

A Semantic Analysis of Interchangeability and Synonymy of Selected Discourse Markers

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ABSTRACT: The commonsense notion that words have synonyms or might be used interchangeably is the 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. Two hypotheses, synonymy and non-synonymy are presented for the study. An attempt has been made to substantiate or reject the principled points of the hypotheses. The research 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 (Time magazine corpus) 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'. The theoretical and methodological foundations underlying this investigation are invariant meaning, markedness and distinctive feature theory, survey, and discourse analysis. Two reliable dictionaries, American Heritage Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English have been employed in this research. In addition, two survey questionnaires have been designed and administered to grade 9 and 10 students of the International Islamic School Malaysia. This thesis serves as an endeavour to contribute to ESL and advocate the use of discourse analysis in Semantic and Semiotic disciplines where not many studies have been carried out. This research exploration intends to drive researchers towards targeting school youngsters as informants and to ponder over the challenges that school-aged youths are faced with, in regards to the accurate use of the English language.

Keywords: discourse markers, synonymy, hypothesis, interchange, analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

With the English language overtaking other languages fast, the urge for a bunch of careful studies that focus on usage and application has become conspicuous by their absence. A lot has been said on this educational field though. The English language users in general and ESL learners in particular are deemed to have confused the relational differences between a few sets of markers. Thus this study tends to find answers to the research questions of synonymy and interchangeability on a couple of selected conjunctive adverbs *too* versus *also*.

Based on the preliminary studies and observation of international school students done by the current researcher, much has been explored on the limited knowledge of semantics or relational meaning owned by the English learners. Hence the need for such a study might be able

1.2 Objectives of the Study

With almost ten years into the 21st century when the English language has completely found and penetrated its position into the globe, there is no doubt that a fresh focus on English is more than necessary. It is a common

experience that English has turned into becoming a paramount necessity. Observing every day conversations in general, and Malaysian school students in particular have prompted the researcher to begin embarking on an in-depth study with the intention of contributing to the language improvement. Thus the main objective of this analytical investigation lies in providing rational, acceptable responses to the research questions. At this preliminary stage and before the embarkation of the thesis, it is hoped that the logical answers to the research questions could yield useful benefits to ESL learners in general and students in particular.

1.3 Research questions

Based on the nature of the study, and since both selected cohesive and discourse markers i.e. *also* vs. *too* have some features in common, the research revolves around answering two questions. The nature of questions centers on the semiotic, semantic, lexical and syntactical differences as well as similarities between the foresaid pairs. The questions are as follows.

- (1) Are *also* and *too* synonyms? (*also* = *too*?)
- (2) Are *also* and *two* interchangeable? (Can *also* fully substitute *too*? and vice versa.)

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is almost six decades since research and practice in English Language Teaching have started to introduce the four interrelated threads of the English tapestry as listening, speaking, reading and writing (Brown, 2001). In addition to the above threads, ESL learners need to include (at least) two more equally essential strands namely *accuracy* and *fluency* to the proponents. This profound study, accordingly, seeks to empower the ESL learners' accuracy to some extent. It is hoped that ESL learners might benefit from the findings of this study by gaining some knowledge regarding the interchangeability and synonymy that may or may not exist between a couple of selected cohesive and discourse markers. ESL learners will hopefully get to know where, when and how to employ each of the chosen markers judiciously. This study tends to offer the ESL learners a souvenir of self-esteem as well as certainty in their every day productive and receptive communications especially when it comes to using each and every of the picked markers.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Connectives are words or short phrases that conjoin clauses or simple sentences. The most important function of the connectives is that they explicitly specify a conceptual relationship between clauses and sentences (Halliday and Hasan, 1999).

