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The Use of Transitional Signals in Essay Writing by EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Transitional signals are very important in writing essays. Therefore, this research aimed to find out the types of transitional signals and their accuracy in sentences. The research used a descriptive quantitative method. There were 68 students taken randomly from the population. The instrument used to collect data was a writing test. The transitional signals analyzed were transitional signals for adding ideas and emphasizing, showing contrast and comparison, showing cause and effect, providing examples, introducing sequence, and summarizing. The findings of this research showed that the total of transitional signals used by the students were 203 transitional signals. More detailed for each type from the first until the sixth type were 35, 32, 17, 5, 95, and 19. Moreover, the percentage of the accuracy was 83%. The orders from the first until the sixth types of transitional signals were 86% adding ideas, 78% emphasizing, 94% showing contrast and comparison, 80% showing cause and effect, 84% providing examples, and 69% introducing time order or sequence, and summarizing. In other words, the most widely used transitional signal was transitional signals for introducing time order and sequence while the highest percentage of accuracy was transitional signals for providing examples.

Keywords: *Transitional Signals, Accuracy, Writing Skill, Essay Writing, Descriptive Method*

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1. Introduction

Being competent in writing is very needed for students who learn English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, since English is not their first language, they would make some mistakes especially for the university students. However, Brown (2004) says that among the language skills, writing is the most complicated skill, because there are several components that have to be mastered by the students; those are spelling, grammar and punctuation, coherence and organization of ideas. From those five components, organizing ideas is the difficult one. Graves (1987) reported that according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, major problems exist in students' ability to write unity text and to use information to persuade readers. Meanwhile, a text can be called as a good writing if the ideas are organized well, have a relation each other, and build a united form of the paragraph.

Knowing about the organizational structure of writing, it can be said that the students should give attention to not only its organization of ideas but also to its coherence. According to Oshima and Hogue (1997), a coherent paragraph flows smoothly from beginning to the end. The three ways to give paragraph coherence are using nouns and pronouns consistently throughout a paragraph, using transitional signals to show relationships among ideas, and setting ideas into some kinds of logical order, such as logical division.

Transitional signals (TS) are connecting words or phrases that strengthen the internal cohesion and coherence in writing. They show the relationships between the parts of sentences in a paragraph, or between the paragraphs in a longer piece of writing. Even though transitional signals have been learned by the students, they still face difficulties to use the correct transitional signals. Rachmawati and



Susanti (2016) in their research found that most of the students had good knowledge about transitions, for instance its definition, its types, and its function, but they still feel difficult to use certain transitional signals in an appropriate way. They put certain transitional signals in the wrong place, chose inappropriate transitional signals, used wrong structure, and over-use transitional signals.

All those phenomena happen because most students focus to collect information and put them as the content of their writing, meanwhile, that information cannot be organized well if they do not use transitional signals to link the ideas with another one. Similarly, the research findings are stated by Marsetia (2017) that from 13 students, only 2 of them who are able to fulfill the requirements of good essays (general statement, thesis statement, topic sentences, and concluding sentence). The others failed to write good essays. Therefore, the researcher is interested in finding out the use of transitional signals in writing essays by the fifth semester students of English department students in Muhammadiyah University of Makassar.

2. Literature Review

Stott (1991) stated that transition is anything that links one sentence-or paragraph-to another. Without the use of transitional signals, the paragraph appears disorganized. But, although transitional signals have an important role in writing, it is not necessary to use them in every sentence, because using too many transitional signals will make the reader confused. Therefore, good writing requires using appropriate transitional signals to make the relationships among the ideas of the paragraph (Oshima and Hogue, 1998). Similarly, Nordquist (2019) states that a transition is anything that links one sentence or paragraph to another, for example, the linking or transitional words are *therefore*, *firstly*, *however*, and many others. According to Lynch and Anderson (2013), transitional signals are divided into six types based on its function. They are transitional signals for addition, showing contrast, showing cause and effect, positive condition, negative condition, and providing time order or listing.

- a. Transitional signals for an addition, such as *moreover*, *also*, *furthermore*, *in addition*, and *apart from*.
- b. Transitional signals to connect two sentences or two paragraphs in the same line, for instance positive sentence with

positive sentence and negative sentence with negative sentence, they support each other. The second type is to contrast the sentences, examples: *nevertheless*, *on the other hand*, *in contrast*, *in spite of*, and *despite*.

