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Bakalářská práce

Barbora Millerová

Use of discourse markers in the speech of advanced learners of English before and after a study stay in an English-speaking country

Užití diskurzivních částic v řeči pokročilých studentů angličtiny před a po studijním pobytu v anglicky mluvící zemi

Poděkování

Velké díky patří vedoucímu mé bakalářské práce, PhDr. Tomášovi Gráfovi, Ph.D., za cenné rady, ochotu a vstřícnost při konzultacích. Ráda bych také poděkovala své rodině a přátelům za to, že při mně stáli a podporovali mně po celou dobu mého studia.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to determine whether study abroad has an effect on the frequency of discourse markers in speech of advanced learners of English. The data used for the analysis are interviews with ten advanced learners of English conducted before and after studying abroad in an English-speaking country for one or two semesters. 1,228 discourse markers were identified and tagged. The research revealed that nine out of ten speakers increased their use of discourse markers post-SA, although this increase was only significant for four of them. The most frequently used discourse markers both before and after the SA were *like* and *so*. Apart from these two markers, *you know* has experienced the highest increase in frequency post-SA. The thesis also examined locational distribution of markers *well* and *so* within an utterance, but did not find any significant changes post-SA. The analysis of individual speakers' recordings proved that apart from changes in frequency, variety of the DMs also changed for most of the students, which suggests their speech was influenced by the study stay abroad.

Keywords: discourse markers, learner language, study abroad

Abstrakt

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zjistit, jestli se frekvence diskurzních částic v mluveném projevu pokročilých žáků anglického jazyka změnila po studijním pobytu v zahraničí. Praktická část analyzuje transkripci rozhovorů deseti pokročilých studentů angličtiny před a po absolvování studijního pobytu v anglicky mluvící zemi. V těchto rozhovorech bylo nalezeno a označeno 1228 diskurzních částic. Výzkum ukázal, že se frekvence diskurzních částic zvýšila u devíti z deseti účastníků, ačkoliv jen u čtyř z nich se tato změna potvrdila jako statisticky významná. Nejčastěji používanými diskurzními částicemi před i po studijním pobytu byly *like* a *so*. Po studijním pobytu se kromě těchto dvou částic nejvíce zvýšila frekvence částice *you know*. Dále byla zkoumána distribuce částic *well* a *so* v promluvě, která ale nepotvrdila žádné významné změny po studijním pobytu. Výzkum jednotlivých nahrávek potvrdil, že nejen frekvence, ale také typy použitých diskurzních částic se u většiny studentů změnila po návratu ze studijního pobytu, což vypovídá o jeho vlivu na jejich řeč.

Klíčová slova: diskurzní částice, žákovský jazyk, studijní pobyt

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List of abbreviations

DM	Discourse marker
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
L2	Second language
LINDSEI	Louvain International Database of Spoken English Language
NS	Native speaker
SA	Study abroad
SLA	Second language acquisition

1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to find out whether the frequency and distribution of discourse markers in the speech of several advanced learners of English has changed as a result of a study stay in an English-speaking country. Discourse markers, being an indispensable part of spontaneous speech, are naturally acquired by native speakers, but are rarely introduced to second language (L2) learners along with grammar and other language features (Müller, 2005). Since similarity to the native speaker's use of language is considered a success for learners of English as a foreign language, the use of discourse markers is thought of as a sign of an advanced speaker (Cots, 1992). Additionally, it is believed that a study stay abroad often results in improvement in L2, due to the constant exposure to the native language speakers (Freed, 1995). These assumptions will be tested in the analytical part of this study.

The theoretical part of the thesis describes the definition and functions of discourse markers and compares their use in the speech of both native and non-native speakers. The description focuses more closely on three frequent discourse markers, namely *well*, *you know* and *like*. Furthermore, it deals with a study stay abroad and its influence on language improvement and the frequency of discourse markers in spoken language of English learners. The practical part of the thesis is a corpus study of nine most frequent discourse markers in the interviews with several students before and after their study stays. The study is based on L2 learners of English and the same speakers were interviewed before their left for a study stay abroad and after their return. The data used for the analysis are interviews made with several advanced English learners, all of them students of the English and American Studies at the Charles University in Prague. Each student was interviewed before they left on their semester of study abroad programme and after their return. The interviews are dialogues between the speaker and the interviewer, lasting approximately 15 minutes. All the discourse markers used by the participants are counted and their frequency in both of the interviews is compared.

Among the studies conducted about discourse markers, most have focused on their use by native or bilingual speakers of English (Luke, 1987; Schiffrin, 1987), and there is significantly fewer data researched about how they are acquired by second or foreign language speakers. Only recently have there been studies made about the acquisition and use of discourse markers by non-native speakers in the classroom environment (Müller, 2005; Aijmer, 2011). Similarly, studies

exploring the effect of study abroad on second language have only emerged in the recent years, often with contradicting results (Freed, 1995; Lafford, 2004). This thesis aims to prove whether a study stay abroad has an influence on the use of discourse markers for advanced English learners, and if there is a connection between the use of discourse markers and language proficiency of non-native English speakers.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Discourse markers

According to Brown and Yule (1983), language has two basic functions: transactional, which serves to give the recipient factual information, and interactional, which expresses social relations and personal attitudes. In everyday spoken communication, especially an informal one, a conversation usually consists of both, but remains primarily interactional (ibid). Besides greetings and politeness markers, discourse markers also fit under the interactional part of an utterance. Although they make no real informative contribution to the conversation, Fung (2007) finds incorporation of discourse markers into the language curriculum necessary to “enhance fluent and naturalistic conversational skills, to help avoid misunderstandings in communication” and “provide learners with a sense of security in L2” (p. 433). Expressions such as *you know*, *well*, or *like* are of common occurrence in spoken language. In fact, it has been established they are found in continuous talk on average every 1.5 seconds (Luke, 1987).

It has been proven that although advanced EFL learners use the frequent discourse markers, their use diverges from the native speaker norm (Aijmer, 2011). There are various other factors which influence the frequency and distribution of discourse markers in one’s speech. According to Müller (2005), these factors can be divided into linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The linguistic factors include whether the speaker is a native or non-native speaker, how they acquired the language, speaker’s contact with a native speaker, the variety of English used and the nature of the context. The non-linguistic factors include the variables of a specific speaker considered, their gender, age, social class, ethnicity, as well as the relationship of the speakers and whether the given situation is formal or informal. These factors will be considered in the analytical part of this paper.

2.1.1 Definition of discourse markers

Many of the studies which deal with discourse markers struggle to find a unified definition

or place them into a traditional word class. They have even been called a “fuzzy concept” (Ziv and Jucker, 1998, p. 2) or “the most ambiguous of pragmatic phenomena” (Polat, 2011). There are many alternative terms used for discourse markers, sometimes categorized by their functions, such as *discourse connections*, *turn-takers*, *confirmation-seekers*, *intimacy signals*, *hesitation markers*, *fillers*, or *hedging devices*; (ibid, p.1) those which consist of more than one word, e. g. *you know*, *you see*, or *I mean*, have been called “pragmatic expressions” (Erman, 1987, p.2) Quirk et al. (1985) categorizes discourse markers as semantic conjuncts, which can mark relationships between verbal activities, for instance *however* to signify contrast or *anyway* to signify digression. Similarly, Fraser (1999) defines discourse markers as a class of lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases, which “signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce and the prior segment” (p. 950). Schiffrin (1988), after examining only eleven expressions, suggests the scope of discourse markers should contain a lot more expressions, including perception verbs such as *see*, *look* and *listen*, deictics (*here*, *there*), interjections (*gosh*, *boy*) or meta-talk such as *this is the point* and *what I mean is*.

Taking into consideration the various different views on discourse markers, it is not simple to find a definition which lists the characteristics that all of them have. Some of the basic features characteristic to discourse markers listed by Hölker (1991) are that “they do not affect the truth conditions of an utterance” and “do not add anything to the propositional content of an utterance” (p. 78). Jucker and Ziv (1998) also describe discourse markers as lacking any semantic content and with vague, or complete absence of meaning. They do, however, contribute to the pragmatic meaning of utterances and therefore play an important role in the pragmatic competence of the speaker (Müller, 2005, p.1). Hölker (1991) continues saying that discourse markers “are related to the speech situation and not to the situation talked about” and “they have an emotive, expressive function rather than a referential, denotative, or cognitive function” (p. 78). Some literature claims they occur exclusively in spoken language (Erman, 1986). This is not true for some words, such as *so* or *well*, which can appear even in formal written literature in the discourse marker function as an element of coherence. It can, however, be said that discourse markers tend to occur in oral rather than written discourse. Svarstvik (1980) wrote that “if they are found in both [oral and written discourse], they often, if not always, assume functions in the oral medium that go beyond those they have in the written medium” (p. 169). Müller (2004) adds that discourse markers can “occur at the beginning, middle, or end of a discourse unit”, but they can also be used individually and

“form a discourse unit of their own”, being often used as filler words or as hesitation during a conversation, and are “syntactically optional” (p. 27).

