Discourse Markers in Written English Texts in a Multilingual Setting: A Comparative Study of High School English in the Schools of Assam

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Abstract

The present study is an account of the use of discourse markers of English and the implications they have with respect to their function for cohesion, coherence and continuity of discourse in the written texts of the students studying in English medium, urban vernacular medium and rural vernacular medium schools of Assam. The study also includes certain subsections in order to have a detailed and comparative study of the discourse markers found in the written texts of the subjects under study.

The study offers a view of the multilingual setting in Assam in which the teaching and learning of English takes place. It shows what roles the variables of

   a) Medium of instruction
   b) Gender
   c) Urban/rural difference

play in the acquisition of discourse markers. The study is backed by a preliminary account of the educational policies proposed by educational organizations such as the NCERT and the more recent Multilingual Education (MLE) proposals of the UNESCO.

The study is based on responses to questionnaire and cloze tests administered in the schools and on an examination of the written texts of the students. The data are analyzed using elementary statistics and conclusions drawn.

The conclusions of the study bring out a detailed picture of the generalizations in the use of discourse markers amongst all the groups of students as well as variations in the levels of competence across the different groups.

Key words: discourse marker, coherence, cohesion, continuity, repertoire

Introduction

The present study attempts a detailed and comparative study of the discourse markers in English used in the written texts of high school students of Assam.

Discourse Markers

Discourse markers are the word insertions that provide continuity in conversations. Discourse markers are also known as words or short 'lexicalized phrases' (Schiffrin, 2001)

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that organize texts. Discourse markers help to create 'cohesion' and 'coherence' in a given text by establishing a relationship between the various ideas that are expressed within the text (Schiffrin, 2001). Schiffrin (1987) operationally defines discourse markers as sequentially dependent elements which brackets units of talk. Examples of discourse markers in English would include 'oh', 'well', 'and', 'but', 'or', 'so', 'like', 'because', 'now', 'then', 'I mean', 'you know', 'uh', 'anyway', 'yet' etc. 'Discourse markers' is the term linguists give to the above mentioned words that break our speech up into parts and show the relation between parts. Discourse markers are found in various grammatical categories including conjunctions, interjections and adverbs. Discourse markers can 'connect' various units of dynamic meaning (coherence) as well as the surface structure of the text (cohesion). For example, 'oh' prepares the hearer for a surprising or just-remembered item, and 'but' indicates that sentence to follow is in opposition to the one before. However, these markers don't necessarily mean what the dictionary says they mean. Some people use 'and' just to start a new thought, and some people put 'but' at the end of their sentences, as a way of trailing off gently. Discourse markers also occur when speakers shift their orientation to information. In this case the markers alert the listener that something within the speaker has changed.

Discourse markers are usually polyfunctional elements. Discourse markers can be understood in two ways: First, as elements which serve towards the union of utterances. Secondly, as elements which serve a variety of conversational purposes, discourse markers are linguistic expressions used to signal the relation of an utterance to its immediate context, with the primary function of bringing to the listeners' attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context.

Simone Muller (2005) made a list of how discourse markers function. He stated that discourse markers are used

-to initiate discourse,

-to mark a boundary in discourse (shift/ partial shift in topic),

-to preface a response or a reaction,

-to serve as a filler or delaying tactic,

-to aid the speaker in holding the floor,

-to effect an interaction or sharing between speaker and hearer,

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-to bracket the discourse either cataphorically or anaphorically,

-to mark either fore grounded or back grounded information.

For a long time, English was considered a language that lacked particles (Lenk, 1998). Subsequent studies of discourse markers in English have meanwhile pointed out that this is indeed not the case: although the propositional content of a sentence might not be altered by the addition or deletion of a discourse marker, discourse markers in English, nevertheless, fulfill an important pragmatic function in the conversational interaction (Lenk, 1998). Discourse markers are linguistic expressions used to signal the relation of an utterance to its immediate context, with the primary function of bringing to the listeners' attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context. Thus, it is seen that discourse markers help to create 'cohesion' and 'coherence' (Schiffrin, 2001) in a given text by establishing a relationship between the various ideas that are expressed within the text. During the last two decades, analyses of discourse markers have occupied a large space in the literature on pragmatics. And discourse markers have been considered from a variety of perspectives and approaches.

Some of the functions of the most commonly used discourse markers are as follows-

Well

"Well" serves various functions in discourse depending on the context and its position in the utterance. *"Well"* at the beginning of a turn serves as a response marker to what has gone before.

Now

"Now" at the beginning of a turn is used as a transition marker, introducing a new topic and changing the direction of the discourse. In the case of automated dialogues, where the application may be very specific, *"now"* can be used to move from one part of the dialogue to another.

