

Exploring the Use of Discourse Markers in Students' Spoken Discourse

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How to cite:

Wari, A. (2026). Exploring the Use of Discourse Markers in Students' Spoken Discourse. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 7(3).191-206. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v7i3.763>

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
10/06/2026

Accepted:
25/07/2026

Keywords:

discourse markers, spontaneous speech, spoken discourse, compensatory strategy, strategic competence,

Abstract

Using discourse markers in speech is inevitable, as they characterize natural, spontaneous speech. However, excessive reliance on this compensatory strategy may affect both speakers and listeners. Grounded in the concept of strategic competence, this study investigates the frequency of discourse markers' use among Moroccan EFL learners in spoken discourse. To achieve this, the occurrence of discourse markers was systematically quantified in participants' speech across different communicative contexts to determine their frequency of use. The findings indicated a tendency for discourse marker use to increase when learners discussed topics requiring less familiar domain-specific jargon. These findings contribute to a better understanding of strategic competence in the Moroccan context and offer insights into learners' spoken language production.

1. Introduction

Discourse markers are meaningless words in the English language as far as speaking is concerned. In the mid-nineties, the study of discourse markers in English (e.g., Jucker 1993; Traugott 1995; Brinton 1996) and in other languages, such as Latin, began to emerge. Discourse markers are linguistic devices that speakers use to signal how the upcoming unit of speech or text relates to the current discourse state (Schiffrin, 1987). An ongoing debate has been about the functionality of these words. For many linguists, discourse markers are words that carry semantic and pragmatic meaning. However, Brinton (1996) put forward that they have little to no propositional meaning. I maintain a neutral stance; these words could either carry meaning if they contribute to the intended meaning, or they may be superfluous and useless if they serve no such purpose. The focus should not only be on the meaning and utility of the lexical items under study per se; it should instead be on the way they appear in one's speech. That is, if they are used with a high frequency, communication can no longer occur, for the disturbance they cause to listeners makes them solely focus on their frequency instead of their function and meaning. Quantifying the frequency with which discourse markers are

employed, identifying the causes for their recurring use, together with other aims, form the purpose of this research.

Learners of English as a foreign language are required to possess many competencies for communication to take place. For this reason, they make a lot of effort when attempting to convey meaning. The driving force behind this research is to raise students' awareness towards the overreliance on compensatory strategies that could limit their potential and their cognitive and professional development.

Another reason that formed the rationale of this study is my genuine interest in Discourse and Applied Linguistics. Thus, the current study is an opportunity for me to deepen my understanding of discourse features, with a particular focus on what characterizes the speech of Moroccan English Learners.

In the Moroccan context, English is considered a foreign language; nonetheless, students can communicate successfully thanks to the guidance of both their professors and the studies conducted by a large number of academics about communicative competence. They possess what is referred to as "strategic competence" that enables them to repair the inevitable miscommunications that regularly emerge during interaction and to employ communication strategies appropriately. Moroccan English learners are aware of the proper usage of this prevalent feature of the English language and the reasons that may cause them to overuse it. Furthermore, getting rid of this unnecessary extensive use can be achieved with the guidance of the numerous studies in which Moroccan learners were participants.

Achieving "communicative competence," a term coined by Hymes in the late nineties and defined later in the coming chapters, appears to be quite challenging for English as a foreign language learners. This is not owing to their unwillingness to learn, nor is it because of the complexity of the language per se; it is more or less related to the incredible effort these learners make to possess a number of competencies that would guarantee effective communication. One of which is "strategic competence" (Canale & Swain, 1980). It is used to overcome difficult situations and to communicate successfully, which makes it of high importance for foreign language learners. The use of discourse markers is believed to be a strategy used by learners to fulfil the previously mentioned functions.

