

Understanding How Ideas are Linked in Compare and Contrast Essays: A Discourse Marker (DM) Study

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ABSTRACT

Discourse markers (DMs) are important when linking the first sentence and another sentence. The previous study showed that DMs can be varied in argumentative text of The Jakarta Post. However, some undergraduate students still face difficulties in using DMs, especially in academic writing, in the context of comparing and contrasting the essays, different from argumentative text. Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the various DMs employed by undergraduate students to establish logical transitions and also to find out the frequency of the DMs used within the context of compare and contrast essays. This study used qualitative methods to collect the data. The subjects of this study were 29 students majoring in English Literature from one of the state universities in Malang, East Java. To collect the data, the instruments used were the students' writing and AntConc 3.5.7 as the corpus analysis. The results were subsequently presented as percentages, offering valuable insights into the differences in DMs usage. The results showed that the students can demonstrate their ability to construct the compare and contrast paragraphs using the DMs properly. The findings contribute to the understanding of DMs usage in academic writing and provide practical implications for educators and learners seeking to improve their writing skills.

1. Introduction

To master writing, the students should understand how to organize their ideas based on the type of writing, such as academic and non-academic writing. Academic writing is different from non-academic writing. In academic writing, the student should understand the rules and the features of it because it is rigid and very strict. Therefore, the students are not allowed to write carelessly. Examples of academic writing are argumentative, persuasive, descriptive, compare and contrast, and so on. Meanwhile, non-academic writing is more flexible, without any rules and features (Davis, 2021). Magazines, newsletters, and personal experiences are examples of non-academic writing (Choemue & Bram, 2021).

Hence, the students should understand the paragraph when they are going to start writing in English. The paragraph is the basic unit of organization in writing as it is needed to develop the main idea from a group of sentences or two kinds of sentences (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). Moreover, mastering paragraphs is needed since this is the basic aspect of writing an essay

which is dealing with academic purposes. An essay is a form of written composition that presents a focused argument or analysis on a particular topic or subject. It is a structured piece of writing that typically includes an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

In creating a good paragraph, there are two common characteristics, namely cohesion and coherence (Boardman & Fridenberg, 2002). Another feature of a well-written paragraph is coherence. As stated by Grabe and Kaplan (1996), coherence pertains to the visible indicators that mirror the organization of a text and the writer's intended goals. Furthermore, according to McDonough (2002), coherence is a broad term encompassing linguistic elements that indicate the structure of the text, thereby ensuring the message's unity.

Some cohesive devices are connecting words, personal pronouns, definite articles, demonstrative pronouns, and synonyms (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). From those aspects, the connecting words are considered the most influential aspect within a text as they serve to connect the elements of sentences or

paragraphs (Schiffrin, 1987). In the present study, the term discourse markers (henceforth DMs) refer to those connecting words. The primary function of DMs is to explicitly indicate the relationship between units of the text (Biber et al., 1999). In this way, DMs occur to maintain the unity of an idea of a text. Hence, without sufficient DMs, a whole unit of thought does not appear to be fully constructed, coherent, and united. Moreover, the misuse of DMs may impact or even disrupt the coherence of a text. A study conducted by Prommas (2011) shows that the occurrence of DMs is necessary since the DMs used in essays are transitional words which are the most potential and obvious devices to demonstrate the relationship of ideas. Further, other issues in using DMs may include excessive use and a lack of DMs (Modhish, 2012; Prommas, 2011).

A compare and contrast essay is a type of academic writing that examines the similarities and differences between two or more subjects or ideas. It involves analyzing and evaluating the characteristics, qualities, or aspects of the subjects in order to highlight their similarities and differences. The purpose of a compare and contrast essay is to provide a deeper understanding of the subjects being compared and to present a well-rounded analysis to the reader. Therefore, it needs discourse markers, such as "similarly," "likewise," "in contrast," "however," or "on the other hand" to guide the reader through the comparison and contrast process, ensuring a smooth flow of ideas and information.

