

The use of English discourse markers across gender: A corpus-based study

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Abstract

The current study aims to investigate the kinds of discourse markers (DMs) used by Indonesian university students in their cause-and-effect essay writing with consideration of gender groups. Twenty-nine cause-and-effect essays composed by 10 male and 19 female university students were analyzed using the DM taxonomy adapted from Fraser's (1999) and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) studies. AntConc 3.5.7 was utilized to find out the types and the frequency of the discourse markers in a corpus-based data analysis. The analysis identified 191 DMs from the 29 cause-and-effect essays. The findings revealed that, in terms of DM variability, there were no notable differences between the use of DMs by the male and female students. However, the study also observed some excessive use of DMs and a general lack of consideration of punctuations following the DMs by some of the male students. Taken together, our findings suggest a degree of similarities between the use of DMs by the male and female students with some potential limitations shown by the male students. Implications for the teaching of discourse markers as well as recommendations for future research are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills that needs to be mastered by students of English as foreign language (EFL). It can be challenging to learn as writing requires students to transform their ideas and thoughts into text (Nunan, 2003). However, writing has an important role in English learning. It can be a demanding and complex task for EFL learners since they have to gather their ideas and develop them into a written form. Likewise, they have to know how to organize their ideas based on the types of text they write.

Depending on the purpose, writing can be divided into academic and non-academic ones. In academic writing, the writers need to deal with its specific rules. Other than the rules, academic writing also has various features. Academic writing is rigid and strict, therefore, students should not write carelessly. The examples of academic writing include argumentative, persuasive, and descriptive text. Academic writing is different from its counterpart, the non-academic writing. In the latter case, there are more flexibility and less rigid rules about the writing conventions. The examples of non-academic writings are magazine, newsletter, and personal experience essay (Choemue & Bram, 2021). The topics in non-academic texts are more general compared to that of academic texts.

A text may consist of paragraphs. According to Oshima and Hogue (2006), paragraph is the basic unit of organization in writing and is used to develop main idea in a group of sentences. Paragraph is an important aspect in constructing text such as in academic writing. Cause-and-effect

essay is an example of academic writing. Some education institutions in Indonesia include such text for the students to learn as a compulsory learning material.

Folse and Fough (2014) mentioned that cause-and-effect essays is used to explain how an event can affect another event or how an event can cause another event. Such text can be written in two forms, that is, to pay more attention on the effects of a cause or more on the causes of one effect. In cause-and-effect essay, there are connectors and transitional markers which can be used to create smoother and cohesive text such as ‘because’, ‘because of’, ‘as a result’, ‘as a consequence’, ‘consequently’, ‘due to’, ‘for this reason’, ‘furthermore’, ‘in order to’, ‘since’, ‘so’, ‘therefore’, and ‘thus.’

There are some stages in the writing of cause-and-effect essay. The first one is choosing a topic. This step is crucial since it deals with the writers’ ideas. In choosing the topic, the writers have to think about the possible causes and effects as well. In step two, the writers should think about focusing more on the causes or contrarily, focusing more on the effects. If the writers decide to focus more on the causes, they have to mention some causes that can create an event as the effect. If the writers focus on the effects, they have to mention some effects as the results of an event. After brainstorming their ideas, writers continue to prepare an outline. Here, they can start thinking about some points in the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusions sections. In the body paragraphs, writers can use the materials that they have constructed in the brainstorming step. Writers can mention two or three effects if it is focused more on the effects or mention two or three causes if it is focused more on the causes. After that, they can continue writing the draft. In this step, the writers can develop what they have listed in outlining step into paragraphs. The next step is getting feedback from peer(s). In this step, (if there are more than one author) the corresponding writer may ask their peer(s) for comments and suggestions to improve the essay. From the feedback, the writers can revise their draft based on the comments and suggestions from the partner(s). Finally, the last step is proofreading the manuscript that has been revised. In this process, the writers should make sure that their writing contain no mistakes.

