استخدام دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالجامعات السعودية لعلامات الخطاب (discourse markers) في الكتابة الجدلية

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الملخص. تهدف الدراسة الحالية للبحث في نمط وتكرارية علامات الخطاب (discourse markers) التي يستخدمها دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالجامعات السعودية في كتاباتهم الجدلية. كما تسعى إلى دراسة العلاقة بين استخدام علامات الخطاب وجودة الكتابة. شارك في الدراسة ٤٨ طالبا ممن يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية. لجمع البيانات لهذه الدراسة، تم تقييم جودة مقالات الطلاب باستخدام الملف التعريفي للإنشاء (composition profile) المقترح من قبل .Jacobs et al (١٩٨١). بعد ذلك، تم تحليل مقالات الطلاب نوعيا وكميا لتحديد استخدامهم لعلامات الخطاب، وذلك باستخدام تصنيف Fraser (١٩٩٩، ٢٠٠٩) لعلامات الخطاب. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن علامات الخطاب الأكثر استخداما هي علامات الخطاب التفصيلية تليها الاستدلالية ثم التباينية، في حين لم يتم استخدام أي من العلامات الرابطة للموضوع. وكشفت النتائج أيضا أن الطلاب اعتمدوا اعتمادا كبيرا على مجموعات محدودة من علامات الخطاب التفصيلية والاستدلالية والتباينية كما أفرطوا في استخدام بعض علامات الخطاب. واظهر تحليل التباين أحادي الاتجاه وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين استخدام الطلاب لكل من علامات الخطاب التفصيلية والاستدلالية واستخدامهم لعلامات الخطاب التباينية وذلك في صالح العلامات التفصيلية والاستدلالية. وكشفت النتائج أيضا عدم وجود علاقة ارتباط ذات دلالة إحصائية بين استخدام الطلاب لعلامات الخطاب بشكل عام وجودة كتاباتهم، في حين كانت هناك علاقة ارتباط ذات دلالة إحصائية بين استخدام الطلاب لعلامات الخطاب التباينية وجودة الكتابة. واختتمت الدراسة بتقديم ببعض التوصيات التي يمكن أن تساعد في تطوير قدرة الطلاب على استخدام علامات الخطاب كوسيلة لتحسين جودة كتاباتهم.

الكلمات الدالة: علامات الخطاب، الكتابة الجدلية، جودة الكتابة، دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

Use of discourse markers in the argumentative writing of Saudi EFL majors

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate the type and frequency of discourse markers (DMs) used by Saudi EFL university learners in their argumentative writing. The study also seeks to examine the relationship between use of DMs and writing quality. The participants were 48 undergraduates majoring in English at AL-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. In order to collect data for the present study, the writing quality of the essays produced by the participants was assessed using the ESL Composition Profile proposed by Jacobs et al. (1981). Then, the participants' essays were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively for use of DMs, following Fraser's (1999, 2009) taxonomy of DMs. The findings of the study indicated that elaborative DMs were the most frequently used ones, followed by inferential and contrastive markers, while none of the topic relating markers was employed in the essays. The findings also reveal that the learners relied heavily on restricted sets of elaborative, inferential, and contrastive markers and overused the DMs "and," "because," "so" and "but." Results of a one-way ANOVA indicate that the learners used both elaborative and inferential DMs significantly more frequent than contrastive ones. The findings also showed that there was no significant correlation between the learners' overall use of DMs and the quality of their writing. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between their use of contrastive DMs and the quality of their essays. It is concluded that DMs were not dealt with adequately in the writing courses offered to Saudi EFL university learners. The study ends with some recommendations that could help in developing the students' ability to use DMs as a means of improving the quality of their writing.

Key words: Discourse Markers, Argumentative Writing, Writing Quality, EFL majors

Use of discourse markers in the argumentative writing of Saudi EFL majors

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Introduction

Writing is one of the most difficult skills for many EFL/ESL learners as it entails not only the writing down of ideas, concepts, and thoughts but also the effective organization of the different information units presented in the text. While it may be easy for these learners to write discrete sentences, writing beyond the sentence level is usually much more demanding. This requires mastery of a number of skills such as the correct choice and use of vocabulary items and grammatical patterns and structures as well as the devices that give the text its cohesion and coherence.

