

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO DISCOURSE
MARKERS IN THE CONVERSATIONS OF
THE CURRENT ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS
USED IN VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOLS**

Subject area : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Code : 60.22.15

**M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
(A SUMMARY)**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

In the age of global communication, it is important and necessary to communicate effectively. There are a lot of factors deciding the success of the communication that language learners acquire such as the speaker's knowledge of linguistic structures of the target language as well as pragmatic and discourse knowledge.

In the process of communication, speakers use discourse markers to lubricate and maintain social relationships. Trivial though they seem to be, the use of them can indeed enhance the overall comprehensibility of one's speech to the ear of those native speakers.

Let's compare the following two conversations – one without DMs and the other with DMs:

(1)

Freddy : I don't want to interrupt you...

Dr. Lind Seth : How can I help you?

Freddy : I like to ask you to sign a permission slip to take the course you are teaching next term.

Dr. Lind Seth : I'm glad you decide to take it....

In (1), although there is nothing wrong with the turn-takings, with the conversation structure, or with the informative exchange, this conversation seems non-authentic, for it lacks the communicative interaction signals.

Consider the new version of the above conversation embedded with DMs: according to Bruce Tillitt and Mary Newton Bruder

(2)

Freddy : **Excuse me**, I don't want to interrupt you...

Dr. Lindseth : **No, no. It's quite alright**. How can I help you?

Freddy : **Well, I would like** to ask you to sign a permission slip to take the course you are teaching next term.

Dr. Lindseth : **Of course**, Freddy. **Actually**, I'm glad you have decided to take it.... [27, p.74]

In (2), types of DMs with such functions as drawing the hearer's attention "*Excuse me*", responder "*No, no/ of course*", meaning framing "*quite/would like/actually*", or lubricating the utterance "*well*" are embedded to produce a real conversation.

For all the above reasons, “**An insightful investigation into Discourse Markers in the conversations of the current English Textbooks used in Vietnamese High Schools from a pragmatic perspective**” is carried out.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 Aims

This study aims at investigating Discourse Markers in the conversations of the current English textbooks in Vietnamese High Schools from a pragmatic perspective. And simultaneously, the pedagogical recommendations set forth by the end of this study will partly contribute to the teaching and learning of English.

1.2.2 Objectives

The study tries to achieve the following objectives:

- To raise the awareness of functions and identification of DMs in English conversations of the current English textbooks in the light of pragmatics.

- To investigate the frequency of DMs in the conversations of the current English textbooks for Vietnamese High School Students.
- To put forward some implications for the teaching and learning of English conversations with the use of discourse markers.
- To suggest some exercises and activities for practising DMs in English conversations, especially for Vietnamese High School students.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are DMs used in the conversations of the current English textbooks in Vietnamese High Schools?
2. What is the role of discourse markers in the conversations of the current English textbooks in Vietnamese High Schools in the light of pragmatics?
3. What are the implications for teaching and learning DMs in the conversations of the current English textbooks?

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims at identifying and quantifying the DMs of students' speaking. It intends to analyze the relation between the use of DMs and the quality of speaking, and identify some of the pragmatic features that characterize students' speech with regard to the choice and use of discourse markers.

1.5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Within the limitation of time and material, this study is confined to intra-linguistics. Paralinguistic and non-verbal factors, important though they really are, are beyond its scope.