In writing, there is a term called discourse marker (DM). It is defined as the expression that plays crucial roles in depicting the organization of writing and to create coherence and cohesion between sentences and paragraphs (Yulianto, 2021; Ismail, 2012). Some terms can be used as discourse markers which serve specific purpose such as discourse connectives, sentence connectives, discourse word, discourse operators, discourse particles, discourse signaling devices, filler, phatic connectives, pragmatic connectives, pragmatic expressions, pragmatic formatives, pragmatic markers, pragmatic operators, pragmatic particles, and semantic conjuncts (Kusumayati, 2020; Semahat, 2017).

Fraser (1999) defined discourse marker as a group of lexical expressions drawn from some groups, and as a word or phrase that can be used to connect one segment with another segment. Such lexical expressions can be in the form of conjunction or prepositional phrase that links one another. Furthermore, Fraser (2009) mentioned three functional classes of DMs. The first class is called contrastive discourse markers (CDMs) such as ‘but’, ‘although’, ‘however’, and ‘on the other hand’. They can be used to establish direct or indirect contrast in writing (Dumlao & Wilang, 2019, p. 203). For example, “I want to go home, *but* it is raining outside”. The second class is called as elaborative discourse marker (EDMs) such as ‘and’, ‘besides’, ‘in addition’, ‘furthermore’, and ‘such as.’ These markers are used to explain preceding statements. For instance, “I sit on the chair, *and* I read the book.” Further, the third class is called inferential discourse markers (IDMs) such as ‘thus’, ‘therefore’, ‘because of’, and ‘so’. IDMs functions to make inferences or to conclude previous statements (Fraser, 2009) as in “The landslide occurred *because* of the heavy rain.”

Meanwhile, Halliday and Hasan (1976) argued that a text will be coherent if it contains cohesive devices, such as conjunctions, lexical cohesions, substitutions, which are then used to connect one sentence to another and to make the text comprehensible. Cohesive devices can be used to connect words, personal pronouns, definite articles, demonstrative pronouns, and synonyms (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Brown and Yule (1983) summarized the types of discourse markers provided by Halliday and Hasan (1976) into three types. These types include additive (and, or, furthermore, similarly, in addition); adversative (but, yet, however, on the other hand, nevertheless);

causal (so, consequently, for this reason, it follows from this); and temporal (then, after that, an hour later, finally, at last).

Table 1. Taxonomy of Discourse Markers (Fraser, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976)

Causal-Inferential Markers	accordingly, thus, so, therefore, then, hence, in this case, consequently, as a result, for this reason, as a consequence
Elaborative Markers	
Additive Markers	in addition, further, besides, furthermore, similarly, likewise, and
Illustration Markers	for instance, for example
Appositive Markers	in other words, otherwise, in one word
Summative Markers	in conclusion, in brief, in summary, in short, to sum up
Adversative Markers	
Concessive Markers	however, but, still, yet, nevertheless, although
Corroborative Markers	in fact, of course, indeed
Corrective Markers	rather, instead, on the contrary
Contrastive Markers	in contrast, by contrast, on the other hand.

Additionally, corpus is a collection of texts in an electronic form containing written and or spoken texts (Kwary, 2018; Dergisi, 2017). Recently, corpus-based approach is used by researchers to analyze language in the written or spoken form by using software and large electronic collections from which are collected in a large general database (Gardner, 2007; Grant, 2010).

Numerous studies have discussed EFL students' difficulty in writing (Nenotek et al., 2022; Alisha et al., 2019; Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020; Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020). The findings showed that students feel difficulty regarding generating ideas, low mastery of the vocabulary and language in use, spelling, grammar, the use of content, organization, mechanics, and discourse. From the above findings, it can be seen that there are many aspects which can inhibit EFL students' progress in writing. Since the genre of the texts is academic writing, the students should pay attention on the way they complete and organize the sentences. Academic writing can be challenging for EFL learners since it is related to cognitive process (Choemue & Bram, 2021; Kasiri & Fazilatfar, 2016); it is different from non-academic writing. In non-academic writing, students can write personally and in informal style, students can use slang or abbreviations (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Thus, it can be seen that writing an academic style is not as easy as non-academic writing.