Parrot (2002:302) gives a clear definition and states some of the different functions and uses of discourse markers as: a) to 'signpost' logical relationships and sequences. b) to point out how bits of what we say and write relate to each other. c) To 'manage' conversations - to negotiate who speaks and when, to monitor and express involvement in the topic. d) to influence how the listeners or readers react. e) to express our attitude to what we say and write. Parrot goes on to state, 'there is no universally agreed way of classifying discourse markers; nor is there an exhaustive inventory of them'. There are several different classifications for the meaning and functions of discourse markers, though the most often referred to are: adversative, additive, temporal, and causal.

Having said this, Halliday (2001) believes that these categories are insufficient to clearly describe the form and function of each conjunction, he put forward a few more categories as extension, elaboration, and enhancement, each with two sub-types: apposition and clarification, addition and variation, spatio-temporal and causal conditional, respectively.

Cohesion analysis has gained much attention in several branches of linguistics. Most descriptive studies (Halliday & Hasan 1999, Hasan 2003, Halliday 2001, Hoey 1999, Martin 1992, 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).

The organization of discourse is one of the central issues of discourse analysis. The term *organization* refers "to the sum of relations which hold between the units of text and between each unit and the whole" (Goutsos 1997, p. 138). The term *discourse* refers to verbal communication in its situational and social context. When investigating the three levels of discourse organization (cohesion, coherence and genre), cohesion and coherence are found analyzed in the individual texts. These texts belong to a certain genre, which places them into context. Cohesion is thus one of the text properties that contribute to the organization of discourse. The term refers to the connectedness of the surface elements in the text. The three main categories of cohesion are referential cohesion (anaphoric chains), relational cohesion (connectives and ellipsis) and lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesion, which is the focus of this dissertation project, contributes to the ideational (semantic) structuring of discourse (Martin 1999). It refers to the semantic relations between the lexical items in the text; thus it provides information about the way lexemes are organized in the discourse (*lexical patterning*).

In a nutshell, A need to a study that could concentrate on the relational meaning of cohesive devices is deemed contributory. A study that can lead to clarifying some confusion and misuse may be of help. Some English language learners may not sure know how similar or different minimal cohesive pairs are. For this reason, this study will be discussing as well as investigating the interchangeability and synonymy of selected markers to contribute knowledge to the existing inventory of learners.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the instinct of this linguistic analytical study and in order to employ real life language utterances, the researcher has decided to make vast use of Time magazine corpus. Besides the mentioned corpus, *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th edition, and *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*, 3rd edition are used to empower the study with authentic breath. The foresaid dictionaries supply clear-cut definitions of the sets as well as shed light on the distinctions, shared shade(s) of semantic meaning(s), and syntactic structures of the minimal pairs. The Time magazine corpus extracts have been chosen randomly and are analyzed within the analysis section.

Also the TIME magazine corpus is used to as a source of providing real-life authentic utterances in which *also* and *too* are used. Seventeen corpus extracts have been used and analyzed in the analysis section. The analysis is illustrated through a few tables within the study.

In addition, a small-in-scale questionnaire has been designed and distributed to grade 9 students studying at a school namely International Islamic School. The school is situated in Jalan Gombak, Selangor state in Malaysia. The

international school whose grade 9 students participated in the research has enrolled 750 students. The school students in general and the 9th graders in particular, are to very much extent non-native English speakers with a very few native or naturalized native English speakers among them. All of the 9th graders who total 47, took part and responded to the *also-* versus- *too* questionnaire. On top of that, the return rate was 100% i.e. all the 47 questionnaires were collected from the participants on the same day. Of all 47 students, in two sections of 9 IK and 5 IS (that in order stand for Ibno Khaldoun and Ibno Sina) only two students are native English speakers and the rest are non native English Speakers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, etc.

The participants range between 16 to 19 years of age. The English language is the only medium of communication and instruction in the International Islamic School i.e. all subjects are taught using the English Language and all teachers and administrative staff are bound to use English in conversing with themselves, students and parents as well. The curriculum that this private school (International Islamic school) uses is the British National Curriculum.

Method wise, corpus accompanied by field studies have proven a strong combination (Fartousi, 2012). In a nutshell, Time magazine corpus, questionnaire, and two reliable dictionaries have made up the instruments of the study.

