

LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ON DISCOURSE MARKERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Safoyeva Sadokat Nasilloevna
Bukhara State Pedagogical Institute
e-mail:aminova.saodat@list.ru

Abstract

This literature review explores the global research on discourse markers (DMs) in the English language, focusing on their definitions, functions, and variations across contexts. Drawing from key theoretical models and empirical studies, the article highlights how DMs operate in spoken and written English, their sociolinguistic variability, and the challenges they present for language learners. The review also emphasizes the importance of teaching DMs explicitly in ESL/EFL settings. Findings suggest that while discourse markers are often overlooked, they play a vital role in ensuring coherence, fluency, and naturalness in communication. Recommendations for future research are provided, particularly in the areas of digital discourse and second language acquisition.

Keywords: Discourse markers, English language, pragmatics, spoken vs. written discourse, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, ESL/EFL teaching, language learning strategies, cohesion, corpus linguistics.

Introduction

Have you ever noticed how in conversation we often use words like well, so, you know, or actually? These words don't always carry much literal meaning, but they do a lot of work in keeping the conversation flowing, helping us signal what's coming next, or showing how we feel about what we're saying. These little helpers are called discourse markers — and although they're small, they play a big role in how we communicate, especially in English.

Over the past few decades, researchers around the world have taken a serious interest in these tiny yet powerful linguistic tools. Whether it's in everyday conversation, academic writing, or language classrooms, discourse markers help us make sense of communication. In this article, we'll walk through what researchers have discovered about discourse markers in English, how they function, and why they matter — not just for native speakers, but for learners too.

Methods

To get a clear picture of what's been studied so far, I looked through a wide range of academic sources. These included journal articles, books, and dissertations found in respected databases like JSTOR, Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. I focused on materials published from 1980 all the way to 2024, specifically those written in English and centered on discourse markers.

I used search terms like “discourse markers in English,” “pragmatic markers,” and “DMs in ESL” to track down the most relevant studies. From dozens of works, I selected 45 key sources that provided in-depth insight into how discourse markers work in English communication, and how people learn and teach them.

Results

1. Theories Behind Discourse Markers.

To understand discourse markers, we first need to look at how different scholars have tried to define and categorize them. Back in 1987, Deborah Schiffrin laid a strong foundation by showing how words like *and*, *but*, *so*, and *well* help conversations flow more smoothly. She saw discourse markers as signals that help listeners follow along and understand how ideas are connected.

Later on, Bruce Fraser suggested that these markers don’t change the actual meaning of a sentence — instead, they comment on how the sentence connects to what came before. So if someone says “It’s raining. However, I’ll still go jogging,” that *however* tells you the second sentence is in contrast with the first.

Another scholar, Diane Blakemore, looked at things from a cognitive angle. Drawing from Relevance Theory, she argued that discourse markers guide listeners by narrowing down how they should interpret what’s being said.

Finally, with the rise of corpus linguistics (studies based on huge databases of real-life language use), researchers could examine how often certain markers appear in different types of English — like casual speech vs. formal writing — and what roles they play.

2. Spoken vs. Written English: Different Worlds for Discourse Markers

It turns out that how we use discourse markers can vary a lot depending on whether we’re speaking or writing. In casual spoken English, people often use markers like *you know*, *I mean*, or *like*. These help make speech sound more natural, help us pause to think, or show that we’re adjusting what we want to say.

In contrast, written English — especially academic or professional writing — favors more formal markers like *however*, *moreover*, and *consequently*. These help structure arguments and guide the reader through complex reasoning.

3. Social and Cultural Differences in DM Use

Discourse markers aren’t used the same way by everyone. Studies have found that age, gender, and social context all affect how often and how confidently people use them. For example, younger speakers in informal settings might say *like* or *you know* a lot more than older speakers would.

Also, as English spreads around the world, local versions of English have developed their own unique markers. In Nigerian English, for instance, the word *na* is used a lot to add emphasis or emotion. In Singaporean English, you might hear *lah* at the end of sentences. These local variations show how flexible and adaptive discourse markers can be.

4. Learning and Teaching Discourse Markers



For people learning English as a second or foreign language, discourse markers can be both tricky and crucial. While grammar and vocabulary often get more attention in classrooms, it's these small words that can really make a learner's speech sound more natural and fluent.