There are three functional classes of DMs (Fraser, 2009). The first class is called as contrastive discourse markers (CDMs), for instance, 'but', 'although', 'however', and 'on the other hand'. They can be used to establish direct or indirect contrast in writing (Dumlao & Wilang, 2019, p. 203). The second class is called as elaborative discourse markers (EDMs), such as 'and', 'besides', 'in addition', 'furthermore', and 'such as'. These terms are used as the explanation of the previous statements. Furthermore, the third class is inferential discourse markers (IDMs), such as 'thus', 'therefore', 'because of', and 'so'. It has a function to make inferences or to conclude the previous statements (Fraser, 2009). Moreover, Brown & Yule (1983) summarized the types of discourse markers provided by Halliday & Hasan (1976) into some types, for instance, as additive (and, or, furthermore, similarly, in addition), adversative (but, yet, however, on the other hand, nevertheless), causal (so, consequently, for this reason, it follows from this), temporal (then, after that, an hour later, finally, at last).

According to Paszyk (2009), a comparison-contrast essay compares and contrasts two unrelated topics, highlighting their similarities and differences. The compare and contrast essay can be used to demonstrate a point, the superiority of one thing over another or the evolution of two things over time. According to Englert in Paszyk (2009), a comparison-contrast essay compares and contrasts two ideas in order to highlight their similarities and differences.

According to Drici et al. (2018), comparison and contrast are ways to highlight the similarities and differences between two or more objects, concepts, creatures, or people.

Furthermore, some previous studies have discussed about exploring discourse markers used in academic papers. Yulianto (2021) found that additive, adversative, causal, and temporal discourse markers are used in four news articles of The Jakarta Post. These DMs usage patterns were ample for readers to gain the information in the articles better. In this study, it can be seen that the articles were non-academic writing, therefore; it will be different from academic writing. Moreover, Raputri et al., (2022) found that elaborative discourse markers were the first type used by the writers. It is commonly employed by authors in journal publications. Even though this study had already investigated the common discourse markers used in journal publications, this study did not investigate Indonesian students' assignments about writing articles. Besides, Choemue & Bram (2021) in their study about discourse markers in academic and non-academic writings of Thai EFL learners revealed that 2.521 words token of DMs distributed in five types, namely contrastive discourse, elaborative discourse, inferential discourse, temporal discourse, and spoken discourse markers, were identified in the 20 academic and 40 non-academic essays, and the most frequently used DM was elaborative discourse markers (EDM).

Considering that EFL learners should have the capacity to generate proficient writing, it is essential for them to have a deeper understanding of the elements of cohesive devices, specifically discourse markers. Familiarity with discourse markers will also assist them in crafting their written compositions. As per the research conducted by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), there is a substantial body of evidence highlighting the significant role that discourse markers play in establishing textual coherence and cohesion.

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical connection between various parts of a text that keep it unified. The cohesive mechanisms function to link the elements of the text and establish text cohesion, such as through reference, substitution/ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Additionally, the use of discourse markers can connect the sentences together (Schiffrin, 1987). The coherence of the text components can assist students in generating a coherent text.

Furthermore, in relation to cohesion, coherence refers to the manner in which the elements of the textual world are mutually accessible and relevant (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). There are certain standards of coherence that can assist the text in making sense to the reader, such as having a sequential organization, transitioning smoothly between topics,

utilizing discourse markers, initiating with a clear and impactful introduction, and minimizing grammatical errors (Moreno, 2003). To be more precise, one of the standards of coherence is the utilization of discourse markers. In order to create a coherent text, discourse markers are employed to connect logical ideas within sentences, thereby enhancing the text's comprehensibility. Consequently, it can be inferred that cohesive devices (discourse markers) and coherence collaborate to aid students in producing a well-written and intelligible text.