As far as writing is concerned, many researchers have emphasized the role that discourse markers (e.g., *and*, *but*, *so*) play in establishing text coherence, facilitating readers' comprehension, and ensuring successful communication. Coherence, an essential feature of well-written texts, is established through a set of implicit relations that bind the text together. Discourse Markers (henceforth, DMs) serve to make such relations explicit to the reader and are, therefore, essential for comprehension (Biber et al., 2007, p. 875; Martinez, 2002, p. 131). They contribute to the coherence of a text in the same way as other cohesive devices such as referents, substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesions do ((Biber et al., 1999; Schiffrin, 1987, 2001). They serve to specify the relationships among sentences in written discourse, thereby leading the reader to the feeling that the sentences "hang together" or make sense (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 519). They also, as Rahimi (2011, p. 68) indicates, constitute an important component of communicative competence and play a facilitating role in communication. Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 528) state that the proper use of DMs plays a vital role in leading readers to accurate inferences about the writer's intentions. On the other hand,

the inappropriate use or lack of use of DMs could, to a certain degree, lead to misunderstanding and hinder successful communication.

Even though DMs has been a subject of research since the late 1970s, there is no agreement among researchers on a universal term for these lexical expressions. They are referred to by means of a wide range of terms including sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), pragmatic markers (Schiffrin, 1987), discourse connectives (Blakemore, 1987, 1992), cue phrases (Knott & Dale, 1994), pragmatic particles (Ostman, 1995), logical connectors (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999), and DMs (Fraser, 1999).

Furthermore, different groups of researchers define the term in different ways. For instance, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-freeman (1999) define DMs as lexical expressions that "serve to specify the relation-ships among sentences in oral or written discourse, thereby leading the listener/reader to the feeling that the sentences 'hang together' or make sense" (p. 519). Another definition is introduced by Schiffrin (1987) who defines them as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (p. 31). A more elaborate definition is proposed by Fraser (1999) who defines DMs as:

> … a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. With certain exceptions, they signal a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1. They have a core meaning, which is procedural, not conceptual, and their more specific interpretation is 'negotiated' by the context, both linguistic and conceptual (p. 23).

Another definition is introduced by Swan (2005) who states that, a "discourse marker" is "a word or expression which shows the connection between what is being said and the wider context" (p. xviii). Moreover, Carter & Fung (2007) define DMs as "intra-sentential and supra-sentential linguistic units which fulfill a largely non-propositional and connective function at the level of discourse" (p. 411).

Literature Review

A good deal of research has been devoted to examine the type and frequency of DMs used in EFL/ESL learners' writings as well as the relationship between learners' use of DMs and the quality of their writings. Following is a brief discussion of the main findings of some of these studies. With regard to the types of DMs used in argumentative and expository texts, the findings obtained from many previous studies (e.g., Ali & Mahadin, 2016; Daif-Allah & Albesher, 2013; Jalilifar 2008; Martinez, 2004; Modhish, 2012; Nejadansari & Mohammadi, 2014; Rahimi, 2011; Zhang, 2000) showed that elaborative DMs were the most frequently used, followed by the inferential and contrastive markers. Some of these studies (Ali & Mahadin, 2016; Daif-Allah & Albesher, 2013; Rahimi, 2011) have also shown that learners heavily relied on a restricted set of DMs in their writings, mainly "and," "in addition," and "for example" to compensate for their unfamiliarity with other DMs.

As for the relationship between learners' overall use of DMs and their writing quality, the findings from previous research using EFL/ESL learners with different L1 backgrounds have shown contradictory results. Some studies (e.g., Daif-Allah & Albesher, 2013; Jalilifar, 2008; Jin, 2001; Liu & Braine, 2005; Martinez, 2004) revealed a positive relationship between the number of DMs and good writing. Other studies (e.g., Alarcon & Morales, 2011; Castro, 2004; Jafarpur, 1991; Modhish, 2012; Rahimi, 2011; Rezvani Kalajahi & Abdullah, 2015; Zhang, 2000) found no significant relationship between use of DMs and the quality of writing.

