PRAGMATIC AND DISCOURSE MARKERS USED BY MALAY AND ARAB POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS DURING CLASSROOM ORAL PRESENTATIONS

By

HUSSEIN WALID HUSSEIN ALKHAWAJA

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

To the soul of my late father, who instilled in my mind the love towards English language

To my mother who has been devoting her life for us,

To my lovely and supportive wife, Tamara Abo Shawish,

To my brother, Khalid and my sisters, Mona, Abeer, Sahar, Amal, and Nadia

To my lovely children, Walid, Ward, Yamen, and Miraj,

To my entire family for your guidance, prayers and encouragement,

To my teachers for your guidance and endless support

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Chair   **: Shamala Paramasivam, PhD**
Faculty   **: Modern Languages and Communication**

As part of their postgraduate courses in Malaysian universities, Arab and Malaysian students have to present their assignments and projects orally in front of their professors. For effective and smooth conceptualization of the presented ideas and facts, students need to employ certain language elements called pragmatic markers (PMs) and discourse markers (DMs). In such institutional discourse, the use of these markers can help students to present their ideas and facts smoothly and coherently, and in a close connection to the context of the presentations. These markers are, in fact, valuable tools in the hands of learners to structure and organize the segments of their speech, make the content of the presentation comprehensible and meaningful, and help their audiences follow the sequence of ideas. Failing to use these markers properly can negatively affect the audience's comprehension of the presented material and consequently affect the students' achievement. This thesis sought to investigate the use of DMs and PMs by two diverse cultural groups (Arab and Malay) during their oral presentations. The focus of the investigation was on identifying the frequencies of the types and functions of these markers realized in these students' spoken discourse. Besides, the thesis attempted to determine and explain the differences in usage between the two groups of students and whether they give rise to problems for the students or the audience. For these purposes, the current thesis used pragmatic discourse analysis in which the data were collected qualitatively in the form of audio-recorded presentations and then analyzed in a mixed mode design using descriptive and analytical approaches. The recorded data were transcribed and then analyzed based on Fraser's (2009) framework for the PMs and Fraser's (1996) framework of DMs.

The findings of this study showed that there were clear quantitative and qualitative differences between the Arab and Malay students in using these

markers. While the Arab students tended to use more PMs that reflected their attitude, stance, feeling, and other interpersonal relationships with the audience, the Malay students tended to use more DMs that contributed to the coherence of their spoken discourse. These differences indicated that the use of these markers is dependent on the type of cultural group. Further, the findings showed that both groups of students face a number of usage problems, such as the interference of the first language, limited lexicon repertoire of these markers, limited awareness of the functions achieved by the use of these markers, and transfer from written register that affected the quality of their oral presentations. The findings contributed to better understanding of how speakers of diverse cultural background possess different linguistic and pragmatic resources that realize different output of oral presentations. These findings would inform better oral presentation performance of ESL/EFL learners in general and postgraduate students in specific. They will also add to the current body of literature in the area of discourse research.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENGGUNAAN PRAGMATIK DAN PENANDA WACANA OLEH PELAJAR PASCASISWAZAH MELAYU DAN ARAB SEMASA PEMBENTANGAN LISAN DALAM KELAS

Oleh

HUSSEIN WALID HUSSEIN ALKHAWAJA

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Pengerusi : **Shamala Paramasivam, PhD**
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Sebahagian daripada tugasan kursus pascasiswazah di universiti-universiti di Malaysia memerlukan para pelajar Arab dan Malaysia untuk menyampaikan tugasan dan projek mereka secara lisan di hadapan profesor mereka. Untuk melancarkan konseptualisasi idea dan fakta yang dikemukakan, para pelajar perlu menggunakan elemen bahasa tertentu yang dinamakan penanda pragmatik (PM) dan penanda wacana (DM). Dalam wacana institusi seperti itu, penggunaan penanda ini dapat membantu pelajar menyampaikan idea dan fakta mereka dengan lancar dan koheren, dan untuk mengait rapat konteks dalam pembentangan. Penanda ini sebenarnya, merupakan komponen berharga yang diperlukan pelajar untuk menyusun dan mengatur segmen ucapan mereka, menjadikan isi pembentangan lebih mudah difahami dan bermakna, dan juga membantu audiens mengikuti urutan idea dengan lebih berkesan. Kegagalan menggunakan penanda ini boleh memberi kesan negatif terhadap pemahaman penonton terhadap bahan yang dibentangkan dan seterusnya mempengaruhi pencapaian pelajar. Maka, tesis ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat penggunaan DM dan PM oleh dua kumpulan budaya yang berbeza (Arab dan Melayu) semasa pembentangan lisan mereka. Fokus penyelidikan adalah untuk mengenal pasti jenis dan fungsi penanda yang digunakan dalam wacana lisan para pelajar ini. Selain itu, tesis ini juga mengkaji dan menentukan perbezaan penggunaan antara kedua kumpulan para pelajar ini dan aspek penggunaan yang bermasalah yang dihadapi oleh mereka. Untuk tujuan ini, tesis telah menggunakan analisis wacana pragmatik sosiolinguistik di mana data-data dikumpulkan secara kualitatif dalam bentuk pembentangan rakaman audio dan kemudian dianalisis dalam reka bentuk mod campuran menggunakan kaedah diskriptif dan analitis. Data yang direkodkan ditranskripkan dan kemudian dianalisis berdasarkan kerangka Fraser (2009) untuk PM dan kerangka Fraser (1996) untuk DM. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan kuantitatif dan kualitatif yang jelas antara para pelajar Arab dan Melayu dalam menggunakan penanda ini. Walaupun pelajar-pelajar Arab cenderung

