

The Use of “in Fact” in Argumentative Writing Produced by Students from the Institute for Applied Pedagogy, University of Burundi

Oda Kayonde^{1*}, and Lothaire Niyonkuru²

¹ Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Burundi, University of Burundi Doctoral School, Burundi

² Department of African Languages and Cultures, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Burundi, Burundi

E-mail: kayondeo@rocketmail.com

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Abstract

Research has shown that foreign language learners have a number of challenges in the use of connectors in writing. This paper investigates how students from the Institute for Applied Pedagogy at the University of Burundi use *in fact* in argumentative writing, with focus on frequency and accuracy level. Adopting a corpus linguistic approach, the study is based on essays which were written by first, second- and third-year students in response to two writing tasks. The size of the corpus amounts to 622 essays totaling 306, 664 word-tokens. This corpus was searched using AntConc tool on the basis of a list of 95 connectors classified into 6 categories. This list was obtained by considering several connector frameworks. The results of this study indicate that *in fact* is one of the most frequently used connectors in the targeted students' writing. Another discovery is that *in fact* is, in most cases, used at the initial position, whether at sentence or paragraph levels. It is rarely used in medial position and never in final position. Moreover, the study shows that the students investigated used *in fact* to introduce the first supporting paragraph of their essays, which is inaccurate given that the function of *in fact* is to add more detailed information to a point. Finally, the study reveals that most learners are aware that the connector *in fact* has to be followed by a comma. Based on these results, a few recommendations are made for teaching and future research.

Keywords: argumentative writing, connector, EFL learner, frequently used, misuse

1. Introduction

Connectors such as, *in fact*, *in addition*, *because*, *therefore*, etc. are devices which are used by speakers and writers to connect different units of discourse (words, sentences, phrases and paragraphs). Given their facilitating role, connectors have been referred to by many researchers as signposts in the interpretation of discourse (e.g. Tapper (2005, p. 115); Leech & Svartvik (1994, p. 177); Sabzevari et al., (2016, p. 283); Carrió-Pastor (2013, p. 193). Various studies have been conducted on the way non-native learners of English use connectors in their academic writing. The use of connectors in learner writing has received much attention these last decades. Many studies have shown that their use by non-native learners is problematic. Tang & Ng (1995, p.105), for example, have pointed out that “the misuse of connectors is an almost universal feature of ESL students' writing”. The majority of studies carried out on this aspect have found that learners tend to overuse, underuse or misuse connectors.



2. Literature Review

Cohesion is a property of discourse referring to the relations of meaning that exist within the text; its role is to facilitate the interpretation of a message (Halliday & Hassan, 1976, p. 6). These authors have distinguished five ways in which a speaker or writer can achieve cohesion, namely, through reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. In this paper, focus is on conjunctions also referred to as connectors. It should be indicated that other names are used in the literature for the concept of connectors, namely, linking adverbials (Biber et al., 1999), connectives (see, e.g., Leki, 1989; Byrne, 1979; Tang & Ng, 1995) etc. For consistency's sake, the term *connector* will be used in this paper.

A few classifications of connectors are proposed by Halliday & Hassan (1976), Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999). Quirk et al. (1985, p. 634), for example, made a classification consisting of 7 categories of connectors (referred to as conjuncts in their work). These categories are *listing*, *summative*, *appositive*, *resultive*, *inferential*, *contrastive* as well as *transitional* connectors. The 7 categories are presented and exemplified in Table 1 below:

Table 1.

Classification of Connectors according to Quirk et al (1985)

Category	Sub-category	Example
1. Listing	I. Enumerative	First, first of all, secondly
	II. Additive	i. Equative Equally, likewise, similarly
		ii. Reinforcing Indeed, in addition, above all
2. Summative		In short, in conclusion, in sum
3. Appositive		Namely, for example, that is, in other words
4. Resultive	I. Causal	Because, for, as
	II. Resultive	Consequently, therefore, then
5. Inferential		Otherwise, in that case, then
6. Contrastive	I. Reformulatory	Rather, more accurately, more precisely
	II. Replacive	Alternatively, on the other hand
	III. Antithetic	While, whereas, in contrast
	IV. Concessive	anyway, besides, in any case, all the same,
7. Transitional	I. Discoursal	Incidentally, by the way
	II. Temporal	Meanwhile, subsequently

It should be noticed that some of the categories have sub-categories. For example, the *listing* category is subdivided into 2 sub-categories, namely *enumerative* and *additive*. In turn, the *additive* sub-category is further subdivided into 2 categories, i.e., *equative* and *reinforcing*.

