

Title	Eng	The Use of Discourse Markers in EFL Classrooms: Challenges and Solutions
	Ar	استخدام علامات الخطاب في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية: التحديات والحلول
	Ku	به کارهینانی نیشاندهره کانی گوتار له هۆله کانی خویندنی زمانی ئینگیزی: ئانگاری و رینگه چاره کان
Name of Researcher	Eng	Rashwan Ramadan Salih
	Ar	رشوان رمضان صالح
	Ku	رهشوان رهمهزان صالح
Place of work	Eng	College of Education, Salahaadin University, Erbil
	Ar	كلية التربية، جامعة صلاح الدين - أربيل
	Ku	کۆلیژی پهروهرده، زانکۆی سه لاهه ددین - ههولیر
Email		rashwan.salih@su.edu.krd
Mobile		0750 452 4034
DOI		http://doi.org/10.31972/vesal12.03
Abstract	Eng	This paper investigates the effect of using discourse markers on the writing skills of Kurdish university students. By revising the related literature, it appeared that so far there is no consensus on the actual effect of the explicit presence of discourse markers on foreign language writing. Many studies concluded that different discourse markers have different effects on the writing of foreign language learners (Morell, 2004; Ying, 2007; Castro and Marcela 2009; Dariush and Mohamad 2015, etc.). The current research tries to find out if there are any cross-linguistic factors that could cause issues for students in EFL modules. Data for the current study were collected from essays written by Kurdish students at the English Department in Salahaddin University, Erbil. In total, 20 essays were received with total of 19872 words and total 261 DMs were found in the data. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyse the data. The raw frequencies of the DMs were: Additive (101 = 0.5 %), Adversative (45 = 0.22 %), Causal / Conditional (83 = 0.4 %), and Temporal (32 = 0.16 %). The findings suggested that level of attention to and appropriate use of discourse markers were significantly unbalanced, and

various misuses were found. Sample errors in using the DMs were selected for a qualitative analysis. It is recommended that discourse markers are taught individually not in groups with more focus on the more difficult discourse marker types.

Ar يتركز هذا البحث على تأثير استخدام علامات الخطاب على مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات الكردية. من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات ذات الصلة، اتضح أنه حتى الآن لا يوجد إجماع على التأثير الفعلي للوجود الصريح لعلامات الخطاب (DM) على الكتابة بلغة أجنبية. خلصت العديد من الدراسات إلى أن مؤشرات الخطاب المختلفة لها تأثيرات مختلفة على كتابة متعلمي اللغة الأجنبية (موريل، 2004؛ ينج، 2007؛ كاسترو ومارسيلا 2009؛ داريوش ومحمد 2015، إلخ). يحاول البحث الحالي معرفة ما إذا كانت هناك أي عوامل لغوية يمكن أن تسبب مشكلات للطلاب في وحدات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تم جمع بيانات الدراسة الحالية من مقالات كتبها طلاب أكرد في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة صلاح الدين، أربيل. في المجموع، تم استلام 20 مقالاً بإجمالي 19872 كلمة وتم العثور على إجمالي 261 DMs في البيانات. تم استخدام مزيج من الأساليب الكمية والنوعية لتحليل البيانات. كانت الترددات الأولية للـ DMs هي: مضافة (101 = 0.5%)، عرضية (45 = 0.22%)، سببية / شرطية (83 = 0.4%)، زمانية (32 = 0.16%). أشارت النتائج إلى أن مستوى الاهتمام والاستخدام المناسب لعلامات الخطاب كان غير متوازن بشكل كبير، وتم العثور على إساءة استخدام مختلفة. تم اختيار عينة من الأخطاء في استخدام DMs لإجراء تحليل نوعي. من المستحسن أن يتم تدريس علامات الخطاب بشكل فردي وليس في مجموعات مع التركيز بشكل أكبر على أنواع علامات الخطاب الأكثر صعوبة.

