

EFL LEARNERS' DEPLOYMENT OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN IELTS ESSAYS: FROM BELIEFS TO PRACTICES

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Abstract: This paper aims at presenting the findings of a study examining the deployment of discourse markers (DMs) in IELTS essays by EFL learners in terms of beliefs and practices. The study involved a group of 60 EFL learners who were taking IELTS preparation courses at an English language center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The research data were gained from questionnaires and 120 IELTS essays (Task 2) written by EFL learners. The questionnaire data were processed using the SPSS software, while the essay data were scrutinized by AntConc software. The findings showed that EFL learners strongly believed in the importance of DMs in writing, and they deployed DMs in their writing at a moderate frequency. Additionally, among six categories of DMs, EFL learners utilized elaborative markers more than other categories of DMs. This paper also presents some pedagogical implications in an attempt to improve the quality of English language teaching and learning in general and English writing teaching and learning in specific at the research context and other similar EFL ones.

Keywords: discourse marker, essay, IELTS, learner, writing

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, studying abroad has gained much popularity among young people, and it is not exceptional for Vietnamese people. Before applying to any educational institutions, applicants are required to show their language proficiency such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or First Certificate in English (FCE) (Le, 2017). According to Moore and Morton (2005), many educational institutions require overseas students to have IELTS scores as a requirement for enrollment. However, many students still

have to struggle to meet the English proficiency requirement as they are not proficient in language skills, especially English writing skills. Part of their writing problem is their inappropriate use of discourse markers (DMs) which render their essays both incoherent and incohesive.

Researchers (e.g., Fraser, 1999; Jalilifar, 2014; Tran & Chau, 2021; Tran & Phan, 2021; Yunis & Haris, 2014) have proved that DMs have played a pivotal role in attributing to the coherence and cohesion as DMs are deemed as phrases or words to connect two adjacent sentences, thereby generating mutual relations in a text (Jalilifar, 2014). Fraser (1999) remarks that the characteristics of DMs in speaking and writing are not identical. DMs in writing are

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much more formal than the ones in speaking. Only by acquiring knowledge of DMs and spotting the register of speech or composition can writers select the appropriate DMs. Modhish (2012) emphasizes that the coherence and cohesion of an essay can be formed by relating DMs properly. Nevertheless, it is noticed that many EFL learners still fail to produce pieces of good writing. According to Makeh and Sinwongsuwat (2014), in comparison with speaking skills, writing is more taxing since the writers cannot show their ideas via facial expressions, gestures, or tones, the meaning of a written piece must be conveyed through constructing structural properties as well as forming a cohesive text. Similarly, Yunis and Haris (2014) underscore that the lack of insights into DMs exerts a profound impact on students' products, resulting in the fact that they tend to misuse, underuse, or overuse DMs in their writing.

Within the research context of an English language center, EFL learners were attending academic IELTS preparation courses at different levels. Of the four language skills, they found the writing skill the most difficult as they usually gained unsatisfactory marks for writing tasks, stemming from a lack of understanding about the critical role of DMs in coherence and cohesion in writing. This means that they sometimes did not know how to use them accurately and often neglected the functions of DMs. With all the above-mentioned rationale, this study sets to examine EFL learners' deployment of DMs in academic IELTS essays (Task 2) in terms of their beliefs and practices at the context of an English language center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and it attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What are EFL learners' beliefs about the deployment of DMs in IELTS essays?
- To what extent do EFL learners deploy DMs in IELTS essays?

Within the aforementioned research purposes, it is hoped that the findings will firstly serve as a reliable source of references for teachers to have a better understanding of EFL learners' beliefs about DMs and their use of DMs in their writing, resulting in improving the quality of English language teaching in general and English writing in specific. Secondly, the findings will provide EFL learners with a better understanding of their practices of deploying DMs in academic writing in general and IELTS essays in specific so that they can adjust their beliefs about and practices of deploying DMs in their writing.