1.6. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This thesis is designed in five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Implications

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past years, the studies of discourse markers (DMs) have been done under a variety of labels including *sentence connectives* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), *discourse signaling devices* (Polanyi and Scha, 1983), *pragmatic connectives* (Van Dijk, 1979; Stubbs, 1983), *discourse particles* (Schorup, 1985), *semantic conjuncts* (Quirk et al., 1985), *discourse connectives* (Blakemore, 1987, 1992), *gambits* (Keller & Warner, 1988), *pragmatic markers* (Fraser, 1988, 1990), *discourse operators* (Redeker, 1990, 1991), *pragmatic expressions* (Erman, 1992), *cue phrases* (Knott and Dale, 1994), *pragmatic operators* (Ariel, 1994), *pragmatic particles* (Ostman, 1995), *discourse markers* (Trillo, 2002), so forth.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. The Concept of Discourse

2.2.1.1. Discourse and Discourse Analysis

a. Discourse

“Discourse: a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative” [Cook, 1989:25]

b. Discourse Analysis

“Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used”

[83, p.1]

2.2.1.2. Features of Discourse

a. Topics of Discourse

Brown & Yule in [25, p.2] state *“Discourse always has a topic, which is known as the presentation of content of discourse”*. McCarthy [71, p.132] says *“It is the topic that gives discourse the property of “goal-oriented””*

b. Cohesion in Discourse

Halliday and Hasan [1980] stated that cohesion refers to *“relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as a text”*. According to McCarthy [71, p.4] *“Cohesion occurs when the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependant on that of another”*.

c. Coherence in Discourse

George Yule [113, p. 84] says *“what language users have most in mind is an assumption of coherence, that what is said or written will make sense in terms of their normal experience of things. That “normal” experience will be locally interpreted by each individual and hence will be tied to the familiar and the expected”*.

2.2.1.3. Written Discourse and Spoken Discourse

2.2.2. Theory of Conversational Analysis

2.2.2.1. The Notion of Conversation

2.2.2.2. Features of Conversation

2.2.2.3. Conversation Principles

a. Co-operative Principle

b. Politeness Principle

2.2.2.4. Conversation Units

2.2.2.5. The Making of Conversation Meaning

a. Turn - taking

b. Adjacency pair

c. Openings and Closings

d. Topics

2.2.3. Discourse Markers

2.2.3.1. The Notion of Discourse Markers

“Discourse markers are discourse lubricants which help us” to introduce a topic of conversation, to link what we have to say to what someone has just said- to agree or disagree , to respond to what we have heard.” [63, p. 4]

2.2.3.2.Characteristics of Discourse Markers

Fraser (1987, 1990, 1991) assumes that utterance meaning is analyzable into two distinct types of encoded information: content meaning, and pragmatic meaning.

2.2.4. Classification of Discourse Markers

2.2.4.1. DM Classification According to Fraser Bruce

a. Topic Markers

b. Activity Markers

c. Message Relationship Markers

2.2.4.2. DM Classification According to Keller and Warner

a. Openers

b. Links

c. Responders

d. Closers

2.2.4.3. Broad Classification of DMs

2.3. SUMMARY

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1. HYPOTHESES

3.2. METHODS OF THE STUDY

3.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.3.1. Data Collection

3.3.2. Data Analysis

3.4. THE INSTRUMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

3.5. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

3.7. SUMMARY

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. OVERVIEW OF THE NEW CURRENT ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR GRADE 10, 11 and 12 (TA 10, 11 and 12)

The aims of the English programme for High Schools is to help students consolidate, expand and improve their communicative competence which consists of the linguistic knowledge and the communicative functions they have learned in lower-secondary school within the topics related to the self, family life, society, culture and common knowledge, at the same time to help them foster

their conducts and intellectual qualities needed to enter life or to study further.

4.2. COMMENTS ON THE DATA

Table 4.1: Survey of Turn Number and Turn Frequency in TA 10, 11 and 12

Number of Turns	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	19	20	21
Number of Conversation	17	6	9	1	11	3	5	3	3	2	3	4	2	0	1	1	1	1	1
Frequency (%)	22,9	8,1	12,2	6,8	1,5	4,1	6,8	4,1	4,1	2,7	4,1	5,4	2,7	0,0	6,8	6,8	6,8	6,8	6,8

4.3. REALIZATION OF TYPES OF DMS IN TA 10, 11 AND 12

4.3.1. Openers:

This includes all DMs and tokens employed to initiate a conversation, to start off a question/ suggestion/ topic/ hesitation reaction ...

