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### **Citation**

Afzali, P. (2024). Argumentative Style Across Cultures: A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Standpoint Presentation by Iranian and Norwegian Learners of English. *Proceedings Of The Tenth Conference Of The International Society For The Study Of Argumentation*, 58-74. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107749>

Version: Publisher's Version

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## Argumentative Style Across Cultures

### *A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Standpoint Presentation by Iranian and Norwegian Learners of English*

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**ABSTRACT:** Argumentative texts by English learners may contain L1 rhetorical strategies which may create confusion in international settings. Some cultures encourage standpoint-first structure, whereas others encourage arguments-first. By combining insights from pragma-dialectics and intercultural rhetoric to analyze 40 texts by Iranian and Norwegian university students (English-related majors), from the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLEv3), I investigate students' placement of standpoint, its relation to complexity of argumentation, and the lexical devices used in the strategic maneuvering.

**KEY WORDS:** argumentative style, corpus research, English learner writing, intercultural rhetoric, pragma-dialectics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Arguing effectively through an academic text is an inseparable part of academic skills. However, argumentation may be challenging for learners of English (Belcher, 2007; Jalilifar et al., 2017; Lillis & Curry, 2015; Melliti, 2019). Existing research suggests that a great number of students have difficulty writing argumentative texts both in their L1 (Chen et al., 2016; Crowell & Kuhn, 2014; Newell et al., 2011, 2015) and in English as L2 (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017; Huh & Lee, 2014; Liu & Stapleton, 2020; Qin & Karabacak, 2010). Studies such as those by Ferretti and Graham (2019) and Grabe and Zhang (2013) note that arguing through a text is more difficult for L2 learners since issues such as writing proficiency, L2 mastery for academic communication, and making inferences requiring cultural genre-specific conventions add to the already difficult argumentative writing process.

I compare argumentative texts written by Iranian and Norwegian university students in order to seek out potential patterns that characterize each group or differ between the two groups. While Iranian students start learning English at school much later than Norwegians and they have more limited exposure to English, both groups have difficulty in argumentative writing (Behroozi & Amoozegar, 2015; Olsson & Sheridan, 2019).

To search for patterns, I focus on the argumentative and the presentational aspects of the texts written by English learners. While these two aspects have rarely been studied simultaneously, the 'argumentative style' perspective of pragma-dialectics presents a framework to analyze complex argumentation by addressing a broad range of argumentative moves and presentational devices (van Eemeren, 2021).

According to pragma-dialectics, writers strategically maneuver to persuade readers by ensuring that their argument appears reasonable and effective. Pragma-dialectics provides tools for systematically analyzing three dimensions of strategic maneuvering: topical choices, adaptation to the audience demand, and presentational devices (van Eemeren, 2021). However, unlike ‘intercultural rhetoric’ (Connor & Rozycki, 2012), this perspective has not been used to investigate differences in argumentative texts written by learners of English until now.

In this paper, I focus on standpoint presentation in relation to the complexity of argumentation to identify students’ argumentative styles in presenting their main standpoint (central idea of the text). In particular, using texts from International Corpus of Learner English (ICLEv3), I analyze main standpoint’s placement in texts and the frequency of the lexical devices to present it. Regarding the complexity of argumentation, I investigate the frequency and organization of supports in favor of and attacks against the main standpoint.

The research questions are: (1) In what order do writers choose to present standpoints and arguments? (2) How does the choice of standpoint first vs. arguments first relate to the complexity of the argumentation? and (3) How does the use of lexical devices correlate with standpoint placement and the complexity of argumentation?

In what follows, after a review of previous studies on L2 argumentative texts, with a focus on Norwegian and Iranian L2 writers, I present the theoretical framework, materials, procedure and tools to analyze student texts, followed by the results and discussion of the analysis.

