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On personal pronouns in Croatian GFL learners' argumentative texts

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Metadiscourse markers are important features facilitating communication by transferring the message that is intended to be mediated by the writer. Personal pronouns can be defined as interpersonal discourse markers often used by foreign language (FL) learners to mark the writer's presence in argumentative texts. Despite previous extensive work on the usage of personal pronouns in FL learners' argumentative texts, the Croatian German as a foreign language (GFL) learning context has not been investigated so far. Therefore, this study analyses the results of a corpus-based study on the usage of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *wir* (English 'we'), and *du* (English 'you', second person singular) in argumentative essays written by Croatian GFL learners (N = 50) at the B2 level. It aims at investigating (a) the frequency of these personal pronouns used in argumentative texts written by Croatian GFL learners, and (b) the functions these nominative personal pronouns fulfil within the discourse. The results show that the most frequently used personal pronoun is the self-referent *ich* (English 'I'), fulfilling various discourse functions, such as expressing stance and describing personal experiences. The second most commonly used personal pronoun is *wir* (English 'we'), primarily used to present a general claim. Finally, *du* (English 'you', second person singular) is the least frequently used personal pronoun, only expressing the function of involving the reader, but reflecting individual differences across the corpus.

Keywords: *personal pronouns, interpersonal markers, discourse functions, writer's visibility, GFL argumentative essays*

1. INTRODUCTION

As an integral component of communicative competence, discourse competence plays an important role in shaping a competent FL user, as it is a specific and complex competence to develop. In the process of its development, FL learners encounter significant difficulties in mastering its two subcomponents: cohesion and coherence. In addition, FL learners must also get familiar with various text genres, each with its own restrictions and standards related to proposition, form, and linguistic style, which may present further challenges in mastering writing tasks.

One of the writing tasks for FL learners to master is writing argumentative texts. Learners are often given controversial topics in argumentative writing, which they are supposed to discuss. Since it is natural for each writer to hold individual attitudes towards specific topics, the construction of arguments for and/or against a topic allows room for subjectivity. This subjectivity can be conveyed through interpersonal markers, which are often realised through personal pronouns. Besides, it is hard to avoid personal involvement and subjectivity, as FL learners are often asked explicitly to give their opinion on the topics discussed in their argumentative essays (cf. Recski, 2004). As argumentative writing by FL learners involves both linguistic and discourse-related challenges, the effective use of interpersonal discourse markers (e.g., personal pronouns) plays a crucial role in mediating meaning and ensuring textual cohesion. According to Chang (2014, p. 95), personal pronouns are “the most familiar and common interpersonal markers” used by FL learners, as FL writers tend to reveal more personal involvement in texts than native speakers (Breeze, 2007; McCrostie, 2008). Bearing in mind that FL learners at different proficiency levels may struggle to express their opinion, personal pronouns may also be considered an effective tool in helping to shape the interpersonal dimension of FL compositions. Investigations of personal-pronoun use in FL have focused on the presence of cultural features, specific linguistic backgrounds, and different FL learning/teaching contexts, as well as individual differences (e.g., Cvikić & Ordulj, 2021; Kubota & Lehner, 2004; Keller et al., 2020; Luan & Zhang, 2016).

Therefore, it is of high importance to further investigate the frequencies and the discourse functions of personal pronouns in different FL learning contexts to gain deeper insights into their use in FL argumentative essays and to be able to make pedagogical recommendations to add to the cohesiveness of written argumentative FL compositions. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to this line of research, focusing on the quantitative and

qualitative analysis of personal pronouns in GFL argumentative writing, taking into consideration the Croatian GFL learning context, which has not been investigated so far. The aim is to examine the frequency distributions and discourse functions of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *wir* (English 'we') and *du* (English 'you', second person singular) used in argumentative texts written by Croatian GFL learners to give closer insights into the features that may influence the use of specific personal pronouns.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Metadiscourse and personal pronouns

Metadiscourse can be linguistically realised in various ways, so different metadiscourse features have been identified as effective tools enabling the writer to structure and produce a cohesive text (cf. Hyland 1998, 2005a). Metadiscourse is defined in Vande Kopple's model (1985) as "discourse about discourse or communication about communication" (p. 83), highlighting that "the kinds of metadiscourse include at least text connectives, code glosses, illocution markers, validity markers, narrators, attitude markers, and comments" (p. 85). Vande Kopple categorised metadiscourse into textual and interpersonal components (p. 86-87). Textual metadiscourse relates to the organization of a composition, whereas interpersonal metadiscourse conveys the writer's attitude toward the presented content and addresses the reader by using "illocution markers, validity markers, narrators, attitude markers, and bits of commentary" (p. 87). Building on Vande Kopple's model, Crismore et al. (1993) defined metadiscourse as "linguistic material in spoken or written texts, which does not add anything to the propositional content but that is intended to help the listener or reader organize, interpret, and evaluate the information given" (p. 40). Finally, Hyland (2005a) proposed an interactional model defining metadiscourse as a "cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community" (p. 37).

Taking into consideration the specific features of different FL learning contexts, one of the most frequent and accessible means for expressing the interpersonal dimension in written FL texts, i.e., writers' personal involvement, is personal pronouns. Personal pronouns are intersubjective (Downing & Perucha, 2014) and polysemantic features that lead them to fulfil various discourse functions, such as illustrating subjective opinions

and/or helping the reader understand and follow the argumentation. The main aim of a writer, especially when writing an argumentative text, is to establish a functional dialogue with their readers to be able to present their arguments. Therefore, Thompson and Thetela (1995) refer to personal pronouns as “projected roles (...) which are assigned by the speaker/writer by means of the overt labelling of the two participants involved in the language event” (p. 108). In addition, the authors state that “if the speaker/writer does project roles, the person on whom the role is projected is simultaneously a participant in the language event and a participant in the clause. This happens most clearly with the personal pronouns, you and we” (Thompson & Thetela, 1995, p. 108). So, personal pronouns not only reflect the relationship between writer and reader but also allow the cultural context and the general background of the writer/reader to enter the discourse, introducing additional variables that may influence the interpretation of the written composition.

2.2 Relevant studies on the use of personal pronouns in foreign language argumentative writing

When it comes to studies on the use of personal pronouns in FL argumentative writing, the use of the first-person singular and plural has often been investigated since their usage seems to explicitly and obviously reveal the writer’s opinion and create a visible authorial presence in a proposition. Accordingly, there is considerable research on writer visibility through the use of first-person pronouns, singular and plural, in argumentative writing¹ in different FL contexts (e.g., Petch-Tyson, 1998; Ädel, 2008; Natsukari, 2013; Zolotova, 2014; Luan & Zhang, 2016; Bikelienė, 2016; Meintjes, 2015; Lee & Oh, 2018; Wang, 2012; Chibi, 2021; Cvikić & Ordulj, 2021).

