

# An Analysis of Discourse Markers Used by Non-native English Learners: Its Implication for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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The purpose of this article is to investigate the similarities and differences in the usage of discourse markers such as *because*, *so*, *and*, etc. among the following three types of university students: native speakers of English (NS), non-native Chinese students (CNNS, mainland Chinese), and non-native Japanese students (JNNS). All the CNNS and JNNS have studied English as a foreign language for more than six years. This paper shows that the three groups of students share a few characteristics with regard to frequency and types of discourse markers used in their English essays. There is an obvious difference among the three groups of students in their preferences for particular types of discourse markers. This paper maintains that priority should be on how to effectively teach the pragmatic and grammatical functions of each discourse marker in English classes carried out in Japan and China because various kinds of misuse of discourse markers have been found in the essays written by the non-native speakers.

**Keywords:** discourse markers (DMs), conjunction, *and*, *so*, *because*, one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA), *t*-test

## Introduction

DMs often have a sphere of influence that is much larger than the immediate content of the verb they modify, or the clause in which they occur. Not only do they have a broad sphere of influence, but also the degree of that influence is remarkable. For example, regarding the influence of DMs on the reading comprehension, previous empirical studies encompassed several perspectives that explore the role of DMs

in the construction of a coherent text representation. Researchers hypothesized that the presence of DMs facilitates text comprehension by decreasing reading time and improving content recall. Haberlandt (1982) is one of those researchers, who found that target sentences, preceded by a connective, resulted in faster reading times than unconnected sentences.

In contrast with Haberlandt, in which the connective role of DMs in text comprehension was emphasized, Fraser (1993) analyzed the role of DMs in view of their content and pragmatic meanings. The content meaning, referred to as the “propositional content” of the sentence, conveys the ideas of the speaker. Pragmatic meaning provides signals of the different messages the speaker intends to convey through direct, literal communication. Fraser claimed that the role of DMs is to signal a speaker’s comment of the current utterance. The discourse marker is not part of the sentence’s propositional content. While the absence of these DMs does not affect a sentence grammatically, it does omit a powerful clue about the speaker’s perception of the relationship between prior and subsequent discourse.

Showing different understandings of DMs in light of its content, connective, and pragmatic meaning, Blakemore (1987) developed the idea of ‘procedural’ meaning. She used the following examples to illustrate her idea:

- 1) John can open Bill’s safe. He knows the combination.
- 2) a. John can open Bill’s safe. After all, he knows the combination.  
b. John can open Bill’s safe. He knows the combination, then.

It may not be immediately obvious to the listener of sentence number one how the speaker intends the second sentence to be interpreted. In (2a), *after all* ensures that the clause it introduces is interpreted as a premise; *then*, in (2b) marks the preceding clause as a conclusion. DMs don’t contribute to truth-conditional content. Their role is to reduce the listener’s processing effort by limiting the range of interpretive hypotheses he has to consider; thus they contribute to increas-

ing the efficiency of communication.

Apart from the role of DMs in text reading comprehension concluded above, a few existing studies have provided their evidence to confirm how DMs have an important role in listening comprehension. However, most of them could not provide consistent support for the beneficial effects of DMs on L2 listening comprehension. Moreover, most of these studies also fail to show how these DMs affect listeners' comprehension of different levels of information in the text. Regarding the investigation of the effect of DMs on the listening comprehension of a text or discourse, Euen (2003) carried out a study on examining the effects of DMs on L2 learners' listening comprehension of high- and low-level information in academic lectures. The study involved 80 Korean learners of English as a Foreign Language. Of the 80 learners, half listened to the lecture with discourse signaling cues (i.e., DMs), and the other half listened to the lecture without such cues. Half the learners in each group performed summary tasks; the other half performed recall tasks. The findings showed that DMs play an important role in L2 listening comprehension. Compared to the non-DMs group, the DMs group recalled significantly more high- as well as low-level information from the lecture in an accurate manner.

Even though the research on the role of DMs has attracted many researchers' attention, the consistence of the term for DMs has not been achieved. There have been so far a lot of terms used to refer to DMs. Among them are *discourse marker* (Schiffrin 1987), *pragmatic marker* (Fraser 1996), *discourse particle* (Schourup 1985), *pragmatic particle* (Östman 1981), *pragmatic expression* (Erman 1987), and *connectives* (Blakemore 1987). Every definition of a discourse marker reflects different attitudes on the question of the uniformity or fuzziness of the class of DMs. It seems that linguists are still hesitant to give one universal term for these linguistic units, because each of the terms has its own peculiar nuance that separates it from the rest.

In this study, I chose “discourse marker” as a cover term to indicate all of the particles or connectives, because it seems to be the one used most frequently and with the least restricted range of applications.

As shown above, little attention has been paid to the study on the use of DMs by non-native English speakers. The author (mainland Chinese) wants to do a comparative study on the characteristics of DMs by JNNS and CNNS by means of adopting the original data from JNNS and CNNS. In section 2, the author will explain the definitions, roles, classifications of, and previous main research on DMs undertaken by researchers in the world, especially in China and Japan. In section 3, the author will present the objective of this study and the problems that will hopefully be solved concerning the use of DMs by NS, JNNS, and CNNS. In section 4, the methodology adopted in this article will be introduced, together with the explanation of the results of this study, in which the differences and similarities in the use of DMs will be shown on the basis of a One-Way ANOVA test and a t-test. In section 5, the author will discuss the distinctive features of the most commonly used DMs, so, and, and because, in English essays by NS, JNNS, and CNNS.

