

Discourse Markers in Local and Native English Teachers' Talk in Hong Kong EFL Classroom Interaction: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract

In EFL classroom interaction, discourse markers play a crucial role. This article investigates the use and functions of discourse markers (DMs) in native and local English teachers' talk in Hong Kong EFL classroom interaction. The 20 most common DMs are examined in this study, and 24 English lessons in the Corpus of English Language Teaching (CELT) developed at the Hong Kong Institute of Education are explored. A comparative study of the use of DMs by local and native English teachers in Hong Kong schools was carried out, and the similarities and differences in DM use are discussed. The findings suggest that there are some similarities but also distinctive differences between the two groups of teachers' use of DMs. Possible reasons for such differences are explored. The pedagogical implications of the study are discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords: discourse markers, spoken discourse analysis, corpus, EFL classroom interaction, teacher talk

1. Introduction

Hong Kong was the colony of Great Britain for 155 years and China resumed sovereignty in 1997. After the handover, the policy of 'one country, two systems' was instituted and the acquisition of bi-literacy (written English and Modern Standard Chinese) and trilingualism (Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English) is consequently promoted in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). To achieve this goal, a series of language policies have been introduced. In early 1998, the Education Department issued an announcement that only 114 secondary schools would be allowed to use English as the medium of instruction (MOI), while the vast majority of the territory's secondary schools (about 300) would be required to use Chinese as the MOI for all subjects apart from the English language subject (Evans, 2000).

In the same year, the Native English-speaking Teacher Scheme (NET scheme) was introduced, which aimed to recruit up to 700 native English speaker teachers from overseas to teach at local secondary schools in order to, in the Chief Executive's words, raise the quality of English-language teaching and learning with "immediate effect" (Luk & Lin, 2007, p.14). Each CMI (Chinese as the medium of instruction) school is permitted to hire two NETs so as to counteract the effects of decreased exposure to English, most school subjects now being taught in Chinese (ibid.). In 2000, the NET scheme was also extended to primary schools, with two primary schools sharing a single NET. Some prestigious primary schools, however, recruited more than one NET. The NET scheme has now been in operation for more than 10 years, generating heated discussions concerning its effectiveness in raising English standards in Hong Kong. Research examining student's perceptions of these teachers in Hong Kong confirmed students' preference for being taught by NETs mainly because of their high English proficiency, although they also value being taught by Local English Teachers (LETs) (Ma, 2012; Luk, 2010).

However, corpus-based comparative studies of authentic teacher talk produced by these teachers are rare. It is against this linguistic background that a comparative and in-depth analysis of discourse markers used by these teachers in EFL classroom interaction was carried out.

DMs are inserts which tend to occur at the beginning of a turn or utterance (Biber, 2000 p.1086). Words such as 'okay', 'so', 'now', 'right' and 'well' are termed DMs. Schiffrin (1987) argues that DMs play an important role in understanding discourse and information progression. Moreover, DMs play a fundamental role in spoken interaction because they serve different discursive functions (Fung & Carter 2007; Louwense & Mitchell 2003). They not only act as attention-getters (e.g. 'okay', 'oh', 'so', 'now'), but also signal imminent turn-taking (e.g. 'okay', 'so', 'now'). They also mark the agreement or response to the students (e.g. 'yes', 'right', 'yeah', 'okay'). They are indicative of attitudes, evaluations, and other dimensions of the classroom environment (Aijmer, 2002). In essence, DMs indicate the active construction of discourse as well as responsive and engaged listenership by the teachers, making communication more interactive, involving and informal (Fung & Carter, 2007). In pedagogical settings, studies on DMs mainly focus on the second language learners. The studies on DMs in teacher talk are under-documented. Little attention has been paid to the usages and functions of DMs in classroom interaction. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the use of DMs by both local and native English teachers in EFL classroom in Hong Kong, and examine into the relationship between the usages of DMs and classroom interaction.

