

ادوات الربط المستخدمة في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العمانيين في جامعة نزوى

Anu Prabha Raj

Ahmed Hamed Al-Rahbi

أنو برابها راج

أحمد حامد الرحبي

الملخص

وكان الغرض من هذا البحث هو فهم استخدام علامات الخطاب في المقالات الإنجليزية مكتوبة من قبل متعلمين EFL العمانيين في جامعة نزوة. وكانت أهداف البحث: (i) لفهم أنواع علامات الخطاب المستخدمة في تركيباتها المكتوبة باللغة الإنجليزية. (ii) لمعرفة أكثر فئة استخدامًا من علامة الخطاب في تركيباتهم الخطية الإنجليزية. كانت العينات 6 تركيبات مكتوبة باللغة الإنجليزية من 500 كلمة من ستة متعلمين من المستوى الثالث العماني EFL في جامعة نزوة. تم اختيار الطريقة النوعية لجمع البيانات وتحليل البيانات لهذا البحث. وكشفت النتائج أن علامات الخطاب من الفئات الخمس التي اقترحها فرايزر (1999) التصنيف لعلامات الخطاب استخدمها الطلاب في مقالاتهم. ومع ذلك، بسبب محدودية معرفة الطلاب بعلامات الخطاب المختلفة واستخدام الجمل الصغيرة والبسيطة، فإنهم يميلون إلى الإفراط في استخدام العلامات المفصلة في مقالاتهم مقارنة مع الفئات الأخرى. ونتيجة لذلك، يبدو أن جودة النص تتأثر. وتتمثل إحدى التوصيات الأساسية للمدرسين في تنفيذ تقنيات التدريس التفاعلية للطلاب لفهم بسهولة علامات الخطاب المختلفة التي يمكن استخدامها وفقًا لسياقات مختلفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علامات الخطاب، المقالات المكتوبة باللغة الإنجليزية، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عمانيين، جودة النص، تداخل اللغة الأولى في اللغة الثانية.

Discourse markers used in the English written composition of Omani EFL learners at the University of Nizwa

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to understand the use of discourse markers in the English-written essays by Omani EFL learners at the University of Nizwa. The research objectives were: i) to understand the types of discourse markers used in their English written compositions. ii) to find out the most frequently used category of discourse marker in their English written compositions. The samples were 6 English-written compositions of 500 words from six level 3 Omani foundation EFL learners at the University of Nizwa. The qualitative method was chosen for the data collection and data analysis of this research. The findings revealed that discourse markers from the 5 categories proposed by Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers were used by students in their essays. However, due to students' limited knowledge of various discourse markers and the use of small and simple sentences, they tend to overuse the elaborative markers in their essays compared to other categories. As a result, the quality of the text seems to be affected. One primary recommendation for instructors is to implement interactive teaching techniques for students to easily understand various discourse markers that could be used according to different contexts.

Keywords: Discourse markers, English written essays, Omani EFL learners, quality of the text, L1 interference in L2.

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INTRODUCTION

Discourse Markers (DM) are considered to be an important aspect of the language that helps in signaling the relationship between the meaning and the sentence in a discourse. Research proves that according to the theoretical background of the analysis, the terms that are used to describe DM's also change, i.e., discourse connectives (Blakemore, 1987), sentence connectives (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), and pragmatic markers (Fraser, 1999). According to Alghamdi (2014), discourse markers are connectives that help join sentences and words in a discourse. Not only in meaning, but the quality of the text also depends on how the speaker uses the appropriate markers that are required for that context. Hamza (2019) states that the quality of writing is mainly affected by the errors that are made in the use of discourse markers in a discourse. Along with this, coherence is a unique aspect and an important feature of a quality text that is well structured so that native speakers can read through it easily (Daif-Allah & Albeshir, 2013). However, the best way that is considered to join these sentences and paragraphs in a text is by using the appropriate discourse markers among the sentences.

Studies done by Yehia (2015), Ali and Mahadin (2016) and Dumlao and Wilang (2019) on the use of discourse markers by EFL learners show that students often tend to overuse some categories of discourse markers in their writing text. Among these, Arab students are found to be more prone to the overuse of discourse markers due to different reasons that affect them during their language learning process. Modhish (2012) states that even though students are taught English for 7 years in public schools and 12 years in private schools in most Arab countries, the quality of English as a foreign language used by the students is found to be poor when it comes to writing. In addition, the use of discourse markers (DM's) in written text is one of the areas where students are unsuccessful while using (Alami, 2015).

1.1 Problem Statement

Issues in the use of discourse markers were also found to be noticed in the writings of Omani EFL learners. In Oman, English is considered as a foreign language, and Arabic is their first language. Apart from their EFL classrooms, Omani EFL students do not get many opportunities to use English regularly. The limited practice and use of English outside an EFL classroom might be a reason why Omani EFL learners have weak language proficiency in writing. Ali and Mahadin (2016) explain that, according to findings from other research, the extent to which Arab EFL students utilize DMs varies according to their competence level. Learners who are more skilled than their peers typically employ explicit messages (DMs) in their writing. This issue was noticed in Omani EFL learner's writing. Students who have good language proficiency tend to produce well-structured sentences with the appropriate amount of discourse markers to connect the ideas and explicitly provide the intended meaning to their readers.

On the other hand, Omani EFL learners with weak language proficiency tend to produce weak sentence structuring, which results in overuse or misuse of discourse markers in their writing. As a result of the overuse or misuse of discourse markers in their writing, the quality of text produced by them seemed to be poor. This overuse of discourse markers was the major problem addressed in this research.

1.2 Purpose of this Research

Based on previous studies done on the use of discourse markers by Arab EFL learners, it was understood that the issue with the use of DMs might be because of the issues that they face during their learning process. This could include the language learning technique (i.e., using L1 to learn L2) that students adapted during their learning process or the linguistic competence of Omani EFL learners as explained by Dumlao and Wilang (2019) in their study. Either way, not many studies explain the errors that Omani EFL learners make in the use of discourse markers in their writing. As a result, not much information was available on whether Omani EFL learners overuse or misuse discourse markers in their writing. This information is found to be highly valuable in this field of research as well as for the EFL instructors, as it provides information on whether Omani EFL learners tend to overuse or misuse the same category of discourse markers compared to other studies done on other Arab EFL learners. So, the purpose of this research was to understand the use of discourse markers in the English-written essays by Omani EFL learners at the University of Nizwa.

