

Discourse Markers in Pakistani English Public Discourse: Situating a South Asian New English within the World and Asian Englishes Paradigm

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Abstract

While World Englishes scholarship has studied lexical, phonological, and grammatical nativization in Outer Circle varieties, register-level pragmatic patterns (particularly in Pakistani English) remains comparatively under-studied within the broader Asian Englishes. This study, therefore, presents a corpus-based comparison of discourse markers across Pakistani English newspaper editorials and National/Provincial Assembly parliamentary debates as a contribution to the sociolinguistics of Asian Englishes by focusing how Pakistani English register-based discourse-marker system compares with discourse marker nativization used for Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Philippine, and Singaporean English. Using AntConc-based frequency, keyness (log-likelihood), chi-square, and one-way ANOVA testing, the analysis shows systematic register variations. Editorials favour additive, adversative, and sequential connectives that construct written argumentation, while parliamentary debates favour interactional, procedural, and stance markers (well, you know, certainly) that manage real-time institutional persuasion. Positioned against recent corpus-based research on South and Southeast Asian Englishes, Pakistani English emerges on an intermediate position on Schneider's Dynamic Model, more structurally nativized at the register level than Bangladeshi or Nepali English, yet less endonormatively stabilized in its discourse marking system than Indian, Philippine, or Singapore English. The findings extend register theory to a New English context and carry implications for English-medium instruction, media literacy, and comparative pedagogy in World Englishes.

Key Words: Asian Englishes, Discourse Markers, New Englishes, Pakistani English, Register Variation, World Englishes

Introduction

The global spread of English has produced not a single monolithic standard but a family of institutionalized, functionally nativized varieties in which grammars, lexicons, and discourse conventions vary systematically from Inner Circle norms (Kachru, 1985; Schneider, 2007). Kachru's (1985) three-circle model, though repeatedly refined and criticised for its fuzzy boundaries (Zoghbor, 2011), remains the key framework for distinguishing Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle Englishes and for legitimizing Outer Circle varieties such as Pakistani, Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Philippine, and Singapore English as norm-developing rather than deficient systems. The institutionalization of this paradigm, that is, exemplified by the sustained publication record of Asian Englishes since 1998 and by recent editorial stock-taking in World Englishes (Botha & Bernaisch, 2024; Schneider, 2025) reflects a maturing consensus that regional Englishes merit description on their own structural and pragmatic terms rather than as deviations from British or American norms.

Within this paradigm, corpus-based World Englishes scholarship has expanded rapidly in 2025-2026, by covering new treebank resources (Huang et al., 2025), large-scale morphosyntactic surveys (Fuchs, 2023; Fuchs et al., 2025), and dialectometric approaches to web-based Englishes (Botha & Bernaisch, 2024). This expansion also includes parallel corpus resources for World Englishes (Scholman et al., 2025) and corpus-based approaches which use metadiscourse to compare AI-generated and human academic writing (Yao & Liu, 2025) which extend corpus-pragmatic methods into new genres and data types. However, this expansion has been significantly uneven across levels of linguistic description. While grammatical and lexical nativization is well presented for South and Southeast Asian Englishes, the discourse-pragmatic level (i.e., how nativized varieties organize

coherence and interpersonal stance across registers) remains comparatively less studied particularly for Pakistani English which is the key focus of this present study.

Literature Review

Pakistani English as an Outer Circle Variety

Pakistani English is an institutionalized second-language variety used alongside Urdu and numerous regional languages across government, education, media, and the judiciary contexts. Structural nativization is now well recognized. Recent corpus work has studied nativized verb–noun collocations that encode institutional procedure (Afzal et al., 2026), variety-specific patterning in the mandative subjunctive (Schmidt & Funke, 2025), and culturally distinctive address-term systems (Shahid, Anwar, & Shaffaqat, 2025). A comprehensive study covering nearly eight decades of scholarship (Jadoon, Qureshi, & Muhammad, 2025) confirms both the depth and the unevenness of this literature as structural and lexical studies vastly outnumber in discourse-pragmatic analyses. Within Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of the evolution of postcolonial Englishes, Pakistani English is generally located at the nativization stage by exhibiting systematic local innovation without yet displaying the endonormative codification associated with, for instance, contemporary Indian English (Cowie, 2026).

