The Distribution of Discourse Markers in Educational Discourse

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Abstract:

Discourse markers play a crucial role in communication. They have a vital role in connecting sentences and utterances making the conversation or talk coherent. This study sheds light on the distribution of discourse markers in communication particularly in educational discourse. It attempts to show the function of some discourse markers, namely: because, but, and so; and how they are distributed in educational settings. The study adopts Shiffrin's 1987 model focusing on the local and global functions. It is based on the hypothesis that discourse markers display relationships that are local (between adjacent utterances) or global (across wider spans and/or structures of discourse). It adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods in the analysis of data under investigation. The study ends up with the conclusion that discourse markers can be used locally or globally referring back to adjacent utterances or remote ones.

Keywords: discourse markers, local function, global function, coherence, turn taking, utterance.

توزيع علامات الخطاب في الخطاب التربوي

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ملخص البحث:

تلعب علامات الخطاب دورا مهما في التواصل.حيث تمتلك دورا حيويا في ربط الجمل والأقوال مما يجعل المحادثة أو الحديث متماسكا. تلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على توزيع علامات الخطاب في التواصل خاصة في الخطاب التربوي. يحاول إظهار وظيفة بعض علامات الخطاب ، وهي(*because, but,* and *so*) وكيف يتم توزيعها في البيئات التربوية. تتبنى الدراسة نموذج شيفرين لعام ١٩٨٧ الذي يركز على الوظائف القريبة والبعيدة. يعتمد البحث على الفرضية القائلة بأن علامات الخطاب تشير الى علاقات قريبة (بين الأقوال المجاورة) أو بعيدة (عبر امتدادات و / أو تراكيب أوسع من الخطاب). أعتمدت الطريقة النوعية والطريقة الكمية معا في تحليل البيانات قيد التحقيق. تنتهي الدراسة باستنتاج مفاده أنه يمكن استخدام علامات الخطاب للاشارة الى المرجعيات القريبة او البعيدة للرجوع إلى الأقوال المجاورة أو الأقوال البعيدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علامات الخطاب ، الوظيفة القريبة ، الوظيفة البعيدة ، التماسك ، أخذ الأدوار ، الكلام

1. Introduction

Discourse markers (henceforth DMs) play an absolutely indispensable and irreplaceable role in English language, primarily due to their unrivaled ability to elucidate the intricately complex and multifaceted relationships that inherently exist between sentences, phrases, clauses, and various other constituent parts of sentences. Ebrahimi and Xodabande (2023, p.1) admit that "With the growing use of English worldwide, it is of great importance to focus on DMs as an essential part of communication which provides discourse coherence." By virtuously performing this vital function, these significant markers invariably contribute to and greatly amplify the overall meaning, significance, and profound impact of spoken and written words. Schiffrin (1994, p. 54) states that "The production of coherent discourse is an interactive process that requires speakers to draw upon several different types of communicative knowledge that complement more code-based grammatical knowledge of sound, form, and meaning per se." In fact, it is not an exaggeration to assert that without these remarkable DMs, conversations and discourse would be incredibly confusing, disjointed, and ultimately bereft of coherence and meaning. Moreover, these DMs possess an effective power to control the tone, mood, and impact of discourse. Furthermore, they have the remarkable ability to establish and articulate a clear and unambiguous relationship, connection, or linkage between multiple, distinct, and separate points or ideas within a comprehensive and exhaustive list, thereby lending a remarkable and invaluable organizational and structural coherence and cohesion to language usage.

This exceptional characteristic and feature of DMs essentially enables and facilitates a seamless and fluid flow of ideas and concepts, ultimately ensuring that our message is conveyed with the utmost clarity, precision, and effectiveness.

In fact, it is quintessentially paramount and absolutely crucial for all language learners and proficient speakers alike to embrace and master these remarkable DMs in order to truly unlock the full potential and mastery of the English language (See: Arya, 2022; Crible & Pascual, 2020).

It is important to have a good grasp of the English proper usage and style. Using certain elements too often may incorrectly suggest a lack of consideration in connecting ideas, leading to writing that sounds superficial, lazy, or overly casual. The aim should be to write in a neutral or informal way that reflects the usual spoken or written English used by educated native speakers. This style follows the cohesion and economy principles commonly emphasized in modern essay writing and seen in English-language newspapers and magazines.

