ANALYSING DISCOURSE MARKERS IN POPULAR YOUTUBE VIDEOS

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Abstract

English language learning process of EFL learners is frequently evaluated through their performance in using the language, in particular their speaking performance. However, achieving spoken fluency is not an easy task for those learners due to many constraints ranging from linguistic aspects to personal aspects. Speaking is particularly complicated as it involves simultaneous processes: articulating and thinking process, and hence quite often people use typical words knows as Discourse Markers (DMs) to mediate the thinking process before they actually articulate ideas in their minds. In most occasions DMs are not explicitly taught in the EFL classroom; however, due to the advancement of technology, EFL learners can acquire them from their independent learning mainly through accessing English YouTube channels. In response to that, this paper examines DMs used in some popular YouTube videos, selected based on the number of their subscribers. The data which were in the form of words/phrases derived from the utterances contained in the videos were analysed qualitatively using Fraser's DMs construct (1991). The results indicated that DMs in the form of Discourse Activity markers functioning as clarifying occurred the most throughout the videos, represented by the use of DMs like (occurred 68 times), just (56 times), and really (36 times). Next trends, in sequence, were DMs in the form of Message Relationship markers functioning as presenting parallels and elaboration, represented by the use of DMs and which occurred 105 times

Keywords – *spoken discourse, discourse markers, YouTube, videos*

Introduction

Achieving spoken fluency is one of the many goals of any language learning. However, the way to achieve it is not easy. Mainly because there are many aspects that have to be mastered. Spoken fluency is achieved when you speak without many hesitations and master the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension (Crystal, D. 2013). It will be very awkward if there are too many empty spaces in someone's utterances. Thus, sometimes, people will say words such as umm, well, oh, like, etc. while they are thinking about what utterance they should say next. Those words are called Discourse Markers (DMs). Scholars such as Schiffrin (1987), Brinton (1996), Fraser (1999), Blakemore (2002), etc. have already studied DMs. However, there are still no universal agreement on the name and the definition of DMs (Li, Q. B. 2016). According to Fraser (1999), DMs is 'pragmatic class, lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases'. He states that it acts as a bridge between prior utterance and the next one.

Studies on DMs in Indonesia mainly discuss DMs occurrences in a formal or academic situation such as in a class by teachers or students. A study conducted by Patriana, Rachmajanti, &

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Mukminatien reveals that students have already put their attention to DMs, however, they are facing a problem on how to use them properly. Shen Yin (1998) in Rahimi and Riasati (2012) found that DMs are not explicitly taught in the classroom. Another researcher also states that it is either 'absent' or 'extremely patchy' (Larsen. 2016). Sankoff et al. (1997) mentioned that DMs often are not included in traditional classes. However, he also mentioned that it is easier for the learners to acquire DMs through communicating with native speakers. The problem we face is that it is not easy to find native speaker in our community. Thus, we could consider one of Larsen suggestions to use video data as the main source.

The development of various social media on the Internet allow us, as the users, not only to use the Internet passively but also to participate in it by uploading contents. This would be very useful for teachers to search for authentic materials they need. Sites such as YouTube provide many kinds of materials in the form of videos. Many videos contain one person talking to the camera about various topics. They usually shared their experiences and opinions ranging from their personal life to a wider world topic. Larsen (2016) suggested that learners could watch and analyze the videos for frequencies of DMs in English and the phonetic, temporal and sequential characteristics of common DMs. This study aims to identify discourse markers used by YouTubers talking about their opinions about various different things. The researcher will focus on the functions of DMs especially the interpersonal function for example 'You see', 'really' and 'I agree'. In short, this study will address the following questions:

1.   Which DMs were used by the YouTubers in their videos?

2.   What are the prevailing functions of the DMs employed by the YouTubers in their videos?

This study is structured as follows. After brief explanations about the importance of the study, first, the writer presents the theoretical framework of this study in the literature review section. Second, the methodology for conducting this study are explained in detail. Third, in section "Findings" the result of the study is provided briefly. Fourth, the relevant theories and interpretations of the study is delivered in the discussions section. Fifth, the study is summarized in the conclusion part.

