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THE USE OF DISCOURSE CONNECTIVES IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING OF
PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to inquire the use of conjunctions in descriptive paragraphs written by first year professional ESL undergraduates. The data comprises of a set of 30 descriptive academic paragraphs collected from an engineering college, in order to explore the use different types of conjunctions based on Swan's (2002) classification of connectives. The findings reveal that the learners used conjunctions inappropriately and they also used coordinating conjunctions very frequently than subordinating conjunctions as part of their writing. The participants encountered problems while using conjunctions to be attributed to various reasons. Initially, the use of their first language may result from a negative transfer. Though, it leads to the overgeneralization in the second language writing production. The learners produced connectives in their writing involuntarily lacking a proper intellectual capacity of its intended use.

Keywords: Conjunctions, Coordinating Conjunctions, Subordinating Conjunctions, linking words, discourse connectives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of English as a global language endures to be increasing as more and more populace found it essential for them to express in English, especially technical writing for the science and engineering students. According to Barkaoui (2007) writing is one of the most difficult skills that second-language (L2) learners are expected to acquire, requiring the mastery of a variety of linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural competencies (p. 35). Writing is a challenging skill than other language skills such as speaking, listening and reading. To be precise, speaking has additional features such as non-verbal communication, tone and pitch. Hence, it is very significant that writing such a way that the message would be clear for the readers. In any academic writing, it is essential for students to construct grammatically correct sentences and use of appropriate vocabulary. A discourse connective is a conjunction that joins sentences in a paragraph. It is also indispensable that the learners use conjunctions accordingly to make ideas connected. As conjunctions are

the most obvious clues for restricting the interpretation of a semantic relation in order to be well understood (Dooley & Levinsohn, 2001). Conjunctions are used to signal the logical connections between ideas.

Writing reinforces the grammatical structures among the students, and it also facilitates them to adventurous with the language and involves with the language (Raines, 1983, p.3). Professional students are required to construct sentences correctly and cohesive text through the appropriate use of conjunctions. Conjunctions indicate rational associations in a text and assist the reader to join diverse components and paragraphs to create a logic sense of the text (Heino, 2010). Hence, conjunctions are considered to be some of the most significant cohesive devices used in academic writing. However, no association has been established in the use of conjunctions in writing improvement (Granger & Tyson, 1996).

On the other hand, ESL learners found the use of conjunctions problematic in their writing. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), there are four types of conjunction that are divided into four such as additive, adversative, causal and temporal. Nevertheless, according to Swan (2002) conjunctions are words that join clauses into sentences (p.129). Therefore, in this study the researcher adopted Swan's (2002) classification of conjunctions such as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions.

This paper aims to find out the use of different types of conjunctions in the written texts. It also attempts to stumble on that how these conjunctions are used in the learners' written scripts that play a major role in the development of language performance in writing.

The study endeavors to answer the following research questions:

1. What extent the professional learners use conjunctions in their written texts?
2. Does the use of conjunctions make students' writing more complex?
3. Does the use of conjunctions affect the writing competency of the students?

2. Literature Review

This part presents the precedent works used earlier and also provides the associated theoretical framework. Conjunction is a word to connect words, phrases, clause or sentences and so on. Aarts (2001) states that conjunctions are a closed class of words that have a linking function (p.46). Post Halliday & Hasan (1976) publication, many studies were conducted on cohesion analysis. Most of these studies analyzed the grammatical cohesion function in texts mainly based on conjunctions. However, conjunction serves to connect two or more aspects of the language. Whereas Patridge (2000) defines that the term conjunction refers to words such as and, but, however, finally, then and in conclusion that joins phrases, clauses, or sections of a text in ways that express their logical-semantic relationship (p.135).

Hamed (2014) investigated the use of conjunctions in argumentative essays written by English as Foreign Language fourth year undergraduate students in Libya. It is found that Libyan students used conjunctions inappropriately and faced difficulties in the use of conjunctions in their writing. Hence, the logical relations were weakened between sentences and paragraphs.

Another study was conducted to discover the use of conjunctions as cohesive devices in the speech of Iranians. It was revealed that the conjunction functionality was compared based on the extent of occurrence frequency. In the end, it was intended for people to utilize a substantial amount of conjunction sub types in order to communicate comprehensibly (Ahangar, Taki, and Rahimi, 2012).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on Swan's (2002) division of conjunctions. It is adopted to analyze the use of conjunctions in descriptive writing of professional students. Thus, it provides widespread and systematic interpretation and the use of connectors in English.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Thirty written scripts were collected from the first year professional undergraduates from a reputed engineering college. Their age is in between 17 and 19 years and they had ten to twelve years of exposure to English. The participants include 8 female and 22 male. The nature of the data was a spontaneous individual production; hence, the data occurred naturally. They were categorized as good, average and poor based on

their writing abilities. The collected learners’ written scripts were produced during an activity in the classroom; however, there was no control over the participants’ behavior. As part of data collection, written texts were collected from a teacher to analyze the study.

