

# Using English Discourse Markers (EDMs) by Saudi EFL Learners: A Descriptive Approach

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**Abstract**

**Background:** The language of EFL learners is of special interests to linguists. Little research has been tackled on issues concerning English Discourse Markers (EDMs) among Saudi EFL learners.

**Aims:** Employing a corpus-based descriptive analysis, the current study attempts at detecting EDMs in the talk of Saudi EFL learners, their frequency, use, usage, etc., in comparison to other EFL learners as well as native speakers.

**Methods:** Two hundreds Saudi EFL learners were randomly selected from 20 public and private schools (ten students from each school) across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Subjects were individually recorded while they were studying English in class. Recordings were then linguistically and statistically analyzed by the researchers.

**Conclusion:** Results illustrate that EDMs “and”, “but” and “also” are the most frequent EDMs in the talk of Saudi EFL learners. These devices are randomly used by Saudi EFL learners who mix their use (appropriateness) with usage (correctedness) due to the influence of their L1 (Arabic). In compare to other EFL learners (native and non-native), Saudi EFL learners use less EDMs. These results confirmed the claims that EFL learners use EDMs less than native speakers. This paper, although preliminary in nature, can help arrive a better understanding of using EDMs by Saudi EFL learners. Further, it can also assist in getting appropriate insights into the way how these EDMs are used in Arab Gulf countries. The researchers decided to conduct an in-depth study into the use of EDMs in the oral work of Saudi EFL learners.

**Keywords:** English discourse markers, Saudi EFL learners, use, usage, frequency, native speakers

## 1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication among people all over the world and this is considered one of its major functions. People normally use language in order to express their ideas, feelings, emotions, beliefs, lore, etc. to others in different places and situations including classroom lessons. In brief, language is used as a tool through which one can diffuse his/ her culture and absorb others' culture (s). Not only do people limit themselves to language use and communication, but they interact as well. Of course, this interaction requires the use of language tools of which discourse makers (DMs) are some of them. The dictionary defines the word "discourse" as "a serious speech or piece of writing on a particular subject." (Longman, 1995, P. 383). On the other hand, the word "mark" is defined as "a sign that is written or printed" (ibid. P. 875). An approach to English Discourse Markers (EDMs) was introduced by Halliday & Hasan (1976) and is known as systematic function grammar approach. The philosophy of this approach is based on the view that EDMs are effective cohesive devices that have different meanings and functions in segment organization.

Based on such approach, Schiffrin (1987) defines EDMs as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" and that they are used as providers to "contextual coordinates for utterances" (Schiffrin, 1987, P. 31). Moreover, he has developed his own model known as Schiffrin's coherence model (1987) which contends that EDMs have four coherence functions. These are: Exchange structure, action structure, ideational structure, and participation framework. Generally, EDMs have been agreed to have a crucial role in the organization of interlocutors' speech. According to Schiffrin (1987) "They help understanding speech and information progression and facilitate speakers' comprehension by creating a smooth and spontaneous interaction between them" (Schiffrin, 1987, P. 31).

Redeker (1990) classifies EDMs into two broad categories: EDMs that mark ideational structure, such as connectives and temporal adverbials (e.g. and, meanwhile, or now) and those which mark pragmatic structure (e.g. *oh*, *alright* or *well*). The second approach is Fraser's (1999) grammatical-pragmatic perspective. According to Fraser, EDMs are not only used for textual coherence; rather, they refer to the intention of the speaker to the next turn in the preceding utterances. However, some linguists suggested examining such ideas by applying them to more than one language to see whether or not information processing and transformation can be made based on EDMs (Sankoff et al., 1997; Jucker & Smith, 1998; Hellermann & Vergun, 2007). Others preferred testing the functional and grammatical-pragmatic part (Jucker & Ziv, 1998) which opened the door for other linguists who came later on and investigated the phenomenon broadly.

For example, Fraser (1999) has introduced two main types of EDMs: EDMs which relate to messages and those relating to topics. The former type, according to Fraser, consists of four sub-types: Contrastive markers (e.g. *though*, *but*, *contrary to this/that*, *conversely*, etc.), collateral markers (e.g. *above all*, *also*, *besides*, *I mean*, etc.), inferential markers (e.g. *accordingly*, *so*, *then*, *therefore*, *thus*, etc.), and additional subclass (e.g. *after all*, *since*, *because*, etc.). The second type includes examples such as "*back to my original point*",

“before I forget”, “by the way”, etc. (Fraser, 1999, P. 946). This functionality convinced some linguists to believe that EDMs share some characteristics with each other. These include: Flexibility with regard to their position in the utterance, influence to the meaning, separate tone unites and their lexical origins (Archakis, 2001). The issue of “*logicality origin*” motivated Fuller who in 2003 traced the German and English origins of some EDMs. Outlined results of Fuller’s study show that “*well*” and “*so*” are highly detachable EDMs whereas “*y’know*” and “*but*” are low detachable EDMs.

Douglas (2008) points out that discourse analysis involves examining both the language form and language function used by speech community members. Some linguists add that the focus should be on the pragmatic fossilization of EDMs in both EFL children and adults. They justify their view by saying that EDMs are context-specific and have functions on the textual and interpersonal level (Trillo, 2002; Aijmer, 2002). Others prefer comparing ESL learners to native speakers to see to what extent they make use of EDMs in their conversations. Müller (2004) compared German ESL college learners to American native speakers and found that the former used EDMs less than the latter. EDMs like “*you know*” may be employed to make information clear, “*Oh*” may be used to indicate that the speaker received new information, and “*Ok*” may act as a movement towards closure. Since EDMs are integral to native speakers’ everyday speech, it may be assumed that they deserve special attention in language classrooms. Despite their vital role in spoken, EDMs have a minor role in the syllabus. According to De Klerk (2005), this can be attributable to “their (EDMs) lack of clear semantic denotation and syntactic role, which makes formal or explicit commentary on their use fairly difficult” (De Klerk, 2005, P. 275).

Interdisciplinary, this means that EDMs help build the local coherence that is collectively setup by both the hearer and the speaker in their interaction and context. EDMs are text-structuring tools that act as markers of openings or closings of discourse units or in-between transitions (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). In addition, EDMs are largely used by teachers to assist in the flow of information from them to students during the learning process. According to Walsh (2006), EFL teachers use EDMs in order to achieve certain pedagogical purposes that map the classroom lesson plan. The use and functions of EDMs are key elements in teacher talk. A more elaborated study was undertaken by Liu (2006) who examined EDMs in Chinese literature class from a pragmatic analysis perspective. Results show that EDMs have a role in the functions of discussion and control of social relationships. Some linguists claim that this social relationship starts from the school where EDMs used by the students should be integrated by those of the learners which make them (EDMs) sentence connectives (Amador Moreno, 2006; Cohen, 2007).