## 1. Definitions of DMs

Many linguists have defined DMs on their own accord. As a result, definitions for DMs are quite different from each other. However, I am going to adopt the definitions given by Fraser (1996), Louwrese and Mitchell (2003). Fraser proposed that DMs are “linguistically encoded clues which signal the speaker’s potential communicative intentions.” Louwrese and Mitchell claimed that DMs “instruct discourse participants on how to consider an upcoming utterance, providing a path toward the integration of different components of language use into one coherent discourse.” Clearly, Fraser, Louwrese and Mitchell defined DMs as those words which promote the listeners’ and readers’ conceptions of a coherent discourse by way of a

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reminder function embedded in DMs.

### 1-1. Classifications of DMs

There are multifarious classifications concerning DMs according to researchers all around the world. In this study, I have chosen some classifications on the basis of the following factors: a) The classifications with which CNNS and JNNS are familiar after more than six years of studying English, and b) those classifications that often appeared in the English textbooks officially authorized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Japan and China. As a result, I found that the classifications of the DMs made by Fraser (1996), Swan (1980), and Schiffrin (1987) might be familiar to JNNS and CNNS. Thus, I have adopted their theories as the basic criteria in classifying DMs. The detailed classifications on the basis of contextual meanings are as follows:

- Addition: *indeed in addition as well not only but also furthermore what's more and let alone . . .*
- Contrast: *but however rather than otherwise . . .*
- Enumeration: *firstly on one hand . . . on the other hand in other words . . .*
- Exemplification: *for example . . .*
- Transition: *as far as I am concerned in my opinion I think . . .*
- Reasoning: *because in that case . . .*
- Summary: *in a word sum up . . .*
- Result: *therefore so thus so that in that case because then . . .*
- Adverbial clauses: *despite once . . .* • Time: *then subsequently . . .*

### 1-2. Previous research on DMs in both China and Japan

The research on DMs mentioned in sections 1, 2.0 and 2.1 shows that there have been many studies on DMs, by which the priority has been laid on the investigation into the characteristics of various DMs in the different documents from linguistic and pragmatic perspectives

or the role of DMs on the reading comprehension of discourse. However, the main purpose of this study is to carry out a comparative study on the features of DMs by JNNS and CNNS compared to NS, so it is necessary to review previous literature studies on DMs by JNNS and CNNS.

In the case of the context of China, the research on DMs is carried out by many researchers. The following researchers might be considered to be the representatives in the field of DMs research in the context of China. The first is He Anping (2002), who expressed the overuse of the DM so in Chinese EFL learners' written English based on the corpora including the discourse of both native English speakers and learners of English in China. Another researcher is Bolton Kingsley (2002). The paper by Bolton focuses on connector usage in the writing of university students in Hong Kong and in Great Britain, and presents results based on the comparison of data from the Hong Kong component (ICE-HK) and the British component (ICE-GB) of the International Corpus of English (ICE). While previous studies of Hong Kong student writings have dealt with the 'underuse', 'overuse', and 'misuse' of connectors, this study confines itself to the analysis of underuse and overuse, and is especially concerned with methodological issues relating to the accurate measurement of these concepts. Specifically, it takes as its benchmark of overuse and underuse the frequency of connectors in professional academic writing; in this case, the data in the ICE-GB corpus. The results show, by measuring in this way, both groups of students — native speakers and non-native speakers alike — overuse a wide range of connectors. The results offer no evidence of significant underuse. Another researcher is Liu Jie (2005). She has adopted a corpus-based approach in investigating the differences between Chinese learners and English native speakers in the use of DMs. It is found in her paper that: (1) Chinese learners tend to use more DMs than native speakers; (2) Chinese learners and native speakers show general consistency in frequency distribution of

different semantic categories of DMs; and (3) Chinese learners and native speakers display considerable dissimilarities in specific use of DMs, which is well illustrated by the mechanical use of some DMs, a lack of stylistic awareness and semantic properties of some DMs, and a preference for certain categories of DMs to introduce new information on the part of Chinese learners. Based on coherence and relevance theories, her paper has also analyzed the reasons behind the differences and provided suggestions for foreign language teaching in this respect. In addition, He and Ran (1999), in light of Relevance Theory, analyzed the cognitive explanation and pragmatic constraint of discourse connector on utterance generation and understanding and tried to prove that the generation and understanding of utterance is a process of mutual constraint. Ran (2002) discovered that in verbal communication, the discourse marker “you know” is found not to contribute to the propositional content of the utterances to which it is attached. Instead, it is used as adaptive evidence to help manage and maintain the ongoing interaction. In context, “you know” can serve as a meta-language indicator, and its function of calling attention is evident. It ultimately leads to the increase of shared knowledge or cognitive mutuality between the participants. He concludes that such a discourse marker appears as a result of adaptation to the context in communication. In addition, in *A Review of Pragmatic Studies of Discourse Markers* (2000/4), Ran introduces the status of DMs and the change of focus in their studies.

Furthermore, the research by Yu and Wu (2003) showed us that DMs work as a linguistic component that does not exert any effect to the truth-value of the utterance, but expresses attitudinal and procedural meanings. They reflect the adaptation made by language users to contexts; meanwhile, they help language users construct discourse and perform different pragmatic functions to facilitate communication. In this connection, DMs may be divided into three types: (1) those that indicate the present utterance and the previous one(s) are

semantically or logically related; (2) those that are mostly hedges and show that the utterance introduced by DMs have no necessary logical relation with the previous and following utterance in discourse progressing; and (3) those that imply to introduce the following utterance without positing its logical connection with the previous one (s), which are simply induced by such DMs.

