

A Cross-linguistic Analysis of Discourse Marker Use in Different Speech Tasks*

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This study explored how the first language (L1) influences discourse marker use in second language (L2) speech. Some studies (e.g., Liu, 2013; Sankoff et al., 1997) have addressed the issue of L1 transfer of discourse markers in L2 speech, suggesting that non-native speakers' L1 use may influence the frequency and usage of English discourse markers in their speech. However, only a few detailed studies have investigated L2 learners' use of discourse markers under the influence of their L1. To compensate for these shortcomings, this study examines whether Japanese speakers' L1 use influences their use of English discourse markers in speech. Two experiments were performed with Japanese college students using a question-and-answer task, a short speech task, and a picture description task. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that the use of some Japanese discourse markers may be transferred to the use of some English discourse markers such as *and*, *so*, and *but* in each task. Additionally, differences were observed in the items used as discourse markers in both English and Japanese by task.

Keywords: discourse markers, frequency, L1 influence, Japanese speakers, speech tasks

1 Research Background

1.1 What is a discourse marker?

Discourse markers (DMs) are frequently used in both spoken and written language. They have been described in different ways, but there is general agreement that they serve two primary functions: pragmatic and syntactic (e.g., Hellermann & Vergun, 2007). In terms of pragmatics, DMs like *right*, *so*, *well*, and *you know* help the speaker guide the conversation or interaction with the listener. Optional elements in syntax are often used to show a speaker's attitude

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and purpose. For example, speakers often use the marker *well* to create a slight pause in conversation because their answer is not readily available. *Well* in (1) plays the role of buying time before revealing the answer at the beginning of the response to a question asked by Debby.

(1) Debby: What happened?

Zelda: Well . . . at one time he was a very fine doctor. And he had two terrible tragedies.

(Schiffrin, 1987, p. 110)

Regarding syntactic function, connective words like *but* and *so* can be observed in examples (2) and (3). These markers establish coherent connections between two different segments of discourse. Fraser (1999, 2009, 2015) and Blakemore (2002) regard DMs as signals that build semantic relationships between segments of discourse.

(2) We left late, but we arrived to the show on time.

(Fraser, 2015, p. 48)

(3) This bridge was down so we could not get onto the island.

(Fraser, 2015, p. 48)

Thus, the role of DMs is extensive, especially in terms of words that are frequently observed in spoken language (e.g., Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Previous research (e.g., Hellermann & Vergun, 2007; Polat, 2011) has pointed out that DMs play a significant role in speech, not only for native speakers of English but also for those who speak English as a second language (L2). DMs have “crucial functions in language, and their absence or misuse may have unfortunate consequences for communication” (Gilquin, 2016, p. 214).

1.2 L1 influence on DM use in L2

However, several studies have suggested that L2 learners’ acquisition of DMs is influenced by their first language (L1). Some researchers have carried out a comparative examination of L1 and L2 speech patterns and have suggested that the way non-native speakers employ DMs in their native language could influence how they use DMs in L2. Studies have found that the use of DMs in one’s L1 influences the frequency of use of the corresponding DMs in one’s L2 (e.g., Onodera, 2004; Sankoff et al., 1997; Shimada, 2017). Additionally, studies have discovered that the usage patterns of DMs in L1, specifically their positions within sentences, affect the positions of the corresponding DMs in L2 English sentences (e.g., He, 2001; Liu, 2013).

Shimada’s (2017) study involved a comparative examination of an English-Japanese parallel-corpus dataset consisting of speech data from 40

Japanese English learners extracted from a corpus of English speech,¹ along with their corresponding Japanese translations. In his analysis (see Figure 1): (a) Each L2 English DM aligns with several L1 Japanese DMs. (b) Specific Japanese DMs (E and F) correlate with distinct English DMs (A and B). (c) Frequently, English DMs do not have direct counterparts in Japanese phrasing, partially because of their use as fillers (i.e., the gray-shaded segment of each English DM).

