A Comparative Study of the Discourse Marker Types in the *Body* Section of the Research Papers of DLSU Students

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Abstract

The study examines the types of discourse markers adult second language (L2) learners in a research writing class most predominantly use given the types of research paper they are required to write. Two Englres (Basic Research) classes at De La Salle University - Manila, each composed of between forty and forty-three students who were assigned to worked in pairs, were selected. Classes were taken from two colleges. From the two research paper classes, thirty papers were collected. The papers were examined on the basis of what discourse markers types are predominantly used in the Body section of the students' research papers. This study used Hyland and Tse's Taxonomy of Textual and Interpersonal Metadiscourse (2004) and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion. Results reveal that the students from the College of Engineering who are required to write a descriptive research paper use the logical connectives of addition and contrast more than they use the other types of discourse markers. This preference was used because the research paper they are expected to produce is descriptive in nature. Hence the data that the students are expected to come up with need to blend with the existing data that are already available concerning the topic. On the other hand, the students from the College of Liberal Arts, who are expected to turn in an argumentative research paper, show preference for the logical connectives of addition, contrast and consequence because the development of the ideas in the research paper needs to escalate into a level where they are supposed to present their contentions to the arguments that they are putting forth. This study has considerable implications in the kind of teaching materials that L2 learners need to be exposed into given their different fields of specialization.

Keywords: Discourse markers, academic writing, writing instruction

Introduction

Academic writing in the undergraduate level at De La Salle University (DLSU) in Manila, the Philippines aims at the mastery of English as a second language (ESL). Writing in this level usually yields two outputs. At the initial stage, awareness, development and mastery of various writing compositions focus on targeted rhetorical devices such as description, cause-effect, comparison- contrast, definition, classification, analysis and argumentation. At a higher phase, students are then taught to employ their awareness of the techniques in writing the different rhetorical devices by integrating these patterns into one written composition which

is the final research paper, also known as the academic paper. At DLSU, *English Research* (coded as *ENGLRES*) addresses the need of the different colleges to come up with a suitable written requirement useful in the students' respective fields. For instance, the topics for research in the College of Computer Science (CCS) class are only approved by the research teacher if these topics have bearing on their field. Thus, the research students may come up with research topics like database, operating system or graphics interface.

Second language (L2) academic research in the undergraduate level is a guided process that aims at the students developing their own writing styles and critical thinking skills. Precisely because these are the target areas of research writing, Mirador (2002) posits that students, who write based on their own pacing, are thus able to complete the sub-processes of research work in a manner different from the others in their class. For instance, because of the nature of the individual thesis statements set by students, they may move at a pace different from their classmates. Additionally, the students may be required to conform to the structure of academic writing patterned after Swales' moves (1990, 2001). This pattern, in fact, was applied several years back at DLSU when the College of Science (COS) students were required to write a paper similar in structure to Swales' introduction moves as well as the introduction-method-results-discussion pattern (IMRD) of journal article publications.

Recently, however, the research paper outputs at DLSU have been simplified into a descriptive extended essay paper for the students enrolled in the Colleges of Engineering, Science, Computer Science as well as Business and Economics. For their final paper, the College of Liberal Arts students are expected to turn in an argumentative extended essay paper. Both types of academic paper follow the basic structure of introduction, body, and conclusion. Additionally, to facilitate the brainstorming of ideas, the students enrolled in the ENGLRES class are allowed to work in pairs and to complete a pair research paper output.

Upon the writing of the three parts of the research paper, the students rely on discourse markers as linguistic units to link previously written sentences with new ones. Furthermore, the kind of discourse markers that students employ will reveal the logical link between the previous sentences and the new ones. To illustrate, consider the example below that uses the discourse marker of contrast to show how the second sentence opposes the idea held in the initial sentence:

> A community of barbarians will revel in the face of war, after a triumphant battle. *On the other hand,* a group of pacifists will shun the idea of war from their minds because it goes against the principles they believe in.

