

EFL Students' Ability in Mastering the English Conjuncts to Create Unity of a Text

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Abstract

This study is mainly concerned with investigating the college EFL students' ability in mastering the English conjunct or linking adverbials to create a text unity. This study focuses mainly on investigation whether the EFL students under study are competent in using English conjunct or linking adverbials to achieve the unity of coherence in a text or not. It also tries to reflect whether those students were aware with grammatical and contextual functions of those English conjuncts. The participants were 22 EFL learners studying English at the third level at the Departments of English, Faculties of Education, University of Aden. The instrument utilized to collect data in this study is a diagnostic test. The data collected were analyzed and interpreted quantitatively and qualitatively in the light of the questions of the study. The results revealed that the students were not competent in using the English conjunct or linking adverbials to fulfill the coherence of a text while writing in English. They also showed the poverty of those students with the awareness of the grammatical functions of those English conjunct or linking adverbials. This study concluded by recommending EFL teachers and curriculum designers to adopt certain methods and techniques to help the students to be competent in writing in English in general and using the English linking adverbials correctly in their writing in particular.

Keywords: Linking Adverbials, Writing, Text Unity.

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1. Introduction

The use of English conjunct or linking adverbials as a linguistic text connector has recently been the focus of many researches. It has been studied not just in academic essays as stated in (Don and Srinivass, 2017; Januliene and Dzeidravicius, 2015), but also in editorials as in (Kim and Ahn, 2012) and in native speakers' texts and text produced by second language learners as mentioned in

(Bikeliene, 2013; Vincela, 2013).

In addition, the field of marketing needs professionals of various fields with higher communicative potentials especially writing skills in English where English (written or spoken) becomes the medium of communication among multinational and global enterprises. For this purpose, students should be qualified in mastering organizational patterns by controlling the use

of conjunct adverbials and other linguistic devices as well as meaningful application of punctuations in their English writings. The previous literature namely (Henry and Roseberry, 2007; Heydari and Baghari, 2012; Ngadda and Nwoke, 2014; Phuket and Othman, 2015) state that second language and EFL learners are still unable to create errorless English written texts. Plakansad and Gebril (2017) reveal that the cohesion markers analyzed in their study, in which they have investigated TOEFEL essays for type and appropriateness of organizations and coherence quality, resulted in no statistical differences across the level score. Crossley and Mc Nawence (2012) also state that advanced second language writers adopt fewer cohesive markers (cited in Kadhim S., 2016). This devoid refers to the learners' inability to master those devices where researchers have recommended that many cohesive and coherence devices decrease the level of text complexity. Graesser et al., (2004) states that this is due to the fact that higher level texts have more inferred rather than, explicit, cohesive (cited in Zainab et al., 2016). In addition, Gennaro focuses on the characteristics of cohesive control which are: "ideas are overtly linked throughout the essay, use of cohesive markers (logical connectors, repetition, synonyms) is always accurate. Compound and complex sentences are used accurately to create connection across sentences and paragraphs." (2016, p.13).

Hence, this study aims at investigating the EFL college students' ability in mastering the conjunct adverbials to create texts and find out whether they are aware with the grammatical functions of those adverbials.

2. The Significance of the Study

The researchers selected this topic to be investigated for the importance of the conjunct adverbials in creating any type of written texts. Biber et al. (1999) who has used the term linking adverbials instead of the term conjunct adverbials, asserts the significance of conjunct adverbials in reporting that they are important devices to create textual unity either cohesive or coherent unity.

3. The Research Questions

Mainly, the present study goes to answer the following questions:

- 1 - Are EFL students able to use conjunct or linking adverbials to connect ideas correctly in a text?
- 2 - Are EFL students aware of the grammatical functions and categories of those adverbials or not?

4. The Limitation of the Study

The population of this study are EFL students who are studying English language at the Departemnets of Enlish language at the Faculties of Educations – University of Aden. Twenty-two of those students were randomly chosen to be the sample of the study. Those students'

participation in this study was in the form of answering the diagnostic test questions. This resulted in collecting the data of the study to be ready for analysis.

5. The Statement of the Problem

EFL learners naturally face a lot of problems while learning English. One of these problems relate to writing in English either at the level of sentence or discourse. As a permanent teacher of English language at the department of English for about 10 years and through correcting test and exam papers of the students the researchers observed that the EFL students under study did not demonstrate controlled use of organizational patterns, coherent linkers and cohesive devices while writing in. This captured the attention of the researchers to conduct this study which is concerned with the investigating of the students' ability to use the English conjuncts to achieve the coherent unity of a text.

