How Competent are Zambian ESL Learners in the use of Discourse Markers in English? Evidence from Selected Grade Twelve Pupils in Kitwe District

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Abstract: *The role of discourse markers (DMs) in English text production and comprehension has long been recognized to the extent that in Zambia, where English is taught and used as second language (ESL), these linguistic entities constitute specific teaching/learning topics at both Junior and Senior Secondary School levels in the country. The expectation is that by the end of Senior Secondary School pupils are able to use these units competently resulting in the production of coherent pieces of discourse. The purpose of this study was to examine competence in the use of DMs in composition writing by a sample of 150 Grade Twelve (G12) ESL learners selected from three secondary schools in Kitwe district, Zambia in the 2014 academic year. The data were collected from 300 scripts comprising two samples of written pieces of discourse produced by each of the 150 pupils. The researcher employed descriptive research design with text analysis as specific research approach based on the perspective of written discourse as rule-structured object or product of a completed activity. A four-stage qualitative approach was applied in data analysis, guided by Fraser's (1999) taxonomy of discourse markers, involving marking and scoring out of 20 each of the 300 scripts, locating the DMs used in each of the 300 scripts, classifying each of the DMS according to its communicative function as either propositional or non-propositional and, finally, identification and cataloguing of instances of inappropriate uses of DMs as reflection of the challenges experienced. The findings indicate that participants experience a multiplicity of challenges in the use of DMs. The study concluded with specific recommendations for both pedagogy and further research.*

Keywords: *ESL, Writing, Competence, Discourse Markers, Pupils*

1. INTRODUCTION

Swan and Smith (2005) define a discourse marker as "a word or expression which shows the connection between what is being said and the wider context." This definition entails that such linguistic units either connect a sentence to what comes before or after it or indicate a speaker's attitude to what he or she is saying thereby promoting textual cohesion and enhancing discourse coherence and comprehensibility. The perspective held by Swan and Smith finds support in Kopple (1985) who points out that discourse markers are linguistic items which appear both in spoken and written language and help the listener or reader organize, interpret and evaluate the information. Building on Kopple's perspective Blakemore (1992: 177) states that "every speaker must make some decision about what to make explicit and what to leave implicit, and that every speaker must make a decision about the extent to which he should use the linguistic form of his utterance to guide the interpretation process." The observation made by Blackmore is as applicable to spoken discourse as it is to written discourse. It is the case that discourse markers signal the listener or reader of continuity in text or the relationship between the preceding and the following text. They guide the reader to predict the direction of the flow of discourse, linking the various text elements. This observation might explain why Brown and Levinson (1987) cited in Barnabas & Adamu (2012) state that skilful use of discourse markers often indicates a higher level of fluency and an ability to produce and understand authentic language. Similarly, Litman (1996) cited by Barnabas and Adamu (2012) states that discourse markers are linguistic devices available for a writer to structure a discourse by

signalling to the reader the relationship between the current and the preceding discourse. In this regard, as stated by Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002) and Sperber and Wilson (1995), discourse markers impose constraints on the implicatures the hearer can draw from the discourse and that discourse without discourse markers is open to more than one type of implicature which might result in misunderstanding. According to Fraser (1990: 302) "a discourse marker is a lexical expression which signals the relation of either contrast (James is fat **but** Mary is thin), implication (John is here, **so** we can start the party), or elaboration (John went home. **Furthermore**, he took his toys) between the interpretation of segment two and segment one." In composition writing DMs are linking words that may be described as the 'glue' that binds together a piece of writing, making the different parts of the text 'stick together' Gerard (2010). By grammatical category, there are three types of discourse markers: conjunctions (such as *and, yet*), adverbs (such as *however*, *consequently* and *moreover*) and prepositional phrases (such as '*in contrast*', '*in any case*', '*in spite of*', '*in addition*' and '*on the other hand*'). Appropriate utilization of DMs enables writers to organise and present their written pieces of discourse in a cohesive and coherent manner by giving guidance to an audience (reader) as to what the writer's intentions and attitudes are regarding the text. Therefore, failure to use or inappropriate use of DMs, has the potential to lead to discourse incomprehensibility.

The theoretical status of DMs has been explained from two related perspectives: the coherence-based approach and the relevance-theoretic account. Within coherence theory it is asserted that one of the characteristics of coherent texts is the presence of a definable set of coherence relations whose recovery or recognition is essential for comprehension. In this regard, the function of DMs or 'cue phrases', as they are sometimes called, is to make such coherence relations explicit (Mann and Thompson, 1986; Fraser, 1990, 1999; Sanders, Spooren and Noordman, 1993; Knott and Dale, 1994; Hovy and Maier, 1994). The understanding is that the explicit presence of coherence relations in a piece of discourse requires equally the explicit presence of linguistic items through which such relations are realised. Consequently, knowledge and correct use of such linguistic units would enhance discourse coherence while lack of knowledge and incorrect use would obscure discourse coherence. Within relevance theory, the most influential point of view on DMs is held by Blakemore (1987) who states that hearers (and readers) interpret information by searching for relevance. According to Blakemore, connectives, also known as discourse markers, contribute essentially to the interpretation process. From this theoretical perspective, connectives are considered signals which, in spoken and written pieces of discourse, the speaker and the writer respectively use to guide cooperatively both the hearer's and the reader's interpretative process. It is the case, therefore, that Discourse Markers constitute one of the linguistic devices the sender may use to unambiguously guide the receiver as to the intended interpretation of a given set of propositions. More specifically, these elements constrain the relevant context for the interpretation of an utterance, reinforcing some inferences while eliminating others thereby facilitating appropriate processing of information.

The two perspectives are more complementary than mutually exclusive. On both accounts DMs have a constraining function. For coherence theorists DMs constrain the relational propositions which express the coherence relations the receiver needs to recover in order to interpret a given piece of discourse. For relevance theorists DMs constrain the interpretation process by guiding the receiver towards the intended context and contextual effects. On both the coherence-based approach and the relevance-theoretic account DMs play a facilitating role. Therefore, the present study applied both theories in interpreting the use of DMs by Grade 12 ESL learners under investigation. Since DMs facilitate communication, it is logical to suppose that the lack of DMs in an ESL learner's written composition, or their inappropriate use, could hinder successful communication or lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, ESL learners must learn to signal the relations of their propositions to those which precede and follow. Additionally, in terms of communicative competence, ESL learners must competently employ the appropriate DMs if they are to communicate effectively.

