

THE USE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS BY PAKISTANI ESL LEARNERS IN THEIR EXPLANATORY AND REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

Dr. Shahid Nawaz

**Assistant Professor, Dept. of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
Corresponding Email ID: aqeelpk786@yahoo.com**

Waheeda Rehman

PhD Scholar English Linguistics AIOU Islamabad

Zohaib Ahmed Tanoli

M Phil English Literature Lecturer Department of English Wapda Postgraduate College

Tarbela Dam Project

Muhammad Abdullah

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Abstract

Discourse markers are expressions which are equipped "with the primary function of bringing to the reader's attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediately preceding discourse context. The researchers, keeping the importance of relevance and coherence in the text in mind, conducted this study to explore the use of discourse markers in the reflective and explanatory essays written by the undergraduates of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. The results revealed the type of discourse markers used in both reflective and explanatory essays. After data analysis the results showed the most frequent and the least frequent use of discourse markers in ESL learners' writing compositions. From the results, it is evident that the learners used the discourse markers in explanatory essays like "and", "because", and "for example" most frequently while "despite", "on the other hand", and "contrary" were used least frequently. The highest percentages were 10.76, 9.88, and 7.85 and the lowest percentages were 0.58, 0.87, and 1.16 respectively. In reflective essays they used "also", "there", "therefore" most frequently while "finished", "at the beginning", and "at that time" were least frequently used. The highest percentages were 10.03, 9.34, and 6.92 and the lowest percentages were 0.69, 1.38, and 2.42 respectively. In both types of essays, the most frequently used discourse markers were: 'and', 'because', 'also' and 'there' with percentages 10.76, 9.88, 10.03 and 9.34 respectively.

Keywords: Discourse Markers, ESL Learners, Explanatory and Reflective Essays

Introduction

Randolph Quirk (1953), elaborated upon the usage of some frequent words, such as you know, you see, and well. His deliberations on these connectives drew the attention of more linguists' attention, and many scholars commenced attaching considerable importance to these connectives and markers. Discourse markers (DMs) have been the focus of extensive research over the past two decades, as evidenced by numerous studies from different perspectives. Although there are differences in how DMs are approached, analyzed, and described over time, most researchers agree that connectives, pragmatic markers, discourse connectors and discourse markers are related to one another. These markers are an additional type that serves the dual pragmatic functions in oral speech (Biber et al., 1999).

Schiffrin, (1987) distinguishes these DMs as "sequentially dependent substances bounded by speech units." He carefully deconstructed the term and identified eleven different forms of these markers which include 'and, because, but, I want to say, now, oh, or, so, then, well, and you know'. Schiffrin persuaded and convinced that DMs simply did not fit a language class, so he made some conversational assumptions about the exact parameters that would allow the expression to be used as a marker. Syntactically, it could be removed as it often appeared in the

first place of the sentence. He also argued that DM's definition was inadequate, and he proposed a clearer definition of the component of discourse harmony, as well as a broader framework covering all unifying expressions: "a word or phrase, such as a conjunction, an adverb, a comment. A sentence or element whose main function is to draw the listener's attention to a particular type of communication in the forthcoming speech" Fraser discussed DMs in relation to Pragmatic Markers. According to Fraser, a DM is "a remark that communicates the fundamental message's connection to the previous discourse." Discourse markers instruct the addressee on how to understand the speech linked with the discourse marker." Discourse markers instruct the addressee on how to perceive the speech with which they are related." According to Hansen, "linguistic elements that perform a non-propositional, met discursive (mainly connective) function and whose scope is fundamentally changeable, such that it may encompass both sub-sentential and supra-sentential units" should be defined as "linguistic elements that perform a non-propositional, met discursive (mainly connective) function and whose scope is fundamentally changeable, such that it may encompass both sub-sentential and supra-sentential units."

The following are the main characteristics of DMs that have been identified based on (Archer et al., 2012):

They are short lexically and phonologically items that can be shortened (for example, because to cos) and differentiated from the remainder of an utterance by a brief pause. They are optional from a syntactical standpoint; they can be eliminated without impacting the interpretation of the information or message being conveyed. When they do appear, they are almost often placed at the start of a sentence, but this is not always the case (Sitthirak, 2013).

