

# THE PROBLEMS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS AND COHERENCE IN THE GRADUATES' THESES OF SINTUWU MAROSO UNIVERSITY

Yuliana Dg. Macora

**Abstract:** The present study went under the issue of discourse markers (hereafter DMs) as text forming devices in English discourse. This topic selection as an object of investigation was motivated by some facts. Firstly, this linguistics item was seldom taught specifically to students in lecturing, so students only know a few of English DMs. Secondly, in the last three decades, researches on developing the theory of DMs as a text forming devices were reinvestigated for many types of text, which previously only a cursory examination. Lastly, these items did not have a uniform system in the former researches. They have the distinction of correlation between propositional meaning and contextual meaning as well as other factors. This study aimed to investigate the problems of discourse markers usage in build coherence in the graduates' theses of English Education Study Program of Sintuwu Maroso University. The data were taken from the Background section of Chapter I of the 5 selected graduates' theses as the sample of the study. The result of this research revealed that the graduates could employ the four types of DMs in their theses, although there are some markers were not included in Fraser's theory (1999, 2009), for instance *if, such as, as well as, like, for, so that, and as*. The result of analysis also showed that the lack, the misplacement and the inappropriateness of using DMs indeed affected the flow of graduates' theses writing and made them less coherent.

**Keywords:** *discourse markers, coherence, thesis*

Academically, writing is one of the four basic language skills besides listening, reading and speaking that taught to students in order to function properly in their various fields of study. Yet it is the most complex and difficult than the other language skills. Dölger (2007) defines writing as the most demanding of the language skills. That is to say, it requires more individual effort than the other skills do. A writer is expected to produce a completely accurate writing, reduces the variety of structures because writing is more rule-bound. Then, maintaining the value of style, avoiding ambiguity and limiting redundancy by organizing and writing carefully.

In addition, Ayu (2013) states five components that must be carefully considered in writing, for instance content, grammar, style, mechanism and form. Those aspects suggest a guiding analysis of the factors that play a role in production of a written text. The writer concern is not only to the limited of sentences but paragraphs and larger units of discourse in the composing process, also dealing with cohesion and coherence is essential if wants to write a good paragraph. Regarding to those aspects, the most problems that are often found in students' writing are the grammatical errors and developing idea. Besides, students also meet difficulties in making coherent texts. Here is the knowledge of discourse markers have to be paid attention to. Although discourse marker is not cruel things in writing, it takes an important role

in linking idea to another idea or sentence to another sentence.

## Discourse Markers

There were many definitions of DMs defined by some experts. Schiffrin (1987) says that DMs as sequentially dependent elements of discourse which brackets units of talk. Blakemore (1987) who worked on the Relevance Theory framework proposes that these expressions are used to indicate how the relevance of one discourse element is dependent on another. Dölger (2007) who says that DMs is words and phrase which organize, comment on, or in some way frame what we are saying or writing that function to signal how the current utterances relates to prior discourse. Fraser (1999) defines DMs as a class of lexical expression drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunction, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. The DMs are used to signal a relationship between the segment that will be introduced (S2) and the prior segment (S1).

From those various explanations of DMs above, the researcher concludes that DMs are words or phrases as class of linguistic devices that mark boundary in discourse and can be used to indicate relationships between clauses or sentences.

Some discourse markers are summarized as follows:

1. *Contrastive markers*: but; however; (al)though; alternatively; even so; in contrast (with/to this/that); whereas; in comparison (with/to this/that); on the contrary; contrary to this/that; conversely; contrariwise; contrary to expectation; conversely; instead (of (doing) this/that); rather than (do this/that); on the other hand; despite (doing this/that); in spite of (doing) this/that; nevertheless; nonetheless; still; yet; regardless (of this/that);
2. *Elaborative markers*: and; above all; after all; also; besides; better yet; for another thing; furthermore; in addition; in other words; moreover; more to the point; on top of it all; too; to cap it all off; what is more; I mean; in particular; namely; parenthetically; that is (to say); alternatively; analogously; by the same token; correspondingly; equally; likewise; similarly; be that as it may; or; otherwise; that said; well; for example; for instance; rather;
3. *Inferential markers*: so; of course; accordingly; as a consequences; as a logical conclusion; as a result; as a conclusion; because of this/that reason; consequently; for this/that reason; hence; it can be concluded that; it follows that; in this in this/that/any case; on the condition; under these/those conditions; on these/those grounds then; therefore; thus; all things considered;
4. *Reasonable markers*: after all; because; for this/that reason; since.