Discourse Markers as a Base for Pragmatic Nativization

Discourse markers, that is, items such as ‘however’, ‘therefore’, ‘well’, ‘you know’, and ‘in fact’ organize propositional content, manage turn-taking, and encode speaker/writer stance without changing truth-conditional meaning (Fraser, 1999; Schiffrin, 1987). Some of the recent studies have tried to extend this area. For example, Schoppa (2025) has positioned meta-illocutionary markers within the speech-act category. On the other hand, Sokolova (2025) has shown that the textual discourse markers perform pragmatic functions across genres. Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model further distinguishes interactive resources, which guide readers through text (transitions, frame markers, evidentials), from interactional resources, which negotiate writer-reader relationships (hedges, boosters, engagement markers). Because DM selection is very sensitive to situational parameters, such as mode, interactivity, planning time, and participant relationship (Biber, 1988, Biber et al., 1999), the DM system offers an unusually direct window onto how a New English organizes discourse differently across registers, and onto whether that organization has stabilized into a recognisably local system.

World Englishes research on discourse markers has grown substantially in the past two years, particularly for South Asian varieties. For example: Degenhardt (2023, 2025a) explores variety-specific request and parenthetical strategies in Indian and Sri Lankan English; Degenhardt (2025b) traces pragmatic functions of tag-questions across the same pair; Kraaz and Bernaisch (2022) establish backchannel norms; and Schmidt and Degenhardt (2026) use multifactorial random-forest modelling to show that Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, and Nepali English newspaper writers frame apology-related speech acts in variety-specific, not uniformly ‘deviant’, ways. Comparable nativization has been reported for Southeast Asian Englishes, including subjectless nonfinite clause patterning that indexes sociocultural identity in Philippine and Singapore English (Magpale & Ferrer, 2025) and internationally-driven lexical innovation in Philippine institutional English (Ravago et al., 2025). Existing studies on DMs in Pakistani English (e.g., Abid, Siddique, & Ahmad, 2024; Noor, 2021) report the forms and functions of nativised markers. However, no study adopts a register based comparative multi-method design. This gap necessitates the register-comparative, statistically triangulated DM research on Pakistani English which is the main focus of this study.

Similarities and Differences between Pakistani English and the Asian Englishes

Comparative positioning across Asian Englishes suggests a graded rather than binary distinction between ‘more’ and ‘less’ nativized varieties. Indian English is widely treated as endonormatively stabilized, having developed internally consistent norms across pauses, thanking, requests, and tag questions (Cowie, 2026; Degenhardt, 2023, 2025a, 2025b; Kraaz & Bernaisch, 2022). Sri Lankan and Philippine Englishes occupy an intermediate position showing robust structural

nativization with pragmatic systems still consolidating (Magpale & Ferrer, 2025; Schmidt & Degenhardt, 2026). Bangladeshi and Nepali Englishes remain comparatively under-described which is a gap explicitly noted in the most recent multidimensional cross-varietal research (Schmidt & Degenhardt, 2026). Pakistani English, despite being the second-largest South Asian variety by speaker population, has attracted disproportionately little register-comparative pragmatic research relative to its demographic and institutional worth (Jadoon et al., 2025), even as research shows Pakistani and other South Asian Englishes are increasingly exposed to Expanding Circle listeners in educational contexts (Jie & Zeng, 2025). This highlights a pedagogical concern emphasized in the study (Zoghbor, 2011) on lingua-franca-core-informed investigation on the pronunciation norms of Expanding and Outer circle varieties. This difference between demographic importance and empirical attention motivates the explicit comparative framing for this present study. For, no existing study combines a purpose-built, register-balanced Pakistani English corpus with multi-method DM analysis (i.e., frequency, keyness, and inferential statistics) while explicitly situating the results within the comparative Asian Englishes. This study addresses that gap by answering following research questions (RQs):

1. Do normalized DM frequencies differ significantly across functional categories between Pakistani English newspaper editorials and parliamentary debates?
2. Which individual discourse markers are statistically register-distinctive (keyness) in each register?
3. How do these register-level patterns position Pakistani English relative to pragmatic-nativization findings reported for other Asian Englishes?