4. ANALYSIS

Also and *too* as English adverbs, are thought to be synonymous. Exist quite a large number of people who employ the above discourse markers interchangeably and do believe that they both bear the same (shade) of meaning and function whereas some other academicians might contend that the two so-called synonymous forms; *also* and *too* are different in word order, semantic domains, etc. Therefore, this discourse analytical study, as mentioned much earlier in the statement of the problem, hires two globally-reliable dictionaries: the American Heritage Dictionary (4th edition) and the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (3rd edition), to provide accurate definitions, examples, and elaborations on both under question discourse markers.

4.1 Dictionary Definition

1. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th edition, published by Houghton Mifflin Company, throws light on *also* as follows.

also: adv.

1. In addition; besides.
2. Likewise; too: *If you will stay, I will also.*

conj.

And in addition: *It's a pretty cat, also friendly.*

The same dictionary introduces *too* as:

Too

adv.

1. In addition; also: *He's coming along too.*
2. More than enough; excessively: *She worries too much.*
3. To a regrettable degree: *My error was all too apparent.*

2. Cambridge Learner's Dictionary presents the following thrust of definitions for both *also* & *too*:

also adverb

in addition:

She's a photographer and also writes books.

I'm cold, and I'm also hungry and tired.

TOO

too /tu:/ adverb **MORE**

more than is needed or wanted; more than is

suitable or enough:

I'm too fat.

I can't reach the shelf - it's (a bit) too high.

There were (far) too many people for such a small room.

too /tu:/ adverb **ALSO**

(especially at the end of a sentence) in addition,

also:

I'd like to come too.

chocolate. "Me too."

too /tu:/ adverb **VERY**

very, or completely:

He wasn't too pleased/happy when I told him about the mistake.

My mother hasn't been too well recently.

FORMAL *Thank you, you're too kind.*

4.2 The Synonymy Aspect

To provide a convincing answer to the research questions (which are: 'are *also* and *too* synonyms? and are they really interchangeable?'), one might say the responses sound more negative than positive. Both discourse markers *also* and *too* no doubt share a common semantic feature which is 'addition'. Both forms are used in the English language as to make an addition especially when they are used as connectives. This rough notion is also advocated by both dictionaries in use in this study. Both references clearly state that in only one sense, *also* means *too* and vice versa. Thus one can arrange the points as follows.

- i) Based on the thrust of definitions and examples presented by both the American Heritage Dictionary and Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, both forms in question are kind of synonyms. They both refer to the semantic domain of 'addition'. Thus the following examples can be to the point provided that the feature 'semantic integrality' is neutral or trivialized.
- ii) Swan in his book called 'Practical English Usage' states that *also* and *too* are similar in meaning: '*too*

and *also* have similar meanings, but they are used in slightly different ways in sentences.' Thus, one can conclude that when *also* and *too* function as connective or conjunctive words, they are most probably synonymous and therefore interchangeable. It should be noted that there exists a condition under which this substitution is valid, i.e. in case of no affirmative emphatic message. In other words, both connectives in question, could replace each other; their messages, however, to some flexible extent, might change. This traditional connective notion which leads to the acceptance of the interchangeability and synonymy of the two, might be schematized as:

$$[X + Y (\text{too})] = [X + (\text{also}) Y]$$

Let's look at a few examples in order to postulate the hypothesis:

1. I **also** have given five pounds to this cause. (Time magazine corpus 2005)

The above sentence might mean others have given five pounds and so have I. The above example is also a great case of interchangeability. It seems one can easily substitute *also* for *too* in the above utterance. Therefore, the new sentence might emerge as:

2. I **too** have given five pounds to this cause.

This sentence helps us understand that the two deeds, i.e. the money given by others and 'I', are in one sense semantically integrated. To put it simply, one can say both deeds happened at the same time or the agent of the sentence, i.e. 'I' is deemed to be a part and parcel of this money donation. However, our aim here in this sub-section is to introduce and focus on the interchangeability rather than non-synonymy.

