

## THE USE OF CONJUNCTIONS IN STUDENTS' CONTINUOUS WRITING: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTIC STUDY

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### Abstract

This study sets out to examine the use of elaborative conjunctions in students' continuous writing. The population of the study constitutes 30 students who were in level 200 at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano. Using simple random sampling technique, a total of 25 students were chosen as the sample size. The selected participants were given an essay writing tasks of not more than two pages. The essays were marked by four veteran teachers of English with the view of identifying instances of mis(use) of elaborative conjunctions. The sentences that feature the use of conjunctions were analysed as data using the Systemic Functional Linguistics associated with Michael Halliday. The findings of the study reveal that most of the students have little or no problem in using the elaborative conjunctions. This is so because of the 100 misuse of conjunctions found in the essays, only 13 cases involve the elaborative conjunctions. Thus, the study concludes that as far as the use of the elaborative conjunctions is concerned, the analysed essays have satisfied the criteria of coherence and cohesion. In other words, students at level 200 in universities have a reasonable mastery of the usage of elaborative conjunctions.

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to investigate how students use the different categories of conjunctions in their continuous writing. As one of the four basic skills of language, Nunan (1989) asserts that writing is not a natural activity. White (1981) further explains that physically and mentally, normal people learn to speak a language but they are taught how to write. This shows that writing is a skill that one has to be trained, coached and above all monitored on how it is done as the person progresses. In the academic context, writing is often developed in students through formal instructional settings, although proficiency in academic writing may be influenced by cognitive development, educational experiences and overall proficiency in second language for English as Second Language learners. Writing involves composing, developing and analyzing ideas, implying the ability to rephrase information in the form of narratives, or transforming information into new texts as in argumentative writing (Myles, 2002). For a piece of writing to send the write type of messages intended by the writer, it must have well-defined, full-pledged paragraph. According to Bacha, (2002) and Zhu, (2004), paragraphs are the building blocks of writing. Many students define the paragraph in terms of length: a paragraph is said to consist of group of at least five sentences; others say it is half a page long, etc. In reality, the unity and coherence of ideas among sentences are what constitute a paragraph. Robert and Collins (2003) define the paragraph as a group of sentences that supports one main idea. Consequently, the knowledge of paragraph development is regarded as a writing skill which can be investigated to manifest the proficiency one has in academic writing. And for a paragraph to be well-developed, cohesive devices always play a central role.

Despite the relevance of cohesive devices in a writing task, it has been observed by the researcher that most students in higher institutions of learning lack the expertise of using cohesive devices that would aid them develop coherent paragraphs. This is even more alarming when using conjunctions to add information, to contrast or state reasons and timing events. There seems to be the misuse of these components as some conjunctions that are ought to be used for stating reasons are obviously used inappropriately. Also, contrasting conjunctions that should give different information from the preceding one are, instead, used to add them. It is against this background that this paper explores students' use of elaborative conjunctions in their writing processes.

### **The Concept of Writing**

Writing has been defined by many scholars in different ways. These definitions are mostly tilted towards the direction of what kind of writing they are talking about. Writing can be in a form of letter, a composition, an essay, a report or any document that is meant to be read. Okoye (2006) defines writing as the act of imaginative composition through which the writer communicates to the audience by way of 'words'. These words can be strung together as the writer wants, depending on the type of the writing being carried out. In the words of Strunk and White (1999), writing is the process of expressing one's feelings and thoughts via the use of chunk of words to the reader. The important thing is for the writer to pass the right message across to the reader. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) also view writing as the production of the written word that results in a text but the text must be read and comprehended in order for communication to take place. This is because a writer communicates with an unseen audience who is expected to extract information from what he has read.

Writing has different types or styles depending on the nature and the purpose for which the writing task is conducted. A writer chooses a type depending on what he or she wishes to accomplish, what sort of material is to be discussed, and what kind of effect she/he wants to have on the reader. According to Kamal (2010), there are four types of writing. The first is the expressive writing, which is usually used at the lower levels of tertiary education where students are asked to write about themselves. The second is the persuasive, which is written to persuade the reader on the topic the writer wishes to write on. Elegance through balance and rhythm, control for appropriate emphasis, propriety of style, precision and memorability in diction and variety of expression are the characteristics of persuasive writing (Williams 1985 in Kamal 2010:80). The third is the literary writing, which is written in form of poems, plays, novels, etc. The fourth is the referential, writing which results in the production of text such as encyclopaedias, magazines as well as newspapers. In addition to the above, there are other types of writing, such as the narrative, the descriptive, the expository and the argumentative (Burton and Humpries, 1992; Eko, 1978).

