

# USE OF CONJUNCTIONS IN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY BY ESL UNDERGRADUATES

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## Abstract

This study examines one aspect that contributes to writing quality in argumentative essay which is the usage of cohesive devices, specifically the usage of conjunctions. Cohesion is regarded as an essential textual component both in creating organized texts and interpreting the content that are comprehensible to readers. The objectives of the study are to determine the frequency of conjunctions used by Malaysian ESL undergraduates in their academic essays, to identify the semantic categories of conjunctions mostly used by the learners and to identify which category of conjunctions is the most problematic to the ESL learners. The data of this study comprised of 50 argumentative essays on a specific topic written by 50 Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) undergraduates and semi-structured interviews were also carried out to elicit information. Findings reveal that there are appropriate and inappropriate applications of conjunctions in the essay due to lack of exposure to different categories of conjunctions and difficulties to use other conjunctions that share similar meaning.

**Keywords:** argumentative essay, cohesion, conjunctions, ESL, semantic

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

ESL undergraduate learners need to master writing skill in order to show their capability and competency in writing. Mastering the skill of writing is harder than speaking skill since there is no additional means of help in terms of nonverbal expressions to ensure the message is effectively conveyed to readers. In Malaysia, some of the ESL learners are still weak in their second language (L2) writing skill and face some challenges in mastering it, as they failed to use appropriate words or phrases in expressing their ideas and they had problems in applying necessary rules in their writing even though they have been learning English for several years in school (Saadiyah, 2009).

Inappropriate usage of conjunctions leads to incoherence sentences or portrayed absurd meanings which gives a possibility for the readers to misunderstand what the writer intends to convey. These justify that not only the academic essays require the university learners to construct grammatically correct sentences, but it also requires them to be able to construct cohesive text using conjunctions (Muftah, 2014).

One of the aspects of writing skill needed by the ESL learners to produce good academic essays is through the use of conjunctions in the essays – to form cohesive texts. Conjunctions, as one type of

cohesive devices are used as linkers to join different sentences together according to their meaning or purpose of the sentences. Such conjunctions are useful to assist the learners in essay writing as they help to signal new or different point in between sentences and also to connect ideas in different paragraphs. Thus, it is important to ensure the learners use the conjunction according to its purpose because it plays an important role in connecting and establishing meaningful ideas (Ghasemi, 2013).

The ability to use conjunctions depends to some factors such as competency and proficiency levels of a learner. However, those levels may be influenced by their cognitive development, educational experiences and overall proficiency in second language (L2) for ESL learners as found by Wang and Sui (2006) that ESL learners face difficulties in using conjunctions appropriately. They found that the ESL learners were lack of exposure in terms of the usage of conjunctions; therefore some of them cannot really understand how to explore them and apply them accordingly. Besides, learners tend to limit themselves to use the same conjunctions repeatedly like '*and*', '*but*', '*besides*' and '*next*' in a paragraph. Furthermore, they are likely to limit themselves to the only conjunction that is quickly learnt due to its frequent usage and easy to use which are '*and*' (additive) and '*but*' (*adversative*) and other learners who have not familiarised themselves with the application of conjunctions may produce a very awkward sentence without realizing that the sentences do not convey any meanings (Park, 2013).

## **2.0 BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW**

The issue regarding the application of conjunctions have been highlighted several times previously in other researches. Lai (2008) states in her research about several situations. First, good learners use conjunctions appropriately, but poor learners do not. Secondly, both good and poor learners use conjunctions wrongly but in dissimilar manners. These situations shown that learners need to know the meaning of the conjunctions in order to use them and the several factors mentioned earlier which affect the learners' writing competency should be taken into consideration when discussing about helping the ESL learners to be exposed on the usage of conjunctions.

### **2.1 Problem Statement**

To help the ESL learners and teachers to be prepared in their writing class, the present study investigates one important aspect which helps them to be good writers and educators, by ensuring cohesiveness in academic essays through the use of conjunctions. This type of cohesive devices has been chosen to be the main focus of the study because it is widely used in any type of essays and what is more important is the usage of conjunctions is apparent in argumentative essays and/or persuasive essays.