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menggunakan lebih banyak PM yang mencerminkan sikap, pendirian, perasaan, dan hubungan interpersonal yang lain dengan audiens mereka, pelajar-pelajar Melayu pula lebih cenderung menggunakan lebih banyak DM yang menyumbang kepada kesesuaian wacana lisan mereka. Perbezaan ini menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan penanda-penanda ini sensitif terhadap kumpulan budaya. Selanjutnya, penemuan menunjukkan kedua-dua kumpulan pelajar menghadapi sejumlah masalah penggunaan, seperti gangguan bahasa pertama, repertoire leksikon yang terhad untuk penanda-penanda ini, kesedaran terhad mengenai fungsi yang dicapai dengan penggunaan penanda-penanda ini, dan perpindahan dari gaya bahasa penulisan yang mempengaruhi kualiti pembentangan lisan mereka. Penemuan ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih baik mengenai bagaimana penutur dari pelbagai latar belakang budaya mempunyai sumber linguistik dan pragmatik yang berbeza yang merealisasikan hasil pembentangan lisan yang berbeza. Selain itu, penemuan ini akan memaklumkan prestasi persembahan lisan yang lebih baik bagi pelajar ESL / EFL pada umumnya dan pelajar pascasiswazah secara khususnya. Ia juga akan menyumbang kepada kesusasteraan terkini dalam bidang penyelidikan wacana.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMs	Discourse Markers
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
Fig.	Figure
f	Frequency
%	Percentage
L1	First Language
PMs	Pragmatic Markers
S1	Sentence One
S2	Sentence Two
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The present thesis investigates the discourse markers (Henceforth DMs) and pragmatic markers (Henceforth PMs) as used by the Arab and Malay postgraduate students during their classroom oral presentations. This chapter is divided into eight main sections. In the first section, the background of the study is introduced to explain the context of the study by providing background information that shows how the idea of this thesis came into being. Moreover, a need for investigating the use of the DMs and PMs in students' classroom oral presentations is established. In the second section, the research problem is stated and the rationale of researching the DMs and PMs in the context of Arab and Malay students is explained and justified. In the third and fourth sections, the research objectives and related research questions that guide the thesis are introduced. In the fifth section, the operational definitions of the key terms used more frequently in the present thesis is introduced and explained. The six section is dedicated to explain the conceptual framework adopted in the present thesis. In the last two sections, the significance of the study as well as the scope and limitations are clarified and justified.

1.1   Background of the Study

Towards more autodidacticism and spontaneity in learning the English language in the Malaysian universities, the Arab students, who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Malay students, who study English as a Second Language (ESL), are required to present their academic work in front of their classmates and professors (Abdullah & Rahman, 2010). The academic tasks of the presentations can be reviews of journal articles, summaries of course book chapters, and proposals of mini or final projects. To present these academic tasks orally in classrooms, the students usually employ a number of technological aids and resources, such as computers, overhead projectors, and Microsoft PowerPoint software that are made available to them in classrooms to create their slides.

The classroom oral presentations are usually conducted individually, in pairs, or in groups of three or more students, who divide the work among each other so each one of the group members presents a part of the task (Maktiar Singh, Mohamad Ali, Chan, & Tan, 2019). The students are then given 5 to 10 minutes to present their work. During this short period of time, the students have to demonstrate efficient time management, high presentation skills, effective communication of ideas, and smooth and coherent transition of the facts in the presentation. Although the oral presentations are the main instrument for learning and teaching in the Malaysian universities and probably elsewhere, they are not yet given enough attention in the literature. Extending the research on

the use of oral presentations for academic purposes can help students improve their learning performance and academic achievement.

Based on a number of studies conducted on the use of classroom oral presentation as a learning aid (Hincks, 2010; Miima, Ondigi, & Mavisi, 2013; Yang, Chang, Chien, Chien, & Tseng, 2013; Young, 2008), an oral presentation is adopted in modern classrooms to serve a number of learning objectives. First, it is used as a method of 'soft skills' learning, which is recommended to replace the conventional teaching and learning methods. Shakir (2009) noted that when students conduct oral presentations, they are given opportunities to practice speaking in the target language and demonstrate levels of self-learning and comprehension of the course material. Second, a presentation is used by a professor to serve as an assessment tool to evaluate the students' language use, their ability to effectively communicate ideas and their ability to explain the facts in the presentation to the audience. Third, presenting the students' academic tasks through an oral presentation enables the students to communicate the ideas and facts in the academic tasks in ways that make it easier for the audience to comprehend and conceptualize the topic being presented. Last but not least, an oral presentation can help the narrator (student-presenter) keep on topic and support the key ideas being presented using audio, visual, and textual illustrations (Saputri & Fitriati, 2019).

Although oral presentations are quite beneficial to students in their learning process, conducting them is, in fact, a challenge to ESL as well as EFL learners (Keong & Jawad, 2015; Melouah, 2013). Being non-native speakers of the English language, these students face a difficulty in conducting oral presentations because of their feeling of apprehension to speak in the target language or because of their limited linguistic competence which makes them suffer to produce a coherent speech that communicates the ideas and facts effectively. Keong and Jawad (2015) found that the majority of the Arab Iraqi EFL postgraduate students, who study in a Malaysian university, felt anxious in speaking with their professors in academic settings in general and in doing presentations in particular. Keong and his colleague attributed the students' apprehension in speaking to the students' humble level of linguistic competence in the target language and the lack of self-confidence. The researchers added that the students' fear of being under-estimated by their professors, being humiliated in front of their classmates, and being given lower assessment scores are additional sources of their apprehension during their oral presentations. Similarly, Melouah (2013) found that Arab Algerian EFL university learners fear speaking in front of their teachers and classmates in classroom as a result of the students' fear of receiving negative correction feedback by their professors, the students' poor language proficiency, and their lack of self-assurance.

In a Malay students' learning context, Abdullah and Rahman (2010) found that the Malay ESL university students experience classroom speaking difficulties although they are more exposed to using English than Arab EFL students. According to Abdullah and Rahman, Malay students perceive speaking in front of their teachers and classmates as a provoking classroom activity because they

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are required to use many linguistic rules while they are assessed by their teachers and compared to their classmates' performances.

