

The Influence of Explicit Instruction of Transition Markers on ESP Students' Expository Writing

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ABSTRACT

As one of the four modes of language, writing has been the focus of almost all methodologies and approaches in language teaching. At times, it has been taught explicitly or implicitly, through strategies or techniques. One of the ways based on which writing can be instructed is through the explicit instruction of transition markers that are defined as adverbs employed to indicate relations or transitions between sentences in a paragraph or piece of writing. The present study attempted to investigate the influence of explicit instruction of transition markers on ESP students' expository writing skill. To this end, 60 homogeneous ESP students majoring in computer science were selected and randomly divided into two groups of 30: an experimental group who received explicit instruction on the use of transition markers to improve their expository writing skills and the control group that just received traditional instruction for their expository writing skills. The study took an academic semester. As the instruction period finished, the participants in both groups took the writing posttest. They were asked to write an essay containing at least 300 words. Ultimately the findings obtained at the posttest demonstrated that the participants of the experimental group had a much better performance than that of the participants of the control group. This revealed the fact that the explicit instruction of transition markers influenced effectively and promoted ESP students' expository writing skills. The results of the study could be of contribution to ESP material and syllabus designers and ESP teachers.

KEYWORDS: Explicit Instruction; Transition Markers; ESP Students; Expository Writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered a skill with a high importance which EFL learners are required to attain some proficiency in. Teaching methods and approaches to the instruction of writing in second/foreign language teaching encountered certain changes in 1990s and consequently there appeared concerns about the real advantages of traditional approaches that emphasized the end product of writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Writing, which was once considered the field of the well-educated, has become an essential tool for people of all walks of life in today's global community (Weigle, 2002). The importance of writing is highlighted in Robinson's (1995) argument that "without writing there would be no history". It is one of the least understood language-production tasks, which both professional and nonprofessional writers often lament that the process of writing is arduous and complex (Kelleher, 1999). Discourse markers in general and transition markers in particular are the devices which may help EFL learners with their writing assignments. Transition markers are a group of cohesive devices that cause the cohesion and smoothness of language (Rahimi, 2011). The omission of discourse markers in one's writing may cause EFL learners' writing to be unorganized and not easy to understand. It should be stated that different kinds of discourse markers with different roles are employed. Put simply, it is quite common for native speakers of every language to apply discourse markers in their communications and that is why their writings seem quite spontaneous and smooth. As a matter of fact, discourse markers have the role of smoothing spontaneous interaction between writers and also facilitating comprehension of the readers. Thus, if EFL learners want to have a more natural and native-like writings, they should adopt discourse markers and apply them properly in their writings (Fuller, 2003).

Since discourse markers are used frequently in written discourse and play roles in the coherence and naturalness of writing, it can be concluded that they should be included in EFL classrooms as well (Rahimi, 2011). Among many devices that serve to maintain cohesion in the text is the (transition) or (connective) a word or phrase, such as "however", "in addition", and "therefore", that "explicates the conceptual relation between different propositions occurring in separate sentences" (Hoey, 1991, p. 69). In fact, transition markers make the written text easy to understand at first time. According to Hyland (2005), transition markers are mainly conjunction and adverbial phrases which help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument by additive, contrastive, and

causative steps in the discourse. Granger and Tyson (1996) found that connectives were one of the facilitating factors to promote nonnative speakers' fluency. Yashima, Yamamoto, and Viswat (1994) also found that the high school students' fluency was facilitated by the use of connectives such as "and", "but", "or", "so", "because", "then", etc. Kawaguchi and Kamimoto (2000) observed distinctive features of oral production by fluent and non-fluent EFL learners, and the results indicated that the fluent speakers employed significantly more cases of coordination ("and", "so", "but", etc.) and subordination ("because," "when", "unless", "that", etc.) than the non-fluent speakers. They referred to the fact that "connectives were used to combine sentences successively and to develop the idea of the previous sentence" (p. 29).

There are some researchers who refer to the similarities between speaking and writing, and emphasize the close relationship of oral and written language (e.g. Burns & Seidlhofer, 2002; Halliday, 1989). Along the same line, one can say that the instruction of transition markers helps EFL learners improve fluency in written discourse. Furthermore, since written discourse is not as time bound as spoken one, which has specific time lag between production and reception (Brown & Yule, 1983; Nunan, 1993), it seems reasonable to suppose that EFL learners have more time to think of connections between sentences and to organize ideas logically while they are writing, rather than while speaking. Accordingly, learning to use transition markers could be more effective at facilitating EFL learners' fluency in written language than in oral language, so that the use of connectives may enable EFL learners to write more about the relevant information and to enhance their fluency in writing. Although research findings strongly support the importance of learners' use of transition markers, many learners and teachers are not aware of the power of consciously use of L2 learning strategies for learning effectively (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Since the late 1980s discourse markers have been studied in a variety of languages and examined in a variety of genres and interactive contexts, though many scholars do not agree on how to define them, even what to call them. Redeker (1991) calls them discourse operators and defines them as "a word or phrase, for instance, a conjunction, adverbial, comment clause, interjection that is uttered with the primary function of bringing to listener's attention a particular kind of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context. Schiffrin (1987) defines discourse markers as "members of a functional class of verbal and nonverbal devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk" (p. 41). Discourse markers have been defined in various ways by different researchers, but as Fraser (1999) states, there is general consensus that "discourse markers impose a relationship between some aspects of a prior discourse segment" (p. 938).

