



MANAGING COHERENCE AND FLUENCY THROUGH DISCOURSE MARKERS IN UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ORAL PRESENTATIONS: A PRAGMATIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

by

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Abstract:

EFL university students frequently struggle to maintain coherence and fluency simultaneously during academic oral presentations, yet the pragmatic role of discourse markers in addressing this challenge remains underexplored in the Indonesian EFL context. This study investigated the types of discourse markers employed by EFL students, their pragmatic functions in supporting discourse coherence, and their contribution to fluency maintenance during academic oral presentations. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, applying Pragmatic Discourse Analysis as the analytical framework, drawing on the theoretical foundations of (Fraser, 1990) and (Schiffrin, 1987). The participants were 14 fifth-semester undergraduate students of the English Language Education Program at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA), Lamongan, Indonesia, at an intermediate level of English proficiency. Data were collected through audio recording and verbatim transcription of classroom presentations, using a researcher-developed Discourse Marker Identification Checklist and Coding Scheme. Data were analyzed through systematic identification, classification, and pragmatic interpretation across all transcripts. The findings revealed five functional categories: additive (31.19%), causal (21.56%), sequential (17.43%), elaborative (16.51%), and contrastive (13.30%), across 218 total instances. These markers functioned to organize discourse structure, signal logical relationships, and sustain speech fluency simultaneously. A key limitation is the small, institution-specific sample. The study concludes that discourse markers serve as integrative pragmatic devices managing coherence and fluency concurrently. EFL educators should integrate explicit instruction on all five discourse marker categories into academic speaking curricula. While future research should expand to larger, multi-institutional samples using mixed-method designs.

Keywords: discourse markers, pragmatic competence, coherence, fluency, EFL oral presentations

Abstrak:

Mahasiswa EFL di tingkat universitas kerap kesulitan mempertahankan koherensi dan kefasihan secara bersamaan dalam presentasi lisan akademis, namun peran pragmatik penanda wacana dalam mengatasi tantangan ini masih kurang dieksplorasi dalam konteks EFL Indonesia. Penelitian ini

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bertujuan menginvestigasi jenis penanda wacana yang digunakan mahasiswa EFL, fungsi pragmatiknya dalam mendukung koherensi wacana, serta kontribusinya terhadap pemeliharaan kefasihan dalam presentasi lisan akademis. Desain deskriptif kualitatif diterapkan dengan kerangka analisis wacana pragmatik berlandaskan teori (Fraser, 1990) dan (Schiffrin, 1987). Partisipan adalah 14 mahasiswa semester lima Program Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA), Lamongan, Indonesia, dengan tingkat kemahiran bahasa Inggris menengah. Data dikumpulkan melalui perekaman audio dan transkripsi verbatim presentasi kelas, menggunakan Daftar Identifikasi dan Skema Pengkodean Penanda Wacana yang dikembangkan peneliti. Data dianalisis melalui identifikasi sistematis, klasifikasi, dan interpretasi pragmatik pada seluruh transkrip. Temuan mengungkapkan lima kategori fungsional: aditif (31,19%), kausal (21,56%), sekuensial (17,43%), elaboratif (16,51%), dan kontrastif (13,30%), dalam 218 total kemunculan. Penanda-penanda ini berfungsi mengorganisasi struktur wacana, menandai hubungan logis, dan mempertahankan kefasihan ujaran secara bersamaan. Keterbatasan utama adalah sampel yang kecil dan spesifik pada satu institusi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penanda wacana berperan sebagai perangkat pragmatik integratif yang mengelola koherensi dan kefasihan secara bersamaan. Pendidik EFL perlu mengintegrasikan pengajaran eksplisit kelima kategori penanda wacana ke dalam kurikulum berbicara akademis. Penelitian mendatang disarankan memperluas sampel ke beberapa institusi dengan pendekatan mixed-method.

Kata kunci: *penanda wacana, kompetensi pragmatic, koherensi, kelancaran, presentasi lisan dalam bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing*

INTRODUCTION

Academic oral presentations in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) place significant cognitive demands on learners, who must simultaneously organize ideas and produce fluent speech in real time. At the university level, EFL students are expected to communicate academic content in an orderly, coherent, and continuous manner; however, many struggle to maintain both coherence and fluency, often producing disorganized discourse marked by frequent pauses, hesitations, and interruptions (González-Robaina et al., 2023; Lee & Goh, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). These challenges are primarily attributable to the cognitive workload of planning and producing language simultaneously in a second language (Soraya, 2023), making this an important concern for English education and applied linguistics research (Lopez & Becerra, 2021; Mulyadi, 2026).

