The Potential of Required and Optional Information Exchange Tasks: Frequency and Types of Discourse Markers in Focus

Asieh Esmail Beigi
Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran
Zohre Mohamadi*
Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the potential of different learning tasks in creating a medium for production of discourse markers (DMs). 60 Iranian female EFL (English as a foreign language) students with intermediate level of proficiency rated on Oxford placement test were randomly selected to participate in this study. They were randomly assigned into two groups of students performing optional information exchange task types (OIE) such as problem solving, decision making and opinion exchange tasks and required information exchange task types (RIE) such as storytelling, information gap and spot the differences. Students were instructed to perform the tasks for eight sessions and their performance was audio recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The results of chi-square and crosstabs analysis on frequency and types of DMs indicated that optional information tasks were significantly more potential in providing a medium for production of DMs. In addition, three types of required information exchange task types and three optional information exchange task types had significantly different potential in creating a medium for the occurrence of different types of DMs. Teachers, materials developers and researchers should make principled decisions about language learning task since tasks mediate attending discursive features of language differently. Suggestions for further study were discussed in the light of the limitations of the study.

  Key words: task types; required information exchanged tasks; optional information exchange tasks; discourse markers

1. Introduction

With an increase in the need for communication across the globe through English and limited access to it in EFL context, providing potential learning environments for maximum learning opportunities is significant. Various studies explored potential of learning practices in maximizing learning opportunities (Crystal, 2003) among which Task-based learning received great attention (Batstone, 2016). Task is defined as an activity in which learners produce, manipulate and comprehend language while their focus is on meaning and task accomplishment (Ellis, 2003). The link between task and acquisition is an indirect one. Interaction and participation in social activity mediates acquisition (Long, 1981). Therefore, acquisition occurs in rather than as a result of interaction. Through interaction, learners can investigate the extremes of their inter-language and notice what they can do or cannot do without assistance (Lee, 2016).

Research on task types and their potential in fostering acquisition has long and well documented history. From cognitive perspective , research explored how different types of tasks and their design and implementation variables such as code complexity and planning time affect attentional resources learners divide to accuracy, fluency and complexity of language (Sadeghi & Mosalli, 2013). Research also approved that there are more negotiation and interaction adjustments in cognitively demanding tasks (Adams, Alwi, & Newton, 2015). From sociolinguistic perspective, different tasks types have different potential in creating a medium for interaction and learning is the result of learners' co-construction of knowledge (Mayo & Ibarrola, 2015). Interest and attention on task performance leads to sustained development as learners co-manage interaction (Broady, 2006; Mirzaee, Domakani, & Roshani, 2010). From achievement perspective, research on task types also indicated that different types of tasks affect language skill improvement (Ahmed & Bidin, 2016), language component learning (Ahour & Dogolsara, 2015; Wu, Lowyck, Sercu, & Elen, 2012) and learning in general (Mackey, 2006).

Although the aforementioned studies are both important and timely, they focused more on language components such as syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary design (Ansarin & Mohamadi, 2013a, 2013b; Bao, 2015). Therefore, other aspects of language learning such as discourse are left as potentially interesting area for research. Discourse is defined as a unit of language larger than a sentence that has coherence (Crystal, 1992 cited in Millward, 2013). Cohesion is achieved through interpretability which necessitates simultaneous processing of many linguistic elements including discourse markers (Foucart, Romero-Rivas, Gort, & Costa, 2016). Tasks require attention to all aspects of language so that the outcome is achieved. Therefore, tasks are potentially a rich medium for learners' noticing discursive

aspects of a language. Despite the fruitful connection between tasks and discourse, no research has attended how task types provide potential medium for learning discursive aspects of language. Besides, large number of studies utilizing means-based statistical analysis of task-based instruction efficacy on language achievement through interventionist approaches they adopt masks how implicit non-interventionist instruction can help learners' develop inter-language further through attending discursive features including discourse markers (Dastjerdi & Farshid, 2011; Rymes, 2015; Takahashi, 2005). In interventionist approaches, it is not clear whether variations in learner performances are because of teacher effect or treatment effect or combination of both.

