Common mistakes in student academic writing

CITATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS, GRAMMAR, STYLE, IDIOMATICITY, REFERENCE, DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT, INFORMATION PACKAGING
Overview

In these slides, I illustrate some mistakes common in student academic writing,

- Unless otherwise indicated, all texts from student writings
- Mistakes related to the following areas:
  - Citation
  - Interpretation
  - Analysis
  - Syntax
  - Style & Grammar
  - Information packaging
Citing works by scholar working on your topic is something you often do in an academic paper. Getting citations right is therefore important. Stick with the following simple rules:

- **Citations in text:**
  - Direct verbatim quote:
    - Quote marks around the quote and exact identification of work from which you are citing, thus:
    - AUTHOR (YEAR COLON PAGE)
    - Example: Levinson (2004: 403)
  - Reference to work which is in some way related/similar:
    - (cf. AUTHOR YEAR) or (cf. AUTHOR YEAR COLON PAGE)
    - Example: (cf. Levinson 2004)

- **Citation in reference section:**
  - Please consult style sheets of linguistic journals for exact conventions.
  - Referencing conventions vary wildly from journal to journal. Just stick to one set of conventions and apply it consistently.
The main parts of this paper are: the analysis of the occurrences of *cos* and *because* in different registers with respect to the development of *cos* into a discourse marker and the development of *cos* out of *because*; a section that follows Anna-Brita Stenström’s article in the book “Discourse Markers. Description and Theory” by A.H. Jucker and Y. Ziv (1998) and deals with *cos/because* in teenage….

In analyzing *cos/because* as a causal connective or subordinator, there has to be made a distinction between adjunct and disjunct clauses.

- She did her homework because her mother wanted her to.
- She did her homework, because her sister was watching her.

As Sinclair points out:

It [semantic prosody] is not subject to any conventions of linguistic realization, and so is subject to enormous variation, making it difficult for a human or a computer to find it reliably (Bednarek 2008: 131).
Interpretation

Only in FIC there is a comparably high number of hits for *cos*. This may be a result from the fact that we often find collocations in fiction, especially fiction for youth readers. But turning to the spoken language (…)

Avoid unsupported claims.

(1) Because I’m so busy

Example (1) may be a typical sentence of a woman that does not want to do something and is too polite to say so. Therefore she pretends to be busy and does not use the collocation *cos* but the more formal and polite because.

Avoid speculating.
6 Conclusion
In this paper the functional differences between cos and because (...)
For the other thing worth scrutinising I chose the fact that cos is mostly present in teenage talk. In consulting the BNC for data concerning the using of cos in different age groups there were some surprising results that are given in the following table:

Table 6.1 shows the distribution of cos among different age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent age</th>
<th>Hits</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Hit texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-14,</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>15-24,</td>
<td>2076</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>25-34,</td>
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<td>35-44,</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-59,</td>
<td>2186</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>60+,</td>
<td>1257</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total,</td>
<td>11375</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was really interesting to experience that the BNC offers even more hits for cos in age groups beyond teenage age. Even though the number of contexts was a little lower in the age groups 35-44, 45-59 and 60+, all of them got hit whereas in the age group 0-14, where one can presume a higher number, only 22 of 26 contexts were hit.

In analysing this phenomenon one can deduce again, that this must be because of cos being a discourse marker, that helps a speaker to convey more information and serves as a take-off for further talk, and this is were the circle closes.
6 Conclusion
In this paper the functional differences between \textit{cos} and \textit{because} (...)
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In analysing this phenomenon one can deduce again, that this must be because of \textit{cos} being a discourse marker, that helps a speaker to convey more information and serves as a take-off for further talk, and this is were the circle closes.
In respect to the thesis of this paper ...

thesis $\rightarrow$ hypothesis
Really striking during the research in the NC and the BNC was the fact, that there was hardly any result for *because* being a discourse marker.

There are not only in teenage discourse differences between *cos* and *because* visible.

Subsequently follows a detailed report of the results...

Avoid marked departures from canonical English word order SV*.

Do not translate from G to E.

Check inversion after adverbials/Avoid unorthodox clause patterns unless they serve a purpose.
As one of the most frequent discourse markers, this study analyzed the different functions of *anyway*.

Which correlation does exist between the type of structure “how about” enters into and the speech act expressed?

... a corpus-based research has been conducted.

C. Rühlemann, Marburg University, Feb 2015
Only in FIC there is a comparably high number of hits for \( \cos \).

“How about” can surely be considered as a conventionalized form ...

It got already clear that ...

In contrast to the situational reference, the cataphoric reference is responsible for ...

Use inversion after pre-posed negation (Only in FIC is there ...)

Check colligation (consider + ADJ)

Avoid colloquial style/lexis/grammar (got + C)

Use zero article with noncount abstract nouns
Since it was not possible to read all of Dickinson’s poems never mind to analyze them all ...

It got already clear that ...