Moreover, it is important to note that some of the words mentioned as discourse markers can occur in speech in a different function, for example, *well* in its adverbial function, in phrases such as *well done* or *as well*, will not be considered a discourse marker. In other cases, the distinction between the word having a discourse marker function can be more ambiguous. Schiffrin (1987) and Müller (2005) both emphasise syntactic optionality as the key feature for defining discourse markers, and imply DMs have to be syntactically detachable from a sentence. Macaulay (2002, p. 752) in connection to *you know* gives a number of examples in which the construction forms a part of the clause syntax and excludes those from his analysis. Moreover, Redeker (1991) argues some other elements should not be counted as discourse markers, for example: clausal indicators of discourse structure (*as I said before, let me tell you a story*), deictic expression as far as they are not used anaphorically (*now, here, today*) and any expressions whose scope does not exhaust the utterance. For the purpose of this study, only words uttered in their discourse marker functions will be taken into consideration.

2.1.2 Function of discourse markers

As was already mentioned, discourse markers usually lack a specific meaning, therefore do not contribute to the informative part of the utterance. Although most discourse markers have lost their core meaning, Schiffrin (2006) remarks that some markers are homonymous with words whose semantic meaning is based on their logical properties (e.g. *and*), and some can contribute semantic meaning to discourse through metaphorical extensions (*now, then*). One way to assign a function to a discourse marker can be based on its position in the utterance. Fung (2007) wrote that most DMs occur at the beginning of the utterance, for instance, *right* or *okay* are often used to initiate discourse, preface a response or reaction, or mark a boundary in discourse, such as a shift between topics. *I think* or *actually*, on the other hand, can also be used as an afterthought or a clarification of a previously stated comment, but this use at the end of an utterance is less frequent (p. 413).

Discourse markers can also act as a filler or delaying tactic when occurring in an unplanned, spontaneous speech. Fung (2007) calls these DMs *cognitive*, as they “provide information about the cognitive state of speakers” (p. 415). They act as a mean for the speaker to elaborate,

reformulate, denote the thinking process, or assess the listener's knowledge about the utterance. Crystal (1988, p. 48) states that discourse markers help smooth spontaneous speech production and interaction and prevent the speaker from being perceived as impolite or "awkward to talk to", and Schiffrin (1988) also highlights "adding to discourse coherence" as the key function of DMs. Indeed, the use of a discourse marker can help the speaker to hold the floor or keep the attention of the addressee. A conversation without discourse markers can be seen as monotonous or too formal in given situation, and along with other pragmatic elements such as voice intonation or body language, they help to make the subject matter of the communication more understandable.

2.1.2.1 *Well* as a discourse marker

Well is one of the most frequently used pragmatic markers of English and most thoroughly covered in literature, since it does not only assume the usual DM functions, but also more specialized ones. Müller (2005) found twelve distinguishable discourse marker functions of *well* in her study, including most of those covered by other authors in the past, but also some which had not been described before, and divided the functions into those at a textual level and an interactional level. According to her description, discourse marker functions of *well* at a textual level are tied to the narrative structure of a text as well as oral narrative, where it can signal the beginning of a new episode, returning to the main story after an interruption or concluding a topic. However, the most commonly used textual function of *well* was stalling for time, in which case the speaker considers what to say next or searches for the right phrase. Discourse marker functions of *well* at an interactional level have to do with responses and expression of an opinion or evaluation. In these cases, *well* is used as a delayed or insufficient answer, response to self-raised expectations, or contributing an opinion or answer. An example of a function which did not occur in Müller's research was found by Owen (1981, p. 109), who wrote that *well* also indicates an occurrence of a face-threatening act, since it is often used at the beginning of disagreements, non-compliances with requests and rejections of an offer.

2.1.2.2 *You know* as a discourse marker

According to the Oxford English Dictionary¹, the discourse marker *you know* can be used to "indicate that the speaker expects that the general nature of what is being referred to will be known

¹ Oxford English Dictionary: <https://www.oed.com>. Accessed 15 January 2021.

or understood” but also as a mere conversational filler, or used “in place of something the speaker is unable or does not care to specify”. However, there are many other recorded functions of *you know*, and it appears to be one of the most diverse markers. It can be used in order to introduce a clarification of some part of a previous statement, mark the boundary between two modes of discourse, or terminate an argument in descriptive discourse (Erman 1987: 114). Östman (1981) emphasised its politeness function and stated that by using it, the speaker pretends shared knowledge to achieve intimacy. In his social study, Macaulay (2002) claims that speakers are more likely to use *you know* in conversations with an acquaintance than in interviews with a stranger. Like many other DMs, *you know* is also used as filling the gap while hesitating or thinking what to say next, and it is often followed or preceded by a pause or other hesitation markers. For example, in Müller’s study (2005), this marker occurs when a non-speaker lacks the English word and it is followed by a short pause. Apart from marking lexical search, false start and repair or approximation, she also notes a quotative *you know*, appeal for understanding, “imagine the scene”, “see the implication” and acknowledging that the speaker is right as functions of *you know* in her study.

2.1.2.3 Like as a discourse marker

Although the popularity of *like* appears to be recent, there are occurrences of *like* in the sense of ‘approximately’ already in the 18th century, and as an equivalent of ‘as if’ in the 19th century texts (Meehan 1991, p. 41). It is interesting to look at the use of *like*, since as Müller (2005) remarks, its use differs from the other frequent DMs, in that it does not have a role in the interaction between speaker and hearer. Unlike *so* or *well*, it does not evaluate previous statements or indicate a transition in topic, and unlike *you know*, it does not evoke any response from the hearer. Apart from its non-discourse marker functions as a verb, preposition or conjunction, it is usually used as a speech filler while stalling for time. It does not appear to have a particular position in an utterance and can even occur in context which can sound unintelligible or incomplete. According to Dailey-O’Cain’s study (2000), *like* is especially popular among young people in the United States, and used more frequently by women. Moreover, there may be a negative connotation to using *like* abundantly as a discourse marker for its association with “Southern Californian ‘Valley Speak’” (p. 70), for which reason people might avoid overusing it in professional settings more likely than other markers. Müller (2005) distinguished four discourse marker functions of *like* for both native

and non-native speakers: marking an approximate number or quantity (e. g. *it's like his eleventh comedy*), introducing an example, introducing an explanation and marking lexical focus, which indicates to the hearer to focus on the following information and perceive it as most significant. Another common occurrence of *like* is in the constructions of “*be like*” and “*feel like*”, which Müller categorizes as “quotative *like*”.

2.1.3 The role of discourse markers in SLA

With regard to all their characteristics and functions, it is clear discourse markers play an important role in native speaker communication, and should not be underestimated in EFL teaching. However, it has only recently been brought to attention that repeats, pauses, false starts and pragmatic markers are not errors, but part of an authentic speech, and became a popular subject of research (Aijmer, 2011). As Cots (1992) states, “[s]uccess in foreign language learning is graded in terms of how similar the linguistic behaviour of the learner is to that of the native speakers of the language” (p. 169). Müller (2004, p. 14) then remarks that this means discourse markers should be considered an important element to be learned by non-native speakers, and seeks to find out how successful L2 English learners are in this area. Wierbicka (2003) also highlights the importance of DMs for non-native speakers, writing that “if learners of a language failed to master the meaning of its particles, their communicative competence would be drastically impaired” (p. 341).

Additionally, discourse markers are part of a pragmatic competence, which was defined as “an aspect of communicative competence [which] refers to the ability to communicate appropriately in particular contexts of use” (Jaworski, 1998, p. 249), or “the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context” (Thomas, 1983: 92). Pragmatic competence includes the use of disclaimers, hesitation markers and tag questions to bring the hearer into the discussion, or polite forms to imply good manners. It has proved to be complex to acquire by non-native learners of English due to the lack of instruction, yet important to enhance, especially in higher levels of proficiency, to avoid misunderstandings in communication (Perez-Sabatar, 2014). In other words, L2 learners are expected not only to acquire the correct grammatical rules and vocabulary, but also to become familiar with social norms and attitudes associated with native speakers of the language, in order to be able to get closer to the native-like use of the language. This also suggests the study stay abroad should result in an

improvement in the learner's speech, as well as make a difference in their use of discourse markers.

2.1.4 Discourse markers and non-native English speakers

Most of the research made about discourse marker use have been focused on native speakers, for example, Schiffrin (1987) or Svarstvik (1980). Thus, what has been considered a significant data, including the terminology and functions of DMs, have been based only on the speech of native speakers. Since then, studies have demonstrated that non-native speakers do not use discourse markers in the same way that native speakers do. Müller's study (2005) showed that the DMs *like* and *you know* were used almost five times more frequently by native speakers than non-native speakers, and Fung (2007) proved the use of some markers such as *right*, *actually* or *you know* is restricted and used by native speakers in a wider variety of pragmatic functions. On the other hand, *well* was overused by non-native speakers in both Müller's and Aijmer's (2011) studies, but used in different functions than native speakers, who use it more frequently to cope with speech management than for attitudinal purposes. Although there are irregularities in the results of these studies, they generally suggest that advanced English learners underutilize DMs when compared with native speakers, especially for their pragmatic functions.