The guiding research questions for this study were therefore formulated as follows: 1) What DMs (both single words and clusters) are used by LETs and NETs in EFL classroom and how frequent are these? 2) What are the differences and similarities between LETs' and NETs' use of DMs in the EFL classroom?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of DM and different approaches to the study of DM

DMs have been studied under different labels such as cue words/phrases (Hovy, 1995), sentence connectives (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), discourse particles (Goldberg, 1980; Schourup, 1985; Aijmer, 2002), discourse connectives (Blackmore, 1987 & 1988), pragmatic markers (Fraser, 1999; Briton, 1996), utterance particles (Luke, 1990), New-Episode Flags (Swales & Malczewski, 2001) and etc. The multiplicity of the terminology shows to some extent the different and diversified research perspectives adopted in the relevant studies. Following Schiffrin (1987), the term 'discourse marker' is adopted in this study since it is the most popular one among the host of competing terms. It is considered a purely functional term and the most widespread and inclusive one as well (Fischer, 2006, p.5).

Though the term DMs may still be ambiguous, in the past three decades, several linguists have tried to define and describe the usages and functions of DMs in specific social contexts. DMs are defined as sentence connectives from a systemic functional grammar perspective (Halliday and Hassan, 1976; Cohen, 2007). Schiffrin (1987), one of the most frequently quoted scholars, who emphasizes the importance of DMs, operationally defines DMs as sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk. Schiffrin (1987) situates the study of DMs within the study of discourse coherence which belongs to the functional paradigm and suggests that their use contributes to the overall structure and interpretation of the talk which is an ongoing joint creation. She proposes a theoretical framework involving five planes of talk, that is, exchange structure, action structure, ideational structure, participation framework and state information. Eleven types of DMs are included in her work and analysed in detail: 'oh' (marker of information management); 'well' (marker of response); 'and', 'but' and 'or' (discourse connectives); 'so' and 'because' (markers of cause and effect); 'now' and 'then' (temporal adverbs) and 'you know' and 'I mean' (information and participation).

Fraser (1999) attempts the study of DMs from the grammatical-pragmatic perspective and defines them as a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. It is argued in the literature that with certain exceptions DMs signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce and the previous segment and that they have a core meaning which is procedural. DMs are categorized into two major types: DMs that relate messages, such as 'but', 'and', and 'I mean', and DMs that relate topics, such as 'by the way' and 'before I forget'.

Generally speaking, there have been four major trends in the study of DMs, namely discourse coherence, polysemy, pragmatics and systemic functional linguistics (Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin, 2003; Fischer, 2006). They differ in their conceptualization of DMs and analytical methods.

Taking research methodologies into consideration, studies on DMs can be generally divided into two types. The first is descriptive, describing the native speakers' usage of DMs in a specific language (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999; Carter and McCarthy, 2006). The second type is empirical study (usually corpus-based) which analyzes the non-native speakers' usage of DMs in a specific language context (Fuller, 2003; Fung & Carter, 2007; Castro 2009; Müller, 2005). Nevertheless, the literature review suggests that research of DMs in teacher talk is relatively limited.

2.2 DMs in Pedagogical Settings

In pedagogical settings, several scholars have sought to investigate the use of DMs in academic lectures or consultation hours and identified the positive roles of DMs in academic settings (Othman, 2010; Morell, 2004; Scheelf, 2005; Jung, 2003; House, 2013). There are three studies (Fung & Carter, 2007; Müller, 2005; Castro, 2009) which are particularly relevant to this study, which focuses on EFL classroom interaction. The first two are both corpus-based ones focusing on second language learners' use of DMs in their oral communication. What is worth mentioning is Fung and Carter's (2007) efforts to propose a conceptual framework for DMs. The third study not only includes non-native students but also teachers in ESL classroom interaction, but only one male teacher appeared in the study.

Fung and Carter (2007) have not only proposed a conceptual framework but also examined and compared the production of DMs by native speakers and learners of English based on a pedagogical sub-corpus from CANCODE, a corpus of spoken British English, and a corpus of interactive discourse of secondary pupils in Hong Kong. This study argues that DMs serve as useful interactional maneuvers to structure and organize speech at the interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive levels. The Hong Kong learners' uses of DMs were found to be relatively limited. Most of the DMs were referentially functional DMs ('and', 'but', 'because', 'OK', 'so', etc.). Native speakers were found to use DMs for a wider variety of pragmatic functions. It is argued that the restricted range of DMs used in EFL learners' oral production may be due to extensive exposure to inauthentic linguistic input from textbooks and both students' and teachers' consequent lack of knowledge of DMs when English is taught and learned. Therefore, DMs should be incorporated into the language curriculum so as to enhance the learners' conversational skills.

