ISSN 1799-2591
Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 2, No. 10, pp. 2002-2010, October 2012

doi:10.4304/tpls.2.10.2002-2010

Perceptions of Iranian English Language Teachers towards the Use of Discourse Markers in the EFL Classroom

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***Abstract*—This study attempts to examine Iranian English language teachers' perception towards the use of discourse markers (DMs) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It is the contention of this study that past research studies have not paid sufficient attention to how teachers perceive the use of discourse markers in the English language classroom. This research extends on Fung's (2011) study and further includes the listening and speaking skills together with the role of DMs in teaching the reading and writing skills. Three research questions are posed in this study. They are 1) What is the perception of Iranian English teachers toward the use of discourse markers? 2) How do Iranian English teachers perceive DMs? 3) Do Iranian English teachers exhibit high, moderate, or low attitudes toward the use of discourse markers? The descriptive method to the data analysis in this study provides better understanding of teacher's perception towards the use of DMs. Forty five Iranian English teachers participated in the study via a questionnaire survey. Results from the analysis of data showed that Iranian English teachers seem to have a moderate attitude toward DMs. Findings also suggest that teachers tend to believe in the pragmatic and practical value of DMs.**

***Index Terms*—Iranian EFL teachers, teacher's perceptions, discourse markers, EFL classroom**

I. Introduction

Various descriptions and terminology are found in the literature to describe and analyze discourse markers. This study adopts Richards and Schmidt's (2002) definition. They define DMs as "expressions that typically connect two segments of discourse but do not contribute to the meaning of either. These include adverbials (e.g. however, still), conjunctions (e.g. and, but), and prepositional phrases (e.g. in fact)". This definition is adopted in this study as literature indicates that it is the most comprehensive in terms of categorization of DMs. Other researchers consider DMs to be words like right, yeah, well, you know, okay (Jucker & Ziv, 1998; Fraser, 1999; Müller, 2004). For instance, Fraser (1999) believed that DMs are not just functioning as textual coherence but also signaling the speakers' intention to the next turn in the preceding utterances.

Over the past 20 years or so, the description of linguistic items related to DMs has been a research focus in many studies related to language learning and teaching. Schiffrin (1987) began writing about the significance of DMs in the 80s, and presented a coherence model which included a semantic, syntactic and discourse-organizing level to investigate how DMs assist oral coherence (Archakis, 2001). A more pragmatic in-depth view later developed and focused more on the functional aspect of DMs. Research studies on DMs can be generally divided into two categories. The first category describes research on DMs through the descriptive analysis of DMs in a particular language as spoken by native speakers (NS) of the language. The researchers in this present study believe that DMs have a substantial role in written language as well as in the spoken form, particularly in non-native writings. The second category describes research on DMs which relate and examine the acquisition of DMs of the target language by non-native speakers (NNS), mostly that of teachers and language learners. The second category of research on DMs has been studied much less and the research seems limited to only second language learners (Müller, 2004; Fung & Carter, 2007).

Most previous research on the study of discourse markers, either DMs in English or in other languages, has focused on their meanings and their corresponding pragmatic use (Schourup, 2001; Matsui, 2002; Tree & Schrock, 2002; Müller, 2004; De Klerk, 2005; Overstreet, 2005; Wang & Tsai, 2005), and on how they help create coherence (Schiffrin, 1987; Redeker, 1991; Risselada & Spooren, 1998). , In the educational context, DMs have beenfound to have a positive role in the classroom as that which can aid effective conversational endeavors (Othman, 2010). Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser

(1990 & 1999) comment that research on the pedagogical importance of DMs in the ESL/EFL classroom has been rather restrictive (McCarthy & Carter (1997); Romero Trillo (2002); Müller (2004); Fung & Carter (2007); Hellermann & Vergun (2007)), and studies on teachers' attitudes towards DMs are virtually non-existent.