Actually

"Actually" gives processing instructions to a listener about how the particular utterance should be understood. *"Actually"* can therefore be used to signal to the hearer that

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although what follows is relevant to the ongoing discourse, it will contain (in the opinion of the speaker) information that the hearer is not expecting.

OK

"OK" has a rather informal status in spoken English, but can have many uses in spoken dialogue systems, depending on the level of formality required for the service. Literature says various functions have been attached to *"OK"* depending on its location within an utterance.

"OK" at the beginning of a turn expresses agreement, and can also indicate acknowledgement of the preceding utterance.

"OK" in second position following "yes" emphasizes the agreement expressed by "yes". However, that role depends on the intonation of the utterance. For example, "Yes, *OK*" (spoken with a sigh) potentially indicates reluctant agreement or consent. On the other hand, "Yes, *OK*" (spoken with stress on "*OK*") indicates impatience with the interlocutor.

And

"*And*" has two roles in talk: it coordinates idea units and it continues a speaker's action. Schiffrin (1987) made an observation that *'and'* is the most frequently used mode of connection at a local level of idea structure.

Some of the functions of the extensively used Discourse Markers in written texts-

With regard to; regarding; as regards; as far as

These expressions focus attention on what follows in the sentence. This is done by announcing the subject in advance. *As regards and as far as* usually indicate a change of subject.

Examples:

His grades in science subjects are excellent. As regards humanities ...

With regard to the latest market figures we can see that ...
Regarding our efforts to improve the local economy, we have made ...

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As far as I am concerned, we should continue to develop our resources.

As for John's thoughts, let's take a look at this report he sent me.

On the other hand; while; whereas

These expressions give expression to two ideas which contrast but do not contradict each other.

Examples:

Football is popular in England, while in Australia they prefer cricket.

We've been steadily improving our customer service center. On the other hand our shipping department needs to be redesigned.

Jack thinks we're ready to begin whereas Tom thinks we still need to wait.

However, nonetheless, nevertheless

All these words are used to present two contrasting ideas.

Examples:

Smoking is proved to be dangerous to the health. Nonetheless, 40% of the population smokes.

Our teacher promised to take us on a field trip. However, he changed his mind last week.

Peter was warned not to invest all of his savings in the stock market. Nevertheless, he invested and lost everything.

Moreover, furthermore, in addition

These expressions are used to add information to what has been said. The usage of these words is much more elegant than just making a list or using the conjunction 'and'.

Examples:

His problems with his parents are extremely frustrating. Moreover, there seems to be no easy solution to them.

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I assured him that I would come to his presentation. Furthermore, I also invited a number of important representatives from the local chamber of commerce.

Our energy bills have been increasing steadily. In addition to these costs, our telephone costs have doubled over the past six months.

Therefore, as a result, consequently

These expressions show that the second statement follows logically from the first statement.

Examples:

He reduced the amount of time studying for his final exams. As a result, his marks were rather low.

We've lost over 3,000 customers over the past six months. Consequently, we have been forced to cut back our advertising budget.

The government has drastically reduced its spending. Therefore, a number of programs have been cancelled.

Herein I would like to add that the literature on this field says discourse marker is one among a number of names suggested for the seemingly empty words found in the oral and the written texts. The other names given to 'discourse markers' are filler, connective, initiator, continuer, discourse structure signalling device and pragmatic particle etc. And in the most comprehensive work on discourse markers, Schiffrin (1987) defines them as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk." During the last two decades, analyses of discourse markers have occupied a large space in the literature on pragmatics. There is a general agreement that discourse markers contribute to the pragmatic meaning of utterances and thus play an important role in the pragmatic competence of the speaker.

English Language Teaching and Discourse Markers

Teaching of English in the schools in India is in a confused state today. Students from the urban vernacular medium and rural vernacular medium are taught English for about six periods per week. So they face problem in forming structures of English. A teacher's so called target is to "prepare" the students for the examination and not to make the students

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competent in the use of the language they are learning. In reality neither the student nor the teacher is anxious to learn or to teach English. So the student is nervous only about his/her success in the examination and the teacher's sole problem is to see that the pass percentage does not go down. People care more for diplomas than for knowledge. It is not learning that we want, but the prize that learning brings - wealth, prestige, status, and so on.