Petch-Tyson (1998), who conducted a study on the comparison of English argumentative essays written by students of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (American, Swedish, Finnish, Dutch, and French), observed that the American students used the first-person reference less frequently than all the other students’ groups. Moreover, American and Finnish students used the first-person reference more frequently to express personal experiences, while Swedish, Dutch, and French students used the first-per-

¹ It is important to mention that there is even more extensive work on writers’ visibility expressed through the personal pronouns *I* and *we* in the genre of academic writing (e.g. Harwood, 2005; Hyland, 2002, 2004; Steinhoff, 2007; Kuo, 1999; Chavez Muñoz, 2013; Samraj, 2008; Vladimirov, 2007; Vassileva, 1998; Tang & John, 1999).

son reference more often to state their opinions and to structure the text. The results indicate that the cultural background, including the learning/teaching context, might play a role in the use of personal pronouns. Zolotova (2014) dealt with author identity in a corpus-based study investigating the overuse, underuse, and misuse of first-person pronouns in the writing of Russian L1 and Russian learners of English. The results show an overuse of the personal pronoun *we*. It is suggested that the detected overuse might be due to different factors, such as L1 transfer and developmental and teaching-induced factors (Zolotova, 2014, p. 1).

Luan and Zhang (2016) investigated the use of *I* and *we* in 200 argumentative essays (N=200) in a Swedish-Chinese EFL learner corpus. The results show higher frequencies of *I* and *we* in the Swedish than in the Chinese subcorpus. There were also interesting differences in the use of *I* and *we* between the two subcorpora. Swedish EFL learners used more *I* in opposition to Chinese EFL learners, who tended to use more *we*. An interesting similarity was that both groups showed a preference for *we* over *I*. Luan and Zhang (2016, p. 342) also suggest that “the reasons behind the similarities and differences were the cultural backgrounds, ways of teaching, and the writers’ identities between the two countries.”

These findings are also in line with Chibi’s study (2021) in which the cultural dimensions in Arabic L1 and EFL argumentative essays written by Moroccan master students (N=34) were analysed. The study investigated (a) the frequencies of the first-person singular pronouns (*I*, *my*, *mine*) and “personal anecdotes as elements of personal disclosure that characterise the writing of individualistic cultures in the students’ Arabic and English essays” (p. 62), and (b) the frequencies of first-person plural pronouns (*we*, *our*, *ours*) that refer “to collective virtues as features of the collective self that characterize the writing of collectivist cultures in both essays” (p. 62). The results displayed a high frequency of first-person plural pronouns expressing collective (self) elements in Arabic L1 essays, while a combination of collective elements and the first-person singular was the most dominant feature in EFL essays.

The studies that have been conducted so far have focused mostly on frequency distributions (overuse, underuse, misuse) of personal pronouns (especially *I* and *we*) in texts written by foreign language learners in various foreign language contexts (e.g., Dutch, French, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Taiwanese, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Lithuanian). Only a few studies deal not only with the frequency distribution of personal pronouns but more importantly with their discourse functions, which aim at adding

an interactional dimension to student writing. In this regard, an interesting study was carried out by Chang (2014), who examined the frequencies and discourse functions of the nominative personal pronouns *I*, *we*, and *you* in argumentative texts written by 76 Taiwanese EFL students from two universities, dividing them into three different proficiency levels (low, mid, and high). In this study, Chang detected that the nominative personal pronouns *I*, *we*, and *you* in EFL argumentative texts fulfil various discourse functions, “such as expressing stance and describing personal experiences by *I*, arousing solidarity by *we*, and directly involving the reader by *you*” (Chang, 2014, p. 93). The results show differences among proficiency levels when it comes to the use of pronoun type, frequency, and discourse function. The high-proficiency group, for example, tends to use *I* mostly to assert their stance, whereas the low-proficiency group uses *I* mainly when expressing personal experiences. Interestingly, the high-proficiency group did not use *you* at all, while the low- and mid-proficiency group applied *you* most frequently when aiming at the reader’s recognition. When it comes to *we*, it was used within the low- and high-proficiency groups when wanting to tone down directives, while the mid-proficiency group used *we* most frequently when attempting to build solidarity with the reader.

Cvikić and Ordulj’s study (2021) investigated writer visibility in Croatian L1 and L2 (N=80) argumentative writing, analysing the frequencies and discourse functions of the first-person singular and plural to get insights into the qualitative and quantitative differences in the use of *I*-forms and *we*-forms. The results from Croatian L1 and L2 writing show that the pronoun *I* is most frequently used to express the discourse functions of expressing the writer’s stance and the writer’s experience. The personal pronoun *we* is mainly used when presenting a general claim. In addition, the study reveals that Croatian L2 learners tend to use certain discourse functions more frequently than native speakers. Cvikić and Ordulj (2021, p. 22) provide a detailed insight into the possible reasons, stating that cultural, linguistic, and language-learning contexts influence writing in both L1 and L2.

There is also a distinct pedagogical line of research that focuses on the German as a second language (GSL) context and the development of argumentative competence. Winter, Michalak, and Lotter (2021) state that it has not yet been thoroughly investigated how argumentative competences in GSL are acquired. Therefore, their study (2021) aims to contribute to this line of research by shedding light on the development of argumentative competences during the initial phase of acquiring GSL, since this specific aspect has not yet been examined in detail (Winter et al., 2021, p. 113). The

study discusses how lower-secondary learners, who have not been living in the target country for long and who are acquiring GSL, develop their argumentative competencies in writing. For this purpose, argumentative letters to the editor written by late entrants participating in the ForEST project (Formative Evaluation of SPRINT [Intensive Language Support]) were analysed. Written assignments collected at the beginning and end of the school year were examined. The results of the study show, for example, that regardless of their second language proficiency, the learners attempt to follow certain general argumentative schemata (e.g., positioning, providing reasons, concluding, persuading). Winter, Michalak, and Lotter (2021, p. 125) emphasize that, in line with current research, it may be assumed that recently immigrated adolescents draw on their prior knowledge and transfer cross-linguistic cognitive structures from their first languages.

Another interesting study is presented in Massud's monograph (2019), in which argumentative patterns in German and Arabic are compared from a contrastive linguistic perspective. The author describes which linguistic and extralinguistic devices are used in intercultural communication processes for persuasive purposes. The second chapter is dedicated to the strategic self-reference expressed by the personal pronouns *ich* and *wir* among German and Arabic writers. The corpus for the empirical analysis was based on publicly available German and Arabic complaint texts, taken from online complaint websites. Massud's corpus analysis confirms his initial hypothesis that the pronouns *ich* and *wir* function not only for referential purposes but also realise pragmatic discourse meanings closely tied to the cultural specificities of the participants, i.e., as culture-specific devices.

Some studies have focused on conventions affecting academic writing. In general, ongoing debates regarding the appropriateness of the first-person singular use in formal academic writing still exist among researchers (cf. Hyland & Jiang, 2017; MacIntyre, 2017). In addition, Wu (2015) and Steinhoff (2007) point to the fact that there is still a German tradition of the so-called *Ich-Tabu*, meaning that German scholars tend to avoid the use of the first-person singular pronoun *I* compared to scholars in English-speaking countries. Wu (2015, p. 153) points out that, "although the convention of the *Ich-Tabu* is sometimes ignored, the main tendency of German academic writing is still that the first-person singular is used very sparingly." Therefore, cultural, historic, and language-specific features should also be taken into consideration when analysing and comparing written argumentative essays, not only by scholars but also by GFL learners, as their writing

style in different genres may be influenced by textbooks and style guides as well.