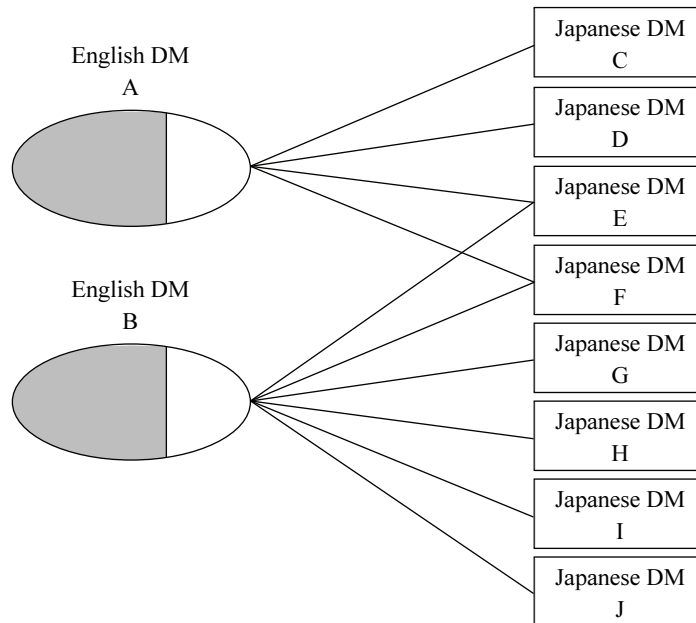


Figure 1. Relationship between English DMs and Japanese DMs
(Shimada, 2017, p. 206)

Utilising these correspondences, Shimada analysed both English and Japanese speech data gathered from picture-description tasks. The findings indicate that the use of certain markers, such as *and*, *so*, and *but*, might be influenced by Japanese learners' native language, potentially resulting in the overuse of these markers.

Therefore, previous research suggests that there could be a significant level of complexity in the connection between L1 and L2 English DMs and that L1 could influence the use of DMs in L2 learners' speech.

¹ The National Institute of Information and Communications Technology's Japanese Learner English Corpus (Izumi et al., 2004) was used in Shimada's (2017) study. The corpus comprises over 1,200 interviews conducted in English.

2 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This research aims to investigate how L1 influences the use of DMs among Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners and to what extent this influence varies depending on differences in speech tasks. The following research questions (RQs) were asked:

RQ1: How is Japanese DM use transferred to English DM use in the speech of Japanese EFL learners?

RQ2: To what extent does the influence of L1 on the use of DMs in L2 English vary depending on differences in speech tasks?

RQ1 involves increasing the amount of speech data to replicate Shimada (2017). Additionally, because his study did not handle speech from multiple tasks, RQ2 entails analysing data from multiple tasks.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

A total of 61 first-year students from a private university in Gunma participated in this study. The students all took a required course to improve their English communication skills, 30 from September 2016 to January 2017 and 31 from September 2017 to January 2018. Before the course, a placement test was conducted to confirm their levels of English proficiency as lower-intermediate, which equated to TOEIC scores ranging from 365 to 500. They majored in early childhood and elementary education.

The four-week experiment was conducted with the participants' consent. Due to technical problems or their absence, some participants' data were not included in the analysis.

3.2 Materials

The students performed three tasks in Japanese and English: a question and answer (Q-and-A) task, a short speech task, and a picture description task. These tasks were chosen to assess the variety of learners' speech in both dialogue and monologue formats. The Q-and-A task used by Shimada and Miura (2013, 2019) included three questions. The three questions were displayed on a computer screen, and the students took 30–40 seconds to respond to each question. The format of these questions resembled that of the TOEIC® Speaking Test. The three questions were:

Q1: Which Japanese food do you like?

Q2: Can you play any musical instruments? I can play the piano.

Q3: What kind of music do you like? Could you tell me your favorite singer or group?

(Shimada & Miura, 2019, p. 209)

Similar to the Q-and-A task, in the short-speech task, a sentence was displayed on the computer screen (see Appendix A) and the students were required to deliver a speech for 60 s based on that sentence. They worked on two topics for the short-speech task, but this study analysed only short speeches related to the first topic.