## 2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous studies from argumentation theory and intercultural rhetoric have addressed various aspects of macro-/micro-structure of texts (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017; Chien, 2015; Jwa, 2020), links between paragraphs (Hinds, 1987; Kubota, 1998), coherence and cohesion (Babaii, 2020; Chuang, 2015), and lexical devices (Canagarajah, 2013; McCambridge, 2019, McNamara et al., 2014). Some scholars have used tools from intercultural rhetoric (Connor, 2008; Mauranen, 1993; Pérez-Llantada, 2013), while others have focused on argumentation theories such as pragma-dialectics (Leal, 2020; van Eemeren, 2022), or the Toulmin model (Nussbaum & Schraw, 2007; Qin 2020). A few studies have combined tools from intercultural rhetoric and argumentation (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017; Chuang, 2015; Wingate, 2012). Several studies have compared L2 argumentative texts written by non/native speakers of English (Mauranen, 1993; Qin and Karabacak, 2010), while others have investigated L1 and L2 texts (Kubota 1992; Rashidi & Dastkheyr, 2009). Furthermore, some studies have reported cultural differences concerning the choice of argumentative strategies (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017; Isaksson- Wikberg, 1999; Mauranen, 1993; Rashidi & Dastkheyr, 2009; Xu, 2017).

In intercultural rhetoric, scholars such as Kaplan (1966) and Hinds (1987) suggested that L2 learners should follow strategies used by native speakers to eliminate cultural differences in texts; however, they have been criticized for overlooking the international plurality of discourse communities (Belcher, 2014; Casanave, 2004; Hyland, 2019; Kubota and Lin, 2009). Other scholars have emphasized that different is not deficient

and suggest raising awareness to help in international collaboration (Abasi, 2012; Isaksson-Wikberg, 1999; Mauranen, 1993). However, the latter group overlooks the fact that not following specific criteria (e.g. test rubrics) may have serious consequences for non-native writers (e.g. failing in international exams or journal publication).

Studies in argumentation have mainly used Toulmin's (1958, 2003) argument model. However, some scholars have described Toulmin's model as too basic and have modified its elements (Abdollahzade et al., 2017; Herman, 2018; Jalilifar et al., 2017; Qin & Karabacak, 2010). Herman (2018, p. 32) points out the following problems with Toulmin's model: 1) Data/grounds are defined as facts or factual information and therefore definitions are not dynamic enough. 2) No clear-cut definitions for backing exist. 3) Rebuttal is introduced as the only way to tackle counter-argument in natural argumentation processes even though there are other ways to indicate them, and 4) Tools for analyzing complex structures are lacking. This indicates that new models are needed to capture different dimensions of complex texts.

Literature related to Iranian and Norwegian argumentative strategies is limited. Some studies suggest that Iranian writers express standpoints with decisiveness (Keshavarz and Kheirieh, 2011; Mozayan et al., 2018). In addition, Mozayan et al. (2018, p. 95) argue that "Iranian researchers show a higher tendency to resort to as many resources as they can in order to cogently justify their arguments". Including many resources for main standpoint adds to complexity of argumentation in texts written by Iranian writers. Studies in the Norwegian context highlight existing tradition of providing factual data as arguments, comparing different perspectives and presenting ideas directly/indirectly (Berge, 1988; Evensen, 1989; Ørevik, 2019). Furthermore, Dahl (2004) and Ørevik (2019) argue that national culture plays an important role in the way Norwegian students choose to structure their texts in English and state their main idea either explicitly/implicitly or inductively/deductively.

Studies reviewed here have used different models and attributed various characteristics to texts written by writers with different cultural/linguistic backgrounds and the results seem to vary extensively. While both intercultural rhetoric and argumentation theory have strengths and limitations, combining insights from these perspectives to analyze texts written by Norwegian and Iranians students may help in addressing understudied complex dimensions of argumentative texts.

### 3. THE STUDY

#### *3.1 Theoretical framework*

The argumentative styles perspective of pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren, 2021) approaches argumentation as a complicated notion and aims at identifying characteristics of each style by analyzing three dimensions of strategic maneuvering. Topical choices include selections regarding the content of the standpoints, starting points, arguments, etc. Adaptation to audience demand addresses adaptation of argumentation to the audience's preferences and perspectives. Presentational devices include the verbal and non-verbal means to present argumentative moves (van Eemeren, 2021, p. 8). These three dimensions together shape the arguer's style.

