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WRITTEN AND SPOKEN DISCOURSE MARKERS: ATTITUDES OF KURDISH EFL UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTORS

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Abstract

Taking written and spoken discourse into considerations, Discourse Markers are regarded as crucial elements of written and spoken discourse by native speakers of English. In addition, their pivotal role and use are also inevitable in EFL Language classrooms. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the attitudes of Kurdish EFL University

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instructors concerning the role and use of Discourse Markers with regard to Pedagogic value, Identification with the native speaker norm, Pragmatic value, Dispensable value, Acceptance of the local usage, how Discourse Markers are represented in EFL classrooms, and how they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms. A questionnaire was distributed to 106 Kurdish EFL instructors at various universities in Kurdistan Region. The quantitative findings revealed that the instructors had positive attitudes towards the role and use of written and spoken Discourse Markers in EFL classrooms. Discourse Markers were found to have both pragmatic and pedagogic values but they were underrepresented in written and spoken materials in Kurdish EFL classrooms and were not highlighted by the instructors in their writing and speaking classes. The study requires the integration of Discourse Markers in the curriculum for both language productive skills. The implications that were drawn from this study for further studies were to investigate role and use of Discourse Markers in the receptive skills of language and the learners' perceptions concerning this role or use.

Key words: Written and Spoken Discourse Markers, EFL instructors, Attitudes

علامات الخطاب اللفظية والكتابية: آراء أساتذة الجامعة الأكراد الذين يدرسون اللغة الانكليزية
كلغة أجنبية

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المستخلص

تعتبر علامات الخطاب عناصر أساسية في الخطاب المكتوب والمفوق من قبل المتحدثين الأصليين للغة الإنجليزية، بأخذ الخطاب اللفظي والمكتوب بعين الاعتبار. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإن دورها الجوهري واستخدامها أمر لا يمكن الاستغناء عنه في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية التي تدرس كلغة اجنبية . لذلك ، الدراسة الحالية بحثت عن آراء أساتذة الجامعة الأكراد، الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بخصوص دور واستخدام علامات الخطاب فيما يختص بالقيمة التربوية ، التطابق مع مبدأ المتحدث الأصلي ، القيمة العملية ، القيمة التي يمكن الاستغناء عنها ، وقبول استخدامها محليا ، كيفية تمثيل علامات الخطاب في صفوف تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، وكيف ينبغي إبرازها

في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ورَّع الاستبيان على 106 من أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعات مختلفة في إقليم كوردستان. كشفت نتائج الاستبيان أن الأساتذة لديهم آراء إيجابية تجاه دور واستخدام علامات الخطاب المكتوب والملفوظ في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وجدت النتائج ان علامات الخطاب لديها القيم العملية والتربوية، ولكن لم يتم توضيحه بالشكل المطلوب في المواد المكتوبة والملفوظة في صفوف الجامعات للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ولم يتم تسليط الضوء عليهم من قبل الأساتذة في صفوف الكتابة والتحدث. تتطلب الدراسة دمج علامات الخطاب في المناهج الدراسية للمؤهلات اللغوية (الكتابة والتحدث). الاستنتاج التي تم استخلاص من هذه الدراسة للدراسات المستقبلية هو البحث في دور واستخدام علامات الخطاب في المهارات الأستقبالية (مدخلات) وآراء الاساتذة عن دور أو استخدام علامات الخطاب في المهارات الأستقبالية.

الكلمات الدالة: علامات الخطاب الكتابية واللفظية، أساتذة اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية، آرا .

1. Introduction

Language productive skills are regarded as the main and active skills of language where language learners produce a piece of language via written or spoken form. Discourse Markers (henceforth DMs) are crucial elements of both written and spoken discourse. Their roles in both modes of discourse are inevitable in EFL settings with regard to their pragmatic use (Schourup, 2001; Matsui, 2002; Tree and Schrock, 2002; Müller, 2004; De Klerk, 2005; Overstreet, 2005; Wang and Tsai, 2005) but their pedagogic use in EFL setting has not been given a due attention. Thus, there have been a great deal of research on written and spoken discourse from different perspectives; via focusing on pragmatics, discourse analytic, sociolinguistics, second language acquisition, and language pedagogy. As Schiffrin (1987) pointed out the importance of DMs, studies focused on DMs as linguistic items such as *you know*, *okay*, and *well* especially in written and spoken discourse. DMs exist in every language in the world in both written and spoken discourse with having pragmatic influence that can be noticed especially in spoken discourse (Lenk, 1998a). It can be said that, DMs are both semantically and syntactically optional in which if they are used or not they do not have any effects on the syntactic structures and the semantic relationship (Erman, 2001; Jucker and Ziv, 1998; Schiffrin, 1988). Though DMs are semantically and syntactically optional they are not considered as unworthy and they are regarded as crucial aspects of interpretation and interaction (Brown and Yule 1983, Fraser 1990, Carter and McCarthy 2006, Fung and Carter 2007).

Generally, each classroom is a dynamic context in which various events occur among teachers, learners, discourse learning materials, and setting (Walsh, 2006: 4). On the other hand De Fina (1997) points out that the nature of interaction that takes place in classrooms is connected with classroom events and thus its nature is characterized by the different role

of participants, goal oriented activities, and institutional needs. The interaction that takes place between learners and teachers is carried out through classroom discourse that can bring about different areas of investigation for the researchers (Yang and Walsh, 2014). Besides, concerning the connection between discourse and pedagogy Hickman (2009) states that since classroom discourse is both applied and theoretical it can exhibit various benefits to the educational settings.