Likewise, the findings obtained from the few studies that investigated the relationships between use of individual types of DMs and writing quality have shown contradictory results. While Jalilifar (2008) found a positive relationship between use of both elaborative and inferential DMs and writing quality, Martinez (2004) reported that only the use of elaborative DMs was positively related to writing quality. On the other hand, Modhish's (2012) study showed a positive correlation between use of topic relating markers and writing quality.

Research objectives and questions

In an attempt to address the above-mentioned issues, the present study aimed at investigating the type and frequency of DMs used by Saudi EFL university learners in their argumentative writing. The study also seeks to examine the relationship between use of DMs and the quality of the essays produced by the learners. Thus, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Saudi EFL university learners use the different types of DMs in their argumentative writing?
2. What DMs do the learners frequently use in their argumentative writing?
3. What is the relationship between the learners' overall use of DMs and the quality of their writing?
4. What is the relationship between the learners' use of individual types of DMs and the quality of their writing?

Method

Participants

The participants were 48 undergraduates majoring in English at AL-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. All participants were male students who were enrolled in the sixth-semester of study at the College of Languages and Translation in Riyadh. The reason for the selection of these participants was that they had already studied six writing courses designed to enable them to write in an academic manner using different types of essay such as description, cause and effect, comparison and contrast essays, etc. The essay-writing course taught in the sixth semester focuses on argumentative, classification, and reaction essays. So, they were expected to be proficient in writing skills.

Materials and instruments

The materials used in the present study were 48 argumentative essays written by the participants as a final exam of the essay-writing course held at the end of their sixth semester of study at the English department. The exam required each student to write, within two hours, a five-paragraph essay in which he argues for or against the idea of

loaning money to friends, classifies the types of health centers in his community, or presents his own response and reaction to a written segment. Out of the 65 students enrolled in the course, 48 students chose to write argumentative essays about loaning money to friends; the rest of the students chose to write about the other two topics.

In addition, two instruments were used in order to collect data for the present study. The first was the ESL Composition Profile developed by Jacobs et al. (1981). It was used to assess the quality of the essays produced by the participants as it has been widely documented and used in studies of ESL/EFL writing. This profile evaluates the quality of writing based on five aspects with various percentages: content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%), and mechanics (5%). For each aspect, it presents a set of criteria ranging from "excellent" to "very poor" with a specified range of scores (see Appendix A). Therefore, it provides, as Rezvani Kalajahi and Abdullah (2015) state, "a general quality score based on an overall impression of the writing, taking both syntactic and organization quality into account" (p. 443).

The second instrument was Fraser's (1999, 2009) taxonomy of discourse markers. It was used for the identification and classification of the DMs included in the participants' essays. This taxonomy was chosen because it conforms to written discourse and seems to be the most comprehensive classification in written discourse (Rahimi, 2011, p. 71). Fraser's taxonomy classifies DMs under two main classes: DMs that relate messages, those signaling a relationship between the interpretation of the discourse segment they introduce, S2, and the prior segment, S1, and DMs that relate topics, those that relate the topic of S2 to that of S1.

DMs that relate messages are further classified under three functional types: contrastive markers, elaborative markers, and inferential markers. Contrastive markers refer to DMs that signal that the explicit interpretation of S2 contrasts directly or indirectly with an interpretation of S1. Such markers include:

alternatively, although, but, contrary to this/that/expectations, conversely, despite (this/that), even so, however, *in comparison (with/*

to this/that), in contrast (with/to this/that), in spite of (this/that),
instead (of this/that), nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary,
on the other hand, rather (than this/that), regardless (of this/that),
still, though, whereas, yet.

