In the name of God

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Abstract

Nowadays, the notion of pragmatics is gaining more and more prominence among language learners. The ability to provide sufficient discourse markers in different genres may be considered as an indicator of pragmatic competency. Discourse markers are not randomly assigned to sentences, but are appropriately used only under precise and well-defined conversational conditions. These conversational conditions may comprise a specific genre that in turn may lead to specific employment of different discourse markers. Bearing this in mind, this study opted to find out whether different film genres employ discourse markers differently with regard to the type of markers preferred, their frequency, and distribution. To this end, the study drew upon a corpus of 15 films pertaining to the three genres of action, comedy, and romance to see whether there were any statistically significant differences in the use of discourse markers. Biber's classification of discourse markers was adopted as a means of analyzing the discourse markers employed in each genre. The results indicated a relationship between discourse marker use and genres in the sense that different film genres led to a different distribution of each discourse marker type. In addition, the results of the Chi-square test revealed a significant difference in discourse marker use according to each specific genre, which was further supported by the strength of association tests. The findings of this study could raise the awareness of syllabus writers and teachers towards the different kinds of discourse markers used in different genres and as a result, enable them to design more effective pedagogic tasks for enhancing the learners' capacity in performing more effectively in speaking activities by making the learners' speech more intelligible for their conversational partners in a specific genre.

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List of Abbreviations

CS   Communication Strategy

DM   Discourse Marker

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

ESP   English for Specific Purposes

FL   Foreign Language

L1   First Language

L2   Second Language

NL   Native Language

NNS   Non – Native Speaker

NS   Native Speaker

SPSS   Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

Since the 1980's, many researchers have contributed to the systematization of English language discourse markers, providing conversational conditions likely to surround different markers. Fraser (1990) considers DMs as belonging to "well-defined pragmatic categories" (p. 383). Occasionally, researchers have assigned broad semantic definitions to individual DMs in an attempt to lexicalize them. This has created debate between the pragmatic and semantic approaches, given that a distinct lexical category and definitions for DMs would regularize them as a component of language.

Providing sufficient DMs in different genres may be considered as an indicator of pragmatic competency. Genre is a ubiquitous phenomenon common to all instances of discourse (Neale, 2000, p. 2), which justifies the interest in this topic at different levels. The narrative genre of discourse is useful for determining the competencies through which the participants conjointly accomplish meaningful communication with the resources, however seemingly imperfect at their disposal (Firth & Wagner, 1997).

According to Lakoff (1973, p. 462), DMs are "not randomly assigned to sentences, but are appropriately used only under precise and well-defined conversational conditions". These conversational conditions may comprise a specific genre that in turn may lead to specific employment of different discourse markers.

1.1 Background of the study

Despite the wealth of information, there is relatively little consensus as to the definition of the term "discourse marker". Discourse markers (DMs) are syntactically independent fragments that serve pragmatic functions in discourse. DMs are considered "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31) and also "lexical expressions…which have a general core meaning which signals the relationship of the current utterance to the prior discourse" (Fraser, 1988, p. 27). The term 'Multifunctional' may be applied to DMs to encompass the many functions they serve, from sequencing and transitioning to providing pause within discourse.

This multi-functionality of DMs may prove fruitful in stages of discourse defining a specific genre. The study of genre within systemic functional linguistics has concentrated on structural characterizations through genre staging. Stages are the constitutive elements of a genre, which follow each other in a predetermined fashion, specific to each genre. The most basic structure of a genre is its division into beginning, middle, and end (Eggins, 1994; Stenström, 1994). Eggins (1994, p. 37) characterizes the staging, or schematic structure of a genre, "as a description of the parts that form the whole, and how the parts relate to each other".

Bruti and Perego (2008) investigated the function of vocatives as a subtype of discourse markers over different film genres with the aim to investigate the various roles vocatives played in the construction of the narrative according to the different needs that different film genres aimed to fulfill. Film and genre have recently been analyzed by various authors and from different perspectives, as the recent wide-ranging literature in the field demonstrates (Altman, 1999; Kozloff, 2000; Neale, 2000; Frezza, 2001; Aimeri & Frasca, 2002; Campari, 2002; Eugeni & Farinotti, 2002).