### Cohesion and Coherence

The term of coherence comes from the Latin word 'cohaerere' (co = together, haerere = to stick) (Corbet, 1987, in Dülger, 2007). As the word suggests, it helps the parts of a discourse stick together. A coherent composition gives the reader the opportunity to follow the writer's words from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph easily.

Coherence helps the parts of a discourse stick together. A coherent composition gives the reader the opportunity to follow the writer's words from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph easily. Halliday and Hasan (1976) consider that cohesion is a part of the linguistic system. For them, cohesion is responsible for the text forming (the texture of well-formedness). Well-formedness of discourse is achieved through 'connectivity' which is realized in 4 forms, such as cohesion, collocation, connectors, and coherence. He argues that these 4 forms have the same in sense that the first three are coming under the fourth. Therefore, cohesion and coherence and interrelated to each other since

coherence is an umbrella under which cohesion operates, where cohesion is one of the linguistic devices that contribute to the coherence of a certain text through the syntactic process of interconnecting the sentence of this text.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) describe that the concept of cohesion account for the semantic relationships through which a certain passage of speech or writing become a text. They view cohesive devices such as:

1. *Reference* that implies the use of language to point to something.
2. *Substitution* is a relation between linguistics elements, whereas an element is not repeated but is replaced by a substitution item.
3. *Ellipsis* (zero substitution) is the omission of one of the identical linguistics elements (a clause, or a part of clause, or a part of a verbal or nominal group) required by the grammar, which the speaker/writer assumes are obvious from the context and therefore need not be raised.
4. *Conjunction* is a relationship that indicates how the subsequent or clause should be linked to the preceding or the following part of the sentence.
5. *Lexical cohesion* refers to the "cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary". It happens when two elements that share a lexical field (collocation). These selection elements are related in some way to those that have gone/said before.

### Related Studies on Discourse Markers

Several previous studies were reviewed that contribute to the understanding of DMs problem. Siniajeva (2005) reported her result of the study that aimed to investigate the problem of DMs, their function and distribution across the 4 discussed registers. Dülger (2007) identified the DMs usage of Turkish EFL learners in terms of number of sentence used, the number of discourse marker used, and the variety of the DMs preferred in the essay. Meanwhile, Feng (2010) discussed the use of DMs in Chinese students' English Writing, and his revealed that due to lack of DMs or its misuse, DMs in the students' articles became less cohesive and less coherent. Then, Patriana (2012) investigated the students' ability in using discourse markers to build coherence and found that of 44 different DMs used in the 234 occurrences, only 116 which were used appropriately.

The students of Indonesia also faced the same problem. Based on her preliminary observation, the researcher found that some students could use a variety of DMs, some of

them just used a few of DMs, and some else overused of certain DMs, such as *and* and *but*.

### Method

The nature of this research was qualitative descriptive, where the problems in the use of DMs in the graduates' theses were addressed and presented in the transcription report, and hence were descriptively interpreted by the researcher. This study took site in Sintuwu Maroso University (UNSIMAR), Poso Regency of Central Sulawesi on July-November 2015. The data were DMs found in the Introduction section of Chapter I from 5 purposively selected S1 theses, written by EFL graduates of 2013/2014 (male and female, age 22-24). Firstly, the data were conducted in thematic structure for its topicalization based on thematic structure and information structure of Halliday's theory (1985) as suggested by Sandarupa (2013). Secondly, the DMs in the raw data were classified and categorized based on Fraser's theory (1999, 2009) and Oshima & Hogue (1991). Lastly, the data were verified to find out the features of DMs for its coherence function in the text.

### Findings and Discussion

#### Findings

The findings of the study are discussed around the theory of Fraser (1999, 2009). Following the taxonomies of discourse markers, data analysis revealed that the graduates could employ the four types of DMs in their theses (see appendix for markers of DMs as data in this study).