While native or bilingual speakers of English acquire the pragmatic elements of speech, including discourse markers, automatically in their childhood (Müller, 2004), the question how discourse markers are acquired into speech by non-native speakers remains, since they are not considered a basic grammatical element which is taught in language courses. As Fung (2007) states, in the case of *well*, its adverb, adjective and noun meanings "are frequently emphasized in an ESL classroom, whereas its pragmatic usages in spoken English", such as topic change, making a suggestion, expressing surprise, doubt, etc., "are rarely focused upon" and this likely results in devaluating the pedagogic significance of DMs and contributes to their low status (p. 433). How, then, can the use of discourse markers be taught to learners of English? Among the studies made about the use of DMs in a classroom environment, most remark the importance of the contact with native speakers of English. Fung (2007) suggests the need to strengthen learner's pragmatic competence in spoken language by creating space to improve their use of DMs, and Müller (2005) stated that discourse markers can only be properly taught through native speaker contact and outside of classroom. Therefore, the exposure to the native speakers of English for a certain amount of time can contribute to the frequency of discourse markers in their spontaneous speech, and result

in overall improvement in proficiency of their English.

2.2 Study abroad

An increasing number of students every year decides to broaden their views by taking a semester or more at a university abroad. Although the tradition of students travelling abroad for a part of their university education dates hundreds of years to the past, the wider range of programmes and places in the past few decades encourages not only university students, but also younger pupils or teachers to experience a different approach to learning. Only in 2019, almost 940 000 people took the opportunity to study, train or volunteer in a foreign country through the Erasmus+ Programme, a European Union student exchange programme, which helps students access studying and working abroad.² It is doubtless that there are many different advantages which come with studying abroad unrelated to the educational element, from personal growth of living independently in a culture one is interested in, to finding friends and contacts from all around the world. Pratt-Johnson (2018) claims that studying abroad (SA) has a positive impact on the student's ability to function in unfamiliar settings, racial and ethnic identity development, emotional stability, and perseverance to graduation, and suggests that many participants are motivated to continue in their multicultural growth and therefore gain advantage in pursuing a career. Sanz and Morales-Front (2018) also mention a notion that Millennial and Gen Z students "see in SA a much-needed opportunity to break away from academic-induced stress" (p. 16).

Finally, an improvement in a foreign language appears to be a crucial reason for students to participate in SA, and it has been perceived as its most direct educational benefit (Freed, 1995). There is a general assumption about positive effect of SA on language learning, some have even argued that some aspects of language, such as pragmatics, can only be learned by living in the country where the language is spoken (Sanz and Morales-Front, 2018). However, there is some contradictory evidence which suggests that SA might only have an impact on the learner's language in some cases. Current approach to SA research tends to pay attention to the individual learner's identity and focuses on the role that one's culture, age or gender has on their language development (ibid.).

² The Erasmus+ 2019 annual report: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en
Accessed 13.1.2020.

2.2.1 The influence of SA on L2 improvement

The effect of SA on second language became a popular field of study only relatively recently, especially after Freed's ground-breaking book *Second Language Acquisition in Study Abroad Context* came out in 1995. Most of the previous research has compared second language development differences between studying abroad and the traditional L2 classroom, including disciplines such as grammar, vocabulary, listening skills or oral fluency (Sanz and Morales-Front, 2018). After the 1990s, a number of longitudinal studies, which compare one's proficiency in L2 before and after studying abroad emerged. Studies concerning social interaction and grammatical competence tend to show positive results. For instance, Lafford (2004) highlights the ability of students to communicate fluently and focus more on meaning than on correct forms, and Meara's study (2000) showed significant gains in native-like word associations for all participants, regardless of their initial level of proficiency. In contrast, Segalowitz et al. (2004) also examined oral complexity and formulaic expressions, but recorded only insignificant improvements. According to Kinginger (2013), results are ambiguous in vocabulary growth and phonology, where some participants show dramatic improvements, while others improve only briefly or not at all.

Taking the complexity of study abroad into consideration, it makes sense the results of previous studies of the development of learner's language after SA often differ or even contradict. There are various factors which can affect the result of one's progress. According to Freed (1995), context of learning has been identified as a crucial variable in SLA (p. 4-5) and there are differences in experience of individuals. Some students may choose to participate in a short-term stay, some prefer a full year programme and engage in studying the country's culture. As Aveni (2005, p. 55) remarked, although there might be a formal language class at school, most speaking opportunities on a study stay abroad occur through "unstructured spontaneous language use", such as unexpected conversation with a stranger or with friends. The out-of-classroom experience depends on the individual's current language ability, motivation and effort to seek out the target language, but also one's personality. While Freed (1995, p. 6-7) assumed students who actively try to use the language the most in authentic situations will be the ones who make the most progress, evidence proved that the type of interaction is more important than mere quantity of the out-of-class contact. Aveni (2005) classifies the factors which influence second language use while SA into external, "*social-environmental*" cues, such as behaviour of a teacher and a type of attention and feedback one receives, and "*learner-internal*" cues, which consist of their own confidence, attitude or level of

anxiety, and claims that “learner’s sense of self in social interactions is inextricably linked with the language they use” (p. 55). These factors, especially individual’s motivation and effort, are also important in order to retain the positive effect of study abroad after the learner returns to their home country and is no longer forced to use L2 outside of school.

As was mentioned in 2.1.3, discourse markers are identified as a part of pragmatic competence, a critical component in acquiring L2. Ren (2018) stated that pragmatic competence “plays a key role in interpersonal communication, particularly for learners studying abroad in a target community”. (p. 120) According to him, study abroad is widely perceived as an ideal context for developing language competence, because “living in the L2 culture appears to provide the most direct access possible to large amounts of input and interaction with native speakers” (ibid.). In addition, SA has shown positive results as regards development in sociolinguistics, such as awareness and use of register or levels of formality in language (Kinging, 2013). Therefore, if there is an improvement in the learner’s pragmatic competence after studying abroad, the use of discourse markers could change and become more similar to the native-speaker use. Gain in vocabulary could increase the variety of different DMs used by students after their semester abroad, and acquisition of sociolinguistic customs and register could increase the frequency of DMs in spontaneous speech.

2.2.2 Longitudinal studies of SA

One of the common ways to examine a gradual language improvement is a longitudinal study. Unlike cross-sectional studies, where multiple variables are examined at a single time, longitudinal ones collect and compare data related to the same variable from two or more time periods, and can therefore more directly observe the developmental patterns of different aspects of language over a certain period of time (Menard, 2008). Another advantage of a longitudinal study design is that it allows the possibility to examine whether some L2 areas develop more quickly than others (Serrano et al., 2012). On the other hand, Menard (2008) claims that there are issues which can raise in longitudinal studies, especially while measuring change over a long period of time, since it is not possible to tell what truly caused the apparent changes. Avoiding any inconsistencies of measurement and considering all the factors in the individual participant’s situation is necessary to perceive a true change. Because of the possibility to identify change between two time periods, the longitudinal design has been used in many studies about language

improvement in study abroad context (Serrano et al., 2012; Pérez-Vidal, 2014).

To my knowledge, there is no longitudinal study focused primarily on the change of the use of discourse markers after a study abroad. Significant research about non-native speaker use of discourse markers have mostly compared their frequency with the native-speaker use, or examined their acquisition or function in speech (Müller, 2005; Aijmer, 2011). Most of the longitudinal studies in the field of pragmatic competence regarding SA focused on speech act strategies, such as apologies, suggestions or refusals, and found out that learner's L2 productive pragmatic competence may develop in a nonlinear manner and the acquisition of morphosyntactic devices may develop slowly (Ren, 2018). There has only been little research made so far as to whether the positive changes in proficiency last after the study stay had ended. One of the few who conducted a longitudinal study after the participants' return to their home country was Matsamura (2007), who found out that if L2 pragmatic competence developed at the students, it was maintained even after the decrease of L2 exposure.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse interviews with several advanced learners of English before and after their study stay in an English-speaking country. The main research question of this study is whether spontaneous speech of the students has changed after their SA in regard to their use of discourse markers. More particularly, the study will examine the differences in frequency and distribution of discourse markers in both interviews generally and individually for each speaker.

3. Analysis

The aim of this thesis is to examine whether the frequency of discourse markers of speakers who have participated in a study abroad programme has changed. The participants of this study are several Czech advanced learners of English who have spent a semester or two in an English-speaking country during their university studies. They were interviewed and recorded before and after their study stay abroad. The analysis will focus mainly on the number of discourse markers the participants uttered in both interviews, but will also examine some of other changes that might appear in the students' use of DMs, such as their variety and position within an utterance.

