

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IRANIAN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK
(GRADE FOUR HIGH SCHOOL)

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ABSTRACT: The use of discourse markers as a linguistic device implies significant results in satisfying coherence and cohesion of a text. Discourse Markers connect sentences and make the text coherent. Therefore, with the aim of investigating their distribution of the use and their possible relevance to the easiness of the texts, this study was developed across examining grade four high school English textbook. To this aim, Fraser's taxonomy with four main classifications including Contrastive Markers, Elaborative Markers, Inferential Markers, and Reason Discourse Markers was employed in the analysis of discourse markers in the reading sections of eight lessons of the textbook. The extent of readability of the reading passages were estimated through Flesch readability formula. Based on the findings, reading sections had a variety of discourse markers with some types used very often than other discourse markers. Elaborative markers were the most regularly used, followed by contrastive markers. However, the relationship between the difficulty levels of the reading passages and use of discourse markers was not statistically significant ($p \geq 0.05$). The findings may promise some implications for syllabus designers, material developers and language practitioners, as well.

KEYWORDS: discourse analysis, discourse markers, readability

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s there has been growing interest in DMs and in the production and comprehension of extended discourse and, more generally, in pragmatic and contextual aspects of utterance interpretation. It was found that they have important role, not only in pragmatic and discourse analytic research but in studies of language acquisition and language pedagogy, and in research on sociolinguistic topics. The analysis of discourse markers is part of the more general analysis of discourse coherence—how speakers and hearers jointly integrate forms, meaning, and actions to make overall sense out of what is said (Schiffrin, 1987). Increased attention is paid to those elements of linguistic structure that appear to be most directly involved in the connection of distinct utterances. Discourse markers have been a focus of research in cognitive and language development. Halliday and Hasan, (1976) considered discourse markers as sentence connectives and stated that they encode causal and adversative connections among events and produce textual cohesion. This study intended to clarify the status of discourse markers in Iranian English textbook (grade four high school). Discourse markers are widely used in written materials such as textbooks. They are "linguistic, paralinguistic, or nonverbal elements that signal relations

between units of talk as a result of their syntactic and semantic qualities and because of their sequential relations as initial or terminal brackets delineating discourse units" (Schiffrin, 1987). Discourse markers have been studied under various labels, including discourse connectives, discourse operators, pragmatic connectives, sentence connectives, and cue phrases (Fraser, 1999). The aim of this study thus is to investigate discourse markers in English textbook of Iranian grade four high school students. Moreover, this study intended to inspect the possible relationship between the use of discourse markers and the easiness of the texts.

1.1. Statement of the problem

While several researchers have studied discourse markers from the descriptive and contrastive standpoints, to determine the role of DMs in written and spoken speech, despite that research needs to deal with these devices in relation to second and foreign language learning. How DMs are used in Iranian grade four high school English textbooks needs to be investigated. In addition, although DMs are important factors, there is no research to examine the extent to which DMs have been taken into consideration with respect to their relationship with the easiness of the texts in

Iranian English textbooks. This study aims to investigate different types and quantities of DMs used in reading comprehension sections of Iranian grade four high school English textbook and their possible relationship with the easiness of the passages.

1.2. Significance of the study

In this study, the researcher analyzed patterns of language in use to produce descriptions and explanations for the use of DMs in Iranian grade four high school English textbook. The main goal of this study is to establish which discourse markers (DM) are used in Iranian grade four high school English textbook and to establish their frequency in reading sections of the textbook. This study describes the range of uses of English discourse markers included in Iranian grade four high school English textbook. It seeks to determine the most frequently used discourse markers too. Furthermore, the possible relationship between difficulty levels of the passages and frequency of DMs used were examined. The reading sections of the textbook were analyzed quantitatively following [Fraser's \(1999\)](#) taxonomy of Discourse Markers. Besides the easiness of the texts were calculated through Flesch readability formula. According to what has been discussed so far, the following questions were investigated.

