The Use of Discourse Markers in Developing Writing

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Abstract: Writing is one of the four language skills in language learning and teaching that needs to be developed by SL students. It has an important role in SL learning and teaching. It is crucial for SL learners, as they need it either for academic purposes or for professional ones. Many devices such as reference, ellipsis, substitution, and discourse markers are used in order to write cohesively and coherently. The aim of this paper is to focus on the role of discourse markers in developing students' writing. The work provides some theoretical background on this issue.

Keywords: Writing, Discourse, Discourse analysis, Discourse markers

Introduction

Writing is considered as the most difficult skill to master for L2. The difficulty is on translating the author's ideas into a readable text (Richards & Renandya, 2002). There have been many approaches in teaching writing. However, we have adopted a discourse perspective since discourse analysis is an eclectic approach that combines form, function, and a context.

Using discourse markers in writing may enable learners to communicate effectively and may also help them to write a cohesive and coherent paragraphs. In the following, we will define discourse analysis. In addition, we will define discourse markers and list some examples, and finally we will define the writing skill.

1. Discourse analysis

Formerly, a sentence was the focus of all studies in linguistics. Applied linguists used to analyze decontextualized sentences in order to generalize the rules. However, the interest has changed into a focus on larger units namely, a discourse which *means 'pieces of language longer than a sentence.'* (Swan, 2005, p. 138). They have found that linguistic items alone are not enough. What is important is using these linguistic items in their context of use. This kind of interest has brought discourse analysis as an approach to language teaching since its focus was on the supra-sentential relationship rather than inter-sentential relationships.

Brown and Yule (1983) define discourse as "the analysis of language in use" p.1. They believe that the use of the code (language use) is important rather than the focus of the code itself (code usage). That is to say, linguistic forms may have different functions in different contexts. Thus, we suggest using discourse analysis as an approach to teach writing.

2. Discourse markers

In order to write a good paragraph. It has to be unified, coherent, and developed adequately. The three are linked to each other (Corbett, 1987). First, paragraph unity deals with the development of one main idea or one topic sentence, and every supporting sentence in the

paragraph has to be logically related to the topic sentence. Another important characteristic of a good paragraph is coherence.

A well-written text has two features: being cohesive and coherent (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2001). Halliday (2001) defined cohesion as "the set of resources for constructing relations in discourse which transcend grammatical structures" (as quoted in Martin, 2001, p.35). In other words, elements that are used to hold the text together syntactically and semantically. That is to say, cohesion happens at the level of language, whereas coherence happens at the level of ideas. Writing a coherent paragraph helps the reader to follow the ideas smoothly and to guide him/her easily to decode the author' intended message appropriately. In this respect, cohesive devices are the elements that provide such relationships within the text.

To understand a discourse, it is important to identify the elements that contribute to the creation of discourse. One of these elements are discourse markers. Discourse markers (DMs) are linguistics expressions such as 'well', 'now', 'so' that connect between the current message and previous discourse (Fraser, 1990). They are a matter of choice in terms of monitoring, organization and management exercised by the speaker or the writer (Carter and McCarthy, 2006). DMs has two facets: first, they are glue elements that hold the text together. Second, they help to create a meaningful discourse. "Discourse markers are words and expressions which help to structure spoken exchanges and written texts (e.g. first of all, on the other hand, in any case, to sum up)" (Swan, 2016, p.284). Similarly, Schiffrin (2001) stated that, "Discourse markers are expressions like *well*, *but*, *oh* and *y'know* – are one set of linguistic items that function in cognitive, expressive, social, and textual domains." P.54. In the same way, Carter & Fung (2007) define DMs as "intra-sentential and supra-sentential linguistic units which fulfill a largely non-propositional and connective function at the level of discourse" (p. 411). In short, these definitions have something in common that all of them do not talk about discourse markers as merely linguistic items, but also these items have a function in discourse.

DMs are mostly adverbs and adverbial conjunctions which can have different functions: first, they can introduce or clarify a topic, and show divisions and changes of topic. Second, they show the kind of on-going communication. Third, they can show both the writer's attitude of his writing and the readers' expectations. Here are some of these discourse markers based on these functions (Swan, 2005)

- **focusing and linking**: with reference to, talking/ speaking off about, regarding, as regards, as far as... is concerned, as for.

- **Balancing contrasting points**: on the one hand (formal), on the other hand, while, whereas

- **Emphasizing a contrast**: however, nevertheless, nonetheless, mind you, still, yet, in spite of this/ that, despite this/ that

- **Similarity:** similarly, in the same way, just as.

