

Abstract

The present study aims at identifying the errors committed by Iraqi EFL learners in using discourse markers . This study addresses many questions such as : what are the common errors of using discourse markers committed by Iraqi EFL learners. To answer this question, the study hypothesizes that students' ability to use discourse markers is limited as far as third year Iraqi EFL learners are concerned and that the most common errors committed by Iraqi EFL learners in using discourse markers are related to adversative class(i.e. the use of instead, but and however) and sequential class(i.e. the use of after and before) . Hence, a test was done following Levenston and Blum's (1978) discourse completion test (DCT). In this test, students were asked to do two kinds of exercises: fill in the blanks and find suitable discourse marker. The results show that the most common committed errors in choosing discourse markers are adversative and sequential classes. Also, it is noticed that the subjects of this study are unable to use the right discourse marker in the right position because they are unaware of the meaning and function of discourse markers.

المستخلص

تحاول الدراسة الحالية تعريف الأخطاء المرتكبة من قبل الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الانكليزية كلغة ثانية في استخدام واسم الخطاب. السؤال الموجه في هذه الدراسة هو: ما هي الأخطاء الشائعة التي يرتكبها الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الانكليزية في استخدام واسم الخطاب؟ للإجابة على السؤال فان الدراسة تفترض بأن قابلية الطلبة في استخدام واسم الخطاب محددة بالنسبة لطلبة المرحلة الثالثة وان معظم الأخطاء تعود الى واسم الخطاب الاستدراكي والتعاقبي. لأثبات الفرضيات، تم تطبيق اختبار تكملة الواسم والذي من خلاله قام الطلبة بالإجابة على نوعين من التمارين. التمرين الاول هو ملئ الفراغات بما يناسبها من واسم الخطاب اما التمرين الثاني هو محاولة ايجاد واسم خطاب يلائم الفراغ. اثبتت النتائج ان اغلبية الأخطاء المرتكبة من قبل الطلبة تعود إلى الخطأ في اختيار واسم الخطاب الاستدراكي والتعاقبي وان الطلبة غير قادرين على استخدام الواسم المناسب في المكان المناسب وذلك يعود لعدم ادراكهم لمعنى ووظيفة واسم الخطاب.

1- Introduction

Discourse markers are connective words which play a crucial role in writing process either in first or second language. Different names are attached to these expressions as suggested by scholars like “ discourse particles”, “discourse operators”, “ discourse markers” and so on, among them discourse markers are popularly used. Interest in discourse markers as a linguistic phenomenon started with the shift in linguistic

study from focusing on the sentence as a higher unit of analysis into looking at the text as a whole. They are regarded as an important feature of written and spoken discourse. Using discourse markers in writing lead to proper communication(Halliday and Hasen 1976:3) . They can be a good sign of cohesive text. So foreign language teachers and researchers need to pay attention to discourse markers as a significant characteristic of writing ability and language proficiency. Studying discourse markers is a key element for achieving text competence across language.

1.2 Aim of the study:

The current study aims at answering the following question: what are the common errors of using discourse markers committed by Iraqi EFL learners?

1.3 Hypotheses:

The current study hypothesizes the following:

- Students' ability to use discourse markers is limited as far as third year Iraqi EFL learners are concerned .
- The most common errors that are committed by Iraqi EFL learners in using discourse markers are related to adversative class (instead, but and however) and sequential class(after and before) .

1.4 Defining Discourse Markers

Discourse markers (hereafter DMs) have been viewed differently by different scholars. Schiffirin ,the first scholar to bring up the importance of DMs ,defines them at a more theoretical level as members of a functional class of verbal and non-verbal devices which provide contextual coordinators. She argues that DMs are “sequentially dependent elements which bracket unit of talk”. (1987:31).Fraser (1998:301) states that DMs are “ lexical expressions which signal relation of either contrast (John is fat but Mary is thin) , implication (john is here so we can start the party) or elaboration (John went home , furthermore he took his toys). Redeker (1991:1168) calls DMs as operators and defines them as “ a word or phrase for instance a conjunction, adverbial, comment clause, interjection that is uttered with the primary function of bringing listener's/ reader's attention a to particular kind of upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context”. They are referred to as signals that show the relationship between an utterance and previous discourse. While Levinson (1983:17) takes DMs as “ signals showing the relationship between an utterance and pervious discourse”.