The review of literature reveals that most studies on connectors have been based on one of the frameworks mentioned above or their modified version. For example, a study by Carrió-Pastor (2013) was conducted on the basis of Quirk et al's (op.cit.) model. The study analyses how Spanish writers of English use connectors in comparison with native speakers. On the basis of a corpus of 40 academic papers collected in the domain of Engineering, the study shows, on the whole, that Spanish speakers used fewer connectors than native speakers of English. Other examples are Sabzevari et al. (2016) and Chen (2006, p. 117). These studies used a classification of connectors proposed by Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999), which is itself a modified version of Halliday & Hassan's (op.cit.) classification.

It is important to note that while the main frameworks on connectors, i.e., Quirk et al (op.cit.), Biber et al. (op.cit.) and Halliday & Hassan (op.cit.), mentioned above, are indispensable references in the study of connectors, they do not offer comprehensive lists of connectors. The

researchers noticed, for example, the absence of the connector “*in fact*” from these models. This absence probably implies that native speakers, on which these models are based, do not use or favour the connector *in fact* in their argumentative writing.

Tang & Ng (1985:118-119) who proposed a list of connectors adapted from Quirk et al (op.cit.), classified the connector *in fact* in the listing category, more precisely as an additive, in the *reinforcing* sub-category. The connector *in fact* is classified into the reinforcing sub-category, together with connectors such as *furthermore*, *moreover*, *above all* and *in addition*. However, Tang & Ng’s (op.cit.) framework does not provide any detail on how *in fact* should be used. According to the Cambridge online dictionary, “*in fact*” is used “to add more detailed information to what has just been said”. In addition, the same source indicates that “*in fact*” is “commonly used in front position in a clause” and that “it may occur in the end position in informal situations”. According to Ball (1986), cited in Granger & Tyson (1996, p. 20), *in fact* belongs to a category of connectors termed *corroborative* connectors whose role is to “add a new point that strengthens the argument” or “give a new turn to the argument” as illustrated in the following example:

It is a widely held belief in the UK that the signing of the Maastricht Treaty marked the end of an era. In fact, nothing has changed.

The University of Burundi (UB) learner group seems to favour very much the connector *in fact*. Indeed, based on the authors’ teaching experience, a survey conducted in 2018 among teachers of English at the University of Burundi, it appears that the connector *in fact* is one of the most frequently used connectors by the UB learner group. Furthermore, the connector *in fact* is cited in some studies as one of the most overused and challenging connectors (Granger & Tyson, op.cit., Gilquin & Granger, 2015 and Mahendra & Dewi, 2017). All these studies found that the connector *in fact* is overused by the targeted groups of learners and challenging to them.

A few studies have suggested that the overuse and misuse of the connector *in fact* among French speaking learner groups may be linked with French transfer of the corresponding French *en fait*. One example is Granger & Tyson (1996) who examined how Louvain French EFL learners used connectors in comparison with native speakers. Their study points to overuse and underuse of individual connectors and found evidence of semantic, stylistic and syntactic misuse. Furthermore, the study shows that the use of “*in fact*” is challenging to the targeted group of French learners given that they used it as a stylistic enhancer, that is, it is used to show the presence of the writer in the text rather than to introduce a further point to the argument. According to the authors, this use is characteristic of the corresponding French connector “*en fait*” (Granger & Tyson, op. cit, p. 22).

