

THE STUDENTS' ABILITY IN USING DISCOURSE MARKERS IN WRITING DISCUSSION TEXT: A Study at English Department of State University of Padang

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk (1) melihat kemampuan mahasiswa bahasa Inggris dalam menggunakan *discourse markers* dalam menulis *discussion text*, (2) mengetahui *discourse markers* yang sering digunakan. Sample penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa bahasa Inggris UNP tingkat III tahun akademik 2010 yang berjumlah 21 orang. Instrumen yang dipakai adalah tes tulis. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menyuruh siswa menulis *discussion text* berdasarkan topik yang telah disediakan. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, ditemukan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki kemampuan yang menengah dalam menggunakan *discourse markers*. Selain itu, *discourse markers* yang sering digunakan mahasiswa adalah *contrastive markers* (39,83%), *elaborative markers* (36,6%), selanjutnya, *inferential markers* (20,32%), dan *reasonable markers* (3,25%).

Key Words: Writing Ability, Discourse Markers, Discussion Text

A. Introduction

Writing is one of the important subjects to be learned in English Department. It requires a critical process in one's mind as well as the complexity of syntax, grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary. It is also one of the media in communication. It can be said as means of communication between the writer and the reader. Since writing is important, it is taught in English Department in 3 successive semesters in order to make students are able to produce a readable writing so that the message can be transferred correctly.

There are five general components that must be carefully considered in writing. They are content, grammar, style, mechanics, and form (Laure, 1981). Content is the substances of the writing or expression of ideas. It includes relevance, clarity, and originality. Grammar is the correct use of syntactic

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patterns and structural words, including verbs, agreement, articles, etc, while style is the choice of appropriate structure and lexical items to give particular flavor or tone to the writing. Mechanics is the use of graphic convention of the language. It includes handwriting, spelling, punctuation, etc. Besides, form is the organization of content including unity, coherence, and cohesion.

From those five general components in writing, there are many English department students have difficulties in it. Based on an interview with some lectures in English Department, especially writing lectures, they said that grammatical errors and developing their idea were the most problem in student' writing. Besides, they had difficulty in making their sentences coherent.

Furthermore, this difficulty might happened because of the lack of ability in using discourse markers. Based on an interview with some friends of educational 3 of 2008 academic year, some of them said that it is hard to distinct discourse markers while writing. Besides, they do not use discourse markers correctly, so that to reduce the mistakes while using them, students are rarely use them in their writing. Furthermore, they tend to make simple sentence and ignore the coherence between their sentences. They just jump from one sentence to another sentence. In order to make students are able in linking their writing smoothly, the use of discourse markers are needed.

Although discourse markers are not the cruel things in writing, it takes an important role in linking one idea to another idea. If students do not pay attention to this, their writing will not be coherent. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing this phenomenon concerned with DM's used in the English Department students' writing.

There are many definitions of discourse markers defined by some experts with differentiation in the named. Schiffrin (1987:37) says that DM as sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk, while Nunan (1993:187) and Dulger (2007:261) say that DM is words and phrase which organize, comment on, or in some way frame what we are saying or writing that function to signal how the current utterance relates to prior discourse. Briefly, they define DM as the words and phrases which are used by the speaker to comment upon the discourse plan and goals, and relate current utterances to prior discourse.

Fraser (1999:931) defines discourse markers as a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. The segment that will be introduced (S2) and the prior segment (S1) are signaled by DMs. Besides, Byron and Heeman (1997:1) say that DM is a linguistics devices that speaker use at the beginning of a contribution to speaker use DM to signal how the upcoming unit speech or text relates to the current discourse that for instances, DM can be used to mark changes in the global discourse structure, as exemplified by "by the way" to shift to a new topic. Another definition offers by Martinez (2002:64), she explains discourse markers as a set of clues which create cohesiveness, coherence, and meaning in discourse.

Therefore, based on the above definition, the researcher can conclude that DM is a class of linguistic devices that includes words or phrases that mark a boundary in a discourse and create cohesiveness, coherence, and meaning in discourse.

Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997) divides DM into three patterns. The first one is words like interjections, conjunction, and descriptive adverbials. The second one is a phrase such as temporal adverbial phrases, namely as anchorage markers and filler words. The third one is a clause like comment clause. Besides, Sinijeva (2005), Bolden (2006), and Fujita (2007) also classified DM into three patterns. They are world-level DM, a phrase DM, and clause DM (see appendix 1).

Fraser (1999) classifies DM simpler than Swan. He divides DM into four kinds. First, contrastive markers, refers to DM that signal the explicit interpretation of S2 contrast with an interpretation of S1. Second, elaborative markers, refers to aspects of S1 and S2 message signal a parallel relationship between S1 and S2. Third, inferential markers, refers to signal that S2 is to be taken as a conclusion based on S1. Last, reasonable markers, refers to a group of DM which specifies that S2 provides a reason for the content presented in S1 (see appendix 2).

Contrastive markers and consequently conjunction are used in discussion text, so that the researcher decided to conduct this research by asking students write a discussion text. It is hoped that in writing discussion text, the students' ability in using discourse markers can be seen clearly.

Gerot and Wignell (1994) define that discussion text is a text that presents at least two points of view about an issue. The purpose of the discussion text itself is giving information which consists of responses, views, arguments in responding to a social issue or social phenomena (Refnaldi, 2010). The generic structure of this text are: (1) Issue; it presents a general response that will be a topic to be discussed. It is stated briefly, interesting, and also provoke to attract reader's attention to read the details, (2) Arguments for and against or Statements of differing points of view; arguments for consist of points of view or opinion which pro or agree with the issue and which means to support the issue. Arguments against consist of points of view or opinion which contra or disagree with the issue because of several considerations, (3) Conclusion or Recommendation; It presents both sides of argument (arguments for and arguments against) as the responses to the phenomena. It can be pro or contra in recommendation.

Meanwhile, the lexico-grammatical features of discussion text can be described as follows: (1) Focus on generic human and generic non-human participants; (2) Use material processes (for example, has produced, have developed, to feed), use relational processes (for example, is, could have, cause, are), use mental processes (for example, feel); (3) Use comparative: contrastive and consequential conjunctions; (4) Reasoning expressed as verbs and nouns (Refnaldi, 2010).

According to the argument above, the purposes of this study were to know the ability of English Department students in using discourse markers markers (contrastive markers, elaborative markers, inferential markers, and reasonable markers) and to know what discourse markers (contrastive markers, elaborative markers, inferential markers, and reasonable markers) dominantly used in students' writing.

B. Research Methodology

This research was a descriptive research. The population of the research was the third year students who registered in academic year 2010 who have taken subject: Writing 1, Writing 2, and Writing 3. There were six classes with the number of students are about 190 students. The sample of this research was randomly selected. The normally sample size for descriptive research is 10% until 20%. The representative was taken from all education classes and non education classes of third year students of the academic year 2010. Moreover, there were 11% of them taken. This means for about 21 students were the sample of this research.

In this research, the instrument used was a writing test. The writing test was about discussion text which is around 5 to 7 paragraphs about the topic given. The test was around 100 minutes. The data were collected through the students' writing test. The test was given to the students. It was around 100 minutes. Students were given 5 topics. Then, the students had chosen one of them to be written. They wrote a discussion text based on the topic. After students finished their writings, they were collected. Then, the students' writings were scored.

The data were analyzed through the following steps.

1. The discourse markers were analyzed whether they were appropriate used or not by using the rubric (adapted from Hamp- Lyons, 1992 and Mertler) (see appendix 3).
2. To find out the percentage of discourse markers used by students, the researcher used:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

In order to get the mean score of the data, the researcher uses this formula:

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

C. Discussion

The data of this research were taken from the writing test given to the third year students who registered in fifth semester in English department of Padang State University. Writing test was given as the instrument of the data collection, because the purpose of this research is to find out students writing ability in using discourse markers. The total respondents were 21 students. The students were asked to write discussion essay for about 5 to 7 paragraphs.

They were given 5 topics and they chose one topic to become an essay. The students writing were analyzed by using the rubric.

After analyzing students' writing, based on the rubric could be found the score in using discourse markers. Therefore, the scores can be categorized into 5 categories namely: excellent, good, average, weak, and low/ very weak.

