

The Use and Functions of English Discourse Markers (EDMs) in EFL Students Writing at University in Indonesia

Dias Andris Susanto*, Januarius Mujiyanto, Dwi Anggani Linggar Bharati, Djoko Sutopo

English Education Department
Universitas Negeri Semarang
Semarang, Indonesia

*diasandris@upgris.ac.id

Abstract—This study investigated the use of English discourse markers in students writing at Universitas PGRI Semarang, Indonesia. Fraser identifies three functional classes of EDMs; contrastive, elaborative and inferential. The problems of this study are; what are the English discourse markers used in students writing, and what are the functions realized in students writing. This is a qualitative descriptive design. The sample of the study was the EFL students writing result which have 45 essays at English education study program of Universitas PGRI Semarang Indonesia. In analyzing the data, the writers did prior activities such as collecting and classifying. The result is that shows students used contrastive EDMs like; *but 24, however 8, although 5*, elaborative EDMs like; *and 344, also 50, in addition 3*, inferential EDMs like; *as a results 4, then 10, because 13, since 39*. It elaborates us that mostly students used and familiar using elaborative functions rather than contrastive and inferential. Furthermore, they have a very limitation in understanding and comprehending some words of EDMs in their writing, it has only 10 markers in all functions. The more markers they use in their writing so that the more coherence and cohesion within their writing. Conclusion of this study reflects that students are still weak in using some EDMs in their writing so that they only produce the certain familiar markers. The pedagogical implication that I can say is that students of EFL need to get some kinds of EDMs to compose their writing well organized and understood.

Keywords—English discourse markers; students writing

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability of writing is a part of language skills that should be mastered by especially students of English study program at university. As known as the University Education and Training in central java Indonesia, Universitas PGRI Semarang prepares the candidates of English teachers in the future. Being English teacher needs a high quality in English teaching and learning. They also are required to be able to write a good writing in English. Among the four language skills, learning to write is the most very challenging for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. The ability to produce a well writing is essential for university students since their academic life success depends on how great they are able to express themselves in writing. In fact, the university students'

academic barometer is measured mainly through their written work such as assignments, reports, papers and other written assessments. Composing a good writing is not as simple as we write and glue the sentence onto sentence. It needs a high skill to put the words and sentences together in a good order as coherence and cohesion promptly.

Making a good coherence and cohesion is not automatically occurred, but we need to know the components which support the process of making a good composition. They are; putting the grammar in the writing, the lexical items, and the coherence cohesion within the sentences. Coherence helps us to understand the written text thoroughly, on the other hand cohesion guides us to know the flow of the written text. To support the cohesiveness and coherences the sentences within the texts, students need to know and comprehend discourse markers. Some people say it as the pragmatic markers, semantic particles, devices markers, etc.

Cohesion and coherence are two of special attentions that have to be existed during writing processes include the establishing of sentences into paragraph, how sentences are joined together, and the general organization of ideas into a coherent piece of discourse. Readers can understand the relations of ideas across phrases and sentences if the writing is cohesive. By coherent writing, readers can follow the arrangements of ideas and points. This is why writing has to be both cohesive and coherence. Harmer states actually, students at developing countries acquire about writing in their own language [1]. However, only few students precise it in a logical and well organized structure when they developed it. Brown argues that in the developing countries, the condition is then worse [2]. Because, students study about writing in a foreign language. This is clear that cohesion and coherence devices are essential in writing process.

Discourse Markers (DMs) have traditionally been restrained because they are viewed as elements which do not give to the truth-conditional meaning of an utterance, or to the syntax and semantics of a sentence. Dealing with DMs in this way is likely to stimulate a "risk of creating a ragbag class of leftovers" [3]. Susanto states that English discourse markers which are used by students at university in Indonesia mostly

was still less in making the paragraph coherence and cohesion [4]. It was caused that they do not get any empowerment from the teachers about the markers appropriate used in a sentence to build their context meaningful.

We do believe that there are many real difficulty facing by students in organizing the sentences into paragraphs and text. They seem lack of information about markers putting into the sentences. The problems of this study are; what are the English discourse markers used in students writing, and what are the functions realized in students writing.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

A. English Discourse Markers

Different linguists have different point of views in defining discourse markers (DMs), depending on their research and subject areas. Among the terminologies used are sentence connectors [5], discourse signaling devices [6], discourse connectives [7], discourse connectives [8], cue phrases [9], pragmatic markers [10] and Fraser stresses that DMs are conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional phrases that link two sentences or clauses together, while Redeker stated that DMs not only connect adjacent sentences but also join the current sentence or statement with its near context [7].

