

**A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE
MARKERS IN RHETORICAL MOVES OF
IELTS AND UNDERGRADUATES
ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS**

by

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**ANALISIS BERASASKAN KORPUS TENTANG PENANDA
WACANA DALAM PERGERAKAN RETORIK ESEI
KEHUJAHAN PELAJAR IELTS DAN PELAJAR IJAZAH
PERTAMA**

ABSTRAK

Dalam bidang penyelidikan penulisan L2, kohesi sebagai komponen teks utama penulisan akademik telah menarik perhatian terutama dalam isu penggunaan penanda wacana (DM) dalam penulisan pelajar ESL. Oleh yang demikian, penggunaan DM yang sesuai yang penting dalam elemen kohesi, mencipta kohesi dan aliran koheren teks (Li & Schmitt, 2009). Kajian ini bertujuan menganalisis jenis, kekerapan, dan fungsi wacana DM terhadap pergerakan retorik dalam penulisan esei penghujahan oleh pelajar Malaysia dan calon IELTS. Korpus dalam kajian termasuklah dua korpora daripada 214 esei penghujahan yang ditulis oleh pelajar ijazah pertama Malaysia dan 100 esei penghujahan IELTS (skor-band 9) untuk digunakan sebagai norma analisis melalui analisis data kuantitatif dan kualitatif menggunakan taksonomi DM, Kalajahi et al. (2012). Pergerakan retorik ditentukan menggunakan templat esei bagi analisis pergerakan dengan rujukan kepada templat Nattinger dan DeCarrio (1993). Model bagi fungsi wacana DM adalah adaptasi daripada rangka kerja Kalajahi et al. (2012). Kajian menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua kumpulan pelajar dan penulis IELTS berkongsi ciri yang sama melalui jenis DM yang digunakan dalam esei mereka tetapi dengan tahap berbeza yang terdapat dalam sesetengah jenis seperti Tambahan (rendah) dan Perbandingan (tinggi). Penggunaan adalah sama dalam jenis lain yang menunjukkan tiada perbezaan. Sebagai tambahan, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa pelajar Malaysia bergantung ke atas set terhad DM dalam penulisan esei akademik berbanding calon IELTS. Berkenaan penggunaan

DM dalam pergerakan berbeza, kajian menunjukkan pelbagai DM dengan kekerapan berbeza didapati dalam tiga pergerakan berlainan dalam esei dua buah kumpulan. Ini dapat membantu mengenal pasti masalah pelajar semasa menggunakan DM dalam penulisan esei mereka. Tambahan pula, kajian menyenaraikan fungsi wacana jenis DM dalam kedua-dua korpora. Bagaimanapun, analisis data menunjukkan banyak persamaan di antara kedua-dua kumpulan dalam penerapan fungsi wacana DM tetapi bagi pelajar Malaysia dalam 26 buah kes fungsi wacana dalam pergerakan berbeza terarah kepada fungsi wacana yang digunakan dalam esei IELTS. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar harus diberi kesedaran tentang masalah DM dan fungsi wacananya dalam pergerakan yang berbeza. Implikasi pepadogi dan saranan tentang penulisan esei akademik serta saranan tentang penyelidikan masa hadapan bagi mengkaji penggunaan DM dalam pelbagai genre dibincangkan.

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN RHETORICAL MOVES OF IELTS AND UNDERGRADUATES ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

ABSTRACT

In the field of L2 writing research, cohesion, as a major textual component of academic writing has attracted much attention especially with reference to the ways of DMs' usage in ESL learners' writing. Hence, the proper use of DMs, which are essential cohesion elements, creates a cohesive and coherent flow of the text (Li & Schmitt, 2009). This study attempts to analyze types, frequency, and discourse functions of DMs across the rhetorical moves in the argumentative essays written by Malaysian students and IELTS candidates. The corpus in the present study includes two corpora of 214 argumentative essays written by Malaysian undergraduates and 100 IELTS argumentative essays (score 9) to be used as the norm of the analysis via quantitative and qualitative data analysis by using Kalajahi et al. (2012) taxonomy of DMs. The rhetorical moves were determined by using essay template for move analysis with reference to the adapted form of Nattinger and DeCarrico's (1993) template. The model for discourse functions of DMs was the adoption of Kalajahi et al. (2012) framework. Findings revealed that both groups of the undergraduates and IELTS writers shared similar characteristics with regard to the types of DMs used in their essays, but with different degree of occurrence in some types such as Additive (lower) and Comparison (greater). In other types, the usage was the same, showing no considerable difference. In addition, the results also demonstrated that Malaysian students, compared to IELTS candidates, in some types relied on a limited set of DMs in their academic essay writing. Regarding the usage of DMs in different