Schiffrin (1987) believes that DMs play an important role in understanding discourse and information progression. This implies that it is important that teachers of language be aware of how to use DMs appropriately in their teaching of the language. It is also the role of the teacher to encourage learners to acquire as many DMs as they can and make language learners understand the functional advantage of using DMs in their language use. Unfortunately, it is evident that some teachers do not know how to teach these linguistic items and subsequently are unable to make language learners realize the importance and functionality of use of DMs. It was also seen that course books too fail to define DMS clearly making the teaching and learning of DMs a difficult task for teachers and learners. This may be the reason why some material developers offer a list of DMs in their language learning and teaching materials and suggest that they can be used interchangeably. Fung (2011) also found that teachers under used DMs and this was revealed in their teaching materials. It was also felt that teachers often did not see the need to teach DMs. Thus research studies on teacher's attitude toward DMs have received scant attention. It is therefore timely and important that this study investigates how Iranian English language teachers perceive DMs.

This study aims to examine perceptions of Iranian English language teachers toward the use of DMs in the EFL classroom. As an important contributor to accurate interactional, discourse markers are important and actually possess elements of multi-functionality in the language skills of listening, reading (both being receptive skills) and writing and speaking (both being the productive skills).

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of Iranian English language teachers with respect to the use DMs and the following research questions are posed:

1) What is the perception of Iranian English teachers toward the use of discourse markers?
2) How do Iranian English teachers perceive DMs?
3) Do Iranian English teachers exhibit high, moderate, or low attitudes toward the use of discourse markers?

II. Literature Review

Fung and Carter (2007) believe that in spoken conversation, the frequency and proportion of DMs that people use is significant compared to the use of other word forms. From the literature it can also be seen that not only are they being used significantly in spoken language, but, they also are being used frequently in written texts by native and non-native language users.

Interestingly too, no agreement on the use of the terminology to describe DMs has ever been reached because of different research perspectives taken by individual researchers (Jucker and Ziv, 1998; Fraser, 1999; Frank-Job, 2006; Cohen, 2007; Han, 2008). DMs have been defined as sentence connectives from the systemic functional grammar perspective (Schiffrin, 1987; Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Cohen, 2007), and also as pragmatic markers (Fraser, 1999) from the grammatical-pragmatic view.

From the pragmatic point of view, Fraser (1999) defines DMs as "a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases [which] signal a relationship between the interpretations of the segment they produce" (p. 931). Investigating DMs from the perspective of whether they refer to a textual segment between sentences or discourse segment in structure, Fraser (1999, p. 946) categorized DMs into two major types:

1) Discourse markers which relate to messages
   a. contrastive markers: though, but, contrary to this/that, conversely etc.
   b. collateral markers: above all, also, and, besides, I mean, in addition etc.
   c. inferential markers: accordingly, as a result, so, then, therefore, thus etc.
   d. additional subclass: after all, since, because.
2) Discourse markers which relate to topics
   e.g. back to my original point, before I forget, by the way etc.

Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1999) are the two most cited scholars in the study of DMs. The two strands of thought promoted by these two scholars have resulted in a descriptive framework of DMs' as a linguistic entity rather than a framework of DMs categorized according to their function. Other possible labels for DMs which result from different research perspectives, include those which relate DMs to lexical markers, discourse particles, utterance particles, semantic conjuncts, continuatives and so on (cited in Yang, 2011). Richards and Schmidt (2002) define DMs as "expressions that typically connect two segments of discourse but do not contribute to the meaning of either. This definition includes adverbials (e.g. however, still), conjunctions (e.g. and, but), and prepositional phrases (e.g. in fact)". To date, this definition seems to be regarded as a comprehensive one.

Today, studies focusing on the use and teaching of DMs are also becoming more and more popular. The majority of research studies focus on the use of DMs by native speakers. These research studies use and adopt different research designs such as that of the corpus-driven approach and the results of these corpus-driven approach studies are often compared to findings of the use of DMs by non-native speakers. Teachers attitude toward the use DMs, on the other hand, have not been researched much in the literature. Fung (2011) identified seven categories of attitude toward DMs

(see Appendix 1) and teachers' perceptions towards the use of DMs in the EFL classroom are measured against these categories in this study.

