що дослідження використання репортативних дієслів мовленнєвої діяльності як мовних засобів вираження евіденції є нечисленними, у нашій розвідці проаналізовано частотність появи таких репортативних дієслів, пов'язаних з евіденцією, у корпусі аргументативних есе, написаних студентами рівня B2 володіння англійською як іноземною. Мета дослідження полягає в тому, щоб з'ясувати, чи існують статистично значущі відмінності в частотності появи репортативних евіденційних дієслів в есе учасників, написаних в осінньому та весняному семестрах.

**Методи.** У дослідженні використано кількісний метод аналізу частотності.

**Результати.** Результати частотного аналізу показують, що учасники виражають евіденційну семантику, часто вживаючи такі репортативні дієслова, як *to argue* (*аргументувати*)*, claim* (*стверджувати*)*, consider* (*розглядати*)*, define* (*визначати*)*, describe* (*описувати*)*, explain* (*пояснювати*),

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[1] Англійська як іноземна мова, рівень B2

point (*вказувати*)*, say* (*говорити*) та *state* (*констатувати*). Вони подібним чином розподіляються між підкорпусом есе, написаних в осінньому та весняному семестрах, враховуючи, що результат не є значущим при p < 0,05 [F(1) = 2,43, p = 0,1256].

**Дискусія.** Результати інтерпретуються наступним чином. Стверджується, що наявність ідентичних репортативних евіденційних дієслів у раундах аргументативних есе в осінньому та весняному семестрах відображає обізнаність учасників щодо репортативних дієслів як проявів доказовості.

**Ключові слова:** аргументативні есе, англійська як іноземна мова (EFL), евіденція, репортативні дієслова.

## Abstract

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### EVIDENTIALITY IN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS BY UPPER-INTERMEDIATE EFL STUDENTS

**Background.** The study that is presented in the article is informed by the theoretical approach towards evidentiality proposed by Aikhenvald (2004), who posits that evidentiality is manifested by linguistic means that point to the source of the proposition.

**Purpose.** Given that the studies on the use of reporting verbs as linguistic means of expressing evidentiality are scarce, the study explores the frequency of the occurrence of reporting verbs associated with evidentiality in the corpus of argumentative essays written by undergraduate EFL students on the upper-intermediate level of EFL proficiency. Furthermore, the study's purpose is to ascertain whether or not there are statistically significant differences in the frequency of the occurrence of reporting verbs associated with evidentiality in the participants' essays written in the autumn semester and spring semester.

**Methods.** A quantitative method of the analysis of frequency is used in the study.

**Results.** The results of the frequency analysis reveal that the participants manifest evidentiality by the frequent use of such reporting verbs as *to argue, claim, consider, define, describe, explain*, *point, say,* and *state*. They are similarly distributed between the subcorpus of essays written in the autumn semester and spring semester, given that the result is not significant at p < .05 [F(1) = 2.43, p = .1256].

**Discussion.** The results are interpreted in the following way. It is argued that the presence of the identical reporting verbs as evidentials in the rounds of argumentative essays in the autumn and spring semesters is reflective of the participants' awareness of reporting verbs as evidentials.

**Key words:** argumentative essays, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), evidentiality, reporting verbs.

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