There is no proper semantic meaning of DMs. In other words, when they appear, they are not added alone to the description or content of the speech, but they are used in congruence with the speaker, the listener, the discourse or text as a whole. They enable the reader to predict what comes next in the text. came before (Lee-Goldman, 2011). These markers perform both textual and interpersonal functions and operate on several linguistic levels at the same time. They appear in sociolinguistics not as written, but as features of oral speech (Brinton, 1996).

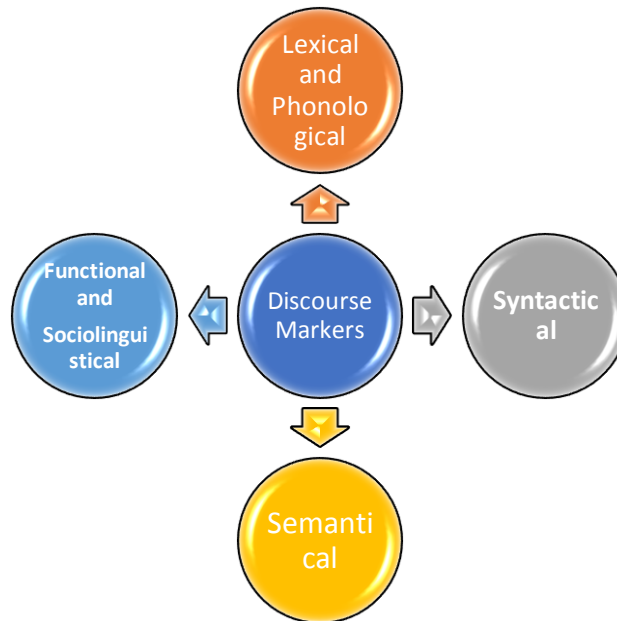


Figure 1. Features DMs

1. Linguistic expressions used to show the direct connection of speech to the context in order to draw the listener's attention to a particular type of speech in the context of the current discourse (Redeker, 1991).
2. Michael Halliday's pragmatic, functional approach to language enhances our understanding of the concept and classification of DMs. It divides language semantic systems into three main functions or systems:

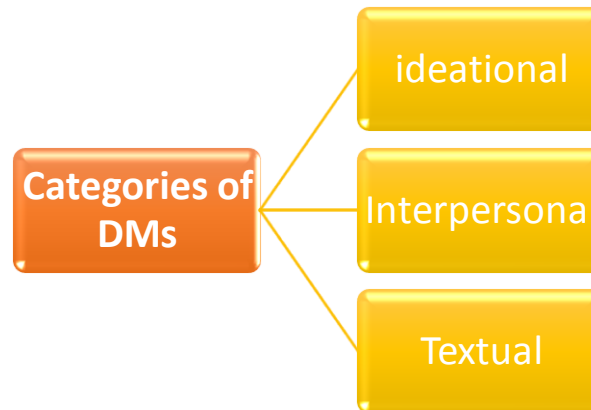


Figure 2. Categories of DMs

For DMs, the function of the three roles of language plays a theoretically central role. The function of an idea is related to the content of linguistic expressions that are true or false. It is representative, referenced and informative in its nature and form. The interpersonal function deals with the formation and maintenance of human relationships and includes, on the one hand, everything that can be understood through the expression of our personalities and personal feelings, and, on the other hand, forms of interaction and social interaction with other participants. The text function is a function that allows you to simplify speech by creating text.

This is required for the efficient transmission of combined texts, as well as ideas and interpersonal meanings. Its purpose is simply to create texts that do not contain a series of words or isolated sentences or paragraphs. Crismore and VandeKopplen changed the DM classification system. They retained two basic forms of text and interpersonal expressions, and termed the categories as text markers, descriptive markers and interpersonal markers which include Hedges, Defining Markers, Attributive markers etc. Discourse markers are considered meaningless by some because they do not give any semantic value. From this point of view, the correct meaning of DMs is determined by their context, and the marker itself does not give any value, so it can be deleted from the sentence without causing visible loss of meaning. Halliday and Hasan view discourse markers as anaphoric indicators of the semantic connections between a sentence and a preceding sentence. In addition to this semantic interpretation of DMs, the study of discourse markers in the conversation, in which Schiffrin emphasizes that it could convey both semantic and pragmatic meanings, provides other precepts. The roles of key DMs are given below (Briton, 1996).

