

**A Corpus-based study of the use of Discourse Markers in Literature  
Review section in PhD Dissertations**



<b>Muhammad Tahir Anjum</b>	PhD scholar, Department of English Air University Islamabad. Email <a href="mailto:ta40972@gmail.com">ta40972@gmail.com</a>
<b>Dr Farzana Masroor</b>	Tenured Associate Professor, Department of English Air University Islamabad. Email <a href="mailto:farzana.masroor@mail.au.edu.pk">farzana.masroor@mail.au.edu.pk</a>

**Abstract:** *Discourse markers can have various functions depending on the context in which they are used. Considering this, in this corpus-based research, we analysed and unveiled quantitatively and qualitatively the functions of discourse markers used by the PhD students while constructing their literature review section in PhD Dissertations. It sought to explore the appropriacy of using the Discourse Markers in crafting the said chapter in dissertations writing. The research was corpus-based as it used the software Antconc to study different categories of Discourse markers by adopting Bruce Fraser's taxonomy of Discourse markers. A total of forty-five PhD theses' literature review sections have been collected into three separate corpora, each comprising fifteen dissertations. The result of this research revealed that there were four types of Discourse Markers used by the PhD students based on Bruce Fraser's theory such as Inferential markers, temporal markers, elaborative markers and contrastive markers. The findings reveal a consistent use of discourse markers throughout the theses, indicating an awareness of their importance in structuring academic discourse. However, a notable observation surfaces, pointing towards a limitation in the appropriate deployment of discourse markers, particularly in synthesizing the literature. It was observed that the writers tend to employ a straightforward approach in the literature review section, wherein they present information by listing authors and summarizing their viewpoints. It also reflects the overt reliance on certain markers reflecting their linguistic inadequacies and lack of linguistic repertoire.*

**Keywords:** Discourse Markers, Dissertation writing, Literature Review

### Introduction

Within academic settings, the ability to write proficiently is indispensable, permeating nearly every facet of a learner's academic journey (Biber, 1999). When it comes to doctoral thesis writing, the demand extends beyond mere linguistic competence, encompassing a nuanced set of writing skills specifically tailored for the intricacies of thesis composition. Unlike general composition writing, thesis writing hinges on the foundation of meticulously researched facts (Wray, 2002). It represents a form of professional writing that necessitates learners to

not only grasp the critical skills inherent to the craft but also to navigate the established conventions of scholarly discourse. As such, the development of writing skills for a doctoral student becomes a multifaceted and challenging endeavor, requiring a comprehensive understanding of morphology and syntax alongside the acquisition of specialized competencies essential to the art of thesis writing. Especially, writing a doctoral thesis requires specific writing abilities related to thesis writing in addition to linguistic competence. This indicates that improving one's

writing abilities as a PhD candidate is a challenging and complex process. Writing a thesis is distinct from writing a composition since it is grounded in professional research. It is a type of professional writing where students must learn its conventions and critical thinking abilities.

Discourse markers play a crucial role in conveying information not just at the sentence level but more significantly, at the discourse level. In the context of this study, their functions are examined with a focus on the entire text, emphasizing the centrality of connected discourse in comprehending language and grammar. This approach stands in contrast to the conventional perspective that confines language understanding to the sentence level. Instead, it aligns with contemporary viewpoints advocating for a broader consideration of textual units in language use and comprehension. By emphasizing the significance of discourse markers in the larger context of connected discourse, the study challenges traditional linguistic frameworks and underscores the importance of considering language beyond isolated sentences, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of language dynamics and usage.

### **Literature Review**

In the realm of research thesis writing, the role of discourse markers in achieving cohesion and coherence has been a subject of scholarly discourse. Amanuel (2009) advocates for their substantial contribution in enhancing the cohesiveness and coherence of such writing. Conversely, Okumbe (1999) holds a contrasting perspective, disputing the idea that discourse markers play a pivotal role in producing cohesive and coherent text. However, he does concede their overall importance in the context of research thesis writing. Additionally, Milimu's study (2008) underscores the significance of discourse markers, emphasizing how they facilitate synthesis, readability, and comprehension for the reader. This sentiment is further echoed by scholars like Indoshi (2000) and Horsolma (2002), who stress the undeniable importance of discourse markers in this domain. Rather than presenting the viewpoints of each

author consecutively within a paragraph, writers can employ discourse markers. This approach not only integrates diverse perspectives seamlessly but also enhances the overall cohesion and coherence of the writing. Wango (2008), for example, believes that discourse markers are crucial tools for writing research theses that are persuasive. According to Indoshi (2000). Discourse markers, on the other hand, are important for research thesis writers because they make their work easier to read.