Fraser (1999) also uses the term discourse markers and refers to their problematic and controversial nature. He points out that discourse markers have been studied under different labels and that although researchers have agreed that discourse markers are lexical expressions that relate discourse segments, they have disagreed on their definition and function. There have been so far a lot of terms used to refer to DCs. Among them are discourse marker (Schiffrin, 1987), pragmatic marker (Fraser, 1999), discourse particle (Schoroup, 1985), sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) and connectives (Blakemore, 1987), cue phrases (Hovy, 1995), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991). Every definition of a discourse marker reflects different attitudes towards these lexical items. Swan (1995) gives a clearer definition of discourse markers and a list of some common ones, whereas many other linguists, writers and researchers may slightly deal with these items under various names (signposts, connectives, sentence connectors, key words, transitions etc.). Discourse means pieces of language longer than a sentence. Some words and expressions are used to show how discourse is constructed. They can show the connection between what a speaker is saying and what has already been said or what is being said; they can indicate what speakers think about what they are saying or what others have said (Swan, 1995, p. 151).

Despite the vast variety of terms, some researchers like Schiffrin (1987) preferred to use the term "discourse markers" because it is neutral between the function of connection and their other function, which is the expression of modality as way of leading the hearer toward a certain interpretation. Discourse markers play crucial roles in interactions and they have a high frequency of occurrence in both written and spoken discourse. Schiffrin (1987) presents a very detailed analysis of DMs as linguistic expressions; she studies the semantic and grammatical status of these markers, their functions and characteristics. She maintains that DMs as one of the leading figures in the coherence group, contribute to the coherence of the text by establishing coherence relationships between units of talk (Schiffrin, 1987).

Discourse markers are defined by Schiffrin (1987) as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" and they often help to make interactions coherent by bringing together the different aspects of discourse in a meaningful way (p. 31). In line with Akande (2009), DMs are "peripheral to the syntax of the sentence or the clause they relate to since they can be omitted without causing any damage to the structure of the sentence or clause" (p. 81). This means that DMs can be omitted and such omission does not affect the truth value of the proposition in the sentence or the clause. According to Blakemore (2006, p. 221), "this concept (i.e. discourse marker) is generally used to refer to syntactically heterogeneous class of expressions which are distinguished by their function in discourse and

the kind of meaning they encode.” The basic assumption of all these is that DMs are communicative devices through which participants in interaction can negotiate meaning and cooperate with one another. Syntactically, DMs have peripheral roles and can be omitted without affecting the truth values of the propositions in which they occur (Rouchota, 1996).

Fraser proposes the discourse markers or conjunctions, adverbs as prepositional phrases that connect two sentences or clauses together. Redeker (1991) suggests that discourse markers link not only contiguous sentences, but the current sentence or utterance with its immediate context. Redeker (1991) consider connectives as cohesive devices that cue coherence relations, marking transition points with in a sentence, between sentences, or between turns, both at the local and global levels of conversation and discourse. Their consideration of discourse markers as cohesive devices in line with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) account of cohesion, by which conjunctions signal cohesiveness by means of additive, adversative, causal and temporal relations.

Two discourse units are related:

1. Ideationally, if their utterance in the given context entails the speaker’s commitment to the existence of that relation in the world the discourse describes. For example, temporal sequence, elaboration, cause, reason, and consequence;
2. Rhetorically, if the strongest relation is not between the propositions expressed in the two units but between the illocutionary intentions they convey. For example, antithesis, concession, evidence, justification, and conclusion;
3. Sequentially, if there is a paratactic relation (transition between issues or topics) or hypotactic relation (those leading into or out of a commentary, correction, paraphrase, aside, digression, or interruption sentence) between only loosely related (or indirectly related adjacent discourse sentences (Redeker, 1991, p. 1168).

Transitions markers as one of the most widely used interactive metadiscourse are used to arrange propositions in the text and involve the readers (Blakemore, 2006). According to Hyland (2005), transition markers are mainly conjunctions and adverbial phrases which help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument by making additive, contrastive, and causative steps in the discourse. Addition adds elements to the argument for e.g. and, furthermore, moreover. Comparison marks arguments as either similar (e.g., similarity, likeness, equally) or different (e.g. i contrast, however, but). Consequences relations tell readers that either a conclusion is being drawn or justified (e.g., therefore, consequently) or an argument is being counted (e.g., nevertheless, anyway). Hyland (2005) defined transition markers as conjunction and adverbial phrases that help readers interpret pragmatic connections between steps in an argument by additive, contrastive, and causative steps in the discourse. Fuller (2003) also has mentioned that if second language learners want to have a more natural and native-like writings, they should apply connectives properly in their writings. Halliday and Hasan (1976) have stated that it is proved that conjunctive elements are more difficult for writers to handle because they are not easily identifiable, unlike the other four types of cohesion. McCarthy (1998) believed that the ability to form a coherent discourse is one of the important aspects of second/ foreign language learners’ communicative competence. Therefore, if language learners want to create a connected and well-structured written discourse, they should benefit from the proper use of cohesive devices, such as connectives, in order to develop their essays in a cohesive manner. Osborne and Osborne (1998) provide seven categories which are as follows:

To indicate	Examples
Time changes	until, now, since, later, eventually
Additions	moreover, in addition, furthermore
Comparison	compared with, both are, like, just as
Contrast	but, yet, in contrast, on the contrary
Cause-effect	therefore, thus, consequently
Numerical order	first, second, eventually
Spatial relations	nearby, in the distance, eastward
Explanation	to illustrate, for example, in other words
Importance	most importantly, above all, take note of
The speech is ending	In short, finally, in conclusion

