The role of learners' proficiency in detecting the word "like" when functioning as a discourse marker

Mehdi Mirlohi and Ali Rahimi

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Scholars believe that the detection of DMs is a tricky task, which necessitates their disambiguation or the identification of their pragmatic occurrence. Among DMs, *like* is said to be one of the most difficult to detect owing to the fact that the word *like* functions as a DM, adjective, adverb, verb, noun, preposition, and conjunction, which all in all necessitates a high level of skill and proficiency for its identification and detection. Accordingly, this study aimed at investigating if learners' proficiency can be indicative of their ability in detecting the word *like* when functioning as a DM. Therefore, two intact classes, 20 sophomores and 27 seniors representing novice and skilled learners respectively, of Iranian EFL majors studying at the University of Kashan participated in this study. From Collins COBUILD, 14 sentences including the word LIKE with its seven functions (2 sentences for each function) were chosen and the participants were asked to translate them into their mother tongue (Persian) and indicate the function of the word *like* within parentheses in front of each sentence. Using two-way ANOVA, the researcher investigated mean differences among function scores. The results indicated that the participants found detecting the word like when functioning as a DM the most difficult and that the level of proficiency can be indicative of the participants' success in identifying the DM *like*

Introduction

During the past decades, discourse analysis (DA) has strongly established a firm foundation for itself in applied linguistics and brought about lots of insights into the nature of real language in various contexts. Discourse analysis is the outgrowth of the interaction among a variety of disciplines including: linguistics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc all of which sharing areas of common interest in heeding closely to particular utterances within particular situations, in how natural and authentic language is used by real people in context and finally in responding to many questions germane to language and speakers in the broad context of society and culture. For this reason, "discourse analysis has grown into a wide-ranging and heterogeneous discipline which finds its unity in the description of language above the sentence and an interest in the contexts and cultural influences which affect language in use" (McCarthy, 2005, p. 7).

However, discourse analysts differently view the scope of research interest of discourse analysis. Renkema (2004), for example, views DA as the study of "verbal communication", whilst Schiffrin (1994) regards the subject matter of DA to be "utterance". Nonetheless, Brown and Yule (1983) adopt a much broader view of DA as a discipline to study "language in use". Refraining from considering DA as a body of facts or theories, Johnstone (2008, p. xiii) describes her approach to DA as follows:

I treat discourse analysis not as a discipline (or as a subdiscipline of linguistics) but as a systematic rigorous way of suggesting answers to research questions posed in and across disciplines throughout humanities and social sciences and beyond. In other words, I see discourse analysis as a research method that can be (and is being) used by scholars with a variety of academic and non-academic affiliations, coming from a variety of disciplines, to answer a variety of questions.

Literature Review

Definition of Discourse

In order to grasp what really discourse analysis involves, we had better ponder meticulously over what '*discourse*' is. Johnstone (2008, p. 2) defines discourse as "actual instances of communication in the medium of language". Given this definition of discourse, she posits that DA refers to the study of language in its everyday sense used by people who, generally speaking, think of language as talk or communication, contrary to the study of language as a system of abstract rules or structures underlying communication. Similarly but more broadly, Bloommaert (2005, p.2) considers discourse as "meaningful symbolic behavior", hence truly pointing to the fact that not all linguistic communication is just written or spoken. Therefore, discourse analysts have wisely opted for " *discourse analysis*" in place of " *language analysis*" in order to refrain from merely focusing on language as an abstract system and to make an attempt to shed light on what happens when people in reality use language to exchange information, negotiate meanings, have things done, express emotions, and so on and so forth.