Several recent studies have investigated discourse markers and spoken fluency in EFL contexts, yet important gaps remain. (Du, 2025) examined discourse markers in EFL academic speaking and found that additive markers dominate in frequency; however, the study focused on frequency counts rather than the pragmatic mechanisms through which markers manage coherence and fluency simultaneously. (Omisakin et al., 2024) Conducted a corpus-based analysis of discourse markers in EFL oral presentations, cataloguing types and frequencies but stopping short of analyzing their integrative pragmatic functions in real-time speech. (Tsunemoto & Trofimovich, 2024) investigated coherence and comprehensibility in

L2 academic speaking but treated these dimensions as separate constructs without examining how discourse markers coordinate them. (González-Robaina et al., 2023) studied oral discourse coherence and fluency among EFL preservice teachers but focused on instructional outcomes rather than the pragmatic strategies speakers deploy. (Youn, 2023) explored discourse marker use across pragmatic performance levels and task types, confirming variation by proficiency, but did not address the Indonesian EFL classroom context. (Suryadi et al., 2024) demonstrated that mastery of discourse markers improved logical sequencing in academic speaking tasks, while (Mohamad et al., 2025) confirmed that additive pragmatic markers consistently signal topic development; however, neither study examined how these markers simultaneously sustain speech fluency under real-time cognitive pressure. Within the Indonesian EFL context specifically, while pronunciation, vocabulary, and instructional media have received considerable attention (Huda, 2019; Zahro et al., 2025), less emphasis has been placed on pragmatic discourse organization in academic speaking (Khulel, 2021), and no study has examined how discourse markers function as integrative devices managing both coherence and fluency concurrently.

Discourse markers are among the most important pragmatic resources in spoken discourse. Following Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987), a discourse marker signals relationships among two or more discourse units, helps transition between topics, and directs the listener through the organized structure of spoken discourse. In academic oral presentations, discourse markers enhance coherence by signaling logical relationships of addition, contrast, cause/effect, and sequencing (Ozturk & Durmusoglu Kose, 2021). At the same time, they provide speakers with a means of maintaining the flow of speech while planning and producing utterances in real time (Saito et al., 2021; Tavakoli & Uchihara, 2020).

Three interconnected gaps are therefore identified. Empirically, the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in naturally occurring EFL classroom presentations remain underinvestigated, as prior studies have predominantly relied on frequency-based analyses without examining how these markers operate pragmatically to coordinate coherent, fluent spoken discourse (Du, 2025; Omisakin et al., 2024). Theoretically, existing pragmatic frameworks have not been applied to explain how discourse markers manage coherence and fluency as an integrated rather than separate construct in spoken EFL discourse. Practically,

EFL academic speaking instruction in the Indonesian context lacks explicit guidance on integrating discourse markers as pedagogical tools for simultaneous coherence and fluency development (Huda, 2019; Khulel, 2021; Zahro et al., 2025).

Pragmatics, as defined by (Taguchi & Roever, 2017), focuses on how people use language to create meaning, interact, and deploy various speech styles in different contexts, beyond the rules of grammar. In higher education, EFL students are required to communicate complex academic concepts logically and effectively, making pragmatic competence a critical component of academic oral performance (Hyland & Jiang, 2019; Saito et al., 2021). By developing pragmatic competence, L2 users can demonstrate how their ideas relate to each other, indicate how to transition between ideas, and present ideas in a way that meets audience expectations, components essential for successful academic oral communication (Ishihara & Cohen, 2021; Ren, 2022). Prior research within EFL pedagogy has indicated that developing EFL learners' pragmatic awareness positively influences their oral performance in academic speaking contexts (Huda, 2019; Khulel, 2021).

Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in supporting coherence and fluency in university EFL students' academic oral presentations. Unlike previous studies that primarily treated discourse markers as structural or frequency-based linguistic features, this study examines discourse markers as pragmatic strategies used by speakers to organize discourse, maintain continuity of speech, and manage real-time communication during academic presentations (González-Robaina et al., 2023; Ren, 2022). The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach: rather than examining coherence and fluency as separate dimensions, it demonstrates how discourse markers function simultaneously as devices for both discourse organization and fluency management in naturally occurring, unscripted EFL classroom presentations, a perspective that prior studies have not fully addressed. This study contributes empirically by providing fine-grained pragmatic evidence from authentic classroom data and practically by offering pedagogical recommendations for discourse marker instruction in Indonesian EFL academic speaking curricula.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the pragmatic approaches of Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987). Fraser (1990) proposes that discourse markers are pragmatic devices that signal the relationship between the interpretation of the current

segment and the prior one, operating at the level of discourse rather than sentence grammar. Schiffrin (1987) conceptualizes discourse markers as sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk and coordinate discourse coherence across multiple dimensions, including ideational, action, and participation structures. Together, these frameworks provide an analytical basis for examining how additive, contrastive, causal, sequential, and elaborative markers function to manage both the organizational and the fluency dimensions of academic spoken discourse.

Guided by these theoretical foundations and addressing the identified gaps, this study seeks to answer three research questions:

1. What types of discourse markers are employed by EFL students in academic oral presentations?
2. How do discourse markers function pragmatically to support coherence in academic oral presentations?
3. In what ways do discourse markers contribute to the maintenance of fluency during EFL students' academic oral presentations?

