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PRAGMATIC MARKERS IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE UNDERGRADUATE ESL STUDENTS' ORAL PRESENTATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAKAND PAKISTAN

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Abstract
This study investigates the use of Pragmatic Markers (PMs) in the academic discourse of English as Second Language (ESL) learners during the oral presentations delivered in classroom at the Department of English, University of Malakand. This is a qualitative study and is grounded in Schiffrin's (1987) theory of discourse markers and aims to identify the types, functions, and usage patterns of pragmatic markers within academic speaking contexts. Oral presentations of five students were recorded and analyzed thematically. The findings reveal a predominant reliance on basic discourse markers such as "and," "so," "but," and frequent use of fillers like "uh," "you know," and "I mean," indicating developmental stages of pragmatic competence. While some students demonstrated effective structuring using temporal and logical connectors, others struggled with overuse of informal and repetitive markers, which affected the academic tone of their speech. The study highlights the need for explicit instruction and training in the use of pragmatic markers to enhance learners' spoken academic discourse. Recommendations are offered for curriculum designers, ESL instructors, and future researchers to integrate pragmatic competence into speaking pedagogy and explore its impact across broader learner populations.

Keywords: *pragmatic markers, discourse analysis, ESL learners, oral presentations, Schiffrin's theory, classroom discourse*

Introduction
Pragmatics considers language from the perspective of users, accounting for the choices users make, the challenges they confront while using language in interaction, and the impact their choices have on others during communication (Crystal, 1997). Pragmatics is distinct from syntax, phonetics, and morphology in that it studies more than just sentences or utterances; it also considers the social and linguistic contexts. The social, cultural and communicative contexts as well as linguistic and grammatical precision are all aspects of pragmatic knowledge. Sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge are the terms used to describe these two types of knowledge. The capacity to use language effectively in a social environment is referred to as pragmatic competence. As a result, pragmatic competency requires both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic understanding of a language (Amnet 2018; Vasilina, 2015).

Pragmatic markers are features of written or spoken language that provide hints or signals about how one thought leads to the formation of another. The term has various names and multiple definitions. Different writers have used different names in the literature to describe pragmatic markers such as discourse markers, discourse connectives, conversational markers, and so on (Fraser, 1996; Blakemore, 1992; Fischer, 2006). Certain well-known authors such as Andersen (2001), Brinton (1996), Fraser (1996), and Buysse (2012 and 2014) have adopted the term pragmatic marker for these linguistics features. Following their tradition, this work also uses the term pragmatic marker.

The two concepts of pragmatic markers and pragmatic competency are interconnected. Pragmatic markers are responsible for transmitting the message's full meaning to the listener or interlocutor. The importance of pragmatic markers for pragmatic competence has been reported in several studies such as (Riggenbach, 1999; Baron & Celaya, 2010; Shively, 2015; Lin, 2016; House 1993, 1996, 2003, 2013).

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In addition, research in the area shows that disregarding proper PM use has detrimental implications. According to Thomas (1983), sociopragmatics failure occurs when a learner fails to perform the illocutionary/sociolinguistic act required by the situation (i.e. deviates in terms of appropriateness of meaning), while pragmalinguistics failure occurs when a learner tries to perform the correct speech act but uses the incorrect linguistics meaning/grammatical, syntactic form (i.e. deviates with regard to appropriateness of form). Without them, the conversation would be impolite, disjointed, unpleasant, and unnatural.

In the absence of PMs, misinterpretation occurs, which has a direct impact on the listener's observations and judgments. The lack of knowledge in the effective use of PMs has an impact on students' academic and professional lives, as it hinders their capacity to communicate coherently, which is required of them in the workplace. The incorrect or non-use of it has an impact on identity, self-confidence, and communication willingness (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Buysse, 2011; Amnet, 2018; Brinton, 1996).

This research paper aims to determine the use of PMs among Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners of Malakand University during their oral presentations. The study uses discourse analysis technique and is focused on how these learners use pragmatic markers in presentation speech for satisfaction in understanding.