Furthermore, with analysis referring, in its literal meaning, to the study of something by examining its parts and their relationship, discourse analysts would be able to underscore the analytical *process* of DA in a quite explicit way. Thus, it is clearly understood that discourse analysts aim to answer questions of different sorts through analyzing discourse by examining aspects of the structures and functions of real language in use – that is, by breaking down longer stretches of discourse into parts according to criteria of interest and

examining the particular characteristics of each part. Generally speaking, discourse analysts, through analysis of discourse in this way, endeavor to answer (Johnstone, 2008; McCarthy, 2005):

1. how talk follows regular patterns in different situations
2. how texts are structured beyond sentence level
3. what are the effects of various cultures on discourse norms and their realizations
4. how complex areas such as stress and intonation put forth their influence in communication
5. why this stretch of discourse has been organized this way
6. why these particular words are used in this particular order

In order to answer these questions and others of similar ilk, discourse analysts, have to have a disciplined systematic way of thinking broadly about new things to possibly provide an interdisciplinary tool to answer the diverse questions posed. To put it differently, "discourse analysis is systematic to the extent that it encourages analysts to develop multiple explanations before they argue for one. Interdisciplinarity is thus not just an attractive feature of discourse analysis but a central fact about it. Discourse analysts have often drawn on disciplines other than linguistics for possible ways of explaining things and we should continue to search as widely as we can" (Johnstone, 2008, p. 271).

Unit of Analysis in DA

As a serious problem confronted by discourse theory, one can refer to the fact that each field involved in the study of discourse (e.g., discourse analysis, conversation analysis, pragmatics, grammar, rhetoric) may take up a quite different unit of analysis. In order to make sense of these methodological differences, three possible units of analysis for the study of discourse have been proposed: *'utterance', 'social interaction',* and *'social context'* (Lindblom, 2001). Considering 'discourse' as unit of experience, we can refer to Young, Alton and Kenneth's (1970) essay on tagmemic theory to further explain the tripartite representation: "*a unit of experience can be viewed as a particle, or as a wave, or as a field. That is [people] can choose to view any element of [their] experience as if it were static, or as if it were dynamic, or as if it were a network of relationships or a part of a larger network. Note carefully that a unit is not either a particle or a wave or a field, but can rather be viewed as all three." (Young et al., 1970)*

Therefore, the formal study of discourse would best be described according to the concepts of particle, wave, and field, indicating that those who approach discourse as utterance take a 'particle perspective', those who study discourse as social interaction take a 'wave perspective', and those who deal with discourse as social context take a 'field perspective'. Each of these perspectives has its own advantages and disadvantages and would be further explicated below.

The Study of Discourse as 'Utterance'

The proponents of this approach are most interested in the Cooperative Principles' maxims and conversational implicature, while they critique the concept of a general cooperative principle. There is a lot of controversy among those who study discourse as utterance as to what should be the object of analysis, the "nuclear" unit of discourse; indeed, a great many argumentations concern which units are the most important for analysis and study. Many a scholar are of the opinion that "[a particle perspective] recognizes the static nature of the unit, ignoring changes in time; select[s] from the dynamic whole some part, usually the nuclear bit, and 'take[s] a snap-shot' of it

for presentation; ignore[s] the difficulties of separating one unit from another, pretending that it were possible, and would arbitrarily, if necessary, specify where the one unit left off and the next began; would isolate the unit as a 'chunk'" (Young et al., 1970: 123). The field consists of, on the one hand, grammarians, who study sentence meaning as the unit of discourse (Chomsky,1975); on the other hand, there are speech-act theorists, who study statements, requests, promises, declarations, etc. (Grice, 1975); and there are also pragmatists who study speaker-intention (Leech, 1983). As Blum-Kulka mentions: "Pragmatic theory is concerned with explaining how interlocutors bridge the gap between sentence meanings and speaker meanings; hence its units of analysis are not sentences, which are verbal entities definable through linguistic theory, but rather *utterances,* which are verbal units of communication in specific contexts." (Blum-Kulka, 1997: 39)

It is very mind-boggling to fully understand the differences between and among these distinct treatments as proponents of one unit of discourse are often in sharp contrast with those analyzing the same building blocks of discourse from a different standpoint, defining alternative units of analysis.

The Study of Discourse as 'Social Interaction'

The study of discourse as 'social interaction' tends to look at language as it has been used in a particular community whether that community is a classroom, a board meeting, or a volleyball game. The scholars involved here study discourse from a 'wave perspective', which puts strong emphasis on interaction. According to Young et al. (1970, p. 123) "the wave view recognizes some dynamic features of the unit, noting flow or movement in time, in space, or in a conceptual framework; it points out the nuclear component, or peak point, of the unit; it emphasizes the fusion, smear, or absence of distinct boundaries between the unit and some other unit or units". Work in this group comprises, for example, Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Leech, 1983), and many of the works in rhetoric and composition that builds upon Grice's Cooperative Principle.