III. Method

This study attempts to investigate and examine Iranian English language teachers' perceptions towards the use of DMs in the EFL classroom. The method employed in this study is descriptive in nature and employs the survey method using a questionnaire adapted from Fung (2011). Forty-five Iranian English language teachers were involved in this study. The majority of the participants were male (N=31, 68.9%), whereas 14 (31.1%) were female. As for their level of education, three (6.7%) of the participants had either a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree, while 20 (44.4%) of them had a Master of Arts or a Master of Science degree, and 22 (48.9%) of them had obtained a doctorate degree. Some of the participants were pursuing postgraduate degrees. The majority of the participant's field of the study was TEFL/TESL/ELT (80%) and (6.7%) were from English Literature programs. The rest were either from English language translation (11.1%) or from fields other than English. A small number of the participants (2.2 %) were from engineering programs. Only (55.6%) of the participants reported that they had more than 10 years working experience. Some respondents (a total of 22.2%) reported that they had between 1-4 years or 5-9 yeas years of teaching experience.

The instrument used in this study was adopted from Fung (2011) and then adapted considerably to suit the context of the study and the focus of the study. The questionnaire that Fung used highlighted the use of DMs in speaking and listening skills. However, for the purpose of this study, the items were reworded and the role of DMs in relation to other skills was added (see Appendix 2). Further, two new items were added to the whole survey (items 23 and 33) as the researchers believed that they were important elements in the investigation. Participants were asked to state their comments (if they had any) and response to a survey. In Fung's (2011) study, the questionnaires were monitored and trailed by 20 ELT practitioners from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and England who offered comments from an insider's point of view and these practioners provided feedback on the strengths and shortcomings of the overall questionnaire design. Similarly, in this study, five PhD candidates were enlisted to help carefully examine the modified version of the questionnaire. They then made their comments and then the researchers in this study revised the questionnaire of 50 items before questionnaire administration. The internal reliability (Cronbach-α) for the questionnaire was (0.75). This was obtained after recoding the negative items found in the initial survey (items 4, 5, 10, 11, 14, 21, 25, 50) (Appendix 2). It was initially discovered that for these items, they wordings used were in the negative and this resulted in participants responding in a different manner compared to items worded in the positive. As a result, the initial internal reliability for the questionnaire was low. However, after rewording of the problematic items, another test of reliability was run and the index obtained indicated that the questionnaire was reliable. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale. Karavas-Doukas (1996) believes that using a Likert scale is a useful instrument in revealing teacher beliefs. The scales were anchored at one end by 'strongly agree' and at the other end by 'strongly disagree', with a mid-3 score expressing uncertainty towards the statement. The questions were pre-coded from 1-5. For positively worded statements, a high score reflects a strong endorsement of an attitude statement, while a low score reflects a weak endorsement.

Fung (2011) conducted a factor analysis to determine the degree to which all the 45 variables could be reduced to a smaller underlying variance structure. In this study, three items from the questionnaire (9,14,19) were not included in the factor analysis because they did not belong to any of the seven categories identified to tie closely to attitudes towards DMs. The questionnaire used in Fung's earlier study was modified in this study. Two new items were also added to the questionnaire. Subsequent to performing a factor analysis, these two new items (23 and 33) were placed under the related category. In effect, seven factors or categories were extracted and factor one named pedagogic value of DMs that included the following items (20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 34, 35, 40, 41). Factor two named identification with the native speaker norm and contained items (31, 32, 33, 42, 43, 44, 48). Factor three named pragmatic (however, in this study this category is named practical) value of DMs is comprised of the value of the following items (1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 27, 29, 30). Factor four named dispensable value of DMs and they are composed of these items (4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13). Factor five named representation of DMs in ESL (EFL) classrooms and contains the following items (15, 16, 17, 18). The sixth factor which named prioritizing teaching of DMs for receptive purpose amd referred to items 36, 37, 38, 39. Finally, - factor seven acceptance of local usage referred to items 45, 46, 47, 49, 50.

Data for the study was collected via an on-line version of the adapted questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was prepared via Google Doc. and emailed to 100 Iranian English teachers. The questionnaire required about 15 minutes of their time in order for it to be completed. Only 45 questionnaires were returned. Excel and SPSS (19) software were utilized to process and analyze the data. After transferring data from an excel file (Google doc provides an excel file of gathered data) to an SPSS file, the data were screened for possible wrong data entry and missing cases using frequency counts. Then, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and frequency analysis were used to analyze the data in order to answer the research questions which direct the study.

