

Culture in Writing: Discourse Markers in English and Spanish Student Writing

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Abstract

Taking into account the Relevance Theory and Contrastive Rhetoric as frameworks, discourse markers are studied in this research from a functional-communicative perspective. Discourse Markers are examined from a corpus of student writing and analysed considering the number and typology of discourse markers used in these texts. Finally, some pedagogical conclusions are established considering the results of the research.

Resumen

Tomando como marcos la Teoría de la Pertinencia y la Retórica Contrastiva, en esta investigación se estudian los marcadores del discurso desde una perspectiva funcional-communicativa. Los marcadores del discurso se examinan a partir de un corpus de escritos de estudiantes y se analizan considerando el número y los tipos de marcadores utilizados en estos textos. Por último, se establecen algunas conclusiones pedagógicas a la luz de los resultados de la investigación.

1. A theory of communication: Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory.

The title of this paper may suggest this is a purely linguistic research. Actually, it is. However, a linguistic research cannot afford to lose sight of the most general context of communication. The sub-title under this first heading, "Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory" makes reference to the framework used in this paper to understand what communication is and how it works.

Communication theory has been ruled by the coding-decoding explanation for many years. This interpretation of communication stated that an addresser sends a message which is

decoded by an addressee thanks to the mutual knowledge of a (linguistic) code. In more recent versions of this theory, the knowledge of the code included socio-cultural as well as linguistic components.

However, Sperber and Wilson (1986) ask themselves whether decoding is enough for understanding an utterance and the answer they reach is that verbal understanding is not solely based on a decoding process, but also, and fundamentally, on an inferential process. They differentiate word meaning, which can be understood by decoding, and the speaker's meaning, which can only be understood by inference and by enriching word meaning with contextual informationⁱ. The problem was now to find the principle which could guide the addressee from the comprehension of word meaning through decoding to the apprehension of the speaker's meaning through inferences. Their solution to that question is the Principle of Relevance.

The Principle of Relevance determines that all utterances are ruled by the level of optimal relevance. That means that when a speakerⁱⁱ calls a hearer's attention to her utterance, she is claiming that her utterance is relevant enough as to deserve the hearer's attention, which means that she has considered the level of optimal relevance. Then, the hearer will interpret that utterance considering that the speaker has used the level of optimal relevance.

The level of optimal relevance is that which results from the equation between the maximal contextual effect and the minimum cognitive effort. The hearer stores a number of assumptions in his memory, and these assumptions can interact with the new item of information conveyed by the speaker, which will provoke three possible results: a new assumption, the strengthening of an old assumption or the contradiction, and even elimination, of an old assumption. These are the three possible contextual effects. (Blakemore 1992:135)

For this process, the speaker must try to make the hearer's cognitive effort as reduced as possible or, if not, she must compensate it with a very important contextual effect. If the speaker does not follow this principle and the required cognitive effort is too large or the expected contextual effect is too short, then the hearer will not participate in the communication process for he will think the reward is not worth the effort.

Thus, the speaker can help the hearer by reducing the cognitive effort he must make. According to Blakemore (1992: 176), "a speaker may use the linguistic form of his utterance to guide the interpretation process." That is, the speaker can reduce the number of possible interpretations of her utterance by means of certain linguistic devices, and that is why style is not a redundant ornament of linguistic utterances, but a necessary element:

Styles vary according to the extent to which the speaker uses linguistically specified devices to constrain the hearer's choice of context, and according to the means they choose (lexical, syntactic and intonational). In each case, the speaker's decision is governed by his estimation of the hearer's processing abilities and contextual resources. In other words, it is a decision which arises out of the search for relevance. (Blakemore 1992: 177)

Blakemore (1992), in her study of the process of understanding utterances, considers the following example:

- 1) Barbara is in town. David isn't here.

Her conclusion is that "in actual discourse the connection between the two utterances would not be left unspecified, and the speaker would constrain the interpretation of the second sentence either by intonation or by the use of discourse connectives like *so*, *after all*, *moreover*, or *however*." (ibid.:136) This is why discourse markers appear in verbal communication. Now we will consider their definition.

2. Definition of "Discourse Markers"

Discourse markers are defined as linguistic items, with no syntactic function at the sentence level, which serve, according to their morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic properties, as a guide for the interpretation of utterances.ⁱⁱⁱ The speaker adds these markers to reduce the cognitive effort required from the hearer to interpret the utterance, by signalling which inference reflects more accurately the speaker's meaning.

This concept is not new at all. Only in Spanish fourteen different terms, apart from "discourse markers" cover, sometimes partially, sometimes completely, the same idea: *conectores*, *conectores extraoracionales*, *conectores argumentativos*, *conectores discursivos*, *conectores pragmáticas*, *conectores enunciativos*, *conectivos*, *partículas discursivas*, *enlaces textuales*, *relacionantes supraoracionales*, *elementos de cohesión*, *operadores discursivos*, *ordenadores del discurso* and *muletillas*. (Martín Zorraquino y Portolé Lázaro 1999: 4057) We prefer "discourse markers" because it is neutral between the function of connection and their other function, which is the expression of modality as a way of leading the hearer towards a certain interpretation.

