The Use of Discourse Markers in the Writings of Turkish Students of English as a Foreign Language: A Corpus Based Study

İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Türk Öğrencilerin Kompozisyonlarında Söylem Belirleyicileri Kullanımları: Derlem Temelli Bir Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the discourse markers used by 104 elementary-level prep class students studying at Namık Kemal University in Turkey. Students were required to write a paragraph with 80-100 words as part of their mid-term exam in the academic year of 2013-2014. A small-size corpus was constructed by using these writings. The corpus was analyzed via a software program called as AntConc 3.2.4. in order to find out the types and frequency of discourse markers. It was revealed that 180 discourse markers were used by elementary-level students: 'and' was used 98 times, but occurred 51 times, 'because' was written 18 times and other discourse markers of 'then', 'so', 'also', 'too' and 'still' were used 7, 2, 2, 1, 1 times respectively. Furthermore, according to Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers, 180 discourse markers were grouped into four categories. It was found out that 101 markers were elaborative markers, 52 were contrastive markers, 18 were causative markers and 9 were inferential markers.

Keywords: Corpus based study, Discourse markers, Writings of Turkish students, Foreign language, English

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı Türkiye'deki Namık Kemal Üniversitesi'nde hazırlık okuyan başlangıç seviyede bulunan 104 öğrencinin söylem belirleyici kullanımlarını araştırmaktır. 2013-2014 akademik yılı vize sınavlarının bir parçası olarak öğrencilerden 80-100 kelimelik bir paragraf yazmaları istenildi. Bu kompozisyonlar kullanılarak küçük ölçüde bir derlem oluşturuldu. Derlem, bir bilgisayar programı olan Ant Conc 3.2.4. kullanılarak söylem belirleyicilerin çeşit ve sıklığını bulmak için analiz edildi. Başlangıç seviyesinde bulunan öğrenciler tarafından 180 tane söylem belirleyicinin kullanıldığı belirlendi. Ve 'and' 98 defa kullanılmıştır, ama 'but' 51 kez bulunmuştur, çünkü 'because' 18 defa yazılmıştır ve diğer söylem belirleyiciler sonra 'then', bu yüzden 'so', bunun yanı sıra 'also', de, da 'too' ve hâlâ 'still' ise sırasıyla 7, 2, 2, 1, 1 şeklinde kullanılmıştır. Dahası, Fraser (1999) tarafından yapılan söylem belirleyici sınıflandırmasına göre 180 söylem belirleyici dört kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Bunlardan 101'i detay veren söylem belirleyici, 52'i karşılaştırma sağlayan söylem belirleyici, 18'i neden gösteren söylem belirleyici ve dokuzu çıkarımsal söylem belirleyici olarak bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Derlem temelli çalışma, Söylem belirleyiciler, Türk öğrencilerin kompozisyonları, Yabancı dil, İngilizce

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INTRODUCTION

According to Prommas and Sinwongsuwat (2011), the purpose of writing is not only to note down the sentences in the accurate way but also to create cohesion and coherence in the texts using cohesive markers such as discourse markers. For this reason, discourse markers have been investigated for the past fifteen years for the purpose of understanding what they are, what they mean and what their functions are from the perspective of different approaches (Lahuerta Martinez, 2004). Therefore, among various terms used to refer to cohesive devices, the term *discourse marker* was chosen in this study.

Rahimi (2011) states that the use of discourse markers were examined in many languages such as Chinese, Danish, Finnish, French, German and Hebrew and they were also investigated in different genres such as classroom, newspaper, radio talk, political interviews, and tutorial sessions. There are also studies that have investigated the use of discourse markers by L2 learners but the writings of low-level learners have not studied before. For this reason, this study examines the discourse markers used by elementary level foreign language learners in their writings since writing in a target language is much more complicated due to this group's low proficiency level (Jalilifar, 2008).

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the frequency and function of discourse markers used by elementary-level students in their writings.

