Discourse Markers in Expository Essays Written by Indonesian Students of EFL

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Abstract

Discourse Markers (DMs) are beneficial to build coherence and cohesion in writing. Some studies carried out in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts show the dominance of a particular type of DMs in a certain text type. Accordingly, this study attempts to reveal three cases of using DMs in expository essays of five development methods which are: (1) most frequently used type of DMs, (2) common variants of DMs, and (3) the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the use of DMs. The study analyzed 275 essays written by 55 undergraduate students of English Language Teaching (ELT) program in State University of Malang, Indonesia, in the academic year of 2014/2015 enrolling in Essay Writing Class. The essays were developed using five development methods: (1) exemplification, (2) comparison and contrast, (3) classification, (4) process analysis, and (5) cause-and-effect analysis. The results revealed that exemplification, comparison and contrast, and classification essays show more elaborative markers. Then, process analysis and cause-and-effect analysis essays show more inferential markers. Each type of DMs showed some common variants: (1) contrastive markers (i.e. but, however, although, on the other hand, and in contrast), (2) elaborative markers (i.e. also, and, for example, or, moreover, and in addition), and (3) inferential markers (i.e. because, so, then, because of, in conclusion, and therefore). From the analysis of appropriateness of using DMs, the most frequent misuse is in the wrong relation. The problem should be overcome by raising students' awareness of deploying DMs appropriately and purposively.

Keywords: discourse markers, five development methods, expository essays

A number of researchers have investigated the use of Discourse Markers (henceforth DMs) either in oral context (e.g. Müller, 2005; Shimada, 2014; Tagliamonte, 2005; Tree & Schrock, 1999; Zhao, 2013) or written compositions (e.g. Biber, Conrad, & Cortess, 2004; Jalilifar, 2008). Some studies have focused on investigating DMs in building the quality of a text (e.g. Dan-ni & Zheng, 2010; Ghasemi 2013; Leo, 2012). The findings show that DMs have a role to enhance the quality of a piece of writing if they are used purposively and appropriately (Jalilifar, 2008: 114). The use of DMs is connected to building cohesion of a text as well as coherence. Cohesion refers to a set of resources that build relations in discourse above grammatical structures (Halliday (1994, cited in Martin, 2001: 35). It is connected to the writer-based concept (Fakuade & Sharudama, 2012) because DMs are beneficial to provide explicit clues to determine the interrelated ideas of a text. Cohesion to some extent distinguishes the style of the texts either spoken or written (Castro, 2004). In addition, the analysis of DMs is mainly related to coherence analysis (Taboada, 2005). The absence of DMs in a text vanishes the explicit information of the sense of coherence among ideas (Tree & Schrock, 1999). It means that readers, as the audience of the writing product, need a longer time to digest the ideas because they have to recognize the implicit cohesive clues. Theoretically, written texts should employ interaction between the writers and the readers (Hyland, 2005). In connection with such interaction, DMs build a significant role for facilitating both writers and readers with cohesion through explicit clues.

Cohesion, in writing assessment, is considered as a main aspect to reflect a well-organized text (Weigle, 2002). It promotes a tie between ideas in discourse and each sentence written in the text that builds a unified concept (Bennui, 2008; Fakuade & Sharudama, 2012; Hinkel, 2004: 279). Since cohesion is semantic features that a text has, it is closely related to the use of DMs in a particular context. The flow of the ideas is clearly recognized and comprehended when the signals of the connection among sentences are provided by the writers.

When the ideas are clear, the writing can be perceived to be coherent. However, another possibility of the unclear ideas is the emergence of incoherence. Three forms that affect the incoherent text are ineffective organization of the ideas, the lack of transitional markers, and the misuses of cohesive markers. Incoherent writing can be syntactically correct but the sense of meaning is poor (Elbow, 1998).

