



DISCOURSE CONNECTORS IN THE ESP STUDENTS' WRITINGS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Wuwuh Andayani¹

¹Institute of Social Science and Management STIAMI

E-mail: wuwuh@stiami.ac.id

Accepted:

10 June 2024

Published:

18 July 2024

Corresponding Author:

Wuwuh Andayani

Email Corresponding:

wuwuh@stiami.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Cohesion and coherent writing are important aspects of a well-written paragraph. For a paragraph to successfully communicate its meaning, it must be coherent and cohesive. Examining how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) students use discourse connectors in their writing was the aim of this study. The argumentative essays written by students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses were the main focus of the study. Thirty-six essays from ESP students were chosen as the sample for this study using a purposive sampling technique. Methods of quantitative analysis were applied to the data. The results showed that the students' use of a wide variety of discourse connectors was lacking. Furthermore, they did not use enough accurate discourse connections. Additionally, it was seen that discourse connectors were being used excessively. In addition, the discourse connectors "and," "or," "because (of)," and "so (that)" were most frequently employed. The study produced a number of recommendations for instructional strategies and further investigation. Lastly, it was anticipated that this study would be helpful for future research on the application of discourse connectors.

Keywords: *Discourse Connectors, ESP Students' Writing*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cohesion and coherence are two important writing elements to take into account (Boardman, C.A. & Frydenberg, J., 2008). For a paragraph to successfully communicate its meaning, it must be coherent and cohesive. Coherence, as defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002), is the relationship between the meanings of sentences in a written document or between comments made during a conversation. Essentially, coherence refers to the logical flow of ideas, making sure that the paragraph has a distinct core theme that is bolstered by relevant details. The reader should be guided easily through the argument or story by each sentence, which should build upon the one before it. Consequently, a paragraph is

considered coherent when it is composed of a series of sentences that methodically elaborate on a main idea, such a topic sentence, together with supporting sentences that are closely related to the main idea.

However, cohesion is a general term for language strategies that indicate the textual structure, which stands for the coherence of the content conveyed, according to McDonough, S. (2002). In order to connect concepts inside the paragraph, it also entails the usage of linking words and phrases (Ahdal & Alqasham, 2021). It strengthens the connections between sentences and contributes to the sense of unity. A paragraph is considered coherent if all of the supporting sentences are strongly related to one other and support the major idea presented in the topic

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

sentence, according to Boardman and Frydenberg (2008). The methods utilized to join sentences are referred to as cohesive devices. Therefore, authors can create a paragraph that is not only clear and interesting but also easy to follow by concentrating on both coherence and cohesiveness.

Textual coherence is essential for establishing connections between concepts. They facilitate the reader's navigation of the information flow and aid in maintaining coherence. The text uses a variety of logical strategies to connect ideas amongst one another. Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (2015) is the most important resource for language teachers, according to Boardman and Frydenberg (2008). Several linguistic components that work together to link and integrate disparate textual sections are referred to as cohesive devices. These consist of demonstrative pronouns, definite articles, personal pronouns, linking words, and synonyms. Since they link the many components of a sentence or paragraph, linking words are thought to be the most important part of a text (Schiffrin, 1987 cited in Boardman, C.A & Frydenberg, J., 2008). Cohesive elements (Halliday & Hasan, 2015), conjunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987), pragmatics markers (Fraser, 1990), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), conjunctive adverbials (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), linking words (Boardman, C.A & Frydenberg, J., 2008), logical connectors (Quirk et al., 1985), linking adverbials (Biber et al., 1999), and discourse connectors (Cowan, 2008) are some of the terms used in the literature to refer to linking words. The term "discourse connectors" (also known as DCs) refers to a variety of terminologies used in this study. DCs' main function is to make the connections between various textual elements obvious (Biber et al., 1999 cited in Prommas, 2011). DCs are used to maintain a textual concept's consistency. Consequently, when sufficient cognitive resources are unavailable, a cognitive process as a whole seems unfinished, illogical, and fragmented. Additionally, a text's logical consistency may suffer from incorrect discourse connection usage, which could cause the content to become fragmented. Discourse connectors (DCs), which are mostly transitional phrases

used in essays, are found in substantial amounts in research undertaken by Prommas (2011). The easiest and most obvious way to show how ideas relate to one another is to use these terms. In conclusion, it is clear that discourse connectors (DCs) significantly affect a text's coherence.