moves, the findings revealed that variety of DMs with different frequency were found in three different moves of the essays of two groups. This would help to identify students' problems in using DMs in their essay writing. Moreover, the study has also produced a detailed list of discourse functions of DM types in both corpora. However, the analysis of the data has revealed many similarities between two groups in terms of the employment of discourse functions of DMs, but Malaysian students in 26 cases of discourse functions in different moves deviated from the discourse functions which were used in IELTS essays. The study implies that there is a need to make learners aware of problematic DMs and their discourse functions in different moves. Pedagogical implications and recommendations about academic essay writing as well as suggestions for future research to investigate DMs used in different genres were discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Writing is confirmed to be the most troublesome skill compared to other language skills for learners of English as a Second or Foreign Language (Ong, 2011) and even for speakers whose English is their native language (Norrish, 1983). Many of the journal articles, subjects, reference materials, textbooks and learning programmes are written in English. This situation is reflected in the Malaysian context as well. University students, especially undergraduate students, are expected to be able to write in different kinds of writing tasks in English during their study period. Such needs for writing in English lead to difficulties for students who study English as a second or foreign language. Thus, the logic of this markers is necessary for beginner writers to transfer their message in a way that make their writing succinct, clear, and easily understandable for the readers (Prommas & Sinwongsuwat, 2014).

Cohesion is considered as one of the effective elements that have to be given attention in writing because it connects different sections of a text. By means of cohesion a text can be regarded as a text but without cohesive sentences, it would be imperfect; that is; cohesion differentiates a text from non-text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). This is due to the fact that, cohesion is crucial to the writer and to the reader to produce a comprehensive text and to understand a text. Instructors have given much attention on text cohesion in their teaching and estimation of writing (Liu & Braine, 2005).

One notable classification of signs of cohesion, which assists to reveal text segmentation, is known as the Discourse Marker (DM). Discourse markers make up a set of linguistic devices used in human communication for creating cohesive messages, which are central in improving the effectiveness of the communication process to help readers understand the messages of the text (VaezDalili & VahidDastjerdi, 2013). Some examples of English DMs are “*likewise, by the same token, with reference to, with regard to, first of all, nonetheless, therefore*”.

An existing problem that non-native students face in academic writing is the deficiency of cohesion due to the inadequate and inconvenient use of DMs, which are effective cohesion components. Studies have indicated that because non-native writers at the university level lack adequate knowledge of DMs, they overuse a limited set of DMs, which they know well. This, in turn, makes their text non-native (Li & Schmitt, 2009). Hence, the adequate application of DMs is regarded as a significant constituent in academic writing (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Hyland, 2008; Li & Schmitt, 2009) and inadequate knowledge of it, is considered as an indication for novice L2 writers (Hyland, 2008; Li & Schmitt, 2009). Considering what has been mentioned earlier, it can be stated that writing fluently requires the acquirement of DMs and their appropriate and optimum use. Therefore, DMs perform a significant role in both language learning and use, especially in learning of the second language (Liu, 2008).

A large body of literature shows that DMs are not only common in language learning but also such markers convey diverse discourse functions in discourse organization (Rhee, 2014). Thus, the chief function of DMs is “to state the speaker/writer’s perception of the relationship between two units of discourse” and

“to make semantic connections between spans of discourse of varying length” (Biber et al., 1999, p. 558 and p. 875). Generally, Hyland and Tse (2004) and Shaw (2009) contrasted the utilization of different DMs in discourse and in different genres. One important component of a genre to be considered is the moves of every genre (Bhatia, 1993a).

Move construction of a genre is the feature of the genre itself (Bhatia, 1993a). Generally, move analysis of organizational patterns of texts are defined as comprising sequences of moves that are regarded as functional units in a text, which together comprise the total communicative aim of the genre (Connor et al., 1995). In short, moves reveal functional and semantic sections of texts that carry particular communicative objectives. Moreover, moves generally have distinguished linguistic bounds that can be objectively analysed (Biber et al., 2007).