M.A.K. Halliday, in his *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994:81-85) describes three different kinds of “adjuncts”: circumstantial, modal and conjunctive adjuncts. When it comes to establish the differences between them, Halliday (1994:84) writes: “What is common to the Modal and Conjunctive adjuncts, as distinct from the circumstantials, is that they are both constructing a context for the clause.” That is, “modal” and “conjunctive” adjuncts provide the hearer with information to enrich the word meaning or, as Blakemore (1992:7) writes: “the gap between the sentence meaning and the utterance meaning may be narrowed by the use of lexical or syntactic means.”

Downing and Locke (1992:58-64) also adopt a similar classification but with slightly different terms: adjuncts, disjuncts and conjuncts. The same difference is marked, that adjuncts belong to the clause structure while disjuncts and conjuncts are external to it. Disjuncts are defined as linguistic items which “represent a comment by the speaker or writer on the content of the clause as a whole.” (ibid.: 62) Conjuncts are said to “tell us how the speaker or writer understands the semantic connection between two utterances, or parts of utterances.” (ibid.: 63) It is interesting to note that, when it comes to comment in detail the contribution of disjuncts and conjuncts in initial position, Downing and Locke (1992:231-232) call them Conjunctive Themes and Modal Themes, revealing their closeness to Halliday’s work.

So, discourse markers are linguistic items used by speakers to ease the interpretation of utterances by providing contextual information easy to decode which will be used by the hearer to enrich the sentence meaning. Discourse markers convey two types of information: attitudinal comments of the speaker or information about the connections between utterances. In any case, discourse markers are not elements of the clause structure; they work from outside the clause, which is frequently marked by the use of commas in writing or by a pause after them in speaking. A possible bilingual classification of discourse markers is introduced below in tables 1 and 2 (adapted from Halliday 1994: 49, and Portolés 1998: 156)

	Type	Meaning	Examples	Ejemplos
I	Appositive	"i.e., e.g."	That is, in other words, for example, etc.	Es decir, a saber, o sea, por ejemplo, etc.
	Corrective	"rather"	Or rather, at least, to be precise, etc.	Mejor dicho, más bien, etc.

	Dismissive	"in any case"	In any case, anyway, leaving that aside, etc.	En cualquier caso, en todo caso, de todos modos, de cualquier forma, etc.
	Summative	"in short"	Briefly, to sum up, in conclusion, etc.	En resumen, en definitiva, en fin, al fin y al cabo, etc.
	Verifactive	"actually"	Actually, in fact, as a matter of fact, etc.	En realidad, en el fondo, de hecho, desde luego, etc.
II	Additive	"and"	Also, moreover, in addition, besides, etc.	Además, encima, aparte, incluso, es más, etc.
	Adversative	"but"	On the other hand, however, conversely, etc.	Por otra parte, por otro lado, por su parte, etc.
	Variative	"instead"	Instead, alternatively, etc.	En cambio, por el contrario, etc.
III	Temporal	"then"	Meanwhile, before that, later on, next, soon, finally, etc.	Mientras tanto, con anterioridad, más tarde, etc.
	Comparative	"likewise"	Likewise, in the same way, etc.	De igual forma, en el mismo sentido, etc.
	Causal.- Consecutive	"so"	Therefore, for this reason, as a result, with this in mind, etc.	Así pues, por consiguiente, de ahí, etc.
	Conditional	"(if...)then"	In that case, under the circumstances, otherwise, etc.	En ese caso, ante tales circunstancias, etc.
	Concessive	"yet"	Nevertheless, despite that, etc.	Sin embargo, no obstante, con todo, ahora bien, etc.
	Respective	"as to that"	In this respect, as far as that's concerned, etc.	En ese sentido, etc.

Table 1. Conjunctive discourse markers in English and Spanish.

Type	Meaning	Examples	Ejemplos
Opinion	I think	In my opinion, personally, to my	En mi opinión,

		mind, etc.	personalmente, desde mi punto de vista, etc.
Admission	I admit	Frankly, to be honest, to tell you the truth, etc.	Francamente, para ser honrado, etc.
Persuasion	I assure you	Honestly, really, believe me, seriously, etc.	Hablando en serio, de verdad, en serio, etc.
Entreaty	I request	Please, kindly, etc.	Por favor, si es tan amable, etc.
Presumption	I presume	Evidently, apparently, no doubt, presumably, etc.	Evidentemente, sin lugar a dudas, sin duda, etc.
Desirability	How desirable?	Unfortunately, to my delight/distress, regrettably, hopefully, etc.	Desgraciadamente, afortunadamente, etc.
Reservation	How reliable?	At first, tentatively, provisionally, looking back on it, etc.	En principio, de forma provisional, etc.
Validation	How valid?	Broadly speaking, in general, on the whole, strictly speaking, etc.	En general, en términos generales, etc.
Evaluation	How sensible?	Unwisely, understandably, mistakenly, foolishly, etc.	Sabiamente, de forma comprensible, etc.
Prediction	How expected?	To my surprise, surprisingly, as expected, by chance, etc.	De forma sorprendente, por casualidad, como se esperaba, etc.