Van Eemeren (2021) presents two general argumentative styles: detached and engaged. The detached argumentative style is recognized by “radiating objectivity” in topical selections, “conveying reliability” in adaptation to the audience demand and “expressing openness” to independent judgement through presentational devices. In contrast, the engaged argumentative style is recognized by “radiating commitment” to the issue in topical selection, “conveying communality” with the audience in adaptation to the audience demand, and “expressing inclusiveness” through presentational devices (van Eemeren, 2021, p. 19).

Argumentative moves in this study (main standpoint, supports, subordinate-supports, attacks, responses to attacks) are related to the topical choices; text structure is related to adaptation to audience demand; and lexical markers of main standpoint are related to presentational devices. Intercultural rhetoric considers inductive/deductive style to indicate writer’s styles. Considering this, we may say that writers adapt to the audience demand by presenting the main standpoint early/late (i.e. backward-/forward-linearization) or by organizing different levels of supports and attacks (i.e. complexity of argumentation).

Lexical markers selected for this research have been studied as interpersonal/interactional metadiscourse in intercultural rhetoric (Ädel, 2006; Crismore et al., 1993; Hyland, 2005, 2018; Vande Kopple 1985). Vande Kopple (1985, p. 86) considers these markers as tools to express personal feelings and ideas that writers present. Furthermore, Hyland (2018, p.43-44) defines metadiscourse as “a cover term for self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers”. In argumentation theory, however, lexical markers are referred to as argumentative indicators/markers which mostly mark an argumentative move (Barton, 1993, 1995; Grote et al., 1997; Musi, 2018; Tseronis, 2011; van Eemeren et al., 2007).

To study markers, I used corpus-based and corpus-driven approaches (Biber, 2012) together with linguistic stylistic approach (bottom-up and top-down analysis) (van Haften & van Leeuwen, 2021). Using corpus-based approach, the validity of lexical markers was analyzed according to lists of lexical markers from previous studies and using corpus-driven approach, I studied lexical markers which emerged while analyzing the corpus.

For the analysis of lexical markers, I annotated opinion markers, attitude markers, boosters and hedges, using search terms (e.g. I believe, unfortunately, certainly, maybe) from the selected studies (van Eemeren et al., 2007; Hyland, 2005; Thomson, 2021; Rubin, 2006) and my observations after close reading of texts. Frequency of markers was used to profile learner varieties and then I charted and compared lexical markers based on checklists from other studies (bottom-up analysis). This list was further reduced to the linguistic devices that were used to present main standpoint (top-down analysis). Finally, using Spearman rho test, I checked whether these lexical items were used systematically to present main standpoint and whether a correlation existed among markers.

### *3.2 Materials*

The texts were randomly selected from the International Corpus of Learner English: Version 3 (ICLEv3) (Granger et al., 2019, p. 134). Two sub-corpora selected for this study contain argumentative texts written by higher intermediate to advanced learners of English with Persian and Norwegian mother tongue. These sub-corpora are comparable thanks to the same collection guidelines (ICLE; Granger et al. 2019): all students major in English-related studies, they wrote the texts under untimed conditions and not as part of an examination.

I selected 20 texts from the Persian sub-corpus (released in 2020) written by Iranian students from 3 different universities. Each text contained between 702 and 954 words each. The 20 texts from the Norwegian sub-corpus (released in 2009) were written by students from 6 universities in Norway and ranged between 711 and 1205 words each.

According to ICLEv3 guidelines, students could choose from 14 essay prompts. Iranian students wrote on 3 of those prompts and Norwegians wrote on 10. Essay prompts do not fully overlap, but both Iranian and Norwegian students wrote on essay prompts that ask about dis/agreement. All prompts are in form of questions (example 1) or declarative sentences (example 2).