One especially interesting area of investigation in studies of DMs is the corpus-based analysis of DMs in different moves of argumentative essays written by undergraduates. The influence of academic argumentative essays can be considered as a good means for evaluating learning and competence of students in a university (Andrews, 2003). To elaborate on these issues, this study is an attempt to give readers an overview of the way ESL learners use DMs in the academic argumentative texts, especially the argumentative essays, to see which DMs and how frequently they are used in different moves of argumentative essays, to maintain text cohesion and produce relations through different parts of the text and compare it with the results obtained from standard tests such as IELTS test. Moreover, it considers what types of discourse functions are applied in different moves of academic argumentative essays of two corpora of the students and IELTS essays.

However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there are very little or lack of studies like the existing one the researcher has identified. This study is exclusive in investigating the use of DMs by Malaysian undergraduates. Thus, the present study is an investigation of the use of DMs types and discourse functions of these linguistic elements in different moves of argumentative essays of Malaysian ESL students and IELTS argumentative essays. More specifically, the frequency of DMs in different moves of two corpora of students and IELTS essays will be presented. Finally, the discourse functions of DMs in different moves of the students and IELTS essays will be analyzed and compared separately.

1.2 Background of the Study

Because of various studies in the area of DMs, research on linguistic elements such as DMs in the last few decades has become an important argument and the focus of many studies. Numerous studies focused on definitions and different functions of DMs by native speakers (Schiffrin, 1987 on English; Miracle, 1991 on Mandarin Chinese). Discourse Markers used by non-native speakers have also been attracting the attention of many researchers (Anping, & Manfei, 2003; Aijmer & Simon-Vandenberg. 2004; Fung & Carter, 2007; Hellermann & Vergun, 2007; Liao, 2009; Müller, 2005). According to Brinton (1996), DMs are grammatically optional and semantically free but are not pragmatically optional or additional; on the contrary, they supply a multiplicity of pragmatic functions.

Discourse Markers have been studied in different languages and examined in a variety of genres and textual contexts. These studies have generally focused on the analysis of DMs in academic genres (Basturkmen, 2012; Del Saz-Rubio, 2011; Kwan et al., 2012; Lim, 2012; Swales, 2004), informal settings (Muller 2004), oral

discourse (Dailey-O’Cain, 2000; Hays, 1992), listening comprehension (EslamiRasekh & EslamiRasekh, 2007), reading comprehension (Jalilifar & Alipour 2007; Khatib & Safari, 2011), students’ writing (Field & Yip 1992; Johnson, 1992), hard and soft sciences articles (Gholami et al., 2012), and EFL classrooms (Kalajahi & Abdullah, 2011). These studies have examined DMs from the contrastive and descriptive perspectives to show the role of adequate knowledge in the area of DMs and language ability. Therefore, conducting studies in the field of DMs is important in second language learners’ writing competency.

The studies above have revealed that L2 learners must acquire adequate knowledge for using DMs in their target language. It is probable to suppose that L2 learners who have an adequate knowledge in the use of DMs of the target language will be more successful in both verbal and non-verbal interaction than those who have not (Warsi, 2000). Hence, the study of the DMs in an L2 deserves attention (Prommas, & Sinwongsuwat, 2014). Nevertheless, the extent to which these two aspects have been approached may deserve a deeper study taking into consideration the discourse functions of DMs in different moves of essay writing, comparing, and validating it with standard and valid tests like IELTS tests.

Although using DMs is of significance and it is believed to be one of the important elements in various types of writing, there is no reliable picture of how Malaysian undergraduate students apply DMs in their English argumentative essay writing. In Malaysian universities, according to the syllabus of courses presented, English is a compulsory subject taught to all undergraduate students as general English regardless of disciplines they are majoring in (Ming & Alias, 2007). For example, in USM, a course coded *LSP 300* entitled academic English course is

considered as a general English course in which undergraduate students are required to take as a general English course by considering their MUET (Malaysian University English Test) band score, as a common course that should be taken by non-English majors. Moreover, in Malaysian universities, the allotted time for the general English courses depending on the university's system is 180 to 240 minutes (three to four hours) per week for teaching English language as a subject in the teaching programme including writing (Ming & Alias, 2007; Pillay, 1998). These lessons include the teaching of writing. Thus, one important part of this course constitutes writing skill that teachers should focus on during the course of teaching because it makes up a part of their final exam.