The problem does not lie in using these words as such, for utilizing them in one's speech is inevitable. The issue is the incorrect placement of these words, as well as their extensive use that could hinder communication; the ultimate level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are striving to achieve. Perhaps these learners are just not aware of the disturbing atmosphere they cause once discourse markers are extensively used, or they do not seem to comprehend why they feel compelled to utilize such lexemes when speaking. Furthermore, researchers did not devise ways to help these learners use DMs in moderation. What's even more problematic is that the participants of numerous studies conducted on the same topic were native English speakers and not English language learners. In response, this paper seeks to identify the reasons that cause EFL learners to use discourse markers.

The significance of this study is embodied in the following reasons. First, in response to the limited number of studies devoted to investigating the use of discourse markers by non-native speakers, the current paper will enrich the literature. Second, it will unveil the current situation of students and their communicative competence. Finally, it will reveal the causes behind the use of discourse markers in the Moroccan context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Discourse Definition

Discourse can be defined as language in use (Brown & Yule, 1983; Cook, 1989). As a result, discourse analysis is defined as the study of language in use. By 'language in use,' the researcher refers to the system of norms, preferences, and expectations that link language to the context. The same ideas are projected in the work of known pioneers in the field of discourse analysis.

Van Dijk, for instance, suggests that discourse is considered a specific form of language use and a type of social interaction that can be characterized as a communicative event in a social environment. (Van Dijk, 1993).

2.2 Discourse Markers

Discourse markers are labelled differently due to the wide range of linguistic methodologies used to examine them and the variety of functions that these elements are believed to fulfil. The various labels also reflect differing perspectives on the homogeneity or fuzziness of the class of discourse markers.

Within discourse analytical frameworks, discourse markers play a role in the organization and structuring of information in spoken or written texts. Despite the fact that discourse markers are not needed as constitutive elements of the syntactic structure, they have important functions of relating units of utterance and fitting them into a discourse context (Aijmer, 2002).

Scholars ascribed different labels to refer to such linguistic devices as already established. Thus, discourse markers' definitions will differ depending on what they are called. The term discourse marker was popularized by Schiffrin in the late eighties. She identified them as words and phrases which provide contextual coordinates aiding in the production and interpretation of coherent conversation at both local and global levels of organization (Schiffrin, 1987). Put differently, they are nonobligatory utterance-initial items that function in relation to ongoing talk and text. Schiffrin proposes that discourse markers function both at primary and secondary levels on different planes of talk – information state, participation framework, ideational structure, action structure and exchange structure –and create coherence through the integration of these different components in discourse, as well as by indexing utterances along participation (speaker/hearer) and textual (prior/upcoming) co-ordinates of discourse.

According to Blakemore (1987), “**discourse connectives**” are one of the linguistic devices the speaker may use to that effect. He argues that:

“They are words and phrases that guide the interpretation process by specifying certain properties of context and contextual effects”.

Accessing the context in which an utterance is to be interpreted involves a cost, and the greater the processing effort required to arrive at an interpretation, the less relevant that interpretation is. The presence of one connective or another guides the hearer towards the intended contextual assumptions and effects; in other words, speakers give a clear indication as to how they intend their utterances to achieve relevance, and thus they save the hearer some processing effort in arriving at the intended interpretation.

(Redeker, 1991) puts down the notion of core meaning for DMs. She referred to DMs as “discourse operators,” putting forward that “the core meaning should specify the marker's intrinsic contribution to the semantic representation that will constrain the contextual interpretation of the utterance” (Redeker, 1991, p. 1164). She defines a discourse operator as a word or phrase that is uttered with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context. An utterance in this definition is intentionally and structurally bounded, usually a clausal unit (Redeker, 1991).

Van Dijk (1979), discussing the pragmatic connective functions, classified the discursive connectives according to the type of relations they expressed. Thus, he labeled them pragmatic connectives if their function is related to the expression of relationships between speech acts, and he called semantic connectives those which express relationships between facts denoted by propositions or by sentences. In the current study, I use the term discourse markers to refer to such lexical items.