Of the structure of the research paper, the part that employs the most use of discourse markers is the body section of the paper since it is in this portion of the paper that the students discuss their major ideas and substantiate them with supporting evidence. It is therefore of interest to learners and teachers to examine what type of discourse marker is most frequently used by the students of specific fields of specialization. First, on the part of the students, awareness of what type of discourse markers they dominantly use will aid them in the kind of critical thinking that they should be developing given their chosen fields. Second, the teachers will

be more effective as facilitators since they will not only be providing more relevant materials but will also be asking important questions to guide the students to the kind of writing skills that they should be harnessing.

Previous studies have looked into the functions of discourse markers. One study for instance, classifies discourse markers as belonging to the coherence group. The main researchers who support this group like Schiffrin (1987), Fraser (1988, 1990), Redeker (1990, 1991), Zwichy (1985), and Giora (1997, 1998) believe that discourse markers play a major role in the interpretation of the text by signaling coherence relations. On the other hand, another group of researchers known as the relevance group argues that discourse markers are indicators or procedures that determine how the reader will interpret the written text or utterance. According to the advocates of the relevance group, discourse markers give cues to allow the reader to get the writer's meaning of a written text with minimum cognitive processing (Blakemore, 2000). Researchers of the relevance group include Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002), Blass (1990), Iten (1998), and Wilson and Sperber (1993). In another study, Eslami and Rasekh (2007) investigated the use of discourse markers in three academic lectures. Their study strengthens the idea that discourse markers are important because they help the receivers (readers and listeners) understand the text better.

Other studies have investigated different linguistic units to determine how their employment in written texts helps achieve cohesion. In fact, Halliday and Hasan (1976) conducted a study on lexical cohesive devices that was supported by other researchers. For instance, Castro (2004) found out in her study that students use lexical cohesive devices to connect ideas together. Duterte-Angeles' (2005) study revealed similar findings. In Mojica's (2006) study, thirty graduate students enrolled in advanced academic writing courses in English at DLSU- Manila, coming from two groups – the first from different disciplines, the second from English - were compared in terms of what type of lexical cohesive device they prefer. Using the four types of content lexical ties proposed by Liu (2000), Mojica's study observed that the use of repetitions is the most frequent lexical cohesive device employed in the papers of the two groups. This repetition cohesive device, she further classifies into four according to their nature of occurrence – identical, inclusive, exclusive and unrelated. In a related study, Liu (2000) reported that ESL classrooms focus on the teaching of functional connectives instead of increasing students' vocabulary. Liu identified the problems that many ESOL students encounter in their writing classes. By looking at her sample students' writings, she examined the different levels of lack of content lexical ties. Central to these problems is the lack of cohesion brought about by misuse of content lexical ties as well as inappropriate logical connector that causes major breakdown in the comprehension of the written texts. She thus developed writing exercises that would address the lack of cohesive ties among ESOL students. Another researcher, Jonz (1987) concluded that the comprehension level of readers is greatly reduced once cohesive ties are removed from the text. In an experimental study involving native and non-native speakers of English, Jonz sought to measure the language – based comprehension of the two groups by requiring the participants to undergo the cloze procedure to restore deleted words to the text.

Although previous studies have focused on the use of lexical ties like repetition, synonyms or antonyms as important cohesive devices, there is scant study on what the use of specific discourse marker types say about the different fields of specialization that college students major in. The present study contributes to the body of literatures on discourse markers as its focus this time is on the use of the discourse marker types to the research papers of the two disciplines Engineering and Liberal Arts. The choice of the two disciplines is dictated by the fact that although both follow the same basic structure in the writing of the research paper, they use two different slants in their exposition. The Engineering students are supposed to come up with a descriptive extended essay paper while the Liberal Arts students need to establish strong arguments for their argumentative extended essay paper.

Research Questions

The present paper will answer the following questions:
1. What types of discourse markers are evident in the *Body* section of the research papers of DLSU undergraduate students?
2. Is there any difference between the discourse marker types used by the Engineering students from those used by the Liberal Arts students?
3. How do the discourse markers contribute to cohesion?