Table 2. Modal discourse markers in English and Spanish.

3. Description of the research: Research questions, participants and corpus

The use of discourse markers is a choice of style. Blakemore (1992: 177) writes that “every speaker must make some decision about what to make explicit and what to leave implicit, and (...) 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.” For that reason, the research on discourse markers in writing is a research on style in writing.

And this idea is combined in this paper with the notion of Contrastive Rhetoric (Trujillo Sáez, en prensa). Contrastive Rhetoric is a current of research which appeared in the U.S. in the late sixties and whose “founder” was the applied linguist Robert B. Kaplan. The

notion appeared out of pedagogical interest and necessity, when foreign students came to the U.S., and the differences in writing style across cultures puzzled language teachers and linguists alike. Contrastive Rhetoric was an attempt to understand them and to propose teaching methodologies appropriate to tackle these differences.

Connor (1996:5) defines Contrastive Rhetoric in its modern sense: “Contrastive Rhetoric is an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them.” Three basic principles complement this definition (*ibid.*:5): 1) “Language and writing are cultural phenomena”; 2) “Each language has rhetorical conventions unique to it”; 3) “The linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the first language interfere with writing in the second language”.

This paper shows a research on discourse markers from the perspective of Contrastive Rhetoric. Our objective is to study the differences and similarities in the use of discourse markers by Spanish- and English-speaking writers. With this comparison we want to know whether any of the two groups use discourse markers more frequently, and the types of discourse markers they use.

The participants in this study have been, on the one hand, students from the Faculty of Education and Humanities of Ceuta (University of Granada), and, on the other hand, North-American students on a study visit to Spain. The Spanish students were eighteen and the American students were seventeen. All of them were volunteers. They were told that this was a research on personal writing styles and it was promised that they would receive a report with their results which would help them to improve their style.

Each of them had to write three texts: an argumentative, an expositive and a narrative text. Unfortunately, given the volunteer participation in the research, the number of texts is not homogeneous: there are 12 Spanish and 8 American argumentative texts, 8 Spanish and 11 American expositive texts and 14 Spanish and 11 American narrative texts. The texts were written in three 60- minute sessions, resembling as much as possible a classroom setting.

After the writing sessions, the texts were assessed by four Spanish raters. Two of them were teachers at Secondary schools and the other two raters were Spanish senior lecturers from the Department of Language Teaching of the University of Granada. If the hypotheses of Contrastive Rhetoric were right, there should be differences between the texts written by the two groups which would provoke differences in the assessment. We wanted, then, to check if there was a cultural preference for the Spanish texts.

The dilemma was that, on the one hand, we could not give the raters the texts in English, because that could influence drastically in the assessment; but, on the other hand, we could not ask the American writers to write in Spanish because the resulting text would not reflect anything about their native writing style, but only interlanguage features which were not our object of study.

The solution was to translate the texts. We assume how problematic this solution is, but it was impossible to find any other way of solving the dilemma. Translating the texts from English to Spanish was the only way to keep the assessment realistic.

After the assessment, the texts were analysed in their original languages. Three analyses were performed: length of the texts (number of words, of paragraphs, and of t-units), use and types of discourse markers and use of textual models. In this paper we will comment only on the second variable.

4. Discussion of the results

So, the research questions we wanted to solve were:

1. Is there any significant difference in the number of discourse markers between the texts in Spanish and the texts in English?
2. Is there any significant difference in the types of discourse markers used in the texts in Spanish and the texts in English?

Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 show the use of discourse markers in each text type, and, later on, the statistics are shown for each language and each text type.

Name	Discourse markers	Conjunctive D.M.	Modal D.M.
Consuelo	3	1	2
Cristina O.	13	4	9
Cristina R.	8	7	1
Hadiya	1	0	1
Jorge	3	3	0

Lorena	7	7	0
Lourdes	5	4	1
Mª del Mar	6	2	4
Maribel	4	3	1
Miguel Ángel	0	0	0
Silvia	5	5	0
Silvia II	5	4	1

Table 3. Discourse Markers in Spanish argumentative texts.

Name	Discourse Markers	Conjunctive D.M.	Modal D.M.
Anne	1	0	1
Charlotte	1	0	1
Elana	1	1	0
Katy	2	1	1
Leslie	0	0	0
Mia	1	1	0
Sarah	0	0	0
Suzy	1	0	1

Table 4. Discourse Markers in American English argumentative texts.

Name	Discourse Markers	Conjunctive D.M.	Modal D.M.
Consuelo	1	1	0
Hadiya	1	1	0
Jorge	3	3	0
Lourdes	9	5	4
Maribel	9	6	3
Miguel Ángel	1	1	0
Silvia	13	12	1
Silvia II	8	6	2

Table 5. Discourse Markers in Spanish expositive texts

Name	Discourse Markers	Conjunctive D.M.	Modal D.M.
Anne	3	3	0
Charlotte	4	4	0
Elana	1	1	0
Irene	4	4	0
Jonathan	0	0	0
Katy	2	2	0
Leslie	2	0	2
Mia	2	2	0
Sarah	1	1	0
Suzy	2	1	1
Will	3	1	2

Table 6. Discourse Markers in American English expositive texts.