IV. Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates that the Iranian English teachers surveyed have a relatively moderate attitude toward DMs (mean = 3.52, SD = .27).

TABLE 1:
OVERALL MEAN OF TEACHERS ATTITUDE TOWARD DMS

Number of Items	Mean	Std.
45	3.52	.27

The results do not indicate an overtly very positive attitude but does indicate merely a moderate attitude. This could be due to various factors. The reason why the attitude toward DMs is not strong or high might be a result of teacher's perception and their own beliefs towards DMs. As one the respondents highlighted:

It has for long been the concerns revolving misuse of DMs either due to its being perceived a trivial point in English or as a consequence of inappropriate language knowledge of teachers.

It seems that the Iranian English language teachers surveyed in this study are simply not fully aware of the functionality of DMs in foreign language learning and teaching. Teachers must be made to realize that DMs exist in language; they have a role to play as they bring cohesion into the text (Fraser, 1999 & Müller, 2004).

Another participant in this study believed that

Cohesive linkers are really able to signpost the road of comprehension of a text and as a result ease the flow of sequence of ideas to be presented. The cohesive linkers do not mean everything in a discourse. Neither are they redundant. Nor are they absolutely essential in any discourse.

It can be concluded that some of the teacher's perceptions toward DMs in this study differ from that of respondents in Fung's (2011) study. The informants in Fung's study put forward that DMs can bring naturalness to a conversation. Further, they maintained that without DMs, speech would sound blunt and impolite. Furthermore, they rose that the interpersonal and referential role DMs have in communication where speaker's attitude and linkage between statements are displayed. In fact, Watts (1989) discusses that DMs are subtle conversational devices. The findings of this study differ from that of Fungs' also because Fung focused on the listening and speaking skills and the present study has expanded to include the other remaining language skills. This could explain for some of the differences in the findings as reported by the participants from both studies.The results for the second research question are presented in appendix II. The mean scores calculated for each and every item and are subsequently reported. It shows the tendency of teacher's perception for each individual item.

Table 2 shows details of the attitudes of the teachers towards DMs.

TABLE 2:
ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS

Category	Frequency	Percent
Low attitude	0	0%
Moderate attitude	33	73.3%
High attitude	12	26.7%

As seen in Table 2 above, the majority of the Iranian English teachers (73.3%) adopt a moderate perception toward DMs whereas (26.7%) tends to have a high attitude. It is worthy of comment that none of the teachers hold possess low attitude toward DMs. This finding shows that the issue of having a moderate attitude to DM might be initiated from the beliefs the teachers held about DMs. Another reason could be the sources that they have been using for teaching purposes could have influenced them in some way. That is to say, course books as well as their teacher manuals might have failed to address the teaching of DMs appropriately resulting in them not realizing how important this linguistic element is. It should be noted that almost one fourth of the respondents did have high attitude toward DMs, and this could mean that there is a tendency to consider them as important, possibly both inside and outside of the classroom among this group of participant.

Table 3 illustrates, the highest mean (4.09) is found to be for pragmatic and practical value of DMs (category 4) whereas the lowest means (2.91 and 2.99) were found to be allocated to the dispensable value and pedagogic value of DMs, respectively. Further, as for the attitude of the teachers, the frequency analysis of the seven categories questioned provided for further details of Iranian English language teachers' perception toward the use of DMs in EFL classrooms.

