THE USE OF TRANSITION SIGNALS IN EFL ACADEMIC WRITING CONTEXT: A CORPUS STUDY

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Abstract:
For foreign language learners, especially in university, academic writing is essential. Students are required to analyse, compare, and inform through academic writing. Moreover, when they reach the end of their study, they should write a thesis as part of a requirement to graduate. Thus, thesis writing is a major challenge for students. Halliday and Hassan as cited in Hinkel (2001) emphasise that academic writing should achieve cohesiveness to make it well-constructed and understandable. Transition signal is one of prominent cohesive devices that should be taken into account in academic writing. This study aims to identify students' problems and tendency in using transition signals in academic writing. The data are gained from university students' academic writing product which is built in a form of corpus. The data are then analysed by using corpus software (ant conc.3.2.4). Its implication on English Language Teaching (ELT) concerning the teaching of transition signals will also be addressed.

Keywords: *Transition Signal, Corpus Analysis, Academic Writing*

For foreign language learners, particularly in university, academic writing becomes one of the essential elements to take concern on. Students are required to analyse, compare and inform through academic writing. Moreover, when they reach the end of their study, they must write a thesis as part of a requirement to graduate. Thus, thesis writing is a major challenge for both students and lecturer. When learners are unable to create a well-constructed and understandable composition, they will not be able to create good thesis.

The aim of writing will change this view as purpose and genre of writing determine students' performance on writing (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). Particularly in university level, students are taught free writing to academic writing. Compared to free writing, academic writing emphasises more on the accuracy instead of fluency. Therefore, a different ways of assessment of the students' writing product will be taken as a main concern.

Focusing on the academic writing, students' mastery in writing is commonly overviewed from their competence in constructing sentences. In relation to L2 writing, the common approach implemented by teachers is grammatical construction or words-by-words approach. Then, the result of students' writing is assessed on the fulfilment of several criteria such as grammar, coherency, and cohesiveness indicating constructing sentences capability. In consequence, mastering writing competency is achieved when students' sentence constructions satisfy lecturers' expectation.

Among several things to take into account in writing, this present study focuses on cohesion. Hinkel (2001) and Tanskenan (2006) emphasize the importance of cohesion in order to achieve well-constructed and understandable writing. Cohesion is also about connectedness of the text, in which becomes prerequisite of discourse. There are five general categories of cohesive devices that create coherence in texts: reference, ellipsis, substitution, lexical cohesion and conjunction (Thompson, 2004). In the teaching of L2 composition and writing, text cohesive devices play an important role. Researchers have conducted further investigations of cohesion

devices in English-language corpora of published texts. L2 instruction associated with cohesion in academic texts has largely continued to focus on specific and limited types of devices, such as sentence transitions and coordinating conjunctions intended to conjoin ideas and sentences. For instance, Reid (1992) points out that in L2 writing instruction, the teaching of explicit cohesive devices, such as coordinators and sentence transitions, is common because ESL writers often employ various cohesion conventions differently than native speakers of English do and that L2 texts may sometimes appear incoherent to native readers. Reid emphasizes that text cohesion and issues in the coherence of ideas need to be taught to provide learners linguistic means of developing unified text. In addition, Hewings and Hewings (2001, p.199) note that the difference of cohesion convention is much caused by interpersonal function.

TRANSITION SIGNALS

The previous section has explained about cohesion as one of essential elements to make a good composition. Transition signal as one of cohesive devices is the focus in this paper. Transition signals are words and phrases that connect the idea in one sentence with the idea in another sentence and show the relationship between them (Oshima and Hogue, 2007). Transition signals are usually at the beginning of a sentence or paragraph to relate it to the one preceding it and they can also come within sentences to connect one idea to another within a sentence. The following is the list of transition signals according to their function (Oshima and Hogue, 2007; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003). By using those transition signals properly and correctly, cohesion in our writing can be achieved.

Tabel 1

List of Common Transition Signals

Transitions indicating additions			
alsoin addition	another further	in fact	
besides too as	furthermore	including	
well as	moreover	to put it another way	
		in other words	
Transitions indicating comparisons, contrasts, or contradictions			
similarly	Unlike	although regardless	whereas even
likewise by	however	on the other hand	though even
comparison in	instead	nonetheless	when in spite of
the like manner	instead of	nevertheless	despite either...
but yet rather		on the contrary	or... neither...
than		in contrast	nor...
Transitions indicating a time relationship and logical division of ideas			
before now	in time later	soon	eventually
next after that	finally since	the next day	at first (second,
		then	third, last)
Transitions which limit or introducing example:			
if unless	Except	for instance	
in case in	namely	such as	
particular	for example		
Transitions indicating cause and effect:			
because for	Therefore thus	as a result	consequently
since	as	so	for that (this)
		as a consequence	reason
Transition indicating conclusion:			
in conclusion	to conclude	thus	to sum up
in summary	in short	to summarize	finally
in brief			

Taking into account of the previous explanation, a substantial body of L2 academic writing has been examined in this paper. Though many

studies have concerned on the use of cohesive devices (Eun & Jeon, 2009; Granger & Tyson, 1996; Hinkel, 2001), but less has narrowed their study on the use of transition signals by non-native speakers and being compared to native speakers' writing products. Therefore, this present study will cover the following matters to be investigated further: (1) the frequency of transition signals used by NS and NNS, (2) students' problem and tendency of transition signals usage. The implication of the findings of this study will also be addressed.