A: *Excuse me!*

B: *Yes?* What can I do for you, sir?

A: *Could you* help me to send this document to my office by fax?

B: *Certainly.* What's the fax number, please?

A: It's 04. 7223898.

B: *OK.* I'm sending it *now*. (TA 11: 103)

4.3.2. Links:

Belonging to this type are DMs which help to expand the conversation, and conjunctions which state the relationship between the propositions.

Lan Huong : Do you like them?

Quang Hung : Well, I do like some of them. *But* I think the best Vietnamese musician of all times is Van Cao. He's really my favourite musician.

(TA 10: 128)

4.3.3. Responders:

DMs of this type appear in replies (usually in center turns).

PAUL : Six kids?

ANDREA: *Yes*. And we're really close. My brothers are married, so it makes for a very crowded home over the holiday. And there are too many people to cook for, so we end up going out to dinner a lot. That's also fun. (TA 12: 16)

4.3.4. Closers:

The occurrence of Closing DMs prepares interlocutors a farewell. Usually they are in last turns.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for being with us tonight.

Dr. Brown : *You're welcome*. (TA 11: 84)

4.3.5. Polite Markers:

Including in the group are honorifics: *please, kindly, ...*

A: What would you like to eat?

B: I will a sandwich, *please*. (TA 10: 151)

4.4. FREQUENCY OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN TA 10, 11 and 12

The overall analysis of 74 conversations in TA 10, 11 and 12 composed of 508 conversational turns, reveals that 673 DMs are used at different positions in conversation moves. That is, on average each turn employs one DM. The distribution of these DMs is as follows:

Table 4.2: A Survey of DM Types in TA 10, 11 and 12

Types of DMs	Openers	Links	Responders	Closers	Polite Markers	
Occurrences	259	212	174	17	11	673
Frequency	38.48%	31.50%	25.85%	2.53%	1.64%	100%

4.4.1. Openers in TA 10,11 and 12

Table 4.3: Occurrences and Frequency of Openers in TA 10,11,12

Meanings	DMs	Occurrences	Total	Frequency(%)
Getting attention	Hello/Hi	9	105	40.5%
	Good morning	3		
	Excuse me	1		
Introducing aspects of a topic	First/Next	19	19	7.3%
Opinion	I think/guess...	25	25	9.7%
Action Strategies	Would you like...?	7	110	42.5%
	Can /Could I (you)...?	30		
	Let's...	6		
	...should/ need/	67		

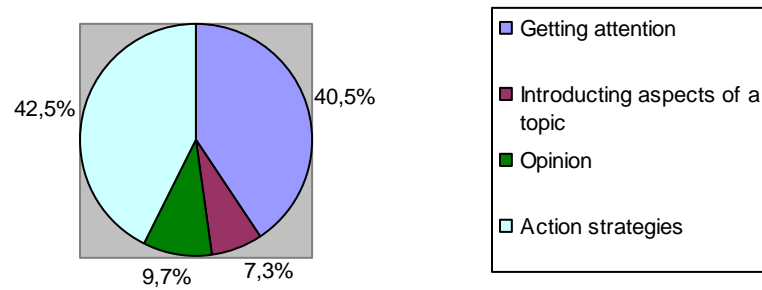


Chart 4.1: Distribution of Openers in TA 10,11 and 12

4.4.2. Links in TA 10,11 and 12

Table 4.4: Occurrences and Frequency of Links in TA 10,11 and 12

Meanings	DMs	Occurrences	Total	Frequency
Adversative	But	29	29	13.7%
Additive	...,too.	6		
	..., either /neither	1		
	And	138	145	68.4%
Causal	So	18	18	8.5%
Temporal	Then	20	20	9.4%

