

Conjunctive Adjuncts in Malaysian Undergraduate ESL Essays: Frequency and Manner of Use¹

ZURAIDAH MOHD DON
University of Malaya
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

SRIDEVI SRINIWASS
University of Malaya

Abstract

This paper applies Halliday's systemic functional grammar to examine the ways conjunctive adjuncts are used in the written English of Malaysian undergraduates. Student essays selected from the Malaysian Corpus of Learner English were examined with a focus on cohesion in the light of a preliminary study of the texts which pointed to the insufficient or inappropriate use of cohesive devices. The aim is to find out what conjunctive adjuncts are used and how they are used in linking successive sentences in their texts. The students had difficulty in using conjunctive adjuncts effectively in paragraphs, and left sentences juxtaposed in inappropriate ways. Only a small part of the range of cohesive devices available in English was used at all, and much of what was used was incorrect or otherwise unsuitable.

Keywords: cohesion, conjunctive adjuncts, argumentative essays, SFG

1. Introduction

Writing in a second language is arguably "far more challenging than learning to listen to, speak or read a foreign language" (Crossley & Mcnamara 2012:115). A major problem facing Malaysian university students is to express themselves in written English in a manner readily understood by the reader and appropriate to the register. Hewings and Hewings (2001:199) argue that "academic text not only contains propositional content but also devices having textual functions", and these include conjunctive adjuncts which are more difficult to use than other cohesive devices in English (Hartnett 1986). A preliminary study of the collected essays shows that the inappropriate use of conjunctive adjuncts, far from clarifying the relationships between parts of the text, appears to contribute to making it difficult to follow (Reid 1993; see also Abdul Hady Kadhim 2016). Although conjunctive adjuncts are used to indicate some kind of meaningful relationship, the texts are nevertheless incoherent because the content lacks logical progression and organization.

Conjunctive adjuncts indicating logical relations between clauses in a text cover apposition, addition, spatio-temporal, causal-conditional and manner (Halliday &

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Matthiessen 2014). Equivalent terms include linking adverbs (Greenbaum 1969), logical connectors (Crewe 1990), linking adverbials (Biber et al. 1999) and sentence transitions (Granger & Tyson 1996). Occurring “at some boundary established at a significant point in the organization of the text” (Downing & Locke 2006:74), conjunctive adjuncts specify “the ways in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before” (Halliday & Hasan 1976:227), and are therefore useful “for developing arguments or signalling connection between specific information and authors’ point” (Biber et al. 1999:881).

This corpus-based study draws on Halliday’s work on the general theory of grammar and the description of English (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014) to investigate the use of conjunctive adjuncts in the written English of Malaysian undergraduates who are L2 speakers of English. It goes beyond the clause into the study of cohesion, which according to Bloor and Bloor (2004) probably reflects the most widespread influence of Systemic Functional Grammar (henceforth SFG) on language teaching. Conclusions are reached not on the basis of a particular approach, in this case SFG, but by using SFG to elucidate the evidence in the data itself. The aim is to find out from the examination of essays drawn from the Malaysian Corpus of Learner English (MACLE) what conjunctive adjuncts are used, how frequent they are, and how they are used in writing (Janulienė & Dziedravičius 2015) to achieve text cohesion. Although L2 writers share some common problems with novice native writers, the careful examination of learner corpus data in its own right will uncover the distinctive features of their writing with respect to the use of conjunctive adjuncts, and will provide an effective means of “operationalizing writing difficulties” (Bitchener & Basturkmen 2006:14).

While errors in such areas as concord in number or between subject and verb certainly need to be corrected, they are generally low level problems, and would not appear to obscure the meaning of the text at a higher level. Syntactical accuracy is still an important indicator of EFL writing quality, but knowing how to use conjunctive adjuncts appropriately to express relations more logically and clearly in writing is also an important requirement (Chiang 2003). Conjunctive adjuncts are most common in academic writing which primarily aims to present and support explanations and arguments for a wide readership, and to use them appropriately EFL/ESL learners need to understand how they are used with respect to their form, meaning and position (Biber et al. 2002). Research which ignores these features of text has been criticized as not providing adequate directions for the teaching of writing (Witte and Faigley 1981), especially at the tertiary level.

This introduction is followed by a review of relevant literature concerning conjunctive adjuncts in ESL/EFL writing and a description of the study itself. The analysis and results section first describes the conjunctive adjuncts used in the student essays and their frequency of occurrence, and then analyses selected samples to illustrate how they are used. The general findings are discussed in the conclusion.

