Writing: A Study on the Saudi Discourse Markers in EFL Learners' Literary Higher Education Context

الكتابة: دراسة لأدوات الربط الخطابي لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من السعوديين في سياق التعليم العالي الأدبي

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Abstract:

This particular study sought to understand the various English discourse markers used by students in writing and their respective functions and seeks to analyse the use of discourse markers in Saudi Arabia. The study used a qualitative descriptive design. The study used a sample of 45 essays written by EFL students in the English Education study program for their graduation in the Department of English at Jazan University. The results of the study showed that students mostly used contrastive, elaborative and inferential discourse markers. There is a limitation of studies on discourse markers especially for English learning students in Saudi Arabia. The results demonstrated that the graduation projects were very appropriate towards learning because they provided enough discourse markers to learn the various functions and types of discourse markers in the various projects. The study recommends that students of EFL get various kinds of discourse markers to prepare and compose their writing to make it well organised as well as understood.

Keywords: Discourse Markers, EFL Learner, Higher Education, Literary Writing, Saudi Arabia.

الملخص:

سعت هذه الدراسة إلى فهم مختلف أدوات الربط في اللغة الإنجليزية التي يستخدمها الطلاب في الكتابة، ووظائف هذه الأدوات، كما هدفت إلى تحليل استخدام أدوات الربط في سياق التعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية. اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي النوعي، حيث تم تحليل عينة مكونة من ٤٥ مقالًا كتبها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) ضمن برنامج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية، وذلك كمشاريع تخرج في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة جازان. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب استخدموا بشكل أساسي أدوات الربط التباينية، والتفسيرية، والاستنتاجية. كما كشفت النتائج إلى وجود نقص في الدراسات التي تتناول أدوات الربط، لا سيما في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية. وأكدت الدراسة أن مشاريع التخرج كانت أدوات تعليمية فعالة، حيث وفرت عددًا كافيًا من أدوات الربط التي تساعد الطلاب على تعلم وظائفها وأنواعها المختلفة. توصي الدراسة بضرورة تزويد طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بمجموعة متنوعة من أدوات الربط، بما يسهم في تحسين مهارات الكتابة، وتعزيز تنظيم النصوص، وضمان وضوحها وسهولة فهمها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدوات الربط، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التعليم العالي، الكتابة الأدبية، المملكة العربية السعودية.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is an important writing skill for students who aim to graduate from colleges or universities (higher institutions of learning). Professionalism and critical writing skills are very pertinent and are majorly intended to assist the professionals. Academic writing engages in factual information and excludes prose and fiction. Students in higher institutions need to write an academic project before they graduate, however, the quality of their writing may not effectively communicate their ideas or reflect their actual level of professionalism. The fundamental challenge that they face is the inappropriate use of discourse markers to enhance coherence for the various elements of texts.

One such element is discourse analysis which discourse markers form part of. The study of discourse markers as a section of linguistics has drawn the attention of various researchers (Alsaawi, 2022). This is linked to the useful nature of discourse markers in enhancing the coherence and cohesion of both the spoken and written discourses (Dontcheva-Navratilova & Povolná, 2020). A good piece of writing must effectively apply discourse markers within a text. This aspect is considered an essential part of great written pieces. Zhao (2014) views discourse markers as phrases and words that are used to achieve coherence while giving specific signals concerning the intentions of a writer. The use of Discourse Markers (DMs) helps a reader of a piece of writing understand what the writer wants to mean. The lack thereof creates a messed discourse since the ideas may not ultimately link with each other. Discourse markers are usually found in all types of texts including students' textbooks (Nurjannah 2021). Discourse markers, essential for coherence and organization in academic texts, play a significant role in students' academic writing, particularly in their graduation projects. This study focuses on identifying the specific discourse markers utilized by students in their graduation projects and analysing their functions, such as signalling transitions, emphasizing key points, providing clarification, and establishing logical connections, to enhance textual coherence and academic rigor. Naikoo et al (2016) note that most Arab-based university students lack the required competency in the use of

the English language, which ultimately hinders their academic progress. Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018) suggest that the lack of enough exposure to the English language in the Arab world has created limitations for students in Arab countries' ability to perform well in the English language. This issue is also expounded by Alhabahba et al (2016) whose study found that proficiency in English languages and literature in the Arab world needs to be improved. However, the sentiments held by the results of such studies should not be taken to mean that the Arab world is badly off when it comes to the use of the English language. Hazaea et al (2021) mitigate these findings by noting that the lack of English proficiency in Arab countries could be attributed partly to the lack of proper teaching infrastructure and technology to ensure effective teaching methods.

Research has been carried out to understand the usage of the discourse markers; and how and why they are used. These studies have been done in various settings and contexts. Only a few studies have been conducted within the context of Saudi Arabia. However, none of them has been done to understand the use of discourse markers for English department students at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The present study consequently seeks to understand the use of discourse markers in graduation projects for students at the English department of Jazan University.