- (1) Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare students for the real world. They are therefore of little value. Do you agree or disagree with the statement above?
- (2) Crime does not pay

### *3.3 Analytical tools and procedures*

#### *3.3.1 MAXQDA software*

Annotation of texts and qualitative/quantitative analyses were carried out using MAXQDA software (VERBI Software, 2021). The texts were imported into MAXQDA and organized based on the external criteria of the writers' nationality. I annotated texts using the annotation scheme developed for this study (section 3.3.2). The frequencies of annotations were extracted by MAXQDA and the statistical analysis using Spearman rho test was done to investigate correlation among markers. Spearman rho was chosen due to continuous nature of variables (section 4.3.4).

#### *3.3.2 Annotation scheme*

In this study, I have annotated the following argumentative moves: main standpoint, supports, subordinate-support, attacks, and response to attack. The text structure was annotated based on the main standpoint position and presentational devices were analyzed based on the list of lexical markers presenting main standpoint. Argumentative moves were studied using insights from pragma-dialectics, text structure was analyzed based on taxonomies from intercultural rhetoric, and lexical markers were studied using tools from intercultural rhetoric, pragma-dialectics and linguistic stylistic approach.

#### Argumentative moves:

##### Main standpoint:

According to pragma-dialectics, the move of standpoint refers to arguer's position toward the cause at issue while resolving differences of opinion (van Eemeren et al., 2007). This definition is slightly different in this study to help with the analysis of text structure. Namely, only one standpoint was annotated for each text, which is the writer's main reaction to the essay prompt. Main standpoint (example 3) is a significant part of the text since all other sections are linked to it in some way.

- (3) Essay Prompt: Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare students for the real world. They are therefore of little value. Do you agree or disagree with the statement above?

Main standpoint: I maintain that the statement above is, to a great extent, true. (ICLE-IR-MA-10007)

##### Support and subordinate-support:

Support (example 4) is an argument that directly defends the proposition presented in the main standpoint. Subordinate-support (example 5) directly defends the proposition presented in the support and thus indirectly defends the main standpoint in the text (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2016, p. 55).

- (4) A lot of students claim that the university degrees to a greater extent should focus on the practical side of the education, rather than emphasizing theory. (NOHE1004)
- (5) Some of the students at Hamar Lærerhøgskole think that the final degree does not embrace enough material to prepare the students for the role of the teacher in reality. (NOHE1004)

I annotated for subordinative argumentation structure, where "arguments are given for arguments" and "if the supporting argument for the initial standpoint does not stand on its own, then it is supported by another argument, and if that argument needs support, then a further argument is added" (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2016, p. 59).

Supports were annotated thematically, based on the themes they were addressing. For instance, if the support mentioned an example to strengthen a certain standpoint, the whole example was selected as one support. Subsequently, if more sentences (e.g. elaboration, statistics, references, addressing the same theme) were provided with the aim of strengthening the support, they were taken as subordinate-supports. Each support was given a number (e.g. support 1) and levels of subordinate-supports were numbered based on the support number (e.g. subordinate-support 1.1).

##### Attack and response to attack:

Presenting attacks is divided into two steps: mentioning attacks and responding to them. Attacks (example 6) indicate the opposing arguments toward the main standpoint. Responses to attacks (example 7) indicate writers' reaction to attacks (e.g. justifying that the attack is not relevant). Attacks and responses to attacks were also selected thematically and numbered (e.g. attack 1, response to attack 1.1).

- (6) Some might argue that university is not the only place for learning how to behave or communicate in the society. (ICLE-IR-MA-00022.14)
- (7) While this statement is true for some cases, the advantage of having a degree to gain a position cannot be denied. (ICLE-IR-MA-00022.14)

Text structure:

According to Peldszus and Stede (2016, p. 13), in backward linearization, the writer “opens the text with the central claim” (main standpoint), followed by reasons and objections, which are all directed backward to the central claim. On the other hand, in forward-linearization, writers state reasons, objections or views first and then draw a conclusion. Therefore, all premises are directed forward and lead to the main standpoint.