Discourse analysis is a technique for the study of connected speech or writing to extend descriptive linguistics beyond the boundaries of one sentence at a time. In dealing with linguistic problems, discourse analysis is concerned with the record (spoken or written) of the process by which language is used in some environment to convey intention.

Discourse analysis encompasses a broad spectrum of discussions ranging from narrowly targeted investigations like how 'oh' and 'well' are utilized in everyday causal talk. Various studies have been done on discourse-involving speaking activities for students who need the utilization of PMs. One example is presenting a talk. Allowing students to discuss topics of interest enables them to practice using English meaningfully and helps them gain confidence and fluency. A student is most useful with these skills when he or she can achieve good presentation skills, which requires the ability to explain sophisticated ideas and information clearly and understandably to the audience.

Research objectives

1. To investigate the different types of pragmatic markers that Pakistani ESL students use when giving oral presentations in class.
2. To find out the specific problem ESL students face when struggling to use pragmatic markers appropriately in academic speaking tasks.

Research Questions

1. What pragmatic markers are used by Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners during their oral presentations?
2. What are the categories and sub-categories of the pragmatic markers used by Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners during their oral presentations?

Theoretical Framework

Deborah Schiffrin's work Discourse Markers (1987) is universally acclaimed as a landmark study in the domains of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and conversation linguistics. Her theory has been instrumental in shaping how scholars and educators conceptualize the role of particular lexical items that structure spoken discourse. In order to examine the data, a discourse analysis method was employed. The research aimed at selecting and classifying pragmatic markers with reference to the frameworks of Schiffrin (1987). The pragmatic markers were classified under the following broad categories: Discourse Markers (such as so, well, now), Interpersonal Markers (such as I think, you know, I mean), Hesitation Markers/Fillers (such as um, uh, like). The occurrence, frequency, and purpose of these markers were investigated in every transcript.

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Research Design

This study followed a qualitative research design. It focused on analyzing naturally occurring speech from a small group of students within a specific context: classroom presentations at the Department of English, University of Malakand (UOM). The qualitative focus of the research permits detailed insight into students' spoken discourse and pragmatic competence in an authentic educational setting. Aiming to identify genuine patterns of interaction and communication by targeting naturally occurring use of language in classroom environments, the study used qualitative approach. The Case study design suits the investigation of the phenomenon in its unique context. It allowed for an in-depth analysis of how pragmatic markers were used by students based on audio-recorded data from class presentations. Audio-recordings were transcribed and analyzed by using discourse analysis for the identification of the categories like; frequency and communicative uses of pragmatic markers.

Data Collection

Data was collected through audio recordings of classroom oral presentations. These presentations were part of students' regular academic activities. With consent from the students and teachers, the recordings were made using a mobile phone. A total of 5 recordings, each lasting between 2:14-7:48 minutes, were collected. The sample for this study comprises 5 undergraduate students of the Department of English at the University of Malakand (UOM). The participants were sampled via purposive sampling on the basis of their active participation in presenting oral classroom presentations. The selected sample represented a manageable and limited group for intense qualitative study, enabling in-depth scrutiny of the occurrence and role of pragmatic markers in academic spoken language. This was deemed to be of appropriate size for a case study that seek to describe patterns and insights and not to generalize results to a wider population.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study involved several steps aimed at identifying, classifying, and interpreting the use of pragmatic markers in the oral presentations of Pakistani undergraduate ESL students. The analysis was grounded in a qualitative framework and employed discourse analysis to examine both the form and function of pragmatic markers in the students' spoken academic discourse. The audio recordings of the classroom presentations were first transcribed into words to ensure accuracy and capture all linguistic details, including fillers, discourse markers, and other pragmatic features.