The scholars interested in the study of discourse as social interaction normally consider the "nuclear unit" to be the exchange. They consider the language as it flows between interlocutors, i.e. speaker and hearer or writer and reader, and consequently refrain from considering whether the speaker's communicative purpose is more noteworthy than the meaning of the words themselves. For instance, Brown and Levinson (op. cit.) study authority levels in community by investigating politeness actions in the talk they transcribe, hence drawing information about cultures from the language use.

The Study of Discourse as 'Social Context'

Lastly we can refer to the study of discourse from a 'field perspective', with scholars putting emphasis on the social context within which language is used or which the use of language creates and necessitates. Young et al. (1970, p. 123) aptly describe the characteristics of approaching discourse study from a field standpoint as follows:

It is seen not as existing in its own right, isolated and independent, but as occupying a place in a system of some kind (in extreme cases, the unit shrinks to a mere point in a larger system); it is seen as a system itself, composed of interrelated sub-systems. To take a field perspective on a unit means to focus on the relationships (patterns, structures, organizational principles, networks, systems, functions) that order the parts of the unit and connect it to other units within a larger system.

Views of the unit as dynamic, merging and interacting with other units in a constant state of flux (wave), and as a discrete, static entity (particle) are for the moment held at the margin of our attention; ordering principles and relationships (field) are in focus.

Scholars who examine discourse from a field perspective aim at "shrink(ing) [discourse] to a mere point in a larger system" and, for this reason, their work is not generally recognized as 'discourse study'; it is, however, considered something broader such as sociology or rhetoric (Lindblom, 2001).

Some Unnoticed Problems

Without a doubt, *particle- field- wave* classification of work on discourse has its own merits and demerits. It refrains, owing to the fact that many a scholar jump categories, from doing the work justice if the full body of any one scholar's work is placed into one category or another. As an example reference can be made to Levinson's work in pragmatics which clearly fits into the particle view whereas his work on Politeness Theory is apparently concerned with the more dynamic features of language and thus fits into the wave view. Furthermore, pragmatic theory investigates utterances within specific contexts and hence does not proceed unmindful of larger issues (Blum-Kulka, 1997).

Works on discourse, generally, make up a vast area of study that contains diverse relationships among different disciplines and includes many dynamic properties itself. "But there is a value to examining the field as characterized by three distinct perspectives because it highlights some of the foci of the research and can highlight relationships among these foci. Particle, wave, and field considered at once can build a map of discourse analysis, a meta-perspective that helps one negotiate the extremely varied reception of Grice's Cooperative Principle" (Lindblom, 2001). Regardless of what perspective one holds towards the unit of analysis in the study of discourse, one interesting line of investigation has been the identification *contextualization cues*, elements of discourse which serve meta-communicative functions, a subset of which are discourse markers.

Discourse Markers

One of the interesting topics in the study of discourse has been the identification of discourse markers, since there is often a prosodic, syntactic and functional distinction between DMs and the rest of an utterance. It is largely maintained that the identification of discourse markers (DMs) in both written and spoken discourse is an indispensable step in shared understanding among interlocutors.

Definition

Owing to having no generally accepted definition of what a discourse maker is despite the huge bulk of research done in the field, the first difficulty in studying and investigating discourse markers hinges upon the fuzzy and unclear terminology used to discover and identify these elements. In English language, for instance, researchers refer to these elements as *discourse markers* whilst they also use a variety of other names to refer to the same elements such as *discourse particles*, *discourse connectives*, *pragmatic markers*, etc (Lindblom, 2001). As researchers have no both inclusive and exclusive definition of this term, it, therefore, would not seem unusual if there would be no agreement regarding what elements to include in the category of discourse markers and this reflects the vast diversity of approaches used by scholars to deal with DMs and subsequently

which result from different research interests and manifold research goals. While Schiffrin (1987), for instance, include just 23 discourse markers in English, Fraser (1990) has proposed a list of 32 DMs. To compound the matter more, the two lists proposed by these scholars have just only five elements in common.