Elaborative markers refer to DMs that signal an elaboration in S2 to the information contained in S1. In other words, they indicate a relationship in which the message of S2 parallels and possibly augments or refines the message of S1. These markers include:

above all, after all, also, alternatively, analogously, and, besides,
better yet, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, for another
thing, for example, for instance, further(more), in addition, in
any event, in other words, in particular, I mean, likewise, more
accurately, more importantly, more precisely, more to the point,
moreover, namely, on that basis, on top of it all, or, otherwise,
rather, similarly, to cap it all off, too, what is more

Inferential markers refer to DMs that signal that S1 provides a basis for inferring S2. These markers include:

accordingly, as a conclusion, as a consequence (of this/that), as
a result (of this/that), because (of this/that), consequently, for
this/that reason, hence, in this/that/any case, it can be concluded
that, it follows that, of course, on this/that condition, on these/
those grounds, so, then, therefore, thus

The second class of DMs, labelled topic relating markers, consists of DMs that relate the topic of S2 to that of S1. This type of DMs includes:

back to my original point, before I forget, by the way, incidentally,
just to update you, on a different note, speaking of X, that reminds
me, to change to topic, to return to my point, while I think of you,
with regards to.

Procedure

The 48 argumentative essays produced by the participants in their final exam were photocopied by the researcher, and students' exam papers were returned to the English Department. Then, the essays were computerized using Microsoft Office Word, retaining all grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. Following this, the researcher scored

the computerized essays with respect to their quality following the ESL Composition Profile proposed by Jacobs et al. (1981). Each essay was given a score out of 100. It should be indicated here that the essays had already been scored by the course instructor who is an experienced professor of TEFL. Each essay was given a score out of 60, written on the cover page of the exam paper. These scores were changed to be out of 100 by multiplying each score by 10 and dividing the outcome by 6.

To ensure scoring consistency between the researcher and the course instructor, interrater reliability of the scores given by the two raters was computed using Chronbach's Alpha formula. The results showed a highly acceptable reliability coefficient of .808. Therefore, each essay was given a final score by calculating the average of the scores given by the two raters.

After marking the essays for writing quality, they were analyzed to find out the DMs used by the learners following the taxonomy of DMs proposed by Fraser (1999, 2009). Each essay was carefully examined, and every word/expression that functions as DMs was extracted along with its adjacent sentences. The extracted DMs were checked again to make sure that they were used properly. To be classified as a discourse marker, a word/expression must meet the following criteria. First, it must belong to one grammatical class: conjunctions, adverbs, or prepositional phrases. Second, the withdrawal of the word/expression must not affect the grammaticality of the sentence. Finally, it must signal a relationship between the two separate messages it links. The analysis showed that the participants did not use any of the topic relating markers. Consequently, the DMs identified in each essay were classified under three functional types: contrastive markers, elaborative markers, and inferential markers. Each essay was given four scores, a score for each of the three types of DMs and a total DMs score.

Data analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the collected data were analyzed using the SPSS program for statistical procedures (Version 16). The statistical procedures utilized were the frequencies, percentages, and means of DMs used in addition to one-way ANOVA and

Pearson's correlation coefficient. To answer the first research question, which deals with the types of DMs used, the frequencies and percentages of DMs use were calculated for each type. These were used to determine the extent to which the participants employed each DMs type. Then, the means of the participants' use of each type were computed and compared using one-way ANOVA and Scheffe's test of post comparisons, to find out whether there were any significant differences among the types of DMs used. The second research question was answered by calculating and comparing the frequency and percentage of the individual DM used under each type.

Finally, Pearson's correlation coefficient was run to answer the third and fourth research questions, which deal with the relationship between DMs use and writing quality. The third question was answered by computing the correlation between the writing score of each essay and the total number of DMs used in the same essay, and the fourth by computing the correlation between the writing score of each essay and the number DMs belonging to each type used in the same essay.

Results and discussion

Use of different types of DMs

With regard to the first research question, the analysis revealed that the learners employed only three of the four types of DMs proposed by Fraser (1999, 2009): elaborative, inferential, and contrastive markers. They did not make use of any of the topic relating markers. As Table 1 shows, elaborative markers were the most frequently used with 231 occurrences (46.02%), followed by inferential markers with 181 occurrences, (36.05%) and contrastive markers with 90 occurrences (17.93%).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Percentages of the Types of DMs Used

Type of DMs	Mean per essay	Std. Deviation	Frequency	Percentage based on total
Elaborative	4.81	2.54	231	46.02
Inferential	3.77	2.22	181	36.05
Contrastive	1.88	1.79	90	17.93
All DMs	10.46	4.31	502	100

Table 1 also shows that the means for the three types of DMs used by the participants were 4.81 for elaborative markers, 3.77 for inferential markers, and 1.79 for contrastive markers. To find out whether there were any significant differences among these means, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Results of this analysis, as shown in Table 2, indicate that the participants' use of the three types of DMs was significantly different (F=21.85, p<0.05). Thus, a significant difference existed between at least two of the three means.