3. If you will stay, I will **also**. (American Heritage Dictionary, 4th ed.)

As it is apparent, substituting the above American Heritage Dictionary example sentence is not hard at all.

4. There has been a cutback in federal subsidies. **Too**, rates have been increasing. (American Heritage Dictionary, 4th ed.)

Although strange, yet the same dictionary states that this use of *too* at the initial position is grammatical. Some critics have objected to such a usage though. As a result, both discourse connective markers, in these two contexts, and on top of that, irregardless of the 'semantic integrality', are not only synonyms, but replaceable. As a whole, both sentences (3 & 4), through the lens of a typical English language communicator, look awkward, but acceptable. Tables one and two illustrate the above better.

Table 1 – Interchangeability and synonymy

No	Instances of <i>too</i>	Semantic Integrality		Interchangeability		Sentence Position			Connective function	Intensive/excessive addition
		Marked (a+b=ab) (ab)	Unmarked (a+b=a+b) (a+b)	plausible	Not-plausible	initial	Middle	final	X + Y(too)	Too X / too (much) X
1.	I too have given five pounds to this cause.	*		*			*		*	
2.	<i>There has been a cutback in federal subsidies. Too, rates have been increasing.</i>	*		*		*			*	

Table 2 – Interchangeability and synonymy

No	Instances of <i>also</i>	Semantic Integrity		Interchangeability		Sentence Position			Connective function	Intensive/excessive addition
		Marked (a+b= ab) (ab)	Unmarked (a+b=a+b) (a+b)	Plausible	Not-plausible	initial	middle	Final	X +(also)Y	Intensive/extensive addition
1.	I also have given five pounds to this cause.		*	*			*		*	
2.	If you will stay, I will also .		*	*				*	*	

4.3 The Non-synonymy Aspect

To present this side of the argument, some points will be discussed to substantiate or reject this aspect.

In dictionaries such as those that are employed in this analytical study, it is not that hard to find the form *also* as an equivalent for the form *too* and vice versa. They, however, don't look like typically balanced tango dancers. The premises and linguistic corpus extracts that are very much abundant might illuminate the avenue of opaque torrent of darkness to some extent.

- i) It is maintained that each member of the pair owns a single invariant meaning which certainly distinguishes it from the other.
- ii) *Too*, in its connective functionality, is marked for 'semantic integrality' to present itself as a part and parcel of the text. So, the reader of the text, for example, sure perceives that there is a movement from a sign to text. (S)he might formulate this united addition as:
(a + b = ab)
- iii) *Also* on the contrary, fails to commit to the feature of 'semantic integrality; or as some might say (it) plays fast and loose with this feature, i.e. *also* is not marked for such a semantic characteristic. The form *also* is more flexible, neutral, and open-ended of the two. It may refer to either integral or non-integral addition. The best scheme to such an addition could be:

$$(a + b = a + b)$$

- iv) An English language user most likely selects one form rather than the other based on the fittability of the chosen form with the marked or unmarked invariant meaning in relation to the message the same person as a speaker of writer is trying to get across. Thus such a careful choice might not be arbitrary.

- v) Swan (1993) claims that *also* is less formal than *too*: *Also* is very common in written English; and does not appear in sentence final position. Attending to the following extracts from the linguistic corpus would be illuminating in a way that the distinction between the members of the pair would emerge outstandingly.