2. Literature Review

DMs have been described in many distinctive ways by a multitude of researchers as a consequence of the different subject areas that they studied, resulting in the fact that the terminology of DMs turns significantly varied. Knott and Dale (1994) define that DMs are cue phrases that postulate communication at the discourse level. Meanwhile, Fraser (1999) highlights that DMs, which are called conjunctions, prepositional phrases, or adverbs, are employed to connect two single sentences or coordinate words in the same clause. Likewise, as indicated by Swan (2005), DMs are words and expressions, which can be used in order to depict the arrangement of communication, inventing a relation of a text.

Scholars (e.g., Liu, 2017; Louwse & Mitchell, 2003; Schwartz, 1992; Tran & Nguyen, 2017) have indicated that the use of DMs has different values. Within the scope of this study, *pragmatic value*, *indispensable value of DMs*, and *learning value of DMs* are adapted (Aijmer, 2002; Schwartz, 1992; Swan, 2007; Trillo, 2002) as they fit the objectives of the research. With respect to *pragmatic value of DMs*, Swan (2007) asserts that pragmatics interprets the

investigation of meaning in the correlational background. Without the presence of pragmatics, a composition or an utterance is in dearth of communicative function because it can explain further not only the literal meaning but also non-literal one. When writers are conscious about the way they describe their opinion or emotions through linguistic expressions, pragmatic value of target words can be enhanced entirely. As for *indispensable value of DMs*, Aijmer (2002) points out that DMs occupy indispensable value in linguistic analysis. Trillo (2002) emphasizes that readers might have difficulty understanding writers' thoughts if they lack the proper use of DMs in a composition. Regarding *learning value of DMs*, Schwartz (1992) states that one of the most sophisticated processes for humans is learning development, which forces learners to put their incentives and restraints to better themselves. The significance of learning perception is of utmost importance in determining learners' amelioration.

DMs are classified from a variety of perspectives. According to Fraser (1999, 2009), DMs are classified into five chief categories, which are *Temporal*, *Contrastive*, *Elaborative*, *Inferential*, and *Topic change markers*. In addition, Fung (2011) points out that *Interpersonal Markers* are beneficial to show writers' evaluation and feelings in academic writing. Taken together, six main categories of DMs including *Temporal*, *Contrastive*, *Elaborative*, *Inferential*, *Topic change*, and *Interpersonal markers* were applied for this research purpose. *Temporal markers* (e.g., firstly, secondly, thirdly, etc.) signal the time in which the action takes place. *Contrastive markers* (e.g., however, but, although, though, etc.) signal the contrast of ideas. *Elaborative markers* (e.g., and, also, for example, etc.) signal an elaboration or continuation of ideas. *Inferential markers* (e.g., therefore, hence, thus, etc.) signal implications of ideas. *Topic change markers*

(e.g., regarding, when it comes to, with regard to, etc.) signal the change of topics. *Interpersonal markers* (e.g., indeed, in fact, it is clear that, etc.) signal the attitudes toward the conveyed ideas.

Prior studies on different aspects of DMs in academic writing have been conducted. Concerning perception perspective, Kalajahi (2012) explored how five Iranian post-graduate students viewed DMs and if there was any distinction between what was expressed in the interview and their writing samples. A qualitative method was employed in the study. All informants were fully aware of applying DMs in their writing, but they did not have sufficient knowledge for the proper use and choosing appropriate ones. Additionally, Modhish (2012) inspected the use of DMs that Yemeni EFL learners used in their composition writings. Fifty essays were analyzed using Fraser's (1999) taxonomy. The findings of the study revealed that the most frequently used DMs were the elaborative ones, followed by the inferential, contrastive, causative, and topic relating markers. It also showed that there was no positive correlation between learners' total number of DMs used and the writing quality of the participants. There was, however, a positive correlation between the topic relating markers and the writing quality of the learners. The study about DMs in argumentative and expository writing of Iranian EFL learners conducted by Rahimi (2011) indicated a hierarchy of use of DMs in both essay types with elaborative markers (mainly "and") was the most frequently connectors used in both essay types. The results, moreover, indicated that, on the whole, the mean of DMs' use was significantly higher in argumentative essays than in expository ones. In the context of Vietnam, there have been some researchers studying the useful functions of devices in writing and DMs in conversations. To illustrate, Nguyen (2011) examined the