6. Literature Review

Writing is one of the four language skills which most individuals use less (Supiani, 2017). Wijaya (2017) refers to the difficulty of English writing skill for EFL learners because it requires the right grammatical rules and textual coherence. Ong (2011), Norrish (1998) and Ting (2003) state that writing is problematic for native speakers as well. According to Syarofi et al. (2018) who describes writing skills as a significant ability in English language learning, EFL/ESL learners should have enough ability to express their intended message obviously. Like Ting and Ong, Promma and Sinwonguwat (2011) think that writing is more challenging because the communication process in the written medium causes a type of misunderstanding for the reader without any help available as it is found in verbal communication in the form of gesture, facial expressions, body movements etc. which, in their turn, make a type of confirmation that the intended message is properly presented and likely understood. For avoiding such challenging, learners should be more competent in mastering the formal, structural and communicative properties to construct a cohesive and coherent text by being capable of using English conjunct or linking adverbials correctly. In spite of those English conjuncts or linkers are not the only tools or devices to create text unity cohesively or coherently, they are not just good indications to the logical or grammatical relations among the various sentences or paragraphs of the text, but also they help the reader to connect different ideas to make a sense of the whole text (Heino, 2010). The following review of literature shed more light on the grammar of English conjunct or linking adverbials.

6.1 Conjunct Adverbials

The term of conjunct adverbials is referred to in Quirk et al. (1985) in the sense that they perform a connecting function to show the relationship between two units of

discourse. These units may be in the form of sentences and may be larger or smaller than sentence. To surf in the previous literature, there are different ways to name and classify these adverbials. Swales and Feak (1994) adopt the term 'linking words and phrases' to refer to those devices which can help a writer to maintain flow and establish the relationship between ideas. Robagashi and Rinnert, (2003) use the term 'discourse markers' for those linkers and they distinguished between three types of them: over meta-discourse markers, partial meta-discourse markers and inter sentential markers. Whereas, Chalker (1996) uses the coordinated term 'coordinating and subordinating conjunction and connectors' to refer to those linkers. Chalker illustrates the idea that they are conjunctions when they combine two or more clauses into a sentence and they are part of the clause. And they are connectors when they refer to the preceding sentence and they do not grammatically belong to the clause. Oshima and Hogue (2007, p.27) use the term "transition signals: transition phrases, conjunctive adverbs, coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions as linking adverbials". Similarly, Leech (1989, p.24) uses the term "coordinating and subordinating linking adverbials", whereas Bikeleine (2013), like Biber et al. uses the term 'linking words'.

The above discussion shows that there is a terminology variety and for this, this current study will use the term 'conjunct adverbials' stated in Quirk et. al. (1985) and 'linking adverbials' stated in Biber et al. (1999) to refer to those adverbials used primarily to introduce units of a text and display a writers' or speakers' perception of the relationship between those discursual units. According to Biber et al., conjunct or linking adverbials can semantically be classified in various ways according to their meanings and uses in the units they occur in. Formally, linking adverbials can be realized in different syntactic forms. The following sections present the syntactic forms of conjunct or linking adverbials and their semantic categories.

6.1.1 Syntactic Realizations

Formally speaking, conjunct or linking adverbials can be in various syntactic forms. Biber et al. (1999) give some of the typical examples in which those adverbials can be recognized; they are as follows:

Single adverbs include (anyway, nevertheless, so, therefore, though, etc.)

Adverb phrases include (first and foremost, more precisely, even so etc.)

Prepositional phrases include (by the way, for example, in addition etc.)

Finite clauses include (that is, that is to say etc.)

Non-finite clauses (added that, to conclude, to summarize etc.)

6.1.2 Semantic Categories

As it is stated above, conjunct or linking adverbials are mainly used to show the relationships between either sentence parts or text units. Burt Roberts (1986, p.10) states that "conjunct adverbials are used to show the relationships between the sentence and its linguistic context". Roberts also asserts that those adverbials have no grammatical functions as an element of the sentence in which they are placed, just they serve to connect or link sentences into a coherent discourse. Semantically speaking, Biber et al. (1999) present these adverbials under four general semantic categories, which are as follows:

6.1.2.1 Enumeration and Addition

The adverbials under this category are used to achieve two semantic functions within the pieces of any grammatical units. The first function is to show the order in which pieces of information are presented as chosen by a speaker or a writer. Quirk et al. (1985) name the adverbials doing such function 'enumeratives' which are syntactically realized by either the forms of ordinal numbers (first, second, third etc.), in some cases to follow the sequence order in presenting information of the text or in the forms (in the first place, for one thing, for another thing, to begin with, next etc.). The second function is to introduce new pieces of information added to the previous ones. The adverbials within this function are called 'additives' such as (in addition, furthermore, moreover etc.) In some cases, another group of those additives are used to show explicitly that the second piece of information is similar to the preceding ones, such additives are (similarly, likewise, by the same token etc.). Quirk et. al. (1985, p. 634) categorize these adverbials under the term "listing adverbials" and subcategorize them into two further-subcategories: "enumeratives and additives". Moreover, they further subcategorize the additive adverbials into "equative, like equally, likewise, correspondingly etc., and reinforcing adverbials, like again, also, besides, in particular etc."