Markers:

The annotated presentational devices include: opinion markers, attitude markers, boosters and hedges which appeared in sentences where the main standpoint was presented. It may be stated that writers who use more hedges (sign of objectivity), tend to detach themselves from the cause at issue and vice versa. Instead, writers who use more attitude markers, opinion markers or boosters (sign of inclusiveness), tend to get personally engaged in the process of presenting the main standpoint and vice versa.

Opinion markers:

Opinion markers (example 8) were annotated based on van Eemeren et al. (2007, p. 30) that assign two conditions to these indicators: indication of an opinion and parenthetical use. When markers are used parenthetically, changing their position in the sentence does not affect the meaning of the proposition.

- (8) The question is: does crime pay, or not? Yes, sometimes *I believe* it does. (NOUO1088)

Attitude markers:

Attitude markers (example 9) express writer’s evaluations or feelings (Hyland, 2005, p. 32).

- (9) *Unfortunately*, most university degrees are theoretical and often don t prepare students for the real world. (IRKI09005)

Boosters:

Boosters (example 10) emphasize force or indicate certainty (Hyland, 2005, p. 52).

- (10) I *certainly* like the notion of trying to reform criminals and reintegrate them into society. (IRMA07020)

Hedges:

Hedges (example 11) withhold writers’ commitment to the issue (Hyland, 2005 p. 52).

(11) I think, all of these criminals are not bad. And, *maybe* law judged wrong.  
 (IRMA07031)

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Text structure (based on the main standpoint placement)

All 20 Iranian students present the main standpoints early in the text (backward-linearization), followed by supports and attacks, while only 9 Norwegian students do the same (Table 1). The remaining 11 Norwegian students have main standpoints at the end (forward-linearization), after supports and attacks. This indicates different argumentative behavior in placement of the main standpoint in these groups, influencing the whole text structure and the route taken to persuade the reader.

Text structure	Iranian	Norwegian
Backward-linearization	20	9
Forward-linearization	0	11
Total	20	20

Table 1. Text structure

### 4.2 Argumentative moves

#### 4.2.1 Supports and Subordinate-supports

Both groups use nearly the same number of supports for their main standpoint, however, they use different distribution strategies (Table 2). Nearly all students present at least two supports for their main standpoint. While 19 students in the Iranian group present a third support, only 14 of the Norwegians do the same. However, in the Iranian group, there is a marked decrease in the supports after the third support, and a sharp drop for each support from support 4 to support 8. In contrast, the decrease is less abrupt in the Norwegian group. The decrease in the Norwegian group continues steadily until support 7, while in the Iranian group there is a sharp drop for each support from support 4 to 8 (Table 2). This indicates that supports in the Iranian group are mostly concentrated between supports 1 and 4, while the supports that Norwegian students provide are more evenly spread between supports 1 and 7.

Patterns in the frequency and distribution of subordinate-supports differ from the patterns concerning the use of supports in two ways. Firstly, the frequency of subordinate-supports in the Iranian group is higher compared to the Norwegian group (107 vs. 70).

Secondly, more levels of subordinate-supports exist in the Iranian group, namely, at least two levels of subordination for each support (e.g. 1.2 for support 1) versus one level in the

Norwegian group (e.g. 1.1 for support 1). Very few instances of level 2 of subordinate-support (e.g. 1.2 for support 1) are found in the Norwegian group (9 out of 70=12%) and no instance of levels 3 and 4 of subordinate-support exist in this group (e.g. 1.3 for support 1).

On the contrary, many instances of second, third and fourth level subordinate-supports (e.g. 3.2, 3.3, 3.4) are found in the Iranian group (35 out of 107= 32%). This shows that to

strengthen standpoints, Iranian students use more levels of subordinate-supports, thus making the route to persuade the readers more complex.

