

A General Perspective on the Use of Conjunctions Across Arab Students as Turkish Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to submit a general perspective to the conjunctions which Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 have structured in their written texts. To this end, this research was designed as a document analysis. In the study, the documents were obtained from free writings by 90 Arab students who were studying at Bolu Branch of TÖMER, Turkey. In order to analyse the conjunctions used by the study group in their written texts, frequency and percentage analyses were employed in quantitative findings obtained through this analysis. Additionally, Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare students' use of conjunctions according to their language levels. The results of the study have indicated that the most commonly used conjunctions by Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 were additive, causal, adversative and time; on the contrary, the least commonly used conjunctions were coordinating, expository, exemplificatory and conditional. The general perspectives on the use of conjunctions across Arab students whose language levels were B2 were found to be higher in their written texts compared to those whose language levels were B1. Consequently, it was revealed that Arab students whose language levels were B2 used '*adversative, conditional and exemplificatory conjunctions*' to a greater extent; contrary to this, it was found that they were not able to progress in the remaining five conjunctions. According to the findings of the study, teaching of the conjunctions used less commonly by Arab students should be focused more to enable them to comprehend what they read and to convey their ideas in written expression more proficiently.

Key words: Teaching Turkish as Foreign Language, Grammar, Written Expression, Conjunction, Conjunction Types

INTRODUCTION

Language, as a system, encompasses the components of sounds, patterns, meaning and syntax. In this regard, no linguistic expression, including words and grammatical patterns, has been formed by coincidence. It is likely to mention about the same criterion in written expression which follows speaking dimension of language use. Indeed, the concept of cohesion refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and ensures the sentences to be perceived as a discourse by connecting them grammatically, logically, and semantically (Çetinkaya et al., 2016). In addition, teaching cohesion is the basis for the development of literacy skills of students in the mother tongue or foreign language.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify the concept of cohesion as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), conjunctions, as structures providing semantic and structural cohesion, are semantic and grammatical connectives that establish a meaning by relating the sentences in a

text or a clause. Conjunctions link morphemes that connect components of a sentence, such as words, phrases or clauses (Vardar, 2002). In other words, conjunctions are words that link components of a sentence or stand between two sentences in terms of meaning and structure, thereby constituting an utterance. For this reason, the teaching of these incumbent words cannot be left to chance in order to fully understand what is read and is written in foreign language literacy.

Similarly, it has been proved in the literature that conjunctions foster the success of written expression (Coşkun, 2005; Karatay, 2010) and have positive impact upon reading comprehension (Khatib and Safari, 2011; Crosson and Lesaux, 2013; Gençer, 2013; Duggleby et al., 2015). Karatay (2010) articulated that cognitive awareness might be enhanced through the teaching of components that provides cohesion within the generation and analysis of meaning in spoken and written activities. Crosson and Lesaux (2013) stated that conjunctions played a pivotal role in reading comprehension; however, the authors added that this role depends on the individual's linguistic background. The findings of

the above- mentioned studies highlighted the contributions of conjunctions on writing and reading skills.

Types of Conjunctions

Turkish grammar books offer various classifications towards conjunctions that are linguistic components related to meaning and syntax. In reference to the words that do not have meaning but grammatical functions, Ergin (2006) examined prepositions under three different categories as interjections, binding prepositions and postpositions. In addition, Ergin classified binding prepositions as ‘sequencers, counterbalancing, comparing, prepositions and postpositions. Korkmaz (2009) classified words in Turkish as significative, functionary and significative- functionary; in addition, functionary words were categorised as prepositions and conjunctions. Again, Korkmaz (2009) classified conjunctions under five titles that were sequencing, correlative- comparison- alternative, intensive conjunctions, alternation and sentence connectors in terms of their functions and places in a sentence. The conjunctions, as sentence connectors, were classified as ‘expository, result, intensive, causal, adversative and other sentence connectors.’