However, a few groups of conjunctions have been reported to be used too much, improperly, and some of them are hardly used (Corgo, Florez and Gomez, 2009) which reflect quality of academic essays being produced and the learners' level of proficiency and competency in applying the conjunctions.

### **2.2 Research Questions**

The specific research questions used for this study are:

1. Which semantic categories of conjunctions are mostly used in the argumentative essays of ESL learners?

2. What are the most problematic categories of conjunctions for ESL undergraduates?

### **2.3 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to improving teaching and learning of English language. It helps both teachers and learners to understand concept, definitions, and problems related to the use of conjunctions. It is important to know level of competency of ESL learners in writing and the problems they might encounter in the process of learning. Therefore, it could be a tool for teachers as a document to be informed about common uses of conjunctives either mistakenly or appropriately. As in Field & Yip (1992), they found many ESL writers misused and overused common conjunctions such as ‘besides’ and ‘on the other hand’ which it may face by ESL undergraduate learners too.

It is also helpful for learners to become aware of common aspects in which they might fall, becoming agents of their own learning. This study shows the results of learners in ESL classrooms which allow us to analyze the possible difficulties occur in the process of writing. However, it is impossible to predict all the specific mistakes learners can make.

Moreover, the findings of the present study can be compared with those other studies which explore conjunctive usage by learners with different mother tongue backgrounds. As a result, it helps us to gain valuable knowledge on whether the particular features of language learners are related to ESL/EFL learners’ mother tongue or common to all learners regardless of their L1. Therefore, the teachers and learners may benefit from this study and they can make greater effort to achieve educational and learning objectives in the future attempts.

## **3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 Cohesive Devices in Academic Writing**

Conjunctions have been classified in two different categories; grammatical classification and semantic classification (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). However, the taxonomy used in the present study mainly focuses on semantic classifications that consist of additive, adversative, temporal, and causal conjunctions. Conjunctions are the elements mostly referred to when discussing about cohesion and the semantic classification of conjunctions is the type which commonly and most extensively used in grammar and writing composition.

Some studies have contended that there is a positive correlation between the number of cohesive devices such as conjunctions and good writing (Liu & Braine, 2005; Jin, 2001; Ferris, 1994). In contrast, other studies have not shown a significant link between the number of cohesive features and the quality of writing (Castro, 2004; Zhang, 2000). Wikborg & Björk (1989) who studied a group of Swedish learners’ expository essays found one of the most occurring problems in learners’ essays is underuse and/or misuse of conjunctions and the learners’ inexperience is subsequently reflected in their English writing. Research has yielded contradictory results in the relationship between cohesion and writing quality (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008, p. 142). The literature suggests that differences exist between skilled and unskilled writers, as well as more and less effective compositions in terms of cohesion (Zoltan, 2013) just

as successful scripts contained more cohesive ties than unsuccessful scripts (Liu & Braine, 2005; Zhang, 2000).

There are very limited number of researchers who devote themselves to search for any significant relationship between proficiency level and use of cohesive devices and to be precise, the conjunctions. Kang (2005) and Wen (2009) found that low usage of conjunctions by the less proficient learners was due to the limited choices of lexical items contributing to repeated use of words which provided less lexical diversity and complexity than learners of higher proficiency. Kiany and Khezhreshad (2001) found that learners with high and mid proficiency use more conjunctions than low proficiency learners. This result indicates that, for one thing, the total amount of lexical cohesion adopted by L2 learners correlates significantly with their L2 proficiency which also justifies the findings of Jin (2001) that learners are more capable of varying their lexical choices in maintaining the cohesion of their writing, as they are in advanced L2 proficiency level.

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Study Approach**

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. These approaches are appropriate for this study because it uses frequency counts of conjunctions used by the ESL learners and the data collected are quantified. It also uses content analysis method in which the description of the problems raised are needed to discuss in particular explanations. Besides, semi-structured interview employed a basic descriptive approach which was used to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored. Both approaches used to gather and categorize the data to be described and interpreted.

