

## THE DIVERSITY OF DISCOURSE MARKERS ON COLLEGE SOPHOMORES' WRITINGS

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the variants, frequency, similarity, and difference of Discourse Markers (DMs) which are used by Surabaya male and female sophomores of English education major in writing their descriptive texts. The author applies a qualitative approach, document analysis design, to identify their DMs in their texts. The findings of the study show that Elaborative Marker appears as the most dominant marker rather than Inferential and Contrastive Markers. More than a half of the total number of DMs used by the students is dominated by 'and'. However, it indicates that the Surabaya College students have difficulty in varying DMs they used. Moreover, there is no indication of a major difference in terms of DMs variants between female and male students in their writings. This study benefits as one of the reflection forms of English students' ability in using DMs. Regarding the several DMs which are identically used by the male and/or female students, further studies are still needed to seek a satisfactory answer to this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** discourse markers, variants, genders, writing, college students

### Introduction

Discourse Analysis (DA) was an increasingly popular and important area of language study which discussed not only about language but also its relation to the society, culture, and thought. Since the wide range of its activities, DA is used to describe phenomena whether in intra-discipline, inter-disciplines, or trans-disciplines of language education areas (Fauziati, 2009).

To be more specific, in spoken and written communication, DMs are verbal and non-verbal devices which contribute to the integrity of the discourse (Schiffrin, 2001 in Rahimi, 2011). As far as writing is concerned, DMs help us to use an effective and satisfactory piece of writing and, in fact, play a facilitating role in communication; furthermore, the lack or inappropriate use of DMs in an L2 would hinder successful communication or might lead to the lack of comprehension. In fact, L2 writers must learn that the reader would be able to follow the ideas expressed in the text easier if they signal the relations of their utterances to those which precede and

follow. Therefore, DMs constitute an important component of communicative competence, which L2 learners must acquire if they wanted to communicate effectively. This implies that the non-native speakers competent in using the DMs of the L2 would be more successful in interaction than those who were not.

To see how DMs were used by an L2 student, writer of English, is an interesting and important area of research in second language writing (Rahimi, 2011). Nonetheless, in L2 writing study was not only known about the different type of DMs used by L2 student writers in a specific genre but also find the possibility of a link between these markers and the genders of the students. Indeed, the studies of DMs that focused on Indonesian college students' writings were limited in numbers. Drawn by these circumstances, this study aimed to analyze the use of DMs by Surabaya college students in their descriptive text. Moreover, it compared differences in DMs which are used by the female and male students. This study might

benefit as one of the reflection form of college students' ability in using DMs.

### *Research Questions*

1. What DMs are used by the Surabaya college students in writing descriptive texts?
2. What the differences of DMs are used by female and male Surabaya college students?

### *Nature of DMs*

Schiffrin (1987) cited by Castro (2009) viewed DMs as sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk. She suggested that DMs were used in discourse because they provided "contextual coordinates for utterances". DMs could be found not only in spoken language but also in written language.

Erman (2001) believed that DMs used to signal transitions of various kinds, between smaller or larger chunks of discourse, either in the thematic organization at clue level or connecting larger pieces of discourse at the textual level. Their basic function was to 'move' the text forward and to ensure that the hearer got a coherent picture and can make sense what was being communicated.

Fraser (2009) viewed DMs as the third type of Pragmatics Markers (PMs) typically signal relation between the discourse segments which hosted them and the prior discourse segment, perhaps used by another speaker.

### *The Importance of Discourse Markers*

Shumin (2002) argued that as a part of grammatical competence, EFL learners must develop discourse competence, which concerned with the intersentential relationship. In discourse, whether formal or informal, the rules of cohesion and coherence applied which aid in holding the communication together in a meaningful way. In communication, both the

production and comprehension of a language require one's ability to perceive and process stretch of discourse, and to formulate representations of meaning from referents in both previous sentences and following sentences.

DMs were related with cohesion relation, and it could be found in both monolog and dialog. In both language modes the readers/hearer needed to be cued as to how to build the coherent mental representation (Louwerse & Mitchell, 2003). Similar cohesion could, therefore, be found in both dialog and monolog.