In addition, Li (2003) demonstrated that DMs are a linguistic means to better express the speaker's intention. They can be classified into three types: textual, interpersonal, and meta-language. Through a cognitive and pragmatic analysis of the DM+S2 discourse model, he holds that DMs can reveal the latent content of discourse, connect the short-circuited information, cause the interpreter to look for relevance, understand the utterance towards the truth intention, and ensure smooth communication. Thus they are important in the process of utterance generation and understanding.

As far as Japan is concerned, it is worth mentioning that the research paper by Takahashi (1984) on "*A study of Sentential Connectives: And, Or, But, So-English & Japanese Contrasted*" is valuable for people to recognize the similarities and differences between English and Japanese in relation with the use of *And, Or, But*, and *So*. Another researcher is Judy (1997), who gave an insightful investigation into the answers to the question of whether or not to use coordinating conjunctions such as *and* and *but* sentence-initially in academic writing. To gain some insight into what consensus linguists and lexicographers have formed on SIABs (sentence-initial *ands* and *buts*), a survey was taken of 42 references on English grammar, style, usage, writing references, and dictionaries. In addition, an informal survey of U.S. University writing labs via the internet was also undertaken. In another paper by Judy (1998), the following results are identified through data analysis: 1) the use of initial *and* and *but* is genre-dependent and occurs in science-oriented academic writing as compared with other spoken and written genres; 2) the use of initial



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*and* and *but* is not only genre-dependent, but also author-dependent; i.e., it is often a matter of personal preference; and 3) the use of sentence-initial *however* is more common in the American style of written academic English than in British style, and the opposite is true for sentence-initial *but*.

## 2. Aims

As mentioned above, there have been no special comparative studies on the use of DMs by NS, JNNS, and CNNS (mainland Chinese), even though there have been many studies completed on the roles and importance of DMs in relation to the comprehension of a text or written discourse or listening comprehension around the world, and some features on some special DMs such as *so*, *but*, *or*, *and*, and the initial-situational *buts* and *ands* by JNNS. In order to cultivate this unstudied field, I have elaborated on the characteristics of DMs used by three groups of university students for the purpose of finding some methods to effectively apply the research results of this study to the practical classroom teaching of DMs. Therefore, this study will focus mainly on the following questions:

- (1) What DMs are most frequently used by NS, JNNS, and CNNS?
- (2) Are there differences in the use of DMs among the three groups?
- (3) What implications can we assume through the analysis of the usage of DMs among the three groups?

## 3. Methods

### 3-1. Data collection

In this study, the researcher collected 300 compositions written by JNNS, CNNS, and NS for data analysis by means of the following ways:

- (1) JNNS: 50 English compositions were written by students of English at Tohoku University with the title of *On the necessity*

of *English subjects in the entrance examination to college*. The other 50 were from Corpus of English by Japanese Learners (CEJL)<sup>a)</sup>, with the topics of *Momotaro* (a Japanese fairy story), *Gardening*, *How far can a kite fly*, *Traveling*, and *Walking*. The total number of words from 100 compositions by JNNS was 16,122.

- (2) CNNS: 50 English compositions were written by students of English at Guangxi Medical University in China with the topic of *What do you think of marriage in college: pros or cons?* The other 50 were selected from Chinese Learner English Corpus<sup>b)</sup>, with the topics of *Getting to know the world outside of the campus*, *Global shortage of fresh Water*, *Health gains in developing countries*, *My good friend*, and *Bicycles in China*. The total number of words by CNNS was 18,876.
- (3) NS: 49 English compositions were chosen from the collection of American College Compositions edited by Wang (1999) with the help of the provision of the original data by Professor Tim Bossard at Cedar Crest University and published by World Affairs Press in China. Such topics included *Feeling the pinch*, *Who was Mary?* *The markers of time*, *Debut*, *Reflection upon life*, etc. The rest of the 51 compositions came from students' writings published on websites and edited by certain universities in America, Canada, and the UK. Topics from the University of Alberta in Canada included *Fatherhood can wait*, *Alcohol*, *AIDS: Use your head*, *Condom sense*, *STD? Not Me*, *Ever thought about living with AIDS? Do you hate your body? Is everyone as stressed out as I am? Not enough time in your day? SAD? Blue? Depressed?* Topics from the homepage of the University of Vermont in America included *Nursing students produce public service announcements*, *Honor society for non-traditional students inducts inaugural members*, *Box city to raise homelessness awareness*, *Politics*, *Student style*, *Iraq vet student to*

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*screen film, Lead war discussion, High energy, Brewing up a dream, Peace and justice, The power of peers, Triple threat, Polite society, Debating a debate, Learning to stay, etc.* Topics from the homepage of the University of Liverpool in the UK included *Reading for pleasure, How to build great readers, Losing sleep to watch the night-sky: The relationship between sleep-length and noctcaelador, College students and AIDS awareness, The effects of condom perception and self-efficacy; Looking good or being good? The role of social desirability tendencies in student perceptions of institutional mission and values, College student views of the elderly: Some gender differences, College student beliefs about women: Some gender differences, Gender differences in the academic ethic and academic achievement, Stress, race and substance use in college, The financial knowledge of college freshmen, A brief measure of creativity among college students, What do college examinations accomplish? Students' attitudes toward statistics: Implications for the future, Student exam creation as a learning tool, Decreasing math anxiety in college students, Employment follow-up of undergraduate rehabilitation majors, Plus/minus grading: If given a choice, etc.*The total number of words was 44,762.

- (4) Because the author wanted to gather 100 articles from each group (NS, CNNS, and JNNS), total number of words in each group varied according to different groups. Owing to the difficulties of collecting the same topics of English essays by NS from the home pages of the universities in America, Canada, and the UK, the topics by NS are quite different.