In the related literature, various studies have examined conjunctions, conjunction types and conjunctions in written texts (Adalı, 1969; Aktaş, 1994; Çiftçi, 2007; Çocuk and Kanatlı, 2012; Korkmaz, 2005, 2009; Özkan, 2004; Torun, 2007; Yavuz, 2011). Moreover, there have been other studies investigating conjunctions as cohesion components in other teaching levels by elaborating cohesion and consistency as a criterion for forming a text (Çoban and Karadüz, 2015; Dikilitaş, 2012; Dolunay and Dölek, 2018; İşsever, 1995; Karadeniz, 2015; Keklik and Yılmaz, 2013; Seçkin et al., 2014; Topbaş and Özcan, 1995). Furthermore, there have been various studies in line with the current study that focus on Turkish language teaching as a foreign language (Aramak, 2016; Coşkun, 2005, 2011; Manti, 2017). Aramak (2016) determined that the use of conjunctions by students whose language level was C1 was relatively low. Coşkun (2005, 2011) observed that Turkish and immigrant students had significant problems in using conjunctions in written expression. Accordingly, students were found to misuse conjunctions. Manti (2017) identifying cohesion components in students’ written expression stated that the level of the use of conjunctions by Egyptian students who were studying Turkish was low.

Objective and Research Questions

The present study aims to submit a general perspective to the conjunctions which Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 have structured in their written texts. For this aim, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What level is the use of conjunction types in the written texts of Arab students at B1 and B2 language proficiency levels
2. Do the types of conjunctions used by Arab students in written texts show difference depending on language proficiency levels?

METHOD

Research Design

The present study aiming to submit a general perspective to the conjunctions which Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 have structured in their written texts was conducted through document analysis. The main principle of this type of analysis is to obtain appropriate documents in accordance with the aim of the study (Karasar, 2012) and, then, to carry out an analysis towards the content of written, published or oral documents (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, in the current research, relevant documents were gathered and content analysis was conducted following the inspection of their originality.

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 90 Arab students who were studying Turkish as a foreign language at B1 and B2 language levels at Bolu Branch of TÖMER, in Turkey. The study group was determined through purposeful sampling technique. The demographic characteristics of students in the study group were provided in Table 1.

Data Collection Procedure

The research data were collected from students’ free writing texts during a lesson hour at the end of the course. The students were requested to write about such topics as personal development, art and art branches, friendship, occupations, global warming, natural disasters and environmental pollution, technology and health, directing and film shooting. These topics were specified based on both themes in course books for Turkish as a foreign language and expert opinions in the field.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the conjunctions used by the study group in their written texts, frequency analysis was conducted. Frequency analysis consists of counting the occurrence of units or patterns (Bilgin, 2014, p. 18). The classification developed by Coşkun (2005) was employed to investigate the

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Students

Demographics	B1	B2	Total	General Total
Gender				
Female	22	25	47	90
Male	23	20	43	
Age				
18-25	32	35	67	90
26-33	10	8	18	
33+	3	2	5	
Country				
Palestine	11	7	18	90
Iraq	18	20	38	
Syria	12	13	25	
Tunisia	3	2	5	
Jordan	1	3	4	

types of conjunctions in the first phase of analysis. Thus, the conjunctions used by Arab students were classified as additive, coordinating, contrast, time, conditional, expository, exemplificatory and causal. According to the conjunction types determined by the literature review, research data were investigated and organized in the second phase and the conjunctions used by the students and the number of their occurrences were classified under relevant themes and combined. Hereby, frequency analysis was conducted. In the third phase, the data obtained was transferred to computer environment. In the following phase, descriptive statistics was used to analyse conjunctions used by Arab students in their free writing; however, Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to make comparisons between groups.

Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure validity and reliability of the study, both investigators, in various times, determined the conjunctions used by the students and entered data obtained in the sample form presented in Table 2. When comparing results of the analyses by both investigators, an agreement of %90 was found (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In case of the presence of disagreement or indeterminacy, students' free writings were reconsidered and assessed and a common decision taken was recorded in the relevant section.

FINDINGS

In this section of the present study which aims to submit a general perspective to the conjunctions which Arab students

whose language levels were B1 and B2 have structured in their written texts, the findings concerning the conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts have been covered. The findings were tabulated through applying appropriate statistics in terms of research questions of the study.

The Conjunctions Used by Arab Students at B1 Language Level in Their Written Texts

Table 3 presents the data regarding the conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts whose language levels were B1 level.

According to Table 3, Arab students mostly used *additive* conjunctions (4.89), *causal* conjunctions (2.23), *time* conjunctions (1.02) and *contrast* conjunctions (0.89). The least frequently used conjunctions by Arab students, however, were found as *exemplificatory* (0.22), *coordinating* (0.26), *expository* (0.31) and *conditional* (0.40) respectively.