1. Students ability in using discourse markers

Table 4. Students' Score in using discourse markers

Students' Number	Score	Students' Number	Score	Students' Number	Score
1	3	8	2	15	2
2	4	9	3	16	3
3	4	10	5	17	2
4	5	11	4	18	3
5	2	12	4	19	3
6	3	13	4	20	4
7	5	14	3	21	4

In analyzing students' ability in using discourse markers, the researcher used the rubric in scoring student' ability in using discourse markers. Based on the table above, it can be seen that there were three students who got excellent in their writing. They were student 4, student 7, student 10. There were seven students in good level (student 2, student 3, student 11, student 12, student 13, student 20, and student 21). In average level, there were seven students (student 1, students 6, student 9, student 14, student 16, student 18, and student 19). There were 4 students in weak level (student 5, student 8, student 15, and student 17), and there was no student in low/ very weak level.

Table 4. Result of Students' Score in using discourse markers

Categories	Number of students
Excellent	3 students
Good	7 students
Average	7 students
Weak	4 students
Low/ Very weak	No student

2. Discourse markers dominantly used

Table 5. The number of discourse markers dominantly used

Students' number	Contrastive Markers	Elaborative Markers	Inferential Markers	Reasonable Markers	Total
1	4	2	1	0	7
2	3	4	2	1	10
3	4	2	2	0	8
4	3	2	1	0	6
5	2	2	1	0	5
6	2	1	0	0	3
7	3	2	1	2	8
8	3	1	1	0	5
9	2	3	1	0	6
10	2	2	1	1	6
11	2	1	0	0	3
12	0	1	2	0	2
13	2	2	1	0	5
14	3	2	0	0	5
15	2	1	1	0	4
16	2	3	2	0	8
17	3	2	4	0	9
18	1	5	1	0	7
19	2	2	1	0	5
20	2	4	1	0	7
21	2	1	1	0	4
Total	49	45	25	4	123

The data were analyzed by using the formula $P = F/N \times 100\%$. This formula was used to represent the number of discourse markers used by students. The students' percentages of discourse markers were taken from the students' discourse markers divided with the total of discourse markers used by students. Based on the analysis, it was found that students were dominantly used contrastive markers in their writing. There were 124 discourse markers in all students' writing.

There were 49 contrastive markers found in students' writing. They were 11 for *on the other hand*, 20 for *however*, 2 for *meanwhile*, 4 for *in contrary*, 2 for *nevertheless*, 5 for *but*, and 2 for *in spite of*. *However* was the contrastive markers that used dominantly in students' writing.

There were 45 elaborative markers found in student' writing. They were 9 for *in addition*, 10 for *furthermore*, 9 for *besides*, 9 for *moreover*, 1 for *then*, 1 for *even more*, 1 for *meanwhile*, 1 for *also*, 1 for *therefore*, 1 for *that is*, 1 for

instead of, and 1 for *well*. The students mostly used *furthermore* in their writing.

There were 27 inferential markers found in students' writing. They were 4 for *as a result*, 3 for *consequently*, 2 for *as a conclusion*, 3 for *so*, 2 for *in short*, 5 for *in conclusion*, 4 for *then*, 1 for *so that*, 1 for *in this case*, 1 for *hence*, and 1 for *thus*. *In conclusion* was used dominantly by the students. Furthermore, there were only 4 reasonable markers used by the students. They were 2 for *for those reason* and 2 for *because*.

Table 6. The Percentage of Discourse Markers dominantly used

No	Discourse Markers	Total Number of Discourse Markers	Total Percentage of Discourse Markers
1.	Contrastive Markers	49	39.83 %
2.	Elaborative Markers	45	36.6 %
3.	Inferential Markers	25	20.32 %
4.	Reasonable Markers	4	3.25 %
Total		123	

Based on findings, it can be concluded that many students mostly used contrastive markers (39,83 %) in their writing. This is in line with what stated by Lahuerta (2004) that contrastive markers were the most dominantly used by students in their writing. This case may happen because when writing discussion text, the students have to give some arguments that need to contrast the ideas so that contrastive markers markers were dominantly used.

Furthermore, the students' ability in using discourse markers were average. The discourse markers that used by students were well chosen even though most of them were missing, they did not impact reader's understanding. Besides, some discourse markers were well chosen and effectively used but occasional/ some of them were used ineffectively.

