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Exploring How Input Types Shape Discourse Marker Use in IELTS Speaking: Genuine, Elaborated, and Modified Elaborated

Helta Bryant[1], Lei Brotchie[2]*

[1] Doctoral School of Education, University of Szeged, Hungary
[2] Institute of Education, University of Szeged, MTA-SZTE Digital Learning Technologies Research Group, Hungary

Correspondence e-mail * : LeiBrotchie@szte.hu.com

Abstract: Considerable scholarly discussion has emerged regarding the optimal input format for advancing linguistic competence and enhancing oral proficiency, especially concerning IELTS speaking assessments. This investigation examined the comparative efficacy of three input formats—Authentic, Enhanced, and Refined Enhanced—concerning discourse marker deployment within IELTS speaking contexts. Employing a temporal-sequence quasi-experimental framework, 36 Hungarian EFL participants from four established courses undertaking IELTS preparation at a language training center encountered audio materials exemplifying each input category. Treatment cohorts experienced comprehensive discourse marker exposure, whereas the comparison cohort received instruction via identical pedagogical approaches and educators yet with reduced discourse marker emphasis. Post-exposure evaluations were administered subsequent to each input category encounter. Friedman's one-way ANOVA analysis of preliminary and subsequent assessment results demonstrated superior performance following enhanced input exposure relative to authentic input, achieving optimal outcomes within the refined enhanced input configuration. Additionally, results indicate that typographical input augmentation substantially advances oral communication capabilities. This investigation presents multiple pedagogical recommendations.

Keyword : Conversational Connector, Enhanced Format, Authentic Format, IELTS Oral Assessment, Refined Enhanced Material.

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INTRODUCTION

Conversational connectors (CCs) constitute essential elements within authentic oral communication (Ji-Young, 2008) and prove vital for effective interpersonal exchange. These linguistic devices particularly assist non-native communicators in achieving fluency within both textual and oral contexts, while fostering confidence throughout the language acquisition journey (Lam, 2009). Such components function as "interactional adhesive" (Louwerse & Mitchell, 2003) and a "distributed" feature (Lewis, 2006) within extemporaneous dialogue, serving crucial roles in facilitating learner participation within continuous communicative exchanges (Lenk, 1998).

Additionally, these elements maintain essential functions at both contextual and relational dimensions of communication, representing aspects language learners cannot reasonably disregard within oral expression (Piurko, 2015). Correspondingly, CCs as facilitators enabling more fluid and productive interaction alongside extemporaneous verbal output (Crystal, 1988) represent among various conversational units deployed by communicators (Fung & Carter, 2007).

Conversely, psycholinguistic researchers and SLA scholars demonstrate familiarity with language generation processes, with particular focus on contributing elements within language output including intricacy, precision, and smoothness (CAF) (Saito, Trofimovich, & Isaacs, 2016). Furthermore, Han (2008) examined the proficient deployment of conversational connectors, establishing enhanced fluency levels within both oral and textual modalities. Consequently, as posited by Swain (1993), directing L2 learner concentration toward particular target linguistic structures assists learners in "perceiving the discrepancy" between current L2 knowledge and target language standards; this constitutes an essential and adequate prerequisite for transforming input into intake through interaction (Schmidt, 1994). Such input derives from multiple origins. A particular challenge regarding authentic materials for language acquisition involves their typical production for native communicators (NSs) or proficient non-native communicators (NNSs), rather than learners. Given that supplied input has not undergone interactive meaning negotiation, it becomes psycholinguistically inappropriate for learners. Nevertheless, particular implicit conventions governing communication exist and are utilized by native communicators unconsciously (Crozet, 2003). Native English communicators deploy these conventions without conscious awareness of component appropriateness within their communication, especially regarding oral contexts. Consequently, the enhanced variant of input enables L2 learners to comprehend language more effectively even encountering unfamiliar linguistic elements (Kim, 2006). Since this input category can occasionally introduce increased linguistic intricacy (Yano, Long, & Ross, 1994), it can be generated by expanding linguistic elements including collocations (Long, 2015). Moreover, as one input modification category, communicators or learners can eliminate crucial lexical or grammatical elements to enable learning or interaction (Oh, 2001). Within another input modification approach, learners can introduce redundancy and clarity to authentic input through mechanisms including paraphrase and conversational connectors (Housen, & Bulte, 2014). Additionally, Magliacane (2020) examining spoken deployment of six CCs through exposure to L2 community input and NS interaction discovered that based on received input categories and NS interactions, variations emerged in CC frequency and applications.

