Male and Female Students' Use of Textual Discourse Markers in Writing Academic Essays

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Abstract

Growing discussion related to gender differences and language includes studies on discourse markers. Not only do these markers play an important role in spoken communication, but they are also important in written one. Previous studies (Tse & Hyland, 2008; Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi, 2015) reveal that there are some discrepancies among scholar whether gender differences influence the use of language, including the choice of discourse markers. Moreover, gender differences and the use of textual discourse markers by Indonesian EFL students in EFL essays have not been extensively discussed. Therefore, this study aimed at elaborating the use of textual discourse markers in male and female students' essays. This study involved 40 essays, 20 essays written by female students and 20 essays written by male students. Those essays were selected randomly from Critical Reading and Writing 1 (CRW 1) courses. The study aimed at analyzing the differences and similarities in the use of discourse markers between female and male students' essays based on Fraser's classifications (1999) of textual discourse markers. Finally, this research concluded the discussion by giving some implication which can be applied in writing classes.

Keywords: *gender, writing essays, discourse markers*

Introduction

Language does not only allow us to express ideas, but it also allows us to perceive how our mind and the society work. Lakoff (in Holmes, 2001) even mentioned that women's social status is reflected from the language they use. Some linguistic features used by women were considered more polite and less confident. Studies related to gender and language also confirm the idea that gender differences influence the speakers' use of linguistic features (Escalera, 2016, Matei 2011, Subon, 2013, and Shirzad & Jamali, 2013).

Literature has extensively explored the gender-based differences in both spoken (Subon, 2013 and Matei, 2011) and written language (Shirzad & Jamali, 2013 Waskita, 2008). Matei (2011) suggested that the gender variable has the greatest influence in Romanian spoken conversation. He found out that women used more discourse markers. The findings were in line with another study conducted by Subon (2013), arguing that in Malaysian context men and women had different preferred topics and explained that women's use of linguistic features was more polite than men. Researchers also have suggested that gender differences are seen in the written discourse. Waskita (2008) argued that women's texts tended to be more complex. They integrated more paraphrases, included more cited information and presented more organized arguments. In addition, Shirzad and Jamali (2013) revealed that men and women quantitatively had differences in terms of syntactic complexity, integrating cited information, and organizing arguments. These studies have consistently confirmed

the idea that gender influences the way people communicate in both spoken and oral form.

Women's and men's speech patterns have been discussed from different linguistic perspectives. Thought-provoking discussion related to gender and the use of linguistic features includes studies on discourse markers. Scriffin (in Zand-Moghadam & Bikineh, 2014: 49) defined discourse markers as, "sequentially-dependent units of discourse". Another definition of discourse markers is "expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, or prepositional phrases, have the syntactic properties associated with their class membership, have a meaning which is procedural, and have co-occurrence restrictions which are in complementary distribution with their conceptual counterparts" (1999: 946). Hyland (2005: 37) elaborated similar concept using another term, i.e. metadiscourse, which is defined as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community."

Tse and Hyland (2008) offered a different confirmation that the ways men and women used a language are not determined by gender. On the other hand, Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015) revealed that gender differences play an important part on using discourse. Based on quantitative and qualitative approaches, the Iranian males tended to use boosters in their academic writing. And the Iranian females preferred to use more hedges in their writing. These studies reveal that there are some discrepancies among scholar whether gender differences influence the use of discourse markers. Therefore, more research on these social variables should be conducted.

Researchers noted that discourse markers had an indispensable role in oral communication (Carter and McCarty, 2006). Not only do they play an important role in spoken communication, they are also important in written one. Some researchers focused on elaborating EFL students' choice of discourse markers in their essays. Rahayu and Cahyono (2015) attempted to elaborate the use of discourse markers using Fraser's theory (1999) and the appropriateness of their use. They suggested that the awareness of using discourse markers should be raised in fostering students' writing skills.