Supports	Iranian		Norwegian	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Support 1	20	26.8	20	26.3
Support 2	19	25.3	19	25
Support 3	19	25.3	14	18.4
Support 4	9	12	8	10.5
Support 5	3	4	6	7.9
Support 6	3	4	5	6.6
Support 7	1	1.3	4	5.3
Support 8	1	1.3	0	0
Total supports	75	100	76	100

Table 2. Distribution of supports

Subordinate-support	Iranian	Norwegian
	Frequency	Frequency
Sub 1.1	19	16
Sub 1.2	5	1
Sub 1.3	1	0
Sub 2.1	19	17
Sub 2.2	7	2
Sub 2.3	2	0
Sub 3.1	19	12
Sub 3.2	9	3
Sub 3.3	3	0
Sub 3.4	2	0
Sub 4.1	9	6
Sub 4.2	1	1
Sub 4.3	1	0
Sub 5.1	3	4
Sub 5.2	1	1
Sub 5.3	1	0
Sub 6.1	3	3
Sub 6.2	1	1
Sub 6.3	1	0
Sub 7.1	0	3
Total	107	70

Table 3. Distribution of subordinate-supports

#### 4.2.2 Attacks and responses to attacks

Frequency of attacks in both groups is remarkably lower than the frequency of supports (Tables 4 and 5). The main difference between the two groups is that 8 of the 10 attacks presented by Norwegian students are attack 1, and only 2 texts contain attack 2 and 3, while in the Iranian group, 9 of the 19 instances are attack 1, 7 are attack 2, and 3 are attack 3.

Both groups have provided one level of response for each attack, but the frequencies are different in this aspect, Iranian students have presented 19 attacks and 12 responses (i.e. 7 attacks were not responded to), while Norwegian students have presented 10 attacks and responded to 5 of them. This indicates that Iranian students respond more to attacks (19 vs. 10).

	Iranian		Norwegian	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Attack 1	9	47.4	8	80
Attack 2	7	36.8	1	10
Attack 3	3	15.8	1	10
Total	19	100	10	100

Table 4. Distribution of attacks

	Iranian		Norwegian	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Response 1.1	4	33.3	5	100
Response 2.1	6	50	0	0
Response 3.1	2	16.7	0	0
Total	12	100	5	100

Table 5. Distribution of responses to attacks

However, it does not indicate that Norwegian students do not acknowledge different views. In fact, they use different strategies (example 12). Namely, before mentioning standpoints, they mention that different points of view exist which are not necessarily contradicting with their standpoint (therefore they cannot be taken as attacks). This strategy was not presented since it is out of the scope of this study.

(12) Essay prompt:

All armies should consist entirely of professional soldiers: there is no value in a system of military service.

Different points of view:

For some it is a matter of feeling their constitutional rights infringed upon, for others a matter of not having the time nor the inclination to spend a relatively long period of time away from work or studies. A much-publicized reason is refusal to do military service for idealistic reasons, i.e. pacifism or religious conviction.

Main standpoint:

I find that there's a place in today's society for men like Para Regiment's soldiers. (NOUO1047)

The correlation between forward-/backward-linearization and complexity of argumentation for Norwegian students, the frequency and distribution of supports, subordinate-supports, attacks and responses, indicate no significant difference. In other words, the same patterns seem to repeat in both forward and backward-linearized texts. The frequency and structuring of argumentative moves in backward-linearized texts in the Norwegian group (Tables 6, 7, 8, 9) were not similar to backward-linearized texts by Iranian students. This indicates that Norwegian students have similar argumentative behavior in both forward- and backward-linearized texts.

Overall, it seems that no correlation exists between complexity patterns and text structure (i.e. backward-/forward-linearization). The only noteworthy difference can be that the number of attacks in forward-linearized texts are twice the number in backward-linearized texts in the Norwegian group. Given the limited number of forward-linearized texts, it seems that this should be further investigated in relation to its correlation with frequency of attacks.