A recent study conducted by Fung & Carter (2007) compares a corpus of spoken British English (native speakers) to a corpus of classroom discourse in Hong Kong (non-native speakers) with regard to their production of EDMs. The two researchers found that both native and non-native speakers show discrepancies in the use of EDMs. Based on these results, they categorized EDMs into four types. Mainly, these are: Interpersonal (e.g. *I see, I think, ok, great, etc.*), referential (e.g. *because, and, or, so, anyway, etc.*), structural (e.g. *now, right, first, then, next, etc.*) and cognitive (e.g. *I mean, well, sort of, etc.*). Some EDMs under

these types were discussed by some researchers who believe that understanding EDMs determines understanding their characteristic features. According to them, the use of the DM “*ok*” is an example of a minimized form that does not have propositional and syntactic structure and functions to demonstrate understanding in many types of contexts. The description of “*ok*” focuses on the occurrence of the form in significant transitions in the discourse (Schegloff, 1982, 2007). Thus, the term EDMs has not yet reached an agreement among linguists. This may be accounted for because of the different research standpoints that tackled EDMs now and then (Cohen, 2007; Han, 2008).

Results of a study by Torres & Potowski’s (2008) comparing Mexican (n=23), Puerto (n=17) and MexiRican (n=11) Spanish use of bilingual EDMs shows that “*so*” is a core borrowing for all bilingual subjects. Such results encouraged some researchers to investigate EDMs during teaching process. One of those researchers is Yu (2008) who examined the EDMs in six moves during the teaching process: Opening, information checking, information clarification, responding, comment, and repetition. She concluded that using EDMs appropriately strengthens the effectiveness’ of classroom teaching. Strictly speaking, EDMs have been broadly researched in pedagogical settings. Many studies concentrated on the use of these markers in second language teaching (Romero, 2002; Müller, 2005; Seedhouse, 2009). Some linguists have examined whether or not social environment affects individual when using EDMs. Liao (2009), for example, examined the use of nine (9) EDMs among six Chinese learners. Mainly, these EDMs are: “*yeah*”, “*oh*”, “*you know*”, “*like*”, “*well*”, “*I mean*”, “*ok*”, “*right*”, and “*actually*”. Results of the study show that social identities, language attitude, and participation in the local community with their individual repertoires are some of the effects.

Testing the effects of EDMs on the receptive skill (reading) of Spanish EFL learners, Martinez (2009) found that there is a significant correlation between using EDMs and comprehending a written text. Some linguists claim that testing a language skill or a language component is not enough. According to them, more than one skill is required and extensive corpora should be used to get better results. Employing a corpus-based contrastive analysis to compare EDMs in the talk of Chinese EFL learners and native English speakers, Wang (2009) concluded her study by emphasizing the fact that there is a significant difference between Chinese and British learners. Unlike British learners, Chinese learners overuse EDMs, notably those with overt semantic senses. These EDMs, according to the researchers, include: “*and*”, “*I think*” and “*so*”, and pause fillers like “*um*”, “*er*” and “*en*”.

In recent studies, new trends have been developed to investigate EDMs in depth. Researchers almost covered all aspects of EDMs. One of the few studies is Othman’s (2010) study in which he investigated three particular EDMs: “*Okay*”, “*right*”, and “*yeah*” employed by college lecturers in Lancaster University. He found that college lecturers use these three EDMs as structural signals in turn-taking during lecture as a subconscious behavior. The researchers concluded that EDMs serve as functions or organizers for the utterance at the structural level that help the speaker (teacher) to communicate his ideas or knowledge with the hearer (learner). Der & Marko (2010) investigated the use of some EDMs among 50 Hungarian learners. The researcher focused on the most frequent EDMs and whether or not

they are used independently. Regarding the first point, the study's results show that some EDMs exceed 200 tokens and these EDMs are: "well", (415 tokens) "so" (338 tokens), "but" (290 tokens) and "yes" (264 tokens). Another group of EDMs, however, ranged between 100 and 200 tokens. Notably, these EDMs are: "no" (194), "and" (149), "then" (114), and "yeah" (100). Last group are those EDMs that had below 100 tokens. These EDMs are: "thus" (98), "let's say" (83), "so that" (68), "good" (56), "incidentally" (54), and "let me see" (53). Concerning the second question whether or not these EDMs can be separately used, the results show that all the above mentioned EDMs stand-alone (i.e., independently used).

Great attention has been paid to EDMs in teacher's speech within the classroom environment. Examining the talk-in-interaction of Korean-English bilingual children and their monolingual peers in two languages (Korean and English), Kim's study (2010) uncovers that bilingual children developed interactional competence through the use of EDMs in various natural interactions. Such result enhanced other researchers to investigate the phenomenon using more data. In response to such results, Bell (2010) used 8 million-word corpus to examine concessive EDMs "nevertheless/ nonetheless", "still" and "yet". The researchers concluded that apart from "yet" there appears no significant difference in the occurrence of "nevertheless/ nonetheless" and "still" EDMs. In detail, the corpus yielded 254 tokens of "nevertheless/nonetheless", 802 tokens of EDM "yet" and 262 tokens of EDM "still".

Undertaking three experiments to find out the effect of the substitution of EDMs on their suggested role, the results of Al Kohlani's study (2010) show that substitution has a differential effect on the localization and assessment of coherence and dialogue goal. Investigating the indexicality of EDMs (EDMs) in Chinese conversational narrative, Xiao (2010) found that EDMs not only manifests the broad and complex relationships between linguistic forms and discourse situations, but also reveals fundamental tensions that drive human communication. Some EDMs have more than one function like EDMs "I think" and "I believe" that are also found to be used as main clause (MC), and comment clause (Dehé, 2010). Such results confirmed the fact that EDMs have discursive and pragmatic functions (Matei, 2010). These functions, according to other researchers, could be invested for pedagogical purposes in matters concerning thought organizing and structuring like the DM "now" for example which can be used as temporal relations between utterances in a discourse (Gulzar & Qadir, 2010; Gánem-Gutiérrez & Roehr, 2011; Schourup, 2011).