As mentioned in a study conducted by Prommas (2011), discourse markers employed in essays are primarily transitional words. The rationale behind this may be that transitional words are the most effective and obvious means of indicating the relationship between ideas. As a result, they are widely apparent in argumentative texts. The terminology for discourse markers varies among different scholars' perspectives. In literature, discourse markers have been referred to by various terms such as cohesive elements (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), conjunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987), pragmatic markers (Fraser, 1999), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), conjunctive adverbials (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), linking words (Boardman & Frydenberg, 2002), logical connectors (Quirk et al., 1985), linking adverbials (Biber, et.al., 1999), and discourse connectors (Cowan, 2008). Therefore, in the present study, the term "discourse markers" encompasses all these various terms that serve to indicate transitions within a text.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) argue that discourse markers communicate specific meanings that assume the existence of other elements within the conversation. The meanings conveyed by discourse markers are relatively uncomplicated: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) also classify discourse markers as appositive, explanatory, additive adversative, diverse, topical, modal, spatiotemporal, and causal-conditional.

Although some previous studies have investigated about discourse markers used in academic and non-academic, but little is known that investigated about discourse markers used in compare and contrast essays used by non-native writers or with multilingual background. It is needed to be observed since compare and contrast is important to be learnt in academic and non-academic essay. This study has a purpose to know the frequency of the discourse markers used in writing compare and contrast essay by the students. By knowing the frequency, this research offers valuable insights into the strategies employed by undergraduate English writers, so that the students can improve their writing skills. Moreover, this study has aim to fill the gap by exploring ideas in writing compare and contrast essays from some multilingual language students who have different background knowledge from their previous school and different races since little is known

that investigated about discourse markers used in compare and contrast essays used by non-native writers who have multilingual backgrounds. Eventually, this study is expected to draw out the new issue in language teacher education about the use of discourse markers used by multilingual students in constructing the compare and contrast essay.

2. Method

The primary focus of this study was to analyze the discourse markers of comparison and contrast paragraphs as well as the frequency of each marker used by undergraduate students in their writing. Hence, the researchers employed a descriptive research methodology since the aim of this study was to describe how many times the students used the discourse markers correctly during composing the compare and contrast essay. The participants of this study were undergraduate students majoring in English Literature in the academic year 2020/2021 at one of the universities in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The selection of participants used purposive sampling in which it was based on the fact that they had undergone several writing courses, including Basic Structure, Grammar, and Writing 1, and were currently in the process of completing the Writing 2 course. This ensured that the students had prior exposure to writing skills and were familiar with the fundamentals of constructing written texts.

To gather data for the study, the researchers assigned a comparison and contrast writing task to the 29 participating students during the fall semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. The students were given the freedom to choose their own topics, allowing them to express themselves freely and showcase their individual writing abilities. The written paragraphs provided by the students were then carefully typed and compiled into a corpus using AntConc version 3.5.7, a software specifically designed for text analysis and linguistic research (Anthony, 2018).

The experiment was conducted over a span of four weeks, utilizing online classes as the primary mode of instruction. The participants were briefed on the study procedure and then instructed to record themselves using the Google Docs platform as they wrote their essays while verbalizing as much thought as possible. In this case, they were controlled by the teacher using Telegram as well as Google Docs.

During the first week, the students received theoretical instruction on comparison and contrast paragraphs, gaining a deeper understanding of the structural elements and features inherent in this type of writing. In the subsequent week, they were tasked with analyzing the organization and structure of comparison and contrast paragraphs, aiming to identify common patterns, style of writing and effective writing techniques. Additionally, the students were required to select a topic that they would develop further in written form.

Moving on to the third week, the students were provided with learning materials focused on transition signals, essential linguistic devices used to establish coherence and cohesion within texts. With this knowledge, the students began outlining their paragraphs, strategically incorporating appropriate transition signals to effectively connect compare, and contrast in their writing. At this stage, they were instructed to identify and outline important points for the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion sections of their comparison and contrast texts.

In the final week of the experiment, the students were tasked with writing the final revision of their comparison and contrast paragraphs, incorporating the theoretical concepts and practical skills they had acquired throughout the online classes. This stage served as an opportunity for the students to refine their writing, ensuring coherence, logical flow, and clear comparison and contrast relationships within their texts.

