Organisational Discourse Markers in ESL Students' Essays: A Study of Metadiscourse

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Abstract
Metadiscourse is the linguistic expressions and signalling words used by a writer to organise a text and connect with the readers. This research paper is a preliminary study to explore and identify the metadiscourse markers from organisational discourse markers category in 195 persuasive essays written by second year undergraduate students at a chosen public university in Malaysia. The organisational discourse markers category (ODM) is one of the two main categories, other than the interpersonal discourse markers category (IDM), in a simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers proposed by (Tan, 2012). This preliminary study focuses on ODM because this category assists a writer to manage the flow of ideas in a text. It is also relevant to get an idea of how metadiscourse markers are applied by this group of tertiary level students to organise their essays, through the use of organisational discourse markers. The metadiscourse markers in the essays were searched with the assistance of a concordance software, WordSmith 5.0. The findings of this study provide a platform for a larger study of metadiscourse use in Malaysian undergraduate students' essays.
Keywords: ESL Students' Essays, Metadiscourse, Organisational Discourse Markers, Text Organisation, Flow of Text

Introduction
The concept of text organisation is one of the most crucial areas in determining a good piece of English language writing, especially in undergraduates writing. As Malaysian undergraduate students engage in many types of essay writing including persuasive, argumentative, reflective and comparative writing, they are required to learn to write these types of essay writing in classrooms. This practice works as a preparation for them to be able to write a good English language writing in the workplace after they have graduated. Besides language and content aspects, organisation is also one of the important aspects which determines the essay quality especially the marks awarded. A well-organised undergraduate essay normally leads to smooth reading comprehension, thus high marks being awarded by the teachers. However, little is known as to how organisation is actually applied by the undergraduates and to what extent does organisation affect their writing.

One of the ways to organise text in writing is the use of metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is a way of interaction between writers to readers and speakers to listeners and writers to themselves which is not a part of propositional content or idea mentioned in the text to deliver and organize contents or messages effectively (Hyland, 2005; Heng and Tan 2010; Amiryousefi and Rasekh, 2010; Rustipa, 2014). Thus, this present study is relevant to give insights into this matter.

In the area of ESL students' essay writing, it has been established by previous studies that good essays have more metadiscourse markers as compared to the weaker essays (Intraprawat & Steffensen, 1998). This is important to conduct this present study so the findings can offer other researchers some insights to pursue numerous metadiscourse studies especially in comparing both good and weak undergraduate essays.

This study focuses on the organisational discourse markers of metadiscourse because many studies have shown that undergraduates use more organisational discourse markers as compared to interpersonal discourse markers in their writing. More studies of organisational discourse markers should be encouraged for various detailed findings across the country which can be made useful to other researchers of the same field to compare the findings of this study.

The research questions guiding this study are:
1. What are the organisational discourse markers identified in good and weak ESL students' essays and how are these organisational discourse markers classified into sub-categories?
2. What are the frequencies of metadiscourse markers use in organisational discourse markers in good and weak in ESL students' essays?

Literature Review
Metadiscourse
The term metadiscourse includes the signalling words of any textual communication between writers with their readers, or writers with themselves which are not a part of contents in an essay. These markers are used by a writer to effectively deliver and organise the contents of the essay. Metadiscourse has become a largely used term in many studies which focus on the textual communication between writers and readers especially in the area of English as a second language among ESL learners (e.g. Rashid, et al., 2016, Rashid, 2016, Anas et al., 2016).

The term metadiscourse is commonly introduced as "writing about writing" (Williams, 1985, p.226), referring to any textual expressions while the writer is interacting with the readers in a piece of writing. Metadiscourse is also defined as any linguistic expressions in a text which are providing some explanations about the text itself, rather than of its messages (Thompson, 2003). Two years later, Hyland (2005) proposed metadiscourse as a "social and communicative process" between writers and readers (p.14) whereby the term itself is represented by the use of "metadiscourse markers" (2004, p.142; 2005, p.50). Even a few years before, Kumpf (2000, p.401) had introduced these markers as "cues and indicators" in text. Many writers typically use signalling words in their written text to organise their contents and guide the readers to understanding.

For the purpose of this study, a model of metadiscourse which is yet to be tested in this study is called 'a simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers' introduced by Tan (2012). It is a new version of metadiscourse taxanomy which is designed for lay leaners of especially L2 undergraduate students. It is a revised model by altering the metadiscourse jargons into common terms based on Hyland's (2015); Crismore's (1993); Vande Kopple's (1985) taxanomies of metadiscourse.