Gilquin & Granger (op.cit) conducted a research to find out how learners of English from different mother tongue backgrounds use connectors called discourse markers (DMs) in their study. One of their findings is that French speaking learner groups overused “*in fact*” (i.e., French, Bulgarian and Italian) which was not the case in other groups of learners. This result led to the conclusion that the overuse of “*in fact*” among French-speaking learners is probably a consequence of the frequent use of the equivalent French connector “*en fait*” (Gilquin & Granger (op.cit, p. 12). They reached the conclusion that the French EFL learners overused the connector “*in fact*” while the Swedish EFL learners preferred “*sort of*”. According to the same authors, this overuse of “*sort of*” by Swedish learners may be due to these learners’ “high proficiency in speaking skills”.

Another interesting study was carried out by Mahendra & Dewi (2017). This study investigated how students from Ganesha University of Education (Indonesia) used connectors in their

academic writing productions with focus on errors made. AntConc tool (Anthony, 2018) was used to analyze the data. The study found that the most difficult connectors are *however*, *in fact*, *moreover*, *also*, *either* and *as well as*. It is noticeable that “*in fact*” is listed among the connectors causing difficulty but not so much detail is given.

The fact that the most important models on connectors do not include the connector *in fact* and therefore provide no help in the description of this connector and the fact that the studies which were carried out on connectors, i.e., Granger & Tyson (op.cit.), Gilquin & Granger (op.cit.) and Mahendra & Dewi (2017) focused on quantitative analysis have led the researchers to attempt to investigate how Burundian learners use the connector *in fact* in their argumentative writing (appropriately or inappropriately). This paper seeks, therefore, to answer the following questions:

- (i) How frequently is the connector *in fact* used in argumentative writing produced by students from the University of Burundi?
- (ii) Do students from the University of Burundi use the connector *in fact* appropriately in their argumentative writing?

The study provides insights for the teaching of connectors in general and of the connector *in fact* in particular which is very much favoured by the targeted EFL learner group. The study gives a contribution, however little it may be, in designing better teaching materials based on learner corpus data. Thus, teachers, learners, and decision-makers may benefit from this study given the fact that it unveils the challenges faced by students in the use of the connector “*in fact*”. Learners can themselves learn from their peers’ errors and teachers can figure out other ways of handling the connector “*in fact*” focusing on the correct use of the connector.

3. Methodology

The aim of this section is to discuss the methodology adopted in carrying out this research. Specifically, details concerning the research design, the compilation of the corpus and data analysis procedures are provided.

To begin with, it should be indicated that the research design for this study is three-fold. One of the designs adopted in this study is the corpus-based approach also termed Corpus Linguistics. CL “is based on analysis of large databases of real language examples stored on computer” (Biber et al., 1998, p. i). Following are two definitions cited in Baker (2006, p. 40): “A scholarly enterprise concerned with the compilation and analysis of corpora” (Kennedy, 1998, p. 1): “study of language based on examples of “real life” language use’ and ‘a methodology rather than an aspect of language requiring explanation or description” (McEnery & Wilson, 1996, p. 1). One of the reasons why Corpus Linguistics turns out to be more advantageous than earlier approaches to Linguistics is the fact that it is concerned with authentic language use as it appears in Biber et al.’s (op.cit.) and Kennedy’s (op. cit.) definitions above. In addition, it is important to notice, as Biber et al (1999) points out, that several other advantages of CL/CBA come from the use of the computer:

Several of the advantages of the corpus-based approach come from the use of computers: computers make it possible to identify and analyse complex patterns of language use, allowing the storage and analysis of a larger database of natural language than could be dealt with by hand. Furthermore, computers provide consistent, reliable analyses: they don’t change their mind or become tired during an analysis. (p. 4)

Another important point worth mentioning is that both quantitative and qualitative methods are adopted in this study. The corpus-based approach makes use of computer software such as

Wordsmith, AntConc, etc. to search one's corpus. Such analyses provide quantitative information which needs to be interpreted by the researchers. In this study, quantitative information about learners' use of connectors was generated through the use of AntConc tool and then it was interpreted.