To fill such a void, present study is intended to investigate the potential of two general classes of task types (required and optional information exchange tasks) and their sub-types in creating a medium for the occurrence of different types and frequency of discourse markers produced by EFL learners in non-interventionist pedagogical context (task-based performance). This paper is organized in the following way. Theoretical and pedagogical background of the study was discussed. The previous research on task based instruction is acknowledged and the originality of the present research is discussed by establishing the gap in the previous research and by offering how the present research intended to fill the gap. The results were discussed and implications and suggestions for further research were provided in the light of the limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

According to Robinson (2005), task based instruction provides opportunities not only for language production but also for language development. The former is about how task demands can differentiate production and the latter is about how task demand can stimulate it further. The task demands in the former can be manipulated to stimulate learners' access to an existing L2 knowledge and in the second, the task demands are manipulated to make a medium by which learners can add to their existing L2 knowledge and extend it.   Language literature is thrived with studies investigating how teaching practitioners utilize tasks and promote language learning   through manipulating task design (e.g. complexity) or task implementation (e.g. planning time, repetition). More recently, potential of task types in creating learning opportunities has inspired pedagogical innovation in teaching and research in recent years (Juan-Garau & Jacob, 2015).

2.1 Empirical Studies on Task Types and Language Learning

Prabhu (1987) suggests there are generally two types of tasks. First, required information exchange tasks are the tasks in which all the participants are required to participate since each student has one piece of information and

without learner participation tasks cannot be accomplished. Information gap, storytelling and spot the difference tasks are some of the types of required information exchange tasks. Second, optional information exchange tasks are tasks in which participants opt to participate. Problem solving and opinion exchange tasks and reasoning tasks are the types of optional information exchange task. They are called optional because participants choose to participate and provide solution to problem or provide their opinion and justification for a topic. If they opt not to participate other member of the pair of the group can take the role (Tabar & Alavi, 2013).

The tasks in which learners are required to reach decisions , exchange information and solve problems were reported to be the most efficient tasks in promoting interaction and in turn learning.(Mayo & Ibarrola, 2015). "Popular information gap tasks are those where the learners have to spot differences in pictures or texts , reconstruct a story on the basis of visual input(jigsaw) and decision making tasks" (Mayo &Ibarrola, 2015, p.44). Research on the effect of recognition task and cued output task types on language learning also indicated that significant increased gain score was established in the group performing cued output task type (Peters & Pauwels, 2015).   Research also indicated that from among argumentative, analytic and informative task types, argumentative task led to more form related and meaning related changes as analyzed by frequency counts of form and meaning negotiation units through chi-square (Yadollahi & Rahimi, 2015).   Similarly, Role play was found to have higher potential in directing learners' attention to evaluative language in comparison with whole-class discussion and group discussion and individual interview tasks (Llinares & Dalton-Puffer, 2015).   . Shared among them is that the focus on attention was on language components other than discursive features. Therefore, it is left as potentially interesting area for research.

2.2 Discourse Markers and Task Types

Interaction and speech have definite rules which make speech coherent and understandable (Asik & Cephe, 2013). Discourse markers are the devices used by language users to show and figure out what is said (Schiffrin, 1987). The relationship between preceding segment and following one is indicated by a class of lexical expression called DMs whose meaning is determined by the linguistic and conceptual context (Fraser, 1999). There were several attempts in classifying different discourse markers. Pérez and Macià (2002) provide taxonomy of interpersonal discourse markers in spoken and textual discourse markers in written discourse (Table 1).

Table 1
Interpersonal and Textual Discourse Makers

Category	Functions	Examples
*Textua*l		
Logical connectives	Express semantic relationship between main clause and sentences	And, therefore, however, still
Frame makers	Mark main transitions between different stages (e.g. sequence material, indicate topic shift)	First, second; now, let's turn to…, before delving into…,
Illocutionary markers	Naming the act of the speaker performs or announcing the speaker's intention	I'd like to discuss: I shall highlight: I have attempted to compare
reminders	Refer back to other sections of the talk	As I mentioned before, as I think back over what I have said thus far…. Through out the lecture
Attributors	Provide support for the speaker's arguments	Because of the increasing evidence
Code glosses	Clarify, explain, rephrase or exemplify prepositional meaning	For example, that is, such as, in other words
Interpersonal		
Hedges	Withhold full commitment to the statement	Normally, perhaps, for the most part. May, might, I think
Certainly	Express full commitment to the statement	Of course, plain, simply, there is no such thing as
Emphatics	To highlight aspects of prepositional content or mark salience	Do in fact.., most importantly:
Attitude	To express the speakers' attitude towards propositional content	It is my opinion that, the most interesting topic …
Relational markers	To establish and maintain rapport with the partner	You might be wondering what…. Can we learn from….?
Personal markers	To explicitly refer to the speaker	I

Millward (2005) stated that since spoken discourse like conversation is unstructured in nature, it is the most difficult form of discourse analysis. Many factors may affect this difficulty including number of the interlocutors, use of non-verbal expressions, occurrence of interruptions, interjections, and turn taking moves whereas written discourse seems to be less difficult because it is structured, preplanned and involves a sole interlocutor. By acknowledging the

fact that discourse of any type is important for understanding, close attention should be given to all segments one of which is discourse markers.