The contrastive markers consisted of *instead, while, but, however, on the other hand*, which signaled that the message of entailment clause were opposite or contrast to the meaning of preceding clause. Later, the elaborative markers consisted of *and, beside, also, in addition, namely, in other words, take for example* and indicated there was a parallel relation of additional messages with the previous clause. They were also used to give one more additional item or exemplification of the condition occurred in the preceding clause.

The inferential markers consisted of *then, hence, thus, as the result, so* and indicated a logical consequence or result of the following clause and provides justification, while the reasonable markers consisted of *because, due to the fact, for this reason* and signaled the entailment provide a reason and cause-effect relationship for the content of previous clause.

Furthermore, from the previous explanation the researcher found that the Subjects were not only used DMs that proposed

by Fraser (1999, 2009), but also found that some DMs were uncategorized in Fraser's theory although they were included as connectors. They were *if, to that end, such as, as well as, like, but also, so that, and as*.

### Discussion

From the findings, it is revealed that some problems occurred in using DMs in graduates theses. Firstly, some graduates seldom used discourse markers to avoid unpredicted mistakes. They employed DMs in their writing as few as possible. For example as in the following:

#### Subject #1

(1) *In Indonesia English is taught as a foreign language from elementary school up to university.* || (2) *Students of junior high school are expected to use English in their oral and written communication.* || (3) **[In addition]** *In oral and written communication there are four skills that have important roles.* || (4) *They are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.*

#### Subject #2

(1) *Education is one of the most important things for human life.* || (2) *Education can be achieved in various ways* || (3) *one of them at school.* || (4) **[As a matter of fact]** *Education at school is obligatory for all citizens of Indonesia,* || (5) **[for]** *the government has launched a 9-year compulsory education.* || (6) *This is in line with Law No. 20 Year 2013 on National Education System Article 3* || (7) *which states that the National Education serves to develop skills and form the character and civilization and dignity* || (8) *in the context of the intellectual life of the nation, aimed at developing the potential of students to become individuals of faith and devoted to God Almighty, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent,* || (9) **[and]** *become citizens of a democratic and accountable...*

(15) *In a variety of formal education English has become a compulsory Subject of study.* || (16) **[Generally]** *To learn something or to learn new things such as learning English,* || (17) *we go through a stage called the learning process.* || (18) *Process itself appears as the urge or desire to know* || (19) **[and]** *learn new things called motivation.* || (20) *Motivation is locomotion in somebody's self to doing learning activity.*

#### Subject #5

(1) *Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols to construct*

or derive meaning (reading comprehension). || (2) It is a means of language acquisition, communication, and sharing of information and ideas. || (3) Like all languages, it is a complex interaction between text and reader || (4) set up by the previous reader knowledge, experience attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially. || (5) [Thus] The reading process requires continuous training, development, and improvement.

In those examples above, the subjects used DMs as few as possible in their writing, so this matter resulted the reader could not communicate the idea among the sentences. There were none DMs in Subject #1, and three underlined DMs *for* and *and* in Subject #2, also only one *Like* in Subject #3. Moreover, the researcher suggested if the DMs within the brackets were added to the original articles, then those texts would read more fluently and coherent. The addition of '*In addition*' in Subject #2 used to introduce an additional idea. In Subject #2, '*As a matter of fact*' was added to make an emphasizing to the source of fact that is explained in the next sentences. Then in Subject #5, '*thus*' was added to express there is a consequence of a process it takes.

Secondly, some subjects misplaced/misused the DMs and connectors in their text. They put clause connectors as the sentence connectors or otherwise put the sentence connectors between the clauses. For instance:

#### Subject #3

(1) As we know, || (2) English language is used as a medium of communication among people. || (3) In other words, as an international language, || (4) many education programs from elementary school to higher education are concerned with language communication of English. (19) For junior high school students, they are still difficult to pronounce contrast sounds like /f/ and /w/. || (20) But for native speaker of English, different pronunciation will result on different meaning. || (21) Take for example, when a person pronounce the word 'fine' that means 'baik' | (22) and the word 'wine' that means 'anggur'. || (23) If students cannot pronounce in correct way, || (24) the word will produce different interpretation. || (25) As the result, the process of communication is not good anymore. (26) For this reason, the writer conducted a research at the SMP Negeri 2 Poso. || (27) The writer chooses the school as the

place of the research || (28) because the writer has conducted a practice there. || (29) So that, she knows more about the condition of the school very well.