### **3-2. Data genres**

There are two genres included in the collected compositions: narrative and expository. That is, 50 compositions by JNNS and CNNS each are in the narrative and expository genres. As for the data from NS, 49 English compositions edited by Wang are in the narrative

genre, and the other 51 compositions by NS from the web pages edited by some universities in America, Canada and the UK are in the expository genre.

### 3-3. Results

To provide some clarity to the types and frequencies of discourse DMs used by non-native students of English, I have listed all frequencies and tokens of DMs that are commonly shared by NS, JNNS, and CNNS in their English essays. The results are as listed in the appendix.

As is shown in the collected data, NS used 86 kinds of DMs, JNNS, 40, and CNNS, 65. Of the 102 kinds of DMs, there are 28 that are commonly used by all three groups. NS and JNNS share 31, CNNS and JNNS 28, and NS and CNNS 51. This indicates that the three groups have a few dispositions in common with regard to the use of DMs. However, there is a difference in the means of frequency among the three groups regarding the total number of the token of DMs. These results can be seen in Table 1.

I used an ANOVA test in order to compare means of three samples/treatments (NS, JNNS, and CNNS). I have used with a One-Way ANOVA for simple comparisons of treatments (NS, JNNS, and CNNS), where one factor (frequency of DMs) is applied in every possible combination. From Table 1, it is 99% certain that there is a significant difference in the use of DMs among the three groups. In other words, we found that the value of means among the three groups

**Table 1:** Result of a One-Way ANOVA on the Use of DMs by Three Groups

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	57462	27	2128	6.11	0.000**
Within Groups	19495	56	348		
Total	76957	83			

\*\*p < 0.01

based on the statistical result ( $p = 0.000^{**} < 0.01$ ) is significant at the level of 1%. Thus, it can be assumed from this result that depending on different countries, cultures, and language systems, different teaching approaches to teaching English have been adopted.

This study conducted a t-test in order to determine whether the means of frequency between NS and JNNS, between JNNS and CNNS, and between NS and CNNS are statistically significant regarding the use of DMs. The results demonstrate there is a big difference between NS and JNNS ( $t = 2.49$ ,  $df = 30$ ,  $p = 0.018^* < 0.05$ ), and between NS and CNNS ( $t = 2.331$ ,  $df = 50$ ,  $p = 0.023^* < 0.05$ ), however, from the statistical results, we can conclude there is no obvious difference between JNNS and CNNS ( $t = 0.166$ ,  $df = 27$ ,  $p = 0.868 > 0.05$ ). This result may remind us to think that some similarities concerning the use of DMs really exist between JNNS and CNNS, whereas the differences between NS and JNNS, and between NS and CNNS are actually seen during their using DMs.

Compared with the total sum of DMs used by NS (86) and CNNS (65), the total sum (40) of DMs used by JNNS is very small; we find weak uniformity and coherence in their English essays. JNNS made a very limited choice of DMs and repeatedly used the ones they learned in their elementary courses. While teaching English composition in Japan, teachers should be required to prepare materials focused on how to effectively use many different DMs.

In addition, it is evident that NS and CNNS share much more DMs (51 kinds) than those frequently and commonly used between NS and JNNS (31 kinds) and between JNNS and CNNS (28 kinds). This might infer that the presence of many similarities between NS and CNNS regarding the use of DMs could consequently be assumed, and this may be because of CNNS have mastered the use of various kinds of DMs even though many errors have been found with regard to the use of DMs in their English essays.

#### 4. Discussions of *so*, *and*, and *because*

In this study, the characteristics of *so*, *and*, and *because* found in the essays are discussed. For some reasons, many EFL students overuse and/or misuse these DMs (Tribble and Jones 1990; Field and Yip 1992). As Schiffrin (1987) points out, *so* and *because*, belong to the same class of cause and result, even though there are some differences between them in their use in discourse; *because* is a marker of subordinate idea units; *so* is a complementary marker of main idea units. *And* is the most frequently used discourse marker found in this study with its total sum of tokens reaching 298 by NS, JNNS, and CNNS.

##### 4-1. *So*

Schiffrin (1987) stated that *so* is a complementary marker of main idea units in terms of its discourse use, while it is explained by Fraser (1993) as having either the function of a discourse marker or that of a conjunction. Fraser differentiates between the discourse marker *so* and the conjunction *so*, even though there are great similarities. In order to explain the differences between them, Fraser cited the following examples:

A: John was sick. *So* don't expect him.

B: John was sick, *so* he went to bed.

*So* in sentence A is considered to be a discourse marker, while *so* in sentence B is regarded as a subordinate conjunction. The *so* in sentence A, functioning as a discourse marker, signals a consequent relationship, namely, that the subsequent advice not to expect John is grounded on the earlier claim that John is sick. In contrast, in sentence B, *so* functions as a subordinate conjunction, where there is a single message with a compound propositional content: a claim that John was sick and because of this he went to bed. It is not that the meaning of *so* is radically different in the two cases. Rather, in the discourse marker case, the *so* is relating two separate messages, while in the subordinate conjunction case, it is relating two propositions

within a single same message. This is the quintessential nature of DMs.