Name	Discourse Markers	Conjunctive D.M.	Modal D.M.
Ana	8	7	1
Celia	1	0	1
Consuelo	1	1	0
Cristina O.	16	15	1
Cristina R.	0	0	0
Elena	0	0	0
Hadiya	0	0	0
Javier	2	2	0
Jorge	0	0	0
Lorena	0	0	0
Lourdes	1	1	0
Mar	2	2	0
Maribel	3	3	0

Rosa	1	1	0
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Table 7. Discourse Markers in Spanish narrative texts.

Name	Discourse Markers	Conjunctive D.M.	Modal D.M.
Anne	3	2	1
Charlotte	2	1	1
Elana	6	4	2
Irene	2	2	0
Jonathan	1	0	1
Katy	1	1	0
Leslie	1	1	0
Mia	1	1	0
Stephanie	2	2	0
Suzy	1	1	0
Will	2	2	0

Table 8. Discourse Markers in American English narrative texts.

Table 9 shows the statistics for the total of discourse markers, considering both conjunctive and modal discourse markers. Texts in English have a mean of 1.76 discourse markers while Spanish texts have a mean of 4.11 discourse markers, with standard deviations of 1.30 and 4.26, respectively. The t-test procedure allows to state that, with a level of significance of 0.004, there is a significant difference in the number of discourse markers used in the Spanish and the English texts, $p < 0.05$.

So, at this point we agree with some previous studies, such as Connor y McCagg (1983), where the same tendency towards a greater number of discourse markers in Spanish texts than in English texts was found. Reid (1992) reached the same conclusion, that Spanish writers used more “cohesive structures” than English-speaking writers. Montañó-Harmón (1991) also found out that Spanish-speaking Mexican writers used more syntactic cohesive elements than English-speaking American writers. However, any conclusion about the coincidence between these studies and ours must be halted until the complete analysis of the texts has finished.

When conjunctive and modal discourse markers are studied separately, we discover differences between them. In English there is a mean of 1.30 conjunctive discourse markers and 0.46 modal discourse markers (standard deviations of 1.20 and 0.68, respectively), in comparison with the mean of 3.14 conjunctive discourse markers and 1.00 modal discourse markers in Spanish (standard deviations of 3.50 and 1.85, respectively).

When we applied the t-test procedure to these data, we found out that a significant difference between the two groups can only be stated in the use of conjunctive discourse markers, with a level of significance of 0.006 and a reliability level between -3.13 and -0.55 , $p < 0.05$. Tables 9 and 10 summarize these results.

	Language	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Discourse Markers	English	30	1.7667	1.3047
	Spanish	34	4.1176	4.2623
Conjunctive D.M.	English	30	1.3000	1.2077
	Spanish	34	3.1471	3.5001
Modal D.M.	English	30	0.4667	0.6814
	Spanish	34	1.0000	1.8586

Table 9. Mean, and standard deviation of discourse markers, conjunctive discourse markers and modal discourse markers for the total of texts.

	Significance	Reliability level	
		Inferior	Superior
Discourse Markers	0.004	-3.9050	-0.7970
Conjunctive D.M.	0.006	-3.1379	-0.5562
Modal D.M.	0.143	-1.2513	0.1846

Table 10. T-test procedure with the means of discourse markers for the total of texts.