Previous Studies

Discourse markers have been the subject of investigation in many studies. Some studies focused on the use of discourse markers in spoken discourse. Norrick (2001) studied discourse markers in oral narratives. Due to the structures and the storytelling procedures of narrative texts, discourse hold special functions in this type. Following is an example of 'but' as a specifically narrative discourse marker.

> yeh I was in the boy scouts at the time
> and we was doing the 50-yard dash
> racing
> but we was at the pier, marked off
> and so we was doing the 50-yard dash
> there was about eight or ten of us, you know,
> going down, coming back
>   Norrick (2001: 859)

The discourse marker 'but' here does not function as expressing contrast to the preceding information. Alternately, but hold the function of ratifying the information.

The functions of Discourse markers also studied and compared across language, Liu (2017), compared the ideational and pragmatic functions of discourse markers 'but' and 'so' by native English speakers and Chinese speakers of English. The findings suggest that there is a gap between English native speakers and Chinese native speaker in using the discourse markers 'but' and 'so. The lack of communicative skills by Chinese speakers affect their use of discourse markers.

Another research on discourse markers in spoken discourse is conducted by Taguchi (2002), she compared the use of discourse markers across registers. Conversation between family, professor-student during office hours, and server-customer. The analyses show that there are differences in the frequency of the distributions of DMs across the registers. The discourse markers 'you know' and 'I mean' often occurs in family and professor-student conversations. 'OK' appears more in professor-student and server-customer conversations. The markers 'you see', 'look', 'now', and 'really' are rarely used in the three registers.

The research of DMs in YouTube videos is conducted by Uicheng and Crabtree (2018). They studied the macro discourse markers used by TED speakers to signal ideas to listeners. TED talk is similar to lecture. It has many audiences, and using formal language. In this study, they found that the frequency of macro discourse markers does not affected by genres of talk. They also found that 51 markers containing the word 'idea' and 'ideas' were found. This present study seeks to identify the distributions and functions of discourse markers used by YouTube content creators in much informal context.

Discourse Markers

Discourse analysis concerns about how the language flows together in forming a structured text. According to McCarthy (1991), discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relation between language and the context in which it is used. It is both a study of the formal linguistic qualities of stretches of language by individuals and groups.

One aspect of discourse that has been characterized as "a growth industry in linguistics" (Fraser, 1999) is discourse markers. One of the first researchers who mentioned discourse marker and suggests that DMs is a field worth to study is Levinson (Fraser, 1991). Hence, there is only a brief comment concerning discourse markers. Thus, many other researchers tried to define and explore discourse markers in depth or general.

Schiffrin defines discourse markers as "sequentially dependant elements which bracket units of talk" (1987, p. 31). While Fraser characterize discourse markers as adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositional phrases that connect the first to the foregoing sentences or utterances (e.g. incidentally, anyway, so). However, some types did not included as discourse markers by Fraser. For example, oh, yeah, uh, I mean and other utterance fillers. Blakemore (1987), furthermore, defines DMs according to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). He claimed that DMs in one discourse are interrelated another. The expressions he studies are and, you see, but, after all, moreover, so, and furthermore.

The fact that the criteria for DMs still have not been agreed generally causes some problems and confusions in classifying them into categories. However, the researcher will most likely to use pragmatics categorisation in exploring spoken discourse. Romero (2002) differentiates DMs into two categories: Involvement markers are the components, which will prevent negative assumptions as the speaker tries to engage with the listeners for example, well, I mean, you know, and you see. Operative markers are the components used to make the utterance flows without any interruption from the listeners (e.g. look, listen, and in another attention getter).

Fraser (1991) put DMs under pragmatic markers term. Where he propose the definition of pragmatic markers as the expressions, which signalize different kinds of meanings. Fraser divides pragmatic markers into three categories: basic, which convey the literal meaning of what being spoken; commentary is the added comment which is not connected with the intended utterance; parallel, still related to the core meaning of a sentence. DMs, fall under the commentary pragmatic marker. However, it is different from other forms of commentary pragmatic marker (e.g. foolishly, technically, frankly, and apparently).

