

“Well... Y’know... Okay...” An Analysis of Discourse Markers’ Pragmatic Functions and Sentence Positions among Senior High School English Teachers’ Spoken Discourse: Implications for Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the English language continues to evolve. As a result, some linguistic features are said to play crucial roles in communication. Hence, this study aims to identify the frequently used discourse markers (hence, DMs) and their pragmatic functions and syntactic positions in spoken discourse. Twenty Senior High School English teachers in Pampanga, Philippines were selected to participate in the study. Using the qualitative research method, the discourse markers were given examples from the research corpus which revealed that English teachers used DMs more often in their oral discourse. Along with this

finding, it was also revealed that DMs serve different pragmatic functions, both textual and interpersonal. In addition, DMs mostly occurred in initial positions of utterances. It can also be noted that non-native speakers of English particularly English teachers in the Philippines have a remarkable tendency to use discourse markers. However, they used a variety of DMs less frequently. Generally, DMs have pivotal implications for establishing speaker-listener relationship and for English language teaching since discourse markers are now considered among the significant linguistic elements in spoken English discourse as they function for various purposes and activate discourse-pragmatic competence of the speakers. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should highlight them in language instruction to increase learners' awareness about the DMs functions to enhance their fluency and become more communicatively and pragmatically competent.

Keywords: *Discourse markers, pragmatics, syntax, spoken discourse, qualitative design, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Communication helps us in organizing our lives, in making decisions, and in establishing good work relationships. In the same way, our ability to communicate well, particularly in English, provides us career opportunities since English, being the lingua franca of the world, has evolved and has become the language for the majority of people living in different countries in terms of communication for science, business, media, education and research, and even on the internet.

Over the years, teaching and learning a second language plays a vital role in building a good communication. Consequently, there has been a necessity for learning and teaching the English language leading researchers to numerous theories as to how English should be learned and taught in classroom settings.

It is in this context that speaking, as a macro skill, has to be developed as a medium of effective communication in first and second language learning contexts (Boonkit, 2010). In a country like the Philippines, people improve their English which is used as one of the official languages and as a medium of classroom instructions (Ozaki, 2011). The Philippines is considered as one of the largest English-speaking countries because the majority of its people have at least some degree of fluency in the English language (Cabigon, 2015). Although Filipinos have been known to be fluent speakers of the English language, still it has been observed that most of the students specifically in the public sector have difficulties in expressing themselves in English. Consequently, Filipino

teachers and instructors use varied strategies on how they can improve their students' speaking skills. In the speaking environment, English language instructors are challenged on how they can increase the students' competence and confidence to improve their academic speaking skills. In relation to this, Basturkmen (2002) stressed that language teaching courses intend to develop speaking skills of students in different contexts and increasing the students' knowledge of oral discourse is another aspect of teaching oral English. She further elaborated that "there are a number of ways the features of spoken language in academic contexts are different from speaking in more informal situations, such as in conversational exchanges with friends and family" (p. 26). In conversational interactions, maintaining social relationships is what conversers are often concerned with (Basturkmen, 2002). She also stated that because of the complexity and indirectness of oral discourse, its nature in academic situations more often gives difficulties for non-speakers of English. For example, when a non-native speaker in a classroom setting is asked by the teacher to share his or her ideas on a certain topic, he or she would think twice before giving his or her answer because spoken discourse is spontaneous and contains hesitations because it is produced in real time (i.e., on the spot).

Moreover, Carter and McCarthy (2006) proposed the following five categories as the common features of spoken English: 1) deictic expressions (*this, that, there, here, now, then*), 2) situational ellipsis ("*Would you like a cup of coffee*" becomes "*coffee*" while waving a mug at someone), 3) headers, tails and tags (***That big house, is it where she lives?; They're quite affordable, kitchen utensils in that store.; This bag is beautiful, isn't it?***), 4) discourse markers (*you know, well, so*) and 5) polite and indirect language, vague language and approximations (*Could you send me the report tonight?; I'll have a coffee, please.; There were **about** fifty people at the hall.*). These categories are more commonly used in spoken than in written English (Huang, 2011). Discourse markers (hence, DMs) as one of the common features of spoken English, are said to play a crucial role in communication.

Research on oral English discourse in real-life situations have increased rapidly (Alami, 2016). As a result, some linguistic features are now considered vital aspects of communication involving the speaker and the hearer/listener. Specific speaking devices are utilized to help ESL learners to express cohesive and coherent discourse. Speakers use discourse markers such as *y'know, well, now, so, I mean, of course, however* etc. as linguistic devices to signal how the incoming unit of speech or text makes a connection to the present discourse state (Schiffrin, 1987). Various research however, accorded DMs with different names (Fraser, 2009): *cue phrases* (Knott & Sanders, 1998), *discourse connectives* (Blakemore, 1987, 2002;), *discourse operators* (Redeker, 1991, 1992), *discourse markers* (Blakemore, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999, 2003, 2006; & Lenk, 1998)

discourse particles (Schourup, 1985; Aijmer, Foolen, & Simon-Vandenberg, 2006), *discourse signaling devices* (Polanyi & Scha, 1983), *pragmatic expressions* (Erman, 1992), *pragmatic formatives* (Fraser, 1987), *pragmatic markers* (Fraser, 1988, 1990; Schiffrin, 1987), *pragmatic operators* (Ariel, 1994), *pragmatic particles* (Ostman, 1995), *semantic conjuncts* (Quirk et Al., 1985) and *sentence connectives* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). While researchers used different terminologies to define the expressions enumerated above, the term “discourse markers” is more preferred by researchers studying discourse in English.