Based on 'a simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers' introduced by Tan (2012), the metadiscourse markers are classified into two main categories (organizational and interpersonal metadiscourse markers) and sub-categories such as connectives, sequencers, topicalizers, pointers, citations, elaborators, hedges, emphatics, attitude markers, engagements markers, conditionals and self-mentions.

Table 1:
A simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers

Category	Function	Example
Organizational	*Discourse markers*	*Help writer to manage the flow of ideas*
Connectives:		
i) Inter-sentential linkers	Expressions that link one idea to the next (between two sentences)	Thus In addition Thus,
ii) Intra-sentential linkers	Expressions that link one idea to the next (within a sentence)	….and….. ….but….. …..yet…..
Sequencers	Contribute to the staging ideas	Finally/to conclude/next
Topicalizers	Stating the purpose or intention of the writer	My purpose here is to….., in the essay, I am going to……,
Pointers	linking current information with preceding or forthcoming information	Noted above/ see Fig/in section 2, ….. that was mentioned earlier
Citations	Giving credit to writers of other texts	According to X/ (Y, 1990) Z states
Elaborators	Providing readers with extra information of the proposition	Namely/ e.g./ such as/ in other words, this includes…/ use of punctuation marks
Category	Function	Example
Interpersonal Discourse Markers	Help writer connects with his readers	
Hedges	Withhold writer's full commitment to proposition	Might/perhaps/possible/about
Emphatics	Emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	In fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude or stance to the proposition	Unfortunately/I agree/surprisingly, …has been…/ …were….
Engagement markers	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Consider/ note that/ you can see that, use of questions
Conditionals	Explicitly brings the reader into the argument	If you…./if I were you
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	i/we/my/our

Since this study focuses on organisational discourse markers in ESL students' essays, only the section of organisational discourse markers category is looked at. Some of the examples of sentences produced by students (with underlined organisational discourse markers) are as follows:

> *Besides, student will learn about grammar and vocabulary to every dialouge that they made (Student 1).*

Secondly, social networking via internet is bad for our soft skills especially if we want to present or interview (Student 2).

Thus, this method can make student improve their face-to-face communication *(Student 3).*

Finally, I really hope that all people especially students will take a note in this problem (Student 4).

Corpus-based Approach
The advancement of computer-mediated technology becomes very imperative to help researchers in identifying metadiscourse markers especially in a corpus-based study where a large set of data is used as samples. A concordance software helps researchers to identify metadiscourse markers in a corpus faster and less hassle. Thus, these are among the reasons for using corpus-based approach in this current study.

Previously, corpus-based studies are used to identify the existence of metadiscourse markers and analyse the categories or features involved in the writing. According to Noor (1998), corpus-based research is often used because it is a study which deals with building a large collection of texts as a database to search for evidence and arguments. Therefore, a corpus provides a real set of data with collected linguistic expressions from either spoken or written samples.

The identification of metadiscourse markers in huge corpora would not be practicable without an assistance of computer-mediated programme such as a concordance software. It allows the researchers to work fast with a very huge collection of data set and get reliable findings (Mohd Noor, 1998). These influences have made many linguistic researchers to adopt corpus analysis approach in their research methods.

Methodology
Samples
Two groups of essays were collected to develop two corpora of Good Students' Essays and Weak Students' Essays from a public university in Malaysia. These essays are the essays written by Semester two students during their Final Examination for English Language paper. All essays have been awarded with either high (20-30) and low (below 10) marks by a few respective lecturers. The full marks for every essay are 30 marks and they are of the same topic.

To build two sensible corpora with almost similar size, these two groups of essays were then finalised with 269 for good essays and 271 for weak essay to sum a total tokens of about 143, 000 words in each corpus. Later both groups of essays were computer-typed and converted into electronic corpus in Microsoft Word and Text files, consisting of 143, 407 and 143, 265 word tokens respectively. For the purpose of this study, these two corpora were named as GSE and WSE corpora respectively.

Procedures of Analysis
The organisational discourse markers in good and weak undergraduate essays were identified electronically with an aid of a computer mediated concordance software, WordSmith 5.0. In

classifying each marker, both GSE and WSE corpora had to be thoroughly analysed sentence by sentence to find all possible organisational discourse markers.