2. Definition of DMs

Due to different perspectives of DMs, there is no agreement on the exact definition of such markers. According to Schiffrin (1994, p.54), "Discourse markers – expressions like *well, but, oh*

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and y'know – are one set of linguistic items that function in cognitive, expressive, social, and textual domains."

Bolden (2015, p.1) mentions that "The term discourse markers refers to a class of linguistic devices that includes words and phrases such as *anyway, well, you know, I mean, oh, so, like, uh, etc.*" Qian (2021, p.320) states that DMS "are a kind of explicit oriented markers in the process of discourse communication, which play a vital role in the generation and understanding of discourse." Bolden (2015, p.1) mentions that DMs have the following characteristics:

> Discourse markers serve meta-discursive functions; they have little or no propositional context-independent meaning; they may not belong to traditional word classes; they are not (or are only loosely) incorporated into the syntactic structure of an utterance; they may be phonologically reduced and produced as separate prosodic units. This list is not uncontroversial, and the features that comprise it reflect the linguistic provenance of much of the research on discourse markers.

DMs is the term referring to the little words like 'well', 'oh', 'but', and 'and' that can split speech into parts. They also demonstrate the connection between those parts. Swan (2005, p.13) defines a DM as "a word or expression which shows the connection between what is being said and the wider context". Fraser (1999, p.931) defines DMs as "a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases." He defines them syntactically. He (1999, p.931) adds that they reflect the relationship between the segments they represent and the segment that comes before. Ismail (2010, p.1260) states that DMs are expressions used to connect sentences to what comes before or after and indicate a speaker's attitude to what is being said.

Halliday and Hasan (1976, p.226) identify five main cohesive devices in English discourse, reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion and conjunction. The last device 'conjunction' is the device that Halliday and Hasan call DMs as they have formal markers that connect sentences, clauses and paragraphs to each other and signal the way the writer wants the reader to relate what is being said to what has been said before.

Stubbs, as cited in Zhao, 2015, p.2107, regards DMs as "elements setting up relationship between syntactic units and discourse context." Schiffrin (1987, p.40) defines DMs as "those linguistic items signaling coherence relations, marking pauses, transitions, or other aspects of communication."

However, discourse markers are words and expressions used to direct or redirect the flow of conversation and add meaning to the discourse. They are used to connect texts and make them coherent and they are also used to reflect the attitudes and opinions of the language users.

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3. Functions of DMs

Bolden (2015, p.1) states that "the functioning of individual discourse markers is also difficult to explicate." She (2015, Pp.2-5) makes an overview of DMs identifying three main functions, based on their use in different contexts, as:

- Indicating contiguities and disjunctions between interactional units
- Conveying stances vis-à-vis prior actions
- Facilitating turn taking

One of the most extraordinary aspects of DMs is their ability to genuinely captivate the listener's undivided attention by offering highly informative, contextually relevant, and incredibly insightful cues about the specific type, nature, and essence of the illustrative example that is being provided. This exceptional quality and attribute of DMs undoubtedly enhances and enriches the listener's comprehension, understanding, and overall experience, thereby ensuring a truly immersive and captivating linguistic discourse.

Müller (2005, p.244) identifies two functions of DMs: a textual function and an interactional function. He (2005, p.244) states that "Textual functions organize the content of what is said or mark (parts of) utterances as specific types of utterances, while interactional functions address the hearer directly or organize the sequence of turns between the participants." DÉR (2010, Pp.21-22) says that the textual functions can either refer to lexical expressions, or concentrate on the propositional content conveyed by discourse units of various length, or rather the relationships of those propositional contents. On the other hand, interactional functions can focus on "the relationship between speaker and listener, indicating speech acts, replies, opinions, or evaluations, or expressing that the speaker is turning directly to the listener." The present study concentrates on the second function of DMs as they represent the direct social interaction of talk.

What truly sets the English language apart and makes it utterly unique and exceptional in comparison to other languages is the fact that these absolutely indispensable DMs are not at all restricted to any specific social groups, or geographic regions. In conclusion, the sheer significance of DMs in the English language cannot be overstated or exaggerated.