The picture description task involved the use of two sets of three-frame picture strips. Comic Strip A (see Appendix B²) depicts a story in which a couple goes on vacation to Hawaii and enjoys themselves, but on the last morning they oversleep and miss their flight back home. Comic Strip B portrays a story where a wife encourages her husband, who smokes cigarettes, to quit, resulting in him quitting smoking. Both stories were selected because of their easy-to-understand narrative flows. They were taken from the second-grade level of the Eiken Test of Practical English Proficiency. Two comic strips were shown on the computer screen and participants were allotted one minute to outline the story for each comic strip.

3.3 Procedure

The experiments for this study were conducted over four weeks for the classes of 2016–17 and 2017–18, respectively (see Figure 2). Except for the order in which the two comic strips were presented, the materials and procedures were identical. The same instructor conducted the sessions.

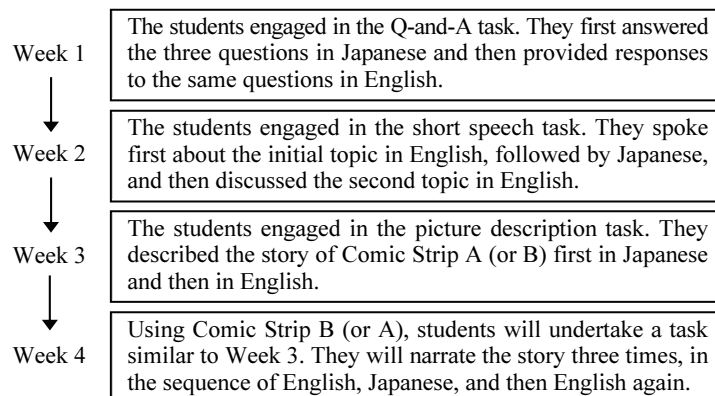


Figure 2. Procedure of the experiment in the present study

² In the experiment, time expressions within the arrows between the pictures were removed to avoid providing hints for the speech and affecting participants' DM use.

In Week 1, the Q-and-A task responses were conducted in Japanese sequence, followed by English to ensure that the students whose L1 was Japanese could answer the questions smoothly. In Week 2, the first topic of the short speech task followed a similar sequence. However, owing to educational considerations in the English course, the second topic was assigned to students to be spoken only in English. However, as mentioned earlier, speech related to the second topic was excluded from the analysis.

Similar to Shimada's (2017) experimental design, in Weeks 3 and 4, counterbalancing was implemented in the presentation order of the comic strips to mitigate the ordering effect. For the 2016–17 class, comic strip A was presented before comic strip B, whereas for the 2017–18 class, the reverse order was used, ensuring that both sequences were employed. Furthermore, the order of languages to be spoken was structured such that Week 3 followed the sequence of Japanese then English, whereas Week 4 followed the sequence of English, Japanese, and then English. However, it should be noted that the final English narration in the last week was not included in the analysis for this study.

During the data collection process, students' speech was captured using a headset microphone in a computer-assisted language learning classroom, and two professional transcribers transcribed the audio recordings.

Similar to Shimada (2017), this study investigated 25 English DMs (see Table 1) using the framework developed by Fung and Carter (2007). The frequency of these English DMs exceeded 0.01 percent in the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology's Japanese Learner English Corpus (Izumi et al., 2004). Additionally, the DMs in Japanese that corresponded to the 25 English DMs were included in the analysis.

Table 1. The 25 English DMs Analysed in the Present Study

Discourse functions	DMs
Interpersonal	<i>yes, yeah, OK/okay, I think, oh, you know, well, just, really, actually, I see, right/alright, sure, kind of, like</i>
Referential	<i>and, so, but, or, because</i>
Structural	<i>and, so, yeah, OK/okay, well, then, how about, right/alright, first, finally</i>
Cognitive	<i>and, I think, you know, well, I mean, I see, like</i>

Note. Adapted from Fung and Carter's (2007) framework. Certain DMs, such as *and*, *I think*, and *well*, serve multiple functions in conversations.

