

A Contrastive Study on Transitional Markers in English Language Teaching Research Articles Written by English and Persian Academic Writers

Mansoorah Elahi

Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran

Mohammad Taghi Badeleh

Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran

Abstract—The present study attempted to work on the distributions of the Transitional Markers in a corpus of thirty articles related to the discipline of English Language Teaching. All of the articles are written in English, fifteen by academic writers who are native speakers of English and the other fifteen by Persian academic writers. Using descriptive statistics, it was revealed that the Transitional Markers belonging to the categories of *contrast* and *purpose* were more used by native writers and Transitional Markers belonging to the category of *comparison & similarity* were used almost equally by both groups of writers. Transitional Markers belonging to the categories of *addition*, *time*, *result*, *place*, *example* and *summary & emphasis* were more used in the ELT articles written by Persian article writers. Moreover, using inferential statistics, it was indicated that a significant difference exist between the uses of the Transitional Markers in the two groups of the articles.

Index Terms—metadiscourse, transitional markers, native academic writers, Persian academic writers, ELT research articles

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to write in a correct way is important to produce articles in English, and as Myles (2002) says this ability cannot be naturally acquired, but it is usually learned through practices in instructional settings. Among factors that make a piece of writing more comprehensible, cohesion and coherence are of the most important ones. Some other devices that also help the unity of the whole text are Transitional words and phrases, being referred to as Transitional Markers (TMs). In the 1970s, the study of texts shifted from formal aspects of writing to organization and structuring of discourse itself (Esmaili and Sadeghi, 2102). A "deeper and narrower approach" (Swales, 1990, p.3) was followed that focused on specific academic genres and tried to investigate communicative purposes of written texts as well as its formal features. Therefore, the nature of the works in academic genre analysis (e.g. Swales, 1990; Dudley-Evans, 1994; Hyland, 1995; Hoey, 2001; Bhatia, 2004) was an applied one and the focus of those works was on typical pattern of linguistic realization. In this study it is tried to be faithful to this description and it is made narrower because the center of attention in this study is on analyzing the use of TMs in written academic discourse, namely ELT research articles.

In academic writing, it is metadiscourse that provides the mutual understanding between writer and reader. Doing so, it concentrates on "those aspects of the text which explicitly refer to the organization of the discourse or the writer's stance towards either its content or the reader" (Hyland, 1999b, p. 438). Metadiscourse "allows us to see how writers seek to influence readers' understandings of both the text and their attitude towards its content and the audience" (Hyland, 1998, p. 437). Hyland and Tse (2004), believe that they metadiscourse, "a writer is able not only to transform a dry, difficult text into coherent, reader-friendly prose, but also relate it to a given context and convey his or her personality, credibility, audience-sensitivity, and relationship to the message" (2004, p. 157). Metadiscourse is a first tool in attracting the reader's attention towards the text. It is also evaluative and engaging, influencing the level of closedness, expressing ideas, and the level of the power that makes the reader involved (Tse, Hyland, 2004). Dafouz-Minle (2008) studied how metadiscourse resources, both textual and interpersonal, contribute toward the overall persuasiveness of text.

The function and presence of metadiscourse have been examined in various genres and contexts, namely textbooks (Hyland 1999b), science popularization (Vartatala, 1998), advertisements (Fuentes-Olivera et al., 2001), newspaper discourse (Lee, 2004; Hemple and Degand, 2008), academic talks and lectures (Thompson, 2003; Eslami and Rasekh, 2007) and research articles (Mauranen, 1993; Dahl, 2004; Moreno, 1997; Hyland, 1998, 2001a, 2002, 2007; Zarei and Mansoori, 2007). According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics (2002, p.120) Contrastive rhetoric is the study of similarities and differences between writing in a first and second language or between two languages, in order to understand how writing conventions in one language influence how a person writes in another. Writing in a second language is thought to be influenced to some extent by the linguistic and cultural conventions of the writer's first language and this may influence how the writer organizes written discourse

(DISCOURSE STRUCTURE), the kind of SCRIPT or SCHEME the writer uses, as well as such factors as topic, audience and paragraph organization (Knoy, 2000).

In this study which is also related to contrastive rhetorics, cohesive elements are narrowed down to a modified list of TMs and tried to find and describe the possible differences between the usages of these TMs in two series of ELT research articles both written in English and written by academic writers who are native speakers of English and those written by Persian academic writers who speak English as a foreign language.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Which categories of TMs are preferred to be used in ELT research articles written by English academic writers?
2. Which categories of TMs are preferred to be used in ELT research articles written by Persian academic writers?
3. Is there a significant difference between the uses of TMs in ELT research articles written by native English academic writers and those written by Persian academic writers?