According to Milimu's (2008) research, the cohesion and coherence of the text govern the structure of written discourse. Cohesion intricately connects various segments of the text, working within both intra-sentence structures and inter-sentence cohesion to contribute to the text's overall resources. Coherence, on the other hand, provides an abstract semantic description of the global content of the discourse. This is due to the fact that adequately describing the meaning of texts extends beyond the local level of individual sentences and their connections to more extensive global levels. The assumption is that communication in a text transcends the semantic content of individual text segments, with relationships between sentences and larger discourse units serving as integral components of the discourse's meaning. A text is a type of communicative event, implying that its structure is dynamic, generated and processed interactively rather than static. Texts can be intentional and inferential because they are communicative events involving interaction between writers and readers. Texts, in this context, are the results of a dynamic process in which writers convey meaning, realize intentions, and readers discern these intentions. As a result, writers go beyond simply communicating propositional content; when they write, they not only present the propositional content as meaningful, but also as accomplishing their goal. As a result, each segment of the text encodes pragmatic information, signaling the writer's communicative intentions and contributing to the overall discourse goal. In contrast, the reader has no access to the writer's intended meaning when creating a given text. The reader's

interpretation of a text's coherence is based solely on inferences of what the writer means.

Compared to other word forms, spoken communication uses Discourse Markers (DMs) significantly more frequently and frequently overall (Fung & Carter, 2007). DMs serve both grammatical and effective interactional purposes as a crucial component of what makes up and structures dialogue (Fraser, 1999). Relying on DMs is one technique to assess how information is processed and conveyed in discourse (Jucker & Smith, 1998). However, due to divergent research philosophies, the terminology of DMs has never been agreed upon (Cohen, 2007; Fraser, 1999; Frank-Job, 2006; Han, 2008; Jucker & Ziv, 1998). From the standpoint of systemic functional grammar (Cohen, 2007; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Schiffrin, 1987), DMs are described as sentence connectives. From a grammatical-pragmatic perspective (Fraser, 1999), DMs are also regarded as pragmatic markers.

Discourse markers (DMs) were first identified by Schiffrin (1987), who states that "markers are sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (p. 31). She identified eleven different discourse coherence paradigms, one of which was "you know, I mean, so, then" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31). Her study views them as contextual coordinates for utterances, positioned within the ideational structure, action structure, exchange structure, participant framework, and information state—the four planes of talk in the coherence model (Fung & Carter, 2007; Schiffrin, 1987). From a more pragmatic perspective, DMs can be characterized as "a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases [which] signal a relationship between the interpretations of the segment they produce" (Fraser, 1999, p. 931). Fraser (1999, p. 946) further classifies DMs into two basic forms based on whether they correspond to a textual section between sentences or a discourse segment in structure.

#### 1) Discourse markers that relate messages

a. contrastive markers: though, but, contrary to this/that, conversely, etc.

b. collateral markers: above all, and, besides, I mean, in addition, etc.

c. inferential markers: accordingly, as a result, so, then, therefore, thus, etc.

d. additional subclass: after all, since, because.

#### 2) Discourse markers that relate topics

e.g., back to my original point, before I forget, etc.

Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1999) are deemed the most quoted scholars in the study of DMs.

Instead of focusing on function, the two strands use a framework that describes the linguistic entity of DMs. As a result of various study philosophies, there are also more possible labels, such as lexical markers, discourse particles, utterance particles, semantic conjuncts, continuatives, and so forth. Discourse coherence, pragmatics, and systemic functional linguistics have historically been the three main themes that may be generalised in the study of DMs (Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin et al., 2003). They differ from one another due to the numerous ways that the idea of DMs and the analytical method can be understood (Schiffrin et al., 2003).