Material and Methods

This study adopts a mixed-method, corpus-based comparative design combining quantitative corpus-linguistic analysis with discourse-functional interpretation, following methodological precedents established in recent cross-genre DM research (Alsharif & Khasawneh, 2026; Fu, Afzaal, & El-Dakhs, 2024).

Corpus Design

Two register-differentiated sub-corpora (Table 1) totaling 781,064 words were compiled from newspaper editorials published in *The Dawn* and *The News International* during 2018-2024 representing organised, and monologic written institutional discourse. Previously, comparable corpora have been used to study interactional metadiscourse and phraseological patterns during politically charged period (see Al-Subhi, 2023), and particularly to study register variation in Pakistani context (e.g., Fatima et al., 2023; Siddique, Mahmood, & Ahmad, 2022). These studies provide a ground for this present research to consider newspaper editorials for the study of DMs in Pakistani English. In addition to the Editorial Corpus, the Parliamentary Corpus comprises Hansard-style texts from the National Assembly and provincial assemblies (421,684 words) representing dialogic, real-time spoken institutional discourse. Texts were purposively sampled for topical comparability (politics, governance, the constitution, the economy, foreign affairs, and social affairs) and annotated for source, date, topic, and register. This design follows corpus development tradition set for the analysis of parliamentary discourse (see Cova, 2025), legislatures (see Hames, Haugh, & Musgrave, 2025; Ilie, 2021) which frames this present study within a broader tradition of political discourse studies (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002).

Marker Identification and Functional Categorization

DMs were identified through a hybrid corpus-based/corpus-driven procedure combining a theory-derived research (Fraser, 1999; Hyland, 2005; Schiffrin, 1987) with inductively identified items from frequency lists and concordances. Candidates were required to connect discourse units, contribute to structural organization or interpersonal stance, and remain semantically optional to truth-conditional content. Items were grouped into eight functional categories: additive, adversative/contrastive, causal/inferential, sequential/frame, elaborative/reformulation, interactional/interpersonal, procedural/conversational, and engagement/evidential markers.

Analytical Procedures

AntConc generated frequency lists, KWIC concordances, and collocations (Mutual Information, ± 3 –5-word span); frequencies were normalized per 100,000 words for comparison across sub-corpora of unequal size. Keyness was calculated via log-likelihood ($LL > 3.84$, $p < .05$; $LL > 10.83$, $p < .001$), a method now well established for cross-register and cross-variety DM comparison (Reveilhac & Schneider, 2025; Schweinberger & Haugh, 2025). Chi-square tests (with Cramer's V) and one-way ANOVA on normalized category frequencies provided inferential and effect-size triangulation following methodological practice in recent metadiscourse research (Alsharif & Khasawneh, 2026; Yang, 2025).

Reliability and Validity

A second coder independently annotated 10% of the corpus, achieving Cohen's Kappa $\geq .85$. Construct validity derived from alignment with established DM frameworks; external validity from the corpus six-year, multi-source span; and a pilot study (20 editorials, 20 transcripts) refined extraction and coding parameters prior to the analysis. As the corpus draws exclusively on publicly available texts, no personal or human-subject data were involved.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Corpus Distribution

Corpus Category	Total Words	% of Corpus
Dawn Editorials	98,000	23.4%
The News International Editorials	94,649	22.6%
Parliamentary Debates	226,151	54.0%
Total Corpus	418,800	100.0%

Functional-Category Frequencies (RQ1)

Table 2 and Figure 1 present normalized frequencies for the eight functional categories. Editorial sub-corpora show substantially higher frequencies for text-oriented categories, that is, additive markers occur roughly 5.5 times more frequently in editorials (mean ≈ 447.0) than in debates (80.9), and sequential/frame markers roughly 3.5 times more frequently (153.1 vs 45.3). Conversely, parliamentary debate shows dramatically higher interactional/interpersonal (513.3 vs an editorial mean of 118.1) and procedural/conversational marker frequencies (364.8 vs 31.5) more than four and eleven times the editorial mean, respectively. Only engagement/evidential markers show modest register difference (92.3 vs 83.6), suggesting evidential grounding is valued comparably in both registers.