Sabir and Jawad (2019) contend that the definition of discourse markers has been done differently by various researchers owing to it being ascribed to different things. Cuenca and Crible (2019) view discourse markers as dependent elements that are used to support concepts of a talk. Traugott, (2022) on the other hand considers discourse markers (DMs) as playing a key role in attracting the attention of a reader or listener to various connections of written or spoken discourses with a mindset fixed on the overall discourse context. Ultimately, the discourse markers are used to connect the various segments of the discourse context. Al-khazraji (2019) contends that discourse markers tend to improve the comprehension level of a text in addition to improving the quality of writing. Susanto et al (2019) states that the use of discourse analysis in writing among students of

EFL needs to be further enhanced through training them to understand myriads of discourse markers to be used in English academic writing to enhance cohesion and coherence.

Previous studies have viewed discourse markers as functions of expressive, social, textual, and cognitive domains (Schiffrin, 2005). The use of discourse markers depends on whether it is formal or informal contexts. For instance, the use of the discourse marker "well" is mostly done in informal discourses while the use of DM " therefore" is mostly found in formal English language discourses (Crible, 2022). From a historical point of view, various researchers have been theoretically concerned with how DMs are used and for what reasons (Alsaawi, 2022). Al-Khazraji (2019) considered each DM to have its meaning. From another point of view, Alsaawi (2022) argued that the meaning of a particular DM is found in its role of clarifying the intrinsic value of any writing or utterance.

The different views regarding the definition of discourse analysis underpin the need to explore any possible need to have differing explanations defining the same concept. DMs have been explored in diverse settings and contexts. Nevertheless, few studies have been conducted within the context of the institutions of higher learning in Saudi Arabia. The present study therefore seeks to understand how DMs have been utilised in the graduation projects of students at the English department of Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The study could further its scope on the extent of awareness of the English department students towards the utilization and the functions of discourse markers.

The current study seeks to investigate and answer fundamental research questions based on the identified gaps following the analysis of the graduation projects for students at Jazan University. These questions are:
  i) Which DMs have been utilized by the students' graduation projects at the English department at Jazan University?
  ii) What are the functions that strengthen the use of discourse markers in students' writing in graduation projects at the English department at Jazan University?

2. LITERATUER REVIEW

Discourse Analysis

The concept of discourse analysis implies the concept of interpreting both the written as well as the spoken languages. Saragih and Saragih, (2021) defined discourse analysis as the study concerned with the relationship between a language used and the context that has been used for all the written and spoken languages. Heriyawati (2021) states that discourse analysis is concerned with the endeavour of how the users of a language strive to interpret how other language users intend to convey in certain texts or conversations. The concept of discourse analysis has to be concerned with how others make sense of the content read or written by other people, how they are able to recognize well-constructed sentences or pieces of text as well as how individuals can manage to understand the indirect implication of written or spoken pieces of texts (Nurjannah, 2021). Sometimes, discourse analysis may go further to reasonably analyse an ungrammatical discourse over and above the identification of grammatical mistakes. In line with this Simanjuntak and Paramitha, (2018) consider discourse as part of a larger framework that aims to organise greater ideas of speakers or writers to make their ideas flow in a more coherent way so that they can be easily understood by either listeners or readers.

Coherence and Cohesion

In order to gain comprehension of a particular text, phrase, paragraph or word, there is a need to analyse the correlation among the above-mentioned elements. The interpretation of the whole discourse should be considered. The organisation of a discourse leading to the formation of texts is its cohesion Latifah and Triyono (2020) contend that cohesion is the arrangement of sentences in a well-integrated manner with the aim of producing a discourse. Therefore, the systematic connection between various elements in a certain text will assist a listener or reader to interpret and understand the intention intended by either a speaker or a writer.

When various language features produce a mutually related and acceptable bond, it is said to be in coherence. It is achieved when there is unity and connectedness as a product of the cohesion that is

formed (Sadeghi and Kargar (2014) contend that the relationship between various sentences forming a discourse is a result of both cohesion and coherence, which engages the discourse markers that form an essential part of the discourse.

Discourse markers

It is recognised as one of the various units of discourse analysis. The definition of a discourse marker has been theorised differently by diverse authors. Nurjannah (2021) state that there are various concepts used to describe discourse markers such as operators, connectives, and sentence connectives among others. All of these terms point to the concept of discourse markers. The DMs specific to written discourses are referred to as the transition (Shafqat et al., 2020). Discourse markers are generally used to connect specific sections of discourses to others (Sudrajat and Asih (2020). Bambang and Cahyono (2015) argue that discourse markers are very significant while connecting various interactions or texts because they signal explicit cues that will be used to enhance cohesion for both readers and writers or speakers and listeners. The intention therefore comes out clearly when an individual is reading any discourse.