Furthermore, it was found that several students encountered difficulties in gathering ideas and constructing them into paragraphs. It means that they had some difficulties in constructing some sentences as a paragraph consists of a group of sentences. According to Zemach and Rumisek (2005, p. 12), students should find a topic firsthand before starting to write a paragraph in academic text. After they decide on the topic that will be constructed into paragraph, the students should think about the main idea of the topic. It is needed since the main idea will help the students in gathering more ideas and thus, starting to write easily. Moreover, the students can support the main idea by explaining what they think about the topic. They can find some references on the internet or some books and other sources to support the statements on the body paragraph. Finally, they can finish their writing by concluding the paragraph. In this step, the students can summarize or write the important point based on what they have written.

More previous studies have found some factors which inhibited students in writing English for English academic purpose. Shokirjonovna (2020) found that students' difficulties in academic writing were lexical difficulties, grammar and punctuation, plagiarism, and text structure. Such reasons are why many people seek for help in authoring an academic article. Similarly, AlMawarni (2020) found that the difficulties encountered by students were about the language skills, academic writing skills, and management skills. It is also supported by Ismiyanti and Kholiq (2020) who mentioned that the factors that may inhibit students in writing were lack of proficiency, lack of knowledge, and lack of interest in learning English. Such issues occurred because the students assumed that they had limited knowledge to develop ideas so that they felt confused to construct sentences. Moreover, students also assumed that the problems were because of their lack of vocabulary mastery and their problem in spelling (Alisha et al., 2019). This is also supported by the

findings of Nenotek et al. (2022) who stated that most dominant issues encountered were found in the process of gathering ideas, developing ideas, deciding on a topic, finding references, and organizing paragraph into the appropriate arrangement (such as cause-and-effect construction).

Several studies also investigated the styles of students' writing. Choemue and Bram (2021) found that discourse markers used by Thai's students were contrastive discourse, elaborative discourse, inferential discourse, temporal discourse, and spoken discourse markers from academic and non-academic essays. Moreover, in the study by Adewibowo et al. (2018), the researchers found that students used inferential markers, temporal markers, elaborative markers, and contrastive markers in constructing their theses background. Mursidin et al. (2020) revealed that students used contrastive markers, inferential markers, elaborative markers, and additional subclasses markers on their argumentative essays.

Another study also investigated the mapping of cohesive device usage to analyze non-native writers' needs in academic English and it was found that non-native speaker of English group prefers to use cohesive devices in the form of lexical cohesion (Ashadi et al., 2020). Although there have been studies on students' writing, most of them only focus on the discourse markers in essays, including academic and non-academic essays. Little attention has been paid to discourse markers in paragraph, especially the cause-and-effect paragraph. Furthermore, research on the discourse markers usage by male and female university students are limited. Therefore, this study aimed to fill in the gaps of research. This research is expected to draw on the new issue in language teacher education about the use of discourse markers by male and female university students in constructing the cause-and-effect paragraph.

RESEARCH METHOD

Twenty-nine (29) students participated in this study. They were undergraduate students who took Writing courses majoring English literatures at Universitas Negeri Malang. The reason for the selection of the participants was that they had been exposed to several courses involving writing skills, such as Basic Structure, Grammar, Writing 1 and were in the process of completing Writing 2 course. The data were in the form of twenty-nine paragraphs written by the students. To achieve the goal of the study, the researchers asked them to write a cause-and-effect text as part of their assignment in the fall semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. They were free to choose the topic they want so they can write as freely as possible. After that, their writings were typed and the corpus was constructed using a software called AntConc version 3.5.7 (Anthony, 2018).