Generally, the students in the government schools are assessed in all the states in India by means of a single examination conducted towards the end of the year. In this system students usually work hard for a few days just before the examination and get through the examination. But, such last minute preparation does not help in the case of language. Language needs constant practice over an extended period and this can be ensured only if examinations are held at frequent intervals. The present system of relying solely on an all - important annual examination therefore does not serve the purpose. Moreover the question papers are set in such a way where all the questions can be answered with the help of guides available in the market. For such an examination, students require no thinking, no originality, no imagination and no skill, though the vital aspect of language learning is integrated skill. Nevertheless, the situation in English medium schools are little better. And, there are institutes which follow TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages). The goal of this experimental text is to introduce the students (and lay men and women who would like to help those who do not know English) to some basic ideas, methods, and tools of teaching English as a second or foreign language. TESOL includes TESL and TEFL. (TESL-Teaching English as a second language, that is, teaching English in a country where English is the primary language. For example: India, Canada, and Australia. TEFL-Teaching English as a foreign language, that is teaching in a country where English is a foreign language. For example: China, Mexico, and Korea).

As mentioned before, the most interesting feature in a multilingual setting like India is that irrespective of the language, the people are conversing in, the discourse markers 'ok', 'oh', 'well', 'and', 'but', 'or', 'so', 'like', 'because', 'now', 'then', 'I mean', 'you know', 'uh', 'anyway', 'yet' are seen to be used. The discourse markers do help a student in forming better structures in English as discourse markers or linking words indicate how one piece of discourse is connected to another piece of discourse. The discourse markers help to develop ideas and to relate them to one another. They show the connection between what has already been written or said and what is going to be written or said. Some are very informal and

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characteristic of spoken language. Others are quite formal and characteristic of written language. There are some discourse markers which help in presenting complicated information in writing.

For example:

1) *With regard to; regarding; as regards; as far as* are expressions which focus attention on what follows in the sentence. This is done by announcing the subject in advance.

2) *On the other hand; while; whereas* are expressions that give expression to two ideas which contrast but do not contradict each other.

3) *However, nonetheless, nevertheless* are expressions that are used to present two contrasting ideas.

4) *Moreover, furthermore, in addition* are the expressions that are used to add information to what has been said. The usage of these words is much more elegant than just making a list or using the conjunction '*and*'.

5) *Therefore, as a result, consequently* are expressions which show that the second statement follows logically from the first statement.

Multilingual Setting and English Discourse Markers

Multilingualism is now a legitimate reality in the world. Given that multilingualism is a norm rather than the exception, maintaining and developing multilingual competence has become a necessity. A majority of students arrive in schools with multilingual competence and hold multiple identities. And even if they arrive as monolinguals, it is imperative that they have opportunities to acquire additional languages from peers or from instruction.

The official language of the Republic of India is Hindi, and its subsidiary official language is English. The individual states can legislate their own official languages, depending on their linguistic demographics. Government of India has given 22 "languages of the 8th Schedule" the status of official language. The number of languages given this status has increased through the political process. Some languages with a large number of speakers still do not have this status, the largest of these being Bhili/Bhiladi with some 9.6 million native speakers (ranked 14th), followed by Gondi with 2.7 million speakers (ranked 18th) and

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Khandeshi with 2.1 million speakers (ranked 22nd). On the other hand, 2 languages with fewer than 2 million native speakers have recently been included in the 8th Schedule for mostly political reasons: Manipuri/Meitei with 1.5 million speakers (ranked 25th) and Bodo with 1.4 million speakers (ranked 26th). For cultural/historical reasons Sanskrit is on the official schedule, though only 14 thousand people claim it to be their language, but many more study it in school as the classical language of India.

In India, a regional language has its geographical bounds defined within the state. Along with Hindi as an official language and twenty two others as official regional languages, each state can choose its own regional language for use in local government affairs and in education among the languages spoken in its territory. It is seen that although there are so many languages in India, quite a number of people do not know any other Indian language than their own. English is most widely spoken second language, followed by Hindi.

Multilingual Education

Mother tongue based MLE (multilingual education) has become a global movement seeking to provide quality education for all. With mother tongue education seen as a critical input for development and revitalization of languages, the number of countries joining the MLE movement has shown a rapid increase. This rising interest in MLE is supported by the forceful developments in theory and practice of multilingual education, a large body of committed MLE practitioners and professionals around the world and also because of influences of several international organizations (such as UNESCO, World Bank, UNPFII etc).

In a multilingual speech community a whole range of languages, or repertoire, is available to speakers, who choose to use some of them in their linguistic interaction to perform particular social roles. Repertoire applies at two different levels to both the community and the individual.

The most interesting feature in a multilingual setting like India is that irrespective of the language, the people are conversing in, the discourse markers 'ok', 'oh', 'well', 'and', 'but', 'or', 'so', 'like', 'because', 'now', 'then', 'I mean', 'you know', 'uh', 'anyway', 'yet' are seen to be used. (After the analysis it was derived that subjects used 'well', 'ok', 'so',

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'now', 'I mean', 'anyway' extensively even while communicating in a language other than English.)