1.3. Research questions

1. What are different types of DMs used in the reading sections of Iranian grade four high school English textbook?
2. Is there any significant relationship between the difficulty level of the reading passages and the frequency of discourse markers used?

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. History and Definition of Discourse Markers

DMs are often described through some ordinary characteristics. For example they can be stressed or independent from their adjoining context, by pauses, or they can be pronounced unstressed, without pauses and with possible phonological reduction. DMs are usually attained from lexical categories such as verbs, verbal constructs, prepositional phrases, adverbs. Generally, they stand at the beginning of an utterance, but they can also be in the middle or even, at the end of an utterance. Irrespective of their location, they are always syntactically detached from the remainder of the sentence.

[Schiffrin, \(1987\)](#) reported the first and the most comprehensive attempt regarding DMs. She considers DMs as elements that mark "sequentially-dependent units of discourse." She

labels them 'discourse markers' and analyzes in detail the expressions and, because, but, I mean, now, oh, or, so, then, well, and you know as they occur in unstructured interview conversations.

There are also four notable research efforts regarding DMs. Each research began in the mid-1980s, and it appeared that the researchers were not aware of each other's' efforts. [Redeker, \(1990\)](#) evaluated Schiffrin's and suggested several remarkable alterations. She explains the concept of core meaning for DMs and calls DMs as discourse operators, suggesting, "the core meaning should define the marker's contribution to the semantic representation that limits the contextual understanding of the utterance".

Fraser, who approached DMs from exclusively a grammatical-pragmatic perspective, suggests the second approach to DMs. In [Fraser, \(1991\)](#) he wrote about a group of expressions that he called "pragmatic formatives" now called "pragmatic markers".

The third theoretical perspective belongs to [Blakemore, \(1987\)](#) and [Blakemore, \(1992\)](#), who calls them "discourse connectives" and considers DMs as a type of Gricean conventional implicatures, but declines his analysis of a higher order speech act, and concentrates on how DMs limit implicatures. Blakemore proposes that DMs do not have a representational meaning the way lexical expressions like "boy" and "hypothesis do", but have only a procedural meaning that is formed of directions about how to operate the conceptual depiction of the utterance.

The researchers who work in the field of discourse coherence propose the fourth approach to the study of DMs. Beginning with Rhetorical Structure, researchers have considered the essence of relations between the sentences of a text such that "the content of one sentence might come up with description for the content of another" ([Knott and Dale, 1994](#)). These researchers' efforts lead to different explanations of discourse coherence that the use of discourse markers or 'cue phrases' makes them clear. This approach of expanding the relationship as a tool for text analysis is conflicting with the other three approaches. For the first three approaches to DMs, a linguistic entity, discourse markers, was the main unit of study, and their effect on the explication of discourse was less important.

2.2. Fraser's Discourse Markers

[Fraser, \(1999\)](#) introduces two kinds of DMs. The first group relates to some aspects of S2 to S1 explicitly, and the second group relates the topic of S1 to S2. According to him, there are some important issues about DMs. The first class in

Fraser's category is Contrastive Markers. These kinds of DMs show that interpretation of S2 contrasts with an interpretation of S1. The second subclass is called Elaborative Markers. DMs relate messages in S2 to S1. In these cases, the DM signals a quasi-parallel relationship between S2 and S1 (Fraser, 1999). The third class of DMs in Fraser's is called Inferential Markers. These group of DMs shows that S2 is seen as conclusion for S1. While Fraser's first class of DMs involves the relationship between aspects of the explicit message of the second segment and either an implicit or an explicit message of the first segment, his second class of DMs are distinguished by focus on topic, and so he calls them topic relating markers.

2.3. Empirical studies

Johns analyzed English essays by tertiary-level teachers following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model. In a similar study, Connor compared six essays written by English native and ESL students, following Halliday and Hasan's framework.