Müller's (2005) study is also a corpus-based study of German English learners' use of discourse markers. It focuses on DMs 'so', 'well', 'you know' and 'like'. Analysis of the textual and ideational functions of DMs is based on Brinton's work (1990). It was found that while German speakers employed four functions of 'well' significantly more often than the American speakers, the latter employed all other functions marked as significantly more than the Germans. Information of several non-linguistic variables has been included in dialogue recording. They are age, gender and partner relationship of the speakers. These factors had more impact on the German data than on the American data.

Castro (2009) conducted a small-scale study on the use of DMs by five students and a male teacher in EFL classroom interaction. The analysis is based on Brinton's work (1996, 35-40). Results show that 'and' was the most frequently used DM in the research sample and that most DMs were used by teachers (61%). Based on the detailed analysis of the functions of DMs in EFL classroom interaction, this small-scale study concludes that DMs were effectively used by the non-native teacher to organize his discourse in the classroom and to fulfill interpersonal and pragmatic functions.

To conclude, although there is confusion regarding DM terminology as a result of the varying research perspectives, the literature shows that the term *discourse marker* is the most widely accepted. DMs are defined as intra-sentential and supra-sentential linguistic units which fulfill a largely non-propositional and connective function at the level of discourse (Fung & Carter, 2007, p.411). There are major common features of DMs namely connectivity, optionality, non-truth conditionality, initiality and multi grammaticality which can serve as basic criteria for the verification of DM status (Fung, 2011).

In pedagogical settings, not much attention has been paid to the use and effects of DMs in teachers' talk, though many researchers argue that DMs play an important role in classroom interaction and inevitably contribute to classroom communication (Othman, 2010; Castro, 2009; Fung 2011). Fung (2011) suggests that teachers in Hong Kong perceive DMs positively for their pragmatic and pedagogic value in EFL classroom.

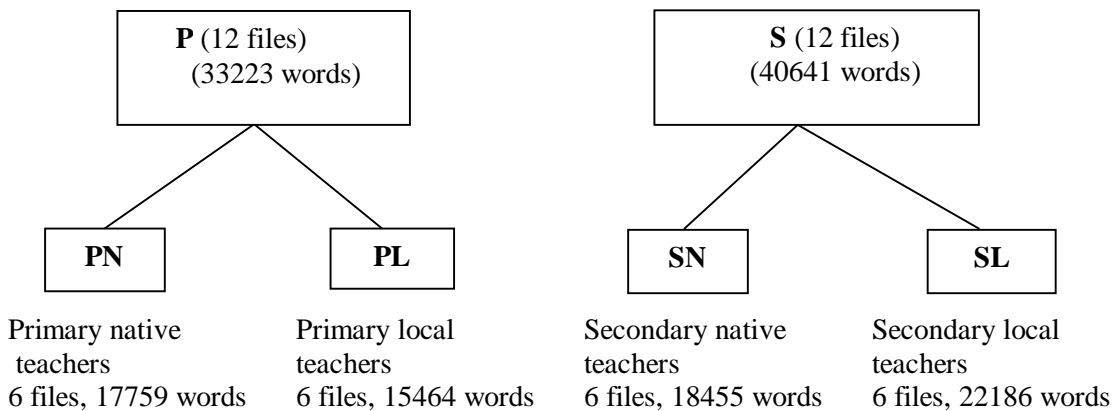
However, a comparative study of DMs used by NETs and LETs in the classroom discourse is virtually non-existent. This study aims to fill in the gap by conducting a corpus based investigation, which can shed light upon the use of DMs in classroom interaction by NETs and LETs, and possible pedagogical implications that can be drawn from the study.

3. Methodology

The classroom interaction data used in this study are taken from the CELT corpus (Corpus of English Language Teaching), a specialized corpus developed by the staff of the former English Department at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. It contains transcription of 84 lessons, approximately 302,500 word tokens of authentic classroom data collected in Hong Kong schools, representing primary/secondary levels, local teachers and native English-speaking teachers, in-service/pre-service teachers, English/other subject lessons, in both EMI (English as Medium of Instruction) and CMI (Chinese as Medium of Instruction) schools. This study investigates both primary and secondary lessons. In order to make sure the data of local English teachers (LETs) and that of native English teachers (NETs) are comparable, twelve lessons taught by NETs and twelve lessons taught by LETs were randomly chosen for this study. The structure of the data chosen for this study is shown below.