### *Characteristics of DMs and Its Function*

Fraser (2009) classified DMs into three main classes: a. Contrastive DMs (but, on the contrary); b. Elaborative DMs (and, anyway); and c. Inferential DMs (so, as a result). More specifically, Ying (\_\_\_\_) combined classification of DMs functions which made by Fraser (1996), Swan (1980), and Schiffrin (1987). The detailed classifications on the basis of contextual meanings were: a) Addition (indeed, in addition, as well, not only, but also, furthermore, what's more, and, let alone, moreover); b) Contrast (but, however, rather than, otherwise); c) Enumeration (firstly, one the one hand, in other words); d) Exemplification (for example, such as); e) Transition (as far as I am concerned, in my opinion, I think); f) Reasoning (because, in that case); g) Summary (in a word, sum up); h) Result (therefore, so thus, so that, in that case, because, then); i) Adverbial clauses (despite, once); and j) Time (then subsequently)

### *DMs in Different Age and Gender*

Shriberg (1996 in Bortfeld et al. (2001) found that men used more fillers than woman did, but the genders were equal with respect to other types of disfluency rates. Shriberg cautiously suggested that using more fillers may be a way for a man to try hold on to the conversational floor,

but pointed out that in her corpora. Gender was confounded with occupation and education level. related to the use of DMs 'you know' and 'I mean' by gender differences showed interesting findings. By analyzing and categorizing the total number of occurrences in the full corpus, the results seem to be contradicting previous claims that women used discourse markers more frequently as well as the hypothesis that men and women used DMs for radically different interpersonal and discourse functions. Their findings suggested that there were no significant differences between the functions of 'I mean' used by the men and women.

Karlina, Suparno, and Setyaningsih(2015) discussed DMs used by two English teachers in their classes. They found that there were 19 types of DMs which the combination of English, Indonesia, and Javanese. In addition, a number of textual functions fulfilled by these DMs which might contribute greatly to the coherent and smooth flow of the discourse organizations generated in classroom interaction.

#### *DMs in Writing Compositions*

Jalilifar (2008) studied the DMs of Iranian students' composition in the descriptive genre. The findings showed that the students employed DMs with different degree of occurrence. Elaborative markers were the most frequently used, followed by inferential, contrastive, causative, and topic relating markers. A direct and positive relationship was also found between the quality of the composition and the number of DMs used. Moreover, the graduate students used more DMs and this led to more cohesive texts.

Similar with Jalifar, Rahimi(2011) investigated the frequency and the type of DMs used in the argumentative and expository writings of Iranian EFL Learners and the differences between these

text features in the two essay genres. The results indicated a hierarchy of use of DMs in both essay types with elaborative markers the most frequent connectors used in both essay types. Overall, 15 different forms of DMs have been used by Iranian undergraduate EFL learners. The most frequently used DMs in all essays was elaborative marker 'and'. In addition, the mean of DMs use was significantly higher in argumentative essay than in expository essays. The results, nonetheless, showed that the use of DMs cannot be a significant predictor of the writing quality in the argumentative and expository compositions of Iranian undergraduate EFL students.

#### **Methodology**

By the aim to explore DMs, this study used document analysis design proposed by Ary et al.(2010) focused on the DMs production by Surabaya college students in writing descriptive text. The students were members of academic writing class, the education major, English department of Surabaya College. All 17 students in that class were sophomore from the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester. Considering the ethics of this study, all students' names had been changed into pseudonym in order to respect their privacy.

This study focused on analyzing the students' descriptive texts. These texts produced during 6 weeks period through peer review method which used the cycle of outlining-drafting-writing-editing-reviewing-revising. All texts were in the form of softfile (doc. version) compiled by the lecturer. By the aim to enhance the trustworthiness, the author combined 4 different descriptive texts used by each student, in total, there were 76 texts. The author also collaborated with the inter-rater in calculating the DMs.

In analyzing the data, first, the author searched and highlighted DMs in each descriptive text. Second, classified all DMs variants based on Fraser (2009).



Third, classified based on DMs classes (contrastive, elaborative, inferential) and its functions (addition, contrast, enumeration, exemplifier, transition, reasoning, result, and time) proposed by Fraser (1996), Swan(1980), and Schiffrin (1987).