Focus of This Study – Analysis of Discourse Markers

The present study incorporates a detailed analysis of the discourse markers and the implications they have with respect to the attributes of cohesion, coherence, and continuity of the discourse in the written texts of the students studying in English medium, urban vernacular medium and rural vernacular medium schools of Assam. In addition to the broader basis of comparison mentioned above, the study also include certain sub-sections in order to have a detailed and comparative study of the discourse markers found in the written texts of the subjects under study. These subsections include a study of the discourse markers found in the written texts of students studying in:

1. English medium school students *versus* urban vernacular medium school students and rural vernacular medium students.

2. Male students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools *versus* Female students of urban English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools.

3. Assamese students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools *versus* Assamese students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools.

4. Assamese male students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools *versus* Non-Assamese male students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools.

5. Assamese female students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools *versus* Non-Assamese female students of English medium schools, urban vernacular medium schools and rural vernacular medium schools.

Thus, the parameters mentioned above yielded a detailed and comprehensive database for a comparative analysis in the usage of discourse markers and their implication in the

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written texts of the High school students in the context of a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic state like Assam.

In Assam, apart from the Assamese community there are the Bodos', Rabhas', Manipuris', Missings', Miris', Deoris', Morans', Karbis', Kacharis'. There are also a huge number of people from the Bengali, Bihari and Nepali communities. Morever, in the more recent times, a fairly large scale migration of people from other parts of India like the Santhals', Gonds', Mundas' etc. from Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh has been noticed, they were mainly brought as indentured labourers for teagardens. These people have also carried their own distinct cultural heritage and language to the state. Thus, by this study on discourse markers, an attempt has been made to evaluate the prevailing state of education and training with respect to the teaching of English as a second language in the state. As English is one of the official languages of the country, with the status of associate national language and mastery of English is considered a social and educational accomplishment, as accurately described by Kudchedkar (2002) as follows:

... English plays a very important role in education, business and administration. It is the medium of instruction for higher education-both academic and technological. Those who seek jobs in private companies or professions must be proficient in English. It is recognized as an official language for purposes of administration at the national level. It would follow that it should be considered as a second language rather than a foreign language.

... Today, it is difficult to think of success in any career in India without adequate proficiency in English.

In short, Kachru's (1986) pronouncement that English has now become an integral part of India's linguistic repertoire is all the more true today.

Methodology

An inductive method of research based on a sample survey was used for the present study. The collection of data was done in the following sequence:

1. Existing literature related to 'Discourse Analysis' and 'Discourse Markers' were collected and read.

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2. After the above analysis was done, first, a questionnaire containing both subjective as well as objective questions, was prepared (the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 1).

This questionnaire was taken to the field and the subjects (students) were asked to fill it up. Second, a cloze test was prepared, wherein a portion of a text with the discourse markers removed, was given to the students (subjects). The students were asked to replace the missing words with appropriate discourse markers (a copy of the cloze test is attached in Appendix 2). Third, the students from all the three groups, i.e., the English medium (EM), the Urban Vernacular medium (VM-U), and the Rural Vernacular medium (VM-R), were asked to write a letter, story and an essay. Taking their (the subjects) letter, story and essay as a specimen, the frequency of their usage of 'Discourse Markers' was analyzed. The subjects were selected by simple random sampling, keeping the medium of instruction, schools and demographic characteristics in mind.

3. The following variables were considered significant for the present study:

a. Level of Education

b. Medium of instruction in School (English Medium, Urban Vernacular Medium, Rural Vernacular Medium)

c. Setting: urban versus rural

d. Linguistic community (Assamese/ Non-Assamese)

e. Sex

4. After the data was elicited and collected, it was categorized and tabulated. This tabulated data formed the basis of the final analysis.

Data Analysis

The Sample

The data has been elicited from two hundred subjects (students). These subjects have been categorized into three different groups based on their school, medium of instruction and demographic location. These subjects are studying in standard 8, 9, and 10. Under these

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groups, the subjects have been further sub grouped based on their gender and community. Broadly the three different groups are-

1. English Medium (EM)

2. Urban Vernacular Medium (VM-U)

3. Rural Vernacular Medium (VM-R)

(Note-there were no rural English medium schools)

The sub groups under these broad groups are-

1. Assamese/Non-Assamese

2. Male/Female

English Medium

In the group of English Medium (EM) students (subjects), there are total 86 students. Out of which, 57 students are female and 29 are male. There are 31 Non-Assamese students. Out of which, 27 students are female and 7 are male. There are 52 Assamese students, out of which, 30 are female and 22 are male.

