

EFL Students' Use of Transition Signals in Essay Writing

Ariyanti

University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda

e-mail: ariyanti@uwgm.ac.id

Abstract:

This study is aimed to explore the use of transition signals used by EFL students in essay writing in higher education level. Particularly, this essay was conducted to English Language Education Study Program students at University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda. This research is a qualitative study with content analysis research design where twenty-six comparison and contrast essays of the third semester students were analyzed by using coding which indicates transition signals used by students. Additionally, in-depth interview also applied to the students who are considered as less active users of transition signals in their writing in order to figure out deeper on what difficulties they found during writing the essay. The findings of this research reveal three major findings i.e. most of students are succeed to use compare and contrast type of transition signals to compose their comparison and contrast essay, the students mostly use time order transition signals to make their essay coherent, and two out of twenty-six students have no transition signals to be used on their essays. Result from interview shows that the students still lack of understanding toward when, where, and what type of transition signals can be used for certain context. Pedagogical implication is discussed further in this research.

Keywords: *EFL students, transition signals, essay writing, comparison and contrast essay*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of important skills in English language proficiency. In order to have a decent writing, there are many factors that should be noticed whether from the content or the surface structure and technical matters. In the matter of technical aspect in writing, transition signals or also called by transition words becomes one of significant aspects which can influence the production of an essay. It has closely related to writing's coherence because transition signals is concerning with logical and smooth arrangement of ideas (Toba et al., 2019). Additionally, writing a coherent text is highly suggested skill for students to be mastered (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). In order to compose a cohesive text of writing, students need to use cohesive devices to run words and sentences smoothly (Alameddine & Mirza, 2016; Lee et al., 2016). In this case, transition signals play important role in bringing smooth flow of ideas and how they are related each other (Bailey, 2006; Megaiab, 2014).

Moreover, the lack of transition signals on a writing indeed will affect the content i.e. in the matter of cohesion and coherence e.g. organization of ideas as well as the connectedness among them (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Yusof, 2012). Therefore, the use of transition signals is highly important since its function is to connect ideas among sentences and paragraphs (Ampa et al., 2019; Murray & Moore, 2006). In short, inappropriate use of transition signals can cause misinterpretation to readers so that it is very urgent in paying attention to the selection of proper transition signals (Alsharif, 2017; Ariyanti, 2016).

Furthermore, students need to demonstrate the descent usage of transition signals unless their writing will be incoherent (Banjarnahor & Narius, 2019). It is because transition signals are important and useful to build transition and connectedness among sentences and paragraphs so that transition signals are important devices to be well-used by students (Mahendra & Dewi, 2017). In line with Banjarnahor & Narius (2019) and Mahendra & Dewi (2017), Sari (2018) mentioned that it is a must for students to give full attention not only to paragraph organization but also to the coherence of their writing. Additionally, Oshima & Hogue (2007) said that a criteria of a good writing is a coherent which is built smoothly from the beginning until the end of paragraph.

However, difficulties in writing especially for EFL students are still happened. Not only the matter of choosing suitable diction and generating ideas, the use of transition signals are also considered as one of difficulties faced by EFL students in writing (Richard & Renandya, 2002). In order to have a good piece of writing, there are quite many of writing elements that should be noticed by students including rules in writing such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence (Brown, 2000; Hatch & Brown, 1995).

Above explanation indicates that transition signals can highly influence the production of a writing. Therefore, its existence is considered to be a vital element in writing, so it is not surprisingly that there are some studies which content focused on the use of transition signals in EFL students' writing (Fauziah, 2019; Siswanti & Harjanto, 2018; Warna et al., 2019; Djahimo, 2018; Sari, 2018; Tampubolon, 2019; Rachmawati, 2016; Papadopoulos, 2018) as well as their challenges in using it based on its function in a proper way (Ampa et al., 2019; Mahendra & Dewi, 2017; Toba et al., 2019; Rianti, 2020).