A piece of writing can be structured in such a way that it has an introduction, main body of the writing and a conclusion. Introduction is the opening part of the writing that explains the purpose or topic of writing with general ideas. Its purpose is to introduce the reader to the topic of the whole body of writing. After the introductory part comes the body of the writing. Its purpose is to develop, support, and explain the topic idea stated in the introductory part of the writing. The body consists of one or more paragraphs. Each paragraph develops a subdivision of the topic, so the number of paragraphs in the body will vary with the number of subdivisions or subtopics. A piece of writing ends with a concluding paragraph. Its purpose is to bring the essay to a conclusion that gives the text a sense of completeness. The most common methods for concluding an essay are emphasizing one of the following: a call to action, a warning, a prediction, or an evaluation of the important points (Checkett and Checkett 2010:288).

### **The Concept of Conjunction**

According to Aliyu (2006), Conjunction is defined as an uninflected word employed to link words or part of sentences. For Ramasawmy (2004), it is a cohesive device which does not need a specifiable element in a situational context for its interpretation. Cook (2001) defines conjunction as words which may simply add more information to what has already been said (*and, furthermore, add to that*) or elaborate and exemplify it (*for instance, thus, in other words*). They may contrast new information with old information or put another side to the argument (*or, on the other hand, however, conversely*). Conjunctions may also relate new information to what has already been given in term of causes (*so, consequently, because, for this reason*) or in terms of time (*formerly, then, in the end, next*) or indicate a new departure or a summary (*by the way, well, to sum up, anyway*). In other words, they are words or phrases which link up phrases, clauses and sentences.

McCarthy (2006) is of the view that 'a conjunction does not set off a search backward or forward for its referent, but it does presuppose a textual sequence, and signal a relationship between segments of the discourse.' This definition of McCarthy is in a way related to the one offered by Halliday and Hasan (1976), where they see conjunctions as 'cohesive not in themselves but indirectly, by virtue of their specific meaning; they are not primarily device for reaching out into the preceding (or following)

text, but they express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse.

As discussed by Halliday (2004), conjunction being responsible for unifying clauses, could portray a relationship of cause and effect. This is to say that, 'possible meanings within the domain of elaboration, extension and enhancement are expressed by the choice of conjunctive adjunct (an adverbial group or a prepositional phrase) or any of the smaller units of conjunctions, i.e. *and, or, no, but, yet, so, then*' occupying the thematic position at the beginning of the clause. Based on this, the different categories of conjunctions can be based on the following:

- **Elaboration:** These conjunctions are used to elaborate a point and discuss it in a more detailed way. Within this domain, conjunctions can be classified into apposition (such as *in other words; that is to say; to put it in another way* etc) and clarification (such as *rather, at least, by the way, in any case, more especially, in short, actually* etc).
- **Extension:** This is a form of conjunction used by means of addition, variation and adversative. They include *and, also, apart from, in addition, yet, on the other hand, however, instead* etc.
- **Enhancement:** Here, cohesion is created by use of various types of enhancement such as spatio-temporal conjunctions (such as *here, there, in place of, behind, nearby,* etc), temporal conjunctions (such as *then, afterwards, previously, finally, at the same time,* etc) and complex conjunctions (such as *soon, next time, thereupon, meanwhile, until then, that morning, all the time,* etc).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Systemic Functional Linguistics associated with Michael Halliday (1985) which is based on the model that language is a system of meaning generation using lexico-grammar. Bloor and Bloor (2004) claim that people's language acts produce and construct meanings. In Halliday's (1989) theory, language expresses three main kinds of metafunctions simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Ideational metafunction (the clause as representation) serves for the expression of content or people's experiences of the real world. This metafunction has the well-known theory of transitivity. The interpersonal metafunction (clause as exchange) helps to establish and maintain social relations; the individual is identified and reinforced in this aspect by enabling him to interact with others by expression of their own individuality through the main theory of modality. The last meaning or metafunction is textual metafunction (clause as message) which creates links between features of the text with the elements in the context of situation. It refers to the manner in which a text is organized through both structural and cohesive textual components.