Discourse markers have been of “substantial interest to researchers studying situated language use because of their role in demarcating discourse connections as well as their potential for indexing social relationships” (Bolden, 2008, p. 102).

Moreover, DMs are classified as “phonologically short items that have no or little referential meaning but serve pragmatic or procedural purpose” (Brinton 2008, p.1). They are also categorized as “lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases” (Fraser 1999, p. 931). DMs may also serve as devices that signal relations between utterances or to direct the listener’s attention (Redeker, 1991) where interlocutors combine forms, meanings, and actions to give overall perception and coherence about what is being said (Schiffrin, 1987). Because discourse processing functions concurrently at different levels, (that some DMs are) the multi-functionality of DMs achieve significant duties for conversational processing exercises of the participants (Frank-Job, 2005). To give an example of the multi-functionality of DMs, *but* functions differently in the two sentences below:

James likes singing; *but* Karen likes dancing.

James is a policeman; *but* he is honest.

In the first sentence, *but* is used to show contrast while in the other sentence it is used to show denial of expectations. Moreover, DMs cover a group or a collection of items from a variety of grammatical classes like adverbs, lexical phrases, conjunctions, and filler words. However, they have the same features: First, they are almost used in all languages (Lenk, 1998; Yilmaz, 2004); they are syntactically independent (Schiffrin, 1987); they are syntactically flexible. They may appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of an utterance. This flexibility contributes to their enormous usefulness and high frequency in discourse (Futji, 2001); they do not affect the propositional meaning of utterance (Brinton, 1996; Schiffrin, 1987); they make no contribution to the informational content of discourse; they deal with the pragmatic aspects of discourse (Andersen, 2001; Fraser, 1990; Yilmaz, 2004); they are meaningful, but non-truth

conditional (Lam, 2007, p.29); they are multifunctional (Fraser, 1990; Shiffrin, 1987; Yilmaz, 2004); and they are short, consisting of one to three syllables (Lenk, 1998).

In the analysis of DMs, Schiffrin (1987) maintained that DMs that “link adjacent units of talk to make the whole discourse” should be considered as linguistic devices. Schiffrin (1987, in Fraser, 1999) suggested that “DMs typically provide contextual coordinates for an utterance by locating the utterance on one or more planes of talk of her discourse mode, indexing the utterances to the speaker, the hearer, or both, and indexing the utterances to prior and/or subsequent discourse and serve an integrative function in discourse and thus contributing to discourse coherence” (p. 934). Moreno (2001) pointed out that the use of DMs tends to aim various interactive functions that are important to the discourse participants’ relationship such as politeness, repairs, attention-getting, and feedback. In addition, functions of these devices subsist on the textual and interpersonal levels enabling understanding for the discourse participants, helping them for the interpretation, and facilitating them to select the correct meaning out of all possible meanings (Aijimer & Simon-Vandenberg, 2006). In the example below, student 2 makes use of the DM **but** as a reaction and disagreement marker to the previous utterance leading student 1 to understand that student 2 is willing to go outside the classroom since Mrs. Cruz is not around.

Student 1: We have to stay inside. Mrs. Cruz might see us around.

*Student 2: **But** she's not around anyway.*

Castro and Marcela (2009) and Othman (2010) believed that the interpersonal relations in the classroom is established through the use of DMs building a better place for the participants to perform actively. Furthermore, DMs lead the interpretation process and make the discourse participants socially engaged in oral communication, and are indispensable in maintaining interactional cooperation (Lam, 2009). In educational settings, DMs employ a positive function in classroom situations as operative conversational tools (Othman, 2010). However, the research on these linguistic devices in teacher talk are understudied (Fung & Carter, 2007). DMs are an essential factor in teacher-learner talk in classroom contexts. For instance, Walsh (2006) claimed that the use of DMs adds to the effectiveness of learning as a whole and makes a common place for both the teachers and learners. Discourse markers in teacher talk assist the students to comprehend the teacher’s language and the certain task’s objective and its connection to the context. For instance, in the sentence “**Now**, class, one reason why you need to learn about the subject-verb agreement rules is...” the discourse marker **now** is used by the teacher as an opening frame

marker to claim the attention of the students who are probably not listening. This was validated in the study of Castro and Marcela (2009) where she examined a nonnative teacher's use of DMs in the classroom revealing that the teacher uses DMs effectively in unifying discourse and establishing interpersonal meanings.

Although the absence or the lack of discourse markers in a statement or an utterance cannot be considered 'ungrammatical,' the speaker or the writer may be regarded as dull, routinized, or impolite (Svartvik, 1980) since some DMs are used in utterances to mark politeness. Moreover, Müller (2005) also argues that "if we take it for granted that discourse markers have such a decisive role to play in native speaker communication as the authors of discourse marker analyses claim, then we must assume that they are important elements to be learned by nonnative speakers as well" (p. 14) because the presence of DMs in spoken discourse will help the listeners to understand more the utterances.

In addition, discourse markers perform several functions in discourse. Muller (2005) listed the most common functions of DMs as in the following: 1.) "DMs are used to initiate discourse (*Okay, how was your day?*); 2.) DMs are used to mark a boundary in discourse (shift/partial shift in topic) (*Anyway, I'm wondering if both of you would show me the way*); 3.) DMs are used to preface a response or a reaction (*Well, everybody has the chance to prove himself*); 4.) DMs are used to serve as fillers or delaying tactics (this is, *well*, not the one they need); 5.) DMs are used to aid the speaker in holding the floor (*well, um, I'm not sure about it*); 6.) DMs are used to affect an interaction or sharing between speaker-hearer (*The students nowadays you know spend more time on social media*.); 7.) DMs are used to bracket the discourse either cataphorically or anaphorically (e.g., *a. He came home late y'know. b. Y'know he came home late.* (Coll, 2009) DMs are used to mark either fore grounded or back grounded information" (p. 5) (Some students still prefer printed materials in reading *because* they are more comfortable with them).