The awareness of people towards the practical utilization of discourse markers can contribute greatly to the quality of prepared discourse (Al-Khazraji, 2019). Yulianto (2021) supports the foregoing idea by stating that it is always imperative to consider the number of DMs while the intention of the writer is being delivered. To develop an ability to use discourse markers is to create a helpful guide towards connecting information within various texts and paragraphs so as to make it more accessible to the readers. This ultimately assists them to better interpret the information that has been delivered or even intended by the writer or speaker. This therefore implies the existence of a strong relationship between discourse markers and cohesion. The two aspects assist in forming the best-written texts coherently.

Various types of discourse markers

To understand how to utilize discourse markers in texts, it is important to understand the various types of discourse markers that can be used in a discourse. According to Susanto et.al (2019), the logical linkage of ideas from one sentence to another depends heavily on the types of discourse markers that are used in that particular text. Therefore, the function played by a discourse marker is dependent on the type of DMs used by a student in developing the discourse (Rabab'ah et al., 2022). Crible (2022) differentiates conjunction and discourse markers. The author states that discourse markers take a wider role than conjunctions. Nevertheless, the fundamental source of DMs are the conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. The key types of discourse markers that are more applicable to various written discourses can be categorised into four major functional classes as stipulated by Fraser (2009).

The first is contrastive markers which give a signal of contrasting information between one section, paragraph or sentence and another. This can be either in a direct or indirect manner. According to Fraser (2009), words used in contrastive categories are "although", "alternatively", "but", "conversely", "despite", "instead of", "nevertheless", "nonetheless", "in spite of", "even so", "contrariwise", "notwithstanding", "regardless", "on the contrary", "on the other hand", "though", "still", "whereas", "for that reason", whenever such expressions are found in a discourse, a reader may be able to distinguish that they have been used to mark contrasting information from the one previously written (Schleiermacher & Bernofsky, 2021).

Elaborative markers are used to elaborate or explain more. They give additional information that is presented in the previous phrase, text, or sentence. Examples of elaborative markers are: "after all", "also", "besides", equally", "for example", "further", "for instance", "by the same token", "analogously", "above all", "more precisely", "more to the point", "in addition", "otherwise", "similarly".

Inferential markers give additional signals in consequent sentences inferring what the predecessor sentences or phrases mentioned. Depending on what a writer or speaker has stated in a sentence, a second sentence can be used to infer the previous one. Expressions that can be used for inference include: "as a consequence", "so", "as a *result", "consequently", "all things considered", "as a*

conclusion", "because", "for that reason", "therefore", "accordingly", "thus", "hence".

Fraser (2006) (as cited in Dumlao & Wilang, 2019) states that the temporal markers are utilized in a discourse mostly to give a signal on the sequence of sentences that have been developed. They can indicate the signal of time. Examples of temporal markers include: "eventually", "before", "afterwards", "second", "subsequently", "as soon as", "then", "originally", "when", "first".

Discourse Markers in Global EFL Contexts

Because of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical factors, discourse marker (DM) usage differs greatly among EFL contexts. As an illustration of curricular gaps in argumentative writing, Indonesian students commonly overuse additive markers like "furthermore" but underuse contrastive ones (Susanto et al., 2019a). However, due to Mandarin's time-oriented discourse, Chinese EFL students use temporal markers (such as "subsequently") more frequently (Ding & Wang, 2015). However, because they are exposed to English academic norms at a young age, European learners exhibit balanced DM usage (Vickov & Jakupcevic, 2017). These differences highlight how pedagogical priorities and language transfer shape DM competency.

The functions of Discourse markers

The major function of discourse markers is to achieve coherent texts (Zhao, 2014). According to Crible (2022) signals of local coherence are affected by the use of discourse markers. Additionally, Mohammadi (2019) contends that DMs usually influence the holistic coherence of the various segments by providing extra external information between the parts to contribute to the overall coherence of the discourse. The written forms of discourse markers are also referred to as transition signals as contended by (Mahendra & Dewi, 2017). The author made a classification of the various discourse markers based on their specific functions in a discourse. This can be represented in the table below:

Functions of Discourse Markers

Table 1 Functions of Discourse Markers

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences
1.	Denoting additive ideas or information	Including, in addition, and, moreover, furthermore, further, in fact, besides, as well as, in other words, etc.	Limestone is important in the manufacture of cement. *In fact*, it is not considered a poisonous mineral.
2.	Signalling contrasts, contradictions or comparisons	Despite, neither, nonetheless, instead of, even though, rather than etc.	Eating a balanced diet helps to boost the body's immunity. *However*, there are nutrients special for boosting immunity.
3.	Limitation or introduction of particular ideas	Such as, except, unless, namely, for instance, for example.	There are certain foods rich in B12 *such as* eggs.
4.	Showing cause and effect relationship	Consequently, hence, since, because, so, therefore.	We have to extend our lesson *because of* the students who never grasped the previous concept.
5.	Conclusion of ideas or information	In brief, in short, in a nutshell, to sum up, to summarize, thus etc.	*To summarize*, discourse markers relate well with cohesion and coherence in

| No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences
			creating logical sentences.
6.	Indicating the sequence of events logical division and order of time	Finally, at first, at last, soon, then, next, second, later.	The researchers will *eventually* come up with a solution to the identified gap.