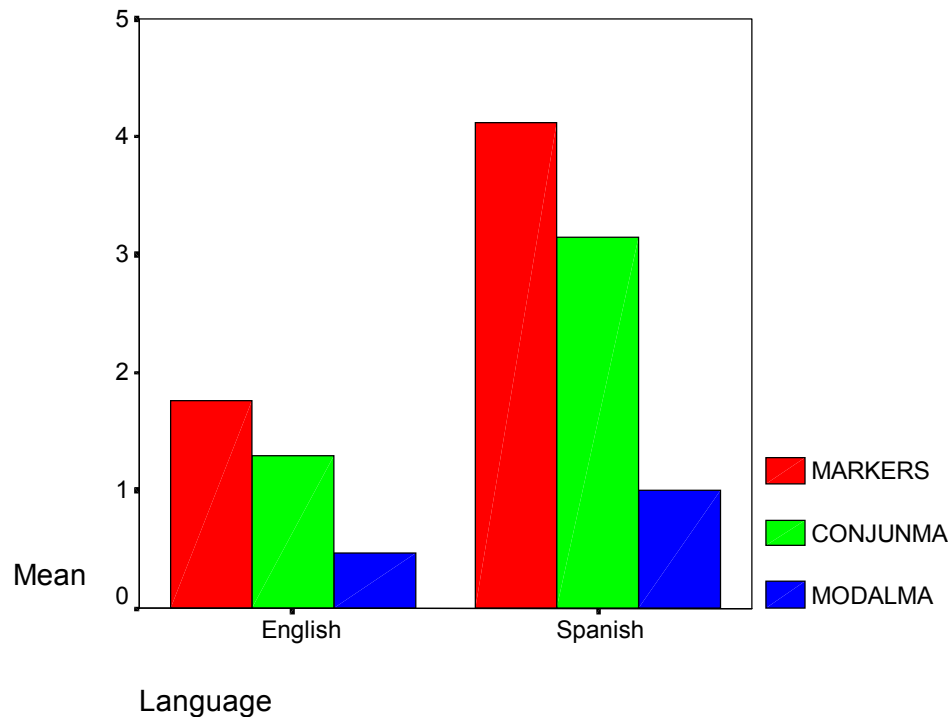


Figure 1. Mean of discourse markers, conjunctive discourse markers and modal discourse markers in the total of texts.

The distribution of discourse markers according to text types has also been analyzed. Tables 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16, and figures 2, 3, and 4 summarize the statistical results and the t-test procedure. There are significant differences in the total of markers in argumentative texts, with a mean of 0.87 in the texts in English and of 5.00 in Spanish (level of significance, 0.001) and in the number of conjunctive discourse markers with a mean of 0.37 in English texts and of 3.33 in Spanish texts (level of significance, 0.001), $p > 0.05$. However, neither in expository texts nor in narrative texts can significant differences be stated for conjunctive or modal discourse markers.

	Language	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Discourse Markers	English	8	0.8750	0.6409
	Spanish	12	5.0000	3.4112
Conjunctive D. M.	English	8	0.3750	0.5175
	Spanish	12	3.3333	2.3484
Modal D.M.	English	8	0.5000	0.5345

	Spanish	12	1.6667	2.5702
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Table 11. Statistics of discourse markers in argumentative texts.

	Significance	Reliability level	
		Lowest	Highest
Discourse Markers	0.001	-6.3238	-1.9262
Conjunctive D.M.	0.001	-4.4808	-1.4359
Modal D.M.	0.226	-3.1197	0.7864

Table 12. T-test procedure for discourse markers in argumentative texts.

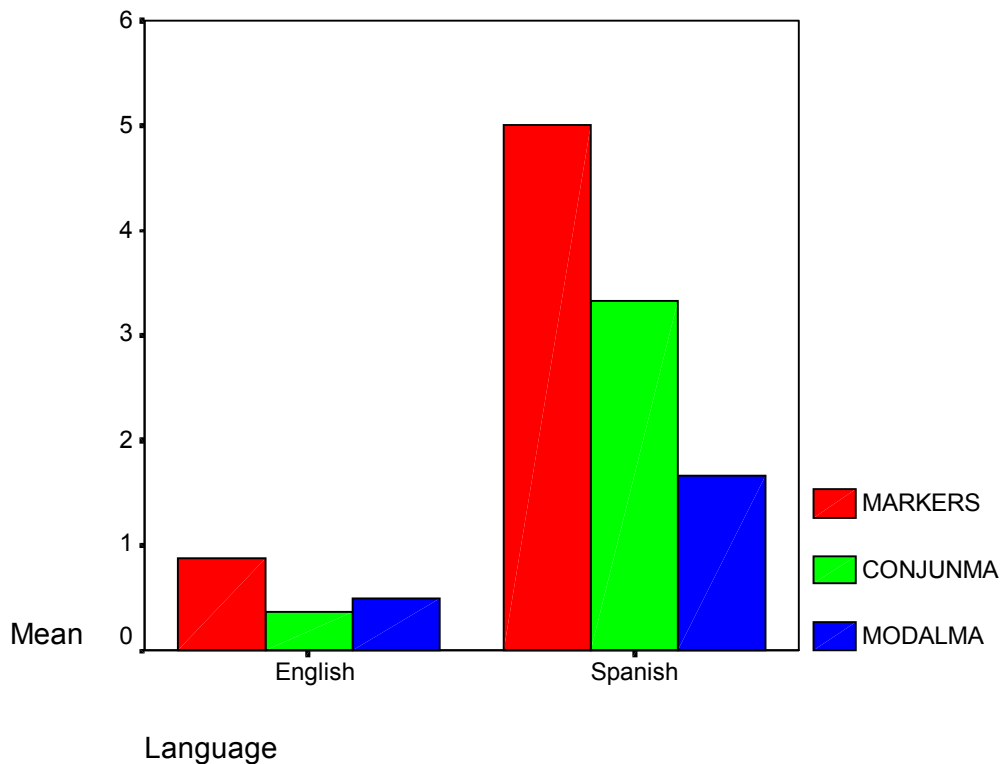


Figure 2. Mean of discourse markers, conjunctive discourse markers and modal discourse markers in argumentative texts.

	Language	N	Mean	Standard deviation
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Discourse Markers	English	11	2.1818	1.2505
	Spanish	8	5.6250	4.6885
Conjunctive D.M.	English	11	1.7273	1.4206
	Spanish	8	4.3750	3.7773
Modal D.M.	English	11	0.4545	0.8202
	Spanish	8	1.2500	1.5811

Table 13. Statistics of discourse markers in expositive texts.