In terms of written and spoken DMs use in this educational field, teachers can play vital roles in managing and organizing the classrooms for the purpose of having influential teaching and learning processes. This is supported by Walsh (2006) which he argues that, basically in EFL classroom settings teachers can exhibit paramount roles in both teaching and learning processes in mastering the target language structures where the so-called language is not just set up for pedagogical aims but for effective goal of learning as well. There is limited research concerning the pedagogical significance of DMs in classrooms (Müller, 2004; Hellermann and Vergan, 2007). The fact is that, research on the attitudes of Kurdish EFL university instructors is not existed. Thus the present study attempts to fill the research gap by investigating the attitudes of Kurdish EFL university instructors towards the role and use of written and spoken DMs in the curriculum in relation to the pedagogic value, identification with native speakers' norm, pragmatic value, dispensable value, acceptance of the local use, how written and spoken DMs are presented in EFL classrooms, and the way they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms.

1.2 Research gap

There is limited research focusing on the role and significance role of DMs in pedagogic setting (Trillo, 2002; Fung and Carter, 2007). In addition, there are also a few researches on the attitudes of teachers on the pedagogic significance of them in classrooms (Fung, 2011). Taking the Kurdish EFL contexts of English language into considerations, investigating the attitudes of Kurdish university instructors on DMs is virtually non-existent. There is a gap in EFL setting in relation to Kurdish EFL university instructors concerning their attitudes towards the role and use of DMs in the curriculum for both written and spoken discourse. Thus, the role and use of DMs can be evaluated through the university instructors' attitudes concerning the pedagogic value, identification with native speakers' norm, pragmatic value, dispensable value, acceptance of the local use, how written and spoken DMs are presented in EFL classrooms, and the way they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms. This investigation highlights a gap in English language pedagogy in EFL setting in which DMs are seen as connected with lexical input in the English curriculum at universities.

1.3 Statement of the problem

English language productive skills have been the basic concern of the Kurdish EFL students since they are problematic for them during their performance but these two major skills have not been taken into serious considerations by the English language teachers in terms of DMs in spoken and written productions. Using DMs appropriately by Kurdish EFL learners in academic contexts at the university level is a good indicator of cohesion and coherence in written and spoken discourse but they underuse and misuse these markers and these affect their performance in both written and spoken discourse. Jung (2006) indicates that the insufficiency use of these DMs in different contexts brings about misunderstanding of academic lectures. On the other hand, Shen (2006) insists on the

necessity of teaching the grammatical and pragmatic functions of them. It is believed that, DMs play crucial roles in the pragmatic meaning of what is produced and the pragmatic competence of the language users (House, 2013; Lenk, 1998; Müller, 2005). Within the educational settings these two skills are somehow neglected in favor of the curriculum guidelines, lexis and grammar.

1.4 Research aims

The current study aims at investigating the attitudes Kurdish EFL university instructors towards the role and use of DMs in the curriculum in terms of the pedagogic value, identification with native speakers' norm, pragmatic value, dispensable value, acceptance of the local use, how written and spoken DMs are presented in EFL classrooms, and the way they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms. In addition, it is aimed that the findings of this study will be beneficial for increasing Kurdish EFL learners' awareness concerning these language forms. It is also aimed that their views will provide good insight into the pedagogic practice of DMs.

1.5 Research hypothesis

It is hypothesized that Kurdish EFL university instructors would have positive attitudes concerning the pedagogic and pragmatic values of written and spoken DMs in EFL classrooms. It is also hypothesized that they would prefer the native speakers' norm of using DMs rather than sticking to the local use of them.

1.6 Significance of the study

The study is significant in many respects. Firstly, the curriculum designers will perceive the fact that the need to incorporate DMs in materials for both language productive skills. Secondly, university instructors will also realize the necessity of teaching the markers since they are indicators of fluency. Finally, Kurdish EFL university learners will find it beneficial to master these language forms as they are connected with cohesion and coherence.

2. Review of previous studies

2.1 Various terminologies

Studies concerning DMs in ESL and EFL settings have been increasing since the last few decades. There has been a great interest in DMs studies via focusing on pragmatics, discourse analytic, sociolinguistics, second language acquisition, and language pedagogy. The majority of researches have focused on DMs in English language concerning how they are used (Fraser, 1990; Blakemore, 2006; Bell, 2010). These markers have been studied from both written discourse (Castele and Collewaert, 2013; Koike, 1996; Cotter, 1996) and spoken contexts (Fuller, 2003; Fung and Carter, 2007; Aijmer, 2011; Buysse, 2012). According to Fung and Carter (2007), the frequency and amount of DMs used in spoken discourse are crucial compared to the other forms of words.

For researchers, there have been still controversies concerning what DMs are since they have various perspectives such as discourse coherence, pragmatics, relevance theory, and other alternative approaches (Aijmer, 2002; Blakemore, 2002; Fischer, 2006; Jucker and Ziv, 1998; Müller, 2005; Schourup, 1999). Schiffrin (1987) and Muller (2005) use the term 'discourse marker' while others propose different terminologies including 'cue phrases' (Knott and Dale, 1994), 'discourse connectives' (Blakemore, 1987, 1992), 'discourse operators' (Redeker, 1990), 'discourse particles' (Schourup 1999, Aijmer 2002), 'discourse signaling devices' (Polanyi and Scha, 1983), 'phatic connectives' (Bazzanella, 1990), 'pragmatic connectives' (Stubbs, 1983), 'pragmatic expressions' (Erman, 1987),

'pragmatic operators' (Ariel, 1993), 'pragmatic particles' (Östman, 1995), 'semantic conjuncts' (Quirk et al., 1985, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1985), "continuatives" (Romero Trillo 1997), "DMs" (Fraser 1990, 1999, Carter and McCarthy 2006), and 'sentence connectives' (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