This means every sentence which appears to have any of the organisational discourse markers had to be reconfirmed for its function with two experienced inter-coders from the field of English Language. This is to make sure that all possible organisational discourse markers found are metadiscourse markers. After they had been confirmed, these organisational discourse markers were categorised based on a simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers' introduced by Tan (2012). The findings were presented in tables as tables of frequency to see the percentage of use and occurrence per 1,000 words. Note that this study is comparing two different sizes of corpora hence occurrence per 1, 000 tokens and percentage of total metadiscourse markers are used for valid comparison. The findings of this present research is descriptive and the detailed frequencies of each sub-category of organisational discourse markers category are revealed.

Findings
Research question 1 (a):
What are the organisational discourse markers identified in good and weak ESL students' essays?

The organisational discourse markers are classified into six sub-categories based on a simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers proposed by Tan (2012) as presented in Table 2. Numbers in brackets show the frequency of occurrence in each sub-corpus such as in connectives, sequencer, topicalizers, pointers, citations and elaborators.

Table 2:
Organisational Discourse Markers Identified And Classified Into Six Sub-Categories And Types

Main Categories	Sub-categories	Types	
		Good Students' Essays (195 texts)	**Weak Students' Essays (100 texts)**
Organizational (discourse markers - help writer to manage the flow of ideas)	**Connectives** (expressions that link one idea to the next)	Because (748)	Also (183)
		Also (450)	And (95)
		And (252)	But (66)
		But (242)	So (62)
		So (186)	Because (47)
		While (70)	However (18)
		Besides that (53)	Besides that (17)
		However (52)	While (16)
		Besides (49)	Furthermore (14)
		Still (46)	Moreover (13)
		Furthermore (43)	Beside that (11)
		Although (40)	Although (9)
		Beside that (29)	Since (8)
		Even though (27)	In addition (7)
		At the same time (26)	Still (5)
		Moreover (25)	At the same time (4)
		In addition (23)	Besides (4)

		Therefore (21) Thus (21) Since (14) On the other hand (11) Leads to (9) Hence (8) Again (4) Though (4) Meanwhile (4) As a result (3) The result is (3) Whereas (3) As a result (3) In contrast (2) At (in) the same way (2) Nevertheless (2) Nonetheless (2) Yet (2) On the contrary (1) Rather (1) **37 types** **2, 481 tokens**	Even though (4) As a result (3) Thus (3) On the other hand (3) As a result (3) Therefore (2) Hence (2) Further (2) Nevertheless (2) Yet (2) Again (2) Leads to (1) Meanwhile (1) **30 types** **609 tokens**
	Sequencers (contribute to the staging of ideas)	Firstly (69) Secondly (50) First (45) Then (44) Lastly (37) Second (24) Next (23) Thirdly (22) Last (16) Third (15) Last but not least (13) Finally (12) To begin (5) First of all (1) First and foremost (1) At last (1) **16 types** **378 tokens**	Firstly (38) Secondly (34) Then (23) Lastly (19) Next (15) Thirdly (13) Last but not least (10) Second (8) First (7) First of all (3) Finally (2) Third (2) To begin (1) First and foremost (1) At last (1) **15 types** **177 tokens**
	Topicalizers (stating the purpose or intention of the writer)	--	--

	Pointers (linking current information with preceding or forthcoming information)	--	--
	Citations (giving credits to writers of other texts)	--	--
	Elaborators (providing readers with extra information of the proposition)	Such as (214) For example (107) '( )' (78) That is (36) For instance (9) Known as (4) In fact (3) Which means (2) This means (1) In other tokens (1) Called (1) Indeed (1) **12 types** **457 tokens**	For example (39) Such as (29) '( )' (25) That is (9) In fact (2) Called (1) **6 types** **105 tokens**
TOTAL	**Tokens**	3, 316	891
	Types	65	51

Research question 1 (b):
How are these organisational discourse markers classified into sub-categories?
There are 3, 316 metadiscourse markers identified in the good essays which consist of 80, 512 tokens; while 891 metadiscourse markers identified in the weak essays which consist of 26, 056 tokens. Note that the table below shows an assessment of two different sizes of corpora hence occurrence per 1, 000 tokens and percentage of total metadiscourse markers are used for valid comparison.