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A study conducted by Ding and Wang (2015) indicated the frequent use of discourse markers such as "ok", "so", "and", "now" and "right" by EFL teachers and Cantonese EFL teachers especially in EFL classrooms. Both teachers were found to overuse certain categories of words such as "to" in order to buy time for more information processing (Ding & Wang, 2015, p. 72). From another perspective, a study conducted by Shahbaz et al. (2013) noted the excessive use of the discourse markers by Chinese EFL teachers such as "so", "right", "well", "ok" as compared to the use of the discourse markers by L1 teachers. Vickov and Jakupcevic (2017) carried out a study to investigate the frequency of occurrence of discourse markers in EFL classroom that engages both teachers and students. The study explored how the DMs such as "so' and "ok" were distributed in an oral discourse in an EFL classroom. The study found a similarity in patterns of the use of DMs for non-native EFL teachers for both secondary and primary schools (Vickov & Jakupcevic, 2017, p. 649). Karlina et al (2015) study examined the various occurrences of discourse markers and the functions they played while being used by EFL teachers. The results of the study concluded that DMs assisted the EFL teachers in attaining a more coherent discourse while interacting with their students in a classroom set-up. Tavakoli and Karimnia (2017) did research focussed on the role gender plays in the use of English language discourse markers in an EFL discourse. It was noted that female EFL learners employed more discourse markers such as "but", "and", "because", "sure" and "by the way" than their counterparts.

Based on the literature review above, most of the research focussed on the use of English discourse markers in either written or oral discussions. The studies differ in terms of content and context. None of the research has been carried out specifically to understand the use of discourse markers for students in the English department at Jazan University in Saudi Arabia. The current research consequently delves into understanding the use of discourse markers in graduation reports of students in the English department at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The study will seek to understand the DMs used in the projects and the functions they play.

The discourse markers are based on the Theory of Frazer (2009) (as cited in Rabab'ah et al., 2022) categorised as: elaborative markers, temporal markers, contrastive markers and inferential markers. The functions of the discourse markers are adapted from the concept of Mahendra and Dewi 2017) who note various categories: Limit and introduce ideas, conclusion expressions, sequence, contradictive, additive, cause and effect.

Table 2 Types and Functions of Discourse Markers
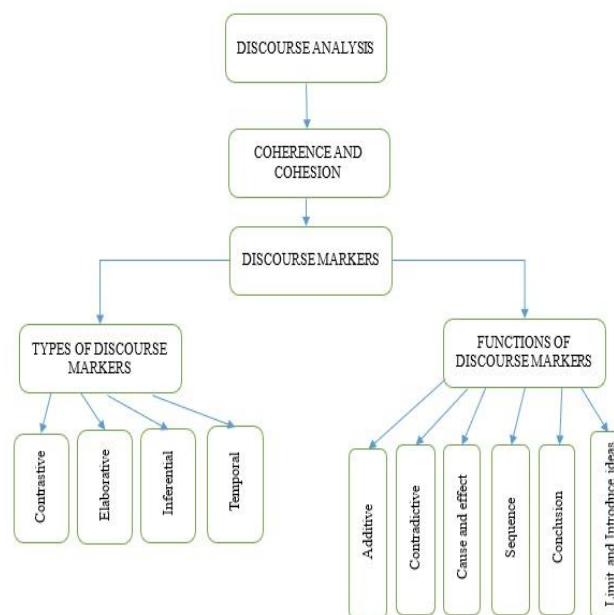
The present research was concerned with the part of discourse analysis that enhances the cohesion and

coherence of a discourse, the discourse markers. The present research engaged in investigating the types of discourse markers present in the graduation projects of students. Additionally, it also endeavoured to understand the functions of such discourse markers. Frazer's (2006) theory has been applied in the present research. Discourse markers have been classified into four categories: elaborative, temporal, inferential and contrastive. The functions of the discourse markers are sequence, contradictive, limiting and introducing ideas, cause and effect, additive and conclusion. This will form the scope of the present study.

Empirical research

Susanto et al (2019) carried out a study that sought to investigate the utilization of discourse markers for students using English at Universitas Semarang, Indonesia. The study used three of the four functional classes of discourse markers utilized by Frazer (2006). These are the contrastive, inferential and elaborative. For this reason, the present research study seeks to fill the aforementioned gap by analysing discourse markers in graduation projects for students at Jazan University.

A study conducted by (Bambang and Cahyono (2015) attempted to find out the types and frequency of discourse markers in expository essays written by Indonesian students of English as a Foreign language. The study sought to assess both the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the usage of the identified discourse markers. A total of 275 essays written by 55 participants were analysed. The study found that students mostly used contrastive markers to explain comparison and contrasting aspects. Inferential markers were found to have been used where cause and effect analysis was engaged. There were also identified markers that were misused. In this case, there were 6 overused markers, 22 that marked wrong relations, and 20 that were semantically incomplete.