	TOTAL	ASSAMESE	NON-ASSAMESE
EM	86	52	34
FEMALE	57	30	27
MALE	29	22	07

Urban Vernacular Medium (VM-U)

In the group of Urban Vernacular Medium (VM-U) students, there are total 56 students. Out of which, 27 students are female and 23 male. There are 5 Non-Assamese students. Out of which, 4 students are female and 1 is male.

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There are 45 Assamese students. Out of which, 23 students are female and 22 are male.

	TOTAL	ASSAMESE	NON-ASSAMESE
VM-U	56	51	5
FEMALE	28	23	4
MALE	28	22	1

Rural Vernacular Medium (VM-R)

In the group of Rural Vernacular Medium (VM-R), there are total 58 students. Out of which, 32 students are female and 26 are male. There are 10 Non-Assamese students. Out of which, 6 students are female and 4 are male. There are 48 Assamese students. Out of which, 26 students are female and 22 are male.

	TOTAL	ASSAMESE	NON-ASSAMESE
VM-R	58	48	10
FEMALE	32	26	6
MALE	26	22	4

For the purpose of data elicitation from the subjects, a questionnaire containing both subjective as well as objective questions, was prepared (the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 1). This questionnaire was taken to the field and the subjects from the Urban English medium (EM), the Urban Vernacular medium (VM-U), and the Rural Vernacular medium (VM-R) Schools were asked to fill it up. Second, a cloze test was prepared, wherein a portion of a text with the discourse markers removed, was given to the subjects. The subjects were asked to replace the missing words with appropriate discourse markers (a copy of the cloze test is attached in Appendix 2). Third, the subjects from all the three groups, i.e., EM, VM-U, VM-R, were asked to write a letter, story and an essay. Taking their (the

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subjects) letter, story and essay as a specimen, the frequency of their usage of 'Discourse Markers' was analyzed. To reach a conclusion, the answers of the students have been analyzed based on 3 parameters. The parameters are as follows:

1. Total number of students.

2. Assamese/Non-Assamese.

3. Male/Female.

The Data

After the analysis, it was seen that the most frequently used and popular discourse markers among the subjects are- *and, but, so, therefore, however, whereas, then, like, anyway, because* (both in oral and written texts). Again, the subjects often used the discourse markers *consequently, as a result, in addition, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore, nonetheless, regarding* more in their written texts and less in their oral texts.

The analysis in the table below is based on the subjects' written texts (letters, stories, essays). Each subject wrote one letter, story and essay. Total two hundred subjects submitted six hundred scripts for this study.

Table 1

A tabulated presentation of the most frequently used discourse markers in both oral and written texts

DISCOURSE MARKERS (FORMAL)	TOTAL NO. OF TIMES USED	AVERAGE USE PER INFORMANT
BUT	740	3.7
SO	705	3.5
AND	690	3.4
THEREFORE	600	3
HOWEVER	580	2.9
THEN	560	2.8

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ANYWAY	522	2.6
CONSEQUENTLY	480	2.4
AS A RESULT	445	2.2
IN ADDITION	416	2.08
NEVERTHELESS	408	2.04
MOREOVER	402	2.01
FURTHERMORE	372	1.86
REGARDING	318	1.59
WHEREAS	312	1.56
AT LAST	302	1.51

Table 2

Tabulated form of the most frequently used discourse markers (informal) in written texts

DISCOURSE MARKERS (INFORMAL)	TOTAL NO. OF TIMES USED	AVERAGE USE PER INFORMANT
WELL	298	1.49
OK	284	1.42
LIKE	209	1.04

[Note- Discourse Markers less than two times in the entire text corpus (questionnaires, cloze tests, letters, stories, essays) were discarded due to their very low frequency rate]

Findings

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1) The subjects used these discourse markers sentence initially. (other than one-two exceptions, it was seen in all the scripts of students).

2) A large chunk of the subjects in the written texts used the discourse marker '*and*' to coordinate idea units and to continue the speaker's action.

3) The discourse markers *however, nevertheless, nonetheless* were used by the subjects to emphasize contrast. The subjects used '*therefore, as a result, consequently*' for the same purpose, to show that the second statement follows logically from the first statement. But the frequency in the use of the discourse marker '*therefore*' was much higher than the discourse marker '*as a result*', '*consequently*.'

4) Technically, '*whereas*' give expression to two ideas which contrast but do not contradict each other. But after the analysis, it is seen that the discourse marker '*whereas*' is used by the subjects to both contrast and contradict two ideas.

5) The subjects used '*anyway*' for dismissal of previous discourse or idea unit.