Significance of the Study

Norrish (1983) mentions that writing has been known as the most difficult language skill, even for native speakers of one language. Hence, this skill has been the center of many studies. However, the writings of low-level learners' have not been investigated until this study. This study attempts to find out the uses of discourse markers and their frequency and functions in these writings.

Research Questions

The following research questions are examined for the purpose of this study.

1. Which discourse markers are used by elementary-level students in their writings?

2. What are the frequency and function of discourse markers in students' writings?

Literature Review

Cohesion and Coherence in a text

Brown and Yule (1983: 190) defines the text as "the verbal record of communicative event" while Halliday and Hasan (1976: 1) interpret it as "any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole". According to these definitions the text is not a collection of unrelated or disconnected sentences and "it is not just like putting the parts together and making a whole out of it; there should be rela-

tionship between the sentences" (Sadeghi and Kargar, 2014: 329). Thus, a written text requires cohesion and coherence created by cohesive devices and it is achieved by constructing sentences properly by cohesive ties (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). On the other hand, coherence is "the semantic relations that allow a text to be understood and used" and it is based on "writer's purpose, the audience's knowledge and expectation" (Witte and Faigley, 1981: 202). Apparently, it could be stated that coherence does not have as clear definition as cohesion (Wang and Guo, 2014). As a consequence, this study mainly employs the construction of cohesion by cohesive devices rather than coherence. Moreover, it will also study and analyze discourse markers as cohesive devices which create a meaningful text by tying sentences since "to communicate appropriately in written texts, it is essential for students to learn about cohesive and coherent devices" (Sadeghi and Kargar, 2014:329).

Discourse markers

According to Sadeghi and Kargar (2014: 329) "Discourse markers are lexical terms" and "link the segments in discourse". Furthermore, Zarei defines them as "words or phrases that function within the linguistic system to establish relationships between topics or grammatical units in discourse (as with the use of words like because, so, then)" (Zarei, 2013:108). However, defining the term *discourse marker* is so complex as Sadeghi and Kargar (2014) interpret that "discourse marker" is too complicated to make a clear definition and to state its functions easily since their functions may change according to the scholars' view. Consequently, many terms are employed instead of discourse markers such as " comment clause, connective, continuer, discourse connective, discourse-deictic item, discourse operator, discourse particle, discourse-shift marker, discourse word, filler, fumble, gambit, hedge, initiator, interjection, marker, marker of pragmatic structure, parenthetic phrase, (void) pragmatic connective, pragmatic expression, pragmatic particle and reaction signal" (Brinton, 1996: 29). Brinton also uses "pragmatic marker" in her book. Bell (2010) mentions some terms such as "pragmatic connectives" (van Dijk, 1979), "discourse particles" (Schourup, 1985) and "discourse connectives" (Warner, 1985; Blakemore, 1987) which are used to refer to "discourse markers" (Bell, 2010: 515). All these differences demonstrate that discourse markers are studied for different linguistic approaches (Urgelles-Coll, 2010). Moreover, it is also stated that discourse markers are "one of the most ambiguous phenomena" in linguistics (Polat, 2011:3746). According to Fraser all these terms have a common feature. "They impose a relationship between some aspect of the discourse segment they are a part of, call it S2, and some aspect of a prior discourse segment call it S1" (Fraser, 1999: 938).

Brinton summarizes the characteristics of discourse markers used as pragmatic markers (1996:33-34). They are generally used in oral discourse due to informality and spontaneity of speech. However, in the written discourse the structure and the reasons of use might be totally different. The markers may be used more than once in a sentence in informal or spoken discourse. In spite of their frequent usage in spoken discourse, discourse markers should be used appropriately and carefully

in written and formal discourse. These generally favour sentence- initial position but they may occupy mid or end position as well. The translation of pragmatic markers into another language is highly complex due to their "*semantic shallowness*" (Svartvik, 1979 and Stubbs, 1983:69 cited in Brinton, 1996:34). The speakers or the writers do not have to use them in their discourses but they help them to create cohesion and coherence in their writing and their speaking (Brown & Yule, 1983). Furthermore, Zarei (2013: 108-109) also exemplifies and explains some characteristics regarding discourse markers as follows: "connectivity, optionality, non-truth conditionality, weak clause association, literality, morality, multi-categoriality".