CONJUNCTIONS

Since transition markers are a type of conjunction or connective, discussing discourse connectives and conjunction here is worthwhile. Webber, Knott and Joshi (1999) argue that DCs consist of “words and phrases whose use requires an on-going discourse (i.e., the presence of at least one clause other than that to which the connective is attached) and whose meaning involves (in part) that discourse” (p. 2). Prasad, Dinesh, and Miltsakaki (2005) categorize explicit connectives in English into three main grammatical classes: subordinating conjunctions (e.g. because, when, although,

since), coordinating conjunctions (e.g. and, or, nor) and adverbials (e.g. however, otherwise, for example). The first two groups of discourse connectives require two arguments (discourse segments connected with a DC) that can be identified structurally from adjacent units of discourse whereas the last group of DCs requires two arguments but only one of them drives structurally.

The other one derives anaphorically from the previous discourse. Two distinct functions of discourse connectives have been distinguished by Cohen (1984): (1) enabling the faster recognition of coherence relations by the reader, and (2) allowing the recognition of coherence relations which could not be inferred in the absence of a connective. This implies that in some situations the use of a connective by the writer is optional, whereas in others it is required. Moser and Moore (1995) point out that the writer has to decide which connective to use to signal a given coherence relation, as the correspondence between connectives and relations is not one-to-one. Similarly to connectives, conjunction as stated by Halliday (1989), refers to how a writer creates and expresses the logical relationships between the parts of a text. Conjunctive relations typically involve contiguous elements up to the size of paragraphs, or their equivalent in spoken language; conjunction (in this sense) is a way of setting up the logical relations that characterize clause complexes in the absence of structural relationships by which such complexes are defined.

Halliday and Hassan (1976) argue that when we use conjunctions as a means of creating text, we may exploit either the relations that are inherent in the phenomena or in the communication. To establish the relations between the goings-on, activities, states, thoughts, etc. in the real world, we make advantage of external conjunctions, whereas to link the relations between two or more ideas in the organizing of the discourse, we benefit from internal conjunctions. The term connective does not refer to a part of Speech (word class) like conjunction or adverb. It is because they all do the same job of linking parts of a text that we treat but, nevertheless and in spite of as connectives.

There are three main categories of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions, subordinate conjunctions and sentence connectors. Coordinating conjunctions connect two independent clauses, for example: he worked hard for the exam, therefore he passed it successfully. Subordinating conjunctions express the relationship between a dependent clause and independent clause, for example: After he came, we began our chores. Sentence connectors (transitions) usually make a relationship between two or more independent clauses for example: we did not expect him to come. But, he came.

Celce Murcia and Larsen Freeman (1999) classified conjunctions in to three categories: coordinating conjunctions, adverbial subordinators, and conjunctive adverbials. Their usages are given as follows: Coordinating conjunctions were said (a) to join syntactically equivalent constituents and (b) to lead the listener / reader to certain interpretations of the way that clauses relate to each other meaningfully adverbial subordinators for students and conjunctive adverbials are often called logical connectors. Like some uses of coordinating conjunctions, logical connectors are typically said to be types of cohesive devices, lexical expression that may add little or no propositional content by themselves but that serve to specify the relationship among sentences in oral or Written discourse, thereby leading the listener / reader to the feeling that the students “hang together “ or make sense . (p. 519)

Parrott (2004) add discorsal function of conjunction into definition. He divided conjunctions into three categories: coordinating conjunction, subordinating conjunctions and discourse markers. Coordinating conjunctions include only three words: and, but, and or, They can serve to (a) link together parts of constituents and are therefore contained within the constituent, and (b) to form a link between clauses. Subordinating conjunctions serve to link two clauses of unequal importance. They consist of (a) one word, such as after, although and if, (b) two or more words: as if, as soon as, and as long as. And those connective elements between sentences indicating logical relationships and sequence are called “discourse markers.”

Halliday and Hassan (1976) classify conjunctive discourse markers into four types: additive, adversative, causal, temporal. Additive is a generalized semantic relation in the text forming component of the semantic system that is based on the logical notion of "and". Adversative is a relation that is based on the notion of “contrary to expectation”. The expectation may be derived from the content of what is being said, i.e. from the communication process, the speaker –hearer situation. Causal is a relation which includes general causal relations specific causal relations such as those of result, reason and purpose. Temporal is a relation of sequence in time. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), the conjunction is one of the four kinds of cohesive devices in texts, “expressing certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse,” and the relationships expressed by the conjunctions are termed as conjunctive relations. Besides, Halliday and Hassan (1976) explain that “cohesion is the relation between sentences in a text,” conjunction is, in fact, linking elements among sentences. In other words, the term ‘conjunctions’ refers to those linking elements occurring inter –sentential, while those used intra-sentential should not be considered as true conjunctions hierarchy of relations proposed by Prasad et. al. (2008) involves four main categories as temporal, contingency, comparison and expansion. However, for the purposes of the present study, mainly the comparison category is used as the connective examined in the study is contrastive class.

Both being acquainted with different writing genres and being familiar with the internal features of written texts can affect learners writing quality to a large extent. The notion of genre is defined as “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language (Hyland, 2003) which are purposeful communicative activities applied by members of a particular discourse community.