Karasi, (1994) analyzed 135 expository essays by Singapore secondary students. Norment, (1994) studied 30 Chinese college students' writing in Chinese and English on both expository and narrative topics following Halliday and Hasan's framework.

Fuller, (2003) examined the use of the discourse markers (DMs) you know, like, oh, well, yeah, and I mean in two speech contexts including interviews and casual conversations to determine their role in marking and negotiating speaker roles. The DMs oh and well showed statistically significant differences in rates of use between contexts, with both of these DMs occurring more frequently in conversations. Discourse markers are usually studied in different contexts. By looking at where they are going to be used, hypotheses can be made about their possible functions. However, investigations of their uses in foreign textbooks are rare. Thus, the present study inspects discourse markers in English textbook of Iranian grade four high school students.

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design

The study engaged ex-post facto design to answer the research questions. The main instruments included grade four English textbook and a checklist to classify the discourse markers used in the textbook.

3.2. Instruments

In this study, some instruments were used with the purpose of collecting the information.

Fraser's category of DMs, Iranian grade four high school English, and Flesch readability formula to determine the readability of the different reading passages.

3.3. Iranian grade four High School English Textbook

All of the eight reading sections in the English textbook were analyzed to distinguish the DMs. There were eight reading comprehension sections in Book 4 (Birjandi et al., 2000).

3.4. Fraser's (1990, 1999) taxonomy of discourse markers

Fraser's taxonomy of discourse markers was chosen for classification of DMs since it conforms to written discourse and it seems to be the most comprehensive classification in written discourse. Fraser's taxonomy includes three main subclasses. The first are contrastive markers that signal that the explicit interpretation of the second sentence contrasts with an interpretation of the first sentence (Fraser, 1990; Fraser, 1999). The second subcategory is elaborative markers that signal a quasi-parallel relationship between the sentences. In addition, the third subclass, inferential markers, signal that the following sentence is a conclusion derived from the preceding sentence. Besides, Fraser distinguishes additional subclasses of discourse markers that specify the reason for the content presented in the previous sentence. (e.g., after all, because, for this /that reason, since).

3.5. Data collection procedure

The experiment was conducted by analyzing the contents of the eight reading comprehension passages of grade four high school English textbook. In fact, the passages were carefully scrutinized to determine the extent that DMs were used and functioned appropriately in the context. The aim of the current research was the analysis of frequency of the DMs and kinds of the DMs used in this textbook. In order to analyze the DMs, some criteria were used. The present study benefited from Fraser's category of DMs to analyze the reading comprehension sections in the textbook in terms of using the DMs. To determine the number of the DMs, the frequency of DMs used in each reading passage was identified and they were presented in tables. Flesch's Readability Formula was used to determine the difficulty level of the reading passages for each lesson. In this way, it was examined whether the DMs used in reading sections had relationship with the easiness of the texts.

3.6. Data analysis procedure

First, the researcher determined the difficulty level of the reading passages according to Flesch's Readability Formula. Then the frequency of DMs in all reading passages was calculated. To answer the first question, the reading comprehension sections of the textbooks were analyzed regarding the use of the DMs based on Fraser's taxonomy. To answer the second research question, the readability of all the texts in the textbook was determined by the use of Flesch's Readability Formula. Then, Pearson chi-square coefficient computed the possible relationship between readability of the passages and the frequency of discourse markers in each passage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. RQ1. What are different types of DMs used in the reading sections of Iranian grade four high school English textbook?