2.3 Discourse Markers: Characteristics

2.3.1 Syntactic and Positioning Optionality

Although a variety of labels and definitions were assigned to discourse markers, it seems that they share the same characteristics. Schifffrin (1987) introduces some salient DMs' features in the following quote:

“Although markers often precede sentences, [...] they are independent of sentential structure. Removal of a marker from its sentence initial position, in other words, leaves the sentence structure intact. Furthermore, several markers – y’know, I mean, oh, like – can occur quite freely within a sentence at locations which are very difficult to define syntactically”

These two features **are syntactic and positioning optionality**. Nonetheless, the optionality of discourse markers does not undervalue their communicative importance. (Brinton, 1996) argues that “they are not pragmatically optional or superfluous; they serve a variety of pragmatic functions”.

2.3.2 A Prominent Characteristic of Spoken Discourse

There may be many discourse markers in a single phrase, which is a common and rather prominent characteristic of spoken speech. Due to their frequent occurrence, discourse markers are often “stylistically stigmatised and deplored as an indication of dysfluency and carelessness” (Brinton, 1996), while they are sometimes seen in a more favourable manner. If discourse markers are primarily connected with spoken language, it is because this code is characterised by higher informality and familiarity, to which discourse markers contribute, than the written code. Notably, the difference between formal and informal is more a question of degree than a discrete dichotomy.

In addition, Ostman (1982) contends that the usage of discourse markers is strongly tied to the lack of planning time, and that discourse markers serve as a compensatory technique for the grammatical fragmentation that may result from restricted thinking time.

2.3.3 Disfluencies

Disfluencies in the field of language learning often allude to what occurs when a speaker lacks complete competence in the target language, which disrupts the natural flow of speech.

Such difficulties in achieving fluency include uttering ungrammatical utterances, mispronouncing words, language errors as a result of negative language transfer, etc. A speech is said to be disfluent when it is impeded by pauses, use of discourse markers, hesitation, and prolongations (U: m and U: h). Similarly, Fillmore states that fluency is the ability to speak at length with few pauses (Fillmore, 1979), while Lennon suggests that delivering speech at the tempo of native speakers, unfettered by silent pauses and hesitations, constitutes native-like fluency (Lennon, 1990).

2.3.4 Polyfunctionality

It is agreed upon that discourse markers could serve multiple functions depending on what the speaker wants to achieve. As a preface to defining discourse markers' polyfunctionality, it is essential to consider what Jucker and Ziv (1998) have said about it. As they put it:

“Whether a specific linguistic element is monofunctional or polyfunctional is not a Useful criterion in deciding whether it is a discourse marker or not because of the vicious circularity it entails. Many studies actually set out to argue explicitly for the monofunctionality or polyfunctionality of specific markers, thus nullifying this as a valid criterion”.

Even if Jucker and Ziv (1998) may be right in objecting to multi-functionality as a defining criterion, Müller (2005) contends that research has demonstrated that many discourse markers fill more than one function, or at least have sub-functions.

Fraser (1988) studies the use of the discourse marker “so” in six utterances and concludes that 'so' as a discourse marker permits a variety of interpretations, all of which arguably derive from a core meaning. The specific interpretation in a given instance is the outcome of enhancing this general signal in light of the intricacies of the discourse context, beginning with this core meaning.

Brinton (1996) argues that discourse markers are multifunctional in that they may concurrently act at the local and global levels, as well as textually and interpersonally within the pragmatic component. (An illustration of such functions is found in Figure 1)

