

The Use of Discourse Markers in L2 English Writing by Iraqi Postgraduate Students at Karabuk University

Sarmad ALAHMED¹, Yahya MOHAMMED, & Özkan KIRMIZI

Karabuk University

TURKEY

sarmadatilla11@gmail.com

Abstract

The current study describes the use of discourse markers (DMs) in essay writing by Iraqi M.A. students at Karabuk University. The main aim of the current study is to find the use of DMs in essay writing by the participants. 15 Iraqi M.A. students participated in this study. 30 essays were written by the participants; each participant wrote two essays on two topics that were chosen. The DMs used by the participants were classified into four categories; a) Contrastive Markers (CDMs); b) Elaborative Markers (EDMs); c) Implicative Markers (IDMs) and d) Temporal Markers (TDMs). The findings of the current study shows that the participants used EDMs (64%) followed by TDMs (20%), CMDs (10%) and IDMs (6%). It was concluded that the students had overused the EDMs, such as 'and', 'or', 'but', 'as', and 'also'. In addition, they had misused some DMs in their writing. The study also concluded that students' ability in using discourse markers have to be developed to reach the Academic level in their writing.

Keywords: Discourse Markers, Iraqi students, Essay writing, Qualitative

1. Introduction

The issue of using discourse markers (DMs) in academic writing has attracted the interest of several studies since writing skill is the most difficult among language skills, not only for non-native but also for native speakers of the language (Norrish, 1983). In their study, Jomaa and Bidin (2017) showed that EFL Arab postgraduates' L2 writing is characterized by using long sentences (Jomaa & Bidin, 2019) because of the overuse of the relative pronouns 'that' and 'which' and the effect of their L1 (Arabic Language). In a study that included several native and non-native speakers of English, House (2013) analyzed the use of DMs and how they effect in EFL teaching. The results showed that three groups of students (native speakers of English, Japanese students, and Chinese students) shared a few characteristics and kinds of discourse markers used in their writings, such as '*first, and, so, and to conclude*'. Other studies examined the effect of DMs in the quality of the text (e.g. Dan-ni & Zheng, 2010; Ghasemi 2013; Leo, 2012). The findings showed that DMs have a major role in promoting the quality of writing when used properly (Jalilifar, 2008). Based on Rahimi (2011), the use of discourse markers was examined in more than one language, such as Danish, Chinese,

¹ Corresponding author

Finnish, German, French, and Hebrew. However, limited studies have explored the use of DMs by Iraqi master students. Therefore, the current study aims at exploring the use of DMs in the essay writing by Iraqi master students at karabuk university.

2. Literature Review

Several studies have presented the definition of the word 'text'. For instance, in their study, Brown and Yule (1983, p. 190) explained the text as "*the verbal record of communicative event*", whereas Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 1) explain it as "*any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole*". According to these definitions, the text is not just putting disconnected sentences together and "*it is not just like putting the parts together and making a whole out of it; there should be relationship between the sentences*" (Sadeghi & Kargar, 2014, p. 329). Thus, a written text needs coherence and cohesion provided by cohesive devices and is accomplished by properly constructing sentences through cohesive ties (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). As for coherence, it is concerned mainly with "*the semantic relations that allow a text to be understood and used*" and it is based on the "*writer's purpose, the audience's knowledge, and expectation*" (Witte & Faigley, 1981, p. 202). Obviously, it could be argued that coherence does not have the same specific definition as cohesion (Wang & Guo, 2014). Hence, the main focus of this analysis is the construction of cohesion by cohesive devices rather than coherence. In addition, it will study and evaluate the discourse markers as cohesive devices that create a meaningful text by connecting sentences. "To communicate appropriately in written texts, it is essential for students to learn about cohesive and coherent devices" (Sadeghi & Kargar, 2014, p. 329).

2.1 Discourse Markers (DMs)

Discourse markers were defined by Sadeghi and Kargar (2014, p. 329) as lexical terms which are used for connecting the segments and the sentences in the discourse or the text. Zarei (2013) added that as the discourse markers are "*words or phrases that function within the linguistic system to establish relationships between topics or grammatical units in discourse (as with the use of words like because, so, then*" (p. 108). Thus, the definition of the term DMs is so complex. In this regard, Sadeghi and Kargar (2014) state that it is too difficult to make a specific definition for the term DMs and also to state their functions easily, as their roles may change according to the researcher's point of view. As a result, many terms are used instead of discourse markers, such as "*comment clause, connective, continuer, discourse connective, discourse-deictic item, discourse operator, discourse particle, discourse-shift marker, discourse word, filler, fumble, gambit, hedge, initiator, interjection, marker, marker of pragmatic structure, parenthetical phrase, (void) pragmatic connective, pragmatic expression, pragmatic particle and reaction signal*" (Brinton, 1996, p. 29). Other terms and labels were also used to refer to the discourse markers, including "pragmatic connectives" (van Dijk, 1979), "discourse particles" (Schourup, 1985) and "discourse connectives" (Warner, 1985; Blakemore, 1987) (Bell, 2010, p. 515). These different expressions show that DMs are studied for various linguistic approaches (Urgelles-Coll, 2010). In addition, DMs are argued to be "*one of the most ambiguous phenomena*" in linguistics (Polat, 2011, p. 3746). However, these concepts have a common feature since "*they impose a relationship between some aspect of the discourse segment they are a part of, call it S2, and some aspect of a prior discourse segment call it S1*" (Fraser, 1999, p. 938). In conclusion, Brinton summarizes the features of DMs used as pragmatic markers (1996, pp. 33-34). Because the DMs may be used more than one time in a sentence, they should be used carefully and

