Abstract: EFL learners tend to overuse, underuse and misuse discourse markers (DMs) either semantically or stylistically although many available textbooks have listed DMs based on their categories. It is because the textbooks do not specifically elaborate the DMs list with clear examples how to use them in a real text in relation to various writing genres. In fact, DMs are considered to be a significant part of building cohesion and are frequently used to enhance the quality of a piece of writing. Based on the current practice of English teaching, learning DMs is not merely about memorization but the more important thing is how to use them in a real writing context appropriately and purposively. Along with this issue, writers have to develop a book dealing with how to make learners trouble-free to interpret and comprehend the use of DMs. Therefore, I develop a prototype for EFL learners on how to use DMs in a particular text with various writing genres. A prototype here contains some chapters of DMs materials including the DMs list and the concrete employment of them in a particular genre for supporting EFL teachers and learners in writing activities.

Keywords: discourse markers, books, prototype, writing genres, writing
include conjunction, adverbs, and prepositional phrases. A discourse marker plays a role as a subordinate conjunction which means it cannot stand by itself. Correspondingly, he divided three main classes of DMs generally used both in oral and written context: contrastive, elaborative, and inferential markers.

DMs are the key features to improve quality of writing. It gives some clues to the flow of writing. The inexistence of DMs in a piece of writing influences on the quality of the related text. Although in some cases the overuse of DMs decreases the quality of a text, the markers cannot be considered as unimportant elements in writing. Ghasemi (2013) divides the correlation between the use of cohesive devices and the quality of the writing into several points and analyzed through different views. The first view is in relation with the writing compositions. Accordingly, the positive relationship was shown in the relationship between the quality of the compositions and the number of DMs being used. On the contrary, Dastjerdi and Samian (2011) did not support the concept of the relationship between the number of DMs and the quality of writing although the students use various kinds of DMs in their argumentative writing. According to their finding, EFL Iranian learners used DMs inappropriately. From the several findings related to the function of DMs in increasing the quality of writing, it can be concluded that DMs should be used purposively and appropriately in order to gain the quality of writing.

Using DMs in writing context cannot be separated from the writing genres. Since in junior high schools, students have been introduced with various writing genres. For tertiary levels, the students start to develop more complex essays. Ghasemi (2013) mentions three kinds of genres in his investigation with college students as his subjects: argumentative, descriptive, and expositions. The features of each writing genre somehow are different from one another. It has its own style and brings some characteristics which ease readers to identify the mode of the text. One of some features specializes each type is a discourse marker. Writing genres identically present certain markers in order to convey the clarity of the ideas. For instance, the elaborative markers “besides, furthermore, moreover” are frequently used in expositions (Martinez, 2004). Moreover, the markers “but, on the contrary” are usually applied in argumentative texts.

Teaching Discourse Markers in EFL Writing: Obstacles and Suggestions

The current teaching process promotes communicative language teaching in which learners use language in real communication both in writing and speaking. The demand of the good ability in using English communicatively should be improved in writing. The quality of students’ writing should be increased by considering that writing a text communicatively is the main purpose. In relation to this demand, the use of DMs is the key to make the ideas of the text united syntactically and to convey the ideas successfully to the readers because the function of DMs as a sign to know the connection between the previous segment and the next segment.

In Indonesia, the exposure to writing is limited (Widodo, 2007). Teaching in the classroom and provided books mostly cover speaking and grammars. Hence, EFL learners do not understand the importance of DMs in determining their writing quality. They need to be familiar with DMs including the meaning, the application in a real text, and adequate practices to use them. Furthermore, EFL learners in tertiary levels highly need an exposure to the use of DMs in writing context as well as sufficient practices in various writing genres (Reppen, 1995). It helps them to identify the difference function of each DM in connecting ideas. They also should know that the use of DMs is differentiated into two types that are oral and written type which have different characteristics. As stated before that the quality of the usage of DMs in increasing the quality of their writing is various depending on the type of writing, students should understand that each genre has a specific characteristic in using DMs.

In the EFL writing context, teaching DMs is not a focus. Most teachers and students majorly focus on grammar and organization (Lestari, 2008). In fact, the use of discourse markers is significant to be learned by EFL learners along with the clarity of the ideas (Hinkel, 2004). Thus, students should be promoted into the use of DMs. The role of teacher to overcome the quality of students’ writing is by building students’ understanding that DMs enhance their writing quality as long as DMs are used appropriately and purposively (Tehrani & Dastjerdi, 2012). The actions of improving students’ awareness on this area surely motivate students to learn DMs intensively.

The major problem when facing teaching writing in the class is time-consuming. Consequently, teachers have difficulties to manage materials taught in the classroom. In fact, students do not feel sufficient to learn all the writing knowledge in the writing class. There are many elements of writing that are needed to be learned by themselves. It is related to the current teaching-learning process which promotes independent learning in which teachers decrease their role as the only source of knowledge (Brown, 2007). In accordance with this issue, students need profound exposures related to DMs. As suggested by (Sabet, Khodabandehehlo, & Jahandar, 2013), students’ problems on overusing or misusing DMs should be solved by a complete book which specifically explores the use of DMs with a real example. According to what the current theory of teaching promotes, students need to learn independently. Therefore, a book how to use DMs is a solution to the students’ problems in using DMs.
Developing a Book on the Use of Discourse Markers: An Exposure for EFL Learners

As the implication for the necessity of EFL learners to get sufficient exposures to the use of DMs in various genres, developing a suitable book is the effective solution. Therefore, I propose a prototype of using DMs in writing for EFL learners, especially for those who are in tertiary levels. In this level, essays that are mostly taught are expository and argumentative essays. Because EFL learners have been familiar with various genres since secondary levels, the topics are developed based on writing genres which means a functional syllabus is applied (Raimes, 1995). The topics include expository essays and argumentative essays. From those topics, DMs are explored through explanation and practices.

Three elements that become my consideration in developing this prototype are goal and organization, content, and suitability (Lee, as cited in Widodo, 2007, p.111). The goal of the prototype is to help EFL learners who enter in tertiary level with materials of using DMs. The prototype is organized from the easier one to the more difficult one, for instance by providing the explanation of DMs, defining the type of an essay, providing examples and practices of DMs by which the use of DMs is explored deeply. Thus, they can learn independently. The prototype is completed with adequate practices to provide them experiences in applying DMs into a text, and to develop learners’ comprehension. The most important element is the content of the prototype which is relevant to the goal and the subject. Because the subject is tertiary levels in various studies, the topics for the essay are free, for example scientific topics or social topics. The suitability can be achieved by the appropriateness of contents and practices with the needs of EFL learners which are specific materials of DMs and also real practices to enhance their skills in using DMs in writing context. As learners will use this prototype independently, self-assessment is provided in order to measure their improvement on every unit they have been completed. The assessment includes the learners’ progress and problems in learning the materials.

Conclusion

The importance of DMs in enhancing students’ writing quality is the reason why DMs should be promoted as an important material in writing. Related to DMs materials, a textbook which specifically focuses on learning DMs is significant to be provided for EFL students since it can be an exposure to the real application of DMs. Because this article only provides a prototype of using DMs, for further study, there should be more research on the development of a complete book focusing on DMs for EFL learners.

References