METHOD

Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, applying Pragmatic Discourse Analysis (DA) as the analytical framework to examine how EFL students utilize discourse markers to facilitate and maintain coherence and fluency in their academic oral presentations. Following Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987) as the theoretical foundation, Pragmatic Discourse Analysis examines how speakers employ linguistic resources strategically to coordinate their discourses and manage their interactions within a specific communicative context, in this case, the academic speaking environment. This approach places greater emphasis on the meanings created through language in their natural setting rather than relying on quantitative data, consistent with qualitative methodological principles (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The focus of this study is the pragmatic functions of discourse markers, specifically how additive, contrastive, causal, sequencing, and elaborative markers contribute to discourse coherence and fluency as defined operationally through the established taxonomy of Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987).

Subject

The subject of this study was the transcribed oral presentation discourse of the 5th-semester students of the English Language Education Program at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA), Lamongan, Indonesia. The participants were 14 undergraduate students at an intermediate level of English proficiency, as indicated by their course placement in the fifth semester of an English Language Education degree program. The discourse data were obtained from classroom academic presentations delivered in English as part of regular speaking-course assignments. The analysis focused on the linguistic and pragmatic features of the discourse, particularly the use of discourse markers in maintaining coherence and fluency. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining permission from the course instructor before data collection, assigning anonymized participant codes (S1–S14) in place of real names, and using the data solely for academic research purposes. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and consented to the audio recording of their presentations.

Data Source and Instrument

The data source of this study consisted of transcripts of academic oral presentations in English, produced during regular classroom sessions as part of speaking-course assignments in the English Language Education Program at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA), Lamongan, Indonesia. Fourteen presentation transcripts were included in this study. Each transcript was assigned a sequential participant code (S1–S14) based on the chronological order in which presentations were delivered during the classroom sessions, to maintain confidentiality. The primary unit of analysis was the spoken discourse represented in the transcripts, specifically the pragmatic functions of discourse markers occurring within each presentation.

The researcher served as the principal instrument, responsible for collecting, transcribing, coding, categorizing, and interpreting the discourse data through a pragmatic framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The following supplementary instruments were also utilized: (1) an audio recording device used to capture all spoken language features from the natural classroom environment; (2) a verbatim transcription protocol to document pauses, repetitions, hesitations, and completions; and (3) a researcher-developed Discourse Marker Identification Checklist and Coding Scheme based on the

frameworks of Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987), classifying markers into five functional coding categories as presented in Table A below.

Table A. Discourse Marker Classification Coding Categories

<i>Code</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>ADD</i>	<i>Additions</i>	<i>Adds information to preceding discourse</i>	<i>and, also, moreover, in addition</i>
<i>CAU</i>	<i>Causes</i>	<i>Indicates causal or logical relations</i>	<i>because, so, therefore, as a result</i>
<i>SEQ</i>	<i>Sequential Order</i>	<i>Organizes discourse sequentially</i>	<i>first, next, then, finally</i>
<i>ELA</i>	<i>Elaboration</i>	<i>Expands or clarifies preceding information</i>	<i>for example, for instance, that is</i>
<i>CON</i>	<i>Contrasts</i>	<i>Signals contrast or opposing ideas</i>	<i>but, however, on the other hand</i>

Data collecting technique

Oral presentations were audio-recorded in their natural classroom setting and transcribed verbatim to retain all spoken discourse features, pauses, repetitions, and instances of discourse markers. The transcription protocol ensured that all features were accurately represented for subsequent pragmatic analysis. The study did not implement any experimental or instructional interventions; data were collected solely from regular classroom activities.

Figure 1 below illustrates the data collection and analysis procedure of this study, covering the phases of recording, transcription, coding, and pragmatic interpretation.

Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Phase	Who	What	How	Where
1. Recording	Researcher	Academic oral presentations	Audio recording device	Classroom, UNISDA Lamongan
2. Transcription	Researcher	Verbatim transcripts (S1–S14)	Transcription protocol	Researcher's workspace
3. Identification	Researcher + peer debriefer	Discourse markers in transcripts	DM Identification Checklist	Researcher's workspace

4. Coding	Researcher	ADD/CAU/SEQ/ELA/CON categories	Functional Coding Scheme	Researcher's workspace
5. Interpretation	Researcher	Pragmatic functions of markers	Pragmatic Discourse Analysis	Researcher's workspace
6. Triangulation	Researcher + peer debriefer	Consistency of coding	Cross-referencing transcripts	Researcher's workspace

Data analysis technique

The data were examined using Pragmatic Discourse Analysis as defined by the analytical frameworks provided by Bruce Fraser (1990) and Deborah Schiffrin (1987). The analysis aimed to identify the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in maintaining coherence and fluency during academic oral presentations.