From the introduction explained broadly above, it is showed that transition signals are highly important and the existence or the none of them surely effect the cohesion and coherence of students' essay. Therefore, this essay is intended to explore the use of transition signals used by the third semester students of English Language Education Study Program at University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda, Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Transition Signals in Academic Writing

It is obvious that transition signals are important in academic writing since its function is to make our writing flows smoothly (Papadopoulos, 2018). Additionally, transition signals is writing devices which contribute to the coherence of a writing (Nikmah, 2019). The function of transition signals is to connect words or phrases in all parts of a writing. It is bridges to link sentences and paragraphs smoothly so that the ideas existed in a piece of writing run smoothly (Tampubolon, 2019; Vincent, 1984).

In this case, there are three reasons in using transition signals i.e. logical relation, directions, and organizational flow (The College of Saint Rose Writing Center, 2012). Specifically, logical relation is related to connection between ideas existed among sentences and paragraphs. Moreover, in writing, we cannot expect that our readers know what we are conveying in our piece of writing. Therefore, it is vital to lead our readers to understand what we are writing by providing transition signals as "stepping stone" between ideas (Aunurrahman, Hamied & Emilia, 2016). Thus, organizational flow also needs to be highlighted in order to make ideas in our writing flow with less abrupt (Zemack & Rumisek, 2005).

Furthermore, it is vital to recognize when to use correct transition signals. In this case, there are two types of transition signals used in a writing i.e. between and within paragraphs (The College of Saint Rose Writing Center, 2012). Particularly, the way we can use transition signals between paragraphs is by adding one or two sentences at the end of a paragraph and at the beginning of the next paragraph to show the ideas between paragraphs are connected each other. Meanwhile, connection of ideas within paragraphs can be used by adding transition words or phrases within paragraphs to show connection among sentences. Additionally, there

are three ways to have coherent paragraph i.e. using noun and pronoun, using transition signals to connect ideas, setting logical ideas or logical order.

According to Lynch & Anderson (2013), there are six types of transition signals suggested by Lynch & Anderson (2013) in academic writing. The transition signals including (1) *for an addition* i.e. moreover, furthermore, also, in addition, and apart from, (2) *to contrast sentences* i.e. nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary, in contrast, in spite of, and despite, (3) *for cause and effect* i.e. as a result, consequently, therefore, thus, hence, for this reason, and because of (NP), (4) *for positive condition* i.e. in that case, if so, and then, (5) *for negative condition* or to give choice for any condition i.e. alternatively, otherwise, instead of, rather than, and if not, (6) *for time order* or sequence of event or priority scale i.e first (1y), second (1y), next, prior to (NP), before (NP), finally, lastly.

Almost alike with Lynch & Anderson (2013), Papadopoulos (2018) also proposed six types of transition signals including (1) *to give example or evidence* i.e. for example, for instance, (2) *to add information* i.e. also, another, furthermore, moreover, in addition, (3) *to compare* i.e. although, despite, in the same way, nevertheless, on the other hand, however, (4) *to show chronological event* i.e. first, next, later, then, eventually, finally, (5) *to indicate importance* i.e. least important, more importantly, (6) *to conclude* i.e. as a result, therefore, thus, due to, in conclusion, in short, in other words.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a content analysis with qualitative research approach (Cresswell, 2005; Leavy, 2014; Biklen & Casella, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Specifically, twenty-six essays of third semester students of English Language Education Study Program at University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda, Indonesia, are analyzed specifically on comparison and contrast essay type. In terms of the students' essay analysis, the researcher uses coding technique (Creswell, 2006; Patton, 2002; Johnson & Christensen, 2000) to indicate the use of transition signals in students' essay writing. After coding step, the researcher categorize the transition signals types based on its functions proposed by Lynch & Anderson (2013) and Papadopoulos (2018).

Furthermore, in order to support the data found from the students' essays, the researcher also interview (Taylor et al., 2016; Gay et al., 2006; Miles et al., 2014) the students to dig their difficulty on the use of transition signals in accomplishing their essays. The students interviewed are those who considered as less active users of transition signals in their essays.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the research problem regarding with transition signal used by EFL students particularly on the third semester in writing a comparison and contrast

essay. In this part, the researcher displays the findings in terms of frequency as well as percentage in using the transition signals proposed by the theory of Lynch & Anderson (2013) and Papadopoulos (2018). Moreover, to obtain the data deeper, the researcher also classify how often the students use transition signals in their essay writing.