properly in the sentences. These discourse markers are generally used in an initial position of the sentence, but they may be used in the middle or the end position of the sentence as well. However, the translation of DMs into another language is very complex because of their “semantic shallowness” (Svartvik, 1979 & Stubbs, 1983, p. 69 as cited in Brinton, 1996, p. 34). Therefore, the present study aims at exploring the use of discourse markers by EFL Iraqi master students at Karabuk University.

2.2 Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following two research questions were explored.

- 1- What are the DMs used by the Iraqi master students in their essay writing?
- 2- To what extent are DMs misused or overused by the Iraqi master students?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach was adopted in the current study to explore the use of discourse markers in L2 English essays by Iraqi master students. Current study followed the semantic perspective of Fraser (2004) in classifying of the discourse markers. The DMs are classified as follows into four categories:

- Contrastive Markers (CDMs), such as *alternatively, in spite of, conversely, but, although, in contrast, despite...*
- Elaborative Markers (EDMs), such as *by the same token, in particular, above all, equally, also, for example, and...*
- Implicative Markers (IDMs), such as *as a conclusion, all things considered, so, as a consequence, after all, therefore, accordingly, hence, then...*
- Temporal Markers (TDMs), such as *eventually, as soon as, meantime, finally, before, meanwhile, first, after...*

3.2 Sampling

15 Male students participated in this study; they wrote 30 essays. 10 essays are on each topic which they are (what is the role of literature in teaching language? write about the characteristics of Victorian literature, and write about the characteristics of Modern literature.) Each essay is more than 1000 words. In this study, the soft application (AntConc) was used to analyze the writing of the Iraqi M.A. students.

4. Findings

The results are presented as follows, in the order of the research questions:

- **Research question one:** What are the DMs used by the Iraqi M.A. students in their essay writing?

Table 1. DMs Used by Iraqi Master Students

Discourse Marker Categories	Discourse markers used by the Participants
Elaborative Markers (EDMs)	In particular, Above all, Equally, Also, For example, And, Besides, Moreover, Furthermore, Such as, In addition, Because
Temporal Markers (TDMs)	Eventually, As soon as, Finally, Before, First, After, Firstly, Secondly, Thirdly, Lastly, Next, As
Contrastive Markers (CDMs)	In spite of, But, Although, In contrast, Despite, However, Or, Otherwise
Implicative Markers (IDMs)	So, As a consequence, After all, Therefore, Accordingly, Hence, Thus, Then

Table 1 shows the total rate of the DMs that were used by the participants. The DMs used by the participants were classified into four categories according to the classification of Fraser (2004): 1) Contrastive Markers (CDMs); 2) Elaborative Markers (EDMs); 3) Implicative Markers (IDMs) and 4) Temporal Markers (TMDs). Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the participants had used in total 40 different DMs which involved 12 TDMs, 12 EDMs, 8 IDMs, and 8 CDMs.