Based on a personal experience in oral presentations, the present researcher noticed that Arab as well as Malay students are frightened when asked to present in front of the class. The researcher also noticed that these students were not perfectly able communicate their ideas and facts in coherent or organized ways which, most of the times, made their presentations poor and lacking effectiveness. Considering the previous observation from the literature and the personal observation inspired the present researcher to further investigate the issue to discover the problems that might face the two groups of students during their oral presentations.

The results just briefly reported showed clearly that oral presentation is a challenge for EFL/ESL learners, which can be partially overcome by using the available technological resources and aids, such as computer devices and applications. These technologies can help the students overcome their fears and assist them to communicate their ideas and explain the facts in the presentations as efficient and smooth as possible. Although the use of the presentation slides can be a facilitator factor to achieve the objectives early mentioned, they are not enough to make effective communication of the ideas and facts and render a powerful and meaningful presentation. Other influential competencies, exemplified by the students' linguistic and pragmatic knowledge and awareness are, in fact, required to conduct an organized, efficient, smooth, and coherent oral presentation, which is closely connected to the context and purpose of the topic being presented (Vu, 2017). Possessing such competencies comes to be a major player and a complement to the use of technologies, to eliminate the challenges the students face while doing the oral presentations. These competencies entitle students to utilize a number of linguistic strategies in order to persuade and satisfy the audience, and, consequently, to meet their expectations and get higher performance scores. Nevertheless, possessing these competencies by ESL/EFL learners is not an easy task to achieve, as it requires them to possess and develop adequate levels of linguistic knowledge and pragmatic awareness of the language (Alraddadi, 2016). More specifically, these learners should build up linguistic repertoire and develop pragmatic awareness of certain English devices known as DMs and PMs. In oral presentations, these devices are extremely essential as they can assist students to produce coherent and cohesive speech. The inability of the students to use such devices adequately and effectively in their oral presentations might deepen their speaking problems and lead to undesired consequences expressed by poor students' performance, low achievement scores, and most importantly, breakdown in communication between the learners and their professors and classmates.

DMs are linguistic devices, such as 'and', 'or', 'but', 'however', and 'because', among others, that are utilized in speech as a strategy to achieve a number of linguistic functions. Halliday and Hasan (1976) viewed DMs from a semantic perspective as linguistic devices that operate at the sentence, paragraphs, and

discourse levels to achieve textual relationships. For example, the conjunctions 'and', 'or', and 'but' can keep continuity in the flow of ideas in the text by showing a relationship and connectedness between the current and next turns in a sentence. Schiffrin (1987, p. 35), who labeled them as 'discourse markers', noted that these devices are mainly used in a sentence as 'connectives' to achieve coherence. Schiffrin maintained that DMs either carry a 'core meaning', such as in the case of the conjunctions (and, but, or, so, because), time deictics (now, then), and lexicalized clauses (you know, I mean), or carry zero meaning, such as in the case of the particles 'well' and 'oh'. From relevance-theoretic point of view, Blakemore (1987), who called them 'discourse connectives', gave the example of the connectives 'so', 'because', and, 'but', which can be used to organize the talk and achieve coherence.

Fraser (1988, p.28) provided a clear definition of DMs as a term that refers to the use of "lexical expressions which are syntactically independent of the basic sentence structure and have a general core meaning which signals the relationship of the current utterance to the core meaning". By this definition, Fraser considers DMs as relational words that help in relating what is being uttered in the sentence to the meaning of the marker used in that utterance. Fraser gave the example of 'in fact' as a DM, which indicates that the next proposition after the DM is a fact, thus establishes a factual relationship between its core meaning and the proposition content that follows the marker. However, DMs in Fraser's view do not change the meaning of the following sentence or the structure of the current sentence in which the DM exists, as he considered them independent, thus removing them does not affect the meaning of the current sentence. Although the use/unused of these markers is considered optional, Fraser (1988, p. 22) maintains that the absences or misuse of these words can "remove a powerful clue" needed for linguistic cohesion realization. In an oral presentation, which is still unexplored in terms of the use of DMs, the use of these devices can yield more coherent, organized, connected, and logically sequenced speech.

While the DMs are linguistic devices that signal a 'textual' or 'co-textual' relationship between the utterances in sentences, PMs, such as 'of course', 'anyway', 'ok', 'well', and 'actually', among others, are devices that signal a pragmatic (contextual) relationships between the segments of speech (Fraser, 1999, p. 931). Moreover, PMs derive their meanings from the social context in which they occur, which provides an interpretation of their meaning and explains the interpersonal relationships among the participants in the interactions. Similar to DMs, these devices can be valuable pragmatic tools in the hands of the speakers to structure and organize the segments of their speech, make the content of speech comprehensible and meaningful, and help the audiences to easily follow the sequence of the ideas and facts (Cuenca, 2008; Huddlestone & Fairhurst, 2013; Norrick, 2009a, 2009b; Romero-Trillo, 2014).

As indispensable elements in a spoken discourse, the research on the use of PMs (Babanoğlu, 2014; Fernández, Gates Tapia, & Lu, 2014; Wei, 2011a) focused on how the use of these markers in any communicative situation can

help the language speakers manage the structure and flow of their speech. In other words, the focus was on how these "discourse-structuring cues signal relationships among the expressed ideas" to meet the participants' expectations (Tyler & Bro, 1992, pp. 74-75). The success of the language users includes their ability to use these cues in an expected way, so that listeners construct meaningful interpretation and judge the discourse as pragmatically coherent. Incorrect selection and use of these devices might lead to undesired consequences, such as misunderstanding and confusion in the part of the hearer.