Argumentative writing as a fundamental writing style is required in higher education to compose various types of writings, to pursue the goal of convincing an audience. Where there exists a conflict between the beliefs and attitudes of the writer/speaker and the reader/audience, this type of writing genre is often used in a situation. Connor (1996) identifies four dimensions of argumentative texts that are unique to this genre. Superstructure refers to the “organizational plan of any text and ... the linear progression of the text” (p. 74). The second feature is the quality of logical reasoning which is assessed by analyzing the interrelationships of writers' assertions and the associated support or data provided to substantiate those claims. The third feature of good argumentative writing is identified as persuasive appeal, including affective appeal and establishment of writer credibility. Finally, she notes that audience awareness is an important characteristic of successful argumentative writing. The writer must observe an awareness of the reader's perspective by "dealing implicitly or explicitly with possible counterarguments" (p. 76). Based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, Connor (1996) compared six argumentative essays written by English native and ESL learners. There found to be not any significant difference between native and ESL students in the frequency of discourse markers.

Field and Yip (1992) analyzed and compared the argumentative writings of 67 Hong Kong with 29 Australians. They pointed out that nonnative learners of English used more conjunctions than Australians and nonnatives usually use all conjunctions at the beginning of the sentences. Using the same framework, Liu and Braine (2005) investigated the use of cohesive devices in 50 argumentative compositions written by Chinese undergraduate non-English majors and also critically dissected the relationship between the number of cohesive devices and writing quality. Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) analysis of elements in text cohesion, Crowhurst (1990) examined differences in the argumentative prose written by 105 students in sixth, tenth, and twelfth grade. The scale used to examine the students' writing contained 15 types of cohesive ties. Crowhurst found a significant difference among grades for the frequency of four kinds of cohesion: same lexical item, other lexical items, long-distance ties, and long-distance ties in the last three T-units. These differences reveal that the older students were more likely to foreshadow and summarize their arguments, thus producing long-distance ties and the repetition of the same lexical items in summaries. In addition, the older students, who have larger vocabularies, more frequently used a variety of terms to refer to the same concept. In this study Crowhurst found no significant difference among grade levels in the number of students using the various types of cohesion. Crowhurst notes that the finding of differences in only 4 of the 15 types of cohesion does not reveal very much about the distinctions in argumentative writing ability among the three age groups.

Expository writing is the other genre of writing used frequently by ESL/EFL learners and users. Johnson (1992) dissected 20 expository essays in the country Malay and 20 essays in English by the same group of Malay students and 20 essays in English by native speakers. They found no significant difference in the degree of cohesion between good and weak compositions written by native speakers in Malay or in English by native and Malay speakers. Generally speaking, findings suggested that second language learners underuse DMs compared to the native speakers especially for their pragmatic functions. Karasi (1994) comparing the frequency of discourse markers used by native and non-native speakers of English, analyzed 135 expository essays composed by Singaporean secondary students and pointed out that there is no difference between native and ESL students in the frequency of cohesive devices. In a similar study, Zhang (2000) concentrated on the application of cohesive devices in the expository compositions of 107 Chinese undergraduates from two Chinese universities. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy and framework were utilized. A variety of cohesives were used by the students. Some categories of ties were used more frequently than the others. Lexical devices were the most frequently used, followed by conjunctions and reference devices were used least frequently. Findings showed no statistically significant relationship between the number of cohesive devices and the quality of students' writings. Some cohesive devices were misused or overused in the expository writing of Chinese undergraduates.

Zhang (2000) examined two major academic genres of writing: argumentative and technical writing. Three hundred eighty-four undergraduate student-produced texts were analyzed through a computational tool called Coh-Metrix. The results showed that students used genre-dependent cohesive devices in a limited way to write research papers. Students' writings were examined in seven dimensions of textual cohesion. For instance, it was found that students' argumentative writing texts tend to have complex syntactic structures (due to overuse of premodifications) that affect the cohesion of texts. Furthermore, students employed impersonal constructions (passive voice) in their technical writing; however, over-indulgence in passive voice may also cause ambiguous meanings. As to the causal

cohesion dimension, the results suggested that college students write argumentative writing with more causal cohesion than for their technical writing. On the dimension of connectives, it was found that college students' argumentative texts include significantly more connectives in their argumentative writing than in their technical writing, excepting the use of positive temporal connectives. In addition, it was found that students' technical writing showed significantly higher co-referential cohesion than students' argumentative writing for all measures. At the dimension of density of part of speech, students used personal pronouns are used less in their technical writing than in their argumentative writing. Regarding syntax complexity, students used significantly more modifiers in their technical writing than in their argumentative writing. Finally, students-produced argumentative texts are more difficult to comprehend than their technical writing texts.

The acquisition and the appropriate use of connectives has been reported as one of the problem areas for L2 learners of different languages and especially for the learners of English by various researchers (e.g., Milton & Tsang, 1993; Chen, 2006). Yasuko (1989) examined the use of connectives by Japanese learners in English academic papers. He analyzed the connectives using the categories of connectives combining the Halliday and Hasan's categorization with that of Bell (2010). He found out that each connective type was subject to certain types of errors. Japanese learners tended to overuse additive connectives and he stated that such an overuse in writing might be due to the colloquialism. On the other hand, they tended to omit adversative connectives and he explained this use with the lack of awareness on the part of the learners that adversative relation is usually marked and needs a connective. He also reported that causal connectives created a problem area for Japanese learners as they used them when they were not necessary and they did not use them when actually they were necessary. He explained the overuse with transfer from L1 and the different ways an argument is developed in Japanese and in English.

