Exploring Discourse Markers Usage and Challenges in Writing Procedure Texts: A Study on Vocational Students

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to find out how vocational students employ discourse markers for writing procedural texts. Another goal is to investigate the difficulties students faced while writing coherent procedure text with discourse markers. This study applied a content analysis and adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis as the analysis technique. Data were gathered through interviews and documentation. 121 occurrences of discourse markers were found from 21 worksheets. Among the four types identified by Fraser's (2005) framework, it was also discovered that elaborative discourse markers are the most often used type. It is discovered that students are challenged because they are not familiar with discourse markers and have less competence in English. It is concluded that students' competence affects their use of discourse markers types in writing. The implications are students need more practice in using discourse markers for writing text and procedure text is applicable for vocational students. Then, student's cultural background affects their language competence. Lastly, the researcher expects the future researchers explore strategies to write using discourse markers or factors behind the challenges in using discourse markers.

Keywords: Discourse Markers; Procedure Text; Students' Challenges; Writing, Vocational High School

Introduction

Writing texts using discourse markers should be a concern for students. In fact, discourse markers support their writing coherence and help the readers to interpret their texts well (Sanusi, 2018). Coherent texts guarantee that readers of all language levels can understand the content (Manan and Raslee, 2017). When readers understand the text means the writing is effective and well-accepted. A text would not seem logically constructed and the relationship between the various sentences and paragraphs would not be clear without discourse markers. However, using too many discourse markers can make writing seem too heavy and unauthentic (Kusumayati, 2020).

Discourse markers referred as connecting words, have a function in building coherent within individual sentences and across paragraphs (Chae, 2014). Some of those words are *first, before, when, finally* which are categorized into temporal discourse markers (Fraser, 2005) that used in certain text type

like procedure text. In the context of vocational high schools, procedure text is a valuable material to be learned.

Procedure text is texts that explain the use of something or operation manuals such as how to use the computer, the washing machine, etc (Nurhidayati, 2015). By using discourse markers, procedure text guides students through step-by-step process and balancing theory and practice, rather than theory only materials. Along with action verb, temporal conjunction is part of the language features for procedure text. It is known as sequences transition, it signals about something happened and the sequence of events (Putri and Saun, 2019). It implies that temporal discourse markers cannot be separated from

It is necessary for students as Crismore (1989) stated in Sun (2013) that discourse markers lead to more effective and efficient language skills, interpreting, and criticial thinking. Crossley et al. (2010 in Lismay, 2020) strengthened that there is a widely held belief that the coherence and cohesiveness of an essay have a significant impact on its quality. It is stated too in previous research (Nur, 2019; Rahayu and Purwanto, 2019) that discourse markers ability had impacts on students' language skills.

Based on the previous research, it showed that among Fraser's (2005) types of discourse markers, there is one type that highly used which is elaborative discourse markers (Surjowati, 2018; Choemue and Bram, 2021; Alsaawi, 2022). Another research found that temporal discourse markers are the dominant markers in procedure text (Sohaya, 2018). However, challenges of using discourse markers for writing procedure text from the view of students remain unexplored. Therefore, this study attempts to analyze the use of discourse markers in vocational high school level. It is also offered discussion about students' challenges and their ways to solve it.

Research Methodology

This study engaged content analysis with both deductive and inductive approaches. There were 21 worksheets by 12th grade vocational students. The techniques to gather data are documentation which is the worksheets and the other one is interviews. The data analysis technique is based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. To analyze the use of discourse markers, this research employed deductive approach where the researcher adopted Fraser's (2005) categorization of discourse markers types. Burns and Grove (2005 in Elo and Kyngas, 2007) stated that deductive approach relies on a pre-existing theory or model, progressing from the broader concept to the more specific details. Then, to investigate the challenges in using discourse markers, this research employed inductive approach. it is starts by examining individual cases, progressing from specific observations to derive a more encompassing summary or generalization (Chinn and Kramer, 1999 in Elo and Kyngas, 2007).