As explained earlier, DMs acquired their meanings textually depending on the linguistic context of the text in which they occur without much reliance on the social or cultural background of the interactants. This makes the meaning of these devices fixed, and carry less variation in the interpretation by the listeners. For example, the conjunction 'but', which carries a fixed meaning of 'contrast', and the conjunction 'and', which carries the fixed meaning of 'addition', do not need any social contextual clues to be understood by the listener other than the linguistic context. In contrast, the PMs derive their meaning from the social context of the utterances, which is subject to social and cultural considerations.

In a study by Hum, Trihartanti, Hum, and Damayanti (2014), the researchers investigated 'oh' and 'well' as discourse particles, another labeling name of PMs. The quantitative analysis of the Indonesian students' recordings showed that 'well' was used more frequently than 'oh'. Qualitatively, 'well' was mainly used to mitigate the threat imposed on the participants' face, and 'oh' was used, though less frequently, as pure surprise. The researcher ascribed the qualitative and quantitative differences between the two particles usages to the fact that Indonesian people frequently use 'well' more than 'oh' in their daily conversation. This study attracted the attention to one important idea that the use of PMs is culture specific, and the selection of a marker to be used in a conversation depends on the familiarity with the marker itself. The different pragmatic functions achieved by the use of PMs make these markers multiple-carriers of interpretations in English language, which proposes a need to study these markers in various social and cultural contexts, such as the university context in Malaysian universities

It can be concluded from the comparison between DMs and PMs that these two categories of devices are different in form, use, and scope of effect. They achieve diverse functions in speech and any mix of their functions is in fact a waste of time. Although the difference between the two types of devices is apparent, a number of previous studies put them in one basket. The present thesis investigates the use of DMs as well as PMs in the oral presentations by two cultural groups, Malaysian and Arabs, who study in the same academic environment, and are required to do the same academic tasks, and present their work to Malaysian professors. Comparing the use of these markers by these socially diverse groups can help better understand the various meanings and functions achieved by these markers. It also helps understand the current

linguistic and pragmatic competencies of the Malay and Arab students and the role of these markers in improving the students' oral presentation performance.

In the context of oral presentation, the presence and proper use of the DMs and PMs by the presenters can provide a road map to the audience to build a coherent interpretation of the meanings communicated in the discourse. They can also help speakers progress logically while presenting the content of their speech to the hearers. Müller (2005) maintained that these markers contribute greatly to the construction of coherence in a discourse and facilitate the comprehension and interpretation of the spontaneous speech production. Müller considered these markers as linguistic cues that assist language speakers to express various social and cultural elements in their communication. Speakers can display their attitudes towards the content of their speech as well as towards their audiences.

Moreover, DMs and PMs were found improving listening to the academic lectures (Kuhi, Asadollahfam, & Anbarian, 2014), so more comprehension is achieved. Fernández-Polo (2014) noted that the use of DMs can go beyond the discourse organization to include achieving other personal and interpersonal agendas, such as audience engagement, reinforcing commitment, and compromising personal image. Hum et al. (2014) found that the pragmatic marker 'well' can be used to mitigate the threat imposed on the participants' face and 'oh' to show the speaker's feeling of surprise. In this sense, these markers play a dual function in spoken discourse. First, they communicate the speakers' propositions residing in the content of their speech, thus achieve semantic/textual relations refer to in the literature as 'coherence'. In this case, these markers can be classified under the term DMs. Second, these markers can achieve other interpersonal/interactional relations, which are beyond the explicit proposition in the utterances. These relations are pragmatic in nature as they establish a relationship between the speakers and their audiences, and can be classified as 'pragmatic markers'.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

With the growing emphasis on speaking skill as one aspect of the language communicative competence in higher education, the importance of learning and assessing speaking has been increasingly stressed (Galaczi, 2013; Pourfarhad, Azmey, & Hassani, 2012). As a result, speaking has been included as an integral component of university classroom learning and assessment. The traditional method to assess the students' oral performance is usually made through observing the students' participation and engagement in answering professors' questions or when practicing in classroom dialogues (Al Hosni, 2014; Namaziandost, Neisi, Kheryadi, & Nasri, 2019). With the advancement of technology and the availability of equipment, especially at a university level, the assessment method of speaking has been developed to include classroom oral presentations (Saputri & Fitriati, 2019). During these presentations, the students are assessed on their presentation skills, slides format as well as their language

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use to organize and deliver ideas in the presentations. Although classroom oral presentation has become an important method of learning speaking and an essential assessment method of speaking in modern classrooms, conducting them is a challenge for ESL/EFL learners (Alraddadi, 2019; Bianchi & Razeq, 2017; Khan & Salam, 2019). For the Arab postgraduate students, who study in Malaysian universities, conducting an oral presentation is a challenge because these students are not quite familiar with such kind of learning method that is not commonly employed at the schools or universities in the Arab world (A Alghamdi, 2021). According to a number of studies that were conducted in the Arab world (Al-Hawamdeh & Al-Khanji, 2017; Al-Sobhi & Preece, 2018; Bianchi & Razeq, 2017; Khan & Salam, 2019), the teaching and learning of English in the Arab world has been to a great extent written exam-based and without much emphasis on speaking especially through oral presentations. Alamri and Al-Tunisi (2019) maintained that the educational system in the Arab countries still follow the traditional systems that utilizes exam-based education and tends to ignore the importance of innovative learning techniques, such as the use of oral presentations. It is therefore important to investigate the use of oral presentations to shed some light on the importance of this method for the students' learning and assessment process. It would also encourage these students to improve their presentation and speech skills in terms of organization, structure, and language use.