TABLE 3:
ATTITUDES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS TOWARDS USE AND VALUE OF DMS FROM 7 SPECIFIC CATEGORIES

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
1.Pedagogic value of DMs	45	2.18	3.82	2.99	.306
2.Identification with native speaker norm	45	1.71	4.43	3.46	.560
3.Pragmatic and practical value of DMs	45	2.38	5.00	4.09	.550
4.Dispensable value of DMs	45	1.71	3.86	2.91	.442
5.Representation of DMs in EFL classroom	45	1.50	5.00	3.48	.800
6.Prioritizing teaching of DMs for receptive purposes	45	2.50	4.00	3.17	.405
7.Acceptance of the local usage	45	2.20	4.40	3.18	.465

The results imply that Iranian English language teachers tend to have a relatively high attitude toward pragmatic and practical aspects of DMs. The findings also indicate teachers' exhibited moderate attitude toward representation of DMs in EFL classrooms and identification with native speaker norm (categories 5 and 2). Their attitude towards acceptance of the local usage and prioritizing teaching of DMs for receptive purposes (category 7 and 6) was almost moderate, too. Although teachers had a positive and relatively low moderate attitude to pedagogic value of DMs and dispensable value of DMs (category 1 and 4), the lowest mean score was for this category.

The findings for category three is partially consistent with Fung's study. As can be seen from Appendix II, from frequencies and overall means, it is evident that almost two thirds of the participants tend to recognize the pragmatic and practical value of DMs in all the language skills. This was evident from the high mean scores. Therefore, it can be said that the majority of teachers strongly believe that DMs do play an important role in both written and spoken discourse and their function is important. Although there was a minor difference between category five and category two mean scores, teachers are in agreement with the categories of representation of DMs in EFL classrooms and identification with native speaker norms. McCarthy and Carter (1994, cited in Fung 2011) discuss that texts with a more dialogic, interpersonal orientation and DMs are seemingly thematized as a range of more 'personal' features of language. Even with discourse that is transactional in nature (as simple as direction-giving), there are still many other peripheral discourse features which mark interactional functions, the exemplification of which can help learners understand the dynamics of talk. Kennedy (1992, cited in Fung 2011), said, 'because discourse items are not handled well in most dictionaries and grammars, they are not part of traditional language teaching, with consequent effects on the naturalness of learners' English.

There was no difference between findings in category seven and six in both this study and Fung's study. The mean scores illustrates that teachers are uncertain in their acceptance of the local usage and prioritizing teaching of DMs for receptive purposes. In this study, participants tend to disagree with the Persian style of using DMs in second language and that they should not be taken into account while in Fung's study participants tend to be uncertain. This means that accepting local usage of DMs may not be an appropriate way but they can be used in order to make learners aware of DMs use in their mother tongue. Nevertheless, if the level of DMs in local usage is increased, it may result in overuse, misuse, and underuse for some. For presenting purpose, the majority of the participants believe that the optimal time for teaching DMs is at the early pre-intermediate or intermediate level. The findings for this category seem to be inconsistent with Fung's study. Fung explained that all informants stated the necessity of raising learner's awareness as the first step to master DMs. They believed that awareness-raising teaching and learning strategies can go hand in hand to support learners in their effort to communicate effectively. They recommended that awareness can be developed through cross-language reference where learners can be helped to acquire DMs naturally through real life interaction. In contrast with Fung's informants' claims, participants in this study felt that it would be ideal to present DMs for receptive purposes early at the pre-intermediate level. Learners at that level may not be able to acquire them naturally, thus the teachers' role might require facilitating their understanding regardless of implicit or explicit instruction. Participants in this study do not see the need to delay presenting the teaching of DMs to EFL learners.

The findings for pedagogic value of DMs and dispensable value of DMs categories showed that teachers were reluctant to some extent to using and teaching DMs. This is in contrast with Fung's results in which the respondents tended to agree with instructional value of DM. The reason for the reluctance for Iranian English teachers to teach DMs is unclear and uncertain. Teachers showed positive attitude toward teaching DMs in Fung's study and they believed that desirable L2 performance links communication with DMs, the knowledge of which is in fact an important step in the attainment of native-like fluency. They also maintained that they perceived a need to put DMs into proper focus through explicit teaching in which the leaners should not be overloaded. However, Iranian teachers of English expressed a low moderate perception toward teaching DMs. It can be argued that their attitude may be due to their belief regarding DMs as they thought they are not really effective in creating discourse cohesion. In light of these findings it is obvious that pedagogic intervention in an explicit form is required to increase effectiveness of discourse (Fung, 2011). As for category four, teachers reported that they disagree with the dispensable value of DMs. That is to say, they consider DMs to be important to some extent but not totally important. It seems that these Iranian English language teachers are unable to deny the importance of DMs but yet they do not wholeheartedly believe that they should be given utmost priority in English language teaching over other linguistic items.