Bolden (2015, p.1) states that "language and social interactional scholarship on discourse markers is concerned with how discourse markers are used as resources for social action, and, consequently, how they are deployed to enact or negotiate relationships between interactants."

In her book (1987) 'Discourse Markers' Schiffrin gives a detailed discussion on DMs. She explains the functions and use of 11 English DMs,p. *oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, I mean,* and *you know* as follows:

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a. - 'and' and 'but' have both cohesive and structural roles; structural since they connect clauses, phrases or verbs and cohesive in light of the fact that the interpretation of the entire conjunctive utterance depends on the mix of both conjuncts.

b. - 'because' is used to demonstrate a connection of "cause and result"

c. - 'so' is used to demonstrate that the message that follows is a consequence of the prior material

d. 'or' is used to demonstrate an exchange of structure or as alternatives

e. - 'now' is used to demonstrate the speaker's movement through a discourse or a shift in talk

f. - 'then' is used to demonstrate the progression between the earlier and the upcoming talk

g. - 'oh' is a marker of "information management". It is used when the speaker wants to show recognition of old information or to mark new information. It is used in repairs, inquiries, answers and affirmations.

h. - 'well' is a pointer of demand for elaboration;

i. - 'You know' is a marker with two functions

1. A marker of knowledge about what speakers and listeners share

2. It is used to demonstrate a circumstance in which the speaker realizes that the listener shares some knowledge about a specific bit of data

j. - 'I know' is used to clarify or correct a statement or to introduce a justification or explanation

According to Schiffrin, these functions construct discourse coherence from three aspects: Markers and Cohesion, Markers and Discourse, and Markers and Pragmatics (Schifrrin et al. 2001, Pp.54-59). She explains the DMs functions using five distinct levels or as she calls them, 'planes' of talk. Schiffrin (1987, Pp. 24-28) refers to five planes of talk as follows:

1. Exchange structure (ES) - which mirrors the mechanics of the conversational exchange and demonstrates the consequence of the members' turn taking.
2. Action structure (AS) - which mirrors the arrangement of speech acts which happen within the discourse.
3. Ideational structure (IdS) - which refers to the specific relationship among the thoughts found within the discourse.
4. Participation framework (PF) which refers to the distinctive ways in which speaker and listener can identify to each other.
5. Information state (InS) which mirrors the knowledge and meta-knowledge, what the speaker knows and what he/she accepts that the listener knows.

4 Educational Setting

Educational setting refers to the physical or virtual environments where teaching and learning activities take place, including K-12 schools and higher education institutions. It means

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any facility or location where teaching, learning, and organized educational activities and discourses occur. It also represents the context in which educational professionals perform their roles. Lopez (2009:275) states that "school personnel, including teachers and specialists, play an important role in the development of language within the school setting." Grammatical, lexical, and even phonological choices adopted by teachers and specialists during educational discourse exchange have a great effect of the nature of language they use in such an educational setting in particular. Keefer and Haj-Broussard (2020: 2) believe that "At the heart of people's use of language to interpret and communicate meaning are discourses that define ideologies about language and schooling." Discourse refers to the ways people communicate narratives, explanations, concepts, myths, and ideologies that symbolize a particular perspective. Nowadays, Language of instruction is an increasingly visible issue in international education. Language choice in educational contexts also carries significant political and cultural meaning. Speaking of national policy regarding language and education, and the implementation of that policy at various levels of society, reflects deeply held, and frequently contested, identity issues (see Shohamy 2006; Alidou 2003; Kone 2010). In the educational setting, "language policies are initiated primarily from above through formal government documents and are meant to be supported and implemented by teachers, materials, curricula and examinations" (Shohamy 2006: 76).

5. Methodology

5.1. Data Description and Method of Analysis

The data under investigation are based on a conversation among teachers discussing the curriculum they tend to teach at school (www.bnc.bank). Their discourses has been analyzed based on Schiffrin's view of local and global function of DMs and how they are distributed in talk. The analysis focuses on how DMs display relationships that are local (between adjacent utterances) or global (across wider spans and/or structures of discourse. The DMs chosen to be investigated are 'because', 'so', and 'but' only due to space and limits of the study.