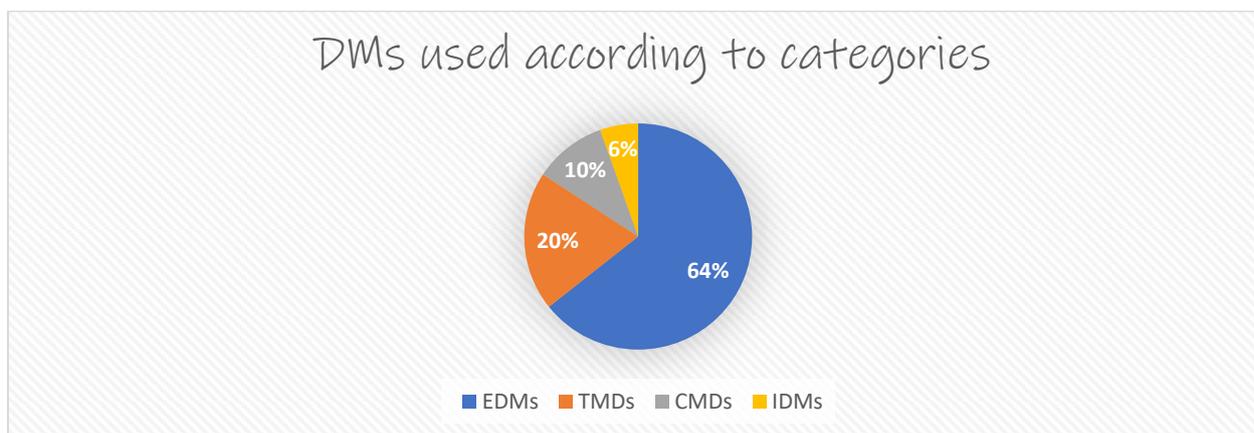


Figure 1. DMs Used by Iraqi Students According to the Categories

Figure 1 shows the DMs used by the Iraqi master students according to the categories. The findings show that the students used EDMs (64%), followed by TDMs (20%), CMDs (10%), and IDMs (6%).

In Table 2, all the DMs used by the Iraqi master students are demonstrated. The findings of the current study show the same result with the findings of earlier studies done by Ab Manan

and Raslee (2016), whereby they found that students used a high rate of EDMs in their writing. Also, Martinez (2004) found that students used a high rate of EDMs, such as ‘and’, ‘because’, ‘for example’ and ‘also’.

Table 2. *Frequency of DMs Used by Iraqi Master Students*

CDMs		IDMs	
In spite of	2	So	79
But	129	As a consequence	1
Although	13	After all	1
In contrast	1	Therefore	20
Despite	5	Accordingly	3
However	26	Hence	6
Or	155	Then	41
Otherwise	1	Thus	24
EDMs		TDMs	
In particular	2	Eventually	4
Above all	1	As soon as	1
Equally	1	Finally	10
Also	89	Before	19
For example	17	First	87
And	1536	After	37
Besides	6	Firstly	4
Moreover	13	Secondly	8
Furthermore	9	Thirdly	3
Such as	42	Lastly	2
In addition	13	Next	4
Because	82	As	465

Table 3. shows the use of DMs in each topic that participants wrote about (Characteristics of Modern Literature, Characteristics of Victorian Literature, and The Role of Literature in Language Teaching) We can see the frequency of using some DMs instead of using other types.

Table 3. *Discourse Markers Used in Each Group*

DMs	Characteristics of Modern Literature	Characteristics of Victorian Literature	The Role of Literature in Language Teaching
CDMs			
In spite of	/	2	/
But	46	66	17
Although	7	5	1
In contrast	1	/	/
Despite	2	3	/
However	9	7	10
Or	38	54	63
Otherwise	/	1	/
EDMs			
In particular	1	2	/
Above all	/	1	/
Equally	1	/	/
Also	31	34	32
For example	8	3	6
And	540	689	557
Besides	/	/	6
Moreover	6	3	4
Furthermore	1	4	4
Such as	19	12	11
In addition	4	4	5
Because	22	32	28
IDMs			
So	30	29	20
As a consequence	/	1	/
After all	1	/	/
Therefore	8	6	6
Accordingly	/	2	1
Hence	/	4	2
Then	18	14	9
Thus	8	9	7
TDMs			
Eventually	2	1	1
As soon as	1	/	/
Finally	3	4	3
Before	10	8	1
First	41	34	12
After	22	12	3
Firstly	1	1	2
Secondly	3	3	2
Thirdly	2	1	/
Lastly	2	/	/
Next	2	1	1
As	183	156	126

- The other part of the findings addresses the question of the extent of misusing or overusing the discourse markers by the Iraqi master students.

Table 4. *Examples of Some Misused DMs by Iraqi Master Students*

P:05 Although the origin of the novel is bourgeois, but new movements are needed to be different from the past age of the novel.

P:13 I personally believe thus when language learners know about the culture of the language they are learning,

In Table 4, participant 5 misused the CDM ‘but’ which must be removed to make the sentence correct. Also, the sentence by participant 13 included a misuse of the IDM ‘thus’ instead of using EDM ‘that’ to make his sentence correct.

Table 5. *A Sample of Overused of DMs by Iraqi Master Students*

P:09 rockets, and so forth, from parents until they landed on the island. Wars and all other negative effects, like war-related deception, destroyed old truths and values, and therefore innocence was gone. The memory of these evils persists with all the boys. Therefore, Lord of the Flies is seen as a criticism of modern human civilization. Golding's vision of humanity and i....

P:13 In one hand, the development in the factories and industry, strong females “angel in the home”(Bowler, 1984, p.67) as they were educated and many middle and upper class women were great readers, and even more there were also a good women writers. On the other hand, these factors showed progress which brought many concerns and questions.