III. METHOD

The corpus to conduct this study, which is an ex-post facto study, was composed of thirty research articles belonging to the discipline of English Language Teaching. Among these thirty articles, fifteen were written by native speaker academic writers and fifteen written by Persian academic writers. Both series of texts were selected from academic writing genre, namely ELT research articles. This similarity was our first criterion for the selection of the research articles. The other important criterion which were applied in selecting the research articles were their possessing the introduction, abstract, method, result and discussion sections and the analysis was done in all these sections.

Another criterion was the publication date of the research articles. The English research articles were all chosen with a publication date between 2004 and 2010. This point was considered very relevant in the study because of the possibility of time influences on the style of the writers. Thus, by considering this time limit, it was tried to minimize that time influence.

As instrumentation, a modified list of the aforementioned items was selected from Robert Harris (2010), Joanna Toraba (2010) and Dafouz Milne's (2008) classification of transitional markers. Then they were put into nine categories for being analyzed, namely the categories of *addition, comparison & similarity, contrast, time, purpose, result, place, example and summary & emphasis*. Lastly, the articles were examined to determine the frequency of the TMs and attempted to analyze the differences between the uses of TMs in the two groups of the articles.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In order to satisfy the goal of the study, only the main bodies of the research articles were taken into account. No peripheral parts were included in the process of the study, namely quotes, bibliographies, headings, footnotes, excerpts, examples, tables, figures and even information in the parenthesis.

A point worth mentioning here is that in selecting the articles written by native academic writers especial attention was paid to the writers being native speakers of English who were British or American. And in the cases of the articles which were written by more than one writer the attention was paid to the point that at least one of the writers was a native speaker of English. After selection of the articles, the analysis was done regarding the use of TMs. In next step, the articles were examined to determine the frequency of the TMs.

It should be mentioned that it was not always easy to determine all TMs used by a writer in a research article. The most important reason to this claim is that some of TMs function polysemously in different sentences or between different paragraphs in different texts. Related to this, Hyland (1996, p.437) believes that "the choice of the particular device does not always permit a single, unequivocal pragmatic interpretation". Therefore, the functions of all the items were examined qualitatively in direct relation to their occurrence in the context. For example the word "here" expresses a kind of physical meaning in the real world, but in a text or specifically in a research article it is used as a device to navigate the readers as they go through the text.

Ambiguities of the kind made it difficult to determine which of the items were functioning as TMs and which of them were not. For this reason, context received an especial attention during determining the frequency of the items and because of those ambiguities all the counting was conducted manually. Besides, this manual job was done twice for the purpose of accuracy.

After the data were obtained, they were summarized by the use of descriptive statistics and presented through frequency tables. A t-test was also used to determine if there was meaningful differences between the uses of the TMs in the two series of the articles.

V. RESULTS

Along with the purpose of the study and also to have an overall image for the distribution of all nine categories for the two series of the articles, the distribution of TMs were first counted in all sections of the articles written by native writers and it was observed that the most distribution percent of the categories of TMs in the articles written by native

writers is related to the *contrast* category (31.3%). The next rank is demonstrated by the category of *addition* (28.2%). The next priorities are occupied respectively by categories of *example* (9.3%), *result* (8.3%), *purpose* (8.2%), *summary & emphasis* (8.0%), *time* (3.9%), *place* (1.8%) and *comparison & similarity* (1.0%), which imply that native writers prefer to use the TMs included in the category of *contrast* most and then the TMs belonging to the categories of *addition*, *example*, *result*, *purpose*, *summary & emphasis*, *time*, *place* and *comparison & similarity* respectively as it is shown here:

TABLE 1:
TABLE OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FREQUENCIES OF THE CATEGORIES OF TMS IN ELT RESEARCH ARTICLES WRITTEN BY ENGLISH WRITERS

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid addition	593	28.2	28.2	28.2
comparison and similarity	21	1.0	1.0	29.2
contrast	660	31.3	31.3	60.5
time	83	3.9	3.9	64.4
purpose	173	8.2	8.2	72.6
result	174	8.3	8.3	80.9
place	38	1.8	1.8	82.7
example	195	9.3	9.3	92.0
summary and emphasis	169	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	2106	100.0	100.0	