2. Conjunctive Adjuncts in the writing of ESL/EFL Learners

Analysing a corpus of learner writing enables researchers to “gain new insights into the meanings, uses, and functions of adverbials of all types, and much new information has become available about the uses of these features in text construction” (Hinkel 2003:1051). Researchers can give precise descriptions of learner writing, and teachers can obtain evidence about what does and does not constitute an area of difficulty for learners (Granger 2002). The use of corpus-related tools, including WordSmith Tools, provides information on what is frequent and typical in a corpus, and makes the analysis more objective (McEnery and Wilson 2001:103). However, Biber et al. (1998) argue for the need for qualitative interpretive analyses of texts to support the results derived from quantitative analyses. This is our motivation for analysing selected samples of students’ writing from a learner corpus to demonstrate how conjunctive adjuncts are used to establish explicit links between clauses.

Studies of conjunctive adjuncts have mainly focused on comparing their use by native and non-native speakers using LOCNESS as the reference corpus (see e.g. Granger & Tyson 1996, Altenberg & Tapper 1998). The availability of learner corpora such as the International Corpus of Learner English (henceforth “ICLE”), which consists of ESL/EFL essays from different L1 backgrounds, provides an empirical resource for large-scale comparative studies in learner language (Pravec 2002:83). Investigations tend to be restricted to identifying overuse, underuse and misuse in ESL/EFL writing in comparison with L1 writing. Corresponding measures of frequency ratios in L1 and EFL/ESL writing show that L2 learners overuse, underuse and misuse certain types of conjunctive adjunct (Hinkel 2001, Jones 2010). The relevance of findings from this kind of research, especially with respect to the use of conjunctive adjuncts by non-native speakers of English, is that they can be compared to the findings reported here.

The pioneering work of Granger and Tyson (1996) has led to studies examining different types of conjunctive adjunct in university student essays. Tankó (2004) finds that the argumentative essays produced by Hungarian university students contain a much greater number of conjunctive adjuncts expressing listing and contrast than L1 essays. The range of conjunctive adjuncts used, however, is more restricted, which suggests a tendency to keep to the same type. Other research findings (Zhang 2000, Bolton, Nelson & Hung 2002, Chen 2006, Fakhra 2009, Ishikawa 2009, Muddhi 2013, Myung-Jeong 2016) confirm that ESL/EFL learners in Asia tend to use more tokens of a small number of types. This is the fundamental finding that perhaps explains the frequency differences found in this and other studies.

A problem with relative frequencies in learner corpora is that they are not fixed but vary from one corpus to another. In essays written by Syrian university EFL students and British students (Fakhra 2009), the five most frequently used expressions were the additives *also* and *and*, the adversatives *but* and *however*, and causal-conditional *so*, the causal and additive types being used almost twice as frequently as by the British writers. The overuse of additives is consistent with the

findings for L1 speakers of Chinese (Zhang 2000) and Asian languages (Ishikawa (2009), but the frequent use of adversatives contradicts Chen’s study (2006) of Taiwanese MA learners in which they are underused. Fakhra (2009) finds causal adjuncts to be overused, but they are underused in Palestinian students’ argumentative essays (Abusharkh 2012). Similar inconsistencies are found within each type. Muddhi and Hussein (2014), for example, find that Kuwaiti students generally underuse the adversatives, being restricted to *however*, *but*, *though* and *yet*, while within this group they actually overuse *but*.

Research in the use of conjunctive adjuncts in learner corpora reveals the difficulties that ESL/EFL learners face in using them in their writing. In their examination of Korean EFL students’ argumentative writing, Yoon and Yoo (2011) identify errors in the use of conjunctive adjuncts, including a preference for sentence-initial position, and their use in sentence fragments and run-on sentences. A more serious type of error involves erroneous meanings or misuse which Crewe (1990) claims to be “an almost universal feature” (p. 317) of L2 writing. This is illustrated for example by *on the contrary* instead of *on the other hand* or *however*, which makes the argument more difficult to follow, and may even appear to make it illogical (p. 316). Milton and Tsang (1993) show how the misuse of *therefore* to force a conclusion from unsupported assumption creates faulty logic. Fakhra (2009) finds evidence of the frequent misuse of *therefore* and other causal conjunctives such as *so* and *thus*, which contradicts Ting’s finding (2003) that students’ essays show less frequent errors of the causal type and more frequent errors in the adversatives and additives.

