

PRAGMATIC MARKERS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN HUMAN- AND AI-GENERATED ENGLISH WRITING BY UZBEK EFL LEARNERS: A COMPARATIVE CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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Abstract: Generative AI has quietly become one more source of English-language text in the world, and that raises a question worth asking: how does what a machine writes actually compare with what a language learner writes? Most of the attention so far has gone to grammar, vocabulary, and overall writing quality. Much less has gone to pragmatics - the layer of writing where a text manages relationships, signals stance, and organizes an argument for a reader. This gap is especially noticeable for Uzbek EFL learners, whose writing has rarely been examined from this angle. The present study compares pragmatic markers and politeness strategies in human- and AI-generated English argumentative writing, using a corpus-based design that sets learner-written texts against AI-generated responses to the same prompts. The analysis looks at discourse-organizing markers, stance and interpersonal markers, and politeness strategies, drawing mainly on Brown and Levinson's framework for the latter. The proposed dataset includes 60 comparable texts - 30 written by learners and 30 generated by AI. Markers are located through frequency searches and then checked by hand in context, since frequency alone cannot settle what a form is doing in a sentence; politeness strategies are classified by their interpersonal function rather than by surface wording. The illustrative analysis points to a pattern: AI-generated texts tend to carry more explicit discourse-organizing devices and lean more on negative-politeness resources, while learner texts show more individual variation and a more context-sensitive use of solidarity language. The broader argument is that pragmatic appropriateness is not the same thing as grammatical correctness, and it is not guaranteed just because a text contains recognizable discourse markers. For Uzbek EFL learners, knowing why and when to use a given marker or politeness strategy matters as much as knowing the form itself. The study sits at the intersection of second-language writing, pragmatics, politeness research, and the newer question of how humans and AI systems produce text differently.

Keywords: pragmatic markers; politeness strategies; AI-generated writing; human writing; Uzbek EFL learners; pragmatics; second-language writing; discourse

1. Introduction

Writing does more than carry information from one person to another. A writer organizing an argument is, at the same time, signaling how ideas relate to each other, showing how confident they are in a claim, heading off likely objections, and building

a relationship with whoever is going to read the text. In academic and argumentative writing, this matters more than usual, because a text that is grammatically fine can still fail if it doesn't hold together as discourse or misjudges its reader.

Pragmatic markers are one of the main tools writers use to do this work. Words and phrases like however, therefore, moreover, for example, perhaps, generally, in fact, and on the other hand organize propositions, connect ideas, soften or strengthen claims, and steer the reader through an argument. Many of these markers are technically optional - a sentence is still grammatical without them - yet leaving them out or putting them in the wrong place can change how a text reads. What a marker does isn't fixed by its dictionary definition; it depends on where it sits in the discourse and what the writer is trying to accomplish.

Politeness is the second piece of the picture. Brown and Levinson's (1987) model describes how speakers and writers manage "face" - essentially, the social risk built into any communicative act - by choosing among several strategies. A claim can be stated flatly, softened through hedging, wrapped in shared ground with the reader, or left implicit rather than spelled out. Academic writing leans on these choices constantly, because writers usually need to argue a point without sounding either dogmatic or confrontational.

Generative AI has changed the landscape these questions sit in. A language model can now draft an essay, rewrite a clumsy sentence, insert a transition, soften an overconfident claim, or shift register on request. That means AI-generated text is no longer just a curiosity - it is a genuine object of comparison, and one that lets us ask not only whether the grammar and vocabulary look right, but what pragmatic habits get baked into machine-produced discourse.

For language learners specifically, this is not an abstract concern. Students already turn to AI for examples, vocabulary, grammar explanations, or entire drafts. Even a learner who never copies a response outright is still exposed to it repeatedly, and that exposure can shape their own instincts over time. If a model consistently favors certain markers or certain politeness strategies, those preferences quietly become part of the input learners are absorbing.

Comparative work on human and AI pragmatics is only starting to build up. A handful of studies have found that large language models lean noticeably toward hedging and indirectness in their politeness choices. Separately, research on learner language has shown that pragmatic markers track pragmatic competence in ways that grammar scores alone don't capture.