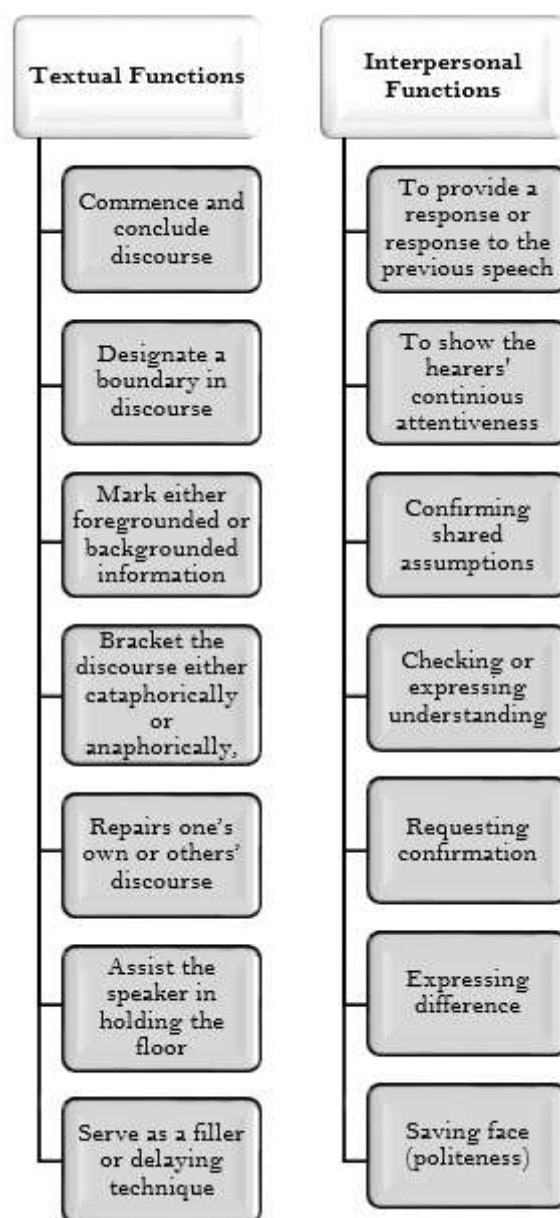


Figure 1

Functions of Discourse Markers

Note. Adapted from *Pragmatic Markers in English: Grammaticalization and Discourse Functions*, by L. J. Brinton, 1996, Mouton de Gruyter

The employment of discourse markers in the textual mode of language assists the speaker in structuring meaning as text, creating coherent discourse passages, and relating language to context, as shown in the figure. Interpersonally, discourse markers are seen as a mechanism for speakers to convey their attitudes, assessments, judgements, expectations, demands, their role as speakers and that of the hearer (Brinton, 1996).

2.4 Recent Research

Research on discourse markers (DMs) in spoken discourse has consistently shown that they are fundamental to effective communication, contributing to discourse organization, interaction management, and the expression of interpersonal meanings. While earlier research established the importance of discourse markers in natural conversation, more recent studies

have focused on their use in second-language contexts, highlighting their role as indicators of learners' pragmatic competence.

Among studies on native spoken interaction, Tagliamonte (2005) demonstrated that discourse markers such as *like*, *so*, and *just* are integral features of spontaneous conversation rather than meaningless fillers. Her findings showed that these markers perform a range of functions, including organizing discourse, expressing speaker stance, and managing conversational flow. This study emphasizes that discourse markers are essential resources for successful spoken interaction, providing a useful benchmark against which learner language can be examined.

The multifunctional nature of discourse markers was further highlighted by Taboada (2006), who argued that although discourse markers contribute to discourse coherence, they are not the only devices through which speakers establish meaning. Instead, listeners also rely on contextual and pragmatic information to interpret spoken discourse. Similarly, Crible and Cuenca (2017) demonstrated that discourse markers in authentic spoken interaction often perform multiple functions simultaneously and should therefore be analyzed within their interactional context rather than as isolated linguistic forms. Together, these studies suggest that research on discourse markers should move beyond simple frequency counts to examine the communicative functions they fulfil during interaction.

More recent empirical research has examined discourse marker use among EFL learners. Shimada and Miura (2019) investigated Japanese university EFL learners' use of discourse markers in spoken and written production and found that learners adjusted their choice of discourse markers according to the communicative task. In spoken interaction, interpersonal markers such as *well* occurred more frequently, indicating that discourse marker use is influenced by communicative purpose as well as language proficiency.