The coherence model introduced by Schiffrin (1987) represents the initial endeavor, as previously mentioned. Schiffrin (1987) posited that the framework can be segmented into four distinct planes, delineated by the various coherence functions that DMs fulfill. These planes encompass the exchange structure, housing adjacency-pair questions and answers; the action structure, where speech acts are situated; the ideational structure, examined semantically as an exchange of ideas; and the participation framework, denoting the relationship and interaction between the speaker and listener (Fraser, 1999). However, studies grounded in this model tend to emphasize textual coherence more than the local context. The study was directed by three goals:

#### Objectives of the study

1. To identify the types of discourse markers used in Literature Reviews in PhD Dissertations?

2. To explain the purpose of the discourse markers used in constructing Literature Reviews in PhD Dissertations.
3. To compare and contrast the use of discourse markers used in the Literature Reviews of PhD dissertations in English Studies.

### **Research Questions of the study**

1. What discourse markers are used in Literature Reviews in PhD Dissertations?
2. What purpose do the discourse markers used play in constructing Literature review section in PhD Dissertations?
3. How does the use of discourse markers vary in terms of genre-specific domain in English studies?

### **Methodology**

The Present study seeks to explore the use discourse markers in the literature review sections of doctoral dissertations in English literature, English linguistics/Applied Linguistics, and English language teaching (ELT) is the subject of the current study. Three corpora—with fifteen dissertations in each category—are gathered from the literature review sections of forty-five PhD theses. The dissertations that have been chosen are written in English by non-native writers (Pakistani), and they have been picked on the basis of how well they fit the study. The chosen PhD dissertations span the years 2010–2020 in order to represent current linguistic, English literature, and language teaching practices. Examining the linguistic and cultural influences on writing literature reviews in these academic domains may be made possible by this study.

### **Collection and Description of Corpora**

Three corpora from 45 PhD Literature section dissertations in the field of English studies in Pakistan were gathered and assembled by the researcher. The corpora were dubbed Corpus of Literature, Corpus of Linguistics, and Corpus of ELT. These corpora were gathered from the HEC repository's archives, which is a common and convenient method of accessing data for research in genre analysis, critical discourse

analysis, and corpus linguistics. To ensure that the research represented the genre analysis of the language used in dissertation writing, the researcher collected PhD dissertations in English from three leading universities in Islamabad. Of the 45 theses collected, 15 were in English Literature, 15 in English Linguistics, and 15 in English Language Teaching (ELT). A sample of the collected 45 theses was sufficient for the study of the genre analysis of literature reviews in the field of English studies in Pakistan. For the current study, specialised corpora were created by the researcher from the selected PhD dissertations. The researcher selected all 45 PhD dissertations related to linguistics, literature, and ELT from the Islamabad region universities, specifically the literature review section of the dissertations. Data from all chosen PhD dissertations were collected and stored in an MS Word file for compilation. The data collection process for this study was both time-consuming and challenging, requiring nearly three months to complete.

### **Compilation of Corpora**

After collecting the data from the selected PhD dissertations, the researcher saved the collected data in MS Word files, and separate names were given to all three corpora. Next, the Word file was converted into plain text to run the AntConc software version 4.2.0. Furthermore, before the software can access them, all corporate files must be cleaned. Thus, all the unwanted texts were eliminated in order to clean corpora. Titles, subheadings, pictures, links, tables, references, and text that appears twice, for instance, indicate that each text should only appear once and should be removed from duplicate copies. The three corpora were cleared in this regard. After removing all unnecessary components, the files were transformed into plain text so that the AntConc program could process them.

### **Description of Compiled Corpora**

This study compiled three corpora from the chosen Ph.D. dissertations: the Corpus of Linguistics, the Corpus of Literature, and the Corpus of ELT, corresponding to the first, second, and third corpora, respectively. The

statistical breakdown of these three corpora is presented in the table below.

### Table

*Statistical Description of Corpora*

Corpus Name	Number of LR	Frequency	Total
Corpus of linguistics	15	264,300	790,900
Corpus of literature	15	210320	
Corpus of ELT	15	270,800	

The table provides information about three corpora - the corpus of linguistics, the Corpus of literature, and the Corpus of ELT. The table has three columns: "Corpus Name," "Number of LR," "Frequency," and "Total." The "Corpus Name" column lists the names of the three corpora, while the "Number of LR" column indicates the number of literature reviews in each corpus. The "Frequency" column shows the total frequency of words used in the literature review sections of each corpus. Finally, the "Total" column shows the frequency of words used in each corpus.