Many studies have been conducted to highlight the significance of DMs. The research on DMs in EFL encompasses two main areas. From pure pragmatic and discursive perspective, Müller (2004) states that since DMs have prominent role in understandability and organization of native speaker language, their classifications, attributed meaning, functions inside and outside the contexts and integration of form and meaning are of prime importance. Taboada (2004) compared the positive effect of discourse markers on adequacy of prepositions in newspaper and common conversations. In the study by Bolden (2006), how DMs are set to be asset for intelligible talk was proven. Eslami, Eslami-Rasekh, and Quiroz (2007) investigated the positive role of DMs in understanding lectures.

The increasing interest in DMs influenced the trend of research from a pure pragmatics and discursive studies to sociological and educational studies. Therefore, curriculum developers are called not only to prepare and develop educational programs by which learners can have maximum exposure to DMs and opportunities for their production practice but also to find determining factors in each.

Castro and Marcela (2009) compared the frequency and occurrence of DMs in native and non-native classes and acknowledged the need for instructions on DMs.. Trillo (2002) also emphasizes the role of DMs in foreign and second language learning and warns "pragmatic fossilization" for educational programs that pay attention to grammar and semantics but not DMs. Literature is thrived with studies that investigated different types of instruction on development of discursive competence (Mohamadi & Rahimpour, 2018). In a study by Fatalaki, Amini, and Mirzaee (2014), explicit instruction on DMs affected English for academic purposes (EAP) leaners' reading comprehension performance. The positive effect of explicit instruction on structural discourse markers is also approved by Alraddadi (2016). Likewise, positive role of intervention program in familiarizing learners with DMs to boost up their reading comprehension in low proficiency leaners in Saudi EFL context (Al-Qahtani, 2015). Besides, a high correlation was established between ability to recognize DMs and reading comprehension in his study. Explicit instruction of DMS enhanced students' awareness and sensitivity of discourse and students' level of writing (Kamali & Noori, 2015). In addition, explicit instruction on DMs is more effective in intermediate level of proficiency (Kamali & Noori, 2015)

Despite the overwhelming number of research depicting importance of instruction on DMs, there are a few studies reporting the effect of implicit non-interventionist instruction on development of discourse competence. Comparative study of input enhancement as an implicit teaching technique and explicit teaching of DMs on immediate and delayed writing performance of

Iranian EFL learners indicated that although both techniques helped learners improve their writing ability, input enhancement had higher sustained effect (Soleimani & Ahangari, 2017). Input flooding as another type of implicit instruction is proved to be significantly effective on DMs learning in comparison with explicit instruction (Hernandez & Rodríguez-González, 2012). Besides, unlike the means-based statistical analysis of task-based instruction efficacy in experimental studies (Dastjerdi & Farshid, 2011; Rymes, 2015; Takahashi, 2005), this study is intended to unravel the potentials of different task types in creating a medium for DMs production. It investigates how different tasks types can help noticing discursive features. Second, the research design is not an experimental design in that this research investigates how the nature of the tasks mediates attention to different types of discourse markers and not the teacher treatment. To address the objectives of the studies, four research questions are posed as follow:

1. Do required information exchange tasks (RIE) and optional information exchange tasks (OIE) have significantly different potential in creating a medium for the occurrence of discourse markers?
2. Do the types of DMs significantly differ in required (ROIE) and optional (OOIE) information exchange tasks?
3. Do types of RIE tasks matter with respect to production of DMs types?
4. Do types of RIE matter with respect to DMs types?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

60 Iranian female intermediate EFL learners participated in this study with the age range of 18-24 in age and with almost same years of English learning experience in the same institute (language center of the researchers' institution). They were randomly selected on the basis of their proficiency scores on Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Since, this study was conducted as free of charge extra curriculum program, random assignment of students in two research groups of studying performing required information exchange task (RIE) and optional information exchange tasks (OIE) was possible. Therefore, there were 2 groups of 30 students (RIE= 30 and OIE= 30). Students were paired in each group. This made 15 pairs in each group. There was no criterion for assigning students into pair and students selected their partner as they wished.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

OPT is standard test of language proficiency with a 6 rating scale; students whose score fell between 0-17 were considered (A1), and students whose scores were 18-29 were identified as elementary students (A2). Those whose

scores were between 30 and 39 were in lower intermediate group (B1). The students with the scores of 40-47, upper-intermediate level (B2) was specified and also student who obtained scores 48-54 and 54-60 were considered as advanced (C1) and very advanced (C2) levels respectively. Students whose scores were 40-47 participated in this study.