Avoid colloquial style/lexis/grammar (never mind \(\rightarrow\) let alone)

Avoid colloquial style/lexis/grammar (got + C)
Discourse management

- **Discourse markers** are words/phrases that serve to indicate the relationship between parts (clauses, sentences, paragraphs) of your text. They are crucial signposts greatly reducing the reader’s processing of the exposition. However, care needs to be taken to select discourse markers that indeed indicate the intended/required logical link:
  - The second group of expressions is used to refer to smaller geographical units, for example, *Cornish* for Cornwall, *Frankish* for a German area. **Consequently**, this category includes regions.

- The discourse marker *consequently* indicates causality: A is because of B. In the example, however, it is hardly a *consequence* of there being a second group of expressions like Cornish and Frankish that this group (‘category’) “includes regions.” The wording in the example rather indicates a relationship similar to “A [the group] is because of A [the category].”
• An alternative wording, which would indicate causality, would be something like this:

- *I also found a number of expressions* used to refer to smaller geographical units, for example, Cornish for Cornwall, Frankish for a German area. **Consequently, I labelled the category for these words ‘regions‘.**
Substantive research was carried out about discourse markers.

... the main function of *anyway* is to reduce the effort the hearer has to take for the interpretation of the utterance.

This more closely explains why ...

In Kathleen Ferrara’s researches, *anyway* occurred in ...
How, and how clearly, you refer to ideas and concepts in the text is crucial for the reader’s orientation. The most frequent type of reference in academic writing is probably anaphoric reference, that is, backward looking reference to some entity mentioned earlier. Given that sentences in academic writing tend to be complex, containing lots of entities, it is important that you use an appropriate referring expression to single out unambiguously the entity you wish to focus on. Use of inappropriate referring expressions may render comprehension difficult or even lead to misunderstandings.
The reference of one referring item is very unclear in this example – which item?
- The noun phrase [the] *formation* is further modified by the *of*-phrase *of a crystalline solid*. That is, the reference is forward-pointing, a type of reference which is called ‘cataphoric’. It does not necessarily have to be an *of*-phrase, which is emphasized by the following examples.

The item ‘it’. Which entity does it point back to? There is in the preceding sentences indeed no single NP that ‘it’ can be said to stand for. The reader is left alone in figuring out what in fact ‘does not have to be an *of*-phrase’.
Another example:
- If reference is exophoric, the item is identifiable in two ways. The first possibility is ... (3 intervening sentences). The second possibility is that identification is provided because it refers to a class of objects.

Again, the reference of ‘it’ is unclear. Neither ‘possibility’ nor ‘identification’ make plausible referents. The only possible referent is the noun ‘item’, which occurred earlier. However, ‘item’ occurred far ahead of ‘it’; it is therefore no longer activated in the reader’s mind.
A very common mistake in reference relates to defining and non-defining relative clauses. Defining relative clauses serve to define the head noun in the matrix clause; matrix clause and relative clause are NOT separated by comma. Non-defining relative clauses refer back to the whole preceding matrix clause; here, the use of a comma is mandatory. It is these non-defining relative clauses, particularly in the form of so-called sentence relatives, which are often used incorrectly:

- ... [discourse markers] give information about the discourse structure which is important for the comprehension of discourse strategies.

Here, the missing comma makes the reader form the impression that the ‘discourse structure’ mentioned is modified in the relative clause, which is obviously not the case. Rather, the relative clause can be seen as a comment on the whole of the matrix clause.

Distinguish defining and non-defining relative clauses.
[On the division of written and spoken texts in the BNC]:
In the following, I will only work with the spoken texts which come from a variety of informants ...

The remaining expressions are difficult to categorize which is why I will classify them as ‘unclear’.

Distinguish defining and non-defining relative clauses.
A detailed analysis of a sample of 90 occurrences of *I goes* in the context of 100 words each was performed.

Not only are the urgency of the situation but also the degree of embarrassment in the situation and the social distance between speaker and hearer indispensable parts of an analysis of the speech act of suggestion.

**Avoid heavy left-branching**

**Avoid heavy left branching plus SV inversion**
Conversational language often does not follow the rules of Standard English. Corpus data show this clearly.

This piece of discourse is difficult to process. Why? Because the information in one sentence does not connect immediately to the information in the next sentence. In terms of theme and rheme: the discourse is difficult because the rheme of the first sentence (i.e. the predicate) is NOT the theme (i.e. the subject) of the next sentence.

A better solution is this:
Information packaging: Theme-Rheme 2

- [Theme 1 One of the most obvious features of Netspeak] [Rheme 1 is the lexicon that belongs exclusively to the Internet]. [Theme 2 ≠ Rheme 1 The terminology of computer science, programming, and electronics] [Rheme 2 is not included in this lexicon.

To make a text ‘flow’ nicely, observe a simple rule: the rheme of one sentence should become the theme of the next sentence.

- [Theme 1 One of the most obvious features of Netspeak] [Rheme 1 is the lexicon that belongs exclusively to the Internet]. [Theme 2 = Rheme 1 This lexicon] [Rheme 2 does not include the terminology of computer science, programming, and electronics.] (text source: Crystal 2001)