Ku ئەم توێژینهوهیه به دوواداچوون بو کارهگیریه به کارهینانی نیشاندهری گوتار لهسهه تواناکانی نووسینی خویندکارانی زانکۆی کوردی دهکات. به پینداچوونهوه به ئەدهه بیاتی په یوه نیدیادار، ده رکهوت که تا ئیستا هیچ کۆدهنگیه که لهسهه کارهگیریه راسته قینهی بوونی روونی نیشاندهری گوتار لهسهه نووسینی زمانی بیانی نییه. زۆریک له توێژینهوهکان گهیشتنه ئەو ئەنجامهیه که نیشاندهری گوتاری جیاواز کارهگیریه جیاوازیان لهسهه نووسینی فیرخووازی زمانی بیانی ههیه (Morell, 2004; Ying, 2007; Castro and Marcela 2009; Dariush and Mohamad 2015, etc..). ئەم توێژینهوهیه ههولدهدات بزانیته ئایا هیچ هۆکارێکی زمانهوانی ههیه که دهتوانیته بپهته هۆی کیشه بو خویندکاران له مۆدیولهکانی EFL داناگانی ئەم توێژینهوهیه له وتارهکان کۆکراونهتهوه که لهلایه خویندکارانی کورد له بهشی ئینگلیزی له زانکۆی سهلاحه دین له ههولیر نووسراون. به گشتی ۲۰ وتار وههگیراون به کۆی گشتی ۱۹۸۷۲ وشه و کۆی گشتی ۲۶۱ DM له داتاگاندا دۆزرایهوه. بو شیکردنهوهی داتاگان تیکه لهیه که له شتوازی چه ندایهتی و چۆنایهتی به کارهینرا. ژمارهیه سههه تایی DM هکان بریتی بوون له: زیادکهر (101 = 0.5%)، نه ریتی (45 = 0.22%)، هۆکار / مه رجدار (83 = 0.4%)، و کاتی (32 = 0.16%). دۆزینه وهکان پینشیار ده کهن که ناسی گرنگیدان و به کارهینانی گونجاوی نیشاندهره کانی گوتار به شتوهیه کی بهرچاو ناهاوسهنگ بووه، و خراب به کارهینانی جوراوجۆر دۆزرایهوه. ههله نمونه یهیه کان له به کارهینانی نیشاندهره کانی گوتار بو شیکارییه کی چۆنایهتی ههله پێژدران. پینشیار ده کریت که نیشاندهری گوتار به تاک فیر بکرتن نه که به گروپیک که زیاتر سه رنجیان لهسهه جوره کانی نیشاندهری گوتار فورستر بیت.

Keywords

Eng TEFL, Writing, Discourse Markers

Ar

تدریس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، كتابة، علامات الخطاب

Ku

فیرکردنی زمانی ئینگلیزی وه ک زمانیکی بیانی، نووسین، نیشاندهری گوتار

The Use of Discourse Markers in EFL Classrooms: Challenges and Solutions

Rashwan Ramadan Salih

College of Education, Department of English, Salahaddin University – Erbil

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effect of using discourse markers on the writing skills of Kurdish university students. By revising the related literature, it appeared that so far there is no consensus on the actual effect of the explicit presence of discourse markers on foreign language writing. Many studies concluded that different discourse markers have different effects on the writing of foreign language learners (Morell, 2004; Ying, 2007; Castro and Marcela 2009; Dariush and Mohamad 2015, etc.). The current research tries to find out if there are any cross-linguistic factors that could cause issues for students in EFL modules. Data for the current study were collected from essays written by Kurdish students at the English Department in Salahaddin University, Erbil. In total, 20 essays were received with total of 19872 words and total 261 DMs were found in the data. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyse the data. The raw frequencies of the DMs were: Additive (101 = 0.5 %), Adversative (45 = 0.22 %), Causal / Conditional (83 = 0.4 %), and Temporal (32 = 0.16 %). The findings suggested that level of attention to and appropriate use of discourse markers were significantly unbalanced, and various misuses were found. Sample errors in using the DMs were selected for a qualitative analysis. It is recommended that discourse markers are taught individually not in groups with more focus on the more difficult discourse marker types.

