

USES OF PRAGMATIC MARKERS: NON-NATIVE SPOKEN PERSPECTIVE

Md. Mehedi Hasan¹

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to strengthen the ability to speak English fluently using pragmatic markers. This endeavor, therefore, aims at identifying the pragmatic markers used by non-native speakers of English and their occurrences in spoken English pragmatics. The other utility of this study reflects upon making less grammatical mistakes and avoiding unnecessary word formations. The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods, and within the quantitative side of the study, a corpus-based approach was composed with the course presentations of the undergraduate students studying at Patuakhali Science and Technology University. The results show that Bengali non-native speakers of English have a lack of variety in using pragmatic markers in their spoken English and use pragmatic markers in a limited number. As for the qualitative side of the study, the functions of the pragmatic markers were given examples which revealed that non-native speakers do not benefit from the variety of functions of the pragmatic markers in spoken discourse. Along with these findings, the study highlights the need for awareness-raising of Bengali non-native speakers in using pragmatic markers in their spoken English discourse and recommends considerable implications for English language teaching.

Key Words: Language teaching, Non-native, Pragmatic marker, Spoken English.

Introduction

Discourse refers to pieces of language larger than a sentence that function together to convey a given idea or information. The linguistic devices that are used to hang the pieces of language or expression together are called discourse markers. They are used in conversation or writing to show or signal the relationship between ideas or information in a given context. These are words or phrases used by speakers or writers to link ideas or information in a discourse. According to Gerard (2010), "Discourse are words like 'however', 'although' and 'nevertheless' which are referred to more commonly as 'linking words' and 'linking phrases', or 'sentence connectors'. They may be described as the 'glue' that binds together a piece of writing, making the different parts of the text stick together. Without sufficient discourse markers in a piece of writing, a text would not seem logically constructed and the connections between the different sentences and paragraphs would not be obvious. Discourse markers, however, guide the reader predict the direction of the flow of discourse than linking the various text elements, especially in spoken discourse. Brown and Levinson (1987) and Barnabas and Adamu (2012) opine that fluency and an ability to produce and understand authentic language. Similarly, Litman (1996) cited by Barnabas and Adamu, 2012 opine that discourse markers are linguistic devices available for a writer to structure a discourse.

¹Associate Professor, Department of Language and Communication, Patuakhali Science and Technology University (PSTU), Patuakhali, Bangladesh.

Pragmatic markers are grammatical/functioning words. Unlike content words, they do convey meaning neither on their own nor change the meaning of a sentence. They only perform grammatical functions by linking ideas in a piece of writing. Most pragmatic markers signal the listener/reader of continuity in text or the relationship between the preceding and following text. Discourse markers are expressions, such as those in the following sentences:

- a. A: I like him. B: So, you think you'll ask him out then.
- b. John can't go. And Mary can't go either.
- c. Will you go? Furthermore, will you represent the class there?
- d. Sue left very late. But she arrived on time.
- e. I think it will fly. After all, we built it right

However, due to the significance of discourse markers in spoken discourse of native speakers of English, there is a necessity to investigate these specific discourse items in spoken discourse of non-native speakers of English. As a consequence, the study as an overall purpose aims at identifying the discourse markers used by Bengali non-native speakers of English. For this purpose, the study tries to find the answers to the following research questions which are the driving force of the study:

- The role of pragmatic markers in spoken English.
- Which Pragmatic markers are used by Bengali non-native speakers of English in spoken discourse?
- Are there any differences between the pragmatic markers used by Bengali non-native speakers and native speakers of English in spoken discourse?
- What are the prevailing functions of the pragmatic markers employed by Bengali non-native speakers when compared with the ones of native speakers according to four categories (interpersonal, referential, structural and cognitive)?

Methodology

As the research aims at identifying the discourse markers what Bengali non-native speakers of English use in their spoken discourse and compare the results with the ones uttered by native speakers of English, the study is based on a corpus-driven approach. The methodology and the analysis of the study, therefore, include the following essential characteristics that a corpus-based study should have:

- Empirical, analyzing the actual patterns of use in natural text,
- Utilize a large and principled collection of natural texts, known as a "corpus", as the basis for the analysis,
- Mmake extensive use of computer for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques,
- Depend on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques, and
- Use secondary data

Participants

The survey was run on the undergraduate students (Level: I; Semester: II) of Patuakhali Science and Technology University. The feedback was received from about 135 students.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 12 questions which reflected the reviews of the students' perception towards pragmatic markers in case of non-native perspective

Procedures

In order to ensure that there weren't any possible mistakes or misunderstandings on the diction.