DMs and PMs have been examined in various academic fields, such as writing (Faizalatif, Nazim, Rasheed, & Sarfraz, 2020; Sibagariang, Ginting, & Sibarani, 2019), reading comprehension (Jafarinejad & Tavakoli, 2011; Martínez, 2009), and lecture comprehension (Kuhi et al., 2014). These markers have been also studied in spoken discourses, such as lectures delivery (Apraku, 2017) and classrooms interactions (Fortuno, 2006; Lin, 2010; Rezaee, Aghagolzadeh, & Birjandi, 2014), conferences (Fernández-Polo, 2014; Morell, 2015), interviews (Furkó, Kertész, & Abuczki, 2019), students' everyday conversations (Hum et al., 2014), and seminars (O'boyle, 2014). In spite of the significant and essential roles of these markers in spoken discourses in general (Banguis-Bantawig, 2019) and classroom oral presentation and speaking assessment in particular (Saputri & Fitriati, 2019), they are still under researched and need to be given more attention. It is therefore important to analyze these markers as used by EFL/ESL learners to understand how these markers function in these learners' spoken discourses in general and, more importantly, in their oral presentation in particular.

Discourse and pragmatic markers are aspects of the language that are primarily used in oral presentations to explicitly organize the talk, effectively engage the audience, and appropriately display the speaker's attitude towards his or her facts and ideas (Banguis-Bantawig, 2019). The appropriate use of these markers can produce interactions that are linguistically successful and pragmatically appropriate to the context of interaction (Aijmer, 2002; Fraser, 1996, 2013; Norrick, 2009a; Schiffrin, 1987). In an institutional spoken discourse, such as the classroom oral presentation, using DMs and PMs can be significantly helpful to the presenter to communicate the information and facts to the audiences systematically, smoothly, effectively, and persuasively, and to the listener in

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order to better understand and follow up the content of the presentation (Saputri & Fitriati, 2019). The absence of these markers in oral presentation would not only affect the flow of the ideas, coherence of speech, and organization of facts but it might also alter the real intention of the presenter (Alraddadi, 2019). The mastery of using these markers requires EFL/ESL learners to possess linguistic knowledge of the meaning of these devices as well as pragmatic awareness of the functions that can be achieved by using these devices (Alraddadi, 2019; Guo, 2015; Moghaddasi, Bavali, & Behjat, 2020). In the case of the Arab and Malay students, unfortunately, using these markers is a challenge, as these learners do not possess the required linguistic knowledge and pragmatic awareness of the two types of markers. Moghaddasi et al. (2020) maintained that Arab students face serious problems in managing their speech in a natural and coherent way due to the transfer process from their mother tongue system. Aziz, Chin, and Nordin (2016) found that the Malaysian students face a number of difficulties in using these markers, including possessing very limited range of markers and employing markers that are usually used in spoken discourse. The researchers attributed the overuse of certain markers and underuse of other markers to the students' shortage linguistic repertoire and their low proficiency level. Lacking such knowledge and awareness can yield poor oral performance during classroom oral presentations, which might frustrate both the teachers and learners. It was therefore necessary in this study to analyze the actual use of DMs and PMs in the discourse of an Arab and Malay students during their oral presentations.

By reviewing the literature, various factors have been found affecting the use of DMs and PMs in spoken discourses, such as students' oral proficiency levels (Wei, 2009, 2011a, 2011b), students' gender (Tavakoli & Karimnia, 2017), students' ages (Taheri Ghaleno & Dabirmoghaddam, 2021), students' exposure (Ament & Parés, 2018), and the topic of speech (Schleef, 2004). These factors have been found affecting the use of DMs and PMs in written and spoken discourses. However, the research on the use of DMs and PMs in a multi-ethnic classroom oral presentations especially in the context of the Arab and Malay learners is still unexplored. In the context of the multicultural education system in most of the Malaysian universities, classrooms are shared by diverse cultural groups, such as the Arab and Malay students who came from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These students are exposed to the same education system and are required to do the same tasks including the oral presentations. In these presentations, both cultural groups are required to use the DMs and PMs depending on their linguistic and pragmatic backgrounds. It is therefore necessary consider the difference in the use of DMs and PMs depending on the type of the cultural group. By comparing the use of markers by the two cultural groups can help define and clarify the meaning and functions of these markers as intended by these groups. It can also provide comprehensive analysis and descriptions of how these markers were used to achieve textual and interpersonal functions and generate in-depth understanding of the use of the markers in cross-culture communication, thus bridging the linguistic and pragmatic gaps between the two groups of learners in order to better understand and communicate in a shared classroom environment (Zorina, Vygodchikova, Gatin, Nazmutdinova, & Gerasimova, 2016).

Previous research on oral presentation has been limited to using this technology as a facilitative tool (Bligh & Coyle, 2013; Chou, Chang, & Lu, 2015), relying on learners' presentation strategies to effectively communicate the facts to audiences (Chou, 2011), eliciting students or teachers' feedback on presentation advantages (Uz, Orhan, & Bilgiç, 2010), and finding out the students' anxiety rates while presenting (Radzuan & Kaur, 2011). Other studies (Abdullah & Rahman, 2010; Aydoğan et al., 2013; Keong & Jawad, 2015; Melouah, 2013; Yahya, 2013) have attributed the problems in oral presentations to psychological reasons, such as the student's anxiety of speaking in the target language, being under-estimated by their professors, being humiliated in front of their classmates, obtaining lower assessment scores, or receiving negative correction feedback from professors. However, conducting an effective oral presentation goes beyond the psychological state of the learners to include possessing inadequate linguistic and pragmatic competencies of using certain language elements called DMs and PMs. In such academic discourse, the problem of lacking the mastery of using these markers should be prioritized as these markers are necessary for speech production (Crible, 2017). In fact, the absence of these markers from speech is not optional and their absence can contribute to speech errors (e.g., "the removal of 'because of' in an utterance would leave the utterance ungrammatical") (Crible, 2017, p. 94). In spite of the role that can be played by DMs and PMs to render a grammatical, meaningful, and well-structured oral presentation, less attention was paid to the problems in using these markers in oral presentations. It is therefore necessary to fill this gap in the literature by explaining the differences in the use of PMs and DMs between Arab and Malay students and whether these differences would give rise to problems for the students or the audience during their oral presentations. Explaining the differences and highlighting the possible arisen problems to the students or their audience as a result of using the two markers would encourage these students to present with confidence, accommodate to the modern learning techniques used in modern classrooms, and, consequently, improve their performance scores.