6) The subjects used '*furthermore*', '*moreover*' to add more information. They also used the discourse marker '*in addition*' in the same line but it was used for more formal purpose in their texts.

Other than these discourse markers, the subjects are seen to have used some discourse markers occasionally. Those discourse markers are as follows –

1) The subjects used '*at the same time, on the other hand, conversely*' to balance contrasting points.

2) The subjects used '*At least, in any case*' to dismiss the previous discourse or sentence unit.

3) The subjects used '*similarly, in the same way*' to show similarity, comparison between idea units.

4) The subjects used '*after all*' for persuading.

5) The subjects used '*I mean, actually*' to clarify or give detail of an idea unit.

6) The subjects used '*basically, generally*' to summarize a discourse unit.

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7)   '*Yet*' is seen to be used by the subjects to emphasize a contrast.

8)   The subjects used *'by the way, incidentally'* for change of subject.

9)   The subjects used '*lastly, finally*' when they were talking about the end.

Overall Analysis Based on the Hypotheses

The acquisition of discourse markers by non-native learners of English is dependent on differences on the medium of instruction and other variables such as gender differences and the urban/ rural division.

The subjects were asked specific questions regarding this hypothesis, wherein they were enquired – which discourse markers do they use even while communicating in a language (including mother tongue) other than English? [Appendix 1 – Q.No.16]

The subjects used '*well', 'ok', 'so', 'now', 'I mean', 'anyway,' 'then'* extensively even while communicating in a language other than English. A comparative analysis between all the three groups—the English medium, the urban vernacular medium, the rural vernacular medium (EM, VM-U, VM-R) shows that the subjects from the VM-U group used maximum number of discourse markers even while communicating in a different language other than English. As out of 56 subjects of this group, 34 subjects gave correct answers, whereas, in the EM group, out of 86 subjects, 45 subjects gave correct answers. Similarly, in the VM-R group, out of 58 subjects, 33 gave correct answers.

<div align="center">

Table 3

</div>

The tabulated form of the analysis (with percentage)

GROUPS	TOTAL SUBJECTS	CORRECT ANSWER	PERCENTAGE
EM	86	45	52.32%
VM-U	56	34	60.71%
VM-R	58	33	56.89%

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Observations

1.   In the VM-U group, male subjects performed better than the female subjects.

2.   In the VM-U group, Assamese subjects performed better than the Non-Assamese subjects.

Table 4

The table presents the performance of male/female and Assamese/non-Assamese subjects

GROUPS	TOTAL SUBJECTS	MALE SUBJECTS	FEMALE SUBJECTS	ASSAMESE MALE	ASSAMESE FEMALE	NON-ASSAMESE MALE	NON-ASSAMESE FEMALE
EM	86	16	39	12	19	4	10
VM-U	56	15	19	15	18	-	1
VM-R	58	17	16	16	13	1	3

Gender differences may also prevail in the use and repertoire of discourse markers and they may serve to be important indicators as to gender based differences in communication and understanding.

Out of the six determining questions and tests, the data shows that the female subjects fared better than the male subjects. (The most common discourse markers among the female subjects were-*like, ok, so, well, anyway*).

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Table 5

The tabulated form with percentage

GENDER	TOTAL	Q.15	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	CLOZE TEST	NO. OF DM'S USED
MALE	78	55	48	53	33	13	30
PERCENTAGE (MALE)		70.51%	61.53%	67.94%	42.30%	16.66%	38.46%
FEMALE	116	55	74	70	55	44	69
PERCENTAGE (FEMALE)		47.41%	63.79%	60.34	47.41%	37.93%	50.86%

Table 6

The tabulated form of the male/female analysis

GENDER	Q.NO.15	Q.NO.16	Q.NO.17	Q.NO.18	CLOZE TEST	NO. OF DMs USED IN WRITTEN TEXTS
MALE	M	--	M	--	--	--
FEMALE	--	F	--	F	F	F

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- M- Male

- F- Female

Differences prevail in both repertoire and use of discourse markers between the students studying in the High Schools of Assam who are coming from different communities.

(In this study, students were from different communities of India like the Bengali, Bihari, Marwari, Sindhi, Tamil, Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, Miri, Manipuri etc. But I have broadly categorized these students' communities into Assamese and Non-Assamese for the analysis purpose.)

A comparative analysis between all the three groups, the Urban Vernacular Medium (VM-U), English Medium (EM), Rural Vernacular Medium (VM-R), it is seen that in the EM and VM-R groups, the subjects from the Assamese community have performed better than the students from the non-Assamese community, whereas in the VM-U group, the non-Assamese subjects performed better than the Assamese subjects. In some of the questions and tests- individual groups, like the Female Assamese subjects of the EM group or the Male Assamese subjects of the VM-U group were performing better. But, in the overall analysis, the Assamese subjects are seen to have performed better. An interesting feature was subjects from the non-Assamese group (especially- Marwari, Sindhi, Bihari, Tamil and even Bengali) used more informal discourse markers like- *well, like, ok, anyway* etc. The discourse marker '*like*' was seen to be the most common one.