In addition to manual analysis, AntConc 3.5.7 was utilized for corpus analysis for analyzing the data, enabling a systematic examination of the frequency and distribution of discourse markers within the written corpus. In this case, the researchers inputted the students' writing and initially calculated the total number of corpus data from the students using

AntConc 3.5.7. Then, they were proceeded to determine the discourse markers found in comparison and contrast paragraphs written by the students. Furthermore, the results were subsequently presented as percentages, offering valuable insights into the differences in discourse marker usage within the context of comparing and contrasting writing.

3. Result

After analyzing the students' writing, the researchers tried to label each marker in order to answer the researchers' questions like what are the markers used for comparing and contrasting the students' ideas, and what are the most frequently used of markers in their essay writing. In this case, the results are divided into two categories in which comparison markers and contrast markers. Out of twenty-nine comparison and contrast essays, thirty-one discourse markers were found where seventeen DMs belonged to comparison markers and fourteen DMs used for stating contrast sentences. Each marker had different frequencies of usage in non-native students' writing. Thus, the following table elaborates the overall types and frequency of DMs used in twenty-nine students' comparison paragraphs.

Table 1. Comparative discourse markers

No	Comparison Markers	Frequency	Percentage
1.	And	339	56.6%
2.	As	81	13.6%
3.	Also	50	8.3%
4.	Both....and....	47	7.8%
5.	(be) the same	30	5.0%
6.	Like	14	2.3%
7.	Not only ... But also	9	1.5%
8.	Too	6	1.0%
9.	(be) similar	5	0.8%
10.	(be) the same as	4	0.7%
11.	(be) compared to	4	0.7%
12.	Just like	2	0.3%
13.	Similar to	2	0.3%
14.	(be) like	2	0.3%
15.	(be) compared with	2	0.3%
16.	As well as	2	0.3%
17.	Neither Nor	1	0.2%
Total words		600	100%

From 29 corpus data which is about comparison and contrast paragraph, it is found that there were 17 discourse markers with 600-word tokens that used to state the comparison sentences. The markers are essential tools for establishing comparisons between

ideas, phrases, or clauses in discourse, facilitating the flow of information and the construction of coherent argument. The frequency and percentage of each marker's occurrence are outlined below.

a) Dominant Markers

The most frequently used marker is "And", appearing 339 times, accounting for 56.6% of the total instances. This overwhelming frequency suggests that "and" serves as the primary connector in comparative structures, reinforcing its role in linking similar or related ideas across the discourse.

b) Moderate Frequency Markers

Following "And," the next most common marker is "As", which occurs 81 times (13.6%). This significant presence highlights "as" as a key marker in establishing equal comparisons or parallels between two entities or actions.

Another marker in this category is "Also", appearing 50 times (8.3%), suggesting its importance in adding supplementary information that complements a preceding statement. "Both...and" follows closely with 47 occurrences (7.8%), emphasizing its frequent use in indicating dual inclusion in comparisons.

c) Low Frequency Markers

Several other markers, while less frequent, still play a meaningful role in comparative discourse. "(be) the same" appears 30 times (5.0%), often employed to denote equivalence. Other markers such as "Like" (14 occurrences, 2.3%) and "Not only...but also" (9 occurrences, 1.5%) contribute to nuanced comparisons. Markers such as "Too" (6 occurrences, 1.0%) and "(be) similar" (5 occurrences, 0.8%) demonstrate more specific or specialized usage in comparison contexts.

d) Rare Markers

Less commonly used markers include "(be) the same as", "(be) compared to", "Just like", "Similar to", "(be) like", "(be) compared with", and "As well as", each occurring only 2 times (0.3%). Their infrequent appearances suggest that these markers are employed in more particular or context-dependent situations. The least frequent marker is "Neither...Nor", appearing just once (0.2%), indicating its limited role in comparative constructions within this dataset.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals that the discourse marker "And" dominates comparative constructions, indicating its fundamental role in linking ideas and comparisons. Other markers like "As" and "Also" play crucial, though secondary, roles. The less frequent markers contribute specific nuance but are used more sparingly, reflecting their specialized function in comparative discourse. This distribution highlights the variability in the use of comparative markers, dependent on the context and the complexity of comparisons being drawn. It is important to note that the analysis is based solely on the frequency and percentage of the comparison markers, and further examination of the context and specific instances would provide a deeper understanding of their effectiveness in conveying the intended comparisons. The data analysis also provides insights into the distribution and prominence of different comparison markers.