Likewise, Pan and Aroonmanakun (2022) compared the spoken discourse markers produced by Thai EFL learners with those used by native English speakers. Their corpus-based analysis revealed that learners underused several common spoken discourse markers and differed from native speakers in the pragmatic functions assigned to these markers. The authors concluded that acquiring the natural use of discourse markers remains a challenge even for advanced EFL learners, underscoring the importance of investigating both their frequency and communicative functions in learner speech.

Overall, previous research demonstrates that discourse markers are indispensable elements of spoken communication and valuable indicators of pragmatic competence. However, most empirical studies have been conducted in European or Asian contexts, with relatively little attention devoted to Moroccan EFL learners. Moreover, few studies have examined discourse marker use in semi-structured interviews, despite the interactive nature of this speaking task. The present study addresses this gap by investigating the frequency and functions of discourse markers used by Moroccan university EFL students during spoken interviews.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Design

The present study makes use of a qualitative approach. For it suits the purpose of this study, its objectives, and its questions. To provide an answer to the research questions, this study uses interviews. Despite using a qualitative approach, this study necessitates the use of numbers to measure discourse markers' frequency of use. The latter determines whether the participants use discourse markers as a speaking strategy. If it appeared that they use different speaking strategies instead of the one under examination, the entire population should be replaced. Second, to identify the reasons for discourse markers' use and the strategies that assisted the participants in the process of lessening their reliance on such lexical items, the participants' thoughts, perspectives, and beliefs were taken into consideration.

The research design used for this study is a case study. This study focuses on a population of Master's students enrolled in the applied linguistics program, from the English department of Casablanca. The selected sample consisted of 20 students. The choice behind this research design was oriented by my knowledge of the population, the case, and the study and its objectives. The target population had to include participants who share interpersonal relationships with me (former classmates in this context), and others who strictly don't know me. Some of the data reported in this paper can be better understood by making comparisons between the two groups, which will help me achieve the research purpose.

3.2 Data Collection Instrument and Procedures

This study relied on in-depth structured interviews to obtain the data needed to answer the research questions at hand. Interviews were selected as they gave access to me to detect the discourse markers that the students use. If the students were presented with a written task, their final works would not contain any discourse markers. The interviews relied on open-ended questions that would allow the freedom of creative speech and would not restrict the participants to yes or no answers only. The interviews lasted about 15 to 20 minutes for each participant. The interviews were recorded; moreover, I took notes of any valuable information that could help achieve the purpose of this study. The interviews took place at Hassan II University.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

A purposive convenience sampling strategy was employed to recruit the participants. A total of 20 Master's students enrolled in the Applied Linguistics programme at Hassan II University were selected because they possessed the linguistic background required to address the research questions and were readily accessible. Convenience sampling was considered appropriate because the interviews required repeated communication with participants throughout the data collection and transcription process. Since the interviews were manually transcribed, maintaining close contact with the participants enabled me to clarify unclear utterances whenever necessary and to seek additional feedback to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the transcribed data. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews.

3.4 Data Transcription

Following the completion of the interviews, all audio recordings underwent a preprocessing stage prior to transcription. To improve transcription accuracy, each recording was enhanced by increasing its audio quality, clarity, and loudness, ensuring that participants' utterances could be distinguished with greater precision. The enhanced recordings were

subsequently listened to repeatedly and transcribed manually. Manual transcription was preferred because it allowed me to capture the participants' spoken discourse as faithfully as possible while remaining attentive to the linguistic features under investigation.

Upon completion of the transcription process, each transcript was carefully cross-checked against the original audio recordings to verify its accuracy and completeness. This verification procedure enhanced the reliability of the dataset and minimized the possibility of transcription errors that could influence the subsequent analysis.

