

A Study of Discourse Markers in Foreign Language Classrooms from the Perspective of Conversation Analysis

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Abstract: Based on conversation analysis theory, this study explored how teachers and students used discourse markers in foreign language classrooms and how these markers affect classroom interaction. The results showed that teachers use different discourse markers in different teaching stages such as lead-in, presentation, practice and summary to make their teaching more organized and clearer. However, students used these markers less often, and their expressions are often less coherent. Based on these findings, the study suggests teaching strategies for teachers and learning strategies for students to improve how they use discourse markers. This can help make foreign language teaching more effective and interactive.

Keywords: Conversation analysis; Discourse markers; Foreign language teaching; Teaching strategies; Teacher-student interaction

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1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, with fast growing information technology, the goal of foreign language teaching is no longer just about teaching vocabulary and grammar. It now aims to help learners communicate effectively using the language. Discourse markers play a key role in building logical connections in language. Conversation analysis offers a new way to study how language is used in the classroom. This study focuses on how teachers and students use discourse markers in foreign language classes. It looks at how these markers are used in different teaching stages and contexts. The study also offers suggestions to make teaching more effective and interactive.

2. Overview of conversation analysis

In the 1960s, American sociologists Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson created conversation analysis. The goal of this theory is not to describe the structure of language or to explain meaning, but to

discover the methods people use in social interaction and the social order behind these methods ^[1]. It looks at turn-taking, sequence organization and adjacency pairs. It stresses that communication is orderly and connected and shows how speakers tend to respond. It also studies how turns are given and taken. Recently, more and more researchers have used conversation analysis to study discourse markers and communicative acts in classroom interaction in order to find problems and improve teaching ^[2].

3. Theoretical background of discourse markers

In linguistics, discourse markers have been given different names over the years, such as pragmatic particles, discourse particles, discourse connectives, and pragmatic markers ^[3]. This paper uses the most common term “discourse markers”. Discourse markers are words or phrases that connect sentences or paragraphs. They show logical or semantic relationships. In spoken language, they can start a topic, change a topic, show a response, or even work as fillers to help the speaker keep their turn ^[4]. They help speakers organize their thoughts and guide listeners to understand the structure of the conversation. He Ziran and Ran Yongping, stated that discourse markers do not carry semantic meaning but provide procedural meaning ^[5]. They guide listeners and help them understand the talk. These markers are part of discourse form and also part of discourse organization. They affect how discourse is built and understood and show dynamic pragmatic features ^[6].

4. Research methods

4.1. Participants

The study focuses on teachers and students in the English department of a university. It looks at how teachers use discourse markers in both online and offline classes and when and how often they use them in stages such as lead-in, presentation, practice and summary. It also looks at how much students know about discourse markers and how they use them in class.

4.2. Data collection

To understand the use of discourse markers, the study used several methods. First, it recorded and transcribed classroom talk to observe how often teachers and students used discourse markers in different stages and contexts. Second, it gave questionnaires to students in the English department to learn about their knowledge and attitudes toward discourse markers.

4.3. Analysis methods

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis was based on conversation analysis theory. It used sequence analysis, adjacency pair analysis and turn-taking analysis to study classroom discourse markers and their effects on interaction. Quantitative analysis used the transcriptions to count the frequency, types and distribution of discourse markers in class. Together with the questionnaire results, the study then gave suggestions for improving teaching through discourse markers.

5. Findings

5.1. How teachers use discourse markers

In the study, the teacher used discourse markers 23 times in class. 65.2% appeared during the presentation stage

as shown in **Figure 1**. This shows that when explaining difficult ideas, the teacher used markers to make the content clearer and more connected, but the use was uneven. In the lead-in stage, the teacher often used “well”, “okay” and “so” to get students’ attention and to show the learning goals. During presentation, the teacher used “for example,” “like” and “however” to make the content clearer and more logical. In the summary stage, the teacher used “to sum up” and “therefore” to review the main points. Using different markers in different stages helped build a clear knowledge line and helped students understand and absorb the content. The teacher’s use of discourse markers clearly improved teaching and increased student participation. In online classes, where face-to-face nonverbal cues are missing, the teacher relied more on discourse markers. These markers helped keep students’ attention and participation and made up for the lack of nonverbal communication. When students received clear instructions through the markers, they gave active feedback. This process followed the rules of turn-taking.

Classroom Information					
Teaching Mode			Online Class		
Teacher’s name			Ms Zhang		
Number of Students			34		
Class Duration			51 minutes		

Classroom Observation Form					
Teaching Phase	Context	Discourse Markers Types	User	Frequency (times)	Effect (Description)
Lead-in	Questioning, engaging attention	well, okay, so	Teacher	5	Guides students to focus and sets learning objectives
Presentation	Concept explanation, example analysis	for example, like, however	Teacher	15	Enhances clarity and coherence, improves student comprehension
Practice	Teacher-student Q&A, student responses	right?, you know	Students	8	Encourages active expression of ideas, promotes natural and fluent language use
Summary	Content review, assigning homework	to sum up, therefore	Teacher	3	Provides clear summarization, helps students consolidate key points

Figure 1. Classroom disclosure markers observation form.

5.2. How students use discourse markers

Students used discourse markers much less often than teachers, only 8 times in total, mostly during interactive parts of the lesson. They often used markers like “right?” and “you know” to confirm information or express their ideas. However, because they used these markers less often, their speech was sometimes less coherent. For example, when teachers asked questions using clear markers like “Do you agree with...?”, students often did not respond in a connected way. This broke the adjacency pair structure and could cause misunderstanding in class^[7]. According to the survey, only 29.41% of students often use discourse markers in daily language learning. About 49.02% use them sometimes as shown in **Figure 2**, and 19.6% hardly ever use them. However, 92.16% of students said it is necessary to learn about discourse markers in class, and 84.31% said they are willing to learn more.