Convenience sampling is used to get the samples of this study. It is a non-probability sampling technique where the participants involved were selected because of the convenient accessibility of the ESL learners as well as the lecturer and also proximity to the researcher. To achieve an optimum goal of this paper, the sample of 50 argumentative essays on a given topic was collected and seven questions asked in the semi-structured interviews. The topic of the essay was a pre-determined topic that suits the level and syllabus of the ESL learners. Each essay consisted of 300-400 words and all of the essays were written within the time limit; 1 hour and 30 minutes, in classroom.

### **4.2 Data Collection Procedure**

The data in this study were collected in several stages. Firstly, the participants were asked to write argumentative essays on the given topic and their demographic information were written on the first page. Then, after they have finished writing the essays, five volunteered participants participate in the semi-structured interviews.

### **4.3 Data Analysis Procedure**

The data analysis procedure is based on previous studies conducted on the use of conjunctions in EFL writing (Muftah, 2014; Ong, 2011; Lai, 2008). Their investigations were based on identification,

classification, and description errors of conjunctions. However, this study replaces the description of errors with specification of the appropriate and inappropriate use of conjunctions based on the previous study conducted by Muftah (2014). In analyzing the data, a complete taxonomy of conjunctions by Halliday and Hassan (1976) and classification of conjunctions appropriate usage by Muftah (2014) are used in this study.

A framework of identification and classification of inappropriate use of conjunctions were adopted from the study conducted by Ong (2011) and it was adapted to suit the objectives of the present study. The stage involved scanning the texts according to its categories and to detect appropriate and inappropriate use of conjunctions according to its types. Any grammatical and lexical errors were ignored. Interpretations were made on whether a particular type of conjunctions has affected the cohesiveness in a text or not; therefore, resulting in an inappropriate use.

The first step in identification was based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of conjunctions; additive, adversative, causal, and temporal as can be seen in Table 1. The second step involved is classifying the appropriateness into its types. What was found in the sample is most suitably classified into (1) misuse, (2) unnecessary addition, (3) omission and (4) redundant repetition of conjunctions.

**Table 1 Classification of Conjunctions**

<b>Semantic Relation</b>	<b>Conjunctions</b>
<b>Additive</b>	additionally, alternatively, and, and...also, and...not, and...too, besides, by the same token, by the way, for example, for instance, further, furthermore, in addition, in a word, incidentally, in other words, on the other hand, by contrast, in the same way, likewise, moreover, namely, neither, not, not...either, or, or else, similarly, that is, I mean, to put it another way
<b>Adversative</b>	actually, although, and (to show contrastive), anyhow, as a matter of fact, at any rate, at least, but (as against), but (in spite of), despite this, even though, however (as against), however (in spite of), at the same time, in any case, in either case, in fact, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, rather, though, to tell the truth, whereas, while, yet, only, however it is
<b>Causal</b>	accordingly, arising out of this, as a result, for, because, aside from this, so, hence, therefore, consequently, as a result, for this reason, otherwise, on account of this, in consequence, with this in mind, in that case, in such an event, that being so, it follows, on this basis, to this end, under other circumstances, in this respect, in this regard, with reference to this
<b>Temporal</b>	then, next, after that, just then, at the same time, previously, before that, finally, at last, first...then (sequential), at first...in the end (conclusive), at once, thereupon, soon, after a time, next time, on another occasion, next day, meanwhile, at this moment, then, next, secondly (sequential), finally, in conclusion (conclusive), at this point, here from now on, to sum up, in short (summarizing), briefly to resume, to return to the point (resumptive)

## 5.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results of conjunctions used in argumentative essays were then divided into three sections. Section One consists of the quantitative analysis of the individual conjunction distribution in the essays, as listed in Table 2. In Section Two, the analysis of appropriateness and inappropriateness use of individual conjunction based on the highlighted conjunctions in the essays is presented. Section Three presents the descriptive analysis of the problematic conjunctions used by the learners.

### 5.1 Individual Semantic Categories of Conjunction

Table 2 The Frequency of Individual Semantic Categories of Conjunctions

Category	N (frequency of each semantic type used in the essays)	Percentage
Additive	810	54.9 %
Adversative	256	17.4 %
Causal	332	22.5%
Temporal	77	5.2 %

Table 2 shows the frequency of individual semantic categories of conjunctions. It displays the total numbers of conjunctions appeared in all 50 essays were 1475 times. The majority of the ESL learners used additive conjunctions more frequent in the argumentative essays and it is followed by causal conjunctions. The total of additive conjunctions used in all 50 essays is 810 and causal conjunctions recorded the total of usage in the essays of 332 times. The table also shows that adversative conjunctions have been used quite frequent by the ESL learners which represented by 256 times of usage and the least frequent used conjunction was temporal, 77 times.