Arising from the two theoretical approaches presented earlier, Fraser's (1999: 946-950) taxonomy of DMs was selected as framework for the identification and analysis of the DMs in Grade 12 ESL learners' pieces of written composition. In his 1999 paper Fraser defines DMs as a pragmatic class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials and prepositional phrases which are used for signalling the relationship between the interpretation of the

segment they introduce (S2) and the prior segment (S1). Fraser (1999) classifies discourse makers into two categories: propositional and non-propositional. Propositional discourse markers are used to relate the propositions or messages of the sentences while non-propositional discourse markers are used to signal aspects of discourse structure or topic like organization and management. The propositional discourse markers are sub-classified into contrastive, collateral, inferential and causal markers. The non-propositional discourse markers are identified as discourse structure markers, topic change markers and discourse activity markers. Table 1 below illustrates the two categories of DMs according to Fraser (1999).

Table1. *Fraser's (1999) Categories of Discourse Markers*

Discourse Markers	
Propositional Discourse Markers	**Non-Propositional Discourse Markers**
1. Collateral (Elaborative) Discourse Markers	1. Discourse Structure Markers
2. Inferential Discourse Markers	2. Topic Change Markers
3. Contrastive Discourse Markers	3. Discourse Activity Markers
4. Causative Discourse Markers	

Table 1 above illustrates the two categories of discourse markers identified by Fraser (1999). Propositional discourse markers relate propositions at the sentence level while non-propositional discourse markers contribute to the organisation of discourse in terms of thematic progression. When used correctly, these two categories of discourse markers greatly enhance discourse cohesion and coherence resulting in discourse comprehensibility.

In Zambia, English has remained the official language at national level since independence. In addition, until 2014, it was also the only official language of classroom instruction from Grade One to the higthest level of education following official proclamation by the Ministry of Education in 1965. However, since 2014 familiar local languages are also being used for literacy, numeracy and as media of classroom instruction in all subjects until Grade Four. During this period, English is taught as one of the subjects. From Grade Five on, English is introduced as medium of instruction while, at the same time, both the familiar local languages and English continue being taught as subjects. As a result of Government decisions, English is required to be used as the only medium of instruction in all forms of post primary education in Zambia, in parliament, for the administration of the country, for all national and international official communication and in the more important commercial and industrial sectors. Further, English is the only official language that is enshrined in the Zambian Constitution, and is perceived by many as a passport to upward socio-economic mobility (Sekeleti, 1983). There are also seven Zambian languages which enjoy official status at regional level. These are: Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga. They are used for certain official purposes such as literacy campaigns, broadcasting and the dissemination of official information. As officially stipulated, Bemba is required to be used in the Luapula, Northern, Muchinga, Copperbelt and Central Province: Kabwe, Mkushi and Serenje; Nyanja in Lusaka and Eastern Provinces; Tonga in Southern Province and part of the Central Province: Kabwe and Mumbwa; Lozi in the Western Province and Livingstone (in Southern Province); Kaonde chiefly in the Solwezi and Kasempa districts; Lunda mainly in the Mwinilunga, Chizela, and parts of Kabompo districts and Luvale principally in Zambezi and parts of Kabompo districts in the North-western Province. In the school curriculum, the seven regional official Zambian languages are taught only as school subjects in prescribed regions of the country. It is the case, therefore, that in Zambia, English as second language (ESL) is taught as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum and is considered the determining subject for certification purposes at both primary and secondary eduction levels. To this end, English is considered to be an essential or indispensable language that learners should master if their success in secondary and tertiary education is be assured. Inevitably, such masterly is expected to include the appropriate use of DMs. In order to underscore the role of DMs in English text production and comprehension, these linguistic entities constitute specific teaching/learning topics at both Junior and Senior Secondary School levels in the country. The expectation is that by the end of Senior Secondary

School pupils are able to use these units competently resulting in the production of coherent pieces of discourse.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the Junior Secondary School English Language Syllabus, by the end of Grade Nine, learners are expected to have mastered the use of DMs to enhance discourse coherence. The use of these elements is consolidated further from Grade Ten to Grade Twelve on the expectation that by the end of Grade Twelve the pupils should be able to write coherently with the aid of the appropriate discourse markers as they prepare themselves for entry into tertiary education institutions. However, this is not the case as every year Chief examiners of 'O' level English composition point out a number of concerns regarding the quality of written pieces of composition produced by the Grade Twelve learners. Most notable of these are limited vocabulary, inadequate rhetorical organisation and poor or inadequate use of discourse markers. To date, there is inadequate information on competency in the use of discourse markers by Grade Twelve pupils to enhance discourse coherence. Stated as a question the problem under investigation is: how competent are Grade Twelve pupils in the use of discourse markers in written discourse to enhance discourse coherence?

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Arising from the problem stated above, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

(i) What discourse markers do Grade Twelve ESL learners use in their written pieces of English composition?

(ii) What communicative functions do the discourse markers used by Grade Twelve ESL learners in their written pieces of English composition serve?

(iii) How do the discourse markers used by Grade Twelve ESL learners in their written pieces of English composition enhance discourse coherence?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies have been conducted on discourse markers under English as Foreign Language (EFL), English as Second Language (ESL) and English as First Language (L1) settings. Some of these have provided evidence that there is a strong relationship between use of discourse markers and coherence, others have indicated that overall there is no statistically significant relationship while yet others have outlined instances of inappropriate use of DMs resulting in the production of incoherent pieces of discourse. It was not the intention of the present study to undertake an exhaustive review of all such studies but to sample only those which were considered to be of direct relevance to the present task.

Most notable of DM studies on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) included Martinez (2004), Feng (2010) who revealed that due to misuse or inappropriate use of discourse markers, students' articles became less cohesive and coherent. The study by Kalajahi et. al (2012) study revealed that the more DMs were employed, the higher the score the written scripts attained. On the other hand, Narita, *et. al* (2004) revealed the prominence of overuse of *in addition, of course, moreover,* and *first,* while there was an apparent under-use of the logical connectors such as *and instead, then* and *yet* and concluded that the influence of L1 transfer on the learners' use of conjunctions remained indefinite. The study by Lai (2008) revealed that even though the participants used conjunctions appropriately, they committed errors in utilising some conjunctions (*therefore, furthermore, in other words, besides, nevertheless, by contrast, on the contrary, because*) in their writing. Further, the study by Jalilifar (2008) indicated that the informants utilized a variety of DMs and that there was a positive relationship between writing experience and appropriate use of discourse markers. The study by Djigunovic and Vickov (2010) provided evidence that the learners tended to use a relatively small range of English DMs and identified L1 interference and inadequate input, as possible causes of low acquisition of English DMs. Daif-Allah and Albesher (2013) observed that the students overused the additive connectors followed by the causative, the contrastive and the illustrative ones and that students' use of DMs was too limited and the ones that were most frequently used were *and*, *in addition* and *for example* and that there was a positive and direct relationship between test scores and the use of discourse markers. A review of studies on discourse markers as used by English Language learners in EFL settings as

presented above was necessary for the present study for a number of reasons. Firstly, none of the studies was conducted in an ESL setting indicating knowledge gap in this respect. Secondly none of the studies was based on data from a secondary school environment thereby indicating another knowledge gap. Finally, none of the studies was based on the Zambian context, which was another knowledge gap.