Table 1: Distribution of Discourse Markers across the Reading Passages

| | Lesson one | Lesson two | Lesson three | Lesson four | Lesson five | Lesson six | Lesson seven | Lesson eight |
|------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Contrastive DMs | 4 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| but | 3 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | - |
| instead | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| although | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Elaborative DMs | 23 | 33 | 22 | 22 | 25 | 26 | 26 | 21 |
| also | 1 | 1 | - | - | 5 | 2 | 3 | - |
| And | 22 | 32 | 22 | 22 | 20 | 24 | 23 | 21 |
| Inferential DMs | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| so | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | - | - |
| then | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Reason DMs | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Because | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | 1 |
| since | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | - |
| Total words | 668 | 713 | 633 | 592 | 705 | 612 | 732 | 629 |
| Total DMs= | 32 | 48 | 30 | 31 | 33 | 35 | 31 | 25 |

The overall use of DMs and the number of times they have occurred in the reading sections of the English textbook were shown in Table 1.

The results indicated that the degree of the use of DMS in the reading sections is not the same. The analyses of the collected data revealed that the total number of DMs used in the lessons is (f= 265). Furthermore, Table 1 shows the variations in the use of discourse markers in the reading sections. Lesson 2 had the highest use of discourse markers (f= 48). On the other hand, lesson eight had the lowest rate for the use of discourse markers (f= 25).

As it is depicted in the above figure, elaborative markers were the most frequent kinds of DMs in the reading sections and after elaborative markers were contrastive markers. Reason related discourse markers were the least frequently used discourse markers. Elaborative markers "and" was the most frequent kind of the

Eight reading passages of the textbook were examined and DMs were classified in accordance with Fraser's taxonomy of DMs. The frequency of the total use of each DM category were calculated. First, the frequency of DMs used of each type was calculated. Table 1 below shows that the reading passages employed a variety of DMs with some types used more frequently than others. Elaborative markers (f= 198) were the most frequently employed, followed by contrastive markers (f= 36), inferential markers (f=16), and reason markers (f=15). The extensive use of elaborative markers may be explained because reading passages require elaboration of ideas that depend on the use of elaborative markers to signal relationships between segments. This is in line with Zhang, (2001) that reported a similar result. She found in her study on cohesion extensive use of the following additive conjunctions: "and, also, besides, in addition, furthermore, what is more".

DMs in the reading sections of the English textbook. The second frequent DMs used was contrastive discourse marker "but." With respect to inferential discourse markers, the most frequent DM was "so."

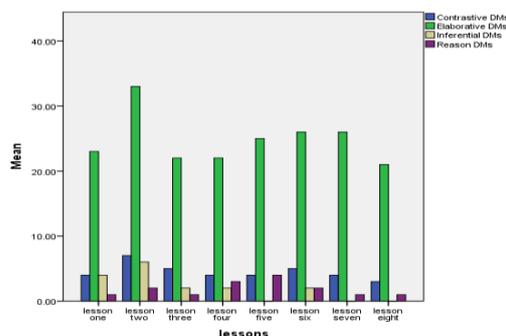


Figure 1: Frequency of Four Types of Discourse Markers across the Reading Passages

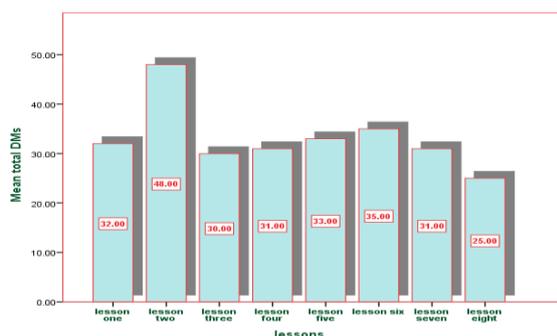


Figure 2: Total Frequency of Discourse Markers across the Reading Passages

As it is depicted in the above figure, lesson two had the highest rate of discourse markers (f=48). In the second place, was lesson six (f=35).

4.2. RQ2. Is there any significant relationship between the difficulty level of the Iranian English textbook reading passages and the frequency of discourse markers used?

The following null hypothesis was suggested:
H0. There is no significant relationship between the difficulty level of the Iranian English textbook reading passages and the frequency of discourse markers.