The questionnaires were handed out during the normal class time for guaranteeing the seriousness. Before distribution, a brief but clear introduction and instruction to the requirement for responding to the questionnaire were given, helping to better guarantee the authenticity of the answer:

- 1) What they should do was to answer the questions in the light of their own experiences and situations, they don't need to be afraid if the answers were correct or not.
- 2) Student's attention to notice the aim of Q1 in questionnaire is to let them write out the meaning expressing causal relation without referring to dictionary.
- 3) According to situation of the pilot study, all questionnaires were carefully checked, four students' questionnaires were kicked out as a result of missing information. That's why, only 131 valid questionnaires were taken back.

Results

The questionnaire is designed to explore the reasons on the use of Pragmatic Markers in spoken perspective. After a careful calculation and analysis for the questionnaires, the following results were obtained. (Here PM indicates Pragmatic Markers and CDMs indicates as Common Discourse Markers)

Table 1. Pragmatic markers that students are most familiar with (data of Q1)

Item	Number	Percentage of Respondent
Because	131	100
Like	129	98.75
So	127	96.95
Because of	126	96.18
Due to	124	94.65
Therefore	122	93.13
Owing to	118	90.08
Thanks to	118	90.07
For	115	87.79
Now that	113	86.20
Thus	109	83.20
Hence	107	81.68
Consequently	104	79.39
As a consequence	95	75.25
On account of	94	71.75
Since	80	61.07
Thereby	74	56.49
For this reason	70	53.43
Accordingly	47	35.88

Table 1 is the data of Q1. The aim of Q1 is to investigate whether students are familiar with these PMs. Although the designation of Q1 may exist some potential queries, for example, some students may not want to write down the meanings of them seriously on account of thinking it is so easy, and some other students may write down the non-causal meaning of these CDMs which has other semantic meanings though they know the causal logical concept. For example, here are four students regards so as the adverb of degree. Yet, regardless of these negative sides, the designation of Q1 also has its positive aspects. It helped students in making a review to these CDMs as well as have an intuitive understanding to know what the CDMs are, which can supply students a better foundation to answer the following questions. Those CDMs which they don't write out are classified into the wrong items. As we can see, 100% of these students know the correct meaning of 'because'. That is to say, the English majors are very familiar with this kind of CDM. The other types of CDMs they are familiar with are 'so', 'because of', 'due to', 'therefore', 'owing to', 'thanks to'.

Table 2. CDMs are most often used by English majors in spoken English (data of Q2)

ITEM	Number	Percentage of Respondent
Because	131	100
So	114	87.02
Because of	84	64.12
For	73	55.72
Thanks to	53	40.46
Therefore	48	36.64
Since	47	35.88
Due to	32	24.43
Thus	24	18.32
Now that	22	16.79
As a result of	22	16.79
For this reason	17	12.98
As a consequence	17	12.98
Consequently	8	6.87
Hence	8	6.11
In view of	7	5.76
Owing to	6	4.58
On account of	4	3.05
Accordingly	3	2.29
Thereby	3	2.29
In consequence	1	0.76

Q2 seek to investigate which CPMs are most often used by students in their spoken English, respectively. These discourse markers which the subjects don't write down correctly in Q1 will not be counted in Q2. Table 2 shows that 100% of them choose 'because' as their most often used CDMs in their spoken English. Besides, more than 50% of them all choose 'because', 'so', 'because of', 'for' in their spoken English. The reasons why they are so often used are investigated in Q4 (see Table 3); 68% of them consider that they just use them unconsciously, and 27% of them think that they don't want to make any mistakes. That is to say, those students are very familiar with these CDMs and they know the meaning and usage of them. They have preference to choose such simple markers to organize their expression. As for the data of questionnaires, most of the English majors choose 'because' and 'so' in their written English. It shows that they have lack of stylistic awareness.

Table 3. Data of the questionnaires (Q4-Q12)

	A		B		C		D	
	No	Per	No	Per	No	Per	No	Per
Q4	35	26.72	10	7.63	89	67.94	2	1.53
Q5	112	85.50	4	3.05	12	9.16	3	2.29
Q6	38	29.01	10	7.63	80	61.07	3	2.29
Q7	9	6.87	77	58.78	45	34.35	0	0
Q8	10	7.63	55	41.98	60	45.80	6	4.58
Q9	22	16.79	101	77.10	7	5.34	1	0.76
Q10	4	3.05	23	17.56	85	64.89	19	14.50
Q11	4	3.05	10	7.63	79	60.31	38	29.01
Q12	25	19.08	73	55.73	31	23.66	2	1.53

Note. Q =question, No. =number, Per. =percentage.