It would be however possible to reach a generally agreed upon definition of what discourse markers are. According to Crystal (2003, P. 141), discourse markers are "sequentially dependent elements which demarcate units of speech, such as *oh, well* and *I mean*". In the framework of relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), discourse markers are defined much more broadly as elements encoding a procedure which aims at restricting the possible number of inferences on the part of hearer to consider in order to enable him/her to make out the intended meaning of the speaker. At a more general level, Andersen (2001, p. 39) defines, on the other hand, discourse markers as *"a class of short, recurrent linguistic items that generally have little lexical import but serve significant pragmatic functions in conversation"*, which makes possible the inclusion of items such as: *and, so, you know, but, actually, like, I mean* and *well*.

Some other scholars defined DMs as elements (mainly conjunctions) which have the primary role and function of signaling rhetorical and semantic associations among contiguous spans of text. Therefore, in text understanding, readers, while deciphering the intent of the writer, benefit most from DMs as the most important clues in an attempt to conjecture the `rhetorical structure' of the text, a task that has lately been called `rhetorical parsing'. In text generation, on the other hand, the writer should endeavor to choose and use a proper discourse marker in the text in order to aptly provide an illustration of propositions and relations present among spans of text (Berger, Reitter, & Stede, 2001).

According to Asher (1993) and Mann and Thompson (1988) , a text's coherence can , on the basis of recent discourse theories, be described through discourse relations and features among adjacent spans of texts. Therefore, all lexical items (and also non-lexical ones, namely punctuation marks) which indicate the presence of such a relationship among spans of text can characteristically be included in the category of discourse markers. It is also worth noting that a discourse relation can be signaled by means of diverse discourse markers as clearly illustrated through the following sentences all communicating the same underlying propositional content.

- Ali crammed for the exam hard, *but* he failed anyway.
- *Although* he crammed for the exam hard, Ali failed anyway.
- *Notwithstanding* the fact that Ali crammed for the exam hard, he failed anyway.
- *Despite* the fact that Ali crammed for the exam hard, he failed anyway.

(The words considered as discourse markers are in *italic*.)

Given these sentences as paraphrases, the discourse markers designated in here, although belonging to diverse syntactic categories and thus entailing quite different syntactic restrictions in their co-text, all signal a concessive relationship between propositions mentioned, namely Ali's assiduousness and his failure. Moreover, the example sentences shed light on the fact that discourse markers, treated from a functional standpoint, can be regarded as alternatives in a paradigmatic choice although they do not belong to the same syntactic category. An important point also needs heeding here: not all catalogued paraphrases,

from the perspective of text generation and also text understanding, satisfy felicity conditions in every context, necessitating the essential knowledge about the differences among similar markers for the same propositional relation. To put it differently, in order to for the writer to generate a totally appropriate text and for the reader to fully grasp the intent of the text, there is no way but to discern the notable differences among similar discourse markers in terms of meaning and style (including the degree of formality and specifity) (Berger, Reiter, & Stede, 2001). Moreover, Taboada (2003) refers to the fact that discourse markers are only partial cues as a result of being no one-to-one mapping between a discourse marker and the existence of a propositional relation. However, DMs have been widely used for the automatic detection of coherence relations, for example concessions, between two clauses indicated by discourse markers such as *but, although, etc* (Marcu, 2000).

Discourse Markers in NLP

Despite the traditional use of DMs for the purpose of the automatic detection of coherence relations, current discourse analysis theories such as *Rhetorical Structure Theory* (Mann & Thompson 1988) have highlighted, since the last quarter of the previous century, the importance of the analysis of DMs for natural language processing (NLP), and more recently there has been an emphasis on utilizing DMs as useful signals to identify dialog acts and conversational moves. Notwithstanding the fact that identification of DMs in speech and grasping what propositional content they convey is really tricky, interlocutors skillfully exchange ideas and communicate their intents in everyday natural language. They use, for example, *oh* as a response to exclamation, a piece of shocking or new information, etc. (Heeman, Byron & Allen 1998).