In short, we can conclude that DMs are words that show connections between what is being said and the whole context. They are syntax-independent and cannot change the sentence meaning. They are essential tools and important key elements in text production , perception and evaluation.

1.5 The Importance of Discourse Markers

Learning a language means learning four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In writing we need to rely on using certain expressions to produce a coherent text. Using discourse markers is an important step towards good writing. Texts are called to be effective if they achieve their communicative goals. Writers are concerned with presenting the content in a way that fulfills their communicative intentions. When the reader is able to recognize these intentions we can say that the producer achieves the text's purpose. Using DMs in writing is very essential rather than in speaking simply because when speaking it is easy for the listener to get what the speaker wants through the use of gestures and body language. In contrast, the writer needs to use DMs to help the reader moves freely from an idea to another (Haselow:2011:3604) . DMs play an essential part in writing since they participate in helping the reader to connect the backward sentence with the foreword and figure out their relation. Here, it seems important to rise the following question: how do DMs contribute to produce a coherent and cohesive text? . To answer this question, it is significant to shed light on coherence and cohesion.

In discourse analysis, coherence and cohesion are inseparable terms. They are the two crucial textual elements that have been identified as seminal characteristics of 'good' writing Cohesion is first studied by Halliday and Hasen, when they publish their book *Cohesion in English* in (1976). In their opinion the concept of cohesion refers to “ relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as text”(Ibid:4). In their theory , they focus on cohesion across sentence boundaries. For them, a sentence is referred to as a unit for cohesion. Halliday and Hasen's study aims at identifying a text as “ a unified whole”. So cohesion refers to non-structural relations above the sentence. Thus, cohesion emphasizes written text as product.

On the other hand, coherence refers to the use of synonyms, pronouns and transitional words and is defined as a semantic property that is related to the individual's interpretations of sentence's relation to other sentence. Halliday and Hasen argue that two conditions must be

available to consider the text coherent. The first condition is that a text should be consisted with content in which it is created. The second condition is that a text must use cohesion devices. So , we need to use DMs and cohesion devices to convey the right meaning, ideas and information of the written text.

1.6 Major Features of Discourse Markers

DMs are often characterized by some common features. In this section ,the most commonly attributed features of DMs are identified and briefly discussed. To begin with, connectivity is the first of the major characteristics of DMs . The main role of DMs is to connect units of a text . Connectivity is conceived differently according to the way discourse is viewed and the framework that is employed . This feature can be used to differentiate between discourse markers and other initial elements(I studied hard but I failed). Fraser (1998:115) considered connectivity as criterial for deterring DMs of any elements. Multi-categoriality is the second feature of DMs. Because of DMs are derived from different grammatical word classes, they are described as ‘heterogenous set’. They vary from single words like adverbs(now, then, etc..), conjunctions (and, but, etc...) to phrases and clauses (to conclude, in other words, etc...). This feature poses a difficulty in describing them as a group. DMs are often occur in initial position ,so intiality is the third feature of DMs. Lenk(1998:51) states that DMs occur initially because they “ introduce the discourse segments they mark” (At least, I would not keep my doors barres in the daytime). Initiality is considered to be the most noticeable and defining features of DMs . It has been argued that this is not always the case since some DMs occasionally appear medially.

Being optional rather than obligatory is the fourth feature that attributes to DMs. Schiffrin (1987: 64) notes that DMs are never obligatory in the sense that their absence, though it may cause the understanding more difficult, does not cause the text ungrammatical or unintelligible. Non-truth Condionality is fifth significant feature of DMs. Being non-truth conditional does not mean that DMs are void of meaning. Blakemore(2011:114) mentions that there are expressions that encode the conceptual meaning though they do not participate to the propositional meaning of the sentence. For example:

A: Tom can open Bill's safe.

B: So he knows the combination..

What *So* does here is to constrain the interpretation of the prior utterance. It contributes nothing to the conceptual representation and its meaning is basically procedural (Ibid).