Method

Thirty research papers were collected. Of the thirty, fifteen came from fifteen pairs of freshman Engineering students. The other fifteen were written by fifteen pairs of Liberal Arts students. These students were enrolled in an ENGLRES class which had for their final requirements the research paper. The Liberal Arts students were required to complete an argumentative extended essay paper while the Engineering students were expected to turn in a descriptive extended essay paper. Their papers were submitted at the end of Term 2, School Year 2008-2009.

The papers were preselected on the basis of their availability as well as the applicability of the topics chosen by the students in their respective fields, Engineering and Liberal Arts. After all, ENGLRES is a research writing Course that is meant to be English for Specific Purposes-based. Also, as the course follows the process approach in the writing of the paper, the choice took into consideration those papers that underwent a suggested sequence. The papers with scores ranging between 85% and 94% were examined as these scores suggest based on the rubric set by the ENGLRES committee that the papers were considered satisfactory to very satisfactory. No paper, however, for the specific term covered by the study, was considered outstanding. Specifically, the body section of the paper, which consisted of approximately between thirty-six and fifty-four sentences or equivalent in pages to between three and four and a half, was examined for the presence of discourse markers. Discourse markers are written cues that facilitate movement of thought in communication from one sentence to the next. In this study, the body of the paper is referred to as the part of the paper that contains the students' discussion of the

insight that was earlier raised in the distinguishing feature of their thesis sentence. As is usual in an extended essay writing, the thesis sentence is the sentence that regulates or controls the discussion of points that will be raised in the essay. The thesis sentence is usually found in the *Introduction* part of the research paper. In ENGLRES, the Engineering students are required to write a thesis sentence that follows the pattern 'term is equal to general class + distinguishing feature'. This required format is similar to a formal definition construction. The difference, however, is the instruction of the ENGLRES teacher that the distinguishing feature also yields the students' insight. The students' insight is further explored using three points that they then discuss in the *Body* section of their paper.

For the first question, data were analyzed using Hyland and Tse's taxonomy (2004). The taxonomy was chosen since it offers a more comprehensive categorization of discourse markers suitable in examining the present study. Their taxonomy is discussed in the following section. This present study focuses only on the four categories of textual metadiscourse – the logical connectives, the frame markers, the evidentials, and the code glosses. To be concrete, a frequency count was done to determine the number of times a discourse marker appeared in the body section of the students' research papers. The discourse markers found were then classified according to the four categories of textual metadiscourse. Statistical treatment was done by determining the percentage a particular discourse marker belonging to a category appeared in relation to other examples of discourse marker of the same category.

For the second question, the discourse markers were analyzed according to the function that they employ in the given sentences where they were noted. Examination of the discourse marker functions was done on the basis of Hyland and Tse's (2004) taxonomy of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse.

For the third question, the present study uses Halliday and Hassan's (1976) notion of cohesion to analyze how appropriate the choice of discourse marker is in establishing cohesion. According to these authorities, cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. For instance, two sentences are linked together by the presence of the full subject in the first sentence and a pronoun or determiner in another. To illustrate, examine the italicized words in the two sentences below:

> *Digital marketing* uses the power of the Internet and other interactive forms of media to circulate information. *It* is relatively cheaper than traditional marketing since *its* interactive forms are easy to replace.

Framework

This study draws from Hyland and Tse's (2004) taxonomy of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse as well as Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion. Table 1 below illustrates Hyland' and Tse's taxonomy:

Table 1
Functions of Metadiscourse in Academic Texts

Category	Function	Examples
Textual Metadiscourse		
Logical Connectives	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition. And, thus
Frame Markers	Explicitly refer to discourse acts/texts stages	Finally, to repeat, our aim here, we try
Endophoric Markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above, see Fig 1, table 2, below
Code Glosses	Help reader grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely, eg, in other words, such as
Evidentials	Refer to source information from other texts	According to X/Y, 1990, Z states
Interpersonal Metadiscourse		
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to statements	Might, perhaps, it is possible, about
Emphatics	Emphasize force of writer's certainty in message	In fact, definitely, it is clear, it is obvious
Attiture Markers	Express writer's attitude to prepositional content	Surprisingly, I agree, X claims
Relational Markers	Explicitly refer to/build relationship with reader	Frankly, note that, you can see
Person Markers	Explicit reference to author/s	I, we, mine, my, your