1.3 Research objectives

To meet the purpose of this research, the following research objectives were chosen:

1. To identify the types of discourse markers (DM's) used by Omani EFL learners in their English written compositions.
2. To find out the most frequently used category of discourse markers (DM's) by Omani EFL learners in their English written compositions.

1.4 Research questions

To achieve the research objectives of this research, these are the research questions that were chosen:

1. What are the types of discourse markers (DM's) used by Omani EFL learners in their English written composition?
2. Which is the most frequently used category of discourse marker (DM's) by Omani EFL learners in their English written compositions?

1.5 Theoretical framework

Among different theories, Schiffrin's (1987) five-plane model of discourse markers is one of the most prominent studies on discourse markers. Through his study, he explained how discourse markers will help to create coherence in the spoken discourse by linking the components in the conversation i.e.; how similar items can have various functions depending on

the way they are presented in the conversation (Alami, 2015). However, various other researchers such as Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (2009) have also proved that not only in spoken discourse but also the use of discourse markers in written discourse will help to create coherence between sentences with different functions. Levinson (1983) in his explanation of the discourse analysis (DA) stated concepts such as rules and well-formed formula set features of this well-formed discourse. Therefore, one can conclude that discourse markers (spoken or written) contribute to the success and organization of the conversation and the overuse of discourse markers will certainly be against the rules

1.6 Research methodology

The method that was used to conduct this research was as follows:

1.6.1 Context of the study

This research was conducted in the foundation institute at the University of Nizwa. There are two main reasons to do so: i) different discourse markers from different categories are discussed at this level. ii) At this level Omani foundation EFL learners are assigned different types of writing compositions which would help them to improve their language proficiency for their higher classes.

1.6.2 Research design

The research design that was used to conduct this research was qualitative. Therefore, the methods and tools which are apt for this research design were chosen to conduct this research.

1.6.3 Sample

The samples that are chosen for this research were 6 English written compositions from 6 Level 3 Omani EFL learners at Nizwa University. These writings were short essays of around 500 words each assigned by their teacher.

1.6.4 Instruments

In this research, the qualitative method was used to analyze the data. First, the authors used a qualitative method (observation) to identify the different types of discourse markers that are being used by Omani EFL learners in their writing. Second, using the qualitative method (observation), the authors found out the most frequently used discourse maker(s) in writing the essays. The discourse markers will be tallied under each category and analyzed accordingly.

1.6.5 Data collection

The data was collected toward the end of the Fall Semester (2020). Since, the level 3 Omani EFL learners were assigned a writing task by their lectures at the end of each semester, the written compositions relevant to this research were collected as a result of written tasks assigned to the students during class time. Therefore, it was a real-time task where students depend on their language knowledge to complete it under the supervision of their teacher.

1.6.6 Data analysis

After collecting the data, the discourse markers (DM's) found from these written compositions were analyzed in two ways. Firstly, using Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers,

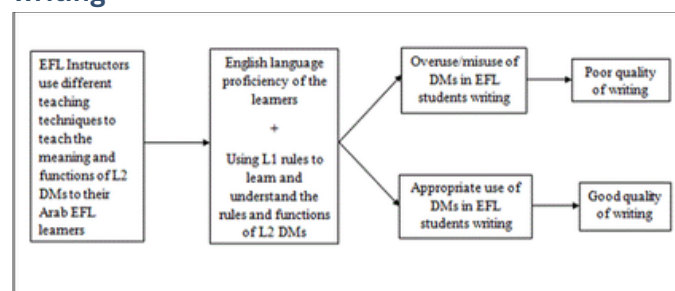
qualitative observation was done in order to categorize the different types of discourse markers based on the pragmatic functions that they perform in the text. In addition, by using this method, we were able to understand what are the types and categories of discourse markers that students generally use in their writing are. Secondly, qualitative observation was done on the discourse markers to find out the most frequent category of discourse marker(s) that were being used in their writing. Moreover, the findings obtained from this observation were compared and explained concerning previous studies on the use of DMs by Arab EFL learners. This was done to get a deeper idea of the findings and to understand what might be the reasons for any kind of variation in the category of DMs compared to previous studies in this research field.

2. RESEARCH BODY

2.1 Conceptual framework

This section graphically explains a possible scenario of how Omani EFL learners tend to misuse/ overuse DM's in their writing which could lead to the poor quality of their written text.

Fig. No. 1: Conceptual framework on overuse/misuse of DMs in Omani EFL learners writing



In the first step of the process, EFL instructors tend to use different teaching techniques to teach and explain the meaning and functions of various DMs in L2 to their Omani EFL learners. In the next stage, students try to understand and learn these DMs with the help of L1. This happens when they do not have an expert peer or an instructor to simplify the concept for them to understand. During this process, the English language proficiency of the learner also matters when students tend to use these discourse markers in their writing. For instance: if the student's language proficiency is average or above average, then the student might be able to learn various discourse markers from different categories of discourse markers and be able to use them in different contexts accordingly. On the other hand, if the learner is found to have weak English language proficiency, then they might not be able to understand different functions of DMs which might come under the same category of discourse markers.

Another problem in using L1 rules to understand and learn L2 DMs is interlanguage interference. If the L2 rules and functions of DMs are similar to L1 DMs, then there could be

positive interlanguage interference. However, if the L2 DM rules are different from the L1 DM rules, then there might be negative interlanguage interference. For instance: according to Majeed and Hmoody (2019), in the Arabic language, the number of DMs and their functions were found to be more compared to the DMs used in the English language. Since Omani EFL learners are still in their learning stage, they might not be able to understand this difference clearly. As a result, this might lead the student to misunderstand the functions of DMs in L2. Moreover, the absence of an expert peer or an instructor during this stage of their learning process might lead them to use DMs wrongly in a written or oral discourse.