Based on the distribution, it is shown that every ESL learner mostly used the additive conjunctions in the essay as it appeared 810 times. There were two learners recorded high usage of additive conjunctions in their essays by using the additives conjunctions 48 and 36 times in both of their essays and the least use of additive was used twice. It shows that additive conjunction were likely to be used by the learners since every learner uses additives to add new information for their arguments. Based on the analysis of additive appearance, the widely used of additives are and, and furthermore.

The ranking is followed by the third highest usage of conjunctions which is the causal conjunctions. Based on the essays, the use of because and so appeared commonly to help the learners to introduce reasons and result of any argumentative points. The highest appearance of causal recorded in the table was 19 and the least used of causal was 2. It can be seen that causal conjunctions are likely to be used by the learners because it is needed to express causal relation in the essays.

The third highest conjunction used by the ESL learners was adversative which is represented by appearing 256 times in the 50 essays. The frequently used conjunctions are but and actually. Lastly, the least used temporal conjunction, some of the learners hardly use it and it is shown in the table that the highest usage of temporal was using 11 times and some of the learners did not use it at all in the essays.

## 5.2 The Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of Individual Conjunctions

Table 3 The Appropriate and Inappropriate Use of Individual Conjunctions

Subcategory	Appropriate	Inappropriate	Total (N)	Percentage (%)	
				Appropriate	Inappropriate
<b>Additive</b>	784	26	810	96.8	3.2
<b>Adversative</b>	244	12	256	95.4	4.6
<b>Causal</b>	289	43	332	87	13
<b>Temporal</b>	75	2	77	97.4	2.6
<b>Total</b>	1392	83	1475		

Table 3 displays the frequency of appropriate and inappropriateness of the conjunctions used by the ESL learners in the argumentative essays. The appropriate use of conjunction is ranked according to their semantic functions and categories following the conceptual framework of Conjunctive Relations used by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The results show that 784 times of additive conjunctions were applied according to its functions, followed by 289 times of causal, 244 times of adversative and lastly 75 times appropriate appearance of temporal. All of the conjunctions were categorized under the appropriate table shown that ESL learners have their basic knowledge in using such conjunctions and it also suggests that different level of proficiency influence the appropriate application of conjunctions.

However, there were few conjunctions identified and categorized as improper use in the essays which each category of individual conjunction based on the total usage of conjunctions has been categorized as inappropriate according to a framework used by Ong (2011) as misuse conjunction, unnecessary addition, omission of conjunction, and redundant repetition of conjunction. Based on the finding, the highest frequency of inappropriate use of conjunctions committed by the learner was the use of causals; 43 times (13%), followed by adversatives; 12 times (4.6%), additives; 26 times (3.2%), and temporal; 2 times (2.6%).

It can be seen that causal conjunctions contributed to the highest inappropriate usage was used inappropriately. The causal conjunctions that were used inappropriately was *because*, followed by *in fact*. This rank is followed by the inappropriate use of adversative as recorded by *but*, 12 times (4.6%) and then inappropriate usage of additive which represented by *besides* as well as *and*. Lastly, the least frequent used and highlighted as inappropriate use of conjunctions was temporal conjunction and it was found that *in conclusion* has not been used in the essays.

In response to the objective of the study which is to find out the inappropriate use of conjunctions, causal seems to be the most problematic conjunction to be applied in the essays since the learners were likely to use it but it has been used inappropriately many times (13% of inappropriateness), followed by adversative and additive. This finding is similar to what has been reported in the previous studies of Lai (2008) where the ESL learners faced some difficulties in applying those categories of conjunctions especially the causal conjunctions like *because* and *so*. The present study found that the learners mostly used *so* even though there was no causal relationship between the discourse units linked by the conjunction which it shows that the causal conjunction was used in unnecessary condition. This finding justifies to what Cele (2001) and Muftah (2014) found in their studies of the non native speakers of English tend to have three types of errors with conjunctions: choosing the wrong conjunction, omitting a needed conjunction and using an extra conjunction where one is not needed-6 sentences.