Table 7

The tabulated form of the analysis

GROUPS	TOTAL NO. OF SUBJECTS	TOTAL ASSAMESE	TOTAL NON-ASSAMESE	TOTAL ASSAMESE MALE	TOTAL NON-ASSAMESE MALE	TOTAL ASSAMESE FEMALE	TOTAL NON-ASSAMESE FEMALE

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EM	86	52	34	22	7	30	27
VM-U	56	45	5	22	1	23	4
VM-R	58	48	10	22	4	26	6

Table 8

The tabulated form of the EM group (with percentage)

EM	Q.15	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	CLOZE TEST	NO. OF DM'S
TOTAL	41	45	71	49	40	36
ASSAMESE	27 (51.92%)	31 (59.61%)	44 (84.61%)	34 (65.38%)	28 (53.84%)	19 (36.53%)
NON-ASSAMESE	14 (41.17%)	14 (41.17%)	27 (79.41%)	15 (44.11%)	12 (35.29%)	17 (50%)

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Table 9

The tabulated form of the VM-U group (with percentage)

VM-U	Q.15	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	CLOZE TEST	NO. OF DM'S
TOTAL	32	34	38	19	5	25
ASSAMESE	28 (62.22%)	33 (73.33%)	33 (73.33%)	17 (37.77%)	2 (4.44%)	21 (46.66%)
NON-ASSAMESE	4 (80%)	1 (10%)	5 (100%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)

Table 10

The tabulated form of the VM-R group (with percentage)

VM-R	Q.15	Q.16	Q.17	Q.18	CLOZE TEST	NO. OF DM'S
TOTAL	37	33	14	20	12	38
ASSAMESE	31 (64.58%)	29 (50%)	11 (18.96%)	19 (39.59%)	11 (18.96%)	32 (66.66%)
NON-ASSAMESE	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	6 (60%)

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Differences prevail in both the repertoire and use of discourse markers between students studying in the Urban English Medium Schools (EM) as compared to Urban Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-U) and Rural Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-R).

From the comparative analysis done on the basis of the written texts (essays, letters, stories) written by the subjects in the three groups, the Urban English Medium (EM), the Urban Vernacular Medium (VM-U) and the Rural Vernacular Medium (VM-R). It is seen that the subjects of the VM-R group used the highest number of discourse markers. The discourse markers used by this group were more formal in nature. They used the discourse markers-*therefore, as a result, consequently, however, nevertheless, whereas, regarding,* extensively.

Table 11

The tabulated form of the analysis of the EM, VM-U, VM-R group (with percentage)

GROUPS	TOTAL SUBJECTS	SUBJECTS WHO USED 5 OR MORE DM'S IN TEXT	PERCENTAGE
EM	86	36	41.86%
VM-U	56	25	44.64%
VM-R	58	38	65.51%

Observations

1. The female subjects performed better than the male subjects.

2. The Non-Assamese subjects performed better than the Assamese subjects.

Thus the analysis of the data reveals that the Discourse markers in English do serve as connectors and aid successful communication in the mother tongue and other languages of the student. Gender differences prevail in the use and repertoire of discourse markers.

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Differences also prevail in both repertoire and use of discourse markers between the students studying in the high schools of Assam who come from different communities. Differences can be seen in both the repertoire and use of discourse markers between students studying in the English Medium Schools (EM), Urban Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-U) and Rural Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-R).

CONCLUSION

The present study was an initial attempt to determine how the acquisition of discourse markers by non-native learners of English is dependent on differences on the medium of instruction and other variables such as gender differences and the urban/ rural division. Although, the number of subjects in the study is not too huge to make any substantial claims, the study itself can be regarded as a step toward uncovering the nature of discourse marker acquisition by a non-native speaker.

On the basis of the present study it was found that the most frequently used and popular discourse markers among the subjects are - *but, so, and, therefore, however, then, anyway, whereas.* Again, in the written texts, the subjects have often used the discourse markers namely *consequently, as a result, in addition, nevertheless, moreover, furthermore, regarding.*

The Main Findings of the Study may be summarized as-

The study reveals that the Discourse markers in English do serve as connectors and aid successful communication in the mother tongue and other languages of the student. The subjects from the urban vernacular medium (VM-U) have proved this correct by using maximum number of discourse markers even while communicating in a different language (including mother tongue) other than English.