Most notable of DM studies on English as Second Language (ESL) include Kamali and Noori (2015) whose findings revealed that teaching DMs to students enhances their awareness and sensitivity of discourse and subsequently sharpens their writing skills and recommended that more attention should be paid to the teaching of DMs to learners. Another study conducted by Alghamdi (2014) showed that correct use and frequency of discourse markers were key indicators of the quality of ESL writing. A study by Chen (2015) revealed that the learners under investigation tended to initiate propositions with, *in my opinion* a as commitment to an important idea, with *I think* while expressing an attitude toward the topic in question, and *so* as an explanation or conclusion to the issue under discussion. These tendencies were attributed to students' lack of knowledge about rhetorical structures and conventions associated with English academic writing and as a result of L1 interference. The study recommended explicit instruction on rhetorical structures and conventions of academic writing to L2 learners. Studies on discourse markers as used by English Language learners in ESL settings were also considered important for the investigation because they were based on data collected from post-secondary education users of English outside Zambia.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Participants

The researcher considered all the 2014 Grade Twelve ESL learners in the study sites as constituting the study population. These sites were three secondary schools in Kitwe district, Zambia. The selection of the three schools was purposively done on the basis that the schools had adequate numbers of classes in terms of male and female ESL learners as the schools comprised one co-education and two single sex schools. The Grade level of the participants was also purposively sampled because the researcher sought to make inferences on whether or not the discourse markers Grade Twelve ESL learners had mastered at this stage in their education were adequate to enable them produce coherent pieces of discourse. From the total population of the 2014 Grade 12 ESL learners at each of the three schools, a sample of one hundred and fifty (150) learners participated in the study, 50 drawn from each of the three schools. The three schools were purposively selected while simple random sampling was used to select the classes from which the pupils were drawn.

5.2. Data Generation

In order to generate data for the study, the researcher employed descriptive research design with text analysis as specific research approach based on the perspective of written discourse as rule-structured object or product of a completed activity (Hyland, 2016). Each of the 150 learners was asked to write two pieces of composition in English: one being the *free style* narrative type and the other being the *guided* comparative/contrastive type. The two tasks were prescribed in accordance with the requirements of the school curriculum in that ESL learners at senior level are required to write two pieces of composition in Paper 1, one from Section 1 and the other from Section 2, respectively. The questions that were included required the participants to express themselves in naturally-occurring language as expected in a classroom environment based on the format of the final Grade Twelve English Composition examination which the pupils were scheduled to write later in the year.

Data were generated through the analysis of 300 composition scripts produced by the 150 Grade Twelve ESL learners in the English Language Paper 1 End of Term 1 Test in the research areas. The test was prepared and administered by the researcher with the permission of subject teachers from the three schools under a controlled environment in order to ensure none of the 2014 Grade 12 ESL learner from study areas had prior access to the task or extra time. The candidates were given one hour forty-five minutes to answer the questions as required of them in the final Grade 12 examination setting. This was done to ensure uniformity in content. The 300 scripts were analysed to find out the

discourse markers the learners employed in composition writing and whether or not the application of these features enhanced or obscured discourse coherence.

5.3. Data Analysis

A four-stage qualitative approach was applied in data analysis. The first involved marking and scoring out of 20 each of the 300 scripts. The scores were useful in assessing the link between use of DMs and discourse coherence and comprehensibility. The average performance of the pupils in the two tasks is indicated in Table 2 below.

Table2. *Average Scores of the Learners in the Two Pieces of Composition*

Average Score out of 20	%	No. of pupils' Scripts	%
16	80	20	06
15	75	14	05
14	70	20	07
13	65	17	06
12	60	31	10
11	55	15	05
10	50	35	12
Total		152	51
Below 10	Below 50%	148	49
Grand Total		**300**	**100**

Table 2 above shows that only 51 % of the pupils' scripts scored above 50%. The rest, 49%, scored below 50% which is below the credit level band under the Examinations Council of Zambia GCE grading scale. The low scores were due to a combination of both limited and inappropriate use of discourse markers.

The second comprised locating the DMs used in each of the 300 scripts and highlighting them by means of a highlighter. Thirdly, each of the DMs was classified according to its communicative function as either propositional or non-propositional. The categorisation was based on Halliday and Hassan (1976) and Frazer (1999). Finally, identification and cataloguing of instances of appropriate and inappropriate uses of DMs was done. Appropriate use, as evaluated by the researcher, constituted manifestation of competence in the utilisation of discourse markers while inappropriate use implied lack of competence. Enumeration of the occurrences of the various types of DMs was also conducted to determine the frequency with which each of the DMs was used.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study catalogued and exemplified instances of competence in the use of discourse markers in the written pieces of composition produced by Grade 12 ESL learners investigated. Two categories of discourse markers were identified as enhancing discourse coherence, when appropriately used, and therefore as indicators of competence in the use of DMs to enhance discourse comprehensibility. These are the propositional discourse markers and the non-propositional discourse markers. Four types of propositional discourse markers were identified, these include: inferential, contrastive or adversative, elaborative or additive and causal or causative discourse markers. Three non-propositional discourse markers were identified and these are the discourse structure markers, discourse activity markers and discourse change or relating markers.

6.1. Propositional Discourse Markers

Competence in the use of propositional DMs deals with the extent to which DMs are appropriately employed to perform their pragmatic and semantic functions. Table 3 below presents the classification

of the four types of propositional DMs which, when appropriately used, enhance discourse comprehensibility.

Table3. *Classification of Propositional Discourse Markers by Function*

Function	Types of Propositional Discourse Markers			
	Elaborative	Contrastive	Inferential	Causal
To Compare		in comparison (with/to this/that), whereas, on the other hand, on the one hand		
Making Differences Between Two Different Things, People or Ideas		but, yet, however, (al)though, in contrast (with/to this/that), on the contrary (to this/that), conversely, instead (of (doing) (this/that), despite (doing) (this/that), in spite of (doing) this/that, nevertheless nonetheless, still		
Cause				because, because of, for this/that reason,
Effect			as a result, consequently, as a consequence, accordingly, hence, under these/ those conditions, so	
To Illustrate	more to the point, in particular, parenthetically, analogously, by the same token, correspondingly, equally, similarly, likewise, otherwise, for instance, for example, moreover			
Adding Something or Information	and, namely, also, in addition, additionally, above all, besides, for another thing, furthermore, or, not only (that/this)			
State Reason Why Something Happened			because, because of, therefore, in this case	
Drawing a Conclusion			as a logical conclusion, in conclusion, it can be concluded that, on the whole, to sum up, in all/ all in all, to conclude,	

			thus	

Table 3 above shows the classification of propositional DMs by function that ESL learners can employ in their composition writing in order to produce cohesive and coherent texts through the appropriate application of DMs. The learners can effectively employ these DMs when they know the functions that different types of DMs perform.