	Significance	Reliability level	
		Lowest	Highest
Discourse Markers	0.079	-7.3874	0.5011
Conjunctive D.M.	0.094	-5.8520	0.5566
Modal D.M.	0.223	-2.1623	0.5714

Table 14. T-test procedure for discourse markers in expositive texts

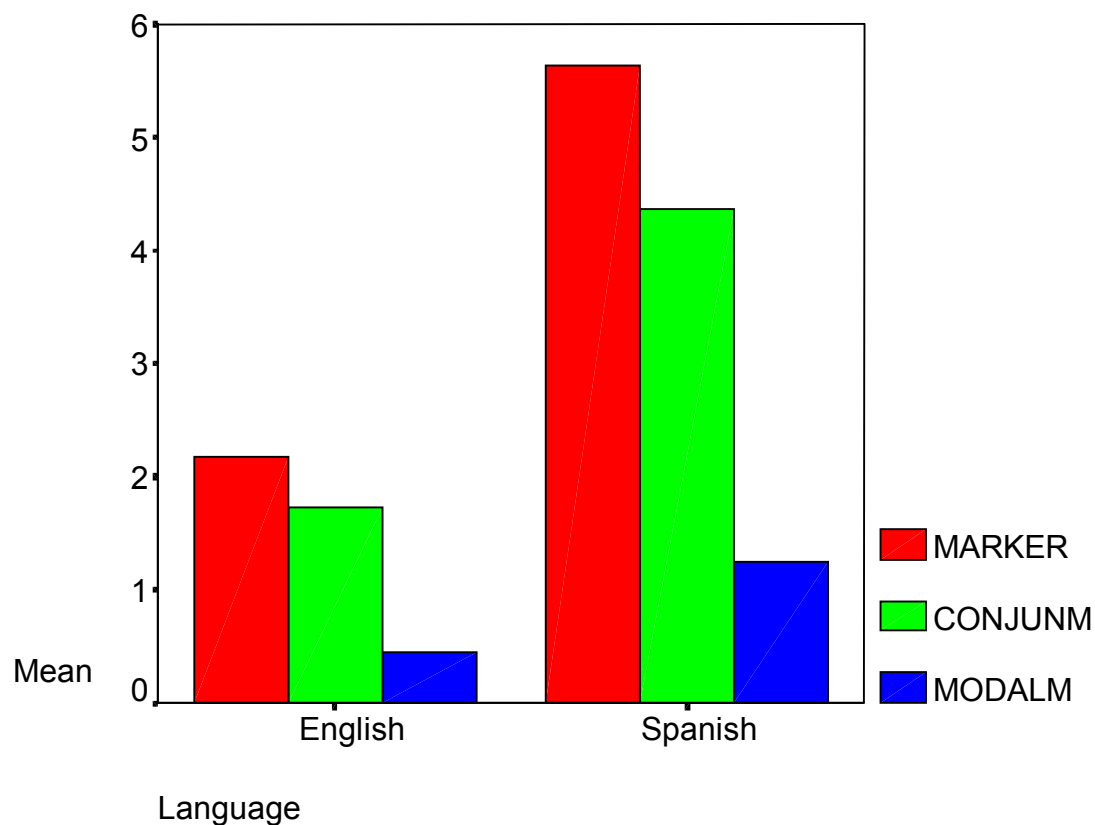


Figure 3. Mean of discourse markers, conjunctive discourse markers and modal discourse markers in expositive texts.

	Language	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Discourse Markers	English	11	2.0000	1.4832
	Spanish	14	2.5000	4.4159
Conjunctive D.M.	English	11	1.5455	1.0357
	Spanish	14	2.2857	4.1218
Modal D.M.	English	11	0.4545	0.6876
	Spanish	14	0.2143	0.4258

Table 15. Statistics of discourse markers in narrative texts.

	Significance	Reliability level	
		Lowest	Highest

Discourse Markers	0.723	-3.3847	2.3847
Conjunctive D.M.	0.568	-3.3850	1.9045
Modal D.M.	0.325	-0.2615	0.7420