Among the many definitions of DMs in the literature, it is felt that Swan definition is the best. According to Swan, discourse markers are words and expressions that we use to portray the structure of our discourse [11]. They serve the purpose of connecting what we are saying, what we have said and what will be said. Fraser is one of the most prolific on the topic as revealed by his various publications on DMs [10]. Contrary to Schiffrin's broad definition of DMs with a focus on discourse coherence, Fraser provides a restriction within a pragmatic approach and defines DMs as a pragmatic class, lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials and prepositional phrases [10]. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1. They have a core meaning, which is procedural, not conceptual, and their more specific interpretation is negotiated by the context, both linguistic and conceptual. There are two types: those that relate aspects of the explicit message conveyed by S2 with aspects of a message direct or indirect, associated with S1; and those that relate the topic of S2 to that of S1.

B. Writing Production

In today's society, the act of writing is important in every aspect of our lives and will continue to shape human relations as we head full force into the 21st century. The ability to write articulately gives one of the power and opportunity to share and influence thoughts, ideas, and opinions with others, not only in day-to-day situations, but across time and space. As the candidate of English teachers, they must be able to produce quality works, and as educators, we have learned a great deal about what it means to teach others to do the same. This brief offers an overview of research and best practice in teaching the writing process.

There are many explanations of writing according to many language experts. Spratt et al. state that writing is a productive skill which involves communicating a message by making signs on a page [12]. According to Gordon in McDonald and McDonald, writing is a process which different things materialize at different stages in the process of putting thoughts into words and words onto paper [13]. To complete the definition of writing proposed by Nunan [14], Brown also states that writing is the written products of thinking, drafting, and revising that entail specialized skills on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers and rhetorical conventions coherently into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning and how to edit text for appropriate grammar and how to produce a final product [15].

Academic writing is a highly demanding task that needs a skillful use of markers and linguistic features. The incorrect use of discourse markers (DMs) may produce a gap in the communication between the writer and the reader. A poor recognition of the relationships that discourse markers may signal is more likely to result in an incoherent interpretation of discourse sequence [10].

III. METHOD

This was a qualitative descriptive design. This study has been accomplished with a qualitative approach, which has certified us to work with more than one data-collecting method. McDonough contrast the qualitative method to normative research: "Whereas normative research requires a numerical evaluation, qualitative research usually gathers observations, interviews, field data records..." [16]. We have chosen to use the EFL Students' writing completions as the data of our research. This research included in the documented study since the writers having the students' writing productions to be analyzed.

A sample is a subset of a population nominated to participate in the study, it is a fraction of the whole, selected to participate in the research project [17,18]. The sample of the study was the EFL students writing result which have 45 essays at English education study program of Universitas PGRI Semarang Indonesia. They were the fourth semester which already passed some very important material such as; grammar, writing, genre text based and lexical studies.

The instrument of the study was the test which is answered by students' in making an essay. In collecting the data, the writers asked the students to collect their production of essay writing through the leader of the classroom.

Pertti views that data analysis is the fundamental step in qualitative research. Whatever the data are, it is their analysis that, in a significant way, forms the endings of the research [19]. Given the centrality of the analysis in qualitative research, in general, a kind of listing of the various approaches to qualitative analysis and of the challenges it faces seems necessary. Anyone interested in the current state and enlargement of qualitative data analysis will find a field which is constantly growing and becoming less structured. In analyzing the data, the writers did prior activities such as; first, collecting students' writing. Second, identifying the discourse

markers. Third, classifying the words beyond the discourse markers. Fourth, analyzing the discourse markers through the functions.

IV. FINDINGS

The result is that shows students used contrastive EDMs like; *but* 24, *however* 8, *although* 5, elaborative EDMs like; *and* 344, *also* 50, *in addition* 3, inferential EDMs like; *as a result* 4, *then* 10, *because* 13, *since* 39. It elaborates us that mostly students used and familiar using elaborative functions rather than contrastive and inferential. Furthermore, they have a very limitation in understanding and comprehending some words of EDMs in their writing, it has only 10 markers in all functions. The more markers they use in their writing so that the more coherence and cohesion within their writing. Conclusion of this study reflects that students are still weak in using some EDMs in their writing so that they only produce the certain familiar markers. The pedagogical implication that I can say students of EFL need to get some kinds of EDMs to compose their writing well organized and understood.

Here we can give readers some English discourse markers used by students within the sentences they arranged already like; - *It is **not only** a source of entertainment **but also** news and information.* - *Learning English through music **and** songs can be very enjoyable.* - *This phenomenon **also** seems to reinforce the idea that songs work on our short-**and**-long term memory.* - ***In addition**, songs are relaxing. They provide variety and fun, and encourage harmony **within** oneself and **within** one group.* - ***Last but not least**, there are many learning activities we can do with songs **such as** studying grammar, practicing selective listening comprehension, translating songs, learning vocabulary, spelling **and** culture.* - ***However**, this money often goes into the pockets of foreign investors, **and only** rarely benefits for local people.* - ***Then**, proposing an important person who has taken a role in our nation history is important.* - *..... damage the eye **because** the eye muscle will lose its flexibility as it stays on stretched condition for long period.*