From a pragmatic point of view, discourse markers appear to be a certain part of pragmatics. Thus, they should not only be studied grammatically but also pragmatically. According to Brinton (1996) DMs have little or no propositional meaning, most DMs have their apparent literal meaning, but they are pragmatically concerned with communication. She further elaborated that DMs show interpersonal functions by effecting cooperation, sharing, or intimacy between speakers and hearers, which include confirming shared assumptions, checking or expressing understanding, asking confirmation, expressing respect, or politeness. Pragmatic meaning is essentially tied to the context in which utterances are produced.

Aijmer (2002), on the other hand, defined discourse markers as a "class of words with unique formal, functional and pragmatic properties" (p.2). He also

added that discourse markers are difficult to analyze grammatically and their literal meanings are superseded by pragmatic roles containing the speaker's relationship to the hearer, to the statement or to the whole text. Moreover, in the analysis of discourse markers, they should be treated pragmatically instead of semantically as they serve contextual cue for the interpretation and provide listeners have better understanding of the utterances; while DMs are stated as unnecessary units in communication, there is no agreement for its terminology and description (Aijmer, 2002).

The interest in the process of using discourse markers by nonnative speakers of the English language has produced a significant amount of research (e.g., Alami, 2016; Jalilifar & Hashemian, 2010; Verdonik, Zgank, & Peterlin, 2008; Shimada, 2011). In the Persian context for instance, although Tehrani speakers frequently use with ease Persian discourse markers such as *na/na* (no/no), *bebin* (look), *aare* (yeah), *haalaa* (now), *vali* (but), *aslan* (by no means) and *dige* (no English counterpart), the pragmatic functions of Persian DMs were neglected and it was found that most Persian DMs occur mostly in the initial position (Alami, 2016). This finding further substantiated Muller's (2005) account of the position of DMs which appear at the beginning of a discourse.

Another study of Jalilifar and Hashemian (2010) focused on the frequency and functions of English DMs 'uh,'well,'y'know,'and 'I mean it' in Iranian students' spoken discourse in interview settings. The analysis of the interviews showed that there are differences in the frequency and functions of DMs, revealing that DMs are developmentally acquired and that more research is needed to validate the results. Verdonik, Zgank, and Peterlin's (2008) analysis on DMs focused on the use of discourse markers in two different conversational genres. The analysis showed that discourse markers are more frequently used in telephone conversations than in television interviews in Slovenia.

Using three different corpora from Japanese learners, native speakers and child speech, Shimada (2011) found that Japanese learners' proficiency developed in terms of diversity, variety and number; native speakers use varied DMs more than Japanese learners who on the other hand, tend to overuse markers such as *so* and *ok*.

Furthermore, some researchers have focused on studies involving the comparison of native and nonnative speakers' use of DMs. As an example, Fung and Carter's (2007) study on DMs examined and compared the production of DMs by British native speakers and nonnative learners of English based on pedagogical sub-corpus of CANCODE, a corpus of spoken British English and a corpus of interactive classroom discourse of secondary students in Hong Kong. The results of the research denoted that discourse markers in the two groups serve as functional interactional maneuvers to build and plan speech on

interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive levels. The researchers also found that Hong Kong learners display a referentially (used to make references between utterances) useful DMs like *and*, *but*, *because*, *OK*, *so*, etc. but show a limited use of other DMs such as *yeah*, *really*, *say*, *sort of*, *I see*, *you see*, *well*, *right*, *actually*, *cos*, *you know*, etc. Fung and Carter (2007) therefore suggested that language learners should learn discourse markers “to facilitate more successful overall language use and at the very least for reception purposes” (p. 434).

Philippine Studies on DMs

In addition, there have been research on DMs in the Philippine setting for several years. For instance, Ilustre (2011) investigated the pragmatic use of the DM *Okay* in distance learning. The researcher found that the results were consistent on Borlongan’s (2008) study, indicating that the main function of *okay* is to give a simple acknowledgment. It was found, therefore, that Filipino speakers of English tend to use *okay* as a form of acknowledgment.

Meanwhile, Philippine newspaper editorials’ use of connectors was built more on the additive relation through the use of progressive and accumulative strategy; the use of more simple connectors, such as the additive *and*, *or*, and *also*, adversative *but* and *yet*, and causal *because* and *so* was also evident (Tarrayo & Duque, 2010). The researchers concluded that editorialists use more parenthetical definitions in providing acceptable clarifications and exemplifications in the content.

Applying Hyland and Tse’s categorization of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse and Halliday and Hasan’s framework of cohesion, Tan-de Ramos (2004) examined the use of DMs in the body section of descriptive papers of Engineering and Liberal Arts students. The findings of the study showed that the Engineering students employ more addition and contrastive DMs while Liberal Arts students employ more addition, contrast, and sequence in their argumentative writings. It was concluded that students’ choice as to what appropriate DMs will use depends on the writing tasks.

