

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the study

English is widely used in spoken and written discourse. In the spoken discourse, people will orally express their ideas, feelings, or opinion; while in the written discourse, they deal with the written form of the language which has certain rules. In the spoken form, the speaker can employ a lot of language aspects to maintain the flow of the interaction. According to Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005), some examples of interactive strategies used in speaking are making eye contact, using expressions, asking check questions (e.g. 'Do you understand?'), clarifying your meaning (e.g. 'I mean ...', 'What I'm trying to say is ...'), confirming understanding (e.g. 'mm', 'right', 'okay', etc.). However, for writing, it is more difficult since there are no oral strategies to ensure that the message is successfully interpreted. Therefore, it is very important to find a way to make the readers receive the message the writer intends to say.

Writing in the first language can be a challenging task. Indeed, it is even more challenging to write in a foreign language since the focus of writing is not only on the content but also on the form of the target language. In other words, comparing with listening, speaking and reading skills, writing skill is a demanding task for EFL students (Harmer, 2001). In a writing task, students need to follow certain rules to produce a good piece of writing. In fact, many EFL students with a certain level of English competency still find it demanding to express an idea under certain linguistic rules. As a consequence, they sometimes find difficulties dealing with writing tasks. In producing a good paragraph, there are two main characteristics in common-coherence and cohesion (Boardman and Frydenberg, 2002). According to Richards and Schimdt (2002), coherence is the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text. In other words, in written texts, coherence refers to the way a text makes sense to the reader through the organization of its context, and the relevance and clarity of its concepts and ideas. Thus, a

paragraph generally has coherence if it is a series of sentences that develop a main idea with, for instance, a topic sentence and supporting sentences which relate to it. Another characteristic of a good paragraph is cohesion. According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996), cohesion refers to surface-level signals that reflect the discourse organization of the text and the intended purposes of the writer. In addition, McDonough (2002) defines cohesion as a general name for linguistic devices which signal the textual structure which represents the coherence of the message encoded. Also, this may be the relationship between different sentences or between different parts of a sentence (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Similarly, according to Boardman and Frydenberg (2002), when a paragraph has cohesion, all the supporting sentences stick together in their support of the topic sentence. There are some linguistic elements connecting sentences to each other which are called cohesive devices.

Furthermore, there are many cohesive devices which fix the links between ideas in the text. Boardman and Frydenberg (2002) explain that the most influential inventory to most language teachers is Halliday & Hasan's Cohesion in English (1976). Specifically, cohesive devices are linking words, personal pronouns, definite articles, demonstrative pronouns and synonyms. However, from those aspects, the linking words are considered the most influential aspect within a text as they function to link the elements of sentences or paragraphs (Schiffrin, 1987). In fact, the linking words have been referred in the literature by several terms such as cohesive elements (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), conjunctions (Halliday and Mattiessen, 2004), discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987), conjunctive adverbials (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999), linking words (Boardman and Frydenberg, 2002), logical connectors (Quirk, et al., 1985), linking adverbials (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan, 1999), and discourse connectors (Cowan, 2008). In the present study, the term of *discourse markers* (henceforth DMs) refers to those various terms. The primary function of DMs is to explicitly signal the relationship between units of the text (Biber, et al., 1999). In this way, DMs occur to maintain the unity of an idea of a text. Hence, without sufficient DMs, a whole unit of thought does not seem to be fully constructed, coherent and united. Moreover, the misuse of DMs may affect or even break the coherence of a text. A study conducted by Prommas (2011) shows that the occurrence of DMs is necessary since the DMs used in essays are transitional words,

which are the most potential and obvious devices to show relationship of ideas. Therefore, it is clear that DMs play an important role in the coherence of a text.

Afterwards, comparing to the other cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion, the misuse of DMs is one of the most common mistakes found in EFL students' compositions (Modhish, 2012; Prommas, 2011; Jalilifar, 2008; Ramasawmy, 2004). Some problems in using DMs include overusing of DMs, lacking of DMs, missusing of DMs, and so on. As a result, it seems that this element is not quite easy to deal with by EFL students. There must be some causes and results underlying this matter. In fact, some research findings did not obviously mention them. Thus, since there are still many issues found in this area of study, the investigation of DMs is still worthwhile.