3.1 The Czerasmus English Learner Corpus

The data for this analysis is derived from Czerasmus English Learner Corpus, a small

learner corpus focused on language development in study abroad context. It consists of recordings of Czech university students who took part in the Erasmus+ Programme both in English- and non-English-speaking countries. The compilation of the corpus was initiated by PhDr. Tomáš Gráf Ph.D. from the Department of English Language and ELT Methodology at the Charles University in Prague. Twenty-one students were interviewed and recorded before and after participating in the Erasmus+ programme, and each interview lasts between ten to twenty minutes. The interviews were subsequently transcribed according to the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Language (LINDSEI)³ transcription guidelines⁴. All participants were students of Charles University in Prague, whose native language is Czech. They were enrolled in one of the following programmes: Bachelor of Arts in English and American studies, Master of Arts in English Language and Linguistics, or Phonetics. Although their level of proficiency in English was not tested for the purpose of creating this corpus, as students of these programmes, they all had to sit an entrance exam proving that their English language proficiency was at least B2, and they all passed a progress test set at the C1 level. In addition, they had all been learning English for 14-18 years up to the time of being interviewed. As a result, the proficiency level of English of all participants may vary between C1 and C2. All of the students went on their Erasmus+ programme to one of the following destinations in the European Union: United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany and Belgium.

The corpus contains two subcorpora, one of which includes the pre-study abroad data, and the other the post-study abroad data. For this study, only ten students were selected from the corpus. The reason for that number of participants is the limited scope of a bachelor’s thesis. The criteria for selecting the participants were the length of their stay (at least one semester) and their Erasmus+ destination (an English-speaking country). The overall size of the part of the corpus chosen for this paper is 69,590 tokens, and Table 1 shows its detailed structure.

	Number of interviews	Tokens: A-Turns:	Tokens: B-Turns:	Total tokens	Total length in hh:mm:ss
Pre-SA	10	10,077	23,094	33,171	02:41:46

³ Louvain International Database of Spoken English Language (LINDSEI). See <https://uclouvain.be/en/research-institutes/ilc/cecl/lindsei.html>.

⁴ See <https://uclouvain.be/en/research-institutes/ilc/cecl/transcription-guidelines.html>.

Post-SA	10	9,108	27,311	36,419	02:51:58
Total	20	19,185	50,405	69,590	05:33:44

Table 1. *The size of the corpus and its two subcorpora*

In Table 2, the corpus data of individual students can be seen.

Speaker	Tokens Pre-SA	Length in mm:ss	Tokens Post-SA	Length in mm:ss	Total Tokens	Total length in mm:ss
A	2,152	15:46	2,611	17:41	4,763	33:27
B	2,423	15:51	3,212	20:45	5,635	36:36
C	2,210	18:17	2,317	16:19	4,527	34:36
D	1,855	14:42	2,762	17:05	4,617	31:47
E	2,120	17:33	2,226	15:43	4,346	33:16
F	3,186	20:25	2,994	16:32	6,180	36:57
G	2,020	11:52	2,329	14:22	4,349	26:14
H	1,585	11:58	2,782	16:37	4,367	28:35
I	2,572	15:35	2,849	15:12	5,421	30:47
J	2,971	19:47	3,175	21:42	6,146	41:29

Table 2. *Corpus details for individual speakers*

3.2 Data for the present study

For this study, ten students were selected from the aforementioned Czerasmus English Learner Corpus. All of the participants were between 20 and 24 years of age. Table 3 shows that three of them were male, seven of them were female, and the destination where they travelled to for their Erasmus+ programme. One student went to Ireland and the others studied in the United Kingdom, two of them in Scotland and seven in England. One of the students spent the whole academic year abroad, nine students only one semester.

Interviewee ID	Sex	Erasmus+ destination	Length of stay
A	F	England (Crewe)	2 semesters

B	M	England (Winchester)	1 semester
C	F	Ireland (Limerick)	1 semester
D	F	England (Newcastle)	1 semester
E	F	England (Canterbury)	1 semester
F	M	Scotland (Stirling)	1 semester
G	F	England (Canterbury)	1 semester
H	M	Scotland (Sterling)	1 semester
I	F	England (Birmingham)	1 semester
J	F	England (Sheffield)	1 semester

Table 3. *The participants of this study*

3.3 Method

After selecting the participants for the study, I reviewed the orthographic transcriptions of their interviews pre- and post- SA, identified and tagged the discourse markers in their speech. For this research, the interlinear, incremental tagging system (see e.g. Gráf, 2017) was adopted. Every discourse marker is identified by the tag DM in the first position. The second position of the tag is numerical and states which discourse marker it is. Each number stands for a different type of discourse marker (1= well, 2= you know, 3= like, 4= so, 5= I dunno, 6= I mean, 7= I think, 8= let's say, 9= I guess). I restricted the tagging process to nine most frequent DMs, since any other markers were only used few times across all texts. Additionally, I have tagged the expressions identical to DMs, which were not used in a discourse marker function as 0. In some cases, a third position is added to the tag, which specifies the position of the discourse marker in the utterance (B= beginning, M= middle, E= end). See Table 4 for some examples of tagged utterances.

Example of the tag	Meaning of the tag
<DM_1_B>	DM = discourse marker, 1= well, B= beginning of utterance
<DM_4_E>	DM= discourse marker, 4= so, E= end of utterance

<DM_0>	DM= discourse marker, 0= non-DM function
<DM_7>	DM= discourse marker, 7= I think
<DM_3>	DM= discourse marker, 3= like

Table 4. *Examples of tags and their decoding*

While deciding whether to tag an expression as a DM, I followed the discourse marker functions which I specified in 2.1.2. For example, the expression *I don't know* or *I dunno* was tagged as a discourse marker only if it was syntactically unnecessary and did not contribute to the lexical meaning of the sentence. In case (1), *I don't know* has a lexical meaning, but in (2), it acts as a filler expression which is syntactically optional, and therefore is tagged as a discourse marker.

(1) <DM_0> *I don't know what to expect but hopefully it's gonna be all= all good*

(2) *I'm going to Newcastle in (er) <DM_5> I don't know four days ...*

Like was also identified as a discourse markers in the previously mentioned functions, such as making an approximate number or quantity (3) or in a 'quotative' function, such as in constructions '*be like*' and '*feel like*' (4). Once again, if the word *like* was necessary for the lexical meaning of the utterance, it was not included as a discourse marker, for example in (5), where *like* is used as a comparison.

(3) ... *even though . it's <DM_3> like a .. two hours flight ...*

(4) *I was <DM_3> like . <DM_1_M> well okay this is probably not happening and he was <DM_3> like ...*

(5) ... *students acting <DM_0> like students*

In the case of *well* and *so*, I also tagged the position of the discourse marker in the utterance. For example, *so* was found in initial (6), middle (7) and end (8) position in the utterance.

(6) <DM_4_B> *so ... (erm) . this is a story of (erm) ...*

(7) *yeah .. <DM_4_M> so .. and and besides that I didn't have that many ...*

(8) ... *the bus driver repeated it with the really rolling R <DM_4_E> so*

Once the tagging process was finished, the files were analysed using AntConc (Anthony, 2019) in two separate sub-corpora: pre-SA and post-SA. In order to determine the true change in frequency of discourse markers in each interview, I calculated the number of DMs uttered per one

hundred words by each student. Finally, to identify the significance of the change between both interviews, I used the log likelihood value calculator⁵, which is often used for comparison of word frequencies in corpora. For this study, the calculated G2 value of 3.8 or higher will be considered significant.

3.4 Results

A total of 1,228 discourse markers were found in the interviews altogether, 470 before the study stay and 758 after.

3.4.1 General results in DM frequency

Table 5 shows the number of all discourse markers that were used by each participant and how the frequency changed after SA.

Speaker	Number of DMs Pre-SA	Number of DMs Post-SA	Total
A	36	58	94
B	28	49	77
C	27	37	64
D	34	93	127
E	40	65	105
F	58	84	142
G	54	65	119
H	44	93	137
I	80	165	246
J	69	49	118
Total	470	758	1,228

Table 5. *Individual speaker's discourse marker frequency pre- and post-SA*

The results show that in the case of nine out of ten participants, the number of discourse markers increased after their return from a study stay. To be able to determine the real change, however, relative frequency of DMs to number of words uttered in total in each interview must be

⁵ <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>. Accessed 24 March 2021.

considered. Table 6 shows how many discourse markers each speaker uttered per one hundred words both before and after SA.

Speaker	DMs per 100 words Pre-SA	DMs per 100 words Post-SA
A	1.67	2.22
B	1.16	1.53
C	1.22	1.60
D	1.83	3.37
E	1.89	2.92
F	1.82	2.81
G	2.67	2.72
H	2.78	3.34
I	3.11	5.83
J	2.32	1.54

Table 6. *Relative frequency of DMs for each participant (per hundred words)*

The biggest change in frequency of discourse markers was recorded in the case of participants D, E, F and I. The results also suggest that an individual factor should be considered, since the speakers who used a high number of DMs after their study stay abroad had often already used them most frequently in the first interview, which is the case of the interviewee I, who had the highest number of DMs in both of the interviews. Similarly, the interviewee C uttered the fewest DMs of all students both before and after SA. Only one student uttered fewer DMs post-SA.