3.2.2 Topic Familiarity Questionnaire

Prior to the administration of research tasks, the participants were asked to fill in a topic familiarity questionnaire. The researcher developed a questionnaire in order to find the most suitable topic for tasks. The answers of the questionnaire were: A) Very familiar: 3 points, B) Familiar: 2 points, C) Not familiar: 1 point. The topics which received as familiar were selected for the tasks of the study. Social disorders such as divorce, poverty, addition, crime, and unemployment were selected to be used in tasks of this study based on the students' responses to topic familiarity questionnaire.

3.2.3 Tasks and Materials

Prior to conducting the research, three optional information exchange tasks (problem solving, decision making and opinion exchange tasks) and three required information exchange tasks (storytelling, spot the differences and information gap tasks) were designed on the basis of students answers to topic familiarity questionnaire for the purpose of ensuring participants' familiarity with the input of the tasks and consistency of content across tasks. Nunan (1989)'s evaluation checklist which evaluated tasks in terms of clarity of objectives, fit to student proficiency level and their potential in promoting motivation and negotiation of meaning was utilized. The high Cronback alpha level (α = .769, p = .000) inter-rater reliability index between five raters rating tasks on the basis of aforementioned checklist confirmed the appropriateness of the tasks. Besides, the complexity level of tasks was ensured to be appropriate and comparable using Geldenhuys (2011)'s task complexity checklist. The checklist included items on the level of abstraction of information, the code complexity, and linguistic context which were measured on five likert scale from very simple to very complex.,. The high Cronback alpha level (α = 0.89, p, 000) inter-rater reliability between five raters indicated that tasks enjoyed the same level of complexity.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

To come up with reliable sources for identification of discourse markers, the researchers asked the same five raters in task designing stage to trace back the produced DMs in the groups through the analysis of recorded and transcribed task performances using Pérez and Macià (2002)' taxonomy of DMs. Since the tasks were oral tasks, only interpersonal DMs were the subject of enquiry. To make comparability across the groups possible, the first 5

minutes of performance were excluded from the analysis since those 5 minutes were mostly before the participants get settled with tasks. To reduce the effect of time of task and make comparability possible only the performances within 6-30 minutes were coded. The potentials of these task types and the sub task types in creating a medium for production of (DMs) were evaluated by treating each occurrence of DMs as test scores adding to the potentials of tasks in production of DMS. The treatment lasted for eight sessions. The tasks were introduced after the treatment. In order to reduce stress, the teacher was trained to run a warm up before performing the tasks. Participants were encouraged to ask questions if they had problems in comprehending the procedure required for performing each task. Series of chi-square and crosstab analyses were conducted to answer the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Frequency of DMs in RIE and OIE Tasks

An analysis of chi-square was run to compare the number of produced discourse markers between the (RIE) tasks and (OIE) tasks. As displayed in Table 2, the OOIE group used more DM (n = 1102, residual = 178) than the RIE group (n = 746, residual = -178). In other words, the OIE group used DM more than what was excepted while the ROIE group's use of DM was below expectation.

Table 2

Frequencies, Expected and Residual Values; Required vs. Optional Oral Information Exchange

	Observed N	*Expected N*	*Residual*
required	746	924.0	-178.0
optional	1102	924.0	178.0
Total	1848		

The results of chi-square (χ^2 (1) = 65.58, p = .000) indicated that the OIE group significantly used more DM than the RIE subjects.

Table 3

Chi-Square Test; Required vs. Optional Information Exchange

	Statistics
Chi-Square	68.580[a]
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.
The minimum expected cell frequency is 924.0.

4.2 Types of DMs in RIE and OIE tasks

An analysis of crosstabs was run to compare the types of DM categories between RIE and OIE tasks. Each cell in Table 4 displays three pieces of information, i.e. frequencies, percentages and adjusted residuals. While the former two indices are descriptive, the last statistics is a standardized index based on which frequencies can be compared for any significant differences. Any adjusted residual value higher than +/- 1.96 indicates that the related frequency is significantly beyond or below what was expected.