METHOD

Materials

In this study, the researchers build their own corpus. Introduction and review from many studies are purposefully selected to investigate the frequency of the transition signals occurrence. There are total 33 writing products derived from academic writing course in Ganesha University of Education with 306066 words to be analysed. As comparison, the same amount of words from reputable journal articles and written by native speakers will also be taken. The investigation will cover the words that indicate transition signals. The words are grouped in several aspects as proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2007); Zemach and Rumisek (2003).

Procedure

Corpus-based analysis is conducted allowing great number of data to be analysed to generate more reliable generalization (Baker, 2006). The corpus data and the frequency of transition signals as represented by selected features of (Oshima and Hogue, 2007; Zemach and Rumisek, 2003), are calculated by Ant.Conc 3.2.4 corpus software.

The result of calculation will indicate how frequent the transition signals are used along with the pattern of words that following it. Thus, the result will also be compared to the analysis of transition signals used in international journal articles. The result will be explained descriptively to determine the difference. Taking into account to the differences, it will affect

the implication on how should writing development by utilising transition signal words be handled in class.

FINDINGS

Corpus research using computer-assisted approaches has enabled a more analytic mechanism for analysing linguistic features of text and patterns of discourse (Biber, 2004). Regarding to this context, researchers have analysed and compared frequencies of transitional signals appeared across types of discourse belong to reputable journal articles written by native speakers and academic writings belong to Ganesha University of Education students. The results are described as follow:

Table 2

Transitions Signals Indicating Addition

Transition Signals	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles	Transition Signals	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles
Also	97	118	Furthermore	3	4
In addition	12	9	Moreover	14	13
Besides	6	5	In fact	-	1
Too	2	10	Including	3	15
As well as	17	26	To put in nother way	-	-
Another	4	3	In other ords	-	10
Further	1	5			
Total	159	219			

As shown in table 2, there is a significant difference of the frequency of this transition signals type. Overall, there are 219 hits in the reputable journal articles, while the academic writing products of Ganesha University of Education students show 159 hits with the word "also" becomes the most frequent word used from both sides. Looking at the distribution, reputable journal articles almost fill in every signal but one, while the products of studets writing miss on three signals.

Table 3

Transition Signals Indicating Comparison, Contrast, Contradiction

Transition Signals	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles	Transition Signals	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles
Similarly	-	1	Regardless	-	3
Likewise	-	3	On the other hand	2	8
By comparison	-	-	Nonetheless	1	1
In the like manner	-	-	Nevertheless	2	3
But	32	58	On the contrary	-	2
Yet	6	12	In contrast	-	7
Rather than	1	19	Whereas	4	3
Unlike	-	2	Even though	2	5
However	16	42	Even when	-	-
Instead	-	2	In spite of	-	2
Instead of	-	5	Despite	2	8
In fact	4	4	Either…or	3	6
Although	3	12	Neither…or…	-	2
Total	78	210			

This type of transition signals seems to be the most struggling parts for Ganesha University of Education students. It is noted that a half of these signals do not appear in their writing, while three signals are missing in the journal articles. The word "but" becomes the most frequent word appears on both sides. Furthermore, articles written in reputable journals state more contradiction in their writing with 210 occurences.

Table 4

Transition Signals Indicating Time Relationship and Logical Division

Transition Signals	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles	Transition Signals	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles
Before	-	2	Since	1	14
Now	3	-	Soon	-	-
Next	2	4	The next day	-	-
After that	4	-	Then	27	11
In time	-	-	Eventually	-	
Later	1	-	At first (second, third)	26	14
Finally	1	8			
Total	65	53			

The table above shows that this type of transition signals are less frequently used compared to other previous types. The occurence of the signals is also approximately the same between the two sides. Ganesha University of Education students write their logical division by mostly putting sequential words like first, second, third, and then. Similarly, the same signals also appear in the reputable journal articles writing.

Table 5

Transitions Which Limit or Introducing Example

Transition signal	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles
If	35	36
Unless	-	4
in case	-	-
Except	1	1
Particularly	3	7
Namely	9	5
for example	4	28
for instance	2	14
such as	29	45
Total	83	140

Regarding the transition signals which limit or introducing example, if and such as are mostly used both in reputable journal articles and Ganesha University of Education academic writings. Yet reputable journal articles show higher occurrence. While in case and except are minimally used in both group writings. Transition signals for instance and for example show high range of different occurrence in both groups of writing, in which for example and for instance are used more in reputable journal articles rather than in academic writing of Ganesha University of Education students. The total amount of the transition signal used for reputable journal articles is 140 and Ganesha University of Education students' writing is 83. In brief, transitional signals of introducing example in reputable journals articles are richer rather than academic writings belong to Ganesha University of Education students.