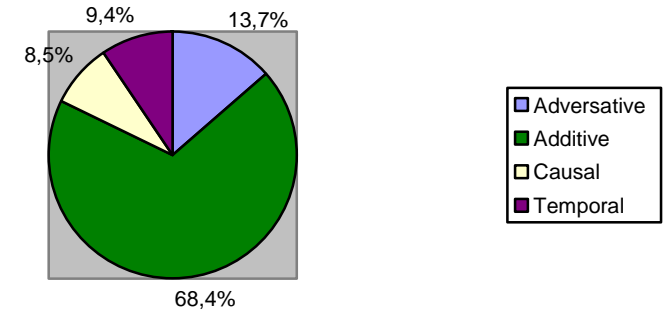


Chart 4.2: Distribution of Links in TA 10,11 and 12

4.4.3. Responders in TA 10,11 and 12

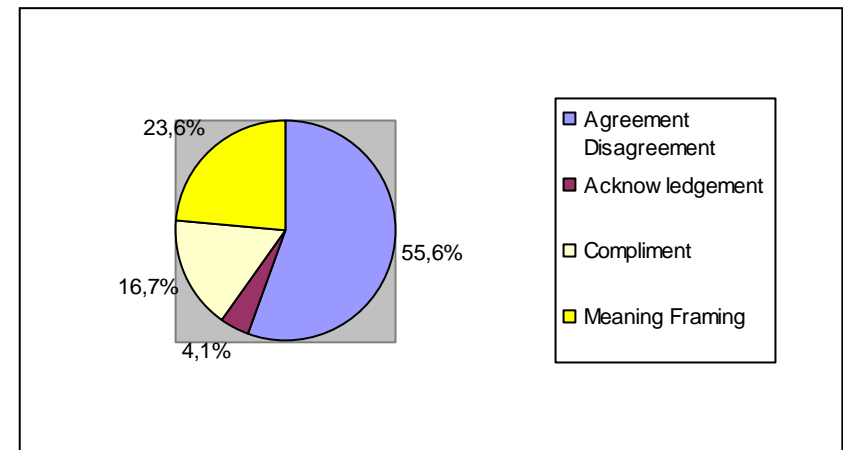


Chart 4.3: Distribution of Responders in TA 10,11 and 12

**Table 4.5: Occurrences and Frequency of Responders
in TA 10,11 and 12**

Meanings	DMs	Occurrences	Total	Frequency
Agreement/ Disagreement	Yes	43	97	55.6%
	OK	9		
	I'd like/love...	2		
	Of course	1		
	I think so/ I don't think so/ Me, too	5		
	No	24		
	I'm sorry	4		
	Sure/ I'm sure	7		
	That's right/ That's true	2		
	Acknowledge ment	I know/I see		
Compliment	Great	11	29	16.7%
	That's a great idea	1		
	That sounds great	1		
	It's very nice.	3		
	Thanks/ Thank you	13		
Modality	Too/quite/so/little/r eally...	39	41	23.6%
	Perhaps/ Maybe	2		

In order to create the utterance's illocutionary force of the responds, modal markers of intensifiers and downtoners are used at the second peak (39 times and 2 times respectively). The former group of DMs is used for two purposes: to intensify a positive quality of what they do not like or to mitigate the negative comments. For example:

Pam: So all in all, it's much better than London, isn't it?

Debbie: Yes, I think so. In London, it's certainly more polluted, and more stressful. Here it's so much quieter, and that's good for my health. (TA 10: 180)

Intensifiers are the favor of High School native students, of which females are of dominance Sali [95, p.1909]. Along the result, we expect these DMs are successfully used by Vietnamese High School students.

A: *Perhaps* Snowy is in there. But he is not asleep.

B: I swear he is sleeping.

A: When Snowy sleeps, he snores but he looks sweet.