Briefly, logical connectives show how the current sentence under consideration, that is, the sentence containing the connector, is linked with the initial sentence. Examples of this type fall under contrast, addition, consequence, and sequence connectors. Next, frame markers, by its very name, serve to keep the reader's focus on the sentence containing the discourse markers as they highlight the point being made in the initial sentences. In the table above, sequence connectors like *finally* function as frame markers because they highlight the attention of the reader on the current sentence containing the particular frame marker. In the frame marker *our aim here,* the reader's focus of attention is led towards the statement containing the given frame marker. Third, endophoric markers display the relationship of a paragraph for instance to other non prose forms in a given text. Fourth, codeglosses provide specific features or examples to the generalization in the initial clause or sentence. Lastly, evidentials provide the needed support from authorities of other texts.

Findings and Discussion

Table 2 lists the examples of discourse markers noted in the body section of the research papers of the Engineering and the Liberal Arts undergraduate students:

Table 2
Types of Discourse Markers in the Body Section of Engineering and Liberal Arts Research Papers

Types	Times Present		% of Signaled Relations	
	Engineering Texts	Liberal Arts Texts	Engineering Texts	Liberal Arts Texts
Logical Connectives				
also	34	13	38.2	13.13
too	0	1	0	1
therefore	3	2	3.37	2
and	5	12	5.61	12.12
thus	1	1	1.12	1
thereafter	1	0	1.12	0
moreover	10	0	11.23	0
another	8	5	8.98	5.05
so	4	1	4.49	1
along with	1	0	1.12	0
however	2	7	2.24	7.07
in contrast	1	0	1.12	0
because of	2	16	2.24	16.16
unlike	1	0	1.12	0
in addition	4	2	4.49	2.02
after all these	1	0	1.12	0
nonetheless	1	0	1.12	0
hence	1	0	1.12	0
but	2	16	2.27	16.16
consequently	1	0	1.12	0
further	1	3	1.12	3.03
on the other hand	1	1	1.12	1
as a result	1	1	1.12	1
after	1	0	1.12	0
despite	1	2	1.12	2.02
although	0	9	0	9.09
yet	0	3	0	3.03
since	0	3	0	3.03
	88		99	
Frame Markers				
lastly	9	3	23.07	17.65
today	1	2	2.56	11.76
then	0	2	0	0
to start with	1	0	2.56	0
now	0	3	0	17.65
the next	2	0	5.13	0
firstly	11	2	28.20	11.76
second	6	3	15.38	17.65
third	5	0	12.82	0
finally	1	2	2.56	11.76
as previously discussed	1	0	2.56	0
here	1	0	2.56	0
fourthly	1	0	2.56	0
	39		17	
Evidentials				
according to	11	16	37.93	45.71
Z States	14	15	48.27	42.86
1990	4	4	13.79	11.43
	29		35	
Code Glosses				
for Example	12	15	92.31	100
particularly	1	0	7.69	0
	13		15	

Of the sample logical connectives, results reveal that the *addition* category at 38.2% seems to take the priority among the Engineering students. Among the *addition* logical connectives, the discourse marker *also* is the most frequently used. This is followed by *moreover* at 11.23% The relatively large difference in terms of occurrence between the two discourse markers may be attributable to the fact that among college students, particularly those who are in their entry level, *also* is the most accessible and less formal compared to *moreover.* Despite the predominant use of the same discourse marker category among the Liberal Arts students, it is apparent that this group of students prefers the logical connectives of *consequence* and *contrast* which accounts for 16.16% yield. Of the choice of available discourse markers for *consequence* and *contrast* types, the Liberal Arts students appear to favor *because of* and *but* respectively. The reason for this may be due to the idea that the morphological units *because of* establishes quite directly the notion of substantiation by virtue of the cause-effect rhetorical pattern that the students may want to use in the nature of the arguments that are being presented. In terms of the morpheme *but* again the nature of accessibility and degree of formality are likely reasons for the students' preference.