Fung and Carter (2007) divided DM functions into four categories: interpersonal, referential, structural, and cognitive. Interpersonal markers are often used to share knowledge, express attitudes, or respond to others. Referential markers serve as connectors that link ideas. Structural markers assist in organising and directing conversational flow. Cognitive markers are frequently used when speakers require time to think before responding.

AntConc 3.5.9 (Anthony, 2020) was used to extract English DMs. In addition to the frequency list automatically generated by AntConc, a manual inspection of concordance lines was conducted to eliminate terms that lacked the functions of DMs, as shown in the italicised words below.

Do *you know* takoyaki?
Um uh Australian beaches impressed me uh because the beach is *so*
beautiful ...
I mm and I *like* shrimp.

Similarly, KH Coder 2.0 (Higuchi, 2014) was employed to extract Japanese DMs and visual inspection of concordance lines was performed.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Statistical features of lexical items

Table 2 displays the lexical statistical features of the students' speech in English. AntConc was used to calculate the types and tokens of the English speech data. The Guiraud index was also used to assess vocabulary richness in the speech; a higher index indicates a more diverse and richer vocabulary. It serves as a means to overcome the limitation of the Type-Token Ratio, which is influenced by text length (Daller & Xue, 2007).

Table 2. Lexical Statistical Features of Japanese EFL Learners' Speech Data in English

Task	Q-and-A	Short speech	Comic strip A	Comic strip B	Total
Participants	58	53	59	57	227
Tokens	5,229	2,641	3,077	3,201	14,148
Types	657	478	273	267	1,204
Tokens/ participant	90.16	49.83	52.15	56.16	62.33
Guiraud index	9.09	9.30	4.92	4.72	10.12

When focusing on the Guiraud index, the picture description task showed a lower tendency of vocabulary richness in learners' produced language than other tasks. In the picture description task, there was little difference in the values between the two comic strips.

Table 3 displays the lexical statistical features of the students' speech in Japanese. KH Coder was used to calculate the types and tokens based on the analysis of the lexical morphemes of Japanese speech data.

Table 3. Lexical Statistical Features of Japanese EFL Learners' Speech Data in Japanese

Task	Q-and-A	Short speech	Comic strip A	Comic strip B	Total
Participants	58	53	59	57	227
Tokens	15,218	7,578	6,696	6,246	35,738
Types	1,368	954	497	417	2,376
Tokens/ participant	262.38	142.98	113.49	109.58	157.44
Guiraud index	11.09	10.96	6.07	5.28	12.57

The Guiraud index for each task was consistent with the English speech results shown in Table 2. Furthermore, upon comparing the results in Tables 2 and 3, it can be observed that the number of types and tokens in Japanese was higher than in English. The results indicate that many L2 learners struggled to speaking fluently in their L2.

4.2 Frequency of English DMs

Table 4 presents the results of the frequency analysis of the students' English speech data. Of the 25 DMs that were the focus of the analysis, 12 items were used to address the three tasks. The frequency of DM was standardised as occurrences per 1,000 words.

Table 4. Frequency of English DMs in Japanese EFL Learners' Speech in the Three Tasks

	Function	Frequency per 1,000 words				Total
		Q-and-A	Short speech	Comic strip A	Comic strip B	
<i>and</i>	Ref/Str/Cog	18.74	26.13	18.85	19.68	20.36
<i>so</i>	Ref/Str	11.09	17.42	10.07	9.68	11.73
<i>but</i>	Ref	10.90	4.92	8.45	3.12	7.49
<i>because/cause</i>	Ref	8.99	6.82	1.95	1.25	5.30
<i>then</i>	Str	0.19	1.51	0.32	2.19	0.92
<i>yeah</i>	IP/Str	0.96	0.76	0.00	0.62	0.64
<i>oh</i>	IP	1.34	0.00	0.00	0.31	0.57
<i>first</i>	IP/Str	0.00	0.38	1.30	0.62	0.49
<i>finally</i>	Str	0.00	0.00	1.30	0.62	0.42
<i>how about</i>	Str	1.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.42
<i>I think</i>	IP/Cog	0.38	0.76	0.00	0.00	0.28
<i>I see</i>	IP/Cog	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.62	0.14

Note. IP = interpersonal; Ref = referential; Str = structural; Cog = cognitive.