Taking into consideration the studies that have been conducted so far, there is still not only a need to investigate the frequency distributions of personal pronouns within different learning and teaching contexts, but also the functions they fulfil within the discourse, especially in the light of cultural features that could additionally influence the use of personal pronouns in various FL learning contexts. This data could lead to valuable pedagogical implications, which could lead to the improvement and development of writing competence. This study aims to fill this research gap, focusing on the under-researched Croatian GFL learning context.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

This study aims to investigate the frequencies and discourse functions of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *du* (English 'you', second person singular), and *wir* (English 'we') used in argumentative texts written by Croatian GFL learners (N=50) at the B2 level. Therefore, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How frequently are the nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *du* (English 'you', second person singular), and *wir* (English 'we') used by Croatian GFL learners in argumentative writing under research?
2. Which discourse functions do these personal pronouns fulfil?

3.2. Corpus

The corpus comprises 50 argumentative texts written by Croatian students in their first year of the BA program in GFL as part of a research project.² All participants, who had previously signed an informed consent form to take part in the study, had passed the higher level of the Croatian State Matura Exam in German³ before beginning their studies, so they had been acquainted with the essay format and argumentative writing in secondary school, as it is part of the Croatian regular secondary school curriculum for

² Fifty essays were collected within a study that was conducted as part of the project *Textual Coherence in Foreign Language Writing (KohPiTekst)* (IP–2016–06– 5736), which has been supported by the Croatian Science Foundation.

³ This level corresponds to level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

foreign languages. Participants were asked to write an argumentative text in German in 200 to 230 words within 75 minutes on one of the following topics and fulfill one of the following tasks:

Task 1:

For some people, life in the city has many advantages. Others see many disadvantages in it. Write an essay on the topic *Life in the City*. In doing so, discuss both the advantages and disadvantages. State your own opinion and provide reasons to support it.

The essay should be between 200 and 230 words in length.⁴

Task 2:

For some people, online shopping has many advantages. Others see many disadvantages in it. Write an essay on the topic *'Online Shopping'*. In doing so, discuss both the advantages and disadvantages. Express your own opinion and justify it with reasons.

The essay should be between 200 and 230 words in length.⁵

The tasks were presented to the participants in German. They were allowed to ask any questions concerning the task in German and/or Croatian. After collecting the essays, they were rated holistically by two experienced writing teachers. Overall, the investigated corpus consisted of 13.387 tokens, and the average length was 267 tokens.

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of two different stages: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. The first step focused on quantitative analysis, i.e., a detailed text analysis of the frequencies of personal pronouns. In the quantitative analysis, a corpus analytic approach was applied by using Sketch Engine as a corpus tool. Furthermore, Sketch Engine has a corpus architect, which is a tool for creating one's own corpora. In the analysis, the question of error treatment was crucial. On the one hand, correcting/deleting mistakes could compromise the authenticity and relevance of findings. On the other hand, some mistakes can prevent the obtaining of relevant results.

⁴ The original task was presented to the participants in German: "Für einige Menschen hat das Leben in der Stadt viele Vorteile. Andere sehen darin viele Nachteile. Schreiben Sie einen Aufsatz zum Thema „Das Leben in der Stadt“. Besprechen Sie dabei sowohl die Vorteile als auch die Nachteile. Schreiben Sie Ihre eigene Meinung und begründen Sie sie. Der Aufsatz soll 200 bis 230 Wörter umfassen."

⁵ The original task was presented to the participants in German: "Für einige Menschen hat Online-shopping viele Vorteile. Andere sehen darin viele Nachteile. Schreiben Sie einen Aufsatz zum Thema „Onlineshopping“. Besprechen Sie dabei sowohl die Vorteile als auch die Nachteile. Schreiben Sie Ihre eigene Meinung und begründen Sie sie. Der Aufsatz soll 200 bis 230 Wörter umfassen."

Therefore, in this study, we did not correct errors before making concordances because of the following reasons. Firstly, students usually do not make many spelling/grammar mistakes when it comes to personal pronouns in the nominative. Secondly, spelling and even grammar mistakes could provide valuable insights into the possible misuse of personal pronouns.

The next step, qualitative analysis, dealt with the analysis of the discourse functions of the personal pronouns under research. All occurrences of the personal pronouns were coded according to their discourse function. For qualitative analysis purposes, in this study, a classification developed by Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018)⁶ as part of the research project *Textual Coherence in Foreign Language Writing (KohPiTekst)*,⁷ based on the analysis of English and French FL argumentative texts, was used. This classification is grounded in the initial classification scheme presented by Chang (2014), who based his classification on previous findings on the pragmatic functions of personal pronouns in various genres (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hyland, 2001, 2002, 2005b, 2005c; Kitagawa & Lehrer, 1990; Kuo, 1999; Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990; Myers, 1989; Pennycook, 1994; Vassileva, 1998; Wales, 1996, as cited in Chang 2014, p. 103). The difference between Chang's classification (2014) and the classification of Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018) can be found within the initial classification concerning the personal pronouns *I* and *you*. The discourse functions of the personal pronoun *I* were modified because the categories from Chang (2014) were not fully applicable to the corpora. Moreover, Chang's (2014) classification for the analysis of EFL argumentative texts was additionally extended by adding two more categories that were identified and analysed by Hyland (2002) on academic writing, i.e., discourse functions of self-mention in student reports (p. 1099).

Table 1 shows the categories of discourse functions, gives explanations and examples of those categories for the personal pronoun *I* according to the classification of Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018) for English and French as foreign languages.

⁶ Initial results of the studies within this research project concerning this modified classification of discourse functions of personal pronouns were presented for French as FL at the *Romance Studies in the Age of Multilingualism Conference*, 2018, Moscow, Russia, and for English as a FL at the conference of *Literacy skills in educational environments: Changing theories and practices*, 2018, Biała Podlaska, Poland.

⁷ IP-2016-06- 5736, supported by the Croatian Science Foundation.

3.3. Data analysis

Table 1

The function classification of the personal pronoun *I*

Tablica 1

Klasifikacija funkcija osobne zamjenice *I*

Functions of the personal pronoun <i>I</i>	Explanation	Example
Stating claims	The function of (re)presenting the writer's knowledge	<i>I have recently read that more and more people are moving to the city.</i>
Elaborating an argument	The function of describing the writer's argumentative line	<i>Life in the city is a good thing because I can be peaceful and healthier.</i>
Asserting the writer's stance	The function of expressing the writer's perspectives or attitudes regarding a particular issue	<i>I think it is not worth losing my health due to polluted air and such.</i>
a) Referring to the writer's experience	The function of describing and conveying the writer's personal experiences	<i>I often buy online, and I haven't had any negative purchases so far.</i>
b) Referring to the writer's expectation	The function of describing and conveying the writer's mental state, anticipations, expectations, desires, and wishes	<i>If you ask me, I would rather live away from big cities.</i>
Indicating discourse structure	The function of serving as a structure marker in the discourse	<i>I will now discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city.</i>

Table 2 shows discourse functions, gives explanations and examples of those categories for the personal pronoun *you* according to the classification of Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018) for English and French as foreign languages.