Analysis of Pragmatic Markers

Schiffrin's theory classifies pragmatic markers into several categories:

1. Additive connections (such as and) add information and ensure the continuity of discourse. The most frequent additive marker is and, which connects equivalent notions or happenings. For example, in the sentence, "She studies English, and she also teaches children," the marker joins two similar actions, adding to coherence and fluency in speech.
2. Contrastive Markers indicate contrast or opposition between concepts. "But" and "so" are common markers for this category. It indicates a switch from a positive or neutral statement to a contrasting one. For instance, "He wanted to go to the seminar, but he was ill," indicates how but contrasts the intention with the hindrance.
3. Alternative Markers are employed to indicate different choices or options. The marker often operates in this manner, as in the question, "Would you like tea or coffee?" This marker assists in organizing options and decision-making in conversation, especially in questions or conditional statements.

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4. Cause-effect markers or Causal Markers signal reason or effect. The 'because' and 'so' markers are the major examples. The sentence, "She missed the class because she was sick," gives the cause. On the other hand, "He was tired, so he went to bed early," signals the effect of the previous clause.
5. Temporal Markers structure discourse by indicating the time or order of things. Typical instances are then and after that. For instance, "First we read the poem, then analyzed its themes," employs them to suggest a time sequence, making it easier for listeners to track the flow of ideas.
6. Topic Shifters or Discourse Organizers marker a change of topic or focus in a conversation. The marker increasingly now tends to serve this purpose. Thus, "Now, let's move on to the next point," is an obvious signal of transition, which leads listeners through the sequence of a presentation or discussion.
7. Response Starters or Frame Markers initiate a response or introduce a speaker's stance. Well is a common example, often used to show hesitation, soften disagreement, or organize thoughts. In the sentence, "Well, I'm not sure about that," the speaker uses it well to politely express uncertainty or disagreement.
8. Repair Markers or Reformulation assist speakers in clarifying, restating, or correcting what they have just uttered. I mean and you know are common instances. As an example, "He's very dedicated—I mean, he never misses a class," employs I mean to explain or make the previous utterance clearer. Likewise, "It's difficult to describe, you know?" invites listener participation or agreement.
9. Filled Pauses or Hesitation Markers are non-lexical features such as um and uh that provide speakers with pause time to think or indicate hesitation. They are particularly frequent in spontaneous speech. In a sentence like "Um, I think we should try something else," the marker um provides the speaker with temporary pause space to get their thoughts organized.
10. Awareness or Engagement Markers engage the listener in the conversation, tending to elicit agreement or shared understanding. You know is used in this manner most often. For example, "It was a really tough test, you know?" indirectly asks for the listener's acknowledgment or sympathy.
11. Reaction Markers or Emotional Response Markers signal emotions like surprise, realization, or acknowledgment. The 'oh' marker is most frequently used to react to new information. In the sentence, "Oh, I didn't realize that was today," oh signals surprise or sudden realization.

These markers, although tiny in size, have important roles to play in organizing discourse, conveying relationships among ideas, and regulating interactions—particularly for novice ESL learners in pursuit of fluency and coherence in spoken discourse.

Student-wise Data Analysis

No.	Students' Utterance	Type	Function
1	So	Contrastive	Marker of signaling a shift
2	But	Contrastive	Marker of introducing a contrasting idea
3	You know	Engagement	Marker of involving the listener

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Table: 1

Analysis of Respondent No. 1

The respondent no 1 presented his presentation in which he frequently used the pragmatic markers contrastive and engagement as per the model of analysis. In contrastive marker, the respondent used “so” to show signals in discourse. And in the engagement marker, the respondent used “you know” to engage or involve the audience with himself. used multiple pragmatic markers for emphasis: "so," and "you know." Example: "So, first of all, okay, Coleridge says..." These revealed an informal, spoken register. The excessive use of "you know" served as floor-holding and audience-checking devices, but distracted from clarity.

No.	Students’ Utterance	Types and Functions of Discourse Markers
1.	So	Contrastive, marker of showing signals
2.	But	Contrastive, a marker of introducing a contrasting idea
3.	And	Additive, a marker of continuation or linking ideas

Table: 2

Analysis of Respondent No. 2

Respondent no 2 presented her presentation in which she frequently used the pragmatic marker Additive Connective "and” this marker adds information and maintains the flow of discourse as per the model of analysis to continue speech and connect ideas to maintain the flow of speech. The frequent use of “and’ shows the student's ability to organize thoughts clearly, which is important in classroom presentations.