The analysis procedures were carried out in five steps. First, the audio-recorded presentations were transcribed verbatim, with each transcript coded using participant labels S1–S14 to maintain confidentiality. Second, the transcripts were reviewed to identify discourse markers based on Fraser's (1990) and Schiffrin's (1987) framework. Third, the identified discourse markers were categorized into the five functional coding categories: Additive (ADD), Contrastive (CON), Causal (CAU), Sequencing (SEQ), and Elaborative (ELA). Fourth, each discourse marker was analyzed in its immediate discourse context to examine its contribution to (a) discourse coherence, (b) continuity of speech, (c) listener comprehension, and (d) fluency maintenance during presentation delivery. Fifth, recurrent patterns of discourse marker usage were interpreted to explain how EFL students utilized discourse markers pragmatically to organize ideas and maintain fluency during academic oral presentations.

Pauses, repetitions, hesitations, and self-repairs were retained in the transcription process to preserve the authenticity of spoken discourse, consistent with conventions for spoken data analysis (Han, 2021; Tergujeff, 2021). A sample of coded transcription data is provided in Appendix A. To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis, two strategies were

employed. First, analytical triangulation was applied by cross-referencing findings across multiple transcripts to identify consistent patterns of discourse marker use (Williams et al., 2021). Second, peer debriefing was conducted through consultation with a colleague specializing in pragmatics and discourse analysis, who reviewed a sample of coded transcripts and confirmed the consistency of the coding categories (Dougherty, 2021). These procedures ensured that the analytical conclusions were grounded in the data rather than subjective interpretation.

Appendix A. Sample of Coded Presentation Transcript

Participant Code	Transcript Excerpt with Coding	Pragmatic Function
S2	“First [SEQ], I would like to introduce our product called Smart Bottle. Then [SEQ], I will explain its main features.”	Organizing presentation stages
S4	“And [ADD] this product also uses recyclable materials to reduce plastic waste.”	Adding supporting information
S7	“Because [CAU] the application can be accessed online, students can study anywhere and anytime.”	Explaining causal relationship
S9	“For example [ELA], users can track their daily water consumption through the mobile application.”	Clarifying explanation through illustration
S11	“However, [CON], the product still needs an internet connection for some advanced features.”	Signaling contrast and limitation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The following results are presented in alignment with the three research questions guiding this study. RQ1 concerns the types of discourse markers employed; RQ2 addresses their pragmatic functions in supporting coherence; and RQ3 examines their contribution to fluency maintenance.

Analysis of the transcribed academic presentations (S1–S14) revealed that discourse markers were consistently present across all fourteen transcripts, appearing in five functional categories: additive, contrastive, causal, sequential, and elaborative. A total of 218 instances of discourse markers were identified.

Types of Discourse Markers Identified

Representative examples of the coded discourse markers identified in the presentation transcripts are presented in Table 1. Each excerpt illustrates how the coding scheme (ADD,

CAU, SEQ, ELA, and CON) was applied during the pragmatic analysis.

Table 1. Representative coded excerpts

No	Transcript Excerpt	Discourse Marker	Code	Pragmatic Function	Contribution to Coherence	Contribution to Fluency
1	“First, I would like to introduce our product called Smart Bottle, then I will explain its main features.” (S2)	first, then	SEQ	Organizes presentation stages sequentially	Signals logical ordering of presentation content	Provides planning time between presentation segments
2	“And this product also uses eco-friendly packaging to reduce plastic waste.” (S4)	and, also	ADD	Adds supporting product information	Maintains continuity between ideas	Reduces hesitation by signalling elaboration
3	“However, the product price is slightly higher than similar products on the market.” (S11)	however	CON	Introduces contrasting evaluation	Clarifies logical opposition	Enables transition without extended pauses
4	“Because the ingredients are natural, the product is suitable for sensitive skin.” (S7)	because	CAU	Establishes a causal relationship	Guides the listener's reasoning	Allows the speaker to maintain speech rate while reasoning
5	“For example, users can track their daily water consumption through the mobile application.”	for example	ELA	Clarifies product function through illustration	Enhances listener comprehension	Provides processing time for the speaker

	(S9)					
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As illustrated in Table 1, each discourse marker performed a distinct pragmatic function in organizing academic presentation discourse. The coded excerpts demonstrate how discourse markers contributed simultaneously to discourse coherence and speaking fluency during presentation delivery.

Table 2. Distribution of discourse markers by coding category

Code	Category	Frequency	Percentage
ADD	Additive	68	31.19%
CAU	Causal	47	21.56%
SEQ	Sequential	38	17.43%
ELA	Elaborative	36	16.51%
CON	Contrastive	29	13.30%
Total		218	100%

Table 2 summarizes the distribution of discourse markers identified across the fourteen presentation transcripts. A total of 218 discourse markers were classified into five functional categories. Additive markers were the most frequently used category (68 occurrences, 31.19%), followed by causal (47; 21.56%), sequential (38; 17.43%), elaborative (36; 16.51%), and contrastive markers (29; 13.30%).