Table 2

The function classification of the personal pronoun *you*

Tablica 2

Klasifikacija funkcija osobne zamjenice *you*

Functions of the personal pronoun <i>you</i>	Explanation	Example
Involving the reader	The function of addressing the reader and inviting them into the discourse	<i>Also, you can expand your cultural knowledge by visiting museums and galleries.</i>
Confronting an opposing stance	The function of distancing the reader from the writer, whose positions are diametrically opposed	<i>On the contrary, it might not be as good as you think.</i>
Presenting generalisations	The function of conveying ideas or facts that are generally accepted by the general public and society	<i>Living in a city means that you have many possibilities.</i>
Representing the writer's subjectivity or knowledge superiority over the reader	The function of conveying the writer's subjective perspective or a sense of knowledge superiority in relation to the reader	<i>On the other hand, peace and quiet is something that you mostly can't afford.</i>

The discourse functions of the personal pronoun *we* were fully used from Chang's study and were applied to the corpus in the presented study, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The function classification of the personal pronoun *we*

Tablica 3

Klasifikacija funkcija osobne zamjenice *we*

Functions of the personal pronoun <i>we</i>	Explanation	Example
Establishing solidarity	The function of fostering solidarity by eliciting the reader's sympathy, understanding, and reflection, or illustrating the situations we were confronted with	<i>When we talk about living in the city, the majority of people imagine this chaotic, busy, and exciting lifestyle where everything is running and going.</i>
Toning down directives	The function of softening a directive, most often expressed through the construction "we + obligation verb"	<i>We must say that city life is not for everyone.</i>
Presenting a general claim	The function of establishing common ground and shared social values, beliefs, experiences, knowledge, and traditions	<i>We live in a world where things are developing fast.</i>
Indicating discourse structure	The function of serving as an explicit structural marker of the discourse	<i>For example, as we've already mentioned, pollution, traffic jams, or noise can be quite a nuisance.</i>

Another valuable reason for the application of the above-presented classifications, adapted by Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018), was the fact that these classifications were already successfully used not only in preliminary research activities connected to EFL and FFL but also in Cvikić and Ordulj's studies (2021, 2022)⁸ for the Croatian L1 and L2 learning context. In their first study (2021), Cvikić and Ordulj analysed writer visibility in L1 and L2 Croatian argumentative writing, and in their second study (2022), the discourse functions of personal pronouns in Croatian L1 argumentative writing were investigated. Since Cvikić and Ordulj's study (2021) also dealt with L2 learners, as does the present study, it seemed methodologically appropriate and justifiable to use the classification by Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018), as its application has been proven feasible.

Since, to our knowledge, this is the first systematic and detailed analysis of personal pronouns and their functions within argumentative texts written by Croatian GFL learners, we decided to focus on personal pronouns in

⁸ Both studies were also supported by the Croatian Science Foundation within the same project (IP-2016-06-5736: *Textual Coherence in Foreign Language Writing (KohPiTekst)*).

the subject position, in the nominative, because, according to Chang (2014, p. 103), “pronouns in nominative case can act as a participant of an action, and is the theme of a clause, whereas the functions of other cases largely depend on the other elements in the clause.”

4. RESULTS

4.1. Frequency of occurrences of personal pronouns

The results shown in Table 4 refer to the first research question connected to the frequency occurrences of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English ‘I’), *du* (English ‘you’), and *wir* (English ‘we’). The most frequently used pronoun in the analysed argumentative texts written by Croatian GFL students was *ich* (f=82), followed by *wir* (f=51) and *du* (f=16), as shown in the following table:⁹

Table 4

Results of the frequency occurrences of the personal pronouns *ich*, *wir*, *du*

Tablica 4

Rezultati učestalosti pojavljivanja osobnih zamjenica *ich*, *wir*, *du*

Personal pronoun in the nominative	Raw frequency (f)	Frequency in % within the whole corpus
<i>ich</i>	82	55.03
<i>wir</i>	51	34.23
<i>du</i>	16	10.74

To further investigate the individual distributions and frequency occurrences of the presented German nominative personal pronouns, the individual data, i.e., the distribution and frequency occurrences per participant, were analysed. The aim was to examine if there were participants who tended to use certain personal pronouns more often than other participants (APPENDIX A, B, and C for distributions per participant). The results for the German personal pronoun *ich* (APPENDIX A) indicate variation in its usage across participants, ranging from a minimum of zero instances (i.e., some participants did not use the pronoun at all) to a maximum of 4 occurrences per essay. Table 5 provides an overview of the frequencies of the personal pronoun *ich* and the number of essays in which each frequency occurs.

⁹ During the analysis there were also other personal pronouns detected, e.g. *ihr* (English *you*, second person plural). There were seven concordances altogether for *ihr*, but six were not the cases of personal but possessive pronouns, and one was used grammatically incorrect, so it was not possible to further investigate the usage.

Table 5Distribution of the personal pronoun *ich* by frequency per essay and number of essays**Tablica 5**Distribucija osobne zamjenice *ich* prema učestalosti po eseju i broju eseja

Frequency occurrences of the personal pronoun <i>ich</i> per essay	0	1	2	3	4
Number of essays in which the frequency occurs	9	17	12	7	5

To investigate possible individual differences, the next step was to also examine the distribution of the personal pronoun *wir* per participant (APPENDIX B). The results indicate variation in the use of the personal pronoun *wir*, ranging from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 3 occurrences per essay. Table 6 provides an overview of the frequencies of *wir* per essay and the number of essays in which each frequency occurs.

Table 6Distribution of the personal pronoun *wir* by frequency per essay and number of essays**Tablica 6**Distribucija osobne zamjenice *wir* prema učestalosti po eseju i broju eseja

Frequency occurrences of the personal pronoun <i>wir</i> per essay	0	1	2	3
Number of essays in which the frequency occurs	15	22	10	3

The analysis of the individual frequency distribution for the personal pronoun *du* was also performed (for a detailed distribution per participant for the personal pronoun *du*, see APPENDIX C). The results indicate that the personal pronoun *du* occurs in essays with a frequency ranging from zero to a maximum of 5 instances. Table 7 provides an overview.

Table 7Distribution of the personal pronoun *du* by frequency per essay and number of essays**Tablica 7**Distribucija osobne zamjenice *du* prema učestalosti po eseju i broju eseja

Frequency occurrences of the personal pronoun <i>du</i> per essay	0	1	2	3	4	5
Number of essays in which the frequency occurs	46	-	-	2	-	2

4.2. Functions of personal pronouns

The second research question focused on the discourse functions the nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *du* (English 'you', second person singular), and *wir* (English 'we') fulfil. As already explained and displayed in section 3.3., the classification from Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018) was applied for the analysis of the discourse functions of the personal pronouns under research.