Q5 and Q6 discuss whether the time will affect their choice of choosing CDMs. Q5 investigates the situation under the timed condition. It finds that 86% of the students will choose simple CDMs which they are very familiar with when they are in timed writing tests. The data shows that they don't have enough time for thinking up other types of CDMs. While under the condition of untimed writing assignments, 61% of them consciously avoid using the easiest and the most common types of CDMs for the sake of seeking the diversity of words in their writings. Meanwhile, there are also some students (29%) who would like to use the CDMs which they are familiar with in case of making mistakes.

Q7 intends to examine the consciousness of using CDMs in their speaking and writing productions, 59% of the students claim that they often use causal discourse markers in their compositions. It indicates that the majority of them have strong awareness of using causal discourse markers in their productions while 7% of them always use these causal discourse markers in compositions. It means that they must overuse causal discourse markers in their compositions. None of them say that they never use any causal discourse markers in their English write ups. The investigation of whether the English majors are under the influence of Bengali way of thought is discussed in Q8. Basically 45% of them, respectively, say that they often and sometimes keep Bengali causal discourse markers in mind in the process of English creation. Q9 discovers 77% of the students are aware of the importance of using causal discourse markers in their writings. And 17% of them think causal discourse markers are very important.

Q10 is designed to investigate if the English teachers pay much attention to the teaching of causal discourse markers in class time. Sixty five (65%) percent of the students claim that their English teachers just instruct knowledge about causal discourse markers sometimes, even 15% of the students hold that their teachers never introduce the meaning or usage of causal discourse markers in the process of teaching.

Q11 intends to find out whether English teachers attach great importance to the teaching of correct style of these CDMs when they are guiding English writing and speaking. Sixty percent(60%) of them claim that their teachers sometimes emphasize the style of CDMs in writing and speaking guidance, and 8% of them say “often”. Yet, up to 29% of these students hold that their teachers never emphasize the style of CDMs.

Q12 reveals that majority (98%) insist that it is necessary to make an explanation and do some exercises for causal discourse markers in class time.

Table 4 . A core functional paradigm of pragmatic markers in a pedagogic discourse

Interpersonal	Referential	Structural	Cognitive
Marking shared Knowledge: See, you see, you know, listen	Cause: Because, cos Contrast: But, and, yet, however, nevertheless	Opening and closing of topics: Now OK/okay, right/alright, well, let’s start, let’s discuss, let me conclude the discussion	Denoting thinking process: Well, I think, I see, and
Indicating attitudes: well, really, I think, obviously, absolutely, basically, actually, exactly, sort of kind of, like, to be frank, to be honest, just, oh	Coordination: and Disjunction: Or Consequence: So Digression: Anyway	Sequence: First, firstly, second, secondly, next, then, finally	Reformulation/Self-correction: I mean that is, in other words, what I mean is, to put it in another way Elaboration: Like, I mean
Showing responses: Ok/okay, oh, right, yeah, yes. I see, great, oh great, sure, yeah	Comparison: Likewise, similarly	Topic shifts: So, now, well, and of what about, how about Summarizing opinions: So	Hesitation: Well, sort of Assessment of the listener’s knowledge about the utterances: You know

Discussion

In the light of statistics of the questionnaires, this paper summarizes the following primary reasons that lead to the features of using CDMs by on-native students

Lack of stylistic awareness

Learners' lack of stylistic awareness means they tend to use lots of expressions which should be employed in the spoken English in their written productions. As it can be seen from Table 2 (the data of Q2), 97% and 70% of students choose 'because' and 'So' ,respectively, as their frequently-used CDMs in their argumentative writings. It shows that students don't realize so and because as informal words which are often used in the oral English.

Intentionally avoiding mistakes

English study is one of the foreign language leaning for Bengali students. They usually incline to use the familiar and frequently used expressions to organize their dissertation for the reason of learners' insufficient vocabularies and for the fear of making mistakes. The statistics of Q4 in Table 3 show that 27% of students choose their most often used CDMs in Q2 because they will not make any mistakes. It illustrates that students are consciously use the familiar causal discourse markers for avoiding mistakes.

Time factor

Learners may feel pressured under the certain situational anxiety. Table 1 shows that students are very familiar with the CDMs of 'so', 'because', 'because of', 'for', 'therefore', 'thanks to', and they are also choosing them as their most frequently-used CDMs in spoken English (Q2). Meanwhile, 85% of English majors claim that they will choose simple CDMs which they are very familiar with due to the lack of time under the condition of examination. Oral examination occurs in real time, it requires instantaneous cognitive processing. As speakers are taking the oral examination, they will feel pressured and prefer to choose some simple words they are very familiar with in order to ensure the fluency of their communication.

Findings of the report analysis

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the study are summarized as follows:

- The use of discourse markers in spoken discourse is not totally excluded by Bengali non-native speakers; in fact, they have remarkable tendency to use discourse markers. However, when compared with the results of non-native speakers, Bengali non-native speakers use discourse markers in their speech much less frequently than native speakers of English.

