





Collaborative Activities in the Learning of Discourse Markers in University Students


Actividades colaborativas en el aprendizaje de marcadores discursivos en estudiantes universitarios

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Summary

The objective of this research work is to analyze the influence of collaborative activities on the learning of discourse markers in the students of the Language Comprehension and Production from a private university in Lima. It is an applied research with a quasi-experimental design, composed of experimental and control. For the collection of data, the Test on discourse markers was used. Likewise, a pretest measurement was carried out successively, and once the results were obtained, the workshop on collaborative activities, composed of 7 sessions, was conducted in the experimental group to then carry out the posttest measurements in both groups. The hypothesis testing was made with the Mann Whitney U test. The results showed that there was significant influence of the collaborative work on the learning of the discourse markers in the students that are object of study.

Keywords: Collaborative work, learning, discourse makers.

Resumen

El objetivo de la presente investigación es analizar la influencia de las actividades colaborativas en el aprendizaje de los marcadores discursivos en los estudiantes del curso Comprensión y Producción de Lenguaje de una universidad privada de Lima. Es una investigación aplicada con un diseño cuasi experimental, conformándose los grupos, experimental y control. Para la recolección de datos, se empleó la Prueba sobre marcadores discursivos. Asimismo, se efectuó sucesivamente una medición pre test, y obtenidos los resultados, se aplicó el taller sobre actividades colaborativas, compuesto por 7 sesiones, en el grupo experimental, para luego efectuar las mediciones post test, en ambos grupos. La contrastación de hipótesis se efectuó con la prueba U de Mann Whitney. Los resultados mostraron que hubo influencia significativa del trabajo colaborativo sobre el aprendizaje de los marcadores discursivos en los estudiantes objeto de estudio.

Palabras clave: Trabajo colaborativo, aprendizaje, marcadores discursivos.

Introduction

In the writing process, it is necessary to use discourse makers that, many times, the university students do not use. Benavides (2014) said that the difficulty of the systematization of such linguistic units does not lie in a single type of words; they are associated with values related to a grammar category or their place in the sentence. Thus, it is very important that university students know how to use these discourse markers in text writing; being necessary to propose strategies that improve this procedure.

In the last decade, there were interesting works, such as works carried out by Ruiz (2012) who determined the significant influence of the cooperative work on learning. Errázuriz (2012, 2014) pointed out that there is a relationship between the adaptation of these links and the logical progression of the essays. Bonilla (2013) concluded that the cooperative work is one of the models that provides more contributions, since it develops the significant learning; this coincides with what Holgado said (2014) and it is ratified in experimental works carried out by Luján (2015), Llontop (2015) and Serna-Hernández (2016), who have already said that the level of studies does affect the use of markers. However, although there is a direct relationship between both of them, the level of studies was not determinant. There is a tendency towards the use of argumentative, control, contact, modality and closing markers (Londoño & Ospina, 2018).

Based on the definition of these variables, Robledo (2013) said that collaborative activities are a “set of resources for the organization of human groups that involves intervening subjects in such organization, (...), and urges the group as a whole to work together to achieve the common goals.” (p.31). Moreover, regarding the variables Discourse makers, Martin and Portolés (1999) said that:

(...) they are invariable linguistic units that do not play a syntactic role in the framework of the sentence predication or as a lexicon of the Spanish language and, they do not have a defined meaning, but they fulfill a function in the discourse or text: to lead, in accordance with their

morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic characteristics, the inferences achieved in the communicative process based on the use of a certain language. (p. 110).

Llontop (2015) said that university students are not able to write texts using discourse markers, since they do not have the knowledge expected of these linguistic units. For that reasons, their writing is not clear, consistent and coherent, since the discourse makers allow them to structure texts. This lack of discourse markers causes written productions to be not fluent and coherent. This is the reality of several university students in our country, since they do not know basic linguistic notions, such as the correct use of discourse markers. Locally, the university student must show varied competencies in all the stages of their life, either professionally or personally (Alonso, 2013). Therefore, it is important that they can read several types of texts and to know how to write clearly, coherently and fluently, properly using discourse markers, since with these activities, they can access knowledge and develop other skills that allow them to properly copy with this globalized world. However, higher education students show serious deficiencies in these practices, which prevents him from successfully coping with various writing situations. Therefore, the collaborative work in the learning of discourse markers appears as a different option to face the writing difficulties that universities students have. This scenario led to the proposal expressed in the problem raised: what is the influence of the collaborative activities on the learning of discourse markers? It was proposed to analyze this influence in a sample of students from the course Language Comprehension and Production at a private university in the city of Lima.

Methodology

Research with quantitative approach, applied. The hypothetico-deductive method was used (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2014). The design was a quasi-experimental design, with two groups (control and experimental) and two times of measurements (pretest and posttest). The population

consisted of 350 students from a course called Language Comprehension and Production of the first semester, from which a sample of 60 was taken and it was divided into 30 for each group. Seven intervening sessions were developed. A validated 48-item test was used as an instrument. Results showed good reliability ($KR = 0.860$). Five dimensions were measured: Connectors (9 items); Information structures (9 items); Reformulators (12 items), argumentative operators (6 items) and conversational markers (12 items). It was taken for a maximum time of 30 minutes. The Mann–Whitney U test ($\alpha = 0.05$) was used for hypothesis testing.

Results

Previously, it is stated that there were no significant differences when comparing control and experimental groups of pretest measurement. For that reason, the inferential results were issued based on the comparison between the two groups of posttest measurement, as shown below.

Table 1.