V. Conclusion

It seems that Iranian English language teachers tend to have a relatively moderate positive perception toward the use of DMs. Some of them expressed that DMs are neither essential nor are they redundant. A detailed analysis of the items investigated in this study provided for further clarification of the teacher's perceptions towards the use of DMs in and EFL classroom. An interesting finding was that the majority of the Iranian English language teachers surveyed tended to agree with the view that DMs had both pragmatic and practical value. Findings of the study suggest that there should be an increased awareness of teacher's perception toward the use of DMs. This increased awareness of DMs for pedagogical uses will benefit both teachers and material developers alike and may even facilitate teachers in the EFL classroom. It is important that teachers and material developers are aware and recognize the importance of DMs in order to aid them better in their teaching and development of teaching material. DMs can be included 'as a part of the most

basic lexical input in a teaching syllabus and teaching material because they are quite simple and straightforward and are often familiar to learners who can recognize them from their basic semantic meaning' (MacCarthy, 1998, cited in Fung 2011). Moreover, teachers need to realize the importance of DMs and need to know when they can use them in the EFL classroom. Although the findings of this study are not generalizable, it still is able to point to the direction for future research. It may be replicated in other EFL situations and further studies could also adopt other data collection methods such as the interview or classroom observation to extract further responses from teachers and their behaviour with regard to DMs.

APPENDIX 1: FUNG'S FINDINGS

Pedagogic value of DMs	**Mean & SD**
DMs are only small words in conversation and it is not worth the time to teach them.	3.86 (.81)
DMs are redundant and sub-standard features in speech and there is not much teaching value.	3.98 (.72)
It is necessary to create and develop linguistic awareness of DMs and promote proficiency in the actual use of them.	3.92 (.77)
Students should be helped to exploit DMs to improve their speaking and listening skills.	3.95 (.74)
DMs do not carry specific meaning and there is not much teaching value.	3.90 (.70)
There is no need to promote spontaneous understanding of DMs as a fluency device in spoken language.	3.53 (.89)
Students should be left at their discretion to learn to speak with DMs in the future when other interaction opportunities arise.	3.07 (1.02)
It is an appropriate time to highlight DMs in spoken text at upper secondary level.	3.58 (.85)
It is important for students to learn to incorporate DMs in their speech which is an essential speaking skill for the public oral examination.	3.67 (.93)
My students do not need to speak with DMs as frequently as most native speakers do, but only need to progress to a speaking proficiency level capable of fulfilling their communicative purpose.	3.48 (.94)

Identification with the native speaker norm	
It is realistic to require my students to use DMs like native speakers of English.	2.70 (1.03)
Students should be taught to speak like a native in order to be a member of the local English speaking elites.	3.05 (1.09)
It is justifiable to require my students to use DMs like native speakers of English.	3.04 (1.01)
Students should be taught how native speakers use DMs and follow their way of using them.	3.70 (.84)
The British way of using DMs should serve as a model for my students.	3.05 (.86)
The American way of using DMs should serve as a model for my students.	2.71 (.85)

Pragmatic value of DMs	
Students can understand native speakers better in their future workplace if they know what DMs are.	4.02 (.81)
Knowledge of DMs helps process information in listening.	4.21 (.76)
DMs can display the speakers' attitude.	4.36 (.63)
Students can follow a university lecture better in the future, especially those conducted by native speakers, if they know the meanings DMs point to.	3.83 (.85)
The sequence of the speakers' mental thoughts can be displayed clearly through DMs.	3.61 (.91)
DMs can oil the wheels of communication.	4.33 (.66)
Showing responses with DMs can yield a softening and facilitative effect	4.06 (.77)
Students can benefit in public examinations, especially in listening comprehension, if they know what DMs are.	3.77 (.83)