The purpose of studying the underuse, overuse and misuse of conjunctive adjuncts in L2 in contrast to L1 writing is to provide evidence to improve the quality of learning materials, and develop materials for data-driven teaching. However, it has been objected that overuse and underuse merely refer to the fact that a linguistic form is found significantly more or less in the learner corpus than in the reference corpus (Gilquin, Granger & Paquot 2007:322). Before learner corpora can be used in this way, it is essential to ascertain what can be learned from corpus materials about learner performance in the use of conjunctive adjuncts. The work reported here is concerned with learner performance in its own right, bringing out not only what they cannot do but also what they can do with conjunctive adjuncts.

3. The study

There is a long tradition of telling students how to write English based on intuition and beliefs about what students need (Billingham & Baumgartner-Cohen 2002). Although we might be convinced from informal observation that students have difficulties with conjunctive adjuncts, it is nevertheless essential to start with some factual evidence of these difficulties (see e.g. Tang & Ng 1996). For this reason, this work was based on a corpus, which was already in existence and available, and so this specific work began with the selection of an appropriate subset of the corpus.

3.1 Materials and methods

The data is a subset of the Malaysian Corpus of Learner English (MACLE), which is modelled on the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE)² and counts as a mono-generic, single type of text. MACLE consists of argumentative essays amounting to about 800,000 words written between 2004 and 2005 by second to fourth year undergraduates at the University of Malaya. The selected subset consists of 54 essays written in class by students from the Faculty of Law. The students were informed that they were contributing to a learner corpus, and were therefore not under the kind of pressure associated with examinations. Essays written by law students were chosen because they are among the best students, and they are able to write English texts of sufficient quality to be analysed. Although they included Malays, Chinese and Indians, the students were all from mainstream government schools where Malay was the medium of instruction, and all the schools used Malay as the language of communication. The language of instruction at the University of Malaya is generally Malay, but some courses taken by international students are taught in English.

While the present concern is with undergraduate writing in general, and just happens for practical reasons to have used the writing of law students, it is perhaps worth pointing out that law is one of a group of academic subjects requiring a high level of discipline-specific linguistic skill in the creation of texts. Law students need to be able to construct a convincing argument, and constructing an argument requires mastery of cohesive devices including conjunctive adjuncts.

The 500-word essay requires the students to establish a position on a specific topic and set forth an argument concerning that topic in a clear and concise manner. They were given an hour to complete the essay and were not allowed to refer to dictionaries or any other references. In this way, it is different from more advanced academic writing which requires citations and references. The set topics were taken from the ICLE, and are listed in Table 1, together with the number of essays written for each topic in the sub-corpus of MACLE included in this study. By far the most popular choice, perhaps not too surprisingly in the case of law students, was the essay on the prison system.

Table 1. The distribution of essays according to topic

	Essay Topic	Number
1	The prison system is outdated. No civilized country should punish its criminals; it should rehabilitate them	19
2	In the words of the old song, “Money is the root of all evil”.	9
3	The role of censorship in society.	7
4	Some people say that in our modern world, dominated by science, technology and industrialization, there is no longer a place for dreaming and imagination. What is your opinion?	6
5	Most university degrees are theoretical and do not prepare students for the real world. They are therefore of very little value.	6
6	Crime does not pay.	4

² <https://www.uclouvain.be/en-317607.html>

7	All armies should consist entirely professional soldiers: there is no value in a system of military service	1
8	Feminists have done more harm to the cause of women than good.	1
9	A man/woman’s financial reward should be commensurate with their contribution to the society they live in.	1

The theoretical framework taken from Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) distinguishes three main categories of conjunctive adjuncts: Elaboration, Extension and Enhancement, and these are further divided into types. The categories and types, together with their grammatical markers, are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Categories and types of conjunctive adjunct

Category	Type	Items
I- Elaboration	Appositive	that is, in other words, for instance, for example
	Corrective	or rather, at least, to be more precise
	Dismissive	in any case, anyway, leaving that aside
	Summative	briefly, to sum up, in short
	Verificative	actually, in fact, as a matter of fact
	Particularizing	in particular, more especially
	Distractive	by the way, incidentally
	Resumptive	to resume, as I was saying
II- Extension	Additive	also, moreover, in addition, besides, nor
	Adversative	but, yet, on the other hand, however, conversely
	Variative	instead, alternatively, apart from that, here, elsewhere
III- Enhancement	Temporal	meanwhile, before that, later on, next, soon, finally
	Comparative	likewise, in the same way
	Causal-Conditional	so, then, as a result, therefore (Causal)
		in that case, then, otherwise (Conditional)
	Manner	likewise, in the same manner
Concessive	yet, still, though, nevertheless	