In this study, the researcher explored the types, frequency, and discourse functions of DMs on English Second Language (ESL) learners' argumentative essay writing and compared it with the IELTS task 2 argumentative essays. The present study puts the important focus on the types and discourse functions of DMs and how they are used in different moves of argumentative essay writings of Malaysian undergraduate students and IELTS argumentative essays.

The argumentative type of essays were chosen as the genre to be studied in this research since, in the academic writing, the learners and scholars are faced with argumentative genres which can help them to defend or oppose an idea and ease the reader to agree with them (Reid, 1988). The rationale for the selection of IELTS test is this test is one of the popular tests throughout the world and it is considered a reliable test among other tests to assess English skills (Shaw, 2004). The selected argumentative essays of IELTS test are regarded as a sample of standard academic model of writing. In these selected argumentative essays, the writers have fully

applied the necessary requirement such as appropriate vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and accuracy with complete understanding in this skill to attain the highest score (9) according to IELTS scoring rubric (Appendix D).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to Silva (1993), second language learners utilize fewer cohesion devices such as DMs and lexical ties in their writing. These cohesion devices are significant tools to write academic and cohesive essays, which have notable argumentative power. Considering this point, essay teachers might teach learners strategies for constructing cohesion and might present feedback about “awkward transitions” (i.e., cohesion breaks) in learners’ written essays. Thus, cohesion is a significant ability that second language writers need for writing successful academic essays (Mirzapour & Ahmadi, 2011), as without the cohesive creation through the adequate use of language, texts are written in a way that are difficult to follow (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Second language learners need to obtain the ability to construct cohesion in their writing to achieve communicative competence (Cumming, 2001; Mirzapiur & Ahmadi, 2011). As it is reflected in the literature about writing (e.g., Collins, 1998; DeVillez, 2003), the quality of essay is highly related to the cohesion, as well as textbooks that teach students how to write (Golightly & Sanders, 2000).

As a significant issue even for native speakers of English, cohesive writing is a challenging task among second language writers as an academic task (Ghoorchaei et al., 2010; Hinkel, 2001; Liu & Braine, 2005; Zhang, 2000). Discourse Markers as a key element of cohesion can reinforce the reader’s capability to make deductions

(Irwin, 1988; O'Reilly & McNamara, 2007; Palmer, 1999) and error in writing cohesive texts can get in the way of a reader's attempts to comprehend the message of the writer (Hedberg & Fink, 1996; Todd et al., 2007). It is these DMs that are of interest here as they illustrate sensible aspects of a text that can be perceived for the decisions of assessment and property analysis.

Each section in the written text has its function and role with other sections of the text (Taboada & Mann, 2006). As it is viewed by Sanford (2012), Discourse Markers indeed create the connection role and the discourse function of the text components. This includes the concept of the sentences as well as logical connections of expressions and realistic message efficiency (Sanford, 2012). Furthermore, DMs are also key elements in helping both writers and readers to comprehend the text better and as a support for understanding of text (Z. Eslami & A. Eslami, 2007). This is also in line with Dergisi's (2010) idea where he pointed out that a good piece of writing being not only grammatical, but it is also about cohesion and coherence as well. Dergisi (2010) also added that specially in teaching English writing, DMs should be focused on instead of being ignored.

The insufficiency of ability in utilizing DMs in written texts indeed affects the coherence and cohesion in writing (Al-Kohlani, 2010). Appropriate DMs used in writing help to group sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into sections forming a hierarchical structure to the text (Devi, 2012). Moreover, as Al-Kohlani (2010) stated, besides creating the cohesiveness in connecting words in the text, DMs are also crucial instruments in providing communication in the text.

As Halliday and Hasan (1976), Halliday (1985) and Hasan (1984) confirmed, the type, frequency, and degree of DMs used in the writing contribute to the

cohesiveness of a text. Accordingly, in written English discourses, clauses are connected semantically by grammatical connections such as DMs (McCarthy, 1991), which make a text cohesive. For Hoey (1991, p.260), “cohesion is a property of a text whereby certain grammatical or lexical features of the sentences of the text connect them to other sentences in the text.” Moreover, Muftah & Rafic-Galea (2013) stated that grammatical knowledge is the most challenging and problematic part for second language learners to master.