Mahendra and Dewi (2017) conducted a research study that sought to identify the tendency as well as problems of transition signals that were used by students while doing academic writing discourses. There were 33 writing products with 306066 words that were compared with various reputable journal articles. A total of 159 signals for academic writing were found, and there were 6 functions found for

the transition signals. There were also 219 transition signals found for journal articles. The study also found that the transition signals were more common in journal articles as compared to academic writing.

These studies discussed above have similar variables of discourse markers as those identified in several other studies noted in this research. However, the present research has identified a gap in both context and content. It seeks to carry out a research study by analysing discourse markers in graduation projects of students at the Department of English at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The research ultimately seeks to analyse both the types as well as functions of the discourse markers in the graduation projects of the students

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach research method. The method was used to explore the use of discourse markers among the graduation reports of students in the English department of Jazan University in Saudi Arabia. The qualitative research approach is based on the interpretivists' paradigm. From this perspective, the reality emanates from the views, thoughts and attitudes held by the participants in a particular study. For the present study, the content of the graduation reports of students in the English department at Jazan University was taken into consideration.

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to systematically examine the utilization and functions of discourse markers (DMs) in students' graduation projects at the English department at Jazan University. The methodology focuses on data collection through content analysis to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

Research Questions

This study sought to address the following research questions:

1. Which discourse markers have been utilized in students' graduation projects at the English department at Jazan University?

2. What are the functions that strengthen the use of discourse markers in students' writing in

graduation projects at the English department at Jazan University?

Data Collection Methods

Table 3 Data Collection Method and Description

Method	Description
Content Analysis	Examined textual data from students' graduation projects to identify the frequency, distribution, and function of DMs Krippendorff (2004).

4.   DATA ANALYSIS

The study sought to recruit 14 participants through their graduation reports. The students were asked to present their graduation reports The 14 projects under analysis were created over the course of two semesters in order to fulfil the capstone requirements for the English department. Faculty gave students iterative feedback with an emphasis on DM usage and coherence. Drafts of Symbolism in Riders to the Sea, for instance, were changed to use inferential DMs ('as a result') in place of ambiguous markers ('and'). The projects' structure, which called for thesis statements, literature reviews, and critical analysis, compelled students to use DMs in real-world academic settings even though they weren't used as instructional materials directly. (Fraser, 2006) approach of categorizing the discourse markers into four categories was utilized in the present study. These categories are: Implicative markers (IDMs), Elaborative markers (EDMs), temporal markers (TDMs) and Contrastive markers (CDMs).

The study identified the discourse markers used by English department students in their graduation projects at Jazan University. Additionally, it sought to understand the functions that strengthen the use of the discourse markers in academic writing; specifically for the graduation reports of students in the English department at Jazan University.

Hiilker (1991) (as cited in Kusumayati, 2020) identifies four basic features of discourse markers. These four basic features will lay the foundation upon which the present graduation projects will be analysed. The discourse markers used by the students in their graduation reports will be highlighted together with the frequency of usage. The graduation projects were noted to have differences in terms of usage of the discourse markers; the style and the pattern of use. The projects majorly manifested contrast and comparison, definition, cause and effect, and argument. Identification of the various discourse markers was followed by linking the reasons and functions of utilization to each discourse marker. Reliability and validity were ensured by following up with the participants to identify and verify their individual pieces of graduation project writings Bryman (2012) (as cited in Alsaawi, 2022).

The study used a wordsmith search tool to calculate the frequency of use of students' discourse markers present in the graduation reports (Scott, 2008). Specifically, the vocabulary search function was utilized to make an analysis of the type of use of students' discourse markers and the corresponding frequencies for the individual discourse markers. The wordsmith tool 4.0 was used to collate all the occurrences of the words deemed as discourse markers from the students' graduation reports. With the utilization of this tool, all the discourse markers were generated automatically and thereafter manual sorting was done through examination. This scrutiny process allowed the removal or elimination of various expressions that do not function as discourse markers for this particular study. For instance, expressions such as "really" and "you know' are not deemed as discourse markers for the present study.

5.   RESULTS

Data of this study comprise students' graduation projects focused on literature, emphasizing the unique characteristics and conventions of literary discourse. By analysing these projects, the study examines how discourse markers are utilized within the context of literature to enhance coherence, structure, and interpretative depth. There were fourteen (14) graduation projects that were analysed. The titles of the graduation projects analysed include: "A feminist Reading of Shaw's *Pygmalion*", "The Character of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*", "*Analysis of the Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost", "A Study of the main Characters of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*", "*The Psychological Reasons that*

affect the Students English speaking skills in Development in Jazan University", "A Study of the Symbolism as reflected in *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge", *"Theme of Prejudice and Intolerance in William Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'*, "Theme of Colonization in Chinua Achebe's Novel, *'Things Fall Apart'*, *"Hero in Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea*", "A Study of the Themes of Love and Sacrifices in O. Henry's Short Story *' Gift of the Magi*", " Key Themes of Robert Frost's Poem *' The Road Not Taken'*, "Revenge as the main theme in Shakespeare's play *'Hamlet'*, "*A study of Themes in " Story of an hour*" by Kate Chopin and "*Loneliness in Cat in the Rain* by Hemingway".