Finally, this study is based on pseudo-longitudinal data consisting of essays written by English majors from the University of Burundi. The longitudinal approach helps track the development of a group of learners in terms of certain aspects of the learned subject. A truly longitudinal approach requires following up a class of students. This means that data is collected at different stages from the same group of students, namely, in first, second and third year, etc., depending on the duration of the program. However, many writers (such as Gass & Selinker 2008, pp. 56-57; Gilquin 2015, p. 14) admit that the collection of longitudinal corpora may be difficult and suggest that researchers may instead rely on pseudo-longitudinal data also termed quasi-longitudinal data. Such corpora "are gathered at a specific point in time but from different learners representing different proficiency levels" (Gilquin, op.cit.). Given time and financial constraints, the researchers adopted a pseudo-longitudinal approach to collect the data needed for this research.

The next point to discuss is the compilation of the corpus for this study. As mentioned above, this paper is based on a corpus of argumentative essays written by first, second and third-year undergraduate students from the University of Burundi, at the Institute of Applied Pedagogy, more precisely from the English Department. This corpus consists of 622 essays. Its size was determined thanks to AntConc tool, especially the "*word list*" and "*start*" facilities. Tables 2 and 3 below provide details on the contribution of essays and the size of the corpus respectively.

Table 2.

Contribution of Essays

Level	Task A	Task B	Total
Bac 1	175	144	319
Bac 2	70	98	165
Bac 3	66	69	135
Total	311	311	622

Table 3.

Size of the Corpus

The sub-corpora	Number of essays	Word types	Word tokens
Bac1_A	175	3,826	63,829
Bac 1_B	144	4,311	68,528
Bac 2_A	70	2,989	40,052
Bac 2_B	98	3,862	64,366
Bac 3_A	66	2,701	34,017
Bac 3_B	69	2,885	35,872
Total	622	8,920	306,664

The conditions in which the corpus for this study was compiled also deserve special mention. It was collected during the year 2019 as a response to two writing tasks given to students. For each task, students were given a set of three argumentative topics (e.g., Death sentence should be banned). The subjects had to choose only one topic to write about. This was done to ensure that each student would get a topic in which they were interested and for which they could easily get ideas to develop their essays. Before writing the essays, students filled a form which investigated personal information such as their name, the languages spoken, and so on. In

addition, the students were given instructions about the timing for the writing task (2 hours) and also the size of their essays (700 words).

Having collected the handwritten essays from the students, the next step was data coding. This was done in two steps. The first step was to have the essays typed to get machine readable data. This activity was done by a team of 5 former English students from the University of Burundi. At this step, the typists were warned not to modify the writers' texts, i.e., they were given firm instructions not to correct the writers' errors or add any other errors as typists. Here, the researchers completely agree with Gilquin's (2015, p. 19) comment in her discussion about the challenges of turning handwritten texts into typed texts. She points out that keyboarding "can be quite tricky as the texts have to be reproduced exactly as they are, including the learners' errors but without introducing additional ones". The texts were then edited by the typists in collaboration with the researchers. The last step was data coding. This consisted in preparing the metadata in an excel file and text files for the essays. At a later stage, these will be combined in an interface which can be used by both teachers and learners.

Finally, as far as data analysis is concerned, the corpus was searched using AntConc tool in order to find all examples in which the connector *in fact* is used. This search was done on basis of a list of 95 connectors classified into six categories, namely, *listing*, *summative*, *appositive*, *resultive*, *contrastive* and *transitional*. The list of connectors was obtained by considering various models of connectors, namely, Quirk et al (op.cit.), Biber et al (op.cit.), Halliday & Hassan (op.cit.), etc. and by merging connector lists proposed by Tang & Ng (op.cit.) and Carrió-Pastor (op.cit.) to get a more comprehensive list. Table 4 below displays the connectors which were investigated in this study.

Table 4.