What's missing is the Uzbek EFL angle. Uzbek learners write English while moving between linguistic and cultural systems that don't handle interpersonal meaning identically. A student can write a sentence that is grammatically flawless and

still land oddly - too blunt, too hedged, or simply mismatched to what the intended reader expects.

This study takes up that gap directly, comparing human-written and AI-generated argumentative texts tied to Uzbek EFL learners, with the focus narrowed to two connected areas: pragmatic markers and politeness strategies. Rather than ranking AI writing against learner writing as better or worse, the aim is to see how the two construct discourse and interpersonal meaning differently.

1.1 Aim of the Study

The study sets out to identify and compare pragmatic markers and politeness strategies across human- and AI-generated English argumentative writing linked to Uzbek EFL learners, paying particular attention to the forms used, how often they occur, and what they're actually doing pragmatically.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What pragmatic markers occur in human- and AI-generated English argumentative writing?
2. How do the frequency and distribution of pragmatic markers differ between human and AI-generated texts?
3. What politeness strategies are used in the two types of writing?
4. How do human and AI-generated texts differ in the pragmatic functions of these markers and strategies?
5. What implications do these differences have for the development of pragmatic competence among Uzbek EFL learners?

1.3 Literature Review

Pragmatics deals with how language gets interpreted and used in context. Written discourse builds that context differently than face-to-face talk does, since writer and reader are usually separated in time and space - but writers still anticipate their readers, calibrate how committed they sound, organize information, and build interpersonal relationships through the choices they make on the page. This matters for academic writing in particular. Academic prose can look impersonal at a glance, with its formal vocabulary and restrained emotional register, but it's doing interpersonal work throughout: signaling certainty, positioning claims against earlier ones, acknowledging other views, steering the reader toward a particular reading. That's why pragmatic analysis adds something grammatical and lexical analysis alone can't: two texts can express roughly the same propositions and still create very different effects, depending on how they handle certainty, solidarity, directness, and distance.

1.3.1 Pragmatic Markers

"Pragmatic marker" is a broad label for expressions whose job goes beyond a sentence's literal content. Schiffrin (1987) laid much of the groundwork for a discourse-based account of markers, and later work has pushed further into their interpersonal,

textual, and metadiscursive roles. In writing, markers can flag contrast (however, nevertheless), addition (moreover, furthermore), result (therefore, consequently), exemplification (for example, for instance), reformulation (in other words), or stance (perhaps, probably, generally) - and these categories overlap more than the list suggests. A marker can organize the text and reveal the writer's stance at the same time. However mostly signals contrast; perhaps mostly adjusts commitment; a phrase like it is important to note that manages the discourse while also nudging the reader's attention toward whatever the writer thinks matters. None of this can be read off frequency counts alone - a word like then might mark sequence, consequence, or just discourse progression depending on where it sits - so identifying candidates is only step one; deciding what they're actually doing requires reading them in context.

1.3.2 Pragmatic Markers in EFL Writing

Learners don't necessarily pick up pragmatic markers at the same rate they pick up grammar. How well they use them depends on exposure, proficiency, genre, communicative experience, and whether they've had explicit instruction - and the evidence suggests instruction does move the needle, both on how often learners use markers and how varied their choices are. Left to their own devices, learner writers often settle into a narrow set: firstly, secondly, moreover, in conclusion will get an essay structured, but leaning on the same handful of markers repeatedly isn't the same thing as pragmatic flexibility. This is worth attention in the Uzbek context specifically, because English academic writing conventions are learned on top of - not instead of - the linguistic and cultural habits learners already have. What comes out the other side is often a distinctive pattern of discourse organization or interpersonal positioning, and that pattern deserves to be described rather than flagged automatically as error.