3.2 Processing and Annotation

The handwritten manuscripts were transcribed, proofread, and stored as word processor files. The automatic search for instances of categories and types in the context of a developing argument requires a high level of text annotation, but even tagging the MACLE corpus using CLAWS had proved unsuccessful on account of the number and nature of learner errors. Automatic searches were limited to individual lexical items and expressions, which was itself made difficult by the large number of inappropriately used expressions. The automatic annotation or even identification of conjunctive adjuncts was in practice very difficult, and the only alternative was to deal with them manually. Sentences containing instances were identified, and the instances classified according to the taxonomy outlined in Table 2. This was possible in view of the size of the sub-corpus which consists of about 27,000 words. It would not be possible to do this for the 800,000 words of the whole corpus. The selected data was analysed and checked by the researchers

and checked again for reliability by a native speaker of English from England with extensive experience of teaching and English linguistics in UK universities.

The number of instances was counted for each category and type, and the total expressed as a percentage of all conjunctive adjuncts. For each category, a number of different expressions was identified, some of them appropriate and others inappropriate. For example, the category Elaboration, type Appositive includes the appropriate expressions *for example* and *for instance*, and the inappropriate expressions *for instances* and *in other word*. As this case shows, inappropriate expressions include learner errors, such as the incorrect marking of number on the head noun.

4. Analysis and Results

The analysis of the student essays gave an insight into what the students were in practice able to do with conjunctive adjuncts when writing in English.

4.1 Frequency of Occurrence of Categories and Types

In total 307 conjunctive adjuncts were identified and assigned to the appropriate category and type. Table 3 presents the categories in rank order: Extension (122, 39.7%); Enhancement (101, 32.9%) and Elaboration (84, 27.4%).

Table 3. Frequency of Occurrence of Categories and Types

Category	Type	Frequent Items	Occurrences	Percentage
Extension (39.7%)	Adversative	<i>however</i> (42) <i>but</i> (35)	87	28.34%
	Additive		29	9.45%
	Variative		6	1.95%
Enhancement (32.9%)	Causal- Conditional	<i>therefore</i> (25) <i>so</i> (15)	54	17.59%
	Temporal		42	13.68%
	Concessive		5	1.629%
	Comparative		0	0%
Elaboration (27.4%)	Appositive	<i>for example</i> (23) <i>thus</i> (22)	53	17.26%
	Summative		19	6.19%
	Verificative		6	1.95%
	Dismissive		5	1.628%
	Corrective		1	0.326%
	Particularizing		0	0%
	Distractive Resumptive		0 0	0% 0%
Total	14		307	100%

The high figure for Extension is largely brought about by 87 instances of the Adversative type, which includes *however* (42) and *but* (35). These alone contribute

28.34% of the total. The figure for Enhancement is largely made up of Causal-Conditional (e.g. *as a result*) and Temporal types (e.g. *secondly*), with 54 and 42 instances respectively, which make up 17.59% vs. 13.68%. Finally, the main contributor to the Elaboration category is the Appositive type with 53 instances, contributing 17.26%. The appositive relations consist mainly of exemplifying (e.g. *for example*) rather than expository (e.g. *in other words*). Together these four main types, namely Adversative (87), Causal-Conditional (54), Temporal (42) and Appositive (53) account for 236 instances, or a round 77% of the total. The high occurrence of individual tokens, such as *however*, *thus*, *therefore* and *for example* confirm the findings of Biber et al. (1999).

While certain types are used frequently, others are not used at all, including the three Elaboration types particularizing, distractive, and resumptive, and one Enhancement type, namely comparative. Another seven types account for less than 10% of the total, and these include corrective, summative, and verificative (in the Elaboration category; additive and variative in the Extension category; and concessive in the Enhancement category. Table 4 gives the total figure for each type, broken down according to the frequency of each item.