Investigating the most commonly used EDMs among British teenagers and how and why young people use them, Martinez (2011) concluded that "I might", "I might go", "I mean", and "It depends on money things and stuff" are the most used EDMs. According to the study, EDMs like "although", "stuff" and "everything" often lose their original set-marking condition in teenage production. The researcher claims that some of the reasons for using such EDMs by British teenagers are related to features typical of "grammaticalization." Some researchers drew attention to the "grammaticalization" and "(inter)subjectification" of EDMs. Such issues are investigated by different researchers like Degand & Vandenberg (2011) who examined some EDMs including: "I think", "actually", "by the way", "instead" and "because". Results of Degand and his colleague show that while the first two EDMs are non-relational, the last three are relational. Comparing the use of EDMs to four discourse

functions by college learners of English in China at different proficiency levels, Wei's (2011) study suggests that proficiency level relates to the way EDMs are used across contextual variations.

Depending upon corpus data from the British component of the International Corpus of English, Haselow's study (2011) provides a detailed account of the pragmatic functions of one of the EDMs in spoken English. Mainly, this DM is the final "then". According to the researcher, DM "then" is used to link the utterance it accompanies to a preceding utterance that is retrospectively converted into a conditional particle. Some researchers chose comparing the frequency of EDMs. For example, Jabeen et al., (2011) compared the frequency of eight EDMs (*I mean, you know, I think, kind of, sort of, well, you see, so*) in British and Pakistani speech. The outcomes of the study validated the claim that native speakers use more EDMs than non-native speakers. According to the team, Pakistani learners use EDMs in all positions (i.e., initial, medial and final) unlike native learners who, generally speaking, use them at the beginning. Others went further by interpreting EDMs lexically and grammatically. For instance, Lewis (2011) analyzes two EDMs: "instead", and "rather" from different linguistic perspectives and concludes that DM senses are closer to the grammatical end of the lexical-grammatical cline, the expressions can be said to have grammaticalized.

Investigating the wider use of the DM "that" in 302 Japanese learners (302) and 252 Chinese learners, Yan's (2011) study concluded that this DM has a dual usage. That is, it can be used as politeness marker as well as modality marker. Some researchers concentrated on other probable roles played by EDMs. For example, Popescu-Belis & Zufferey (2011) have elaborately discussed the lexical, prosodic/positional and sociolinguistic features EDMs "like" and "well". Outlined results show that the most reliable indicators are followed by prosodic/positional features, while sociolinguistic features are marginally useful for the identification of DM "like" and not useful for "well". Others preferred examining the use of EDMs outside the pedagogical frame. Vickers & Goble (2011) investigated the use of some EDMs including: "Well" and "Now" among Spanish speakers working in the field of medicine. The two researchers show that out of 915 English words, 317 tokens EDMs were used. They also concluded that EDMs serve to exacerbate the power relationship between providers and patients even though it does not cause overt miscommunication in the ongoing interaction.

Based on corpora extracted from recorded natural conversation, Lee-Goldman (2011) proposed three senses of "no" as a DM, on the basis of their pragmatic, semantic, and turn-sequential characteristics. According to the study, these senses do the work of (i) topic shift, (ii) managing misunderstanding, and (iii) turn-taking conflict resolution. Some researchers used another technique for data collection. The new strategy is known as the developmental learner corpora and it depends on tracing learner's language acquisition for a year. Polat (2011) conducted a study using this strategy. The aim of the study was to identify which EDM is dominantly used by new EFL learners. Results outline that DM "you know" is the most frequent EDMs. According to the researcher, the occurrence of "you know" was 2300 tokens per 100,000 words.

Hernández (2011) has undertaken a study to examine the combined effect of overt instruction (EI) and input flood (IF) among 66 Spanish subjects (EI= 36 and IF= 30) by comparing them to a control group (25 subjects). Results show that the combined effect of EI and IF was not superior to IF alone in promoting students' use of EDMs as measured on the post-test speaking tasks. It is for this reason, perhaps, that some linguists recommend drawing a great attention to the teacher's language (Ghabanchi, et al., 2011; Gießler, 2012). Some suggested that a distinction ought to be made between EDMs used for different purposes depending upon what topic we are talking about. Hengeveld (2012) examines the referential markers and agreement markers in functional discourse grammar. According to the researchers, these markers are on a language-specific basis classified as either contextual agreement markers or as appositional referential markers.

Discussing a sentence-terminal DM "Ketun" meaning "if/ when that is the case" in his language (Korean), Kim (2011) found that this DM plays a catalytic role in the grammaticalization processes. According to the researcher, the speaker tends to use this DM to clarify a point, make excuses, apologize, provide background information, mitigate illocutionary forces, or redress face-threatening acts. Likewise, Zhuang (2012) investigated the most frequent EDMs in the speech of Chinese EFL learners to test the effect of conjunctives on their listening comprehension. Having classified the conjunctives into three groups: adversative, temporal, additive and causal, Zhuang concluded that additive is the most frequent group (13) followed by assertive (11) then temporal (9) and finally causal (4). Specifically and according to the researcher, "also" and "but" are the most frequent EDMs with 7 tokens for each. While "and" is the second most frequent DM (3 tokens), "however", "because", "firstly", "second" and "secondly" come after with 2 tokens each. Other EDMs are only mentioned once. These include: "in other words", "for instance", "for example", "nevertheless", "in fact", "for all of these reasons", "so", "thirdly", "then", and "first of all".

### *1.1 Aims of the Study*

So far, no study has been undertaken to investigate how EDMs are used in EFL classrooms in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The purpose of the present study is to explore how this linguistic phenomenon is used by Saudi EFL learners. More specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most frequent EDMs used by Saudi school learners in EFL classrooms in comparison to those EFL learners from English speaking countries?
2. How and why Saudi EFL learners use EDMs the way they do?
3. Who used EDMs more, Saudi school learners or their colleagues from other native and non-native English speaking countries? How such results can be used to contribute to the teaching of conversation to Saudi EFL learners?

### *1.2 Methodology*

The current study is descriptive by nature which means that data collection is mainly based



on a simple frequency description. The subjects(S)are 200 Saudi male EFLlearnersstudying at20 public and private secondary schools in KSA. Nearly all subjects have not been in any of the English speaking countries before; therefore, their level of proficiency in English is almost similar.Subjects were divided into four groups (G) as follows: G1.includes subjects 1-50, G2.includessubjects 51-100, Group 3 consists of subjects 101- 150 and G.4 contains subjects 151-200.The ages range between 17-20. The data were spontaneously collected which means that the subjects naturally produced the language. The subjects were individually recorded while they were studying English.