Table 4

Frequencies, Percentages and Adjusted Residual Values; Types of Discourse Markers by Groups

		Hedges	certainty	Emphatic	attitude	relational	personal	Total
				Types of DM				
RIE	Frq.	144	37	43	104	141	277	746
	%	19.3%	5.0%	5.8%	13.9%	18.9%	37.1%	100.0%
	Adj. Residal	1.2	-3.4	-4.1	.2	-1.7	4.9	
OIE	Frq.	188	101	126	150	245	292	1102
	%	17.1%	9.2%	11.4%	13.6%	22.2%	26.5%	100.0%
	Adj. Residal	-1.2	3.4	4.1	-.2	1.7	-4.9	
Total	Frq.	332	138	169	254	386	569	1848
	%	18.0%	7.5%	9.1%	13.7%	20.9%	30.8%	100.0%

Based on these results, it can be claimed that:

There was not any significant difference between the RIE (n = 144, Adj. Residua = 1.2 < 1.96) and the OIE (n = 188, Adj. Residua = -1.2 < -1.96) groups' use of hedges.

The OIE group (n = 101, Adj. Residua = 3.4 > 1.96) used certainty DM significantly more than the RIE group (n = 37, Adj. Residua = -3.4 > -1.96).

The OIE group (n = 126, Adj. Residua = 4.1 > 1.96) used empathic DM significantly more than the RIE group (n = 43, Adj. Residua = -4.1 > -1.96).

There was not any significant difference between the RIE (n = 104, Adj. Residua =.2 < 1.96) and the OIE (n = 150, Adj. Residua = -.2 < -1.96) groups' use of attitudinal DM.

There was not any significant difference between the RIE (n = 141, Adj. Residua = -1.7 < -1.96) and the OIE (n = 245, Adj. Residua = 1.7 < 1.96) groups' use of relational DM.

The RIE group (n = 277, Adj. Residua = 4.9 > 1.96) used personal DM significantly more than the OIE group (n = 292, Adj. Residua = -4.9 > -1.96).

The results of chi-square (χ^2 (5) = 46.15, p = .000) (table 5) indicated that there were significant differences between the two groups' use of types of DM. While there were not any significant differences between the two groups'

use of hedges and attitudinal and relational DM, the OIE group used significantly more certainty and empathic DM; however, the RIE group used personal and hedges DMs more than the OIE group.

Table 5
Chi-Square Tests; Types of Discourse Markers by Groups

	Value	*df*	*Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)*
Pearson Chi-Square	46.155[a]	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	47.413	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.252	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	1848		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 55.71.

4.3 Moderating role of RIE Types in DMS types

Crosstabs and chi square analysis were conducted to investigate if there is any statistically significant difference in produced discourse marker categories between sub task types of RIE; namely information gap, spot the difference and storytelling.

Table 6
Frequencies, Percentages and Adjusted Residual Values; Types of Discourse Markers by Sub-Tasks

		Types of DM						*Total*
		hedges	*personal*	*attitude*	*Relation*	*emphatic*	*Certainty*	
Storytelling	Frq.	62	52	25	20	4	4	167
	%	37.1%	31.1%	15.0%	12.0%	2.4%	2.4%	100.0%
	Adj. Residual	7.6	-.7	1.1	-5.0	-1.8	-1.4	
Spot the differences	Frq.	9	24	21	6	3	7	70
	%	12.9%	34.3%	30.0%	8.6%	4.3%	10.0%	100.0%
	Adj. Residual	-1.0	.2	4.6	-3.7	-.3	2.4	
Information-Gap	Frq.	73	201	58	201	36	26	595
	%	12.3%	33.8%	9.7%	33.8%	6.1%	4.4%	100.0%
	Adj. Residual	-6.1	.5	-3.8	6.7	1.8	-.2	
Total	Frq.	144	277	104	227	43	37	832
	%	17.3%	33.3%	12.5%	27.3%	5.2%	4.4%	100.0%

Based on the results displayed in Table 6, it can be claimed that;

The hedges were significantly used the most in sub-task of story-telling (n = 62, Adj. Residual = 7.6 > 1.96) than information gap (n = 73, Adj. Residual = -6.1 > -1.96) and spot the differences (n = 9, Adj. Residual = 1 > 1.96) sub-tasks.

There were not any significant differences in the use of personal DM in sub-tasks of story-telling (n = 52, Adj. Residual = -.7 < -1.96), information gap (n = 21, Adj. Residual = .5 < 1.96) and spot the differences (n = 24, Adj. Residual = .2 < 1.96).

The attitudinal DM were significantly used the most in sub-task of spotting the differences (n = 21, Adj. Residual = 4.6 > 1.96) than information gap (n = 58, Adj. Residual = -3.8 > -1.96) and story-telling (n = 25, Adj. Residual = 1.1 > 1.96) sub-tasks.