Functional categories of discourse markers (RQ1)

Applying Pragmatic Discourse Analysis based on Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987), five primary functional categories of discourse markers emerged from the presentation transcripts: Additive, Contrastive, Causal, Sequencing, and Elaborative. These categories were identified inductively through recurring patterns in the data and are consistent with established pragmatic classifications for spoken discourse. Table 3 summarizes these categories with their representative markers, frequency (n = total occurrences across all transcripts), pragmatic functions, and contributions to coherence and fluency.

Table 3. Pragmatic functions of discourse markers in EFL students' academic oral presentations.

Code	Category	Representative Markers (n)	Total	Pragmatic Function	Contribution to Coherence	Contribution to Fluency
ADD	Additive	and (41), also (15), in addition (7),	68	Extend ideas and introduce supporting	Maintain continuity between ideas	Reduce hesitation by signalling

		moreover (5)		information	and support smooth elaboration	upcoming elaboration
CAU	Causal	because (19), so (16), therefore (7), as a result (5)	47	Explicitly indicate cause-and-effect relationships	Guide listener reasoning and reduce ambiguity	Allow the speaker to maintain the speech rate while reasoning
SEQ	Sequential	then (12), first (11), next (9), finally (6)	38	Organize the stages of the presentation	Support discourse organization and real-time speech planning	Provide planning time between presentation segments
ELA	Elaborative	for example (18), for instance (9), that is (9)	36	Clarify abstract ideas through illustration or reformulation	Enhance listener comprehension	Provide processing time for speakers while engaged with the audience
CON	Contrastive	but (14), however (12), on the other hand (3)	29	Signal shifts in perspective or counter-arguments	Clarify logical opposition and structure academic argumentation	Enable transition without extended pauses

Table 4 below provides illustrative pragmatic functions with representative examples drawn directly from the transcription data (see Appendix for full coded transcription sample).

Table 4. Illustrative Pragmatic Functions of Discourse Markers in EFL Academic Oral Presentations

Code	Category	Example from Transcription	Pragmatic Function
ADD	Additive	"And [ADD] this product also uses eco-friendly packaging, so it is safer for the environment." (S4)	Adding supporting product information
CAU	Causal	"Because [CAU] the ingredients are natural, the product is suitable for sensitive skin." (S7)	Explaining product advantages through causal reasoning
SEQ	Sequential	"First [SEQ], I will explain the ingredients of the product, then [SEQ] I will show how to use it." (S2)	Organizing presentation stages
ELA	Elaborative	"For example [ELA], students can use this application to improve their pronunciation practice at home." (S9)	Clarifying product function through illustration
CON	Contrastive	"However [CON], the product price is slightly higher compared to similar products in the market." (S11)	Presenting a contrasting evaluation

Additive discourse markers (RQ1 & RQ2)

Additive markers constituted the largest category in the data, with 68 total occurrences (31.19%) across the 14 transcripts, making them the most frequently deployed discourse marker type. Representative markers included (n = 41), also (n = 15), in addition (n = 7), and (n = 5). A typical instance was produced by participant S4: “And [ADD] this product also uses eco-friendly packaging, so it is safer for the environment.” In this utterance, it also functioned to attach a new supporting point to the preceding claim without disrupting the speech flow. A further example appeared in S8’s presentation: “In addition [ADD], the product has been tested and certified by the national health authority.” Here, in addition signalled to the listener that further supporting evidence was forthcoming, enabling the speaker to extend the explanation gradually. Across all 14 transcripts, additive markers consistently appeared at points where speakers were building up product descriptions, adding advantages, or layering supporting details. The pattern indicates that students employed additive markers as a primary pragmatic strategy for maintaining informational continuity while simultaneously sustaining uninterrupted speech delivery.

Contrastive discourse markers (RQ1 & RQ2)

Contrastive markers totalled 29 occurrences (13.30%), the least frequent category, comprising but (n = 14), however (n = 12), and on the other hand (n = 3). Despite their lower frequency, they appeared at structurally critical points in the presentations, specifically when students introduced product limitations or shifted perspective following a positive claim. Participant S11 produced a representative instance: “However [CON], the product price is slightly higher compared to similar products in the market.” The use of however marked a deliberate argumentative turn: the preceding segment had described product advantages, and however signalled to listeners that a contrasting point was being introduced, allowing the transition to occur without an awkward pause. A second instance was observed in S6’s presentation: “But [CON], not all users find the interface easy to navigate.” Here, but served to qualify a previously stated claim, preserving the logical structure of the argument. Across the transcripts, contrastive markers were found to occur most frequently in evaluation segments and in comparison sections of product presentations, indicating that students selected them deliberately to mark argumentative boundaries and signal logical opposition.