4.2.1. Discourse functions of *ich* (English 'I')

In the data, the self-reference *ich* (English 'I') most frequently (f=82) appeared in the main part of the essay, where the arguments were supported by examples based on personal experience, and in the conclusion, where the writer's personal opinion was given. Table 8 shows the function distributions of the pronoun *ich*:

Table 8

The function distributions of the personal pronoun *ich*

Tablica 8

Učestalost pojavljivanja pojedinih funkcija osobne zamjenice *ich*

Discourse function of the personal pronoun <i>ich</i>	Raw frequency (f)	Frequency in % within the whole corpus	Frequency in % within the discourse functions of <i>ich</i>
Stating a claim	1	0.67	1.22
Elaborating an argument	13	8.73	15.85
Asserting the writer's stance	34	22.82	41.46
Referring to the writer's experiences	21	14.09	25.61
Referring to the writer's expectation	5	3.36	6.1
Indication discourse structure	8	5.37	9.76

Table 8 indicates that the function referring to the writer's stance was the most common discourse function (f=34). The personal pronoun *ich* fulfilled the function of *expressing the writer's stance*, views, or attitudes towards something using clusters "I + stance or mental verb" (e.g., "Ich finde", "Ich meine", "Ich glaube", etc.). Moreover, the participants tended to emphasize *ich* using clusters as "Ich persönlich glaube", "Ich selbst meine". The following examples from the corpus illustrate the usage in this category:

- (1) *Ich denke, dass alle Menschen anders denken, und so haben wir die Menschen* die in der Stadt leben möchten und die *im Land.*
- (2) *Ich finde es sehr schön* dort zu leben.*

The second most common identified discourse function is connected to *referring to the writer's experiences* (f=21). The personal pronoun *ich* was used to describe the *writer's personal experiences* connected to living in the city and online shopping. In this way, the writer tries to justify the given arguments and drag the reader into a discussion, trying to sound more convincing and trustworthy.

- (3) *Ich *hab in einem Dorf gelebt, und bin in die Stadt gezogen. (...)*
- (4) *Ich *käufe oft Online und habe mit dem Onlinekauf nur positive Erfahrungen. (...)*

The discourse function *elaborating an argument* was used (f=13) when the writers described their line of argumentation, i.e., introduced an argument:

- (5) *Ich finde das Leben dort gut, weil ich so meine eigene *Rhüe *hab, und bin auch so in der Stadt.*

The discourse function connected to *indicating discourse structure* (f=8) took over the role of an overt structure marker for the discourse, leading the reader through the arguments, smoothing comprehension, and emphasizing the schematic structure of the former or latter arguments:

- (6) *In diesem Aufsatz diskutiere ich beide Seiten. Zuerst*, benenne ich die Nachteile (...)*
 (7) *Im folgenden Abschnitt werde ich die Vorteile und Nachteile des Lebens in der Stadt erklären.*

Ich was also observed when describing the *writer's personal expectations*, state of mind, or wishes in general (f=5). It was often used in the conclusion, as it was a part of the participants' explicit task to express their own opinion, to intensify the writers' arguments and point of view. The following two examples are representative:

- (8) **Persönlich hoffe ich, eines Tages ein Haus in der Stadt zu besitzen.*
 (9) *Wenn man mich fragen würde, wo ich lieber leben würde, in einer Stadt oder *in einem Dorf, würde ich lieber in der Stadt wohnen.*

Finally, the least commonly used discourse function, *stating a claim* (f=1), presents the writer's knowledge and occurred in the argumentative texts under research only once in the following example:

- (10) *Ich weiß und habe in *eine Artikel gelesen, dass (...).*

4.2.2. Discourse functions of *wir* (English 'we')

In the data, the nominative personal pronoun *wir* (English *we*) appeared in the introduction, the main part of the essay, and the conclusion. Table 9 illustrates the discourse function distributions:

Table 9

The function distributions of the personal pronoun *wir*

Tablica 9

Učestalost pojavljivanja pojedinih funkcija osobne zamjenice *wir*

Discourse function of the personal pronoun <i>wir</i>	Raw frequency (f)	Frequency in % within the whole corpus	Frequency in % within the discourse functions of <i>wir</i>
Establishing solidarity	17	11.41	33.33
Toning down directives	3	2.01	5.89
Presenting a general claim	26	17.45	50.98
Indicating discourse structure	5	3.56	9.8

As illustrated in Table 9, the most commonly used discourse function for *wir* is *presenting a general claim* (f=26). This discourse function was used when wanting to express shared social values, common traditions, and/or beliefs. The writer tends to win over the reader for his argumentation by sharing common values, beliefs, etc., wanting to show his goodwill and objective point of view, trying to gain the reader's trust.

- (11) *Wir haben eine *größere Wahl in der Stadt, ob mit Geschäften, Schulen oder Unis.*

The second most common discourse function is *establishing solidarity* (f=17), aiming at evoking the reader's sympathy, mutual understanding, and/or way of thinking, sometimes by displaying situations the writer had to get through:

- (12) *Da wir in einer modernen Zeit leben, ist das Stadtleben populärer als je zuvor.*

The discourse function *indicating discourse structure* (f=5), i.e., the function of structure-marking, was observed when the writer tended to structure its composition by using common phrases to lead the reader through the arguments.

- (13) *Nach *der Nachteilen kommen wir nun zu den Vorteilen.*

Finally, the discourse function *toning down directives* (f=3) was fulfilled when the writer tends to sound calm, trying to persuade the writer into believing his argumentation by establishing solidarity. This construction was realized by the cluster "*wir* + obligation verb" (e.g., "müssen").

- (14) *Eines Tages will man auch eigene Kinder haben, da müssen wir auch an ihre Interessen denken.*

4.2.3. Discourse functions of *du* (English 'you', second person singular)

The nominative personal pronoun *du* most frequently appeared in the main part of the essay. Table 10 shows the function distributions:

Table 10

The function distributions of the personal pronoun *du*

Tablica 10

Učestalost pojavljivanja pojedinih funkcija osobne zamjenice *du* po ispitaniku

Discourse function of the personal pronoun <i>du</i>	Raw frequency (f)	Frequency in % within the whole corpus	Frequency in % within the discourse functions of <i>du</i>
Involving the reader	16	10.74	100
Confronting an opposing stance	0	0	0
Presenting generalisations	0	0	0
Representing the writer's subjectivity or knowledge superiority over the reader	0	0	0

In our study, *du* (English *you*, second person singular) fulfilled only one discourse function: *involving the reader* (f=16), intending to invite the reader into the discourse to be able to address him directly, as shown in the following examples:

- (15) *In der Stadt kannst du viele Leute treffen und kennenlernen, du kannst auch mehr rausgehen z. B. auf Parties.*
 (16) *Einige betrachten Onlineshopping als gefährlich, weil du nie *weist *wer hinter dem Monitor sitzt.*

The other three discourse functions – *confronting an opposing stance*, *presenting generalisations*, and *representing the writer's subjectivity or knowledge superiority over the reader* – as found in Chang's study (2014) and indicated by the classification of Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018) for EFL argumentative essays, were not detected. Moreover, it should be emphasized again that there seem to be individual differences in using the German nominative personal pronoun *du*, taking into consideration that only 4 out of 50 participants used *du* in their essays (Table 7). It should also be noted that there were many cases of misuse in these 4 essays, i.e., inappropriate use of *du*. In these cases, the third-person impersonal pronoun *man* should have been used instead of *du*.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. On the frequencies of the nominative personal pronouns in Croatian GFL argumentative writing

This study aimed at determining the frequency of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English *I*), *wir* (English *'we'*), and *du* (English *'you'*, second person singular) in texts of Croatian GFL learners and the various functions they fulfil within the discourse. The most frequently used personal pronoun was *ich* (f=82), followed by *wir* (f=51) and *du* (f=16) (Table 4).

