

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN WRITTEN ESSAYS

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Abstract: Studies on discourse markers are being discussed more and more in relation to gender disparities and language. These symbols are significant not only in verbal communication but also in written communication. According to earlier research (Tse & Hyland, 2008; Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi, 2015), there is some disagreement among scholars about the question of whether gender differences affect language use, particularly the selection of discourse markers.

Language gives us the ability to not only communicate our thoughts, but also to understand how society and our own minds function. Even Lakoff asserted that women's socioeconomic position might be inferred from their language (Holmes, 2001). Language employed by women was sometimes perceived as being more demure and less self-assured. Studies on gender and language support the notion that the use of linguistic elements varies depending on the gender of the speaker (Escalera, 2016, Matei 2011, Subon, 2013, and Shirzad & Jamali, 2013). Gender-based disparities in spoken and written language have been extensively discussed in literature (Subon, 2013; Matei, 2011; Shirzad & Jamali, 2013; Waskita, 2008). According to Matei (2011), the gender variable has the biggest impact on spoken Romanian dialogue. He found out that women used more discourse markers. The findings were in line with another study conducted by Subon (2013), arguing that in Malaysian context men and women had different preferred topics and explained that women's use of linguistic features was more polite than men. Researchers also have suggested that gender differences are seen in the written discourse. Waskita (2008) argued that women's texts tended to be more complex.

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on the markers used to show relationships among clauses and topics in students' essays. To analyze the differences and the similarities in the use of 75 discourse markers in female and male students' essays, this study used Fraser's classifications which were elaborated in Rahayu and Cahyono's study (2015). Fraser (1999) classified the use of discourse markers into three categories contrastive markers, elaborative markers, and inferential markers. Below are the three classifications and the variants of discourse markers. Women's and men's speech patterns have been discussed from different linguistic perspectives. Thought-provoking discussion related to gender and the use of linguistic features includes studies on discourse markers. Scriffin (in Zand-Moghadam & Bikineh, 2014: 49) defined discourse markers as, "sequentially-dependent units of discourse". Another definition of discourse markers is "expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, or prepositional phrases, have the syntactic properties associated with their class membership, have a meaning which is procedural, and have co-occurrence restrictions which are in complementary distribution with their conceptual counterparts" (1999: 946). Hyland (2005: 37) elaborated similar concept using another term, i.e. metadiscourse, which is defined as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to

negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community.”

Table 1

Types of discourse markers based on Fraser’s classifications (1999) in Rahayu and Cahyono (2015)

Types	Examples
Contrastive markers	But, however, although, in contrast (with/to this), whereas, in comparison (with/to this), on the contrary, contrary to, conversely, instead (of), rather (than), on the other hand, despite (doing) this/that, in spite of (doing) this/that, nevertheless, nonetheless
Elaborative markers	And, above all, also, besides, for another thing, furthermore, in addition, moreover, more to the point, in particular, namely, parenthetically, analogously, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, likewise, similarly, or, otherwise, for instance, for example
Inferential markers	So, of course, accordingly, as a consequence, as a logical conclusion, as a result, because of, consequently, for this reason, hence, it can be concluded that, therefore, thus, in this case, under these/ those conditions, then, after all, because, for this/that reason, since

Conclusion This study indicates that essays written by male and female students share similar patterns. Both male and female students tended to use elaborative markers. It means that they were more likely to add information and give examples to support their ideas. A slight difference between male and female essays is in the use of the discourse marker for example. Female students tended to give more examples by using this discourse marker in their essays. Both male and female students’ essays also inserted inferential markers to show causal relationships and draw conclusion. Finally, both male and female students had the tendency not to use contrastive markers, which are generally used to contrast ideas. The Indonesian EFL students preferred to develop their essays by adding details, examples and explanations, rather than offering contrasting ideas.

This study confirms other studies (Newman et. al. 2008 and Tse & Hyland, 2008) that gender differences were not the main factor in influencing one’s language choice. On the basis of these findings, some implications can be suggested for both teachers and future researchers. In the pedagogical context, teachers should raise students’ awareness about using various discourse markers in appropriate context. Teachers can design lessons about distinct variant of discourse markers in writing classes. Furthermore, this study was limited only to a number of essays and to the discussion of textual discourse markers. Other studies can also analyze metadiscourse markers using Hyland’s theory (2005), which do not only cover textual markers, but also interactive markers, such as hedges and boosters. Also, the current study is in line with other studies which suggest that other factors, such as age, ethnic background, and linguistic competence, may influence someone’s language choice. Therefore, other researchers may conduct studies in discourse markers by investigating these social factors.

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