Dispensable value of DMs	
Without DMs the conversation is still coherent and interpretable.	2.50 (.88)
I can still understand the conversation using other linguistic clues rather than referring to the DMs.	2.27 (.80)
DMs do not necessarily help to orientate the listener to the overall idea structure and sequence in talk.	3.27 (1.06)
DMs appear to be redundant in the conversation.	3.71 (.89)
It is still an effective listening strategy for listeners to focus closely on the key words in talk without referring to DMs.	2.53 (.98)
DMs are not very useful devices to guide listeners to understand the conversation.	3.69 (.99)
DMs do not necessarily help to signal relationships between ideas in talk.	3.22 (.96)
Without DMs the conversation would become disjointed and incoherent.	3.27 (1.08)

Representation of DMs in ESL classrooms	
DMs have been presented as a speaking skill in most oral materials I am using.	3.28 (1.12)
DMs have been presented as a listening skill in most listening materials I am using.	3.15 (1.12)
I always highlight DMs in listening lessons.	2.92 (1.10)
I always highlight DMs in oral lessons.	3.02 (1.06)

Prioritizing teaching of DMs for receptive purposes	
At secondary level we should prioritize teaching DMs mainly for listening purpose.	2.74 (.91)
DMs as an aspect of speaking skill should be delayed until awareness of DMs as a listening skill has been grasped.	2.88 (.92)
DMs as a linguistic device for both listening and speaking purposes should be introduced at the same time at secondary level.	2.27 (.76)
It is too ambitious to expect students to learn DMs for both listening and speaking purposes at secondary level.	2.47 (.86)

Prioritizing teaching of DMs for receptive purposes	
At secondary level we should prioritize teaching DMs mainly for listening purpose.	2.74 (.91)
DMs as an aspect of speaking skill should be delayed until awareness of DMs as a listening skill has been grasped.	2.88 (.92)
DMs as a linguistic device for both listening and speaking purposes should be introduced at the same time at secondary level.	2.27 (.76)
It is too ambitious to expect students to learn DMs for both listening and speaking purposes at secondary level.	2.47 (.86)

Acceptance of the local usage	
We should respect and accept a Hong Kong style of using DMs.	3.11 (.91)
It is not necessary to stick to the native speaker norm of using DMs because English language teaching should seek relevance to local culture while trying to enable global transaction.	3.40 (.93)
It can be regarded as a wrong usage when Hong Kong learners use DMs differently from native speakers.	3.07 (.93)
We should help students to recognize and accept different national and regional uses of DMs.	3.87 (.71)
It is necessary to expose students to different varieties of using DMs for purpose of comprehension, though not of production.	3.82 (.81)

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY AND FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES

Items	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Uncertain*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*	***Overall mean***
1. DMs can oil the wheels of communication (both in writing and speaking).						***4.29***
2. Knowledge of DMs helps processing information in listening and reading.						***4.29***
3. DMs can display the speakers' and writers' attitude.						***4.07***
4. DMs are not very useful devices to guide listeners and readers to understand the conversation.						***1.96***
5. DMs do not necessarily help to orientate the listener and readers to the overall idea structure and sequence in talk.						***2.49***
6. It is still an effective listening and reading strategy for listeners and readers to focus closely on the key words in talk or in the passage without referring to DMs.						***3.02***
7. The sequence of the speakers' and writers' mental thoughts can be displayed clearly through DMs.						***3.64***
8. Without DMs the conversation and writing would become bitty and incoherent.						***3.96***
9. Relationships between the speakers and writer would sound more distant and formal if there are no DMs in the conversation and writing.						***3.18***
10. I can still understand the conversation and writing using other linguistic clues rather than referring to the DMs.						***3.40***
11. DMs do not necessarily help to signal relationships between ideas in talk and writing.						***2.67***
12. Showing responses with DMs can yield a softening and facilitative effect.						***3.96***
13. Without DMs the conversation and a piece of writing are still coherent and interpretable.						***2.91***
14. DMs appear to be redundant in the conversation and writing.						***2.27***
15. DMs have been presented as a listening or reading skill in most listening and reading materials I am using.						***3.33***
16. DMs have been presented as a speaking and writing skill in most speaking and writing materials I am using.						***3.71***
17. I always highlight DMs in oral lessons as well as including writing one.						***3.51***
18. I always highlight DMs in listening and reading lessons.						***3.38***
19. Students have traditionally been taught to speak in written language form and they seldom display DMs in their speech.						***3.51***
20. It is necessary to create and develop linguistic awareness of DMs and promote proficiency in the actual use of them.						***4.31***
21. There is no need to promote spontaneous understanding of DMs as a fluency device in spoken language and writing skill.						***2.24***
22. Students should be helped to exploit DMs to improve their speaking and listening skills.						***3.93***
23. Students should be helped to exploit DMs to improve their reading and writing skills.						***3.53***
24. DMs are only small words in conversation and writing and it is not worth the time to teach them.						***1.73***
25. Generally, DMs do not carry specific meaning and there is not much teaching value.						***1.80***
26. DMs are redundant and sub-standard features in speech and writing and there is not much teaching value.						***1.87***
27. Students can benefit in examinations if they know what DMs are.						***4.04***
28. It is important for students to learn to incorporate DMs in their speech and writing which is an essential skill for the oral and written examination.						***4.20***
29. Students can follow a university lecture better in the future and write efficiently, especially those conducted by native speakers, if they know the meanings DMs point to.						***4.33***
30. Students can understand native speakers better in their future workplace if they know what DMs are.						***4.11***