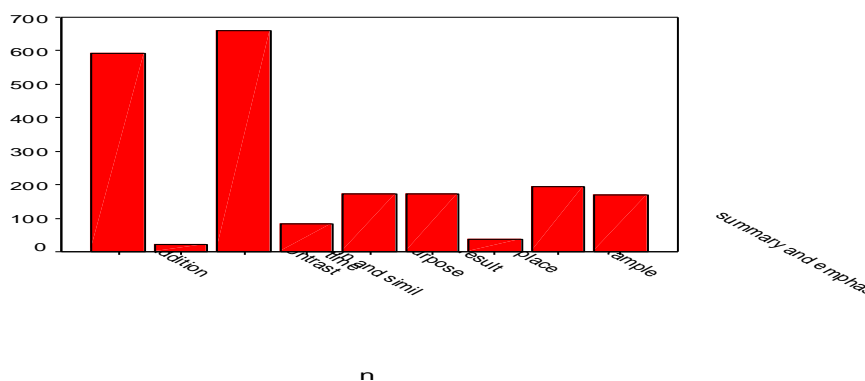


Figure 1: Distribution of the Frequencies of TMs in Articles Written by English Writers for Each of the Categories

Separately, the distribution of TMs was calculated in the articles written by Persian writers and it was discerned that the most distributed category of TMs in the written products of Persian writers is the *addition* category (35.9 %). The next distribution percent is related to the category of *contrast* (19.3%). The next levels are occupied respectively by categories of *result* (13.5%), *example* (9.8%), *summary & emphasis* (8.4%), *time* (5.1%), *purpose* (5.0%), *place* (2.0%) and *comparison & similarity* (1.0%), which means that Persian writers prefer to use the TMs included in the category of *addition* most, and then the TMs belonging to the other categories respectively *contrast*, *result*, *example*, *summary & emphasis*, *time*, *purpose*, *place* and *comparison and similarity*.

TABLE 2:
TABLE OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FREQUENCIES OF THE CATEGORIES OF TMS IN ELT RESEARCH ARTICLES WRITTEN BY PERSIAN WRITERS

	frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid addition	401	35.9	35.9	35.9
comparison and sim	11	1.0	1.0	36.9
contrast	215	19.3	19.3	56.2
time	57	5.1	5.1	61.3
purpose	56	5.0	5.0	66.3
result	151	13.5	13.5	79.8
place	22	2.0	2.0	81.8
example	109	9.8	9.8	91.6
summary and emph	94	8.4	8.4	100.0
Total	1116	100.0	100.0	

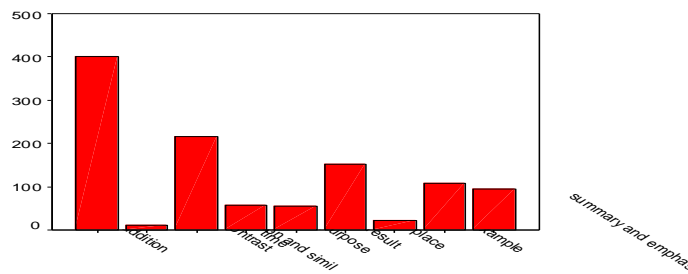


Figure 2: Distribution of the Frequencies of TMs in Articles Written by Persian Writers for Each of the Categories

According to the tables above, the categories of *contrast* and *purpose* are more observed in the articles written by native writers and category of *comparison & similarity* observed equally in the two series of the articles and categories of *addition, time, result, place, example* and *summary & emphasis* are more observed in the ELT research articles written by Persian writers.

Consequently, determining the existence of a difference between the uses of TMs in the two series of the articles, independent T-Test calculations were done and explained through the following table:

TABLE 3:
CALCULATION OF INDEPENDENT SAMPLE TEST

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
n.p	Equal variances assumed	129.785	.000	-6.855	208	.000	-6.36219	.92815	-8.19197	-4.53241
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.062	136.537	.000	-6.36219	.90095	-8.14380	-4.58057

$$|t| = 6.85 > t(0.05, 208) = 1.96$$

According to the table above, the observed t value is 6.85. This value is greater than the t value in the table of critical values of t (Brown, 1988, p.192) for 208 degrees of freedom at 0.05 probability of error and a level of significance less than 0.05 which is equal to 1.96. Therefore, with the possibility of 95 percent the hypothesis can be accepted. In other words: "There is a significant difference between the use of TMs in ELT research articles written by writers who are native speakers of English and those which are written by academic writers who are Persian."

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that the TMs belonging to the categories of *contrast* and *purpose* are observed more in the articles written by native writers and the TMs belonging to the category of *comparison & similarity* are observed equally in the two series of the articles, and categories of *addition, time, result, place, example* and *summary & emphasis* are observed more in the articles written by Persian writers and using a T-test, it was confirmed that there is a meaningful difference between the uses of TMs in articles written by native and Persian writers.

Such a difference results from various reasons one of which can be the lack of mastery of norms and conventions of academic writing genre and more specifically article writing at Persian writers' side. Hyland (2004) confirmed this by mentioning that metadiscourse resources are of great value at higher levels of writing in an academic and at the same time meaningful and appropriate way to a particular disciplinary community.

