

A Corpus-Based Study on the Use of Logical Connectives in English Majors' Undergraduate Dissertations—Taking Chengdu Neusoft University as an Example

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Abstract: Connectives can eliminate ambiguity in readers' understanding by creating logical semantic linkages between phrases, paragraphs, and sections of speech. This study creates a corpus of 40 translation reports written by English major students at Chengdu Neusoft University. Four different forms of linking were compared and analyzed in these papers. It discovers that among these students, there are notable variations in the use of temporal and transitive connectives. While there are issues with a lack of variety in word choice and the persistence of stereotyped writing templates, the majority of connectives are utilized in much the same ways. The purpose of this paper is to provide some insights and enhancements for academic essay writing by students, as well as pertinent recommendations for English writing instruction.

Keywords: Connectives; Corpus; Undergraduate Thesis; Academic English Writing

Introduction

The English undergraduate thesis is essential for English majors, when writing their papers, students should be mindful of how the chapter is structured. Writing in English is more than just a collection of expressions and rhetoric. By enhancing the discourse's coherence and clarity, logical connectives can assist readers rapidly understand the text's main concept and pulse and fulfill the goal of effective communication. (Dai Junhong, 2013). Connectives come in an abundance of varieties. Halliday and Hasan published the first list and classification of connectives, classifying them into four groups (additive, adversative, temporal, and causal) according to their semantics.

The corpus refers to a large collection of well-sampled and processed electronic texts, on which language studies, theoretical or applied, can be conducted with the aid of computer tools. In the same way, corpus is the basic resource for corpus linguistic research and the main resource for the empiricist approach to language research. It is widely used in statistical, lexicography, language pedagogy and conventional language study. Numerous studies have been conducted on the use of logical connectives in the writing of English language learners. Among these studies, a sizable number of scholars have investigated various facets of the use of logical connectives by English language learners using the corpus research method. Comparative studies on the use of connectives have already been carried out recently by several Chinese academics. These corpus-based research results on logical connectives are highly significant for teaching English writing. Based on the corpus search, this study then focuses on a comparative examination of students' usage of these four types of connectives in undergraduate English essays. Additionally, recommendations for the logical use of connectives in writing as well as recommendations for the instruction of English writing are provided to the academics in light of the analysis' findings.

1. Research Design

1.1 Research Questions

Using the four classifications of additive, adversative, causal and temporal in Halliday and Hasan's theory of articulation, researcher collects the common vocabulary of these four types of connectives and builds a word list. It primarily examines the types of connectives and frequently used vocabulary that academics utilize in their undergraduate English theses. The following are the questions explored in this study:

- (1) Which connectives are most commonly employed in undergraduate theses by Chengdu Neusoft University English majors ?
- (2) Based on the results of the study, it is inferred Chinese undergraduate English majors' use of logical connectives in their theses.
- (3) What findings concerning English academic writing do these studies provide?

1.2 Corpus Collection

Initially, a table summarizing the common language of the four categories of connectives typically found in universities is created in this study. Then, based on the five components that are shared by 40 theses (translation reports) written by English majors at Chengdu Neusoft University (abstract, translation task, translation method, case study, conclusion). The five corpora were created in the following order: A, B, C, D, and E.

1.3 Research Tools

In order to create a word list, the author first manually scanned the five corpora for connectives. The author then filtered out any terms that contained any of the four categories of connectives—additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. After that, discovered connectives in the five corpora were searched using the expert corpus search tool AntConc. Manual verification was done to identify connectives that may express various semantic connections. At last, the top 10 most often used connectives in each of the five corpora as well as the frequency of occurrences of each of the four connective types were tallied.

2. Results and Analyses

2.1 Overall Use of Connectives

The first step is to list the common vocabulary for the four types of connectives: temporal, adversative, causal, and additive (Table 1). Next, an overall analysis of the employment of the four kinds of connectives in five distinct corpora is conducted. (Table 2).

Causal	Additive	Adversative	Temporal
because	and	but	earlier
since	also	on the contrary	previously
owing to	in addition	though	former
due to	further(more)	yet	before
as a result	besides	nevertheless	after
on a account of	moreover	however	until
thus	what is more	instead	later
so	not only...but also	unlike	afterwards
hence		whereas	meanwhile
consequently		conversely	meantime
therefore		rather than	first
accordingly		by comparison	simultaneously
as a consequence		by contrast	after a while
for		in contrast	all that time
as		on the other hand	finally
		although	accasionally
			at the same time

Type	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Causal	105	503	716	1603	525	3452
Additive	708	1218	1853	2741	1151	7671
Adversative	17	70	97	403	125	712
Temporal	84	120	424	331	134	1093

2.2 The Use of Causal Connectives

In English academic writing, the causal connectives that are often used are: “because, since, thus, so, hence, therefore, for, as”, etc. Scholars use these conjunctions to causal relationships between words, phrases, clauses, or sentences.