Let us see the following examples taken from JNNS’s and CNNS’s essays in which a subtle difference between the discourse marker *so* and the conjunction *so* could be identified:

- ( 5 ) “In summary, college students shouldn’t get married, their priority is to ensure that they master enough knowledge for their futures, *so* they should pay more attention to their studies rather than getting married.” (CNNS 1: conjunction *so*)
- ( 6 ) “Marriage is not that simple. Apart from love, married life needs more things. *So*, I think college students should not get married.” (CNNS 2: discourse marker *so*)
- ( 7 ) “It is nature that we study English to pass the exams, *so* I object to abolishing the English test.” (JNNS 1: conjunction *so*)
- ( 8 ) “The competitions in entrance exams have become more intense in recent years. *So* students have to study English harder in order to memorize many English words, idiomatic phrases, grammar, and so on. (JNNS 2: discourse marker *so*)

Based on Fraser’s classification, let us consider what kind of characteristics JNNS and CNNS show when they use *so* in their English writing. The following tables (Tables 2, 3, and 4) illustrate the

**Table 2:** The use of *so* by NS

	Discourse marker	Conjunction	Total
Token	22	48	70
Percentage	31%	69%	100%

**Table 3:** The use of *so* by JNNS

	Discourse marker	Conjunction	Total
Token	6	42	48
Percentage	15%	85%	100%

**Table 4:** The use of *so* by CNNS

	Discourse marker	Conjunction	Total
Token	16	43	59
Percentage	27%	73%	100%

detailed tokens and percentages of *so* among the three groups. Percentage is based on totals.

There are several interesting points we can observe from these tables. First, the percentage of NS using the discourse marker *so* is much higher compared with 15% of JNNS and 27% of CNNS. From this statistical result, it is clear that NS students are apt to make conclusive sentences or insert their own opinions by using *so* as a discourse marker. In other words, NS prefer drawing a sharp line between the previous clause and subsequent ones and indicating a change from the previous topic. Thus, we can conclude that NS's preference for using *so* as a discourse marker may support the claim by McCarthy (1991), who stated that a discourse marker can, to a great extent, constitute and extend the content of discourse better than a conjunction.

A second interesting point worth noting here is that, as is seen in Table 2, there is a small instance of the discourse marker *so* found in the essays by JNNS. This might indicate that JNNS are inclined to use *so* within single messages, where a close relationship between the main clause and the subordinate one is manifested, rather than within the separate messages in which there is little distinctive interrelation between the main and subordinate clauses.

Third, just like the discourse marker *so*; the total sum of the usage of conjunction *so* by NS is far higher than that of JNNS and CNNS. Table 2 shows that in the essays by NS, there are more tokens of *so*, either as a discourse marker or as a conjunction. The reason for this may be that NS might use discourse marker *so* to express many meanings in the discourse instead of using other ones to do so.



Moreover, the data shows that JNNS and CNNS misuse *so* very often. Consider the following examples from the CNNS's essays (The *so* with \*in front of them is semantically incorrect; *so* in the parentheses is correct.):

- (9) "When two people are in love, they feel drawn to one another, \**So* (*so*) they get married after their careful thought." (CNNS 3)
- (10) "But they are all students, \**So* (*so*) they will study every day." (CNNS 4)
- (11) "Speaking and listening are important; \**So* (*so*) English exams should place importance on speaking." (JNNS 3)
- (12) "Teachers almost always use textbooks because they have to teach what is decided by the Ministry of Education, \**So* (*so*) teachers do not have enough time to make students practice speaking and listening to English." (JNNS 4)

As shown above, we learn that both JNNS and CNNS have a tendency to use the discourse marker *so* where they should use the conjunction *so*. The reason for this may arise from the fact that both JNNS and CNNS are not very sure what the logical and grammatical relationship is between the previous clause and latter one, or they don't understand that there is a pragmatic complexity between the previous clause and the latter one. Therefore, the pedagogical priority should be put on how to effectively enhance students' comprehension of the connections between clauses and segments occurring in various discourse contexts, and to master clause combining strategies in the future English essay writing.

Finally, as noted in Table 4, the total number of tokens (59) of *so* used by CNNS occurs more often than usage by JNNS. This is consistent with the investigation made by He (2002), who stated that the English textbook, called Senior English for China, the current major source of English exposure for Chinese senior high school students, uses *so* five to 20 times more often than that of *so that*,

*therefore, and thus*. Additionally, *so* is quite similar to the phonetic realization of its Chinese equivalents 所以 (*suoyi*), so it becomes easy for CNNS to apply *so* to various language expressions.

#### 4-2. *And*

*And* has a wider range of discourse functions. According to Schiffrin (1987), *and* has two roles in talk: it coordinates idea units and it continues a speaker's action. McCarthy (1991) focused more attention to how *and* functions in discourse that reflects its linguistic properties. Depending on context, it has senses of additive, adversative, causal, and temporality. Here I will search for some distinguishing characteristics and qualities existing in the use of *and* by NS, JNNS, and CNNS. First of all, NS use all forms of *and* impartially, as can be seen from the following:

- (13) "The glorious hype about becoming independent *and* free became my sole reality." (NS 1: additive)
- (14) "I had my own room for most of my life, *and* suddenly I have to share my space." (NS 2: adversative)
- (15) "After running, she prepared breakfast, takes children to school, *and* then goes to work." (NS 3: temporal)
- (16) "The major drawback of antihistamines is that they cause drowsiness *and* make concentration difficult." (NS 4: causal)

However, it is found that JNNS and CNNS have gone too far in one direction; that is, they most often use the additive and causal forms. This might reflect potential evidence for incomplete knowledge of how to use *and* by JNNS and CNNS.

The following are typical sentences where *and* is used by JNNS and CNNS.