6.1.2.2 Summation

The adverbials under this category can be used to show that a piece of information is intended to conclude or sum up the previous information. These adverbials are called 'summatives' which are syntactically realized in various forms like (all in all, to sum up, in conclusion, in summary etc.) Quirk et. al. (1985, p. 637) state that "summative conjuncts introduce an item that embrace the preceding ones". They exemplify this sentence (he lost his watch, his car broken down and he got a letter of complaint from a customer, all in all he had a bad day.) in which the summative adverbial 'all in all' encloses the first speech: his watch loss and his car breaking down by saying that he had a bad day.

6.1.2.3 Apposition

The adverbials under this category are used to show that a piece of information is to be looked at as equivalent to the preceding one or to include it. That is, these adverbials are

to introduce given information with the aim of restating or reformulating the previous information. The adverbials do this function are called 'appositives' and they formally appear in the forms (which is to say, in other words, that is, for instance, for example etc.) Quirk et. al. (1985, p. 637) indicate that "appositive conjuncts are concerned rather to express the content of the preceding item or items in other terms". They also distinguish between two contexts of using appositive adverbials. The first is where appositive refers to more than an item, in this case, there is a type of summative implication as in the sentence (they took with them some chocolates, cans of beer, fruit juice... In other words, enough refreshment), the appositive adverbial 'in other words' introduces the summative implication 'enough refreshments' to refer to the previously-detailed things they took with them. The second context is where the appositive adverbials consist of several items. The appositive is used to specify a list of it as the appositive adverbial 'that is' in the sentence (they took refreshments, that is, sandwiches, coffee, beer etc.)

6.1.2.4 Result / Inference

The adverbials under this category are used to show that the second piece of information states the result or consequence of the preceding ones. Biber, et al. (1999) mention two types of results connected by these adverbials. The first is "overt result or consequence" which can overtly be recognized as a logical or practical result of the first part of speech. The second type is "inferred result or consequence" (pp.877-878). This can be seen in this sequence of sentences (he works late. How am I supposed to get there, then?) in which the resultive 'then' connects between the idea of the first sentence 'his working late' and the resulted idea of the second sentence 'the speakers' problem of getting to another place. Quirk et. al (1985) add that inferential adverbials are used to indicate a conclusion based on logical and supposition as the adverbial 'in other words' is realized as inferential one in the sentence (You have not answered my question, in other words, you disapprove of my proposal) because it infers the second event 'proposal disapproval' relying on the first event 'no question answering'. For this, Quirk et al. (1985) talk clearly about the fact that resultive / inferential adverbials have something common with each other not just but also with additives, summatives and appositives as it is referred to above, the adverbial 'in other words' is used as appositive adverbials in one context (see apposition section) and as inferential adverbial as in the above mention sentence of this section. That is, the same adverbials are grouped under several categories.

7. Methodology

This section presents the procedures and methods adopted to answer the questions of this study. For the same reason, this study used the diagnostic test to collect data from 22 participants who are EFL college students studying English in two Faculties of Education (Aden and Yafea)

which are affiliated to the University of Aden, Yemen. The study used mixed method i.e. both qualitative and quantitative, while analyzing the participants' responses on the test items. The test contains two questions. The first test question is expressed in a form of a narrative text with 15 blank gaps and asked the participants to choose the correct conjunct adverbial in each gap to achieve the text unity. The second test question gives the same conjunct adverbials given in question no. 1 and asked the participant to identify the grammatical function of each one. These two questions were designed to answer the main two questions of the study, respectively. The presentation of the data analysis and discussion was shown in regard to the questions of the study.

8. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the data collected through the instruments. It mainly shows the responses of the students on the items of the two questions of the diagnostic test. To show the participants' responses on the test questions number one, the researchers classifies the conjunct adverbials to be chosen in the given gap functionally, as Quirk et. al (1985) identify them, in parallelism with the number and percent of both correct and incorrect responses of the participants as follows:

Table1

The Participants' Responses on Question No. 1.