### 5.3 The Problematic Use of Causal Conjunction

The highest inappropriate conjunction used in the argumentative essays involving ESL undergraduates recorded by the causal conjunction which clearly explained its similarity to the findings from the previous studies conducted by Lai (2008) and Abdalwahid (2012). The application of causal conjunction ranked as the third frequent used by the learners in their essays but the proper use of that category contributes to the highest record in inappropriateness. As the application of *because* was examined, it was found that the learners used *because* even though there was no causal relationship between the sentences since it has been used in the beginning of the sentence. The following example extracted from the learner's essay shows how *because* is employed unnecessarily.

**Example 1:** *There are many reasons why I said like that. \*Because, in a fact, as we know, the incident of motorcycle accidents involving among youths and teenagers.*

The example shows *because* was used inappropriately and fails to display cohesive relationship of causality between the sentences. It can be seen that the sentence began with *because* is neither the result nor the purpose of what has been mentioned earlier. The application of *because* in the beginning of the second sentence confuses the readers of the essay since they would expect the following sentence is the result of what has been mentioned earlier, but it is not. The conjunction should be used in the middle between the sentences in order to show connectedness of the text that is tied together and contributes to meaningful sentence rather than introducing an independent clause.

Another example of inappropriate use of *because* is displayed through Example 2 which it shows that the learner use it to introduce a new point by referring to the earlier statement. Even though the use of it was to show a cause-effect relation, it can be considered neither semantically appropriate nor structurally correct which it should be omitted from the text as to provide the sentences matched.

**Example 2:** *A young people, are addicted with the social page. \*Because of this, they didn't pay attention while driving on the road.*

### 5.4 The Problematic Use of Adversative Conjunction

The use of adversative conjunction can be seen as one of the most frequently appeared in the sample. Initially, it is used to show expected contradicting ideas in the sentence. The most frequently used by the learners in this study are *but* and *on the other hand* only. Most of the time, the learners keep using these two conjunctions if they want to express contradictions. However, there were some learners who mistakenly used the role of adversative in signalling the contrast ideas.

**Example 3:** *The driving license can be given to people aged more than 19 years old \*but they can think better and mature.*

In Example 3, the adversative has been misused in this sentence. It seems that the topic sentence has no contradict ideas in it and it can be a meaningful sentence and more coherent by substituting *but* with additive conjunction; *because*. It was found in the essays that most learners were using *but* as if it is meant to be a cause-relation idea. However, there is no contrastive relation between the two ideas since they are supporting each other. This case is similar to the findings found by Muftah (2014) and Cowan (2008) in their studies which adversatives were inappropriately employed by the learners when they

inferred the relation between two ideas as contrastive, but those two ideas were semantically and structurally not contrastive.

### 5.5 The Problematic Use of Additive Conjunction

The additive conjunction is used in essays to show semantic similarity of units, emphasize key point, and adding new information to the prior expression. However, when this type of conjunction is used frequently in the essays for example *and*, it shows that the learners simply use it because it is familiar to them and it is easy to use. It was found that the majority of the learners use *and* at the wrong place in sentences and they do not mean to emphasize or add new information.

**Example 4:** *They will busy to decorate their motorcycle. \*And they will spend their money.*

Example 4 shows not only wrong choice of word used by the learner for “decorate” but also the learner misused a conjunction in the sentence. The use of causal conjunction like *so* or *therefore* is supposed to take place in that position rather than additive. Besides, there is one learner who used *and* redundantly as shown in Example 4. As it is repetitive, the *and* should be omitted from the paragraph to make the argument looks consistent.

**Example 5:** *Usually, teenager in 19 years old and above going to the university and their place and class are far away.*

These types of findings showing the additive conjunction being used redundantly justify what have been informed by some learners during interview sessions where they had to use the same words in their essays because they have limited vocabularies on a particular conjunction. This finding supports what was discussed by Park (2013) in his study that learners tend to use same conjunctions like ‘*and*’, ‘*but*’, ‘*besides*’ and ‘*next*’ because ESL learners limit themselves to the only conjunction that is quickly learnt due to their familiarity and its high frequency and easy to use like ‘*and*’ (additive) and ‘*but*’ (*adversative*).