- **Concession**: it is true, certainly, of course, granted, if, may, stressed auxiliaries.

- **Counter-argument:** however, even so, but, nevertheless, nonetheless, all the same, still.

- **Contradicting:** on the contrary, quite the opposite.

- **Dismissal of previous discourse:** at least, anyway, anyhow, at any rate, in any case.

- **Change of subject:** by the way, incidentally. Right, all right, now, OK

- **return to previous subject** to return to the previous point (formal), as I was saying (informal)

- **Structuring:** first(ly), first of all, second(ly), third(ly) etc, lastly, finally, to begin with, to start with, in the first/second/third place, for one thing (informal), for another thing (informal)

- **adding:** moreover (very formal), furthermore (formal), in addition, as well as that, on top of that (informal),another thing is (informal), what is more, also, besides, in any case.

- **generalizing:** on the whole; in general; in all/ most/ many I some cases; broadly speaking; by and large; to a great extent, to some extent, apart from...; except for....

- **giving examples:** for instance; for example; e.g.; in particular

- **logical consequence:** therefore (formal); as a result (formal); consequently (formal); so; then

- **making things clear; giving details:** I mean; actually, that is to say, in other words

- **softening and correcting:** I think; I feel; I reckon (informal); I guess (informal); in my view/opinion (formal); apparently so to speak; more or less; sort of (informal); kind of (informal); well; really that is to say at least, I'm afraid; I suppose; or rather, actually, I mean

- **Gaining time:** let me see, let's see, well; you know, I don't know, I mean; kind of sort of

- **showing one's attitude to what one is saying:** honestly; frankly, no doubt

- **persuading:** after all; look here

- **referring to the other person's expectations** *actually* (especially British English); in fact, as a matter of fact, to tell the truth; well

- **summing up:** in conclusion; to sum up; briefly; in short

(Swan, 2005, pp.138-145)

3. The Writing Skill

Formerly, writing was regarded as a language skill that emphasizes learning grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, which in turn helps to achieve oral correctness (Uso-Juan, Martinez-Flor, and Palmer- Silveira, 2006). Based on such view, teachers focus on formal correctness of students' writing rather than the actual process of writing. However, the view has changed through time. The focus is now on writing as a process rather than a product (McDonough & shaw, 1998). Accordingly, "writing is currently seen as a dynamic, creative, and contextualized process of communicating meaning " (Uso-Juan, et al., 2006, p. 394). Therefore, writing is an active process that is composed of four basic stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. The four stages are not necessarily in order (Seow, 2002) as the figure shows p.315. There are of course other stages which they are externally imposed on students by teachers such as: responding (sharing), evaluating, and post-writing. Of course, it is the teacher who decides which step is the first.

STAGES
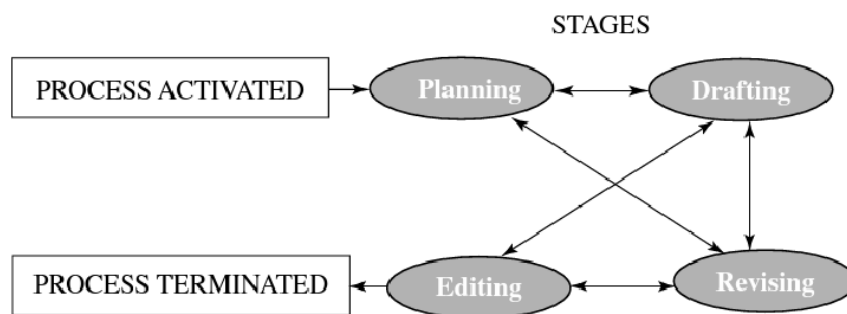
Figure 1 The Writing Process

Schiffrin (1987) said that knowledge about discourse markers and other things is used to enhance the writing skill. Therefore, in order to develop the writing skill, it is important to use discourse markers appropriately. Hence, we suggest that learners need to know about discourse markers and their different functions in different contexts of use since one discourse marker may have various functions (Swan, 2005).

Conclusion

Developing writing is a difficult aspect in language teaching. Therefore, teachers should take into consideration the learners' needs. This article has dealt with some discourse markers and their role in enhancing the writing. It gives only theoretical background. However, it is preferable that other researchers try to investigate the frequency of use of these discourse markers in students' essays and if they are using them appropriately. To conclude, using discourse markers will enable learners to write coherent paragraphs and thus communicate their thoughts properly.

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