6.1.1. Competence in the use of Propositional Discourse Markers

This section discusses the findings in terms of the appropriate use of propositional DMs by G12 ESL learners in composition writing to enhance discourse coherence. Propositional DMs are used to connect words or other constructions in writing. DMs in this category are employed to serve as connective devices to create logical and consistent pieces of discourse. The four propositional discourse markers that were employed by G12 ESL learners are the inferential discourse markers, contrastive discourse markers, elaborative discourse markers and the causative discourse markers.

Inferential Discourse Markers

Inferential discourse markers signal that the second segment (S2) is to be taken as a conclusion following from the first segment (S1). The use of appropriate inferential discourse markers enhances discourse comprehensibility. The basic conceptual forms of sequences follow the canonical representations S1. DM+S2> as evidenced in the findings of this this study and illustrated in examples 1, 2 and 3 or S1, DM+S2>, as presented in example 4 and NP1+V+DM+NP2> in example 5.

1. R. Semi wanted something better for himself. *As a result,* he began to read farming pamphlets.

2. Most people migrating to urban areas are illiterate and so they do not have qualifications to get them jobs that they came seeking. *As a result*, there is a lot of unemployment and people end up stealing to stay alive.

3. Few lucky ones manage to find employment as unskilled workers. A*s a result of* their lack of skill, they are constantly oppressed by unscrupulous employers.

4. Mr. R. Semi gained a keen interest in farming, *consequently*, he started reading farming pamphlets which obviously contributed to some of the knowledge he acquired.

5. The problem of street kids is *as a result of* rural-urban Migration.

The DM *as a result* in examples 1, 2 and 3 as well as the DM *consequently* in example 4 indicate that (S2) follows from (S1). Additionally, they are to be taken as expressing conclusion while playing the function of effect. The DM *as a result of* in 5 reflects the canonical representation NP1+V+DM+NP2> which indicates that the DM links Noun Phrase 1 (NP1) to Noun Phrase 2 (NP2) suggesting that the existence of NP1 is the outcome of NP2. Table 4 below presents the frequency of use of inferential DMs by G12 ESL learners under investigation.

Table4. *Frequency of use of Inferential DMs in Compositions Written by G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Inferential DMs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	So	287	59.5
2.	as a consequence	1	0.2
3.	Consequently	2	0.4
4.	in conclusion	7	1.5
5.	it can be concluded that	3	0.6
6.	Thus	21	4.4
7.	Therefore	52	10.8
8.	under these conditions	1	0.2
9.	Hence	28	5.8
10.	as a result (of)	73	15.1
11.	all in all	7	1.5

		Total	482	100
Total Number of IDMs	**Utilised**	**Percentage**	**Unutilised**	**Percentage**
25	11	44%	14	56%

Table 4 shows that out of the 25 variants of inferential DMs presented and discussed in this study, 11 were employed by G12 ESL learners in the written discourses to enhance their pieces of writing. The total number of inferential DMs employed by the participants represented 44%. However, 14 inferential DMs were not utilised by the learners and these represent 56% of unutilised inferential DMs.

The 11 variants of inferential DMs that were employed in both discursive and narrative compositions are; *so*, *as a consequence*, *consequently*, *in conclusion*, *it can be concluded that*, *thus*, *therefore*, *under these conditions*, *hence, as a result of*, and *all in all* (see Table 3). A closer look at the data revealed that of the 11 inferential DMs, the DM *so* was the most commonly employed and it occurred 287 times out of the total of 482 inferential DMs employed in this study. *So* accounted for 59.5% of the total number of inferential. The learners under investigation made use of the DM *so* for multiple functions such as providing an explanation, initiating a question, expressing an opinion or making a conclusion. Further analysis of the data revealed that, G12 ESL learners showed the tendency of using *so* as an inter-sentence connector to join two clauses. Despite the myriad inferential variants (25) employed in this study, G12 ESL learners seemed to be tied to the idea of the DM *so* for showing conclusion (Gilquin and Paquit, 2007).

Inferential DMs were the most frequently employed DMs in the pieces of composition written by G12 ESL learners investigated in this study. The appropriate use of inferential DMs signalled that the second segment (S2) was to be taken as a conclusion based on the first segment (S1). The inferential DMs enhanced discourse coherence by directing the reader to expect a conclusion arising from the first segment (S1). The justification of the learners' preference in utilising more inferential DMs than any other DMs seems to relate to Rahayu's (2015) findings which revealed that cause and effect assays tend to show more use of inferential DMs. The use of more inferential DMs can be attributed to the fact that the two questions attempted by G12 ESL learners in this study, related more to cause and effect hence the use of more inferential DMs.

Contrastive Discourse Markers

Contrastive discourse markers indicate the presence of an adversative relationship between two propositions whereby the implication of the linkage between the two can be described as contrary to expectation. Put differently, this sub-category of discourse markers signals that the explicit interpretation of the second segment (S2) contrasts with the interpretation of the first segment (S1). Among the discourse markers in this sub-category are: *but*, *yet*, *however* and *nevertheless*. An adversative relation may indicate affirmation, in which case the conjunction *actually* (in spoken discourse) or *in fact* (in written discourse) is used. Adversation may also indicate a dismissive relation where the conjunctions *in any case* or *in any way* among others are used. To illustrate the extent to which the Grade 12 ESL learners under investigation employed contrastive discourse markers below are the examples.

6. In 1945 his father passed away. It was hard **but** he focused on his future.

7. Seven years later, in 1937, Semi left school to work on his father's farm. **Although** he was out of school at this tender age, he developed a keen interest in farming.

8. **In spite of** the tragic death of his father, Semi still had high ambitions about his life.

9. Mr. R. Semi was appointed Minister in 1970 during the third Five Year Plan. During this period only spices were exported **compared to** 27 tons of rice, oil and machinery that were imported.

10. Between 1976 and 1980 there were many exports **whereas** the imports were few.

11. During the first, second and third Five Year Plans rice was never exported, ***but***, in the fourth Five Year Plan, when Honourable Semi was Minister of Agriculture, an estimated 220 tons of rice was exported for the first time. ***However***, it was still in the third Five Year Plan that an average area of 1, 420, 000 acres of land was cultivated and he farmers' average income per annum increased to K1, 040 from K610.

12. In urban areas, people with well-paying jobs afford good and decent accommodation, ***but*** those who come from rural areas end up living in areas with unsanitary conditions forcing them to commit crimes.

13. Almost all the young people in rural areas aspire to live in urban areas someday. ***However***, the housing situation in urban areas does not accommodate every person that comes to urban areas. To survive such people engage in crimes.

14. People from rural areas face a lot of problems such as; lack of decent accommodation and food. They have no means of making their lives any better under such conditions. ***Yet*** still, they have to find means and ways of getting by and they resort to crime.