Moreover, several features of how native and non-native English speakers use DCs have already been included in research studies on the subject. The use of DCs has been the subject of numerous studies conducted in Western environments. A majority of these research (Christodoulidou, M., 2011; Vickers, C. & Goble, R., 2011) compare how native English speakers employ DCs. Furthermore, a number of research comparing the usage of discourse markers by native and non-native English speakers have been conducted in Asian contexts. The research conducted by Gurkan & Yuksel (2012), Fung (2011), Prommas (2011), Jung (2009), and Ying (2009) is encompassed in these papers. In addition, a great deal of study has been done to investigate how non-native speakers use DCs (Yang, W. & Sun, Y., 2012; Yang, S., 2011; Wang, Y., Tsai, P., & Yang, Y., 2010; Wang, Y. & Tsai, P., 2007). However, not many studies have been conducted to look at the use of DCs in Indonesia (Priyatmojo, A.S., 2011; Budiharso, 2006; Fadlilatur, 2010). Therefore, it would be interesting to look at how ESP students use discourse links in their writings. Understanding these findings can lead to knowledge that can be shared to improve the language skills of students learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohesion and Coherence in the Writing Process

Cohesion is defined by Halliday and Hasan (2015) as the grammatical and lexical links that support a text's coherence among its different parts. Text cohesion is ensured by the cohesive devices, which help to make connections between the text's numerous elements. These strategies include conjunctions, lexical coherence, substitution/ellipsis, and references (Halliday & Hasan, 2015). Afterward, the application of DCs will create links among the elements

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

in the sentences (Schiffrin, 1987). Tight integration of a text's components can raise the text's level of coherence.

Furthermore, according to De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), coherence is the degree to which the components of the textual universe are related to and meaningful to one another. Making sure the reader can understand the text is made easier by adhering to a few coherence standards. These include of starting with a succinct and powerful introduction, using discourse connectors, arranging the content logically and sequentially, minimizing grammatical errors, and seamlessly transitioning between themes (Moreno, 2003). Specifically, one way to attain coherence is via employing discourse connections (DCs). Discourse connectors (DCs) are employed to construct connections between logical ideas within sentences, hence improving the general comprehensibility of the content and resulting in a cohesive text. Thus, it follows that coherence and cohesive devices (discourse connectors) work together to help students produce writing that is both excellent and understandable.

Argumentative Writing

Argumentative writing is described by Richards & Schmidt (2002) as a type of writing that seeks to support a position that is open to criticism or substantiate a controversial viewpoint. Moreover, the goal of this type of writing is to persuade the reader to embrace a particular point of view or argument. Sentences in an argumentative essay must clearly communicate the ideas since they must outline benefits and drawbacks or compare and contrast particular circumstances. Discourse connectors must therefore be used to show the changes in concepts in order to preserve coherence. As an illustration, it makes extensive use of DCs. Prommas (2011) revealed that transitional phrases are the most common discourse markers found in essays. The best and most obvious way to show how ideas relate to one another is to use transitional terms. As so, their presence in the arguments text is evident.

Discourse Connectors

Different specialists have different opinions, which is reflected in the name of

DCs. The term "DCs" has been used in the literature to refer to a variety of linguistic elements, including conjunctions (Halliday & Hasan, 2014), cohesive elements (Halliday & Hasan, 2015), discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987), pragmatics markers (Fraser, 1999), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), conjunctive adverbials (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), linking words (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002), logical connectors (Quirk et al., 1985), linking adverbials (Biber, et.al., 1999), and discourse connectors (Cowan, 2008). The term "discourse connectors" in this study refers to the many terms used to denote textual transitions.

DCs provide distinct meanings that presuppose the existence of other discourse elements, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976). DCs are understood to have four distinct meanings: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. Moreover, the DCs are categorized as appositive, clarifying, additive adversative, altering, matter, manner, spatiotemporal, and causal-conditional by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004).

Argumentative writing is described by Richards & Schmidt (2002) as a type of writing that seeks to support a position that is open to criticism or substantiate a controversial viewpoint. Moreover, the goal of this type of writing is to persuade the reader to embrace a particular point of view or argument. Sentences in an argumentative essay must clearly communicate the ideas since they must outline benefits and drawbacks or compare and contrast particular circumstances. Discourse connectors must therefore be used to show the changes in concepts in order to preserve coherence. As an illustration, it makes extensive use of DCs. Prommas (2011) revealed that transitional phrases are the most common discourse markers found in essays. The best and most obvious way to show how ideas relate to one another is to use transitional terms. As so, their presence in the arguments text is evident.