Key words: TEFL, Writing, Discourse Markers,

1- Introduction

English is considered as the major international language in various fields of study like business, science, entertainment, communications, and even on the Internet. Knowledge of English is necessary, at least at a basic level, in many professions and occupations throughout the globe. Consequently, English language teaching is increasingly taking place not only in English speaking countries, but in the foreign English learners' own country. Teaching English as a foreign language usually occurs within the classroom with contextual characteristics that deserve special attention.

One common characteristic of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is that the teachers may be non-native speakers of the language they are teaching. From my experience as a non-native teacher of English and as a student/teacher educator, I consider that research on classroom interaction based on an analysis of the discourse can be very useful for two main reasons: First, it may contribute to gaining a better understanding of what happens inside the EFL classroom and second, it provides a valuable possibility to examine and describe the language used by non-native students and teachers of EFL. Inevitably, there has been a lot of research on this topic. Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) provide a comprehensive review, traced back to the late 1940s of the considerable amounts of research on the language used by teachers and pupils in classroom settings. The contribution by McCarthy (1991) on discourse analysis for language teachers provides not only a sound theoretical framework and descriptions based on research but also practical activities which informed teachers towards the language used inside their own classrooms. Similarly, CelceMurcia & Olshtain (2000) propose a context and discourse-based perspective on language teaching and learning to redefine the roles of teachers, learners and materials. Despite the extensive work by Llorca (2005) who explicitly addresses and puts together the research conducted in different EFL settings such as the Basque Country, Catalonia, Brazil, and Hungary, the language used in writings by non-native English-speaking students remains largely unexplored.

The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate writing skills of students in EFL classes in the context of English as a foreign language where the students are nonnative speakers of the language. Discourse marker usage is one specific aspect of writing and language use that is the focus of my attention in this paper. Therefore, the occurrences of discourse markers will be explored and described both quantitatively and qualitatively with an established approach method in mind. Therefore, I have not attempted to validate, formulate, and hypothesize but

rather took simple statistical analyses as a starting point for a qualitative analysis of the discourse marker frequencies used by non-native students of EFL classrooms.

2- Literature Review

Discourse Markers (DMs) have been widely studied by researchers even if discussions on terminology and definable issues are still unresolved. However, there seems to be general agreement on the fact that the production of coherent writings is an interactive process that requires writers to draw upon communicative knowledge and pragmatic resources. The following is a list of names by which DMs are recognized:

Longrace (1976) “mystery particles ... grammatically optional and semantically or functionally unmotivated”

At first, these particles came meaningless, but Longrace himself found a way to resolve this problem by going beyond the level of sentence .

Discourse Particles: Aijmer (2002), Lam (2009a and 2010b) and Stede (2002)

Discourse Connectives: Unger (1998)

Pragmatic Markers: Brinton (1996) Fraser (1999)

Pragmatic Connectives: Van Dijk (1997)

Although DMs do not seem complicated, the former investigations reveal that it is not the case, that is why different terminologies, definitions, classifications, and taxonomies are offered (Aijmer, 2002; Brinton, 1996; Fraser, 1999; Schiffren, 1987; Blakemore, 2002):

Cohesion in English (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) Semantic values of DMs

Text and Context (Van Dijk, 1977) Pragmatic potentials of DMs

Fraser (1999): DMs are linguistically encoded clues which signal the speaker’s (writer’s) intention.

According to van Dijk (1997) discourse is a form of language use which includes the functional aspects of a communicative event. It means that people use language in order to communicate ideas, beliefs or emotions in social events and situations such as an encounter with friends or a lesson in the classroom. As Douglas (2001) points out, discourse analysis is the examination of language used by the members of a speech community which involves looking at both language

form and language function. In this study, language is viewed as linguistic tool that is used to guide classroom writing among adult nonnative students in EFL classrooms. As mentioned earlier, one specific aspect of classroom language use is the occurrence of discourse markers. This literature review deals with the two central concerns of this study: discourse markers (DMs) and studies on the writing of nonnative EFL students.