In examples 6 to 14 above, the learners under investigation can be perceived to be competent or able to use common alternates of DMs either at the beginning, middle or final position of a sentence. They can match the purpose of the variants with the meaning that they intend to convey in their pieces of composition. In all the examples listed the DMs signal that the explicit message of the second segment, in each case, is in contrast with the expected implied message associated with the first segment. Table 5 below illustrates the frequency of use of contrastive DMs by Grade 12 ESL learners in their pieces of composition.

Table5. *Frequency of use of Contrastive DMs in Pieces of Composition Written by G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Contrastive DMs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	But	123	31.9
2.	Yet	37	9.6
3.	However	84	21.8
4.	(al)though	13	3.4
5.	in contrast	8	2.1
6.	on the contrary	7	1.8
7.	instead of	35	9.1
8.	Despite	29	7.5
9.	in spite of…	3	0.8
10.	on the other hand	13	3.4
11.	Nevertheless	17	4.4
12.	Whereas	3	0.8
13.	compared to	6	1.6
14	nonetheless	7	1.8
	Total	**385**	**100**

Total Number of CDMs	Utilised	Percentage	Unutilised	Percentage
34	**14**	**41.2%**	**20**	**58.8%**

Table 5 above shows that a total of 34 variants of contrastive DMs were identified and presented in this study. Of these only 14 were employed by G12 ESL learners bringing the percentage of utilised DMs to 41.2%. However, 20 DMs representing 58.8% were not employed by any of the 150 participants considered in this study.

The analysis of the data revealed that 385 instances of use of contrastive DMs were discovered. Of the total frequencies of the use, the DM *but* was employed 123 times representing 31.9%. The 14 variants of the contrastive DMs that were employed by G12 ESL learners in this study include; *but, yet, however, (al)though, in contrast, on the contrary, instead of, despite, in spite of, on the other hand, nevertheless, whereas, compared to* and *nonetheless* (see Table 5). According to Parrot, (2000) these are the variants that are perceived to be mostly used in writing to show contradictory relations.

The participants employed several variants of contrastive DMs in all the three positions (initial, medial and final), a feature typical of ESL learners. According to Jabeen et al. (2011) native speakers generally use DMs at the beginning. In addition, unlike native speakers who use DMs in a functional way as separate units (Othman, 2010) non-native learners, as was the case with the G12 ESL learners investigated in this study, use them randomly (Schiffrin, 1987; Jackerand, 1998; Aijmer, 2002; Müller, 2004). Further, native speakers for instance, know how and why these DMs should be used. For example, DMs functioning as opening information are normally employed at the beginning of the sentence by native speakers. In other words, native speakers know how to initiate the flow of discourse, hold it and end it. ESL learners in general and G12 ESL learners in particular, commit both mistakes relating to both use and usage of DMs although they use them less than is done by native speakers (Jabeen, et al., 2011).

Initial position is generally regarded as the expected slot for DMs as observed by Schourup (1999:233). The present study also revealed that DMs tend to occur more frequently in initial position. Since these items "prototypically introduce the discourse segment they mark" (Hansen, 1997:159) they have been referred to as "natural themes" Halliday (2004:83). The close relation between DMs and sentence initial position is also realised by the theory of grammaticalization. This theory suggests that "linguistic items which come to be used as markers can seemingly, in a majority of cases be shown more to the initial position" Kamesjõ (2005:43).

Underlying this close association between DMs and the sentence initial position is the assumption that this position is significant at both sentential and discoursal levels. The onset of a sentence is considered "a strategically important position" because it is the point "where continuity as well as breaks in continuity can be marked" Hasselgard (2004:77). It is also the information contained in this position that carries the flow of discourse by locating and orienting the sentence within its content as well as contributing to the development of discourse.

The significance of the initial position as a text organiser is what makes it the most appropriate place in which DMs can fulfil their role in discourse. Being located at this significant point gives them wide scope over the whole sentence (propositional markers), and paragraph (non-propositional markers) thereby allowing them to influence and guide the hearer/reader in the interpretation of everything that follows. As Halliday (2004:83) states, the use of DMs enables "the speaker or writer to make explicit the way the clause relates to the surrounding discourse (textual) or project his or her own angle on the value of what the clause is saying (interpersonal)." Additionally, Halliday explains that "it is natural to set up such expressions as the point of departure." Thus, the tendency of DMs to occur initially then is related to their function in discourse. As Schourup (1999:233) states "Because they are used to restrict the contextual interpretation of an utterance, it makes sense to restrict context early before interpretation can run astray." However, DMs that appear in other positions in the sentence do not have this power over the whole segment.

From the findings as presented it can be said that appropriateness in the use of DMs in both narrative and discursive pieces of composition written by G12 ESL learners under investigation is polysemic (Urgelles-Coll, 2010) which means they have multiple meanings and can be varied depending on the situation and context in which they are deployed. More general DMs which are acceptable in different relations of a particular type of DMs become the most favoured ones. Some variants thus, may have more than one applicable position, for example, the contrastive DM *however*. This variant can be placed in three positions: at the beginning of a proposition (initial) within the proposition (middle) or at the end (final) of a proposition.

It is the case, therefore, that the DMs occurring in sentence internal or final positions display differences in meaning from their counterparts that occur initially. "Different positions," states Hansen (1997:156) "are responsible for subtle changes in meaning or function." Occurring sentence-initiality seems to be the most common predominant case for DMs, whereas, appearing sentence medially and finally seems to be motivated by specific reasons such as emphasis. This seems to suggest that initiality is a distinctive feature of DMs from which some markers deviate in particular instances to convey some intended meaning.

The DM '***but***' was particularly outstanding among the contrastive discourse markers used. It is used when preceding information contradicts the earlier proposition. Its prominence in the pieces of composition analysed appears to reflect the position observation by Blakemore (2002) and Prasert (2013) that *but* is acceptable in most contrastive relations in which other contrastive markers are not. Additionally, the DM *but* is perceived to have a simple structure viewed from syntactical structure. It is the case, therefore, that its eminence in the scripts confirms the assumption that non-native writers tend to show a characteristic of simplicity in structure (Silva, 1993).

One of the positive aspects of the findings of this study is that through the appropriate use of contrastive DMs the learners created coherence in the sense that that they were able to match the purpose of the variants with the meaning that they intended to convey in their written pieces of discourse. In this regard, they were able to clearly show how the explicit sentence two (S2) message was contrastively related to the implied message of sentence one (S1).

Elaborative or Collateral Discourse Markers

Elaborative or collateral discourse markers signal a relationship in which the message of the second segment (S2) matches, expands on, elaborates or enhances the message of the first segment (S1) and perhaps the preceding discourse, as in examples 48 to 52.

18. The fourth Five-Year Plan which ranged from 1976 to 1980 saw an estimated amount of 220 tons of rice being exported ***in addition to*** coffee, sugar cane and spices.