Besides analyzing the comparative markers, the researchers also broke down the markers used by students in stating the contrast sentences. The summary of types of discourse markers found as well as the frequency was stated in the following table.

Table 2. Contrastive discourse markers

No	Contrast markers	Frequency	Percentage
1.	But	35	23.3%
2.	While	30	20%
3.	However,	14	9.3%
4.	Although	13	8.7%
5.	Even though	13	8.7%
6.	Whereas	11	7.3%
7.	(be) unlike	9	6.0%
8.	On the other hand,	8	5.3%
9.	In contrast	6	4.0%
10.	Still	5	3.3%
11.	Differ (from/in)	3	2.0%
12.	Yet	1	0.7%
13.	In (by) comparison	1	0.7%
14.	(be) dissimilar to	1	0.7%
Total words		150	100%

In this table, the researchers found that there were different markers used by non-native students in connecting their ideas in contrast paragraphs. However, the total amount of contrast markers was not many as comparison markers since it was only 14 contrast markers with 150 words tokens that taken from 29 corpus data. The analysis of contrastive discourse markers highlights their varied use in signaling opposition, contradiction, or differentiation between ideas.

Among these markers, "But" is the most frequently used, appearing 35 times, which accounts for 23.3% of the total occurrences. Its prominence indicates its central role in constructing contrastive relationships, suggesting that "But" is the preferred marker for introducing opposing ideas or counterarguments in discourse. Following closely is "While", with 30 occurrences (20%). Like "But," "While" serves to juxtapose ideas, often highlighting simultaneous or differing actions or conditions. Its substantial frequency underscores its versatility in expressing contrast in both temporal and logical contexts.

Other markers, such as "However" (14 occurrences, 9.3%), "Although" (13 occurrences, 8.7%), and "Even though" (13 occurrences, 8.7%), further contribute to the nuanced expression of contrast. These markers are frequently employed to acknowledge a point or situation before introducing a contradictory or limiting factor. Similarly, "Whereas" occurs 11 times (7.3%), typically used to compare two different conditions or situations, drawing clear distinctions between them.

Markers such as "(be) unlike" (9 occurrences, 6.0%) and "On the other hand" (8 occurrences, 5.3%)

serve to introduce contrasting viewpoints or characteristics, offering alternative perspectives

within the discourse. "In contrast" appears 6 times (4.0%), often functioning to introduce a direct opposition to a previous statement.

Less frequently used markers include "Still" (5 occurrences, 3.3%), indicating persistence or continuity despite a contrasting situation, and "Differ (from/in)" (3 occurrences, 2.0%), which highlights specific differences between elements. The least used markers, each appearing only once (0.7%), are "Yet", "In (by) comparison", and "(be) dissimilar to". These rare markers may be employed in more specific or specialized contexts where contrast needs to be expressed with particular subtlety.

In summary, "But" and "While" dominate the usage of contrastive markers, reinforcing their importance in structuring opposition and differentiation in discourse. Other markers, while used less frequently, contribute to more nuanced contrasts, offering a range of options for expressing subtle differences and contradictions. The varied frequencies of these markers highlight their context-dependent usage and the richness of contrastive discourse in conveying complex relationships between ideas.