1.3.3 Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) frame politeness around face: positive face is the wish to be liked or approved of, negative face is the wish to act autonomously and without imposition. Since almost any communicative act threatens one or the other, speakers and writers pick strategies to soften the threat. The model sorts these into four broad types. Bald on-record strategies state something directly with little or no softening. Positive-politeness strategies lean on common ground, solidarity, agreement, approval. Negative-politeness strategies protect the reader's autonomy through hedging, indirectness, and similar devices. Off-record strategies communicate indirectly, leaving part of the meaning for the reader to infer. In argumentative writing this plays out in recognizable formulas: We can all agree that... for positive politeness, It could be argued that... for negative politeness, Governments should introduce... for bald-on-record directness. A single sentence can carry more than one of these resources at once, which is why coding has to focus on whichever function is dominant.

1.3.4 Politeness and EFL Learners

In second-language writing, politeness and pragmatic competence are hard to separate. A learner can know exactly which grammatical structure a proposition needs and still not know how directly to phrase it - a gap that shows up most clearly around requests, disagreement, criticism, recommendations, and anything touching social or academic authority. You are wrong and It could be argued that this interpretation requires further consideration express roughly the same disagreement, but they land completely differently. Academic writing doesn't demand constant indirectness - sometimes directness is exactly right - but writers do need a feel for what each choice costs and buys them rhetorically.

1.3.5 Human and AI-Generated Discourse

Generative AI can now turn out large volumes of fluent English with very little effort, and the resulting texts tend to show explicit organization, conventional academic vocabulary, and recognizable stance and politeness patterns. That's not the same as saying AI has pragmatic competence in the way a human writer does - what's really happening is that the model is reproducing patterns learned from enormous amounts of text, not reasoning about a reader's face needs. Even so, comparative studies have found real differences in how humans and language models choose politeness strategies: models lean heavily on negative politeness, hedging and indirectness especially, while human writers move more fluidly between positive and negative strategies depending on who they're addressing. That distinction matters pedagogically. AI-generated writing can model useful academic formulations for learners, but it can just as easily hand them formulaic patterns without the judgment needed to know when those patterns actually fit.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study uses a comparative, corpus-based design that pairs quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative pragmatic interpretation. The comparison sits between human-written argumentative texts by Uzbek EFL learners and AI-generated argumentative responses to the same or closely matched prompts. Two questions drive the design: do the two groups of texts differ in the forms and frequency of pragmatic markers and politeness strategies, and do seemingly similar expressions actually function the same way across the two groups?

2.2 Participants and Texts

The proposed dataset is 60 argumentative English texts: 30 written by Uzbek EFL learners with no generative-AI assistance, and 30 generated by an AI system responding to the same prompts. The learner participants are students at Kimyo International University in Tashkent (KIUT), at an intermediate level of English proficiency (roughly CEFR B1). Each text runs about 250-300 words. Topics are drawn from familiar argumentative territory - education, technology, social media,

environmental issues, university life - and keeping the prompts comparable matters here, since topic alone can shift pragmatic choices; using the same or near-identical prompts for both groups helps control for that.

2.3 AI Text Generation

For the AI condition, each writing prompt is entered into a generative AI system with a standardized instruction, asking for an argumentative response of about 250-300 words pitched at a level comparable to the learner texts. Responses are saved as generated, with no human editing afterward. Because AI systems change over time and different prompts can pull out different pragmatic patterns, the eventual study needs to document the system used, the model or version, the generation date, the exact prompts, and any relevant settings - otherwise the results aren't really replicable.

2.4 Corpus Preparation

Every text gets an anonymous ID code. Human and AI texts are kept in separate files and converted to plain text, with formatting stripped out where it doesn't contribute to linguistic interpretation. Text length is logged so frequencies can later be normalized rather than compared raw. Corpus software such as AntConc can generate frequency lists, concordances, and contextual searches, but none of that output counts as pragmatic classification on its own - every candidate expression still needs a manual check in context.

2.5 Identification of Pragmatic Markers

The initial coding framework groups markers into seven functional categories: contrast, addition, result/conclusion, exemplification, reformulation, stance/epistemicity, and interpersonal positioning.

Category	Illustrative forms
Contrast	however; nevertheless; although; on the other hand
Addition	moreover; furthermore; in addition
Result/conclusion	therefore; thus; consequently
Exemplification	for example; for instance
Reformulation	in other words; that is
Stance/epistemicity	perhaps; probably; generally; apparently
Interpersonal positioning	of course; importantly; fortunately

This list is a starting point, not a closed inventory. Whether a given item is actually functioning as a pragmatic marker in a given sentence is a judgment call, and ambiguous cases get reviewed by hand rather than counted automatically.