The relational DM were significantly used the most in sub-task of information gap (n = 201, Adj. Residual = 6.7 > 1.96) than spotting the differences (n = 6, Adj. Residual = -3.7 > -1.96) and story-telling (n = 20, Adj. Residual = -5 > -1.96) sub-tasks.

There were not any significant differences in the use of empathic DM in sub-tasks of story-telling (n = 4, Adj. Residual = -1.8 < -1.96), information gap (n = 36, Adj. Residual = 1.8 < 1.96) and spot the differences (n = 3, Adj. Residual = -.3 < -1.96).

The certainty DM were significantly used the most in sub-task of spotting the differences (n = 7, Adj. Residual = 2.4 > 1.96) than information gap (n = 26, Adj. Residual = -.2 < -1.96) and story-telling (n = 4, Adj. Residual = -1.4 < -1.96) sub-tasks.

The results of chi-square (χ^2 (10) = 111.75, p = .000) (table 7) indicated that there were significant differences between the use of types of DM in sub-tasks of information gap, story-telling and spotting the differences.

Table 7

Chi-Square Tests; Types of Discourse Markers by Sub-Tasks

	Value	*Df*	*Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)*
Pearson Chi-Square	111.755[a]	10	.000
Likelihood Ratio	104.886	10	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	44.378	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	832		

a. 2 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.11.
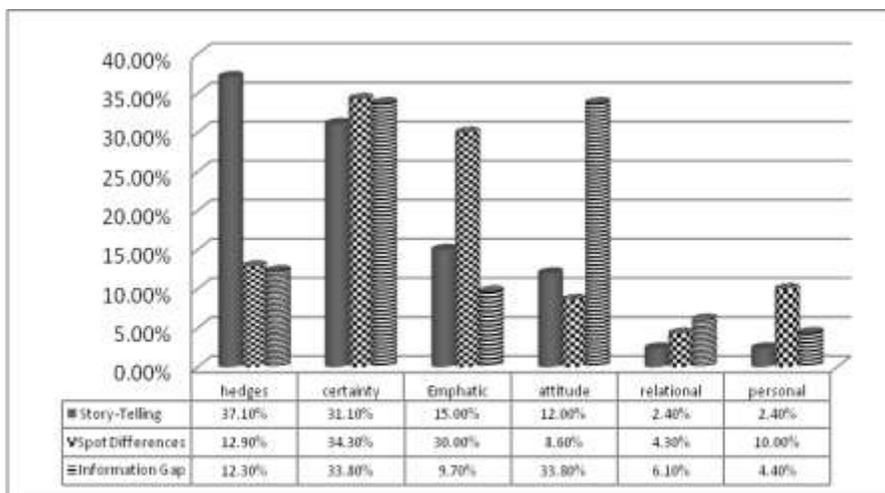
Figure 1. Percentages of types of DMs in RIE task types

4. 4. Moderating Role of OIE Types in DMS Types

Crosstabs and chi square analysis were used to investigate if there is any statistically significant difference in produced discourse marker categories between sub task types in optional oral information exchange tasks; namely opinion exchange, problem-solving and decision making tasks

Table 8

Frequencies, Percentages and Adjusted Residual Values; Types of Discourse Markers by Sub-Tasks Types in OIE

		Types of DM						Total
		hedges	*personal*	*attitude*	*relation*	*emphatic*	*certainty*	
opinion	Frq.	74	76	99	98	59	53	459
	%	16.1%	16.6%	21.6%	21.4%	12.9%	11.5%	100.0%
exchange	ual	-.7	-6.3	6.4	-.6	1.3	2.3	
problem	Frq.	56	181	25	110	49	29	450
	%	12.4%	40.2%	5.6%	24.4%	10.9%	6.4%	100.0%
solving	Adj. Residual	-3.4	8.6	-6.5	1.5	-.5	-2.6	
decision	Frq.	58	35	27	37	18	19	194
	%	29.9%	18.0%	13.9%	19.1%	9.3%	9.8%	100.0%
making	Adj. Residual	5.2	-2.9	.1	-1.2	-1.0	.3	
Total	Frq.	188	292	151	245	126	101	1103
	%	17.0%	26.5%	13.7%	22.2%	11.4%	9.2%	100.0%

The results of crosstabs (table 8) indicated that:

The hedges were significantly used the most in sub-task type of decision making (n = 58, Adj. Residual = 5.2 > 1.96) than problem solving (n = 56, Adj. Residual = -3.4 > -1.96) and opinion exchange (n = 74, Adj. Residual = -.7 < -1.96) sub-tasks.