Besides, for knowing the occurrences of the markers, the researcher tried to analyze the sample of the use of contrastive and comparison markers that used in students' paragraph. The study yielded the following results, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. The example of the use of comparison markers in students' writing

Comparison markers	Sentences
And	However, laptops <u>and</u> smartphones are quite different things, such as in shape, size, <u>and</u> flexibility However, offline classes are required to attend the class on time <u>and</u> they have no recorded video with the teaching video of the lecturers.
As	<u>As</u> we know, noodles are a type of food that originated from China It is interesting to discuss the similarities and the differences between two things <u>as</u> it will make us realize that those similarities play an important role in human life
Also	Digital books are <u>also</u> easier to bring when you can't bring so many things in your bag, you only need to bring your device. <u>Also</u> , the differences between them are the way they are communicating, the way they sound, and their behaviors.
Both ... and	<u>Both</u> Jakarta <u>and</u> Tokyo have various options for street food. <u>Both</u> are round in shape <u>and</u> divided into several parts so that it becomes a small triangular shape.
(Be) the same	Many people think the guitar and the ukulele <u>are the same</u> instruments. The first difference is gravy soup <u>has the same</u> texture as Soto, which is gravy

Table 4. The example of the use of contrastive markers in students' writing

Contrast markers	Sentences
But	Maybe, at sometimes, they will take an occasional nap, <u>but</u> they will always stick by your side. When you upgrade your laptop, the RAM inside the laptop could get bigger once we update it. <u>But</u> , a cell phone can't do that.
While	smartphones are generally rectangular, <u>while</u> laptops have two rectangles Photocard containing selfie or selca photos. <u>While</u> the postcard contains a concept photo.
However,	Street food in Tokyo is quite expensive. <u>However</u> , street food in Jakarta is quite cheap.
Although	... the difference between a guitar and a ukulele about the size, the number of strings, also the type and classification of strings, <u>although</u> at first glance they look the same. <u>Although</u> modern markets and traditional markets have the same function, they are very different in some ways.
Even though	Lime and pomelo clearly have differences <u>even though</u> we know that both are the same as oranges. <u>Even though</u> ice cream contains more fat, many people prefer ice cream because it is easier to find.

Table 3 and 4 illustrate that students utilized both comparison and contrast discourse markers (DMs) in a similar variety but with varying frequencies. This indicates that there is a notable difference in the number of occurrences of these markers. At times, students used comparison and contrast markers at the beginning of sentences, while in other instances, they placed them in the middle of sentences without considering proper punctuation before the markers. Additionally, the tables reveal that students occasionally overused certain markers, such as "however" and "and," in the same sentence, leading to redundancy. However, this study had some limitations; one of them is this study only investigated one type of essay which is compare and contrast essay. Perhaps future research could expand this scope by investigating multiple types of essays. Doing so would provide richer data on the use of discourse markers for comparison and contrast across different writing formats.

4. Discussion

Comparison and contrast markers are essential tools in writing, as they enable students to express similarities and differences between ideas, subjects, or concepts. These markers not only help in organizing thoughts but also enhance clarity and promote critical thinking. When used effectively, comparison and contrast markers allow writers to draw connections between points, ensuring that their arguments are logically structured and easy for readers to follow. In this discussion, we will explore the importance of using these markers effectively in students' writing, as well as some challenges they may face in doing so.

According to research, students demonstrate their ability to construct well-organized comparison and contrast paragraphs by employing a variety of discourse markers. This indicates that they are aware of the need for cohesion and coherence, which are key components in creating a smooth flow of ideas. Students who utilize these markers appropriately are able to better engage their readers and present their arguments more persuasively. Additionally, their use of these markers can reflect their growing proficiency in critical thinking and analysis, as they learn to assess how different ideas or concepts relate to each other.

The study further reveals that students are proficient in distinguishing between comparison and contrast markers and in using them appropriately in their writing. For instance, comparison markers such as "similarly," "likewise," and "in comparison" serve to highlight the similarities between ideas or subjects. These markers allow students to build connections and demonstrate how certain concepts relate to one another. By using comparison markers, students are able to guide the reader through their reasoning, leading them to see how points converge.

On the other hand, contrast markers such as "however," "on the other hand," "conversely," and "but" are equally important in signaling the differences between ideas. Contrast markers help the writer introduce alternative viewpoints, opposing ideas, or distinctions that require attention. They assist in making comparisons more nuanced by acknowledging where subjects diverge. The strategic use of contrast markers ensures that the writer presents a balanced argument, considering multiple perspectives or elements.