Table 3:
Frequency Of Use Of Organizational Discourse Markers

	Good Students' Essays corpus (80, 512 tokens)			**Weak Students' Essays (26, 056 tokens)**		
Metadiscourse Category	**Total Markers**	**Occurrence per 1, 000 tokens**	**% of Total metadiscourse**	**Total Markers**	**Occurrence per 1, 000 tokens**	**% of Total metadiscourse**
Organizational discourse markers	3, 316	41.19	45.54	891	34.20	39.78

Based on the findings in the good essays, it can be seen that organizational discourse markers use is recorded as 45.54%, while interpersonal discourse markers use is 54.46% (8.92% lower than interpersonal discourse markers category of metadiscourse). The interpersonal discourse markers category of metadiscourse has a higher frequency of use with 49.26 occurrences per 1, 000 words as compared to organizational discourse markers with 41.19 occurrences per 1, 000 words. Similarly, in the weak essays, the organizational discourse markers use is recorded as 39.78%, while interpersonal discourse markers use is 60.22% (20.44% lower than interpersonal discourse markers). The interpersonal discourse markers have a higher frequency of use with 51.77 occurrences per 1, 000 words as compared to organizational discourse markers with 34.20 occurrences per 1, 000 words.

In comparing good and weak essays, the organizational discourse markers category in the good essays shows a proportionally higher frequency of use compared to the weak essays. In other words, the good essays generally use more organisational metadiscourse than the weak essays do. At this point, this might suggest that the use of organizational discourse markers in good essays is optimal and increase the readability of the essays. It could be one of the contributing factors of the high ratings or marks of these essays.

Research question 2
What are the frequencies of organisation discourse markers use for each sub-category in both good and weak in ESL students' essays?

The frequencies of organisational discourse markers use in good and weak in ESL students' essays are described in the following Table 4. The table is based on the simplified metadiscourse framework for ESL lay writers proposed by (Tan, 2012).

Table 4:
Sub-Categories of Organizational Discourse Markers Found In Good And Weak Essays

Metadiscourse Category	Good Students' Essays corpus (80, 512 tokens)			Weak Students' Essays (26, 056 tokens)		
	Total markers	Occurrence per 1, 000 tokens	% of Total metadiscourse	Total Markers	Occurrence per 1, 000 tokens	% of Total metadiscourse
1. Organizational						
Connectives	2, 481	30.82	74.82	609	23.37	68.35
Sequencers	378	4.69	11.40	177	6.79	19.87
Topicalizers	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pointers	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citations	-	-	-	-	-	-
Elaborators	457	5.68	13.78	105	4.03	11.78
Total	3,316	100		891	100	

Table 4 shows that connectives (e.g.: *and, also, but*) have the highest frequency of use in both groups of essays, accounting for substantially more than half of the total metadiscourse tokens. The good essays contain 2,481 connectives (74.82% of total organizational discourse

markers) while the weak essays contain 609 connectives (68.35% of total organizational discourse markers). This is similar to the other studies of the same kind (Intraprawat and Steffensen, 1995; Hyland, 2004; Hyland and Tse, 2004; Hempel and Degand, 2008; Heng and Tan, 2010) which show high percentages of transitions use in each study.

In the good essays, there are 457 markers of elaborators found with 5.68 occurrence per 1, 000 words and 378 markers of sequencers found with 4.69 occurrence per 1, 000 words. On the other hand, in the weak essays, there are 177 markers of sequencers found with 6.79 occurrence per 1, 000 words and 105 markers of elaborators found with 4.03 occurrence per 1, 000 words. In comparing between the two corpora, elaborators are recorded higher in the good essays with 457 markers of elaborators (5.68 occurrence per 1, 000 words) while the weak essays contain 105 markers of elaborators (4.03 occurrence per 1, 000 words).

Conclusion

Based on occurrence per 1, 000 words, it can be seen that GSE corpus shows a higher frequency of use in organisational discourse markers category as compared to WSE corpus. This finding is similar to what has been proven by previous studies including Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995). This is likely to happen because organisational discourse markers are frequently used throughout the essay to allow the readers to capture the messages through the use of transition markers, frame markers, endophoric markers, code glosses and evidentials.

Many previous studies have proven that metadiscourse can contribute to effective writing as the ideas become more organised, clear and understandable (Intaraprawat and Steffensen, 1995; Hyland, 2005; Amiryousefi and Rasekh, 2010). In this study, the claim that shows the ideas become more organised is so much being portrayed by the use of organisational discourse markers. So, the results of the study present supplementary information of how metadiscourse markers are used among Malaysian students in academic essay writing.

Recommendation

A further study should be followed up as an attempt to investigate more on how metadiscourse markers are used especially another category which is interpersonal discourse markers. The corpora of the same size should be tested out to see whether there is any difference in the occurrences per 1,000 words or the percentages. The study must also look at both categories of metadiscourse in Malaysian students' essay writing especially to see the correct and wrong use of metadiscourse markers. Although it is somehow impossible to determine the correct and wrong use of metadiscourse markers, it is practical to look at the appropriate and inappropriate use of these markers in texts while looking at the patterns of their writing.

Acknowledgement

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