Table 2

ANOVA Summary Table for use of the Three Types of DMS

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Types	212.93	2	106.47	21.85*
Within Types	687.04	141	4.87	
Total	899.97	143		

* $p < 0.05$

To determine where the significant differences lie, Scheffe's test of post comparisons was used. As can be seen in Table 3, results of the analysis of the differences among the three types of DMs revealed significant differences between elaborative versus contrastive, and inferential versus contrastive DMs. On the other hand, there was no significant difference between elaborative versus inferential DMs. In other words, the participants in this study used both elaborative and inferential DMs significantly more frequently than contrastive ones. These results emphasize those of most previous research on the use of DMs in argumentative and expository texts (Ali & Mahadin, 2016; Daif-Allah & Albesher, 2013; Jalilifar 2008; Martinez, 2004; Modhish, 2012; Nejadansari & Mohammadi, 2014; Rahimi, 2011; Zhang, 2000) who found that the most frequently used DMs were the elaborative ones, followed by the inferential and contrastive markers.

Table 3

Results of the Scheffe Test for the Differences among the Means of Use of the Three Types of DMs

(I) Type of DMs	(J) Type of DMs	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Elaborative	Inferential	1.042	.451	.073	-.07	2.16
	Contrastive	2.938*	.451	.000	1.82	4.05
Inferential	Elaborative	-1.042	.451	.073	-2.16	.07
	Contrastive	1.896*	.451	.000	.78	3.01
Contrastive	Elaborative	-2.938*	.451	.000	-4.05	-1.82
	Inferential	-1.896*	.451	.000	-3.01	-.78

* $p < 0.05$

Use of individual DMs

As for the second research question, which deals with the individual DMs that Saudi EFL learners frequently use in their argumentative writing, Table 4 presents the frequency and percentage of use for each elaborative, inferential, and contrastive DM. Overall, the participants in this study made use of 12 elaborative, 10 inferential, and 9 contrastive DMs, with some markers used more frequently than others. A closer look at the frequency of use of each marker reveals that the DMs "and," "because," "so," and "but" were the most frequently used markers with a frequency of 156, 74, 56, and 55, respectively. Next came the DMs "also," "or," "then," "however," "for example," "of course," and "in conclusion" with a frequency of 29, 21, 19, 16, 12, 12, and 11, respectively. These 11 DMS account for 91.83% of the entire set of DMS employed in the essays. The rest of the DMs presented in Table 4 were rarely used. The following paragraphs present an analysis of the participants' use of individual DMs that are grouped under elaborative, inferential, and contrastive types of DMs.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Individual Elaborative, Inferential, and Contrastive Markers Used

Elaborative Markers	Frequency	percentage	Inferential Markers	Frequency	percentage	Contrastive Markers	Frequency	percentage
and	156	67.53	because	74	40.88	but	55	61.11
also	29	12.55	so	56	30.94	however	16	17.78
or	21	9.09	then	19	10.50	on the other hand	5	5.56
for example	12	5.19	of course	12	6.63	even though	4	4.44
too	3	1.30	in conclusion	11	6.08	Even, Even if	3	3.33
after all	2	0.87	therefore	4	2.21	still	3	3.33
in addition	2	0.87	In this/such case	2	1.10	rather (than)	2	2.22
moreover	2	0.87	as a result of this	1	0.55	although	1	1.11
above all	1	0.43	for that reason	1	0.55	In the contrary	1	1.11
for instance	1	0.43	thus	1	0.55	All markers	90	100
furthermore	1	0.43	All markers	181	100			
likewise	1	0.43						
All markers	231	100						

As mentioned before, elaborative markers were the most frequently used DMs with 231 occurrences that account for 46.02% of the 502 DMs used by the participants. As can be seen in Table 4, the most frequently used elaborative marker was "and" with a frequency of 156. It accounts for 67.53% of the entire set of elaborative markers employed in the essays. In terms of rank order of use, other frequently used elaborative DMs were "also," "or," and "for example," with a frequency of 29, 21, and 12, respectively. These three markers account for another 26.83% of the entire set of elaborative markers employed in the essays. The rest of the elaborative markers presented in Table 4 were rarely used. These results indicate that the participants in this study made use of a restricted set of elaborative DMs and overused the DM "and."