Learning of the discourse makers in the students from the course Language Comprehension and Production.

Statistics	Pretest		Posttest	
	Control	Experimental	Control	Experimental
Median	27	21	24	35.5
Quartile deviation (QY)	6.65	5.08	4.26	4.1

(Posttest: Experimental - control): Mann–Whitney U = 24.500; Z = -6.300; p = .000

It was observed that the median of the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group, and the dispersion (QY) was lower in this group, being a favorable factor, since through this intervention, not only better results of the learning of discourse markers are obtained, but the group's performance is homogenized. Figure 1 shows the detail.

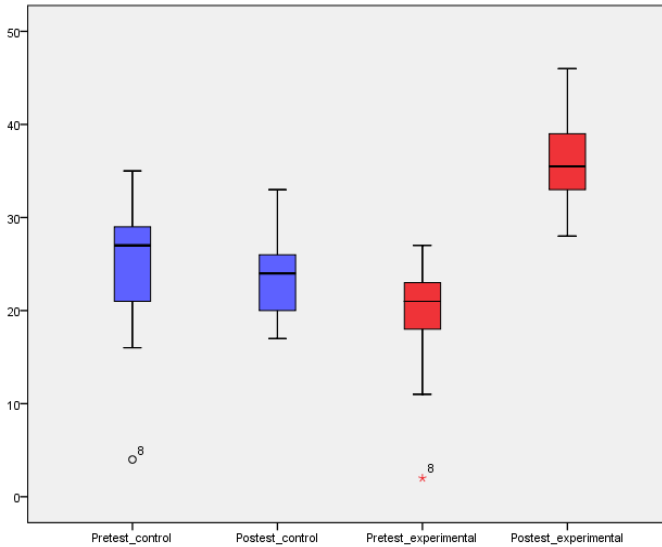


Figure 1. Distribution of scores of the learning of discourse markers in students from the course Language Comprehension and Production.

Table 2.

Learning of the dimensions of discourse markers in students of the course Language Comprehension and Production.

Dimensions	Statistics	Pretest		Posttest		Difference Posttest (Experimental - control)
		Control	Experimental	Control	Experimental	
Learning of connectors	Median	5	4	5	7	Mann-Whitney U = 128,500; Z = -4.829; p = .000
	QY	1.47	1.18	1.41	1.17	
Learning of information structurers	Median	5	4	5	6	Mann-Whitney U = 98,500; Z = -5.322; p = .000
	QY	1.54	1.46	1.1	1.07	
Learning of reformulators	Median	5,5	5	6	9	Mann-Whitney U = 34,000; Z = -6.204; p = .000
	QY	1.89	1.65	1.41	1.27	
Learning of argumentative operators	Median	3	2,5	3	3	Mann-Whitney U = 302,000; Z = -2.260; p = .024
	QY	0.99	1.19	1.07	1.13	
Learning of conversational markers	Median	7	5	5	9	Mann-Whitney U = 27,500; Z = -6.304; p = .000
	QY	2.56	1.87	1.47	1.73	

There were significant differences between pretest and posttest measurements of the five dimensions. It was determined that the posttest scores were statistically higher than pretest scores, which means that there is significant influence of the collaborative activities on the learning of connectors, information structurers, reformulators, argumentative operators and conversational markers in students from the course Language Comprehension and Production at a private university. It is worth noting that in the dimension “Learning of argumentative operators”, similar medians and a not-so-distant QY were obtained. However, it is worth mentioning that the differences of ranges were enough for the significance to 0.05.

Discussion

The intervention through collaborative activities in the learning of discourse markers significantly influenced the academic achievement of students evaluated in the course Language Comprehension and Production (CPL, by its Spanish initials), being significant learning and the application of connectors, information structurers, reformulators, argumentative operators and conversational markers. It is recommended that future research works include strategies to collectively measure cooperative learning, using online technological tools as ancillary tools for such purpose (Nuñez, Muñoz & Mihovilovic, 2006)

In determining the influence of the collaborative activities on the learning of discourse markers in students from the course Language Comprehension and Production, it was defined that the intervention is significantly useful. This result coincides with Errázuriz’s work (2013), who said that the discourse markers play an important role for the processing of inferences and text production. Moreover, Portolés (1998) said that they allow the organization of the information in the text and they indicate the information organization of the discourse. However, the findings made by Holgado (2014) are important to be considered since the dictionary enables the Spanish students to know and master a number of discourse markers,

since the students who used the dictionary used a larger number of markers, not so much in variety as in quantity, so this could be relevant for this group and other groups of students with similar characteristics. On the other hand, although the measurement was firmly done, it is important to indicate that the innovation of the evaluation would refine the results obtained. In this regard, Ruiz, (2012) and García (2017) highlighted that if the contents are learnt through cooperative techniques planned and developed in classes, being more beneficial the efficacy of the cooperative learning, a cooperative evaluation strategy could be designed in a collective manner. Consequently, cooperative learning would not be only used as a strategy with the aim of increasing success and academic results, but it would also be an effective way to promote a happy and pro-social environment in the classroom. This would efficiently contribute to affective results and to significant improvement of interpersonal relationships. Arroyo (2012) and Humada (2008), who contributed with more strategies, said that the collaborative work is acquired by applying different stages of the learning methodology based on projects, and it also encourages the interaction and communication between the members, promoting significant learning through problem solving. The relevance of reinforcing this learning is supported by the need to provide students with tools not only to improve their performance (García, 2005; Moreano & Roca, 2014; Llontop, 2015), but also to avoid dropping out (Ferruci & Pastor, 2013).

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