The experiment was conducted within four (4) weeks through online class. During the four weeks, the students were given a topic about cause-and-effect writing. On week one (1), the students were given theory about cause-and-effect paragraph. On week two (2), they were asked to analyze the organization of cause-and-effect paragraph. Moreover, they were also asked to choose topic to be developed in written form. On the week three (3), the students were given learning materials on transition signals and they were asked to start outlining. At this point (week three), they were asked to write some important points on the part of introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusions sections. On the week four (4), the students were asked to write the final revision of cause-and-effect paragraph based on the theory given throughout the online classes.

This study primarily focused on the DMs used by the male and female students by using a descriptive method. The data were analyzed by adapting Fraser's (1999); and Halliday and Hasan (1976) theories. Since the study used AntConc 3.5.7, we also used corpus analysis to analyze the data. Firstly, the total of female and male students was calculated in AntConc 3.5.7. Then, the frequency of the use of each discourse markers was checked based on each group (the female and the male group). After that, the frequency of each group was divided by the total of the students and further, this result was displayed as the percentage of the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, results were obtained from the use of DMs in students' cause-and-effect essays. Out of twenty-nine cause-and-effect essays, 191 DMs were found. These were categorized into two types of DMs, a total of 92 DMs for indicating cause sentences and 99 DMs for stating

effect sentences. Table 2. elaborates the overall types and categories of DM classes used in twenty-nine students' cause-and-effect paragraphs.

Table 2. Discourse Markers for Cause

No	Discourse Markers (Cause)	Frequency	%	Gender			
				Male		Female	
				Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Because	62	67.39%	23	37%	39	63%
2.	Since	5	5.43%	3	60%	2	40%
3.	Due to	18	19.56%	9	50%	9	50%
4.	Caused by	6	6.54%	1	17%	5	83%
5.	The reason for	1	1.08%	1	100%	0	0%
Total		92	100%				

From the table above, it can be seen that “Because” is the most widely used marker (67.39%), followed by “Due to” (19.56%), “Caused by” (6.54%), “since” (5.43%), and “The reason for” marker (1.08%) as the least common marker used by the students. In other words, the common discourse markers for stating reason that is used by the students is ‘because.’ It occurred since most of the students are familiar with that word. They had already known the use of because from their previous education and also it is a common word that is used in daily life to express the cause of something that happened. Thus, the researchers argued that since the students had already been familiar with the word “Because” in both written and spoken form, it was easier to use for expressing reason.

The finding above is in line with Adewibowo et al. (2018) who found that the word ‘because’ was used many times (47%) in students’ thesis background since they have to state strong fact that support their opinions and ideas in drafting their thesis. Similarly, Susanto, et al. (2019) also pointed out that the most dominant causal marker function used by the students in hortatory exposition text is “because” since it is familiarly known by students compared to the other causal English discourse markers. As the inferential discourse markers signal that the current utterance conveys a message that is, in a sense, consequential to some aspect of the foregoing, the marker ‘because’ was dominantly used (Choemue & Bram, 2021).

Regarding the gender, female students used the words “because” and “caused by” more frequently than male students. It can be seen that females used the word “because” thirty-nine times and “caused by” five times, while males used “because” twenty-three times and only once occurrence of the word “caused by.” On the contrary, male students often used the words “since” 3 times and “the reason for” once in composing the cause sentences. Conversely, female students only used the word “since” twice and no usage of the expression “the reason for.” Furthermore, for the use of discourse marker “due to” in stating the cause sentences, both females and males used it in the total of 9 times.

Besides analyzing the causal markers, the researchers also broke down the markers used by the students for drawing a conclusion in cause-and-effect essays. Out of twenty-nine data, the researchers found five inferential markers that were used by the students the most, the details of the DMs are presented in Table 3 below. The table presented the data obtained from the discourse markers of effect. This study found that the word “So” (52.52%) was the widest used marker of stating the effect sentence, followed by “As a result” (19.19%), “So that” (10.10%), “Therefore” (10.10%), and “Thus” (8.09%) as the last discourse markers of stating effect.

