

AN ANALYSIS OF INTERCHANGEABILITY AND SYNONYMY OF SELECTED DISCOURSE MARKERS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: The paper tries to offer real life responses to the research questions. In doing so, the primary methodological rationale for this research is to exemplify and advocate the use of real performance data called from a large corpus of written language representing actual native use English language. This research deals with the delicate category of synonymy and interchangeability of selected troublesome discourse markers from the point of view of the concepts of 'invariant meaning' and 'markedness theory'. Two hypotheses, synonymy and non-synonymy are presented for this paper. The theoretical and methodological foundations underlying this investigation are invariant meaning, synonymy and non-synonymy hypotheses, markedness and distinctive feature theory, student survey, and discourse analysis. Two reliable dictionaries, American Heritage Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English have been employed in this research. The results of this study show that although the two discourse markers *for example* and *for instance* are, in practice, used interchangeably by non-native English speakers, they are neither synonym nor interchangeable.

Keywords: Discourse markers; Synonymy; Interchangeability; Invariant meaning; Specificity

1. Introduction

The commonsense notion that words have synonyms or might be used interchangeably is most difficult to substantiate objectively so much so that many philosophers have despaired the task and declared synonymy an impossibility except in the most highly formalized languages where a rigorous definition of the notion of identity could be given (S.A. Tyler, *The Said and the Unsaid*, P. 339). Discourse cohesion refers to the linguistic links between sentences. Such links demonstrate the relationship between the ideas contained in these sentences. In everyday life, it is typical to see many non-native English speakers easily interchange some minimal cohesive pairs. The purpose of this study is to test whether this kind of interchangeability between the set under question is plausible. The crux of this semantic study is to highlight the similarities and differences between two sets of discourse conjunctions. In other words, this study intends to investigate the synonymy and interchangeability aspects of two sets of much-in-use discourse connectives. In a broader sense, this research deals with the delicate category of synonymy and interchangeability of selected troublesome discourse markers from the point of view of the concepts of invariant meaning and markedness theory.

2. Research questions

Based on the nature of the study, and since the selected set of cohesive and discourse markers – i.e. for example vs. for instance has some features in common, the research revolves around answering the two questions below. The

nature of both questions for the selected set centers on the semiotic, semantic, lexical and syntactical differences as well as similarities between the foresaid pair.

- (1) Are for example and for instance synonyms?
- (2) Are for example and for instance interchangeable?

3. Research Methodology Design

Due to the instinct of the study, and also to combine the quantitative and qualitative approaches, survey as well as discourse analysis have been chosen to be the research methodologies. The survey will be in the form of a questionnaire distributed to school students. As for the corpus analysis, many example statements used in the TIME magazine have been chosen. A number of extracts would be analyzed and tabulated within the investigation to reinforce the results of this study. The TIME magazine corpus extracts have been chosen based on convenience sampling. In addition, a questionnaire, based on the research questions, has been designed and distributed to all 45 grade 11 students studying at a school namely the International Islamic School Malaysia. The school is situated in Jalan Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia. In the other words, the theoretical and methodological foundations underlying this investigation are invariant meaning, markedness, distinctive feature theory, survey, and discourse analysis.

4. Data Collection

Earl Babbie (2010) believes that surveys are a very old research technique. Based on the nature of this linguistic

analytical study and in order to employ real life language utterances, the researcher decided to make use of TIME magazine corpus too. Discourse cohesion analysis has gained much attention in several branches of linguistics. Most descriptive studies (Halliday & Hasan 2002, Hasan 2003, Halliday 2001, Hoey 2003, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, Tanskanen 2006) aim to develop an appropriate taxonomy for the analysis of all kinds of texts. In order to find a suitable categorization and to generalize the results, a large amount of data is necessary. This has led to the increased use of computerized text corpora in linguistic research since the late 1980s (Conrad 2002). Besides the mentioned corpus and student survey, American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (4th ed.), and Cambridge Learner's Dictionary (3rd ed.) are used to supply clear-cut definitions of the set as well as shed light on distinctions, shared shade(s) of semantic meaning(s), and syntactic structures of the minimal pairs. A survey in the form of a questionnaire was designed and administered to two class sections of grades 11 students studying in the International Islamic School in Malaysia.