On the one hand, these results connected to the frequency of the personal pronouns signalling writer visibility (through the personal pronouns *I* and *we*) are partly in line with some of the previous studies. Chang's results (2014) also reveal that Taiwanese EFL students in argumentative writing most frequently use the first-person personal pronoun *I*. According to Chang (2014), these findings are in line with McCrostie's (2008) and Breeze's (2007) results, stating that "non-native writers of English use I mostly to express opinions or to talk about themselves as writers" (Chang, 2014, p. 109). Chibi's results (2021) also revealed a higher frequency of the first-person singular pronouns in Arabic EFL argumentative essays. Cvikić and Ordulj

(2021), investigating the differences in the use of the first-person personal pronouns in argumentative essays written by Croatian L1 and L2 learners, also observed that, in total, Croatian L2 writers used the first-person singular forms more frequently than the first-person plural forms.

On the other hand, some studies show a higher frequency in the use of the first-person plural pronoun in the overall investigated corpus. Petch-Tyson's study (1998) showed that the *we*-forms were more frequently used by FL learners compared to *I*-forms in writing. Luan and Zhang (2016) confirmed similar results for Swedish and Chinese EFL learners, observing that "compared to 'I', 'we' is more preferred among both groups of English learners" (p. 351). Nevertheless, Luan and Zhang (2016, p. 347) emphasize that the Swedish and Chinese EFL corpus shows an important difference: "Swedish English learners tend to use more 'I' (Swedish: 34.21% > Chinese: 20.80%) while Chinese students tend to use more 'we' (Chinese: 45.80% > Swedish: 43.86%)."

It should also be pointed out that the high frequency use of the *I*-form is in contrast to the possible German tradition to avoid *ich* in academic writing, as it was observed and documented in Vassileva (1998) concerning argumentative writing, and Wu (2015) and Steinhoff (2007) connected to academic writing.

There are several possible explanations for the present results. One possible reason could be connected to the text genre (Zolotova, 2014; Bike-lienè, 2016; Cvikić and Ordulj, 2021) and the task instruction itself (cf. section 3.2.). The GFL participants of the present study were explicitly asked within the task to write an essay on the topic, discussing the advantages and disadvantages and stating their opinion, providing reasons that support it. This is in line with the instructions in similar studies connected to argumentative writing (e.g., Chang, 2014; Chibi, 2021; Cvikić and Ordulj, 2021) since this is a widely spread task instruction scheme used for writing argumentative texts. It is likely that the learners have chosen the easiest and most approachable way to literally fulfil the task and preferred the first-person nominative pronoun *I*. This observation goes in line with the analysis presented in section 4.2.1., showing that the self-reference *ich* (English 'I') most frequently appeared in the conclusion, where the writer's opinion was given, but also in the main part of the essay, where the arguments were supported by examples based on personal experience.

Another possible reason why the nominative first person *I* is used more frequently than *we* might be connected to cultural factors. Cvikić and Ordulj (2021) observed in their study that Croatian L1 learners use *I*-forms

over *we*-forms, suggesting that this “might be due to teaching of writing in Croatian L1” (p. 18). The thesis that the FL/L2 learning contexts, instructions, possible change in teaching paradigm, and cultural restrictions tend to influence the use of the personal pronoun *I* was also suggested by Zolotova (2014), drawing a relationship between pedagogical requirements and teaching materials and the overuse of the English pronoun *I* in Russian EFL writing. Moreover, since all participants are Croatian learners of GFL, differences in educational backgrounds, stemming from different high schools and different teaching environments, may have also influenced the use of *ich*.

Luan and Zhang (2016) also suggest that the cultural backgrounds, teaching strategies, and the writers’ identities between the countries play an important role in the usage of the personal pronouns *I* and *we*. As already mentioned, Luan and Zhang (2016, p. 347) observed in their corpus that Swedish EFL learners prefer *I* more than Chinese EFL learners. This is in line with Hyland’s (2002), Chibi’s (2021), and Massud’s (2019) suggestion that the usage of personal pronouns might be influenced by individual versus collective identity schemata. Within the context of the present study, the Croatian cultural context might have facilitated the usage of *ich*, but maybe not only the cultural context, but also the language learning/teaching context as Luan and Zhang (2016) suggest for their study emphasizing that “(i)n China, teachers always give students lectures in which students are instilled with knowledge passively instead of expressing their own opinions” (p. 350). On the contrary, according to Luan and Zhang (2016, p. 350), “Swedish teachers are more likely to hold seminars, in which students are required to speak out their own creative ideas freely.” Taking into consideration the Croatian learning/teaching context, the cultural and learning/teaching input could have influenced the way learners see their role as writers of argumentative texts and the way they implement it into their texts. Nevertheless, it should also be taken into consideration that the participants of this study are GFL learners, studying German as a FL at university level, but they have also received (and are still receiving) various input from different teachers of other FL languages they have studied, i.e., L1 Croatian and FL English, but have also studied and used various textbooks and received various instructions in their Croatian, English and German classes throughout their education which might have also caused L1 and FL transfer.

The results connected to the frequency of use of the personal pronoun *du* are in line with the findings in Chang’s study (2014), since it was also

the least frequently used personal pronoun. It should be noted that the frequency distributions per participant for the personal pronoun *du* (APPENDIX C) show significant individual differences since the personal pronoun was used in only 4 essays altogether. The other 46 participants did not use the personal pronoun *du* at all. As already stated in section 4.2.3., the qualitative analysis showed that the personal pronoun *du* was often misused because instead of *du*, the impersonal pronoun *man* should have been used.

5.2. On the discourse functions of personal pronouns in Croatian GFL learners' argumentative writing

The second research question focuses on the discourse functions of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *wir* (English 'we'), and *du* (English 'you', second person singular) in Croatian GFL learner argumentative texts.

As can be seen in Table 8, the German first-person nominative personal pronoun *ich* was most frequently used when intending to assert the writer's stance ($f=34$), views, or attitudes towards something, using clusters "I + stance or mental verb" (e.g., "Ich finde", "Ich meine", "Ich glaube", etc.). These findings are in line with Chang's study (2014, p. 108), where the *stance*-function was most commonly used (69.1% of the total *I*-functions), followed by the functions connected to the *writer's experiences* (25.6%) and *indicating structure* (5.3%). These findings are also in line with other studies (Cvikić & Ordulj, 2021; McCrostie, 2008; Breeze, 2007; Zolotova, 2014). On the one hand, non-native writers tend to use more writer/reader visibility features, for example, the first person nominative personal pronoun *I* to give their opinion (cf. Chang 2014, p. 108) because it is the easiest way to develop an argument and to express personal thoughts. On the other hand, as already mentioned in section 5.1., the task instruction already suggests that the writer's/author's point of view should be included in the argumentative text (cf. Cvikić and Ordulj, 2022; Zolotova, 2014), which most likely leads to a high frequency of the *stance*-discourse function.