Despite the importance of these markers, students may face challenges in using them effectively. For one, they may struggle to choose the appropriate marker for the context or may overuse certain markers, which can disrupt the natural flow of the text. Additionally, students may not fully grasp how to vary their use of comparison and contrast markers to avoid repetition. As they continue to practice, however, their ability to skillfully employ these markers will improve, leading to more polished and articulate writing. Overall, comparison and contrast markers are invaluable in academic writing, serving not only as organizational tools but also as aids in expressing complex relationships between ideas. By mastering the use of these markers, students enhance their writing clarity and demonstrate their ability to engage in deeper analysis.

This aligns with Ariyanti's research (2021), which indicates that most students understand the importance of using transition signals in comparison and contrast essays. These signals help structure essays by comparing and contrasting two subjects, ensuring a logical flow of ideas. Ariyanti also revealed that many students successfully used comparison and contrast markers in their essays. These markers not only organize content but also encourage critical thinking, as students must identify and explain similarities and differences, thereby enhancing their analytical skills and understanding of the topics. Additionally, students often use time-order transition signals to maintain coherence in their essays. They generally grasp how to apply these signals based on the essay's purpose, as seen in the significant number of comparison and contrast markers used.

The results also showed that students are capable of using markers appropriately, with comparative markers linking similar ideas and contrastive markers organizing differences. However, there was a noticeable preference for comparative markers (17 token words with 600 occurrences) over contrastive markers (14 token words with 150 occurrences). This suggests that students find it easier to use comparative markers, such as "and," "also," and "too," which provide a clear and structured way to highlight similarities. In contrast, contrastive markers like "however," "but," and "in contrast" require a deeper understanding of nuanced differences and more complex writing, which may lead to students using them less frequently.

To address this tendency, teachers can encourage students to explore contrastive markers more fully. By guiding students on the effective use of these markers, teachers can help them develop a more balanced and persuasive writing style. Emphasizing the importance of using both comparative and contrastive markers can improve students' ability to express their ideas clearly and comprehensively. Furthermore, the study found that the most commonly used marker in constructing comparison paragraphs was "and," likely due to its

familiarity in the students' first language. This finding aligns with Raputri et al., (2022), who also identified "and" as the dominant choice for expressing elaborative statements in journal articles. Other frequently used markers include "as," "also," "both ... and ...," and "(be) the same."

The study by Kusyowo et al., (2020) also found that both native and non-native English-speaking (NNS) engineering lecturers frequently used cohesive conjunctions like "so" and "and." Interestingly, NNS lecturers used these conjunctions more frequently than their native-speaking (NS) counterparts. In academic essays, the most common discourse markers (DMs) were "and," "or," and "also," while "and," "also," and "such as" were prevalent in non-academic essays. Notably, the marker "and" was overused in both genres, as highlighted by Choemue and Bram (2021). Besides, Rahayu and Cahyono (2012) found that non-native students often used comparative markers like "also" to add information in writing, while native students preferred "too" in speech to establish parallels. This suggests that students have a variety of markers for expressing similarities, but teachers could encourage the use of less familiar markers to diversify their writing. In contrast, students used a range of markers for contrasting ideas, with "but," "while," "however," "although," and "even though" being the top five. "But" was the most familiar, likely due to its frequent use in students' first language. However, teachers could encourage the use of less familiar markers to develop more complex writing. These findings are consistent with studies by Povolna (2012) and others, which found that "but," "however," and "although" were common in student essays. Yulita et al., (2021) noted that non-native speakers used a variety of contrastive markers, such as "still," "but," "however," and "yet."

Additionally, Sitthirak (2013) observed that Thai students used "although" and "while" interchangeably more often than native English speakers, highlighting the importance of context in expressing contrast. Ariyanti (2021), Choemue and Bram (2021), and Raputri et al., (2022) also found that students frequently used markers like "although," "however," "but," and "while" in writing. Lee (2020) noted that Chinese ESL writers tended to overuse "but" and use other contrastive markers less frequently, leading to simpler sentence structures.