While the former components comprise theme and rheme and given and new structure, the latter includes ellipsis, reference or substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Out of conviction that the latter features work in longer stretches of language like paragraphs, the researcher applies Halliday's (1989) comprehensive model of conjunction as a cohesive feature to examine the students' ability to use elaborative conjunctions and determine their frequency and identify how misuse of elaborative conjunctions affects paragraph unity and reader's comprehension.

### **Methodology**

The population of this research is made up of 30 level two hundred students of the Department of English and Literary Studies of Bayero University, Kano. Considering the time factor and other research constraints, it is almost impossible to easily make a stratified analysis on all the assessable population that would be generalized on the target population (Second language learners of English). That is why a total of 25 students were chosen using the simple random sampling technique. This was done to arrive at a desired number and give all the members in the class equal chance of being selected as Krejcie and Morgan (1970) assert. For the purpose of data collection, the students were given an hour to write an essay of not more than two pages narrating the experiences they encountered so far in their lives. The aim was to get as much information as possible on the ways in which they develop their paragraphs as it regards the use of conjunctions as cohesive devices. The students were

allowed to ask questions that would not predetermine their responses. For the analysis of the data (the students' essays), the study uses a mixed approach in which the cohesive devices extracted from the essays were analysed qualitatively through descriptions and explanations and quantitatively through frequency and percentage tables.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The following section presents instances of misuse of elaborative conjunctions as found in the students' essays. This was done in such a way that only sentences that manifest misuse of this conjunctions were extracted from the essays and presented as "a". The researcher then gave the possible correct version of the sentence immediately below as "b". In other words, sentences that do not manifest misuse of elaborative conjunction were not presented even though they were reflected in the tabular analysis. Similarly, in order, to stick to the scope of the study, the analysis ignores other usage and spelling errors common in the essays.

In order to determine whether a particular misuse of elaborative conjunction is common or otherwise, a working frame was established to show the significance or otherwise of the discovered misuse. Considering the importance of cohesive devices to the flow of ideas in texts and the textual coherence at large, it is assumed that they should be mastered and their uses be appropriate to some extent. As such, it is established that each of the identified misuse represents 33.3% and, therefore, any text which exhibits one misuse of elaborative conjunctions has 33.3% of the discovered errors which is regarded as common. On the other hand, any text which exhibits more than one misuse of elaborative conjunctions (representing 66.6% and above) is treated as uncommon and is thus considered insignificant.

1. (a) \***However**, the new things that been added in what I have already know suprised me.  
(b) Furthermore, the new things that had been added to what I already had already known surprised me.

The above sentence contains misuse of elaborative conjunction of a sort. The writer was trying to add to the ideas he knew before coming to university but ended up contrasting them (the ideas). Thus, 'however' was replaced with additive conjunction 'furthermore' for a free flow of meaning and cohesion of the paragraph in the essay.

2. (a) \*I was playing with my mother's phone and at the same time browsing, **so** thought came in to my mind and I decided to check my Neco result **but** the network was poor so I asked my Mum for some money to go to the café **and** check.  
(b) I was playing with my mother's phone and, at the same time, browsing the internet, a thought came to my mind and I decided to check my NECO result. Unfortunately, the network was bad, so I asked my Mum some money to go to the cafe to check the results.

In the preceding sentence, there was a misuse of the contrastive conjunction 'but' at the middle of the sentence. Reading the entire paragraph, however, reveals that the writer was trying to state how unlucky he was to have experienced a network failure. Thus, 'but' was replaced with 'unfortunately' in the possible correct version in "b".

3. (a) \* **And** the lecturers should have to be doing justics about what they are doing, so that the student will really appreciate what the lecture is doing.  
(b) However, the lecturers need to be fair in their dealings with students so that the students will appreciate what they do.

In this sentence, an additive conjunction (and) was misused to contrast the students' idea with lecturers' attitudes. The writer was trying to explain his difficulty and was simultaneously appealing to lecturers for more understanding of such situations but ended up adding the two ideas instead of contrasting them. Thus, 'and' was replaced with a more appropriate contrastive conjunction 'however'.

4. (a) \* **In this regard**, that is the experience that I will never forget.  
(b) In short, this is the experience I will never forget.