3. METHODS

Thirty-six argumentative compositions written by Indonesian students made up the collected data. This study investigated DCs that fell into four groups based on the

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

taxonomy of DCs developed from Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004): 1) Addition; 2) Reduction and comparison; 3) Causation and effect; and 4) List and arrangement. After the data was gathered, the researcher examined the students' works with the help of native English speakers, writing and grammar experts, and others. The specialists were selected because they were English instructors with more than five years of experience teaching writing and grammar. Finally, the DCs that were in the mixture were identified, counted, and analyzed.

The collected data were analyzed using the taxonomies developed by Halliday and Hasan (2015) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) in order to ascertain how frequently discourse connectors were used in students' writings. The four different classifications into which the DCs were divided are described below.

- 1) **Addition**: Providing further details to the preceding information and presenting new information in a manner that is similar to the previous information.

and, moreover, additionally, similarly, in other words, for example, by the way, to say it another way, for instance, also, likewise, in a different way, in the same manner, etc.

- 2) **Concession and contrast**: Presenting knowledge that is relatively astonishing or unforeseen given the preceding facts; Connecting data that is perceived as direct opposition

nevertheless, whereas, on the other hand, in fact, otherwise, however, nonetheless, aside from that, or alternatively, etc.

- 3) **Cause and result**: Presenting data that is a direct outcome or repercussion of previous data.

Thus, due to, given that, owing to, considering, thus, accordingly, thus, hence, as a consequence, therefore, for this reason, otherwise, in that regard, in other aspects, elsewhere, due to this, for that reason, then, in that scenario, if not, nonetheless, etc.

- 4) **Enumeration and ordering**: Signaling the order of important points that speakers or writers wish to express and indicating a sequence of actions in a procedure.

(and) then, after, later, as long as, until, after that, at the same time, meanwhile, first, next, finally, when, to sum up, at least, or rather, to be more precise, by the way, incidentally, in any case, anyway, leaving that aside, in particular, more specially, to resume, as I was saying, in short, briefly, actually, next, verificative, just then, previously, here, now, secondly, up to now, lastly, at once, thereupon, soon, after a while, next time, next day, that morning, at that time, until then, at this moment, etc.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Written Test

First, argumentative essays were required of the 36 ESP students. The majority of them were able to complete a 250-word essay. The researchers then went through the essays written by the students who participated in this study to find out what kinds of discourse connectors they used. The findings showed that most students seemed to be used to utilizing discourse connections in their writing. Addition, concession, contrast, enumeration, result, and cause and effect connections have all been used by them. In Table 1 below, the percentage of all DCs (47.19%) that correspond to the addition of DCs (227) is also shown. The style of writing assignment—argumentative writing, specifically—that the students were assigned may have contributed to the overuse of additive linkages. Next comes enumeration and order (86), which has a percentage of 17.88%, concession and contrast (102) with a percentage of 21.21%, and cause and outcome (66) with a percentage of 13.72%.

Table 1. Percentage of DCs Used

Type of DCs	Addition	Concession and contrast	Enumeration and order	Cause and result	Total number of DCs
Frequency	227	102	86	66	481

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

Percentage based on total number of DCs	47.19 %	21.21 %	17.88 %	13.72 %	100%
---	---------	---------	---------	---------	------

The results show that the connection 'and' appears in the data (207). As indicated in Table 2 below, the other connectors that the learners used the most were "or," "because (of)," "but," and "so (that)." Both in written and spoken Bahasa, this specific DC is frequently employed. Thus, the learners' dependence on their L1 may have contributed to the overuse of these five frequently used connections.

In that case, some factors associated with the learners' narrow range of discourse connectors (DCs) can be blamed for this. The results unequivocally demonstrated how severely limited their use of DCs is. Furthermore, they were reluctant to take the possibility of experimenting with DCs they were unfamiliar with and instead chose to use those they felt comfortable using. Furthermore, some students are afraid of making mistakes, which makes them reluctant to investigate topics outside of their comfort zone. Moreover, it seems that teachers of writing and ESP in general do not fully understand the importance of DCs. Therefore, it can be said that the ESP program does not sufficiently initiate DCs. Furthermore, as they primarily concentrate on the primary sub-skills of English, it is a regular occurrence for the ESP professors to downplay this specific discussion of DCs.

Additionally, the results showed that some students are employed differently by other DCs, as demonstrated by the terms in conclusion, finally, aside from, in addition, instead (of), in reality, otherwise, because of, etc. The data indicates that among the different DCs covered by Halliday and Hasan (2015) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) Apart from taxonomies, the students employed additional DCs. That being said, it is clear that some students have a better comprehension of DCs and are more proficient writers.