(TA 11: 121)

4.4.4. Closers in TA 10,11 and 12

**Table 4.6: Occurrences and Frequency of Closers
in TA 10,11, and 12**

Meanings	DMs	Occurrences	Total	Frequency
Casual Closing	Thanks/ Thank you	7	11	64.7%
	Good Bye / Bye	2		
	See you later/ I'll call you soon,	2		
Formal Closing	You're welcome/ Not at all	6	6	35.3%

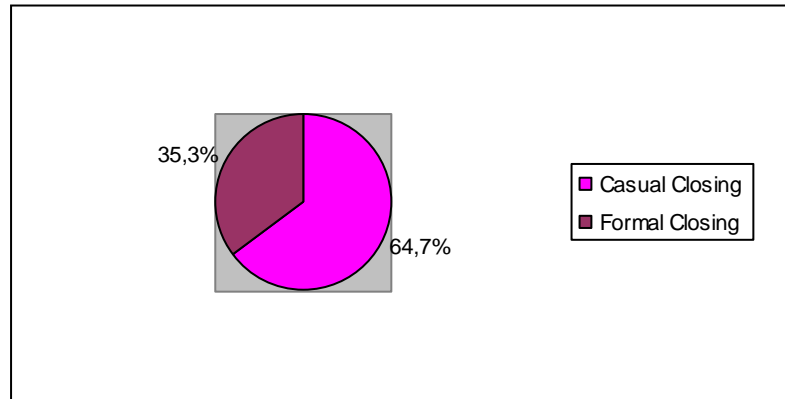


Chart 4.4: Distribution of Closers in TA 10,11 and 12

4.4.5. Polite Markers in TA 10,11 and 12

Table 4.7: Occurrences and Frequency of Polite Markers in TA 10,11 and 12

Meanings	DMs	Occurrences	Total
Softening the face threat	Please	11	11

Polite marker- *Please*- is resorted to communicate an aspect of the speaker's belief about the relationship between him and the listener. The lexical item doesn't mean the speaker is of lower status, but it indicates the deference towards the hearer. It appears pre-verbally and post-propositionally.

4.5. PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF DMS

4.5.1. Discourse Managing Functions:

4.5.1.1. DMs as Signals of Opening, Expanding, and Closing

(1). A: **Excuse me!**

(2). B: **Yes?** What can I do for you, sir?

(3). A: **Could you help me** to send this document to my office by fax?

(4). B: **Certainly.** What's the fax number, please?

(5). A: It's 04. 7223898.

(6). B: **OK.** I'm sending it now.

(7). A: **Thank you. Oh.** How much is that?

(8). B: It's five thousand dong. **And** you can see the rates on the table.

(9). A: **Yeah. I see.** Here you are. **Thank you.**

(10).B: **You're welcome.** (TA 11: 103)

DMs realized in the above dialogue are **Openers, Expanding, and Closers.** *Excuse me, Could you help me* in (1), (3) and *Oh* in (7) are respectively used as getting attention, suggestion, and hesitation openers; *And* in (8) as additional links; *OK* in (6) as an agreement responder; **Yeah. I see** in (9) as an encouragement responder and *Thank you* in (9), **You're welcome** in (10) as closers.

a. DMs as Openers:

A: Excuse me!

B: Yes? What can I do for you, sir? (TA 11: 103)

In the sequence, A politely employs the opening strategy "*Excuse me*" with the purpose to draw the B's attention and to avoid the sudden initiation.

b. DMs as Expanding Markers :

Expansion markers prepare speaker A for the next argument or view, from which (s)he is going to provide feedback argument-agreement or rejection. Let's see how speaker A change the topic:

A: Excuse me, are you in this class?

B: Yes, I am, but... you know I am a new comer.

A: *By the way*, where are you from?

B: Well, I come from Xanadia , and What about you? [5, p. 69]

To be successful in evaluating or rejecting to the subject, we may use Evaluation markers. For example:

A: Which do you prefer, detective films or science fiction films?

B: Well, it's difficult to say. But I suppose *I'd prefer* science fiction films to detective ones.(TA 10: 135)

c. *DMs as Closers:*

Like openers which lead in a conversation naturally, closers are signals foretelling the farewell.