Another study was conducted by Palacio and Gustilo (2016). The researchers found that a surprising number and interesting types of combined English and Filipino Relational DPs have several micro functions. Moreover, these devices having pivotal implications in the way Filipino youths convey their message, gain understanding of the message received, and build speaker-receiver relationships and attitude on Facebook are used to let the conversers send their emotions, attitudes, and relationships toward the hearer/listener. Although several research on discourse markers have been conducted, there still is a need to further research on these linguistic devices in real-life contexts in the Philippine setting to determine how Filipinos, particularly English teachers use DMs in their

everyday interaction. Since teachers are the main source of learning a language, it is necessary to investigate whether Filipino English teachers sufficiently and effectively use discourse markers in their oral communication because they play a pivotal role in an ESL class.

This present study focuses on the investigation of DMs in the conversational speech. Halliday (1989) believed that speech and writing are two different disciplines; consequently, DMs are not similar in form and use when speech and writing are compared (Flowerdew, 1994b).

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study is anchored on Brinton's model of DMs pragmatic functions. Brinton (1996) asserted that although DMs are not pragmatically optional and superfluous, they are grammatically optional and semantically empty and serve a multiplicity of pragmatic functions. She presented an inventory of pragmatic functions and grouped them into two main categories (the textual and interpersonal functions). The textual function relates to the way the speaker builds meaning as text, making cohesive passages of discourse, utilizing language relevant to the context. The interpersonal function, on the other hand, pertains to the role of the speaker and the role assigned to the hearer.

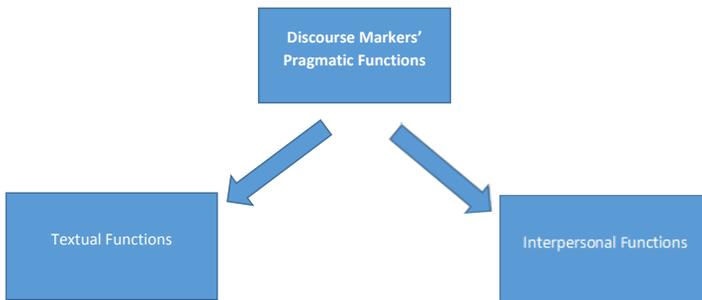


Figure 1. Pragmatic functions of discourse markers (Based on Brinton's (1996) inventory of DMs pragmatic functions)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study primarily aims to provide inputs for teachers in improving their English speaking skills with regard to the use of discourse markers. It specifically seeks to: (1) identify the commonly used lexical items that function as discourse

markers in the spoken English; (2) describe the pragmatic functions of DMs in the interpersonal and textual levels; and (3) specify the position of DMs in spoken discourse.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative in nature, this research used Discourse Analysis (DA) as an approach in analyzing the data taken from the interviews.

DA is defined as the analysis of language in use (Brown & Yule, 1983) and deals with language in use in social contexts and in particular with communication or conversation between speakers (Stubbs, 1983).

As stated above, linguistic elements in their broadest sense are included in the scope of the discourse analysis which is not limited to a sentence or a clause. Furthermore, Stubbs (1983) presented what kinds of forms that discourse analysis aims to study as in the following:

Discourse analysis attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers. (p. 1)

Similarly, Schiffrin (1987) enumerated the assumptions of discourse analysis as: 1.) *Language always occurs in a context* in which the language includes *cognitive contexts* (i.e., past experience and knowledge is stored and drawn upon) and *social contexts* (institutional and interactional orders are drawn upon to produce definitions of situation and action). 2.) *Language is context sensitive*: Language is potentially sensitive to all of the contexts in which it occurs, and, even more strongly, that language reflects those contexts because it helps to constitute them. 3.) *Language is always communicative*: Language is always communicative either because it is directed toward a recipient (immediate or eventual), because it is intended to be so directed, and/or because it is attended by a recipient. 4.) *Language is designed for communication*. Language whether written or spoken is used to communicate. Thus, language is in a change constantly to fulfill the needs of communication. (p. 4-6)

In this study, the researcher used DA to accurately gather and analyze the needed data. English teachers from different schools in Pampanga were selected to participate in the present study from November to December 2018. The participants were between the ages of 24-43 years old and are teaching in different schools in Lubao, Guagua, Sta. Rita, and City of San Fernando, Pampanga. The gender ratio of the population was 10:10 (females:males). Although Brinton (1996) noted that the use of DMs is more typical of women's speech, the gender

ratio of the sample size was not taken into consideration in the present study since it was not part of the investigation.

To guarantee the validity of the data, participants were considered according to the following criteria: (1) must be a graduate of Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English; and (2) must have been teaching English either in public or private schools for at least three years. In particular, the number of English teachers participated in the research is twenty (20).

Conducting an analysis in spoken discourse involves different methods and instruments than in written discourse. To collect the data within spoken discourse of English teachers, the interviews with Filipino English teachers were first audio-recorded in an indoor setting. An audio-recorder of quality was used for the recording of the interviews. In addition, the recorder was checked and tested before the recording sessions.

The researcher checked the quality of the recording at the end of each recording session to determine whether the recordings were comprehensible or not. This was taken into consideration to give importance for the correctness while transcribing. Then, the recordings were moved to the computer and were saved as sound files. This procedure was done to keep the recordings for backup. After saving the recorded interviews for transcription, transcribing process started.

Applying Brinton's (1996) model of DMs as a framework, the DMs were counted manually and were identified through the use of lexical and pragmatic approach. The current study was based on qualitative analysis. The transcripts were analyzed in detail as to which words were used as discourse markers. To search for these discourse markers, the functions of DMs proposed by Brinton (1996) were taken as the basis. During the analysis, extracts from the interviews were presented to show how the discourse markers were used by the participants and what pragmatic functions they serve. In sum, the researcher made use of this approach to include several functions of items to be investigated and analyzed and to present outcomes of the linguistic items from the discourse. Meanwhile, the results of the analysis were examined by an expert who has been teaching English for fifteen years and who holds Master's degree in English and is studying PhD in Linguistics at De La Salle University.