### Findings and Discussion

These findings presented DMs variants by the Surabaya college students from two perspectives, either as the academic writing class and/or as the group of female & male students. To be clear, the author re-informed that there were 17 students who produced 76 descriptive texts (4 texts/student). They produced these texts during their 6-week period through peer-review cycles (write-revise-rewrite).

#### 1. DMs Classes and Production

In general, table 1 showed there were three DMs classes with the amount 718 markers used by the Surabaya college students in their 76 descriptive texts. These DMs consisted of: Elaborative Markers 500 (69, 64%), Contrastive Markers 95 (13, 23%), and Inferential Markers 123 (17, 13%). On average, each student used 42 DMs in 4 descriptive texts or 10 DMs per text.

Table 1. DMs classes students-based

Number of Students	Class of DMs		
	Contrastive	Elaborative	Inferential
N=17	95	500	123
<b>TOTAL</b>		718	
<b>PERCENTAGE</b>	13, 23%	69, 64%	17, 13%
<b>MEAN</b>	5, 59	29, 41	7, 23

#### Elaborative Markers

Based on table 2, Elaborative Markers showed as the most frequently used (500) by the students rather than Inferential and Contrastive Markers in their descriptive texts. This finding was in line with Matinez(2004), Jalilifar(2008), and Rahimi(2011) studies which related the

DMs and writing. In other words, even with different languages (Spanish or English) and different genres (descriptive, argumentative, or expository) but the finding was quite similar.

There were several Elaborative Markers which commonly used by the students such as 'in addition', 'furthermore', 'not only... but also', 'and', 'moreover', 'firstly', 'secondly', 'on the one hand ... on the other hand', 'for example', 'such as', and 'then'. Precisely, the marker 'and' was the most frequently used; it found that 422 'and' appeared in students descriptive texts. In others word, it implied that more than three-fourth (84, 4%) Elaborative Markers dominated by 'and'. Indeed, 'and' was not only frequently used by Iranian college students such Rahimi's(2011) finding but also used by Surabaya college students.

Surprisingly, it seemed that there was a wide range in production and mean score between Elaborative and Inferential Markers. In production, these two DMs classes differed 52, 51% because the students used only 123 Inferential Markers. Meanwhile, related to the mean score, these two DMs classes differed 22 points; since each student used 29 Elaborative Markers but they used only 7 Inferential Markers.

Table 2. Elaborative Markers

Classes of DMs	Function	DMs variant	Frequency
Elaborative	Add	In addition	3
		Not only... but also	7
		Furthermore	1
		And	422
		Moreover	6
	Enumerate	Firstly	6
		Secondly	2
		On the one hand... on the other hand	2
	Example	For example	9
		Such as	35

Time	Then	5
	<b>TOTAL</b>	500
	<b>MEAN</b>	29, 41

In addition, each student used 29 Elaborative Markers. Peculiarly, there were two students, Alia and Inaro, who did not use Elaborative Markers in their descriptive texts (see table 3). The author could not find even a single Elaborative Markers in their descriptive texts.

Table 3. Elaborative Markers of Alia and Inaro

No	Name	Gender	Number of DMs	Class of DMs Elaborative			
				Add	En	Ex	Ti
1-4							
5	Alia	Female	0	-	-	-	-
6-10							
11	Inaro	Female	0	-	-	-	-

However, even there was not a strong connection between DMs use and literacy level (Hallermann & Vergun, 2007), but the importance of DMs in writing were inevitable. It was not only use to increase the quality of writing, but also DMs' roles as meaning (Shumin, 2002) and coherent mental representations (Louwerse & Mitchell, 2003) should be considered by the students.

*Inferential Markers*

The Inferential Markers was fuelled by 'because' in explaining reasons. In fact, the author found that there were 77 'because' appeared in students' descriptive texts. By comparing the frequency of several DMs in the table above, it can be said that the marker 'because' was the most frequently used in Inferential Markers.

Table 4. Inferential Markers

Classes of DMs	Function	DMs variant	Female
Inferential	Transition	In my opinior	4
		I think	19
		As far as	1
	Reason	Because	77
		So that	7
	Result	Therefore	6

So thus	3
Then	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	123
<b>MEAN</b>	7, 23

Inferential Markers was not only used to explain reasons, but also transit ideas and draw results too. Several Inferential Markers such as 'in my opinion', 'I think', and 'as far as' were used by the students to transit ideas. Moreover, others Inferential Markers such as 'so that', 'so thus', 'then', and 'therefore' used by the students to draw results were found with the relatively small frequency in this study.