No.	Students’ Utterance	Types and Functions of Discourse Markers
1.	Oh	Reaction Marker, a marker of expressing feelings such as surprise, realization
2.	So	Contrastive, marker of showing signals
3.	And	Additive, a marker of continuation or linking ideas

Table: 3

Analysis of Respondent No. 3

The respondent no 3 presented her presentation in which she frequently used the pragmatic markers cause-effect and repair. In the cause-effect marker, the respondent indicates consequence. In the repair marker, she indicated to restate what she before said. She used because and I mean as per the model of analysis. For example "He becomes bad because he follows his theory too closely." She also displayed hesitation and reformulation through "I mean," a marker of self-correction. These strategies suggest cognitive processing during speech and an effort to maintain clarity.

No.	Students’ Utterance	Types and Functions of Discourse Markers
1.	Then	Temporal, marker of time progression
2.	Now	Discourse Organizer/Topic shifter, a marker of a shift in the time frame
3.	And	Additive, a marker of continuation or linking ideas

Table: 4

Analysis of Respondent No. 4

Respondent no 4 presented her presentation in which she frequently used the pragmatic marker contrastive which shows signal as per the model of analysis. She often repeated words for self-correction, e.g., "He... he used to describe..." This repetition served as a self-repair.

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And frequently used the pragmatic marker "so" to indicate showing signals: “So all the pattern. So by this.. This marker signals to conclude.

No.	Students’ Utterance	Types and Functions of Discourse Markers
1.	Because	Cause-effect, a marker of expressing cause-effect
2.	I mean	Repair, a marker of clarifying, restating, or correcting

Table: 5

Analysis of Respondent No. 5

Respondent no 5 presented his presentation in which he frequently used the pragmatic marker contrastive marker as per the model of analysis. In contrastive marker “so” was used by the respondent to show signals and conclude the point. Frequently used the pragmatic marker "so" to indicate sequence and draw conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

Discourse Markers in Students’ Presentations

No.	Category	Examples from Students	Functions
1.	Contrastive	So, but	Linking ideas, contrast, cause-effect
2.	Engagement	You know	Engaging the audience
3.	Additive	And	Adds information and maintains flow
4.	Reaction	Oh	Expressing feelings: surprise, realization
5.	Causal	Because	Indicating consequence
6.	Repair	I mean	Clarification, restate, or correct
7.	Temporal	Then	Expressing timing or sequence of events
8.	Discourse organizer	Now	Shift in the time frame

Table:6

Findings

The discourse analysis of 5 Pakistani undergraduate ESL students' oral classroom presentations uncovered characteristic patterns in the use of discourse markers (PMs) that described both pragmatic competence developmental features and particular learning gaps. Applying Schiffrin's (1987) model, the research established how these students used a variety of PMs to structure talk, address addressees, and control speech coherence in academic speaking tasks. Whereas students showed sensitivity to the functional functions PMs have in organizing discourse and regulating audience attention, the results also indicated over-reliance on a small pool of fundamental markers as well as difficulties in sustaining academic tone.

One of the most striking features noticed in almost all the presentations was the excessive use of contrastive and additive discourse markers, especially "so," "but," and "and." The speakers made extensive use of these markers to link ideas, introduce contrasts, or merely maintain continuity of speech. For example, respondents 1, 2, and 3 kept using "so" time and again to mark conclusions or transitions, whereas "but" mostly came in to introduce contrasting points of view. While these markers were fulfilling their rudimentary connective roles, being repeated frequently without modulation suggested a limited pragmatic range. The prevalence of these elementary conjunctions reflected that a significant number of learners were only beginning to acquire fluency in academic discourse and had not yet learned a broader range

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of markers for reporting complex rhetorical relationships. Whereas the application of these fundamental PMs did support cohesion, the absence of variation inhibited the richness and detail of their oral academic performances.