In conducting the study, the participants were asked for permission and the recordings were conducted with their consent. Furthermore, all the pertinent data gathered were made confidential and were used solely for the very purpose of writing this research. The data and name of the participants were kept secret to maintain the anonymity of their identity. More so, the interviewees were coded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the analysis of discourse markers in the research corpus are presented to identify the similarities or differences of the discourse markers and the reasons why these may occur. All these findings will be used in the interpretation process of the analysis. For these purposes, numeric tables including the items to be analyzed were developed. It is expected that these tables would definitely be helpful on the overall analysis and allow the researcher to determine the use of discourse markers among English teachers' spoken discourse.

In this part of the research, the data collected through interviews were presented, analyzed, and discussed aligned to the research objectives. In the analysis of the findings of the study, one of the important steps is to identify the words that function as discourse markers. This research is based on the DM functions proposed by Schiffrin (1987) and Brinton (1996) as stated in the review of related literature.

Based on Brinton's (1996) inventory of discourse markers, these items may also serve other functions different from their use as discourse markers. Thus, the researcher aimed to identify DMs from those items. The extracts below are given as examples from the research corpus to show how each item is distinguished:

And is one of the items to be considered in the analysis. **And** is excluded when it is used to join two or more words together as in the extract below:

*They are you know shy **and** afraid to be laughed at because we Filipinos uh are very conscious when using the language.*

In this extract, **and** is used to join the adjectives *shy* and *afraid*. Thus, it is not included in the analysis because it does not fulfill a discourse marker function. In the extract below, however, the item **and** fulfills the function of a discourse marker (used to shift the topic, to display contrast or as an additive marker before a short or long pause to add something new to the ongoing topic by joining two clauses together). In these instances, the item meets the criteria to be a discourse marker.

*English is ubiquitous... **and** we use it in almost all aspects of our everyday living, instructions found in products, road signs, etc.*

Another discourse marker to be considered in the analysis is **well**. The extract below shows the function of **well** as a discourse marker where it is used as a response or a reaction marker:

Well... *I believe not only in our school but also in uhh entire educational system particularly in our curriculum K12 wherein students you know start having uhh English subject in Grade 4. I can say this uhh based on my experience now I'm handling Grade 7 students. They can hardly follow simple instructions in English. (ET1)*

However, in the next example, the word *well* does not fulfill any DM function because it is used as an adverb. Hence, it was not included in the analysis.

*They are trying at least and at most time they are hesitant. Students you know nowadays now know the great importance of English so they are trying to speak **well** in English. (ET3)*

COMMONLY USED DISCOURSE MARKERS

Table 1 presents the most commonly used discourse markers according to the frequency of occurrences

No.	Discourse Markers	Occurrence
1	Uhh	52
2	And	46
3	Because	33
4	Yes	32
5	Well	31
6	Okay	30
7	You know	26
8	I mean/think	16
9	But	11
10	So	8
11	Then	2
12	Right	1
Total		288

The total word count of the twenty transcripts is 3, 789. From the total word count uttered by the speakers, twelve different discourse markers were determined. However, each discourse marker differs in terms of the number of occurrences.

As clearly shown above, the most commonly used item is *uhh* with 52 occurrences. Furthermore, the DM *and* is at the second rank of the list. *And* was used 46 times by the English teachers. The DM *and* is followed by the item *because* which was used 33 times; *yes* with 32 hits and *well* with 31 hits.

The item *okay* ranked 6th with 30 number of occurrences which was followed by the phrase *you know* which was occurred 26 times. The other DMs determined were *I mean/think* with 16 hits; *but* with 11 hits; *so* with eight hits; *then* with two hits and *right* with one hit.

PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS AND SYNTACTIC POSITIONS OF DISCOURSE MARKERS

Textual Functions of DMs

Table 2. Distribution of *uhh* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
Uhh	0	52	0	52

As it was mentioned above, *uhh* is the most frequently used DM in the medial position in the interviews with 52 occurrences and it is specifically used as a filler or as a delaying tactic in the conversations. For example:

*Okay, **uhh** with that we really need to intensify or **uhh** strengthen the use of English language instruction because it is already de **uhh** deteriorating in the case of the students nowadays. (ET1)*

*They fear that that others **uhh** might laugh when they commit mistakes and they were not they were not fluent enough to converse well since they **uhh** lack the basic skills. (ET2)*

*...is that English is a useful tool in **uhh** every aspect especially in dealing with professionals. (ET5)*

In the instances above, the participants used the DM *uhh* as a filler or as delaying tactics to sustain the conversation with the interviewer.

Table 3. Distribution of *and* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>And</i>	28	18	0	46

Another commonly used DM in the interviews is *and* which usually occurs in the initial position of a discourse as shown in table 3. Most of the functions of the DM *and* are related to the textual functions as it is used to show continuity and to add new information. For example:

*...communication skills is a vital tool to make connections with other parts of the world. English is ubiquitous. **And** we use it in almost all aspects of our everyday living, instructions found in products, road signs, etc. (ET2)*

*...Globalization and development will not be possible without communication. **And** English is the tool to communicate and be heard with what we like to express. (ET2)*

In the first example above, the participant adds information to the preceding utterance “*English is ubiquitous*” about the importance of communication using the DM *and*. In the second utterance, on the other hand, *and* is used by the participant to express continuity. However, *and* in the next example functions as an additive marker and a partial shift in a topic simultaneously.