Once the accuracy of the transcripts had been established, I manually identified and counted every occurrence of discourse markers in the participants' responses. Manual coding enabled a careful examination of the frequency and distribution of discourse markers across the interview data while ensuring that each occurrence was interpreted within its immediate conversational context. The resulting frequency counts constituted the primary dataset used for the quantitative analysis.

3.5 Research Questions

In this work, I conducted twenty interviews in an attempt to respond to the following research questions:

- Do Master's students of Applied Linguistics belonging to the English department of Casablanca use discourse markers as a speaking strategy?
- Why do they use such lexical items when speaking?

3.6 Research Validity and Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which the findings of a particular study are replicated. This investigation is reliable if approached correctly. Researchers interested in obtaining the same findings as the ones presented in this paper are supposed to consider the following: The frequency of discourse markers measured was associated with different jargons specific to different disciplines as aforementioned. However, this does not imply that other researchers should necessarily consider the same fields of study (Applied Linguistics, Culinary Arts, and Religion). These domains were chosen carefully based on the participants' degree of familiarity with the English specific to these areas of knowledge. Perhaps they approach religious topics, for instance, frequently using their mother tongue (Moroccan Arabic), but not necessarily using the English language.

Applied linguistics was deemed a familiar discipline, for the population consists of students whose field of study is Applied Linguistics. They can discuss different issues related to this field with confidence and with no hesitation. Contrarily, Culinary Arts and Religion were assumed initially to be unfamiliar fields of study; however, this was only confirmed after analysing the frequency with which discourse markers were used in relation to the aforementioned disciplines. Notably, if the results had shown otherwise, I would have chosen other fields where the English language can be used. To conclude, achieving the same findings under the same conditions described in this work would necessitate a solid consideration of the disciplines chosen, the jargon unique to them, and the *degree of familiarity*, as discussed above.

Validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the data collection instrument adopted is measuring what it claims to measure. Based on the interviewee's responses, I measured the frequency of discourse markers. The nature of the topic naturally suggested

interviews conducting, for I am interested in investigating spoken data. Accordingly, the instrument employed to collect the data is valid.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

Prior to analysing the data, I manually counted the number of discourse markers used by the participants to answer the interview's questions, as illustrated in the first interview's report. After obtaining the frequency with which DMs were utilized, SPSS was used to conduct descriptive statistics following this path: Analyse → Descriptive statistics → Descriptives. I theoretically considered two separate variables: the number of DMs used, as a dependent variable, and jargon as an independent one. However, when entering the data, DMs' frequency could not be entered as a separate variable; instead, under jargon (independent variable), the frequency with which these words were employed was listed.

4. Results and Findings

The interview's questions were formulated in accordance with three distinct fields of study as illustrated below:

If you were to become a teacher, what teaching theory/method/approach would you adopt? ⇒ **Applied Linguistics**

Why do you think Muslims sacrifice animals on the day of Eid-Al Adha? ⇒ **Religion**

How do you make your tea? ⇒ **Culinary Arts**

To highlight the relationship that could exist between the jargon unique to the aforementioned field of studies (Independent variable) and the frequency of discourse markers (dependent variable), descriptive statistics were used.

At this stage, the SPSS software was used to perform descriptive statistics. "Descriptives" command was utilized to come up with the following chart:

		Applied Linguistics	Culinary Arts	Religion
N	Valid	20	20	20
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		0.70	2.45	2.10
Minimum		0	2	2
Maximum		2	6	3
Sum		14	49	42

The mean is a measurement that indicates the central tendency of the data. A measure of central tendency is a single number that attempts to characterise a data set by pinpointing its centre. As a result, the concepts of central tendency and central location are often used

interchangeably. In the context of this inquiry, the value of the mean refers to the average number of DMs used by the participants, which varies depending on the jargon used.

The smallest value in the data set is the minimum. Regarding the use of DMs, its value shows the bare minimum of instances in which the respondents utilised discourse markers depending on the questions they were asked.