The broadband system emphasizes the role of the information technology *particularly* in the organization activities. Its functions include automated semi automatic business processes *and* the effectiveness of allowing quick access to vast amount of information worldwide. It provides fast, accurate, *and* inexpensive communication within *and* between organizations. It is *also* capable of storing huge amount of information in an easy to access *yet* small space.

In human resources function (Van Horn, 2006), there are three types of labour forces: the attract, the develop and the maintain labour force. *Firstly*, the attract labour force is the one responsible for the hiring of potential applicants. It is *also* the one that analyzes the job suitable for the applicants. *Secondly*, the develop labour force is the one that evaluates the performance of the employees. It is *also* responsible for the career path and the management of labour relations so that the work in the company will be distributed evenly. This group *also* trains the employees through team building activities. *In addition*, this labour force forecasts the future needs of the company. *Lastly,* the maintain labour force provides the employees' benefits so that they will enjoy working for the company.

The first excerpt above makes use of two categories of discourse markers. These are the logical connectives and the code glosses. Of the two categories, the logical connectives are more widely used as is observed in other sample texts. In the first text alone, two types of logical connectives appear: the *addition* and, the *contrast.* The addition connectives *and...*as well as *also* function as indicators of the numerous benefits that broadband system brings to its users. The contrast connective *yet* serves not only to contrast the two opposing ideas in the *huge amount of information* and *small space* but more to highlight the additional benefit of broadband system. The use of the code gloss *particularly* functions to

substantiate the established idea covered in the general concept *the role of information technology*. This use of the code gloss is appropriate, although scantily used in the undergraduate Engineering research papers, since the main objective of descriptive writing is to make specific the writer's focus. This objective is targeted, in fact, with the pair's use of *particularly* followed by the specific point *in the organization activities*. In the second excerpt, the Engineering students use two types of discourse markers: the logical connective of *addition* and the *frame markers*. The use of *frame markers* serves not only to enumerate the types of labour force. In the text, the students are also able to show the progression of ideas and concepts using this discourse marker. After identifying the concepts '*the attract, the develop* and *the maintain force*', the students employ the frame markers *first, second* and *lastly* to shift discussion from one concept before moving on to another concept. Within the frame markers, the students use connectives of *addition*. For instance, after naming one type of labor force, the students make use of *also* to maintain development of ideas on the same type. The ENGLRES pair in the College of Engineering also interchanges *also* with *in addition* to create variety and prevent overuse.

Table 3 below summarizes the sample discourse markers according to the categories set in Hyland and Tse's taxonomy (2004).

Table 3
Summary of Discourse Markers Categories among Engineering and Liberal Arts Research Papers

Types	Times Present	
	Engineering Texts	Liberal Arts Texts
Logical Connectives	89	99
Frame Markers	39	17
Evidentials	29	35
Code Glosses	13	15

The table shows that there is relatively insignificant difference in the predominant discourse marker preference of the undergraduate Engineering and Liberal Arts students. The difference though is more marked in the next category of discourse markers that is most frequently used in the academic papers of the Engineering and the Liberal Arts students. At 39 units, the frame markers are the second preferred discourse marker category of the Engineering undergraduate students while the evidentials carry the second spot in terms of discourse marker preference of the Liberal Arts students. This is probably due to the fact that, in a descriptive type of extended essay, topics in Engineering like *systems analyst*, the *Define-Measure-Analyze-Improve-Control (DMAIC) methodology* and *product development*, require descriptions of procedures in order for these topics to be understood fully, as in the excerpts below:

> Profit maximization and company advancement are the primary objectives of the (DMAIC) model. This is done step-by-step and part-by-part. *First*, the quality of products and services produced must be improved. *Second*, the employees of the company should be trained for further proficiency. *Lastly*,

innovations must be capable of being practiced and applied within the company.

Due to the widespread use of computer programming, society has benefited a lot from it. *One* benefit that can be derived from it is its creation of valuable programs that have solved computer-related problems. A *second* benefit is the fact that it provides a faster way of doing things. *Thirdly*, it provides knowledge and entertainment on the part of the user and the programmer. *Finally* and more importantly, it promotes product design and development.