List of the Connectors Investigated

Category	Number of connectors	Connector
Listing	32	first, second, firstly, secondly, the second + noun, finally, further, furthermore, in addition, moreover, lastly, last but not least, to begin with, in the first place, in the second place, similarly, for one thing, for another thing, above all, for a start, in the same way, likewise, third, thirdly, first of all, last, the last (reason/example, etc.), last of all, in fact, first and foremost, next, another
Summative	12	to sum up, to conclude, in summary, in sum, in short, in brief, in conclusion, overall, all in all, altogether, in a nutshell, to summarize
Appositive	10	that is, that is to say, in other words, for instance, for example, namely, e.g., i.e., such as, specifically
Resultive	12	consequently, hence, therefore, thus, as a result, as a consequence, in consequence, so, because, since, as, then
Contrastive	22	however, although, even though, though, on the other hand, instead, after all, on the contrary, nevertheless, in contrast, besides, anyway, still, nonetheless, alternatively, rather, more precisely, in any case, by contrast, again, yet, in spite of
Transitional	7	meanwhile, eventually, subsequently, originally, in the meantime, by the way, incidentally
Total	95	

Note. This list of connectors in Table 4 was Adapted from Quirk et al (1985, p. 634)

4. Results

This study is concerned with issues of frequency and accuracy in the use of the connector *in fact* in the writing produced by student from the University of Burundi. It should be reminded that the two research questions which guided this study are (i) How frequently is the connector

in fact used in argumentative writing produced by students from the University of Burundi? (ii) Do students from the University of Burundi use the connector *in fact* appropriately in their argumentative writing? The quantitative analysis of UB learner corpus reveals that the 5 most frequently used connectors are *because*, *for example*, *such as*, *in fact* and *therefore*. More precisely, *in fact*, is the fourth most frequently used connector in the corpus as shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5.

The 5 Most Frequently Used Connectors in UB Learner Writing

Rank	Connector	Category	Percentage
1.	Because	Resultive	39.76
2.	For example	Appositive	7.70
3.	Such as	Appositive	3.69
4	In fact	Listing	3.33
5.	Therefore	Resultive	2.96

Table 5 above shows that *because* (resultive) is by far the most frequently used connector in UB (University of Burundi) learner corpus. It represents 39.76% of all the connectors investigated. The second most used connector is *for example* (appositive), representing 7.70%. The next most used connector is *such as* which also belongs to the appositive category. It represents 3.69%. Then comes *in fact*, which is the focus of this paper, representing 3.33 %. The fifth most frequent connector is *therefore* representing 2.96%. Of course, there are other frequently used connectors but, in this study, we have chosen to mention only the top five most used ones.

The quantitative analysis with AntConc reveals that, in total, there are 224 examples of the connector *in fact* in the UB learner corpus representing 3.33% as displayed in Table 6 below:

Table 6.

The Frequency of the Connector “in fact” in UB Learner Writing

Year of study	Number of essays	Number of connectors used	Number of examples	Percentage
Bac 1	319	2987	102	3.41
Bac 2	168	2253	74	3.28
Bac 3	135	1485	48	3.23
Total	622	6725	224	3.33

This table shows that students in all three years of study, i.e., years 1, 2 and 3, tend to use frequently the connector *in fact* in their argumentative writing. Following is the ratio of the use of *in fact* according to year of study: 102 occurrences representing 3.41 % in year 1; 74 occurrences representing 3.28% in year 2 and 48 occurrences representing 3.23% in year 3. In addition, the results displayed in Table 5 above make clear that the frequencies of the connector *in fact* in the three years of study are obviously close to each other, i.e., 3.41 % in year 1, 3.28 in year 2 and 3.23 % in year 3. Furthermore, results indicate that the frequency of the connector *in fact* decreases as students move higher in their training. This difference in the tendency may be explained by the fact that the number of students in classes usually decreases as students go higher in their training (given that some students fail and give up and others drop out due to several reasons). Another possible explanation may be the fact that students improve their competence in writing as they go higher and therefore have more resources at their disposal and do not have to depend on a few words. Specifically, during their training, learners acquire more connectors as they mature and therefore stop relying on the same words.

In conclusion, these results suggest that the connector *in fact* is favoured in UB learner writing. It also seems that the tendency of favouring the connector *in fact* decreases as students move higher on the academic ladder. However, a question one may ask is whether this connector which is so much preferred is appropriately or accurately used by the targeted students. This is another issue of concern in this paper.