Having the collected data, the second step was to analyze these data (answer the study questions) linguistically and statistically. After that, data were statistically analyzed. Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) was administered to describe data frequencies and compare them to outcomes of other studies.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Most Frequent EDMs in Saudi EFL Classrooms

As mentioned earlier, the first objective of the present study is to determine which EDMs in particular are most frequent in the talk of Saudi EFL learners. Having finished listening to data recorded, the researchers started to count EDMs. In order to ensure the validity of the research, they asked three specialists (two mathematicians and a statistician) to count them again manually and electronically. Furthermore, he made two copies (hard and soft copies) wherein subjects' utterances were written. After that, utterances were entered in Encondensensor program to count them automatically before they were sent to SPSS which is the complementary strand of the present study.

Concerning the most frequent EDMs, SPSS results reveal that “*and*”, “*also*”, and “*besides*” are the most frequent EDMs in comparison to other EDMs uttered by subjects of the present study. Consider:

Table 1. Most frequent EDMs: 1st rank (*and*, *but* and *also*).

<i>Device &amp; No. of freq.</i>	<i>And</i>	<i>But</i>	<i>Also</i>
<i>Subjects</i>			
1-50	136	64	51
51-100	154	56	54
101-150	150	58	61
151-200	74	54	48
<i>Total</i>	<i>514</i>	<i>232</i>	<i>212</i>
<i>Mean</i>	<i>2.57</i>	<i>1.16</i>	<i>1.07</i>

As can be seen in Table 1, “*and*” is found to be the most frequent device (514 tokens), followed by “*but*” (232 tokens) then “*also*” (212 tokens). The second most frequent EDMs are “*so*”, “*because*”, and “*however*”. The following table clarifies the number of frequencies

for this group. Consider:

Table 2. Middle frequent EDMs: 2nd rank (*so, because, and however*).

<i>Device &amp; No. of freq.</i>	<i>So</i>	<i>Because</i>	<i>However</i>
<i>Subjects</i>			
1-50	50	26	46
51-100	54	42	27
101-150	40	38	12
151-200	34	26	36
<i>Total</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Mean</i>	<i>0.89</i>	<i>0.66</i>	<i>0.60</i>

In comparison with Table 1, Table 2 shows less frequency in the use of EDMs by the subjects at hand. Consequently, “*so*” registered the highest score in this group (178 tokens) in comparison to “*because*” (132 tokens) and “*however*” (121 tokens). However, the further we move, the less frequent EDMs become. This can be clearly identified in Table 3 which describes the frequencies of EDMs “*besides*”, “*therefore*” and “*yet*”. Consider:

Table 3. Less frequent EDMs: 3rd rank (*besides, therefore and yet*).

<i>Device &amp; No. of freq.</i>	<i>Besides</i>	<i>Therefore</i>	<i>Yet</i>
<i>Subjects</i>			
1-50	12	8	6
51-100	14	8	6
101-150	44	6	4
151-200	14	5	1
<i>Total Score</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>0.47</i>	<i>0.13</i>	<i>0.08</i>

Again, Table 3 shows that in comparison with “*therefore*” (27 tokens) and “*yet*” (17 tokens), “*besides*” is the most frequent EDM (94). On the other hand, EDM “*and*” remains the most frequent EDM in all three Tables (514 tokens). The following figure summarizes these three tables Consider:

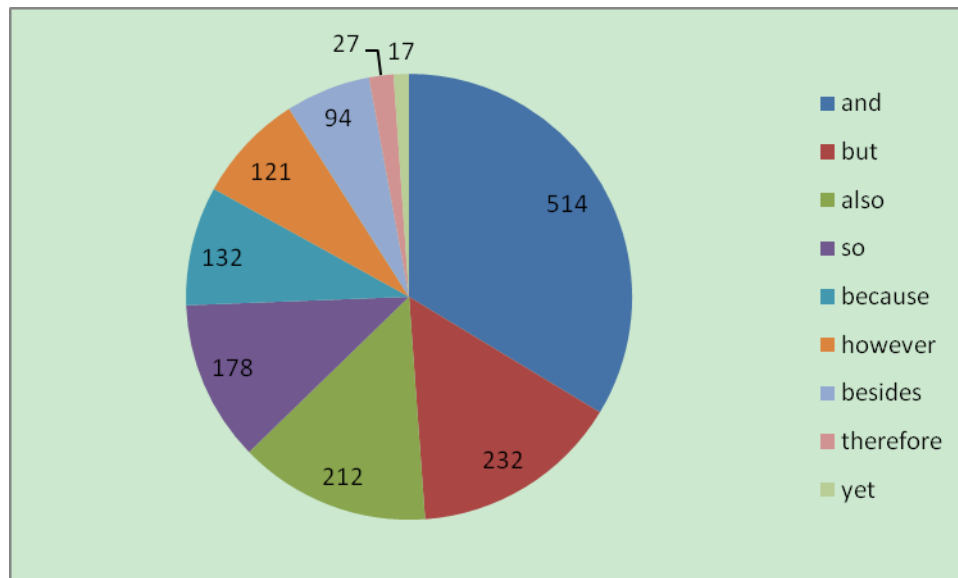


Figure 1. Frequencies of all EDMs

Based on the available data in Figure 1, it is obvious now that EDMs “and”, “but”, and “also” occupied the first rank among all other EDMs. While EDMs “so”, “because” and “however” fall in the middle, EDMs “besides”, “therefore”, and “yet” occupied the third rank. It is to be noted herethat these frequencies were registered based on their existence in the actual data no matter how they are used.

## 2.2 Using EDMs by Saudi EFL School Learners

Strictly speaking, the use of EDMs by Saudi EFL learners is not utterly different from that of other EFL learners. However, in comparison to native speakers, the difference is there. EDMs have been differently used by native and non-native learners (Müller, 2005). Studies show that native speakers use EDMs more than EFL learners (Sankoff et al., 1997; Fuller, 2003). It is felt that a distinction ought to be made between the two groups (EFL learners and native speakers) in matters concerning the usage of EDMs. Unlike native speakers who use EDMs in a functional way (Sciffrin, 1987; Jucker & Ziv, 1998; Aijmer, 2002; Müller, 2004) as separate tone unites (Othman, 2010), non-native learners, notably Saudi EFL learners use them randomly. Yet, both native and non-native learners face some discrepancies when using those (Fung & Carter, 2007).