However, this finding does not support what was discussed by Kang (2005) and Wen (2009). They came out with the findings of low usage of conjunctions was committed by the less proficient learners. Therefore, they used words repetitively providing less lexical diversity and complexity than learners of higher proficiency. While in this study, it was found that both proficiency level; advanced and intermediate, have similar issues of limited word choices.

### 4.6 The Problematic Use of Temporal Conjunctions

In writing an argumentative essay, sequential can be the most important aspect to include in the essay because it shows how the learner introduces readers to a new point or to express the preceding events through the essay. However, the uses of temporal conjunctions have been recorded to be the least frequent used by the learners. It can be seen from the learners’ essays that they tend to use an article *the* to replace the use of conjunctions like *next*, *secondly*, or *in conclusion*. This may be due to the lack of exposure on the use of sequential markers and also the learners themselves were not aware of the organization of the argumentative essays in displaying temporal relations.

**Example 6:** (New paragraph) *\*The minimum driving age should be raised to 19 because of the life.*

**Example 7:** (Last paragraph) *\*The government plans to increase the age limit for obtaining a driving license.*

In example 5 and 6, the learners replace the temporal conjunctions with *the*. In this case, it was similar to Tickoo (2002) study which shows that the learners were confused by the purpose of using the article *the* in showing something that has been mentioned. Therefore, they were likely to use *the* rather than temporal conjunctions such as *next* or *in conclusion* in displaying their intention to the readers about their previous arguments or even to summarize the whole argument. This portrays that learners may be unsure about the meaning of the temporal conjunctions.

#### 4.7 Finding from the Interviews

In this study, five ESL undergraduates volunteered to participate in the short-structured interviews. The analysis is divided into two sections; Section One focuses on the argumentative essay, and Section Two discusses on the application of conjunctions. Each interview session consists of seven questions.

Based on the interview data, all of them were familiar with the key elements to be included in an argumentative essay. In the first few questions which were focused on the argumentative essay, all of the volunteers seemed to know the basic knowledge of an argumentative essay such as providing stand to the topic; for or against the topic, introduce thesis statement to convince the readers to agree with our proposed points and provide supporting details to argument points.

This is similar to what have been discussed by Charlie (2011) on criteria that should be considered by the learners while writing an argumentative essay and also justifies that an argumentative essay is a writing process that takes a position and tries to support or justify the position and persuade others to share it (Choi, 2005). One of the information given by the learners was about the argumentative essay should have pros and cons ideas which before the learner started writing the essay, it is imperative to make a list of ideas and choose the most suitable ones among them for supporting and refuting the arguments.

The ESL learners also know that they have to include conjunction in that type of essay because conjunctions are used to help them to connect ideas between sentences or paragraphs. This is also agreed by some scholars regarding the function of conjunction where it helps in expressing certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Besides, it is similar to what was discussed by Sancyk (2010) where the use of conjunction or linguistic signals of argumentation like *furthermore* or *because* is important to help establish the argumentative relation. This reflects why the majority of the learners chose to use conjunctions in their essays as the reason given by Learner 5 (L5) as follows:

**Example 8:** *"I do because conjunctions help me to make my sentence connecting to each other. I remember my lecturer commented on my essay when I failed to use some conjunctions appropriately like and and because. The sentence sound weird to me and when I read again, it is not connected as I wanted to"* (L5)

In the interview session, the researcher also focused on a role conjunctions could play in the writing process. The findings from the interview data acknowledge the notion that these learners faced some

difficulties in applying conjunction due to the fact they received less practice and exposure to the usage of conjunction with similar meanings. This is because, the majority of the learners agreed that sometimes they faced such difficulties to use the conjunctions due to their weak foundation, less exposure and lack of contents in their English textbook which this finding support a suggestion proposed by Park (2013) in his study, he found that the information is to simplified the learners for easy learning experience.