It means that most of the students often used the word 'so' instead of the others for composing the effect sentences or even paragraph. Therefore, the researchers assumed that the students used the marker of 'so' frequently since the word is easy to say and use and they have already familiar with it in both written and spoken form. This finding was in line with the Surjowati (2018) who stated that among those DMs, ‘so’ becomes the most frequently employed inferential markers by the students

Table 3. Discourse Markers for Effect

No	Discourse Markers (Effect)	Frequency	%	Gender			
				Male		Female	
				Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	So	52	52.52%	14	27%	38	73%
2.	As a result	19	19.19%	4	21%	15	79%
3.	So that	10	10.10%	4	40%	6	60%
4.	Therefore	10	10.10%	1	10%	9	90%
5.	Thus	8	8.09%	1	13%	7	83%
Total		99	100%				

from those groups. This finding gives different illustration that ‘therefore’ and ‘thus’ were the most frequently used inferential markers found in the research by Kaveired and Allami (2011). Besides, Ali and Mahadin (2016) also found the different finding that ‘because of’ was the more frequency used than others inferential markers in drawing a conclusion.

Additionally, the study also found that female students were more frequent in using all the discourse markers of effect. It can be seen from the Table 3 that female students used the word ‘so’ twenty-eight times, while male students used it fourteen times. Then, fifteen times for the female students in utilizing the word “as a result” and only four times for the male students. The male students also only used the expression of “so that” 4 times whereas the female students used it nine times. Besides that, female students used the word “therefore” nine times and “Thus” seven times. On the contrary, both of the words are used only once by the male students in stating the effect sentences.

To sum up, this study indicated that paragraphs written by male and female students share some similar and also slightly different patterns. Both male and female students’ writing also inserted causal markers to show causal relationships and draw conclusion. Based on the findings, both male and female students are almost similar in the use of markers because as the common causal markers and so as the inferential markers for stating the clause in cause-and-effect essays. However, male students have different pattern compared to the female students for using the markers of ‘since’, ‘caused by’, even ‘the reason for’ in their paragraphs. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Pasaribu (2017) who stated that there is no difference between both male and female students in using inserted inferential markers to show causal relationship and draw conclusion in their academic essays. Similarly, Thao and Vinh (2021) also revealed that both Vietnamese male and female employed English DMs in their writing in a similar way. Female journalists were, nevertheless, found to employ the interpersonal functions of the used English DMs more than their male counterparts. Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the students have already been familiar with some causal markers, while others were still unfamiliar with it.

Furthermore, by analyzing the occurrences of the markers from the samples of the usage of causal and inferential markers in students’ cause-and-effect paragraphs, the following results were found (see Table 4 and 5 below).

Table 4. The Example of Discourse Markers of Cause

Male	Female
Smartphones can be regarded as a substitute for computers, because we can do some work that we usually do on computers such as typing, searching, and	The frequent eating of instant noodles is bad for people because it contains harmful substances, such as Butylated hydroxy anisole (BHA) that are used to make instant noodles safe longer and
Then global warming started since people used private transportation.	Second, the taste of fast food is usually more delicious than home-cooked food since fast food contains a lot of additives that are high in sugar and fats.

Volcanic eruptions are known as the process of magma expelling from the magma chamber in the bowels of a volcano, due to magma activity and the movement of tectonic plates.	Due to imitating the behavior seen on TV shows, many teenagers are dating.
One of them is due to the loss of animal habitat caused by human-caused damage which results in Illegal logging by irresponsible humans is not very animalistic.	Dry skin is usually caused by factors such as weather, hot baths and showers, and vitamin B deficiency.
And since Illegal hunting also has a major impact on ecosystems and the food chain, they arbitrarily hunt animals arbitrarily and greedily the reason for the drastic decline in animal populations is due to the greed of humans to hunt indiscriminately and hunt as much as possible.	-