19. People come to urban areas to look for a better life **and** to improve their economic status through employment.

20. Mr. Semi was a very hard working student and excelled in his studies. He was showing all signs of becoming a successful student. He spent a lot of time on his books and studied extra hard during the time he was in college. ***Furthermore***, Mr. Semi worked hard on his after the death of his father.

21. People who come from rural areas find it difficult to adapt to the competitive lives in urban areas. **Moreover**, they do not afford the basic needs of life which lead them into committing crimes of all sorts.

22. The economic situation in rural areas forces people to leave. **Additionally**, they come to urban areas in search of a better life which they could not find in rural   areas.

In examples 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 given above the DMs ***in addition to***, ***and***, ***furthermore***, ***moreover*** and ***additionally*** respectively provide more information to what has been presented in the preceding segment (S1). For example, in 50 the DM ***furthermore*** relates the segment it introduces not only to the immediately preceding segment ('He spent a lot of time on his books and studied extra hard during the time he was in college') but also to several prior segments in the paragraph. All the DMs used in examples 18 to 22 are elaborative additive DMs that provide more information to what has been provided in prior segments (S1). Table 6 below presents the frequency of use of inferential DMs by G12 ESL under investigation.

Table6. *Frequency of use of Collateral/Elaborative DMs in Compositions Written by G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Collateral DMs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	And	274	59.1
2.	Also	118	25.4
3.	above all	5	1.1
4.	Furthermore	21	4.5
5.	Moreover	12	2.6
6.	in addition to	18	3.9
7.	Additionally	13	2.8
8.	similarly	3	0.6
	Total	**464**	**100**

Total Number of C/EDMs	Utilised	Percentage	Unutilised	Percentage
27	8	30%	19	70%

Table 6 shows that twenty-seven (27) variants of elaborative also known as collateral DMs were identified and discussed in this study. Of the twenty-seven (27) elaborative DMs, only eight (8) representing 30% were utilised by G12 ESL learners under investigation. While nineteen (19), variants representing 70% were not employed by any of the participants in composition writing. The eight (8) elaborative DM variants that were employed by G12 ESL learners in composition writing are; *and, also, above all, furthermore, moreover, in addition to, additionally,* and *similarly*. Of the eight (8) elaborative variants employed in this study, the DM *and* was the most common DM employed by the participants. The frequency occurrence of the DM *and* appeared 274 times representing 59.1% of the total frequency of use. The DM *and* is used to add extra information to the preceding sentence. It functions as a cohesive device to link the previous sentence to the preceding one. It points to a continuation of talk in the written discourse of G12 ESL learners' pieces of composition. It consolidates the clarity of the message in a given piece of discourse.

Elaborative or collateral DMs were employed in G12 ESL learners' written pieces of discourse to indicate additional information. Hinkel (2004) asserts that ESL writers tend to provide insufficient amplification in their essay writing. However, the findings of this study refute the previous assumption in that in both narrative and discursive pieces of composition investigated in this study, the learners were able to develop their propositions in detail signalled by the high use of elaborative markers. The use of elaborative DMs contributes to the smooth flow of information in the sense that the DMs indicate a relation in which the message of the second sentence (2) parallels and possibly expands, enhances or refines the message of the first sentence (S1). In other words, elaborative DMs provided more information to what had been provided in prior segments thereby contributing to thematic progression and enhancing discourse coherence and comprehensibility.

The DM *and* was the most frequently used followed by the DM *also* which was employed 118 times, representing 25.4% of the total frequency of use in all the 300 compositions written by G12 ESL learners. The use of the elaborative DM *and* in the beginning (initial) of a sentence, as was the case in most of the scripts analysed, implies a low sense of formality. This style shifts the sense of formal writing into a casual (informal) one. This finding is in agreement with similar findings which state that the DM *and* characterises the L2 writing as a less formal one. Theoretically, in writing the use of some advanced elaborative DMs such as *above all*, *furthermore*, *moreover* and *similarly* should be higher after learners have been instructed on the use of these devices (Martnez, 2003; Gilguin and Paguot, 2007; and Darstjerdi and Semian, 2011) thereby reflecting a high level of proficiency. The findings did not reflect this theoretical position in the sense that the G12 ESL learners who participated in this study still favoured the DM *and* to signal additional information (see Table 7) thereby suggesting limited proficiency. Additionally, the repeated use of '*and*' and '*also*' can be attributed to L1 interference because in most Zambian languages there is only one word for adding information. For instance, in Bemba language, '*na*' can be used interchangeably to mean 'and' as well as 'also.**'** The learners' failure to employ most of the elaborative DMs presented in the current study can be attributed to their lack of knowledge of use and the existence of such DMs.

Causative Discourse Markers

The causative DMS specify that segment (2) provides a reason for the proposition presented in segment (1) as in:

23. In 1957 he was appointed Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture **because of** his hard work.
24. Mr. Semi's contribution to the Ministry of Agriculture did not end with his resignation in 1961 **because** he was elected Chairman of the Farmers' Corporative Union in 1968.
25. In my opinion rural-urban migration has contributed greatly to the problems we are faced with in towns **because** most of these people flock to urban areas with no vision.

In the examples 23, 24 and 25, the use of **because of** and **because** as DMs signal that the segment following is to be taken as expressing reason for which the content of the first segment (S1) provides justification. The extent to which Grade 12 ESL learners employed causative DMs is presented in Table 7 below.

Table7. *Frequency of use of Causative DMs in Compositions Written by G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Causative DMs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Because	167	55.7
2.	because of	94	31.3
3.	for that/this reason	39	13
	Total	**300**	**100**

Total Number of CDMs	Utilised	Percentage
3	**3**	**100%**

Table 7 shows that the Grade 12 ESL learners under investigation employed all the three (3) variants of the causative DMs. The three causative DMs are *because*, *because of* and *for this/that reason*. As has been presented in Table 8 the DM *because* was the most frequently employed by the participants of this study for indicating causal relations. This DM was employed 167 times, representing 55.7% of the total (300) causative DMs employed in this study.

The causative DMs were employed by the informants of this study to provide reasons for which the content of the first segments (1) of each sentence provided a justification. In this sense, the use of causative DMs provided smooth flow of information because the DMs enabled the reader to create concrete interpretation and comprehension of discourse.

In the analysis of the data at the centre of this study, DMs are considered as signals that function as instructions to the reader to help him or her build the most adequate mental representation. The appropriate use of causative DMs reflected in the texts written by G12 ESL learners eased or facilitated understanding of the information relayed in the pieces of composition.

The DM *because* is frequently employed to show a causal relation in academic writing but according to Hinkel (2003) it is associated more with spoken than it is worth written discourse.