Notably, CC deployment represents among multiple assessment criteria through which evaluators allocate scores within oral components of high-stakes language competency examinations for English certification attainment (Cambridge

Assessment Scale for Speaking, 2011; IELTS, 2021). Subsequently, as Buysse (2015) affirmed, these connectors constitute an integral component of oral communication and interaction.

Among varied CC functions within communication, they facilitate exchange by establishing cohesion and generating interpersonal connection between communicator and recipient. However, limited understanding exists concerning how input categories can assist learners and English communicators in developing and addressing challenges regarding this aspect. Correspondingly, various investigations (e.g., Jakupčević, 2019; Lai, & Zheng, 2018; Xu, Chen, Liu, Zhang, & Zhang, 2018) demonstrated that CC deployment challenges among numerous EFL learners partially resulted from inadequate input exposure. Concurrently, Romero-Trillo (2020) disclosed that situational elements influence learner CC utilization and advancement within optimal conversational and interactive circumstances.

Considering preceding assertions regarding conversational connector functions within oral communication, second language learners and particularly IELTS candidates typically encounter difficulties when deploying them within verbal expression, with limited individuals successfully applying conversational connectors and communicating fluently as reflected in assessment scores. Therefore, this investigation endeavors to examine each of three input categories' influence—specifically authentic, enhanced and refined enhanced—on conversational connectors within IELTS speaking contexts.

Review of Literature

1. Discourse markers

These linguistic devices constitute elements that bridge communicative and cognitive voids that oral expression necessitates for considering the interaction framework"(Romero-Trillo, 2006). They represent "metalinguistic observations" or one commentary pragmatic connector category whereby communicators specifically elaborate regarding how their utterances should be interpreted (Yang, 2011), notwithstanding their diversity and multidimensional applications within verbal expression continue generating numerous descriptive and methodological considerations (Fischer, 2006). Nevertheless, they supply contextual coordinates for continuous discussion. Conversational connectors (CCs) are recognized as possessing a 'mutually dependent' association with extemporaneous verbal expression (Fraser, 1990) and actively participate within dialogue or bilateral interaction as they prove necessary for preparation and courtesy (De Vos et al., 2018b).

Moreover, substantial L2 pragmatics investigation regarding these interactional devices has occurred since the 1980s; for instance various research has been executed to examine conversational connector deployment between native communicators and non-native communicators of English (Aijmer, 2004; Aşık and

Cephe, 2013; Fung and Carter, 2007; Huang, 2011; Neary-Sundquist, 2014; Sitthirak, 2013); these investigations demonstrated that native communicators deploy these devices more regularly and with greater variation than non-native communicators. Various investigations compared device utilization between learners at varying competency stages and within different contexts (e.g., Wei, 2011) and certain investigations disclosed positive correlation between conversational connector deployment and competency levels (e.g., Neary-Sundquist, 2014). Additional investigations scrutinized these devices regarding different instructional approaches. For instance, Jones and Carter (2014) contended that explicit instruction (including the Present – Practice – Produce (PPP) approach) affects discourse connector acquisition within verbal expression. Additionally, Alraddadi (2016) asserted that both Presentation – Practice – Production model (PPP) and Task-Based Language Teaching approach (TBLT) assisted learners in advancing their structural discourse connector utilization, with TBLT approach demonstrating substantial influence on discourse connector acquisition. Furthermore, Aijmer (2002) argued that since they possess formal, functional and pragmatic characteristics, they merit more pragmatic investigation than alternative cases. Additionally, Louwerse and Mitchell (2003) within their research demonstrated that CCs manifest more regularly within oral rather than textual communication, emphasizing the orality characteristic significantly. Moreover, Hellermann and Vergun (2007) within their investigation of 17 beginning adult English learners without prior formal English language instruction demonstrated that these devices function within the linguistic framework to exhibit associations between subjects or grammatical elements within communication, enabling learners to attain superior competency.