Table 1: Transition Signals Used by EFL Students in Essay Writing

Type of Transition Signals	Frequency	Percentage
Add information	18	16%
Time order	30	27%
Compare & contrast	37	33%
Positive condition	10	9%
Conclude	9	8%
Give example	3	3%
Cause & effect	4	4%
Total	111	100%

Table 2: Students' Activeness in Using Transition Signals in Writing the Comparison and Contrast Essay

Categories	Range of Transition Signals Used	Number of Students	Percentage
Students who actively use transition signals	1 - 5	13	50%
Students who seldom use transition signals	6 - 10	11	42%
Students who never use transition signals	0	2	8%
Total		26	100%

From all types of transition signals, the transition signals which appears to be the dominant use is compare and contrast transition signals. It is indicated that that the students can place the appropriate transition signals based on type of essay they are composing. Other than that, there is one type of transition signal which does not appear to be used by the students i.e. transition signals which function is to explain negative condition or to give alternative choice.

Moreover, most of students use appropriate transition signals based on their function. It is just some students who translate the transition signals with Indonesian taste, e.g. *not just that* or in Bahasa means *tidak hanya itu*. This transition signal is intended to add information, therefore, students can use *additionally*, *moreover*, *furthermore*, or *apart from* instead.

Apart from translation style, grammatical and sentence structure also contribute to the meaning intended from the use of transition signals as the following excerpt:

*Conclusion traditional music was born from areas all over Indonesia.
In the next one, we will discuss the differences between...
The first one, this paragraph will discuss...*

Suggested usage of above transition signal is as follows:

*In conclusion, traditional music was born from areas all over Indonesia.
Next, this part is intended to discuss about the differences between...
Firstly, this paragraph is particularly contained about...*

Furthermore, the next findings indicate that most of students understand that in order to compose a comparison and contrast essay, they need the transition signals which functioned is to compare and contrast two objects on the essay i.e. *while, meanwhile, however, unlike, therefore, whereas, despite, although, on the other hand, in many ways, and likewise*. In this case, the students understand how to apply the transition signals based on its function which is appropriate with the type of essay composed. It is showed from the biggest percentage of the usage of transition signals by the students is transition signals which functioned is to compare and contrast as the type of the essay they composed is a comparison and contrast essay.

Next, efforts from students on making the ideas of their essay flow is indicated by the use of 27% of time order transition signals i.e. *the first, the second, the third, the last, secondly, next, and lastly*. This type of transition signals helps the students in connecting the ideas within sentences and among paragraphs. Related to this finding, Toba et al. (2019) proven different result where on their research most of EFL students failed to make ideas cohesive and coherence because the lack of transition signals used by the students. Therefore, the result of students' essay writing is not well-ordered and organized. Related to this finding, it is obvious that consistency in composing a coherence writing is important. In this case, Mahanani (2008) noticed that most of EFL students in her research failed to compile a consistent usage of transition signals in their writing assignments. For example, one student in her research only catch up to achieve coherence ideas on the first paragraph. According to Oshima & Hogue (2007), a coherent writing is maintained from the first until the end of paragraph. Meaning that students who cannot sustain the connectedness of ideas until the end of paragraph of their writing failed to have coherent writing.

However, some students still face difficulties in using transition signals when writing in some area. The result from interview to the students who are considered as less active users of transition signals designate that they have lack of understanding toward the use of transition signals, lack of transition signals word bank, and confuse toward the use of appropriate transition signals to convey ideas. This fact is confirmed by the research from Banjarnahor & Narius (2019) where limited understanding toward the use of transition signals which are appropriate to

be used in writing as well as lack of understanding in terms of transition signals placement. This fact is confirmed by a research by Djahimo (2018) where some students still use transition signals incorrectly, although most of students have already understood how to use transition signals based on their function.