Similarly, Milton and Tsang (1993) analyzed the corpus of Chinese learners of English for the use of connectives and compared their use with that of native speakers in the American Brown Corpus, its British counterpart, the LOB corpus and HKUST corpus consisting of extracts from first-year university Computer Science textbooks. This study revealed that there was a high ratio of overuse of connectives by nonnative learners. Milton and Tsang classified the problems of connector use into two: misuse and redundant use and they provided student samples of writing to describe these uses for moreover and therefore. They stated that the problems in the teaching of coherence, teaching of writing, and the writing habits and attitudes of learners that they bring from their previous education.

Milton and Tsang (1993) investigated how Chinese learners handled connectives in their writing and they collected 32 pieces of writing from the Science and Arts departments. The results showed that science students used fewer connectives and that the listing, regulative and contrastive connectives were used significantly more than others. Tang and Ng (1995) listed the top ten most frequently used connectives and in the list and however were the first two connectives. They also examined the position of the connectives in the sentences and found out that two groups of learners had different preferences for the same connectives regarding the position of the connective. For instance, although besides and however were mostly used in the sentence initial position by both groups of learners, therefore was used mostly in initial position by science students whereas arts students preferred to put it in non-initial position. In the discussion part of their work, the authors stated that the students had difficulty in building logical arguments, developing and organizing ideas and due to this difficulty; there was a high frequency of connectives in their writing.

Field and Yip (1992) in Hong Kong examined the use of three types of cohesive devices, say, reference, conjunction, and lexis in essays of 150 foreign language learners referring to their narrative and descriptive essays. They found that the three easiest writing devices were remote cohesive devices, immediate cohesive devices, and mediate cohesive devices and the three hardest writing devices were temporal conjunctions, causal conjunctions, and adversative conjunctions. The writings of 67 Hong Kong students with 29 Australians on an argumentative topic were compared by Field and Yip (1992). They proved that nonnative learners of English used more conjunctions than Australians and they usually put all conjunctions at the beginning of sentences. In a study of this type, comparing the number of cohesive devices used by native and non-native speakers of English, Karasi (1994) examined 135 expository essays by Singaporean secondary students. They showed no difference between native and English as second language (ESL) students in the frequency of Meta discourse markers.

Milton and Tsang (1993) investigated the relationship between the use of connectives and the learners' length of study. Eighteen samples of writing were collected and examined for the misuse, overuse, underuse and grammar errors. The study confirmed that length of study had an effect on the number of connectives used but it did not lead to producing greater number of subordinators. The group who studied English for a longer period of time produced wider range of connectives but the length of study had also an effect on incorrect uses. Some connectives were overused and there were grammar errors with some others such as because. On the other hand, the incorrect uses of but was reported to be evenly distributed among all categories of errors. From these findings, it was suggested that learners should be taught when not to use connectives and be aware of the grammatical constraints of individual connectives. As the

study showed that many of the errors were caused due to the transfer of conventions of speech to writing, it is also suggested that learners should understand the appropriate register for writing.

Chen (2006) analyzed the cohesive errors in the writing of Chinese tertiary EFL students using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework. For the study, 80 essays were selected, analyzed for the cohesive errors and also marked by two raters. Regarding the errors in conjunction, the author stated that these types of errors were extensively found in student essays. Specifically, errors in use of adversatives and additives were more common than errors in using causals and temporal. On the other hand, the author reported that there was no significant difference between the good essays and the poor essays in the use of subcategories of conjunction and this implies that the use of conjunctive ties is a general problem for all students with a Chinese first language background. The results of the study showed that there was an overuse of additive conjunctions, and misuse in the use of some adversative conjunctions.

Altenberg (1999) notes that as grammatical categories, English and Swedish conjuncts correspond in slightly more than 70% of the cases in the material. Altenberg also observed that "from the point of view of their language systems, English and Swedish have a similar range of connecting words and phrases to signal semantic relationships between units of discourse". Thus, there seem to be no signs leading to the expectation that Swedish learners should find English connectives particularly problematic. However, some potentially challenging areas might be identified from Altenberg's results. For example, the overall frequency of conjuncts in Altenberg's Swedish data was greater than in the English data, and this tendency was particularly evident in the appositive, listing and contrastive semantic categories of conjuncts. The suggestion that conjuncts might be used more frequently in Swedish texts is supported by the fact that Altenberg found that conjuncts were omitted more frequently in the English translations of Swedish original texts than in the Swedish translations of English original texts.

Chen (2006) explored the use of conjunctive adverbials in two corpora compiled by the author, one that consists of 23 papers by Taiwanese learners and the other being the control corpus that consists of 10 journal articles. For the study, Chen (2006) adopted Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (1999) simplified version of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) classification. It was found that L2 learners slightly overused connectors and that many L2 learners misused besides and therefore. One of his suggestions at the end of the study was to raise students' sensitivity on register differences. In a recent study, Ying (2007) investigated the similarities and differences in the usage of discourse markers among native speakers of English, nonnative Chinese students and nonnative Japanese students. The researcher collected 300 compositions in total which were expository and narrative. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the nonnative learners and the native learners regarding the use of discourse markers. On the other hand, there was no such difference between the Chinese learners and Japanese learners. It was found that nonnative learners used fewer types of discourse markers than the native learners. Moreover, the researcher observed several cases of misuse of discourse markers by the nonnative learners and these misuses were considered to be due to L1 interference.