Since DMs usage is evidently a challenging field for ESL learners to master them, they have attracted a number of researchers in the area of DMs studies (McCarthy, 1991; Lorenz, 1998). This is because of some elements. Firstly, since DMs usage is not usually obligatory, writers often face difficulty to decide when to use and when not to use them (Conrad, 1999; Halliday, 2004). Types and amount of DMs are decided by the genres because every genre (e.g., conversation and news) necessitates a different category of DMs (e.g., contrastive, apposition, etc.) (Biber et al., 1999; Conrad, 1999). Finally, first and second languages require different rhetorical structures that may affect writers’ selection of DMs. This may result in writers’ overuse, underuse, and misuse in the choice of DMs in their writing (Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; Kang, 2005). Hence, it becomes evident that the acquisition of DMs devices to use them appropriately and correctly is a very complicated and tough task (Crewe, 1990; Hinkel, 2004; Nippold et al., 1992; Shea, 2009; Tapper, 2005).

Moreover, another source of difficulty is the various discourse functions that DMs apply in different contexts (Lai, 2008). The important role DMs perform in the discourse of writing is to determine the semantic relations among linguistic units

(Lai, 2008). The relationship between DMs in written discourse and their discourse functions does not always perform one-to-one basis (McCarthy, 1991). Many DMs in writing can be used for more than one discourse function (Lai, 2008).

Despite English being taught as a second language in the education system in Malaysia for many years and students in schools and pre-university courses are learning the language skills including writing, there is still a need for it to be mastered by a large number of Malaysian learners as numerous mistakes are found in their writing production (Stapa & Izahar, 2010). As a matter of fact, they do not do well in English writing at university level, although their English writing problems seemed to be less problematic before attending the university (Adzmi et al., 2009). To illustrate, unfortunately, it seems that a considerable number of Malaysian undergraduate students have not achieved the necessary level of proficiency in English to pursue their studies in university although they have been learning the language for several years, both in primary and secondary school levels. English is considered as a language that has yet to be acquired by many Malaysian students as they still face many problems in their academic writing (Maros et al., 2007; Stapa & Izahar, 2010).

The Malaysian ESL teachers, as stated by Hussein (2004), being L2 speakers themselves, are often uncertain on how to manage the teaching of grammatical items to their students. In other words, these teachers were oblivious of how much detail should go into explaining grammatical items. When the Malaysian New English Language Curriculum, based on a communicative model of language teaching learning, was implemented in 1988, the teaching of grammar emerged as problematic (Hinkel, 2004; Jones & Bailey, 2013; Pillay & North, 1997). Therefore,

according to the above mentioned researchers, the instructors are imprecise of the role of grammatical subjects in the new educational plan and are uncertain of how grammatical items should be appropriately merged into the lesson plan. Because of this ambiguity and uncertainty, second language instructors find it difficult to teach one of the most important items among all the grammatical items, DMs. DMs are said to be a part of the grammatical items that are considered problematic (McCarthy, 1991; Lorenz, 1998). It is essential to recognize the problems among Malaysian ESL learners in using DMs and find measures to eliminate them given that DMs play a crucial role in a sentence or expression. Hence, it is important for students at university level to have the knowledge to accurately use grammatical items such as DMs in their writing in order to produce a written text which will interact with readers effectively.

Furthermore, analysis of the features of students' writing is important because it allows teachers to detect strengths and weaknesses, and subsequently design differentiated instruction that addresses specific skill deficits (National Commission on Writing, 2003; Rousseau, 1990). Language mechanics such as orthography, punctuation and lexical selection have long proved areas of difficulty for L2 writers, and salient features which mark L2 writing as non-native like (White, 1987).

In view of this, the present study is an investigation of the types, frequency, and discourse functions of DMs in different moves of argumentative essay writing of Malaysian undergraduate ESL students. The researcher's purpose of selecting the college students in this study is to understand undergraduate level of students' familiarity with DMs and observe their level of exposure in using DMs towards the format of argumentative essay writing. Essentially, it is a study on other

determinants of good argumentative essay writing in the context of second language writing research. To date and to the best knowledge of the researcher, by considering and studying previous literature in this area of study, there is very rare of published research paper on this topic, that is, on DMs and their discourse functions in rhetorical moves in argumentative essay writing of undergraduate Malaysian students. In this area of research, in the Malaysian context, for example Johnson (1992), Dueraman (2007), and Nor (2012) analyzed DMs for different purposes in different genres but they did not specialized their studies on the use and discourse functions of DMs in different moves of argumentative essay writing.