Table 4. Frequency of Occurrence of Types and Individual Items

Type	Number of occurrence of individual items
Adversative (87)	<i>However</i> (42); <i>But</i> (35), including <i>But then</i> (1); <i>But then again</i> (1); <i>But on the other hand</i> (1); <i>But first</i> (1); <i>On the other hand</i> (5); <i>On the contrary</i> (1).
Causal-Conditional (54)	Causal: <i>Therefore</i> (25); <i>So</i> (15); <i>Hence</i> (4); <i>As a result</i> (3); <i>Due to this</i> (1); <i>Thereby</i> (1); <i>So as a conclusion</i> (1); <i>Because of this</i> (1); <i>Even said so</i> (1); <i>In return</i> (1). Conditional: <i>Otherwise</i> (1)
Appositive (53)	<i>For example</i> (23); <i>Thus</i> (22); <i>Take for example</i> (2); <i>For instance</i> (2); <i>In other word</i> (2); <i>As an example</i> (1); <i>For instances</i> (1).
Temporal (42)	<i>Firstly</i> (8); <i>Secondly</i> (8); <i>Thirdly</i> (8); <i>Then</i> (5); <i>First of all</i> (4); <i>Meanwhile</i> (2); <i>First</i> (1); <i>First and foremost</i> (1); <i>If the Secondly</i> (1); <i>Fourthly</i> (1); <i>At the meantime</i> (1); <i>After that</i> (1)
Additive type (29)	<i>Furthermore</i> (12); <i>And</i> (4); <i>In addition</i> (3); <i>Moreover</i> (3); <i>Also</i> (2); <i>To add</i> (1); <i>Additionally</i> (1); <i>Plus</i> (1); <i>Besides that</i> (1)
Summative type (19)	<i>As a conclusion</i> (6); <i>In conclusion</i> (7); <i>Finally</i> (4); <i>In short</i> (2); <i>As the conclusion</i> (1); <i>To make it as a conclusion</i> (1); <i>In my conclusion</i> (1); <i>Lastly</i> (1)

The most frequent types are the adversative (87), causal-conditional (54), appositive (53) and temporal (42) and the relatively less frequent, with less than 30 occurrences, are additive (29) and summative (19). *However* (42) is the most frequent individual item, followed by *but* (35), *therefore* (25), *for example* (23), *thus* (22), and *so* (15). All the other items have fewer than 10 occurrences. A very large number of tokens thus belong to a very small number of individual

expressions. Since the small repertoire of conjunctive adjuncts matches the findings of e.g. Fakhra (2009), this profile is unlikely to be restricted to Malaysian undergraduates.

4.2 How individual expressions are used

This section examines learner performance in its own right, identifying not only what they cannot do but also what they can do with conjunctive adjuncts. The two texts below illustrate the use of the preferred items to mark contrast, i.e. *however* and *but*:

- (1) *Most criminal justice system uses penalty as a substitute for imprisonment. However, the penalty is inexpensive to administer and does not have the social stigma effects. [L0002-a]
- (2) *Instead of a punitive system, [...] correctional methods could be the best way to change these criminal. But the efforts to help these kind of people needed big sacrifices, [...]. [L0022-b15]

In (1) *however*, which marks an adversative relation of the form “X and conversely Y” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014), is used inappropriately. The semantic relation between the two clauses is in this case one of positive addition, where expressions such as “furthermore” and “in addition” are more appropriate, e.g. “Furthermore, the penalty is inexpensive [...]”. Tang and Ng (1995:112) highlight the difficulty that Hong Kong university students faced in using *however*, which they tend to use in the initial position “to indicate a turn in discussion or introduce a new idea”. Adversative has its basic meaning ‘contrary to expectation’ which is illustrated in (2). The contrast set up by *but* is a simple direct contrast between two views, namely that correctional methods are the best way to change the criminals and that the efforts to help them involved big sacrifices. However, used as a functional equivalent of *however*, *but* represents a grammatical downgrade lacking the emphatic adversative sense of the sentence-initial *however*. It is also less formal.

The relation of cause figures prominently as a cohesive agent in the essays. Texts (3) to (5) illustrate the use of the predominant causal-conditional types *therefore* and *so*, and to a lesser degree *hence* and *as a result*:

- (3) *It is hoped that offenders will change their attitudes and respect laws and regulations. **Therefore**, in deciding the appropriate sentence, a court should always be guided by certain considerations such as public interest to curb the increasing of the statistic of offences. **As a result**, people who break the laws of our society are sent to prison for three basic reasons. [L0005-a9]
- (4) Censorship has become obsolete in the sense that even if we take away the violence and sex from the television or movies, we can still see it on the news [...] every day. **So**, until mankind itself is peaceful enough, there is no sense in taking out scenes that are solely meant for entertainment purposes. [L0010-b56]
- (5) *Without charitable people and organisations the world would be a miserable place to be in. Hence, it is true that the love for money is the root of all evil! [L0021-b44]

In (3), the writer uses *therefore* and *as a result* inappropriately to mark causal relations. *Therefore* is placed in sentence-initial position, which according to Green

et al. (2000) is the preferred position for language learners and when read aloud can have “a triumphant remonstrative resonance” (Jones 2010:214). The presupposition is that the hope that “offenders will change their attitudes and respect laws and regulations” justifies the strong suggestion that “in deciding the appropriate sentence, a court should always be guided by certain considerations...”. However, the clause preceding and following *therefore* are logically unconnected, and there is no causal relation between them. *As a result* is also placed at the beginning of the sentence, but there is no real link to a result.