Classification of discourse markers

Brown and Yule (1983: 191) summarize the taxonomy of types of discourse markers provided by Halliday and Hasan (1976) as it follows:

a) additive: and, or, furthermore, similarly, in addition

b) adversative: but, yet, however, on the other hand, nevertheless

c) causal: so, consequently, for this reason, it follows from this

d) temporal: then, after that, an hour later, finally, at last

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 238-239) exemplify each category with a sentence in order to clarify the concept of taxonomy:

(1) For the whole day he climbed up the steep mountainside, almost without stopping.

a. *And* in all this time he met no one. (additive)

b. *Yet* he was hardly aware of being tired. (adversative)

c. *So* by night time the valley was far below him. (causal)

d. *Then*, as dusk fell, he sat down to rest. (temporal)

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 239) add that the words (and, yet, so, then) in the examples above clearly show the general conjunctive relations ensuring to approach a text easily so as to understand and analyze the cohesion.

As Halliday and Hasan (1976: 238) mention, "there is no single, uniquely correct inventory of the types of conjunctive relation; different classifications are possible, each of which would highlight different aspects of the facts". Hence, two more classifications of discourse markers suggested by Quirk et al. (1985) and Fraser (1999) will be outlined.

The other taxonomy of discourse connectives proposed by Quirk et al. (1985:634-640) includes seven conjunctive roles some of which have subdivisions as presented in Figure 1 below.

Quirk et al. (1985) classify the conjuncts according to their functions and list them as listing (first, second, firstly, secondly, in the first place, in the second place, first of all, on the one hand, to conclude, finally, last of all, correspondingly, equally, likewise, by the same token), summative (altogether, further,
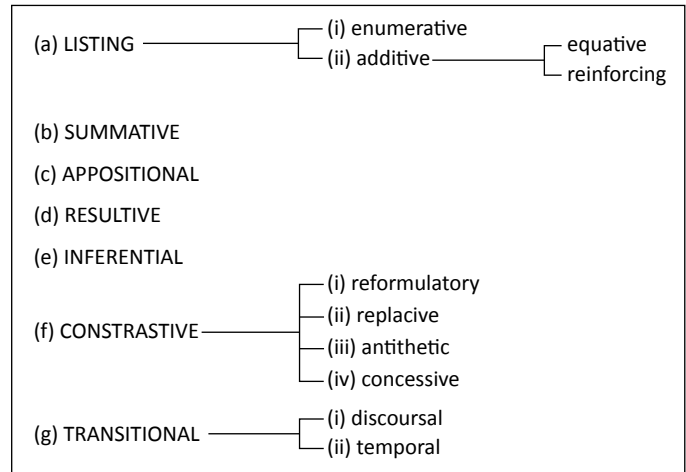
Figure 1: The classification of discourse markers by Quirk et al. (1985: 634).

also, furthermore, moreover, in addition, above all, on the top of it all), appositive (namely, thus, in other words, for example, that is), resultative (accordingly, hence, so, therefore, as a consequence, as a result of, of course), inferential (else, otherwise, then, in that case), contrastive (better, rather, more precisely, again, on the other hand, worse, instead, on the contrary, by contrast, anyhow, anyway, however, nevertheless, still, yet, in spite of, that said) and transitional (incidentally, by the way, by the by, meantime, eventually).

