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The Pragmatic Use of Discourse Markers in the Unplanned Speech of University English Language Learners

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THE PRAGMATIC USE OF DISCOURSE MARKERS IN THE UNPLANNED SPEECH OF

UNIVERSITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Rachel Adams Goertel
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: The Pragmatic Use of Discourse Markers in the Unplanned Speech of University English

     Language Learners

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Use of discourse markers (DM) in the ordinary conversation of English language learners (ELL) remains a relatively unexplored area. This qualitative research study examines, in unplanned speech, the occurrence and use of DMs which are defined as a set of linguistic items functioning in the cognitive, social, expressive, and textual domains establishing coherence within discourse (Bright, 1992). Grounded in relevancy theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) the main goal of this research is to explore the pragmatic use of DMs in the unplanned speech of ELLs with their peers and to investigate a possible connection between second language competency level and the use of the pragmatic elements of DMs in these conversations. Discourse analysis of approximately four hours of talk reveals patterns in the use of discourse markers. The findings in this study contribute to the field of linguistics as the importance of DMs lies in the fact that they add "pragmatic tone" (Beebe & Waring, 2002) to the utterance indicating the speaker's intention and attitude towards the hearer, a vital tool for university ELLs seeking communicative competence.