application of DMs in the conversations of the current English textbook. The findings of her study revealed that the pragmatic functions of DMs in the English dialogues in the present books for high-schoolers in Vietnam greatly contributed to the cultivation of the appropriateness and efficiency of the use of DMs by Vietnamese students, thereby facilitating them to avoid cross-cultural confusion and misinterpretation. In 2018, Vo investigated how DMs were used in short stories in English and Vietnamese. She concluded that DMs, which were natural and vivacious, helped the reader and the listener to follow the thought of the story. Nguyen (2018) applied a corpus-based study to compare the use of meta-discourse devices in academic research articles by Vietnamese and native English-speaking writers, and reported that there was a low distribution of hedges in the former due to the ethnically miscellaneous backgrounds. Another contrastive study carried out by Ho (2011) displayed that Vietnamese learners extremely depended on textual connections in argumentative writing compared with model text written by native professional authors. However, there have been scarce investigations on the beliefs and use of DMs in academic writing, especially in IELTS essays written by EFL learners. To that end, this study aims at exploring EFL learners' beliefs and use of DMs in their IELTS essays – Task 2 at the context of an English language center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Setting and Participants

This study adopting the quantitative research was conducted at an English language center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which offers a variety of English language courses from general English to standardized test preparation. The IELTS preparation courses consist of different

levels (Band: 3.0-5.00; Band: 5.0-6.5; Band: 6.5-7.5). With a three-day-a-week schedule, there is one session for speaking and listening lessons, and the other two for reading and writing sessions. Each session lasts two hours. The total number of learners in a class is 15. For the writing, the teaching materials were adapted from popular textbooks (*Writing* by Collins, *The Key to IELTS Writing* by Pauline Cullen, *Writing for the IELTS* by Barron, *English collocations in Advanced use* by Felicity O'Dell & Michael McCarthy).

A cohort of 60 learners from four classes were recruited by convenience sampling. Amongst the participants, six learners (10%) were under 17 years old, while 23 learners (38.3%) were in the 18-to-22-year-old group. Over-22-year-olds accounted for 51.7% (31 learners). When it comes to previous English learning experience, 53.3% participants spent 5 to 6 years studying English, followed by 43.3% of those who dedicated 7 to 8 years and 3.3% more than 8 years. Additionally, their English language proficiency level was pre-intermediate and intermediate as they were taking the IELTS courses for Band 5.0-6.5.

3.2. Research Instruments

Two types of instruments, namely questionnaire and IELTS essay (Task 2), were employed for data collection. The closed-ended questionnaire, which was adapted from Albeshier et al.'s (2017) study, includes two main parts: Part A is about respondents' background information; Part B is for respondents' beliefs about the deployment of DMs in IELTS essays. There were 15 items divided into three categories (pragmatic value: 5 items; indispensable value: 5 items; learning value: 5 items), and they were designed with a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was .88, which means that the questionnaire was very reliable.

Regarding the IELTS essay, learners were required to write two essays (Task 2) with at least 250 words each. They were in-class assignments learners had to write as mid-term and final tests.

3.3. Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect data from the questionnaire, the Google form was created and sent to learners via social networking and personal email. It took them around four days to finish the questionnaire at their convenience. As for the essays, EFL learners were required to write two essays as part of the mid-term and final tests. The topics for two essays were about tourism and technology, each of which took the learners

40 minutes to write. The total number of essays was 120, which were collected from 60 learners with their permission for data analysis.