2.6 Coding of Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies are coded using Brown and Levinson's (1987) four categories - bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record - with coding keyed to what an expression is doing communicatively rather than to specific vocabulary.

Strategy	Typical linguistic resources	Illustrative example
Positive politeness	we; our; shared knowledge; agreement	We can all see that...
Negative politeness	hedges; modals; indirectness	It could be argued that...
Bald on record	direct claims; direct recommendations	Governments should act now.
Off record	implication; indirect hints	Some students may find this approach difficult.

2.7 Reliability and Contextual Interpretation

Pragmatic categories are interpretive by nature, so reliability needs deliberate attention. In a full study, a second trained coder should independently code a portion of the data; disagreements get discussed and the coding scheme refined before the rest of the dataset is coded, with inter-coder agreement reported using an appropriate statistic. It also helps to keep concordance lines or surrounding sentences on hand for representative examples, so a given coding decision can be shown, not just asserted, when frequency figures alone don't tell the whole story.

2.8 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative side records both raw and normalized frequencies (per 1,000 words), since normalization matters once texts stop being exactly the same length. Descriptive statistics and significance tests can be layered on depending on the eventual sample size and how the data are distributed - but the right statistical procedure should be chosen after looking at the actual data, not decided in advance.

3. Results

Important: The numerical results in this section are illustrative examples showing how the completed article can present findings. They are not claimed as empirical results from an actual 60-text dataset and must be replaced with verified data before publication.

3.1 Overall Distribution of Pragmatic Markers

Category	Human texts	AI-generated texts
Contrast markers	42	57
Addition markers	28	46
Result/conclusion markers	31	49
Exemplification markers	35	39
Reformulation markers	14	25
Stance markers	27	44
Interpersonal markers	11	18
Total	188	278

Even at illustrative scale, the AI-generated texts come out well ahead in overall marker count. The gap is widest for addition, result/conclusion, stance, and

reformulation markers - a pattern that fits with the broader impression that AI-generated academic prose tends to spell out discourse relations rather than leave them implicit.

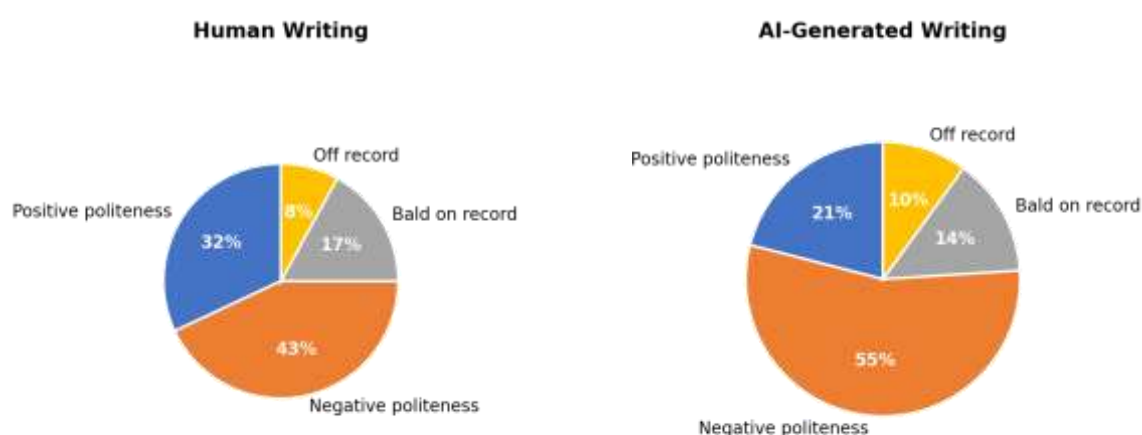
3.2 Contrast and Addition

Contrastive markers - however especially - show up often in both groups. A learner might write: Social media provides many opportunities for communication. However, it can also create problems for students. An AI response might land on something structurally similar: Social media offers numerous benefits. However, it can also have several negative consequences. The overlap here says something useful: some markers are simply conventional in argumentative English, human or AI. The more interesting question isn't whether however shows up, but how often, where, and whether its use starts to feel repetitive rather than genuinely shaped by context.