Johnstone (2008) rightly states that discourse markers show what a speaker can be seen as doing on several different planes and refers to the importance of discourse markers, in conversations with a number of participants, to enable conversation partners to mark off their chunks from one other. Discourse markers frequently occur at structural boundaries in the discourse, a characteristic which features fluent coherent dialog and distinguishes between stilted and natural sounding dialog in tutorial language. Also known as cue words and interpersonal interactional signals, discourse markers, marking rhetorical relations between segments, help indicate changes in attentional state on the part of the hearer and in intentional state on the part of the speaker (Mann and Thompson, 1988). Scholars usually subsume DMs within conjunctions and emphasize their use as marking boundaries of topics and having functions such as aiding coherence and cohesion in text (Schifrin, 1987).

Overview of DM Frequencies

The following three factors are influential in determining the frequency of discourse markers: the type of discourse, the type of activity, and the regional variation of language. To exemplify the frequency of DMs, the discourse marker *however*, according to Zuffery & Popescu-Belis (2005), is, in terms of the type of discourse, found much more frequently in written than in spoken language as there are about 50 occurrences of *however* in the London-Lund Corpus (500,000 words, transcription of spoken language) and about 550 occurrences in the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) corpus (1 million words, written texts). *However*, like most other DMs, is also much more frequent in dialogs as opposed to monologs. In terms of the type of activity, *however* is more frequent in formal settings, such as interviews

vs. telephone conversations. In terms of the regional variation of English, e.g. American *vs.* British, there are few instances of *however* in spoken American English (Lenk, 1998).

On the basis of the manual annotation of DMs in a subpart of the ICSI meeting corpus (6 hours and 60,000 words), there is a big difference in the frequency of occurrence for various DMs. "The most frequent ones are *but* (543 times), *like* (89), and *well* (287). Others are moderately frequent, e.g., *actually* (43), *basically* (21) or *now* (19), while others are very rare: *furthermore* (2), *however* (1), *moreover* (0). The frequency of each DM is relatively stable," (Zuffery & Popescu-Belis, 2005). The researchers, however, admit that the frequencies of DMs are different for various languages and it cannot be taken to be universal.

The Detection of DMs

Due to fulfilling different functions and hence being ambiguous (and even sometimes multiguous), the detection of DMs turn out to be a very mammoth task. Therefore, the first step towards the appropriate use and detection of discourse markers for natural language processing is disambiguating them or to identify, in Zuffery & Popescu-Belis's (2005) term, their pragmatic occurrences.

How to Disambiguate Discourse Markers

According to Zuffery and Popescu-Belis (2005), one should consider *three linguistic criteria* to identify discourse markers: *the presence of collocations*, *the position in utterance*, and *prosody*. The presence of collocations*,* a criterion much more efficient in ruling out the presence of a DM, *is* the most fruitful way to disambiguate and identify DMs. In their pragmatic occurrences, discourse markers, are usually accompanied by specific words. When *well,* for instance, is used to indicate a topic change, it is nearly always used in a cluster of markers such as: *well you know*, *well now*, *well I think* or *oh well*. On the contrary, *well*, when used to end a topic, is usually found in clusters like: *OK well* or *well anyway/anyhow*. The criterion of collocations can also be applied to exclude elements which are not discourse markers. The occurrences of *like* and *well*, for example, in the following clusters cannot be regarded as pragmatic: *I/you like*, *seem/feel like*, *just like*; or when *well* is used in constructions like: *very well*, *as well*, *quite well*, etc.

The criterion of the position in utterance can also be used to, especially when the position is strongly constrained, determine an element as a DM or rule out occurrence as pragmatic. DMs are usually placed at the beginning or at the end of utterances. For example, *well* as a discourse marker is almost always positioned at the beginning of an utterance. According to Aijmer (2002, p. 30), "Some of the discourse particles … (*actually, sort of*) can, for instance, be inserted parenthetically or finally, often with little difference in meaning, after a sentence, clause, turn, tone unit as a post-end field constituent" (cited in Zuffery & Popescu-Belis's, 2005).

The third criterion used to distinguish discourse markers is prosody which, according to Schiffrin (1987, p. 328), features a discourse particle with a range of prosodic contours such as tonic stress followed by a pause or phonological reduction. This is the criterion which is specifically used in spoken speech by conversation partners in order to extract DMs successfully and fully grasp the propositional relations.