6.1.2. Competence in the Use of Non-Propositional Discourse Markers

Non-propositional discourse markers are "words and phrases that writers use to sequence and structure ideas and information in paragraph-length discourse" Hernandez, (2008:666). These markers "have the function to signal relationships between prior and coming discourse" Biber and Barbien (2007:265). Three non-propositional discourse markers exist as discourse coherence devices. These are the discourse structure markers, discourse activity markers and discourse change or relating markers. Table 8 below illustrates the three types of propositional discourse markers based no Fraser's 1999 (taxonomy).

Table8. *Types of Non-Propositional Discourse Markers Based on Fraser's (1999) Taxonomy*

Non-Propositional Discourse Markers	Example
1. Discourse Structure Markers	once again, at the outset, finally, first/second, lastly, to start with, in the first place, next, moving right along.
2. Topic Change Markers	by the way, to return to my point, back to my original point, that reminds me, before I forget, incidentally, just to update you, speaking of x, to change the topic, on a different note, while I think of it, with regard to.
3. Discourse Activity Markers	for example, for instance, to explain, to clarify, to illustrate, according to, to interrupt, in short.

Of the three subcategories of non-propositional discourse markers, only two were identified in the written scripts of the Grade 12 ESL learners. The two are the discourse structure makers and the discourse activity markers discussed below.

Discourse Structure Markers

Discourse structure markers are text-structuring tools that act as markers of openings or closings of discourse units or in-between transitions (Thornbury and Slade, 2006) which are employed by writers to structure or organise their texts in order to enhance coherence. This coherence in turn helps the reader to build a coherent mental representation of the text thereby sustaining its comprehension. Therefore, discourse structure markers play a significant role in textual cohesion as evidenced from the findings of the present study which indicated that learners who employed discourse structure

markers appropriately in their writing produced more coherent pieces of composition. Examples of use of discourse structure markers are indicated in 26 to 29 below.

26. *Secondly*, what led to Mr. Semi's success was his dedication to everything he did.

27. *Finally,* Mr. Semi was appointed Minister of Agriculture.

28. *To start with*, people have different aspirations and great hope of a better life when they come to urban areas.

29. *Lastly*, the police should play their role by ensuring that there is law and order in our communities instead of allowing a few selfish individuals to rob people of their property which they have worked so hard for.

Table 9 below presents a summary on the extent to which G12 ESL learners employed discourse structure markers.

Table9. *Frequency of use of Discourse Structure Markers in pieces of Composition Written by G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Discourse Structure Markers	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Finally	38	27.3
2.	first(ly)	18	13
3.	second(ly)	16	11.5
4.	Lastly	9	6.5
5.	to start with	58	41.7
	Total	139	100

Total Number of DSMs	Utilised	Percentage	Unutilised	Percentage
10	5	50%	5	50%

Table 9 above shows that ten (10) discourse structure markers were identified and presented in this study. Of the ten, five (5) representing 50% of the total number of discourse markers used while the other five (5) were not. The discourse structure markers that were employed by G12 ESL language include; *first(ly), second(ly), to start with, finally, and last(ly)*. The DM *to start with* was the most favoured as it was employed 58 times accounting for 41.7% of the total of 139 frequency of use of discourse structure markers.

Discourse Activity Markers

The learners under investigation employed discourse activity markers to indicate that the new proposition in a given piece of discourse represented an activity such as illustrating, exemplifying or explaining a preceding discourse. This enabled the reader to form concrete impressions of the propositions being elicited and communicated by the writers.

Discourse Activity Markers indicate that the current discourse is merely an activity that illustrates, exemplifies or explains a preceding one as in:

30. Honourable R. Semi was a great achiever, *for example*; he pursued a diploma course in agriculture, won a scholarship, went to study in the USA, became a lecturer, was appointed Permanent Secretary, became Chairman of the Farmers' Cooperative and was appointed Minister of Agriculture.

31. Rural Urban Migration has led to a lot of problems, *for example*, the proliferation of shanty compounds, casualization, crime, poverty, over-crowding, to mention a few.

32. Most of the rural-urban migrants end up committing a number of crimes. *For example*, they become murderers, robbers, serial-killers, ritual killers and prostitutes, all in the name of living a better life than they used to in rural areas.

In example 30, the DM *for example* has been employed to exemplify the achievements that Honourable R Semi attained. In example 31 the discourse activity marker *for example* introduces the list of the problems rural-urban migration brings. In example 32, the discourse activity marker *for example* has been employed to introduce the crimes rural-urban migrants commit. Table 10 below

illustrates the extent to which discourse activity DMs were employed by Grade 12 ESL learners in the analysed pieces of composition.

Table10. *Frequency of use of Discourse Activity Markers in Compositions Written by G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Discourse Activity Markers	Frequency	Percentage
1.	for example	29	49.2
2.	for instance	18	30.5
3.	in short	12	20.3
	Total	59	100

Total Number of DAMs	**Utilised**	**Percentage**	**Unutilised**	**Percentage**
8	3	37.5%	5	62.5%

Table 10 above shows that eight (8) discourse activity markers were identified and presented in this study. Of these, only three (3) representing 37.5% of the total number of discourse activity markers were utilised in this study while 5 representing 62.5% were not deployed in any of the written pieces of G12 ESL learners' discourses. The three discourse activity markers that were employed by G12 ESL learners include; *for example*, *for instance* and *in short*. Of these, *for example*, occurred 29 times representing 49.2%, followed by *for instance*, which occurred 18 times representing 30.5%, while *in short* appeared 12 times representing 20.3% of the total of the 59 discourse activity markers that were employed by G12 ESL learners in this study.

Topic Change Markers or Topic Relating Markers

The topic change markers or topic relating markers were not at all utilised by any of the informants in this study in their written pieces of discourse signifying that the Grade 12 ESL learners under investigation are not adequately exposed to this subcategory of non-propositional discourse markers (cf. Fraser, 1999:946-949). Nonetheless, studies by many researchers indicate that explicit instruction of learners in the utilization of this type of DMs is cardinal to enhancing discourse coherence and more so the quality of writing (Hamid and Kaveifard, 2011; Sun, 2013; Zarei, 2013; Kamali and Noori, 2015) because like any other types of DMs, they contribute to the structure and flow of information in composition writing (cf. Castro, 2009 and Feng, 2010).

Consequently, the absence of topic change markers in the participants' pieces of written discourse signals either lack of knowledge over the existence of these devices or inadequate familiarity with their use. This is the case because these DMs are not available in both the Junior and the Senior Zambian English Language Syllabuses, nor are they available in the selected textbooks that teachers and learners use in the teaching and learning of English language in the school curriculum. The analysis of the Junior English Language syllabus for Grades 8 and 9 revealed that a very narrow set of discourse markers are taught under the component of Structure. The DMs taught at junior level include; *and, but, as a result, therefore, consequently, for this reason, because* and *since*. The Senior English Language Syllabus which caters for Grades 10, 11, and 12 on the other hand, contains DMs such as *while, despite, apart from, in spite of, besides, although, in other words,* and *on other hand* (MOE, 2013). The implication of this finding therefore is that ESL learners in secondary schools are not adequately exposed to a wide range of DMs, more so to topic change markers. Furthermore, non-propositional DMs mostly, are not reflected in the English Language Syllabuses. Moreover, the absence of topic change markers in the written pieces of discourse produced by Grade 12 ESL learners investigated in this study perhaps, implies that even some of the teachers of English in secondary schools are oblivious to the existence of such DMs and their importance in enhancing discourse cohesion and comprehensibility in composition writing.