- Bengali non-native speakers of English overuse certain discourse markers (*uhm* initially, *yes*, *and*, *but*, *so*,) so that other types of discourse markers could not be activated to add variety to their speech and this also leads to fossilization of the discourse markers, which finally cause lack of discourse pragmatic competence.
- The most frequent discourse markers used by native speakers of English, such as *hence*, *owing to*, *accordingly*, etc., exist in Bengali non-native speakers' speech less frequently. Bengali non-native speakers do not use a variety of discourse markers in their spoken discourse.
- The discourse markers determined in spoken discourse of Bengali non-native speakers are primarily in the textual category including notable use of referential and structural tokens while native speakers use discourse markers serving interpersonal and cognitive purposes.

Conclusion

Given the implications of the study, the study brings to a conclusion that pragmatic markers as a research topic is a vast and prolific one in which plenty of research can be done. Although this study does not imply an overall generalization for any non-native speaker community, it has revealed the need to teach the use of pragmatic markers in English language teaching. Many studies can be conducted along this line, which will have considerable contribution to the development of pragmatic competence of language learners. As the study has aimed at identifying the discourse markers in non-native spoken discourse, a study which includes informed sessions about the use of discourse markers in language classrooms to observe the progress of the frequency, variety and functional use of discourse markers by non-native speakers can be done. Moreover, the use of discourse markers by non-native teachers of English is as important as the use of discourse markers by non-native students of English.

Recommendation

The scope of pragmatic markers in English linguistics is immense. It is suggested to increase language learners' awareness towards the variety and the use of discourse marker. Pragmatic markers are significant in making learners feel secure in speaking, enhancing in fluency, having naturalistic skills and becoming more native-like in spoken English. Thus, students should be exposed to more natural contexts with variety of functions of pragmatic markers and spontaneous conversations with pair or group discussions. Increased awareness and classroom practice on discourse markers will gradually help learners have pragmatic competence in English. Since the study displays that Bengali non-native speakers of English are not capable of using more discourse markers

effectively in their spoken discourse, using several functions of discourse markers like interpersonal and cognitive functions and using them in variety, their awareness should be raised towards the variety and functions of discourse markers. Accordingly, a study can be conducted about non-native teachers of English to find out whether they use discourse markers in instructional settings adequately and functionally or whether they are aware of the significance of these pragmatic markers. A final suggestion for further research is that studies can be done about the use of discourse markers by non-native speakers whose native language is different from English. Therefore, the use of pragmatic markers by non-native speakers with different origins might have a contribution to comparative analysis among different groups of non-native speakers of English and might be significant in the field of intercultural pragmatics.

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Appendix

Questionnaires

This questionnaire is designed to explore the use of pragmatic markers in spoken English. The students were asked to finish it according to their own reality. There is no true or false with answers and it will not influence their academic record.

(1) Please write out the meanings of these pragmatic markers.

Because, for, since, so, therefore, thereby, thus-, hence now that, because of, due to , consequently , owing to, for this reason, ____

(2) Please check the following Pragmatic markers which are most often used in your spoken. Because, for, since, so, therefore, thereby, thus , hence , now that , because of, due to, consequently, owing to, thanks to, in view of, on account of, as a result of

- (3) Do you think that pragmatic markers have a pivotal role in English linguistics?
(a) Yes (b) No
- (4) Why do you often use them?
(a) Most likely not to make mistake, (b) They are similar to those in Bangla,
(c) I use them unconsciously, (d) Other reasons.
- (5) Which of the following circumstances do you meet in timed examination?
(a) I will choose the simple and familiar one, (b) I will choose the pragmatic marker which are similar in Bangla, (c) I will avoid to use the uncommon terms, (d) Other situations.
- (6) Which of the following circumstances do you meet in untimed examination?
(a) I will go for the simple and familiar one, (b) I will choose the one which is familiar in Bangla, (c) I will avoid the common & familiar ones unconsciously, (d) Other reasons.
- (7) How often do you use Pragmatic markers in your speaking?
(a) Always (b) Often
(c) Sometimes (d) Never
- (8) Will you think of Bangla Pragmatic markers in the process of speaking?
(a) Always (b) Often
(c) Sometimes (d) Never
- (9) What do you think about the pragmatic markers in spoken English?
(a) Very Important (b) Important
(c) Not very important (d) Unimportant
- (10) Does your English teacher instruct you the knowledge about Pragmatic markers?
(a) Always (b) Often
(c) Sometimes (d) Never

(11) Does your English teacher emphasize the style of Pragmatic markers in the teaching process?

- (a) Always (b) Often
(c) Sometimes (d) Never

(12) What do you think of explaining and doing some exercise for Pragmatic Markers in class?

- (a) Much necessary (b) Necessary