Excerpt (4) represents a complex construction with embedded clauses. *So* is appropriately used to mark the relation of cause between the second and the preceding sentences. In (5) the student uses *hence* to link the two sentences, but they do not have causal links at all. Putting *hence* in initial position actually further highlights the inappropriateness of the word for the sense intended. What is apparent from the above examination is that the students use conjunctive adjuncts to make causal links in sentences when there are no links at all, as illustrated in (3) and (5).

Sentence (6) is a complex construction of the causal-conditional type which is correctly used.

(6) By doing work you despise for purchasers you scorn? If so, then your money will not give you a moment's or a penny's worth of joy. Then all the things you buy will become, not a tribute to you but a reproach. [L0024-b]

“If so, then ...” indicates that what is contained in the clause following *then* is a consequence of the condition in the preceding clause. *Then* basically indicates temporal relations, but is here used for a logical inference.

The most common Appositive type is the exemplifying type which is predominantly signalled by *for example* and *thus* as illustrated in (7) and (8) respectively:

(7) *Nowadays, [...] we are threatened by the danger of war. **For example**, the crisis between America and Iraq. [L0004-b]

For example indicates the *e.g.* relation, namely that the second sentence restates the idea in the preceding sentence by example. Although the section beginning with *For example* is not a grammatical sentence, it would be perfectly normal in speech to give it a separate intonation contour. This separation is reflected by the use of the full stop and the capital “F”, but the normal requirement in written language is for the two parts to be joined together to form a single grammatical sentence.

It is interesting to note that students tend to use expressions including *as an example* and *take for example* which are more appropriate in speech, as illustrated in (8) and (9):

- (8) Through science, technology and industrialization, [...] the ability to innovate and create are also being shared and democratised. As an example, [...] composing a song for an orchestra would only be an exclusive ability of those who are really well-trained and experienced in music. [L0013-b]
- (9) As for the arguments that imprisonment is cruel and barbaric, there is no justification for it. Take for example Penjara Sungai Buloh. [L0025-a]

The transfer of the features of spoken English to L2 learner writing is quite common in the data analysed (see e.g. Shaughnessy 1977). Two of the less common appositive expressions, namely *for instance* which exemplifies, and *in other words* which expounds, include grammatical problems with number (e.g. *for instances* and *in other word*).

The most frequent temporal types are the ordinal expressions which are correctly used and belong to a single strategy as illustrated in (10). The items *firstly*, *secondly* and *third* enumerate a list of factors presented as “the temporal unfolding of the discourse itself” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:618):

- (10) There are several factors which supports this view. Firstly, the repressive nature of the prison regime [...] secondly, the problem of prolonged deprivation. [...] Third, [...] [L0007-a]

The predominant expressions in the Additive type are *furthermore*, *in addition* and *moreover*, and their use is illustrated in (11), (12) and (13) respectively.

- (11) When they are released, there is no guarantee that they will come out rehabilitated. ... there is also no guarantee that future crimes can be prevented. Furthermore, the prison system has become a liability [...]. [L0010-a12]
- (12) *This is the reason why programmes such as vocational training, [...], does little to turn them into the society’s conception of a law-abiding citizen. In addition, the widespread of diseases among the prisoners are a threat to the health aspect [...]. [L0010-a28].

Furthermore is used more frequently than one would expect in L2 writing, occurring no fewer than twelve times. *Furthermore* in (11) is merely a bombastic equivalent for *also* or *in addition*. In (12) the second sentence containing *in addition* does not develop the main idea in the preceding sentence, which is concerned with the failure of programmes to reform prisoners. Instead, it introduces a new problem altogether, namely the threat of widespread diseases. Compare this to *moreover* in (13) which is used correctly to signal positive addition, in that the second sentence in the text is added to the preceding one.