Graduation projects containing identifiable discourse markers were selected based on specific inclusion criteria for the analysis. The analysis of the discourse markers was facilitated through the use of the Wordsmith tool 4.0. The discourse markers were then categorised into tables and their percentages determined as shown in *table 2* below. The findings of the study found that the types of discourse markers are as identified by (Fraser, 2009) theory. According to the theory, there are four types of discourse markers: elaborative, temporal, inferential and contrastive. They have been found within the texts of the fourteen graduation projects that have been analysed. Additionally, the functions of the discourse markers have also been determined and explained based on the description list noted in chapter two of the present project. (Fraser, 2009) theory on discourse markers is widely adopted in linguistic studies, particularly in research focused on the analysis of text coherence and academic writing structures. Scholars in applied linguistics and discourse analysis frequently reference this framework to categorize and interpret the use of discourse markers in various contexts.

To carry out further analysis and presentation of the results of the data obtained from the research, the present research will seek to accumulate the discourse markers that have been found within a table. The types and functions of discourse markers will be prepared alongside their analysis and discussions.

The formula, $P = \frac{F}{N}$ x 100, was employed to calculate the percentage of data, where, P, represents the percentage of data, F, is the frequency of data occurrence, and N, is the total number of the entire dataset. Following Aritkunto (2010), this method is widely used in qualitative research to provide a clear and standardized way of presenting proportional data. Arikunto's approach emphasizes the importance of expressing findings in percentage form to facilitate easier interpretation and comparison across datasets.

Table 4 Analysis of types of Discourse markers

No.	Types of DMs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Contrastive markers	37	20%
2.	Elaborative markers	79	43%
3.	Inferential markers	61	33%
4.	Temporal markers	8	4%
Total		185	

From the analysis carried out in the table above, it can be inferred that elaborative markers were the most frequent discourse markers in the fourteen graduation reports analysed, followed by the inferential markers. The papers used elaborative markers such as besides, for example, in addition, additionally, moreover, and also, among others. Some of the most frequent inferential discourse markers include: as a result, therefore, hence, thus, consequently, to sum up. Contrastive and temporal markers were the least used in the graduation projects.

From the analysis, it can also be worth noting that the number of discourse markers used was lower than the tally indicated. For example, in one instance, the contrastive marker 'however' appeared five times in a single paragraph to emphasize different points, while the elaborative marker 'in addition' was used repetitively across consecutive sentences to link related ideas. This suggests a tendency among students to overuse certain markers, which may affect the overall balance and readability of their writing. The number increased since some discourse markers appeared more than

once in various texts or projects. For instance, a discourse marker like "However" appeared in almost every project analysed. All types of discourse markers as indicated in Frazer (2009) were found in the analysed graduation projects.

The functions of the discourse markers as indicated by Mahendra and Dewi (2017) can be as shown in the table below.

Table 5 The functions of the discourse markers as indicated by Mahendra and Dewi 2017

1/ Denoting additive ideas or information

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
1.	Denoting additive ideas or information	Including, in addition, and, moreover, furthermore, further, in fact, besides, as well as, in other words, etc.	**A Feminist Reading of Shaw`s Pygmalion** Moreover, the researcher has used other modern references to answer the problems and research questions of the study. **Hero in Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and The Sea** Furthermore, it helps him earn the deeper respect of the village fishermen and secures him the prized companionship of the boy **A Study of the Themes of Love and Sacrifices in O. Henry's Short Story 'Gift of the Magi'** Additionally, it appears that the

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
			youngster has trouble telling the difference between his imaginary world and the actual one…. **A Study of the Symbolism as Reflected in Riders to the Sea by J.M. Synge** The main objective of this study is to discuss the main symbols as reflected in Riders to the Sea, besides explaining their role in conveying the main theme of the play.

2/ Signalling contrasts, contradictions or comparisons

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
2.	Signalling contrasts, contradictions or comparisons	Despite, neither, nonetheless, instead of, even though, rather than etc.	**Analysis of the Road Not Taken by Robert Frost** However, all the quotations and citations used in the work are duly acknowledged and referenced. **Theme of Prejudice and Intolerance in William Shakespeare's**

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects	No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
			'The Merchant of Venice Instead, she favours Bassanio, a poor young Venetian nobleman, also a soldier and scholar. **Key Themes of Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken'** Although Frost is known to many as essentially a "happy" poet, the tragic elements in life continued to mark his poems. **Revenge is the main theme in Shakespeare's play 'Hamlet'** On the other hand, Laertes and Claudius don't want to lose any chance to revenge on Hamlet		of particular ideas	instance, for example.	**Bernard Shaw's** *Pygmalion* For instance, Eliza is hardly described as a human being in his eyes **Loneliness in Cat in the Rain by Hemingway** For example, in his article entitled "Portrayal of Human Relationship Through Representative Language in Earnest Hemmingway's Cat in the Rain **The Character of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart** For example, in Purwarno and Irawati's (2008) study entitled "Aristotle's Concept of Tragedy and Tragic Hero in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart," Okonkwo is analysed as a classic tragic figure.