Table 2
Normalized Frequency of Discourse-Marker Functional Categories

Functional Category	The Dawn	The News	Parliamentary Debates	Register Direction
Additive Markers	445.1	448.8	80.9	Editorial $\uparrow\uparrow$
Adversative/Contrastive	494.0	490.0	249.9	Editorial $\uparrow$
Causal/Inferential	346.9	339.7	260.4	Editorial $\uparrow$
Sequential/Frame	155.7	150.4	45.3	Editorial $\uparrow\uparrow$
Elaborative/Reformulation	108.5	119.3	58.6	Editorial $\uparrow$
Interactional/Interpersonal	110.2	126.0	513.3	Parliamentary $\uparrow\uparrow$
Procedural/Conversational	28.5	34.5	364.8	Parliamentary $\uparrow\uparrow$
Engagement/Evidential	78.4	88.7	92.3	Parliamentary $\uparrow$

$\uparrow$ = moderately higher; $\uparrow\uparrow$ = substantially higher in the indicated register. See Figure 1 also.

Keyness and Statistical Triangulation (RQ2)

Log-likelihood keyness testing identified ‘well’, ‘you know’, and ‘I mean’ as the strongest parliamentary discourse markers ($LL = 187.42$, 161.88 , and 144.21 respectively, $p < .0001$), along with ‘certainly’ and ‘in fact’. ‘Moreover’ and ‘on the other hand’ emerged as the leading editorial-key markers ($LL = 119.73$ and 87.44 , $p < .0001$). Chi-square testing confirmed all eight functional categories

differ significantly by register ($p \leq .009$), with interactional/interpersonal (Cramer's $V = .47$) and procedural/conversational markers ($V = .43$) showing the largest effect sizes by approaching a large effect and indicating the register contrast is practically, not merely statistically, significant. A supplementary one-way ANOVA corroborated this pattern (Table 3).

Table 3
ANOVA and chi-square results for discourse-marker functional categories

Category	F	p	χ^2 (df=2)	Cramer's V
Interactional/Interpersonal	16.42	<.001	244.73	.47
Procedural/Conversational	12.31	.001	198.42	.43
Additive	5.71	.009	58.74	.21
Adversative/Contrastive	4.88	.015	47.13	.18
Causal/Inferential	3.94	.028	35.69	.16
Elaborative/Reformulation	3.12	.053	18.31	.11
Sequential/Frame	2.47	.098	24.88	.14
Engagement/Evidential	–	.009 (χ^2 only)	9.47	.08

Positioning Pakistani English within the Asian Englishes

The register differences noted above (i.e., formal connective density in written institutional discourse versus interactional/procedural density in spoken institutional discourse) is not, in itself, unique to Pakistani English; comparable written/spoken differences have been reported for Arab, Zimbabwean, and other Outer and Expanding Circle Englishes (Alsharif & Khasawneh, 2026). What is distinctive is the specific finding and collocational profile through which Pakistani English realizes this difference, and how that profile compares with the pragmatic systems noted for other Asian Englishes. Figure 2 synthesizes recent literature (Cowie, 2026; Degenhardt, 2023, 2025a, 2025b; Magpale & Ferrer, 2025; Kraaz & Bernaisch, 2022; Schmidt & Degenhardt, 2026) to situate Pakistani English relative to Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Philippine, and Singapore English on two dimensions: approximate developmental stage on Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model, and the reported density of pragmatic/discourse-level nativization.

As Table 4 summarizes, Pakistani English shares with Indian and Sri Lankan English a register-sensitive discourse-marker system where spoken register relies heavily on interactional tokens ('well', 'you know', and 'certainly') that parallel the backchannel and parenthetical resources reported for Indian and Sri Lankan spoken English (Degenhardt, 2025a; Kraaz & Bernaisch, 2022). It differs from Indian English, however, in showing less evidence of endonormative codification. The present corpus shows productive but still register-bound use of markers such as 'however' and 'therefore', the markers that cause difficulty even for the L1 readers (see Zufferey & Gygax, 2020), across both editorial and parliamentary registers, rather than the fully stabilized, genre-independent pragmatic norms reported for Indian English by Cowie (2026). Compared with Bangladeshi and Nepali English (i.e., varieties Schmidt and Degenhardt (2026) describe as having sparse, still-emerging metapragmatic systems) Pakistani English register-level DM organization appears considerably more elaborated, consistent with its status as the demographically larger and institutionally more entrenched of the four South Asian varieties compared in that study. Relative to Philippine and Singapore English where discourse-pragmatic systems show identity-marking structural nativization extending into syntax itself (Magpale & Ferrer, 2025), Pakistani English nativization remains concentrated at the lexical-pragmatic (marker choice, collocation) rather than syntactic level which suggests an intermediate position on the variation cline. The comparative Synthesis of Discourse-Pragmatic Nativization across Selected Asian Englishes (Table 4) is based on the present study and recent (2022–2026) corpus-pragmatic literature cited with Figure 2.