The most commonly used causative conjunction in the students of this study is “as”, with an average of 1301 uses, follow with “for, so, before, because”. However, the word “so” is mainly used in spoken language, but students used it 605 times in the undergraduate thesis. Students tend to use formal colloquial language, which can be seen they rarely use formal conjunctions (such as “since, therefore, because”).

2.3 Use of Additive Connectives

Additive connectives mean that the latter sentence complements the earlier sentence. The students of this study employ a wider variety

of additive connectives in their undergraduate theses, such as “in addition, further (more), besides, furthermore”.

Nonetheless, with a total of 6,850 instances throughout the five corpora, the usage of “and” is concentrated and even abused. There are 633 and 95 instances of “also” and “in addition” correspondingly in the remaining words, but “what is more” and “not only... but also...” are hardly used. Comparative analysis reveals that the majority of conjunctions are straightforward, easily learned terms that arise early in the language acquisition process, which will lead to a lack of variety in word choice.

2.4 The Use of Adversative Connectives

In English academic writing, the adversative connectives that are often used are: “but, though, yet, however, instead, unlike, whereas, although”, etc. Among them, “but” is used to indicate that the two sentences before and after are mutually opposed. “However” refers to the transformation of meaning between two sentences, resulting in a change in situation.

Throughout the five datasets, the students employed a solitary adversative connective, such as “but”, which surfaced 459 times, “however, on the other hand, although,” which surfaced 100 times or fewer conversely. The data shows that the students’ usage of transitive connectives in the thesis is very uniform, opting to employ “but”, disregarding the essay’s diversity in word choice.

2.5 The Use of Temporal Connectives

Temporal connectives reflect the sequence relationship, the length of an interval, and the frequency of an event occurring. The temporal connectives that are often used are: “earlier, previously, former, before, after, first, at the same time”, etc.

The students of this study primarily used the conjunctions “first, before, after” along with the phrase “at the same time” to express temporal semantics in their undergraduate theses. Notably, “first” and “before” are the most frequently used, with 401 and 200 usages respectively. Nevertheless, the terms “afterwards, repeatedly, all that time, after a while” are absent. This might be because the pupils’ prior learning involved the usage of writing templates. Nonetheless, that students who overuse connectives may overuse apparent logic in their work while neglecting implicit logic.

2.6 Use of The Most Frequent Connectives

Among the 10 conjunctions the most frequently occurring conjunctions, 7 of them are the same: “and, as, for, first, also, so, but”. These students favored “and” when expressing additive semantics “as, so, for”, when selecting causal conjunctions. “And “ and “also” mean to add; “but” means transition; “first” means time, referring to the very beginning. The aforementioned observation suggests that these students employ the most often utilized connectives in a consistent manner in their work, suggesting a very similar writing proficiency.

Table 3 Use of the Most Frequent Connectives

	A	frequency	B	frequency	C	frequency	D	frequency	E	frequency
1	and	680	and	1112	and	1652	and	2435	and	971
2	as	100	as	167	as	257	as	641	for	192
3	for	80	for	163	for	211	so	307	as	136
4	first	35	also	97	also	148	for	282	also	113
5	also	27	so	76	after	131	but	266	so	83
6	so	22	first	53	so	117	also	248	but	66
7	before	18	but	46	first	109	therefore	226	first	51
8	at the same time	13	therefore	44	before	105	first	151	therefore	43
9	but	10	because	21	but	71	after	68	further (more)	35
10	after	9	after	16	therefore	54	because	61	due to	31

3. Conclusion

This study uses five portions of the research corpus, which consists of the translation reports from the 40 English majors at Chengdu Neusoft University, to assess the usage of connectives in theses authored by English majors. After comparing the five corpus segments, it is evident from the results that the students in this research usually utilize connectives in diverse ways, especially when it comes to the employment of additive and temporal connectives. Word choice is not sufficiently diverse, and individual connectives are often overused and abused. There is also a more advanced learning level that is still influenced by the conventional writing styles of the past. However, seven of the 10 most prevalent connectives are the same, indicating a roughly similar level of writing proficiency among these students. The aim of

this research is to offer practical advice to Chinese students who are writing essays.

The study's findings lead the researcher to provide a number of recommendations for instructional strategies. Instructors should first urge students to research each kind of logical connective on their own. After that, they should evaluate how well the students used the feedback and fix any errors. When students write, teachers should help them to focus on the coherence of the entire text and the connectivity of the entire discourse. Meanwhile, students should avoid using too many colloquial connectives in their academic writing, correctly expand the diversity of connectives to strengthen the discourse articulation and coherent elements of English articles.

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