To (Schiffrin, 1987; Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Cohen, 2007), DMs are defined as sentence connectives from a systemic functional grammar perspective and to (Fraser, 1999) as pragmatic markers from a grammatical-pragmatic perspective. Fraser's definition proposes a more complete generalization and a pragmatic framework concerning the heterogeneity of DMs via her grammatical-pragmatic perspective. Meaning that, they do not only function as textual coherence such as that coherence model proposes but rather they signal the speakers' intention to the next turn in the preceding utterance. Schourup (1999) states that, since there are various definitions and terminologies for DMs, their characterization have become hard. Fung and Carter (2007, p. 410) define DMs as "*intra-sentential and supra-sentential linguistic units which evolve process of the conversation, index the relation of an utterance to the preceding context, and indicate an interactive relationship between a speaker, hearer, and message*". Similarly, for Padi and Dianita (2014) DMs are a phrase or word that is relatively syntax-dependent. In other words, they do not change the meaning of the sentence and they are regarded as semantically empty. Guo (2015) defines DMs as "*a complex phenomenon which involves among other things, textual, pragmatic and cognitive factors that interact with each other.*" The definition that was given by Schiffrin (1987) was later reformulated by Lee-Goldman (2011) to mean they are "*some linguistic unit the primary function of which is not to contribute to the descriptive or propositional meaning of an utterance, but rather to indicate to the reader how they should understand what follows or what came before with respect to each other and to the discourse as a whole.*" The variety of DMs definitions proposed by different researchers including Schiffrin (1987), Redeker (1990), Fraser (1999), Schourup (1999), and Van Bergand and Degand (2013) gives the idea that they are multifunctional and multicategorical in the discourse.

2.2 Written discourse and spoken discourse

The significance of investigating and studying spoken and written discourse by researchers in the field of discourse analysis has been given a great deal of attention. Basically, discourse is categorized into two main units; written and spoken discourse. It is clear that, there cannot be a definite dividing line between both spoken and written discourse, the relationship between writing and speaking is not internally correlated and no distinctive features are there to be existed in these two modes of communication. To Dubin and Alshtain (1986), written discourse and spoken discourse are differentiated in terms of their planning as "*written discourse is usually planned, while spoken discourse can be planned or unplanned*". In the same vein, Čechova (2008) explains that, written discourse entails more planning, preparation and organization. While Schiffrin (1994) claim that, writers and speakers tend to produce language based on the needs of their receivers. He highlights the differences between both as '*spoken discourse is more fragmented and written discourse is more integrated*' (p. 189). The concept of fragmentation is meant how quickly the speaker turns from one idea to the other is since this characteristic is more common in spoken discourse than in written discourse. On the other hand, integration is meant how ideas are set appropriately concerning their complexity of the structure and the length of the sentences since there is sufficient time in hand for producing any texts.

For Davies and Widdowson (1974) spoken discourse contains paralinguistic elements including gestures, body movement, tone, etc. In other words, the utterances between the interlocutors can be changed by the speaker by referring back to the listener's status of reaction. On the other hand, written discourse shares a great deal of linguistic elements especially the phonological elements available for the written production. Mullerova and Skacel (1997) argue that, with the help of technical tools that are designed for communication and interaction among humans the common held view regarding the differences between both modes of communication have approached to more relative. Since the current study intends to investigate the attitudes of university instructors towards the role of DMs in language productive skills it can be argued that these two modes of communication require different language elements morphologically and syntactically. The use of DMs through language productive skills tends to be of different usages of types and different function as well. Different situations, contexts, and purpose need different language elements to be used and the unique characteristics of written and spoken discourse ask for different types of DMs and different function as well.

2.3 Discourse analysis and language pedagogy

Discourse analysis (henceforth DA) and language teaching have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners. Researchers have focused on both written and spoken modes of communication inside classrooms. To McCarthy (1991) DA is considered as the study of the relationship between language and the context where it is used. DA investigates the issue of turning sentences into larger chunks of discourse in different social situations to a much institutionalized form of talk. Meaning that, the data that are obtained from DA proposes that language in communication is socially, cognitively, and linguistically interrelated (Hatch, 1992). The use of DA inside classroom setting has been related to the evaluation of both teachers and students' output. Based on Olshtain & Celce-Murcia (2001, p. 721) the success behind communicative approaches to language teaching is significantly related to their involvement with DA specifically *"language teachers and other teaching professionals (curriculum developers, textbook writers, language testers) with proper grounding in discourse analysis"*. Taking the EFL teaching context into considerations, DA is defined as *"how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social, and psychological context, become meaningful and unified for their users"* (Cook, 1990, p. 3). As Olshtain & Celce-Murcia (2001) pointed out that communicative language teaching is impossible to be effective if teachers are not enriched with theoretical issues that are based on DA, the next point to be considered is how to put these theoretical knowledge into practice. In addition, taking DA into considerations in pedagogical settings in EFL classrooms, a highly contextualized teaching methodology would come into play that is equipped with authentic language practices in various social situations (Cots, 1996). Based on Olshtain & Celce-Murcia (2001, p. 721) the success behind communicative approaches to language teaching is significantly related to their involvement with DA specifically *"language teachers and other teaching professionals (curriculum developers, textbook writers, language testers) with proper grounding in discourse analysis"*. Taking the EFL teaching context into considerations, DA is defined as *"how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social, and psychological context, become meaningful and unified for their users"* (Cook, 1990, p. 3). Discourse Analysis is commonly regarded as the language above clauses and sentences. It is seen as a crucial aspect of linguistics that deals with forming meaning in greater communicative units rather than building up

grammatical ones. Generally, it studies meaning in both written and spoken productions as language productive skills. The term DA was first initiated by Zelig Harris in 1952 for the purpose of analyzing written and spoken productions above sentences or to analyze the relationship between both linguistic and non-linguistic behavior.