This study will also classify the discourse markers using Fraser's theory elaborated in Rahayu and Cahyono study (2015). This study aimed at describing the similarities and differences in the use of textual discourse markers in male and female students' essays. The essays are taken from Critical Reading and Writing 1 (CRW 1) courses which were taught when the students were in the third semester of English Language Education Study Program. In CRW 1 classes, the students were required to write essays with different genres, namely: expository and argumentative essays. To write those essays, students followed some writing processes, such as drafting, peer-evaluating, and revising their essays. They were encouraged to connect their ideas together by using transition signals.

Based on the elaborated background, the current research aimed at analyzing the differences and similarities in the use of discourse markers between female and male students' essays. This study involved 20 essays written by female students and another 20 essays written by male students which were selected randomly. After the elaboration of the research literature and research procedures, this study discussed the each classification of discourse markers based on Fraser's theory (1999). It concluded the study by showing some implications that can be applied in writing classes.

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on the markers used to show relationships among clauses and topics in students' essays. To analyze the differences and the similarities in the use of

discourse markers in female and male students' essays, this study used Fraser's classifications which were elaborated in Rahayu and Cahyono's study (2015). Fraser (1999) classified the use of discourse markers into three categories contrastive markers, elaborative markers, and inferential markers. Below are the three classifications and the variants of discourse markers.

Table 1
Types of discourse markers based on Fraser's classifications (1999) in Rahayu and Cahyono (2015)

Types	Examples
Contrastive markers	But, however, although, in contrast (with/to this), whereas, in comparison (with/to this), on the contrary, contrary to, conversely, instead (of), rather (than), on the other hand, despite (doing) this/that, in spite of (doing) this/that, nevertheless, nonetheless
Elaborative markers	And, above all, also, besides, for another thing, furthermore, in addition, moreover, more to the point, in particular, namely, parenthetically, analogously, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, likewise, similarly, or, otherwise, for instance, for example
Inferential markers	So, of course, accordingly, as a consequence, as a logical conclusion, as a result, because of, consequently, for this reason, hence, it can be concluded that, therefore, thus, in this case, under these/ those conditions, then, after all, because, for this/that reason, since

Both female and male students' essays are going to be classified into these three classifications. This discussion elaborates the patterns as well as the dominant markers found in each category.

Methodology

This research aimed at elaborating the differences and the similarities in the use of textual discourse markers in female and male students' essays. This study approached the data through document analysis (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2006). The data were taken from 40 EFL students' essays in Critical Reading and Writing I. This study employed Fraser categories of discourse markers (1999) in classifying students' use of discourse markers. The data were collected and analyzed by following these steps.

First, the researcher gathered students' essays from CRW 1 classes. The researcher classified the expressions containing discourse markers. The occurrences of discourse markers were highlighted. The researcher identifies the discourse markers which could be classified into contrastive markers, elaborative markers, and inferential markers. The collected data, including numbers and figure, were explained through verbal means rather than left in figures and numbers alone. However, the numbers and figures were displayed to support the analysis. Based on this framework, it can be concluded that the nature of this present research is categorized as descriptive qualitative (Latief, 1999).

Findings and Discussion

Referring to table 2, there are 1733 textual discourse markers from 40 essays. Although male students used more markers (51.24%) than those written by female students (48.76%), the findings showed that both gender used contrastive, elaborative, and inferential markers in their essays. It is worth mentioning that these numbers offered a different confirmation from the conclusion made by Matei (2011) that women tended to use discourse markers in conversations. Furthermore, the data also revealed that both male and female students'

essay followed similar patterns. First, the most dominant makers were elaborative markers (68.49%). Next, both male students and female students also used inferential markers (20.77%) which were in the second place of most frequent markers. In the third place, the students used contrastive markers (10.73%). The table reveals that students were more likely to elaborate, show causal relationships or draw conclusion rather than to provide readers with contrasting ideas. Essays written by male students involved more contrastive markers (6.52%) and inferential markers (11.89%). However, it is also worth noting that essays written by female students used more elaborative markers (35.66%). Further details and numbers can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2
Three types of discourse markers in female and male students' essays