3/Limitation or introduction of particular ideas

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
3.	Limitation or introduction	Such as, except, unless, namely, for	**A Study of the Main Characters of George**

4/ Showing cause and effect relationship

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
4.	Showing cause and effect relationship	Consequently, hence, since, because, so, therefore.	**A Feminist Reading of Shaw`s Pygmalion** This study will analyse the stereotype of women from a feminist approach. As a result, it is necessary to study this topic as a contribution to the field of literary work. **The Character of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart** Hence, the researcher has found some studies which relate to the play by many writers. **A Study of Themes in "Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin** Hence, the researcher has found some studies related to the play by many writers.

5/ Conclusion of ideas or information

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
5.	Conclusion of ideas or information	In brief, in short, in a nutshell, to sum up, to summarize, thus etc.	**Analysis of the Road Not Taken by Robert Frost** To sum up, in this research the researcher tried to prove that the title of the research The Road Not Taken by Robert Forst revolves around the theme of it.

6/ Indicating the sequence of events logical division and order of time

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
6.	Indicating the sequence of events logical division and order of time	Finally, at first, at last, soon, then, next, second, later.	**The Psychological Reasons that Affect the Student's English Speaking Skills Development in Jazan University** Finally, some suggestions expected to be significant remedies to overcome the problem were proposed by the researcher.

No.	Example of Functions of discourse markers	Examples of Expressions for the named function	Examples in sentences for various projects
			A Study of the Symbolism as Reflected in Riders to the Sea by J.M. Synge Finally, Maurya suggests that women may exist in the same way that men do **Theme of Colonization in Chinua Achebe's Novel 'Things Fall Apart'** Secondly, as mentioned before, there is a lack of print resources

Based on the table above, it can be seen that all the functions of the discourse markers as envisaged are reflected through the expressions found in the various sentences for the various projects. The table has endeavoured also to give some of the representative sentences for the various graduation projects that have been analysed. The findings provide key insights into the use of discourse markers in students' academic writing.

Saudi Students' Use of Discourse Markers
Saudi students' use of discourse markers (DMs) in writing, according to Fraser (2006) categorization, reveals both patterns and challenges. Fraser's model classifies DMs into four categories: elaborative, temporal, contrastive, and inferential. Research indicates that Saudi students frequently use elaborative DMs, followed by temporal, contrastive, and inferential markers. However, they often struggle with the appropriate application of these markers, which affects the coherence and cohesion of their writing. This difficulty is attributed to limited exposure and practice in academic settings.

Patterns of Discourse Marker Use
Table 6 Patterns of Discourse Marker Use

Discourse Marker Category	Frequency (%)	Example
Elaborative (e.g., moreover, furthermore, in addition, besides)	32%	"Moreover, the study highlights the importance of structured arguments."
Temporal (e.g., subsequently, finally, thereafter, previously)	20%	"Finally, the research suggests avenues for further study."
Contrastive (e.g., however, on the other hand, conversely, nevertheless)	27%	"However, existing studies fail to consider regional differences."
Inferential (e.g., therefore, thus, consequently, as a result)	21%	"Thus, the findings confirm the proposed hypothesis."

Challenges in Using Discourse Markers
Despite the benefits, the study identified certain challenges in using discourse markers. Saudi students often misuse discourse markers, which can lead to incoherent text. This is partly due to a lack of understanding of the semantic and syntactic roles of discourse markers (Alsaawi, 2022). Low exposure to discourse markers in classroom settings contributes to the difficulty in their appropriate use. This highlights the need for more focused educational interventions (Alsaawi, 2022). Some students rely excessively on a limited set of markers, reducing lexical variety (Ding & Wang, 2015). Incorrect placement of discourse markers sometimes affects clarity and coherence (Crible, 2017). While some discourse markers are used effectively, others are underutilized, limiting rhetorical effectiveness. Some students overuse

discourse markers, making their writing repetitive and less concise.

Educational Implications

Instructors can use the following tactics to address the issues noted, such as the excessive use of elaborative markers and the insufficient use of temporal markers.

Analysis of Model Text: To illustrate DM functions, use passages from peer-reviewed literary analyses (such as critiques of Things Fall Apart). For instance: "Okonkwo's strict adherence to tradition contrasts with his son's flexibility." Students substitute synonyms like "nevertheless" and "conversely" for overused DMs like "however."

Writing Timelines for Temporal DMs: Assign students to analyse literary works' chronological events (such as Hamlet's revenge plot). Students create phrases such as "Hamlet first meets the ghost." He subsequently puts the play on stage. The duel finally starts.

Colour-Coding Peer Review: Students share drafts and use colours to highlight direct messages (e.g., blue = inferential, green = contrastive). For example, peers recommend using "moreover" in place of the repeated phrase "in addition" in Things Fall Apart's Theme of Colonisation.