Despite the useful application of the aforementioned criteria to successfully extract DMs, some rare occurrences remain vague as to whether or not they are discourse markers. Moreover, according to Zuffery and Popescu-Belis (2005), none

of these criteria, used independently, suffice to completely help the identification and extraction of DMs.

Discourse Marker "LIKE"

Among DMs, *like* is very notorious. Since there is a high proportion of DM *like* in natural language, it seems quite essential to be able to mark and disambiguate this tricky DM in language processing. According to Zuffery and Popescu-Belis (2005), the discourse marker *like* is one of the most difficult to detect owing to having a large number of functions. The word *like* can be used as a preposition, as in example (1) below, an adjective (2), a conjunction (3), an adverb (4), a noun (5) and a verb (6):

1. He was *like* a son to me.
2. Cooking, ironing and *like* chores.
3. Nobody can sing that song *like* he did.
4. It's nothing *like* as nice as their previous house!
5. Scenes of unrest the *like(s)* of which had never been seen before in the city.
6. I *like* chocolate very much.

Apart from the above-said functions, *like,* as a discourse marker, is sometimes analyzed simply as "filler", a hesitation word like *uhmm* that has no contribution to the meaning of an utterance. According to Andersen (2001), at a general level, the word *like* can be described as a "loose talk" marker. Anderson also postulates that DMs often indicate the speakers' hesitation about what follows the marker and don't contribute to the meaning of an utterance that much. In short, the function of *like* as a discourse marker is to make explicit to the hearer that what follows the marker is in fact a loose interpretation of the speaker's belief. The following examples, provided by Zuffery and Popescu-Belis (2005), in which *like* has been used as a DM help clarify the point:

1. It took *like* twenty minutes.
2. They had little carvings of *like* dead people on the walls or something.

The first example shows that, the speaker intends, by using *like*, to communicate that the duration mentioned is an approximation. In the second example, the approximation concerns the expression following the DM *like* ("dead people"). By using *like*, the speaker informs the addressees that the description doesn't exactly match what he has in mind. These examples, with *like* as a discourse marker, clearly illustrate how the word *like* is used with the function of an approximation, indicating a loose interpretation of the speaker belief. Although this discussion about *like* and its different functions does not address all the elements involved in its identification and extraction, it does provide a foundation for the preliminary study of like in the language learning classroom presented in the next section.

A Study of Discourse Marker "LIKE"

The study reported here focused on exploring the ability of learners in detecting the specific function of the word *like* as a DM through having them translate into their mother tongue sentences containing the word *like* with its different functions. Accordingly, the following research questions were proposed:

● Which functions of the word *like* will the subjects find most difficult while translating?
● What is the role of learners' proficiency in detecting the word *like* as a DM?

Accordingly, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. There would be no significant difference between the participants' mean of scores on different functions of the word 'like'.
2. There would be no significant difference between novice and skilled participants in detecting the word 'like' as a DM.

Method

Participants

Two intact classes of Iranian EFL majors studying at the University of Kashan participated in this study. One class included 20 sophomores and another 27 seniors. Both sophomores and seniors encompassed of male and female participants. At the time of data collection, the senior participants had passed 115 credits and the sophomore participants had passed 20 credits. Therefore, sophomore participants could well represent learners with low proficiency (novice participants) and senior ones could well represent high proficient learners (skilled participants).

Instruments

The measuring instruments used in this study consisted of Collins COBUILD, and SPSS 16 for analyzing obtained data. From Collins COBUILD, 14 sentences including the word *like* were chosen (Appendix A). As said earlier, the word *like* has 7 functions and for each function 2 sentences were selected. An attempt was made to choose sentences which provide enough contexts for the participants to guess the function of the word *like*.

Procedure

The 14 sentences were presented to the participants on one single sheet of paper. Enough space was provided under each sentence for the participants to translate the sentences into their mother tongue, Persian, and also to indicate the correct function of the word *like* within parentheses in front of each sentence. To delimitate and partly eliminate the effect of guessing, the participants were asked to provide an appropriate Persian translation of the sentences. A comparison was made between each participant's answers as to the function of the word *like* and the translation provided in order to see if he/she could truly understand the function of the word *like*. In two separate sessions, the sophomore and senior participants responded to the survey, and for each correct answer, they got 1 and 0 for the incorrect answer, up to a total score of 14. The data obtained were entered into SPSS 16 for analysis.