The poor sense in building meaning in a text is a common phenomenon that is frequently found in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. This is related to the students' problems in using DMs which are obvious since they are non-native writers who have different interpretation and comprehension of using various DMs in their essays. The obstacles they have are overusing, underusing, and misusing of DMs (Aidinlou & Mehr, 2012; Patriana, 2012). The phenomenon of the students in misusing DMs diminishes the quality of their writing. Dan-ni and Zeng (2010) investigated DMs and their findings revealed the students' tendency to misuse some DMs. For instance, Chinese learners were confused with the differences between *on the other hand* and *otherwise*, *on the contrary* and *in contrast*, etc. Moreover, they also overused DMs that diminished the quality of their text. On the other hand, some learners tend to use the strategy of repetitions to apply an avoidance strategy that minimizes the level of error (Ong, 2011). Almost similar to Dan-ni and Zeng's investigation on the use of DMs, Rahimi (2011) investigated DMs in argumentative and expository writing of Iranian students. The use of elaborative DMs was dominant both in expository and argumentative essays. Her findings showed that the lack of the ability of Iranian undergraduate students resulted in the case of using inappropriate DMs. Despite the problems of using DMs, Rahimi's findings reported that expository writing showed a high frequency of DMs. Thus, the assumption is that DMs are significantly needed to build cohesion and coherence of expository essays. Such a relation to some extent is able to indicate the genre of writing.

A type of genre has been believed to have a relation with the occurrence of the types of DMs. Therefore, Ghasemi (2013) investigated various writing genres including argumentative, descriptive, and expository writing. In argumentative writing, the relationship between the quality of writing and the use of DMs dissected. Both native students and ESL (English as a Second Language) students had different attitudes towards the use of DMs. Native students used more DMs in the beginning of the sentences than the ESL students did. Furthermore, in descriptive writing, the finding showed a frequent use of elaborative markers a positive and a correlation between the quality of the compositions and the number of DMs. However, in expository writing, the finding showed no significant relationship between the frequency of DMs and the quality of students' writing because some students underused or overused DMs. Although various common variants of DMs are found, for instance, *and*, *but*, and *however*, many variants of DMs are seldom used, for instance, *furthermore*, *on the contrary*, *moreover*, *in addition*, and *nevertheless*. Besides, the students have a tendency to use numerous DMs without discerning the semantic differences among them, for examples, using *on the contrary* instead of *however*, and overusing connectives (e.g. *but*, *and*, and *so*).

In accordance with the previous studies on the use of DMs which reveal students' problems when using DMs, the present study aims to focus on investigating expository essays in relation to the use of DMs. Therefore, the problems of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What types of DMs are most frequently used in expository essays written by Indonesian students of EFL?
2. What variants of each type of DMs are most frequently used in expository essays written by Indonesian students of EFL??
3. How is the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the use of DMs in expository essays written by Indonesian students of EFL??

Research Method

This research is developed from the concept of corpus-based research. The corpus analyzed in this study was produced by 55 undergraduate students of English Language Teaching (ELT) program in State University of Malang, East Java, Indonesia, who enrolled in Essay Writing Class in the third semester of the academic year of 2014/2015. In Essay Writing, students have to be able to write expository essays of five development methods which are: (1) exemplification, (2) comparison and contrast, (3) classification, (4) process analysis, and (5) cause-and-effect analysis. The detailed description of the total number of expository essays written by the students in Essay Writing Class is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Total Number of Students' Expository Essays

No	Development method	Subject of the study		Total
		Class A	Class B	
1	Exemplification	27	28	56
2	Comparison and contrast	27	28	56
3	Classification	27	28	56
4	Process analysis	27	28	56
5	Cause-and-effect analysis	27	28	56
Total		*135*	*140*	*275*

The data were analyzed in two main steps. The first step is counting the frequency of DMs using a corpus program known as AntConc 3.2.4w. The DMs that were analyzed are listed in the types of DMs as a combined adaptation of types of DMs proposed by Fraser (1999) and Halliday and Hasan (1976) (See Table 2).