#### Subject #4

(5) Character education has indeed become a major issue of education, || (6) in addition to being a part of the process of forming the child's moral, || (7) character education is also expected to be a major foundation in the success of Indonesia Emas 2025.

#### Subject #5

(6) And read also the basic life skills. || (7) This is the foundation for the child's success in school, and indeed, throughout life. || (8) Without the ability to read well, || (9) opportunities for personal fulfilment and success will surely lose jobs... (13) Each language learning should further be noted that the targeted and can improve students language skills. || (14) Included it is a skill reading has many benefits in the development of language students. || (15) And in improving the reading skills there are several factors that affect the ability to read... (27) And the relationship between motivations with read is something that is important, || (28) by reading the students understand what is read, || (29) meaning that motivation is mental forces that drive the process of reading activities.

In the examples above, *as*, *but*, *for*, and *and* in the beginning of sentences and/or paragraphs were inappropriate since all of them were clause connectors. In the formal writing, clause connectors are not allow used in the beginning of a sentence. Also *for this reason* in the beginning of paragraph was also inappropriate although it was a sentence connector, but it has function as conjunctive adverbs. Then, *in addition* in Subject #4 that takes place as clause conjunction was inappropriate too, because it functions as transition phrase of sentence connector that has to be placed in the beginning of a sentence.

Semantically, those connectors as DMs might build coherence of the text, but if they could not fulfill the rule of formal writing, so grammatically those were inappropriate.

Lastly, there were subjects used a certain numbers of discourse markers in their writing, but they were not sure what is the correct way to use them. Hence there was mistake or inappropriateness occurs in their writing. The examples as in the following:

#### Subject #4

(19) Character education is arising deep in our national curriculum, || (20) sometimes a character education into specific subjects, || (21) **but also** existing character education at all lost in our curriculum.

The use of marker **but also** was not appropriate because it has to be used completely as in correlative conjunction 'not only . . . but also'.

Subject #5

(10) Through language learning students acquire the ability to communicate well, || (11) namely reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a variety of aspect of language. || (12) **To that end**, teachers and students should have a good cooperation in the language learning process.

The DMs **to that end** was neither semantically nor formally appropriate here. The Subject might not know which appropriate DMs to use, so she translated it literally. Hence, the researcher suggested to change it into **therefore** that signaled the result or consequence of the preceding discourse.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Following Fraser's theory of discourse markers (1999, 2009), it is concluded that the graduates could employ the four types of discourse markers (DMs) in their theses. On the other hand, some markers were not included in DMs category that proposed by Fraser, such as *if, such as, as well as, like, for, so that*, and *as*. Although they have same function as the other markers, unfortunately Fraser did not provide the proper category for them. The result of analysis showed that the lack, the misplacement and the inappropriateness of using DMs indeed affected the flow of graduates' theses writing and made them less coherent. Hence, the DMs are obviously important in writing and they should become emphasis in writing teaching and learning process. The students need not only to focus on grammatical or vocabulary meaning, but also to focus on the content and the objective of their writing as well.

Furthermore, the researcher hopes that research on discourse markers in different field of study by using developing theory from other scholars for future researches.