Table 16. T-test procedure for discourse markers in narrative texts

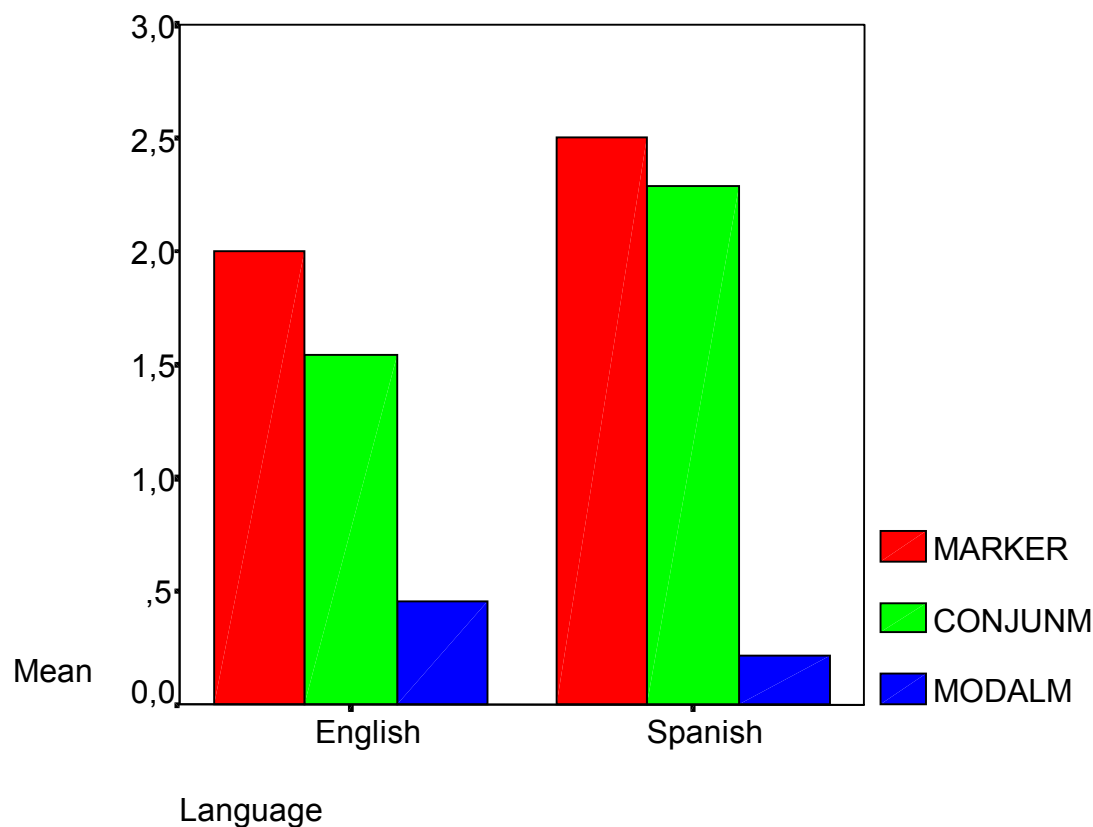


Figure 4. Mean of discourse markers, conjunctive discourse markers and modal discourse markers in narrative texts.

To sum up, after the study of the three text types, there is a significant difference in the use of discourse markers in argumentative texts but only considering conjunctive discourse markers. The two other text types show no significant differences in relation to the number of discourse markers or the types of discourse markers, conjunctive or modal, normally used.

These data coincide with the results of Ana I. Moreno (1997) in her study of intersentential relations of causal coherence. According to this research, Spanish and English-

speaking writers are similarly explicit in the use of discourse markers, and if there are differences, these are governed by style, or using, Halliday's terminology, by register and genre.

So, our data, after studying discourse markers in relation to text types, do not agree with those in Connor and McCagg (1983) or Reid (1992), who do find differences in the use of discourse markers between Spanish and English. However, in the case of Connor y McCagg (1983), the differences only appear in the best qualified texts, not in the rest, whilst in the case of Reid (1992), as he used texts written in English as a foreign language, his results must be questioned for the validity of the comparison between native writing and foreign (inter)language writing.

Therefore, we cannot completely ratify the hypothesis of Contrastive Rhetoric. Discourse markers appear with similar functions and frequencies in both groups, so we cannot observe any cultural determination in the use of discourse markers, and these cannot serve to explain a bad reception of the texts by the members of the other discourse community.

However, differences have indeed been found in argumentative texts in relation to conjunctive discourse markers. This makes us think that the hypothesis of Contrastive Rhetoric does not affect all text types equally, and a more genre- and register-based study is necessary in each case.

Finally, we have also studied the use of discourse markers by the best and the worst qualified writers, and some very interesting tendencies have appeared. For example, the best qualified argumentative texts tend to use a number of discourse markers above the mean of the texts. Cristina O., one of the best writers of argumentative texts in Spanish, used 13 discourse markers in total, 4 conjunctive y 9 modal discourse markers, when the mean in Spanish argumentative texts is 5 discourse markers in total, 3.3 conjunctive and 1.6 modal discourse markers. Elana, in the English argumentative texts, is also above the mean in the number of discourse markers (1 vs. 0.87) and conjunctive discourse markers (1 vs. 0.37), although she uses no modal discourse marker at all.

On the other hand, the worst qualified argumentative texts show the opposed tendency, that is, to use a number of discourse markers below the mean. Jorge, a Spanish writer, uses only 3 conjunctive discourse markers, when the means are 5 discourse markers, 3.3 conjunctive and 1.66 modal. Leslie, an American writer with a mean score of 2.75, has not used any discourse marker at all, when the mean for the English texts is 0.87 discourse markers. However, as we have already said, this is only a tendency which should be

contrasted with a greater corpus, as between the worst qualified texts we can find samples of texts above the mean, as Silvia or Katy.