Table 2: Types of DMs of Fraser (1999) and Halliday and Hasan (1976)

No	Contrastive markers (Fraser, 1999)
1	but
2	however, although
3	in contrast (with/to this), whereas
4	in comparison (with/to this)
5	on the contrary, contrary to
6	conversely
7	instead (of), rather (than)
8	on the other hand
9	despite (doing) this/that, in spite of (doing) this/that, nevertheless, nonetheless
No	**Elaborative markers (Fraser, 1999)**
1	and
2	above all, also, besides, for another thing, furthermore, in addition, moreover, more to the point
3	in particular, namely, parenthetically
4	analogously, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, likewise, similarly
5	or, otherwise
6	for instance, for example (Halliday & Hasan, 1976)
No	**Inferential markers (Fraser, 1999)**
1	so
2	of course
3	accordingly, as a consequence, as a logical conclusion, as a result, because of, consequently, for this reason, hence, it can be concluded that, therefore, thus
4	in this case, under these/ those conditions, then
5	after all, because, for this/that reason, since

The next step is determining the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the use of DMs. The analysis of appropriateness of the use of DMs deals with how DMs successfully connect two segments. On the other hand, the analysis of inappropriateness of the use of DMs deals with six misuse patterns of DMs (See Table 3).

Table 3: Misuse Patterns of DMs (Kao & Chen, 2011)

No	Misuse pattern	Definition
1	Non-equivalent exchange	The use of DMs conveying the same textual relation in an interchangeable manner when they are not
2	Overuse	The high density of the occurrence of DMs
3	Surface logicality	The use of DMs to impose logicality or bridge the gap among propositions when actually their existence does not
4	Wrong relation	The failure of using a particular DM to express a certain textual relation
5	Semantic incompletion	The lack of elaboration that makes a DM less functional
6	Distraction	The unnecessary uses of DMs

Findings

The analysis on expository essays written by Indonesian students of EFL shows that the frequency of contrastive, elaborative, and inferential markers is diverse in all development methods. The complete description of the frequency is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Frequency of DMs in Students' Expository Essays of five Development Methods

Development method	Type of DMs					
	Contrastive		Elaborative		Inferential	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Exemplification	173	4.27	306	7.56	273	6.74
Comparison and contrast	317	7.83	367	9.06	285	7.04
Classification	194	4.79	293	7.24	207	5.11
Process analysis	127	3.14	223	5.51	295	7.29
Cause-and-effect analysis	173	4.27	319	7.88	497	12.27
Total	*984*	*24.30*	*1508*	*37.24*	*1557*	*38.40*

From Table 4, it can be inferred that in exemplification essays the students had a tendency to elaborate more and draw a conclusion rather than to contrast ideas. This pattern is in connection with the nature of exemplification essays which provides a topic with real examples. Then, in comparison and contrast essays, the higher frequency of elaborative markers proves that students had a tendency to establish their concept of comparison and contrast by elaborating and contrasting, and inferring. In classification essays, students tended to elaborate and make an inference from the elaboration and provide the readers a contrast regarding the related topic. Similarly, in process analysis essays, students had a preference to elucidate a particular process using causal relations between segments and to add detailed information. Lastly, in cause-and-effect analysis essays, inferential markers are significant to be used to make causal relations of a particular topic.

From the analysis on students' expository essays according to the types of DMs, students use 46 variants out of 56. The complete list of the variants is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Variety of DMs in Students' Expository Essays of five Development Methods

No	Type of DMs								
	Contrastive markers			Elaborative markers			Inferential markers		
	Variants	f	%	Variants	f	%	Variants	f	%
1	but	590	14.57	also	586	14.47	because	599	14.79
2	however	114	2.82	and	502	12.40	so	393	9.71
3	although	91	2.25	for example	130	3.21	then	209	5.16
4	on the other hand	62	1.53	or	65	1.61	because of	85	2.10
5	in contrast	53	1.31	moreover	61	1.51	in conclusion	56	1.38
6	rather (than)	24	.59	in addition	60	1.48	therefore	48	1.19
7	instead (of)	16	.40	besides/besides that	33	.82	of course	45	1.11
8	whereas	15	.37	for instance	29	.72	since	35	.86
9	nevertheless	6	.15	furthermore	15	.37	thus	20	.49
10	on the contrary	5	.12	namely	14	.35	as a result	18	.44
11	despite (doing) this/that	3	.07	otherwise	7	.17	in this case	18	.44
12	in spite of (doing) this/that	3	.07	in particular	4	.10	consequently	7	.17
13	conversely	2	.05	above all	1	.02	hence	7	.17
14				similarly	1	.02	for this reason	5	.10
15							after all	4	.10
16							as a consequence	3	.07
17							it can be concluded that	3	.07
18							in this condition	1	.02
19							regardless of their condition	1	.02