Furthermore, research studies on DMs have already covered some dimensions regarding the use of DMs by native and non-native English speakers. There have been a lot of studies of DMs conducted in western settings, most of which compared the use of DMs among the native English speakers (Christodoulidou, 2011; Vickers and Goble, 2011). Additionally, many studies have also been conducted in Asian contexts in which the use of DMs by nonnative and native speakers of English is compared (Gurkan and Yuksel, 2012; Fung, 2011; Prommas, 2011; Jung, 2009; Ying, 2009). However, only a few research studies have been conducted to compare the use of DMs among the nonnative speakers (Yang and Sun, 2012; Yang, 2011; Wang, Tsai, and Yang, 2010; Wang and Tsai, 2007). Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate the use of DMs from this infrequently explored dimension, for instance comparing the use of DMs among EFL students in Southeast Asian countries. In particular, it is worth considering comparing the use of DMs between EFL Indonesian and Thai students since the role of English in Indonesia and Thailand is similar – as a foreign language. Both countries, therefore, may share many similarities and differences related to English teaching and learning. In addition, other similarities and differences may be found in the characteristics of the students, the difficulties in learning English, the students' English competence, etc. The understanding of these similarities and differences can lead to lessons that can be shared to improve the linguistic skills of their EFL students.

In order for EFL students to be able to produce good writing, they need to know better the components of cohesive devices, particularly DMs. To make it more detail, cohesive devices include references, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) while DMs only refers to the transitional devices. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), research studies about DMs contributing to textual cohesion and coherence are considerable. Nevertheless, despite the previous studies about DMs, few are about the comparison of the use of DMs in written language among non-native EFL students. In this regard, the present study will examine the use of English DMs in the argumentative writing, the kind of writing that relies rather heavily on DMs for its logical quality, produced by EFL Indonesian and Thai university students.

Objectives of the Study

In accordance with the formulation of the research questions, the objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To investigate the kinds of DMs employed by EFL Indonesian and Thai university students in their argumentative writing.
2. To compare and contrast the use of DMs produced by EFL Indonesian and Thai university students in terms of its nature and problems.
3. To find out whether EFL Indonesian and Thai university students employed DMs in their argumentative writing appropriately.

Research Questions

Regarding the background of the study, the researcher formulated research questions as follows:

1. What kinds of DMs did EFL Indonesian and Thai university students employ in their argumentative writing?
2. What were the similarities and differences regarding the use of DMs in the argumentative writing produced by EFL Indonesian and Thai university students?
3. To what extent did EFL Indonesian and Thai university students employ DMs in their argumentative writing appropriately?

Significance of the Study

Regarding the background and the objectives of the study, the significance of the study could be drawn as follows. First, it is hoped that this study will shed some lights on how DMs are used similarly and differently by Indonesian and Thai students. Within the similar role of English as a foreign language, both countries were assumed to share identical use of DMs, otherwise the differences would show the varied types of the DMs employed by both groups. Then, these similarities and differences might be explored deeper for the source of research purpose. For instance, the similarities might help the teachers in designing English curriculum, learning approaches, and teaching materials while the differences might be useful for assisting them to encourage students to focus on the problem of the use of DMs.

Second, the findings might be able to assist English teachers in identifying which DMs are needed to be focused on. The DMs found in a piece of writing revealed students' knowledge of DMs and its implementation in their argumentative writing. As a result, it could be beneficial for the pedagogical purposes as it would show the teachers what DMs are necessary to teach explicitly and effectively. This was also related to other aspects of learning goals such as the method the teachers will employ, the materials they will deliver, the assesment they want to design in their writing class, and so on.

Third, the findings might help students to raise their awareness on various types and uses of DMs and their roles in creating textual cohesion and coherence in order to produce effective argumentative and other writing types. The use of DMs may contribute much to the unity of the text, as well as its interpretation toward the text. Thus, an understanding on how to use them could be helpful for the students to construct the cohesion and coherence of the text. Further, the appropriate use of DMs plays an important role in supporting the text's coherence. As a result, the students' knowledge on DMs would facilitate them to compose an appropriate piece of writing.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

On regard to the scope and limitations of the study, it included as follows.

1. The kind of writing investigated in this study was limited to only argumentative writing because this genre of writing consists of abundant arguments of

certain issues which may need the transitions of ideas within the text. The use of DMs by EFL students in other kinds of writing may be different.

2. There were 46 third-year English students of Indonesian and of Thai university. The investigation of the use of DMs was carried out under the taxonomy of DMs adopted from Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday and Mattiessen (2004).

3. Regarding the semantic category, the DMs examined in this study covered four categories: 1) addition, 2) concession and contrast, 3) cause and result, and 4) enumeration and ordering.

Organization of the Study

This study was divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter One presents the rationale of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope and limitations of the study, and organization of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the literature and research works related to the written discourse, discourse markers, approach to the study of discourse markers, and related research.

In Chapter Three, an overview of procedures employed in this study is presented. It contains the information about research participants, framework for analysis, and data collection and data analysis.

Chapter Four discusses the findings of the present study for all research questions including the kinds of the DMs employed by forty six EFL Indonesian and Thai students in their argumentative writing at Indonesian and Thai University. In addition, the findings of the similarities and differences on how DMs are used by both groups of students are described in details. Moreover, this part also discusses whether both groupsof students employ DMs in their argumentative writing appropriately. Chapter Five concludes the study based on the research findings. In addition, implications of this study and recommendations for further studies are presented.