More significantly, Schiffirn (1987) investigated exclusively oral conversational connectors (e.g., within clauses, conjunctions, particles, and temporal indicators). She affirmed that they establish associations between communicative units regarding their syntactic and semantic characteristics and through their sequential associations. She additionally maintained that wherever communicators deploy conversational connectors, in actuality, s/he introduces cohesion to communication. However, Redeker (1991) contended that CCs do not supply concepts or introduce meanings.

Alternatively stated, he emphasized that they constitute coherence-generating mechanisms and should be integrated with alternative connective devices possessing comparable characteristics within communication. Consequently, as Müller's (2005) discoveries regarding CC deployment by German EFL communicators and Fung and Carter's (2007) discoveries regarding conversational connector generation within pedagogic contexts demonstrate language learners should acquire conversational connectors or that they can enable more effective comprehensive language utilization and superior interaction.

2. Types of input

Gass (1997) contended that input conception represents the paramount conception within SLA. Within second language acquisition research and theoretical frameworks, greater emphasis centers on input comprehension functionality, whereby numerous researchers affirmed that target language input exposure proves highly significant. Additionally, input obtained by L2 typically undergoes modification to enhance comprehensibility and advance SLA processes (Anani Sarab & Karimi, 2008).

Historically, considerations of various oral and textual input categories for language acquisition have examined relative merits of authentic and streamlined oral and textual materials. Currently, enhanced input and, particularly, refined enhanced input have been regarded as superior selections, functioning as substantial input for expanding learners' acquisition opportunities (Piamsai, 2018).

Relatedly, authentic (genuine) input represents an umbrella terminology for extensive varieties of 'discovered' specimens of authentic target language deployment. These constitute oral or textual documentation of authentic communication and everyday communicative objectives which were not initially designated for language acquisition or instruction (Long, 2020). Nevertheless, Widdowson (1976) problematized this input category and contended that authenticity correlates with its utilization. Moreover, supplying them, especially within foreign language settings, proves problematic, and generates psycholinguistically inappropriate input for language acquisition, notwithstanding their typical authentic utilizations for external classroom environments (Pienemann, 2011). According to Urano (2000), within both oral and textual modalities authentic input for L2 learners necessitates modification to achieve comprehensibility within classroom contexts.

Furthermore, NSs deploy extensive device varieties for input enhancement objectives (Long, 2007). The enhanced variant advances L2 learner comprehension while concurrently supporting pedagogical effectiveness and language acquisition opportunities. Initial research (e.g., Kelch, 1985; Long, 1985) demonstrated constraints in dual aspects. Various investigations contrasted NS authentic oral or textual materials with singular modified variant categories, alternative investigations with modified variants combining streamlining and enhancement, without evaluating each variant's merits. Nevertheless, Parker and Chaudron (1987) particularly compared streamlining and enhancement devices and established enhancement advantages. Additionally, Yano et al. (1994), Oh (2001) and O'Donnell's (2009) investigations disclosed that enhancement modifications proved comparably beneficial in advancing comprehension as streamlining. Correspondingly, certain scholars demonstrated that enhanced input does not diminish and weaken semantic and curricular substance across duration (e.g., Al-Thowaini, 2018; Long, 2018; Long, Al-Thowaini, Al-

Thowaini, Lee, & Vafaee, 2018); their discoveries prove beneficial from acquisition perspectives.