A possible interpretation for these findings is that the participants heavily relied on these DMs to compensate for their unfamiliarity with the other elaborative markers. This interpretation is supported by Martinez (2004) who found that proficient writers effectively used a varied set of elaborative DMs to develop their ideas, whereas less profi-

cient writers tended to repeat a restricted set of elaborative DMs that resulted in a lower writing quality. Another possible interpretation is that it is due to NL interference, since the DM *"and"* is widely used in spoken and written Arabic.

Inferential markers occupied the second rank among the three types of DMs used by the participants, with 181 occurrences (36.06%). Based on the data presented in Table 4, it is clear that the DMs "because," "so," "then," "of course," and "in conclusion" were the most frequently used ones, with a frequency of occurrence of 74, 56, 19, 12 and 11, respectively. These five DMs account for 95.03% of the entire set of inferential markers used in the essays. These findings show that the participants in this study employed a restricted set of inferential DMs and overused the DMs "because" and "so." They also imply that the participants were unfamiliar with the other inferential DMs.

Finally, contrastive markers were the least used by the participants, with 90 occurrences (17.93%). The most frequently used contrastive markers, as table 4 shows, was "but," with a frequency of 156, which accounts for 61.11% of the entire set of contrastive markers employed in the essays. Other frequently used contrastive markers were "however," "on the other hand," and "even though," with a frequency of 16, 5, and 4, respectively. As in the case of both elaborative and inferential DMs, these findings indicate that the participants employed a restricted set of contrastive markers and overused the DM "but." They also show that the participants heavily relied on these DMs to compensate for their unfamiliarity with the other contrastive markers.

In sum, the analysis of the participants' use of individual DMs reveals that Saudi EFL learners who participated in this study did not make use of a wide variety of elaborative, inferential, or contrastive DMs. It also shows that they overused the DMs "and," "because," "so" and "but." These findings are similar to those reported by Ali and Mahadin (2016), Daif-Allah and Albesher (2013) and Rahimi (2011).

Relationship between overall use of DMs and writing quality

The third research question deals with the relationships between the learners' overall use of DMs and the quality of their essays. To

answer this question, Pearson's correlation coefficient between the writing score of each essay and the total number of DMs used in the same essay was computed. The results presented in Table 5 reveal that there was an insignificant weak positive correlation between the frequency of use of all types of DMs and writing quality $r(48) = .243$, p =0.096. This finding indicates that the frequent use of the different types of DMs did not significantly contribute to the writing quality of Saudi EFL university learners.

Table 5
Correlation between the frequency of use of DMs and writing quality

Frequency of DMs		Writing Quality
	Pearson Correlation	.243
All Types of DMs	Sig. (2-tailed)	.096
	N	48

This finding is in line with the findings of some other studies that investigated the relationship between writing quality and use of DMs by EFL learners with different L1 backgrounds (e.g., Alarcon & Morales, 2011; Modhish, 2012; Rahimi, 2011; Zhang, 2000). In a study that investigated undergraduate Filipino students' use of DMs, Alarcon and Morales (2011) found that use of DMs was not significantly correlated with the quality of the students' essay. Modhish's (2012) study revealed no strong correlation between the total number of DMs used by Yemeni EFL university learners and the quality of their essays. Similarly, Rahimi's (2011) study indicated that the use of DMs does not significantly predict the quality of argumentative and expository essays produced by English-major Iranian EFL learners. Zhang's (2000) research on the use of DMs in the expository compositions of Chinese undergraduates demonstrated that the relationship between the number of DMs employed and the quality of writing was not statistically significant.

Moreover, Rezvani Kalajahi and Abdullah's (2015) research on Malaysian ESL students indicated a very weak negative, insignificant correlation between writing quality and the frequency of use of DMs. Kalajahi concluded that this finding implies that DMs were not used

effectively and appropriately by the students and that the frequent and extensive use of DMs by Malaysian ESL students not only did not contribute to the writing quality of the essays but it might also work otherwise.