Some of the learners stated that they have very limited knowledge on the usage of conjunction. They suggested that they should be given a list of similar words of conjunctions to help them using them interchangeably. As a result, they will not produce a weak essay by using the same conjunctions repeatedly throughout the essay. For example, as stated by the Learner 1 (L1) volunteer.

**Example 9:** “Sometimes...I have limited words to signal new points or when I want to add points...like and and besides...I use them quite often in my essay because I don't know what else I can use”. (L1)

Little exposure to the conjunctions may be due to teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. These learners are unable to prepare themselves adequately to practice using the conjunction according to comprehensive writing requirement as needed by the lecturers and university level. This is because proficiency level of the learners also plays an important role to enable the learners to prepare themselves on their own. However, according to one of the learners, the lecturer did give the learners feedbacks or comments on their writing. It shows that the lecturer provided the learners with positive learning environment but it was not enough for the learners who came from variety of educational background to adapt with self-learning environment implemented in the university. One example given by the learner is as follows:

**Example 10:** “Erm... maybe I should have a list of similar meaning for the conjunctions I use...I can't only depend on my lecturer because this is university level...we have to be independent...plus she gives us lots of information but sometimes we tend to forget it...but, it is good if I can be exposed to new words for the conjunctions”. (L3)

Based on the data taken from the interview sessions, this suggests that information about conjunctions should not only depend on teachers itself but English textbook used in the classroom should also can play the role to help the learners. The limited information from the textbook would lead to limited discovery of self-learning by the learners. Mukundan, Leong and Nimehchisalem (2012) revealed that the distribution of conjunctions in Malaysian textbooks failed to provide insightful notes to the learners and most resource books used by the learners provided lists of conjunctions with their semantic functions without further explanation about it.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 6.1 Conclusion

The present study has investigated the frequency of four semantic categories of conjunctions used in the argumentative essays written by 50 ESL Malaysian learners. The selection of conjunctions was based on Halliday and Hassan's (1976) taxonomy, consisting of additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. The findings show that there were appropriate and inappropriate application of conjunctions was identified in the essays. The result has revealed that the most frequent use of semantic category was additive (and), but the most inappropriate application of conjunction was by causal *because* and *so*.

Based on the analysis, the logical connection between sentences and paragraphs was weakened because the learners hardly maintain text cohesion between sentences or ideas due to their inability to connect sentences using proper conjunctions. Most of the learners experienced difficulties in applying those mentioned conjunctions and temporal conjunction can be categorized as underused. This is due to most of the temporal was not placed at the right position and was omitted most of the time in the essay.

In conclusion, the frequent use of additive in each essay can be attributed to one reason which is the learners are so familiar with this conjunction rather than any other additives like *and*, *in addition* and *besides*. On the other hand, the inappropriate use of causal conjunctions due to the lack of exposure of presenting conjunction in terms of the semantic function in the class textbook, unaware of teachers' information during class, and also due to the factor of forgetful. The exposure of this type of function would help the learners to be more aware to the appropriate use of conjunctions in their future academic essays writing.

## **6.2 Recommendation for Future Research**

Generally, in most ESL classrooms, textbooks are used to introduce conjunctions to the learners and to help them apply and use it according to its purposes. However, the examples are given without any further explanations on the application of particular conjunctions as well as their semantic functions. Providing a list of conjunctions and teaching the learners to look out for synonyms of the given lists would not guarantee the learners use the conjunctions correctly in their essays regardless of their proficiency levels.

In classrooms, teachers have to help the learners by exemplifying good models, demonstrate its effects and show the benefits of using it, but the learners still do not know how to write coherently. ESL teachers tend to only make feedbacks or comments on the learners' writing, but the idea of connecting ideas and conveying meaning of the sentences remain puzzling to ESL learners which they have to figure out themselves.

Therefore, in order to help the ESL learners to have a maximum usage of better cohesive devices in their academic writing, future study should consider to look at what are the other external factors that contribute to help the learners learning the devices in better ways. In addition, the factor of proficiency level of the learners can also be focused in details as their latest or current results of English tests can be a good measurement in the future study to focus on whether learners' proficiency levels do affect their choices of lexical in academic writing. Besides, interviews with course lecturers will also help to get in-depth information about learners' issues in writing as well as to increase the number of learners participating in semi-structured interview.

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