The main objective of the second research question, was to investigate the possible relationship between the number of DMs used in the reading section and the difficulty level of the texts. General descriptions for the reading sections of the textbook is presented in the following table:

Table 2: General Descriptions for the Reading Sections of the Textbook

| | Lesson one | Lesson two | Lesson three | Lesson four | Lesson five | Lesson six | Lesson seven | Lesson eight |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease | 68.7 | 63.6 | 75.1 | 69.2 | 50.3 | 68.6 | 54.4 | 59.8 |
| Total DMs | 32 | 48 | 30 | 31 | 33 | 35 | 31 | 25 |
| Character Count | 2,885 | 3,230 | 2,821 | 2,653 | 3,210 | 2,739 | 3,332 | 2,767 |
| Syllable Count | 946 | 1,055 | 893 | 865 | 1,084 | 885 | 1,154 | 976 |
| Word Count | 668 | 713 | 633 | 592 | 705 | 612 | 732 | 626 |
| Sentence Count | 37 | 40 | 52 | 43 | 27 | 39 | 39 | 42 |
| Characters per Word | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 4.6 | 4.4 |
| Syllables per Word | 1.4 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.6 |
| Words per Sentence | 18.1 | 17.8 | 12.2 | 13.8 | 26.1 | 15.7 | 18.8 | 14.9 |

Pearson chi-square was computed between the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease scores and the frequency of DMs. According to the findings, the (r) values showed that with increasing Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score that suggested the easiness of the reading comprehension texts, the frequency of DMs increased, too. Therefore, it

could be concluded that the larger the number of DMs used in the reading sections, the easier the reading passages. The following chi-square test shows the relationship between Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score and 4 types of discourse markers used in each reading passage.

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests for the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Scores and Different Categories of the Discourse Markers

| Pearson Chi-Square | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|--------|----|-----------------------|
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease * contrastive DMs | 24.000 | 21 | 0.293 |
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease * elaborative DMs | 40.000 | 35 | 0.258 |
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease * inferential DMs | 24.000 | 21 | 0.293 |
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease * reason DMs | 24.000 | 21 | 0.293 |
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease * total DMs | 48.000 | 42 | 0.243 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 8 | |

The highest relationship was found between Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score and elaborative discourse markers. This implied that with increasing number of elaborative discourse markers, the easiness of the reading comprehension would increase. Therefore, the number of DMs can be considered a discriminating factor in relation to the easiness of the texts. However, The Pearson chi-square values indicated that this slight relationship between the scores of the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease and the number of DMs used in the passages was not statistically significant ($p \geq .05$). This supports the null hypothesis and suggests that there is no significant relationship between

the difficulty level of the Iranian English textbook reading passages and the frequency of discourse markers.



Figure 3: The Relationship between Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Score and Elaborative Discourse Markers

CONCLUSION

Elaborative and contrastive discourse markers had been used at higher rates than reason markers or inferential markers. The findings showed that discourse markers slightly made the text easier. They make texts cohesive and coherent. In fact, the results show the role of DMs in coherence that finally leads to the comprehensiveness of the texts. Because the functions of markers are so broad, any and all analyses of markers even those focusing on only a relatively narrow aspect of their meaning or a small portion of their uses can teach us something about their role in discourse (Schiffrin, 1987).

Since Reading is an important skill and other skills are defined in the framework of reading, it is important for text writers to direct their attempts towards helping readers to comprehend the text easier. Reading is communication between reader and writer and the purpose of reading is making the meaning. Students should be encouraged to learn DMs to improve their reading comprehension. It is necessary to explain to them clearly with adequate examples the meaning and correct use of DMs in English. Employing appropriate types and amounts of discourse markers can suit the objectives of foreign language readers. This study utilized Freaser's taxonomy. The major limitation of the study was that it was confined to grade four high school English textbook. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Iranian English textbooks. In order to alleviate this limitation, other researches can be done using other frameworks of discourse markers in other English textbooks.

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