However, this finding differs from the findings of some other studies that reported a significant correlation between use of DMs and writing quality. In a study that aimed at investigating the use of DMs in paragraphs written by Saudi Preparatory Year Program EFL students, Daif-Allah and Albesher (2013) found a statistically significant correlation between the paragraphs scores and the number of DMs present in the same paragraphs. Jalilifar's (2008) study also showed a statistically significant correlation between the quality of descriptive texts produced by Iranian postgraduate and graduate EFL students and the number of well-functioned DMs used in the compositions. Similarly, Martinez (2004) found a significant relationship between the scores of expository compositions of Spanish undergraduates and the number of discourse markers used in the same compositions.

Relationship between use of individual types of DMs and writing quality

The final research question deals with the relationships between the learners' use of individual types of DMs and the quality of their essays. To answer this question, Pearson's correlation coefficients between the writing score of each essay and the number DMs belonging to each type used in the same essay were computed. It should be noted here that the majority of previous studies that investigated the relationship between use of DMs and writing quality only examined this relationship in terms of the total number of DMs used by the participants; they did not investigate the relationships between the participants' use of each type of DMs and the quality of their writing. Findings of this study, as shown in Table 6, revealed very weak positive but insignificant correlations between writing quality and the frequency of use of either elaborative DMs [$r(48) = .052$, p =0.726] or inferential DMs [$r(48) =.121$, p =.413]. On the other hand, there was

a statistically significant positive correlation between the frequency of use of contrastive DMs and writing quality [$r(48) = .369$, p < 0.01].

Table 6

Correlations between the frequency of use of individual types of DMs and writing quality

Frequency of DMs		Writing Quality
Elaborative DMs	Pearson Correlation	.052
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.726
	N	48
Inferential DMs	Pearson Correlation	.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.413
	N	48
Contrastive DMs	Pearson Correlation	.369[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010
	N	48

Thus, in spite of the fact that the learners used both elaborative and inferential DMs significantly more frequently than contrastive DMs, their use of elaborative or inferential DMs did not significantly contribute to their writing quality, while their use of contrastive DMs did significantly contribute to the writing quality of their argumentative essays. The most probable interpretation for this finding is that the participants ineffectively overused limited sets of elaborative and inferential DMs to compensate for their unfamiliarity with the other elaborative and inferential markers. This overuse lowered the quality of the essays they produced. On the other hand, even though they used contrastive DMs less frequently, their use of these markers was effective and resulted in a higher writing quality.

These findings are incongruent with those reported in the few studies that investigated the relationships between the participants' use of individual types of DMs and the quality of their writing (Jalilifar, 2008; Martinez, 2004; Modhish, 2012). While this study found that the only statistically significant correlation was between the learners' use of contrastive DMs and their writing quality, Jalilifar's (2008) study revealed that both elaborative and inferential DMs were the most closely related to the quality of the descriptive

texts written by Iranian postgraduate and graduate EFL students. Similarly, Martinez (2004) reported that, among the different types of DMs, elaborative DMs were the most closely related to the quality of expository compositions of Spanish undergraduates. Modhish's (2012) study showed a positive correlation between use of topic relating markers and the quality of the essays of Yemeni EFL university learners.

Conclusion

The present study revealed that elaborative DMs were the most frequently used ones, followed by inferential and contrastive markers. Moreover, the learners' use of both elaborative and inferential DMs was significantly more frequent than their use of contrastive ones. On the other hand, they did not make use of any of the topic relating markers, relied heavily on restricted sets of elaborative, inferential, and contrastive markers, and overused the DMs "and," "because," "so" and "but." These findings imply that Saudi EFL university learners were unfamiliar with topic relating markers as well as many of the elaborative, inferential, and contrastive DMs. They also indicate that the learners were unaware of the semantic distinctions among the various DMs; consequently, they assumed that DMs could be used interchangeably as long as they are classified under the same functional type.