According to Fraser (1991), there are three major classes of DMs: Topic Markers, Discourse Activity, and Message Relationship Markers. Those classes are still can be divided into several categories.

1. Topic Markers: are markers that indicate some types of topic shift to the reader so that the information can be easily followed. There are two groups of topic markers. First, markers which signal new topic (by the way, continuing, with regards to, listen, moving right along, etc.) Second, markers which signal re-emphasis on the current topic (again, in fact, listen, look, but, here, indeed, OK, etc.)
2. Discourse Activity Markers: are markers which signal the activity in the present topic.

> Clarifying: to clarify, by way of clarification
> Conceding: after all, anyway, besides, of course, anyhow
> Explaining: if I may explain, to ex¬plain
> Interrupting: to interrupt
> Repeating: once again, to repeat
> Sequencing: first, finally, lastly, next, to begin, on the other hand
> Summarizing: in summary, summarizing, to sum up, overall

3. Message Relationship Markers: are markers which signal the relationship between the current information and the prior one.

> Parallel Discourse Markers: alternatively, and, likewise, or, otherwise, too, also.
> Contrastive Discourse Markers: but, conversely, despite, however, instead, still.
> Elaborative Discourse Markers: also, for example, for instance, in fact.
> Inferential Discourse Markers: as a result, consequently, then, therefore, so.

This categorization by Fraser does not included several DMs where they are considered important in English language as a mark of fluency. Therefore, the researcher will add one more category

proposed by Clark and Fox (1992) cited in Qianbo (2016) such as well, you know, oh, and yeah which are called utterance fillers.

It is evident from the categorization above that one type of discourse maker can have two or more different functions. Therefore, the researcher's knowledge in the field in interpreting and determining which function assigned into a certain type is crucial.

Methodology
Selection of discourse markers

Considering the limited time given for this research, therefore, not all of the discourse markers found in this research will be analyzed thoroughly. The researcher will limit the discussion and choose only the most frequent DM from each category. All of the discourse markers will still be identified and will be presented. However, the most frequent one from each of the category will be analyzed deeply.

Data collection technique

The data chosen from spoken discourse. They were obtained from three different YouTube channels. First, Jenn Im, a Korean-American fashion and beauty vlogger. She started her YouTube channel in 2010 and reached approximately 2 million subscribers in 2017. She was named 'top influencers' by Forbes in 2017. Second, Chris Stuckmann, he begin his YouTube career in 2011 and reached 1.4 million subscribers in 2019. His contents are mostly about movies, games, and anime. Third, Studytee, this channel are mostly talking about study tips, recommendations, and motivations. The channel was made in 2017. It reached more than 600.000 subscribers in 2019. One video will be selected from each channel. There are some criteria used in choosing the videos for this research. First, the videos are all in English. Second, the videos were uploaded to YouTube in 2017 or 2018. Third, their length ranges from almost seven to more than eleven minutes. Fourth, subscribers for each channel should be more than 500.000 people at the date of the corpus collection.

Data Analysis

Since the data are qualitative, the researcher employed a descriptive qualitative to provide useful information. The first step in the data analysis was to transcribe the videos automatically by copying the automated transcripts provided by YouTube. The researcher copied the transcripts of the selected videos while also correcting it manually. The researcher then organized each row of the transcription to make the data analysis process easy. Second, the organized transcription then all transcripts were analyzed regarding which words or phrases were qualified as DMs as specified by Fraser (1998), Fung and Carter (2007), and Müller (2005). Third, the researcher chose the five most used DMs and analyzed it thoroughly for its meaning, location and function.

Findings and Discussion

The researcher reports the findings in two main categories. First, the researcher presented all DMs found in the videos. Here, the researcher only investigates the most and the least frequent DMs occurrences. Second, the researcher explores the pragmatic functions of the five most used DMs.

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Discourse Markers found in the videos

From the table below, we can see that the most used DM is and which appears with the total number of 105. Following and, which ranks the most used DMs in the videos they are: *like*, *just*, *really*, and *but*.