Table 7 shows whether the relative frequency of DMs increased (+) or decreased (-) in the interview after SA of each speaker, and their calculated log likelihood value. The higher the G2 value, the more significant is the difference between the frequency scores before and after SA.

Speaker	Change	Log likelihood value
A	+	G2 = 1.82, p > 0.05
B	+	G2 = 1.41, p > 0.05
C	+	G2 = 1.13, p > 0.05
D	+	G2 = 10.00, p < 0.01
E	+	G2 = 4.85, p < 0.05

F	+	G2 = 6.54, p < 0.05
G	+	G2 = 0.01, p > 0.05
H	+	G2 = 1.05, p > 0.05
I	+	G2 = 22.56, p < 0.0001
J	-	G2 = 4.86, p < 0.05

Table 7. Log likelihood value of each speaker's change in frequency of DMs

According to the log likelihood value test, significant increase in discourse marker frequency after a study stay abroad was found in the case of 4 out of 10 students. Speakers E and F had a G2 value higher than 3.84, which is significant at $p < 0.05$. Speaker D had a G2 higher than 6.6, which is significant at $p < 0.01$, and Speaker I had a G2 higher than 15.13, which is significant at $p < 0.0001$. Speakers A, B, C, G and H did not show any significant increase and number of DMs uttered by Speaker J decreased, although this change was also calculated as significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table 8 contains a more thorough overview of all speakers and how many of each discourse marker per hundred words they used before and after SA.

Speaker	Occurrence of each DM per 100 words								
	DM 1	DM 2	DM 3	DM 4	DM 5	DM 6	DM 7	DM 8	DM 9
A – Pre-SA	0.28	-	0.51	0.42	0.09	-	0.37	-	-
A – Post-SA	0.46	-	1.03	0.5	0.08	-	0.04	-	0.11
B – Pre-SA	0.25	0.25	0.08	0.37	0.04	-	0.04	0.12	-
B – Post-SA	0.47	0.16	0.22	0.44	-	0.09	0.06	0.09	-
C – Pre-SA	0.45	0.05	0.05	0.5	-	0.14	0.05	-	-
C – Post-SA	0.09	1.34	0.09	0.09	-	-	-	-	-
D – Pre-SA	0.16	0.05	0.6	0.54	0.43	-	0.05	-	-
D – Post-SA	0.14	0.36	1.74	0.65	0.25	0.11	0.11	-	-
E – Pre-SA	0.38	0.09	0.61	0.71	0.09	-	-	-	-
E – Post-SA	0.13	-	1.8	0.9	0.04	0.04	0.04	-	-
F – Pre-SA	0.31	-	0.6	0.44	0.03	-	0.16	0.22	0.06
F – Post-SA	0.13	0.1	1.37	0.53	0.03	0.03	0.13	0.47	-
G – Pre-SA	0.54	-	1.38	0.54	0.05	-	0.29	0.05	-
G – Post-SA	0.56	-	0.77	0.43	-	-	0.04	-	0.98
H – Pre-SA	0.5	1.14	0.38	0.38	0.19	0.13	-	-	0.06

H – Post-SA	0.28	1.55	0.54	0.5	-	0.28	0.14	-	0.04
I – Pre-SA	0.5	0.12	1.83	0.47	0.12	-	0.08	-	-
I – Post-SA	0.04	0.32	4.14	0.95	0.11	0.07	0.18	-	-
J – Pre-SA	0.3	0.67	0.54	0.67	0.03	-	0.03	-	0.07
J – Post-SA	0.03	0.31	0.25	0.85	-	0.03	0.03	0.03	-

Table 8. Frequency of each DM for each participant per hundred words pre- and post-SA

Table 9 shows the nine most common discourse markers found in this study and how many times each of them was used by all speakers together, as well as the relative frequency of each DM per hundred words, in interviews both before and after SA.

DM	Total use pre-SA	Per hundred words	Total use post-SA	Per hundred words	Total
Well	84	0.37	63	0.23	148
You know	51	0.22	111	0.41	162
Like	150	0.64	324	1.19	435
So	117	0.5	160	0.58	274
I dunno	22	0.1	14	0.06	38
I mean	5	0.02	19	0.07	24
I think	25	0.11	22	0.08	47
Let's say	11	0.05	18	0.07	29
I guess	5	0.02	27	0.1	31

Table 9. Frequency of each discourse marker in interviews pre- and post-SA

The most popular DMs in total were *like*, *so*, *you know* and *well*. The most popular discourse marker both before and after SA is *like*, which also experienced the biggest increase in frequency. Besides *like*, the use of *you know* has increased the most. The DMs *I mean*, *let's say* and *I guess* were also used more times after SA. On the other hand, the use of *well*, *I dunno*, and *I think* has decreased.

Table 10 shows how many of different types of discourse markers were found in the recordings of each of the participants before and after SA.

Speaker	Types of DMs pre-SA	Types of DMs Post-SA
A	5	6

B	7	7
C	6	4
D	6	7
E	5	6
F	7	8
G	6	5
H	7	7
I	6	7
J	7	6

Table 10. *Individual speaker's variety of DMs used pre- and post-SA*

The results show that after the study stay abroad, four students have used more types of discourse markers than before their SA programme. The number of uttered DMs had stayed the same for three of the participants, and lowered for another three. However, these differences are minor, as most speakers increased or lowered their types of DMs by one, except for Speaker C. Although the table only shows the number of types of DMs used in each interview, most of the speakers also used different discourse markers after their study stay. Change in variety of commonly used DMs could suggest the student learned to use new ones or adjusted to native-like use of DMs during the SA. A detailed overview of specific DMs each student used before and after SA will be shown in Tables 11 to 20.

3.4.2 Results of individual speakers

To determine the specific changes in the use of discourse markers which occurred in the students' speech, the number of each DM uttered before and after SA for each speaker individually can be found at Tables 11 to 20.

	Speaker A			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,152		2,611	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	6	0.28	12	0.46

You know	-	-	-	-
Like	11	0.51	27	1.03
So	9	0.42	13	0.5
I dunno	2	0.09	2	0.08
I mean	-	-	-	-
I think	8	0.37	1	0.04
Let's say	-	-	-	-
I guess	-	-	3	0.11

Table 11. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker A

Speaker A mostly uses the same types of discourse markers after the SA in a higher frequency, with the exception of *I think*. She did not use *you know*, *I mean* or *let's say* at all, and only used *I guess* in the second interview, which makes her variety of DMs slightly bigger after SA. The log likelihood value for speaker A was 1.82 ($p > 0.05$), which means although the frequency of DMs increased after the speaker's study stay, the change is not big enough to consider significant.

	Speaker B			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,423		3,212	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	6	0.25	15	0.47
You know	6	0.25	5	0.16
Like	2	0.08	7	0.22
So	9	0.37	14	0.44
I dunno	1	0.04	-	-
I mean	-	-	3	0.09
I think	1	0.04	2	0.06
Let's say	3	0.12	3	0.09
I guess	-	-	-	-

Table 12. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker B

Similarly to Speaker A, the frequency of DMs Speaker B used increased after the SA, but the log likelihood value of 1.41 ($p > 0.05$) shows the change was not significant. Speaker B used mostly the same DMs in his interview after the SA, with an exception of *I dunno*, which did not appear after SA, and *I mean*, which only appeared after SA.

	Speaker C			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,210		2,317	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	10	0.45	2	0.09
You know	1	0.05	31	1.34
Like	1	0.05	2	0.09
So	11	0.5	2	0.09
I dunno	-	-	-	-
I mean	3		-	-
I think	1	0.05	-	-
Let's say	-	-	-	-
I guess	-	-	-	-

Table 13. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker C

Speaker C used the fewest discourse markers in total of all participants, and the log likelihood value of 1.13 ($p > 0.05$) only shows an insignificant increase in frequency. However, general use of discourse markers has definitely changed for speaker C, as Table 14 shows. In fact, while she used fewer or completely stopped using almost all of the DMs in the second interview, his use of *you know*, which was only used once in the first interview, increased significantly and was used 31 times in the second one. Apart from *you know*, she only uttered three other DMs a few times after the SA. This could mean the variety of DMs was influenced by the speaker's language development during the study stay.

	Speaker D	
	Pre-SA	Post-SA

Total tokens	1,855		2,762	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	3	0.16	4	0.14
You know	1	0.05	10	0.36
Like	11	0.6	48	1.74
So	10	0.54	18	0.65
I dunno	8	0.43	7	0.25
I mean	-	-	3	0.11
I think	1	0.05	3	0.11
Let's say	-	-	-	-
I guess	-	-	-	-

Table 14. *Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker D*

Speaker D increased the frequency of almost all DMs in the second interview, while also adding *I mean*. The only DMs she did not utter at all were *let's say* and *I guess*. The log likelihood value for this speaker was 10.00 ($p < 0.01$), which means the frequency of DMs significantly increased after the SA. The biggest increase is seen in the DM *like*, which almost tripled, *so*, and also *you know*, which was only used once in the interview before SA and ten times after.