5. They thought that the Post's dramatic critic, Charles Collins, was **too** unfriendly, without adequate critical cause. So there were going to be lawsuits. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

6. The lies that we call Fiction. # And there's the problem, **too**, for what of Babbitt, Moon Calf, Eric Dorn? Who can enjoy. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

7. As for Moon Calf (Felix) and Eric Dorn: they are **too** despicable to be yourself and have too fine a sinful time to be your neighbor. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

8. Sort of chaperon for both workers and operators. Both sides have feared to be **too** unreasonable with the stern eye of the omission over them. But what will happen. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

9. That which should accompany old age-honor-does not fall to those who go by **too** many aliases, like the steamship Yankton. She was offered at auction in New York. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

No		Marked (ab)	Unmarked (a±b)	plausible	Not-plausible	initial	middle	final	X+(also)Y	Intensive/extensive addition
10.	He is considered to be one of the most prolific writers of modern times. He is also official film censor for Great Britain. # His political career started in 1880 when....		*		*		*		*	
11.	They regulate customs tariffs and another to reform Italian codes. The electoral reform bill may also come up for discussion. # It is said that Premier Mussolini intends to summon....		*		*		*		*	
12.	He would be murdered if he attempted to resume his lectures at Bucharest University. They also threatened Jewish students that they would die if they tried to attend the University.		*		*		*		*	
13.	But he likes to feel that his active editorial days are past. He has also written essays, poetry, plays, criticism. Two general books, one of		*		*		*		*	
14.	It was to provide for the erection of this statue in Chicago forgot the statue and also died.		*		*		*		*	

Invariance and marked-unmarked relationship Aspect

This section tries to put forward a sign-oriented analysis which could be able to highlight the semantic distinction between *also* and *too* in discourse and communicative functions. Unlike many traditional notions or analyses, it is more likely deemed that the two forms have two different invariant meanings which enable the English speakers to make a clear-cut distinction between them. These invariant meanings are deeply associated with the marked-unmarked

relationship. This relationship orbits around the feature of 'semantic integrality', i.e. whether an entity is perceived as a single continuous space or not. Accordingly, *too* makes a strong claim for 'semantic integrality' and therefore is definitely a marked member of the pair. On the other hand, *also* remains an unmarked member of the duo and as a result, makes no or very small claim regarding 'semantic integrality'. To lighten this analysis more clear, figure one could serve a lot

Semantic Substance	Form	Meaning
Addition	too	Marked for semantic integrality
	also	Unmarked for semantic integrality

Figure 1 – Markedness-unmarkedness relationship

The best matching examples that can describe the integral and non-integral domain of addition have been adopted from the Time magazine corpus again: .

15. 'The baby grunted again, and alive looked very anxiously into its face to see what was the matter with it. There could be no doubt that it had a very turn-up nose, much more like a snout than a real nose; **also** its eyes were

getting extremely small for a baby. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

16. When his eyes chanced to fall upon Alice, as she stood watching them, and he checked himself suddenly: the others looked around **also**, and all of them bowed low. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

In example 15, the connective marker *also* could be easily replaced by the conjunction *and*. So the scheme of (

$a + b = a + b$) seems postulated enough through such a to-the-point extract. As explained earlier, the form 'also' makes no claim for semantic integrality, thus the extracted sentence definitely means something like:

One of them sees her first, and then, immediately afterwards, the others (also) see her and react to her presence.

Example 16 uses the form *also* at the clause-final position which is rare to find. So this sentence shows that the characters of the story (the playing cards-gardeners) have disunity. So that's why unmarked *also* is prioritized over the marked *too*. The example makes it clear that the others turned round not at the same time. Thus, replacing 'also' by 'too' in the below example might describe the

semantic integrality and substantiate or reject the synonymy and interchangeability feasibility as well:

17. When his eyes chanced to fall upon Alice, as she stood watching them, and he checked himself suddenly: the others looked around **too**, and all of them bowed low. (Time magazine corpus, 2005)

Using *too* rather than *also* spices up the event and its participants with a breath of continuous or integral unity which is inappropriate for the message and spirit of this context, that is the use of *also* is highly preferred.

Tables five and six demonstrate the above analysis clearly.