P (Primary) + S (Secondary)

24 files, 73,864 words



Since this study focuses on teacher talk, student talk is excluded when generating the frequencies of DMs in teacher talk. 20 lexical items identified as DMs are investigated in this study: 'okay', 'right', 'and', 'now', 'so', 'yes', 'just', 'but', 'yeah', 'oh', 'because', 'like', 'I think', 'you know', 'really', 'actually', 'well', 'sort of', 'I mean' and 'um', as according to Fung and Carter (2007, p.426), 19 of the 20 items (except 'um') are among the top 100 most frequent words in the pedagogic sub-corpus in CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English). 'Um' as a discourse marker is included in Castro's study (2009) which also focuses on EFL classroom setting, and it turned out that 'um' is salient in teacher talk in this study, thus 'um' is included as well.

Quantitative analysis is performed using the concordancing program *Wordsmith 5.0* (Scott, 2008). The top 10 most frequent DMs identified in our study are compared with the frequencies of the same DMs in CANCODE. When generating the frequency of each DM, each example was checked one by one manually to exclude those which do not function as DMs. The qualitative analysis involved the specification and description of the functions of the DMs in the classroom interaction.

4. Results analysis

4.1 General analysis

Overall there are 73,864 word tokens of teacher talk in the 24 lessons analysed. Among them, native teachers' talk consists of 36,214 word tokens and the non-native teachers' talk consists of 37,650 word tokens. Since the computer software is unable to differentiate the discursal and non-discursal role of individual words, the concordancing lists of each DM were checked manually. As mentioned before, due to the diversified perspectives adopted in the study of DMs, the determination and classification of their uses is difficult. Some key characteristics of DMs are adopted as verification criteria: they are sentence connectives and syntactically optional; and they usually initiate an utterance.

Words not functioning as discursal markers (such as those in fixed expressions) are not counted. Take 'so' as an example: when 'so' is used as adverb of degree (e.g. *There are so many dogs.*) or in fixed expressions (e.g. *I think so.*), it is not counted as a DM.

As shown in Table 1, the top ten DMs used in the teacher talk in this study are 'okay', 'so', 'and', 'right/all right', 'now', 'yes', 'but', 'just', 'um' and 'oh'. Among them, 'okay' has the highest frequency, averaging 2.7 words per 100 words in teacher talk which is much higher than its frequency in the pedagogical sub-corpus in CANCODE (about 6.7 times higher) (Fung & Carter, 2007, p.426). For all the 12 primary lessons, 'okay' is the most frequently used DM for both NETs and LETs. There are around 2025 occurrences of DMs in the teacher talk in these 24 lessons. When compared with their frequencies in the pedagogical sub-corpus in CANCODE, frequencies of 'okay', 'so', 'right/all right', 'now', 'yes' and 'oh' are higher, while frequencies of 'and', 'but', and 'just' are lower. The frequency of 'and' in the pedagogical sub-corpus in CANCODE is much higher than its frequency in this study. One possible reason is that discursal and non-discursal uses of DMs are not discriminated in Fung & Carter's (2007) study. While analyzing the data in this study, if 'and' is used in the middle of a sentence, for example as a conjunction to connect nouns or verb phrases, it is not counted as DM use. For instance, 'and' in the following cases are not counted as DM use: "on and on", "bread and butter".

Generally speaking, the frequencies of DMs in teacher talk in the data for this study are higher than those in the pedagogic sub-corpus in CANCODE.

4.2 Comparative study

4.2.1 Single use pattern of DMs

Table 2 shows that there are similarities and differences in the use of DMs by the native and local English teachers in the EFL classroom interactions.

A simple mathematical subtraction is performed on the two columns in order to obtain a contrastive frequency of the two sets of DMs. In Fung and Carter's (2007, p.425) study, a contrastive frequency of +/- 0.14 was chosen as the cut-off point, which is also adopted in this study. If the contrastive frequency is +0.15 or above, the representation is regarded as more frequent. If the contrastive frequency is -0.15 or below, the representation is considered as less frequent. If the figure falls within the range between -0.14 and +0.14, the representation of DMs is regarded as comparable.