With regard to discourse and pedagogy, Hickman (2009) claims there exist many benefits for educational setting because classroom discourse is both applied and theoretical. In terms of DMs use in classrooms, teachers can exhibit crucial roles in managing and organizing the classrooms to provide their learners with suitable teaching and learning processes. In the same line, Walsh (2006) states that, in EFL classroom settings teachers can have big roles in both teaching and learning processes in mastering the target language structures where the so-called language is not just set up for pedagogical aims but for effective goal of learning as well. He also believes that, regardless of the other form of discourse, classroom discourse is crucially connected with the target language forms and units that can be met through effective communications that occur in classrooms. DA in pedagogical settings especially in EFL classrooms has received a great deal of attention by researchers in the field of DA. Basically, all skills of language have been given prior attention. Thus, since the current study focuses on DMs role and use in EFL pedagogical settings it is seen essential to shed the light on some research in the field of DMs

2.4 Role and use of discourse markers in EFL classrooms

The significant roles of DMs in classrooms have been researched. It is believed that DMs have great roles in comprehending written texts (Jung, 2003). In addition, they also contribute to the listener's perception of coherence (Tyler, Jefferies and Davies, 1988; Basturkmen, 2007). Moreover, they have great relationships with the learner's oral fluency (Hasselgren, 2002) and understanding lectures (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Dunkel & Davis, 1994; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995). Learners' awareness on DMs needs to be developed and supported since they may face problems in comprehending what is produced (Whichmann and Chanet, 2009). On the other hand, Jung (2006) insists that the insufficiency of these DMs in different contexts brings about misunderstanding of academic lectures. Besides, Shen (2006) insists on the necessity of teaching the grammatical and pragmatic functions of them. It is believed that, DMs play crucial roles in the pragmatic meaning of what is produced and the pragmatic competence of the language users (House, 2013; Lenk, 1998; Müller, 2005). In addition, Fung and Carter (2007) insist that the use of DMs makes the language to be culturally, socially, and situationally suitable. Conversely, the inappropriate and insufficient use of them brings about ineffective communication and puts hindrances for the interpersonal and intercultural communication (Martinez, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1991). Considering the native speakers' use of DMs Lee (2009) believed that learners need to be accepted as they are rather than being accepted as competent native speakers of language.

For both written and spoken DMs, there have been insufficient researches on the instructors' attitudes at the university level considering the role and use of DMs in EFL classrooms. In a study, Fung (2011) studied the attitudes of Hong Kong teachers on the role and use of DMs. The results indicated that teachers had positive attitudes towards the pedagogic and pragmatic values of DMs. They accepted that, learners need to be helped to be competent user of language. It was also revealed that DMs were underrepresented in the subjects and teaching materials that were taught. Similarly, AŞIK (2015) studied the attitudes of Turkish EFL teachers concerning the role and use of DMs, their pragmatic,

pedagogic, and representation in EFL classrooms. The results showed that, the teachers had positive attitudes on DMs through which learners could develop their pragmatic competency. DMs also had teaching values and they were highlighted in classrooms. Muller (2005), compared the use of four DMs (*so, well, you know and like*) between both native American and non-native German discourse. He insisted on the relationship between pedagogic practices and language use. The results showed that textbooks and non-native EFL teachers were not engaged in providing their learners with how native speakers use DMs. In addition, DMs were clearly underrepresented in English textbooks. Considering the significance role of DMs, De Fina, (1997), Fung & Carter (2007), and Walsh (2006) insist that DMs play paramount roles in managing classrooms and they developed the language users' pragmatic knowledge. In addition, they claim that DMs are indispensable even for English language teachers since they are the main source of language input. Based on Flowerdew & Tauroza's (1995) view, DMs facilitate the comprehension of lectures by learners. In a study, Chapeton Castro (2009) studied the use of DMs by a non-native teacher within classroom setting and it was found that DMs were used to organizing discourse and fulfilling interpersonal functions. In their study, Kalajahi & Abdullah (2012) investigated the perceptions of Iranian postgraduate students concerning the role of DMs in their written performance and the results indicated that the learners realized the significant roles of DMs but they had the lack of knowledge in using and selecting proper DMs.

Taking the Kurdish context of EFL into considerations, the studies of DMs in relation to the university instructors' attitudes are limited and are not researched sufficiently yet. On the other hand, the instructors' attitudes towards the pedagogic roles and use of DMs are crucial in the process of education and bring about beneficial understanding of teaching. Basically a great deal of research has dealt with the performance of learners rather than the instructors' attitudes and thus their perceptions have not been given a due attention. So, with regard to Kurdish context of EFL, the current research intends to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on the university instructors' attitudes concerning the role and use of DMs in Kurdish EFL classrooms with relation to the pedagogic value, identification with native speakers' norm, dispensable value, pragmatic value of DMs and how they are presented in EFL classrooms and the way they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms. The significance of this research is related mainly the pedagogic value of DMs markers since studies related to DMs in EFL settings are not conducted sufficiently. It is also significant concerning how they are perceived by the instructors and how DMs are represented in Kurdish EFL classrooms.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The present study investigates to fill the gap raised in the literature above concerning the pedagogic value of DMs by focusing on the Kurdish EFL university instructors' attitudinal sides towards the role and use of DMs in Kurdish EFL classrooms. Thus, it addresses the following research questions:

Q1/ What are the Kurdish EFL university instructors' attitudes towards the role and usage of written and spoken DMs in the curriculum in terms of:

- a) Pedagogic value.
- b) Identification with the native speaker norm.

- c) Pragmatic value.
- d) Dispensable value
- e) Acceptance of the local usage.

Q2/ What do they think about how written and spoken DMs are represented in EFL classrooms and how they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms?