## REFERENCES

- Ayu M. N. (2013). The students' ability in using discourse markers in writing discussion text: a study at English Department of State University of Padang. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 1(2), Seri G.
- Blakemore D. (1987). *Semantic constraints on Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Dülger O. (2007). Discourse markers in Writing. *Selcuk Universitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 258-270.
- Feng. (2010). Discourse marker in English writing. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 3(11).
- Fraser B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics*, (online), Vol. 31 (1999) Page 931-952.
- Fraser B. (2009). An account of discourse markers. *International Review of Pragmatics*, BRILL, 1: 1-28.
- Halliday, M.A.K., and Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Oshima A & Hogue A. (1991). *Writing Academic English*. USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Patriana A. (2012). *Students' ability in using discourse markers to build coherence in composition*. Unpublished thesis. Malang: State University of Malang.
- Sandarupa S. (2013). *The voice of a child: Constructing the moral society through the reteng poeting argumentation in Toraja, Sulawesi, Indonesia*. Paper presented at The Third International Conference on Language Education, State University of Makassar, Pinisi Tower, 6-7 December 2013.

Schiffrin D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Siniajeva I. (2005). *Discourse markers: Their functions and distribution across register*. Unpublished Thesis. Lithuania: Vilnius Pedagogical University.

**About the Author**

**Yuliana Dg. Macora** was born in Poso, 4th April, 1986. She finished off her Elementary School until Senior High School in Poso, Central Sulawesi. She earned her Sarjana Degree on Sintuwu Maroso University and her Master Degree from Hasanuddin University. Now she is a lecturer at English Education Study Program of Sintuwu Maroso University. Her interest is in Applied Linguistics in Teaching English. She can be contacted at 085341018695 and [vdgmacora@gmail.com](mailto:vdgmacora@gmail.com).

Table 1: The types of discourse markers and connectors

No	Example	Total	Connectors		Discourse Markers	
			Type	Meaning	Type	Meaning
1	As well as	1	Prepositional phrases	Addition	-	-
2	Such as	4	Phrase Linker	To introduce an example	-	-
3	Because	6	Subordinating conjunction	Reason/Cause	Reasonable markers	Cause and effect
4	So that,	2	Coordinating conjunction	To introduce a result	-	-
5	And	12	Coordinating conjunction	To introduce an additional idea	Elaborative markers	Addition
6	Then	2	Transition phrase	Time/temporal	Inferential markers	Logical consequence
7	Due to the fact	1	Subordinating conjunction	To introduce a reason/cause	Reasonable markers*	Cause and effect*
8	Besides	1	Conjunctive adverb	To introduce an additional idea	Elaborative markers	Addition
9	For	1	Coordinating conjunction	To introduce a result / consequence	-	-
10	Instead	1	Conjunctive adverb	To introduce an opposite idea	Contrastive marker	To contrast / disagree
11	While	1	Subordinating conjunction	To introduce an opposite idea	Contrastive marker	To contrast
12	Like	2	Phrase linker	To introduce similarity		
13	As	2	Subordinating conjunction	To introduce a reason / cause	-	-
14	In other words	1	Conjunctive adverbs	To introduce a restatement or explanation	Elaborative marker	Exemplification or repeating idea
15	Hence	1	Conjunctive adverbs	To introduce a result	Inferential marker	Logical consequence
16	Thus	3	Conjunctive adverbs	To introduce a result	Inferential marker	Logical consequence
17	But	3	Coordinating conjunction	To introduce an opposite idea	Contrastive markers	Concession and counter argument
18	Take for example	1	Transition phrase	To introduce an example	Elaborative markers	Exemplification
19	If	1	Subordinating conjunction	To introduce a choice or alternative	-	-
20	As the result	1	Conjunctive adverbs	To introduce a result	Inferential marker	Logical Consequence
21	For this reason	1	Conjunctive adverbs	To introduce a result	Reasonable marker	Provide a reason
22	Also	1	Conjunctive Adverb	To introduce an additional idea	Elaborative markers	Addition
23	However	2	Conjunctive Adverb	To introduce an opposite idea	Contrastive markers	Direct contrast
24	In addition	2	Transition phrase	To introduce an additional idea	Elaborative markers	Addition
25	But also	1	Correlative conjunction	To introduce an additional idea	-	-

26	So	1	Coordinating conjunction	To introduce a result	Inferential markers	Logical Consequence
27	Namely	1	Conjunctive adverbs	To introduce a restatement or explanation	Elaborative markers	Adding specific idea
28	To that end*	1	-	-	-	-
29	On the other hand	1	Transition phrase	To introduce an opposite idea	Contrastive markers	Balancing Contrasting points