Initially, the students’ written texts were collected from a teacher of English from a reputed professional college. These written texts were produced spontaneously during their class. The same topic was given to all the students to find out their use of conjunctions in the descriptive paragraphs of between 150 and 200 words on a prearranged topic. The classroom was observed for two hours to get an understanding of teaching methodology. In addition to the classroom observation, the researcher had an informal discussion with the students about their use of conjunctions in academic writing.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis was done based on previous studies that were conducted on the use of conjunctions by Halliday and Hassan (1976) Swan (2002). The data was analyzed qualitatively as well as quantitatively in order to generalize the sample. Initially, conjunctions in the students’ academic writing were highlighted. Then, the researcher classifies the conjunctions according to its type and provides labels depending on its usage in the written texts. The suitable and inappropriate use of connectives was identified based on its semantic function. Afterward, conjunctions were counted to find out its use and frequency in the paragraph.

Table 1. Halliday and Hasan’s classification of conjunctions: an overview (readopted from Tanone 2013).

Conjunctions	
Additive	and, also, and... too, and... as well, nor, neither, not..., either, or, or else, nor, further, furthermore, in addition, besides, additionally, moreover, and another thing, add to this, alternatively, in other words, incidentally, by the way, that is to say, that is, I mean, in other words, for example, thus, for instance, likewise, similarly, in the same way, on the other hand, by/in contrast, conversely.
Adversative	yet, though, only, but, nevertheless, however, despite this, all the same, in any case/event, in either case/event, any/either way, whichever, anyhow, at any rate, in any case, that may be, and, on the other hand, at the same time, as against that, in fact, as a matter of fact, actually, to tell the truth, in point of fact, instead, rather, on the contrary, at least, rather, I mean.
Causal	So, then, thus, therefore, hence, consequently, because of this, then, in that case, in such an event, under those circumstances, under the circumstances, otherwise, under other circumstances, it follows, for this reason, arising out of this, to this end, for, because, in this respect, for, because, in this respect, in regard to this, in other respects, apart from this.
Temporal	Then, next, afterwards, just then, at that moment, previously, before then, first..., second..., at first..., in the end, finally, at last, eventually, at once, there upon, soon, presently, this time, next time, next day, 2 minutes later, meanwhile, all this time, by this time, up until then, next moment, at this point, secondly, first...next, in conclusion, up until now, hitherto, at this point, here, from now on, henceforth, to sum up, to resume.
Continuatives	now, of course, anyway, surely, after all.

In this study, the researchers focused on the Swan’s (2002) classification of conjunctions and their use in the academic writing to discover writing complexity and language performance of the learners.

Table 2. Swan’s kinds of conjunctions (Adopted from Practical English Grammar by Michel Swan, 2002.)

Coordinating conjunctions	Subordinating conjunctions
And, but, so, yet, for, nor and or	Because, when, that or which, if, although, though, while, after, before, since, whenever, once, until, as soon as, further, furthermore

4. RESULTS

Results of the study indicate that the students used various sorts of conjunctions to express different relationships between sentences to sentence. They also used two types of connectives such as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions in their academic descriptive paragraphs. It also discusses the implications for teaching in the professional context that many of the students used coordinating conjunctions very frequently and subordinating conjunctions very sporadically.

The results exhibited that all the participants together produced 6050 words in their descriptive writing, but they had exercised only 280 connectives as a whole in their write ups. According to figure 1, only 4.62 % of words were conjunctions in their academic paragraphs.

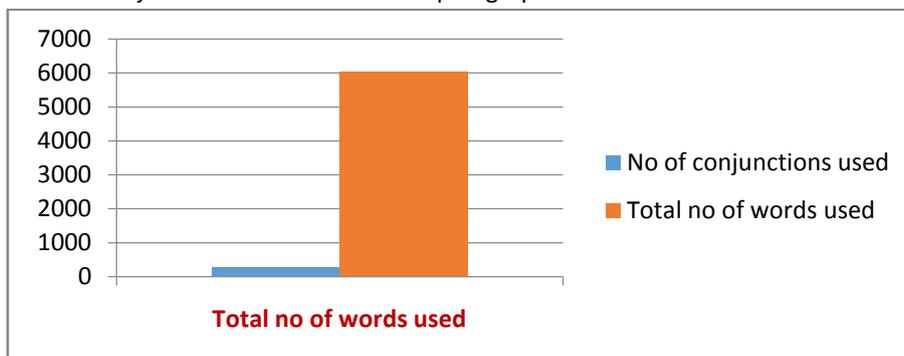


Figure 1. Total number of words used in the descriptive writing of the participants

It was established that the total number of conjunctions used by the participants in their descriptive paragraphs were 280, among them 223 were coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions were 57. In figure 2, it showed that more number of coordinating conjunctions (79.35%) was used in their writing than subordinating conjunctions (19.65%).