In the narrative texts, the best qualified writers have always used a greater number of discourse markers than the rest of the group. Ana, the best Spanish narrative writer, uses 8 discourse markers, 7 conjunctive and 1 modal, while the mean of Spanish narrative texts is 2.50 discourse markers, 2.28 conjunctive and 0.21 modal. On the other hand, Irene, one of the best American narrative writer, uses 2 discourse markers in total, both of them conjunctive, while the mean in English is of 2 discourse markers in total, 1.54 conjunctive and 0.45 modal; however, Elana, who is also very well qualified, uses 6 discourse markers in total, 4 conjunctive and 2 modals.

In this case, the worst qualified narrative writers have always been below the mean, Neither Jorge nor Hadiya have used discourse markers at all, while Suzy and Mia have used only one, when the mean in English are 2 discourse markers.

Finally, the case of expositive texts is quite significant. None of the two best qualified texts, in English or Spanish, are above the mean. Hadiya has used 1 discourse markers in her text, while the mean is 5.68 discourse markers. Elana has also used only 1 discourse markers when the mean in English is 2.18 discourse markers. Equally, if we study the worst qualified expositive texts, we find out that Jorge and Katy, the worst qualified writers, are also below the mean. That is, neither the best nor the worst are above the mean.

However, if we consider the central elements of the qualifications, they are now above the mean of discourse markers, conjunctive and modal. That is, if we consider the case of Lourdes, a Spanish writer with a mean score of 3.75, instead of Hadiya, we find out that she has used 9 discourse markers, 5 conjunctive and 4 modal, or if we consider Jorge, with a mean score of 2.75, we discover that he has used 8 discourse markers, 6 of them conjunctive and 2 of them modal. If, for the English texts, we study Irene, with a mean score of 4.50, we find out that she has used 4 discourse markers, all of them conjunctive, and if we consider Charlotte, with a mean score of 3.25, we discover that she has use 4 discourse markers, all of them conjunctive.

To sum up, the raters have preferred a rich use of discourse markers in the argumentative and the narrative texts, while the use of discourse markers seems not to have had any influence upon the marks of expositive texts. We could infer that the presence of time in the narration and logical reasoning in the argumentation can justify a more intense use of discourse markers in these two text types, and that this expectation has been shown in the

qualification of the texts. Meanwhile, the exposition as a text type has not required a specific use of discourse markers. Anyway, this question remains open for future research.

Conclusions

The analysis of discourse markers has revealed some very interesting results. At first, it was thought that there was a significant difference in the number of discourse markers used by both groups, as the Spanish writers seemed to use more than twice the number of discourse markers used by the American writers. Then, we analyzed the types of discourse markers used and we discovered that difference was provoked by the conjunctive discourse markers, more frequent in the Spanish texts, but there was no difference in the use of modal discourse markers.

However, when we studied the three text types separately we have found out that in the argumentative texts there was really a difference in the total number of discourse markers provoked by the number of conjunctive discourse markers used, more numerous in the Spanish texts. However, no difference has appeared in the expositive and narrative texts.

So, if we had made just a surface analysis, we would have stated a great difference between the two groups, when the real difference is limited to conjunctive discourse markers in argumentative texts. This reminds of the suggestion made above that genre and register rule style, and that style is an instrument used by the writer/speaker to help the reader/hearer interpret the text.

These results provide information to suggest some pedagogical considerations. First, if discourse markers have been defined as linguistic items, which serve as a guide for the interpretation of utterances, we can only perceive that the students analysed have not made a very extensive use of them. Particularly the American writers can be said to have underused such a powerful linguistic resource, although none of the two groups have used, for example, modal discourse markers to their full potential, particularly given the important correlation found between the use of discourse markers and the assessment of the texts (Trujillo 2000). Obviously, this statement is made with the limitation of the small corpus we have used, and the data should be contrasted with a larger corpus.

Finally, a comparison between this student writing corpus and other writers' texts (academics, journalists or professionals in general) could answer some interesting questions.

First of all, it could give a wider explanation of the use of discourse markers in the two languages, which could have a pedagogical and a linguistic interest; on the one hand, it could help teaching writing in both languages, and, on the other hand, it could help answer the question whether this use of discourse markers has anything to do with relying more on the reader or on the writer to make inferences explicit, which is one of the possible explanations the phenomenon may receive; second, if there are differences in the use of discourse markers, this type of research can help to clarify the source of the possible differences, whether it is the culture, the genre, the register or any other explanation.

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ⁱ Context, according to Sperber and Wilson (1986) are the beliefs and assumptions the hearer constructs for the interpretation of an utterance either on the basis of her perceptual abilities or on the basis of the assumptions that she has stored in memory or on the basis of her interpretation of previous utterances. In that sense, they make context a cognitive variable, which consist on the physical environment as perceived by the hearer, her background knowledge and the "cotext" which surrounds the utterance in question.

ⁱⁱ We include under the term "speaker" the addresser of an oral or a written utterance, and under "hearer" the addressee of an oral or a written utterance.

ⁱⁱⁱ This definition has been adapted from Portolés (1998).