Therefore, much needs to be learnt about how Malaysian undergraduate students use DMs and what is the discourse function of these DMs in the moves of essay writing? Evidently, there is a research gap and in consequence, a dearth of empirical evidence that can only be rectified by more studies. Thus, the present study intends to identify the types, frequency and discourse functions of DMs in the moves of academic argumentative essay writing of non-English major of Malaysian undergraduate ESL students and compare it with IELTS argumentative model essays as a standard test. To this end, the following research questions were formulated; in other words, the accurate use of DMs in writing, it will help the writer to convey the intended message of the essay writing content more efficiently to the readers.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Although the minimum English language proficiency is one of the entry requirements at all Malaysian universities, high level of English language proficiency may not be considered as one of the measurements for entry requirements (Tan & Eng, 2014). However, upon entering the university, determined

courses may be administrated in English and the learners would have to write their assignments and essays in English adequately. Thus, it is significant to explore the students' essay writing because it is necessary for their academic writing success in the university. The ability to write a piece of argumentative writing based on academic agreement and conventions could be a new challenge for these learners. Analysis of types, frequency, and discourse functions of DMs in different rhetorical moves of the argumentative essays written by the Malaysian students and IELTS writers may help to provide the valuable rationales for pedagogical design. As a result of these challenges and the sensitivity to know the writing readiness of these undergraduates, and especially, their use of DMs in their writing, had motivated this study to investigate the use of DMs features in both the Malaysian undergraduate students and the IELTS argumentative essay-writing task. As such, the following itemized objectives were formulated to guide this study.

1. To analyse and identify the types and frequencies of DMs in argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates.
2. To compare the types and frequencies of DMs used in argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates.
3. To analyse and identify the types and frequencies of DMs used in the different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates.
4. To compare the types and frequencies of DMs used in different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates.

5. To analyse and identify the discourse functions of DMs in the different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates.

6. To compare the application of discourse functions of DMs in the different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates.

1.5 Research Questions

Given these observations raised above, the present study, to be specific, addresses the following questions:

1. How are DMs realized in types and frequencies in argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates?

2. What are the differences and similarities in the use of DMs in argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates?

3. How are DMs used in types and frequencies in the different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates?

4. What are the differences and similarities in the use of DMs in different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates?

5. How are DMs used in applying discourse functions in the different moves of argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates?

6. What are the differences and similarities between argumentative essays of the Malaysian undergraduates and IELTS candidates in terms of the application of discourse functions of DMs in different moves?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Discourse Markers are considered as text-constructing components that function as markers of openings or closings of discourse units or in-between transitions (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). According to Olshtain and Cohen (2005), “DMs play a crucial role in texts as DMs: (a) indicate the relationship existing among the sentences within a given text and thus lessen the need for complex cognitive processing; (b) facilitate the prediction process while reading; (c) guide the reader to move forward or backward within the text in order to make logical inferences; and (d) help readers develop local and global interpretation. As a consequence, much needs to be done in the teaching of writing to enhance the students’ awareness of the importance and use of DMs in their argumentative essay writing.”

The current study attempts to reach findings which might come up with results to make contributions to writing skill, namely to identify types, frequency, and discourse functions of DMs in different moves in the essays written by the Malaysian undergraduate students and shed light on these issues. For these reasons, the results of this study may add new information to the existing body of knowledge regarding the types and discourse functions of DMs by considering their variation in different moves in argumentative essay writing of the Malaysian undergraduate ESL students. Being able to define how the essays are written by the Malaysian undergraduate students and IELTS essays differ with regard to the DMs usage for the purpose of cohesion, as well as knowing how these features differ across rhetorical move structures, would be beneficial for understanding second language writing development for designing instruction, and may be for validating writing measurements. It is expected that the study might lead to a better understanding of DMs in Malaysian undergraduate students’ argumentative essays.

It is the researcher's hope that the findings of this study, on one hand, may be helpful for English academic writing instructors in Malaysia and other similar contexts in the ESL/EFL context. On the other hand the knowledge derived from this investigation may provide information in the area of academic essay writings of ESL university students in developing a thorough understanding of students' knowledge in using DMs in their academic essay writing.

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The present study was conducted in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), located in Penang Island. The essays selected for the present study consisted of undergraduate male and female students from non-English majors registered for the second semester in the February of 2012-2013 academic year. Thus, the selected essays are written by the students of one semester due to the availability of these essays at the time of data collection. In this study, the researcher focuses on the types, frequency, and discourse functions of DMs in the moves of argumentative essays written by Malaysian undergraduate students as ESL learners. The researcher has compared these argumentative essays written by these students and compared them to IELTS argumentative task 2 essays as a standard and norm test. Moreover, the sample texts used in the two corpora of this study are argumentative essay genre.