Generally speaking, when comparing the frequency of DMs between local teachers and native English-speaking teachers, the data show that local teachers use more DMs in classroom interaction (9.5%) than native English-speaking teachers (8%). However, further analysis shows that, among the 20 DMs listed, only five DMs (25%) are more frequently used when comparing local teachers' use of DMs to that of native teachers': 'okay', 'right/all right', 'now', 'yes' and 'um'. The other 15 DMs (75%) are found to be comparable in terms of frequency. Only one DM, 'so' (5%), occurs less frequently.

It is revealing to compare the frequency of 'um' between LETs and NETs. Local teachers used 'um' as many as 191 times, averaging 0.5%, while native teachers used it only 37 times, averaging 0.1%. A further look at the data shows that teachers of two secondary lessons, SL01 and SL02, used 'um' with relatively high frequency, averaging 1.2% and 1.3%, respectively, in the two lessons.

DMs such as 'like', 'I think', 'you know', 'really', 'well', 'actually', 'sort of' and 'I mean' are found to have relatively low representation in the oral productions of both groups of teachers in EFL classrooms.

4.2.2 Collocation and co-occurring patterns of DMs

Several scholars have noticed the phenomenon of the co-occurrence of certain DMs. Table 3 shows the top twelve two-word DM clusters in LET and NET talk. While the LETs tended to use 'okay now' quite often, the NETs used 'okay so' frequently instead.

Table 4 shows the top ten three-word DM clusters in LET and NET talk. The LETs used more three-word DM clusters than the NETs. Among the ten clusters, both groups used four clusters: 'okay this is', 'very good okay', 'okay how about', 'okay and then'. The LETs used 'okay how about' 21 times, while the NETs used this cluster only nine times. The LETs used 'okay and then' far more frequently than the NETs did (23 vs. 7 times). The LETs tended to collocate 'okay' with 'thank you'. They used 'okay thank you' 62 times, while the NETs used it only six times. In fact, the LETs said 'thank you' 127 times and 'please' 154 times in the twelve lessons, while the NETs said 'thank you' 30 times and 'please' 53 times in the twelve lessons.

4.2.3 The range of DMs employed in each lesson

Fuller (2003) argues that non-native speakers of English tend to rely heavily on certain DMs so the ranges of DMs used in each lesson are also analyzed. Table 5 shows the average rates of DM use in four types of lessons: SN, PN, SL and PL. Data show that local teachers in primary schools tend to use less varied DMs in their lessons compared to the other three groups. Of the 20 DMs included in this study, on average only 11.2 DMs were used in each primary lesson taught by LETs. However, local teachers in secondary schools used 16.83 DMs on average in each lesson. In lesson PL01, only 7 DMs occur. They are 'okay', 'and', 'now', 'right/all right', 'yes', 'so', and 'oh'. Moreover, the frequency of 'okay', 'and', 'now', and 'right/all right' accounts for 95% of all DMs used in this lesson. No primary local teachers used the DMs 'I mean', 'you know', 'actually' and 'sort of', though they are common DMs that are frequently mentioned in the DM literature.

4.2.4 DM use and classroom interaction

Generally speaking, the LETs tended to use more DMs than NETs in class. But there is variation between primary and secondary schools. At primary level, the NET teachers used more DMs than the LETs while at secondary level, the LETs used more DMs than the NETs. In primary lessons, the NETs used 'so' 235 times averaging 1.33% while the LETs use 'so' only 82 times averaging 0.53%.

The volume of student talk in all lessons is 13.58% on average. It is usual that teacher talk makes up around 70% of classroom language (Cook, 2001). But teacher talk accounts for more than 85% on average in these lessons in this study. It is therefore fair to claim that these lessons are all more teacher-centered. Student talk percentages in local secondary teachers' lessons are the lowest compared with the other three groups.

5. Discussion

5.1 Frequencies of DMs in the data

The previous literature has pointed out that DMs use is context specific. Fuller (2003) has compared DM use in two different speech contexts: interviews and conversation. Our study focuses on the specific context of teacher and student conversation in EFL classroom in Hong Kong. The data show that the top ten DMs are 'okay', 'so', 'and', 'right/all right', 'now', 'yes', 'um', 'but', 'just' and 'oh'. Generally, English teachers in this study prefer to use 'okay', 'and' and 'so' in the classroom interaction. Earlier researchers have made similar claims. Fung and Carter (2007:420) point out that 'okay' is one of the most widely used markers, and Buysse (2012) concludes that 'so' is among the most popular discourse markers in native and learner speech. However, DMs such as 'I mean', 'you know', and 'well', which are widely used in daily speech, lack salience in both the NET and LET discourse. Liao (2009) argues that 'actually' is used frequently among Mandarin non-native English speakers according to personal observations. However, in this study, the frequency of 'actually' is very low. 'Actually' occurs only 20 times in total and is found in only five of the 24 lessons.