	Speaker E			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,120		2,226	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	8	0.38	3	0.13
You know	2	0.09	-	-
Like	13	0.61	40	1.8
So	15	0.71	19	0.9
I dunno	2	0.09	1	0.04
I mean	-	-	1	0.04

I think	-	-	1	0.04
Let's say	-	-	-	-
I guess	-	-	-	-

Table 15. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker E

The log likelihood value for Speaker E is 4.85 ($p < 0.05$), which means there is a significant increase in frequency of discourse markers recorded after the study stay abroad. While Speaker E used fewer of the DMs *well*, *you know* and *I dunno* in the second interview, her use of *so* and especially *like* increased. This speaker also used only five types of DMs before SA, and used *I mean* and *I think* only after the SA, although each only once.

	Speaker F			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	3,186		2,994	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	10	0.31	4	0.13
You know	-	-	3	0.1
Like	19	0.6	41	1.37
So	14	0.44	16	0.53
I dunno	1	0.03	1	0.03
I mean	-	-	1	0.03
I think	5	0.16	4	0.13
Let's say	7	0.22	14	0.47
I guess	2	0.06	-	-

Table 16. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker F

Speaker F is another student whose increase of DMs after SA with the log likelihood value of 6.54 ($p < 0.05$) was determined as significant. Speaker F used every one of the nine most commonly recorded discourse markers in at least one of the interviews. He used *you know* and *I mean* only in the second one, while not using *I guess* anymore after the SA. The speaker also showed fewer utterances of *well* and *I think*, but used *like*, *so* and *let's say* more often in the interview after SA.

	Speaker G			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,020		2,329	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	11	0.54	13	0.56
You know	-	-	-	-
Like	24	1.38	18	0.77
So	11	0.54	10	0.43
I dunno	1	0.05	-	-
I mean	-	-	-	-
I think	6	0.29	1	0.04
Let's say	1	0.05	-	-
I guess	-	-	23	0.98

Table 17. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker G

The log likelihood value for Speaker G was calculated as 0.01 ($p > 0.05$), which means she showed the smallest change of all participants in frequency of discourse markers after the SA. However, Table 17 shows there were some notable changes in the variety of DMs she used. Interestingly, Speaker G used fewer of almost all DMs in the second interview except for *well* and *I guess*, and did not use *you know* and *I mean* at all. However, while this speaker didn't use *I guess* at all before her SA, it appeared 23 times in the second one, becoming her most frequently used DM. In fact, she is the only one of the participants who used *I guess* as a discourse marker significant number of times.

	Speaker H			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	1,585		2,782	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	8	0.5	8	0.28
You know	18	1.14	43	1.55

Like	6	0.38	15	0.54
So	6	0.38	14	0.5
I dunno	3	0.19	-	-
I mean	2	0.13	8	0.28
I think	-	-	4	0.14
Let's say	-	-	-	-
I guess	1	0.06	1	0.04

Table 18. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker H

With the log likelihood value of 1.05 ($p > 0.05$), Speaker H shows a very slight increase in frequency of DMs after the SA. There is, however, a noticeable increase of his use of the DMs *you know*, *like* and *so*. He also started using *I think* and *I mean* more often, while not using *I dunno* anymore in the interview after SA.

	Speaker I			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,572		2,849	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	13	0.5	1	0.04
You know	3	0.12	9	0.32
Like	47	1.83	118	4.14
So	12	0.47	27	0.95
I dunno	3	0.12	3	0.11
I mean	-	-	2	0.07
I think	2	0.08	5	0.18
Let's say	-	-	-	-
I guess	-	-	-	-

Table 19. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker I

Speaker I uttered the highest number of DMs in both interviews in comparison to other students. She especially shows a high increase in the use of *like*, with 118 recorded occurrences in the interview after the SA, which is the highest frequency of any DM in an interview. On the other

hand, *well* was only used once in the second interview, although being the second most common DM in the first one. The variety of DMs she used did not significantly change, apart from *I mean* appearing only post-SA. Apart from having the highest number of DMs already before SA, this speaker also had the highest increase in her use of discourse markers, with a log likelihood value of 22.56 ($p < 0.0001$).

	Speaker J			
	Pre-SA		Post-SA	
Total tokens	2,971		3,175	
Discourse Marker	Number of DMs	Per hundred words	Number of DMs	Per hundred words
Well	9	0.3	1	0.03
You know	20	0.67	10	0.31
Like	16	0.54	8	0.25
So	20	0.67	27	0.85
I dunno	1	0.03	-	-
I mean	-	-	1	0.03
I think	1	0.03	1	0.03
Let's say	-	-	1	0.03
I guess	2	0.07	-	-

Table 20. Number of discourse markers before and after SA for speaker J

Speaker J is the only one who used fewer discourse markers in the interview taken after SA than before. Her variety of DMs did not notably change, but the frequency of most DMs decreased after the SA, except for *so*, which she uttered a few more times in the second interview. Moreover, the log likelihood value of this change was 4.86 ($p < 0.05$), which means the decrease of her use of DMs was significant.

The results show that some of the participants have changed their use of discourse markers during the SA. According to Tables 11-20, most speakers used the same discourse markers in the second interview with a higher frequency, introducing new ones into their speech only in few cases. Speaker C, for example, narrowed his range of DMs, but started to use one of them more frequently. Speaker F used more types of DMs in the second interview, but occurrence of some of them

lowered post-SA. Most significantly, the speakers increased their use of the DMs *like*, *you know* and *so*, and decreased their use of *well* after the SA. Although only four students show a significant increase in DM frequency, there are others who present some notable differences in variety and distribution of discourse markers in their speech, which is the case of Speakers C and G. Other speakers did not prove any significant changes after their semester abroad, but a small increase in DM frequency was recorded in the case of almost all speakers, with the exception of Speaker J.

3.4.3 Results in DM distribution

Apart from the changes in frequency, there are other aspects which the data reveals, for example, how the distribution of discourse markers changed after return from the study stay. The following tables show whether there was a change in the position of *well* and *so* within an utterance after SA.

Position of <i>well</i>	Pre-SA			Post-SA		
	Number of DMs	Per 100 words	Percentage	Number of DMs	Per 100 words	Percentage
Beginning	57	0.25	67.9%	37	0.14	48.7%
Middle	26	0.11	31%	26	0.1	41.3%
End	1	-	1.1%	-	-	0%
Total	84	0.37	100%	63	0.23	100%

Table 21. Number of utterances of the DM *well* in every position pre- and post-SA

The discourse marker *well* was only found at the beginning and middle of an utterance with only one exception. *Well* was generally used fewer times by the students after SA, and Table 21 shows that while its frequency in the middle of an utterance stayed the same after SA, it decreased only at the beginning. In the interviews before SA, 67.9% of occurrences of *well* were uttered at the beginning of an utterance, 31% in the middle and 1.1% at the end position. After their return from SA, the speakers uttered *well* in 58.7% at the beginning of an utterance and remaining 41.3% in the middle.

Position of <i>so</i>	Pre-SA			Post-SA		
	Number of DMs	Per 100 words	Percentage	Number of DMs	Per 100 words	Percentage

Beginning	20	0.09	17.1%	22	0.08	13.75%
Middle	64	0.27	54.7%	96	0.35	60%
End	33	0.14	28.2%	42	0.15	26.25%
Total	117	0.5	100%	160	0.58	100%

Table 22. Number of utterances of the DM *so* in every position pre- and post-SA

The use of the discourse marker *so* increased after the SA. Table 22 shows that there was an increase in frequency of *so* at the end position and even more significant one in the middle of an utterance after the SA, while the frequency in the initial position did not significantly change. In interviews before SA, 17.1% of the occurrences of *so* were uttered at the beginning of an utterance, 54.7% in the middle and 28.2% at the end of an utterance. After the SA, 13.75% of the occurrences of *so* appeared at the beginning of an utterance, 60% in the middle and 26.25% at the end position.

Table 23 shows how the distribution of *well* changed for individual speakers after SA. The table shows frequencies per one hundred words.

Speaker	Beginning		Middle		End	
	Pre-SA	Post-SA	Pre-SA	Post-SA	Pre-SA	Post-SA
A	0.14	0.27	0.14	0.19	-	-
B	0.12	0.19	0.12	0.28	-	-
C	0.27	0.09	0.14	-	0.05	-
D	0.11	0.11	0.05	0.04	-	-
E	0.33	0.09	0.05	0.04	-	-
F	0.19	0.13	0.13	-	-	-
G	0.45	0.34	0.1	0.21	-	-
H	0.38	0.18	0.13	0.11	-	-
I	0.27	-	0.23	0.04	-	-
J	0.27	-	0.03	0.03	-	-

Table 23. Distribution of the DM *well* pre- and post-SA for individual speakers (per hundred words)

The table shows that at the beginning of an utterance, the discourse marker *well* was uttered more frequently by 2 speakers, less frequently by 6 speakers and the frequency remained the same

for 1 speaker after the SA. In the middle position, the frequency of *well* increased in the case of 3 speakers, 6 speakers uttered it fewer times, and there was no change for 1 speaker after the SA. At the end of an utterance, *well* was only uttered once by speaker C.