With respect to data analysis, the data from the questionnaire were processed by the SPSS software in terms of descriptive analysis (M: Mean; SD: Standard deviation). The interval mean scores were understood as 1.00-1.80: Strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60: Disagree; 2.61-3.40: Neutral; 3.41-4.20: Agree; 4.21-5.00: Strongly agree. Meanwhile, 120 essays were compiled in a corpus which was processed by AntConc to analyse DMs in terms of six categories (Table 1).

Table 1

Framework for DM analysis (Fraser, 1999 & 2009; Fung, 2011)

| No | DM | Examples |
|----|----------------------|---|
| 1 | Temporal marker | <i>Firstly, secondly, thirdly, lastly, next, before, after, first and foremost, to begin with, etc.</i> |
| 2 | Contrastive marker | <i>However, but, although, though, by contrast, in spite of, yet, still, nonetheless, nevertheless, etc.</i> |
| 3 | Elaborative marker | <i>And, also, for example, for instance, besides, moreover, furthermore, for such as, because, etc.</i> |
| 4 | Inferential marker | <i>Therefore, hence, thus, as a result, as a consequence, in conclusion, in brief, etc.</i> |
| 5 | Topic change marker | <i>Regarding, when it comes to, with regard to, turning to, etc.</i> |
| 6 | Interpersonal marker | <i>Indeed, in fact, it is clear that, it is obvious that, it is certain that, obviously, inevitably, etc.</i> |

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. EFL Learners' Beliefs About the Deployment of DMs in IELTS Essays

The results in Table 2 reveal that the average mean score of EFL learners' beliefs about the deployment in DMs IELTS essays is 4.33 (SD =.76) out of five. Specifically,

the mean scores of three components, namely pragmatic, indispensable, and learning values of DMs, are 4.32 (SD=.74), 4.36 (SD=.89) and 4.40 (SD=.65), respectively. Such findings imply that EFL learners strongly believed that DMs were very important in IELTS essays as they were fully aware of the pragmatic, indispensable, and learning values of DMs in IELTS essays.

Table 2

EFL Learners' Beliefs About the Deployment of DMs in IELTS Essays

| Components | N=60 | |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| | M | SD |
| 1 Pragmatic value of DMs | 4.23 | .74 |
| 2 Indispensable value of DMs | 4.36 | .89 |
| 3 Learning value of DMs | 4.40 | .65 |
| Average | 4.33 | .76 |

EFL Learners' Beliefs About Pragmatic Value of DMs in IELTS Essays

Regarding the pragmatic value of DMs in IELTS essays in Table 3, EFL learners strongly agreed that “having a better understanding of DMs [could] help process information in writing” (item 4: M=4.50; SD=.62), and “the sequence of the writer's thoughts [could] be shown through DMs” (item 2: M=4.40; SD=.84), and they could “achieve higher scores in IELTS writing if they [used] DMs appropriately” (item 5: M=4.43; SD=.69). Furthermore, they were aware that DMs “should be presented as an important part of writing skills” (item 3: M=4.13; SD=.98) and “[could] indicate the writer's attitude” (item 1: M=3.73; SD=.82).

Table 3

Pragmatic Value of DMs

| No. | Statements | N=60 | |
|-----|---|------|-----|
| | | M | SD |
| 1 | DMs can indicate the writer's attitude. | 3.73 | .82 |
| 2 | The sequence of the writer's thoughts can be shown through DMs. | 4.40 | .84 |
| 3 | DMs should be presented as an important part of writing skills. | 4.13 | .98 |
| 4 | Having a better understanding of DMs can help process information in writing. | 4.50 | .62 |

| | | | |
|---|--|------|-----|
| 5 | Learners can achieve higher scores in IELTS writing if they use DMs appropriately. | 4.43 | .69 |
|---|--|------|-----|