Yet another significant finding was the recurrent occurrence of engagement markers, in this case "you know" which helped to build rapport with the listeners and preserve a sense of interpersonal engagement. These tokens were most prevalent in the speech of respondent 1, who used "OK So" prefacing as an introduction to fresh points on numerous occasions. These tokens are typical of interactive discourse and indicate a desire to engage listeners in the speech. In informal contexts, these were successful and adequate, but their overuse in academic presentations had the potential to water down the formality and precision demanded in academic communication. This trend was indicative of a wider imbalance between fluency in speech production and appropriate use in the genre — although learners seemed at ease deploying conversational markers, they tended to do so at the cost of academic tone and disciplinary conventions.

The data also showcased learners' deployment of reaction and repair markers, which acted as diagnostics of speech production in progress and cognitive processing subject to real-time pressure. Markers like "oh," "I mean," and repetitions were frequent in some of the participants, including especially respondents 3 and 5. These markers served an important function in enabling students to self-correct, clarify, or restate information as they adapted to the cognitive pressures of providing spontaneous speech. The employment of "I mean," for instance, enabled speakers to calibrate their thinking during the process of speaking and provide a more accurate or intelligible rendition of what had already been uttered. Such a tactic, while not commonly linked with refined academic speaking, is typical of learners striving towards second language fluency and coherence and speaks to their pragmatic development.

With regard to content organization and argument structure, students made significant use of temporal and causal discourse markers, such as "then," "now," and "because." These were used to order points in a logical fashion and indicate cause and effect. For instance, respondent 4 applied "then" and "now" to navigate her audiences through various phases of their presentations, and "because" was used repeatedly in the discourse of respondent 5 to clarify rationale or substantiate assertions. The use of these markers showed a developing competence in putting together logically linked arguments and in dividing discourse into coherent units. This indicates that learners at least intuitively understood how to employ time-based and logical markers to improve the clarity and persuasiveness of their academic talk, although the range of markers employed was still limited.

Yet another significant finding was students' employment of shift markers and higher-level discourse organizers like "now," "the first merit is," and "let's look at." These markers were used as devices to control the transitions and lead the audience through the ordered arguments. Respondent 4, for instance, showed comparatively more sophisticated control over discourse organization by employing phrases such as "now let's look at…" to break into new sections or transition to other areas of his subject. These moments of orderly movement indicate an emerging awareness of how to put together a well-connected scholarly presentation, going beyond rudimentary listing or sequencing.

Despite these indications of developing competence, one dominant theme for all participants was the narrow inventory of discourse markers used, along with an over-reliance on several high-frequency markers. The overly frequent use of "and," "so," "but," and "you know" indicated insufficient exposure to and control over more advanced markers. Also, markers like "actually," "basically," and "like" were frequently misused or overused, making for an

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informal intrusion into otherwise academic material. Such usage indicated that even as students were trying to build fluency and convey complex ideas, they had not yet learned how to demarcate a conversational versus academic register. Their over-dependence on a short list of well-known PMs can be an indicator of both linguistic poverty and inadequate instructional focus on pragmatic competence within the ESL curriculum.

Overall, the results of this study demonstrated an intricate relationship between the development of fluency, real-time cognitive pressure, and pragmatic sensitivity among Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners. While learners showed initial knowledge of how discourse markers are used in structuring speech and addressing audiences, their narrow vocabulary, monotonous repetition, and informal flavor signal the importance of context-specific pedagogical interventions. These may involve explicit teaching of a wider set of academic PMs, genre-bound speaking tasks, and register, rhetorical, and structural feedback. Improving in these areas would greatly improve learners' oral communication competence and serve them better in academic as well as professional communication environments.

Discussion

The examination of the use of discourse markers by five Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners in their in-class presentations offers a more insightful understanding of the learners' pragmatic ability in academic oral discourse. The study's findings explained against Schiffrin's (1987) discourse approach, bring forth both the functional knowledge and constraints in the learners' employment of discourse markers (PMs). In considering these results, it is important to situate them within the larger context of past research, making comparisons and contrasts to prior studies and determining the specific contributions of this work within the discipline of applied linguistics. The findings not only support existing theory in the use of PMs in oral discourse but also point to the contextual influences on their use within a Pakistani ESL context.