However, these small discrepancies do not mean that native speakers cannot use EDMs appropriately. Conversely, they know how and why these EDMs should be used. For example, EDMs functioning as opening information are normally used at the beginning by native speakers. This is not the case when it comes to Saudi EFL learners who tend to use them randomly (initial, medial and final). In detail, the native speakers know how to initiate the floor (discourse), hold it and end it. This professional and convenient usage of EDMs is normally accompanied by signals (e.g., falling intonations, eye gaze, expressions, etc.) predicted by the listener as signs that the speaker wants to initiate, maintain or hand the

discourse over. EFL learners in general and Saudi EFL learners in particular commit both mistakes relating to both the use and usage of these EDMs although they use them less than native speakers (al- 'Anbāri, 1992; Jabeen et al., 2011).

The researchers believe that committing errors this way by Saudi EFL learners is due to the fact that the learners' speech was spontaneous; that is why, utterances were not all times correct. Undoubtedly, there are many other factors (linguistic and non-linguistic) that should be taken into consideration. These include: The lack of practicing the language, especially with native speakers. Weakness of education in public primary, elementary schools is another factor. Additionally, the culture of the society where in the eyes of society members learning English is something, religiously speaking, worthless and cannot be compared to other courses. It is true that this bad impression used to be dominant in the last few decades, but its effects remain in the performance of Saudi EFL learners today. Also, students convinced themselves that their problems with language are permanent and can never be solved. Taken together, the result is unqualified generation and weak learners who misuse language expressions, rules, vocabulary, devices, etc.

In the present study, the use and/ or usage of EDMs by Saudi EFL learners was inappropriate or incorrect most of the times. For example, “*and*” which is the most frequent EDM in all three tables has been misused many times in different positions throughout the recordings. This violation of this important device was made nearly by all subjects. Subjects of G2 committed the large number of mistakes, followed by subjects of G.3, then those of G.1 and G.4. Some mistakes of the subjects of G2 are listed below Consider:

1- \*The car was very old and I bought it. (S.53)

2- \*I have a pen and which is new. (S.67)

3- \*It is very cold and the weather is nice. (S.92)

As can be obviously seen in the above three mentioned examples, the use of “*and*” lacks both “*appropriateness*” and “*correctedness*”. In the first and third examples, he substituted “*but*” with “*and*” where he should have said: “The car was very old, but I bought it.” in the first example and “It is very cold, but the weather is nice.” in the third to avoid contradiction. In the second sentence, “*and*” was wrongly used. There is no need for “*and*” at all. Alternatively, the speaker could have said: “I have a new pen.” Or “My Pen is new.” A sentence like: “I have a pen which is new.” is one more alternative choice that speaker could have selected.

Using a false analogy by comparing English to Arabic, S.22 misused the EDM “*and*” when he mentions it initially. This mistake can be obviously seen in one of his utterances when he says: “And Ali and Ahmed should participate in that competition.” Obviously, EDM “*and*” is misused here. It cannot be initially used, notably with numeration where it is supposed to be preceded by something (name/ object). In fact, even in Arabic, the use of EDM “*and*” in this position exactly is in appropriate (al-Sijistānī, 616 A.H; al- Duwaynī, 1995).

However, “*and*” has been correctly used by other subjects. Below are three sentences uttered by S.57, S.144, and S.19, Consider:

1-Let's see page five and page six.

2-If you can't answer it, and then let me try and you will see how smart I am.

3-We should talk mainly about the present and the past.

As can be clearly seen in the above three mentioned sentences, the EDM “*and*” has been appropriately and grammatically used.

“*But*” is another EDM that has been frequently used by the subjects under the question. In fact, it is the second most frequent device that has been used (232 tokens) in comparison to “*and*”, “*also*”, “*so*”, “*because*”, “*however*”, “*besides*”, “*therefore*”, and “*yet*”, (514 tokens), (212 tokens), (178 tokens), (132 tokens), (121 tokens), (94 tokens), (27 tokens) and (17 tokens) respectively. Despite of its frequency, the use of this EDM lacks sometimes appropriateness. Consider, for example, S.16, S.77 and S.170 who used certain utterances without using the EDM “*but*” although these utterances lack clarifications. Sentences like:

1-I wanted to come to your class Sir and I could not. (S.16)

2-But in order to prove to you that I respect you, I talked to him. (S.77)

3-You can come to the wedding of my eldest brother, please do not tell my father about my absence from classes. (S.170)

As can be seen in the above three mentioned sentences, the utterances of S.16 lacks the EDM “*but*” that has been randomly replaced by “*and*”. The use of the EDM “*but*” in the second sentence is also inappropriate. The third utterance, however, lacks the EDM “*but*” which was supposed to be inserted between the verb “*come*” and the word “*please*”.

Unlike “*and*”, “*also*” and “*besides*”, “*but*” has been correctly used nearly by nearly all other subjects at hand. This can be clearly seen in the utterances of S. 19, S.43 and S.79. The three examples listed below explain such usage. Consider:

1-I would like you to write what is on the board, but before that, read page seventy- four.

2-Read the second paragraph, but don't go fast.

3- I would like you to write in blue, but not in red.

The researchers believe that it may be accounted for because of the fact that the lesson has been well prepared by the learners. Additionally, the use of “*but*” is normally known to every EFL learner who tend to use it in their everyday life to justify their apology, prove something, etc.

Like the EDMs “*and*” and “*but*”, “*also*” has been misused by some of the subjects at hand, notably those of the second and third groups. This can be clearly seen in the utterances of S.73, S. 96 and S. 108. Consider:

1-\*Who also want to read?

2-\*Who also want to go?

3-\*Do you want to say anything also?

In the three examples listed above, “*also*” has been incorrectly used. In detail, whereas “*also*” in the first two examples indicates some problems in the use, in the third example, it refers to problems in usage. In other words, the first two questions are grammatically accepted (in using also), but not semantically or pragmatically. In the third question, neither the use nor the usage of the EDM “*also*” is correct. However, the three subjects should have used “*else*” in the above three mentioned questions. Away from using “*also*”, there is another grammatical mistake in the first two examples. Since the two examples are in the third-person-singular-number present simple tense, the inflexional suffix “*s*” should be added to the verb to form the tense. Thus, the questions should have been re-written as follows:

1-Who else wants to read?

2- Who else wants to go?

3-Do you want to say anything else?