Findings

The Use of Discourse Markers

a. Types of Discourse Markers in Students' Procedure Text

This study found that there were 121 occurrences of discourse markers by the students. The discourse markers most frequently used is elaborative markers, occurring 73 times, with the word *'and'* being the predominant one. Temporal discourse markers are placed as the second most used and noticed in procedure text. There were 30 occurrences of temporal discourse markers, one of them was *'first'*. The least used ones were *'third'* and *'fourth'*, because the students preferred to write *'after'* or *'after that'* more. Both *'first'* and *'after'* were always put in the initial of the sentences. Then, there were 16 inferential discourse markers that dominated by the word *'then'*. Contrastive discourse markers were rarely used and with only two instances of the marker *'but'*.

Table (1) The Most and Least Used Discourse Markers in Students' Writing

Discourse Markers Types	Discourse Markers Group	Frequency
Elaborative	and	57
	also	2
Temporal	after (that)	9
	first	8
Inferential	then	9
	(if) so	3
Contrastive	but	2

In the procedure text, the *'and'* marker is used to list materials or ingredients and to add extra details. The marker *'also'* can signify that the readers have finished the required actions. The marker *'then'* is used to show how sentences or steps in instructions move smoothly from one to the next. Despite being in the different types, the markers *'and'* and *'then'* are typically applied in one sentence by the students. Additionally, the marker *'after'* in Fraser's framework is just a single word. However, in students' writing the marker *'after'* is commonly written as *'after that'*. Then, the marker *'but'* illustrates a condition or exception within the sentences.

b. Problems of Discours Markers in Students' Procedure Text

1. Misused Dicourse Markers

Due to the high frequency of usage, students might misuse the word *'and'*. One common error involves placing *'and'* at the start of a sentence. It is because the word *'and'* typically functions as a connecting word between two separate clauses.

Passage 1:

And *you can install the light fittings that you assembled previously*

Passage 2:

Pour in the eggs and milk. ***And*** *wait for around 20 seconds, do not stir it*

It shows that the sentence is still understandable if the student omit the word *'and'* in the beginning. Alternatively, the student could write other markers to connect one step to another.

2. Advanced Dicourse Markers

It is possible as well that the word *'and'* is written properly in the text by the students. It is mentioned that there are two functions of *'and'*. It is also shown in students' writing.

Passage 3:

Add tomato sauce, pepper, ***and*** *salt until all materials are blended*

Passage 4:

Last, lift the eggs, ***and*** *put them on a serving plate. Your scrambled eggs are ready.*

Passage 3 shows the function of *'and'* as a connector in listing materials or ingredients. Moreover, the use of comma in passage 3 is correct. Passage 4 shows *'and'* as a point to detail the sentence. Both passages illustrated the word *'and'* in the middle of the sentence which are correct.

Besides, temporal discourse markers were used properly in sentence construction, according to its' positional and function.

Passage 5:

First*, connect the charger to your hand phone*

Second*, wait until the battery icon appears on the screen*

After that*, charger battery approximately 2 hours until is fully charged*

Passage 5 is correct because the temporal discourse markers are written in the beginning of the sentences and followed by comma.

3. Overused Discourse Markers

It is mentioned that there is an overuse of the *'and'* marker.

Passage 6:

*…crack the eggs into a small bowl **and** add a pinch of salt **and** pepper.*

*In a frying pan, add butter **and** let it melt*

*…fold the eggs to the center **and** stir it with a spatula*

*Remove the eggs from the heat, **and** continue to fold and stir the eggs for around a minute*

Passage 6 shows that *'and'* used more than one in a sentence. In procedure text, the instruction can be started with imperative verbs. The marker *'and'* and others are needed too for making the text coherent not the otherwise; repetitive.

4. Other problems: Writing Errors

The other problems of discourse markers in this study are referred to writing errors like misspelling, vocabulary, and poor punctuation. Misspelling and the other two problems found can impact the clarity and coherence of a text.

*Passage 7: Second, plug the iron **cabel** to an electric socket until the iron becomes hot*

It shows that the student wrote *'cabel'*, while the correct spelling one is *'cable'*. Misspellings can be affected by the less familiarity of the students with English vocabulary. The passage 8 provides an example of how a lack of vocabulary knowledge can pose a problem.

*Passage 8: **Cook for groud** in the mp3 module and connect it together.*

That passage is difficult to understand and lacks context. The context refers to making an electronic loudspeaker, but the student wrote *'cook for groud'*. Moreover, *'groud'* is not even a word. Another one is poor punctuation which would affect to the flow and readability of a text. The passage which did not have right punctuation would be hard to read and understand.