3.3 Stance and Epistemic Markers

Stance markers matter because they're where writers position themselves relative to their own claims. Perhaps, probably, generally, apparently, it seems, it can be argued that - all of these dial commitment up or down. The illustrative data suggest AI-generated texts lean toward more explicit stance formulations, while learners tend to fall back on a smaller set of modal verbs - may, might, could. That would mean AI exposure could widen a learner's stance repertoire, though a wider repertoire isn't automatically the same thing as better pragmatic judgment.

3.4 Politeness Strategies



In this illustrative coding, negative politeness dominates more in AI-generated texts, while positive politeness shows up more in learner writing. Read this as a tendency worth investigating further, not a fixed trait of either group.

3.5 Positive Politeness and Solidarity

Learner texts often reach for inclusive forms - we, our, as students - to build common ground: As students, we can understand why this issue is important. That kind of sentence puts writer and reader inside the same social group. AI-generated writing

can do this too, but the illustrative pattern suggests it does so less consistently than it reaches for negative-politeness formulations. The difference matters because solidarity language depends heavily on assumptions about who the writer and reader actually are to each other - something a model has no real access to.

3.6 Negative Politeness and Indirectness

AI-generated texts frequently produce formulas like *It could be argued that...*, *It may be suggested that...*, and *It is important to consider whether...*. These soften directness and can lend an appropriately cautious academic tone. But hedges stack, and when they stack too far the result gets clunky rather than careful - *It could perhaps be argued that this may potentially... is what happens when several mitigating devices pile up in one clause*. A hedge only does its job when it's proportionate to the claim; past a certain point, more hedging just reads as noise.

3.7 Pragmatic Marker Function

The qualitative side of the illustrative analysis makes one thing clear: markers that look identical on the page can do different jobs. *However* organizes contrast; perhaps adjusts epistemic commitment; of course signals assumed shared knowledge but can just as easily read as overconfident or dismissive depending on context. None of this is visible from a word list alone - it only shows up once you read the marker in its sentence.

3.8 Summary of Illustrative Findings

Taken together, the illustrative results point to three possible patterns. AI-generated writing appears to use more explicit discourse-organizing markers. It also appears to favor negative-politeness resources, hedging and indirectness in particular. And human learner texts appear to show more individual variation, with a more visible thread of solidarity-oriented language running through them. All three are tendencies to test against real corpus data, not conclusions to take at face value yet.

4. Discussion

4.1 Pragmatic Markers as Indicators of Academic Discourse

Why would AI-generated writing carry more pragmatic markers in the first place? Probably because academic English itself is highly conventional. Arguments get introduced, contrasted, backed with examples, qualified, and summarized in fairly predictable ways, and a model trained on huge amounts of academic and educational prose can reproduce that rhythm efficiently. Learners build the same repertoire more slowly, and their texts may carry the same underlying discourse relations while expressing them with fewer overt markers. That's not evidence of shallower reasoning - it more likely reflects a difference in the linguistic resources each writer has on hand.

4.2 Pragmatic Competence versus Formulaic Fluency

The key point here is that marker count isn't a proxy for pragmatic skill. AI-generated writing can look highly cohesive simply because it spells out every

relationship between propositions, but real pragmatic competence needs sensitivity to context, audience, genre, and purpose - none of which shows up in a frequency count. Moreover reads fine in a formal essay and oddly stiff in a casual message; it could be argued that softens a claim nicely the first time and gets tiresome fast if it's inserted mechanically before every sentence. For Uzbek EFL learners, this distinction is genuinely useful pedagogically: rather than memorizing lists of transition words, students benefit from comparing alternative formulations and talking through what each one actually does to the writer-reader relationship.