- (17) "Some of them will rent a house outside the school. It is dangerous, *and* it affects the school's shame." (CNNS 5: additive)
- (18) "College life is rather busy, *and* students do not have any extra

time to think of any of the problems that occur between young couples.” (CNNS 6: causal)

- (19) “I enjoy my fifty-minute walk to campus, though my friend says that it is a waste of time *and* that I should take a bus which will get me to campus in less than ten minutes.” (JNNS 5: additive)
- (20) “After all, artists have senses that are different from average peoples, *and* such differences create what is called art.” (JNNS 6: causal)

The examples listed above reflect that JNNS and CNNS have an incomplete knowledge of the discourse marker *and*. *And* is the most simple and indispensable word by which we can make sentences more cohesive without relying on difficult DMs. What must be emphasized here is that the EFL/ESL teachers in Japan and China should make greater efforts to help their students to obtain an in-depth knowledge of how to use the discourse marker *and*.

### 4-3. *Because*

Schiffrin (1987) argued that *because* is a marker of subordinate idea units, and McCarthy (1991) gave shape to Schiffrin’s theory by claiming that *because* has the meaning of “cause-effect” and “reason” in view of its discourse use. Here, the use of *because* by NS, JNNS, and CNNS will be considered based on the theory of McCarthy. Findings indicate that all of NS, JNNS, and CNNS in this study tend to use *because* to describe “reasons” rather than “cause-effect”. The frequencies of *because* used as “cause-effect” and “reason” are listed in Tables 5, 6, and 7. Percentage is based on totals.

**Table 5:** The use of *because* by NS

	Cause-effect	Reason	Total
Token	11	105	116
Percentage	9.5%	90.5%	100%

**Table 6:** The use of *because* by JNNS

	Cause-effect	Reason	Total
Token	1	44	45
Percentage	2%	98%	100%

**Table 7:** The use of *because* by CNNS

	Cause-effect	Reason	Total
Token	4	8	12
Percentage	34%	66%	100%

Let us identify two reasons why using *because* to describe a “reason” rather than “cause-effect” is preferable to NS, JNNS, and CNNS: a) When *because* functions as a “reason,” it can not only provide knowledge-based linking, but can also add new information to an independent clause; b) It can be used in “content,” “epistemic,” and “speech-act” domains as exemplified in (21), while it is unacceptable in example (22) below. Therefore it could be thought that *because* used to describe a “reason” is easy to conceive and then apply to many clauses by NS, JNNS, and CNNS.

(21) *Because*

- a. content: John came back *because* he loved her.
- b. epistemic: John loved her, *because* he came back.
- c. speech-act: What are you doing tonight, *because* there’s a good movie on? (Sweetser (1990: 77))

(22) \**Because* the ground is wet, it has rained. (Hirose (1991: 27))

- \**Because* you are a linguist, what do you think of Chomsky?

In sum, concerning the use of *because* describing the meaning of “cause-effect” and that of “reason,” there are no distinctive differences among NS, JNNS, and CNNS.

#### 4-4. Other DMs

Besides *so*, *and*, and *because*, the study found that JNNS and CNNS are fond of using other DMs, such as *I think*, especially when they want to express their personal opinions. Chinese students used this phrase 50 times, accounting for 48.54%; Japanese students used them 45 times, accounting for 43.68%; however, NS only use them 8 times, accounting for 7.76% of the total number of discourse marker *I think* used by NS, JNNS and CNNS respectively in their English essays. The reasons for this may be due to the following factors: a) The influence of the virtue of modesty that comes from Asian culture and is shared by and familiar to both CNNS and JNNS and b) the influence of the native language's interference (Japanese and Chinese) on the use of the target language. That is, the prevalent use of pre-positioned and post-positioned *I think* used by JNNS and CNNS might reflect that both JNNS and CNNS are hesitant to state their decisive attitude or opinions in their English essays. In addition to this, in term of using *I think* in post-positional situation by JNNS, a grammatical transfer from Japanese, in which it is often grammatically correct to place *I think* (*omou*) at the end of sentence, can be clearly assumed.

Moreover, it is clear that CNNS prefer to use some common DMs such as *and*, *but*, and *so*, which are taught to them in their secondary education condition, whereas the items learned later such as *therefore*, *of course*, and *then* seldom occur in their English essays even though they are capable of using a variety of DMs to bridge the previous sentences and the following ones to make their essays clearer and more logical. In addition, it is also clearly seen that CNNS prefer using *for example* (40 times) in comparison with that used by NS (14 times) and JNNS (17 times); *in my opinion* (22 times) compared with that used by NS (once) and JNNS (once). One point worth especially noting here is that the preference of frequently using *in my opinion* by CNNS might indicate a rhetorical transfer from Chinese. In Chinese rhetoric,

the use of personal style or emotional appeals is very common and encouraged in an expository essay in order to make the argument more forceful.

Additionally, within the same genre of argumentation, those sequential DMs in English such as *first* and *second*, seem to appear with frequent occurrence in English essays edited by CNNS, with 39 times' occurrence of *first* in CNNS's essays as compared with that of 10 times in JNNS's essays, and 7 times in NS's essays; 36 times of repeatedly using *second* by CNNS are strikingly more than that of 3 times by NS and 7 times by JNNS. This might be due to transfer from Chinese spoken discourse writing, in which *first*, *second*, and *third* appear more frequently in order to make Chinese discourse more logical and forceful.

In contrast to CNNS, it is evident that *on the other hand* was used most frequently by NS (15 times) compared with that of JNNS (3 times) and CNNS (5 times). This finding might suggest that NS tend to use *on the other hand* to express both sides of things or persons instead of using *in the meantime*, *while*, which seem to be difficult or not familiar to non-native English learners. Furthermore, it is also explicit that NS use *then* (62 times) more often than that of JNNS (12 times) and CNNS (20 times); *therefore* (24 times) more frequently than that of JNNS (5 times) and CNNS (3 times); *of course* (23 times) more often than that of JNNS (3 times) and CNNS (2 times).