However, certain experimental investigations (e.g., Webb et al., 2013) disclosed that notwithstanding input enhancement advantages, it demonstrates certain undesirable consequences, especially regarding excessive utterance or sentence duration. Conversely, utilizing modified input native communicators (Ns) employ different modalities to sustain and modify their input enabling them to qualify non-native communicators' (NNSs) comprehension. Consequently, language acquisition can be advanced and facilitated by modified input within contexts (Ziglari, 2008). Nevertheless, authentic and streamlined categories constitute the predominant input categories for language acquisition and instruction. Nevertheless, enhanced and refined enhanced variants represent superior selections since they are readily generated through certain identical devices NSs deploy extemporaneously to advance comprehensibility and sustain communication with NNSs of restricted L2 capability. Alternatively stated, these variants present valuable input, frameworks for native-like language deployment, advanced comprehensibility and substantial information retention. Refined enhanced variants are additionally more accommodating than enhanced variants regarding readability. Furthermore, they are uncertain to become the standard for pedagogic materials immediately (Malone, 2018). Concurrently, enhanced and, especially, refined enhanced input demonstrate greater advantages for language acquisition and for subject-matter instruction through new languages (Johnson, 2003). Moreover, the authentic input constituted the origin of refined enhanced variant development, through enhanced to refined enhanced input (Long, 2017).

Comprehensively, through evaluating prior research on streamlining and enhancement, Chung (1995) discovered that both streamlining and enhancement would advance L2 reading comprehension. Similarly, Maleki and Pazhakh (2012) examined pre-modified, interactionally modified input and modified output influences on EFL learners' new word comprehension and concluded that interactionally modified input cohorts outperformed in comprehension assessments among their cohort counterparts. Additionally, Farshi, Tavakoli and Ketabi (2019) demonstrated that enhanced materials substituted with refined enhanced input prove more beneficial for receptive knowledge retention and acquisition than authentic input and enhanced input. Furthermore, certain scholars emphasized authentic, enhanced, and streamlined input influence on alternative skills or sub-skills. For example, Oh (2001) and Yano et al.(1994) investigated them regarding L2 reading comprehension, Kim (2006) and Watanabe (1997) examined them regarding incidental vocabulary acquisition. Nevertheless, numerous challenges remain unresolved.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were 36 Hungarian EFL learners getting ready for IELTS exam in an English language institute in which 21 of them were male and the other 15 were female. All the participants were learning English as foreign language (EFL) with an age range of 23 to 38 years old. However, age and sex were not considered as variables in this study. At first, in order to choose a homogenous sample, the researcher used a proficiency PET test (2004) to 51 participants as the population of this research and 67 learners who obtained scores from 70 to 80 out of 100, were chosen and randomly assigned into four groups: genuine input group (n=9), elaborated input group (n=9), modified elaborated group (n=9) and control group (n=9).

Instrumentation

The instruments for the purpose of this quasi-experimental study were a preliminary PET (2004) test, a speaking test as a pre -test and another speaking test as the post test and also, the study material was a sample of IELTS speaking (2020) with the focus on discourse markers in it.

At first, a proficiency PET (2004) was administered to the population participating in the study a week before the study in order to elicit a homogeneous sample from the population under study. To choose the subjects in the experiment as the sample of the study. After administrations the PET test, however, 36 learners whose scores were below 70 or above 80 were removed from the study. Only the treatment groups received the instruction; they were taught discourse markers in IELTS speaking, the independent variable was in the three levels of genuine, elaborated, and modified elaborated levels and the scores on the immediate and delayed posttests of using discourse markers in speaking served as the dependent variables.