- (13) Society still needs prison systems to function safely and secured from crime doers. A proper prison systems are needed to keep criminals at bay. Moreover, there is currently no other systems that can replace prison systems as the best method around. [L0025-a10]

The Summative type is made up primarily of expressions such as *as a conclusion* and *in conclusion* including ill-formed expressions, e.g. *To make it as a conclusion*,

in *my conclusion* and *as the conclusion*. Texts (14) and (15) illustrate how *As a conclusion* and *In conclusion* are used:

- (14) As a conclusion, I submit that the prison system is not outdated and punishment is still relevant [...]. [L0014-a25]
(15) In conclusion, I feel that the advance of science and technology is a good trend for our society [...]. [L0005-b41]

Another less frequent type, which is essentially temporal but which functions conclusively includes *finally* in (16) and *lastly* in (17).

- (16) *The society itself creates their own legal system as to prevent the crime. [...] Here, the legal system plays an important part in the society. Finally, we should think further whether the punishment is adequate to prevent the crime or not. [L0001-a38]
(17) *The most tragic effect the activities of speculates of money is, when a certain country have to borrow a money from an International Monetary Fund. ..., whenever they borrows the money [...] is like to pawns their sovereignty and they no more independent [...]. This happen as the consequences of the activities of make money from money. Lastly the points of saying that "Money is the root of all evil" in some situation are correct. [L0016-b30]

Finally is used correctly in (16) as a temporal marker to introduce the last sentence, but it does not conclude. In (17), lastly is used to indicate “temporal unfolding of the discourse” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:618), that it is the last sentence, even though it is unconnected with the previous text, and is neither summative nor conclusive.

An interesting pattern has already emerged. The students have a limited number of cohesive strategies available. They have a small repertoire of expressions that they are able to use successfully, and they tend to make errors when attempting less familiar expressions as illustrated in (18) and (19):

- (18) *Actually, our prison system should help prisoner to think about their fault and felt guilty [...]. [L0029-a4]
(19) *Thereby, you may achieve a bright future as long as you are willing to pay more. [L0023-b34]

Actually is normal in speech but typically awkward in written texts. In (18) it is used inappropriately, giving the impression that the writer is revealing a secret. Something like *in fact* would be more appropriate in this context. *Thereby*, which creates cohesion by reference to means, is inappropriately used (in 19) as a synonym for *therefore*, which indicates a logical consequence.

5. Discussion

The Malaysian Corpus of Learner English, MACLE, from which data for this study was taken, was set up as a general-purpose resource for the study of English in Malaysia, with the general aim of finding out what Malaysian undergraduates can do in English, and what they cannot do. The project reported in this paper takes advantage of the fact that the data collected was in the form of essays, which require the writer to structure text without the help of headings other than the title itself. A structured text links sentences together, and the study of cohesive devices reveals how these links are made, if indeed they are made at all.

Halliday’s framework provides us with a context for interpreting the results. The first impression is that Malaysian learners use conjunctive adjuncts frequently, but on closer inspection they are found to use a narrow range of types, and tend to use them inappropriately. The most frequent type in Table 3 is Adversative with 87 occurrences, 77 of which are *however* or *but*, which is in line with previous studies (Rørvik & Egan 2013, Wei 2014). Since the writers are law students, and the task requires them to construct an argument, the high frequency is perhaps not surprising. The same explanation applies to *therefore* and *so*, which make up 40 of the 54 occurrences of the Causal-Conditional type. In third place is the Appositive type, the 53 occurrences of which are made up by *thus* and *for example*, and this is followed by 29 occurrences of the Additive type. These four types alone account for about three quarters of all occurrences.

What is immediately apparent is that the writers seem to have a limited repertoire of resources to construct their arguments, which suggests that they may not be familiar with different types of conjunctive adjuncts (Yong-Yae Park 2013). As can be seen in Table 4 and in the examples in 4.2, when students try to construct an argument outside their linguistic comfort zone, they use or invent expressions that are awkward or inappropriate. It is important to note that with a single exception, all the conjunctive adjuncts analysed are in initial position, a finding that confirms results from previous studies on learner language (Lee 2004, Park 2013, Yoon 2006, Zhang Yan 2013). The positioning of conjunctive adjuncts could represent a universal learner strategy or reflect the preference for initial position in Malay, and needs to be investigated in future work.

It is more difficult to account for low or zero occurrences. A consequence of the repeated use of the same expressions is that even in the case of types that are well represented in the essays, there are common expressions available in the language that are not used. Examples include *that is* and *that is to say* (Appositive), *in any case* and *anyway* (Dismissive), *briefly* and *to sum up* (Summative), *as a matter of fact* (Verificative) and *to resume, as I was saying* (Resumptive). If we consider missing expressions and missing types individually, we have no way of knowing whether the writers are unfamiliar with them, or whether their failure to occur in the corpus is due to the small sample of essays included in the study. However, the omissions go far beyond individual items and types. Apart from a small and possibly arbitrary set of items, the part of the cohesion system concerned with conjunctive adjuncts is at best patchy, and some parts are almost entirely lacking.