In another research, specifically in the research of Yolanda et al. (2013), the score of students in using transition signals considered in average category. There are still quite many of students make errors in the use of transition signals such as to compare and contrast ideas, time order, and some other types of transition signals. Average score toward the use of transition signals also found in the research of Banjarnahor & Narius (2019) where the EFL students only catch up maximum 60% related to the their ability in using the transition signals in writing.

Finally, above findings and discussion drive the red line of novelty and pedagogical implication in this research. Novelty of the research comes to one highlighted point where most of students are active in using comparison and contrast transition signals in writing a comparison and contrast essay. Additionally, most of students also active users of time order transition signals so that they are succeed in delivering cohesive and coherent ideas in sentences and paragraphs levels.

Moreover, pedagogical aspect implied in this research comes after the comparison toward this research result and other previous studies. It is said that 42% of the students still considered as a less active users of transition signals and unfortunately 8% of the students have none of transition signals used on their essays. Additionally, some previous studies highlighted in this research also perform less maximum usage of transition signals. It means that there is still a huge need of students in acquiring deep understanding toward where, when, and what transition signals appropriate to be used in different context and based on their needs during writing.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on above findings and discussion, the researcher comes to several points of research findings formulation to be concluded. There are three major findings in this research that need to be noticed. Firstly, most of students are succeed to use the most needed transition signals based on the type of essay i.e. using comparison and contrast transition signals in a comparison and contrast essay type. Secondly, the use of time order transition signals helps the EFL students in conveying cohesive and coherent ideas on their essays. Lastly, two out of twenty-six students failed to understand and use not event one transition signals in their essays so that it makes the ideas on their essay cannot flow smoothly.

Furthermore, there are still limited research regarding with transition signals used by EFL students in writing. As many experts and previous researchers believe that transition signals are vital and extremely important devices in connecting ideas both in cohesion and coherence levels, therefore, it is highly suggested for further researchers to have deeper analysis regarding with similar focus of study. In

addition, finding a formula of teaching and learning writing specifically related to the introduction and application of transition signals in writing is also needed to support better production of EFL students' essay.

6. REFERENCES

- Alameddine, M. M., & Mirza, H. S. (2016). Teaching Academic Writing for Advanced Level Grade 10 English. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 209–216.
- Alsharif, M. (2017). The Frequently Used Discourse Markers by Saudi EFL Learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 8(2), 384–397. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no2.28>
- Ampa, A. T., Akib, E., & Sari, D. K. (2019). The Use of Transitional Signals in Essay Writing by EFL Students. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 7(2), 33–38.
- Ariyanti, A. (2016). Shaping Students' Writing Skills: The Study of Fundamental Aspects in Mastering Academic Writing. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 1(1).
- Aunurrahman, Hamied, F. A., & Emilia, E. (2016). Exploring an Academic Writing Class in an Indonesian University Context. *Journal of Language and Literature*, XI(1), 1–11.
- Bailey, S. (2006). *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students Second edition*. Routledge Falmer Taylor & Francis Group.
- Banjarnahor, N. L. J., & Narius, D. (2019). An Analysis of Student's Ability in Using Transition Signals in An Argumentative Essay Written by The Second Semester of English Department Students at Universitas Negeri Padang. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 8(3), 417–424.
- Biklen, S. K., & Casella, R. (2007). *A Practical Guide to the Qualitative Dissertation*. Teachers College Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Longman.
- Carstairs-McCarthy, A. (2002). *An introduction to English morphology: Words and their structure*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Cresswell, J. (2005). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Longman.
- Creswell, J. W. (2006). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publication Inc.
- Djahimo, H. R. (2018). An Analysis of Transition Signals in Discussion Texts Written By the Sixth Semester Students of the English Study Program of Undana in Academic Year 2016/2017. *International Journal of Research - GRANTHAALAYAH*, 6(1), 137–149. <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v6.i1.2018.1603>