The taxonomy of Fraser differentiates from Quirk's et al. in terms of the number and the name of categories. Fraser (1999) classifies the discourse markers as contrastive markers (but, however, al(though), in contrast (with/to this/that), whereas, in comparison (with/to this/that), on the contrary, contrary to this/that, conversely, instead (of doing) this/that, rather (than (doing) this/ that),on the other hand, despite (doing) this/that, in spite of (doing) this/ that, nevertheless, nonetheless, still) elaborative markers (and, above all, also, besides, better yet, for another thing, furthermore, in addition, moreover, more to the point, on top of it all, too, to cap it all off, what is more, I mean, in particular, namely, parenthetically, that is (to say), analogously, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, likewise, similarly, be that as it may, or, otherwise, that said, well) and inferential markers (so, of course, accordingly, as a consequence, as a logical conclusion, as a result, because of this/that, consequently, for this/that reason, hence, it can be concluded that, therefore, thus, in this/that case, under these/ those conditions, then, all things considered). He also reveals some additional subclasses including "after all, because, for this/that reason, since" and they are called reason (causative) markers. The other subclass consists of topic-relating markers such as "incidentally, to return to my point, with regards to" (Fraser, 1999: 947-949).

Here is an example for each subcategory proposed by Fraser (1999, p. 947-949).

(1) We left late. *Nevertheless*, we got there on time. (contrastive marker)

(2) The picnic is ruined. The mayonnaise has turned rancid. The beer is warm. *Furthermore,* it's raining. (Elaborative marker)

(3) The bank has been closed all day. *Thus*, we couldn't make a withdrawal. (Inferential marker)

(4) Take a bath right away, *because* we have to get going. (Reason/causative marker)

(5) I am glad that is finished. *To return to my point*, I'd like to discuss your paper. (Topic change marker)

The contrastive marker (nevertheless) in the example (1) illustrates that two sentences contradict one another in that they present contrasting views. In the example (2) above, the elaborative marker (furthermore) provides a quasi-parallel relationship between the second sentence and the first sentence, which adds further meaning to the discourse. In the inferentials marker category it could be deduced that the discourse marker (thus) in the example (3) presents a conclusion for the first sentence.

In the other subclass (reason/causative) marker discourse marker (because) in the example (4) emphasizes a reason for the first sentence. On the other hand, in the last example (5) the discourse marker (to return to my point) attempts to manage the discourse using a topic-relating discourse marker.

Corpus and Corpus-based approach

The term "corpus" comes from Latin, which means "body". It can be a body of any kind of written or spoken text. Özhan and Zeyrek (2012: 16) point out "the texts are compiled either as written texts or as a transcription of recorded speech". However, a text could also be regarded as a corpus provided that it has such features as sampling and representativeness, finite size, machine-readable form and a standard reference (McEnery & Wilson, 2001).

The corpus-based approach helps the researchers to identify and classify language items by using high-powered computers, robust software, and large electronic collections of written or spoken texts obtained from the real world (Gardner, 2007). Grant (2010: 2282) supports that "corpus studies enable both linguists and language teachers to investigate aspects of written and/or spoken English by analyzing the authentic language collected in a variety of both small specialized and large general databases". Although the extent of this study is small in number, using a corpus-based approach enabled the study to be conducted in an easier and more reliable manner since it is difficult to count all the discourse markers manually.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection Procedure

The 104 students who participated in this study were studying English in prep-class at Namık Kemal University. They studied different majors. They wrote a descriptive composition as a part of their mid-term exam in the fall semester of the 2013-2014 academic year by choosing one of the following topics:

1. You study English and you want to practice English with online friends. Introduce yourself and your family.

2. Bob Simpson has a busy life. Look at the pictures and write about his typical day.

Only 13 students chose the second topic and the remaining 91chose chose the first one since their proficiency level was elementary and it was easy to write about themselves rather than the third person's life using "Simple Present Tense". They were requested to write a paragraph with 80-100 words as a part of the exam by which a small-size corpus was compiled. It consisted of 8.500 tokens.

The obtained data were typed and the corpus was constructed by the researcher herself. Indeed, it was a small size corpus when compared to other corpora such as the British National Corpus, Corpus of Contemporary American English and Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English. However, this corpus is unique in a sense that there is no similar example investigating elementary-level writings.

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed in order to find out answers of the following research questions:

1. Which discourse markers are used by elementary-level students in their writings?

2. What are the frequency and function of discourse markers in students' writings?

The corpus was conducted both for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was investigated in order to determine the frequency and percentage of discourse markers. The concordance program "AntConc 3.2.4" developed by Laurence Anthony was used for this corpus analysis. It was chosen since it was free and it was available on the website www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/ antconc_ index.html. Though there are the two other common concordance programs of "WordSmith Tools and Monoconc Pro", they were not preferred as they are highly commercial.