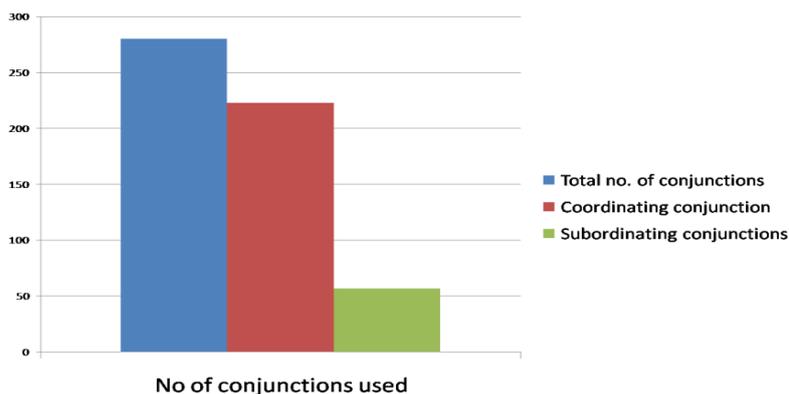


Figure 2 Total number of conjunctions used in descriptive writing of the participants.

The findings of the study demonstrated that the most of the students were used linking words appropriately in spite of having problems in the use of vocabulary, grammar and other aspects of writing.

Table 3. The overall words used in academic writing

S.No.	Item	No of coordinating	No. of subordinating	Total no of conjunctions	Total no of words
1	Total No. of words	223	57	280	6050
2	Mean	7.43	1.9	9.33	201.66

5. DISCUSSION

The study reveals that there was a considerable connection between the number of conjunctions used and the quality of the academic writing produced by professional students. The learners' use of conjunctions in academic writing was very extensively utilized to illustrate the connections amongst sentences

and thoughts. However, it would assist them to fabricate comprehensive pieces of writing as part of their course. It was observed that the use of conjunctions' underuse, overuse, and misuse by the ESL learners in their academic writing. It exhibited that the students found difficulty in the use of conjunctions. The present study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What extent the professional learners use conjunctions in their written texts?

The results of the study displayed that the participants' use of conjunctions – coordinating and subordinating connectors in their descriptive writing. It provided the answer to the question that the student who used the highest number of words to produce a descriptive writing was 261, whereas the average and the lowest students used 201 and 145 words respectively to produce the descriptive writing. In other words, the use of connectives was inserted where it was unessential. It happened due to failure to identify the logical connection between thoughts and ideas. It was found that the and unnecessarily within and between ideas, thoughts, sentences and paragraphs.

2. Does the use of conjunctions make students' writing more complex?

The use of coordinating conjunction in descriptive writing made students' writing as casual due to overuse of certain conjunctions such as 'and', 'but', 'for' and 'or'. It made most of the descriptive paragraphs monotonous to read whereas the use of subordinating conjunctions could make the paragraph more complex in nature and also more interesting. In all the paragraphs 280 conjunctions used, among them, 223 were coordinating conjunctions the remaining 57 subordinating conjunctions. Based on the students' write-ups, more number of subordinating conjunctions makes one's writing more complex, where all the learners – the poor, average and good, used linking words appropriately in their scripts.

3. Does the use of conjunctions affect the writing performance of the students?

The more number of subordinating conjunctions in one's writing would make their writing more complex and also it affects their writing performance in many ways. Of the two kinds of conjunctions, the use of subordinating conjunctions was the most challenging to the students than using coordinating conjunctions. The learners' use of subordinating conjunctions include 'because', 'when', 'that', 'after', 'before', 'while', 'which', 'if', 'though', 'further' and 'wherever'. However, the learners who performed well in their academic writing used more subordinating conjunctions than coordinating. Sayah & Fatemi (2013) opined that conjunctions have significant effects in one's writing performance (p.140). Subordinating conjunctions make one's writing more complex, effective and meaningful.

6. Implications

In order to improve students' writing, it is essential to have an awareness of appropriate use of connectives. The research exhibits that the writing skill should be taught in a very different way to master the skill. The teachers should adopt special strategies for teaching conjunctions to equip their learners with the required knowledge to get command over the use of conjunctions. The teachers should instruct their learners in using linking words appropriately. Hence, the students may achieve a balance in using various types of conjunctions. The use of learners' first language may result from a negative transfer. Though, it leads to the overgeneralization of linking words in the second language writing production. The learners produced connectives in their writing involuntarily lacking the proper intellectual capacity of its intended use.

7. Conclusion

The results exhibit the professional students' academic writing that the efficiency of their writing was poor. There are many factors such as lack of trained teachers at advanced level, teaching methods, and syllabus. The research has found that the use of conjunctions in the academic writing would play a crucial role in order to articulate message intelligibly. The analysis of the performance of using conjunctions in their writing discovered that the students who used more number of subordinating conjunctions in their writing were found to be very complex in nature when to comparing to the use of coordinating conjunctions. At the end, the present study focused on the use of different kinds of conjunctions among the professional

undergraduate students. Students' overuse of coordinating conjunctions made their writing more simple and monotonous; and the underuse of subordinating conjunctions made their writing very simple. As the students' views that they were familiarized themselves with the more use of coordinating than subordinating conjunctions. At this juncture, the students' previous knowledge about the language plays a major role in the language efficiency and performance. Further, the research needs to carry out in order to investigate the learners' performance in the usage of conjunctions at an advanced level.

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