Table 2. Distribution of DCs

Type of DCs	Frequency
<i>and</i>	207

<i>or</i>	71
<i>because (of)</i>	32
<i>because</i>	31
<i>so (that)</i>	20

The following passages are taken from the essays of the ESP students and demonstrate how they utilize discourse connectors in their writing:

The following passage is taken from the essay created by S11. It demonstrates the excessive and exclusive reliance on the word 'and' by learners in their writing.

Hybrid learning is a method that combines face-to-face and online or blended learning. Hybrid learning originated from the Pandemic in 2019, this was done so that learning was not delayed and could be done via online meetings. From this pandemic, online learning is increasingly dominating the world of education in this digital era. With this hybrid learning, teachers, lecturers, and students have the benefits and challenges of this learning including increased student interactivity, time flexibility, and challenges in managing technology equipment and internet connections. This hybrid learning has both advantages and disadvantages.

The aforementioned sample illustrates the writer's endeavor to convey her ideas, substantiated by her use of discourse connectors. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a recurring occurrence of grammatical faults, specifically, additions to the text. Moreover, this demonstrates that the learner's linguistic proficiency is insufficiently developed to generate grammatically accurate phrases, which falls outside the focus of the current research.

The following passage is taken from the essay created by S36. It demonstrates the utilization of infrequent connectors in writing by learners.

One of the technology products that is really needed today is information technology applications. Information technology applications have the advantage of providing personal information related to health, hobbies, recreation, and spirituality. Apart from that, for occupations such as scientific research, technology development, commerce, financial updates, and professional organizations.

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

This indicates that the learner requires a deeper understanding of DCs. The use of 'aside from that' is employed instead of 'Moreover/In addition'.

This statement is taken from section 9 (S9) and it indicates that the writer is not aware of the significance of using DCs (discourse connectors) in writing. This lack of awareness leads learners to construct statements that lack coherence.

Hybrid learning mixes in-person and online classes, offering both benefits and challenges for students. We started hybrid learning when covid 19 came, that's a new things for us. But we can get the advantages from hybrid learning. Flexibility, easy acces, dan learn about tecnology, from hybrid learning we can get a flexibility to study, we can adjust time and place when we wanna start study. Easy acces of cours form hybrid learning we can get this, cause we choose what we want, we can to more learn everythings. From hybrid learning also give more skill about technology, we know how to using a laptop how to using zoom for online class.Its a big improve skills.

The results of this study align with previous research undertaken by Sanosi, A.B. (2024), Mumbi & Simwinga, (2018), Modhish, A.S., (2012; Braine, G. & Liu, M., 2005; and Budiharso, T., 2006), which also found that ESP students lack sufficient proficiency in the usage of DCs. Furthermore, this study uncovered the excessive utilization of discourse connectors generated by English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pupils. As a result, they are quite difficult to employ DCs correctly to promote coherence and comprehensibility.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings showed that in their English writing, the ESP students made use of a variety of discourse connectors. Addition had the largest percentage of connectors, followed by concession and contrast. The next category was enumeration and order, although the cause and consequence category was rarely used. The words "and," "or," "because (of)," "but," and "so (that)" had the highest incidence percentages among the DCs that were provided.

It is advised that writing be treated as a unique gift in ESP programs in Indonesia and similar countries, rather than as a supplementary skill that receives insufficient emphasis. Writing instructors should urge ESP students to actively interact with the language rather than only concentrate on avoiding mistakes because this could impede their development. Furthermore, it is imperative to emphasize how important it is for English language instructors—particularly ESP writing instructors—to start DCs using both inductive and deductive methods. Giving students lots of chances to interact with L2 will definitely help them concentrate on these linguistic components and realize how helpful they are in improving the coherence and cohesiveness of their writing.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the findings, we have formulated conclusions and recommendations for education and future study.

Recommendations for pedagogy

- 1) The Designers of English Specific Purposes Curriculum should develop an ESP Syllabus that integrates all the propositional and non-propositional DCs discussed in this study.
- 2) The ESP teachers should successively teach all the propositional and non-propositional DCs.
- 3) The ESP teachers should sequentially engage students in continually practicing the relevant use of DCs.

Recommendations for further research

- 1) Extensive studies on the development of proficiency in the application of discourse connectors in English writing by grade level (per semester).
- 2) The range of incorrect applications of discourse connectors occurs from first language interference.
- 3) The functional roles of DC application in other positions other than initial.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher would like to express her gratitude to Allah the Almighty for the given health and knowledge in completing

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

this research paper. Writing a research paper is somehow challenging, yet interesting. Thus, it needs high persistence to finish it. The strength of enduring all the problems is all the things Allah has provided.