A common observation across the three tasks is that the students tended to prefer using certain DMs, such as *and*, *so*, and *but*, with referential or structural functions when performing these tasks. Examples (4) and (5) represent students' speech in the Q&A task and picture description task, respectively.

- (4) ... when I am high school student I played cello *and* my favourite instrument is piano, violin, and cello.
- (5) I want to surfing *but* next day they woke up late, *so* they didn't enjoy surfing.

These markers seem suitable for both dialogic and monologic tasks such as short speeches and picture descriptions.

Furthermore, in all tasks, the frequently used item *so* was also used as a filler when struggling to articulate words smoothly. In example (6), during the Q-and-A task, and in example (7), during the short-speech task, *so* was used as a filler to buy time for the next word, similar to the use of *um* and *uh*. Examples (8) and (9) illustrate the use of *so* during the picture description task, when words explaining the story's progression did not come out smoothly.

- (6) Um ... *so* ... um. Do you know tempura?
- (7) When I was elementary school students ... *so* ... I went to a lot of food store because there are lot of cooking.
- (8) ... uh ... *so* ... Ms. ... Mrs. Okada think ride on surfing ...
- (9) ... her hus ... uh ... *so* ... her husband decided to stop smoking.

On the other hand, while *because* was frequently used in the Q-and-A task and short speech task, its frequency was not as high in the picture description task. This might be attributed to the possibility that using *because* was less convenient when explaining the story of the comic strips.

Interpersonal markers such as *yeah*, *you know*, and *well* were rarely used in any task. Although these markers might be less suitable for monologic tasks because of their function, they could potentially be applicable to the Q-and-A task. However, it appears that these markers were not user-friendly for students.

4.3 Frequency of Japanese DMs

The previous section revealed that students employed 12 English DMs in the three tasks. This section examines the translation equivalents in the students' Japanese speech data. Table 5 shows the frequency of use of each Japanese DM. A frequency count was conducted to examine how L1 transfer affects the use of English DMs. The frequency of each marker was standardised as the number of occurrences per 1,000 words.

Table 5. Frequency of Japanese DMs in Japanese EFL Learners' Speech in the Three Tasks

English DMs	Japanese DMs	Frequency per 1,000 words				Total
		Q-and-A	Short speech	Comic strip A	Comic strip B	
<i>and</i>	<i>soshite</i>	0.07	0.26	0.90	5.28	1.18
	<i>ga</i>	1.84	1.45	1.34	0.48	1.43
	<i>demo</i>	0.20	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.14
	<i>sorede</i>	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03
	<i>node</i>	2.30	0.40	0.75	0.00	1.20
	<i>to</i>	0.13	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.11
	<i>sorekara</i>	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03
	<i>ato</i>	2.63	2.77	0.00	0.16	1.73
	<i>de</i>	2.69	3.56	2.99	1.12	2.66
<i>so</i>	<i>node</i>	2.30	1.19	0.75	0.00	1.37
	<i>sorede</i>	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03
	<i>demo</i>	0.20	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.14
	<i>dakara</i>	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.16	0.08
	<i>nanode</i>	0.46	0.00	0.30	0.32	0.31
<i>but</i>	<i>ga</i>	1.84	1.45	1.34	0.48	1.43
	<i>demo</i>	0.53	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.28
	<i>shikashi</i>	0.00	0.00	0.75	0.00	0.14
<i>because</i>	<i>node</i>	2.30	1.19	0.75	0.00	1.37
	<i>kara</i>	0.92	0.40	0.45	1.12	0.76
<i>then</i>	<i>soshite</i>	0.00	0.00	0.60	2.72	0.59
	<i>sonogo</i>	0.07	0.00	0.75	1.28	0.39
<i>oh</i>	<i>oo</i>	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06
<i>first</i>	<i>saishowa</i>	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03
	<i>mazu</i>	0.13	0.26	0.60	0.16	0.25
<i>I think</i>	<i>to omoimasu</i>	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06

Note. Japanese DMs equivalent to *yeah*, *finally*, and *I see* were not observed in the speech data.