31. Students should be taught how native speakers use DMs and follow their way of using them.						***4.07***
32. Students should be taught to speak like a native in order to become competent speakers.						***3.58***
33. Students should be taught to write like a native (from the aspect of DMs use) in order to become competent writer.						***3.40***
34. It is an appropriate time to highlight DMs in spoken text and written text at pre-intermediate and intermediate level.						***3.78***
35. It is an appropriate time to highlight DMs in spoken text and written text at upper intermediate and advanced levels.						***3.89***
36. It is too ambitious to expect students to learn DMs for both writing and speaking purposes at pre-intermediate and intermediate level.						***2.98***
37. At pre-intermediate and intermediate level, we should prioritize teaching DMs mainly for writing and speaking purpose.						***3.42***
38. DMs as a linguistic device for both listening and reading purposes should be introduced at the same time at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels.						***3.62***
39. DMs as an aspect of speaking and writing skill should be delayed until awareness of DMs as a listening skill has been grasped.						***2.67***
40. Students should be left at their discretion to learn to speak and write with DMs in the future when other interaction opportunities arise.						***2.62***
41. My students do not need to speak and write with DMs as frequently as most native speakers do, but only need to progress to a speaking proficiency level capable of fulfilling their communicative purpose.						***2.84***
42. It is realistic to require my students to use DMs like native speakers of English.						***3.13***
43. The American way of using DMs should serve as a model for my students.						***3.36***
44. The British way of using DMs should serve as a model for my students.						***2.87***
45. It can be regarded as a wrong usage when Iranian learners use DMs differently from native speakers.						***3.36***
46. We should respect and accept a Persian style of using DMs.						***2.47***
47. We should help students to recognize and accept different national and regional use of DMs.						***3.22***
48. It is justifiable to require my students to use DMs like native speakers of English.						***3.82***
49. It is necessary to expose students to different varieties of using DMs for purpose of comprehension, though not of production.						***3.80***
50. It is not necessary to stick to the native speaker norm of using DMs because English language teaching should seek relevance to local culture while trying to enable global transaction.						***3.09***

APPENDIX 3: FREQUENCY OF SEVEN CATEGORIES

Category 1			**Category 2**		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Low	1	2.2	Low	2	6.7
Moderate	42	93.3	Moderate	25	55.6
High	2	4.4	High	17	37.8
	Category 3			**Category 4**	
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Low	0	0	Low	2	4.4
Moderate	8	17.8	Moderate	41	91.1
High	37	82.2	High	2	4.4
	Category 5			**Category 6**	
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
Low	5	11.1	Low	0	0
Moderate	19	42.2	Moderate	38	84.4
High	21	46.7	High	7	15.6
	Category 7				
	Frequency	Percent			
Low	1	2.2			
Moderate	38	84.4			
High	6	13.3			

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