Procedure

This investigation was executed with four established courses. An oral assessment emphasizing conversational connectors within it was administered as a pre-evaluation preceding the investigation. This assessment incorporated those conversational connectors that would be instructed throughout the course. A catalog of different conversational connectors were provided to the subjects and they were requested to utilize and verify all of them that they were familiar with utilized them previously within speaking and those which were unfamiliar for all of them were selected for the course.

Following one semester's conclusion, a post-evaluation was designed to evaluate the subjects' proficiency level determine the rate of utilizing the

conversational connectors within IELTS speaking. They were evaluated two weeks preceding data collection. The assessment consisted of a catalog of 10 conversational connectors instructed throughout the course and the subjects were requested to utilize them within speaking. This post-evaluation was identical for all four referenced cohorts.

To direct the participants' concentration to the conversational connectors within IELTS speaking, there exists an interval between the pre-evaluations and principal data collection. It was examined through two post-evaluations, some days following treatment completion and the alternative following three weeks. Within each assessment, the researcher evaluated its reliability. The reliability measurement (Cronbach's alpha) for these assessments (0.68, and 0.74) were sufficiently high to confirm the assessment's reliability. According to Jafarpour (1992), reliability of 0.60 and exceeding proves acceptable for most research.

Within six instructional sessions throughout three weeks as the treatment, the learners received instruction on conversational connectors within IELTS speaking. Each conversational connector category was incorporated within various different IELTS speaking specimens, which were carefully supplied in authentic, enhanced, and refined enhanced variants.

These candidate learners for IELTS were exposed to conversational connectors within IELTS speaking within certain sessions attributable to the abundant speaking specimens within the present investigation. This flooding dimensions could supply the noticing the target elements and their characteristics within input (Ellis, 2009). The authentic input as specimens of authentic target language utilization were selected from the oral documentation of authentic communication. Within these specimens, the learners were engaged within conversational connectors within speaking. Following familiarity and utilizing certain of these conversational connectors, the participants were requested to utilize certain of them within certain specimens of IELTS speaking assessments. The alternative objective was that they had to utilize most of these conversational connectors within their speaking assessments.

Within the enhanced input configuration, the participants were exposed to the identical conversational connectors within certain specimens of authentic IELTS speaking assessments, yet they were qualified for non-native communicators' (NNSs) speaking as within the NS–NNS conversation structure – designated foreigner discussion communication (FTD) with streamlined tasks and enhanced input. Within this treatment configuration, certain elements contained within authentic specimens were offset with enhanced variants by such conversational connectors. Within the third configuration, enhanced speaking specimens were reproduced in a manner that the refined enhanced input evolution was traced from authentic, through enhanced, to refined enhanced variant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study addressed gains in knowledge on discourse markers by the participants in the genuine, elaborated and modified elaborated groups. For the both groups, the descriptive statistics on the dependent variables (genuine, elaborated, and modified elaborated inputs) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Mean Scores and Sds of the Participants' Performance on the Pre-Tests.

Groups	Mean SD	Pre-test
Genuine	Mean	4.51
	SD	2.26
Elaborated	Mean	4.62
	SD	2.23
Modified Elaborated	Mean	745.
	SD	2.19
Control	Mean	0
	SD	0

Both cohorts' performances on the conversational connector knowledge measurements were comparable within the pre-evaluation: (M = .00, SD = .00). One-way variance analysis (ANOVA) constituted the appropriate statistical methodology to compare these cohorts regarding their scores on the post-evaluations on this knowledge.

Additionally, comparable specimens Friedman's one-way ANOVA was deployed to evaluate whether there existed any substantial difference on the participants' performances on the pre-evaluations (Table 2). Since the p value (.991) is exceeding 0.05, there was no substantial difference within this case. The outcomes of comparable specimens Friedman's two-way ANOVA of the participants' performances on the three post-evaluations (Table 2) demonstrates that the p value (.001) is beneath the critical value .016. Consequently, we conclude that there existed a substantial difference within the scores of the participants on the three post-evaluations. Because the participants demonstrated comparable results on the identical assessments (utilized as the pre-evaluations), we can conclude that the difference on the scores on the post-evaluations is attributable to the three different treatments, specifically authentic, enhanced and refined enhanced input.

