



**A Comparative Study of Using Discourse Connectors  
in Thai and English College Students' Academic Compositions**

**Pansa Prommas**

**Prince of Songkla University, Trang**

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<b>Author</b>	Miss Pansa Prommas
<b>Department</b>	Languages
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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this comparative study was to investigate the use of discourse connectors (DCs) in non-native speakers' writing corpus (NNSW) and native English speakers' writing corpus. Particular analysis was given to (1) the frequency of DC occurrences, (2) most frequent types of individual DCs found in the two corpora, (3) similarities and dissimilarities in the DC use in terms of semantic functions and syntactic distribution, and (4) grammatical problems when using DCs in academic writing. 40 argumentative compositions were examined in this study. The NNSW corpus was collected from second- and third-year English major students from Prince of Songkla University, Trang Campus; Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya, Trang Campus; Songkhla Rajabhat University; Thaksin University; Suratthani Rajabhat University, whereas the NSW corpus was retrieved from the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS). Following the taxonomy adopted from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Biber et al. (1999), and Cowan (2008), 140 DCs were classified into eight semantic categories. Findings revealed that the frequency of DC occurrences in the NNSW corpus was significantly higher than that in the NSW corpus. However, the non-native speakers employed a narrow range of individual DC types. Some DCs (i.e., *and*, *but*, *because*) were predominantly preferable by the two groups. Regarding DC semantic functions, both non- and native speakers used *and* to denote additive, causal, temporal senses. The adversative sense of *and* appeared only in the NSW, never in the NNSW. Like the native speakers, *but* was used by the non-native speakers to mark contrastive facts, contrastive stances, concession, and addition. *Because* was also used to mark a cause-effect and a reason.

In terms of syntactic distribution, *but* as well as *and* were restrictedly used by the non-native speakers interclausally as coordinators, rather than clause-initially as conjunctive adverbials. Other DCs which can be syntactically distributable in clause-initial, medial, and final positions (e.g., *moreover*, *furthermore*, *for example*, *therefore*) were used by the non-native speakers as conjunctive adverbials solely in the clause-initial position. Although both groups used these DCs in similar functions in different syntactic positions, findings suggested that the non-native speakers still had problems in areas of superfluous use of *and*, fragmentation with some DCs, inappropriate punctuation, and writing choppy sentences. These can be owing to the influence of their L1 language, more familiarity with colloquial language, and limitation of DC prior knowledge.