Qualitative analysis was carried out so as to identify the functions of discourse markers. Thus, Fraser's (1999) taxonomy for discourse markers was adopted although there are two other taxonomies of discourse markers suggested by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Quirk et al. (1985). While Fraser's taxonomy embodies the three main subclasses of contrastive, elaborative, and inferential markers, there are also another two subclasses of reason (causative) markers and topic-relating markers.

While the analyses were examined for the type, frequency and functions of discourse markers, the inter-rater reliability was calculated in order to increase the reliability of results and minimize the subjectivity (Jalilifar, 2008). The first rater was the researcher herself and the other rater was her colleague. After debating on some disagreements, a consensus was achieved.

RESULTS

When the discourse markers were analyzed manually, the

use of "*and, but, or* and *so*" in "an elliptical sentence such as *Jack and Mary rode horses* was not considered as a discourse marker since a discourse marker should present a different message in the related sentence whereas there is merely one message in the sentence above (Fraser, 1999: 939). Furthermore, semantically inappropriate usage was not counted as a discourse marker. For example:

*I like pop music **and** I don't like jazz music.*

*He has breakfast **so** he reads newspaper.*

*He likes eating healthy food for diner. **Then,** he watches tv.*

The words above (too, and, so, then) used by the students in their writings in order to connect the sentences and ideas were not credited as discourse markers since they failed to establish content integrity and cohesion between two sentences. Finally, because this paper particularly focused on discourse markers, "grammatical mistakes were not corrected" (Feng, 2010:302).

Table 1 below was organized by taking the criteria above into consideration. It demonstrates the types of discourse markers, as well as the frequency and percentages, used by elementary-level students in their writings that make up the corpus investigated in this study.

Table 1: Overall Frequency of Discourse Markers in the Corpus

Rank	Discourse Markers (DMs)	Token	Ratio of DMs
1	and	98	54.4%
2	but	51	28.4%
3	because	18	10%
4	then	7	3.9%
5	so	2	1.1%
6	also	2	1.1%
7	too	1	0.55%
8	still	1	0.55%

The results from Table 1 reveal that eight types of discourse markers are adopted by elementary-level students as follows: *and, but, because, then, so, also, too* and *still.* Such types of discourse markers as *and, but* and *because* are used more frequently than the others (*then, so, also, too* and *still*). Furthermore, while *and* as a discourse marker accounts for 54.4% of the overall discourse markers, *but* covers 28.4% and *because* covers 10%, *then* makes up 3.9%, *so* and *also* constitute 1.1% and lastly *too* and *still*, as the least frequently used discourse markers, cover 0.55%. Here is an example for each discourse marker employed in the corpus.

*I write the poem in my free time. **Also** I always read the poem.*

My brother' name is Ahmet. He lives in İstanbul with my parents. My sister's name is Elif. She lives in İstanbul with

*my parents, **too.***

*He has a shower. He wears clothes. **Then** he has a breakfast.*

*I am learning English **because** I need it for my job.*

*I am a student. **And** I am studying computer engineering.*

*I like playing football. **But** I sometimes have time to play football.*

*I like swimming **so** I prefer go to beach for holiday.*

*I am a university student. I lived in Adana with my family but I am living in Tekirdağ now. My family **still** live in Adana.*

The examples above included discourse markers employed properly by the students and it reveals that even low-proficiency level students tend to use cohesive markers to achieve content integrity and cohesion in their text.

After the types of discourse markers, their frequency and percentages were identified by using the software program AntConc 3.2.4 and the functions of discourse markers based on Fraser's taxonomy of discourse markers were analyzed.