The researchers believe that this may be accounted for because of the influence of mother tongue (Arabic). To date, S.73, S.96, and S.108 used the literal translation when they uttered these sentences. However, in Arabic, (’Ayḍan), ‘also’/ ‘too’ is used here to mean not only “*also*” or “*too*”, but even “*either*” (al-Zamakhshari, 1993).

Influenced by their mother tongue, S. 5, S. 64, S. 78, and S. 196 used the EDM “*also*” inappropriately and this can be noted in their utterances when they say:

1-Also I want to explain another lesson for you.

2-Also you could not answer the question.

3-Also your hand writing was not clear.

4-Also it was full of mistakes.

In Standard Arabic (SA), using more than one DM is important. According to some Arab grammarians, it makes the speaker’s speech less boring and interesting. It also helps audience to follow what he/she says; that is why, they suggest using expressions similar to other expressions, recommending the speaker to use them from time to time. However, for the Arabic (ayḍan), ‘also’, the speaker can, alternatively, use (walā nansā ayḍan), ‘Nor must we forget’ (ibn al-Mutarraz, 1979), (walā yafūṭunī an adhkur), ‘I should not forget to mention’ (al-Jurjānī, 1983), (zid ‘alā dhālik), ‘Moreover’ (al-’Anṣārī, 1985), (faḍlan ‘an), ‘In addition to’ (ibn Jinnī, 1985), etc.

Nearly all subjects of G.3 used “*also*” in a correct way. This is better being illustrated through the examples listed below. Consider:

1-I was also there. (S.101)

2-I can also understand phonetics to some extent.(S.104)

3-He is also a good classmate. (S.127)

4-I will also go there. (S.133)

5-I can also inform him (his classmate Ahmad) about the new instructions. He is my neighbor Sir. (S.139)

6-They are also my friends. (S.146)

Although the second sentence of S.104 has some problems at the end, the use of “*also*” in this sentence is, generally speaking, correct. It should be noted here that “*also*” is the most EDM that has been used by G.3 of Saudi EFL learners.

The EDM “*so*” was incorrectly used by S. 39 and this can be seen in his utterance when he says: “So as to say...” where he should have said: “So to say...” The same EDM was incorrectly used by S. 91 who misused it twice in his sentences. Consider:

1-So, I did not see him there so.

However, the EDM “*so*” was correctly used by many other subjects. The following sentences are some of these uses. Consider:

1-Your Arabic teacher is absent today, so I will teach you English instead. (S.2)

2-You are late so you will have to clean the board. (S.14)

3- I have not seen so many foreign students at our school before. (S.26)

4- Sir, he is so weak that he can hardly stand up. (S.67)

5- He does so enjoy practicing the same examples you give us in the class Sir. (S.151)

The same thing applies to other EDMs including “*because*” that has been wrongly used by S.70 when he says: “Because you, I punished others.” Alternatively, S.70 could have said: “Because of you, I punished others.” Or “I punished others because of you.” Of course, the picture is not all black, S.119 and S. 179, for example, used EDM “*because*” properly and this can be seen in their sentences. Consider:

1-Sir, I think that we should to go faster in the syllabus because we are late.

2-I need your permission Sir because I have to travel.

The EDM “*however*” has been inappropriately used and this can be seen in the discourse of S.5 when he used it at the end of the sentence (in the position of *instead*). This can be illustrated through S.15 sentence. Consider:

1-I thought they (his classmates) will reward me for what I have done for them; they wrote a petition against me and gave it to the principle however.

The same device was misused by S.81 who misused it in one of his utterances. Consider:

1-I was sick in the last class, however, I did not come.

As can be seen in the two examples mentioned above, the EDM “*however*” was used in a position where another EDM (so) should be used in. Again, researchers believe that this is a normal result of not practicing the language with the native speakers. However, the use of the EDM “*however*” is characterized by being correct. Evidence from recorded data reveals no mistake in the use of any of them. Consider:

1-He is a good student however he comes late to the class. (S.40)

2-The bell rang however no one is in the class. (S.62)

As mentioned in Table 3. “*besides*” has been mentioned 94tokens which makes it the seventh DM that has been used by the three groups. Undoubtedly, in comparison to EDMs “*therefore*” (27 tokens) and “*yet*” (17 tokens), “*besides*” is more frequently used. Like any other device in grammar in general and in EDMs in particular, “*besides*” was correctly used by some subjects and incorrectly misused by some others. This can be clearly illustrated in light of the utterances of the subjects 107, 118, and 167. Consider:

1-\*I will sit besides Nasser.

2-\*Come and sit besides your friend.

3-\*Look, besides you.

Readers can easily identify that “*besides*” has been mistakenly used by S107. S.118 of G.3 and S167 of G.4The three subjects could not distinguish the uses of “*besides*” as an adverb (that is normally used as one of EDMs) from its use as a preposition (beside). Lexically speaking, “*besides*”, the adverb, “is used when making another point or statement after one that you have already made” (Longman, 1995, P. 108), whereas “*beside*”, the preposition means “next to or very close to someone or something” (ibid. P. 108). However, the researchers believes that this “*randomness*” in the use of this lexical term is because of the fact that the word “*besides*” can also be used as a preposition so to mean “in addition to a point, statement, etc., that has just been mentioned” (ibid.P.108).

When S.18 replaced the EDM “*also*” with the EDM “*besides*” and used the latter in a position where it should not be used there, he was committing a pragmatic mistake. Consider, for example, his utterance: “You should besides bring your medical report when you come to the principle.” As can be seen in the above mentioned utterance, S.18 substituted the EDM “*also*” with the EDM “*besides*” which reflects his lack of practicing these EDMs. It should be noted here that when the researchers asked him after the interview about the reason for using this EDM that way, he said that he was imitating one of his colleagues.

Like other EDMs, the EDM “*besides*” has been correctly used in many different positions by many subjects. This can be clearly seen in the utterances of S.3, S.54, and S.116. Consider:

1- It is hot; besides, the air-conditioner is not working.

2- Besides English, I will teach you history.

3- Besides my high temperature, I have flu.



The above mentioned examples show that subjects of G.1, G.1, and G.3 can use “*besides*” properly. Note here that punctuation marks like periods, question marks, commas, semi-colons, etc., are used although data are spoken, not written. Such punctuation marks are added by the researchers based on the fact that there were some supra-segmental changes in the propositions of the subjects.