'Okay' ranks first in terms of frequency in this study. The frequency of 'okay' is 2.74% of all teacher talk, which is much higher than its frequency in CANCODE (0.41%). Both the LETs and NETs used 'okay' quite frequently in their lessons.

'Okay' (also spelled "OK", "O.K.") is a colloquial word denoting approval, acceptance, agreement, assent, or acknowledgment. 'Okay' frequently occurs as a loanword in many other languages. Moreover, 'okay' is a versatile discourse marker or back-channeling item, it can also be used with appropriate voice tone to indicate doubt or to seek confirmation, for example: "Okay?" or "Is that okay?" (Wikipedia: Okay, n.d.).

A closer look at the data reveals that two local teachers recorded an exceptionally high frequency of 'okay' use. In Lesson SL02, the teacher used 'okay' 245 times which is 6.2% of all teacher talk in the lesson and 62% of the DM tokens in this lesson, and in Lesson PL06, the teacher used 'okay' 154 times which is 5.9% of all teacher talk in the lesson and 52.4% of the DM tokens in this lesson. This finding is in line with Fuller's (2003) claim that non-native speakers tend to use some DMs in a formulaic manner. Below is an excerpt of lesson PL06.

<T>Okay, right.</T>
 <PPP> (inaudible)</PPP>
 <T> Shu, no talking, please. Okay, now, em.</T>
 <P> There.</P>
 <T>Okay there are many pictures, okay? Now like.</T>
 [T writes on blackboard]

<T> An elephant, a bird, a tiger//</T>
 <P> A monkey.</P>
 <T> Monkey and hippo. **Okay** so...</T>
 <P> Tiger.</P>
 <T> Yes, tiger.</T>
 <PPP> Bird, elephant, hippo, monkey.</PPP>
 <T>**Okay**, can you spell it to me?</T>
 <PPP> (inaudible)</PPP>

In this section of classroom interaction, there are seven teacher turns. This teacher used ‘okay’ in five of the seven turns, in a formulaic manner.

5.2 Comparison between LETs and NETs

It is argued in this study that the LETs and NETs in general used DMs similarly in terms of the rankings of DMs’ frequencies and the number of DMs used. Among the listed 20 DMs, both the NETs and LETs used 15 DMs in a comparable manner and teachers in both groups showed personal preferences for certain DMs in their lessons.

Nevertheless, there are also differences between DM use by the LETs and NETs. The corpus data in this study show that, in general, local English teachers used more DMs in classroom teaching. Local English teachers used ‘okay’, ‘right/all right’, ‘now’, ‘yes’ and ‘um’ more than native English teachers did. The NETs used ‘so’ more frequently than the LETs. The local English teachers tended to use ‘okay’ and ‘now’ together, while the NETs used ‘okay’ and ‘so’ together more often. Moreover, local teachers tended to use the ‘okay thank you’ cluster frequently (88 times in total). The NETs, however, used ‘okay thank you’ only six times. A closer look at the data indicates that the LETs said ‘thank you’ 127 times, while the NETs said ‘thank you’ only 30 times. Moreover, the LETs said ‘please’ 154 times, while the NETs said it only 53 times. Therefore, we may claim that the LETs used more politeness terms in their classroom discourse in EFL classrooms, which may be explained by reference to local cultural norms.

The data drawn here do not fully accord with the research findings of Sackoff *et al* (1997) and Fuller (2003) which state that non-native speakers use DMs at a lower rate. But this may reflect the fact that local English teachers are a special group of non-native speakers. As English teachers, they are expected to be relatively advanced and proficient non-native speakers of English. Moreover, these two researchers argue that some non-native speakers appear to rely heavily on certain DMs in their speech, using them in a formulaic manner at a high frequency. However, this study suggests that both native and local teachers show this tendency in their lessons. Aijmer (2002) has pointed out that DM use is highly idiosyncratic and the data in this study have confirmed this statement.

One distinctive difference between the use of DMs by LETs and NETs is their use of ‘now’ and ‘so’, which is discussed in detail below.