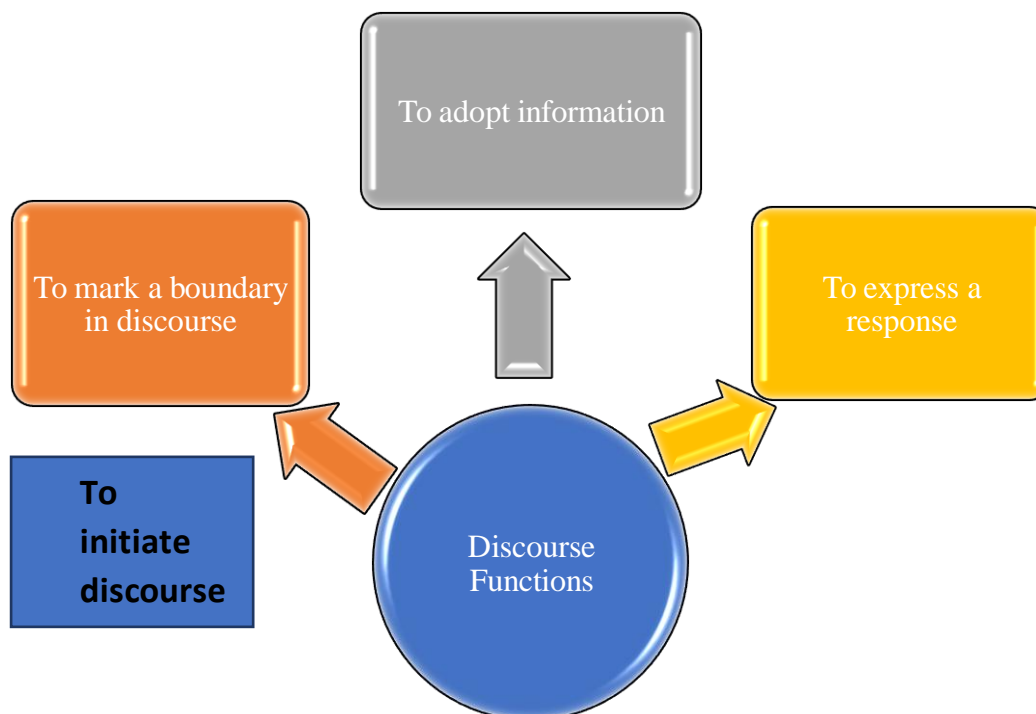


Figure 3. Major Functions of Discourse Markers

Discourse markers have two purposes: text in language and interpersonal roles. The dual role of DMs can be useful in a variety of situations, including language learning and teaching. For starters, this is very important for English language research, as it can lead to more effective and efficient speaking, listening, writing and translation. Second, DMs are useful for teaching reading because they provide readers with sources of ideas, a summary of cognitive processes and mental states, text organization, guidance on reader expectations, and writer-reader harmony. Fung and Carter (2007) developed a functional-based framework that adapts Maschler's (2000) classification of DMs to four functional categories: interpersonal, reference, structural, and

cognitive, taking into account the fluidity of discourse particles that can perform multiple functions at the same time. Consists of four functions and gives a clear idea of how DMs express cognitive processes.

According to Schiffrin, Fraser, and others, the responsibilities of DMs are largely determined by their contribution to speech conformity. Schiffrin defines DMs as "sequential dependent objects in parentheses of speech units" and markers as "suggesting contextual coordinates in which an expression is formed and intended to be understood." According to Schiffrin, harmony is created by the connection between the surrounding pieces of discourse.