Table 5. The Example of Discourse Markers of Effect

Male	Female
People are too lazy to cook other food because they already have junk food, so they don't need to cook their own food.	In addition, metal music is able to help listeners explore all the emotions they feel, so it bring out feelings and inspiration.
Also, the effect of piles of plastic waste by everyone is increasing global warming. As a result, many areas are getting dry.	First, it is possible for teenagers to experience trauma from events in their childhood that are still ongoing today. As a result, teenagers will have a hard time to socialize because of the fear that overshadows teenagers.
We have to take care of it by opening captivity or caring for it like in a zoo so that no greedy humans can damage the ecosystem.	Some will upload their pictures on social media with interesting captions so that it attracts other people to see the picture.
Second Smartphones have high mobility. We can carry a smartphone wherever and whenever we want because smartphones are compact. Therefore everyone likes smartphones more than any other device.	The content of bad fats and white flour can make people fatter, thus they have a high possibility of obesity. Therefore, people who are always consuming it will slowly get fat and unhealthy. with that small size, instant noodles can bring 120-200 calories.
Result of the game is a chance to make your group or your friend split far from each other. Thus, "Among us" is just a game, it can make your trust between friends decrease.	An open economy is a type of economy where not only domestic factors but also entities in other countries engage in trade of products (goods and services). Thus, Countries in the world are increasingly open to each other so that there is an exchange of products from one country to another.

Table 4 and 5 show that both male and female students employed DMs using the same variety but are different in terms of occurrences. This indicated information that the number of occurrences of the DMs are quite different. Sometimes, the students used the causal markers in the beginning of sentence, while sometimes they used it in the middle of sentence without considering the use of punctuation before the markers. Besides, as can be seen from tables above, male students often overused the markers in composing the sentences like using the word 'since', 'the reason for', 'due to' in one sentence. This study findings are similar to research by Ni'mah (2019) who showed that students' problems in using DMs in their writing is overuse of DMs which in turn cause the essay to be incoherent and difficult to understand by the readers. It means that even though the students had already known the use of causal markers as well as inferential markers for cause-and-effect essay, some of them overused the markers which caused problems in their writing. Hence, it needs much attention for knowing how to use the markers appropriately as well as the punctuations.

CONCLUSION

Discourse marker is a significant aspect in academic writing. The markers help building cohesion and coherence in writing as well to convey ideas meaningfully to the readers. Without them, a text would be hard to follow and there would be no continuation between the sentences and paragraphs.

In formal and academic writing, the lack of discourse markers can be an issue. Discourse markers cause the information in text to go with no disturbance. In educational writing, markers are essential and they must be applied best when appropriate. This research examined the kinds and also frequencies of discourse markers used by male and female students in writing cause-and-effect paragraph.

Furthermore, the finding of this study showed that the most frequently used discourse markers used by students for stating causal relationship was 'because' while 'so' was found to be the most applied in drawing the conclusion in cause-and-effect paragraph. Additionally, this study also found that both male and female students had similarities and differences in the use of discourse markers. The similarity was that both of them had already applied discourse markers in their writing with 'because' and 'so' as the commonly used DMs. Meanwhile, the researchers found the differences from both of them in the frequency since in some word the female students' utilization of DMs were higher than male, yet there is a word that were not used by the female students. Even though the students had already applied the suitable discourse markers in accordance to the topic of the paragraph, they still faced some problems in arranging the sentences such as with the overuse of discourse markers which makes the readers confused in understanding the text. As one of the factors to determine the cohesion and coherence of an essay, discourse markers are not informed intensively in writing class. Therefore, it needs the lecturers' role in introducing and obligating the use of DMs as well as the appropriate punctuation in the students' writing.

Finally, it must be pointed out that this study had some limitations. The results of this study are not to be generalized to all levels of students due to its relatively small-sized corpus within a certain level of proficiency. This study also has neither considered the non-typical connectives which may also indicate a cause-effect relationship, such as 'and', nor has it considered covert cohesive devices that have similar functions. Future studies are recommended to be more focused while pursuing a greater depth. Given that studies of connectives are overwhelmingly concerned with students of English majors, future studies may also devote more attention to non-English major students.

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