The second most detected discourse function is connected to *referring to the writer's experiences* ($f=21$). This result is in line with the results from Chang (2014) and Cvikić and Ordulj (2021), but contrasts with those of Petch-Tyson (1998) and Zolotova (2014). Chang (2014) found that, comparing argumentative essays from low-, mid-, and high-proficiency groups, the function of *I* connected to the writer's experiences was used most frequently in the low-proficiency group, mainly to describe their experiences, signalling their preferences for affective and credibility appeals (Chang,

2014, p. 109). As mentioned in section 3.2., the participants of the present study had passed the higher level of the Croatian State Matura Exam in German, corresponding to level B2 of the CEFR, but taking into consideration the qualitative analysis of the essays in general, and the fact that studies on argumentative writing suggest that the proficiency level might not be determined well enough by taking into consideration only the German language Matura Exam in Croatia, it might be that the proficiency level in the present study is lower than suggested, at least in writing,¹⁰ which could have influenced the use of *I*-forms in terms of this specific discourse function.

In the present study, the first-person plural nominative pronoun *wir* (English 'we') was used most frequently for *presenting a general claim* (f=26). This result is in line with the study by Cvikić and Ordulj (2021), in which Croatian native and non-native writers most often realised this specific discourse function through the use of *we*. Since these results are different from Chang's study (2014), which investigated the use of personal pronouns in Taiwanese EFL students, this could be a sign that the cultural context might play a role in the use of *we*-forms, possibly even signaling L1 transfer. The high frequency in the use of the German *we* to establish solidarity (f=17) is not surprising, as Chang (2014) also points out that this specific function is often used as a solidarity mechanism aiming at convincing the reader to accept an argument or point of view, taking its active role in the discourse. The use of *wir* indicating discourse structure (f=5; 5.89%) is also in discrepancy when it comes to frequency in Chang's study (2014), in which the usage of this specific discourse function ranged among proficiency groups from 0 to 3.0%.¹¹ The reason behind these differences might be connected to the cultural and teaching context, which the participants from Cvikić and Ordulj's study (2021) partly share with the present study, as opposed to Chang's study (2014). The proficiency level should also be taken into consideration as a possible variable that could have influenced the present results, but was not part of the present research foci.

Interestingly, the discourse function *toning down directives* (f=3; 2.01%) was the second most commonly illustrated discourse function with *we* in Chang's study (2014), with a range in frequency from 25.2% to 51.6%, but was not detected at all in either subcorpus in Cvikić and Ordulj (2021) and

¹⁰ There are other studies dealing with argumentative writing, i.e., coherence and cohesion, within the Croatian GFL learning context that have already discussed possible problems of the higher level of the German Matura Exam in Croatia as a reliable variable for determining the proficiency level (e.g., Bagarić Medve & Karlak, 2023; Karlak & Šarić Šokčević, 2024).

¹¹ Low group writers: 0%; Mid group writers: 2.9; High group writers: 3%

was the less commonly detected discourse function in the corpus of the present study. Taking a closer and more critical look at the examples in the present study, a possible reason for this might be the very close definitions of the functions *toning down directives* and *establishing solidarity*, perhaps making it difficult at times to set them apart (cf. section 4.2.2., example 14). As already elaborated in section 3.3., the only discourse functions that were not modified by Bagarić Medve and Šarić Šokčević (2018), but were taken over from Chang (2014), were the classification for the personal pronoun *we* since preliminary research¹² on a Croatian EFL and FFL corpus has proven its applicability. Since the Cvikić and Ordulj study (2021) applied the same classification for Croatian L2 and L1 but did not find any instances of this discourse function and the present Croatian GFL study has only shown a very low frequency of the *toning down directives*-function, a closer look should be taken at this specific discourse function in further studies in order to try to get a better understanding of its illustration because the detected differences between studies might also stem from the cultural and learning/teaching context showing possible L1 transfer, and should, therefore, not be issued as a possible problem connected to Chang's (2014) classification.

When it comes to the discourse functions of the personal pronoun *du*, as already outlined in section 4.2.3., only the discourse function of *involving the reader* was detected as opposed to Chang's study (2014), where it fulfilled even three different functions with different distributions within the low-, mid-, and high-proficiency subcorpora. One possible reason for this underrepresentation of different discourse functions of *du* might be the fact that the qualitative analysis detected many cases in which the nominative personal pronoun *du* was inappropriately used. In these cases of misuse, instead of the nominative personal pronoun *du*, the German impersonal pronoun *man* should have been used to express the meaning and the pragmatic functions that were intended to be expressed. Unlike the German *du*, the English *you* can fulfil a wider range of functions that overlap with the possible functions of the impersonal German *man*. It has also to be emphasized again that there were significant individual differences (APPENDIX C) indicating an under-, over-, and/or misuse of the personal pronoun *du*. To better understand the reasons for possible individual over-, under-, and/or misuse of the nominative personal pronoun *du*, the results should be

¹² As already mentioned, the results of this research were presented at the conference of *Literacy skills in educational environments: changing theories and practices*, 2018, Biała Podlaska, Poland.

questioned in a broader study in which the corpus of native speakers' texts would be taken into analysis as well to compare the usage of this specific personal pronoun between native and non-native written argumentative compositions. Additional background information concerning the participants (e.g., retrospective interviews) would also help to better understand the background of the observed individual differences.

It should also be noted that the results for the personal pronoun *du* interestingly do partly correspond with the results of Chang's (2014) low-proficiency group, which in 90% of the cases used the function of *involving the reader* when using *you* to express a certain discourse function. This might also be in line with some of the above-mentioned assumptions that the proficiency level of the corpus under research was not determined properly and that the proficiency level does play a role when trying to express discourse functions through certain personal pronouns.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first limitation of the present study is the relatively small sample size of the corpus (N=50). Therefore, it should be emphasized that larger studies are needed to examine the discourse functions of personal pronouns in the Croatian GFL learning context more closely to draw more precise conclusions about their possible overuse or misuse and to provide a more detailed and robust description of the discourse functions observed. Moreover, and more importantly, a German native speaker corpus should be considered and analysed to compare the results between the native and non-native speaker corpus.

It should also be noted that further studies should include not only the German nominative personal pronouns but also other morphological forms of the personal pronouns discussed (e.g., dative pronouns *mir*, *dir*, *uns*) in order to gain a more precise insight into the discourse functions fulfilled not only by nominative personal pronouns but by personal pronouns in argumentation processes in general. It would also be interesting to examine the differences in frequency and individual distribution among the three pronouns, related to the different linguistic realizations, i.e., morphological forms used by the participants.

Additionally, it seems also of high importance to inspect possible transfer for future research within the Croatian learning context, as some of the observations in this study have shown that, in some cases, this could play a role when using personal pronouns. Furthermore, as already mentioned,

a native learner corpus should be inspected and compared to these results. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the personal pronoun *du* showed that in some essays there is a stronger tendency than in others to overuse certain pronouns, which points at individual differences (APPENDIX C connected to the use of the personal pronoun *you*) that have also to be taken into consideration, especially concerning the cultural and learning context (subjects taken, syllabi, teachers, way of teaching, etc.) and language proficiency issues discussed.