Table 5 – Interchangeability and synonymy

No	Instances of 'also'	Semantic Integrality		Interchangeability		Sentence Position			Connective function	Intensive/excessive addition
		Marked ($a+b=ab$) (ab)	Unmarked ($a+b=a+b$) (a+b)	plausible	Not-plausible	Initial	middle	final	X +(also) Y	Intensive/extensive addition
15.	The baby grunted again, and alive looked very anxiously into its face to see what was the matter with it. There could be no doubt that it had a very turn-up nose, much more like a snout than a real nose; also its eyes were getting extremely small for a baby....'		*		*	*			*	
16.	When his eyes chanced to fall upon Alice, as she stood watching them, and he checked himself suddenly: the others looked around also , and all of them bowed low.		*		*			*	*	

Table 6 – Interchangeability and synonymy

No	Instances of <i>too</i>	Semantic Integrality		Interchangeability		Sentence Position			Connective function	Intensive/excessive addition
		Marked ($a+b=ab$) Unmarked		plausible	Not-plausible	initial	Middle	final	X +Y(too)	Too X / too (much) X

17.	When his eyes chanced to fall upon Alice, as she stood watching them, and he checked himself suddenly: the others looked around too , and all of them bowed low.'	*			*			*	*	
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4.4 Survey Analysis

To solidify the other measuring methods such as the markedness theory, a questionnaire was designed, distributed to, and collected from the grade 9 students who study in the International Islamic School, Malaysia. The only two sections of 9th graders who total 47 students were considered the target participants. All the 47 students took part in and returned all the questionnaires.

The survey data analysis has shown that out of 47 respondents, 37 voted for the similarity whereas the other

10 students polled for dissimilarity between the pair in question. Thus the rounded ratio between similarity and dissimilarity is 79% to 21%.

When it comes to interchangeability, 46 participants answered the second question of the questionnaire which is about the interchangeability-vs.-non-interchangeability issue. 40 respondents believed that both members of the pair are interchangeable while the rest 6 students considered them not interchangeable. Therefore, the rounded ratio of 87% to 13% has popped up. The following table and figure illustrate the above findings more vividly.

Table 7 – Survey results

No	Synonymy and interchangeability of <i>also</i> and <i>too</i>	synonymy		Interchangeability	
		plausible	Not-plausible	plausible	Not-plausible
	No. of respondents	37	10	40	6
	Percentage of the respondents	79%	21%	87%	13%

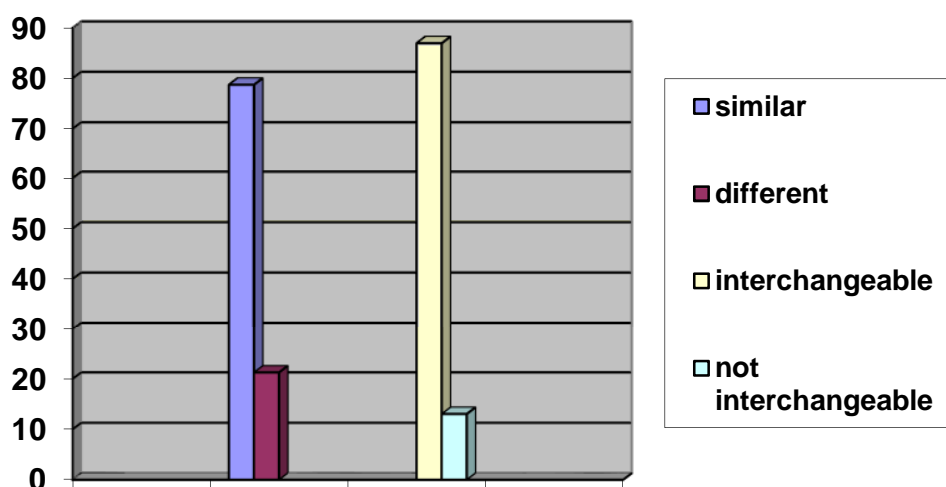


Figure 2 – Survey results

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experience in the English language teaching in the UAE and Iran. Hassan has published two books, and a number of papers in Semantics, Rhetoric, Writing, ELT, etc. having a master of TESL from the IIU, a public university in Malaysia. His areas of interest include Rhetoric, writing skill, Semantics, and ELT.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY



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