The recurring and sustained use of simple PMs like "so," "and," and "but" in the presentations by the students corroborates Schiffrin's (1987) pioneering work, which identified such markers as being crucial devices for discourse coherence maintenance, marking transitions, and conveying logical connections. Likewise, Fraser's (1999) research on pragmatic markers reinforced their multifunctionality and their capacity to organize discourse, control interaction, and assist listeners in comprehension. This current research confirms this underlying theory by demonstrating how these learners, even at the intermediate level, are sensitive to the necessity of organizing their speech with such markers. For instance, "so" was used extensively to indicate conclusions or results, and "but" was used to introduce contrasting information—a use most closely tied to Fraser's contrastive discourse marker category. Thus, the speech of the learners replicated some of the fundamental discourse organization mechanisms found in previous research, validating the applicability of those frameworks to ESL learners outside native speaker environments.

When contrasted with Fung and Carter (2007), whose research examined the application of discourse markers by ESL speakers of spoken English, several similarities and differences are interestingly encountered. Similar to Fung and Carter's study, learners in the current study used elaborate use of engagement markers "you know," "I mean," and "okay" as inter-actional resources. The markers served as a device for audience engagement, clarification, and self-repair, often emerging when learners were making effortful attempts under real-time pressure to speak. But whereas Fung and Carter reported an increasing sophistication in the use of such markers by more mature ESL students, particularly with regard to contextual suitability and register awareness, the present study finds a different trend. Pakistani students tend to overuse many of these interactional markers even in formal scholarly settings, at

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times to the detriment of the learned tone of their delivery. For example, "Okay so" was repeatedly employed by some participants as a default transition marker, although its habitual and casual usage deflated the scholarly tone of their presentation. This tension indicates a developmental disparity in register sensitivity and genre awareness, pointing to the fact that although learners have functional information about PMs, they tend to struggle with applying them suitably in academic settings.

In addition, the current results are highly consistent with contextual studies carried out within the Pakistani ESL context. Studies by Rahman (2004) and Asghar and Kamal (2020) also revealed that Pakistani students excessively use low-level connectives such as "and" and "so," and have low application of advanced or formal discourse moves. Rahman noted that students tended to be unable to use more academic-style PMs like "however," "moreover," or "in addition," a trend supported in this study. Though they hold great promise for enhancing the cohesion and rhetorical efficacy of spoken discourse, these markers were nearly nonexistent in the speeches of the students, suggesting the need for greater explicit modeling and instruction within classroom environments. The convergence of these findings with local research also serves to bolster the systemic character of the problem and underscore curricular shortcomings in the teaching of spoken academic English. While the students in this study enjoyed sufficient exposure to English as an instructional language, their discourse performance indicated an instructional emphasis more on grammar and vocabulary than on pragmatic and discourse competence.

Compared to studies in more advanced linguistically EFL contexts, like Müller's (2005) German study and Wang and Cheng's (2015) Chinese research, the present results indicate a narrower formality and range in PM use. Müller discovered that German advanced learners tended to use a range of metadiscursive markers—used for summarizing, elaborating, and emphasizing—which served to increase the precision and formality of their speech. Likewise, Wang and Cheng reported an increasing ability among Chinese university students to make distinctions between informal and academic markers facilitated by exposure to discourse-level pedagogy. By contrast, the Pakistani students in the current study had relatively less control over such distinctions and frequently placed informal items like "like," "you know," and "I mean" incorrectly into their formal writing. This disparity could be due to variations in pedagogical strategies, availability of resources, or even broader educational priorities within regions. The difference suggests that in economically developed EFL settings, discourse-level features are attended to more in the classroom, whereas in Pakistani classrooms, such attention is still limited.