1.7 Literature Review

One important thing that most second language learners commit in writing is related to DMs errors. Many researches done studies to show the various use and disaccorded mistakes of DMs committed by EFL learners. To begin with, Martines (2002) conducted a study to investigate the use of DMs by Spanish EFL learners. Data analysis showed that some learners overuse some kinds of DMs whereas others rarely use them. Farhan Z. and Fannoush T. (2005 cited in Yehia 2015: 224) examined the difficulties that encounter when translating DMs from second language to target language i.e. from English into Arabic. The researchers found out that students agree in translating coordinators (and & but) but they found difficulties in the translation of subordinates and conjuncts (DMs) which could be considered as a source of ambiguity and mistranslation. The researchers concluded with the fact that English style had a clear- cut tendency to the use of DMs in more profusion and diversity than Arabic. Following Fraser's taxonomy, Jalilfar (2008: 115) identified the use of DMs by Iranian EFL students. The subjects of her study were asked to write descriptive compositions. She comes to the conclusion that the most frequently use of DMs is elaborative markers for there is a significant relationship between the frequency of DMs and the quality of the compositions. Asassfeh, et al (2013: 19) examined the use of logical connectors in 146 essays written by Jordanian EFL learners. They found that Jordanian learners tend to “ incorporate a higher number of logical connectors compared to what the context requires”. The subjects overuse and overload their essays with logical connectors.

To sum up, it is clear that many researchers conducted studies to investigate how do EFL learners use DMs types in written discourse. But few research works have been done to identify the errors made by students in the use of DMs in literature. The current study is based on identifying the errors committed by Iraqi EFL learners in using DMs. The subjects of this research were required to reply to two questions concerning DMs. The results showed that Iraqi EFL learners' ability is limited in using DMs and that learners commit highest error in the use of adversative and sequential markers.

2- Methodology

The study population has been limited to the third class students of English Department, Al- Hadba'a University College. The total number of students is 20.

The current study adopted discourse completion test (DCT) which was first used by Levenston and Blum (1978). By applying this test, 20 students of the third year at Department of English at Al- Hadba'a University College were asked to do two kinds of exercises which are based on literary texts. The materials were chosen from two different novels namely, **The Great Gatsby** and **Wuthering Heights**. In the first exercise the students were asked to fill the blanks with a suitable given marker whereas in the second exercise they were asked to find the appropriate marker to complete the text.

2.1 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed to look at the most popular kinds of DMs that EFL learners use incorrectly i.e errors related to additive markers(and, also), sequential markers(after, before), adversative markers(instead, however, but) and referential marker (so)(Eckersley& Eckersley 1960:306-319). The researcher herself correct the papers to show how do Iraqi EFL learners use DMs.

2.2 Results and Discussion

The main interest of this research is to identify the committed errors in the use of DMs by Iraqi EFL learners. The analysis of twenty papers showed 125 out of 200 is the number of errors committed by Iraqi EFL learners. that the total number of errors that were committed by students is 125 out of 200 which constitute 69.5%. This rate is nearly 70% and confirm the first hypothesis which says that Iraqi EFL learners' ability to use DMs is limited and this due to the little use of DMs in spoken discourse. If students use DMs in their speech, they will be accustomed of using DMs when writing. The committed errors belong to four categories of DMs : sequential, additive, adversative and referential.

Type of DMs	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Sequential	46	33%
Additive	27	19.4%
Adversative	51	36.9%
Referential	15	10.7%
Total	139	100%

Table 1.

As shown in table (1) , the total errors of students in using DMs is 139 with 69.5%. Table (1) clarifies the research question and the hypotheses. As for the research question which says: what are the common errors of discourse markers committed by Iraqi EFL learners?, and as for the hypotheses, the obtained results find answers for both . The findings show that the most common types of DMs errors committed by students are adversative (36.9%) and sequential (33%) followed by additive (19.4%) and finally referential (10.7%). It is clear that students commit more errors in the use of adversative and sequential types since they are unable to recognize the appropriate meaning of DMs because, according to the text DMs meaning may change. This reveals students' inability to use DMs. The following tables (1.1 ,1.2 , 1.3& 1.4)show the common error of each kind of DMs.