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on research findings, it can be concluded that the ability of third year English Department students in using discourse markers were average. The discourse markers that they used dominantly were contrastive markers, then followed by elaborative markers, inferential markers, and reasonable markers was the lowest percentage of discourse markers.

From the findings of the research, some suggestions are proposed for getting the better result in learning and teaching discourse markers in writing for the students and the lecturer. For the students, the students should learn more and have a lot of practice in using discourse markers . They must pay more attention to the correct placement of discourse markers in their writing. In addition, they should give more attention to the discourse markers which

must be appropriate or not. Also, they should learn more to improve their understanding in using discourse markers. For lecturers, the lectures should pay attention in teaching and learning writing, especially in using discourse markers. Besides, lectures have to pay attention in giving teaching reasonable markers, because the use of reasonable markers was almost never. Although discourse markers are not the major factor in writing, they take important role in the writing.

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Appendix 1. Pattern of Discourse Markers

Single word	A phrase	A clause
but; however; (al) though; conversely; whereas; nevertheless; nonetheless; still; also; besides; and; namely; parenthically; correspondingly; equally; likewise; similarly; or otherwise; well; hence; since; accordingly; so; thus; hence; accordingly; therefore; consequently; then; yet; if; may; even; so; still; while; anyway; moreover; furthermore; apparently	in contrast (with/to this/that); in comparison (with/to this/that); on the contrary; contrary to this/that; instead (of/doing/this/that); rather (than (doing) this/that); on the other hand; despite (doing) this/that; in spite of (doing) this/that; above all; better yet; for another thing; in addition; more to the point; on top of it all; to cap it all off; what is more; in particular; that is (to say); by the same token; be that as it may; that said; of course; as a consequence; as a logical conclusion; as a result; because of this/that reason; in this/that case; under these/those conditions; all things considered; after all; as regards; with regard to; with respect to; in regard to; as to; as for; with reference to; speaking/talking of/about; in contrast/in contrast to; of course; all the same; at least; at any rate in addition; as well as that; on the top of that; another thing; in other words; in my view/opinion; so to speak; more or less; sort of; kind of well; for instances; for example; in particular; such as	I mean; it can be concluded that; that's why; it is true; that is to say; I think; I feel; I reckon; I guess; I am afraid; I suppose; as I said before; I'm sorry; you know; you see; correct what I've said; as told you; like I said before; I suggest; let me see; I believe

Appendix 2. Kinds of Discourse Markers based on Fraser

Kinds of discourse markers	Example
<p>1. Contrastive markers</p>	<p>but; however; (al) though; in contrast (with/to this/that); whereas; in comparison (with/to this/that); on the contrary (to this/that); conversely; instead (of (doing), this/that); on the other hand; despite; (doing) this/that; in spite of (doing) this/that; nevertheless; nonetheless; still;</p>
<p>2. Elaborative markers</p>	<p>and; above all; also; besides; better yet; for another things; furthermore; in addition; moreover; more to the point; on top of it all; too; to cap it all off; what is more; I mean; in particular; namely; parenthetically; that is (to say); analogously; by the same token; correspondingly; equally; likewise; similarly; be that as; it may; or; otherwise; that said; well;</p>
<p>3. Inferential markers</p>	<p>so; of course; accordingly; as a consequences; as a logical conclusion; as a result; because of this/that, consequently; for this/that reason; hence; it can be conclude that; therefore; thus; in this/that case; under these/those conditions; then; all things considered;</p>
<p>4. Reasonable markers</p>	<p>after all; because; for this/that reason; since</p>

Appendix 3. The Rubric of Discourse Markers

Score/category	Criteria
5 Excellent	>81 % discourse markers are well chosen to indicate the relationships between the ideas, they connect and they are effectively used.
4 Good	61-80 % discourse markers are well chosen eventhough they are missing, they do not impact reader's understanding.
3 Average	41-60 % discourse markers are well chosen and effectively used but occasional/ some are ineffectively used and/ or missing.
2 Weak	21-40 % discourse markers are misused and/or ineffectively used and/ or missing but occasional well chosen are effectively used.
1 Low/very weak	<39 % discourse markers are misused and/ or ineffectively used and/ or missing.