The EDM “*therefore*” is another EDM that has been mistakenly misused by S. 111 who substituted it with “*finally*”. This can be illustrated in his sentence. Consider:

“...Finally, all unites of the book will be included in the final exam.” where he should have said: “.....; therefore, all unites of the book will be included in the final exam.” However, S.111, S. 115, S. 188, and S. 196 used the EDM “*therefore*” in a correct way and this can be obviously seen in some of their sentences. Consider:

1-Students sometimes lazy therefore I need to give extra activities.

2-I am very busy therefore I cannot help you.

3-Sir, we can travel to the exhibition by Ali’s car. It is bigger and therefore more comfortable.

4-We are, therefore, confident that our research will be completed on time. So, don’t worry Sir.

Finally, the EDM “*yet*” has been incorrectly used by some subjects. This can be observed in the utterance of S.124 when he says:

1-Although you did not answer my previous question, yet I will give you another one.

One more evidence can be taken from the talk of S. 198 when he says:

2-I have finished my homework yet.

However, the problem of S.124 sentence is that the EDM “*yet*” should be omitted here in this position because it is preceded by the conjunction (although) which is used to introduce a statement that makes his main statement seem surprising or unlikely; therefore, there was no need at all for adding the device “*yet*” in the second part of the sentence. S.124 should have said instead: “Although you did not answer my previous question, I will give you another one.” Committing a similar error to that of S.124, S.198 mistake is that the negative article “not” should be added to the sentence to form perfect present tense in its singular form. Clearly, S.198 should have said: “I have not finished my homework yet.”

Like other EDMs, “*yet*” was correctly used by many other subjects and this can be seen in the sentences of S.19, S.61, S. 89, S.91and S. 131 who used it in sentences like the following:

1-Your homework is good, yet, it needs some revision.

2-I am on a diet yet I want ice-cream.

3-Have not you done your assignment yet?

4-I have not told him yet.

5-Has your father arrived from Mecca yet?

It should be noted here that all the subjects involved in this study did not use other EDMs used by other EFL learners or non-native speakers. EDMs like “*that*”, “*I mean*”, “*you know*”, “*I think*”, “*kind of*”, “*sort of*”, “*well*”, “*you see*”, “*Nevertheless*”, “*still*”, “*I might*”, “*I might go*”, “*I mean*”, etc., were not used by any of the subjects of three groups’. Last but not least, the difference between native speakers and other EFL learners is that while the former use EDMs appropriately and in decided to the situations wherein they are supposed to be used, the latter use them either randomly or for more than one purpose. Japanese, for example, use the EDM “*that*” as a politeness marker as well as modality marker Yan (2011). Also, EDMs “*I think*” and “*I believe*” were used as main clause (MC), and comment clause (Dehé, 2010). The EDM “*but*” was used by many Saudi EFL learners for both clarification, and for providing background information. This reveals that Saudi EFL learners lack the grammatical functions of EDMs despite its importance (Jucker & Ziv, 1998).

### 2.3 EDMs Frequency among Native and Non-native Learners

Comparing the results of the frequencies for all EDMs, readers can easily identify that “*and*”, “*but*” and “*also*” are the most frequent. However, EDMs like “*so*”, “*because*” and “*however*” fall in the middle. Other EDMs including “*besides*” “*therefore*” and “*yet*” occupied the third rank in frequency. It is felt that a distinction ought to be made between the use of EDMs among EFL learners (Saudi and non-Saudi learners) and their colleagues from other English speaking countries. What makes such comparison complex to some extent is the fact that those EDMs that have been more frequently used by the subjects in hand are different from those from other EFL learners, yet from those native speakers themselves. Based on the outcomes of Tables 1, 2, 3 and Figure 1, “*and*”, “*but*” and “*also*” found to be the most frequent EDMs used by Saudi learners in EFL school classrooms respectively. There was an exponentially increase in the number of frequencies for these EDMs (over 200tokens) in comparison to the EDMs “*so*”, “*because*”, and “*however*”(100-200tokens) and EDMs “*besides*”, “*therefore*” and “*yet*” (less than 100 tokens). The case, however, is not the same when comparing these results to those of other studies. The following table compares the most frequent EDMs among EFL learners from one side. On the other hand, it compares these EDMs of EFL learners to their colleagues from English speaking countries from the other side. Compare:

Table 4. Most frequent EDMs among Saudi learners, EFL learners, and English speaking countries learners: Comparison

EDMs		
Learners' origin		“ <i>and</i> ”, “ <i>but</i> ”, and “ <i>also</i> ”
Saudi EFL school learners		
EFL school learners worldwide	Spanish	“ <i>so</i> ”, “ <i>well</i> ”, and “ <i>now</i> ”.
	Hungarian	“ <i>but</i> ” and “ <i>so</i> ”
	Chinese	“ <i>and</i> ”, “ <i>also</i> ” and “ <i>but</i> ”
Native speakers		“ <i>You know</i> ”, “ <i>yet</i> ”, “ <i>so</i> ”, “ <i>I might</i> ”, “ <i>I might go</i> ”, “ <i>I mean</i> ”, and “ <i>It depends on money things and stuff</i> ”

As can be clearly seen, the most frequent EDMs are not the same among learners from different world countries. Unlike Spanish subjects, for example, who used the EDMs “*so*”, “*but*” and “*now*” more than any other EDMs (Torres & Potowski, 2008; Vickers & Goble, 2011), “*and*”, “*also*”, and “*besides*” found to be the most frequent EDMs in the talk of Saudi subjects and this can be clearly seen in Tables 1,2, 3 and Figure 1. Also, Chinese subjects used EDMs “*and*”, “*also*” and “*but*” more than the EDMs “*however*”, “*because*” and “*so*” (Wang, 2009; Zhung, 2012). It means that Saudi EFL learners share Chinese EFL learners the use same use of EDMs (both use EDMs “*and*”, “*but*” and “*also*”). The only difference, however, is that while the EDM “*but*” occupies the second rank among Saudi EFL learners, it comes in rank number three in the discourse of Chinese EFL learners (the least most frequent EDM).