Generally, compared with propositional DMs, non-propositional DMs were less frequently employed by Grade 12 ESL learners in their writing. The frequency of use in both subcategories is indicative of low turnout due to lack of knowledge on the use of these subcategories of discourse markers. More so, whereas all the subcategories of the propositional discourse markers were employed in the written discourses produced by Grade 12 ESL learners, only two of the three types of the non-propositional DMs were employed. In this regard, it can be concluded that although the learners employed some propositional DMs, the findings reveal that the learners under investigation are not sufficiently exposed to non-propositional DMs. Additionally, topic relating DMs were not employed by any of the

participants. Failure to employ topic relating DMs which facilitate thematic progression rendered the written pieces of discourse incoherent and incomprehensible resulting in low scores.

The appropriate use of DMs by the learners facilitated the enhancement of comprehensibility of the written texts thereby rendering support to both coherence theory and relevance theory. Coherence theory postulates that one of the characteristics of coherent texts is the presence of a definable set of coherence relations whose recovery or recognition is essential for comprehension and that such relations are made possible through the use of DMs (Mann and Thompson, 1986; Fraser, 1990, 1999; Sanders, Spooren and Noordman, 1993; Knott and Dale, 1994; Hovy and Maier, 1994). The relevance theory postulates that hearers (and readers) interpret information by searching for relevance (Blakemore 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1992 and 1993). In this regard, the role of DMs is to guide the receiver's interpretation process through the specification of certain relevant properties of the context thereby facilitating appropriate processing of information for the effective interpretation of a given piece of communicative event. The role of DMs in discourse coherence is also supported by Brown (1977) who states that "While discourse markers are grammatically optional and semantically empty, they are not pragmatically optional or superfluous. They serve a variety of pragmatic functions" If such markers are omitted, the discourse is grammatically acceptable but, would be judged unnatural, awkward, impolite, unfriendly or dogmatic within the communicative context (Biton, 1996).

The coherence enhancing capacity of the correct use of DMs as evidenced from the current study also renders support to previous studies by Martinez (2004), Alghamdi (2014) whose investigation showed that correct use and frequency of discourse markers were key indicators of the quality of ESL writing, Jalilifar (2008) who observed that the participants in the study used a great deal of DMs in their written pieces of discourse and that there was a positive relationship between writing experience and appropriate use of discourse markers; Kalajahi *et. al* (2012) whose findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between the scores of the compositions and the number of DMs utilized; Daif-Allah and Albesher (2013) who observed that there was a positive and direct relationship between test scores and the use of discourse markers and Kamalli and Noorii (2015) who observed that teaching DMs to students enhances their awareness and sensitivity of discourse and subsequently sharpens their writing skills. In view of both theoretical and literature support for the role of DMs in discourse, it is plausible to suppose that ESL learners and users who are competent in the use of the DMs of the L2 will be more successful in both oral and written ESL interaction than those who are not.

Table 12 below presents a summary of all the discourse markers in the pieces of composition analysed in the study.

Table12. *Total Number of DMs Employed in the Study*

S/No.	Type of DM	Frequency of Use	Percentage
1.	Inferential DMs	482	26.4
2.	Collateral/Elaborative DMs	464	25.4
3.	Contrastive DMs	385	21
4.	Causal DMs	300	16.4
5.	Discourse Structure Markers	139	7.6
6.	Discourse Activity Markers	59	3.2
	Total	**1,829**	**100**

Table 12 above reveals that inferential DMs were the most frequently employed DMs in the written pieces of composition produced by G12 ESL learners. A total of 1,829 DMs was employed by G12 ESL learners under investigation. Of these, 482 representing 26.4% were inferential DMs, 464, representing 25.4% were elaborative or collateral DMs while 385 representing 21%, were contrastive DMs. Causative DMs occurred 300 times accounting for 16.4%. Discourse structure markers accounted for 139 appearances translating into 7.6%. Discourse activity markers were employed 59 times translating into 3.2%, while discourse change or relating markers were not employed by any of the participants.

The participants of this study employed more inferential DMs in both narrative and discursive pieces of composition. Table 13 below illustrates the use of DMs in narrative and discursive pieces of composition.

Table13. *Number of DMs Employed in Narrative and Discursive Compositions of G12 ESL Learners*

S/No.	Type of DM	Narrative Composition	Discussion Composition	Total
1.	Inferential DMs	284	198	**482**
2.	Elaborative DMs	271	193	**464**
3.	Contrastive DMs	204	181	**385**
4.	Causal DMs	162	138	**300**
5.	Discourse Structure Markers	86	53	**139**
6.	Discourse Activity Markers	17	42	**59**
	Total	**1,024**	**805**	**1,829**

Table 13 above illustrates the frequency of DMs employed in both narrative and discursive pieces of composition. The results indicate that G12 ESL learners employed more DMs in the narrative type of composition than they did in the discursive type. A total of 1,024 times of utilisation of DMs in narrative composition was noted compared to 805 times of utilisation in discursive composition.

7. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the ESL learners investigated in this study employed both propositional and non-propositional discourse markers to facilitate discourse comprehensibility and coherence. This finding suggests the participants' awareness of the relevance of DMs in discourse production and comprehension and is supported by Kalajahi (2012) whose results indicated that all the participants in the study conducted were fully aware of utilising DMs in their writing but did not have sufficient knowledge for the proper use and choice of appropriate ones. While all the four subcategories of propositional DMs discussed in this study were employed by the participants, only two of the three subcategories of non-propositional DMs were observed. Appropriate use of the discourse markers enhanced discourse comprehensibility and was suggestive of the participants' competence in the use of such discourse markers. The study also revealed that the participants in the study only used a limited number of discourse markers out of so many which were available for use. The results seem to support the observation by Simwinga (1992:26) that "any incoherence in the written pieces of discourse prodiuced by Zambian University students is due to factors other than the students' failure or inability to use appropriate cohesive ties" (Simwinga, 1992:26). As proposed by Simwinga (1992:28) "It may be the case that incorporating all the likely sources of coherence into the English language syllabus in Zambian schools will go a long way towards minimising incoherence in the discourse produced by learners after school". The results of the the current study, therefore, seem to indicate that lack of coherence in the written pieces of discourse produced by Zambian ESL learners was not due to non-adherence to formal linguistic features but to other factors.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the discussion of the findings, the implications and the conclusion drawn some recommendations are hereby proposed for pedagogy and further research.

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