Support	Norwegian (backward-linearized)		Norwegian (forward-linearized)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Support 1	9	25	11	27.5
Support 2	8	22.2	11	27.5
Support 3	7	19.5	7	17.5
Support 4	4	11.1	4	10
Support 5	3	8.3	3	7.5
Support 6	3	8.3	2	5
Support 7	2	5.6	2	5
Support 8	0	0	0	0
Total	36	100	40	100

Table 6. Distribution of supports in backward- vs. forward-linearized texts

Subordinate-support	Norwegian (backward-linearized)	Norwegian (forward-linearized)
	Frequency	Frequency
Sub 1.1	7	9
Sub 1.2	0	1
Sub 1.3	0	0
Sub 2.1	8	9
Sub 2.2	1	1
Sub 2.3	0	0
Sub 3.1	7	5
Sub 3.2	0	3
Sub 3.3	0	0
Sub 3.4	0	0
Sub 4.1	4	2
Sub 4.2	0	1
Sub 4.3	0	0
Sub 5.1	3	1
Sub 5.2	1	0
Sub 5.3	0	0
Sub 6.1	3	0
Sub 6.2	1	0
Sub 6.3	0	0
Sub 7.1	2	1
Total	37	33

Table 7. Distribution of subordinate-supports in backward- vs. forward-linearized texts

	Norwegian (backward-linearized)		Norwegian (forward-linearized)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Attack 1	3	100	5	71.4
Attack 2	0	0	1	14.3
Attack 3	0	0	1	14.3
Total	3	100	7	100

Table 8. Distribution of attacks in backward- vs. forward-linearized texts

	Norwegian (backward-linearized)		Norwegian (forward-linearized)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Response 1.1	3	100	2	100
Response 2.1	0	0	0	0
Response 3.1	0	0	0	0
Total	3	100	2	100

Table 9. Distribution of responses to attacks in backward- vs. forward-linearized texts

#### 4.3.1 *Opinion markers*

Frequency of opinion markers in standpoints does not show a significant difference between groups (15 among Iranians vs. 13 among Norwegians) (Table 10). In addition, in both groups, a positive correlation between frequency of opinion markers and attitude markers is observed (Table 11). Another correlation, which is statistically significant (Table 12), is between opinion markers and hedges, indicating that in both groups students who use more opinion markers use fewer hedging devices.

#### 4.3.2 *Attitude markers*

Attitude markers are the most frequent markers to present standpoints in both groups and Iranians use them more than Norwegians (23 vs. 15). Similar to opinion markers, attitude markers have a negative correlation with hedges in both groups.

#### 4.3.3 *Boosters*

Boosters are used more in the standpoints among Norwegians than Iranians (13 vs. 8). However, it is not the most used marker by Norwegian writers.

#### 4.3.4 *Hedges*

Hedges are among the least used markers to present standpoints in both groups (9 in the correlation between hedges and opinion/attitude markers (Table. 12). The correlation between attitude markers and opinion markers is not significant and therefore, it seems that students who use more opinion markers are not necessarily the ones who use more attitude markers (Table 11).

Markers	Iranian		Norwegian		Total
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Opinion Markers	15	53.6	13	46.4	28
Attitude markers	23	60.5	15	39.5	38
Boosters	8	38.1	13	61.9	21
Hedges	9	45	11	55	20

Table 10. Distribution of standpoint markers

Markers	Standpoint Attitude markers
Standpoint Opinion Markers	0.072 (p=0.6601)

Table 11. Correlations between attitude and opinion markers

Markers	Standpoint Hedges
Standpoint Opinion Markers	-0.417 (p=0.0074)
Standpoint Attitude markers	-0.280 (p=0.0798)

Table 12. Correlations between hedges and attitude/opinion markers

Regarding presentational devices accompanying main standpoint, students use markers which indicate how detached or engaged they are. More attitude and opinion markers are found in the Iranian group which shows that writers provide personal ideas and signal them by markers. On the other hand, the number of hedging devices to modify the main standpoint is not significantly different in the two groups, therefore none of them can be said to be more objective.

Another method to investigate how these markers are used is the correlation between opinion/attitude markers and hedges. According to the results from the statistical analysis, a negative correlation exists between opinion markers and hedges which seems statistically meaningful (p value=0.007) and attitude markers and hedges in both groups which is not statistically significant (p value<0.07). Therefore, regardless of the cultural and linguistic background, students who use more opinion/attitude markers tend to use fewer hedges. Since opinion markers are used to mention a personal idea and attitude markers are used to express writer's feelings, they do not seem to conflict with hedges. In other words, writers can mention uncertainty and indicate that it is their personal ideas. However, it seems that students who use more hedges, tend to use fewer signs of engagement.