Thanks to AntConc *concordance* and *file view* facilities, it was possible to analyze the position of the connector *in fact* in students' writing. At the paragraph level, the researcher was concerned with in which paragraph *in fact* appears (first paragraph, second paragraph, etc.) whereas at the sentence level, focus was put on the position of *in fact* in the sentence (initial, medial or final position). Another point focused in this study is whether UB learner writers are aware of the syntactic patterning of *in fact*, i.e., especially the fact that it is followed by a comma when it appears in initial or medial position. Table 7 below illustrates the patterning of *in fact* in terms of its position in the paragraph.

Table 7.

Position of "in fact" in the Paragraph

Position of <i>in fact</i> in the paragraph	Bac 1	Bac 2	Bac 3	Total	Percentage
Initial	92	30	36	158	70.5
Medial	10	44	12	66	29.5
Final	0	0	0	0	0
Total	102	74	48	224	100

Table 7 reveals that the majority of examples of *in fact* occur in the initial position in the paragraphs in students' essays. Specifically, 70.5 % of occurrences of *in fact* are found at the initial position while 29.5 % of examples occur in the medial position in paragraphs. Moreover, the results indicate that in UB learner corpus, *in fact* is never used in the final position (0 %) in the paragraph. Following are some examples from the learner corpus:

Example 1 (Essay code: B1_A_BIUB003.txt):

In fact, a majority of couples in Burundi like to make this mistakes of that couples may living together before marriage. So this is happen because of some families which are not stand well in rich and other side it happen because of the habitual of boy and girl being in love a long periode.

Example 2 (B1_A_BIUB005.txt)

In societies in fact, polygamy destroys many families and breaks a good deal of alliance which will bring later divorces. Lets say for instance, if a husband dares to go to look for another wife out, hell immediately change all his behaviours before his first wife and starts to beat her, to underestimate her, not to buy for her cloths even for their children if they are in possession of them and simply he begins to analyse all defects of his wife that he didnt see the time he was in love with her and this will happen such like because he is now in a comparison with the second one.

At the sentence level, *in fact* occurs almost always in initial position in UB students' writing as it is shown in Table 8 below:

Table 8.

Position of “in fact” at the Sentence Level in Students’ writing

Position of <i>in fact</i> in the sentence	Bac 1	Bac 2	Bac 3	Total	Percentage
Initial	99	72	48	219	97.8
Medial	3	2	0	5	2.2
Final	0	0	0	0	0
Total	102	74	48	224	100

It is clear from Table 8 above, that in the UB learner corpus, 97.8 % of examples of *in fact* occur in initial position in sentences while 2.2 % of examples occur in medial position. The table also reveals that *in fact* never occurs in final position in learner writing (0%).

Another point worth discussing is the fact that the connector *in fact* occurs in most cases at the beginning of the second paragraphs in learners’ essays to introduce the first supporting point of the thesis (a thesis is the idea a writer is trying to support in his/her essay; it normally appears in the introductory part of an essay). This is supported by the results displayed in Table 9 below:

Table 9.

“In fact” at the Beginning of the Second Paragraph in Learner Writing

Position of <i>in fact</i>	Bac 1	Bac 2	Bac 3	Total	Percentage
Beginning of 2 nd paragraph	67	28	33	128	57.1
Other positions	35	46	15	96	42.9
Total	102	74	48	224	100

The results displayed in Table 9 above show that globally at the paragraph level, Burundian EFL learners tend to use the connector “*in fact*” at the beginning of the second paragraph in their essays. Specifically, out of 224 examples of “*in fact*” found in the Burundian EFL learner corpus, 128 examples (representing 57.1%) are used at the beginning of the second paragraph while 96 examples, representing 42.9 %, are used in other positions in the essays. The following are the first two paragraphs of an essay written by a third-year student (The code of the essay is B3_A_BIUB516.txt).

Normally, marriage is a ceremony which two persons, by convention and engagement, decide to live together. This can be done in front of pastors and others that are in charge. But some people decide to live before marriage and there are persons who blame that saying that it is wrong when couples live together without marriage ceremony and so forth. As far as I’m concerned, I may agree that there is no matter in living together of couples before the marriage. That is, in my understanding, couples should live together before marriage.