This issue could be seen in the next of the learner's learning process. If the student's English language proficiency is good and can understand and use various DMs appropriately, then the quality of text produced by these students might be found to be good. However, if the student's English language proficiency is weak and was not able to understand and use various DMs appropriately, then the quality of text produced by these students might be found to be weak.

2.2 Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers

In this research, Fraser's (1999) framework will be considered for the analysis of the discourse markers used in the written essays. According to Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers, there are mainly 5 categories of discourse markers. They are:

2.2.1 Causative markers:

These are markers that help to provide the reasons for the previous idea. They include "after all", "since", "because", "for this reason" etc. (Ali & Mahadin, 2016)

2.2.2 Contrastive markers:

These are markers that help to provide a contrastive idea or a statement to the previous sentence. They include "but", "however", "in comparison", "still", "in contrast" etc. (Al-Yaari, Al Hammadi, & Alyami, 2013)

2.2.3 Elaborate markers:

These are markers that help the writer to provide some explanation or clarity to the previously stated statement. They include "and", "also", "furthermore", "in addition", "or", "besides", "moreover" etc. (Ali & Mahadin, 2016)

2.2.4 Inference markers:

These are markers that signal that the upcoming sentence is a conclusion to the previous ideas. They include "as a result", "so", "therefore", "thus", "consequently" etc. (Al-Yaari, Al Hammadi, & Alyami, 2013)

2.2.5 Topic change markers:

These are markers that indicate that there is a change in the topic in the upcoming sentences from the previous ideas. They

include "In my opinion", "I think", "by the way", "before I forget", "on a different note" etc. (Ali & Mahadin, 2016).

2.3 The use of English discourse markers by Arab learners

About different studies exploring the use of discourse markers by non-native Arab students, Alghamdi (2014) explains that non-native speakers often feel difficulty in writing tasks since they are expected to produce written material that would exhibit the ability of the learners to arrange the content. This is found to be the case even in discourse markers. Due to the lack of the ability to make well-structured, complex, and meaningful sentences, students are often found to overuse these discourse makers in their texts (Alghamdi, 2014). Arab EFL learners' English language competencies were found to play an important role in the misuse or overuse of discourse markers in their writing. This was clearly explained through the study conducted by Ali and Mahadin (2016). The study was to examine the use of discourse markers by 127 Jordanian EFL learners. It was done to observe the effect of students' level of proficiency. The results obtained from the study indicated that the use of discourse markers was more found in above-average learners rather than average learners. In addition to this, elaborative markers were the most frequently used category of discourse markers by Jordanian EFL learners. Inferential markers were the second most frequently used DMs followed by temporal markers and contrastive markers. This means that the linguistic competence of the EFL learner also matters when it comes to the use of discourse markers in a context. As rightly explained by Ali and Mahadin (2016), less experienced EFL students typically employ more constrained and repeated sets of DMs. Additionally, DMs may be limited in the roles they can perform due to lesser competence levels. This might limit the grammatical groups from which these markers can be taken as well as the range of places they can occupy. Thus, it follows that the usage of DMs in written discourse depends on learners' competency (Ali & Mahadin, 2016).

Alghamdi (2014) conducted a study on Saudi EFL students, and found that there is an underuse/overuse in frequencies of discourse markers used by non-native speakers as compared to native speakers in their written texts. This issue can be clearly understood when students tend to overuse the discourse markers "and", "because" "so" etc. in their writing. According to studies conducted by Dumlao and Wilang (2019), Alsaawi (2022), and Ramadan (2018), "and" which functions as an elaborative marker is the most frequently used discourse marker in Arab EFL learners writing. One of the major reasons that Alsaawi (2022) highlights for the overuse of "and" in their writing were because of using long sentences to expand their ideas as much as possible. As a result, to make these sentences meaningful and well-structured, Arab EFL learners tend to use more elaborative markers "and" which leads to the overuse of them in the text. In addition, the overuse of "and" also implies that learners are unfamiliar with other elaborative markers in

the same category due to which they overuse or misuse it in their text (Dumlao & Wilang, 2019).

Just like the use of discourse markers "and", there are some other DMs that Arab EFL learners tend to overuse or misuse in their writing. For instance: Asassfeh et al. (2013) conducted research among 146 Jordanian undergraduate EFL students to study the use of discourse markers in their written essays. The analysis revealed that there was not much variety of discourse markers being used in their writings. DMs such as "so" and "because" were found to be overused and DMs such as "as a result" and "thus" were found to be underused by the Jordanian EFL learners. Moreover, the results obtained from the study also explain how the learners semantically and grammatically misused some discourse markers in their writing (Asassfeh et al., 2013).

The influence of Arab EFL learner's native language (Arabic) into the foreign language (English) during the process of acquisition might also be another reason which leads to the overuse of discourse markers in their writing. Hamza (2019) supports this by saying that there is a vast variation between the use of discourse markers in Arabic and English. One of the difficulties for learners is that these markers would have various functions in Arabic such as "but" and "and" when they are being used in a context. Nasser Alsager et.al, (2020) indicate that "but" is used by natives and non-natives as an addition in the contrary to the Arabic version "lakin" which is used as a primary correction by Arabic natives in addition to other uses. If this is the case with simple one-word discourse markers, we also assume that a more complex discourse marker such as "I think" or "in my opinion" triggers more differences in use with non-native Arabic speakers. Thus, students at times are not able to differentiate and use the appropriate markers in their spoken or written production.

Various aspects might affect the use of discourse markers in Arab EFL learner's writing. Now since it is clear that the use of discourse markers is influenced by certain factors, it was important to understand deeper from previous studies whether the overuse of DMs has any effect on the quality of the text that they produce. Concerning this research, since Arab EFL learners are still in their learning process, it is important to consider research that might include EFL learners at a school level. For instance: Al- Khazraji (2019) conducted a study on Grade 9 intermediate ESL learners at a school in Dubai. The study examined ESL learner's understanding of discourse markers in essay writing. The results indicated that several types of DMs from causative, contrastive, elaborative, and inferential markers were used. Among these, some DMs were found to be used correctly while others were incorrectly. In addition to this, the quality of students' writing was found to be better when there was an apt use of discourse markers. From this research, it was understood that the misuse of DMs was found to be a common issue that was not just found in university students but was also found in the writings of school-going students. This means that the misuse of DMs in

Arab EFL students' writing is an important issue that must be addressed before it becomes pragmatically fossilized in their language.