EFL Learners' Beliefs About Indispensable Value of DMs in IELTS Essays

As for the indispensable value of DMs in IELTS essays, the results in Table 4 present that EFL learners strongly believed that DMs helped “to signal relationships between two ideas in a text” (item 9: M=4.62; SD=.61) and “to orientate the writers to the overall idea, structure and sequence in writing” (item 8: M=4.30; SD=.88), and they were “important in not only writing but also other language skills (e.g., listening, reading, speaking)” (item 10: M=4.35; SD=.86). Additionally, they agreed that they could create “coherent essays by using DMs” (item 6: M=4.50; SD=.62), and “good essays by including DMs” (item 7: M=4.07; SD=.88).

Table 4

Indispensable Value of DMs

| No. | Statements | N=60 | |
|-----|--|------|-----|
| | | M | SD |
| 6 | Learners can create coherent essays by using DMs. | 4.50 | .62 |
| 7 | Learners can create good essays by including DMs. | 4.07 | .88 |
| 8 | DMs help to orientate the writers to the overall idea, structure and sequence in writing. | 4.30 | .88 |
| 9 | DMs help to signal relationships between two ideas in a text. | 4.62 | .61 |
| 10 | DMs are important in not only writing but also other language skills (e.g., listening, reading, speaking). | 4.35 | .86 |

EFL Learners’ Beliefs About Learning Value of DMs in IELTS Essays

With respect to the learning value of DMs in IELTS essays in Table 5, EFL learners were fully aware that they should learn DMs carefully “in terms of types, meaning, and functions” (item 14: M=4.60; SD=.71) and “in not only writing but also other language skills” (item 15: M=4.47; SD=.65), and they should “learn to exploit DMs to improve their writing scores” (item 12: M=4.37; SD=.63) and “pay attention to DMs as an important part of academic essays” (item 13: M=4.25; SD=.79). They also thought that it was necessary for them “to develop awareness of DMs in writing lessons” (item 11: M=4.35; SD=.70).

Table 5
Learning Value of DMs

| No. | Statements | N=60 | |
|-----|--|------|-----|
| | | M | SD |
| 11 | It is necessary for learners to develop awareness of DMs in writing lessons. | 4.35 | .70 |
| 12 | Learners should learn to exploit DMs to improve their writing scores. | 4.37 | .63 |
| 13 | Learners should pay attention to DMs as an important part of academic essays. | 4.25 | .79 |
| 14 | Learners should learn DMs carefully in terms of types, meaning, and functions. | 4.60 | .71 |
| 15 | Learners should learn DMs in not only writing but also other language skills. | 4.47 | .65 |

4.1.2. EFL Learners’ Deployment of DMs in IELTS Essays

The corpus of 120 IELTS essays consists of 35123 word tokens, and the results in Table 6 show that the total number

of DMs used in the IELTS essays is 1,553 (52 types of DMs). Among six categories of DMs, Elaborative markers accounting for 63% were the most frequently used in the IELTS essays, followed by Inferential markers with 16%. Other types of DMs, namely Contrastive markers (9%), Temporal markers (7%), Interpersonal markers (4%), and Topic Change markers (1%) are responsible for small proportions of the total percentages of DMs in IELTS essays. This means that EFL learners deployed Elaborative markers much more than the other types of DMs in their IELTS essays. As for the calculation per 1,000 words, it was found out that the percentages for six categories of DMs are 27.79% for Elaborative markers, 6.86% for Inferential markers, 3.99% for Contrastive markers, 3.07% for Temporal markers, 1.94% for Interpersonal markers and 0.57% for Topic Change markers. The total percentage per 1,000 words is 44.22% for the whole corpus. This means that EFL learners deployed DMs in their writing at a moderate frequency.