Essay Number	Number of all the conjunctions per essay	Number of misuse of elaborative conjunctions	Percentage
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The above sentence equally contains such misuse of the elaborative conjunction. The writer was trying to establish a reason as to why he considered the episode he reported as an experience he will never forget. Instead of using summative conjunctions that require clarification, he ended up using particularizing conjunction—‘in this regard’. This sounds awkward as the potential reader may expect an idea of the same footage to follow. Thus, it was replaced with a summative clarificative conjunction ‘in short’.

5. (a) \* **In view of this** I started documenting my C.V **and** forward them to the ministry.  
 (b) With this development, I started documenting my C.V for onward submission to the ministry.

This above sentence contains a conjunctive adverb ‘in view of this’ at the beginning and additive conjunction ‘and’ towards the end and both were used inappropriately. This explains why in the possible correct version, the conjunctive adverb ‘in view of this’ was replaced with the more appropriate ‘with this development’. Similarly, the additive conjunction ‘and’ was replaced by the preposition ‘for’ show the reason why the CV was documented.

6. (a) \***Because** I was just seeing things as if they are going on movies or dream.  
 (b) I was just seeing things as if they were in a movie or a dream.

In the preceding sentence, the introduction of the clause with a causal conjunction ‘because’ indicates that the clause is a dependent clause which requires an independent clause in order to complete its meaning, but the writer used the conjunction wrongly without any independent clause. That is why the conjunctive adverb ‘because’ was removed completely in “b”.

7. (a) \***First of all** I have experience so many things that I can never forget. **And** the best among them is helplessness among your family neighbor and others.  
 (b) I have experienced so many things that I will never forget. The best among them is the feeling of helplessness among your family members and others.

There are two instances of wrong use of conjunction in this essay. A phrase “first of all” is used as the opening statement for the first paragraph of the essay. This gives the impression that apart from the point raised in that particular paragraph, other points would be introduced according to the sequence but the writer did not do that in the subsequent paragraphs. What we have, instead, is a ‘first’ among others that were never mentioned. Another wrong use of conjunction could also be seen in the same paragraph where the conjunction ‘and’ is used to begin a sentence. The conjunction neither joined any similar elements in the sentence nor linked the clause it introduced with the previous clause.

8. (a) \***Meanwhile after** the (JAMB) I performed very well and the score is qualify to obtain for me admission into the great university that I have been dreaming to be.  
 (b) In the JAMB exams, I performed very well. My scores were good enough to qualify me for admission in the great university of my dream.

In the previous sentence, both elaborative conjunctions (‘meanwhile’ and ‘and’) were misused and are, therefore, deleted in “b”. The sentence was also split into two in order to create a better cohesion.

9. (a) \*This is **because** when we finished our level 200 studies when the time of registration come I had being struggling to raise the fund in order to pay for my registration fees on time.  
 (b) The moment we finished 200 level examination, I started struggling to pay for the next level’s registration fees on time.

1.	4	1	25%
2.	4	1	25%
3.	6	0	0
4.	3	2	66.7%
5.	5	0	0
6.	5	0	0
7.	4	1	25%
8.	2	0	0
9.	5	0	0
10.	1	0	0
11.	1	0	0
12.	5	1	20%
13.	2	0	0
14.	3	0	0
15.	2	1	50%
16.	1	0	0
17.	1	0	0
18.	5	0	0
19.	7	0	0
20.	1	0	0
21.	11	1	9.10%
22.	3	0	0
23.	3	1	33.3%
24.	6	1	16.7%
25.	10	3	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13%</b>

In this sentence, the conjunction ‘because’ was used redundantly. This means that even if the conjunction was removed, the meaning of the sentence stands. This is what was done for its possible correct version in “b”.

10. (a) \*They started shouting together crying for help **but** no one can hear them **and** also the door of the parlour locked up **and** they hv die all of them.

(b) They started shouting together, crying for help. Because the door of the parlour was locked up, no one could hear them. So, all of them died.

In the above sentence, the additive and contrastive conjunctions ‘and’ and ‘but’ were replaced with spacio-temporal ones that require reasons after ‘so’ and ‘because’. Similarly, in order to make the sentence more meaningful and cohesive, it was split into three sentences in “b”.

11. (a) \***On a faithful day**, early September 2015 when I Join Rotary International with the intention of improving my speaking skills and showing hands in charity.