Although, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there is no sufficient study investigating the presence of all types of discourse markers and their distribution in film genres. In order to accomplish this, the researcher draws on a corpus of 15 films pertaining to the three genres of action, comedy, and romance to see whether there are any statistically significant differences in the use of DMs.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

A successful communication is one achieves its communicative goals. Interlocutors are not only engaged in presenting the propositional content, but they are also concerned with presenting this content in a way that fulfills their communicative intentions. Discourse markers are essential tools for achieving communicative goals. Although they are considered semantically and grammatically optional, they are pragmatically obligatory tools for speech processing.

Therefore, studying the function of discourse markers as elements that ensure the acceptability, naturalness, and effectiveness of a speech is indispensable. However, while studying how these elements function in speech, it seems even more important to study them across a variety of different genres. Different genres employ discourse markers differently whether with regards to the type of markers preferred, their frequency, or distribution.

Despite the extensive use of discourse markers, there are very few studies that are devoted to the study of these items in film genres. This means that a systematic treatment of discourse markers as a discourse phenomenon in various film genres is almost absent. As a means of addressing this gap, the present study examines discourse markers from a systemic functional grammar (SFG) perspective in three genres, that is, action, comedy, and romance. The current study is different from the other studies in that all types of DMs adopted from Biber's (1999) classification have been considered in the analysis of film genres rather than only one type.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

Increasing knowledge about the use of various discourse markers in different genres can help syllabus designers to focus on those genres which seem to be problematic for the students in both comprehending a film and speaking according to a specific context of speech.

Teaching discourse markers to the students can help them become armed with the knowledge they need in order to speak more coherently and can also lead to a better understanding of their interlocutors' speech. Comparing the different genres due to their discourse marker employment can also raise the students' critical awareness towards these genres and in turn cause them to become critical thinkers.

1.4. Research Questions

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ (1): What types of discourse markers are frequently used in action, comedy, and romance genres?

RQ (2): Is there a relationship regarding discourse marker employment across action, comedy, and romance genres?

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship regarding discourse marker employment across action, comedy, and romance genres.

Alterative Hypothesis: There is a relationship regarding discourse marker employment across action, comedy, and romance genres.

1.5. Definition of key terms

Before proceeding into the literature on the issue investigated in this study, it seems necessary to digress for a moment to clarify some of terminology which is crucial to the discussion and which is used extensively throughout the thesis.

➢ **Genre:** The organization of any speech activity in stages, determined by the overall purpose of the genre and by social conventions (as cited in Taboda, 2006).

➢ **Action genre**: This genre typically involve portrayals of main characters engaged in a series of dramatic, dangerous events involving narrow escapes, fights, or rescues, all filmed in a face-paced style that keeps audiences wondering if the hero or heroine will make it out alive at the end of the film (Welsh, 2000).

➢ **Comedy genre:** Comedy films are designed to elicit laughter from the audience. Comedies are light-hearted dramas, crafted to amuse, entertain, and provoke enjoyment. The comedy genre humorously exaggerates the situation, the language, action, and characters (Hartley, 2001).

➢ **Romance genre:** Romance films are love stories, or affairs of the heart that center on passion, emotion, and the romantic, affectionate involvement of the main characters (usually a leading man and lady), and the journey that their love takes through courtship or marriage. Romance films make the love story or the search for love the main plot focus (Welsh, 2000).

➢ **Discourse marker:** Discourse marker is a word or phrase which links clauses or sentences by signaling relations between them (Hutchinson, 2004).

➢ **Coherence**

: Coherence is an umbrella term for many aspects, such as the sequencing of events covered in the text, completeness of the actions or concepts laid out in it and whether the text conforms to what we would expect from a piece of writing belonging to a given genre (Pearson & Pennock-Speck, 2005).

1.6. The organization of the study

In addition to this chapter, which is the whole study in a miniature fashion and which covers the background of the study, the significance of the study, research questions, and definition of key terms, this study has been organized into four other chapters.

Chapter Two: Review of the related literature

A thorough review of the related literature is presented here. It begins with a broad review of the definition of genres and the stages included in each genre from a systemic functional linguistics point of view. The review is then narrowed down by means of attending to issues such as different approaches to genre analysis, which in turn are followed by the definition of film genres and the characteristics of the main film genres (that is, comedy, romance, and action) which are the focus of this study. In the next part, different classifications regarding discourse markers are presented. Finally, some related studies regarding discourse markers in various genres are given.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter begins with the restatement of the research questions. Other factors underlying this study are discussed under the rubrics of design of the study, materials, and categories of analysis, respectively. Last but not least, the procedures carried out in this study are disclosed, to provide a better vision on what is going on and what to expect.