3.2 participants

A questionnaire was distributed to 106 EFL instructors in public and private universities in Kurdistan Region to investigate the role and use of DMs in the curriculum. It was used to elicit their perceptions towards the role and use of DMs in the curriculum in both written and spoken discourse. They participants were chosen on a convenience technique (Dörnyei, 2007) that were selected on a voluntary basis. They were instructors of English language teaching of EFL learners at different universities in Kurdistan Region at different language proficiency levels. The instructors were invited through a link of the questionnaire by the researcher with free access.

3.3 Data collection

An online questionnaire was used to collect data for the research questions and it was adapted from Fung (2011). It was designed on the five-point Likert Scale as: 1: Strongly agree; 2: Agree; 3: Uncertain; 4: Disagree; 5: Strongly Disagree that is suitable for obtaining responses from respondents especially in social issues (Busch, 1993). It was then sent to 8 jury members with holders of Professor and PhD for feedback and comments. Originally, the questionnaire was designed for listening and speaking purposes but it was redesigned and refined to focus on writing and speaking skills for the objectives of the current study. Some of the items were modified and refined so that it would fit with the Kurdish EFL context. In addition, some of them were negatively worded but they were changed to be positively worded and the Likert Scale of the questionnaire was changed from 1: *Strongly agree*; 2: *Agree*; 3: *Uncertain*; 4: *Disagree*; 5: *Strongly Disagree* to 1: *Strongly Disagree*; 2: *Disagree*; 3: *Uncertain*; 4: *Agree*; 5: *Strongly agree*. There were 48 items that were distributed on seven factors; **Pedagogic value of discourse markers** that was related to the teaching values of DMs in classroom setting, **Identification with the native speaker norm** which is concerned with the use of DMs by native speakers of English and how students should deal with them, **Pragmatic value of discourse markers** that reflects the role of DMs in understanding and comprehending texts whether written or spoken, **Dispensable value of discourse markers** whether they are optional or not, **Representation of discourse markers in EFL classrooms** concerning how they are represented in the materials that are taught, **The way DMs should be highlighted in EFL classrooms** which deals with how they should be represented in classrooms, and **Acceptance of the local usage** that is related to the preference of the local use or the native speakers' use of DMs. The questionnaire was first distributed via a link and the participants were restricted to submit no more than one questionnaire. It was sent to English Departments in public and private universities in Kurdistan Region. Only a total of 106 responses were received from the participants. The data were then arranged based on the seven factors for analysis.

3.4 Data analysis

The research was undertaken through a quantitative method analysis. To analyze the data obtained from the instructors' questionnaire, IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25, 2021 was

used to obtain sufficient answers for the research questions proposed in the study. All the 48 items were represented under seven factors the almost the same way Fung (2011) applied in her study. Some of the factors were modified and renamed to be suitable with the items that were modified based on Kurdish EFL context of English. Firstly, for the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach alpha was run for the whole 48 items with an overall moderately good reliability (0.903) and also for the individual factors as well thus it produced Cronbach alpha coefficients for the factors from 0.62 to 0.82 .

Pragmatic value of discourse markers (Q1-3, 7, 12, 26, 28, 29) ($\alpha = 0.822$)

Dispensable value of discourse markers (Q4-6, 8, 9-11, 13-14, 19) ($\alpha = 0.621$)

Pedagogic value of discourse markers (Q20-25, 27, 38, 39). ($\alpha = 0.689$)

Identification with the native speaker norm (Q30, 31, 40-42, 46) ($\alpha = 0.678$)

Representation of discourse markers in EFL classrooms (Q15-18) ($\alpha = 0.741$)

The way DMs should be highlighted in EFL classrooms (Q32-37) ($\alpha = 0.813$)

Acceptance of the local usage (Q43-45, 47-48) ($\alpha = 0.630$)

Those seven factors mentioned above were embedded within two research questions. The data were analyzed based on the means and standard deviations of individual factors. The results of the first research question were analyzed based on pragmatic value, dispensable value, pedagogic value, identification with the native speaker norm, and acceptance of the local usage. Moreover, the results for the second research question were analyzed based on two factors; representation of discourse markers in EFL classrooms and the way DMs should be highlighted in EFL classrooms.

4. Results

This section presents the quantitative finding obtained from the responses of the questionnaire and the data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard deviation) of all the seven factors of the questionnaire. The answers of the two research questions are illustrated in a detailed manner. Factors 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 are grouped together to answer the first research question and factors 5 and 6 are set together to answer the second research question.

Q1 What are the Kurdish EFL university instructors' attitudes towards the role and usage of written and spoken DMs in the curriculum in terms of:

- a) Pedagogic value.
- b) Identification with the native speaker norm.
- c) Pragmatic value.
- d) Dispensable value
- e) Acceptance of the local usage.

Factor 1 in table 1.4 illustrates the instructors' attitudes concerning the pedagogic value of DMs in EFL classrooms.

Table 1.4 Factor 1: Pedagogic value of discourse markers	Mean	Std. Deviation
20.It is necessary to create and develop linguistic awareness of DMs and promote proficiency in the actual use of them.	1.90	1.10
21.It is necessary to promote spontaneous understanding of DMs as a fluency device in language productive skills.	2.04	1.02
22.Students should be helped exploit DMs to improve their language productive skills.	1.78	.93

23.DMs are only small words in conversation and writing but it is worth the time to teach them.	1.88	1.00
24.DMs carry specific meaning and there is much teaching value.	2.10	1.08
25.DMs are redundant and sub-standard features in speech and writing and there is not much teaching value.	3.12	1.44
27. It is important for students to learn to incorporate DMs in their written and spoken performances which are an essential skill in examination.	1.97	.97
38.Students should be left at their discretion to learn to use DMs in the future when other interaction opportunities arise.	3.05	1.41
39.My Kurdish students do not need to use DMs as frequently as most native speakers do, but only need to progress to a language proficiency level capable of fulfilling their communicative purpose.	3.22	1.34