Another problem committed by the participants is the overuse of DMs. Table 5 showed that the participants overused the DMs in their L2 English writing. In both Paragraphs, the participants overused the DMs to make up for their limited vocabulary since some of the Iraqi master students still have limited vocabulary. They overused a high rate of the DM ‘and’ in their sentences. Therefore, this overuse resulted in a weak L2 English writing.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The main aim of the current study was to explore the use of DMs by Iraqi master students at Karabuk University. The current study concluded that although the participants in the study are in the master level (Academic level), they still have to develop their writing skills to achieve the academic level in their writing. The use of DMs in their essay writing did not

make perfect cohesion and coherence because they had either misused the discourse markers or overused them. Consequently, this linguistic use affected their writing and made it weak instead of making it strong and effective. In addition, the results showed that the participants used a very high rate of EDMs instead of using another type of DMs to make effective and high-quality sentences. In addition, the findings of the current study were very close to the findings of earlier studies (Ab Manan & Raslee, 2016), whereby they found that the students used a high rate of EDMs in their writing. Also, Martinez (2004) found a similar result implying that the students used a high rate of EDMs. They used a high rate of EDMs such as ‘and’, ‘because’, ‘for example’ and ‘also’. However, EFL students need to be guided in their use of DMs in their writing. To solve this issue, courses related to Academic writing should be offered at the university. However, the current study is limited only to analysing the discourse markers by Iraqi master students at Karabuk University. Therefore, as Jomaa (2019) suggests, due to the complexity of both academic and non-academic discourses, multiple approaches and methods should be followed in order to obtain both emic and etic perspectives from a writer through employing varied lenses.

References

- Ab Manan, N. A., & Raslee, N. N. (2016). The Use of Discourse Markers in Paragraph Writing Among Malaysian ESL Learners. *Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perak*, 22–30. Retrieved from: <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?oi=bibs&cluster=211677040386105575&btnI=1&hl=en>
- Bell, D. M. (2010). Cancellative discourse markers: A core/ periphery approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 8(4), 515-541.
- Brinton, L. J. (1996). *Pragmatic markers in English: grammaticalization and discourse functions*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Brown, G. & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dan-ni, S., & Zheng, C. (2010). Analyzing the micro coherence in English writing and implications for the teaching of English writing. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 7(12), 7-10.
- Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31(1), 931-952.
- Fraser, B. (2004). *An account of discourse markers*. In Garcés, P., R. Gómez, L. Fernández, & M. Padilla. (Eds.). *Current trends in intercultural, cognitive and social pragmatics*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla: 13-34.
- Ghasemi, M. (2013). An investigation into the use of cohesive devices in second language writings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(9), 1615-1623.
- Halliday, M.A.K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- House, J. (2013). Developing pragmatic competence in English as a lingua franca: Using discourse markers to express (inter) subjectivity and connectivity. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 59(1), 57-67.
- Jalilifar, A. (2008). Discourse markers in composition writings: The case of Iranian learners of English as a foreign language. *English Language Teaching*, 1(2), 114-122.
- Jomaa, N. J. (2019). Multiple Approaches for Analysing Academic Discourses: Similarities and Differences. *Eurasian Journal of English Language and Literature*, 1(1), 1-14
- Jomaa, N.J., & Bidin, S.J. (2017). Perspective of EFL doctoral students on challenges of citations in academic writing. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction (MJLI)*, 14 (2), 177-209.

- Jomaa, N. J. & Bidin, S. J. (2019). Reporting and Quoting: Functional Analyses of Logico-Semantic Relations of Clause Complex Citations. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 25(1), 158 -178
- Leo, K. (2012). Investigating cohesion and coherence discourse strategies of Chinese students with varied lengths of residence in Canada. *TESL Canada Journal*, 29(6), 157-179.
- Martinez, A. C. L. (2004) Discourse markers in the expository writing of Spanish university students. *IBÉRICA*, 8(1), 63-80.
- Norrish, J. (1983). *Language learners and their errors*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- Polat, B. (2011). Investigating acquisition of discourse markers through a developmental learner corpus. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(1), 3745-3756.
- Rahimi, M. (2011). Discourse markers in argumentative and expository writing of Iranian EFL learners. *World Journal of English Language*. 1(2), 68-78.
- Sadeghi, B. & Kargar, A. (2014). The effect of explicit instruction of discourse markers on EFL learners' writing ability. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 1(1), 328-338.
- Urgelles-Coll, M. (2010). *The syntax and semantic of discourse markers*. London: Continuum International Publishing.
- Wang, Y. & Guo, M. (2014). A short analysis of discourse coherence. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(2), 460-465.
- Witte, S. P. & Faigley, L. (1981). Coherence, cohesion, and writing quality. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(2), 189-204.
- Zarei, F. (2013). Discourse markers in English. *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Science*, 4(1), 107-117.