Likewise, Hungarian EFL learners partially agreed with both Spanish and Saudi EFL learners in the frequent use of EDMs “*but*” and “*so*” that occupied the first rank (more than 200 tokens), but again disagreed with Saudi EFL learners in the use of EDM “*and*” which occupied the second rank (less than 200 tokens) among Hungarian EFL learners (Der & Marko, 2010). The DM “*you know*” is found to be the most frequent device among American learners (Polat, 2011). From among 8 words of British speakers, the EDM “*yet*” is found to be the most frequent device (802 tokens) (Bell, 2010). In another study, “*so*”, “*I might*”, “*I might go*”, “*I mean*”, and “*It depends on money things and stuff*” are found to be the most frequent EDM among British subjects (Nickman, 2008; Martinez, 2011). However, in the present study, it came in the third rank with only 8 tokens (see Table 3). Finally, it should be noted that British speakers are found to be the most users of these EDMs. They use them more than Saudi, Spanish, Hungarian and Chinese and even Pakistani EFL learners (Jabeen et al., 2011).

### 3. Conclusion

Although complete evidence is not yet available, and although the research improvements cited earlier are necessary, there are some potential important implications for EDMs instruction based on existing findings. The study shows that EDMs “*and*”, “*but*” and “*also*” are the most frequent EDMs among Saudi EFL learners. Recordings show that “*and*” has been repeated 514tokens (Mean=14.7), “*but*” and “*also*” were repeated, according to the recordings, 232 and 212 tokens respectively (Means= 2.57, 1.16, and 1.07 respectively). For EDMs “*besides*”, “*therefore*” and “*yet*”, results show that they are the least frequent EDMs with 94, 27and 17 tokens (Means=0.47, 0.13 and 0.08 respectively). Results also show that EDMs “*so*”, “*because*”, and “*however*” fall in the middle between EDMs “*and*”, “*but*” and “*also*” and “*besides*”, “*therefore*” and “*yet*”. Score frequencies for these four EDMs are: 178, 132 and 121 tokens with means 0.89, 0.66 and 0.60 for each.

Outcomes also show that EFL learners do not use the same EDMs used by learners from other English native speaking countries. In fact, even Saudi EFL learners used these EDMs in different ways. For example, “*and*” proves to be the most frequent EDMs used by G.2 (S.51-100) who used it 154 tokens. The same device has been used 47 tokens by G.4 (S.151-200). The same groups used the EDM “*yet*” 6 tokens and 1 token respectively.

As mentioned in the analysis, some Saudi EFL learners mix the use/ usage of some EDMs with other grammatical devices. Others misuse the rules due to influence of mother tongue or first language (L1); that is why, they translated these words wrongly. Years of not practicing English in general and English grammar in particular play a pivotal role in committing such mistakes. In addition, the ignorance of grammatical rules (intentionally or unintentionally) participated in shifting such faults from the level of mistakes into the level of errors.

It should be noted here that EDMs are appropriately and inappropriately used almost by all groups. This can be clearly seen in the side conversations between one of the researchers and some subjects. For example, some subjects used the expression: “Me also” instead of “me too.”, others used EDMs in positions where they should have been used like using the adverb “also” before the auxiliary verbs in sentences like: “He also is a smart.” “Therefore” has also been preceded by “and”. This can be clearly seen in S7 sentence when he says: “And therefore, final exam was administered.” “So” has been deleted in expressions where it should not. This can be observed in the talk of S2, when one of the researchers asked him about his opinion of the future of KSA schools. The interviewer’s question was:

“Do you think KSA schools will improve in the following 5 years?” S2 answer was:” I don’t think, well, I hope.” The researchers believe that it may be accounted for because of the fact that these learners are not well qualified. They are either graduated from primary and secondary schools in the villages or from schools in cities where the language of teaching English was Arabic.

A paper of this length cannot completely answer the questions how and why EFL Saudi learners misuse EDMs. Further information about the reasons can be found in both Arabic grammar books (See, for example, al-Sijjistānī, 616 A.H; ibn al-Mutarrāz, 1979; al-Jurjānī, 1983; al-’Anṣārī, 1985; ibn Jinnī, 1985; al-’Anbārī, 1992; al-Zamakhsharī, 1993; al- Duwaynī, 1995, etc.) and English grammar books (See, for example, Azar & Hagen, 2006; Groen et al., 2010). Since some reasons are related to problems in translation, EFL learners are also advised to go through books of translation (See, for example, Shunnaq, 1983).

Saudi EFL learners should benefit from the outcomes of other studies which organize the use and usage of EDMs for them. One of these useful studies is Al Kohlani’s (2010) for example who suggested functional classifications for EDMs at the sentence and the paragraph levels. According to the researchers, the functions of EDMs in sentence level include: additive, contrastive, explanatory, inferential, sequential, alternative, exceptive, background, subjective and interactive discourse makers. On the other hand, EDMs functions used at the propositional level include: continuity, refocus, and change of topic.

With reference to the outcomes of the analyses for EDMs frequencies, it is found that Saudi EFL learners used EDMs not only less than native speakers, but also less than other EFL learners. This conclusion is supported by evidence from the numbers of the frequencies. For example, in the present study, Saudi EFL learners used “and” (514tokens), “but” (232tokens), “also” (212tokens), “so”(178 tokens), “because”(132 tokens), “however”(121 tokens), “besides”(94 tokens), “therefore” (27 tokens) and “yet” (17 tokens). Other EFL learners like

Hungarian for example uses EDMs “well”, (415 tokens) “so” (338 tokens), “but” (290 tokens), “yes” (264 tokens), “no” (194 tokens), “and” (149 tokens), “then” (114 tokens), “yeah” (100 tokens), “thus” (98 tokens), “let’s say” (83 tokens), “so that” (68 tokens), “good” (56 tokens), “incidentally” (54 tokens), and “let me see” (53 tokens) (Der & Marko, 2010).

Similarly, Saudi EFL learners used EDMs less than native speakers. This includes the corpus itself which proved to be lesser in number in compared to native a speaker’s studies. For example, the 8 million corpus of Bell (2010) yielded 802 tokens of the EDM “yet”, 262 tokens of the EDM “still” and 254 tokens of “nevertheless/nonetheless”. In addition, the EDM “you know” is found to be the most frequent EDM among American learners (2300 tokens per 100,000 words) (Polat, 2011). According to the researcher, the occurrence of the EDM “you know” was 2300 tokens per 100,000 words. In response to these findings, it can be said that the current study confirms the assumption that non-native speakers used EDMs in their speech less than native speakers. However, the researchers recommend further research with more corpora and different methodology. Next study should focus on how EDMs are used in the written work of Saudi EFL learners in comparison to other EFL as well as English native speakers.

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**Glossary**

EDM (s)= English Discourse Marker(s).

EFL= English as a Foreign Language.

G= Group.

S=Subject.

N=Number.

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