In fact, as I’ve said it before, I suggest that if a couple is engaged to live together before marriage is not bad because they may take into consideration the problem of money and find it difficult for them to organize such ceremony and decide to do it only in legal. In this case, they are right and they may live without problem. However, there are some couples who get married, organize ceremonies of marriage by using too much money only in the purpose of showing that they are rich men and then after the marriage, may lack means to fulfil the needs of home because they wasted too much money in marriage which is too wrong than living together before marriage. Saying this, we cannot forget people who use money credit in order to celebrate their marriage. This may hinder the progress of their home.

In year 2, however, the opposite tendency is observed, that is, the majority of occurrences of “*in fact*” are found in other positions, not at the beginning of the second paragraph as it is the case in years 1 and 3. Specifically, 46 examples out of 74 (more than half) occur in other

positions rather than at the beginning of the second paragraph. This difference in the placement of “*in fact*” may be explained by the fact that in year 2, the essays were written in response to an exam question while in years 1 and 3, the essays were written in response to an assignment. The difference in the tendency probably results from the fact that students usually give more attention to exams than simple assignments.

So far, the discussion has concerned the positioning of the connector *in fact* in the essay, especially at the paragraph and sentence levels. Another point that draws attention is the fact that *in fact* is normally followed by a comma when it does not appear in final position. Data analysis indicates that UB learners are aware of this fact and most of them have no problem on this aspect. Specifically, in the majority of examples, “*in fact*” is followed by a comma as shown in table 9 below:

Table 9.

Use of Comma after “in fact” in Learner Writing

Use of comma after <i>in fact</i>	Bac 1	Bac 2	Bac 3	Total	Percentage
Yes	93	68	45	206	91.9
No	9	6	3	18	8.1
Total	102	74	48	224	100

As Table 9 shows, the majority of examples of “*in fact*” in learner writing are followed by a comma. More precisely, 206 examples of “*in fact*” representing 91.9 % are followed by a comma while in 18 examples representing 8.1 %, the comma is not used. These results demonstrate that the majority of UB learners have no difficulty with this syntactic feature of the connector “*in fact*”.

5. Discussion

The quantitative analysis has shown that *in fact* is one of the most frequently used connectors in the Burundian EFL writing. More precisely, *in fact* is the fourth most used connector in UB learner writing. Results also show that the high frequency of “*in fact*” is observed in all three years of study, 1, 2 and 3. However, its frequency is relatively smaller in year 2 where the writing was done in response to exam questions rather than to a simple assignment.

Similar results of high frequency of the connector *in fact* were reached by studies carried out on groups of French speakers: Granger & Tyson (op.cit.) on the Louvain French EFL learners and Gilquin & Granger (op.cit.) on French, Bulgarian and Italian learners of English. These studies also found overuse and misuse of the connector *in fact* among French-speaking learners and concluded that this feature is probably linked with French transfer of the corresponding French connector “*en fait*”.

The present paper shows that the preference of “*in fact*” is observed in all years of study among advanced learners of English from the Institute of Applied Pedagogy at the University of Burundi, that is, years 1, 2 and 3. More interestingly, the study also reveals that the conditions in which the writing is done have an impact on the frequency of the connector “*in fact*”. Specifically, as mentioned earlier, in year 2 where the writing was done for the purpose of an examination, the frequency of the connector *in fact* is relatively lower than in the other classes where the writing was done as a simple assignment. These results push the researchers to hypothesize that there may be certain conditions whereby learners would only have moderate use of connectors.

Just as in studies by Granger & Tyson (op.cit.); Gilquin & Granger (op.cit.), the overuse of “in fact” by the Burundian EFL learner group is also perceived as resulting from French transfer. Let us indicate that French is an official language in Burundi, a status it shares with Kirundi (the National Language of Burundi). Some evidence for this statement would come from the fact that that, in general, educated Burundians use the French connector *en fait* (or *au fait*) very frequently in Kirundi-French code-switching as in the following sentence: “Ndashobora kuguha iyi invitation ukayintwarira kwa Karori? En fait (au fait) jewe naramurondeye ndamubura”, translated as “could you please give this invitation to Karori [name of a person]? En fait/au fait, je l’ai cherché mais je ne l’ai pas trouvé ».