One of the unique contributions of this work is its attention to real-time, spontaneous classroom presentations—an academic speech genre whose development remains understudied compared to prepared speech samples or scripted interviews that have been traditionally employed in prior studies. Such a naturalistic setting provides an opportunity to look at spontaneous features of speech, such as hesitation, self-repair, and audience management strategies. The incidence of markers such as "I mean," "uh," and reiterated phrasing in the present study indicate learners' attempts to regulate cognitive load, maintain speech flow, and make up for processing difficulties at the moment of speaking. These features are seldom observed in controlled speech tasks, and their occurrence here allows for glimpses of the dynamic and multidimensional character of learner speech. It also emphasizes the necessity for analyzing spoken academic English both in structural terms and in pragmatic and interactive terms that take into account the intentions, difficulties, and strategies of the speaker.

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In conclusion, this debate places the use of pragmatic markers among Pakistani ESL learners in a broad theoretical and empirical context. The research confirms the pivotal position of PMs in scholarly speech but identifies such significant limitations as their scope, control over register, and appropriateness. Although the learners demonstrated natural awareness of the proper application of PMs to connect ideas and get the listener involved, repeated use of less formal markers and common connectives suggests that they lack exposure to more sophisticated and academic-level discourse structures. These results suggest the necessity for explicit pragmatic teaching to be included in ESL courses, especially in environments such as Pakistan where academic speaking is taken for granted but not formally taught. The research not only contributes to the expanding body of work on pragmatic development in ESL environments but also offers a call for greater genre-based speaking training and evaluation to close the gap between the conversational facility and academic discourse ability.

Conclusion

This research is an attempt to fulfill its core objectives and respond to the major research questions that informed the study. In particular, the study aimed to investigate the pragmatic markers that Pakistani undergraduate ESL students employ in spoken presentations, with a view to seeing how these markers work within academic discourse, and identifying what the patterns of usage tell us about the learners' general pragmatic competence. In an in-depth and sequential qualitative analysis of audio-recorded class presentations made by five students of the Department of English at the University of Malakand, the study offered important insight into the learners' oral language strategies used in academic discourse. The study found that students mainly used common connectives like "and," "but," and "so" to structure their discourse. Although these markers were successful in ensuring a simple structure, repetition and the lack of variation in their use revealed that students were still refining more sophisticated discourse management skills. Together with connectives, the prevalence of fillers and repair markers such as "uh," "um," "I mean," and "you know" also revealed that students frequently had difficulty in expressing themselves or making decisions on what to say in English. These markers, while authentic in ordinary conversation, tended to be overused, a sign of a lack of lexical automatization and fluency. Many students also exhibited the inclination to add informal, conversational markers like "you know," in formal presentations, which sometimes diminished the formal tone required in formal speaking exercises. Few students, but most importantly those students who seemed to be more confident and prepared, showed proper use of more formal and structured markers like "then," and "because," which helped positively in the logical progression and coherence of their speech. The flow of the research, from its early stages to its ultimate conclusions, is a thorough and well-executed process.

The research initiated with emphasizing the significance of pragmatic markers in oral academic discourse and locating the research issues in the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, with a focus on Schiffrin's (1987) model. An extensive review of pertinent literature set the academic context for the research and was followed by the construction of a qualitative case study methodology that allowed for the gathering of spontaneous spoken data. Analysis of this data generated a comprehensive insight into the way ESL learners in the context of a Pakistani university use pragmatic markers, both usefully and less usefully, in formal spoken interaction. The outcomes were discussed closely in relation to the aims of the research and theoretical framework in order to maintain coherence and academic integrity at all times. Finally, the results of the current study validate that though Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners have achieved an initial awareness of pragmatic markers, their usage patterns indicate a need for improvement and pedagogical guidance.

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The excessive use of fillers, the dependence on casual discourse markers, and the narrow variety of connectives indicate that learners are continuing from spoken to academic fluency. This is an important gap between informal spoken English and the requirements of formal academic speech. Consequently, the research stresses the need for focused practice and teaching in pragmatic competence—namely assisting learners to realize the function of various markers, identify suitable ones depending on context, and apply them purposefully to attain clarity, coherence, and audience rapport. In so doing, this study not only enriches our knowledge of ESL learners' spoken discourse in Pakistan but also has important practical implications for enhancing the quality and efficiency of English language teaching in institutions of higher education.

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