- Fauziah, R. R. (2019). *Transition Words in English Paragraph Writing Subject*. STKIP PGRI West Sumatera.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2006). *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications*. Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Hatch, E., & Brown, C. (1995). *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2000). *Educational Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Leavy, P. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Oxford University Press.
- Lee, L. F., Sidhu, G. K., Chan, Y. F., Teoh, S. H., Narayanan, G., & Ishak, M. I. A. M. (2016). Examining Contributory Factors and Barriers to Success in Academic Writing Among Undergraduates. In *Regional Conference on Science, Technology and Social Sciences*. Springer Singapore.
- Lynch, T., & Anderson, K. (2013). *Grammar for Academic Writing*. University of Edinburgh Press.
- Mahanani, N. (2008). *An Analysis on the Transitional Words n Essays Written by the Students of English Department of the State Islamic University of Malang*. The State Islamic University of Malang.
- Mahendra, M. W., & Dewi, N. P. R. P. (2017). The Use of Transition Signals in Efl Academic Writing Context: a Corpus Study. *Jurnal Bahasa Lingua Scientia*, 9(1), 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.21274/lis.2017.9.1.87-100>
- Megaiaab, M. M. A. (2014). The English Writing Competence of the Students of Indonesian Senior High School. *WEI International Academic Conference Proceedings*.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebooks* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Murray, R., & Moore, S. (2006). *The Handbook of Academic Writing*. Open University Press.
- Nikmah, S. M. (2019). *an Undergraduate Thesis an Error Analysis on Using Transition Signals in Essay Writing Among the Fourth Semester Students of English Education Department in State Institute for Islamic Studies of Metro*. State Institute for Islamic Studies of Metro.
- Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (2007). *Introduction to Academic Writing*. Pearson Longman.
- Papadopoulos, T. P. (2018). *Understanding the Body Paragraph : A Handbook for EFL Teachers & Students*. The University of San Francisco.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rachmawati, S. M. (2016). *An Analysis of Using Transitions in Writing Argumentative Essay of the English Department Students at University of Nusantera PGRI Kediri Academic Year 2015/2016*. University of Nusantera

- PGRI Kediri.
- Rianti, R. (2020). *The Ability of PBI Students in Using Transition Signals in Paragraph Writing*. UIN Ar-Raniry.
- Richard, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sari, D. K. (2018). *The Use of Transitional Signals in Writing Essay at the Fifth Semester Students of English Department in Muhammadiyah University of Makassar*. Muhammadiyah University of Makassar.
- Siswanti & Harjanto. (2018). Coherence Strategies and Devices in Efl Academic Writing Introductions. *Magister Scientiae*, 3(43), 34–57.
- Tampubolon, S. (2019). Transition Signals Used in Short Stories. *JETAL: Journal of English Teaching & Applied Linguistic*, 1(1), 33–40. <https://doi.org/10.36655/jetal.v1i1.118>
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. L. (2016). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods : a Guidebook and Resource* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- The College of Saint Rose Writing Center. (2012). *Transition Sentences*. Transition Sentence Handout. <https://www.strose.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Transition-Sentences-Handout-2012B.pdf>
- Toba, R., Noor, W. N., & Sanu, L. O. (2019). The Current Issues of Indonesian EFL Students' Writing Skills: Ability, Problem, and Reason in Writing Comparison and Contrast Essay. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 19(1), 57–73. <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v19i1.1506>
- Vincent, V. (1984). *Writing's Building*. Antony Rowe Ltd.
- Warna, D., Wijaya, B., Sartika, E., & Riznanda, W. A. (2019). Cohesive Devices Used in Argumentative Essays of Undergraduate EFL Students in Indonesia. *ENGLISH FRANCA : Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, 3(02), 125. <https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v3i02.1164>
- Yolanda, F. Y., Jufri, J., & Fitrawati, F. (2013). *The Analysis of English Department Students' Ability in Using Transition Signals at Padang State University*. FBS Padang State University.
- Yusof, J. et. al. (2012). Guided Peer Feedback on Academic Writing Tasks using Facebook Notes: An Exploratory Study. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 67, 216 – 228.
- Zemack, D. E., & Rumisek, L. A. (2005). *Academic Writing: From Paragraph to Essay*. Macmillan.