‘Now’ and ‘so’ are both typical of classroom discourse (Buysse, 2012). The quantitative data in this study shows that the NETs tend to use ‘so’ more frequently than the LETs and the LETs use ‘now’ more than the NETs. While the NETs may use ‘okay’ and ‘so’ together, the LETs may use ‘okay’ and ‘now’ together. To understand these points better, some sample concordance lines of ‘now’ and ‘so’ are listed below:

Concordance lines of ‘now’ by the LETs

- 1 of the, er, of the holiday village. Now this is found in urban area, c
- 2 what kind of facilities are there. Now this is a general introduction
- 3 od, alright? Now then we move on--- Now they offer both day camp and o
- 4 he transportation is good, alright? Now then we move on--- Now they of
- 5 ething new today. [switches on OHP] Now today I’m going to introduce

Concordance lines of ‘so’ by the NETs

- 1 one? [Tape stops and resumes] Okay, so we’ll be doing Travelling in;K
- 2 hat do you see? Okay, (name). Okay. So, who is the passenger? The pass
- 3 opus card. [20 sec inaudible] Okay, so this is a *double decker bus*.
- 4 ws reading out different sentences. So our work maybe, when I say this
- 5 owards there are air conditioners. So, number two, can you tell me wh

'Now' is used as a discourse marker 'in ways that reflect its properties as a time deictic; it provides a temporal index in discourse time and it is ego-centred' (Schiffrin 1987:245). The LETs' tendency to use the DM 'now' more may indicate that the local teachers focus more on discourse time and the progression of classroom teaching and on what he or she is about to say, rather than on what the hearer says (ibid.). By using the DM 'so', instead of being ego-centred, the NETs focus more on explaining and justifying their classroom teaching or what and why students are supposed to do during the classroom interaction. The comparison may contribute to our understanding of the two groups of teachers' cultural and personal traits. The NETs seem to concentrate more on interaction between the teacher and student when compared to the LETs. This is in agreement with the results of studies concerning students' perception of being taught by LETs and NETs. It is argued that NETs are perceived as emphasizing communicative language activities and being good at getting learners to speak and good at teaching conversation (Ma, 2013; Kasai and Lee, 2011).

6. Pedagogical implications

By way of summary we would like to put forward some suggestions for English teachers based on this study.

a) According to the research findings, around 15-16 DMs are frequently used by English teachers, and play various roles in classroom interaction. Thus, it will be worthwhile to include the study of DMs in an English teacher training programme, so as to raise the teachers' awareness of the importance of DMs in classroom interaction.

b) For teachers to reflect on and monitor their own use of DMs in classroom interaction, they could record some of their own lessons and transcribe them, and compile their own corpus of English teaching, and use corpus tools to analyse their own use of DMs. In this way they can identify their own problems/issues in using DMs, and make improvements accordingly, for example, avoid overusing of certain DMs, and broaden the range of DMs they use in classroom interaction.

c) Based on the findings LETs and NETs used some of the DMs in very different ways. It is recommended that LETs and NETs in local schools can get together through workshops and seminars, with an expert on DMs from a higher teacher education institution as a consultant, so that professional exchanges can be carried out for staff development.

d) When looking at the use of DMs in classroom interaction, it is necessary to look at other related topics at the same time, such as the use of deixis, teachers' questioning techniques, and how meanings are effectively negotiated through discourse devices that help teachers to achieve coherence and cohesion in classroom interaction.

7. Conclusions

This exploratory study attempts to find out what and how DMs are used by both native and local English teachers in EFL classroom interaction in Hong Kong. The results show that the DMs 'okay', 'so', 'and', 'right/all right and 'now' are the top five most frequently used DMs found in both local and native teachers' classroom discourse. Generally speaking, the LETs and NETs used DMs similarly in terms of the frequency ranking of the DMs and the number of DMs used in their classroom teaching. Both groups of teachers show personal preferences for certain DMs, and there appears to be a tendency that LETs would overuse 'okay'. Local English teachers tend to use more DMs than native English teachers in general. Possible reasons are that some local teachers tend to rely heavily on certain DMs in their speech, using them frequently in order to gain time for information processing in spontaneous speech. The local teachers are found to use the DM 'um' far more in their speech than the NETs, which can be considered as an indication of dysfluency. The native English teachers used more 'so' while the local English teachers used more 'now' which may suggest the different cultural and personal traits of the NETs and LETs.