Table 24 shows how the distribution of the discourse marker *so* changed for individual speakers after SA.

Speaker	Beginning		Middle		End	
	Pre-SA	Post-SA	Pre-SA	Post-SA	Pre-SA	Post-SA
A	0.05	0.19	0.23	0.23	0.14	0.08
B	-	0.06	0.33	0.22	0.04	0.16
C	0.14	0.09	0.36	-	-	-
D	0.16	0.18	0.38	0.36	-	0.11
E	0.5	0.09	0.19	0.49	0.47	0.27
F	0.13	0.03	0.22	0.3	0.09	0.2
G	0.05	-	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.13
H	0.06	-	0.25	0.43	0.06	0.07
I	0.12	0.14	0.19	0.56	0.16	0.25
J	0.1	0.03	0.4	0.57	0.17	0.25

Table 24. Distribution of the DM *so* pre- and post-SA for individual speakers (per hundred words)

At the beginning of the utterance, 4 speakers uttered *so* more frequently, and 6 speakers less frequently after the SA. In the middle of the utterance, 6 speakers used *so* more times, and 3 speakers fewer times, and the frequency remained the same for 1 student after the SA. At the end of an utterance, the frequency increased in the case of 6 speakers, decreased for 3 of them and was not used at all by one speaker.

According to these numbers, use of DMs in regard to their position did not significantly change after the students' return from their study stay. The only notable difference was in the distribution of *well*, which decreased at the beginning of the utterance while staying the same in the middle position. In the case of *so*, it remained to be most frequently used in the middle of an utterance, and there are no significant changes in the speech of individual speakers.

3 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out whether there is any change in the use of discourse markers in speech of ten advanced learners of English after studying abroad in an English-speaking country. In particular, the paper focused on the change in frequency and distribution of discourse markers. As was mentioned in chapter 2.1, it has been proven that pragmatic markers are not errors, but an important part of authentic speech, and their lack of can even contribute to misunderstandings in communication (Fung, 2007). However, non-native learners of English are not usually taught how to use discourse markers in the classroom, and tend to underutilize them in comparison to native speakers. Study abroad is generally believed to be an efficient way to second language improvement, mainly because of the direct contact with language of the native speakers. Since most studies (Fung, 2007; Müller, 2005) emphasize the importance of exposure to native-like English in regard to DM acquisition, the assumption for this thesis was that the frequency of discourse markers in the students' speech would increase.

It was found that the frequency of discourse markers significantly increased after the study stay abroad in the case of only four students. However, out of the ten speakers, nine of them increased their use of DMs and only one used fewer DMs post-SA. Specifically, there was an increase in the use of the discourse markers *like*, *so* and *you know*. The most frequently found DMs before the study stay were *like*, *so* and *well*. While *like* and *so* remained the most popular DMs after the SA, the frequency of *well* decreased and *you know* became the third most frequently used DM. An analysis of change for each student proved that the variety of used DMs often changed even without a significant increase in frequency. For example, although the frequency of discourse markers at Speakers C and G did not significantly increase, they started using a particular DM, which was not a part of their vocabulary before the SA, more frequently. These results suggest that the use of discourse markers is influenced by a study stay abroad. Language of some of the speakers, including pragmatic competence, clearly developed and changed throughout the semester they spent in an English-speaking country.

Although this paper did not focus on the functions in which discourse markers were used in the interviews, there is a difference in using discourse markers for structuralizing the utterance and using it as a filler with no real addition to the coherence, which should be considered while examining these results. A statement by Cots (1992), which said that “[s]uccess in foreign language learning is graded in terms of how similar the linguistic behaviour of the learner is to that of the

native speakers of the language” (p. 169) was quoted previously. However, native speakers do not always speak according to the rules of their standard national languages, and there is some controversy concerning the term native speaker of English, because of the linguistic varieties displayed in regional, occupational or social class-related differences. According to Anchimbe (2006), being a native speaker is no guarantee for competence in communication, since inefficient speakers are found even among native speakers. Therefore, there is a question of whether similarity to a native-like speech is always desirable in L2 learning. In the case of almost all of the participants of this study, the discourse marker *like* was used more frequently after the SA. Speaker I, for example, overused *like* even more after the SA, which is often stigmatized and avoided in professional settings, although it associated with natural speech of a native speaker. In other words, speakers whose frequency did significantly increase after the SA might have assimilated to the local native-like speech, but that does not necessarily mean their English became more proficient.

To my knowledge, no study which compares specifically the change of frequency of discourse markers in regard to study abroad has been conducted. Most of the studies concerning the use of discourse markers by English learners have focused on comparing their frequency in language of native and non-native speakers. For example, a study by Müller (2005) found out that American speakers used *so, you know and like* significantly more often than German speakers, while there was no difference between the two speaker groups in frequency of *well*. In this present study, *well* was the only one of those four DMs which was uttered fewer times after the SA, which would suggest similarity to native-like use of DMs according to Müller’s results. Moreover, there have been some studies conducted about L2 pragmatic competence in study abroad context, the majority of which concluded the learners’ speech was similar to the native speakers post-SA. Iwasaki (2008), for example, found out Japanese L2 learners had gained competence in making choices about style of speech, but also that they overuse the informal speech post-SA. In Cordella’s (1996) analysis of disagreement in L2 Spanish, participants who studied abroad were more similar to NSs in their use of confrontational style characterized by challenge questions or interruptions. Schauer (2009) found that German learners of English approach native-like awareness by judging appropriateness of apologies, requests or suggestions in English after SA.

As was mentioned in 2.1, there are various linguistic factors which influence the frequency and distribution in one’s speech stated by Müller (2005), such as how the speakers acquired the language, variety of English or one’s contact with a native speaker, of which the latter has changed

in the second interview. The participants might have been in contact with native speakers of English before their study stay, but their exposure to native speaker language while studying in an English-speaking country for a semester appears to be influential, since the use of DMs has changed for most of the speakers. Apart from the linguistic factors, the variables of a specific speaker, such as their gender, age or personality or the situational context of the recordings also play a role in the discourse marker use, and should be explored further. Although the interviews were taken in an informal manner, nervousness, stress or distraction in the environment could all influence the speakers' performance. The results have proved that the individual factor is an important one to consider, since for example, Speaker C used the fewest discourse markers, and Speaker I used the highest number of DMs in both interviews, regardless the SA.

4 Limitations

This study is by no means without its limitations, which will be addressed in these paragraphs. As is often the case, the results could have been more accurate if a larger sample of data had been provided. Because of the limited scope of this thesis, only ten participants were examined regarding their use of discourse markers. Although a significant increase in frequency of discourse markers were recorded only in the case of four speakers, there was at least a slight increase for the majority of them. These results suggest that more significant changes could have been found if more samples had been analysed, or if the students stayed abroad for a longer period of time. Since most of the participants only spent one semester in an English-speaking country, their exposure to the native speakers was limited. Moreover, given the complexity of study abroad, it would be well worth to compare language development of students with different SA experience and especially different amount of exposure to native speakers.

Another limitation applies to the narrow focus of this study, as it only analyses the frequency of discourse markers and more factors need to be considered to find out how their development changes during a study abroad. More understanding of development of pragmatic competence during an SA could be gained if other aspects had been examined, such as in which functions the DMs were used. In addition, there are some uncertainties in defining the language competence of a native speaker, which makes it difficult to connect the of use of discourse markers to language improvement.

5 Summary and conclusion

The aim of this paper was to analyse the use of discourse markers in speech of ten advanced learners of English before and after studying abroad in an English-speaking country. In particular, it focused on whether the frequency of discourse markers in their spontaneous speech changed and in what way. In the theoretical part, the definition and research about discourse markers was described, and several functions of discourse markers were introduced with the focus on the expressions *well*, *you know* and *like*. Furthermore, the differences between the use of discourse markers between native and non-native speakers was explained, as well as their role in second language teaching. Subsequently, the research of study abroad linguistic gain was summarized, including the many factors which can cause contradicting results in this field, and the nature of longitudinal studies.