No.	ADVERBIAL FUNCTION	Correct		Incorrect	
		No.	%	No.	%
1	Resultive	10	45%	12	55%
2	Resultive	6	27%	16	73%
3	Enumerative	2	9%	20	91%
4	Resultive	8	36%	14	64%
5	Enumerative	10	45%	12	55%
6	Resultive	12	54%	10	46%
7	Contrastive	16	73%	6	27%
8	Additive	2	9%	20	91%
9	Enumerative	14	64%	8	36%
10	Additive	10	45%	12	55%
11	Concessive	0	0%	22	100%
12	Enumerative	6	27%	16	73%
13	Additive	2	9%	20	91%
14	Appositive	12	54%	10	46%
15	Enumerative	12	54%	10	46%
		122	37%	208	63%

This table shows the students' responses on the items of the test given to them with regard to the choice of the appropriate given conjunct or linking adverbial in the suitable gap. It shows that 10 (45%) students replied correctly to choose resultive adverbial in the first gap, whereas 12 (55%) students replied incorrectly by choosing various wrong adverbials. With gap 2, 6 (27%) students

replied correctly by choosing resultive adverbial as well, whereas 16 (73%) students replied incorrectly by choosing various wrong adverbials. Only 2 (9%) students replied correctly by choosing enumerative adverbial in gap3, whereas 20 (91%) students chose wrongly various adverbials. 8 (36%) students replied correctly by putting resultive adverbial in gap 4, whereas 14 (64%) students chose wrong adverbials. In gap 5, 10 (45%) students chose correctly enumerative adverbial, whereas 12 (55%) students chose wrongly various adverbials. Twelve students (54%) chose correct resultive adverbial, whereas 10 (46%) chose wrong various adverbials within gap 6. With gap 7, the table shows 16 (73%) students chose correctly contrastive adverbial, whereas just 6 (27%) students chose various wrong adverbials. Only 2 (9%) students replied correctly in gap 8 by choosing additive adverbial, whereas 20 (91%) students replied incorrectly by choosing various wrong adverbials. In gap 9, 14 (64%) students chose correct enumerative adverbial, whereas 8 (36%) students wrongly chose various adverbials. Ten students (45%) correctly chose additive adverbial within gap 10 whereas 12 (55%) students chose wrongly various adverbials. In gap11, no one of the students chose correctly concessive adverbial, but all the 22 (100%) students wrongly chose various adverbials. In gap 12, 6 (27%) students replied correctly by choosing enumerative adverbial, whereas 16 (73%) students wrongly chose various adverbials. Twenty students (91%) wrongly chose various adverbials, whereas just 2 (9%) students correctly chose additive adverbials in gap 13. In gap14, 12 (54%) students chose correctly appositive adverbial whereas 10 (46%) students wrongly chose various adverbials. Twelve students (54%) chose correct enumerative adverbial in gap 15, whereas 10 (46%) students wrongly chose various adverbials.

The table also shows that the total of the students' correct responses is 122 (37%) responses out of 330 responses, whereas the incorrect responses are totally 208 (63%). This percentage refers to the fact that the students are not able to master the use of English conjunct or linking adverbials to create the coherence unity of a text where it is obligatory for those students to be qualified more in organizing writing units. This result goes in line with the statement of Crewe (1990) who posits that the students or learners' ability to use appropriate linking adverbials contributes to successful writing, whereas inappropriate use detracts more the writing quality. Similarly, Wijaya, (2017) indicates to the difficulty of English writing skill for EFL learners because it requires the right grammatical rules and textual coherence.

With reference to the test question No. 2 which is intended to investigate the students' awareness with the grammatical functions of conjunct or linking adverbials, the following figure shows totally the students' responses

as follows:

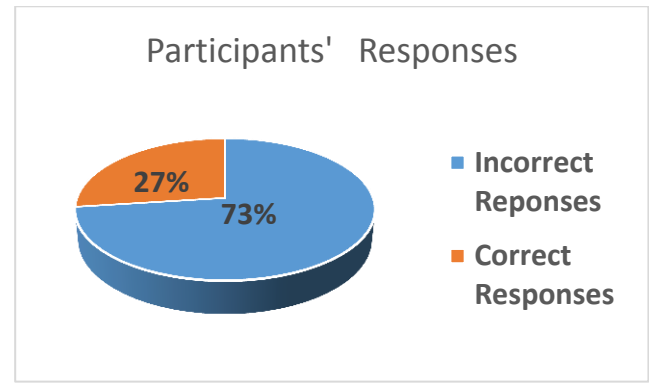


Fig.1: The participants' responses to question no. 2

This figure implicitly shows that the 89 out of 330 responses of the students on question No. 2 are correct, whereas the remaining responses which rate 241 are incorrect. It explicitly displays that the average of the correct responses of the students is 27% whereas that of the incorrect responses is 73%. This result actually indicates lack of the students' awareness with the grammatical functions of the conjunct adverbials. This indicates that the students lack the semantic and communicative knowledge about the English conjunctions which in turn they may encourage the students to apply them correctly in their writings and to connect their speech ideas successfully. This finding goes in line with the outcomes of two previous studies. The first was error analysis study of the use of linking words and phrases in EFL learners' essays conducted by Apse and Farneste (2018), which concluded that "linking words and phrases are not among very frequently used discourse markers to keep the written text coherent and unified" (p. 36). The second study done by Zainb et al. (2016, p.10) concluded that "the students do not know to classify the conjunctive adverbs on the basis of functions".

9. Results of the Study

This study found out that 37% of the students' responses were correct in choosing the suitable English conjunct in its suitable place of the text, whereas 63% of their responses were incorrect. And 27% of the students' responses about their awareness with the communicative functions of English conjunctions were correct whereas 73% of those responses were incorrect. These findings apparently display the poverty of the students to the grammatical rules, forms and expressions that help them in writing better and better.

10. Conclusions

The outcomes resulted from this study sure conclude the following:

- 1- The EFL college students are not able enough to master the appropriate choice of English

- conjuncts or linking adverbials which help in achieving the text coherence.
- 2- The students need more knowledge about English conjuncts or linkers in relation to their various forms, categories, and terms.
 - 3- The students should be able to communicate with others by means of English, so they should be able to create meaningful communicative discourses either in written or spoken forms using English conjuncts to connect their ideas easily and correctly.
 - 4- The students should be exposed to all English adverbials particularly conjuncts or linking adverbials and they should be accustomed to apply them in their formal and informal talks and writings.
 - 5- For the importance of English conjuncts or linking adverbials, the students should be aware more and more with grammatical distribution and communicative functions of English conjuncts or linkers.

11. Recommendations of the Study

Due to the outcomes of this study and the significance of the English conjuncts to achieve good quality writing in English, the researchers would like to offer some suggestions for teachers and students. Firstly, teachers should adopt appropriate and exciting techniques, methods and approaches in teaching English in general and English grammatical rules in particular. They are also advised to adopt the operational grammar which enables the students to apply all the grammatical rules under study in their speech and writings gradually till these rules become part of their underlying system. Secondly, the students must engage themselves in writing sentences and paragraphs pertaining to the English conjuncts and they should be accustomed to apply those conjuncts in their formal and informal talks and writings. The students should also be exposed to linguistic knowledge which enhances their linguistic competence about English grammar in general and about the grammatical categories, functions and distributions of English conjuncts, in particular.

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قدرة طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية على إتقان الظروف الرابطة لغرض كتابة نص ذات وحدة عضوية.

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الملخص

تُرکز هذه الدراسة على قدرة طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في إتقان الظروف الرابطة لغرض بناء وحدة عضوية للنص المكتوب، وذلك من خلال مدى كفاءتهم في استخدام هذه الظروف لإنتاج نص ذات وحدة عضوية مترابطة. وأيضاً تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة مدى إدراك هؤلاء الطلاب للوظائف النحوية والنصية لتلك الظروف. اختار الباحثان بطريقة عشوائية ٢٢ طالباً وطالبة يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في المستوى الثالث، كليات التربية، جامعة عدن. تم استخدام اختباراً تشخيصياً لجمع البيانات، وتم تحليل تلك البيانات كمياً ونوعياً على ضوء أسئلة الدراسة. كشفت نتائج الدراسة عدم قدرة الطلاب على استخدام الظروف الرابطة في إنتاج نص مترابط عضوياً في مهارة الكتابة، وأيضاً كشفت عجز هؤلاء الطلاب في إدراك الوظائف النحوية والنصية لتلك الظروف. لذلك أوصت هذه الدراسة بضرورة تبني المدرسين ومصممي المناهج طرق وتقنيات محددة لمساعدة الطلاب على أن يكونوا قادرين على إنجاز مهارة الكتاب بصورة عامة وعلى استخدام الظروف الرابطة بشكل صحيح بصورة خاصة من أجل إنتاج نص ذات وحدة عضوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الظروف الرابطة، الكتابة، وحدة النص.

© ٢٠٢٤، قاسم، علي و عبدالصفي، عدنان، الجهة المرخص لها: مجلة جامعة لحج للعلوم التطبيقية والإنسانية.

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