Types/Occurrences	Female Students' Essays		Male tudents' Essays		Total	
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Contrastive markers	73	4.21%	113	6.52%	186	10.73%
Elaborative markers	618	35.66%	569	32.83%	1187	68.49%
Inferential markers	154	8.89%	206	11.89%	360	20.77%
Total	845	48.76%	888	51.24%	1733	100%

As described previously, both male and female students' essays had the tendency to use elaborative markers. It means that the characteristic of their essays were elaborative in nature. Not only did the students add more explanation by using elaborative markers, but they also gave examples to support their arguments. As seen in table 3, the variants of the elaborative markers are: *also, besides, furthermore, in addition, moreover, namely, likewise, or, otherwise, for instance, such as, like* as well as *for example.* This research added the phrase *according to* because this marker added support to the ideas presented in the essays.

Table 3
Elaborative markers in female and male students' essays

Type	Discourse Markers	Female students' essays (Σ)	Male students' essays (Σ)
laborative markers	And	353	359
	also	75	63
	besides	1	4
	furthermore	-	4
	in addition	6	3
	moreover	4	2
	namely	2	-
	likewise	1	1
	or	104	86
	otherwise	1	0
	According to	11	7
	for instance	1	1
	Such as	18	24
	Like	25	10
	for example	16	5

The three common variants of this categories used by both female and male students are *and, or,* and *also*. The discourse marker *and* could be found mostly in the middle position of the sentences, but the data showed few sentences that began with *and*, as seen in example (1) and (2). It showed that some students' writing styles were casual (Rahayu and Cahyono, 2015). Likewise, the elaborative markers *or* (example 3 and 4) and *also* (example 3 and 4) could be found in the initial and middle positions of the sentences.

1. The second is a medical factor, which is an internal factor. And the third is addiction.
2. Those who have a long period of working time cannot go to the grocery and cook something healthy for themselves.
3. Why do we have to differentiate their look? Or selling them at different price just because they do not fit the standard?
4. The learner also receives no reinforcement for behaviors that pose harm or prevent learning.
5. Also, the kids get rewards for every correct response she/he makes.
6. Clean environment will also affect people's health.

Referring to table 2 and 3, it is worth mentioning that female students used slightly more elaborative markers (35.66%) than those found in male students' essays (32.83%). The data showed that female essays had more exemplification markers, specifically the marker *for example.* By using this marker more frequently, female students had the tendency to give examples to the ideas, which are previously introduced. Moreover, female students also were more likely to elaborate their arguments by referring to other sources through the use of the transitions *according to.*

Furthermore, Table 4 shows that the use of inferential markers in both female and male students' essays comes in the second place (20.77%). By using these markers they tended to establish causal relationship among clauses and to draw conclusion. The variant of the markers found in the students' essay are: *so, of course, as a result, because of, hence*, *it can be concluded that, therefore, thus, in this case, then, after all, because,* and *since*. Table 4 reveals the details of these discourse markers.

Table 4
Inferential markers in female and male students' essays

Type	Discourse Markers	Female students' essays (Σ)	Male students' essays (Σ)
Inferential markers	So	38	53
	of course	2	3
	as a result	2	2
	Hence	2	1
	it can be concluded that	1	3
	therefore	2	5
	Thus	4	1
	in this case	3	4
	Then	14	19
	after all	1	1
	Because	83	111
	Since	2	3

The most common markers in this category are *because, so,* as well as *then*. The discourse markers can be found in the beginning and middle positions of the sentences. The examples are provided below:

7. Because the costumers are so used to seeing good looking products, supermarkets only put those products on the shelf.
8. Parents often feel ashamed to their friends because their children's behavior is abnormal
9. So what are the techniques of this therapy?
10. She felt really disappointed with herself and wanted to have a time machine so she could fix her mistake.
11. Then, if it is already known that nicotine is deadly substance, why are there still many people who consume nicotine?
12. If forests are destroyed, then plants and trees will also be cut down, and animals will lose their habitat.