In addition, the study showed that there was no significant correlation between the learners' overall use of DMs and the quality of their writing. However, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between their use of contrastive DMs and the quality of their essays, despite the fact that they used contrastive DMs significantly less than either elaborative or inferential ones. These findings imply that the learners' use of both elaborative and inferential DMs was inappropriate which resulted in poor essays. In sum, the findings of the present study indicate that DMs were not dealt with adequately in the writing courses offered to Saudi EFL university learners.

Limitations

The present study has a number of limitations. The major limitation is that the sample was confined to male EFL students who were enrolled in the sixth-semester of study at the College of Languages and Translation, AL-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. Another limitation was lack of multiple data collection procedures, as the study was based on the data collected from the participants' use of DMs in an argumentative essay in which they argue for or against the idea of loaning money to friends.

Implications

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, a number of pedagogical implications can be presented, based on the findings obtained from the study. First, it is recommended that the teaching of DMs be an essential component of the writing courses offered to Saudi EFL university learners, in order to enable them to use these markers appropriately. More specifically, DMs need to be taught gradually and explicitly through providing the learners with different types of activities that enable them to recognize, practice, and use these markers appropriately. In this respect, it is important to present DMs to the students in context, rather than as isolated words.

Therefore, writing instructors should start with raising the learners' awareness of the appropriate uses of individual DMS. To do this, instructors can present the students with model texts with appropriately used DMs and draw their attention to the role that these markers play in making the text more coherent and cohesive. Following this, instructors can make use of the sentence combining exercise to get the students to practice using these markers. This exercise can be carried out in different ways according to the level of the students. At first, instructors can provide the students with the DM they need to combine the two sentences. Then, they can provide them with some DMs and ask them to choose the appropriate one for combining the sentences. After the student get some practice, the instructors can require the students to supply the DM themselves.

Second, writing instructors should encourage their students to make use of various DMs in their writing. When correcting students' written work, they should highlight the role of DMs, particularly how the absence, misuse, or overuse of DMs reduces the quality of their writing.

Finally, writing instructors are required to draw the attention of their learners to the semantic distinctions between the various DMs that are grouped under the same functional type. A useful teaching exercise that can be used to achieve this goal is the modified cloze exercise. In this exercise, the students are presented with a cloze passage and required to fill in the blanks from a list of DMs that belong to the same functional type.

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Appendix "A"
ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, et al., 1981)

	Score	Criteria
Content	30-27	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: knowledgeable • substantive thorough development of thesis • relevant to assigned topic
	26-22	GOOD TO AVERAGE: some knowledge of subject • adequate range • limited development of thesis mostly relevant to topic, but lacks detail
	21-17	FAIR TO POOR: limited knowledge of subject • little substance • inadequate development of topic
	16-13	VERY POOR: does not show knowledge of subject • non- substantive • not pertinent • or not enough to evaluate
Organization	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: fluent expression • ideas clearly stated/ supported succinct • well-organized • logical sequencing • cohesive
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: somewhat choppy • loosely organized but main ideas stand out • limited supports logical but incomplete sequencing
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: non-fluent • ideas confused or disconnected • lacks logical sequencing and development
	9-7	VERY POOR: does not communicate • no organization or not enough to evaluate
Vocabulary	20-18	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: sophisticated range • effective word/ idiom choice and usage • word form mastery • appropriate register
	17-14	GOOD TO AVERAGE: adequate range • occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured
	13-10	FAIR TO POOR: limited range • frequent errors of word • idiom form, choice, usage meaning confused or obscured
	9-7	VERY POOR: essentially translation • little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form • or not enough to evaluate
Language use	25-22	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: effective complex constructions • few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions
	21-18	GOOD TO AVERAGE: effective but simple constructions • minor problems in complex constructions • several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions but meaning seldom obscured
	17-11	FAIR TO POOR: major problems in simple/complex constructions • frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions • meaning confused or obscured
	10-5	VERY POOR: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules dominated by errors • does not communicate or not enough to evaluate

	Score	Criteria
Mechanics	5	EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD: demonstrates mastery of conventions • few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing
	4	GOOD TO AVERAGE: occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning not obscured
	3	FAIR TO POOR: frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization paragraphing poor handwriting meaning confused or obscured
	2	VERY POOR: no mastery of conventions • dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing • handwriting illegible • or not enough to evaluate