Understanding and production are two processes involved in learning. In the comprehension phase, students try to understand what needs to be learned, such as definition, classification, features, and structure, as well as to identify the applied theory and how it works or functions Wei, M. (2011). Then they have to go to the next stage, practice, to be ready for the final stage of production. As the main outcome of language acquisition, speaking and writing, students need to practice extensively before producing them in a natural, correct and responsible way. From this learning process, we can conclude that it is one thing to understand DMs, but it is quite another to use them. Although many linguists have reached a broad consensus on the importance of DM as a result of research and studies, there is still work to be done on how to teach and learn DM most effectively. The lexical approach, also known as mass learning (Nattinger&Decarrico, 1992), can be a good way to learn and teach it today. The transition from routine to creative application, according to the lexical approach, is a common feature of language learning. Teachers should help students as soon as possible by eliminating inaccurate and misuse.

Students are then expected to be advanced in understanding and applying discourse and discourse analysis, including discourse analysis, an important unity and consistency view of discourse structure and discourse style, which will greatly help them in reading and writing. Effective, as well as better understanding and application of DMs. This stage will help students to automatically identify and use DMs and will allow them to expand their learning of DMs during the first two periods.

Teachers serve as instructors, proofreaders, and guides throughout the process to help students learn DM. However, whether the approach is applied or not, the most important aspects to ensure success are experience and proper control. At the same time, not only teachers and students, but also textbook authors, professional writers and publishers need to better understand these language anomalies. Elements should also be included in comprehensive theories of speech, writing, reading, and interpretation. To ensure the successful use of DMs in language learning and teaching, linguists need to create additional research on these items, researching their numerous applications and users in different texts and contexts.

Research Questions

This research is conducted to obtain the answers of the following questions:

1. What type of discourse markers do ESL learners use in their expository essays?
2. What type of discourse markers do ESL learners use in their reflective essays?
3. What type of discourse markers do ESL learners most frequently use?

Methodology

The study is descriptive in its nature and form. The researchers, through convenient sampling, collected 50 essays from undergraduate ESL learners who were enrolled in 3rd Semester of the BS (English, Management Sciences and Software-Engineering) program of the Islamia



University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. These essays were carefully checked. The researchers located and identified discourse markers used in expository and reflective essays. The total word count for the above-mentioned types of essays was 23,678.

Analysis

To answer research questions, the tables below show the frequency and percentage of DMs identified in the explanatory and reflective essays written by ESL undergraduates.

Table 1: Discourse markers identified in students’ explanatory essays

Discourse markers	Frequency	Percentage
But	19	5.52
However	11	3.197
Although	5	1.45
On the other hand	3	0.87
In contrast	7	2.03
Rather than	6	1.74
Instead of	8	2.33
Whereas	12	3.49
Nevertheless	4	1.16
On the contrary	3	0.87
Despite (doing this/that)	2	0.58
Inspite of (doing this/that)	4	1.16
Conversely	4	1.16
Also	26	7.56
And	37	10.76
For example	27	7.85
So	19	5.52
Then	15	4.36
Because	34	9.88
Because of	24	6.98
In conclusion	20	5.81
In Addition,	18	5.23
Moreover	13	3.78
Or	23	6.69
Total	344	100