Minh: Where are you going now?

Quan: I'm going to the library to borrow some books. Well, *I've got to go*. Talk to you later.

Minh: *Bye*. See you later. (TA 10: 25)

What DMs end the conversation between the tourist and tourist guide?

TOURIST: What kind of food and drinks are served?

TOURIST GUIDE: Traditional food and beer or wine are served. During the reception, the groom, bride, and their parents stop by each table to thank their guests. The guests in return, will give envelopes containing wedding cards and money to the newly wedded couples along with their blessing.

TOURIST: Oh. That's very interesting. **Thank you.**

TOURIST GUIDE: **You're welcome!** (TA 12: 25)

4.5.1.2. *DMs as fluency devices*

Fluency devices or discourse fillers in Ngo Huu Hoang's view [8, p.74] are hesitation sounds that interlocutors employ to indicate

uncertainty or to maintain the floor while thinking of what to say next. The fillers can occur anywhere in the stream of speech, but they neither add any new information to the conversation nor alter the meaning of what is uttered.

4.5.2. *DMs as Meaning Framing*

• **Downtoners:** consist of elements such as *simply, possibly, perhaps, maybe, probably, in a way, etc.* They are used to express tentativeness or uncertainty.

A: Is Snowy at home? Snowy Smith?

B: He is sleeping. Go away.

A: Sleeping? Where?

B: In there. Why do you smile?

A: **Perhaps** Snowy is in there. But he is not asleep.

(TA 11: 121)

• **Understaters:** are elements used to minimize the imposition, or reduce the degree of the propositions such as: *a bit, a little, a little bit, just a bit, etc.*

A: When do you often read books?

B: I read books whenever I have **a little** free time. I also read while waiting for the bus or during the break at school.

(TA 12: 122)

• **Hedges:** include all the elements by which S avoids specification in making a commitment to the illocutionary point of the utterance: *sort of, kind of, somehow, something like that, etc.*

A: What is he like?

B: He is **sort of** brave, witty and very kind to other people.

(TA 12: 122)

• **Subjectivisers:** are elements by means of which S shows his/her view or attitude towards the proposition: *I think, I hope, "I mean", hopefully, in my mind, to my view, etc.*

Lan Huong: Do you like them?

Quang Hung: Well, I do like some of them. But **I think** the best Vietnamese composer of all times is Van Cao. He's really my favourite composer.

(TA 10: 128)

• **Intensifiers:** consist of such elements as *so, such, really, extremely, absolutely, etc.* They are used to intensify the reality denoted in the proposition.

A : How do you like the class ?

B : I **really** enjoy it.

(TA 10: 26)

• **Commitment upgraders:** are used to express speakers' commitment to the proposition: *sure, certain, of course, surely, certainly, etc.*

PAUL: So, Andrea, you're going home for the holiday?

ANDREA: I am **sure**. I've booked a flight for tomorrow afternoon and I can't wait.

PAUL: That's sounds great.

(TA 12: 16)

• **Cajolers:** include DMs at the interpersonal level such as *you know, you see, as you know, as you may have learnt, etc.*

Interviewer: What did you like best about your school then?

Hanh: I liked everything in my school, **you know**. Well, of course, not the breaks as I've said. I liked my teachers, my friends and the different activities at school then.

(TA 10: 47)

• **Appealers:** are such elements employed to seek approval or response from the hearer as *OK? Right? , would you? , is it? , will you? etc.*

• **Politeness markers:** consist of such honorifics as *please, kindly, etc.* They are used to soften the face threat of the utterance.

A: What would you like to eat?

B: I will a sandwich, **please**.

(TA 10: 151)

4.5.3. Textual Function

• **Adversative:**

B: What do you like to do in your free time?

S: Well, I don't have much free time, **but** I like different sports- basketball and swimming, for example- and just sitting at home and reading.