*...I always make praises even for for for little improvements. **And** I motivate them by telling how being proficient in English would help them. (ET3)*

And in the extract below serves as a filler or delaying tactics used to sustain discourse or hold the floor. For example:

*...Well when the time allows (laugh). **And** I give extra minute to say...to discuss to them the basic and sometimes I insert it during the discussion. (ET8)*

There were also instances in the interviews where a participant made use of combined DMs like “*and*” and “*uhh*” as fillers or as delaying tactics as in the example below:

...want to be rather a laughing stock whenever they committed grammatical errors, **and uhh** they are not used to it. (ET9)

Table 4. Distribution of *but* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>But</i>	7	4	0	11

One of the discourse markers used by the English teachers in the interviews is *But*. The main function of *but* is to state contrasting points as in the following extract:

*Some students prefer activities in small groups, **but** some prefer big groups.* (ET18)

But in the utterance contains the contrastive relation between the two different discourse units "Some students prefer activities in small groups" and "Some prefer big groups." The significance of this DM was explained by Schiffrin (1987) as "That *but* is an adversative conjunction suggests that what follows *but* is an idea which contrasts with what has preceded" p.52. In addition, this marker is also used as a closing or opening frame marker, repair marker, turn taker, sequence marker and topic switcher. In the example below, the DM *but* is used to show denial of expectation.

*Well, I wish they could've shown interest in learning the language. **But** they are more interested in other things.* (ET11)

In the utterance above, the first discourse unit (*Well, I wish they could've shown interest in learning the language*) might lead the hearer or listener to expect something which is then denied because of the use of *but* in the second discourse unit (***But they are more interested in other things***).

Furthermore, *but* fulfills the function of initiating discourse, including claiming the attention of the hearer. For example:

*Yes. **But** we can only intensify or strengthen the English language itself by using it as...as our medium of instruction in teaching...by letting students to express themselves in the same language whenever whenever they answer.* (ET9)

Aside from initiating discourse, *but* can also be used as a closing frame marker, offering its recipient a chance to close the discourse. For example:

*Yes. How will these students learn the language or learn to speak the language if they keep on refusing to speak it? How will they be able to master the competencies? **But** what else can I do? I already did my part. (ET14)*

The utterance above shows that the speaker wants to close the discourse using the DM *but*.

Table 5. Distribution of *okay* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>Okay</i>	30	0	0	30

Another discourse marker that fulfills textual functions is *okay*. As clearly shown in the table, it was used 30 times in the initial position in the spoken discourse of the participants. *Okay* is used to indicate a new topic or to take turn. Consider the statements below:

Interviewer: *How important is the English language now in the 21st Century?*

Participant: Okay, *it is important because English is used in different forms of communication. It is used in commerce, business, and social media. (ET8)*

Interviewer: *Do you see the necessity to intensify the English language instruction in your school?*

Participant: Okay, *it is a must in in our school. The fast-growing economic atmosphere in our place or community necessitates the the need to make it more of a language of practical use. (ET3)*

In the utterances presented above, before the participants answered the questions they used the DM *okay* to give a signal to the interviewer that they are immediately ready to give their views. Thus, *okay* in these extracts is used to take turn in the conversation.

In addition, *okay* is used as an opening or closing frame marker and cooperation marker. However, these functions of *okay* were not fulfilled in the interviews. Some discourse markers, in addition, are specifically used to do the

same function (i.e., to take turn) in a conversation. This is fulfilled by the DM *well*. For example:

Interviewer: *How important is the English language now in the 21st Century?*

ET1: *Well, English language is an essential part in the 21st Century because it is a universal language... it is part of the society.*

Well in the extract above is used by the participant to take his turn to answer the given question. Thus, it fulfills a textual function in the conversation.

Table 6. Sample instances of discourse markers' textual functions in the interviews

TEXTUAL FUNCTIONS		
DMs	Functions	Instances
<i>Okay, so, but</i>	To initiate discourse	So , English is very important especially now in the 21 st century where we live in a global community and uhh communication skills is a vital tool to make connections with other part of the world. (ET20)
<i>Well, and, okay</i>	To take a turn	Well , I allow them as long as they can express what they want to say after that I'll help them translate it in English. But as much as possible I'll encourage them to speak English. (ET2)
<i>Uhh, and uhh, and</i>	To serve as a filler or delaying tactics	<i>Well</i> , in our school uhh English teachers are looking for some remedies uhh some strategies on how to strengthen the English language teaching. Most of the students you know find it hard to communicate using the English language. (ET4)
<i>And</i>	To indicate a new topic or a partial shift of topic	That's what I do in my class. And what about students' skills and abilities to do all of the activities? <i>Well</i> , it seems they are... (ET15)
<i>Because, and</i>	To denote either new or old information	<i>Well</i> I consider it a problem because confidence you know has to be established first. (ET17)
<i>Then, and</i>	To mark sequential dependence	...I allow my students to use Filipino during discussions. We had an agreement that in the first quarter of the lesson I'll allow them to speak 60% in Filipino and 30% in English. Then the percentage in speaking English increases towards the end of the school year. (ET1)

<i>I mean</i>	To repair one's own or other's discourse	<i>English has always been uhh a universal language. Everywhere we go and whatever whatever we do we shall always need to speak I mean communicate. English has always been the common ground, and it is very vital especially now in this modern world. (ET16)</i>
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As evidently shown in table 6, the textual functions of DMs are used to initiate discourse, to take a turn, to serve as a filler or delaying tactics, to indicate a new topic or a partial shift of topic, to denote either new or old information, to mark sequential dependence, and to repair one's own or other's discourse.