5.2 Data Analysis and Discussion

This study uses a qualitative and quantitative approach in the analysis of data. The BNC (English National Corpus) was used to inestigate the nature of lanuge used in educational setting, particularly how discourse markers are distributed in educational discourses.

- **Because: Used Locally**

In the following extract (1), Cath agrees with Alan on considering some items as they are not related to the curriculum. She wonders as she feels that some items are irrelevant to the international curriculum they are teaching. She uses 'because' **locally** to express her direct

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agreement. She wants to show directly that she agrees on some of the unnecessary materials to their curriculum.

Extract (1)

Alan	1	You could assess them on on <pause> on that, and just say right I I think you're a <pause> and A or a B <pause> on this particular booklet.
Cath	2	Mhm.
Alan	3	Because I've done it, with you.
	4	I mean, that's no reason, but we shouldn't be sort of saying, well look let's not, lets all not do this booklet <-|-> now <-|->
Cath	5	<-|-> Mm.
Alan	6	and I think it's something that we ourselves <pause> should look at.
Cath	7	Yeah, I I just wondered because there are some of them that don't have any relevance to national curriculum and I <-|-> want to <-|->
Alan	8	<-|-> Why?
Cath	9	I just thought maybe, you know, sort of miss them out <pause> <-|-> do level one.

- **Because: Used Globally**

In extract (2) below, Alan addresses Cath not to assess the kids on a particular booklet they teach together. He says that because he knows this booklet very well as he teaches this booklet with Cath. 'Because' is considered 'Global' as it has been deliberately delayed by Alan and being interrupted by Cath.

Extract (2)

Alan	1	You could assess them on on <pause> on that, and just say right I I think you're a <pause> and A or a B <pause> on this particular booklet.
Cath	2	Mhm.
Alan	3	Because I've done it, with you.
	4	I mean, that's no reason, but we shouldn't be sort of saying, well look let's not, lets all not do this booklet <-|-> now <-|->

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- **So: Used Locally**

In the following extract (3), Alan focuses on having a national curriculum record. In this case, they will have something fantastic if it could be printed on computer. The result would be a sort of accomplishment. Thus, Alan uses 'so' locally to refer directly to such a result.

Extract (3)

Alan	396	now, you're gonna get anybody with that, but let's suppose that you did have somebody that was really <pause> there <pause> we <pause> want that blacked out really
Cath	397	Mhm.
Alan	398	and we would need to have national curriculum, name, date <pause> and so on which <-|->
Cath	399	<-|-> Mhm.
Alan	400	I mean, just a few odds and ends that you could do from your <pause> <-|-> nice <-|->
Cath	401	<-|-> Mhm.
Alan	402	printing on the computer
Cath	403	Mhm.
Alan	404	now, what we would say like, if somebody has erm <pause> you know, by the end of year seven <pause> done that
Cath	405	Yeah.
Alan	406	right, this would be the national curriculum record so we'd have something, but I don't know that it's wise <pause> <-|-> to <-|->
Ian	407	<-|-> No.

- **So: Used Globally**

Judith uses 'so' globally referring back to what Ian says about having extra good work sheets. Judith says that in this case, if they have these work sheets available , the result will be having a bank of work sheets. She says that as a result of a long previous talk with other teachers about having such a useful bank of work sheets (see extract (4)).

Extract (4)

Ian	255	<-|-> Well it seems pretty <-|-> pointless, me sort of saying oh here, you know,

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they're never gonna get the hang of negative numbers and Judith saying, oh I've got an excellent work sheet, and you think well, you know

Cath 256 Mm.

Ian 257 if I'd known about that that would of great!

Cath 258 Mm.

Ian 259 I think if we all know what's available it would, it would be a lot easier than, than just operating as as <pause> you know, five separate <-|-> units.

Judith 260 <-|-> Oh <-|-> yes, I think so <pause> for that, and, so then we've gotta bank our work sheets

- **But: Used Locally**

In the following extract (5), Ian asks if other teachers would be bothered not being able to make kids reach level four. Alan replies that he is not going to be bothered but on the contrary he would be very happy if they (the kids) can be familiar with the work they have done rather than moving quickly from one level to another. Therefore, he uses 'but' locally to refer to this particular crucial issue. Thus, this is shown clearly by means of a direct contrast between ideas and concepts.