(TA 10: 36)

• **Additive:**

A: I know what we should do first. We should widen the roads.

B: That's a good idea. If the roads are widened, cars and lorries can get to our village.

C: Yes. **And** if lorries can get to the village, we won't have to cart heavy loads of farming products to the city.

(TA 10: 85)

• **Causal:**

Tuan: She said she didn't want to talk to you.

Tung: Well, what did she say when you told her I was really upset?

Tuan: She said she was upset too, **so** I asked her to let me tell her your side of the story, she said she was not interested because you had promised to go to the cinema but you hadn't turned up. She said she didn't want to see you again.

(TA 12: 40)

- **Temporal:**

A: So we've learned a lot about New York and London. Let's make some comparisons between them.

B: All right. **First**, the area of London is 1610 square km, and that of New York is 946 square km, so London is larger.

(TA 10: 160)

4.6. THE RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRES

4.7. SUMMARY

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS- IMPLICATIONS- LIMITATIONS- RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Also significant in the study is the identification of DM types as well as pragmatic functions of DMs in English conversations in the current English textbooks used in Vietnamese High Schools. The proposed model and the quantitative study suggest conclusively that discourse markers are part of linguistic competence in that they form a procedural class of verbal items whose function is to serve as monitoring devices in the interactive aspect of discourse. The monitoring is done by pointing to an undergone or required adaptation of one or more models of the world involved in an ongoing conversation. The kind of monitoring and textual manifestations

are determined by the conceptual component of the chosen discourse marker and conversational requirements. The results are expected to help not only English but also Vietnamese speakers better understand and use discourse markers in utterance as appropriately as avoid cross-cultural embarrassment, misapprehension or shock. Moreover, these results may be significant to teachers and researchers in regard to their approach to the teaching of foreign languages from a pragmatic point of view.

To sum up, the findings and discussions of discourse markers in the conversations of the current English textbooks used in Vietnamese High Schools match the hypotheses put forward earlier in the study. Discourse markers point to their user's attitude to the information to which they relate. Thus, DMs constitute an extremely efficient, economical and felicitous means of facilitating the smooth production and interpretation of discourse.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will present some implications for teaching DMs and practical activities to assist High School students to use DMs appropriately and effectively with a reference to the characteristics of learners. However, a preview of communicative competence is really essential because there is a close relationship between the use of DMs and components of communicative competence.

5.2.1. Communicative Competence.

The theory of second language acquisition states that the skilful use of DMs is one essential criterion valuating the learners' communicative competence which refers to four areas of knowledge and skills: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence Canale [29, p.147].

5.2.2. Some Pedagogical Implications for Teaching and Learning Discourse Markers

5.2.2.1. Teaching DMs in Parallelism with Teaching Appropriateness

5.2.2.2. Teaching DMs in Parallelism with Teaching The Target Culture.

5.2.2.3. Teaching DMs in Parallelism with Teaching Strategic Competence.

5.2.3. Some Suggested Activities and Exercises for Practicing DMs in English Conversations

5.2.3.1. Conversation Fluency

a. Encouraging Noises

b. Keeping Talking

c. Interrupting and Asking Questions

d. Agreeing and Disagreeing

e. Game: Links

5.2.3.2. Appropriateness

a. Greeting and Greeting Routines

b. Matching

5.2.3.3. Learning English Website Online to Improve Speaking Skill by Using Discourse Markers

<http://thanhnien.easyvn.com/thuylinh>

5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to the limitation of time and data collected, there will be unavoidable weakness in the study.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As mentioned in the scope of the study, the thesis is partial investigation into DMs in conversations in the new set of English textbooks for High School students, representatively in TA 10, 11 and

12. There are still some wider aspects of DMs left unsolved that need further study:

- DMs in native and non native adolescents' conversations.
- The influence of mother tongue on non native adolescents' use of DMs.
- DMs and intonation in conversations.