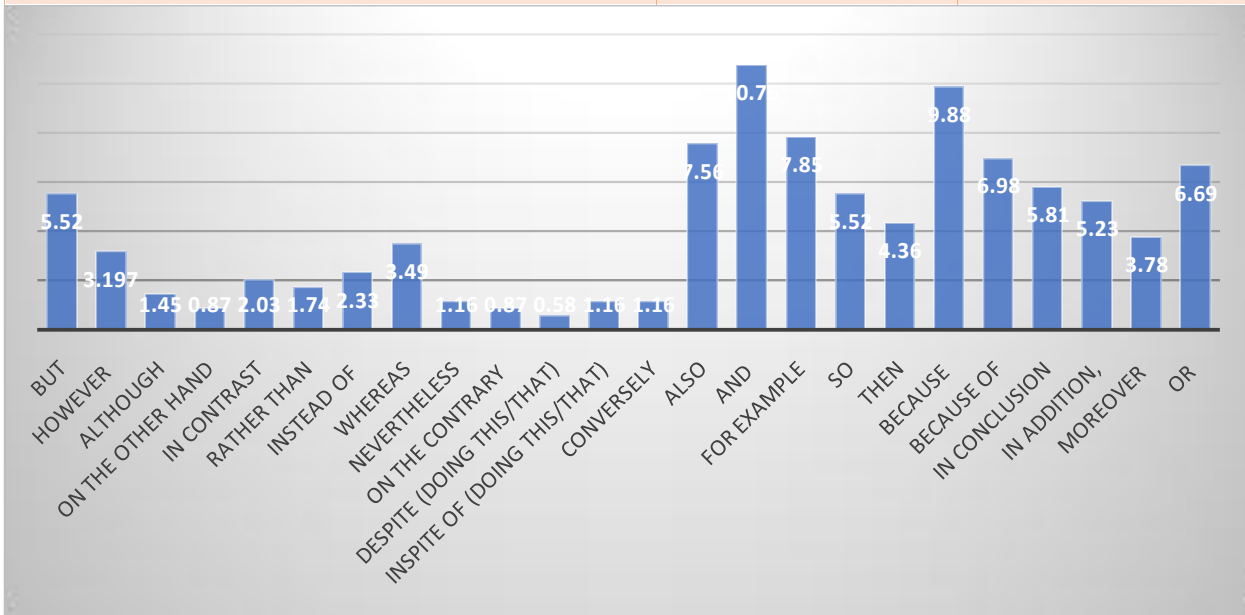


Figure 4. Discourse markers identified in students’ explanatory essays

Table and graph show the frequency and the percentage of the discourse markers that the students used in writing expository essays. From above table it is evident that “and”, “because”, “for example” were among the most frequently used discourse markers while “despite”, “on the other

hand”, and “contrary “were among the least frequently used discourse markers. The highest percentage of the most frequently used discourse marker were 10.76, 9.88, and 7.85 respectively. The lowest percentages of the most frequently used discourse marker were 0.58, 0.87, and 1.16 respectively.

Table 2: Discourse markers identified in students’ reflective essays

Discourse markers	Frequency	Percentage
Across	16	5.54
Here	13	4.5
There	27	9.34
Side	12	4.15
Side by	7	2.42
Close to	13	4.5
Apart from that	9	3.11
Even	17	5.9
Whatelse	8	2.77
Also	29	10.03
At this time	9	3.11
At that time	7	2.42
Then	17	5.9
But	19	6.6
Are different from	6	2.08
Same as	7	2.42
Just like	8	2.8
Therefore	20	6.92
So	20	6.92
Finished	2	0.69
For example	19	6.6
At the beginning of	4	1.38
Total	289	100