5. Findings

Here are the findings of this research. The findings (i) through (iv) advocate the synonymy hypotheses whereas the findings (v) through (vii) support the non-synonymy hypotheses and are deemed more convincing as well as powerful.

(i) The two markers in question are discourse connectives which are used to demonstrate or show by an example.

(ii) In some cases both dictionaries (the American Heritage Dictionary and The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English) which are already hired to boost the professionalism of this on-going study, stipulate the two discourse markers for example and for instance are introduced as synonyms and based on the definitions, example sentences, and usage notes which both dictionaries offer, it is concluded that the markers do play fast and loose. In the other words, they are, in one sense, definitely synonymous while in other sense, they are not. Basically it seems that for example is almost able to replace for instance, whereas the vice versa sounds to be in cloudy opacity.

(iii) They both provide examples that are cited to prove or invalidate a contention.

(iv) They both share semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic characteristics. Many traditional analyses have definitely maintained that for example and for instance could replace each other in their varied illustrative functions.

(v) The ripe response that can be given to the research question (Does 'for example' = 'for instance?') is more negative than positive. As it is a common experience that they both share semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic characteristics. Despite many traditional analyses which have maintained that for example and for instance could replace each other in their functions as discourse

connectives. It should be noted that for instance is thought of more specificity than its counterpart, i.e. for example. In the other words, based on the sign-oriented notions of invariance and markedness, for instance stands marked for exemplification specificity and is a marked member of the pair while for example shows unmarked for the same feature. Thus, as illustrated in figure one, the marked-unmarked relationship orbits around the feature of exemplification specificity.

Semantic Substance	Form	Markedness-unmarkedness Relationship
Exemplification specificity	<i>For instance</i>	Marked for particular exemplification of the same type
	<i>For example</i>	Unmarked for particular exemplification of the same type

Figure 1- Marked-unmarked Relationship

(vi) Technically it is deemed that for example is hired in sentences to refer to a particular type of occurrence where many types exist. To coffer more clarity, the below corpus extract is presented:

1) Small children are most receptive to - and most in need of - particular nutrients. For example, studies suggest that a lack of iron early in life can lead to several diseases. (TIME magazine corpus 2005)

The above extract uses the discourse linker for example because there exist two occurrences; 'the nutrients that children need' and an example of 'lack of iron' to prove the first occurrence. As it is apparent, there is no other occurrence which is parallel to the second occurrence i.e. 'lack of iron'. In other words, the two occurrences are not the same in (sub)type. The first clause includes the children's need for nutrients which is a general statement followed by an unparallel supporting example. The following figure sheds light on the explanation above.

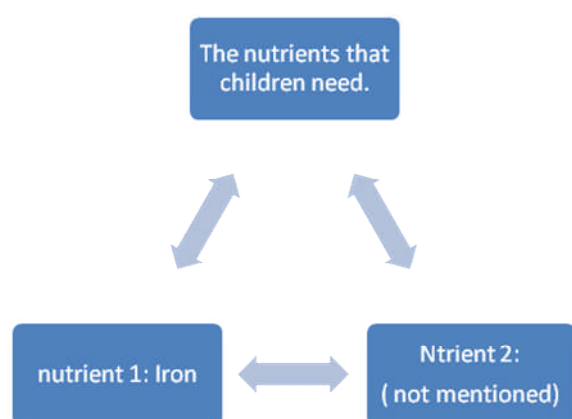


Figure 2- Non-synonymy and Non-interchangeability of for example

(vii) For instance, on the other hand, bears a strong inclination to refer to a particular occurrence of the same type, where many occurrences exist. The following corpus extract is selected to elaborate more.

2) Mr Brown is being investigated for wash sale rules violations, for instance the trade with ABC Corp. where he bought the same shares in his personal account from DEF Corp. (TIME magazine corpus 2005)

The above statement implies that there are other violations of the same type, i.e. wash sale violations, and this is just one instance/occurrence. Here, for instance is marked for particular specificity where other instances of the same type exist. Therefore, in principle, it should not be interchanged. The below figure is presented for clarification.



Figure 3 - Non-synonymy and Non-interchangeability of for instance

Therefore, in principle, for example and for instance are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. However, in practice they are used interchangeably by non-native English speakers.

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