Causal discourse markers (RQ1 & RQ2)

Causal markers were the second most frequent category (n = 47; 21.56%), with because (n = 19), so (n = 16), therefore (n = 7), and as a result (n = 5) identified across the

transcripts. These markers appeared consistently in segments where students were explaining product benefits, describing cause-and-effect relationships, or justifying claims. Participant S7 provided a clear example: “Because [CAU] the ingredients are natural, the product is suitable for sensitive skin.” In this utterance, the product characteristic (natural ingredients) leads to its consequence (skin suitability), enabling the listener to follow the speaker’s reasoning without inferential effort. Another instance was produced by S13: “Therefore [CAU], we recommend this product for daily use, especially for people who are concerned about chemical exposure.” Here, therefore, marked the conclusion drawn from preceding evidence, guiding the listener through the logical chain of argument. Across the data, causal markers appeared with the highest density in the explanation and recommendation segments of presentations, confirming their role in constructing logically transparent discourse in real-time academic speaking.

Sequencing discourse markers (RQ1 & RQ2)

Sequencing markers totalled 38 occurrences (17.43%), with then (n = 12), first (n = 11), next (n = 9), and finally (n = 6) identified across the data. These markers appeared overwhelmingly at the opening and transition points of presentations, where speakers were signalling movement from one segment to the next. Participant S2 produced a representative instance: “First [SEQ], I would like to introduce our product called Smart Bottle, then [SEQ] I will explain its main features.” Both first and then served to announce the sequential structure of the presentation to listeners in advance, enabling them to track the organization of the discourse. A further example was observed in S10’s delivery: “Next [SEQ], I will show you how to use the application step by step. Finally [SEQ], I will explain the price and where you can purchase it.” In this excerpt, next and finally worked in tandem to map out the remaining structure of the presentation, providing the audience with a clear organizational roadmap. Notably, these markers were also observed to coincide with brief pauses and slightly reduced speech rate, suggesting they provided the speaker with short cognitive planning intervals between presentation segments while maintaining the continuity of speech delivery.

Elaborative Discourse Markers (RQ1 & RQ2 & RQ3)

Elaborative markers totalled 36 occurrences (16.51%), comprising, for example, (n = 18), for instance (n = 9), and that is (n = 9). These markers appeared consistently at points where speakers transitioned from a general or abstract claim to a specific, concrete illustration. Participant S9 produced a clear instance: “For example [ELA], users can track their daily water consumption through the mobile application.” In this utterance, for example,

a concrete case was introduced to clarify an abstract product feature, making the concept accessible to listeners without disrupting the flow of speech. Another instance was observed in S5's presentation: "That is [ELA], the product can be refilled up to five hundred times before requiring replacement." Here, that is functioned to restate and specify a preceding general claim, reducing potential listener ambiguity. Across the data, elaborative markers were found to occur most frequently in the feature description and demonstration segments, where speakers needed to render abstract specifications concrete. Notably, a brief pause consistently preceded elaborative markers in the transcripts, indicating that these markers also served as micro-planning devices that allowed speakers to formulate the upcoming specific illustration before continuing their delivery.

Overall, the data confirm that students did not deploy discourse markers randomly or merely as speech fillers. Rather, they appeared in predictable functional patterns — additive and elaborative markers in information-building segments, causal markers in explanation and reasoning segments, contrastive markers in evaluation segments, and sequencing markers at structural transitions. This patterned distribution across all 14 transcripts indicates that discourse markers were employed as deliberate pragmatic strategies for simultaneously organizing ideas and sustaining continuous speech delivery in real-time academic oral presentations.

Discussion

This study examined the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in supporting coherence and fluency in university EFL students' academic oral presentations. The findings are discussed below in relation to the three research questions, compared with results from previous studies, and interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987).

Addressing RQ1, the analysis identified five functional categories of discourse markers employed by EFL students: additive ($n = 68$; 31.19%), causal ($n = 47$; 21.56%), sequential ($n = 38$; 17.43%), elaborative ($n = 36$; 16.51%), and contrastive ($n = 29$; 13.30%), yielding a total of 218 instances across 14 transcripts. Additive markers (and, also, moreover, in addition) were the most dominant category. As participant S4 demonstrated: "And this product also uses eco-friendly packaging, so it is safer for the environment." This pattern is consistent with Du (2025), who found additive markers to constitute the largest proportion of discourse marker use in EFL academic speaking contexts, attributing their dominance to the

information-cumulative nature of academic discourse. Similarly, (Omisakin et al., 2024a) reported that additive markers were the most frequently deployed type across EFL oral presentations in their corpus-based study, reflecting speakers' reliance on them to expand ideas without disrupting speech flow. (Suryadi et al., 2024) further confirmed that mastery of additive discourse markers significantly improved students' logical sequencing in academic speaking tasks. (Mohamad et al., 2025) observed that pragmatic markers serving an additive function were consistently used to signal topic development, a pattern mirrored in the present data. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that additive markers served not only an organizational function but also a pragmatic fluency-sustaining role, as speakers used them to signal elaboration while simultaneously managing real-time cognitive load — a dimension not fully addressed in prior frequency-focused investigations (Du, 2025; Omisakin et al., 2024b).