To this end, the intent of this study was to investigate the spoken discourse of two diverse cultural groups of Malay and Arab students during their oral presentations. The focus of the investigation was on how these students use the DMs and PMs in terms of the frequencies of the types of use. The focus will be also on determining the linguistic and pragmatic functions of these markers in the oral speech of these learners. Moreover, the focus will be on the differences in the use of these markers between the two cultural groups, Arab and Malay students as well as on the problems that face the students during the use of these markers. This is hoped to have insights into the current practice of these learners and suggest better practices of rendering oral presentation in the future that is based, in addition to using technology, on using effective language.

1.3   Research Objectives

Doing classroom oral presentation is a challenge to EFL and ESL learners because it requires these learners to possess linguistic and pragmatic

knowledge of two types of linguistic devices known as DMs and PMs (Keong & Jawad, 2015; Melouah, 2013). The general aim of this study was to investigate the use of these markers in the spoken discourse of two diverse cultural groups (Arab and Malay students) studying at the postgraduate level in a Malaysian university. The focus of the thesis was on analyzing the students' uses of DMs and PMs during their classroom oral presentations and comparing their uses based on their linguistic and cultural background. More specifically, the following objectives were set forth in the present study:

1) To identify and describe the DMs and PMs in relation to the frequencies of the types and functions as employed by EFL Arab postgraduate students during their classroom oral presentations,
2) To identify and describe the DMs and PMs in relation to the frequencies of the types and functions as employed by ESL Malay postgraduate students during their classroom oral presentations,
3) To compare the frequencies of the types and functions of DMs and PMs between EFL Arab and ESL Malay students during classroom oral presentation?
4) To explain the differences in the use of DMs and PMs between Arab and Malay students and whether they give rise to problems for the students or the audience during their oral presentations.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the early mentioned research objectives, the following four research questions were used to guide the thesis:

1) What are the frequencies of the types and functions of DMs and PMs as employed by Malay EFL postgraduate students during their classroom oral presentations?
2) What are the frequencies of the types and functions of DMs and PMs as employed by Arab EFL postgraduate students during their classroom oral presentations?
3) What are the differences in the frequencies of the types and functions of DMs and PMs between the Arab EFL and Malay ESL students?
4) How can differences between Arab and Malay students be explained and do they give rise to problems for the students or the audience?

1.5 Operational Definition of Key terms

This section is dedicated to introduce the definition of the key terms that were frequently used in the thesis. This will include the definitions of discourse

analysis, DMs, PMs, classroom presentations, English as a foreign language, and English as a second language.

1.5.1 Discourse Markers (DMs)

Fraser (1988, p.28) provided a clear definition of DMs as a term that refers to the use of "lexical expressions which are syntactically independent of the basic sentence structure and have a general core meaning which signals the relationship of the current utterance to the core meaning". In this sense, DMs are relational words that help in relating what is being uttered in the sentence to the meaning of the marker used in that utterance, thus maintain coherence in the sentences and discourse as a whole.

1.5.2 Pragmatic Markers (PMs)

According to Fraser (2009a, p. 3), PMs are those lexical words and expressions that can be "part of a discourse segment", must be "part of the propositional content of the message conveyed", "do not contribute to the meaning of the proposition", and signal aspects of the message the speaker wishes to convey" (p. 3). In this sense, the PMs are completely different from DMs as they operate at the interpersonal level to reflect the dynamics of the talk and set the relationships among the speech utterances and the interactants beyond the linguistic meaning of the utterances in the discourse.

1.5.3 Classroom presentations

Classroom presentations are a modern method of learning and teaching (Abdullah & Rahman, 2010). The purpose of the presentations in an academic discourse is to give a chance to students to share knowledge and meaning to an audience that consists of a number of students (classmates) and a professor. It is also a method of assessment by which the students are assessed and given scores based on their presentation skills and language use. In the present thesis, classroom oral presentations are the main instrument of data collection by which the students' oral production is recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

1.5.4 Linguistic and Pragmatic Competencies

Based on the Common European Framework of Reference (Europe, 2020), communicative language competences can cover a number of competence areas, including the linguistic, sociolinguistics, sociocultural, pragmatic competence, strategic, and discursive competencies. In this study, the use of markers in oral presentations requires students to be aware of the language

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system (linguistic competence), to have the desire and ability to initiate communication with other people (social or pragmatic competence), and, if necessary, refine their speech in order to close up communication gaps (strategic or compensatory competence).

1.6   Conceptual Framework

The present study can be conceptualized as a sociopragmatic discourse analysis of the academic discourse of the Arab and Malay students' classroom oral presentations. One way to evaluate how information is processed and communicated to an audience by a presenter during a classroom oral presentation is to rely on his or her actual employment of DMs and PMs (Matei, 2012). This is because these markers are used during an oral presentation to plan and organize the speech, so the speech outcome becomes more coherent, organized, and expressive. In an institutional spoken discourse, such as the classroom oral presentation, using DMs and PMs can be significantly helpful to the presenter to communicate the information and facts to the audiences systematically, smoothly, effectively, and persuasively. The use of these markers is necessary for the listener to better understand and follow up the content of the presentation (Saputri & Fitriati, 2019). The absence of these markers in oral presentation would not only affect the flow of the ideas, coherence of speech, and organization of facts but it might also alter the real intention of the presenter (Alraddadi, 2019). As it is illustrated in Fig. 1.1, the first and second research questions focused on determining the frequencies of the frequencies of the types and functions of DMs and PMs as used by Arab and Malay students. For this purpose, Fraser (1996/2009) proposed taxonomies and functions of DMs and PMs were used to underpin the identification of the markers as well as the functions achieved by using these markers. Investigating the frequencies of the types and functions of the markers would better understanding of the role of these markers in each group's oral presentations.