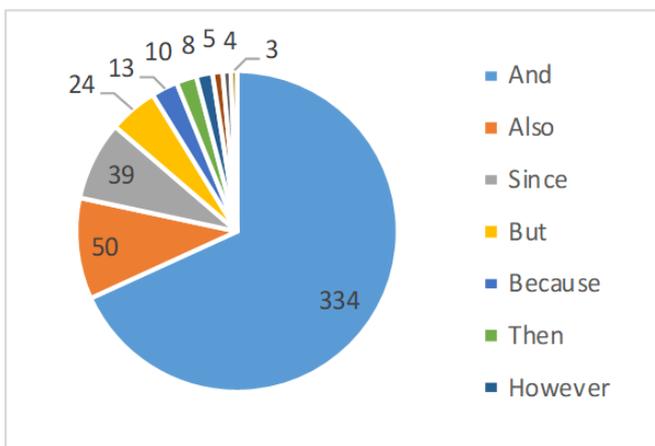


Fig. 1. Students used contrastive EDMs.

V. DISCUSSION

It elaborates us that mostly students used and familiar using elaborative functions rather than contrastive and inferential. Furthermore, they have a very limitation in understanding and comprehending some words of EDMs in their writing, it has only 10 markers in all functions. The more markers they use in their writing so that the more coherence and cohesion within their writing are; *and, also, since, but, because, then, however, although, as a result, in addition.*

Most of them used a compound sentences even though there are some used complex sentences as well in organizing their essay writing like; -***Since** the peer pressure was growing, I decided to go to the gym.* -***As result**, the available time will be more flexible for them.* -*smoking produces lethal diseases like cancer and reduces the length **and** quality of your life.* -***Once** you start doing exercise and observing positive results, you actually enjoy it.*

VI. CONCLUSION

Conclusion of this study reflects that students are still weak in using some EDMs in their writing so that they only produce the certain familiar markers. They are very rare knowing the other English discourse markers since the do not familiar with these some markers like; *in line with, so that, hence, by reasons, accordance with, in contrast with, to the point of that thing, in general terms, etc.* by having this conclusion then we can map our teaching in the future especially for writing focus, we should really consider to give and explore EDMs to students and ask them to implement them in the real context of writing. The pedagogical implication that I can say is that students of EFL need to get some kinds of EDMs to compose their writing well organized and understood. In order to have a good coherence and cohesion writing production, students of university should have a discussion on building a good writing through using EDMs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank to the committee of the ICAS Conference that gives me a chance to publish my manuscript in the Scopus Journal/Proceedings. I also thank to Kemristek Dikti for supporting my doctoral study at Universitas Negeri Semarang. At last but not least, I sincerely thank to Universitas PGRI Semarang as my hut of exploring and transferring my knowledge and skill to students there.

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Third Edition: Completely Revised and Updated, New York: Longman Publishing, 2001, p. 246.
- [2] H.D. Brown, *Language Assessment 'Principles and Classroom Practices'*, New York: Longman, 2003, p. 218.
- [3] D.M. Lewis, "Rhetorical motivations for the emergence of discourse particles, with special reference to English of course. In: van der Wouden, T., Foolen, A., Van de Craen, P. (Eds.), *Particles*," *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 16, pp. 79-91, 2003.
- [4] D.A. Susanto, "Schiffrin's English Discourse Markers (EDMs) Functions in The Students' Writing Hortatory Exposition Text," *Journal of*

- Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, vol. 289, 2018.
- [5] M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman, 1976.
- [6] L. Polanyi and S. Remko, *The syntax of text and discourse*, 1983, pp. 261 - 270 .
- [7] G. Redeker, "Review article: Linguistic markers of discourse structure," *Linguistics*, vol. 29, no. 6, pp. 1139-1172, 1990.
- [8] Blakemore, Diane. *Understanding Utterances*. Oxford: Blackwe. 1992
- [9] A. Knott and R. Dale, "Using linguistic phenomena to motivate a set of coherence relationsm," *Discourse Processes*, vol. 18, pp. 35-62, 1994.
- [10] B. Fraser, "What are discourse markers?," *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31, pp. 931-952, 1999.
- [11] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- [12] M. Spratt, A. Pulverness and M. Williams, *The TKT course*. Ernst Klett Sprachen, 2011.
- [13] McDonald, Christina R. and Robert L. McDonald, *Teaching Writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002.
- [14] D. Nunan, *Practical English Language Teaching*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003.
- [15] H.D. Brown, *Teaching by Principles: and Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: A Pearson Education Company. 2001.
- [16] J. McDonough and S. McDonough, *Research methods for English language teachers*. London: Arnold, 1997.
- [17] H.L. Brink, *Fundamentals of Research Methodology for Health care Professionals*. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd, 1996.
- [18] D.F. Polit and B.P. Hungler, *Essentials of nursing research: Methods, appraisals and utilisation*. 4th edition. Philadelphia: Lippincott-Raven Publishers, 1997.
- [19] A. Perti, 'The globalization of qualitative research', in Clive Seale et al. (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage, 2004, pp. 595–608.