The maximum is the largest value in the data set, and it refers, in the context, to the maximum number of times discourse markers were used by the interviewees.

The total number of observations is the sum. It indicates the total number of DMs used by participants.

The value of the average use of DMs concerning the field of Applied Linguistics is remarkably low (0, 50), in comparison to that of Culinary Arts (2, 45) and Religion (2, 10).

The participants used a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 2 DMs when asked about their field, applied linguistics. They used a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 6 discourse markers when attempting to use a language unique to Culinary Arts. With regard to Religion, as a field of study, the participants used a minimum of 2 DMs and a maximum of 3.

The interviewees employed a total of 14 discourse markers when answering questions pertaining to the field of applied linguistics, 49 DMs when responding to questions related to the Culinary Arts, and 42 discourse markers when attempting to talk about a religious subject.

This section was centred around the relevant values extracted from the chart and their pertinence to this investigation. It appears that the participants used a certain number of DMs depending on the questions they were asked.

5. Discussion

The participants were asked different questions that were formulated in accordance with three distinct and different domains in which the English language can be used, and with the research questions this paper seeks to answer. The “first” interview was conducted to know if there could be any significant difference in terms of the number of discourse markers employed in relation to the jargon appropriate and specific to the aforementioned areas of study.

Based on my knowledge about the target population and the participants’ responses, he argues that the interviewees used few DMs when expressing ideas about their field of interest, Applied Linguistics, thanks to their frequent utilization of the terminology unique to that field. Moreover, since they are Master’s students of Applied Linguistics, they are able to discuss, without hesitation, different issues and topics they have perhaps already covered in class or read about in various articles and influential papers. Concerning the other fields: namely, Culinary Arts and Religion, the interviewees used a remarkable and interesting number of discourse markers due to their infrequent use of the jargon specific to these disciplines.

It is apparent that the participants use discourse markers as a speaking strategy; hence, the following research question was addressed: do Applied Linguistics Master’s students of the English department at the faculty of letters and human sciences in Casablanca use discourse markers as a speaking strategy?

The present finding explains as well the employment of the word “Englishes” in researchers’ and educationists’ work, particularly those who showed interest in “teaching

English for specific purposes”. The latter alludes to English instruction that emphasizes the growth of conversational abilities in a particular subject or field. The precise vocabulary and register that learners need are taken into consideration while designing ESP courses. “Englishes” refers to the English language “versions” specific to the context in which it is used. In other words, talking about a religious topic, for example, requires a variety of lexical items to be stored in one’s lexicon, which are solely utilized when needed to approach a topic of the same nature.

The findings suggest that infrequent jargon is a reason for the use of DMs. The latter was only identified by a few researchers in their work:

Dockrell et al. (1998) argued that the use of DMs is mostly attributable to the prevalence of uncommon words. They are words that are not used on a regular basis and are thus absent from our mental dictionaries. This indicates that when a speaker is unable to find a word, he/she will pause and frequently toss *um* in its place until the word, or its synonym, is located and retrieved, then utilised in speech. (Dockrell et al. 1998)

With regard to the theoretical framework upon which this paper is based, the participants used discourse markers as a *stalling or time-gaining strategy* primarily characterized by the use of such lexical items in speech, as a *self-monitoring strategy* when attempting to self-repair their spoken text, and as an *achievement or compensatory strategy* when translating lexemes from their mother tongue to English.

A hypothesis that requires testing in the future, and that could explain precisely why unfamiliar and infrequent jargon is associated with a high frequency of discourse marker use, is that learners fail to retrieve the appropriate lexical items that are needed in a specific context. Consequently, they are left with two options: The *first option*: they could stall time through the use of discourse markers to find the right words; this is if we assume that they are already stored in their lexicon and that only retrieval is required. The “*second option*” which is pertinent to a scenario in which a particular word or expression is not existent in one’s lexicon, is retrieving the right word from the stored vocabulary of the EFL learner’s mother tongue and use it instead, as long as it is specific to one’s culture and context (Moroccan Arabic in this case), and that its usage will not hinder communication.