The results of (Item 20, Mean: 1.90) indicate that the majority of the instructors had positive attitudes towards the pedagogic value of DMs as they agreed that Kurdish EFL learners should develop their linguistic awareness and should have proficiency about DMs as they interact and communicate. In addition, they need to have better understanding of DMs for the sake of fluency especially for their language productive skills (Item 21, Mean: 2.04) and they agreed that they should be helped use DMs for improving their written and spoken performances (Item 22, Mean: 1.78). Taking the teaching values of DMs for granted, they accepted that they have teaching values and worth being taught (Item 23, Mean: 1.88 and Item 24, Mean: 2.10) but they disagreed that they are not necessary and have no values in speech and writing (Item 25, Mean: 3.12). The result of Item 27, Mean: 1.97 shows that students need to use them in their language productive skills since they help them in their academic examinations. The last two items in this category illustrate that they disagreed to leave students learn DMs by themselves in the future (Item 38, Mean 3.05) and use DMs in a language proficiency level that is not like that of a native speaker's use (Item 39, Mean 3.22) but rather they think students need to be taught with written and spoken DMs and the students need to find awareness when and how to use DMs in a way that is suitable and accepted.

The instructors' attitudes are also reflected through Factor 2 in Table 2.4 that is concerned with the use of DMs by native speakers of English and how students should deal with them.

Table 2.4 Factor 2: Identification with the native speaker norm	Mean	Std. Deviation
30.Students should be taught how native speakers use DMs and follow their way of using them.	2.43	1.40
31.To be a competent user, students should be taught with DMs to use like a native speaker.	2.68	1.44
40.It is realistic to require my students to use DMs like native speakers of English.	2.86	1.49
41.The American way of using DMs should serve as a model for my students.	3.47	.97
42.The British way of using DMs should serve as a model for my students.	2.02	1.29
46.It is justifiable to require my students to use DMs like native speakers of English.	2.78	1.32

As it can be noticed there is a clear consensus among the instructors at the university level students should be taught to apply and follow native speakers' use of DMs (Item 30, Mean: 2.43) and they believe that to be a competent user in English language Kurdish learners of English language need to be taught to use DMs such as native speakers (Item 31, Mean: 2.68). In addition, they are certain that their students are able to use them like native speakers (Item 40, Mean: 2.86 and Item 46, Mean: 2.78). Concerning preferring the American or the British way of using DMs, the majority of the university instructors disagreed with the American way of using DMs (Item 41, Mean: 3.47) but preferred the British way of using DMs at the university level (Item 42, Mean: 2.02).

Factor 3 in Table 3.4 presents the positive attitudes of Kurdish EFL university instructors towards the pragmatic value of DMs in EFL classrooms.

Table 3.4 Factor 3: Pragmatic value of discourse markers	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.DMs facilitate the process of communication.	1.55	.88
2.Knowledge of DMs helps processing information in production.	1.56	.70
3.DMs can display the intention of what the language users use.	1.86	.98
7.The sequence of the language users' mental thoughts can be displayed clearly through DMs.	2.07	1.00
12.Showing responses with DMs by Kurdish Learners facilitate comprehension and understanding what is produced.	2.29	1.07
26.Students can benefit in public examinations, especially in writing and speaking comprehension, if they know what DMs are.	2.06	1.12
28.Students can follow a university lecture better in the future, if they know the meanings of DMs point to.	2.06	.99
29.Students can understand communication better in their future workplace if they know what DMs are.	2.16	1.08

The results show that written and spoken DMs are helpful for language learners to facilitate the process of communication (Item 1, Mean: .88), processing information in production (Item 2, Mean: .70), understanding the intention of the language users (Item 3, Mean: .98), showing language users' mental thoughts (Item 4, Mean: 2.07., and understanding what is produced (Item 12, Mean: 2.29). Moreover, (Items 26, 28, 29) with mean scores of (2.06, 2.06, 2.16) respectively illustrate that DMs are beneficial for Kurdish EFL learners in a sense that they help them in their writing and speaking skills examinations, understanding the lectures that are given at university level, and even out of their academic life knowing DMs help them to interact and communicate better in their real life interactions with their peers and interlocutors.

The dispensable value of DMs is clearly shown through Factor 4 in Table 4.4 that is related to the usefulness and necessity of DMs whether they are optional in language productive skills.

Table 4.4 Factor 4: Dispensable value of discourse markers	Mean	Std. Deviation
4.DMs are very useful devices to guide Kurdish learners to understand the written and spoken texts.	1.82	.80

5.DMs necessarily help orientate the Kurdish learners to the overall idea structure and sequence in text.	1.97	.85
6.Kurdish learners basically focus on key words to get the speakers' intention rather than focusing on DMs.	2.36	1.23
8.DMs make the conversation and text more coherent.	1.71	.77
9.DMs appear to be redundant in speaking.	3.50	1.32
10.I can still understand the written and spoken language using other linguistic clues rather than referring to the DMs.	2.67	1.29
11.DMs necessarily help signal relationships between ideas in talk.	2.07	1.03
13.What is produced will still remain coherent and interpretable without DMs.	3.52	1.29
14.DMs appear to be redundant in writing.	3.67	1.36
19.Students have traditionally been taught to use written and spoken language forms (such as using conjunctions) rather than using DMs in their production.	2.16	1.01

The results showed that most of the respondents had the positive idea that DMs help Kurdish EFL learners understand written and spoken language (Item 4, Mean: 1.82) and make sense of the structures and sequences of written and spoken texts (Item 5, Mean: 1.97 and Item 11, Mean: 2.07). Though most of the respondents agreed with the inevitable positive value of DMs but they also thought that English language users also might rely on other key words for comprehension rather than DMs (Item 6, Mean: 2.36 and Item 10, Mean: 2.67). Conversely, they disagreed DMs to be redundant in both written and spoken language (Item 9, Mean: 3.50 and Item 14, Mean: 3.67) and they also refused what is produced would still stay coherent without DMs (Item 13, Mean: 3.52). Lastly, they believed that Kurdish EFL learners were traditionally taught to use other stretches and structures of written and spoken language forms such as conjunctions rather than focusing on DMs in their written and spoken performances. The results showed that DMs are not dispensable and optional.