The personal DM were significantly used the most in sub-task type of problem solving (n = 151, Adj. Residual = 8.6 > 1.96) than opinion exchange (n = 76, Adj. Residual = -68 > -1.96) and decision making (n = 35, Adj. Residual = -2.9 > -1.96) sub-tasks.

The attitudinal DM were significantly used the most in sub-task type of opinion exchange (n = 99, Adj. Residual = 6.4 > 1.96) than problem solving (n = 25, Adj. Residual = -6.5 > -1.96) and decision making (n = 27, Adj. Residual = .1 < 1.96) sub-tasks.

There were not any significant differences between the use of relational DM in sub-task types of decision making (n = 37, Adj. Residual = -1.2 < -1.96), problem solving (n = 110, Adj. Residual = 1.5 < 1.96) and opinion exchange (n = 98, Adj. Residual = -.6 < -1.96) sub-tasks.

There were not any significant differences between the use of empathic DM in sub-task types of decision making (n = 18, Adj. Residual = -1 < -1.96), problem solving (n = 49, Adj. Residual = -.5 < -1.96) and opinion exchange (n = 59, Adj. Residual = 1.3 < 1.96) sub-tasks.

The certainty DM were significantly used the most in sub-task type of opinion exchange (n = 53, Adj. Residual = 2.3 > 1.96) than problem solving (n = 29, Adj. Residual = -2.6 > -1.96) and decision making (n = 19, Adj. Residual = .3 < 1.96) sub-tasks.

The results of chi-square (χ^2 (10) = 131.88, p = .000) (table 9) indicated that there were significant differences between the use of types of DM in sub-tasks of opinion exchange, problem solving and decision making.

Table 9

Chi-Square Tests; Types of Discourse Markers by Sub-Tasks in OOIE

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	131.881[a]	10	.000
Likelihood Ratio	131.310	10	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.700	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1103		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.76.

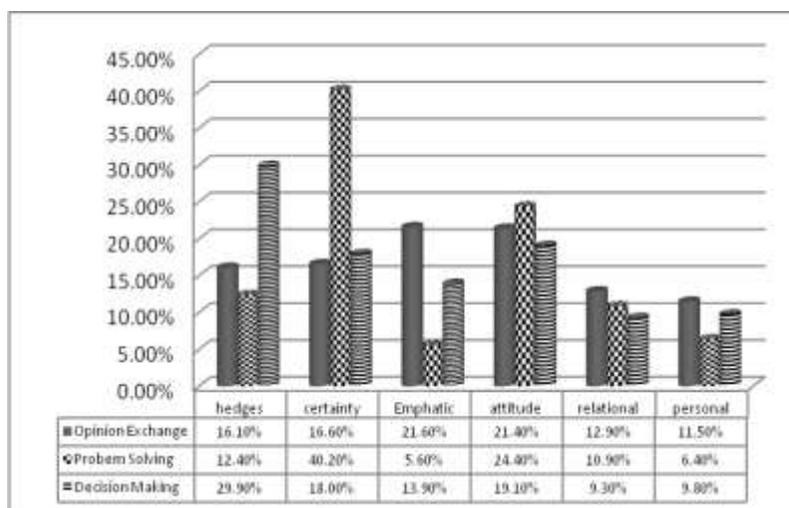|	hedges	certainty	Emphatic	attitude	relational	personal
■ Opinion Exchange	16.10%	16.60%	21.60%	21.40%	12.90%	11.50%
◎ Problem Solving	12.40%	40.20%	5.60%	24.40%	10.90%	6.40%
≡ Decision Making	29.90%	18.00%	13.90%	19.10%	9.30%	9.80%

Figure 2. Percentages of DMs types in OIE task types

4.5. Discussion

This study investigated the potential of required versus optional information exchange tasks in directing learners' attention to discursive features. Results indicate that a) OIE tasks were more potential in providing a medium for DMs production in comparison with RIE task, b) both task types were significantly different in terms of DMs types: "personal and hedges" were the most frequently occurring DMs in RIE task and "certainty and emphatic" were the most frequently occurring DMs in OIE tasks, c) three RIE task types (spot the difference, storytelling and jigsaw) were significantly different in terms of the types of DMs: "hedges" DMs more in information gap, "attitude and certainty" DMs in spot the difference task and "hedges" DMs in storytelling task, d) three OIE tasks (opinion exchange task, problem making and decision making tasks) were significantly different in terms of the types of DMs: "attitude" DMs were the most frequently occurring ones in opinion exchange task, "hedges" DMs were the most frequently occurring DMs in decision making, and "personal" DMs were the most frequently occurring DMs in decision making task. All an all, different types of tasks as semiotic tools set up differentiated language practice medium.