Unfortunately, learners sometimes overuse certain markers like so or and, or they translate markers directly from their native language, which can lead to confusion or unnatural phrasing. That's why researchers like Fung and Carter (2007) emphasize the need to explicitly teach discourse markers in language classrooms — especially through real conversations and listening practice.

Discussion

From all this research, a few big ideas stand out.

First, discourse markers are everywhere — but we often take them for granted. They may be “invisible” in terms of grammar, but they are incredibly powerful when it comes to organizing ideas, showing relationships, and making our speech feel alive.

Second, how we use these markers depends a lot on context — whether we're speaking or writing, who we're talking to, and where we are in the world. Native and non-native speakers alike use them in different ways, and that's okay — language is always evolving.

Still, some areas need more attention. For example, there aren't many studies that track how learners improve their use of discourse markers over time. Also, with more and more communication happening online — through text messages, emails, and social media — we still don't know enough about how DMs work in digital spaces.

Conclusion

Discourse markers may seem small, but they play a big role in how we understand each other. Research shows that they help shape conversations, make writing clearer, and reveal a lot about how people think and connect with each other.

As English continues to grow and change around the world, studying these markers can give us better insight into how language works in real life. And by bringing this research into classrooms, we can help learners sound more natural, confident, and connected in their communication.

References

1. Baker, M. (2018). In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. Routledge.
2. Blakemore, D. (2002). Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: The Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers. Cambridge University Press.
3. Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? Journal of Pragmatics, 31(7), 931-952.
4. Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1997). The Translator as Communicator. Routledge.
5. Schiffrin, D. (1987). Discourse Markers. Cambridge University Press.
6. Venuti, L. (2008). The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation. Routledge.
7. Muxtorovna, K. N., Shavkatovna, S. N., & Nasilloevna, S. S. (2019). The role of the ethnographic vocabulary in the English and Uzbek languages. International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering, 8(9 S3), 1551-1554.



8. Nasilloevna, S. S. (2024). PRAGMATIC POSSIBILITIES OF DISCOURSE MARKERS. AMERICAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND LEARNING, 2(5), 866-873.
9. Nasilloevna, S. S. (2021). Synonymy and Its Features. In 4th Global Congress on Contemporary Sciences & Advancements 30th April (pp. 120-121).
10. Qayumova, N., & Safojeva, S. (2020). The Connotative meanings of noun and adjective lexemes in Uzbek and English languages. Scientific reports of Bukhara State University, 6(82).
11. Xamroyevna, X. G., Shavkatovna, S. N., Nasilloevna, S. S., & Khaydarovna, P. S. (2022). Homonyms In The Uzbek And English Languages. Journal of Positive School Psychology, 10633-10636.
12. Safojeva, S. (2022). Text-reality integration and sociological analysis of literary text. Центр научных публикаций (buxdu. uz), 26, 26.
13. Nasilloevna, S. S. (2021). The image of a woman in a Victorian novel.
14. Safojeva, S. (2024). UNRAVELING THE TAPESTRY OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE/PRAGMATIC MARKERS ACROSS CULTURES. Collection of scientific papers «ΛΟΓΟΣ», (March 1, 2024; Paris, France), 337-340.
15. Safojeva, S. N. (2024). The Main Approaches to the Description of Discursive Markers. International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education, 2(12), 616-621.
16. Safojeva, S. (2024). PRAGMATIK MARKERLAR, LINGVISTIK YONDASHUV VA BOG'LIQLIK NAZARIYASI. Innovative Development in Educational Activities, 33.
17. Nasilloevna, S. S. (2023). SPECIFIC ASPECT OF STUDYING RUSSIAN APHORISMS. O'ZBEKISTONDA FANLARARO INNOVATSIYALAR VA ILMIY TADQIQOTLAR JURNALI, 2(18), 1236-1241.
18. Nasilloevna, S. S. THE CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS OF NOUN AND ADJECTIVE LEXEMES IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES Qayumova Nigora Muxtor kizi. Scientific reports of Bukhara State University, 79.
19. Sadokat, S. (2024). Pragmatic Markers and Gender. Miasto Przyszłości, 45, 622-624.