It is reasonable to conclude that the students are largely unfamiliar with major components of the cohesion system, and so unable to use these components in their writing.

These findings have obvious implications for the selection of teaching materials (see e.g. Leedham & Cai 2013) and the teaching of writing in English at undergraduate level, which requires language skills far beyond the mastery of grammar and lexis associated with conventional proficiency. It includes the awareness of the textual aspects of writing in English, including the ability to develop ideas clearly and effectively for the reader, and to select appropriate conjunctive adjuncts to link ideas together as the text unfolds. If students have not been taught to construct an English text, then it is not particularly surprising that they have only a limited ability to do so. Writing lessons should include what conjunctive adjuncts are available and the circumstances in which they are appropriately used.

In the absence of headings, conjunctive adjuncts bear much of the load of structuring the essay, requiring the writer to make clear coherent links between sentences. Because they are optional, Asian learners of English may find it difficult to decide when to use them, resulting in erroneous use (Crewe 1990). According to Crew (1990:321) their inappropriate use suggests that they are used as “surface-level fillers” imposing “surface logicity on a piece of writing where no deep logicity exists”. That is why it is important for teachers to make their students aware when, why and how to use conjunctive adjuncts (Tankó 2004).

Infelicities in the use of conjunctive adjuncts include the use of incorrect forms (e.g. *at the meantime* and *to make it as a conclusion*), and the tendency to use expressions which are more appropriate in speech than writing (e.g. *take for example*) and to begin sentences with *but* and *and* which offends against the ‘school rule’ that sentences should never begin with these words. The fact that students get the details of frequent expressions wrong (e.g. *for instances*) suggests that they have not developed the necessary observational skills to notice detail in the target language, and incorporate their observations into their own linguistic practices. These errors, which may be quite different from native writing, will provide teachers and text book writers with important information to enable them to address specific problems encountered by advanced L2 learners.

While we can reasonably hypothesize that the students’ problems can be traced to what and how they have been taught, our corpus-based methodology cannot determine that this is the case. Jones (2010), for example, argues that:

misuse is often put down to the way logical connectives are taught in the class-room and the way they are presented in textbooks: typically with oversimplified definitions, minimal co-text and context, and often accompanied by examples from made-up or simplified texts (p. 200).

To ascertain whether or not this is the correct explanation will require further research involving classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers complemented by a review of the materials used for teaching to find out

the most likely explanation why students have not learned to use conjunctive adjuncts in their writing.

6. Conclusion

There is a clear mismatch between what the students in this investigation are able to do, and what they are expected and required to do. As language learners, they are still in the process of learning to write grammatically well-formed sentences. In many cases, the errors are of an elementary nature, e.g. confusing singular and plural, or using words of the wrong part of speech. These grammatical errors can be taken as evidence that these learners have not yet acquired the necessary grammatical structures. Schleppegrell (1996) attributes the reason for the lack of accuracy in student writing to inadequate feedback on grammatical accuracy and appropriateness, because the focus is on content rather than form.

At the same time, undergraduates are expected to be able to write essays, which require a combination of high and low level skills. Unlike an academic research article, an essay does not normally include headings to label the different sections, and this requires of the writer a high level of linguistic skill to convey the structure of the text to the reader without the help of headings. The problem is that high-level language skills necessarily draw on lower level skills, and these lower level skills would appear to be insufficiently developed to form a sufficient foundation. It is possible to have high-level skills such as the ability to write sentences and paragraphs without the ability to mark plurals or subject-verb concord correctly and consistently.

The ability to use conjunctive adjuncts is not a matter of only academic interest, but contributes to the skills which are expected in the real world, and which will be expected of undergraduates when they seek employment commensurate with their academic qualifications. Employers expect their recruits to be able to draft documents in English and that includes not only the command of basic grammar and lexis but also the ability to construct an argument in a logical fashion. The beginning language learner may aim to produce well-formed sentences, but university students, especially law students, have to develop the ability to fit individual sentences together to form a meaningful text, using conjunctive adjuncts appropriately to provide readers with information about text organization. However, without a good grasp of conjunctive adjuncts, they are unlikely to be able to structure a complex argument effectively. Although this study is limited by the size of the sub-corpus used, it is hoped that it will provide university teachers with a precise description about what learners at this level can and cannot do in their writing with respect to conjunctive adjuncts, and enable them to use this information to train their students accordingly.

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