Since DM use is highly idiosyncratic, individual differences should always be considered while interpreting the teachers' use of DMs. Previous studies tend to focus on a limited number of DMs. This study includes 20 DMs altogether (mostly those considered by Fung and Carter (2007)) and adopts a corpus-based approach to empirically analyze a significant amount of natural classroom discourse data. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the use of DMs by the LETs and NETs contributes to our understanding of the varying advantages and disadvantages of the LETs and NETs in terms of their English proficiency and teaching practices.

Qualitative analysis of the data suggests that DMs are used both by local and native teachers to construct coherent classroom discourse and interactional relationships with students. More research is needed to investigate how DMs can be appropriately and effectively used to improve classroom interaction. Research along this line may be illuminating to non-native EFL teachers and learners.

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Table 1: Frequency of the top ten discourse markers in the 24 lessons in CELT

DMs	Frequency	24 lessons in CELT (%)	Pedagogical sub-corpus in CANCODE (%)	Differences
Okay	2,025	2.74	0.41	+2.33
So	723	0.98	0.96	+0.02
And	657	0.89	2.55	-1.66
Right/all right	615	0.83	0.71	+0.22
Now	478	0.65	0.32	+0.33
Yes	432	0.58	0.27	+0.31
Um	228	0.31		
But	224	0.3	0.69	-0.39
Just	219	0.3	0.43	-0.13
Oh	176	0.24	0.18	+0.06
Total	5,777	7.82	6.52	+1.3

Table 2: Comparison of discourse markers used in local and native English teacher talk

DMs	LET frequency	LET (%)	NET frequency	NET (%)	Differences (%)	DMs in local teacher talk compared with those in native English teacher talk
Okay	1,096	2.91	929	2.57	+0.34	More frequent
Right	360	0.96	255	0.71	+0.25	More frequent
And	341	0.91	361	0.87	+0.04	Comparable
Now	327	0.87	151	0.42	+0.45	More frequent
So	308	0.82	415	1.15	-0.33	Less frequent
Yes	272	0.72	160	0.44	+0.28	More frequent
Um	191	0.51	37	0.1	+0.41	More frequent
Just	109	0.29	110	0.3	-0.01	Comparable
But	104	0.28	120	0.33	-0.05	Comparable
Yeah	66	0.18	105	0.29	-0.11	Comparable
Oh	63	0.17	113	0.31	-0.14	Comparable
Because	60	0.16	50	0.14	+0.02	Comparable
Like	26	0.07	25	0.07	0	Comparable
I think	24	0.06	25	0.07	-0.01	Comparable
You know	19	0.05	26	0.07	-0.02	Comparable
Really	19	0.05	24	0.07	-0.02	Comparable
Actually	13	0.03	7	0.02	-0.02	Comparable
Well	10	0.03	23	0.06	-0.03	Comparable
Sort of	4	0.01	0	0	+0.01	Comparable
I mean	2	0.005	2	0.005	0	Comparable
Total	3,414	9.5	2893	8	+1.06	More frequent

Table 3: Two-word DM clusters in LET and NET talk

No.	Two-word DM clusters	LET	NET
1	okay now	65	24
2	okay so	31	65
3	okay okay	26	13
4	okay and	23	9
5	yes okay	18	12
6	alright now	12	11
7	alright so	9	0
8	right okay	7	6
9	right so	5	12
10	yeah okay	4	3
11	oh okay	1	5
12	okay alright	0	6
	total	201	166

Table 4: Three-word DM clusters in LET and NET talk

No.	LET		NET	
	DM clusters	Frequency	DM clusters	Frequency
1	okay thank you	62	okay one two	16
2	okay can you	29	okay so I	14
3	thank you okay	26	okay okay so	13
4	okay and then	23	okay let's	14
5	okay how about	21	okay this is	11
6	okay now I	12	very good okay	10
7	very good okay	11	okay so you	10
8	okay okay now	11	okay let me	10
9	okay this is	11	okay how about	9
10	okay sit down	11	okay and then	7
	total	217		114

Table 5: Rate of different DMs used in the LET and NET lessons

	Different DMs in LET lessons	Different DMs in NET lessons
Primary	11.2 (out of 20)	15 (out of 20)
Secondary	16.83 (out of 20)	16 (out of 20)