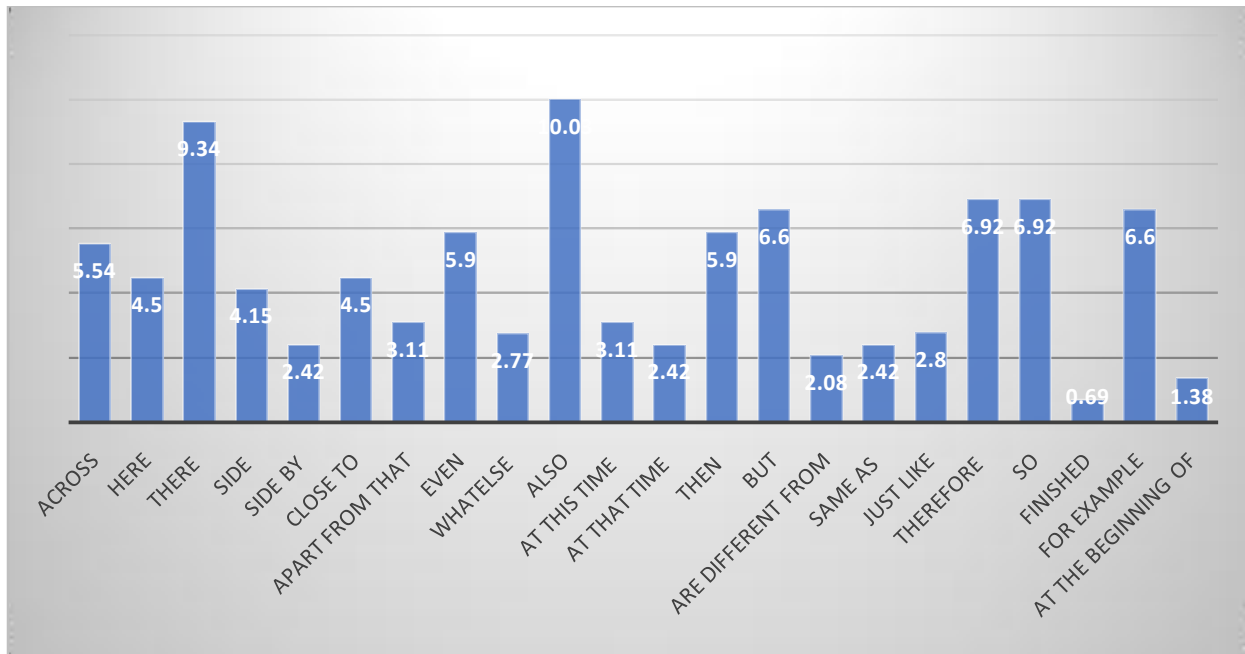


Figure 5. Discourse markers identified in students' reflective essays

Table and graph show the frequency and the percentage of the discourse markers that the students used in writing expository essays. From above table it is evident that “also”, “there”, “therefore” were among the most frequently used discourse markers while “finished”, “at the beginning”, and “at that time” were among the least frequently used discourse markers. The highest percentages of the most frequently used discourse marker were 10.03, 9.34, and 6.92 respectively. The lowest percentages of the most frequently used discourse marker were 0.69, 1.38, and 2.42 respectively.

Type	Most frequently used DMs	Least frequently used DMs
Explanatory essays	And (37), Because (34), for example(27), Also(26), Because of(24), or (23) So(19) and but (19)	Despite (2), on the contrary(3), on the other hand(3), conversely(4), In spite of (4), nevertheless (4)
Reflective essays	Also (29), their(27), therefore(20), So(20), but(19), then(19), even(17), and across (16)	finished(4), at the beginning of (4), at that time(7), side by(7) and whatelse(8)

The Table shows the most frequently used and least frequently used discourse markers in both essays: explanatory and reflective essays. The data revealed that the discourse markers like ‘and’, ‘because’ and ‘for example’ were used most frequently markers in explanatory essays whereas in reflective essays markers like ‘also’, ‘there’ and ‘therefore’ were among the most frequently used markers. The least frequently used discourse markers were ‘despite’, ‘on the contrary’ and ‘on the other hand’ in the explanatory essays while in reflective essays, the least used markers were, ‘finished’, ‘at the beginning of’, and ‘at that time’.

Results

The analysis of both explanatory and reflective essays showed: the learners used the discourse markers in explanatory essays like “and”, “because”, and “for example” most frequently while

“despite”, “on the other hand”, and “contrary” were used least frequently. The highest percentages were 10.76, 9.88, and 7.85 and the lowest percentages were 0.58, 0.87, and 1.16 respectively. In reflective essays they used “also”, “there”, “therefore” most frequently while “finished”, “at the beginning”, and “at that time” were least frequently used. The highest percentages were 10.03, 9.34, and 6.92 and the lowest percentages were 0.69, 1.38, and 2.42 respectively. In both types of essays, the most frequently used discourse markers were: ‘and’, ‘because’, ‘also’ and ‘there’ with percentages 10.76, 9.88, 10.03 and 9.34 respectively.

Conclusion

The study explored that the learners who used more discourse markers, their composition work was more coherent followed by the strong arguments of relevance. The learners who used only few discourse markers in their explanatory essays, their work was comparatively poor or somewhat satisfactory. It was observed that the learners used more discourse markers in explanatory essays and made less usage of discourse markers in reflective essays comparatively. The researchers rounded of the study that the learners made use of the discourse markers and used them wherever they deemed necessary. The researcher identified the strong and the weak areas of the learners in writing explanatory and reflective essays. It was also surfaced that the learners at times misused/overused the discourse markers.

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