According to the table, the Corpus of ELT has the highest frequency of words (270,800), followed by the Corpus of Linguistics (264,300) and the Corpus of Literature (210,320). Each of the corpus is of almost the same length, as is the number of literature reviews in all three corpora, i.e., 15.

### **Fraser (1999) as a Research Method for the Discourse Markers**

Fraser (1999) emphasised that corpus-based genre analysis is a powerful tool to investigate the discourse markers of a specific genre. Using corpora helps identify patterns in language use, offering insights into the conventions and practices of academic writing. Fraser's approach to discourse markers, also known as the pragmatic framework, is a research method used to analyse the functions and uses of discourse markers in written or spoken language (Fraser, 1999). This approach is based on the idea that discourse markers are not simply words or phrases with fixed meanings but are used to convey a variety of pragmatic and discourse-related functions.

According to Fraser, there are three main components to the pragmatic framework for analysing discourse markers: the propositional content, the speaker's communicative intent, and the discourse context (Fraser, 1999). The propositional content refers to the semantic meaning of the discourse marker, while the speaker's communicative intent refers to the speaker's purpose in using the marker. The discourse context refers to the larger context in which the marker is used, including the preceding and following discourse.

Fraser's approach involves analysing these three components to identify the functions and meanings of discourse markers in different types of discourse. This involves identifying the different types of discourse markers used, their frequency, and the functions they serve in different contexts. For example, discourse markers such as 'however' or 'nevertheless' can be used to signal contrast or concession in a discourse, while markers such as 'so' or 'therefore' can be used to signal causality.

The understudy PhD theses' Literature Review section was subjected to the pragmatic framework. Using this approach, insight was gained into how discourse markers structure and organise the literature review sections.

### **Data Analysis of Discourse Markers**

Discourse markers are essential linguistic devices that help authors connect ideas, structure their arguments, and guide readers through the informative flow. Each marker serves a specific function in conveying the author's intentions and forging links between textual sections.

### *Discourse Markers and their Frequencies*

**Table 1**

No	Corpus Data	Discourse Markers (Elaborative, Contrastive, Inferential, Conclusive, Reason)
1	ELT Data (54598)	Moreover 17, But 120, So 61, Conclusion/ed/s 29, Because 47
2	Linguistics Data (94017)	Moreover 61, But 178, So 66, Conclusion/ed/s 27, Because 48
3	Literature Data (102957)	Moreover 57, But 131, So 48, Conclusion/ed/s 32, Because 102

The table delineates the frequencies of discourse markers across three distinct corpora: English Language Teaching (ELT) Data, Linguistics Data, and Literature Data. Each corpus is characterized by the prevalence of specific discourse markers categorized as elaborative, contrastive, inferential, conclusive, and reason. The numbers in parentheses denote the total size of each corpus, with ELT Data comprising 54,598 instances, Linguistics Data totaling 94,017 instances, and Literature Data encompassing 102,957 instances. Notably, the frequencies of discourse markers vary across corpora, with "Moreover," "But," "So," "Conclusion/ed/s," and "Because" featuring prominently. For instance, in ELT Data, "But" is observed 120 times, while in Literature Data, "Because" occurs 102 times agrees with the previous studies (Li, & Schmitt, 2009, Crowhurst, 1987, & Hasniar, 2017). This table offers insights into the nuanced use of discourse markers within specific linguistic contexts, shedding light on the varied patterns of discourse organization and expression in English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature.

### Examples from Corpora

#### 1. Moreover (ELT Corpus)

*Moreover, a lot of researchers have recommended test accommodations for the ELL (English Language Learners) apart from additional coaching on English language.*

In this sentence, "Moreover" is used to add information or emphasize a point. It signals that the upcoming statement supports or builds upon

the preceding information. Here, it indicates that there are additional recommendations for ELL beyond language coaching.