Based on the frequency analysis results in Table 5, it can be observed that the Japanese DMs equivalent to the high-frequency English markers *and*, *so*, and *but* also had similarly high frequencies. Moreover, a notable characteristic is the diversity of the types of Japanese DMs that correspond to English DMs. In other words, three or more types of Japanese DMs were utilised as equivalents of English DMs such as *and*, *so*, and *but*.

In addition, as mentioned by Shimada (2017), some Japanese DMs, such as *node* and *ga*, correspond to multiple English DMs. For instance, in (10), *node* corresponds to *so*, whereas in (11), it corresponds to *because*.

- (10) ... hamabe ga chikakatta *node* saafin wo suru keikaku wo tatemashita ...
[the beach is close, *so* they plan surfing, ...]
- (11) ... hosuto familii ga chotto bimyo de aa chotto yuuhan tokamo hitori de tabetari hotori janai hutari de tabeteita *node* ...
[... host family is little bad *because* they don't eat dinner together ...
I always eat only I and my friends.]

Although the Japanese counterparts *node* and *nanode*, which serve as referential and structural markers for *so*, had a certain degree of usage frequency, their overall usage frequency was not particularly high. This can be attributed to the fact that English *so* was also used as a filler.

Upon examining the frequency of Japanese DMs in each task, certain observations emerged. For instance, in the picture description task with Comic Strip B, *soshite* was used more frequently than the others, and in the Q&A task, *node* was more frequently used. Consequently, it can be inferred that the items used as Japanese DMs vary depending on the task.

5 Conclusion

This study examined the influence of learners' L1 on the use of DMs among Japanese EFL learners. It also aimed to assess the extent to which this influence differed based on variations in speech tasks.

In the frequency analysis related to RQ1, the Japanese DMs are equivalent to high-frequency English discourse markers such as *and*, *so*, and *but* also exhibit a high usage frequency. Additionally, through several qualitative observations, instances were identified where Japanese DMs were used, and corresponding usage of English DMs was confirmed. Consequently, as an answer to the research question, similar to Shimada (2017), it is suggested that these DMs may be influenced by the usage of Japanese DMs. Notably, items like *and*, *so*, and *but* have multiple corresponding Japanese DMs, which could contribute to their high frequency of use.

Concerning RQ2, the frequently used *and*, *so*, and *but* were generally employed across various tasks, with *so* being used as a filler as well in each task. However, in the case of *because*, despite its frequent usage in the Q-and-A and short speech tasks, it was not used as much in the picture description task. In Japanese, certain DMs such as *soshite* and *node* showed a tendency to be used more frequently in specific tasks. Therefore, in both English and Japanese, the results indicate that the DMs used could differ based on task variations.

From these results, it would be beneficial to increase instructional practices focusing on speech practice, encouraging the use of a wider range of DMs beyond those overused due to L1 influence. Additionally, considering

that DMs used may vary depending on the task, it would be essential for teachers to guide learners with examples, emphasizing the functions and distinctions in using these markers.

The results of this study complement those of previous research. However, a direct connection between this aspect of task differences and L1 transfer could not be established in this study. This constitutes a major limitation of this study, and further analysis is needed. Furthermore, because of the limited variety of tasks used in this study, it is necessary to expand the range of task types in future to conduct a more comprehensive validation. For example, by using interview-style tasks to engage learners in certain interactions, there is a possibility of obtaining different results from their responses compared to the outcomes observed in this study. For future research, it will be worthwhile to explore the influence of L1 in various tasks.

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Appendix A PowerPoint Slide for the Short Speech Task

Topic 1

今までに訪れた国内外の場所で、
印象に残っているところについて、
60秒間話してください。

"a country or area you visited which
impressed you"

(Talk for 60 seconds about a place, either within the country or abroad, that has left a lasting impression on you from your past travels.)

Appendix B Comic Strip A for the Picture Description Task

Your story should begin with this sentence: **One day, Mr. and Mrs. Okada arrived in Hawaii for their vacation.**



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