Interpersonal Functions

Table 7. Distribution of *you know* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>You know</i>	6	20	0	26

Discourse markers have an essential role in increasing interpersonal attitudes between the speakers and hearers or listeners in spoken discourse. They are used to mark shared knowledge between speakers. The DM *you know*, which occurs mainly in the medial position (see table 7), is one of the discourse markers that performs an interpersonal function. *You know* in the instances below was used to express sharing and cooperation between the speakers. For instance:

*...we tend uhh we need to think of ways on how to strengthen the English instruction. Some classes **you know** allow the use of Filipino even in learning areas where English must be used. (ET3)*

*...students **you know** nowadays know the great importance of English so they are trying to speak in English. (ET4)*

By using *you know*, in each extract above, the interviewee wants the hearer to accept the content of the speaker's utterance without arguing.

Table 8. Distribution of *well* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>Well</i>	31	0	0	31

Another marker that fulfills an interpersonal function is the DM *well* that is generally used in initial position of the utterances following another utterance. As displayed in table 8, it occurs 31 times. *Well* has different distinct functions such as a response/reaction marker, hesitation marker, an attitude marker, a cooperation marker and face-saver. According to Jucker (1996), *well* has four distinct uses in Modern English: as a frame marker to open a new topic or preface direct reported speech, as a qualifier, as a face-threat mitigator, and as a pause-filler. Although *well* fulfills some textual functions such as to indicate a new topic, hold the floor or to take turn, it has been observed that it also fulfills interpersonal functions.

The first function of *well* in the interpersonal level is as a response or a reaction marker to the prior discourse. In such instances, *well* shows a conversation between the speakers as in the example below:

Well...one of the reasons why students refrain from communicating in English is that they are afraid to be laughed at. Well, English is not our first language, so they are not used to it. Aside from that, lack of vocabularies is also a reason. (ET12)

In the utterance shown above, the DM *well* performs not only as a response marker but also as an attitude marker. In the first instance, it is used to express a reaction to the preceding utterance, whereas in the second instance, it is used to express the speaker's affective value to the same content.

Another use of *well* analyzed in the interviews is as an agreement or cooperation marker. The purpose of its use is to share the same points of view. Take the example below:

Well, it's perfectly true that that there are still a lot of students who uh refrain from speaking in English. I think they are afraid to commit mistakes in front of many. And they don't want to be judged for being inadequate or for using the language incorrectly. (ET15)

The speaker in the example above uses *well* to agree with the prior utterance which is "Students nowadays refrain from communicating using the

English language". The next use of *well* is as a hesitation marker (i.e., when the speaker is not immediately ready to give the response or is hesitant to tell the expected answer). For example:

Well... *I think...it is a problem. As an English teacher my goal is for my... for my students to learn the English language...And they have to apply what they have learned. And it becomes a problem because some of the students feel ashamed and afraid because others might laugh at them.* (ET9)

It can be analyzed that the speaker in the utterance above needs some time to bring together what she wants to say or is not sure about what she wants to say. For her to bridge the interactional silence, she uses the marker *well*.

Table 9. Distribution of *yes* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>Yes</i>	32	0	0	32

The next discourse marker that can fulfill the functions of back-channel signal, agreement marker, response or reaction marker, and confirmation-seeker or face-saver is *yes* which occurs 32 times in the initial position (see table 9). The extracts below show the function of the DM *yes* not only as an agreement marker but also as a response or reaction marker:

Yes. *Children start learning formal education at school that is why I think it is the primary source where children should learn English strictly provided they are proficient in their mother tongue.* (ET7)

Yes, *I consider it a problem. Refusing to speak in English would only mean that these students are not willing to practice the language that will eventually make them inefficient or not proficient in the English language.* (ET15)

Yes is used by the participants in the extracts above as a discourse marker to indicate their agreement and responses to the preceding utterance. On the other hand, another use of *yes* is as a confirmation marker as in the example below:

Interviewer: and aside from that, if they are proficient in English, they will have an opportunity to work in English-speaking countries.

Participant: Yes, because being able to use English correctly and appropriately could actually help them get a better job. (ET12)

By using the marker *yes*, the participant in the utterance above confirms shared assumptions with the other speaker.

Table 10. Distribution of *I think* in spoken discourse

Discourse marker	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
<i>I think</i>	12	4	0	16

The next commonly used DM in the interviews is *I think*. *I think* frequently occurs in initial position of the discourse. Table 10 shows the most number of occurrences of *I think* in the initial position is 12 and 4 in the medial position. In general, this DM indicates speakers' attitude to what they are saying:

I think, it is necessary to uhh build a strong foundation in teaching English not just in my school but also in other schools. I've observed that some students are still having a hard time to speak...understand uhh... construct sentences using English. (ET10)

In this extract, the speaker makes use of the marker *I think* to show her attitude to her statement. On the other hand, *I think* can sometimes be used to express hesitation. However, this function was not fulfilled in the interviews.