Table 5 also shows that both male and female students' essays used various contrastive markers. The variants of the elaborative markers are: *but, however, although, whereas, on the contrary, instead (of), rather (than), on the other hand despite (doing) this/that,* and *yet*. These markers are used to contrast ideas. The numbers of their occurrences can be found in table 5.

Table 5
Contrastive markers in female and male students' essays

Type	Discourse Markers	Female students' essays (Σ)	Male students' essays (Σ)
Contrastive markers	But	49	68
	However	11	17
	Although	5	12
	Whereas	0	1
	On the contrary	-	1
	instead (of)	1	2
	rather (than)	1	5
	on the other hand	1	2
	despite (doing) this/that,	2	1
	Yet	3	4

It can be inferred from the table that both male and female students' essays shared similar pattern by using common variants of contrastive markers: *but* and *however*. The discourse markers can be found in the initial and middle positions of the sentences. Unlike other common variants, the marker "*however*" is dominantly found in the initial positions. Only one example shows the use of this discourse in the middle position (example 16). The examples are:

13. But, many people still put their waste into one place.
14. Well, I do not mean to scare people, but we need to be aware of it.
15. However, some people have a more significant and longer grief.
16. Skipping breakfast, however, in diet program is not recommended.

Contrastive discourse markers were the least used classification among the three categories. Both female and male students tended to avoid contrast in their essays. It is in line with Newman et. al. (2008) who mentioned that "Contrary to popular stereotypes, men and women were indistinguishable in their references to … the insertion of qualifiers in the form of exclusion words (e.g., but, although)." (p.299). Differences in the use of contrastive discourse markers are not obvious probably because both male and female students still

struggle to differentiate between non-contrasting ideas and contrasting ones (Sitthirak, 2013) or because students in general tend to add more details to the ideas rather than offering contrasting ideas (Cahyono and Rahayu, 2015 and Budiharso, 2016).

Finally, this research confirms that female and male students' essays tend to share similar patterns. The students tended to use elaborative markers, while they show a tendency of not using contrastive markers. This study also confirms Tse & Hyland (2008) who suggested that the ways men and women used a language, specifically discourse markers, were not determined by gender alone. There are other variables that may influence one's choice of codes, such as age, ethnic background, and linguistic competence.

Conclusion

This study indicates that essays written by male and female students share similar patterns. Both male and female students tended to use elaborative markers. It means that they were more likely to add information and give examples to support their ideas. A slight difference between male and female essays is in the use of the discourse marker *for example.* Female students tended to give more examples by using this discourse marker in their essays. Both male and female students' essays also inserted inferential markers to show causal relationships and draw conclusion. Finally, both male and female students had the tendency not to use contrastive markers, which are generally used to contrast ideas. The Indonesian EFL students preferred to develop their essays by adding details, examples and explanations, rather than offering contrasting ideas. This study confirms other studies (Newman et. al. 2008 and Tse & Hyland, 2008) that gender differences were not the main factor in influencing one's language choice.

On the basis of these findings, some implications can be suggested for both teachers and future researchers. In the pedagogical context, teachers should raise students' awareness about using various discourse markers in appropriate context. Teachers can design lessons about distinct variant of discourse markers in writing classes. Furthermore, this study was limited only to a number of essays and to the discussion of textual discourse markers. Other studies can also analyze metadiscourse markers using Hyland's theory (2005), which do not only cover textual markers, but also interactive markers, such as hedges and boosters. Also, the current study is in line with other studies which suggest that other factors, such as age, ethnic background, and linguistic competence, may influence someone's language choice. Therefore, other researchers may conduct studies in discourse markers by investigating these social factors.

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