From the analysis of the frequency of variants of DMs, the results show five common variants from contrastive markers, i.e. *but*, *however*, *although*, *on the other hand*, and *in contrast*; six common variants from elaborative markers, i.e. *also*, *and*, *for example*, *or*, *moreover*, and *in addition*; and six common variants from inferential markers, i.e. *because*, *so*, *then*, *because of*, *in conclusion*, and *therefore*. For showing appropriate uses of DMs in expository essays, three samples from the highest variant of each type are provided by considering the representativeness of the samples of appropriate uses of DMs.

(1) Finally, Dong Ngunyen promised that he would release this game again this year **but** he would first modify the game and make it less addictive.

(2) Last season, Real Madrid successes in Champion League and Copa Del Rey. Real Madrid **also** reached the best FIFA's football club (2013).

(3) **Because** as you get older, you may have the temptation to tell your parents how to live their lives.

From Excerpts 1, 2 and 3, students can be perceived to be able to use common variants of DMs either in the beginning of the sentence or within a sentence. They can match the purpose of the variants with the meaning that they intend to convey in their essays. The uses of appropriate inferential markers make their essays clear in the terms of cohesion and coherence.

Furthermore, the samples of inappropriate uses of DMS are presented by taking the first misuse of each common variant in each development method displayed in the concordance of AntConc. The following excerpts show samples of each misuse pattern.

(4) It is the one of the important things in the people's life. Especially for people who have to work far way from their house. **But**, before they want to buy a motorcycle, the price is the one of people's considerations.

(5) Based on the contents, Arabica has more acidity than Robusta. **Therefore**, the taste of their acidity is different.

(6) We just have to press purple button in the car and the door will change the form becomes a little wing. It **also** has power muffler.

(7) Even so, making our young generation to avoid internet is not exactly right. **Moreover**, we have to make them learn more about the basic knowledge of it like how to use internet sufficiently, how to avoid the bad impact of it, and how to gain benefit from it.

(8) Family is a group blood- related people living under one roof. That is a family including members as grandparents, parents and children. **However**, with the rapid development of society nowadays, the family structures are more and more becoming multiform and complicated than the past; **however**, the family structures as a whole still have three main types of families based on the family structure.

(9) But, in this case, it produces speed instead of power. **In contrast to** heavy vehicles, car and motorcycle can run fast than lorry or truck. It also very efficient, economics and good for environment.

Excerpt (4) shows the misuse of *but* in the pattern of wrong relation. The use of a contrastive marker is incorrect because the following sentence indicates an elaboration. Excerpt (5) shows the misuse of *therefore* in the pattern of semantic incompletion because there should be more explanation about the inference. Excerpt (6) also shows a misuse pattern on a non-equivalent exchange. *It* in that case does not clearly refer to a specific antecedent; thus, the use of *also* is illogical. Excerpt (7) shows the misuse of *moreover* in the pattern of distraction. Without the use of *moreover* the sentences remain logical. Excerpt (8) shows a surface logicality since *however* fails to connect segments. Excerpt (9) shows a case of overuse because the preceding variant of *but* confuses the readers with the relation of the two segments.

Above all, the most frequent misuse is in the pattern of wrong relation. The finding shows that Indonesian students of EFL frequently misunderstand what a correct variant to fill the gap between two segments. The total number of cases for six misuse patterns is presented in Table 6.