Table 6
EFL Learners’ Deployment of DMs in IELTS Essays

| No | Categories of DMs | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | Temporal markers | 108 | 7% |
| 2 | Contrastive markers | 140 | 9% |
| 3 | Elaborative markers | 976 | 63% |
| 4 | Inferential markers | 241 | 16% |
| 5 | Topic Change markers | 20 | 1% |
| 6 | Interpersonal markers | 68 | 4% |
| Total | | 1553 | 100% |

EFL Learners' Deployment of Temporal Markers in IELTS Essays

The results in Table 7 present that of 120 essays in the corpus, five different kinds of Temporal markers were used. EFL

learners used *to begin with* the most (26%), followed by *secondly* (23%). Other Temporal makers were 17% for *first and foremost*, 18% for *second*, and 18% for *firstly*.

Table 7

EFL Learners' Deployment of Temporal Markers in IELTS Essays

| Category | DM | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Temporal markers | <i>Firstly</i> | 20 | 18% |
| | <i>Secondly</i> | 25 | 23% |
| | <i>First and foremost</i> | 18 | 17% |
| | <i>Second</i> | 19 | 18% |
| | <i>To begin with</i> | 26 | 24% |
| Total | 5 | 108 | 100% |

EFL Learners' Deployment of Contrastive Markers in IELTS Essays

As shown in Table 8, there were eight types of Contrastive markers accounting for 140 times in the IELTS corpus. EFL learners overused *on the other*

hand (60%). Contrastive markers *although* and *despite* amounted to 13% and 9% correspondingly. Other types of Contrastive markers (e.g., *nonetheless*, *yet*, *but*, *however*, *on the downside*) were rarely used in the IELTS essays.

Table 8

EFL Learners' Deployment of Contrastive Markers in IELTS Essays

| Category | DM | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Contrastive markers | <i>However</i> | 5 | 4% |
| | <i>But</i> | 2 | 1% |
| | <i>Although</i> | 18 | 13% |
| | <i>Despite</i> | 13 | 9% |
| | <i>On the other hand</i> | 84 | 60% |
| | <i>Yet</i> | 9 | 6% |
| | <i>Nonetheless</i> | 7 | 5% |
| | <i>On the downside</i> | 2 | 1% |
| Total | 8 | 140 | 100% |

EFL Learners' Deployment of Elaborative Markers in IELTS Essays

Table 9 shows that there were 19

types of Elaborative markers, of which EFL learners paid much attention to *and* (33.6%) and *because* (12.3%). Additionally, they

deployed Elaborative markers such as *moreover* (8.6%), *such as* (7.9%), *for example* (6.8%), *due to* (5.4%) and *what is more* (5.1%) at a certain frequency, but they

seldom employed other types of Elaborative markers (e.g., *or*, *on account of*, *in addition*, *furthermore*, etc.) in their IELTS essays.

Table 9

EFL Learners' Deployment of Elaborative Markers in IELTS Essays

| Category | DM | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Elaborative markers | <i>And</i> | 328 | 33.6% |
| | <i>Or</i> | 5 | 0.5% |
| | <i>For example</i> | 66 | 6.8% |
| | <i>Besides</i> | 13 | 1.3% |
| | <i>Moreover</i> | 84 | 8.6% |
| | <i>Furthermore</i> | 9 | 0.9% |
| | <i>What is more</i> | 50 | 5.1% |
| | <i>Such as</i> | 77 | 7.9% |
| | <i>Because</i> | 120 | 12.3% |
| | <i>On account of</i> | 4 | 0.4% |
| | <i>In addition</i> | 30 | 3.1% |
| | <i>Additionally</i> | 24 | 2.5% |
| | <i>Due to</i> | 53 | 5.4% |
| | <i>In other words</i> | 28 | 2.9% |
| | <i>To put it differently</i> | 10 | 1% |
| | <i>Particularly</i> | 8 | 0.8% |
| <i>To be more precise</i> | 12 | 1.2% | |
| <i>In line with</i> | 35 | 3.6% | |
| <i>To be more detailed</i> | 20 | 2% | |
| Total | 19 | 976 | 100% |

EFL Learners' Deployment of Inferential Markers in IELTS Essays

It is observed in Table 10 that of 11 types of Inferential markers, EFL learners deployed DM *in conclusion* (48%) most. Two types of Inferential markers *therefore*

(11%) and *as a result* (11%) were also prominent in EFL learners' IELTS essays. Other types of Inferential markers (e.g., *In turn*, *thus*, *hence*, *thereby*, *in brief*, *to recapitulate*, etc.) were not frequently used in IELTS essays.