Schiffrin operationally defines DMs as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (1987, p. 31). She suggests that DMs are used in discourse because they provide "contextual coordinates for utterances". That is, they contribute to building the local coherence which is jointly constructed by speaker and hearer in their discourse structure, context, meaning and action during interaction. Thus, DMs serve to show how what is being written is connected to what has already been written. In the relevant literature, there are studies which deal, whether generally or specifically, with a wide scope of DMs, however, difficulties arise as there is no agreement among scholars when they refer to their terminology, classification and functionality¹.

Brinton (1996) points out that DM has been the most common name suggested for "seemingly empty expressions found in oral discourse", however, she proposes the term pragmatic markers, as pragmatic "better captures the range of functions filled by these items". Brinton compiles an inventory of 33 markers that have received scholarly attention and proposes a broad number of characteristics typical of these items. The characteristics were later adopted by Jucker & Ziv (1998) who reordered them to combine features that relate to the same level of linguistic description: phonological and lexical, syntactic, semantic, functional and sociolinguistic features. They seem to be optional rather than obligatory features of discourse. Fraser suggests that the absence of DMs "does not render a sentence ungrammatical and/or unintelligible" but does "remove a powerful clue" (1988: 22). The different studies of DMs distinguish several domains where they may be functional, in which there are included textual, attitudinal, cognitive, and interactional parameters.

As far as the written form is concerned, Jucker & Ziv (1998) analyzed DMs as text-structuring devices that serve to mark openings or closings of discourse units or transitions between these units. In addition, DMs serve as modality or attitudinal indicators, as instructions on how given sentences are to be processed or interpreted.

With regard to the study of DMs in classroom settings, Chaudron & Richards (1986) investigated learning DMs by nonnative speakers of English living and studying in The United States, i.e., in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Chaudron & Richards (1986)

made use of four different versions of the same text with different categories of discourse markers (baseline, micro, macro, or micro-macro versions). Overall results showed that macro-markers produced better text memory than micro-markers. It was claimed that micro-markers do not provide enough information to help in making content more relevant.

The fact that most studies on DMs have focused their attention on native (or bilingual) speakers of English who acquire this pragmatic competence in their childhood might be an indicator of the need to further explore and systematically investigate the language used by non-native English speakers and writers. The current paper looks at the usage of DMs by non-native student of English department. The DMs selected to amplify on in this study spread over four main types of Additive, Adversative, Causal/Conditional and Temporal.

3- Methodology

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods is used in this paper. The data for this study consists of a total of 20 essays written by 4th year students at the English department of College of languages in Salahaddin University, Erbil. The total tokens in these 20 essays were 19872 words, of which a total of 261 DMs were used (see table 1). Preliminary analysis of the data involved the range of frequencies regarding the usage of various types of DMs. The samples present the commonest or most frequent DMs that were used by the students (Ying, 2007; Castro and Marcela 2009; Dariush and Mohamad 2015).

Type of DMs	Raw frequency	Percentage (over all tokens) 19872
<i>Additive</i>	101	0.5 %
<i>Adversative</i>	45	0.22 %
<i>Causal / Conditional</i>	83	0.4 %
<i>Temporal</i>	32	0.16 %