The inappropriateness of the use of DMs deals with all patterns of misuses of DMs: (1) wrong relation, (2) semantic incompletion, (3) non-equivalent exchange, (4) distraction, (5) surface logicality, and (6) overuse. This case indicates the students' weaknesses when dealing with using DMs that result in the lack of coherence and cohesion in texts. Thus, Indonesian students of EFL need to comprehend the function of DMs and the uses of DMs in contexts.

Table 6: Total Number of Six Misuse Patterns of DMs

Type of DMs	Variant	Misuse pattern of DMs					
		NEE	O	SL	WR	SI	D
Contrastive	*but*			1	3		1
	however	1		1	1	1	1
	although	2	2		1		
	on the other hand	2			3		
	in contrast	1	1		1		
Elaborative	*also*	2			1	2	
	and		1	1	1	2	
	for example	2			1	1	1
	or	1		2	1	1	
	moreover				3	1	1
	in addition	1		1		1	2
Inferential	*because*	2		1		2	
	so	2	1		1	1	
	then				2	2	1
	because of		1		2		2
	in conclusion					5	
	therefore	3			1	1	
	Total	*19*	*6*	*7*	*22*	*20*	*9*

NEE =Non Equivalent Exchange; O = Overuse; SL = Surface Logicality;
WR =Wrong Relation; SI = Semantic Incompletion; D = Distraction

Discussion

This section discusses the findings in the terms of the use of DMs in expository essays of five development methods, common variants of DMs, and the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the use of DMs.

In exemplification and cause-and-effect analysis essays, students use a particular type of DMs that is suggested by some theories of writing expository essays (Rooks, 1999: 73; Smalley, Ruetten, & Kozyrev, 2001). Hinkel (2004) affirmed that ESL writers have a characteristic of providing insufficient amplification of their example(s). However, the actual finding clarifies the pattern of Indonesian students of EFL in developing exemplification that they are able to develop exemplification essays in detailed elaboration signaled by the higher use of elaborative markers. In cause-and-effect analysis essays, students are inclined to use a high number of inferential markers that implies that students are able to develop a causal-and-effect relation to follow the nature of this essay.

However, in comparison and contrast, classification, and process analysis essays, students show a tendency not to use contrastive markers frequently although Smalley, et al. (2001) designated that to develop the clear logic of comparing and contrasting, contrastive markers should be deployed. In classification essays, students have a tendency to use elaborative markers although, in nature, classification essays deal with explaining some groups or classes of a particular term. Thus, the necessity of using contrastive markers is possibly high in this development method in order to show similarities and differences (Smalley, et al., 2001: 207). With regard to the numerous uses of elaborative markers in classification essays, Indonesian students of EFL are likely adding more information to explain each class/group of a particular topic rather than criticizing. This confirms the finding of Budiharso (2006) that the tendency of undergraduate students is to use a rhetorical style of providing details but not contrasting. In process analysis essays, inferential markers are frequently used. The findings contribute to the different confirmation that students prefer to make an inference from a certain step of a process and also to conclude the steps that they propose followed with an additional note that the reader should underline in order to gain a precise result.

The variants of DMs that are frequently used by Indonesian students of EFL are discussed according to their types. Five common variants of contrastive markers used by Indonesian students are *but*, *however*, *although*, *on the other hand*, and *in contrast*. Those variants are perceived to be mostly used in the writing context to show contradictory relations (Parrot, 2000).