These results show that although students know discourse markers exist, they do not yet use them often or on purpose. Possible reasons include lack of knowledge about how and when to use them, lack of practice chances, or more attention to vocabulary and grammar than to markers. Another reason may be that teachers treat discourse markers as natural patterns and do not stress their importance, so students do not fully understand their function and value.

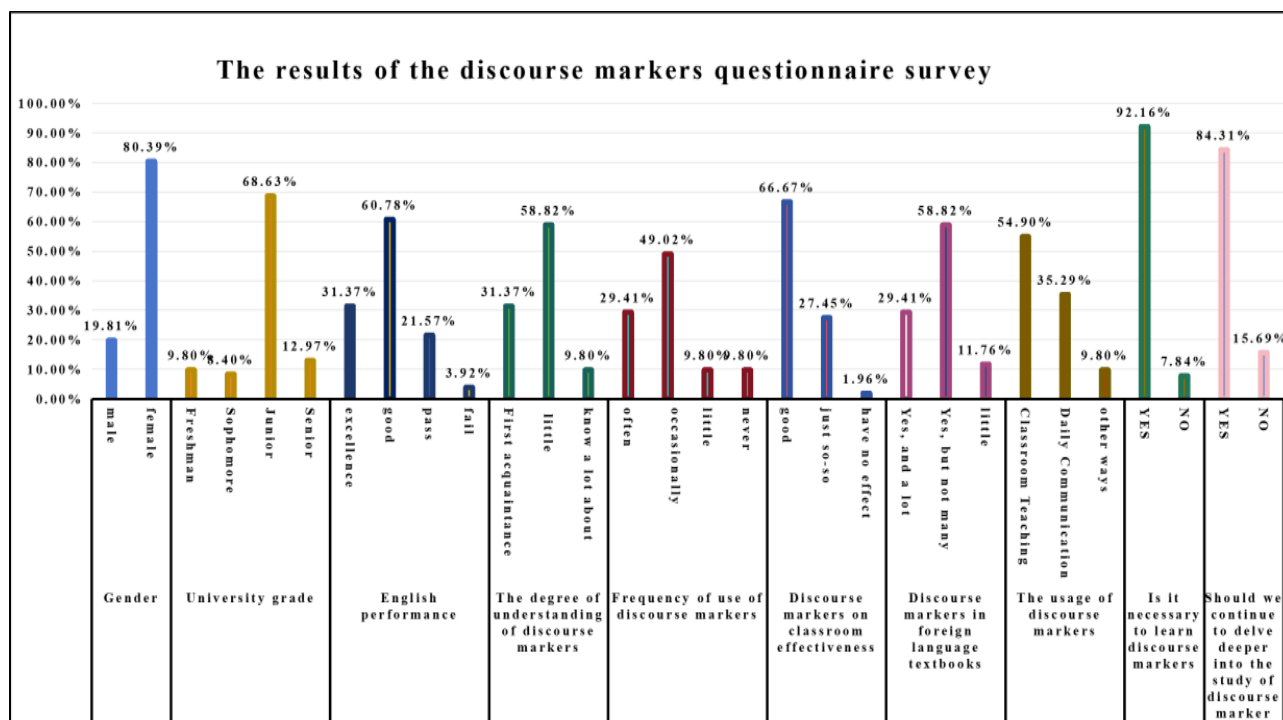


Figure 2. Survey results on discourse markers usage.

6. Teaching strategies for discourse markers

6.1. Strategies for teachers

Teachers can use regular feedback and self-assessment to look at how often they use discourse markers in different stages and to see which markers work well. For example, when watching class videos or reading teaching logs, teachers can focus on how often and how varied their markers are and whether student answers are clear and turns are taken properly. This helps teachers adjust their strategies in time. In class, teachers should guide students to notice discourse markers. They can set special sections to explain these markers, use open questions to give students turns, and combine language and non-language activities to help students build meaning through markers. Teachers can also create cross-cultural situations, such as simulating an international business negotiation, to help students experience thinking patterns in different cultures and contexts and to improve their ability to use markers properly ^[8].

Research divides language exercises into mechanical, meaningful and communicative practice ^[9]. Therefore, teachers should include all three types of practice for discourse markers. First, introduce basic concepts and let students memorize some markers. Next, analyze how markers are used in texts to deepen understanding. Finally, design interactive tasks in class to check if students can use markers correctly. These three steps can effectively improve students' mastery and use of discourse markers and develop their overall language ability.

6.2. Strategies for students

Students should look for chances to use discourse markers in their learning. For example, in group discussions or class presentations, they can try using markers like "for example" to give examples or "however" to show contrast. They should pay attention to the sequence of speech and how turns are taken in order to keep the talk

smooth. They can also watch English movie clips, read news reports and academic articles, and focus on how the three core ideas of conversation analysis are used in different contexts. Linking classroom learning with extra materials can strengthen their knowledge of discourse markers ^[10].

Students need to take part actively in class interaction. They can share problems and confusion about using discourse markers during discussions and ask teachers for advice on how to use them better. Through constant interaction and feedback, students can gain more resources and suggestions, deepen their understanding and improve their ability to use discourse markers in real talk.

7. Conclusion

This study used conversation analysis to explore how teachers and students use discourse markers in foreign language classrooms. Teachers use these markers often, especially when explaining lessons, to make their teaching clearer. However, students use them less often, and their language is sometimes less coherent. To improve this, we suggest that teachers analyze their own teaching, create authentic practice situations, and design interactive exercises. Students should actively practice using discourse markers and take part in classroom communication. These strategies can help make foreign language teaching more effective.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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