Elaborative markers are the most frequently used category of discourse markers in Arab EFL learner's writing. As rightly mentioned by Alghamdi (2014), the limited knowledge of EFL learners to create complex, well-structured sentences to express their ideas was one of the reasons for the high frequency of the use of elaborative markers. The extreme dependency on the use of discourse markers "and" might be a reason for not just the high use of elaborative markers, but also for the poor quality of the text. A study conducted by Jalilifar (2008) on Iranian EFL learners supports this since elaborative markers such as "and" are the ones that are most frequently used by the learners in their written compositions. Moreover, Modhish (2012) also adds the fact that elaborative markers are the ones which is most frequently used by the learners. As a result, there is no positive connection between the quality of writing and the no. of discourse markers used in the written essays. In other words, if the Arab EFL learners tend to use various discourse marker(s) from different categories that are appropriate for the context, then it might not only help the author to express their ideas clearly but also help them to produce a good quality of the text. Jalilifar (2008) also proved this through the research that the no. of appropriate discourse markers used in a text could lead to the production of successful coherent quality writing.

Even though several researches have been done among Arab students, it was noticed that not many studies were done on how Omani EFL learners use these discourse markers in their writing tasks. Thus, this research focuses on how Omani EFL learners use these discourse markers in their writing.

2.3 Findings and Discussions

2.3.1 Findings of this research

RQ 1: What are the types of discourse markers (DM's) used by Omani EFL learners in their English written composition?

After the analysis, it was noticed that all the categories of discourse markers mentioned by Fraser (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers were being used in the essays produced by Omani EFL learners.

2.3.1.1 Topic change markers "e.g: In my opinion, I think, on a different note":

Topic-related discourse markers are expressions that are used to indicate the upcoming sentence is a change from the present or the previous topic (Fraser, 1999). After the analysis, only 2 types of topic change markers were being used by the learners in their English written composition.

a) Use of "In my opinion":

According to Unaldi (2013), phrases such as "[in my opinion]", and "[in my point of view]" are some of the commonly used DMs in EFL learners' writing. Even though the discourse marker "[in my opinion]" was not used frequently by learners, Omani EFL learners tend to use it appropriately in the context to express a change in their opinion/idea about the topic.

Eg.: [.....university with scholarship].1 In my opinion, [uni students should have a] 2.....

Here, the expression "[in my opinion]" signals to the readers that the writer is introducing his/her opinion in sentence 2 concerning sentence 1. This means that Omani EFL learners did have the understanding about the function that "[in my opinion]" which comes under topic change markers performed in a particular context. As a result, learners were able to use appropriate discourse markers as mentioned by Ali and Mahadin (2016).

b) Use of "I think":

According to Ali and Mahadin (2016), "[I think]" is one of the most commonly used DMs in EFL learners writing. In this research, the function (i.e., to present the writer's opinion in the text) was found to be used rightly by the Omani EFL learners in their writing.

Eg.: [.....can't study in the home with us. Also] 1 I think [that if they live] 2.....

Here, the expression "[I think]" signals two main functions i.e., i) change in 2 topic as compared to the ideas presented in 1. ii) the writer was introducing his/her opinion in 2 which supports the ideas mentioned in 1. This means that the Omani EFL learner has certain knowledge about the meaning and function that this discourse marker performs in the context. As mentioned by Ali and Mahadin (2016), the learners tried to use appropriate discourse markers to express their opinions clearly to their readers.

2.3.1.2 Contrastive markers "e.g: but, however, in contrast":

Fraser (1999) states that contrastive discourse markers are expressions that indicate the explicit meaning of the upcoming sentence is a contrast to the meaning provided in the previous sentence. After the analysis, only 1 type of contrastive marker was used by the learners in their writing.

a) Use of "but":

After the analysis, it was also understood that Omani EFL students only tend to use "[but]" as a contrastive marker in their essays. Moreover, this finding seems to be supported by previous research done by Taweel (2020), Rabab'ah et.al, (2022), and Dumlao and Wilang (2019) as they mention that "[but]" is the most commonly used discourse marker under the contrastive markers category. To understand further, the use of "[but]" in the text was analyzed.

Eg.: [..... a lot of students have a part time job] 1, but [others they are have not] 2.

In this sentence, the learner uses the discourse marker "[but]" to show the function of contrast between two different ideas or meanings in 1 and 2. Although several discourse markers come under the same category, the overuse use of only one discourse marker in the text might imply the limited knowledge of DMs and their functions that come under contrastive marker category as highlighted by Ali and Mahadin (2016). In addition, the only use of "[but]" in the text also supports the information mentioned by Nasser Alsager et.al, (2020) i.e, students tend to use "[but]" as a substitute for the Arabic DM

"lakin" in their writing. This might be another reason why students tend to use "[but]" as a contrastive marker in their writing. Along with this, the average/lower language proficiency of Omani EFL learners might be another reason for using just one discourse marker from the contrastive markers category.

2.3.1.3 Causative markers "e.g: since, because, after all":

Causative discourse markers are expressions that indicate that the upcoming sentence provides the reason(s) for the ideas presented in the previous sentences (Fraser, 1999). After the analysis, only 2 types of causative markers are used by the learners in their English written composition as discussed below.

a) Use of "after all":

The use of "[after all]" by Omani EFL learners in their writing was found to be interesting and unique. Based on previous studies, not many learners were found using this discourse marker in their writing. This might indicate that not many Omani EFL learners might know the function that this discourse marker performs in the context.

Eg.: [.....stop the development of the generation] 1. After all that, [teachers should have a] 2.....