#### 2. Because (ELT Corpus)

*In this easified version, the wording of the legal text is unaltered but is much more accessible to readers because of the way it is laid out.*

"Because" is a causal discourse marker indicating a reason. In this context, it explains why the legal text is more accessible—specifically, due to the way it is laid out.

#### 3. Moreover (Linguistics Corpus)

*For example, realizing geographical difference only may result in successful communication, and, moreover, it is the understanding of apt timing...*

Similar to the first example, "Moreover" is used here to add to the previous point about successful communication. It suggests that understanding geographical differences is not the only factor; timing is also crucial.

#### 4. Because (Linguistics Corpus)

*Many media houses are governed and controlled by men because of their financial stability/independence where they promote the male ideology.*

In this case, "Because" introduces a reason for the assertion that media houses are governed by men—it's attributed to financial stability/independence, leading to the promotion of a male ideology.

#### 5. Moreover (Literature Corpus)

Moreover, they draw a parallel between women and animals because they are inferiorized and become the commodity for the male gaze and provide 'the entertainment of the world' (125).

Once again, "Moreover" is used to highlight an additional point. It indicates that there is another aspect to consider—the parallel drawn between women and animals—and explains the reasons for this parallel.

#### 6. Because (Literature Corpus)

*Because of these spheres and demarcated areas for self and other, the dependency of self on the other is denied and the other is subordinated further to shake off the feeling that the self exists because of the other.*

"Because" is employed to introduce a causal relationship, explaining the consequences of the spheres and demarcated areas. It clarifies why the dependency of self on the other is denied and how the other is further subordinated.

The analysis of research theses from Pakistani writers in this study and above examples reveals a consistent use of discourse markers throughout their writing. However, a noteworthy observation underscores a limitation in the appropriate application of discourse markers, particularly in the synthesis of literature within the literature review section. It was observed that the writers often fall into a pattern where they present information in this section by merely mentioning authors and summarizing their viewpoints without effectively integrating their own voice into the narrative.

In essence, instead of incorporating discourse markers in a manner that articulates their unique

perspective or critical evaluation of the literature, the writers tend to rely on a more straightforward recounting of what various authors have said. This approach involves mentioning the authors and summarizing their contributions without providing a distinct synthesis or analysis that reflects the writer's individual perspective. Consequently, the writers' voice, which could serve as a means of guarding against plagiarism and contribute to the overall coherence of the text, is not sufficiently expressed or heard.

It is a common practice to list authors in the literature review section when presenting information and also summarizing their viewpoints might result in a lack of originality and depth in the writer's engagement with the literature. Ideally, the use of discourse markers in this context should go beyond mere enumeration, allowing the writer to interweave their voice into the narrative, demonstrating a thoughtful synthesis of ideas, identification of gaps or contradictions, and offering insights that contribute to the overall scholarly conversation.

Besides this, there were some other markers used in the study. The following table is cross-comparison of the markers

#### **Cross-Comparative Analysis of the Discourse Markers in Three Genres**

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the use of discourse markers— important linguistic components that support academic discourse's logical flow and coherence—in three distinct genres: ELT, Linguistics, and Literature.

#### **Table**

*Three Genres Discourse Markers*

No	Discourse Markers	ELT Freq	Linguistics Freq	Literature Freq
1	Moreover	78	141	92
2	Therefore	95	189	191
3	So	325	220	250
4	Hence	86	86	91
5	However	254	237	255
6	Like	170	258	293

7	In Addition	53	60	64
8	Then	120	104	88
9	Because	194	142	289
10	Besides	33	32	30
11	But	491	486	564
12	Furthermore	26	43	31
13	In Contrast	20	32	26
14	Thus	135	119	213
15	Similarly	54	79	52