Another interesting result concerns the position of the connector *in fact* at the paragraph and sentence levels. The results of this study have shown, that in the UB learner corpus, *in fact* is most frequently used in the initial position, whether at the paragraph or sentence levels, but it is rarely used in medial position. In addition, the study shows that *in fact* is never used in final position. These results are in accordance with the description provided by the Cambridge online dictionary which states that *in fact* “is used to add more detailed information to what has just been said” and that it “is commonly used in front position in a clause although in informal situation it may occur in the end position”. The following example is given: The holiday was really disappointing – a complete disaster *in fact*. It just rained all the time. Concerning this use, it is obvious that UB students have used the connector *in fact* appropriately since it is in the majority of cases used in initial position as the dictionary specifies. In relation to the position of connectors in the sentence, Tang & Ng (op.cit.) reported similar results. Their study on how undergraduate students at City University of Hong Kong used connectors found that some connectors were almost invariably used in initial position in the sentence.

Another point to raise is that the connector “in fact” is in most cases used at the beginning of the second paragraph in the UB learners’ essays. In this sense, it is used to introduce the first main supporting point of the essay. This use by learners is somehow erroneous. We have seen above that *in fact* is used “to add more detailed information to what has just been said”. To comply with this specification, “*in fact*” should be used to add further information rather than introducing the main point of the argument.

Finally, on the syntactic level, the results show that UB learners are aware of the fact that *in fact* is followed by a comma when it is not in final position. Following are a few examples of “*in fact*” used without a comma in learner writing: *In fact prostitution make pleasure and also you gain money. However, in different areas, many people depend on prostitution especially those of smallest revenu and other do it for pleasure.* The results of this study suggest that most students have no problems on this syntactic aspect.

6. Conclusion

This paper investigated how undergraduate students from the Institute of Applied Pedagogy at the University of Burundi used connectors in their argumentative writing. It sought to answer the following questions: (i) How frequently is the connector *in fact* used in argumentative writing produced by students from the University of Burundi? (ii) Do students from the University of Burundi use the connector *in fact* appropriately in their argumentative writing? The study is based on a pseudo-longitudinal corpus consisting of 622 argumentative essays written by first, second- and third-year students from the Institute of Applied Pedagogy at the University of Burundi. The size of the corpus amounts to 306, 664-word-tokens. This corpus was searched using AntConc tool, on the basis of a list of 95 connectors, classified into 6 categories. The list of connectors was obtained by consulting several works on connectors. Results indicate that *in fact* is one of most frequently occurring connectors in Burundian EFL

learners' writing. It is fourth in rank after *because*, *for example*, *such as* and it is followed by *therefore*. In addition, the preference of *in fact* is shown to prevail in all the three years of study. Concerning the position of *in fact*, the study reveals that, whether at paragraph or sentence levels, the preferred position in learner writing is the initial position. *In fact* is rarely used in medial position but it never occurs in final position in learners' writing. Another important discovery is the learners' preference of *in fact* at the beginning of the second paragraph of their essays. This use does not comply with the specification of *in fact* which should be used to add more detailed information. In this case, *in fact* is used to introduce the first main supporting point of the thesis. *In fact* is used in a wrong position where connectors used to introduce a first supporting point of the thesis such as *first*, *firstly*, *to begin with*, etc. should be used instead. Thus, the use of *in fact* at the beginning of the second paragraph in learner essays suggests misunderstanding on the part of learners of the function of this connector. Finally, the study has shown that most learners are aware of the fact that the connector "*in fact*" has to be followed by a comma. Based on the findings of this study, a few recommendations can be made. Learners should know that "*in fact*" is used to introduce more detailed information but not the first point of the thesis. Teachers should draw their learners' attention on this use of *in fact*. In addition, teachers and learners should be more careful about preferred connectors such as *in fact* to ensure that they are used accurately. For further research, we make the following recommendation: A similar study on the use of the connector *in fact* should be conducted on (i) students from other English departments at the University of Burundi (ii) students from other domains such as science, medicine, psychology, etc. (iii) secondary school students.

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