Table 2.
Results of Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way ANOVA for the Pre-Tests

	Sig.	Decision
Pre-test	0.991	retain the null hypothesis
Post-test	0.001	reject the null hypothesis

Paired comparisons of the participants' performances on authentic, enhanced and refined enhanced input are presented in Table 3. As we can conclude from the table, the participants' mean score on the enhanced input (5.57) was superior than their mean score on the authentic input (4.77). This signifies that the participants demonstrated a greater utilization of the conversational connectors following speaking based on the enhanced input specimen texts.

However, they typically observe the typographically augmented modalities and this noticing can result in superior performance on utilizing conversational connectors within speaking. The outcomes are confirmed with the prior research which supported that different modalities of typographical augmentation results in superior noticing the conversational connectors and consequently in superior utilizing of them (Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, & Doughty,1995; Shook,1994; White,1998).

The difference on utilizing on the authentic and enhanced input, however, was not statistically substantial with reference to our P value (0.16).

Table 3. Paired Comparisons of Performances on Post-Tests Through Related-Samples Friedman's One-Way

.	**Sig.**	**Decisi**
Genuine- Elaborated Modified	0.40	retain the null hypothesis
Elaborated- Genuine		
Elaborated-Modified	0.00	reject the null hypothesis
Elaborated		
	0.29	retain the null hypothesis

Additionally, the outcomes of this investigation were in agreement with prior investigations disclosing that enhanced input generate superior comprehension results than authentic input while it often renders more linguistically intricate texts than authentic texts (Long & Ross, 2009).

Concurrently, this is in alignment with the Noticing Hypothesis suggesting that incidental learning becomes practical when the demands of a task gets participants' focal emphasis to the target linguistic elements (Schmidt, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Enhanced and, especially, refined enhanced, input demonstrate remarkable capacity for advancing language acquisition and cultivating speaking proficiency through conversational connectors. Authentic and Enhanced input within speaking constitute the predominant input categories for language instruction, yet enhanced and refined enhanced input represent superior selections for IELTS speaking assessments. They are readily generated through numerous of the identical devices.

NSs utilize extemporaneously to advance comprehensibility and facilitate conversation with NNSs of restricted L2 capability. They supply abundant input, models of native-like language deployment, advanced comprehensibility, superior information retention, and increased conversational connectors. Refined enhanced materials are additionally superior to enhanced variants regarding fluency. Authentic and enhanced input supply certain of those advantages, yet not all of them. Enhanced and refined enhanced materials demonstrate certain of the methodological principles of TBLT (Long, 2015) – MP3: Elaborate input, MP4: Supply abundant input, and MP5: Encourage inductive 'chunk' acquisition. Moreover, the results of this research demonstrated that enhanced material input supplemented with refined enhanced input are more beneficial for acquisition and utilizing of conversational connectors than authentic input and enhanced input are.

Conversely, within IELTS the evaluators are native communicators of English which enables the measurements more precise. Typically, CCs within a superior scale and within an precise modality of deployment, can be excellent aid to a superior English speaking and within comparison to the prior research within this case, here the statistics assist us achieve these results.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the educational significance of authentic, enhanced, and refined enhanced materials, for within cohort acquisition advancement and utilization regarding conversational connectors. Discoveries of this investigation demonstrate certain significant pedagogical ramifications for the advancement of instructional materials for cultivating speaking. Although this investigation expanded our comprehension of the deployment of authentic, refined, and refined enhanced input in combination with input flooding for acquisition and advancing speaking through conversational connectors, it involves certain constraints regarding the scope and number of participants among alternatives and it can be further refined to advance them. Moreover, Future investigations are necessary to supply IELTS participants with substantial exposure to the conversational connectors within speaking and superior performance.

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