Table 10*EFL Learners' Deployment of Inferential Markers in IELTS Essays*

| Category | DM | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Inferential markers | <i>Therefore</i> | 27 | 11% |
| | <i>Hence</i> | 15 | 6% |
| | <i>Thus</i> | 18 | 7% |
| | <i>Thereby</i> | 2 | 1% |
| | <i>As a result</i> | 26 | 11% |
| | <i>As a consequence</i> | 9 | 4% |
| | <i>In conclusion</i> | 116 | 48% |
| | <i>In brief</i> | 2 | 1% |
| | <i>To recapitulate</i> | 2 | 1% |
| | <i>In turn</i> | 22 | 9% |
| | <i>Henceforth</i> | 2 | 1% |
| Total | 11 | 241 | 100% |

EFL Learners' Deployment of Interpersonal Markers in IELTS Essays

It can be seen from Table 11 that seven types of Interpersonal markers were used. EFL learners employed *inevitably*

(25%) and *it is obvious that* (19%) much more frequently than other Interpersonal markers such as *undoubtedly* (15%), *perhaps* (15%), *indeed* (7%), *it might be suggested that* (13%) and *it could be the case that* (6%).

Table 11*EFL Learners' Deployment of Interpersonal Markers in IELTS Essays*

| Category | DM | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Interpersonal markers | <i>Indeed</i> | 5 | 7% |
| | <i>Undoubtedly</i> | 10 | 15% |
| | <i>Perhaps</i> | 10 | 15% |
| | <i>It is obvious that</i> | 13 | 19% |
| | <i>Inevitably</i> | 17 | 25% |
| | <i>It might be suggested that</i> | 9 | 13% |
| | <i>It could be the case that</i> | 4 | 6% |
| Total | 7 | 68 | 100% |

EFL Learners’ Deployment of Topic Change Markers in IELTS Essays

As for Table 12, there were only two types of Topic change markers used by EFL learners. *When it comes to* constituted 75%, threefold as much as that of *regarding* (25%).

Table 12

EFL Learners’ Deployment of Topic Change Markers in IELTS Essays

| Category | DM | Frequency Percentage | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| | | (F) | (%) |
| Topic change markers | <i>Regarding</i> | 5 | 25% |
| | <i>When it comes to</i> | 15 | 75% |
| Total | 2 | 20 | 100% |

4.2. Discussion

This study aimed to find out EFL learners’ beliefs about and practices of deployment of DMs in IELTS essays, and it has gained the following findings. Firstly, the study has shown that EFL learners were very cognizant of the significance of DMs in IELTS essays. They believed that using DMs in academic writing could be beneficial in terms of pragmatic, indispensable, and learning values of DMs. This finding may be that EFL learners have learned English for years, and they could have a good understanding of the importance of DMs in writing from their teachers’ instruction; consequently, they may realize the important roles and values of DMs in writing. This outcome was in agreement with Kalajahi’s (2012) and Ali and Mahadin’s (2016) findings which illustrated that learners in their research were fully conscious of DMs in academic writing. It may imply that teaching how to use DMs in writing to learners can be feasible, resulting in raising learners’ awareness of the importance of DMs in writing.