In Iranian universities, writing courses are followed based on a product-oriented approach rather than a process-oriented one. Another thing worth being mentioned here is that in such an approach students are not sensitized to the discourse community they address. Thus, it is true to say that such students who are exposed to product-oriented approaches to writing will not be expected to write appropriately in a genre of which they have no clear picture in mind and were not fully and seriously exposed to.

Generally, In order to make their piece of academic writing more fluent and comprehensible, the writers make use of lots of cohesive devices. They may use different genres to satisfy the dynamic necessities of the members of the discourse communities. It can be said that, if sometimes discourse community's conventions do not work, one of the reasons can be the generic awareness. In other words, writers of the articles should not be unaware of the genre they are writing in. This kind of unawareness may have its root in the fact that academic writers in Iran during their BA, MA and PhD studies do not pay enough attention to the genre of thesis and dissertation or article writing. And maybe the

supervisors and the responsible educational system do not take enough care of this generic awareness and let it develop along the students' lives and becomes sources of such problems when they are in the positions of an academic writer who are supposed to be able to write research articles accurately and at the same time comprehensibly.

In addition, like some MA or PhD students who are writing their thesis or dissertations, some Persian writers may have a tendency to use other scholars' writings as inspiring models to get an overall image of a research article or maybe they are simply under the influences of the general and familiar instructions given by their professors in their educational lives. Generally, what a writer writes as an ELT research article is a reflection of their general picture of what an ELT research article is. Having different pictures of an ELT research article can be one of the reasons for the existence of difference between the articles written by the two groups of writers. As an example, there was an interesting difference found between the occurrences of the TMs *I believe*, *I hope*, *I suppose* and *I think* which belong to the category of *Summary and Emphasis* in the two series of the articles. Persian writers were not much willing to use these TMs and they preferred the passive voice structure. The reason to this may again be the effects of their educational background and the Persian writing structures the writers received during their years of academic lives. The other reason to this can be rooted in the lower degree of confidence regarding their responsibility for the accuracy of the findings of their research articles. This may imply the fact that the differences of the academic written works of native and non-native writers can also have cultural roots. It is true that research articles follow same conventions according to genre necessities, however as some scholars believe there exists a "significant intercultural variation in the rhetorical preference of writers" (Mauranen, 1993, p. 1).

What are found in the study are to some extent in congruence with what are found in the study run by Noorian & Biria (2008) which was also a contrastive one revealed that there are meaningful differences between the two groups concerning the existence of interpersonal markers. Their study also suggested that different factors interacted in the choice of metadiscourse markers in newspaper opinion articles written by American and Iranian EFL columnists: culture-driven preferences, genre-driven conventions, and Iranian EFL writers' extent of foreign language experience. There are also some agreements between the results of this study and a research run by Ailin Firoozian Pooresfahani, Gholam Hassan Khajavy & Fateme Vahidnia (2012). In their study, it was revealed that there were significant differences on the overall frequency of metadiscourse features as well as on the particular occurrence of some categories in interactive and interactional features (Mur-Duenas, 2011)

The results of the present study may have some pedagogical implications and help teachers of writing courses to design tasks that focus not only on grammatical issues but also on rhetorical structures and different genres of writing. As some scholars like Cheng and Steffensen (1996) believe that tracing endophorics can increase students' understandings of the major structures of texts. The study also has some implications for Iranian students and novice article writers who are willing to write in academic genres. Moreover, Groom suggests that the best way of including major genres in syllabus is to "present generalizations about the linguistic and rhetorical features of these genres not as models to be applied, but as hypotheses for students to test by investigating authentic texts and practices in their own disciplines" (Groom, 2005, p. 273). Along with this suggestion, the present study attempted to have some implications for material developers and syllabus designers in order to give them some insight to provide materials mostly in line with the process-oriented approach.

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Mansooreh Elahi is an MA graduate from Semnan University. She received her BA from Guilan University in 2006. She has been teaching at undergraduate levels in the areas of General English courses, specialized English of the discipline of the Qur'anic sciences. She is currently teaching English in private language institutes in Mazandaran. Her area of interest includes language teaching and learning techniques and strategies, writing and translation.

Mohammad Taghi Badeleh is a faculty member of Golestan University of Medical Sciences. He received his MSc in Anesthesiology from Ferdousi University. He also received his MA in TEFL from Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch. He is currently the Head of Language Department at Golestan University of Medical Sciences and he has been teaching at undergraduate and graduate levels in the areas of research methodology, language testing, letter writing, oral production, political texts translation, press texts and specialized English of various disciplines of Medical Sciences. He has also published some articles in several journals.