In this sentence, "[after all]" is used by the learner to provide reasons for the ideas that are being mentioned in 1. In addition, "[after all]" also functions as an assertive in the sentence. Interestingly, the use of "[after all]" in the text also indicates that Omani EFL learners might be aware of the various functions that it performs in a context.

b) Use of "because":

The word "[because]" is another frequently used discourse marker in Omani EFL learner's writing. In the analysis, it was noticed that Omani EFL learners tend to overuse the DM "[because]" in their writing. This might be because of the function that it performs in the context.

Eg.: [.....for me is to be teacher] 1, because [some reasons which are the time] 2.....

In this sentence, "[because]" is used in 2 to provide a reason for the ideas that are being mentioned in 1. Moreover, this discourse marker also functions as an imperative in the sentence. This means that the learner did know the various functions that "[because]" could perform according to the context in which it was used. Moreover, the findings in this research also support the fact mentioned by Dumlao and Wilang (2019), that EFL users mostly depended on the use of "[since]" and "[because]" in their writing to represent the causative category of discourse markers.

2.3.1.4 Elaborative markers "e.g: and, also, furthermore":

Fraser (1999) explains that elaborative discourse markers are expressions that indicate a parallel relationship between the upcoming sentence and the previous sentence. According to Modhish (2012), Jalilifar (2008), Rababah et.al. (2022), Ali and Mahadin (2016), and Alsaawi (2022), discourse markers that come under elaborative markers category are the most frequently used discourse markers compared to other

categories in EFL learners writing. After the analysis, 5 elaborative DMs used by the students in their English written composition were explained below.

a) Use of "and":

In this research, "[and]" was the most frequently used discourse marker by Omani EFL learners in their writing. This means that the findings from this research are similar to the findings obtained in Dumlao and Wilang (2019), Alsaawi (2022), and Ramadan (2018). To understand further, the use of "[and]" in the text was analyzed.

Eg.: [.....living at school is more relaxing] 1 and [more helpful for study] 2.....

Here, "[and]" was used by the student to make a relationship between the messages or ideas found in 1 and 2. Along with this, "[and]" also acts as a connective expression to connect the two ideas and elaborate them to make a meaningful sentence. In addition to this, "[and]" was found to be overused by Omani EFL learners in their writing. As rightly explained by Alghamdi (2014), students' difficulty in writing complex, well-structured sentences is one of the reasons for this over of DM. This means that students tend to produce long sentences to express their ideas which often require the use of "[and]" to connect the ideas and make the text meaningful to their reader.

b) Use of "also":

"[Also]" is another commonly used discourse marker in Arab EFL learners writing. According to the study done by Ramadan (2018), "[also]" is the second most commonly used discourse marker in Libyan EFL undergraduate students. This research findings also supports the findings of Ramadan (2018).

Eg.: [....points in her study] 1. Also, [her parents are proud of her] 2.....

Here, "[also]" was used by the learner to add extra information or message to the previous idea. Moreover, it also helped the learner to elaborate the ideas that they intend to convey to their hearer. Along with this, as rightly mentioned by Modhish (2012), a variety in the use of discourse marker(s) from the same category indicates that the students do know other DMs from the same category. The findings from this research seem to support Modhish (2012).

c) Use of "furthermore":

"[Furthermore]" was found to be the least used elaborative discourse marker in Omani EFL learner's writing. This seems to be supported by the research done by Dumlao and Wilang (2019). This lower frequency in the use of "[furthermore]" in Arab EFL learner's writing might be related to their English language proficiency. Further analysis was done to understand it better.

Eg.: [....the study and the work] 1. Furthermore, [they will spend them] 2...

The use of "[furthermore]" in the sentence shows that the 2 is adding extra information or message not just to 1, but also to the ideas that was mentioned before in the text. The use of "[furthermore]" in this context shows that the learner might be competent enough to understand the function of this DM and

use it accordingly to the context. This finding seems to be in support with the fact explained by Ali and Mahadin (2016).

d) Use of "in addition":

Similar to the use of the discourse marker "[furthermore]", the use of discourse marker "[in addition]" was found to be the least used elaborative discourse marker in Omani EFL learners' writing. This finding seems to be supported by the findings of Dumlao and Wilang (2019). One possible reason might be because of students' weak English language proficiency. Another reason might be that Omani EFL learners do not have enough opportunities to use L2 in different contexts. As a result, they might be unfamiliar with using these discourse markers in different contexts. Further analysis was done on the use of "[in addition]" to find out if the students had used it appropriately or not.

Eg.: [.....to deliver the lesson well] 1. In addition, [I would like to have] 2.....

The use of "[in addition]" in the sentence functions as a signaling expression which indicates adding some extra ideas to the previous ideas within the text. It also helps the writer to connect the different ideas and meanings within the context. This means that the student is competent enough to understand the functions of these discourse markers and use them accordingly. As a result, the student might have been able to use several DMs from the same category.

e) Use of "or":

"[Or]" is another commonly used elaborative discourse marker in Omani EFL learner's writing. Interestingly, Alsaawi (2022) reveals that "[or]" is the third most frequently used elaborative discourse marker in senior university students in Saudi Arabia. This might be because of the function that the discourse marker performs in the context (i.e., providing various suggestions or choices).

Eg.: [....they will use them for themselves] 1 or [just put them away] 2....

Here, the use of "[or]" shows that the learner wanted to elaborate on the idea by providing an appropriate contrastive idea that supports 1. Surprisingly, the findings of Alsaawi (2022) also seem to be similar to the findings of this research. According to Alsaawi (2022), "[or]" is used to indicate that an upcoming sentence is a contrastive idea to the previously mentioned statement.