First option : <i>Successful retrieval</i>	Second option : <i>Failed retrieval</i>
It is related to <i>you know</i> our beliefs	<u>what</u> is it called <i>um</i> /tefha:r/?
It reminds us of <i>u:m</i> Ibrahim’s faith	I clean <i>um</i> /lbera:d/
I usually use <i>you know</i> those <u>lipton</u> teabags	I add tea and sugar a to the <i>um</i> /lbera:d/ I guess since it's a Moroccan thing
....and wait for like some time in order for it to <u>u:m</u> simmer.	Once I’m done I throw away the content we call it in Darija ‘teflila/

An illustration of the “two options” discussed above, and that is based on the data collected through the first interview, is the following:

Note: these options are strongly dependent on learners' strategies and could vary from one learner to another.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between discipline-specific jargon and the frequency of discourse marker use among Moroccan EFL Master's students from the perspective of strategic competence. The findings demonstrate that learners' familiarity with the jargon associated with a particular domain is closely related to the frequency with which they rely on discourse markers during spontaneous speech. When discussing familiar topics, participants produced fewer discourse markers, whereas unfamiliar disciplinary contexts generated greater reliance on these lexical items as compensatory strategies.

Beyond identifying this relationship, the study contributes to the growing body of research on spoken discourse by highlighting the importance of lexical familiarity as a factor influencing discourse marker use in EFL communication. These findings extend current understandings of strategic competence by showing that excessive use of discourse markers may reflect lexical retrieval demands rather than merely poor speaking habits. In the Moroccan EFL context, the results suggest that developing learners' domain-specific vocabulary can reduce unnecessary dependence on discourse markers and promote more fluent and effective oral communication.

7. Limitations

Several methodological constraints limited the current investigation. To arrive at the results presented in this study, qualitative data instead of inferential statistics were used to complement the quantitative findings. The field of study could not be entered as a separate independent variable; hence, I was unable to run the three- factor ANOVA inferential test. In addition, this study focuses on a single group, with a total of 20 participants; thus, the results cannot be applied to larger populations.

8. Future Research

In this quantitative phase, it has been established that infrequent jargon affected the frequency with which DMs were inserted in the participants' spoken discourse. Further research could investigate the following:

The correlation between gender and the utilization of discourse markers.

The dependence of written text on the jargon used.

The relationship between language formality/informality (register) and the use of DMs in both spoken and written text.

9. Implications

Both students and teachers could benefit from a broader academic vocabulary that includes as much information as possible about other disciplines. This does not imply they have to be experts in every field wherein English is used; for achieving such a level seems to be quite demanding. Instead, they should bear in mind that learning has always been a lifelong

process, and that expanding one's horizons of knowledge is a sound way to boost one's sense of self-worth.

The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications for English language teaching in the Moroccan EFL context. First, teachers should explicitly raise learners' awareness of the communicative functions of discourse markers and distinguish between their appropriate use and excessive reliance on them. Rather than discouraging discourse markers altogether, instruction should emphasize their strategic role in maintaining fluency, coherence, and interaction.

Classroom speaking activities should encourage learners to develop strategic competence by using a wider range of communication strategies instead of depending excessively on discourse markers. Role-plays, discussions, presentations, and problem-solving tasks can provide opportunities for students to monitor and regulate their use of discourse markers in authentic communicative situations.

Second, teachers should provide formative feedback on learners' spoken production, highlighting instances of overuse while suggesting alternative linguistic resources such as paraphrasing, reformulation, and self-repair strategies. Such feedback can help learners achieve greater fluency without compromising clarity or coherence.

Finally, teacher education and professional development programs should incorporate training on strategic competence and spoken discourse. Equipping teachers with practical techniques for identifying and addressing excessive discourse marker use will enable them to foster more effective oral communication skills among Moroccan EFL learners.

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