Table 11. Sample instances of discourse markers' interpersonal functions in the interviews

INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONS		
DMs	Functions	Instances
<i>Well, yes</i>	To express a response or a reaction	<i>Well, we need to intensify English language instruction. Globalization and development will not be possible without communication and English is the tool to communicate and be heard with what do we like to express. (ET2)</i>
<i>Well, yes</i>	To express speaker's agreement or disagreement	<i>Yes, we need to strengthen the English instruction. It will help students to improve their communication skills since...since English is a universal language. (ET10)</i>

<i>You know, yes</i>	To express sharing or cooperation	<i>Well, honestly as much as I want to but it doesn't work especially in the public school. Sometimes no students you know want to raise their hands to answer... you just have to call their name or force them to answer. At the end, you tell them to try expressing themselves in English they will end up using Tagalog. The sad thing is they know the answer and they will remain silent because they can't express in the language they want. (ET9)</i>
<i>Right</i>	To save face or to seek confirmation	<i>I think Filipinos must develop oral communication. It's the universal language, right? (ET6)</i>
<i>I think, well</i>	To express speaker's attitude	<i>I think Filipinos must develop oral communication. It's the universal language, right? (ET6)</i>
<i>Well</i>	To express speaker's hesitation	<i>Well, I think... peer and teacher pressure is a factor. They assume that that they will be laughed at and be humiliated. When they do not feel confident in speaking they keep themselves quiet. (ET6)</i>

Table 11 provides the summary of the interpersonal functions of discourse markers in the interviews. As clearly shown in the table, the DMs interpersonal functions are: to express a response or reaction, to express speaker's agreement or disagreement, to express sharing or cooperation, to save face or to seek confirmation, to express speaker's attitude, and to express speaker's hesitation.

Overall, the functions discussed in the interviews are both textual and interpersonal. The textual functions of DMs are used to open or close discourse, to sustain discourse or hold the floor, to mark sequence or to repair the discourse while the interpersonal functions of DMs are more related to the reactions, responses and relations between the participants. The analysis also reveals that the initiality and multifunctionality of discourse markers are evident in the findings. As regards the position, DMs are frequently occurred in the initial position of the discourse (initiality) and fulfil more than one function in contexts (multifunctionality). Table 12 displays the number of occurrences of the DMs (both textual and interpersonal levels) used by the participants in the initial, medial, and final positions. As clearly shown below, most DMs were used initially by the English teachers in the interviews which validates Muller's (2005) study on the positioning of DMs where he found that DMs are commonly placed in the initial position of the discourse with 169 occurrences. On the other hand, the speakers used DMs in the medial position with 118 occurrences and only one DM was used in the final position.

Table 12. Summary distribution of DMs syntactic positions

DMs	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
Uhh	0	52	0	52
And	28	18	0	46
because	19	14	0	33
Yes	32	0	0	32
Well	31	0	0	31
Okay	30	0	0	30
You know	6	20	0	26
I think/mean	12	4	0	16
but	7	4	0	11
So	2	6	0	8
Then	2	0	0	2
Right	0	0	1	1
Total	169	118	1	288

This result of the study reveals that *initiality* is one of the most noticeable features of discourse markers in spoken interactions. The tendency of DMs to take place utterance initially is predominant. Nevertheless, DMs can appear as well utterance medially and sentence finally with functions essentially equal to those they serve initially (Schourup 1999). However, the initial position of DMs provides DMs a wide scope over the entire sentence or utterance to effect hearer's interpretation of the things that follow (Al Kohlani, 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

As an overall finding of this research, it can be noted that the frequently used discourse markers by the participants are *uhh, because, yes, well, okay*, etc. listed in the table of the most recurrent items utilized by the English teachers in their oral communication. The analyses of DMs used by the English teachers reveal that they fulfill both textual and interpersonal functions. However, it was also found that DMs are multifunctional and they work for both textual and interpersonal functions. This was supported by Castro and Marcela's (2009) study on discourse markers' multifunctionality where she found that DMs used by the participants serve several functions in utterances. In summary, the findings show that although English teachers have a remarkable tendency of using discourse markers in their spoken discourse, they do not use a variety of discourse markers.

In other words, English teachers tend to use less frequently the kind of discourse markers that native speakers use mainly in interpersonal and textual categories. The participants also overused some DMs like *uhh*, *and*, *because*, and *yes*.

As Müller (2005) claimed, discourse markers play a pivotal role in the pragmatic competence of the speaker and add to the pragmatic meaning of utterances. Hence, to become effective and competent speakers, second language learners should be communicatively and pragmatically competent within the target language. Learning the range and functions of discourse markers is pedagogically significant among nonnative speakers since native speakers of English have discourse-pragmatic competence as regards the use of DMs for several functions in conversations. Therefore, there is a necessity to integrate the use of discourse markers in language teaching. Fung and Carter (2007) stressed that “the restricted range of discourse markers used and the frequency of particular markers reflect the unnatural linguistic input ESL learners are exposed to and the traditional grammar centered pedagogic focus which has been geared towards the literal or propositional (semantic) meanings of words rather than their pragmatic use in spoken language”. In other words, ESL learners should be exposed to the pragmatic functions of DMs to attain pragmatic-competence in spoken discourse. Since the participants in the study are English teachers, they must be aware of the types of DMs and their pragmatic functions. Thus, they also play a significant role in making learners aware of the variety of discourse markers and their pragmatic functions. Their use of discourse markers during interactions and activities can be a model for the learners. To make these suggestions possible, the Department of Education should include lessons on the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in the curriculum particularly in textbooks.

Generally, DMs have fundamental implications for establishing speaker-listener relationship and for English language teaching since discourse markers are now considered among the significant linguistic elements in spoken English discourse as they function for various purposes and activate discourse-pragmatic competence of the speakers. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should highlight them in language instruction to increase learners’ awareness about the DMs functions and their various types to enhance their fluency to have pragmatic competence in communication. Furthermore, since this study is limited only to the discourse markers used by English teachers in an interview setting, future research could focus on different settings like classroom settings or lectures.

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