Ni'mah (2019) and Lee (2020) further emphasized the challenge students face with overusing DMs, which can result in incoherent and repetitive writing. Some students struggle to balance the use of comparison and contrast markers, making their writing monotonous. Encouraging them to explore a wider range of markers can lead to more sophisticated and engaging writing. Syhabuddin and Zikri (2018) also observed misuse and overuse of contrastive markers, including incorrect placement and punctuation, contributing to weaker essays.

Based on these findings, the study suggests several implications for students, teachers, and researchers alike. It emphasizes the critical importance of understanding how to appropriately use comparison and contrast markers, as well as the role punctuation plays in effective writing. While many students may be familiar with the basic function of these markers, some still struggle with overuse or improper placement, which can diminish the overall quality and coherence of their writing. This suggests that more attention is needed to help students strike the right balance when employing discourse markers.

One effective strategy to address this issue is peer review. By participating in peer review sessions, students can provide valuable feedback on each other's use of comparison and contrast markers. This collaborative process allows them to identify common errors, such as overuse, and to offer constructive suggestions for improvement. Peer feedback not only helps students recognize weaknesses in their own writing but also fosters critical thinking as they evaluate others' work. This kind of interaction creates a learning environment where students can better understand how to apply discourse markers in a balanced and meaningful way.

Teachers also play a pivotal role in this process. By providing focused, constructive feedback on marker usage, they can guide students toward improving their writing skills. Teachers can highlight areas where students may be relying too heavily on certain markers or where they are not using them appropriately. Encouraging students to revise and edit their work after receiving feedback ensures that they become more aware of how discourse markers influence the clarity and flow of their writing. Additionally, incorporating targeted lessons on the appropriate use of comparison and contrast markers into classroom instruction can further help students develop these skills.

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that discourse markers are invaluable tools for effective communication in both spoken and written language. When used thoughtfully, these markers help structure text, enhance clarity, convey meaning, and shape the overall tone of a conversation or a piece of writing. They play a key role in guiding the reader or listener through the content, helping them follow the logical progression of ideas and understand subtle nuances of meaning. This makes the text more engaging and easier to comprehend, which is especially important in academic settings where complex ideas need to be communicated clearly.

Punctuation, in conjunction with discourse markers, is equally important in maintaining clarity and grammatical accuracy. Proper punctuation helps writers organize their thoughts effectively, ensuring that sentences and paragraphs are easy to follow. It also aids readers in navigating the text, making it more accessible and allowing them to engage with the

content without confusion. Misplaced or missing punctuation can lead to misunderstandings, while correct usage reinforces the structure and meaning of the writing.

In conclusion, the effective use of comparison and contrast markers, supported by proper punctuation, is essential in academic writing. These tools help students organize their essays logically, making their arguments clearer and more coherent. By recognizing the challenges associated with marker usage and providing strategies like peer review, focused feedback, and revision opportunities, educators can support students in developing the skills needed to produce well-structured and compelling academic work. The ability to use markers appropriately not only enhances writing quality but also improves overall communication, benefiting students in both their academic and professional lives.

4. Conclusions

The study highlights that students predominantly rely on comparative markers to emphasize similarities over contrastive markers, a preference likely driven by the simplicity and clarity of the former, while the latter demands greater nuance and comprehension. Key findings reveal that students demonstrate competency in utilizing discourse markers in compare and contrast essays but often favor familiar markers such as "and" and "but," which may stem from their alignment with first-language usage. This reliance, coupled with occasional overuse, limits the diversity and sophistication of their writing and underscores the need for targeted instruction on proper marker placement, punctuation, and varied usage. The novelty of the study lies in its focus on non-native, multilingual learners' application of discourse markers in academic essays, bridging a gap in understanding the practical challenges faced by this demographic. The findings underscore the critical role of discourse markers in fostering textual cohesion and coherence, offering significant pedagogical implications for educators to emphasize balanced use of both comparative and contrastive markers to enhance students' critical thinking and writing clarity. Future research should expand the scope by exploring discourse marker usage across different essay types, such as argumentative or descriptive writing, and investigating their impact on broader aspects of writing proficiency across diverse student populations.

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