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Developing Pragmatic Competence through Discourse Markers in EFL Teacher Education

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Abstract

Effective academic speaking depends not only on grammatical accuracy and subject knowledge, but also on the ability to organise ideas clearly and guide an audience through a presentation. This study examines how undergraduate students in an English language teacher education programme use discourse markers in oral academic presentations and considers what their choices reveal about the development of pragmatic competence. The study draws on 94 presentations collected over two academic years at a Slovak university. The recordings were manually transcribed, producing a learner corpus of 54,386 words, and analysed with a focus on the frequency, range and functional use of discourse markers. In total, 3,486 instances were identified. Although students used discourse markers regularly, their repertoire was relatively narrow. So, and, and but accounted for more than half of all occurrences, while markers associated with more formal academic discourse, such as however, therefore, and moreover, appeared much less frequently. Organisational and elaborative markers predominated, whereas contrastive and inferential markers were used less often. The findings suggest that students can maintain basic continuity and organisation in spoken presentations but make less use of language that supports comparison, argumentation and the formulation of conclusions. The results point to the value of explicit work with spoken discourse, guided reflection and targeted feedback in university language teacher education.

Keywords: Academic Speaking; Higher Education; Learner Corpus; Oral Presentations; Presentation Skills