The selected IELTS essays are the argumentative essays that have the qualification of a very good model (score 9) as examined and scored by the IELTS examiners because such samples should be as a model of argumentative essays for the analysis of the current study. The IELTS selected essays are limited to the available numbers of argumentative essays in IELTS official website (www.ieltsesexam.net). The other limitation that could be considered in selecting the

IELTS essays is the specifications of writers such as their age, education, and nationality. There are out of the current research. Hence, as the original authors of IELTS tests were not available and the original essays were available on IELTS website, the researcher could use the texts and was not able to analyse the authors' specifications.

This study follows the varied categories of classification for DMs available in the theoretical framework of Kalajahi et al. (2012). In the present study, DMs are considered as linguistic elements that two groups of argumentative essay writers use them to guide the text-receivers' explanation and conception. Therefore, the study takes a semantic approach to describe the discourse functions of DMs not only as significant connecting elements that make contribution to the cohesion of the text, but also as important tools for communicating the text-producers' purpose, meaning, designs, viewpoints and attitudes.

Thus, the present study, due to various constraints, experienced certain limitations in terms of sampling, scope of the data, methodology, and generalizability. First, the sample texts used in the corpora were narrowed down to argumentative essay genre; hence, the findings may not be applied to other types of genres. Another constraint of the current study lies in the limited scope and range of DMs and their different types, since the researcher did not include in the data analysis the varied DM types investigated in classifications other than the one proposed by Kalajahi et al. (2012). A further limitation, also concerning the scope of the data, pertains to the corpus, which was restricted to second language learners of Malaysian undergraduate students, and did not include corpora of any other backgrounds. Additionally, largely due to its quantitative method, the study focused

only on the types, frequency, and discourse functions in different moves of argumentative essay writings of DMs. The considerations of DMs as their proper use, their stylistic appropriateness in context, and their correct distribution in the sentence were not taken into account. A fifth limitation of the current study concerns the generalizability of the study's findings. As DMs create a significant part of written discourse of essay writing ability; nevertheless, they represent a single written discourse phenomenon and the major claim of the study about the universality of written discourse competence is thus verifiable only within the bounds of this specific linguistic phenomenon.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

In order to foster more definitive comprehension of this research and clearer discussion of the effect of DMs on written essays, the following definitions of a number of important terms used are provided below.

Argumentative essay: The goal of argumentative writing is persuasive, and it is done in a situation where there exists a conflict between the beliefs and attitudes of the writer/speaker and the reader/audience (Hinkel, 2002). In the current study, the argumentative essays are essays written to justify one claim or multiple claims.

Corpus: Through corpus-based studies, the scope of certain features can be determined (Hulstijn, 1995). Corpus linguistics is regarded as a crucial method in order to investigate the language in use (Thompson & Hunston, 2006). Furthermore, by using corpus, the researchers will be able to study extensive samples of language both qualitatively and quantitatively (McEnery et al., 2008, Thompson & Hunston,

2006). In the current study, a corpus is defined as either a collection of texts and is used for the purposes of general linguistics.

Discourse function: Discourse function of DMs is that every DM has a particular function, which can be explained by the details presenting in the discourse context. Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 226) claimed that DMs “are not primarily devices for reaching out into the preceding or following text, but they express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other elements in the discourse.” In the current study, every DM has a particular function which can be explained by the details presenting in the discourse context.

Discourse Markers: Discourse markers are a group of linguistic items functioning within cognitive, expressive, social, and textual domains (Schiffrin, 2001). According to Fraser (1999), DMs are defined as a pragmatic class, lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases. In the current study, DMs are conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases that connect two sentences or clauses together.

IELTS: The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is the criterion which shows prospective students will be able to master the language in an English-speaking country or universities with English as the medium of instruction, such as Masters and Ph. D levels in most European countries. In the current study, IELTS writing is a direct test that requires candidates to create academic argumentative text types.

Move: Moves represent semantic and functional units of texts that have specific communicative purposes; in addition, moves generally have distinct linguistic

boundaries that can be objectively analysed (Biber et al., 2007). In the current study, a move is regarded as a section of a text, written, which gains a specific goal within the text.