The strategic use of discourse markers across the three genres aims primarily to improve narrative structure. Consider the Elaborative marker "Moreover," which appears 141 times in the field of Linguistics. This frequent use suggests that it is used to elaborate on points, which aligns with the genre's preference for detailed explanations. The prevalence of the elaborative marker reflects this inclination, as outlined in the model for Linguistics Move 2, where scholars tend to delve into detailed explanations of a single point. This marker appears 81 times in ELT and 96 times in Literature, indicating a relatively lower frequency in comparison. In the field of linguistics, the inferential marker "Therefore" is used 191 times, referring to the previously mentioned point about how scholars rely on these common markers excessively to make certain connections between seemingly long and lengthy paragraphs. Scholars may overuse such markers to achieve a particular syntactic style. In contrast, the number in ELT is relatively low, at 91. In general, it denotes a logical progression of thought and evidence-based conclusions. The overt use of contrastive markers, particularly the frequent use of "However" (254 times), reveals a deliberate strategy for nuanced exploration of opposing viewpoints. This approach appears to be shared by all three genres/disciplines. Furthermore, the frequent use of "But" (491 times) emphasizes its critical role in presenting opposing viewpoints, which is essential for fostering critical thinking. The inferential marker "So" is used 325 times in the field of ELT, 220 times in Linguistics, and 250 times in Literature. This pattern reflects the linguistic repertoire difficulties that non-native speakers face when learning a second language. It also highlights some limitations encountered by scholars raised and trained in local cultures,

where the tendency to translate verbatim is deeply ingrained. In addition, it shows the lack of commenting on and hence lack of argumentation. It, in essence, is used as a bridge to connect ideas and emphasise relationships within the discourse.

Discourse markers are essential tools for navigating complex linguistic concepts in the linguistics corpus. "Therefore" (189) and "So" (220) are consistently used to organize arguments and ensure logical coherence. The frequent use of "Like" (258) suggests its use for drawing linguistic comparisons, which is consistent with the field's empirical and illustrative nature. The strategic use of "Because" (142), which reflects linguists' dedication to unraveling the mechanics of language, facilitates the provision of causal explanations. The repeated use of "However" (237) reflects the exploratory nature of linguistics, where various points of view are regularly considered. To increase narrative complexity, the literature genre expertly incorporates discourse markers. "Moreover" (92) and "Therefore" (191) continue to play important roles in the construction of intricate narratives, which is a hallmark of academic discourse in Literature. The use of "So" (250) frequently serves to connect thematic elements within literary analyses. The strategic placement of "However" (255) emphasizes literature scholars' preference for nuanced interpretations. The inclusion of "Like" (293) adds illustrative depth, echoing the genre's fondness for vivid imagery. The significant frequency of "But" (564) indicates its critical role in unraveling intricate literary themes and opposing ideas.

Nonetheless, despite their obvious reliance on these markers, PhD students face and



demonstrate distinct challenges in their use of discourse markers. For starters, there is a tendency to rely heavily on a small number of well-known markers. Second, their vocabulary lacks the depth and nuance required for native-like expression. Thirdly, they usually pass up chances to express their own voices in their writing by using discourse markers. Because of this, their writing's use of discourse markers is frequently characterized by its inappropriateness and simplicity. Since a writer's ability to use discourse markers effectively demonstrates their familiarity with the academic community's register, it is critical for PhD scholars to comprehend and effectively deploy these linguistic devices. This highlights the critical importance of explicitly teaching the appropriate and proficient use of discourse markers in academic writing courses designed for research thesis writers.

In essence, the use of these discourse markers reflects the distinct characteristics of each genre—comprehensive explanation in ELT, empirical exploration in linguistics, and layered interpretation in Literature. They function as linguistic tools, guiding readers, structuring arguments, and reflecting the specific demands of each discipline's discourse conventions.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The significance of discourse markers in promoting connectivity, coherence, and cohesion within academic discourse cannot be overstated. Analyzing the frequencies of discourse markers in the works of Pakistani scholars in the fields of ELT, linguistics, and Literature provides valuable insights. The results reveal a deliberate and effective use of discourse markers, reflecting the scholars' commitment to improving the interconnectedness and fluidity of ideas in their respective corpora. The substantial presence of these markers, as depicted in the table, attests to the scholars' awareness of their role in shaping the overall flow and structure of their dissertations.

As the study delves deeper into the use of discourse markers, an intriguing paradox emerges. While the corpus data shows a plethora

of these markers, the investigation reveals that Pakistani PhD scholars were rarely fully aware of how to use them in their intended manner. This phenomenon highlights the nuanced nature of language usage, in which the frequency of occurrence does not always correspond to a comprehensive understanding of their precise functions. This observation, however, lends support to previous research by Fraser (1999), Li & Schmitt (2009), and Hasniar (2017). These researchers' findings support the high prevalence of specific discourse markers like 'so,' 'but,' 'however,' 'because,' and 'thus' in the ELT corpus of Pakistani scholars' PhD dissertations.