In a recent study, Altunay (2009) investigated the use of connectives in written discourse by Turkish ELT department students. She collected the argumentative essays of 132 first year students from the English Language Teaching B.A. program at a Turkish university. For the classification of DCs, Halliday and Hasan's categories were adapted and for discourse appropriateness and structural correctness. Altunay (2009) examined the connectives for appropriate use, misuse, overuse and underuse, grammatical and punctuation errors. According to the study, the most frequently used top ten connectives were and, but, if, so, because, when, in conclusion, first of all, however, and firstly.

METHOD PARTICIPANTS

The present study employed two intact classes of computer science at university. One of these two classes had 38 and the other had 33 students. To check their writing proficiency, all 71 students took a writing test which was piloted before the study commenced. The researcher designed a test of writing based on the topics selected from the book "Absolute Beginner's Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista" (O'Hara & Mansfield, 2007). The test was administered to 15 students majoring in computer science to check its reliability. After the administration of the test, their papers were given to two raters who were EFL teachers to grade them. The Pearson-Product correlation was applied and the reliability coefficient of the pretest was .86. As for the posttest, the same procedure was used. Through another pilot study, the reliability coefficient obtained for the posttest was .84. 60 out of 71 students passed the pretest and constituted the population of the study. The researcher randomly selected 30 students as the experimental group and the other 30 as the control group. The experimental group received explicit instruction on transition markers to improve their expository writing skills and the control group received no instruction on transition markers for their expository writing skills. The participants' ages varied from 20 to 37.

INSTRUMENTS AND MATERIALS

The following instruments and materials were used in order to collect the data in this study:

1. A topic was taken from “Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista” (O’Hara & Mansfield, 2007). The topic was used for the pretest. The test was employed to enable the researcher to check the participants’ writing proficiency and homogeneity. The test was piloted and administered to 15 students majoring in computer science. The reliability coefficient of the test was 0.86 based on the Pearson-Product Correlation.
2. A topic was taken from “Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista” (O’Hara & Mansfield, 2007). It was used for the posttest. At first, the test was piloted and administered to 15 students of computer science. The reliability coefficient of the test was 0.84 via the Pearson-Product Correlation. Then, the test was administered to all participants in both groups to check their ability in their expository writing.
3. Twelve topics were taken from “Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista” (O’Hara & Mansfield, 2007). These topics were used for the writing activities in both classes.
4. The following transition markers (Osborne & Osborne, 1998) were explicitly taught to the participants in the experimental group:

To indicate	Examples
Time changes	until, now, since, later, eventually
Additions	moreover, in addition, furthermore
Comparison	compared with, both are, like, just as
Contrast	but, yet, in contrast, on the contrary
Cause-effect	therefore, thus, consequently
Numerical order	first, second, eventually
Spatial relations	nearby, in the distance, eastward
Explanation	to illustrate, for example, in other words
Importance	most importantly, above all, take note of
The speech is ending	In short, finally, in conclusion

In both the pretest and the posttest, the ESP students in both groups were asked to write an essay containing at least 300 words. The essays in the posttest were examined to find out whether the explicit instruction of transition markers significantly influenced the participants’ expository writing skill in the experimental group. To rate their writing activities, scoring rubric (McGraw-Hill, 2013) was used.

PROCEDURE

To select the homogenous participants and check their proficiency and use of transition markers in the writing skill, the researcher designed a test of writing. Then, he administered the test to 15 students majoring in computer science. The test included a topic taken “Absolute Beginner’s Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista” (O’Hara & Mansfield, 2007). The testees were allotted 60 minutes to write a 300-word essay on the topic given. Then, their papers were given to two raters who were EFL teachers. The raters were provided with the following independent writing scoring rubric (McGraw-Hill, 2013):

Table 1
Independent Writing Scoring Rubric

Score	Task Description
5 (17-20)	<p>An essay at this level largely accomplishes all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Effectively addresses the topic and task ✓ Is well organized and well developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications, and/or details ✓ Displays unity, progression, and coherence ✓ Displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice, and idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors <p>An essay at this level largely accomplishes all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Addresses the topic and task well, though some points may not be fully elaborated

(13-16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is generally well organized and well developed, using appropriate and sufficient explanations, exemplifications, and/or details ✓ Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though it may contain occasional redundancy, digression, or unclear connections ✓ Displays facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary, though it will probably have occasional noticeable minor errors in structure, word form, or use of idiomatic language that do not interfere with meaning
3 (9-12)	<p>An essay at this level is marked by one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Addresses the topic and task using somewhat developed explanations, exemplifications, and/or details ✓ Displays unity, progression, and coherence, though connection of ideas may be occasionally obscured ✓ May demonstrate inconsistent facility in sentence formation and word choice that may result in lack of clarity and occasionally obscure meaning ✓ May display accurate but limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary
2 (5-8)	<p>An essay at this level may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Limited development in response to the topic and task ✓ Inadequate organization or connection of ideas ✓ Inappropriate or insufficient exemplifications, explanations, or details to support or illustrate generalizations in response to the task ✓ A noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms ✓ An accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage
1 (1-4)	<p>An essay at this level is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Serious disorganization or underdevelopment ✓ Little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics, or questionable responsiveness to the task ✓ Serious and frequent errors in sentence structure or usage
0	<p>An essay at this level merely copies words from the topic, rejects the topic, or is otherwise not connected to the topic, is written in a foreign language, consists of keystroke characters, or is blank.</p>

Grounded upon the scoring rubric presented above, the raters graded the papers. Through Pearson-Product Correlation, the reliability coefficient was .86. This assured the researcher that the test was reliable enough to be administered to 71 ESP students to have a homogenous population. Two weeks later, another test designed by the researcher was administered to the same 15 students who took the first writing test. This test of writing was expected to be used as the posttest at the end of the study. The same procedure used for the pretest was also employed for the posttest to make sure that the writing test was reliable. Through Pearson-Product Correlation, the reliability coefficient was .84.