(b) On the fateful day, in early September 2015, I joined Rotary International with the intention of improving my speaking skills and giving hands in charity.

In the above sentence, the verificative conjunction ‘on the fateful day’ was wrongly worded as ‘on a faithful day’. Likewise, a conjunctive adverb ‘when’ was wrongly inserted towards the middle of the sentence. And it was duly removed in the possible correct version of the sentence in “b”.

12. (a) \*It happens that by the time I registered, there is a propose came event by

Rotary district 9125 paged RYLA 2015, (Rotary Youth leadership Award) which started October 5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> in Ede Osun state, **and** luckily for me **and** I got my self ready for the event.

(b) It happened that by the time I did my registration, an event was organized by Rotary district 9125 paged RYLA 2015 (Rotary Youth Leadership Award) which was scheduled to take place between 5<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> October in Ede, Osun State. Luckily for me, I got myself ready for the event.

In the preceding sentence, the additive conjunction 'and' was used wrongly towards the end of the sentence. Thus, in the possible correct version of the sentence in "b", the conjunction was deleted and the sentence split into two, so as to maintain its coherence and cohesion.

13. (a) \***As usual** of me at home were I will sleep **and** wake up around 9:30am,  
it is a surprise to me when I am very deep asleep **and** I had the man O war  
man shouting "if you are still sleeping you are wrong!!!".  
(b) As it was common for me at home to sleep until 9:00am, therefore, I was shocked  
when I heard a 'Man o War' staff shouting "if you are still sleeping, you are wrong!",  
while I was still deep asleep.

In the above sentence, three conjunctions (as usual, and, and) were used wrongly at different places. In the possible correct version of the sentence in "b", all the three conjunctions were deleted. Commas were inserted in appropriate places in the sentence to maintain its cohesion. The above analysis can be represented in the following table:

### Discussion of Findings

In his theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, Halliday (2004) submits that conjunctions may either be categorized based on their elaborative, extension or enhancement functions. This study focuses only on the elaborative conjunctions as it is used to enhance the free flow of the messages and their comprehension in paragraphs. Based on the presentations and analysis of the data in the previous sections, it can be observed that of all the conjunctions used in the essays, only 13 elaborative conjunctions (representing 13%) were misused by the students. Based on the set working frame which established that any identified misuse of conjunctions which does not exceed 33.3% of all the misuse of conjunctions found in the essay is regarded as common, it can be upheld that the subjects know how to use elaborative conjunctions. This is concluded because of the fact that the students' misuse of the elaborative conjunctions stood at 13% which is well below the established working frame.

The findings above reveal that the subjects of the study have performed quite impressively in the use of elaborative conjunctions in their essays. This is so because of the twenty-five (25) essays, only two essays (numbered 4 and 15) contain misuse of elaborative conjunctions at a rate that is more than the set percentage of 33.3% regarded as common in the working frame. In other words, twenty-three out of twenty-five (25) essays examined used elaborative conjunctions correctly by having 33.3% and below which is regarded as common in the working frame. This means that although the sampled students have difficulties in using other categories of conjunctions in their continuous writing, they are relatively proficient when it comes to the use of elaborative conjunctions. The findings further show that for both subtypes of elaborative conjunctions (conjunctions of apposition and clarification), the subjects of the study are relatively good in using them in their essay writing. In most of the paragraphs in the essays, the students were able to use the elaborative conjunctions to summarise, restate, reinstate and clarify points for the better understanding of their readers.

### Conclusion

This study focuses on the use of elaborative conjunctions in students' continuous writing. After analysing the data—which is made up of essays written by level 200 students of English at Bayero University, Kano, the study concludes that most of the subjects have little or no problem in using elaborative conjunctions in their writing tasks. This is evidenced by the statistics that was obtained from the data which shows that of the 100 misuse of conjunctions found in the students' essays, only 13 involved misuse of elaborative conjunctions. This means that the participants in the study have performed admirably when it comes to proper application of elaborative conjunctions. This is perhaps because of the fact that as people who were approaching the halfway stage of their university education, the students must have gone through some courses related to grammar and English usage. Thus, as far as the use of elaborative conjunctions is concerned, the analysed essays have satisfied the criteria of coherence and cohesion which are necessary for a free flow of ideas in a piece of writing. This means that students at level 200 in universities have a reasonable mastery of the usage of elaborative conjunctions.

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