- c. Transitional signals for cause and effect. This type connects two sentences of two paragraphs in which the first sentence or paragraph acts as a cause and the second sentence of paragraph acts as the result or effect of the first sentence or paragraph. Examples: *so*, *as a result*, *consequently*, *therefore*, *thus*, *hence*, *for this reason*, *because of (NP)*.
- d. Transitional signals which act as positive condition, such as *in that case*, *if so*, and *then*.
- e. Transitional signals for negative condition. Those are used when there is a negative condition and we give a choice for any condition, as for examples: *alternatively*, *otherwise*, *instead of*, *rather than*, and *if not*.
- f. Transitional signals for time order or listing provides a sequence of event or a priority scale, such as *then*, *afterwards*, *first(ly)*, *second(ly)*, *next*, *prior to (NP)* *before (NP)*, *finally* and *lastly*.

Furthermore, Whitaker (2009) also divides transitional signals based on its function. Those are transitional signals to start or to begin the sentence, to add another idea, such as *in addition*, *furthermore*, *also*, *moreover*, and *what's more*. The others are transitional signals for adding more important ideas or concluding a sentence or a paragraph, such as *finally*, *most of all*, and *most importantly*, and for contrasting previous ideas, such as *however*, *nevertheless*, and *on the other hand*.

Meanwhile, Sherman, et al. (2010) state that transitional signals are also called transitional words and phrases. They classify transitional signals into eleven types. They are transitional words and phrases to indicate sequence and addition, to indicate time, to show comparison, to show contrast, to introduce example, to indicate conclusion or summary, to indicate concession, to show cause and effect, to generalize, to indicate restatement, and to emphasize a point or idea.

On the other side, Oshima and Hogue (2006) divide transitional signals into eight types. They also divide transitional signals based on its function; this is similar to the previous experts. Those divisions are transitional signals used to add more ideas, to show contrast, to compare, to show cause and effect, to provide example, to introduce time order or sequence, to emphasize idea,

and to conclude or summarize. Here are some examples:

1. Contrast signals are one type of transitional signals. *In addition*, there are others, such as compare signals and addition signals.
2. There are three main ways to improve cohesion in your writing. *First*, you can use transitional signals.
3. Transitional signals are very useful. *However*, they should not be used to begin every sentence.
4. *Although* transitional signals are very useful, they should not be used to begin every sentence.

The transitional signals stated by Sherman (2010), Whitaker (2009), Lynch and Anderson (2013) show some differences in realizing their opinions, but the researcher believes that all those experts have their own ways to classify the transitional signals based on the functions. It cannot be denied that there are still many other transitional signals stated by the experts, but those that have been discussed are the most common transitional signals which are most familiar with the students.

A study has been conducted in Indonesia by Djahimo (2018) about the use of TS in texts produced by the 6th semester students. Djahimo made a research related to 8 types of TS in discussion texts and discovered that the most frequency of TS used by the students was addition (81%), whereas the fewest frequency happened to emphasis (1.63%). The students' competency was quite good, but there are still many inadequate TS and grammatical functions of students writing. Further, Mahendra & Dewi (2017) also discuss the use of TS in the context of academic writing. They had exposed that among the six types of TS the cause and effect type took the greatest frequency in writing (26%), whereas the fewest one was the conclusion type (5.93%). Based on the above facts, it can be inferred that TS types which are expected to be properly used in any genre of texts need to be practiced by the students and exemplified by the teachers in teaching the English writing skills in classroom interactions.

3. Methodology

The method of this research was a descriptive research. The variables and sub variables of this research were transitional signals that include the transitional signals for adding ideas and emphasizing, showing contrast and comparison, showing cause and effect, providing examples, introducing time order or sequence, and concluding or

summarizing. The populations of this research were the fifth semester students of English education department, and consisted of 272 students, while the samples consisted of 68 students (10 males and 58 females) that had been taken randomly. They had studied in English Education department for 3 years. So, the researchers considered that data of essay writing were probably obtained from those samples. The instrument of this research was a writing test. The researcher asked the students to choose one of the five topics (religion, education, economic, health, and environment), and then the students wrote at least 3 paragraphs within 90 minutes. The researchers collected the students' writing works, and then analyzed them in accordance with the aims of the research. In analyzing data, the steps used were *identification, classification, correction, and percentage*. In identification, the researcher identified all transitional signals used by the students in their writing; in classification, all transitional signals produced by the students were grouped according to the types of transitional signals. The next step was correction in which all wrong TS were corrected. Finally, the researcher calculated the percentages of the TS types produced by the students. The formula used was $F/N \times 100$, where F is the frequency of using TS and N is the total number of TS.