Sequential DMs	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
After	30	65.2%
Before	16	34.8%
Total	46	100%

Table 1.1

Table (1.1) shows that students' frequent errors fall in the sequential type. Also, it is clear that "after" has gained the highest frequency of errors in both exercises (65.2%). Students incorrectly use "after" 14 times in the first question and 16 times in the second question. Such errors occur because students may think that "before" should come at first, therefore they wrongly use "after" . whereas "before" constitutes (34.8%) and students use it inappropriately 16 times in the first question. This percentage is low if compared to the previous one.

Adversative DMs	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
But	14	27.4%
Instead	17	33.4%
However	20	39.2%
Total	51	100%

Table 1.2

It is very obvious in table (1.2) that students' common errors are in the use of "however" with percentage of (39.2%). It takes the highest frequency of errors for no one uses it correctly. "instead" achieved (33.4%) since 17 students use it incorrectly while "but" constitutes (27.4%) i.e. the lowest percentage in adversative category. Actually , students do errors in the use of these markers since they cannot understand their main function and meaning . As predicated earlier, the given results of the above two tables go

with the research hypotheses and question. It is either the students do not recognize how do DMs work , or do not understand the whole idea of the given paragraph.

Additive DMs	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
And	12	44.4%
Also	15	55.6%
Total	27	100%

Table 1.3

Table (1.3) illustrates the use of additive markers in both exercises. For additive category which constitutes (19.4%), students are asked to use “and” & “also”. As for “and” it is clear from the above table that students wrongly use this marker 12 times in the first question. The error frequency of “and” constitutes 44.4% and this percentage is not low. “Also” is the second additive marker , students have to find and use it appropriately. It was wrongly used 15 times in the second question. It takes 55.6% of the total percentage of additive kind. Although students understand the meaning of (and & both) but they misuse these markers because they do not comprehend the meaning of the given paragraphs.

Referential DMs	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
So	15	10.7%
Total	139	100%

Table 1.4

Table (1.4) shows the error frequency and percentage of referential marker (so). Students are unable to understand what did “so” mean therefore they do not use it correctly. They mistake “so” 15 times which constitutes 10.7% of the total errors of the other kinds as it was clear in table (1). “So” constitutes the lowest percentage and this doesn’t mean that students know its meaning and position. It achieves such low rate for it is used only in the first question.

From the explanation of the results, it is clear that adversative and sequential classes form difficulty for Iraqi learners because they do not fully know the different functions and meanings of them and are unable to choose their right place. Accordingly, the limited use of DMs in speech has its influence on learners’ use of DMs in writing and therefore in answering the test’s second question.

3- Conclusions and Recommendation

From the above discussions, some conclusions can be drawn:

- DMs are those linguistic items that help learners to produce a cohesive and coherent text.

- Third year Iraqi learners at college level are relatively weak in using DMs.
- Low achievements in applying DMs due to learners' intuition towards cohesion and coherence because English teachers may not take DMs seriously when they teach writing.
- The differences of the percentage among DMs categories as mentioned in table (1) are very important because they show teachers where and why errors occur.

In the light of these conclusions, the researcher recommended that teachers should focus on and encourage using DMs in spoken discourse, so as learners will be familiar with DMs and can freely use them when writing.

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Question no. 1

Fill in the blanks with the suitable following linking words:

(so, like, before, and, after, but)

You may use them more than once.

_____ Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction. _____ when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home. There was nothing to be done _____ I left, an awkward, unpleasant thing that perhaps had better have been let alone. _____ I wanted to leave things in order and not just trust that obliging and indifferent sea to sweep my refuse away. I saw Jordan Baker and talked around what had happened afterward to me. She was dressed to play golf, _____ I remember thinking she looked like a good illustration of a golfer.

Question no.2

Read the following paragraph and then try to complete the gaps with the appropriate marker you find.

Yesterday afternoon set in misty and _____ cold weather . I had half a mind to spend it by my study fire _____ of wading through heath and mud to Wuthering Heights. On coming up from dinner, _____, on mounting the stairs with this lazy intention I saw a servant girl surrounded by brushes and coal scuttles. This scene drove me back at once, I took my hat and _____ a four mile's walk arrived at Heathcliff's gate to escape the first feathery flakes of a snow-shower.