Results and Discussions

As said above, this study concerned with which function of the word *like* the subjects would find most difficult while translating. Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on the seven functions of the word *like*. In this table, PREP, ADV, V, N, ADJ, DM, and CONJ refer to the functions of preposition, adverb, verb, noun, adjective, discourse marker, and conjunction respectively. Here the grade level 1 refers to sophomore participants and grade level 2 to the senior ones. This table also shows the number of participants across levels. It can be established that there were 20 sophomore and 27 senior participants in the experiment.

The mean of all scores of all the participants across each of the functions are also presented in this table. As you notice the table also reveals the mean of scores across grade level for each function. Therefore, it follows from the Table 1 that the senior participants averaged more than the sophomore ones across all functions. A comparison between and among the mean of scores makes it clear that *the participants had the lowest mean score on the DM (discourse marker) and it can be concluded that the*

participants found this function of the word 'like' the most difficult to detect. This finding implies the necessity of explicit instruction on discourse marker detecting and providing learners with practicing opportunities regardless of their level of proficiency.

As mentioned above, the first null hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference between the participants' mean of scores on different functions of the word 'like'. Therefore, by using a two-way ANOVA to test this null hypothesis, the researcher investigated the significance of the difference between score means of the participants. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2 below. As the table illustrates, the significance level for the effect of function is .000. This is smaller than .05 and .01; as a result, the differences between the means of the scores of the seven designated functions are significant and the first null hypothesis is rejected. All this indicates the necessity of explicit instruction on function detection at elementary levels. Learners at this level should know these different functions and should have opportunities to practice and use them.

The present research also concerned with the role of learners' proficiency in detecting the word like as a DM and the second null hypothesis claimed that there would be no significant difference between novice and skilled participants in detecting the word 'like' as a DM. Table 2 also indicates that the significance level reported by the computer for the effect of level is .000 which is smaller than .05 and .01. Therefore, the differences between the means of scores across level are significant and the second null hypothesis is rejected. What this implies is that in skilled learners, the level of proficiency does have a strong influence on their ability to detect the word like as a DM. To put this finding in other words, it can be claimed that level of proficiency can be considered as a criterion for differentiating between novice learners and skilled ones in terms of their ability to identify and detect DMs. This finding once again implies the necessity of instruction and providing the novice learners with more practicing opportunities.

The two-way ANOVA table indicates that the two independent variables, *function* and *level*, have an effect on the dependent variable, *score*. To know where exactly the effect lies and how the function of DM is different from the other functions, the post hoc test (Scheffe) was used the result of which is shown in Table 3. The reported significance levels in the table show that the mean difference of scores between discourse marker, on the one hand, and adjective, conjunction, noun, and verb, on the other, is significant. As this table also reveals the mean difference of scores between *like* as a DM and the two functions of adverb and preposition is not significant. Considering the mean of scores of all these functions (Table 1), it can be implied that the word *like* when functioning as a DM is much more difficult for students to detect than when it functions as adjective, conjunction, noun, and verb. Although the mean of participants' scores on the function of DM is lower than that on the two functions of adverb and preposition and hence students found more difficulty detecting the function of DM, the difference between the means of these functions is not significant. Here again, the necessity of more practicing opportunities in helping learners to identify the word *like* when it functions as a DM, adverb and preposition is clear.

Pedagogical implications of the study

The result and conclusions of this study indicate that level of proficiency is possibly an important factor in identifying and detecting the word *like* when functioning as a DM. The findings of this study imply that there should be an emphasis on more careful planning in function detecting instruction, that at elementary levels explicit instruction is required for novice learners and that all learners should be given adequate opportunities to practice identifying and using the word *like* with its different function. Not only are this function detecting instruction and practicing opportunities vital for novice learners but they are also necessary for advanced level and skilled learners. Teachers should try to provide extensive opportunities for all learners and encourage all novice and skilled learners to detect and use these functions of the word *like* if they are going to successfully communicate their intent in everyday discourse. However, since this research was a case study, its results and conclusions can not be generalized with certainty and assurance and many more research projects are still needed to replicate this study.