In the analytical part of this thesis, the data and the method for this study were described, and finally, the results were presented. As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there is an assumption of study abroad being an efficient means to achieve second language improvement. Because of the participants' contact with native speakers during the SA, the hypothesis of this paper was that the frequency of discourse markers would increase after their return from the study stay. The frequency did increase at least minimally in the case of nine out of ten students, but this increase was statistically significant for only four of them. However, according to the data, even more students showed interesting changes in the use or variety of DMs after their study stay abroad. Another analysis was made regarding the position of discourse markers *well* and *so*, which did not show any significant changes, except for the frequency of *well* decreasing only in an initial position, and not changing in the middle position. Although the changes were not proven to be significant for most of the speakers, the results suggest there might have been a development of the students' pragmatic competence, which could develop even more if their study stay had been longer.

Thus, the results could indicate that the use of discourse markers can change as a result of an exposure to native-like English, whether it be an increase in frequency, variety, distribution or function. Moreover, while it has been established that native speakers use DMs more frequently than non-native speakers (Müller, 2005), and therefore an increase in the frequency of discourse markers could mean the speaker's language became closer to one of a native speaker, this change does not always equal an improvement in proficiency. Although discourse markers and other pragmatic elements, such as repeats and false starts, are all a natural part of spontaneous speech,

an excessive use of filler words is often stigmatized and may be perceived as impolite. Nonetheless, the notion remains that discourse markers are an important part of spontaneous speech, and should not be omitted from the study of SLA. As Fung (2007, p. 434) suggests, teachers should “explore to what extent learners need to speak native-like” to become internationally competent L2 users, while still leaving them the choice of how they will use the language. This choice will nonetheless be restricted without the awareness of discourse marker use.

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Resumé

1. Úvod

Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda se frekvence užití diskurzních částic u deseti pokročilých žáků angličtiny změnila poté, co vyjeli na studijní pobyt do anglicky mluvící země. Studie konkrétně porovnávala počet devíti nejčastěji používaných diskurzních částic. Jelikož diskurzní částice jsou jedním z indikátorů plynulosti a rodilí mluvčí je zpravidla používají častěji, jejich zakomponování do jazyka je důležité pro pokročilost jazyka nerodilých mluvčích. Studijní pobyt v zahraničí je obecně považován za výjimečnou příležitost, jak přijít do kontaktu s rodilými mluvčími jazyka a zlepšit svou úroveň studovaného jazyka. Tato práce si klade za cíl ověřit, jestli je tato představa pravdivá. Změna ve frekvenci diskurzních částic je měřena porovnáváním jejich počtu v rozhovorech před a po absolvování studijního pobytu.

2. Teoretická část

Teoretická část práce se zabývá dvěma hlavními tématy, a to diskurzními částicemi a studiem v zahraničí. Kapitola 2.1 zkoumá vlastnosti diskurzních částic a jak jejich užívání ovlivňuje úroveň cizího jazyka. Podkapitola 2.1.1 se zabývá definicí diskurzních částic a v podkapitole 2.1.2 jsou popsány jejich nejčastější funkce se zaměřením na tři konkrétní částice, a to *well*, *you know* a *like*. V podkapitole 2.1.3 je vysvětlen vztah diskurzních částic k úrovni cizího jazyka, a v podkapitole 2.1.4 jejich role v jazyku nerodilých mluvčích. Ačkoliv vynechání diskurzních částic v hovoru může vést k nedorozumění, jejich používání obvykle není součástí výuky jazyka ve škole. Rodilí mluvčí používají diskurzní částice jinak než nerodilí mluvčí, a to zpravidla ve vyšší frekvenci a v jiných funkcích. Jelikož se kontakt s jazykem rodilých mluvčích uvádí jako kritický komponent k zapojení diskurzních částic do jazyka, studenti by po strávení minimálně jednoho semestru v anglicky mluvící zemi měli svůj jazyk přiblížit tomu rodilému.

Další kapitola teoretické části se zabývá studijním pobytem v zahraničí a jeho vlivem na zlepšení cizího jazyka. Studijní pobyt v zahraničí kromě osobního rozvoje považován také za jednu z nejefektivnějších možností ke zlepšení cizího jazyka. Přesto si výsledky studií často protirečí, a to hlavně kvůli řadě faktorů, které vývoj jazyka na studijním pobytu ovlivňují, jako metoda výuky na zahraniční univerzitě nebo charakter studenta a jakou vynaloží snahu ke kontaktu s rodilými mluvčími. Poslední kapitola se věnuje dlouhodobým studiím, mezi které patří i tato práce.

Dlouhodobé studie spočívají ve sběru a porovnávání dat stejné proměnné v průběhu určitého časového úseku.

3. Praktická část

Analýza byla provedena na základně rozhovorů s deseti pokročilými žáky angličtiny, kteří vyjeli na jednosemestrální či dvousemestrální pobyt do anglicky mluvící země v rámci programu Erasmus+. Krátké rozhovory s každým účastníkem před a po absolvování studijního pobytu byly zaznamenány a přepsány do korpusu Czerasmus English Learner Corpus. Poté byly v rozhovorech identifikovány a spočítány diskurzní částice a porovnána jejich frekvence mezi oběma rozhovory každého účastníka.

Výzkum ukázal, že se frekvence užití diskurzních částic po studijním pobytu zvýšila u devíti z deseti účastníků, jen u čtyř z nich se ale změna prokázala jako statisticky významná. U zbytku byla změna nepatrná a u jednoho studenta se frekvence po studijním pobytu snížila. Nejčastější diskurzní částice před i po studijním pobytu byly *like* a *so*. Frekvence *like*, *so* a *you know* se také nejvíc zvýšila po studijním pobytu, naopak výskyt *well* byl v druhém rozhovoru menší. Analýza frekvencí diskurzních částic u každého studenta ukázala, že ačkoliv se v některých případech frekvence významně nezvýšila, jejich používání diskurzních částic, co se týče variace a distribuce, se po studijním pobytu lišila.

Dále byla zkoumána distribuce diskurzních částic *well* a *so*. Podle výsledků se frekvence užití *well* snížila v pozici na začátku promluvy, zatímco uprostřed zůstala stejná. U diskurzní částice *so* se žádná významná změna neprokázala.

4. Diskuze

Ve čtvrté kapitole jsou shrnuty výsledky práce a porovnány s jinými studiemi. Studie si kladla za cíl zjistit, jak se po studijním pobytu změní užívání diskurzních částic u deseti pokročilých studentů angličtiny. Ačkoliv se frekvence diskurzních částic zvýšila významně pouze u čtyř z nich, změna ve variaci a distribuci diskurzních částic například u mluvčích C a G napovídá tomu, že se měl studijní pobyt vliv na jejich užití i přesto, že se jejich frekvence výrazně nezvýšila. Výsledky potvrdily také vliv individuálního faktoru. U mluvčích, u kterých se naměřila vysoká frekvence diskurzních částic už před studijním pobytem, jich používali velké množství také po návratu.

Ačkoliv zkoumání funkce diskurzních částic nebylo účelem této práce, je nutno zvážit rozdíl mezi jejich užitím ke strukturalizaci věty a nadměrným používáním výplňových slov, která promluvě nepřidávají žádnou hodnotu. Přestože se často uvádí přiblížení k jazyku rodilých mluvčích jako cíl pro učení cizího jazyka, nelze vyhodnotit jeden určitý standard anglického jazyka, a ne každý rodilý mluvčí angličtiny je ve svém jazyce kompetentní. Nadměrné užívání částice *like* některých studentů v této studii po studijním pobytu sice napovídá jejich přiblížení k jazyku rodilých mluvčích, nikoli ale ke zlepšení jejich úrovně jazyka.

Studie o užití diskurzních částic nerodilými mluvčími se většinou zabývají jejich porovnáváním s jazykem rodilých mluvčích, podle kterých rodilí mluvčí používají diskurzni částice častěji. Rovněž existují studie o vývoji pragmatické kompetence po studiu v zahraničí, které většinou vyhodnocují řeč žáků angličtiny jako více podobnou jazyku rodilých mluvčích po absolvování studia v zahraničí.

5. Omezení

Během této práce se vyskytlo několik omezení. Jedním z nich je velikost korpusu, která neposkytuje dostatečný počet dat pro vyvození obecných závěrů. Dalším omezením je úzké zaměření výzkumu. Změna užití diskurzních částic studentů po jejich studijním pobytu mohla nastat nejen ve frekvenci, jejíž analýza byla cílem této práce, ale také například v jejich funkci. Mnoho faktorů mohlo ovlivnit výsledky této studie, například v jaké míře přišel každý student do kontaktu s rodilými mluvčími nebo způsob výuky na zahraniční univerzitě. Také nervozita mluvčích a další externí faktory při nahrávání rozhovorů mohly ovlivnit jejich spontánní řeč.

6. Závěr

Šestá kapitola uzavírá práci. Výsledky potvrzují hypotézu, že po studiu v zahraničí dojde ke zvýšení užití diskurzních částic. Není ale jasné, jestli tato změna nutně vede ke zlepšení úrovně jazyka, a je na místě dále zkoumat vliv studijního pobytu na vývoj cizího jazyka. Častý výskyt diskurzních částic v řeči rodilých mluvčích a jejich významná funkce nicméně napovídá tomu, že by neměly být vynechány z výuky cizího jazyka.