Contrastive markers (but, however, on the other hand), though the least frequent category (n = 29; 13.30%), played a qualitatively significant role in structuring academic argumentation. As participant S11 stated: "However, the product still needs an internet connection for some advanced features." This use of however enabled a pragmatically smooth transition from a positive claim to a limitation without disrupting discourse continuity. Tsunemoto and Trofimovich (2024) similarly found that contrastive markers were among the most functionally complex markers in second language academic speaking, as they require speakers to signal logical opposition while maintaining propositional coherence. Du (2025) noted that EFL learners who employed contrastive markers more frequently produced more coherent argumentative discourse, demonstrating greater pragmatic awareness. (Youn, 2023) reported that however and but were the most commonly used contrastive markers in academic oral presentations among Chinese EFL students, a pattern consistent with the present findings. (Lee & Goh, 2022) further argued that pragmatic competence in academic oral communication is critically indexed by learners' ability to use contrastive markers to signal argumentative shifts a claim supported by the data from S11 and other participants in this study. Taken together, these comparisons indicate that the present findings align with prior research in confirming the functional importance of contrastive markers, while distinguishing themselves by demonstrating their simultaneous contribution to both coherence and fluency in real-time spoken production.

Addressing RQ2, the findings revealed that discourse markers functioned

pragmatically to support discourse coherence by making logical relationships between ideas explicit, thereby guiding listener comprehension. Causal markers (because, so, therefore, as a result; $n = 47$) were particularly prominent in this regard. As participant S7 explained: “Because the ingredients are natural, the product is suitable for sensitive skin.” This utterance demonstrates how the causal marker because " establishes a transparent cause-effect relationship that enables listeners to follow the speaker’s reasoning without ambiguity. (Ozturk & Durmusoglu Kose, 2021) argued that causal discourse markers are among the most effective devices for creating global coherence in spoken discourse, as they explicitly connect informational units in a way that reduces inferential burden for the listener, a claim directly supported by the present data. (Ren, 2022) similarly found that causal markers were central to pragmatic competence in second language learning, enabling L2 speakers to construct logically coherent arguments. (González-Robaina et al., 2023) demonstrated that EFL preservice teachers who employed causal and logical connectors more systematically produced oral narratives rated as more coherent by expert evaluators, paralleling the patterns observed among UNISDA students in the present study. Fraser (1990) theorized that causal discourse markers perform a directive pragmatic function, steering the listener’s interpretation toward an intended logical relationship consistent with the way S7 and other participants deployed because and so to structure their product explanations. Schiffrin (1987) further established that causal markers operate at multiple discourse levels simultaneously, organizing ideational content while also signaling the speaker’s communicative intent. (Ishihara & Cohen, 2021) underscored that pragmatic instruction targeting cause-effect connectors significantly enhanced L2 learners’ ability to construct coherent academic discourse. (Wang et al., 2024) found a significant positive relationship between EFL learners’ mastery of logical connectors and their rated speaking accuracy and coherence. The present study is therefore consistent with this body of literature in confirming that causal markers are central pragmatic resources for coherence management, while additionally demonstrating their function within a naturally occurring, unscripted classroom presentation context.

Addressing RQ3, the findings demonstrated that sequencing markers (first, next, then, finally; $n = 38$) and elaborative markers (for example, for instance, that is; $n = 36$) made the most direct contribution to fluency maintenance. Participant S2 exemplified sequencing marker use: “First [SEQ], I would like to introduce our product called Smart Bottle, then [SEQ] I will explain its main features.” These markers did not merely organize content

structurally; they functioned as micro-planning devices that afforded the speaker brief processing intervals while sustaining continuous speech delivery. (Tavakoli & Uchihara, 2020) theorized that fluency in L2 speaking should be understood primarily as the management of cognitive load in real-time speech production, rather than as speech rate alone, a conceptualization directly supported by the present findings, where sequencing markers visibly served this planning function. (Saito et al., 2021) similarly found that L2 speakers with higher fluency ratings made systematic use of discourse-organizing devices to maintain speech continuity under cognitive pressure. (Lopez & Becerra, 2021) demonstrated that EFL learners who employed sequential connectors in authentic oral production tasks were rated as more fluent by assessors, suggesting a pragmatic-fluency link consistent with the present data. Similarly, elaborative markers enabled participants to sustain speech while clarifying content. As participant S9 explained: “For example [ELA], users can track their daily water consumption through the mobile application.” The use of, for example, provides processing time for the speaker while simultaneously enhancing listener comprehension, a dual function that (Ren, 2022) described as characteristic of pragmatically competent spoken discourse organization. (Huda, 2019) reported that EFL students who demonstrated stronger pragmatic awareness in academic speaking contexts produced more elaborated and fluent discourse. This finding aligns with the present observation that elaborative markers function as cognitive buffer devices. (Khulel, 2021) found that developing pragmatic awareness in EFL speaking classrooms, particularly with respect to elaborative and sequential markers, led to measurable improvements in discourse fluency ratings. These convergent findings from across the literature reinforce the inference that discourse markers in the present study were not deployed incidentally but represented strategic pragmatic choices that simultaneously managed discourse structure and real-time speech production demands, an integrative function that prior studies examining coherence and fluency in isolation (Du, 2025; Kang & Kim, 2022) were unable to capture.