To start the investigation, the researcher administered the pretest to 71 available ESP students majoring in computer science. They were asked to write an essay containing at least 300 words about the following topic:

Topic: Explain a computer-assisted method for the recording and analyzing the existing or hypothetical systems.

All the testees were allotted 60 minutes to write their essays. They were told to observe the content, organization, cohesion, style, register, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and mechanics in their essays. When they finished their test, their papers were given to two raters to grade. Based on the results obtained, 60 homogeneous students were selected. Then, these 60 students were randomly divided into two groups of 30: an experimental group who received explicit instruction on transition markers to improve their expository writing skills and the control group just received traditional instruction for their expository writing skills. During the treatment period, the participants in the experimental group were taught the transitions markers and their correct usage. In each session, the teacher in this group made attempts to:

1. Explicitly teach them the transition markers,
2. Explain the purpose and benefits of such markers,
3. Explain how to use them in their expository writing,
4. Correct their writing errors,
5. Provide the ESP students with some topics taken from "Absolute Beginner's Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista" (O'Hara & Mansfield, 2007) to write an essay about.

As regards the control group, they followed a type of instruction in which the ESP teacher did not teach them the transition markers and their usage. They were just provided with the same topics given to the participants in the experimental group. The study took an academic semester. As the instruction period finished, the participants in both groups took the writing posttest. They were asked to write an essay containing at least 300 words. The topic of the writing posttest was as follows:

Topic: Explain the processes and steps in creating a computer program.

The participants in both groups were expected to explain and discuss the steps required in creating a computer program, observing spelling, grammaticality, coherence, and cohesion as the major features of the performance on the writing examination. To grade the ESP students' essays in both groups, the raters used the independent writing scoring rubric (McGraw-Hill, 2013). Then, the raw scores obtained from the two groups were fed into SPSS16.0 to be analyzed through independent samples t-test to check the probable difference between the two groups' performances on the posttest.

RESULTS

As stated earlier in chapter three, the researcher used the Pearson-Product Correlation to check the reliability of both the pretest and the posttest in the two pilot studies. As regards the pretest, it was a writing proficiency test from "Absolute Beginner's Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista" (O'Hara & Mansfield, 2007). The researcher employed it to check the writing proficiency and homogeneity of the participants in the two classes. The reliability coefficient of the test was 0.86 based on the Pearson-Product Correlation.

As regards the posttest, it should be pointed out that it was a writing test taken from "Absolute Beginner's Guide to Microsoft Windows Vista" (O'Hara & Mansfield, 2007) whose reliability coefficient was 0.84. To score the essays written by the 60 participants, the study enjoyed two raters to score the essays. Then, the inter-rater reliability was used to calculate the degree of agreement among the raters. Subsequent to the end of the treatment period for the experimental groups, both groups' participants took part in the posttest. The data obtained was analyzed through independent samples t-test procedure to compare the means of both the experimental groups and the control groups' performances on the posttest in order to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the associated population means were significantly different. And finally, to compare the performances of each group in the pretest and the posttest, paired sample t-test was utilized.

Table 1

Pilot Study for the Pretest

No. of Participants	Pearson-Product Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
15	0.86	.000

The present investigation used 15 students to sit for a writing test to examine the reliability of the test. Through Pearson-Product Correlation, the inter-rater reliability of the test was obtained. Table 1 shows that the test enjoyed a reliability coefficient of 0.86 which was dependable enough to select a homogeneous research population.

Table 2

Pilot Study for the Posttest

No. of Participants	Pearson-Product Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
15	0.84	.000

The researcher conducted another pilot study on a writing test. The test was intended to be administered to the participants in both the experimental and the control groups to examine their writing ability at the end of the treatment period. As stated earlier, those 15 participants who took the first test in the pilot study also sat for the second test. The same scoring and rating procedure was employed and its reliability coefficient was 0.84, showing that the test was qualified to examine the writing ability of the participants in both groups at the posttest.

Table 3
Inter-Rater Reliability for the Pretest

No. of Participants in both Groups	Pearson-Product Correlation
60	0.83

Using independent writing scoring rubric, both raters almost reached a consensus on their scoring procedure. The table given above reveals their scoring results.

Table 4
Both Groups' Performances on the Pretest

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	30	8.5333	3.17026	.57881
Control	30	7.9667	2.74783	.50168

As regards the performance of both groups on the pretest, the results presented in table 4 display that the two groups enjoyed nearly the same ability in writing.

Table 5
Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.726	.398	.740	58	.462	.56667	.76597	-.96658	2.09992	
Equal variances not assumed			.740	56.853	.462	.56667	.76597	-.96724	2.10067	

According to Table 5 the Sig. (2-tailed) value (.462) is more than 0.05, claiming the fact that both groups were homogenous in terms of their writing ability.