Gender differences prevail in the use and repertoire of discourse markers. The final analysis shows that the female subjects fared better than the male subjects in the frequency as well as proficiency of usage of discourse markers.

Differences prevail in both repertoire and use of discourse markers between the students studying in the High Schools of Assam who come from different communities. In the overall analysis, the Assamese subjects are seen to have performed better.

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Differences prevail in both the repertoire and use of discourse markers between students studying in the English Medium Schools (EM) as compared to Urban Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-U) and Rural Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-R). The study also found that the subjects of the Rural Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-R) group used the highest number of discourse markers in the written texts.

Implications for English Language Teaching in a Multilingual Setting

Multilingualism is now a legitimate reality in the world. Given that multilingualism is a norm rather than the exception, maintaining and developing multilingual competence has become a necessity. A majority of students arrive in schools with multilingual competence and hold multiple identities. And even if they arrive as monolinguals, it is imperative that they have opportunities to acquire additional languages from peers or from instruction.

Skutnabb Kangas (2000) says that English is a killer language in India. But it is seen that English is not usually the direct cause of language death in India. Rather, it is seen to be a driving force in the globalization of the economy, which forces people to switch to English as a means to improve their social mobility. Today, be it education, business or administration, English plays a very important role. It is the medium of instruction for higher education-both academic and technological. Proficiency in English is mandatory for jobs in private companies. Today, the reality is such that it is difficult to think of success in any career in India without adequate proficiency in English.

In the present study, it was seen that English is not always learned with subtractive effect on other languages. The present study found that the subjects of the Rural Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-R) group used the highest number of discourse markers in the written texts. Again the subjects from the urban vernacular medium (VM-U) have used maximum number of discourse markers even while communicating in a different language (including mother tongue) other than English. In both the Rural Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-R) and the Urban Vernacular Medium Schools (VM-U), the medium of instruction is the mother tongue, which is Assamese (even the non-Assamese students studying in these schools have to learn Assamese). This proves that medium of instruction in mother tongue does not stand as a deterrent in acquiring adequate proficiency in English.

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The most interesting feature in a multilingual setting like India is that irrespective of the language, the people are conversing in, the discourse markers 'ok', 'oh', 'well', 'and', 'but', 'or', 'so', 'like', 'because', 'now', 'then', 'I mean', 'you know', 'uh', 'anyway', 'yet' are seen to be used. In the present study, it was derived from the analysis that subjects used 'well', 'ok', 'so', 'now', 'I mean', 'anyway' extensively even while communicating in a language other than English.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. Father's Name:

3. Mother's Name:

4. Date of Birth:

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5. Male/Female:

6. Class:

7. Ambition:

8. Occupation of Father: Govt./Private/Business (tick one)

9. Occupation of Mother: Govt./Private/Business/Home maker (tick one)

10. Since when have you lived here?

11. Which languages do you speak?

a) at home

b) at school

c) with friends-

12. List the languages you know?

a) well:

b) so-so:

c) not so well:

13. What languages do you use at home?

a) with grandparents:

b) with parents:

c) with siblings:

d) with relatives:

e) with servants(if any):

f) with pets(if any):

14. Do you sing in the bathroom (if yes, in which language do you sing)?
-

15. What words do you use to connect sentences in English?
-

16. Which of these English words do you use even while talking in a language other than English?
-

17. How often do you use the following words while writing answers, essays, stories?

[Very often/often/occasionally/never]

a) Well:

b) Ok:

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c) Actually:

d) And:

e) Like:

f) Now:

g) But:

h) Because:

i) Then:

j) Yet:

k) Anyway:

l) I mean:

m) So:

n) While:

o) Whereas:

p) Nonetheless:

q) However:

r) Moreover:

s) Therefore:

t) Furthermore:

18. Which are your favourite sentence connectors?

===
Appendix 2

Cloze Test

Fill in the blanks with appropriate sentence connectives:

………………our efforts to improve the local economy, we have made some benefits……………the latest market figures, we can see that our company is progressing. We have been steadily improving our customer service center,……………., our shipping department needs to be redesigned. I would like to say that …………….., I am concerned, we

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should continue to develop our resources. Our energy bills have been increasing steadily……………..these costs, our telephone costs have doubled over the past six months. I warned Amy not to invest all his savings in the stock market…………., he invested and lost everything. Amidst these, his problems with his parents are extremely frustrating. ………….., there seems to be no easy solution to them. I assured him that I would come to his presentation. ……………………. I also invited a number of important representatives from the local chambers of commerce. We have almost lost 3,000 customers over the past six months. ………….., we have been forced to cut back our advertising budget. The government has drastically reduced its spending. ……………., a number of programs have been cancelled.

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