Taken together, the findings from all three research questions indicate that discourse markers in EFL academic presentations function as integrative pragmatic devices that manage coherence and fluency simultaneously rather than independently. This conclusion extends previous studies that examined these dimensions separately (Du, 2025; Tsunemoto & Trofimovich, 2024) and aligns with the broader theoretical claim advanced by Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987) that discourse markers are multi-functional pragmatic resources

operating at the intersection of discourse organization and communicative management. Furthermore, the results indicate that challenges in EFL academic speaking may stem not only from limited linguistic competence, such as vocabulary or grammar (Suryadi et al., 2024), but from insufficient pragmatic awareness regarding discourse marker use, a dimension that remains underemphasized in the Indonesian EFL context (Huda, 2019; Khulel, 2021; Zahro et al., 2025b). Teacher discourse practices in EFL classrooms also play a role in shaping such pragmatic awareness among students (Sugianto & Khoirunnisa, 2024). These findings thus carry direct implications for pedagogical practice: explicit instruction on discourse markers as pragmatic tools, drawing on practitioner-informed approaches to pragmatics pedagogy (Ishihara, 2021), rather than as isolated vocabulary items, should be prioritized in EFL academic speaking curricula.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

Addressing RQ1, this study found that EFL university-level students at UNISDA employed five functional types of discourse markers in their academic oral presentations: additive, contrastive, causal, sequencing, and elaborative. These categories were identified across all fourteen transcripts in predictable functional patterns, confirming their systematic pragmatic use rather than incidental deployment.

Addressing RQ2, the discourse markers functioned pragmatically to support coherence by marking logical relationships between discourse units through addition, contrast, and causal reasoning, enabling students to construct organized, logically connected arguments. Students such as S2, S7, and S11 (Table 2) demonstrated the capacity to signal argumentative development and causal reasoning through strategic marker use, consistent with the pragmatic frameworks of Fraser (1990) and Schiffrin (1987).

Addressing RQ3, sequencing and elaborative markers contributed to fluency maintenance by functioning as micro-planning devices that provided speakers with processing time while sustaining speech continuity. This supports (Tavakoli & Uchihara, 2020) account of fluency as cognitive load management, demonstrating that discourse markers serve a dual pragmatic function, structuring discourse and enabling fluent production simultaneously. These findings reinforce the position that pragmatic competence is a central component of

effective academic speaking in EFL contexts and should be accorded greater attention in EFL pedagogy.

Limitation

The results here have limitations due to methodological issues, the different types of discourse, and the research context. First, with respect to the methodological aspects of this study, a primarily qualitative descriptive research approach was followed. The researcher focused on pragmatic interpretation of discourse markers and did not statistically analyze the data quantitatively, including but not limited to how statistically significant and/or how frequently discourse marker functions occurred across proficiency levels or different contexts in which presentations occurred. Future research could utilize both qualitative analyses (e.g., analytical Pragmatics qualitative form) and corpus-based (i.e., statistical quantitative) or mixed-method research methodologies to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

Furthermore, this research was limited to investigating only the linguistic and pragmatic characteristics of spoken discourse without considering non-verbal communication characteristics (e.g., gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, intonation, and body movements) along with how they may contribute to the coherence and fluency of the oral presentations in academia; consequently, the results of this research only reflect the verbal dimension of the presenters' performance.

Thirdly, the discourse data used were specifically of classroom-based academic product presentations created by undergraduate EFL students within one institution, whilst in an ESL classroom setting. The discourse patterns used may be different from those found in other types of speaking genres, such as seminar discussions, debate forums, professional presentations or spontaneous interactional communication. Furthermore, the small (14) and homogeneous nature of the sample limits the possibility for broader generalisation of the findings across participants of varying proficiency levels, across disciplines, and across different education systems.

Ultimately, the data collected for this study came from regular classroom activities without any attempted manipulation of participant involvement. Therefore, the authors can make no conclusions regarding differences in language use among students with and without explicit instruction related to discourse markers. Additional research might explore the impact of targeted instruction related to discourse markers on improving the development of both coherence and fluency of students' academic speaking in EFL settings.

Implication

From a pedagogical perspective, this study recommends that EFL educators teach discourse markers as functional pragmatic tools rather than isolated vocabulary items. Instructional integration of all five categories, additive, contrastive, causal, sequencing, and elaborative, into academic speaking courses, through model presentation analysis, guided speaking tasks, and reflective review of audio-recorded speech, would support students in developing both the organizational coherence and the fluency necessary for effective academic oral communication. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of pragmatic competence as encompassing the simultaneous management of coherence and fluency, reinforcing the view that discourse markers are integrative pragmatic resources in EFL academic speaking.

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