As with the results of this research, different tasks can create a totally different context for the acquisition of different language elements. The learners' ability to notice input can be affected by the potentiality of each task in engaging students in the task itself and in turn whatever the language items elicited within. These findings are supported by many other studies. For example, the study by Ansarin and Mohamadi (2013a) indicate that tasks set up differentiated language use when syntax is concerned. Except for the point that the tasks that they used in their study were form focused tasks such as text reconstruction and dictogloss whereas in this study the tasks were unfocused

tasks such as storytelling and jigsaw. Likewise, the study by Mohamadi and Rahimpour (2018) indicated that different types of task have different potential in raising learners' awareness about discourse markers since different tasks create different medium for metatalk opportunities on discourse markers. In their study, jigsaw and translation had the highest potential in engaging learners with metatalk opportunities. With this regard, in the present study, optional information exchange tasks led to more DMs use. In addition, research indicated that optional information exchange tasks have highest potential in increasing opportunities for negotiation of meaning and respectively more DMs occurrence (Mohamadi, 2015) which is supported by the results of this study with the difference that task types were different in these two studies. In this study the tasks were optional convergent tasks.

The results of this study corroborate those of studies which indicated that the participants' management of the discourse and discourse repairs through either self -correction or other correction help them notice language and in turn learn a language. Given the significant role that attention plays in learning, a large number of studies have focused on exploring the tasks that direct learners' attention to specific linguistic target (Ghari & Moinzadeh, 2011). The results of research suggest that noticing is a key element in changing the immediate input into intake. Most of the studies on noticing have focused on how different types of tasks direct learners' attention to form and meaning at the same time (Izumi, 2002; Mackey, 2006). This study focused on discourse makers as the medium in which form and meaning merged and how tasks can direct learners' attention to specific linguistic targets such as discourse markers.

Results are also in line with mediation and internalization studies. Mediation is defined as indirect activity in the form of assistance which is not limited to assistance by human beings. It can be also assisted through semiotic artifacts one of which is task (Baleghizadeh & Timcheh Memar, 2010). DMs used by the learners in interactions in task performance were utilized later by the learners in communication management and discourse repairs. This is a sign of internalization which is defined as the process of performing cognitive functions by no externally provided support or mediation (Baleghizadeh & Timcheh Memar, 2010).

Despite interesting finding, this study has several limitations. First, studies in which language performances are evaluated by frequency counts cannot account higher social and cognitive processes (Mohamadi & Rahimpour 2018). These processes include the learning endeavors learners have to move from inter-subjectivity which is learners' collaborative construction of knowledge through communicative acts to intra-subjectivity which is self' regulated learning (Alt, 2017; Mohamadi, 2017). Therefore, enquiry about patterns of development mediated by artifacts such as tasks or people (inter-subjectivity) to self-development and regulation (intera-

subjectivity) is worthy since it tracks how language development leads to self-development. Group membership and how it is structured might have affected the results. In this study, students were grouped on the basis of their convenient timetable, no criterion was used in assigning them into groups. Therefore, the patterns of interaction in collaborative sense need to be taken into account. Research is needed to investigate the patterns of engagement for the maximum learning opportunity to be created. Equality which means all team members take direction from one another in an agreement rather than one taking control in unilateral fashion should be encouraged. Besides, mutuality which is the extent to which leaners jointly establish ideas and how it affects learning opportunities need be investigated in mediums in which collaboration is at the heart of learner performance (Yan & Kember, 2003).

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study investigated and established that required and optional information exchange tasks have different potential in promoting production of different discourse marker types both in terms of frequency and types. Results of this study can help teachers in designing tasks for development of discourse competence (Trillo, 2002; Weinert, 1998). As one component of communicative competence, discourse competence and lack of it may either foster or lead to failure in communication. Therefore, the results of this study which tributes values to the potential of tasks types can help both teaching and testing practitioners design their approach in such a way that tap discourse competence. Curriculum designers, educational organizations, academic specialists, administrators, course developers, teachers and English language students should make principled decisions about language learning tasks as the essence and nature of the tasks affect produced language. Besides, the results can assist testing practitioners in designing Task-based language assessment (TBLA) which aims at assessing the mastery of language components through scaffolding (Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2002). The cooperation in task completion helps learners scaffold each other and assist their partners to bring language related problems within their zone of Proximal development and learn what they cannot do without assistance (Vygotsky, 1980). Therefore, cooperation fostered in task performance can bring into students' attention the linguistic items which may not noticed in individual performance.

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