The similarities between the current study's findings and those of Fraser (1999), Li and Schmitt (2009), and Hasniar (2017) highlight the persistence of certain patterns in discourse marker usage within this scholarly community. While the quantitative presence of these markers improves the coherence of the textual fabric, their precise functional application may warrant further investigation. The study sheds light on the intricate interplay between the use and true comprehension of discourse markers, making a valuable contribution to the larger conversation about effective communication strategies in academic writing.

The usage frequencies of discourse markers in the corpus of linguistics show a distinct pattern when compared to their deployment in English Language Teaching (ELT). This divergence can be attributed to the various genres' differing strategic orientations. While ELT researchers place emphasis on topic centralization, linguistic scholars focus their efforts on comprehensive conceptualization of the research field. As a result, as shown in the table above, the strategic positioning of discourse markers within their discourse manifests distinct frequencies.

Certainly, discourse markers play a crucial role in fostering connectivity, coherence, and cohesion within academic discourse. In the specific context of Pakistani scholars' contributions to English Language Teaching (ELT), linguistics, and literature, a meticulous examination of discourse marker frequencies provides valuable insights. The findings highlight a robust utilization of these markers,

suggesting a deliberate effort to enhance the interconnectedness and fluency of ideas within the respective corpora. The significant prevalence of these markers, as illustrated in the table, serves as evidence of the scholars' awareness of their importance in shaping the flow and structure of their dissertations.

However, an intriguing paradox surfaces as the study delves deeper into the usage of discourse markers. Despite the corpus data displaying an abundance of these markers, the inquiry reveals that Pakistani PhD scholars were often not fully aware of deploying them in their intended manner. This paradox draws attention to the nuanced nature of language usage, where the frequency of occurrence may not always align with a comprehensive understanding of their precise functions. Nevertheless, this observation aligns with established research by Fraser (1999), Li & Schmitt (2009), and Hasniar (2017), which affirms the high prevalence of specific discourse markers, such as 'so,' 'but,' 'however,' 'because,' and 'thus,' within the ELT corpus of Pakistani scholars' PhD dissertations.

The convergence between the current study's findings and the research of Fraser (1999), Li & Schmitt (2009), and Hasniar (2017) underscores the persistence of certain patterns in discourse marker usage within this scholarly community. While the quantitative presence of these markers enhances the coherence of the textual fabric, their precise functional application may warrant additional scrutiny. The study brings to light the intricate interplay between the utilization and true comprehension of discourse markers, making a valuable contribution to the broader discourse on effective communication strategies within academic writing.

Also, the convergence of the findings and results of this study with that of the research carried out by Fraser (1999), Li & Schmitt (2009), and Hasniar (2017) supports the more general patterns in discourse marker use. These studies demonstrate and elucidate the limitations of non-native writers with regard to the appropriate use of discourse markers. The present study also highlights the same problems with the PhD scholars in all. In spite of their prominent presence, PhD scholars grapple with notable

challenges in effectively deploying discourse markers. Firstly, they often lean heavily on a restricted set of well-known markers, displaying a certain reliance. The likely cause of the linguistic deficiencies is a limited linguistic repertoire. Furthermore, non-native writers are prone to translation because it is embedded in primary education, which hinders their ability to use these markers appropriately. Second, their choice of discourse markers lacks the variety and finesse needed to achieve a level of expression comparable to that of a native speaker. This limitation impedes the subtlety and nuance required for conveying complex ideas. Furthermore, they frequently miss opportunities to use discourse markers as a means of asserting their own distinct voice in their writing. As a result, the use of discourse markers in their written works frequently skews toward simplicity, bordering on inappropriateness at times. Given that, adept use of discourse markers indicates a writer's familiarity with the academic community's established conventions, it becomes critical for PhD scholars to master and skillfully wield these linguistic tools for future success in their respective fields of study. This highlights the critical importance of explicitly teaching the discerning and proficient use of discourse markers in specialized academic writing courses designed specifically for research thesis writers. It supports the idea that the complexities of these markers are shaped by genre-specific considerations while remaining true to the overarching principles of effective communication. Finally, this investigation into linguistic discourse markers adds to the ongoing discussion about the nuances of language use in academic contexts by providing valuable insights into the interplay between genre, discourse strategies, and scholarly communication strategies.