The use of the markers in oral presentations is influenced by a number of factors. One factor that plays important role in the use of these markers is the cultural background of the presenter. Vetrinskaya and Dmitrenko (2017) defined culture as the sum of the verbal and non-verbal behaviors that reflect people's attitude in a community. These behaviors are shared by a group of people who have common basic assumptions, values, beliefs, and ways of thinking (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2012), which is reflected on people's communication style. Rangriz and Harati (2017) emphasized that there is a close relationship between culture and learning a language as culture forms the background of learning any language since language is the medium of communication and learning a new language is associated and affected by the culture in which it is learnt. In the multi-cultural atmosphere, such as the classroom, cultural differences should be taken into consideration as the cultural differences among the parties engaged in the communication process can create conflicts and misunderstanding (Dwivedi, 2016). Makhmudov (2020) concluded that the cultural differences are necessary to be considered in language learning and teaching as students who learn a foreign language need to be aware of both, the language skills and the

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culture of the community in which they study the language. To avoid such a conflict, one should notice the language use of the surrounding community because these may be different or even at variant with one's socio cultural norms and patterns (Dwivedi, 2016; Makhmudov, 2020).

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                 │  Comparative Discourse Analysis of   │
                 │      Classroom Oral Presentation     │
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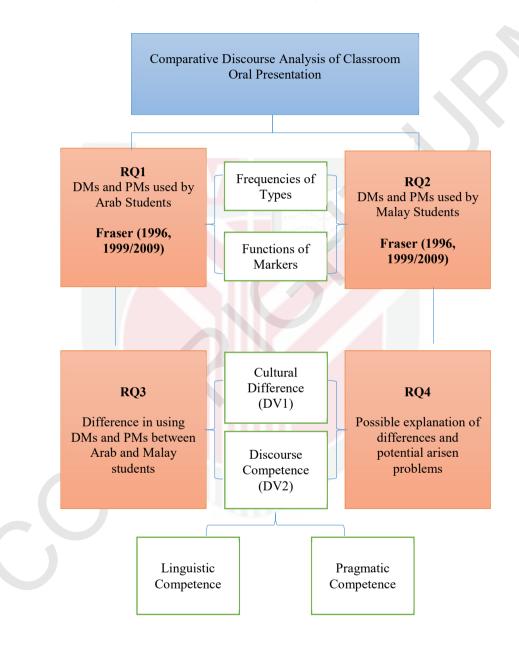|		
RQ1 DMs and PMs used by Arab Students **Fraser (1996, 1999/2009)**	Frequencies of Types Functions of Markers	**RQ2** DMs and PMs used by Malay Students **Fraser (1996, 1999/2009)**
RQ3 Difference in using DMs and PMs between Arab and Malay students	Cultural Difference (DV1) Discourse Competence (DV2)	**RQ4** Possible explanation of differences and potential arisen problems
	Linguistic Competence	Pragmatic Competence

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

By recognizing the influence of the cultural variable on the speech production, it was therefore necessary in the present study to consider this factor depending on the type of the cultural group, thus to answer the third and fourth research questions. To answer the third research question, which asked for the differences in the use of the two markers between the two groups of the students, considering the cultural variable provided more insights into the variation of the use of these markers between the Arab and Malay students. It also provided a comprehensive analysis and descriptions of how these markers were used to achieve textual and interpersonal functions and generate in-depth understanding of the use of the markers in cross-culture communication, thus bridging the linguistic and pragmatic gaps between the two groups of learners (Zorina et al., 2016). Considering the cultural variable was also necessary in the present study in answering the fourth research questions which concerned with explaining the differences in the use of the two markers and determining the possible between the two groups of students.

Another important variable considered in the present study was the discourse competence background of the Arab and Malay students expressed by their linguistic and pragmatic competencies. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference (Europe, 2020), communicative language competences can cover a number of competence areas, including the linguistic, sociolinguistics, sociocultural, pragmatic competence, strategic, and discursive competencies. Accordingly, the use of markers in oral presentations requires students to be aware of the language system (linguistic competence), to have the desire and ability to initiate communication with other people (social or pragmatic competence), and, if necessary, refine their speech in order to close up communication gaps (strategic or compensatory competence). Being non-native speakers of the English language, these students might feel apprehended to speak in the target language because of their limited linguistic and pragmatic competencies which might make them suffer to produce a coherent speech that communicates the ideas and facts effectively. Keong and Jawad (2015) concluded that the majority of the Arab Iraqi EFL postgraduate students, who study in a Malaysian university, felt anxious in speaking with their professors in academic settings in general and in doing presentations in particular. Keong and his colleague attributed the students' apprehension in speaking to the students' humble level of linguistic competence in the target language. Melouah (2013) noted that the Algerian EFL university learners fear speaking in front of their teachers and classmates in classroom as a result of the students' poor language proficiency.

To this end, it was necessary to consider the linguistic and pragmatic background of the students as a variable that might have made a difference in the use of the two types of markers, thus to answer the third research question. considering this variable might also give explanation of the differences in the use of DMs and PMs between Arab and Malay students and whether these differences gave rise to any usage problems for the students or the audience, such as the language transfer and transfer of register as possible arisen problems, thus to answer the fourth research question.

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1.7   Significance of the Study

This study investigates an important discourse, which is the classroom oral presentation. This discourse is an important constituent of the modern classrooms in which students enjoy more responsibilities for their learning. The results about how these presentations are conducted in effective ways relying on the use of language will encourage the education systems in both Malaysia and the Arab world to adopt this type of learning.