Extract (5)

Ian 191 So you're not bothered if at the end of <pause> the two years they haven't <pause> <-|-> even <-|->

Cath 192 <-|-> Reached <-|-> level <-|-> four <-|->

Ian 193 <-|-> the <-|-> best kids haven't reached level four?

194 <-|-> Because <-|->

Alan 195 <-|-> I would-- <-|->

Ian 196 have <pause> working three lessons a week <pause> some of mine are scarce, sort of struggle to onto <-|-> four.

Cath 197 <-|-> Mhm.

Alan 198 I'm not saying that I wouldn't <-|-> say <-|->

Cath 199 <-|-> Mhm.

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Alan 200 I'm not bothered but I would be happier if <pause> they will <pause> very familiar with the work that they have done

Ian 201 Mhm.

Alan 202 rather than

Ian 203 Mhm.

Alan 204 <-|-> race through <-|->

- **But: Used Globally**

Extract (6) shows that Cath is addressing Judith and Ian about doing area one. Ian replies using 'but' **globally** referring back to how they have done area one. 'But' is used to make a contrast between two ideas or concepts. Ian uses 'but' globally to refer or to show the contrast in the ideas of doing area one.

Extract (6)

Cath 115 you've done area <-|-> one <-|->

Judith 116 <-|-> Aha.

Cath 117 isn't it?

Ian 118 Yes.

Judith 119 Yeah.

Ian 120 But I think the link-up is suggesting <-|-> that <-|->

Judith 121 <-|-> Mm.

Ian 122 you <-|-> could <-|->

Cath 123 <-|-> Yeah.

Ian 124 just <pause> follow on there.

Table (1) shows that the most frequent DM used in the data under investigation is 'But'. It has been used 46 times by talk participants. Then, the DM 'so' which has appeared 18 times comes next followed by 'because' which has been used 12 times only. As the teachers discuss a critical issue about the curriculum, they use 'but' rather than the other DMs 'because' and 'so'. This is due

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to the fact that they should present different ideas, opinions, and concepts that require discussion and contrasting ideas.

Table (1) The frequency of occurrence of 'because, so, and but' in educational discourse

DM	Frequency of Occurrence
Because	12
So	18
But	46

Fig. (1) The frequency of occurrence of 'because, so, and but' in educational discourse

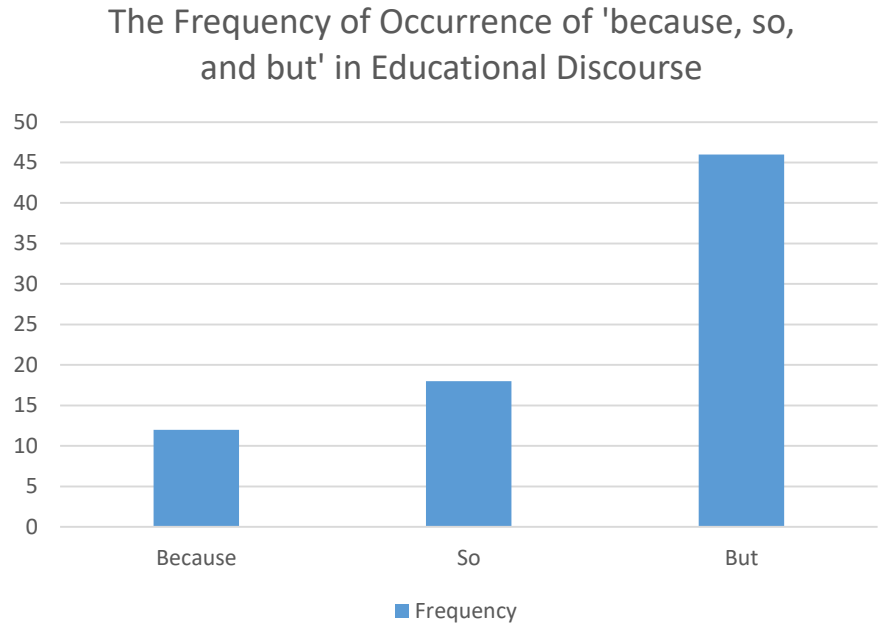

Fig. (1) above indicates that in classroom interaction, participants tend to use the DM 'but' more than the other discourse markers 'so' and 'because'. This is due to the function of "but' in having both the cohesive and structural roles in conversation interaction.