4.3 Politeness and Writer Positioning

The split between positive and negative politeness hints at two different ways of constructing the writer-reader relationship. Positive politeness builds closeness - shared knowledge, inclusive pronouns, agreement, recognition of the reader. Negative politeness builds distance and respect by dialing back imposition and commitment. AI-generated academic writing gravitates toward negative politeness partly because academic prose rewards caution generally, and a model can produce hedged, less categorical phrasing without any real stake in why that caution matters socially. Human learners, by contrast, tend to draw on solidarity markers rooted in their own experience - an Uzbek student writing about university life might naturally reach for *we* as students or our generation. Those aren't just stylistic choices; they're a way of positioning the writer socially.

4.4 The Uzbek EFL Context

Uzbekistan is a genuinely useful setting for studying pragmatic transfer, because learners bring expectations about directness, respect, interpersonal distance, and disagreement from Uzbek and other languages they already know. English academic writing asks them to work within a different set of conventions on top of that. None of this implies a particular Uzbek communicative style is deficient - the actual pedagogical goal is helping learners build a repertoire flexible enough to make context-sensitive choices in English, and setting learner writing against AI-generated English is one useful way to make those differences visible.

4.5 Implications for EFL Writing Instruction

A few implications follow from this. Pragmatic markers should be taught as functional tools, not vocabulary to memorize - students can group markers by what they do and study real examples of each. Politeness deserves a place in argumentative writing instruction too, with learners rewriting the same strong claim several different ways and discussing how each version shifts their stance and their relationship to the reader. AI itself can become a point of comparison rather than a model to imitate unquestioningly: put a human paragraph next to an AI paragraph, have students identify the markers, classify the politeness strategies, and decide which formulation actually fits the intended audience. And learners should get in the habit of justifying

any AI-assisted revision they accept - asking why a particular hedge or transition works keeps the pragmatic decision-making with the student instead of quietly handing it over to the technology.

4.6 Limitations

A few limitations are worth naming up front. The proposed dataset is small and won't represent the full range of Uzbek EFL writing - a larger sample across proficiency levels and institutions would paint a fuller picture. AI-generated writing is also sensitive to the exact prompt, model, date, and settings used, so a different model could well produce different results; the generation procedure needs careful documentation for that reason. Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, while influential, has drawn criticism over its assumptions about universality and its handling of culturally specific politeness, so it's best treated here as an analytical tool rather than a complete account of Uzbek or English interpersonal behavior. Pragmatic-marker categories overlap in practice - a single expression can organize discourse and signal stance simultaneously - which makes contextual coding, and ideally a second independent coder, genuinely necessary rather than a nice-to-have. And finally, comparing human and AI writing directly doesn't tell us whether learners' own pragmatic habits actually shift from repeated AI use; that would need a longitudinal design or a third, AI-assisted learner group.

4.7 Conclusion and Future Research

This study has looked at pragmatic markers and politeness strategies as features of human- and AI-generated English writing tied to Uzbek EFL learners, and the central claim is a simple one: comparing human and AI writing shouldn't stop at grammar, vocabulary, and surface fluency. It needs to include how each text organizes discourse and builds a relationship with its reader. The illustrative analysis points toward AI-generated writing carrying more explicit discourse-organizing markers and leaning more on negative politeness, while learner writing shows more variation and a stronger thread of solidarity language - though these are tendencies to verify against real corpus data, not settled facts. The deeper point is that linguistic form and pragmatic function aren't the same thing: however doesn't automatically make a text sound more academic, and a hedge doesn't automatically make a claim more polite. What a marker or strategy actually accomplishes depends on context, purpose, and who's reading.

For Uzbek EFL learners, this makes pragmatic awareness a real component of effective English writing, not an afterthought. AI systems can offer useful models of academic language, but learners still need to evaluate those models critically rather than absorb them wholesale. A natural next step for this research is adding a third group - AI-assisted learner texts - to see whether learners keep their own pragmatic habits after using AI or gradually drift toward the model's discourse and politeness preferences, with proficiency, genre, and topic all worth testing as variables along the

way. Ultimately, tracking pragmatic markers and politeness strategies is a productive lens for a question that isn't going away: how the relationship between human language learners and generative AI is actually changing, and what that means for second-language writing, pragmatics, and discourse analysis going forward.

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