Chapter Four: Data analysis & Results

The results and findings of the study in terms of research questions are presented here. Descriptive and inferential statistics are adopted throughout this chapter as means of addressing the research questions. In addition some useful tables and figures are provided.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses the results and some possible answers for the research questions will be presented regarding the results of the study. There is a more in-depth qualitative discussion and interpretations of the results and possible reasons for the obtained results will be discussed and then discussion of pedagogical implications and also the limitations of the study are included. Finally, some suggestions for further research will be made at the end.

1.7. Chapter summary

In this chapter, in order to present a general view of the study, a brief background concerning the importance of using discourse markers in various genres was presented. Then, the importance and the purpose of conducting this study and the gap in the literature that it attempted to fill were also mentioned. After that, the two research questions were presented in a separate section. In addition, the key words which are used very frequently in this study were described very briefly and at the end of this chapter the overall organization of different parts and sections of the study were pointed out.

Chapter Two

Review of the Related Literature

2.0. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide both a theoretical background and a rational for the present study. At the outset it begins with a broad review of the definition of genres and the stages included in each genre from a systemic functional linguistics point of view. The review is then narrowed down by means of attending to issues such as different approaches to genre analysis, which in turn are followed by the definition of film genres and the characteristics of the main film genres (that is, comedy, romance, and action) which are the focus of this study. In the next part, different classifications regarding discourse markers are presented. Finally, some related studies regarding discourse markers in various genres are given.

2.1. Defining genre

Most definitions of genre establish a connection with Mikhail Bahktin's work. For Bakhtin (1986, p. 60, as cited in Taboada, 2011) language is realized through individual concrete utterances by participants in the various areas of human activity:

> Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres.

In the Hallidayan tradition, this relationship between human activity and language is portrayed as one between context and text. The idea of a relationship between context and text was first formalized in the concept of *register*. Halliday, MacIntosh, and Strevens used register to refer to "a variety, according to use in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and chooses between them at different times" (Halliday et al. 1964, p. 77).

A register is constituted by the linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features, classified in values of the field, mode, and tenor of the text's context of situation. Field refers to what is going on; the area of operation of the language activity. It describes the inherent features of the situation and the event taking place, with an emphasis on institutional areas of activity.

Tenor refers to the relations among the participants, to the extent that they affect and determine features of the language. In the category of tenor we include degrees of formality, the roles played by the participants and the focus of the activity. *Mode* of discourse is the function of the text in the event. Mode typically describes the channel of communication (spoken or written), the degree of spontaneity between extempore and prepared, together with the amount and type of feedback possible (see Taboada, 2011).

In summary, register captures aspects of the language that are defined by the situation, what is taking place, who is taking part, and what part the language is playing along with the words and structures used in the realization of those meanings. The three elements that realize context are linked to the linguistic system in the Hallidayan model. Field, tenor, and mode have direct realizations through the metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Thus, field is realized through the ideational metafunction, tenor through the interpersonal metafunction, and mode through the textual metafunction (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Halliday et al. 1964).

Register places emphasis on the context of situation, as defined by the field, tenor, and mode variables. It does not account for the relationship of language to the context of culture, which is the realm of genre. The widely quoted definition by Martin (1984, p. 25) is that genre is "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture."

The study of genre within systemic functional linguistics has concentrated on structural characterizations through genre staging. Stages are the constitutive elements of a genre, which follow each other in a predetermined fashion, specific to each genre. The most basic structure of a genre is its division into beginning, middle, and end (Eggins, 1994; Stenstrom, 1994). Eggins (1994, p. 37) characterizes the staging, or schematic structure of a genre, "as a description of the parts that form the whole, and how the parts relate to each other. This is achieved following both formal and functional criteria".

The definition of genre followed in this study is one where genre is primarily a structurally determining characteristic of texts. A given text is perceived as belonging to a genre because of its structural characteristics, that is, its staging. For that recognition to happen there must be established consensus that certain texts develop in a certain series of stages (see Taboada, 2003).