Table 6
Inter-Rater Reliability for the Posttest

No. of Participants in both Groups	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2tailed)
60	0.85	.000

All the participants of the study took part in the posttest of the study. The independent writing scoring rubric was used by the two raters and both of them had an agreement concerning their scoring procedures. The Pearson-Product Correlation coefficient (0.85) demonstrated consensus in the two raters' scoring procedure.

Table 7
Both Groups' Performances on the Posttest

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	30	17.6000	1.84951	.33767
Control	30	9.6000	3.28634	.60000

The results obtained at the posttest of the study indicated that the participants of the experimental group had a much better performance than that of the participants of the control group. This revealed the fact that the explicit instruction of transition markers influenced effectively and promoted ESP students' expository writing skill. Table 7 has the details.

Table 8
Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	7.593	.008	11.620	58	.000	8.00000	.68849	6.62183	9.37817
Equal variances not assumed			11.620	45.696	.000	8.00000	.68849	6.61389	9.38611

Based on table 8, the Sig. (2-tailed) is (.000) is less than 0.05, demonstrating the fact that the participants of the experimental group outperformed their counterparts in the control group.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present investigation depicted that the participants in the experimental group who received explicit instruction on transition markers made more frequent use of them in their expository writing essays. On the contrary, the participants of the control group who received no instruction on transition markers did not use them frequently in their expository writing essays. This could be attributed to the influence of explicit instruction on the use of transition markers. Based on this and other previous studies, it can be stated that that transition markers play a crucial role in the writing skill. All participants of the study enjoyed approximately insufficient knowledge of transition markers and this reveals that all of them needed to master the correct application of such discourse markers in their English in general and their writing skills in particular. There are some scholars referring to the necessity of using transitions, for instance, Fraser (1999), Giora (1997), Redeker (1990), Schiffrin (1987), Zwicky (1985). They claim that such markers play a major role in the interpretation of the text. Moreover, all of the students clearly stated that they did not know what type of Transitions they needed to use. In fact, they rarely could realize how often they make use of them in writing and they did not also realize how frequently and where they used them. This can be due to lack of clear instruction. Teachers do not focus adequately on connectives in the classroom and are not aware of explicit teaching, as the result of this study reveals that how useful explicit instruction is for learners. Hence, it could be the consequence of implicit instruction and confining to the textbooks lists.

According to the previous studies, learning to use transition markers could be effective at increasing students' fluency in written language as well as oral language. They can enable students to write more about the relevant information and to enhance their fluency in writing. The findings of the present study implied that the teacher's explicit instruction on the use of transitional markers had an effect on increasing the proper use of these markers. Furthermore, ESP students can be more grammatically equipped with knowing when and where to use transition markers in their writing, especially expository essay writing. Of course, teacher instruction should be based on the most critical needs of student writers (Conrad & Goldstein, 1999; Ferris, 1997, 2003; Reid 1994). The results of the pretest showed that almost all of the participants of the study did not know how to use transition markers properly. For example, they sometimes used causal devices (e.g., therefore, thus, consequently) without any clear cause-effect relationships among parts of sentences. They also had problems with the initial positioning of conjunction devices even when it is allowed

to place them in non-initial position. That is, most of conjunctive words or phrases appeared at the beginning of sentences. Similar finding was found in Zhang's study (2000).

Ferris (2003) suggested that competence in research writing includes a developed knowledge of linking words, i.e. when, where and how to use them. This knowledge varies across disciplines and this implies that an awareness of discipline variations is necessary for writing teachers. For example, Rollinson, (2005) argues that different text genre require different relationships between the ideas; for instance, description entails cognitive properties of interrelation and differentiation of perceptions in space, while narration requires relationship in time; or, exposition involves comprehension of general concepts through differentiation by analysis or synthesis, while argument needs evaluation of the concepts through extraction of similarities, contrasts, or transformations. This means that different text types do not necessarily cohere in the same way and require different textual links. Therefore, students should receive proper and adequate input to find different proportions of use of such markers in different texts. This is in line with the previous research that reported a positive impact of instruction of discourse markers on language writing (Ferris, 2003). Obviously, ESP students who can cope with writing tasks, dealing with creating cohesion text, feel more successful in writing in a foreign language. This finding is also supported by Han (2001) referring to the effects of discourse markers' relationship with self-perceived success of learners in writing in a foreign language.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the influence of explicit instruction of transition markers on ESP students' expository writing skill. There were two groups: an experimental group receiving explicit instruction on the use of transition markers and the control group receiving no instruction of using such markers in their expository essay writing. The whole investigation lasted for an academic semester. Finally, the findings of the posttest indicated that the participants of the experimental group had a much better performance than that of the participants of the control group. This revealed the fact that the explicit instruction of transition markers influenced effectively and promoted ESP students' expository writing skill. Regarding both performances of the participants in the experimental group, it should be stated that there was a statistically significant difference between the results obtained in the pretest and the posttest. The paired t-test was used to compare the two populations' means. The mean of the pretest in the experimental group was 8.5333 and the mean of the posttest was 17.6000. Therefore, the participants of the experimental group not only outperformed their counterparts in the control group but this time they excelled themselves in the posttest compared to their performance in the pretest. As regards the two performances of the control group' participants in the pretest and the posttest, it is to be stated that there was some difference between both the pretest and the posttest performances. It should be stated that the difference between these two performances was not statistically significant. This demonstrated the fact that the participants in the control group did not have a statistically significant progress in their expository writing ability.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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