The results of this study are significant because they are built based on a close and comprehensive analysis of the current communication and oral performance of the ESL/EFL students. This helps thoroughly understand how these students use the DMs/PMs to achieve speech coherence and express their attitude. Discovering the strengths and weaknesses in the learners' language use definitely helps suggest improvements to conduct better oral presentations skills and improves academic quality and achievement.

In recent years, Malaysia has witnessed a remarkable advancement in learning and teaching at the university levels. This led thousands of Arab students to join its universities to the extent that they form the majority of the foreign students in the university classrooms. This presence put these students in a face-to-face interaction with Malay students and professors. However, the Arab students come from an environment in which English language is foreign language unlike the Malay students who study English as a second language. With this difference in the education systems and exposure to language learning in mind, this study compares the language performance of the Arab and Malay in using the DMs and PMs during oral presentations. The comparison between the two groups of students is significant as it can bridge the linguistic and pragmatic gaps between the two groups of learners, so they can better understand and communicate in a shared classroom environment.

DMs and PMs as cohesive and interpersonal devices are used more frequently in oral communication. In accordance with this fact, it is logical to hypothesize that their role in language communication is crucial. Without the use of these markers, the language production will be materialistic, incoherent, unrelated, not organized, and without any interpersonal ties. In spite of important role of these markers in language communication, few studies have investigated the ideational DMs and interpersonal PMs in the academic discourse of EFL and ESL language learners. The available studies have paid more attention to western learners' settings focusing on how native speakers use these markers. Other limited number of studies investigated the use of DMs without making a difference between DMs and PMs. This study distinguishes itself by filling these gaps in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of these markers in the context of Arab and Malay learners' academic discourses. This adds another building block to the body of spoken discourse analysis and to the literature about the use of device by the two groups of students.

This study is considered novel in at least in three aspects. First, it makes a clear difference between the DMs and PMs, which is still paid little attention in the discourse studies and needs to be further explored. Unfortunately, the available studies mixed the two terms under one generic term 'discourse marker', which does not reflect the real difference in the used types of devices and the functions achieved by the two types of markers. Moreover, the focus has been paid more on written discourses (Hu & Cao, 2011; Li, 2010) especially the journal articles and on limited discourses, such as in legal, political, and media. Other studies (Crystal, 1988; Laserna, Seih, & Pennebaker, 2014; Müller, 2004) have handled one type of markers such as the use of 'I mean', 'well', or 'you know'. Little attention is given to include the two types of markers in one study and focus on all possible markers used in the given contexts. This is not helpful in drawing a clear picture of the difference between the functions of the two devices and does not create a comprehensive classification of the main and sub-categories of these markers. This study fills these gaps in the literature of discourse analysis by presenting a novel and comprehensive account of the two markers along with their possible linguistic meaning, pragmatic functions, and positions in sentences. This account can be used as a reference in pedagogical implications in classrooms learning and teaching.

Second, the novelty of this study lies in its attempt to explore the linguistic knowledge and pragmatic awareness of two ethnic groups, the Arab and Malay learner, which has been neglected in the discourse studies (Ahmad & Maros, 2017). By investigating these discourses in relation to the used DMs and PMs, the results can be applied pedagogically to improve the language performance of the two types of learners.

Third, this study explores one of the important spoken discourses, the classroom oral presentation, which is nearly completely ignored in the discourse studies. The available studies have focused on lecture comprehension (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Kuhi et al., 2014), conference presentations (Fernández-Polo, 2014; Ruiz-Madrid & Fortanet-Gómez, 2015), and presentation skills (Gil-Salom & Benlloch-Dualde, 2016; Haber & Lingard, 2001). To the best of the researcher knowledge, no study has been conducted to explore the use of the DMs and PMs in university classroom oral presentations.

This study would encourage the teachers and education decision makers to adopt the results of this study as a base and starting point to improve the Arab and Malay learners' performance during oral presentations. This can be made through adopting the proposed correct forms as a result of explaining the differences in the use of DMs and PMs between the two groups of students to design English for specific purpose course that is specialized in oral presentations. The purpose of this course is to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the students regarding the use of the DMs and PMs during an oral presentation. It also helps in reducing the students' anxiety rates that result from the feeling of apprehension and poor linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. This course not only will help the students, but also it will benefit the teachers or

professors to have presentations that are more effective in the classroom and possess better criteria of presentation assessment.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of Study

This study involved an investigation of the linguistic and pragmatic behavior of two groups of postgraduate students during their classroom oral presentations. The first group consisted of Arab EFL students and the second group consisted of Malay ESL learners in the Universiti Putra Malaysia. The scope of the study included analyzing the DMs and PMs in terms of their frequencies, main sub-categories, and functions. It also included a comparison of the differences in the use of these markers between the two ethnic groups. Moreover, the scope included explaining differences in the use of DMs and PMs between Arab and Malay students and whether they give rise to problems for the students or the audience issues that might have face the students during the oral presentation as result of misuse of the two types of markers.

On the other hand, the study was limited in the following aspects. First, it focused on analyzing the student' speech production without considering the analysis of the professors or the other classmates' talk during the oral presentation. However, their talk that was seen important for the interpretation of the markers was considered in the analysis, especially during the discussion period after each presentation. This is justified by the nature and objectives of the study, which focused on the students' production of the two markers.

Second, this study was limited in considering the students' gender. Although the students might display varied of the two markers due to their gender, it was not possible to consider this important factor because the majority of the students in this study were female students.

Third, the linguistic and pragmatic analysis of the two markers was limited to their semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic properties. Other language aspects such as phonology and phonetics were not within the scope of the study. This is because the two groups of students are non-native speakers and their mastery over these elements is not perfect

1.9 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the background of the study and the statement of the problem were presented. It also set forth the purpose of the study and research questions that guided the study. The definitions of key terms were then explained followed by discussing and explaining the conceptual framework in which the relationship between the variables were shown and explained. The chapter ended with presenting the significance of the study and its scope and limitation.

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