Table 4
Comparative Synthesis of Discourse-Pragmatic Nativization across Selected Asian Englishes

Variety	Register Sensitivity of DM System	Evidence of Endonormative Stabilization	Primary Locus of Nativization
Pakistani English (this study)	High (editorial vs parliamentary)	Emerging	Lexical–pragmatic (marker choice, collocation)
Indian English	High	Strong	Pragmatic + syntactic
Sri Lankan English	Moderate–High	Moderate	Pragmatic (backchannels, apologies)

Bangladeshi English	Limited data	Weak / emerging	Under-described
Nepali English	Limited data	Weak / emerging	Under-described
Philippine English	High	Moderate–Strong	Syntactic + identity-indexical
Singapore English	High	Strong	Syntactic + particle system

These findings extend three complementary frameworks to the context of Pakistani English. First, Schiffrin's (1987) multidimensional model is supported at the register level: editorial markers ('moreover', and 'therefore') operate primarily at the ideational and informational levels to structure pre-planned written argumentation, while parliamentary markers ('well', 'you know', and 'certainly') operate at the participatory and exchange levels to manage turn-taking and real-time institutional persuasion. Second, Fraser's (1999) procedural account is confirmed cross-registers: the same relational apparatus (indicating contrast, addition, or inference) is used with register-specific collocational preferences, consistent with Fraser's (1999) claim that DMs form a pragmatically, not lexically, coherent class. Third, Hyland's (2005) interactive/interactional distinction maps clearly onto the editorial/parliamentary split, extending a model developed largely on Inner Circle data to Outer Circle institutional discourse.

More broadly, the comparative discussion in Section 3.4 suggests that Pakistani English DM profile is best understood not as a deficient estimate of Indian English or of Inner Circle norms, but as a coherently organized register system in which the degree of nativization is intermediate on the Asian Englishes cline which is more elaborated than the still-emerging Bangladeshi and Nepali systems, yet less endonormatively codified than Indian, Philippine, or Singaporean English. This graded picture is consistent with recent findings (Botha & Bernaisch, 2024; Jie & Zeng, 2025; Schneider, 2025) to treat variation in World Englishes as a continuum of stabilization rather than a fixed phenomenon, and it identifies Pakistani English specifically as a rich language for future diachronic and cross-register research within the paradigm of Asian Englishes.

Conclusion

This study has presented a corpus-based analysis of discourse markers in Pakistani English newspaper editorials and parliamentary debates as a contribution to World Englishes and Asian Englishes scholarship. Across 781,064 words, editorial discourse showed higher frequencies of additive, adversative, and sequential connectives suited to organised written discourse, while parliamentary discourse showed dramatically higher frequencies of interactional and procedural markers suited to real-time institutional persuasion, that is, a pattern confirmed by log-likelihood, chi-square, and ANOVA testing. Situating these results against 2022-2026 corpus-based research on Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Nepali, Philippine, and Singapore English indicates that Pakistani English occupies an intermediate position on the Asian Englishes cline. Its register-sensitive DM system is more elaborated than those reported for Bangladeshi and Nepali English, yet less endonormatively stabilized than the DM systems of Indian, Philippine, or Singapore English. Pakistani English thus emerges as a distinct, internally coherent New English in which discourse-level organization needs continued comparative attention with direct implications for English-medium instruction, ESP curricula, and media-literacy in Pakistani higher education, and for the broader comparative project of documenting how postcolonial Englishes nativize not only lexically and grammatically but also pragmatically.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that Pakistani EMI and ESP curricula explicitly teach register-appropriate discourse markers to enhance communicative competence of the students. Future research should employ diachronic and cross-variety designs to study nativization, while media literacy programs and curriculum developers should utilise these insights to validate local English norms in pedagogy and professional practice.

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