2.3.1.5 Inferential markers "e.g; so, as a result, therefore":

Inferential discourse markers are expressions that are used to indicate that the upcoming sentence is a conclusion to the idea that is being presented in the previous sentence (Fraser, 1999). After the analysis, it was noticed that only 2 types of inferential markers were used by the learners in their English written composition.

a) Use of "Therefore":

The use of "[therefore]" was not found to be frequently used by Omani EFL learners compared to other DMs in the same category. Analysis of the use of "[therefore]" concerning its context was done to find out if the discourse marker was used

In this sentence, "[therefore]" was used to indicate that the upcoming sentence is a conclusion for the ideas that are being presented in the previous sentences. This finding was found to be supported by Ali and Mahadin (2016) as it explained that L2 users tend to use "[therefore]" in a context to introduce an idea and organize the text.

b) Use of "So":

In Omani EFL learners writing, it was interesting to notice that learners tend to overuse "[so]" in their writing. Asassfeh et al. (2013) also support that "[so]" is the second most frequently used discourse marker by L2 users under the inferential marker category.

Eg.: [...at university] 1. So, [the money that they get it from the part] 2

In this sentence, "[so]" was used at the beginning of the 2 to symbolize that the upcoming sentence is a concluding idea for the messages that were presented in 1. Ali and Mahadin (2016) also explain that the use of "[so]" indicates that the upcoming idea or sentence has a relation to the previously mentioned idea in the context. This seemed to be confirmed by the findings of this research. Moreover, the overuse of "[so]" by Omani EFL learners might be because they are much more familiar with using "[so]" as an inferential discourse marker compared to other DMs in the inferential category.

RQ 2: Which is the most frequently used category of discourse marker (DM's) by Omani EFL learners in their English written compositions?

In this section, the frequency of each category of discourse markers were analyzed to find out the most frequently used category of discourse marker in all 6 English written compositions.

Fig. No: 2 Most frequently used DMs by Omani EFL learners in their writing

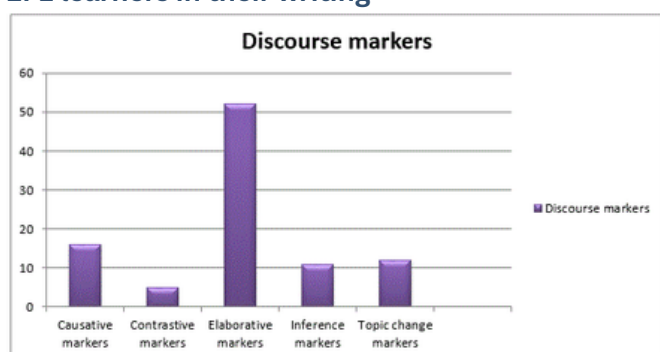


Fig. No: 2 clearly shows that all 5 categories of discourse markers mentioned in Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers were found to be used by Omani EFL learners in their writing. Among these, elaborative markers were found to be the most frequently used discourse markers by Omani EFL learners in their writing. Interestingly, this finding seems to be supported by Modhish (2012), Jalilifar (2008), Rababah et al. (2022), Ali and Mahadin (2016), and Alsaawi (2022) whose studies were done on Yemeni, Iranian, Jordanian, and Saudi EFL learners. This might be because of the functions that discourse markers under the elaborative category perform in a

context.

Causative markers were the second most frequently used discourse markers by Omani EFL learners in their writing. However, the findings from this research seemed to contradict the findings from Modhish (2012), Jalilifar (2008), Rababah et al. (2022), and Taweel (2020). There were mainly two main reasons why the findings from this research seem to contradict the previous studies. First, the framework that was used in this research was found to be different from that of the current study. In the previous study, many of them tend to use Fraser's (2009) taxonomy of discourse markers. According to Fraser's (2009) taxonomy of discourse markers, there were only 4 categories of discourse markers. They are elaborative, contrastive, temporal, and inferential markers. This means that discourse markers that come under the causative marker category were found to be transferred to other categories due to the multiple functions that a discourse marker performs in a context. One such example was the DM "because". Based on Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers, the use of "because" indicates that the upcoming sentence or statement is a reason for the previously mentioned idea. However, according to Fraser's (2009) taxonomy of discourse markers, "because" functions to indicate that the upcoming idea is the result of what is being mentioned in the previous sentence.

With a slight difference in the frequency of use, inferential markers and topic change markers were the third most frequently used discourse markers by Omani EFL learners in their writing. The use of topic change markers by Omani EFL learners in their essays was found to have a close relation with the content of their essay i.e., stating their opinion about the topic. Moreover, the use of topic change markers also depends on the language proficiency of the EFL learner. The findings in this research are matching Ali and Mahadin (2016) study findings. The latter explained that EFL learners who are more proficient in the language tend to use a variety of discourse markers from different categories compared to those EFL learners who are less proficient in the language.

The frequency in the use of inference markers by Omani EFL learners in their writing was found to be interesting compared to other researches done among Arab EFL learners. According to a study done by Rababah et al. (2022) on Jordanian high school EFL learners, inferential markers were the third most frequently used category of discourse markers by the learners. The reasons for this high frequency in the use of DMs were because of lack of knowledge, literal translation, and overgeneralization. This might be the same case with Omani EFL learners. Due to their limited knowledge about L2 and interlanguage interference, students tend to misunderstand the functions of DMs and overuse them in the context accordingly. Although there are researches who supports the findings of this study, it was also interesting to notice that studies conducted by Modhish (2012), Jalilifar (2008), and Ramadan (2018) contradict the findings obtained in this research. According to these researchers, the inferential marker

was the second most frequently used discourse marker among Arab EFL learners. This might be because of the types of DMs that were used by Arab EFL learners in their writing as well as the English Language competence of learners.

Contrastive markers were the least frequently used discourse markers by Omani EFL learners in their writing. This might be because of their lack of knowledge of various DMs that come under the contrastive marker category and the literal translation of ideas into their essays. This statement is supported by Rababah et al. (2022). Based on the findings of Rababah et al. (2022), contrastive markers were the least frequently used category of discourse markers in Jordanian EFL learner's writing. Even though previous studies do support the fact that contrastive markers are the least frequently used discourse markers, some other research also contradicts this research finding. According to the study conducted by Modhish (2012) and Jalilifar (2008) on Yemeni and Iranian EFL learners, contrastive markers were the third most frequently used DMs in their writing. This might be because of the context in which students used these DMs.