Secondly, the analysis of IELTS

essays written by EFL learners has indicated that EFL deployed 1,553 DMs in their 120 IELTS essays (35,123 word tokens), which were grouped in 52 types of DMs. Of six categories of DMs, EFL learners tended to deploy Elaborative markers more than other categories of DMs (Inferential, Contrastive, Temporal, Interpersonal, and Topic Change markers). This may be because of the fact that Elaborative markers (e.g., and, or, for example, etc.) are very prevalent in writing and speaking, so learners could use those DMs for elaboration or continuation of ideas in their writing. This result was consistent with that of previous studies conducted by Modhish (2012) and Jalilifar (2008) who have found that their research participants were also in favor of Elaborative markers in writing as they heavily depended on DMs such as *and*, *because* and *moreover*. This also accorded with Dumlao and Wilang (2019), which depicted that learners had the over-reliance of certain DM types such as Elaborative and Inferential markers. Additionally, the finding presented that there was a limited deployment of contrastive markers (9%), Temporal markers (7%), Interpersonal markers (4%) and Topic Change markers (1%). One of the plausible explanations for this finding may be due to the limit number of words that ELF learners had to write for each IELTS essay (Task 2); therefore, they may tend to use other content words (e.g., verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.) to express ideas to address the writing task requirements.

5. Conclusions

The study has concluded that EFL learners had a strong belief about the importance of DMs in IELTS essays (Task 2), and they deployed DMs in their writing at a moderate frequency. Among six categories of DMs, EFL learners seemed to deploy elaborative markers in their writing more than other categories. This study has some pedagogical implications based on the

gained findings. First of all, as EFL learners in this study were very aware of the importance of DMs in writing, teachers should design more writing exercises in which DMs are deployed so that EFL learners can gradually understand how to use DMs effectively and appropriately. Secondly, it was found out that elaborative markers were the most common DMs employed by EFL learners, so teachers should highlight the values of other categories of DMs in writing. If teachers want their learners to achieve high scores in IELTS writing, they should help their learners to know how to deploy different categories of DMs in their writing appropriately. Thirdly, administrators at the English language center should design extra materials relevant to the glossary of DMs so that both teachers and learners can make use of those materials in English writing teaching and learning.

This study still had some inevitable limitations. Firstly, this study was conducted with a small sample size at one research context. Secondly, only questionnaire and essays were used as the main sources of data. Therefore, future research should include learners from different contexts, and the quasi-experiment may be conducted to examine the effectiveness of DM instruction.

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NIỀM TIN VÀ THỰC TẾ VIỆC SỬ DỤNG CÁC TỪ NÓI TRONG BÀI LUẬN IELTS CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC TIẾNG ANH NHƯ LÀ NGOẠI NGỮ

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu niềm tin và thực tế việc sử dụng từ nối (discourse markers) trong bài luận IELTS của những người học tiếng Anh như là ngoại ngữ. Tham gia nghiên cứu là một nhóm 60 học viên đang tham gia các khóa luyện thi IELTS tại một trung tâm Anh ngữ ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam. Dữ liệu nghiên cứu được thu thập từ bảng câu hỏi và 120 bài luận IELTS (Task 2) do học viên tham gia nghiên cứu viết. Dữ liệu bảng câu hỏi được xử lý bằng phần mềm SPSS, còn dữ liệu các bài luận được xử lý bằng phần mềm AntConc. Kết quả cho thấy học viên tham gia nghiên cứu có niềm tin mạnh mẽ vào tầm quan trọng của các từ nối trong văn viết, và thực tế họ sử dụng các từ nối trong các bài luận IELTS với tần suất vừa phải. Ngoài ra, trong sáu loại từ nối, học viên sử dụng từ nối thêm thông tin nhiều hơn các loại từ nối khác. Bài viết này cũng trình bày một số đề xuất nhằm nâng cao chất lượng dạy và học tiếng Anh nói chung và dạy và học viết tiếng Anh nói riêng tại nơi nghiên cứu và các nơi khác tương tự.

Từ khóa: liên từ, bài luận, IELTS, học viên, văn viết