Results about boosters are puzzling because they do not correlate with any other marker except for hedges. Studying boosters by employing different methodologies or in combination with other markers, could provide more information on students' argumentative behavior in relation to boosters.

Similar to argumentative moves, markers do not seem to be different in backward-/forward-linearized texts (Table 13). However, both Iranian and Norwegian students (regardless of the way of structuring their texts) seem to follow the same patterns in their groups. Therefore, it seems that cultural/linguistic background has more influence than the text structure on the way students use lexical markers to present main standpoints. Interestingly, the only exception to this rule is the correlation between the use of attitude/opinion markers with hedges, which indicates that regardless of cultural/linguistic background, students who use more attitude/opinion markers use fewer hedges. Since hedges and attitude markers have been linked to writers engaging themselves in the text

and hedges as signs of detaching, this may indicate that distinct patterns of using markers of objectivity vs. subjectivity exist which may not be influenced by students' cultural/linguistic background.

Markers	Norwegian (backward-linearized)		Norwegian (forward-linearized)		Total
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Opinion Markers	5	17.9	8	28.6	13
Attitude markers	7	18.4	8	21.1	15
Boosters	8	38.1	5	23.8	13
Hedges	6	30	5	25	11

Table 13. Distribution of markers in backward- vs. forward-linearized texts

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study aimed at answering the following research questions: (1) In what order do writers choose to present standpoints and arguments? (2) How does the choice of standpoint first vs. arguments first relate to the complexity of the argumentation?, and (3) How does the use of lexical devices correlate with standpoint placement and the complexity of argumentation? To answer these questions, I investigated texts from a corpus of English learner argumentative texts, written by Iranian and Norwegian learners of English. I combined insights from intercultural rhetoric and pragma-dialectics to identify more aspects of argumentative texts in relation to main standpoint and complexity of argumentation.

Differences between the groups can be summarized as follows: 1) regarding text structure, nearly all Iranians present main standpoints early in the text, while more than half of Norwegians present it late, 2) Iranians use more levels of subordinate-supports and present more attacks and responses to attacks, therefore, we may say that Iranian students behave differently from Norwegians when adapting to audience demand (by presenting complex argumentation structures to convince readers), 3) based on the characteristics of detached and engaged argumentative styles, we might say that since Iranian students use more attitude markers, they are more personally engaged in presenting the main standpoints than Norwegians.

The two groups seem to share similarities in three respects: 1) a negative correlation exists between opinion/attitude markers and hedges, 2) one level of responding to attack was used in both groups, and 3) a positive correlation exists between attitude markers and opinion markers. Therefore, regardless of students' linguistic/cultural background, both groups have similar argumentative behavior in these three areas.

These findings indicate that, although each group seems to have specific characteristics which may help in assigning an argumentative style, comparison based on aspects such as presentational devices are trickier and more complex. Therefore, the markers that are present should be considered in relation to the ones which are left unstated.

Finally, selection of main standpoint and dialectical routes taken to strengthen that standpoint and, as a result, selection of strategies to persuade the audience, seem to be different in these two groups but no culture specific patterns were found in presentational devices accompanying the main standpoint. The annotation scheme developed in this study seems to help in annotating specific aspects of argumentative texts which can be further

compared to find culture specific characteristics. It can help analysts to find potential patterns in texts written by writers from the same or different cultures, since ignoring this information will have consequences for students from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds who intend to enter academia.

This study has limitations such as the size of the annotated sample and having only one annotator. As a result, the findings of this study can only indicate that specific phenomena have been observed and should be further investigated among other groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I would like to thank Kaja Borthen, Nancy Lea Eik-Nes, Lars Evensen, Hana Gustafsson, Assimakis Tseronis and Annelie Ädel for their insights and helpful comments.

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