Table 6

Transitions Indicating Cause and Effect

Transition signal	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles
Because	75	40
Since	21	30
Therefore	24	25
Thus	32	17
as a result	2	5
So	35	36
as a consequence	-	1
Consequently	-	3
for that (this) reason	-	-
Total	191	165

In transition signals which indicate cause and effect, as a result, as a consequence, consequently, and for that (this) reason are not significantly used in both groups writing. Meanwhile, they mostly used because, thus, and so in which the writings belong to Ganesha University of Education students show higher occurrence for those transitional signals. The total amount of the transition signal used for reputable journal articles is 165 and Ganesha University of Education students' writing is 191. In brief, the occurrence of transitional signals of introducing example in reputable journals articles written by native speakers are lower than academic writings belong to Ganesha University of Education students.

Table 7

Transition Indicating Conclusion

Transition signal	Students Academic Writing	Journal Articles
in conclusion	3	2
in summary	-	2
in brief	-	1
to sum up	-	-
Finally	2	-
to conclude	-	1
in short	5	-
Thus	32	17
to summarize	-	3
Total	42	26

Regarding transition signals which indicating conclusion, thus has highest occurrence in both groups of writing. The rest transitional signals have low occurrence. The total amount of the transition signal used for reputable journal articles is 26 and Ganesha University of Education students' writing is 42. In brief, the occurrences of transitional signals of indicating conclusion in reputable journal articles are lower than academic writings

belong to Ganesha University of Education students.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data gained, some findings are worth to be discussed in this section. Firstly, among all findings shown in those table, the first type of transition signals become the most frequently used by both the Ganesha University of Education students and writers from reputable journal articles. This is in line with the findings from Xuefan (2007) who finds this type of transition signals are dominantly written by her subjects. This indicates both the university students and writers from journal articles have a tendency to gather as much information as they need to support their ideas and add them into their writing production.

Nonetheless, students from Ganesha University of Education tend to add their writing with ideas that support their current preconceived ideas. It is different when being compared to native writers who tend to give addition balanced with presenting contradiction. Mostly the contradiction appears to be the way of native writers how they argue to previous theories, research findings, as well as showing their intention to fill the gaps from previous related studies. In addition to that, both Ganesha University of Education students and journal article writers have an attempt to reach cohesiveness by using the third type of transition signals. It leads them to have a well-ordered plot in writing as well as to reach writing complexity. This supports Shitadevi and Mahendra (2015) who find sentences and clausal extension reflect the attempt to reach writing complexity.

To support their ideas, journal article writers also tend to give more examples. The samples are noted from several sources such as previous findings, theories from related books, and even subjects experiences. Though less examples are provided in the Ganesha University of Education students' writing, the sources of their information are relatively the same. The researchers also find that the students ability in gathering information as well as providing examples are used to proving a causal and effect relation.

It is different from journal article writers who use some specific information provide contradiction, students some informations are used to support one they believe as the cause of one matter. This is indicated by high use of transition signals which indicate causal and effect relationship.

Surprisingly, the occurences in the transition signals indicating conclusion are found more in Ganesha University of Education students writing. Since other types of transition signals are more frequently found in journal writing, it is logical to assume that those high frequency of words will be used to lead them drawing more conclusion. It can be seen from the occurence of this type transition signals in journal articles which is only a half of students writing production. Therefore, this gap can only be answered by further investigation in next prospective study.

Another fact,students' problems are mostly located on the double use of the transition signals such as "However, in fact", "Moreover, also", and "either as well as". This has led to sentence confusion because it contains two different indications. Note too that the result of this study does not reflect the whole quality of students writing but one of essential factors to reach it. As found by Meisuo (2000) and Alarcon and Morales (2011) that cohesion is not built independently by cohesive devices or transition signals.

CONCLUSION

The findings on this study have several contributions toward English language teaching, especially in teaching academic writing for college students. As primary concerned, teacher cannot assume that his/her students have sufficient knowledge in using transition signals to construct their academic writing in a first place. Look at the result of this study, lecturers can take it as a model that transition signals play an important role in academic writing. Moreover, the variety used in the journal articles provide learners with more option to link their ideas sentence to sentence, and even paragraph to paragraph.

As the repressive action toward the findings, teacher may laso take

transition signals as primary concern in teaching writing. It can be integrated in grammar review as a focus of practise. Students need to be taught deeply about the function of particular transition signals in paragraph construction.

The other idea to solve this problem is assigning students to have extensive reading outside the classroom. They may read articles from international journal to enrich their knowledge how international writers construct their paragraphs coherently and cohesively. In addition to extensive reading, they also need to practice writing by using appropriate transition signals to certain writing condition. In this case, teacher should provide exercise that triggers them to comprehend the transition signals. The exercise can be a cloze test, where the students are provided with a model text and the transition signals part are omitted. It can also be a judging task, where the students are provided with a model text containing transition signals, and they have to judge whether its usage has been appropriate.

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