After the analysis of the frequency graph, the frequency of occurrences of different discourse markers under each category was done to obtain a detailed understanding of the concept

Table No.1 Frequency occurrence of discourse markers

SL. No	Categories of discourse markers	Frequency of occurrence	Percentage
1.	Causative markers (<i>after all, because</i>)	16	16.67%
2.	Contrastive markers (<i>but</i>)	5	5.21%
3.	Elaborative markers (<i>and, also, furthermore, in addition, or</i>)	52	54.17%
4.	Inference markers (<i>so, therefore</i>)	11	11.46%
5.	Topic change markers (<i>In my opinion, I think</i>)	12	12.5%
	Total:	96	100

Table No. 1 provides information on the frequency of occurrences of different DMs from each categories of Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers. Based on the table it was understood that Omani EFL learners had the knowledge about a variety of DMs which comes under the elaborative marker. This might be a reason for the high frequency in the use of elaborative discourse markers in their writing. Moreover, the increase in use of "and" in Omani EFL learners' writing might be because of 2 main reasons i.e, i) the result of the L1 rule interference with L2 as mentioned by Rababah et al. (2022) and inability to write well-structured and meaningful sentences to express their ideas/opinion in the context as mentioned by (Alghamdi, 2014). This misunderstanding of the L2 rule might have happened because of the lack of an expert peer who could correct them during their language learning process. As a result, the overuse of elaborative DMs was found to have affected the quality of the text.

Considering the DMs used in causative, inference, and topic change markers, it was understood that students had limited knowledge of variety of DMs from these 3 categories compared

to elaborative DMs. This might be because of 2 main reasons i.e., i) students' weak language competence to learn and understand DMs from these 3 categories that might be used in the particular context and ii) the context in which these DMs were used. Interestingly, this could be understood from the frequency in the use of topic change markers used in this research compared to other previous studies such as Modhish (2012) and Jalilifar (2008). Based on these studies, the frequency of the use of topic change markers was found to be less compared to other categories of DMs.

Finally, the numbers of DMs which come under contrastive marker category were found to be limited. The only use of "but" in their writing might indicate 2 main reasons. They are i) students limited knowledge about the different discourse markers which functions under contrastive DMs and ii) using L1 to understand and learn the discourse markers in L2 as mentioned by Nasser Alsager et.al, (2020) . Interestingly, it was noticed that the findings in this research seems to contradict with the findings obtained by Modhish (2012), Jalilifar (2008), and Ramadan (2018) since contrastive markers were the third most frequently used discourse markers by Arab EFL learners in their research. This might be because of Omani EFL learners' language competence due to which they tend to underuse the use of "but" in their writing which seemed to have affected their writing quality.

2.3.2 Discussion of the findings

After the analysis of the findings of this research, it was understood that Omani EFL learners tend to use different DMs from all 5 categories of discourse markers mentioned by Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers. As rightly mentioned by Jalilifar (2008), the appropriate use of discourse markers by students in their writing to convey their intended meaning to their readers does have a strong impact on the quality of the text that they produce. In this research context, Omani EFL students tend to overuse and underuse certain discourse markers in their writing, which results in reducing the quality of the text that they produced. As explained by Alghamdi (2014), writing is also a reflection of their ability to exhibit their language competence by conveying their ideas in a well-structured manner for their reader to understand. However, in this research context, the quality of the text seemed to be average. This might indicate two main issues. They are: i) students inability to write well-structured, complex, and meaningful sentences to express their ideas to their readers explicitly, as mentioned by Alghamdi (2014); and ii) limited knowledge of L2 discourse markers, which come under different categories to perform different functions, as mentioned by Rababah et al. (2022). One such example was the overuse of "and" in their writing to connect the idea and make a long, meaningful sentence. This was also supported by the findings obtained from research conducted by Al Ahmed and Kirmizi in 2021.

The findings from this research were found to be valuable as they seemed to cover the research gap on how Omani EFL

learners use DMs in their writing. Although the sample in this study was found to be limited, the information was found to be of great importance. The findings of this research indicate two main reasons why students tend to overuse or underuse discourse markers in their writing. Limited exposure of Omani EFL students to authentic L2 texts could be one of the reasons. As discussed earlier, apart from their EFL classroom, Omani EFL learners often do not get enough opportunities to use L2 in their day-to-day lives. Therefore, EFL instructors need to provide more practical writing tasks that might be helpful for students to not only improve their writing skills but also provide them with the opportunity to use a wide variety of discourse markers that are appropriate for the context. This could ultimately help Omani EFL learners improve the use of DMs in their writing, which could eventually help them produce good-quality writing.

Another reason might be the absence of an expert peer or an instructor during their learning process to correct their misunderstanding about the functions of DMs in a given context. As rightly mentioned by Majeed and Hmoody (2019), since students are not competent enough to understand the different functions of L2 DMs, they might not have completely understood the different functions that they could perform in a given context. As a result, this might have led to the overuse or underuse of DMs in their writing. In addition, as mentioned by Dumlao and Wilang (2019), the negative impact of using L1 to learn L2 could also affect the learning process of Omani EFL learners. So, to reduce this, implementing collaborative teaching and learning techniques might be helpful for Omani EFL learners not only to understand the concept, but with the help of expert peers or instructors, they could clarify their doubts and learn the discourse markers without any misunderstanding. As a result, discourse marker(s) errors caused by interlanguage interference (i.e., L1 into L2) could be reduced.

CONCLUSION

Overuse or misuse of discourse markers were one of the issues found in the writings of Arab EFL learners. Studies done on Arab EFL learners' shows that elaborative marker were the

most frequently used category of DMs in their writing. However, not much research was done on the use of DMs by Omani EFL learners in their writing. So, the purpose of this research was to understand the use of discourse markers in the English-written essays by Omani EFL learners at the University of Nizwa. The findings of this research were found to have answered the research questions of this research. Omani EFL learners were found to use all the categories of discourse markers mentioned in Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers. In addition, the elaborative marker was the most frequently used discourse marker category by Omani EFL learners in their writing. The overuse of the elaborative marker "and" was found to be the reason for the high frequency of the use of elaborative markers. As highlighted by Alghamdi (2014), the limited ability of students to create complex, well-structured sentences to express the intended meaning to their readers was found to be one of the issues for the overuse of elaborative markers. Moreover, students' limited knowledge about other discourse markers was another issue for the overuse or misuse of DMs in their writing. Due to this reason, the quality of the text that Omani EFL learners produced seemed to be affected.