Factor 7 in Table 5.4 includes items 43, 44, 45, 47, and 48 which are concerned with which norm is to be accepted and followed by the respondents the Kurdish norm of using DMs or the native speakers' norm of using DMs. The majority of the instructors preferred the native speakers' use of DMs in both writing and speaking skills and they disfavored the local use or the Kurdish way of using DMs. They refused the Kurdish style of using DMs (Items 43-45) but they agreed with the native norm of using DMs (Items 47 and 48).

Table 5.4 Factor 7: Acceptance of the local usage	Mean	Std. Deviation
43. It can be regarded as a wrong usage when Kurdish learners use DMs differently from native speakers.	2.71	1.24
44. We should respect and accept a Kurdish style (incorrect use or underuse) of using DMs.	3.38	1.54
45.We should help students to recognize and accept Kurdish (translated form) equivalent uses of DMs.	3.47	1.43
47. It is necessary to expose students to different English varieties of using DMs for purpose of comprehension and production.	1.96	1.31

48. It is 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.	2.56	1.51
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Q2/ What do they think about how written and spoken DMs are represented in EFL classrooms and how they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms?

Factor 5 in Table 6.4 highlights the presentation of DMs by the university instructors and the materials that are taught at the university level for both writing and speaking skills.

Table 6.4 Factor 5: Representation of discourse markers in EFL classrooms

	Mean	Std. Deviation
15.DMs have been presented as a writing skill in most writing materials that are taught.	3.46	1.35
16.DMs have been presented as a speaking skill in most oral materials that are taught.	3.56	1.33
17.I always highlight DMs in oral lessons.	2.55	1.42
18.I always highlight DMs in writing lessons.	2.42	1.34

Items 15 and 16 with mean scores 3.46 and 3.5 6 deal with the presentation of DMs in written and spoken materials that are taught at university. It is believed that DMs are not presented as writing and speaking skills in the materials that are taught. Concerning highlighting DMs by themselves in their written and spoken lessons, they disagreed that they highlight DMs in their written and oral lessons (Item 17 and 18 with mean scores 2.55 and 2.42 respectively).

The last table is concerned with the way DMs should be highlighted in EFL classrooms which is illustrated below. Factor 6 is concerned with the views of the instructors about how DMs should be represented in Kurdish EFL classrooms. As it can be noticed from the table, the results of (Item 32, Mean: 1.85 and Item 33, Mean: 1.83) present that the suitable time of the academic life of the learners is to highlight DMs at the university level for both written and spoken contexts. In addition, they agreed to give DMs priorities in their classroom settings and found them necessary to teach their learners written and spoken DMs at university level (Item 34, Mean: 2.39, Item 35, Mean: 2.01, and Item 36, Mean: 1.97). Though, the instructors agree to introduce and teach written and spoken DMs at the university level but they disagree with the introduction of them if the students have not received and grasped awareness concerning what DMs are and how to use them in appropriately and correctly.

Table 7.4 Factor 6: The way DMs should be highlighted in EFL classrooms

	Mean	Std. Deviation
32.It is an appropriate time to highlight DMs in written text at university level.	1.85	.95
33.It is an appropriate time to highlight DMs in spoken text at university level.	1.83	.98

34.It is necessary to teach Kurdish students to learn DMs for both writing and speaking purposes at university level.	2.39	1.34
35.At university level, we should prioritize teaching DMs mainly for productive purpose.	2.01	1.00
36.DMs as a linguistic device for both writing and speaking purposes should be introduced at the same time at university level.	1.97	1.08
37.DMs as an aspect of writing and speaking skills should be delayed until awareness of DMs has been grasped.	2.73	1.17

5. DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was designed to investigate the attitudes of Kurdish EFL university instructors concerning the role and use of DMs in the curriculum. There were seven factors within the questionnaire distributed and the attitudes of the Kurdish EFL university instructors were reflected on all the items of these factors. The findings for the first research question concerning the **pedagogic value** of DMs in EFL classrooms revealed that the university instructors had positive attitudes on the pedagogic value of DMs as it was hypothesized in the study. Kurdish EFL learners need to have better understanding about DMs and also need to have proficiency in using them. Besides, they agreed that they have teaching values as well. These are all referred to the pedagogic value of DMS and these attitudes are supported by Fung (2011) in which she insisted that DMs have pedagogic values. On the other hand, they insisted that learners' awareness towards DMs should be increased and developed. This is in line with Wichmann and Chanet (2009) as they insist on increasing learners' awareness regarding DMs use.

The second part is related to the **identification with the native speakers' norm**. There is a clear consensus among the instructors that at the university level students should be taught to apply and follow native speakers' use of DMs. This is contradictory to the study conducted by Fung (2011) but it is in line with the results of the study conducted by AŞIK (2015) while considering being competent, the results of her study showed that the respondents were uncertain and the results in the current study indicated that to be a competent user, learners should be taught to use DMs such as that of native speakers. Similarly, the results revealed by Fung (2011) and AŞIK (2015) state that the Turkish EFL teachers and Hong Kong teachers were also uncertain about which model to follow while most of the university instructors in this study disagreed with the American way of using DMs but agreed with the British way of using DMs at the university level.