4. Results and Discussion

The data described in these findings were taken from the fifth semester students of English department in Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in using transitional signals in their essay writing.

Table 1: The Types of Transitional Signals Used by Students

Sr. No.	Types of Transitional Signals	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Transitional signals for adding information and emphasizing ideas	35	17
2	Transitional signals for contrast and comparison	32	16
3	Transitional signals for providing example	17	8
4	Transitional signals for showing cause & effect	5	3
5	Transitional signals for providing time order and sequence	95	47
6	Transitional signals for summarizing	19	9
Total		203	100

Data in Table 1 show that there are 203 TS which have been produced by the students and classified into 6 types. The fact indicates that TS for providing time order and sequence get the greatest percentage of all (47%). TS for showing cause and effect are almost never used by the students in writing (3%). Based on these results, it is necessary to show the examples of written texts which are related to the cause and



effect, so that the use of transitional signals about cause and effect can be seen clearly.

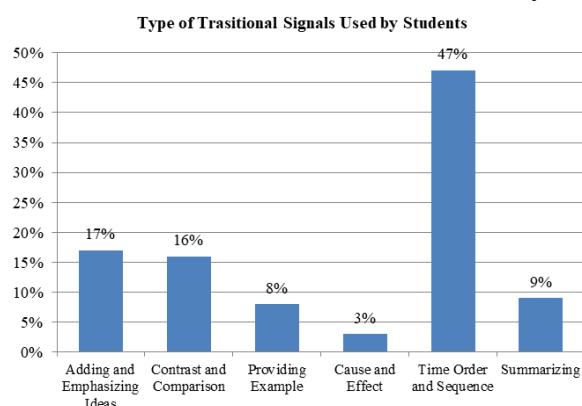


Figure 1: Type of Transitional Signals Used by Students

Based on the table and figure above, the transitional signals that are used by the students are divided into six types. Those are transitional signals for adding and emphasizing ideas, showing comparison and contrast, transitional signals for providing example, showing cause and effect, providing time order and sequence, and summarizing. In detail, the examples of transitional signals for adding and emphasizing ideas that have been used by the students in their essays are *besides, not only, furthermore, moreover, in addition, and another*. Then, the transitional signals for showing comparison and contrast used by the students are *meanwhile, however, although, nevertheless, on the other hand, even though, and but*.

Furthermore, the transitional signals used by the students for providing examples are only four types; those are *for example, such as, like, and for instance*. As a contrary with providing examples transitional signals, a transitional signal for showing cause and effect only has one type; that is *therefore*. On the other hand, the transitional signals used by the students for providing time order and sequence are *first, firstly, second, third, fourth, then, after that, after, finally, last/the last, now, first of all, next, and at that time*. And, the transitional signals for summarizing are *so, in sum/in summary, and in conclusion*.

The total of the transitional signals used by students are 203 TS. Clearly, those 68 students use 35 adding and emphasizing transitional signals, 32 comparison and contrast transitional signals, 17 providing example transitional signals, 5 cause and effect transitional signals, 95 time order and sequence transitional signals, and 19 summarizing transitional signals. Furthermore, the percentages of the transitional signals frequency for each type are 17%, 16%, 8%, 3%, 47%, and 9%.

Simply, the most widely-used transitional signals are transitional signals for introducing time order and sequence. While, the fewest transitional signals used are the ones for showing cause and effect.

The results of this study are different from the two previous related research findings. This study shows that the type of TS that is most widely used is 'time order and sequence', while the two previous studies show that the most types used in writing are the addition (Djahima, 2018) and the cause & effect (Mahendra & Dewi, 2017). These two previous findings also reveal that time order and sequence type is poorly produced and unproductive. Then, the research results also indicate that the types of conclusion or summary and the provision of examples are poorly produced in writing. The present study has exposed similar results in which these two issues are also poorly produced; they are the types of conclusion or summary (9%) and the provision of examples (8%).

There are some reasons that potentially make the use of TS different in the texts or essays produced by the students. The students need to be familiar with all types of TS, so that they can remember and use them properly in writing essays. Genres of texts also become the aspects that make the use of TS different from the others, for each type of TS has its own function. If the genre of a text is, for instance, concerned with the procedure and historical event, certainly the time of sequence type will have high probability to be used in writing. Then, if the genre of a text is concerning the academic facts, the type of TS that will appear more than the others is cause and effect. Thus, the use of TS types will depend on the students' competences of these types in producing texts and the genres of texts that will be written by the EFL students.