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APPENDIX A
Directions:

Please translate the following sentences into Persian. Try to provide an appropriate translation and also pay attention to different functions of the word *like* and indicate it within parentheses in front of each sentence. *Like* may function as preposition, verb, adjective, adverb, noun, and conjunction. In case it doesn't have any function, indicate it as NF within parentheses.

1. The neglect that large cites like New York have received over the past twelve years is tremendous. (……)
2. You should have told us but it's just like you not to share. (……)
3. People are strolling, buying ice-cream for their children, just like they do every Sunday. (…….)
4. His arms look like they might snap under the weight of his gloves. (……)
5. The US administration would like to see a negotiated settlement to the war. (……)
6. I hear Mary's husband likes her to be home no later than six o'clock. (……)
7. You have to make sure you're comparing like with like. (……)
8. She went to Cambridge and rubbed shoulders with the likes of George Bernard Shaw. (…….)
9. She responded in like manner. (……)
10. She is busy cooking, ironing and doing like chores. (……)

11. It's really hard like. Like I have no time for my own work. (……)
12. It's nothing like as nice as their previous house. (…….)
13. It took like twenty minutes. (……)
14. I decided that I'd go and, like, take a picture of him while he was in the shower. (…….)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Different Functions of the Word 'Like'				
	gradelevel	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
PREP	1	.7000	20	.57124
	2	1.0000	27	.78446
	Total	.8723	47	.71070
ADV	1	.7500	20	.85070
	2	.8889	27	.69798
	Total	.8298	47	.76098
V	1	1.5000	20	.51299
	2	1.6296	27	.56488
	Total	1.5745	47	.54152
N	1	1.0000	20	.85840
	2	1.4815	27	.70002
	Total	1.2766	47	.79951
ADJ	1	.9000	20	.71818
	2	.9630	27	.70610
	Total	.9362	47	.70416
DM	1	.0500	20	.22361
	2	.6667	27	.67937
	Total	.4043	47	.61360
CONJ	1	.9000	20	.71818
	2	1.5185	27	.57981
	Total	1.2553	47	.70612

Table 2.Two-way ANOVA Analysis of Score Means

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	53.944[a]	13	4.150	9.146	.000
Intercept	319.324	1	319.324	703.861	.000
function	41.003	6	6.834	15.063	.000
level	9.050	1	9.050	19.948	.000
function * level	3.872	6	.645	1.423	.205
Error	142.907	315	.454		
Total	540.000	329			
Corrected Total	196.851	328			
a. R Squared = .274 (Adjusted R Squared = .244)					

Table 3. Post Hoc Analysis of Score Means

(I) function	(J) function	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
DM	ADJ	-.5319*	.13894	.025	-1.0283	-.0355
	ADV	-.4255	.13894	.157	-.9219	.0709
	CONJ	-.8511*	.13894	.000	-1.3475	-.3547
	N	-.8723*	.13894	.000	-1.3687	-.3759
	PREP	-.4681	.13894	.082	-.9645	.0283
	V	-1.1702*	.13894	.000	-1.6666	-.6738
ADV	ADJ	-.1064	.13894	.997	-.6028	.3900
	CONJ	-.4255	.13894	.157	-.9219	.0709
	N	-.4468	.13894	.115	-.9432	.0496
	PREP	-.0426	.13894	1.000	-.5390	.4539
	V	-.7447*	.13894	.000	-1.2411	-.2483
CONJ	ADJ	.3191	.13894	.510	-.1773	.8156
	N	-.0213	.13894	1.000	-.5177	.4751
	PREP	.3830	.13894	.273	-.1134	.8794
	V	-.3191	.13894	.510	-.8156	.1773
ADJ	N	-.3404	.13894	.425	-.8368	.1560
	PREP	.0638	.13894	1.000	-.4326	.5602
	V	-.6383*	.13894	.002	-1.1347	-.1419
N	PREP	.4043	.13894	.210	-.0922	.9007
	V	-.2979	.13894	.597	-.7943	.1985
PREP	V	-.7021*	.13894	.000	-1.1985	-.2057