Table 5. Inferential Markers of Alia

No	Name	Gender	Number of DMs	Class of DMs Inferential			
				Tr.	Rea.	Su.	Res.
1-4							
5	Alia	Female	0	-	-	-	-
6-17							

Similar to the findings in Elaborative Markers, unfortunately, there was a student named Alia, who did not use Inferential Markers at all (see table 5).

*Contrastive Markers*

Comparing with Elaborative and Inferential Markers, the Contrastive Markers was the most rarely marker that used by the student. It found that there were only 95 (13, 23%) Contrastive Markers in all texts. The Contrastive Markers was dominated by 'but' in contrasting ideas. In fact, the author found that there were 89 'but' appeared in students' descriptive texts

Table 6. Contrastive Markers

Classes of DMs	DMs variant	Frequency
Contrastive	But	89
	However	6
	<b>TOTAL</b>	95
	<b>MEAN</b>	5, 59

Again, the case of several students who did not use DMs appeared in Contrastive Marker too. From the table 7,



there were four Surabaya students (Rey, Alfa, Airen, and Bruce), who did not use Contrastive Markers in their descriptive texts. The author could not find even a single Contrastive Markers in their descriptive texts.

Table 7. Contrastive Markers of Rey, Alfa, Airen, and Bruce

No	Name	Number of DMs in texts	Class of DMs
			Contrastive Contrast
1	Rey	0	-
2-7			
8	Alfa	0	-
9-12			
13	Airen	0	-
14			
15	Bruce	0	-
16-17			

These students who did not use DMs in their texts implied their lack of DMs use even though they had become adults and college students in English education major. They would hinder their effective and sophisticated communication with their readers (Schiffrin, 2001 in Castro, 2009). They needed to realize that the readers would be easier to follow the ideas expressed by the writer if the writer gave a signal when he or she would move to another topic.

*Differences between Female and Male Students in Producing DMs*

Since the number of female students and male students was quite different, thus the differential number of DMs they used was quite large (see table 8). Precisely, the differed was 362 DMs. However, male and female students' mean score was differed less than 10 DMs in all texts they used. Then, it seemed that there was relative narrow range difference. Precisely, the female students used 45 DMs in 4 texts (11 DMs/text) meanwhile each the male students used 35 DMs in 4 texts (8DMs/text). In others word, these statements before supported Winkler's

(2008) finding that females were able to use DMs more than males.

*Varieties of DMs*

Indeed, all students' texts were limited in academic context and there was not a single interesting marker (discursive innovation) such as Matei's (2011) finding, but the interesting findings in this study were several varieties of DMs which used by both genders, males only, and females only. On one hand, 10 variants DMs were used by both genders such as 'but', 'and', 'moreover', 'for example', 'such as', 'I think', 'because', 'so that', 'therefore', and 'then'. Based on Table 9, the DMs such as 'but', 'and', 'such as', 'I think', and 'because' used by students in quite large numbers.

On the other hand, specifically, there were 5 DMs ('not only... but also', 'then', 'in my opinion', 'as far as', 'so thus') which used by the female students only and 4 DMs used by male students only ('in addition', 'firstly', 'secondly', and 'on one hand... on the other hand'). It seemed that there were some preferences in producing DMs by each gender.

**Conclusion**

The findings implied that the Surabaya college students have difficulty in varying DMs they used for their writings. From the 19 variants which found, commonly, they used only 5 variants of DMs such as 'but', 'and', 'such as', 'I think', and 'because' in large numbers than other DMs. Especially for 'and', its overuse signed the students' weakness in producing, using, and understanding the functions and the importance of DMs in their writing. We suggested that the lecturer gave more explanations and feedback which focused on DMs, in order to gain students' awareness of textual forms. In addition, there was no indication of a major difference in terms of DMs variations between female and male students in their writings.

Regarding the several DMs which identically used by the male and/or female students, the author invites other researchers who may have the same interest to seek the answer to this phenomenon. Conducting in-depth interview with some students or spreading questionnaire to large numbers of students is the possible way to reveal the preferences and reasons in using these DMs based on their genders

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