7. CONCLUSION

Because FL learners must handle not only lexical and grammatical barriers when writing a composition but also discourse features, using personal pronouns as interpersonal discourse markers can play an effective role in mediating the writer's message and producing a cohesive text, especially argumentative texts. To contribute to this line of research, this study investigated the frequencies and the discourse functions of the German nominative personal pronouns *ich* (English 'I'), *wir* (English 'we'), and *du* (English 'you', second person singular) in argumentative texts written by Croatian GFL learners. The results connected to frequency show that the most frequently used personal pronoun is the self-referent *ich* (English 'I'), followed by *wir* (English 'we') and *du* (English 'you', second person singular). The quantitative and qualitative analysis connected to the metadiscourse functions has shown a wide range of specific functions connected to the different personal pronouns under research suggesting – similarly to what has been proposed by other researchers (e.g., Ädel, 2008; Chang, 2014; Cvikić & Ordulj, 2021) – that the genre, prompts, cultural context, learning/teaching strategies, including possible transfer, but also individual differences, all influence the use of personal pronouns denoting writer/reader visibility within an argumentative FL text.

As far as pedagogical implications are concerned, the overall frequencies and discourse function observations, but also the cases of misuse and overuse, point to the need to raise learners' awareness of the appropriate use of personal pronouns, aiming at tackling a systematic approach in teaching personal pronouns within different genres. It is important to continue to investigate the use of personal pronouns in order to better understand the different factors that may influence FL learners' writing so that more effective and appropriate pedagogical materials can be created.

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APPENDIX A indicates the frequency distributions of the German nominative personal pronoun *ich* per participant

Essay code	Stating a claim	Elaborating an argument	Asserting the writer's stance	Referring to the writer's experiences	Referring to the writer's expectation	Indication discourse structure	Total per participant
nj1			2			1	3
nj2		1	2	1			4
nj3		1	1		1		3
nj4					2	2	4
nj5			1				1
nj6							-
nj7		1	1				2
nj8		1	1	1			3
nj9			2	1	1		4
nj10			1			1	2
nj11		1	1				2
nj12						1	1
nj13		2					2
nj14			1				1
nj15				1			1
nj16							-
nj17				3			3
nj18							-
nj19			1				1
nj20							-
nj21				1			1
nj22			1				1
nj23							-
nj24							-
nj25			1				1
nj26				1			1
nj27			1				1
nj28							-
nj29						1	1
nj30		1	2	1			4
nj31			1				1
nj32				2			2
nj33			1			1	2
nj34		1	1		1		3
nj35							-
nj36		1		1			2
nj37			1				1
nj38			1				1
nj39			2				2
nj40				2			2
nj41			1	2			3

nj42		1		1			2
nj43	1	1	2				4
nj44			1				1
nj45			1		1		2
nj46			1				1
nj47			1	1			2
nj48		1					1
nj49			1	2			3
nj50				-			-
Total	1	13	34	21	5	8	82

APPENDIX B indicates the frequency distributions of the German nominative personal pronoun *wir* per participant

Essay code	Establishing solidarity	Toning down directives	Presenting a general claim	Indicating discourse structure	Total per participant
nj1			1		1
nj2					-
nj3			1		1
nj4			2	1	3
nj5					-
nj6					-
nj7			1		1
nj8					-
nj9	1				1
nj10	1				1
nj11	1		1		2
nj12					-
nj13			1	1	2
nj14	1		1		2
nj15		1	2		3
nj16			2		2
nj17		1	1		2
nj18					-
nj19	1		2		3
nj20		1	1		2
nj21			1		1
nj22	1		1		2
nj23					-
nj24			1	1	2
nj25	1				1
nj26			1		1
nj27			1		1
nj28	1				1
nj29				1	1

nj30					-
nj31			1		1
nj32	1				1
nj33	1				1
nj34					-
nj35					-
nj36					-
nj37	1				1
nj38					-
nj39			1		1
nj40				1	1
nj41	1				1
nj42					-
nj43	2				2
nj44	1				1
nj45	1		1		2
nj46			1		1
nj47	1				1
nj48					-
nj49			1		1
nj50					-
Total	17	3	26	5	51

APPENDIX C indicates the frequency distributions of the German nominative personal pronoun *du* per participant

Essay code	Involving the reader	Confronting an opposing stance	Presenting generalisations	Representing the writer's subjectivity or knowledge superiority over the reader	Total per participant
nj1					-
nj2					-
nj3					-
nj4					-
nj5					-
nj6					-
nj7					-
nj8					-
nj9					-
nj10	5				5
nj11					-
nj12					-
nj13					-
nj14					-
nj15					-
nj16					-

nj17					-
nj18					-
nj19					-
nj20					-
nj21					-
nj22					-
nj23	5				5
nj24					-
nj25					-
nj26					-
nj27	3				3
nj28					-
nj29					-
nj30					-
nj31	3				3
nj32					-
nj33					-
nj34					-
nj35					-
nj36					-
nj37					-
nj38					-
nj39					-
nj40					-
nj41					-
nj42					-
nj43					-
nj44					-
nj45					-
nj46					-
nj47					-
nj48					-
nj49					-
nj50					-
Total	16	-	-	-	16

O osobnim zamjenicama u raspravljačkim tekstovima hrvatskih učenika njemačkoga kao stranoga jezika

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Metadiskursni su izrazi važna obilježja koja olakšavaju komunikaciju i prijenos poruke koju pisac želi prenijeti. Osobne se zamjenice mogu definirati kao interpersonalni diskursivni označivači koje često koriste učenici stranih jezika kako bi označili prisutnost autora u raspravljačkim tekstovima. Unatoč dosadašnjim opsežnim istraživanjima o upotrebi osobnih zamjenica u raspravljačkim tekstovima učenika stranih jezika, tekstovi hrvatskih učenika njemačkoga kao stranoga jezika dosad se nije istraživao. Stoga ova studija analizira rezultate korpusne analize o upotrebi njemačkih osobnih zamjenica *ich* (hrv. *ja*), *wir* (hrv. *mi*) i *du* (hrv. *ti*) u raspravljačkim tekstovima koje su napisali hrvatski studenti njemačkoga jezika (N = 50). Cilj je istražiti (a) učestalost upotrebe navedenih osobnih zamjenica u raspravljačkim tekstovima hrvatskih studenata njemačkoga jezika te (b) diskursne funkcije navedenih osobnih zamjenica. Rezultati pokazuju da je najčešće korištena osobna zamjenica *ich* (hrv. *ja*), koja ispunjava različite diskursne funkcije, poput izražavanja stava i opisivanja osobnih iskustava. Druga najčešće korištena osobna zamjenica jest *wir* (hrv. *mi*), koja se primarno koristi za iznošenje općih tvrdnji. Osobna je zamjenica *du* (hrv. *ti*) najmanje zastupljena osobna zamjenica i koristi se isključivo kako bi se čitatelja uključilo u diskurs.

Ključne riječi: *osobne zamjenice, interpersonalni označivač, diskursne funkcije, vidljivost autora, raspravljački tekstovi na njemačkome kao stranome jeziku*