Table 2: Functions of Discourse Markers

Types of Markers	Contrastive Markers	Elaborative Markers	Inferential Markers	Reason (Causative) Markers
Frequency	52	101	9	18
Percentage	28.8%	56.2%	5%	10%

Table 2 above illustrates that elaborative markers (56.2%) were used more frequently than the other categories of discourse markers. Jalilifar (2008) conducted a study with Iranian students where they were asked to write descriptive compositions. These compositions were analyzed using Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of *Discourse Markers*. His results conform to this current study in which elaborative markers are more frequent markers and he argues that "the extensive use of elaborative markers may be explained because descriptive writing in general requires elaboration of ideas which depends on the use of elaborative markers" (p.116). Consequently, it can be stated that students' writings in this study which consist of the corpus were descriptive paragraphs and elaborative markers may be used more commonly in this study.

Contrastive markers embody the second frequent usage (28.8%). This study shows that while Turkish students tend to use contrastive markers in their writings, which is even valid for elementary level students, Altenberg and Tapper (1998) found by using the taxonomy of Quirk et al. (1985) that contrastive markers were underused by Swedish learners.

Causative markers account for 10% of all discourse markers. Since the texts which made up the corpus were descriptive, the use of causative markers was less. However, the study conducted by Heidar and Biria (2011) in order to analyze the discourse markers in International Law texts shows that causative

markers such as *because and since* are used more frequently than the other discourse markers in the corpus.

The other subcategory of taxonomy of discourse markers is inferential markers and 5% of the overall discourse markers need to be explained within the framework of this category. Finally, it should be noted that any topic-relating discourse markers were not used by elementary-level students since the proficiency level of students was low. However, according to the study of Lahuerta Martinez (2004), high proficiency level students did not employ topic-relating discourse markers frequently in their writings either.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

This current study concludes that even elementary level learners tend to use discourse markers to achieve cohesion in their writings as they used 180 discourse markers out of 8500 words properly. This result is not discouraging when the students' proficiency level is considered. The types of discourse markers used by the students are *and, but, because, then, so, also, too,* and *still.* The most frequently used discourse marker is *and* which occurred 98 times. *Because, then, so, also, too,* and *still* were employed 51, 18, 7, 2, 2, 1, 1 respectively in the corpus. This result conforms to the general idea that EFL learners have a tendency to overuse discourse markers in their writings. In this study, the native language of learners might have influenced the use of discourse markers since discourse markers such as *and (ve), but (ama)* and *because (çünkü)* are used frequently in written Turkish.

The research of Prommas and Sinwongsuwat (2011) in order to find out the discourse markers in argumentative compositions used by Thai undergraduate students and English native speakers revealed that both groups of students had similar characteristics as they adopted the same discourse markers of *and, but, because, also*.

However, this result is not similar to Altenberg and Tapper's (1998) findings. They carried out a study to compare the adverbial connectors used in written English by advanced Swedish learners of English, advanced French learners of English and native speakers of English. They examined the different corpora using the taxonomy of Quirk et al. (1985). They reveal that the markers in their written English are underused by Swedish learners.

Consequently, the discourse markers were also analyzed within the framework of Fraser's (1999) taxonomy. The results show that elaborative markers embody the largest ratio of the overall discourse markers (56.2%), followed by contrastive markers (28.8%), reason (causative) markers (10%) and inferential markers (5%). This result bears similar findings to the study of Lahuerta Martinez (2004) who investigated the uses of discourse markers in the expository compositions of Spanish undergraduate students.

As a pedagogical conclusion, it can be suggested that learners should be taught different discourse markers and asked to write in different genres on appropriate topics for their level. Consequently, they will not be confined to the same markers and will learn the differences among the genres.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The corpus in this study was confined to 104 paragraphs and 8500 tokens, which makes it a small-size corpus. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all elementary level English language learners since the corpus is small and the number of students is limited. For further research, students from different universities and different language institutions could participate in the study. Furthermore, the lack of comparison is another drawback of this study. For further research, a longitudinal research could be designed in order to find out the changes and differences in the uses of discourse markers of the students. Finally, further studies could investigate the effects of the native language (Turkish) on the use of discourse markers in written discourse by the learners of English.

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