The implication of the present study indicates that the ability of the EFL students in writing will also be determined by their familiarity in the use of TS and their competency to write any form of a text. Exercises to write different forms of texts might give effects to the quality of written work.

3.2 The Accuracy of Transitional Signals Used by Students

The following data in Table 2 indicate the Frequency of Transitional Signals (FTS) and the Frequency of Correct Transitional Signals (FCTS) produced by the EFL students.

Table 2: The Accuracy of Transitional Signals Used by Students

Sr. No	Types of Transitional Signals	FTS	FCTS	Percent (%)
1	Transitional signals for adding information and emphasizing ideas	35	30	86
2	Transitional signals for adding information and emphasizing ideas	32	25	78
3	Transitional signals for providing example	17	16	94
4	Transitional signals for showing cause	5	4	80
5	Transitional signals for providing time order and sequence	95	80	84
6	Transitional signals for summarizing	19	13	69
Total		203	168	83

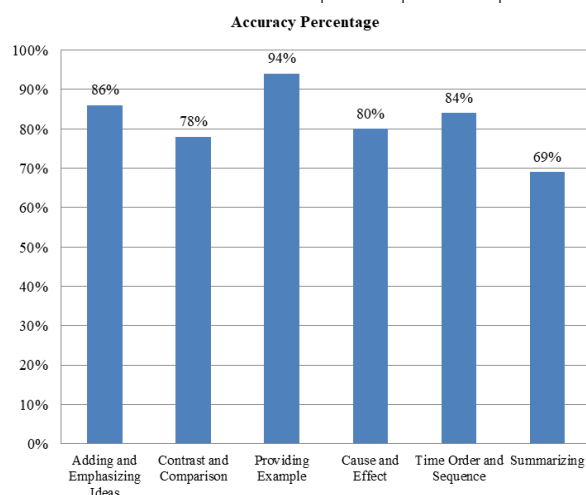


Figure 2: The Accuracy of Transitional Signals Used by Students

Data on Table 2 and Figure 2 indicate that most of the fifth semester students of English department in Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in academic year 2018/2019 are good in using transitional signals. The percentage of the accuracy of transitional signals that have been used by the students in their essays is 83%. Moreover, the percentage of the accuracy of the transitional signals used by the students for each type is more than 60%.

In detail, the percentage of the accuracy of the use of transitional signals for adding and emphasizing ideas is 86%. From 35 transitional signals used by students in their essays, 30 TS of adding and emphasizing ideas are correct; the students use correct adding and emphasizing ideas of transitional signals based on the context of the sentence that they want to convey. Meanwhile, there is a decline from the percentage accuracy of adding and emphasizing ideas. The percentage of accuracy for showing comparison and contrast of transitional signals are from 86% to 78%, because there are seven transitional signals for showing contrast and comparison used in inappropriate context of sentence. So, from 32 transitional signals used in this

type, there are only 25 transitional signals used correctly.

Besides, the percentage of the accuracy of the use of transitional signals for providing examples is 94%. This percentage of accuracy is the greatest score from the other five types of transitional signals. From 17 providing examples of transitional signals that are used by the students, 16 of them are used correctly. It is similar to the previous type, the incorrect transitional signal for showing cause and effect used by the students is only one; from five transitional signals about cause and effect, four of them are correct.

Meanwhile, the percentage of the accuracy of the use of transitional signals for providing time order and sequence is 84%. From 95 transitional signals used by the students for this type, 80 of them are used correctly. Actually, this type is the most widely used by the students, but the percentage of its accuracy is not the highest percentage. The last type of transitional signals is a transitional signal for summarizing. The percentage of its accuracy is 69%; from 19 summarizing transitional signals, 13 of them are used correctly. In conclusion, the highest percentage of accuracy is a transitional signal for providing examples and the lowest percentage of accuracy is a transitional signal for summarizing.

4. Conclusion

A total number of transitional signals used by the students are 203. There are 35 transitional signals for adding and emphasizing ideas, 32 transitional signals for showing contrast and comparison, 17 transitional signals for providing examples, 5 transitional signals for showing cause and effect, 95 transitional signals for introducing time order and sequence, and 19 transitional signals for summarizing. Simply, the most widely used transitional signal is a transitional signal for introducing time order and sequence. Moreover, the percentage of the accuracy of transitional signals used by the students in their essays is 83%. It can be stated that the students' ability to use transitional signals is good. Orderly, the percentages of the accuracy are 86%, 78%, 94%, 80%, 84%, and 69%. The greatest percentage of accuracy is a transitional signal for providing examples and the fewest percentage of accuracy is a transitional signal for summarizing.

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