Limited opportunities to use and learn discourse markers that were appropriate for different contexts were noticed as a limitation. In fact, through the study conducted by Faghih-Sabet et al. (2013), the effectiveness of teaching DMs to learners in their regular sessions was discussed. They discovered that the learners' understanding of the text increased. This is compelling proof that discourse competency may be attained with a specific instructional technique. Even in this research context, since English was considered as their foreign language, Omani EFL students could be provided with more opportunities to apply and learn discourse markers that are apt to express their intended meaning meaningfully in various contexts. So, one primary recommendation for instructors is to implement interactive teaching techniques in their EFL classroom for Omani EFL students so that they get the opportunity to easily use and learn various discourse markers that could be used according to different contexts.

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APPENDIX

Sample 1:

In my opinion I think that university students should live at school and that for many reasons. First I think that if they live at school they will be able to focus in their study and they will take more care about it because they will be far from their home and their family so they can't be having at something else but their study. The second reason is being far away from your home is a good thing because you will feel more responsibility and you will feel about that money that you have it so that will make you care about your study to get high marks. Also sometimes in some family there is always tensions so that could make the one student lost his mark and think about his family. The third reason is being at living at school is more ~~easy~~ ^{easy} than living at home. For study if we look at the most helpful ~~reasons~~ ^{reasons} and more helpful for study if we look at the most helpful place because there ~~is~~ ^{is} nothing to care about it than there study and I can see that in my sister because she can't study in the home with us also I think that if they live at school they will be more able to get another skills like they can be more care about their personal things and maybe cleaning his room and the place that he lives it will make his personality because I think that it's a important thing to live alone far away of your family ~~and~~ ^{and} to do their things by ~~their~~ ^{their} himself and I'm sure if everyone try to live alone for a one hour only we will be more responsibility and we will take care about our things that we do at the place that we live on. Finally I'm sure that live at school is more helpful not just for the student but also for the family.

Sample 2:

There are many students work and study at the same time. They congratulate and complete work, it's amazing to work to feel of your ~~own~~ ^{own} power self.

The first reason that make me accept with students have a part time job is, ~~to~~ ^{to} give them positive thinking of job and to have confident with their selves. Many students are work and they are an ~~excellent~~ ^{excellent} students in the university.

The second reason is, to help their parent if they are needed for money and to use less money while they are studied. For example, my best friend is working now and she's study in Assiut Qubus University, she have good points in her study also, ~~and~~ ^{and} her parents are proud of her, that she can help her father.

The third reason is, to be an example for the people who said that they ~~are~~ ^{are} can't work because of the highest number of people ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ China. For example, my uncle is study in Nizwan College in muscat, and he told his friend to search for a job to learn how to make his life before ~~it's~~ ^{it's} in come old.

In general, to have a ~~part~~ ^{part} time job at ~~the~~ ^{the} time study is good for many points. That's because many people have ~~the~~ ^{the} time to study and work but they are lazy. ~~and~~ ^{and}

Sample 3:

In my opinion, I think the uni students should have apart-time job for many reasons.

The first reason is when the student have apart-time job they will get able of spectacular thing such as they will learn how to get their money with them selves without their family. Also, when they work they will get able of important skills which must find in the person such as they get some communication skills so he can speak with the people.

The second reason is they will know how the work life is and how it difficult so they get used to work for a long time and with alot of works. Also, they will learn how to manage their time between the study and the work. Furthermore, they will spend their free time in something good.

Finally, I hope our uni students work in apart-time job to improve their selves by get important skills, and spend their time with an amazing thing which help her to works in the future.

Sample 4:

Unistudents are the students who study in university. Some of them study in university with ~~scholarship~~ there many but others study in university with scholar ship.

In my opinion, unistudents should have apart time job because ~~the~~ some of them need to support themselves with money at university. So the money that they get it from part time job they will earn use things for themselves or just put them away of their hands for future.

The second reason, some of unistudent must able to break so they can do another things. They can use their break in some thing useful and the part time job is useful thing.

In other hand, there are unistudent have able of jobs. So that kind of student ~~do~~ doesn't have to ~~have~~ have a part time job if they really didn't need it. Because they will be so much busy and doesn't have a much time for studying.

All of all, ~~not all~~ ~~not all~~ unistudent should have apart time job and not all should have a part time job.

Sample 5:

Nowadays, a lot of students have a part time job, but others ~~and~~ they are have not. In my opinion I think the students should not have a part time jobs for many reasons.

The first reasons is : if they have a part job they will not study hard because they don't have more time to study.

The second reasons is : They ~~will~~ will feel tired and sad because they don't have time to study and they will spend in their job.

The ~~and~~ third reasons is : they will ~~fail~~ fail in the exam because they don't study hard in the ~~the~~ their house and they will go out in the university maybe they don't have money to study ~~again~~ again and their family don't have money to help their.

Finally, In my opinion I think you should not have a part job because, you cannot study hard and you feel always sad because you have not more time to study. and maybe you fail in the exam and you will study the subject again.

Sample 6:

Confer education is very exciting and hard at the same time. The best job for me is to be teacher, because some reasons which are the time of working, work nature and salary. I will discuss why to be teacher is my best job.

First reason is the time of working. Usually the teachers start their job in the morning at six o'clock am and they finish at 1 o'clock pm. So that's very good to wake up every morning early and finish the work not to late.

The second reason is work nature. To be a teacher I have to be able with different types of students. Also, being able to deliver the lesson well. In addition, I would like to have confidence to speak in front of students without feeling hesitated or nervous.

The final reason is the salary. The teacher's mind the world earn a good amount of salary. Being a teacher means being very crucial in the society. Imagine a society without teachers, people would be just ignorant and would there safe stop the development of the generation. After all that, teachers should have a convenient environment with an