Table 1. Number of DMs Occurrences

DM	Occurrence	DM	Occurrence
And	105	Also	18
And so, and then	15	More	18
Just	56	Especially	3
Like	68	Or	22
So	25	As you can see	2
But	30	More of	2
Because	17	Now	3
Then	6	About	7
Finally	6	Really	36
First, the first thing	3	Of course	3
Here	2	By the way, I think, even	11
Kind of/kinda	5	I guess	2
Just like	5	Definitely	4
Actually	5	You know	2
Too	3	As	10
Oh okay	3	Sort of	3
The last thing, a final thing	1(*2)	Another	3
Although, though	3	Highly	2
Truly	3	Strongly	2
Officially, luckily, personally, absolutely	1(*4)	Therefore, for example, any of those, namely, whether, otherwise, alright, basically, anyway, anymore, more specifically, let's, probably	1(*13)

The Functions of the Five Most Used Discourse Markers

1. And

As I stated above the word and is the most frequently used discourse marker in the videos. The word itself not only provide one kind of function. The main function of and as a discourse marker especially in textual function is as a sign of continuation. According to Schiffrin (1987), textual function of DMs is to bridge between prior utterances with the following utterances. It also connect

between the context and utterance. And, therefore and moreover are the example of textual functions. Another function of and is for marking summary and marking new topics.

(1) **and** Marvel has had a really good track history with taking directors **and** writers who are primarily from an indie background **and** putting them in this universe **and** letting them shine. (**and** indicating continuity)
(2) Alright everyone **and** that is a wrap on my February favourites. (**and** indicating summary)
(3) Hey everyone, it's your girl Jen **and** the shortest month of the year is officially over. (**and** marking new topics)

2. Like

According to Müller (2005), the discourse marker like has six functions they are hesitation or search for the right expressions, quantitative expression, example, explanation, lexical focus and restart. The most frequent function is highlighting or focusing new topic and searching for the right expressions appeared to be the second most used function.

(1) and this whole process takes around **like** two to three minutes, sometimes it takes me **like** four to five minutes…(**like** indicating quantitative expression)
(2) I absolutely loved his dry sense of humor and his **like** impeccable delivery. (**like** indicating hesitation)
(3) This is something that was very disappointing to me because you look at a movie **like** Thor Ragnarok that Taika Waititi directed or James Gunn's work on The Guardians of the Galaxy or the Russo brothers. (**like** indicating example)

3. Just

Aijmer (2002) claims that the core meaning of just is "exactly, only".

(1) So, I like how I have options and I **just** love the quality of Pat McGrath products.

4. Really

The discourse marker really has an interpersonal function which is to indicate speaker attitudes.

(1) and I found it **really** frustrating because I felt like I started the year on such a bad foot.

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5. But

The function of DM but in these articles is to signal contrastive relationships between utterances. In other words, but takes a function of contrastive marker, indicating that the given utterance is either a denial or a contrast from the preceding discourse.

(1) this film felt like a series of setups where the actors are in frame and they're performing and they were captured on film doing something **but** there's no visual style to it.
(2) it's not like a cream highlighter **but** it's not like powdery and dusty either.

In this paper, the researcher examined how discourse markers function as one of the signs of fluency in every day or informal speech. Each discourse marker serves particular functions; they sometimes serve different functions according the context of the utterance. The most used discourse marker in this research is 'and'. The most frequently used function found in the data was as a continuation of ideas. However, inappropriate use of discourse markers can mark disfluency. In this paper, Jenn Im, although her native language is English she overused the word 'like'. This could happen for some reasons and we cannot conclude it from seeing one video only. The word 'like' can functions differently for example: give examples, search for the appropriate expression, introduce an explanation, etc. However, the overused of like can also means be a sign of disfluency. Usually, it appears many times in ESL students' talk.

Conclusion

One of the most successful factors in determining how fluent someone use a certain language is by knowing the amount of discourse markers they use. DMs are mostly appear in oral discourse. DMs facilitate the flow of the communication to achieve an effective communication. Language learner must be aware of DMs in order to be fluent. The fact that the time given to learn English in the school is limited, students must develop their autonomous learning process. One of the ways is using YouTube. The various contents made by content creators are very useful for the students. However, the limited corpora used in this study is insufficient to be able to make a good conclusion. A much larger data is preferable for the future research of this study.

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