But is perceived to be a general variant for indicating a contrast and it is acceptable in the most contrastive relation in which some other contrastive markers are not (Blakemore, 2002; Petchprasert, 2013). Furthermore, *but* can be perceived to have a simple structure viewed from syntactical structure and it confirms the assumption that non-native writers tend to show a characteristic of simplicity in structure (Silva, 1993). Elaborative markers show six common variants which are *also*, *and*, *for example*, *or*, *moreover*, and *in addition*. Some prior studies confirm the findings of this study (e.g., Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011; Martinez, 2004). Gilquin and Paquot (2007) reveal that *and* characterizes the L2 writing as a less formal one. Theoretically, in writing, the uses of some advance markers, such as, *moreover*, *furthermore*, and *similarly* should be high; however, EFL students still favor *and* to signal additional information. Common variants of inferential variants are *because*, *so*, *then*, *because of*, *in conclusion*, and *therefore*. *Because* is frequently used for showing a causal relation although it is perceived to be less formal for showing a causal relation in academic writing and mostly occurs in spoken discourse (Hinkel, 2003). In addition, EFL undergraduate students are tied with the idea of *so* for showing a conclusion (Gilquin & Paquot, 2007). Thus, this study confirms some studies of common variants used by students in EFL contexts.

Furthermore, the appropriateness of the use of DMs in expository essays fall into four major cases which are meaning, sentence position, style (formal/informal), and punctuation. Many variants of DMs are polysemy (Urgelles-Coll, 2010) which means their meaning can be varied depending on what situation or context they are deployed. More general variants which are acceptable in different relations of a particular type of DMs become the most favorable ones. Some variants may have more than one applicable position, for examples, *however* and *then*. The variants can be placed in three different ways: in the beginning of, within, or in the last sentence. In expository essays written by Indonesian students, the position of DMs is mainly in the beginning of a sentence or within sentence. Additionally, the style depends on what variants the students use. An example of this case is the use of *and* which implies a low sense of formality. For example, *and* is placed in the very beginning sentence. This style shifts the sense of formal writing into casual one (Gilquin & Paquot, 2007). Lastly, the issue on punctuation which is an important element in writing should be noticed (Parrot, 2000). DMs in the beginning of a sentence to some extent should be followed with a comma because DMs are considered to be non-truth condition which means they are nothing to do with the propositions.

In addition, the case of inappropriateness falls into six patterns including: (1) non-equivalent exchange, (2) overuse, (3) surface logicality, (4) wrong relation, (5) semantic incompletion, and (6) distraction. Among those patterns, wrong relation is a major problem in using DMs. The misunderstanding of adjusting meanings and contexts is the basic reason for inappropriate uses of DMs. For example, Dan-ni and Zeng (2010) and Paquot (2010) found that in EFL context the misunderstanding of contrastive markers *on the other hand* or *on the contrary* is frequently found. EFL undergraduate students tend to use some DMs interchangeably whereas they are not (Yunus & Haris, 2013). Other problems dealing with the meaning that appear are non-equivalent exchange and semantic incompletion. The use of DMs is slightly appropriate but in the further analysis on semantics some unacceptable relations are found. The other patterns of misuses of DMs (e.g., distraction, surface logicality, and overuse) become the rare problems found in students' expository essays. For a case of distraction, a similar study conducted by Jones (2007) who has an analysis on Australian undergraduate students from various backgrounds shows a failure of inserting contrastive variants (e.g., *however* and *nevertheless*) because they do not signal any contrastive relations. Therefore, the six misuse patterns are common problems in EFL students' writing.

Conclusions

According to the frequency of DMs in expository essays, the dominance of a certain type of DMs in a particular development method to some extent confirms some theories related to developing good expository essays. EFL undergraduate students are proved to use some common variants for each type of DMS. Most of them are confirmed to be majorly used in EFL contexts due to the simplicity of using the variants. Despite the ability of using common variants, students have a major problem in the wrong relation which is a case of misunderstanding the concept of a variant with the context. Some suggestions have been made for teachers and researchers in relation to the pedagogical settings. For teachers, three important points need to be evaluated which are: (1) the effective uses of DMs, (2) the students' awareness of using a higher number of variants of DMs, and (3) the students' understanding of how to use DMs in relation to the purpose of texts.

Other researchers who have an interest in the use of DMs in writing may conduct research on (1) the correlation between the uses of DMs and the students' writing scores, (2) the use of DMs in relation to the rhetorical patterns, (3) the students' perception of using DMs to build cohesion and coherence in expository essays, and (4) comparison between the use of DMs EFL students and English L1 students.

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