Rubric-Based Evaluations: Assess DM usage using standards such as: Variety: at least three different DM types per paragraph. Accuracy: "Therefore" for cause-and-effect rather than contrast. Redundancy Avoidance: ≤2 uses of "however" per page.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with previous research on discourse markers in academic writing. Prior studies, such as Fraser (2009) and Cuenca and Crible (2019) have highlighted the role of discourse markers in enhancing textual cohesion and coherence. This study confirms that students at Jazan University rely on a set of frequently used DMs, with elaborative and contrastive markers being the most common.

Research by Dumlao and Wilang (2019) emphasizes that proficient academic writing requires a balanced use of discourse markers to structure arguments effectively. The present study found that while students employ a range of markers, there is a tendency to overuse specific ones, leading to

redundancy. This aligns with previous findings that inexperienced writers often struggle with DM variety and proper placement (Riznanda 2021).

Furthermore, studies such as Heriyawati (2021) on Saudi university students indicate that DM usage patterns reflect students' linguistic backgrounds and exposure to academic writing conventions. The results of this study suggest that students benefit from targeted instruction on diverse DM usage, supporting Alghamdi's recommendation for explicit teaching interventions.

Crible (2022) argue that discourse markers should be integrated into writing curricula to enhance students' rhetorical skills. The findings of this study suggest that structured feedback and guided practice can significantly improve DM effectiveness in student writing. Additionally, (Fraser, 2006) categorization reinforces the importance of balancing elaborative, temporal, contrastive, and inferential markers to maintain clarity in argumentation.

Moreover, research by Kusumayati (2020) highlights that student in EFL contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, require explicit training to develop competency in DM application. The present study's findings affirm that students struggle with contrastive and inferential markers due to limited exposure. This challenge can be addressed through scaffolded learning approaches that gradually introduce and reinforce the use of DMs in various writing contexts.

If we see regional and Linguistic Influences, he use of inferential (33%) and elaborative (43%) markers by Saudi students is consistent with patterns in Arab EFL contexts, where academic writing is dominated by additive language. Alhabahba et al (2016). East Asian students, on the other hand, excel in temporal markers (Ding & Wang, 2015). For instance, Chinese learners preferred to use "subsequently" to indicate process steps, whereas Saudi students used "therefore" to indicate conclusions. Mandarin's linear discourse and Arabic's thematic cohesion norms may be the cause of this discrepancy. In a similar vein, the underuse of contrastive markers (20%) in Kurdish contexts consistent with findings of Sabir and Jawad (2019); is however, European learners use contrastive DMs like "however" more frequently (Vickov & Jakupcevic, 2017).

Overall, this study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the patterns and challenges of DM usage among Saudi students. The results indicate a pressing need for curriculum adjustments to ensure that discourse markers are taught systematically. Future studies could explore longitudinal impacts of DM-focused interventions and compare findings with other non-native English-speaking student populations.

Susanto et al (2019a) study concluded that the more the use of discourse markers in a study, the more the students seek to achieve coherence and cohesion in academic writing. It also noted the fact that students are still weak in using some discourse markers in their writing exercises because what is seen in their writing is only the markers they are familiar with. The study recommends that students of EFL get various kinds of discourse markers to prepare and compose their writing to make it well organised as well as understood.

7. CONCLUSION

The use of discourse markers (DM) in literary graduation projects by Saudi EFL students is thoroughly examined in this study, which also identifies important trends, practical applications, and pedagogical difficulties. According to the results, students use temporal (4%) and contrastive (20%) markers sparingly, primarily depending on elaborative (43%) and inferential (33%). These DMs improve textual coherence, but problems like repetition, overuse, and semantic errors draw attention to the need for focused interventions like practice-based learning, explicit instruction, and structured feedback.

The graduation projects were especially successful as teaching tools because of their literary focus and iterative design, Students received direct feedback on DM usage while revising their drafts under faculty supervision over the course of two semesters. To improve argumentative nuance, for instance, repetitive contrastive markers like "however" were swapped out for "conversely" or "on the other hand" in the project *A Feminist Reading of Shaw's Pygmalion*. Similarly, temporal markers ('firstly', 'subsequently') helped to make sense of chronological sequences in Hamlet's Revenge Plot, while inferential markers ('therefore,' 'as a result') were essential in Theme of Colonisation in *Things Fall Apart* to connect colonial policies to cultural erosion. These changes helped students bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world writing by allowing them to apply theoretical DM knowledge to authentic academic tasks within the framework of authentic literary analysis.

As models for DM mastery, we advise incorporating such projects into EFL curricula going forward. Future studies could examine comparative analyses of DM patterns across disciplines (e.g., literary vs. scientific writing) or longitudinal studies that track DM usage from initial drafts to final submissions. Teachers can enable students to use discourse markers as effective tools for coherence, argumentation, and academic rigour by integrating scaffolded instruction, authentic revision cycles, and genre-specific practice.

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