Table (2) reveals that the main function of the three DMs (because, so, and but) is local. 'Because' is used locally 11 times (91.66%) while it is used only 1 time globally (8.33). Additionally, 'so' is used locally 11 times (61.11%) while it is used globally 7 times (38.88%). Furthermore, 'but' is used locally 31 times (67.39%) while it used globally 15 times (32.60%). 'But' is the most frequent DM used among the other DMs 'because', 'but', and 'so'. It is used locally 13 times (67.39%) to refer to the close and direct relationship between utterances expressing a serious discussion of critical opinions. Then, 'because' is used locally 11 times (61.11%) also to show the close justification teachers need to present while discussing curriculum issues. Finally, 'so' is used locally 11 times (61.11%) also to present the close results of the matter under discussion.

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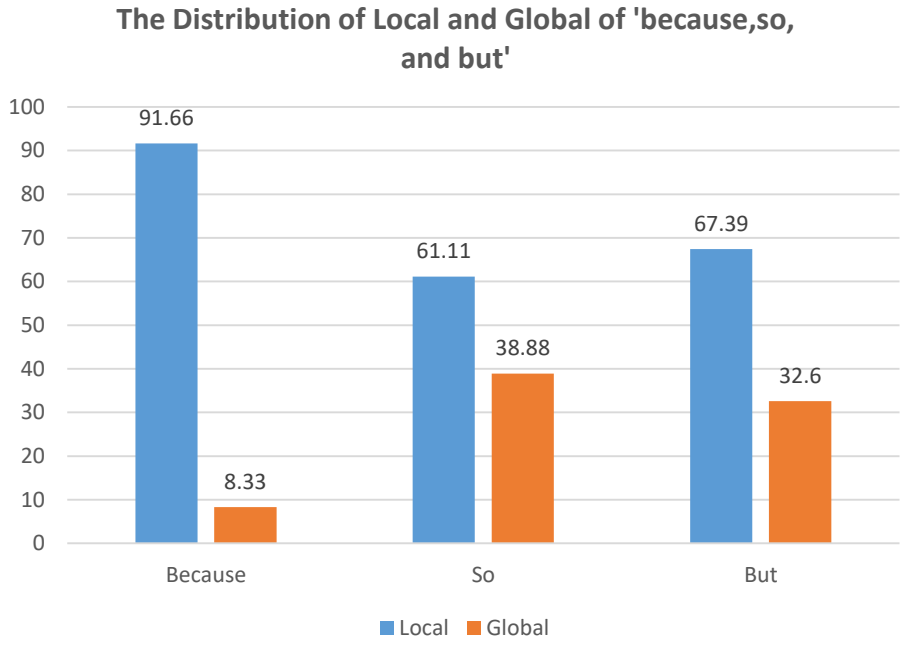
Table (2) The frequency of occurrence and percentages of 'because, so, and but' used locally and globally in educational discourse

DM	The frequency of occurrence of the local function	Percentage	The frequency of occurrence of the global function	Percentage
Because	11	91.66	1	8.33
So	11	61.11	7	38.88
But	31	67.39	15	32.60

Fig. (2) The frequency of occurrence and percentages of 'because, so, and but' used locally and globally in educational discourse



This reflects the fact that the 'local' function of the DMs (because, so, and but) represents the normal and most frequent function of these markers. The 'global' function is rarely used in conversations, talks or classroom interactions.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the distribution of DMs indicates that they can be used differently. They can be used locally or globally referring back directly to previous a sentence or utterance or they can refer back to remote ones. Based on the analysis, DMs mostly refer back to previous speech but not necessarily an adjacent one. As a social phenomenon, DMs are used in speech or talk to connect ideas and make them coherent. Therefore, in natural conversation, it is normal to find DMs

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distributed differently. As educational discourse includes turns and interruption, the DMs can function clearly and can be distributed naturally since turn taking represents an essential part of conversation. The study also concludes that the DMs 'because', 'so', and 'but' are used in conversation locally most of the time to make utterances and talks explicit. They are also used locally to make talk coherent, making ideas and concepts connected to each other.

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