7. REFERENCES

- Alarcon, J.B. & Morales, K.N.S. (2011). Grammatical cohesion in students' argumentative essays. *Journal of English and Literature*, 2(5), 114-127.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Essex: Pearson Education, Limited.
- Boardman, C.A. & Frydenberg, J. (2002). *Writing to communicate: paragraphs and essays*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Braine, G. & Liu, M. (2005). Cohesive features in argumentative writing produced by Chinese undergraduates. *System*, 33, 623-636.
- Budiharso, T. (2006). The rhetoric features of English and Indonesian essays made by EFL undergraduate students. *TEFLIN Journal*, 17(2), 157-186.
- Celce-Murcia, M. and Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course (2nd Edition)*. New York: Heinle & Heinle.
- Christodoulidou, M. (2011). Lexical markers within the university lecture. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 5(1), 143-160.
- Fadlilatur, R. (2010). The cohesion and coherence of thesis abstracts written by students of the English Letters and Language Department of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Retrieved March 25, 2013, from <http://lib.uin-malang.ac.id/thesis/.../06320084-fadlilatur-rohmah.pdf>
- Fraser, B. & Malamud-Makowski, M. (1996). English and Spanish contrastive discourse markers. *Language Science*, 18(3-4), 863-881.
- Fung, L. (2011). Discourse markers in the ESL classroom: a survey of teachers' attitudes. *The Asian EFL Journal*. 13(2).
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Arnold Publishers.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Hasan, R. (2015). *Cohesion in English*. New York: Routledge.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. (2004). *An introduction to Functional Grammar (3rd edition)*. London: Arnold Publishers.
- Jaya, A., Hermansyah, & Rosmiyati, E. (2019). Redefining Project Based Learning In English Class. *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme*, 2(<https://jurnal.univpgri-palembang.ac.id/index.php/esteem/issue/view/304>). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31851/esteem.v2i2.2423>
- Jung, J. (2009). Discourse markers in contrast: but, actually and well in native-nonnative English conversations between friends. Retrieved December 16, 2012, from <http://udini.proquest.com/view/discourse-markers-in-contrast-but-pqid:1851113681/>
- McDonough, S. (2002). *Applied Linguistics in language education*. London: Arnold Publishers.
- Modhish, A.S. (2012). Use of discourse markers in the composition writings of Arab EFL learners. *English language Teaching*, 5(5), 56-62.
- Mumbi, C.M. & Simwinga, J. (2018). Challenges in the use of discourse

Vol 7, No 2 (2024): ESTEEM

- markers in English as Second Language (ESL) Writing: Evidence from Selected Grade Twelve Pupils in Kitwe District, Zambia. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 5(2), 214-234. <http://www/ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index>
- Sari, A., Jaya, A., Hermansyah, H., & Mortini, A. V. (2022). Using Mixidea Online Debating Strategy To Promote the Students' Speaking Ability. *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme*, 5(2), 298-303. <https://doi.org/10.31851/esteem.v5i2.8591>
- Priyatmojo, A.S. (2011). Cohesion and coherence of the students' recount text and its implication for teaching writing of text types in English. Retrieved February 27, 2013, from <http://enotez.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/my-paper2.doc>
- Prommas, P. (2011). *A comparative study of discourse connectors in argumentative compositions produced by Thai EFL learners and English-native speakers*. Master. Thesis. Prince of Songkla University.
- Ramasawmy, N. (2004). *Conjunctive cohesion and relational coherence in students' compositions*. M.A. Thesis. University of South Africa.
- Richards, J.C and R. Schmidt. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Sanosi, A. B. (2024). Revisiting cohesion in academic writing: A corpus-based analysis of EFL learners use of conjunctions. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 64-78. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v14i1.70418>
- Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton, H.E. (2004). *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Victoria: Blackwell Publishing.
- Wang, Y. & Tsai, P. (2007). Textual and contextual contrast connection: A study of Chinese contrastive markers across different text types. *Journal of Pragmatics* 39, 1775-1815.
- Wang, Y., Tsai, P. & Yang, Y. (2010). Objectivity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity: evidence from *qishi* ('actually') and *shishishang* ('in fact') in spoken Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42, 705-727.
- Yang, S. (2011). Investigating discourse markers in pedagogical setting: a literature review. *ARECLS*, 8, 95-108.
- Yang, W. & Sun, Y. (2012). The use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing by Chinese EFL learners at different proficiency levels. *Linguistics and Education* 23, 31-48.
- Zhang, M. (2000). Cohesive features in the expository writing of undergraduates in two Chinese universities. *RELC Journal*, 31(1), 61-95.