For instance, in C, the research topic *DMAIC* is discussed by identifying its main objectives. The Engineering students, who worked on this topic, found it crucial to enumerate the guidelines through which these objectives will be met. Hence, the category of *frame markers* is used to move from one guideline to the next. This is also true in D where the students enumerated the benefits the user can get from computer programming using the category of frame markers 'one',' *second*',' *thirdly*' and *'finally'*.

In an argumentative essay paper, arguments in the Body section of the paper require support from authorities to highlight the idea that the students' papers are worth reading since the use of *evidentials* suggest thorough research has been undertaken by the researchers, as in the excerpts below:

Since parody is part of the Filipino language, as *Denith (2000) said*, it is passed down through continuous chains which *now* evolves into not just mockery of language *but* also as an attack to the person's lifestyle which *then* leads to stereotyping.

War has aided man to develop his technology. It was in 1946 when the microwave was invented. The microwave was developed from a military radar used in war (Ziemke, 2007). The ambulance is *also* a product of war. Its idea originally came from horse-drawn wagons used during Napoleon's time (Connell, 2007)

Within the category of logical connectives are three types: the *addition*, the *contrast*, the *consequence*. The findings reveal that there is an almost equal distribution among the logical connectives of *addition, contrast* and *consequence* present in the research papers of the Liberal Arts undergraduate students. For instance, in E, the students in the College of Liberal Arts use the logical connective of consequence *since* to show the relationship between *parody* and the *Filipino language*. Their relationship is one of *cause- effect* showing how parody, because it is part of the Filipino language, develops its meanings from *mockery* to *stereotyping*.

Although the major discourse marker type employed by the Liberal Arts students is logical connective, they also find it necessary to insert the discourse markers of *evidentials* and *frame markers.* The use of evidentials in the discourse marker *as Denith (2000) said* lends support to the contention of the pair that there is indeed development in the meaning of the term *parody.*

On the other hand, the next most frequently used discourse marker category among Liberal Arts students is *evidentials.* This may account for the fact that in an argumentative type of extended essay, the need for supporting authorities is a requirement to make the students' arguments more substantial, as in the excerpts below:

> *According to Gook* (2002), 'emo' is found to be the most emotionally inclined genre when it is performed.

> *According to T.B. Andres* (1997), Filipinos see education as their gateway to becoming rich.

If, as Halliday and Hassan (1976) maintain, cohesion is achieved because certain linguistic units are added to link either two sentences or ideas together, then the use of the discourse markers - connectives and frame markers for the Engineering texts and connectives and evidentials for the Liberal Arts texts – helps facilitate comprehension on the part of the readers and critical thinking on the part of the student-writers.

Conclusion

The preference for particular discourse marker types and categories suggests that, based on the kind of research paper required among the students and based on the discipline the students   belong to, the written outputs usually indicate an inclination to a particular set of discourse marker choice. The priority therefore of the Engineering students to use the discourse marker categories of l*ogical connectives*, particularly addition*,* and of *frame markers* may most likely be due to the fact that   the goal of the descriptive paper is to supply information that is either collected from previous research or to contribute support to the present discussion that yields the students' insights. There is little use of the *contrast* category of logical connectives probably because the students do not perceive much need to oppose an existing idea to achieve this goal. On the other hand, the observation that the Liberal Arts' research papers seems to prefer the categories of *logical connectives*, particularly addition and consequence and the *evidentials*, suggests that the students are aware of the nature of their discipline. According to Latham (n.d.), the pursuit of a Liberal Arts degree trains the students to examine life, engage in practical reasoning and develop aesthetic inquiry, expression and appreciation. These findings are significant in the field of language teaching especially in the area of writing since the language teachers can pay particular attention to the need of students in different disciplines and to address their needs based on their different requirements. One strategy that the teacher can choose to make sure that the students are prepared as well as properly trained to employ the appropriate discourse markers that they will use based on their disciplines is by providing them model texts and exercises that will force their awareness as to the functions of certain discourse markers categories. Through this, the students will begin to explore available examples of discourse marker types other than those they frequently use. Thus, not only is critical awareness activated among the students but also the need to create variety in their linguistic choices.

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