Figure 1. Passage 9 – Example of the text which has poor punctuation

Challenges in Using Discourse Markers

In the interview results, the students' knowledge of the discourse markers seemed to be diverse. Most of them knew it from books, but some of them used it because they found those words are more dominant than others.

"I have known about it and there are I'm familiar with because I see it in the book and the internet. There was no specific intention in using 'and', it is because 'and' is more dominant word than other words."

The other ones thought that discourse markers are simply to connect sentences and were familiar with temporal discourse markers' function in procedure text context.

"There was no specific reason. The word 'and' I use for linking sentences."

"As I know, the function of 'first of all', 'but', 'then' etc. is for telling the steps (in text)."

They acknowledged that they had trouble understanding discourse markers or even English in general. It is because they could not understand the meaning of the words.

"There is no difficulty in writing procedure text, but most of us do not understand English. Actually, it will be easy for us if we understand English."

"The only difficulty is I don't understand the meaning."

"There are some difficult words because I just know about them. Another difficulty is organizing the right word and writing a little longer text."

Due to their lack of competence in English, the students found writing and using discourse markers are challenging. To assist them in overcoming those challenges, they used the internet,

dictionaries, and books. In completing this study's worksheet, the students used Google Translate and asked their peers.

"I did the worksheet with translator and asked help from my friend."

"I looked for the meaning (the translation) on Google Translate."

According to the interview result with the teacher, it is explored that the teacher built habits for students by asking them to find difficult words on Google Translate. Then, every time the students needed to do writing tasks, the teacher instructed them to write both in English and Indonesian. So, the students are used to English words and its meaning.

"To assess their vocabulary competence, I always asked them to write in Indonesian first and then translate it into English using a dictionary or Google. In every English learning, the students try to find the words meaning and subjects on the internet. It makes them easier to access and translate vocabularies, even though they are easy to forget too."

Discussion

It is identified that elaborative markers are the most used one by the students. In different text types, students' level, and researches, the findings are generally similar. Riznanda (2021), Raputri (2022), and Alsaawi (2022) found the same about the elaborative discourse markers. Furthermore, when students use too many markers the problems are pointed out, those are misused, advance used, and overused (Al-khazraji, 2019). In this study, the marker *'and'* noticed in all the three problems. For the advance used, the placement of *'and'* along with temporal markers are correct. According to Ali and Mahadin (2016) temporal discourse markers are more frequently used at the beginning of sentences, whereas elaborative markers are predominantly observed in the middle of sentences. For the overused, they also stated that the intermediate students depended on the *'and'* more than other elaborative markers like *'besides'*, *'in addition'*, etc.

The writing errors like misspelling, vocabulary, and poor punctuation could be obstacles for the students in writing coherent texts. That is why Johnson (2003 in Monika, 2020) stated that even though errors like spelling and punctuation are minor, they are actually fatal. According to Starkey (2004) that punctuation and writing capital letters are substantial parts in writing. Najemi et al. (2014 in Astari, 2021) added that writing components included punctuation and vocabulary.

Moreover, the challenges that students faced in using discourse markers to write coherent procedure text are sorted into two. The first is students' unfamiliarity with the markers, like Surjowati (2018) quoted that unfamiliarity is one of the issues in using discourse markers. It is possible that the students did not get explicit explanation about the importance of discourse markers and coherency in writing. The second challenge is students' lack competence in English. It is explored when the students themselves told that English is hard to understand. Additionally, Jalilifar (2008) earlier stated that as students become more skilled, their use of elaborate discourse markers tends to decrease.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the analysis of using discourse markers involves examining types and issues. Out of the four types proposed by Fraser (2005), elaborative discourse markers were the most frequently employed. The next orders were temporal, inferential, and contrastive discourse markers. The problems were misused, advance used, overused, and writing errors like misspelling, vocabulary, and punctuation. There were two problems that faced by the students:

unfamiliarity with discourse markers and lack of competence in English. The implication is the students know some discourse markers from books and the internet, but they needed more writing practice to be familiar with how and why to use discourse markers in their English tasks. Another point to consider is that a student's cultural background affects their skills because language and writing are part of cultural experiences. That could be a potential factor to be studied for the next researchers in this topic.

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