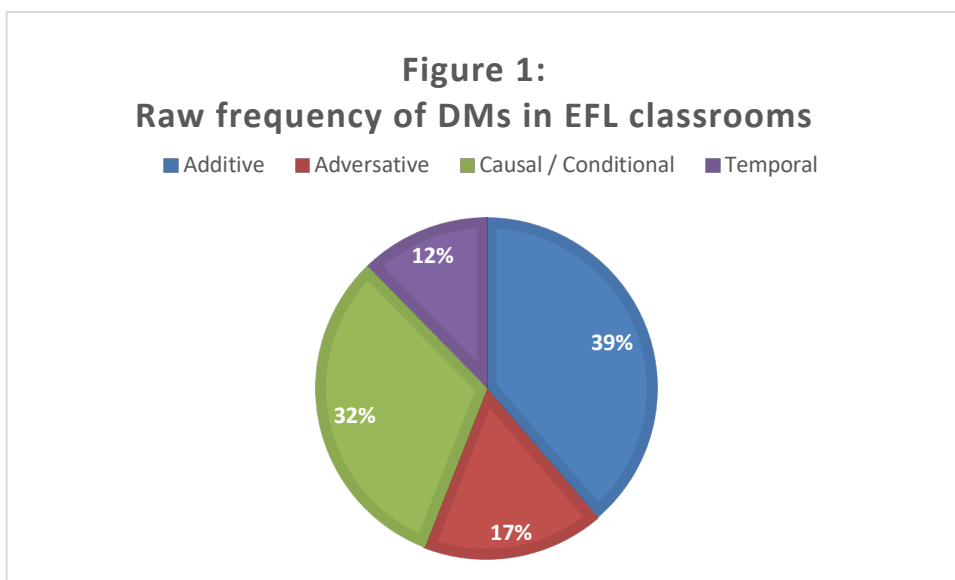
Table 1: Frequencies of DMs

The procedures of analyzing data starts with collecting the data from the essays. Then, each of the DMs used by the students were tabulated and classified according to Halliday and Hassan's 1976 taxonomy of conjunctive relations in which the DMs are distributed into four main categories: Additive, Adversative, Causal/Conditional, and Temporal. The analysis started from counting the number of different classes of DMs used by each student and combined in a total number of DMs in each category. In this case, the research result would inform which category of DMs were more frequent than the others. The calculation was continued to investigate errors in using DMs in the essays. This would give information about the students' knowledge of appropriate use of DMS and their competency in maintaining textual cohesion and coherence.

4- Findings and discussions

Analyzing students' errors is a valuable source of information concerning the transitional state of the learners' competence and weaknesses (Al-Buainain, 2007). Looking at table1, it is apparent that the use of Additive DMs was much higher than the other types of DMs. The discrepancies in using different types of DMs and the frequency of using a category of DMs over others could disclose invaluable explanation about the students' competencies regarding this topic and whether they have used DMs excessively and eventually they have misused them. For instance, the Additive DMs came at the first place with 39% of all DMs used in the sample

data (See Figure 1). This is the highest frequency among the four types of DMs focused on this study.



Examining the samples closely revealed that some of the students used DMs excessively and made errors. The errors ranged from inappropriate and excessive use of DMs to major errors while using DMs mistakenly. For instance, the double usage of DMs:

Sample errors in DMs usage:

DM combination:

...So I will be more confident for future. **If** I get the chance for more study abroad.

DM traffic:

“She succeeds gracefully in the levels of training. **However**, because of the political reasons they make her to quit and to go home where she belongs. **Moreover**, Jane does not give up easily and tries to make her way to join the forces again, **therefore** she makes a bold step which make the authorities in a bad position **and** take her back to the forces. From **then** she continues her training till the end, **and** she achieves her goal to become a strong and an independent woman.”

Errors in using DMs: Wrong use of “because”

“**Because** the more you appear in a humble face, increases the degree of self-confidence. **Consequently** I demand those who are responsible to develop the process of education to be separately. **Because** it is better healthier for them.”

As far as the frequencies of the DMs are concerned, the high frequency of the Additive types in the data shows that the students are influenced by the additive “w” (*and*) in their mother tongue (Kurdish). That’s because Kurdish writers and speakers tend to use the additive DMs more frequently than other DMs in Kurdish language (Salih, 2014).

5- Conclusions

This small-scale study showed that DMs were, to some degree, used by the non-native students to organize their writings in the classroom and to fulfill interpersonal, pragmatic functions as well. These findings might be useful to non-native EFL teachers and practitioners. The findings suggested that level of attention to and appropriate use of DMs were significantly unbalanced, and various misuses were found.

Increased awareness on the textual functions of DMs could facilitate the structuring and organization of the practitioners' lesson as the DMs work as signals of the main segments (e.g: frame markers) and perform a number of organizational functions such as topic shifts. Also, the frequency of Additive DMs by Kurdish students of EFL classes indicates that they are influenced by their mother tongue, because the frequency of additive DMs in Kurdish, especially the additive DM "w" (*and*) is usually very high.

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