Finally, as indicated in the data, it seems that CNNS and CNNS use DMs more frequently in sentence initial position. This, to some extent, conforms the study by He (2002), who compares the position of the discourse marker *so* in the native English speakers' and Chinese learners' written English, and the result shows that native English speakers tend to embed *so* within a sentence, while the Chinese EFL learners tend to put *so* in sentence-initial position.

## 5. Conclusions and pedagogical implications

As is seen in the appendix, we learn that CNNS used 65, JNNS 40, kinds of DMs respectively in their English essays, less than that used by NS (86 kinds). This result is not consistent with the result of Milton and Tsang (1993), who made a corpus-based study of Hong Kong students' use of connectors and concluded that "there is a high ratio of overuse of the entire range of logical connectors in our students' writing, in comparison to published English."

However, the researcher found that when the research data is small, that is when the total number of data does not reach 100, the overuse of *so* by CNNS and JNNS is very obvious, whereas when the total number of data is more than 100, the frequency of the token and percentage of the use of *so* individually used by NS, JNNS, and CNNS becomes changed. Especially, in the narrative writing by NS, many instances of *so* are seen to be used in comparison with that used in expository writings.

In addition, the misuse of DMs is frequently found in the essays written by JNNS and CNNS. Let us look at the following examples (DMs or conjunctions in the parentheses are grammatically correct):

- (23) "Most college students spend money on everything that they want to, and their money is provided by their parents, *but* (*though*) most of their families are poor." (CNNS 7)
- (24) "When I was a high school student, I wanted to enjoy English, but I could not do so all the time. *But* (delete *But*) while I was preparing for the recommendation examination, (add *however*), I enjoyed studying English." (JNNS 7)

Such misuses would mislead the reader or the listener, and to a considerable extent, hinder the communicative quality of a written text or discourse.

As demonstrated above, CNNS's errors in using *but* instead of *though* show that CNNS are not conscious of a fine distinction existing between *but* and *though* according to the context. JNNS using *but*

before *while* can illustrate that CNNS did not realize that sometimes *but* and *while*, can convey almost the same meaning depending on the context. Apart from these misuses, many other misuses are also found in the English essays by JNNS and CNNS. The biggest reason for errors easily occurring in their English essays may be because of the interference of their native languages. For example, non-native English-speaking JNNS and CNNS do not clearly know the use of definite (and indefinite) articles, because there are no similar grammatical items in their native languages. Therefore, in order to prevent these errors from appearing, the basic grammatical rules of the target language should be taught more explicitly and logically when teaching of English essay to non-native English learners.

As for approaches to prevent misuse of DMs from coming into being so often, many studies have been made so far. One of which comes from Crewe (1990), who suggested three different approaches that may be adopted to remedy the misuse of connectives by second language students; he referred these as reductionist, expansionist, and deductionists.

- (25) The reductionist approach: Students are taught only a small selection of connectors and through practice are able to understand the semantic and discourse value of each selected item.
- (26) The expansionist approach: DMs are categorized into implicit and explicit items. Students are encouraged to use more explicit items such as connectors with more than one word, which make the connection clearer. 'With these, the student writer might more easily be called to account for the logic structure of his or her argument and made to explicate the links.'
- (27) The deductionist approach: When writing, students focus first on the content of the text. Crewe (1990) suggests that the students should write their first draft without the aid of any DMs, to ensure that the content of the text has a logical progression before the connectors are added.



The researcher of this study suggests that in order to decrease the misuse of DMs used by non-native students of English, the following points should be paid more attention to:

- (28) Teachers who are engaging in teaching English writing should let students spend more time in doing writing exercises. That is, using DMs in their practice to write English essays, either in narrative or expository form. During the period of conducting exercises, the process-oriented approaches to writing should be adopted in how to write a cohesive English essay with necessary DMs instead of only putting much emphasis on the product-oriented approaches to writing.
- (29) Teachers should also make it clear to students that DMs themselves do not create the relationships in a text; what they do is to make relationships explicit. DMs can, to some extent, make discourse cohesive, but only DMs can not make discourse semantically coherent. So the most important thing to let students know is how to make discourse cohesive and semantically coherent not only by using DMs appropriately and correctively but also by using some other cohesive devices as well.
- (30) Moreover, in order to raise the students' syntactic and semantic perceptions of DMs. They should be encouraged to read as much as possible so as to have a deep understanding of the use of DMs in various texts contexts and then use DMs correctly and logically without many difficulties. The detailed procedure of achieving this goal might be some special exercises such as making sentences by means of using DMs. For example, the students can be required to write a paragraph using different DMs. Following that, peer review can be used to analyze the use of DMs in each other's essays and comment on the effects of using these DMs. After each task is finished, it is necessary for writing teachers to select a sample for critique without informing the name of the writer of the selected essay, focusing

- on the explanation of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of DMs, and reminding students to avoid misusing DMs.
- (31) Not only meaning must be clarified, but also form and appropriation should be taken into consideration as to avoid the misuse of DMs. One of the most effective ways to clarify meaning, form and appropriation is to ask students to infer the correct usage from context by means of some exercises designed to students.
- (32) The extent to which the students are familiar with some DMs must play a central role when deciding which DMs will be taught first, and then the list should be reduced or expanded accordingly. However, before deciding this, we must take into consideration several different factors, the most important of these being the learners' reasons for learning the use of DMs: Do they need to use them in a written discourse, or whether they need to use them in a formal discourse. In addition, another central consideration should also be taken into account: how often these DMs are used, how they are used in relation to particular discourse and context, and how many DMs they have seen and mastered before. After having a comprehensive understanding of these factors, it might become easier for teachers to guide students to comprehend and furthermore to use DMs on a practical level.
- (33) Furthermore, writing teachers need to expose learners to the target norms by modeling written academic or published narratives or expository writing, in which DMs are cohesively embedded. This may ensure that students do not only learn about writing and practice it in abstract and detached fashion, as the case may be with second-language students who have not read extensively academic texts and general writing styles. This modeling may ease problems associated with the use of DMs and be expected to improve the skills of using cohesive devices

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such as DMs in their writing.