The study sheds light on the pivotal role of discourse markers in fostering connectivity, coherence, and cohesion within academic discourse, particularly in the context of Pakistani scholars' contributions to English Language Teaching (ELT), linguistics, and literature. The exploration of discourse marker frequencies led

to valuable insights into the nuances of their usage in research thesis writing, addressing three central research questions.

The first research question delves into the specific discourse markers employed in research thesis writing. The findings reveal a meticulous selection of markers such as "Moreover," "Because," "However," "But," and "Thus" within the corpora of ELT, linguistics, and literature. These markers contribute to the structure and flow of the scholarly narratives, providing a snapshot of the linguistic tools prevalent in the academic discourse of Pakistani scholars.

The second research question pertains to the functions of the use of discourse markers play in academic writing in general and thesis writing in particular. Despite the apparent profusion of markers, the study uncovers a nuanced aspect—Pakistani PhD scholars often exhibit a limited awareness of deploying these markers in their intended manner. This paradoxical observation underscores the importance of not only recognizing the presence of discourse markers but also comprehending their precise functions. The study aligns with prior research by Fraser (1999), Li & Schmitt (2009), and Hasniar (2017), highlighting the challenges non-native writers face in effectively employing discourse markers for nuanced communication.

The third research question explores the variation in the use of discourse markers across genre-specific domains in English studies. The study reveals a distinctive pattern in the deployment of discourse markers within linguistics compared to ELT. In linguistics, where the focus lies on presenting a comprehensive understanding of the research field, discourse markers are strategically positioned to facilitate the reader's navigation through intricate theoretical frameworks, diverse perspectives, and multifaceted linguistic inquiry. This genre-specific variation emphasizes the strategic orientation of discourse markers based on the scholarly objectives of each genre.

Importantly, the study notes a relative lack of attention to discourse markers in the domain of

literature. Scholars in literature tend to explicate thoughts without extensive reference to previous works, and while the frequencies and positions of discourse markers may differ in the linguistic genre, their underlying purpose remains consistent in anchoring the discourse within a structured and intelligible framework.

## **Conclusion**

This research study has shed light on the use of discourse markers in research theses authored by Pakistani writers, with a specific focus on their application within the literature review section. The findings reveal a consistent use of discourse markers throughout the theses, indicating an awareness of their importance in structuring academic discourse. However, a notable observation surfaces, pointing towards a limitation in the appropriate deployment of discourse markers, particularly in synthesizing the literature.

It was observed that the writers tend to employ a straightforward approach in the literature review section, wherein they present information by listing authors and summarizing their viewpoints. This conventional method, while informative, falls short of effectively integrating the writer's voice into the narrative. The writers often miss the opportunity to use discourse markers to convey their unique perspective, critically evaluate the literature, and contribute their insights to the scholarly conversation. Consequently, the full potential of discourse markers in guarding against plagiarism and enhancing the coherence of the writing remains underutilized.

The study underscores the importance of encouraging writers to go beyond a mere enumeration of authors and their contributions. It highlights the need for writers to leverage discourse markers as tools for synthesizing the literature, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the existing scholarship, and articulating their own voice within the academic discourse. This nuanced use of discourse markers not only contributes to the originality and depth of the literature review but also strengthens the overall scholarly impact of the research thesis.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that academic writing pedagogy and support initiatives be tailored to address this specific area of improvement. Providing guidance on the strategic use of discourse markers to enhance synthesis and coherence in the literature review section can empower writers to more effectively convey their scholarly voice. Future research endeavors may explore additional factors influencing the use of discourse markers in academic writing, contributing to the ongoing discourse on refining writing practices for scholars within the Pakistani academic context. Ultimately, the study encourages a more thoughtful and deliberate approach to the integration of discourse markers, acknowledging their potential as instruments for elevating the quality and impact of research theses.

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