It was hypothesized that Kurdish EFL university instructors would have positive understanding on the pragmatic value of DMs. Thus the positive attitudes of the respondents towards the **pragmatic value** and use of written and spoken DMs can be seen through the third part. DMs were considered to facilitate communication and interaction, processing information in production, understanding the intention and aims of the language users, and comprehending what is produced. These results are similar to those were found by Fung (2011) and they play crucial roles in the pragmatic meaning of what is produced and the pragmatic competence of the language users (House, 2013; Lenk, 1998; Müller, 2005). In addition, they help learners in comprehending written texts (Jung, 2003) and they have great relationships with the learner's oral fluency (Hasselgren, 2002). Moreover,

knowing DMs were seen to help learners understand lectures which is supported by some researchers including Chaudron and Richards (1986), Dunkel and Davis (1994), and Flowerdew and Tauroza (1995). The insufficiency of DMs brings about difficulties in comprehending lectures given (Jung, 2006).

The fourth part of the first research question is related to the **dispensable value or optionality** of DMs whether they are replaceable in language productive skills. The respondents had the tendency towards written and spoken DMs that they are helpful for the learners in understanding written and spoken texts and making sense of the structures and sequences of written and spoken texts. The results are consistent with Jung (2003) as DMs are helpful in understanding written texts and with Hasselgren (2002) as they help learners in understanding spoken texts (Dunkel & Davis, 1994). On the other hand, the results indicated that English language users also might rely on other key words for comprehension rather than DM that is similar to what Fung (2011) revealed. Conversely, while Fung (2011) and AŞIK (2015) found that the teachers agreed with the absence and redundancy of DMs in texts and without them the text would still be understandable, the results of the current study illustrated that DMs are not redundant in written and spoken texts and their absence will affect the meaning if what is produced. Though students were traditionally taught with the other forms of language but DMs are not considered as optional or dispensable.

The **acceptance of local usage** is explained through the fifth part of the first research question whether accepting the local use or the native use of DMs to be followed. Another hypothesis of the current study was that instructors would prefer following the native speakers' norm of using DMs. Thus since interactions whether written or spoken that take place in EFL academic contexts, the results showed that the instructors preferred the native speakers' norm of using DMs rather than following the Kurdish style or norm of using DMs. They disagreed with incorrect use, Kurdish equivalent translated forms, and the wrong usage of DMs but rather agreed to stick to the native speakers' norm and different varieties of English language. These results are contradicted with that of AŞIK (2015) in which in her study she revealed that the Turkish EFL teachers preferred the local use of DMs. In the same line Fung (2011) found that Hong Kong teachers agreed with local use of DMs. Moreover, Lee (2009) preferred to respect non-native speakers' use of language rather than being a competent native speaker.

Q2/ What do they think about how written and spoken DMs are represented in EFL classrooms and how they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms?

The second research question is composed of two main factors; the first factor is related to **how DMs are represented in EFL classrooms** by which Kurdish EFL university instructors perceive the representation of DMs in EFL classroom and the second factor is related to **how they should be represented and highlighted in EFL classrooms**. The results confirmed that DMs are underrepresented as writing and speaking skills in the materials that are taught at universities. This is contradictory with the results that were found in AŞIK's (2015) study but is consistent with the study conducted by Fung (2011). Moreover, in the current study the instructors were found to pay little attention to DMs as writing and speaking skills which is also similar to the findings of Fung (2011) but it contradicted with AŞIK (2015). Similarly, Muller (2005) found that textbooks and non-native EFL teachers were not engaged in providing their learners with how native speakers use DMs and thus DMs were clearly underrepresented in English textbooks.

Concerning the way DMs should be highlighted in EFL classrooms, the results presented that university is a suitable academic era to highlight DMs in both written and spoken contexts. In addition, they agreed to give DMs priorities and found them necessary to teach their learners written and spoken DMs at university level which is similar to the findings of AŞIK (2015). They also agreed with finding awareness in their learners before introducing DMs in written and spoken texts. This is consistent with the results obtained in the study of Whichmann and Chanet (2009) as they found that learners' awareness on DMs needs to be developed and supported since they may face problems in comprehending what is produced.

CONCLUSION

The main reason behind conducting this study was to investigate the attitudes of Kurdish EFL university instructors through a questionnaire that was adapted from Fung (2011) concerning the role and use of DMs in the curriculum in Kurdish EFL classrooms. There were seven factors in the questionnaire and the items were refined so that they fit with the Kurdish context of EFL classrooms. The first objective was to know their attitudes regarding the pedagogic value, identification with the native speakers' norm, pragmatic value, dispensable value, and acceptance of the local usage. The second objective was to investigate how written and spoken DMs are presented in EFL classrooms and the way they should be highlighted in EFL classrooms.

It can be concluded that, the results indicate that Kurdish EFL university instructors had tendencies and positive attitudes concerning the pedagogic and pragmatic values of written and spoken DMs but they paid little attention to discourse markers in their written and spoken lessons. They agreed that DMs are dispensable or optional but they are necessary for the coherence of texts. In addition, they were found to be not redundant since their absence would affect the understanding of texts and lectures. Moreover, they believed that they were underrepresented in the materials that are taught at the university level and they have given less priority in teaching DMs to their students. It was also revealed that they preferred the native speakers' use of DMs but for which model to choose they preferred the British model of using DMs.

Since DMs are considered as essential parts of both written and spoken interactions and they are underrepresented and given less priority, the current research calls for professional development in incorporating DMs in the academic lectures and materials that are taught at university level. Future research can be carried out concerning the receptive skills of language which listening and reading because these are also crucial skills of any language. Furthermore, students' attitudes are also needed to be investigated concerning their knowledge of DMs and the role and use of DMs in their academic life.

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