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### Notes

- a) CEJL pages are designed to serve scholars of corpus linguistics and researchers of second/foreign language acquisition research.
- b) Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC) is a collection of English essays written by Chinese college students for College English Tests (CET) 4, 5, 6, etc. in China. CET 8 is the highest level. It was collected and composed by Professors Du Shichun and Yang Huizhong and published by the Publishing House of Shanghai Foreign Language Learning and Teaching.

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Appendix: The following table shows the token and percentage of DMs commonly shared by NS, JNNS, and CNNS.

NS		JNNS			CNNS			TOTAL	
Category	Token	Percentage	Category	Token	Percentage	Category	Token	Percentage	Percentage
And	167	56%	And	77	25%	And	54	18%	100%
Because	116	67%	Because	45	26%	Because	12	6.9%	100%
Besides	2	25%	Besides	3	37.5%	Besides	3	37.5%	100%
But	101	35.68%	But	96	33.9%	But	86	30.38%	100%
Especially	5	41.66%	Especially	4	33%	Especially	3	25%	100%
Even though	12	41%	Even though	16	55%	Even though	1	3.4%	100%
First	7	12.5%	First	10	17.85%	First	39	69.64%	100%
For example	14	19.71%	For example	17	23.9%	For example	40	56%	100%
For instance	6	42.85%	For instance	5	35.71%	For instance	3	21.42%	100%
Generally speaking	2	33%	Generally speaking	3	50%	Generally speaking	1	16.66%	100%
However	44	70.96%	However	13	20.96%	However	5	8.06%	100%
I think	8	7.76%	I think	45	43.68%	I think	50	48.54%	100%
In addition	10	83.33%	In addition	6	50%	In addition	6	50%	100%
In conclusion	4	50%	In conclusion	1	12.50%	In conclusion	3	37.50%	100%
In fact	8	57.14%	In fact	2	14.28%	In fact	4	28.57%	100%
In my opinion	1	4.16%	In my opinion	1	4.16%	In my opinion	22	91.66%	100%

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In other words	1	33.33%	In other words	1	33.33%	In other words	1	33.33%	3	100%
In short	1	20%	In short	2	40%	In short	2	40%	5	100%
Indeed	1	25%	Indeed	2	50%	Indeed	1	25%	4	100%
Not only, but also	7	63.63%	Not only, but also	1	9%	Not only, but also	3	27.27%	11	100%
Now	21	67.74%	Now	2	6.45%	Now	8	25.80%	31	100%
Of course	23	82.14%	Of course	3	10.71%	Of course	2	7.14%	28	100%
On the other hand	15	65.21%	On the other hand	3	13%	On the hand	5	21.73%	23	100%
Second	3	6.52%	Second	7	15.21%	Second	36	78.26%	46	100%
So	70	39.54%	So	48	27.11%	So	59	33.33%	177	100%
Then	62	65.95%	Then	12	12.76%	Then	20	21.27%	94	100%
Therefore	24	75%	Therefore	5	15.62%	Therefore	3	9.37%	32	100%
Today	9	52.94%	Today	1	5.88%	Today	7	41.17%	17	100%
Despite	5	83.33%	Despite	1	16.66%				6	100%
Nevertheless	6	75%	Nevertheless	2	25%				8	100%
Well	8	80%	Well	2	20%				10	100%
Above all	1	25%				Above all	3	75%	4	100%
Actually	2	50%				Actually	2	50%	4	100%

NS		JNNS		CNNS		TOTAL	
Category	Token	Percentage	Category	Token	Percentage	Token	Percentage
Also	11	78.57%	Also	3	21.42%	14	100%
As	62	92.53%	As	5	7.46%	67	100%
As a result	9	81.81%	As a result	2	18.18%	11	100%
As far as ... concerned	1	50%	As far as ... concerned	1	50%	2	100%
As long as	2	40%	As long as	3	60%	5	100%
As you know	1	25%	As you know	3	75%	4	100%
Consequently	2	66.66%	Consequently	1	33.33%	3	100%
Contrary to	1	33.33%	On the contrary	2	66.66%	3	100%
Finally	15	88.23%	Finally	2	11.76%	17	100%
Moreover	1	20%	Moreover	4	80%	5	100%
No matter	10	90.90%	No matter	1	9.09%	11	100%
Obviously	3	60%	Obviously	2	40%	5	100%
Or	30	90.90%	Or	3	9.09%	33	100%
Recently	2	40%	Recently	3	60%	5	100%
Since then	2	66.66%	Since then	1	33.33%	3	100%
So that	6	60%	So that	4	40%	10	100%



An Analysis of Discourse Markers Used by Non-native English Learners:

Thus	6	66.66%				Thus	3	33.33%	9	100%
What is more	1	20%				What is more	4	80%	5	100%
Yet	23	95.8%				Yet	1	4.16%	24	100%