The Conjunctions Used by Arab Students at B2 Language Level in Their Written Texts

Table 4 presents the data regarding the conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts whose language levels were B2 level.

According to Table 4, Arab students mostly used *additive* conjunctions (6.51), *causal* conjunctions (2.35), *contrast* conjunctions (1.80) and *time* conjunctions (1.27). The least frequently- used conjunctions by Arab students, however, were found as *coordinating* (0.47), *expository* (0.64), *exemplificatory* (0.80) and *conditional* (1.11) respectively. When

Table 2. A Sample Form towards Conjunctions used by Students in Their Written Texts

Students' Pseudonyms	Language Level	Additive	Coordinating	Contrast	Time	Conditional	Expository	Exemplificatory	Causal
K1 (Students' Pseudonyms)	B1 (Language Level)	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:	Conj. 1: Freq.: Conj. 2: Freq.:
K2	B1								
K3	B1								
K4	B1								
K5	B1								

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics concerning the Conjunctions used by Arab Students at B1 Language Level

B1 Level	Additive	Coordinating	Contrast	Time	Conditional	Expository	Exemplificatory	Causal
Mean	4.88	0.24	0.88	1.02	0.40	0.31	0.22	2.17
Total	220.00	11.00	40.00	46.00	18.00	14.00	10.00	98.00
Percentage	48.1	2.4	8.8	10.1	3.9	3.1	2.2	21.4

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics concerning the Conjunctions used by Arab Students at B2 Language Level

B2 Level	Additive	Coordinating	Contrast	Time	Conditional	Expository	Exemplificatory	Causal
Mean	6.51	0.46	1.80	1.26	1.11	0.64	0.80	2.24
Total	293.00	21.00	81.00	57.00	50.00	29.00	36.00	101.00
Percentage	43.9	3.1	12.1	8.6	7.5	4.3	5.4	15.1

comparing the types of conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts, it may be alleged that the frequency of conjunctions used by Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 did not vastly change in the written texts. At both levels, students were seen to use additive and causal conjunctions most frequently; however, the least frequently- used conjunctions used by Arab students were found as exemplificatory, coordinating and expository conjunctions.

The Conjunctions Used by Arab Students at B1 and B2 Language Levels in Their Written Texts

Table 5 presents the data regarding the conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts whose language levels were B1 and B2 levels.

According to Table 5, Arab students mostly used *additive* conjunctions (5.70), *causal* conjunctions (2.29), *contrast* conjunctions (1.34) and *time* conjunctions (1.14). The least frequently- used conjunctions by Arab students, however, were found as *coordinating* (0.37), *expository* (0.48), *exemplificatory* (0.51) and *conditional* (0.76) respectively.

Comparison between Conjunctions use of Arab Students from Different Proficiency Levels

Mann- Whitney U test was performed in order to determine significant differences among the conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts according to language levels.

In order to analyse whether the conjunctions used by students showed significant difference according to language levels, Kolmogorov- Smirnov test (Coşkun et al., 2015, p. 208) was carried out since the number of samples is over fifty. Normal distribution was not observed in both groups ($p < .05$). Since research data was not normally distributed, Mann Whitney U (Coşkun et al., 2015, p. 207) test was conducted. It was revealed that the conjunctions used by Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 showed significant difference ($p < .05$). Accordingly, the conjunctions used by Arab students whose language level was B2 were found to be higher than those whose language level was B1. This finding implies that the conjunctions used by students who are studying Turkish show an increase as their language level improves.

The Significant Differences among the Types of Conjunctions used by Arab Students in Their Written Texts According to Language Levels

Mann- Whitney U test was performed in order to determine significant differences among the types of conjunctions used by Arab students in their written texts according to language levels.

In order to analyse whether the types of conjunctions used by students showed significant difference according to language levels, Kolmogorov- Smirnov test was carried out since the number of samples is over fifty. Normal distribution was not observed in both groups ($p < .05$). It was observed that the use of “*contrast, conditional and exemplificatory*” conjunctions were higher as the language level increased. On the contrary, no increase was found in the use of “*additive, coordinating, time, expository, causal*” conjunctions.

DISCUSSION

The results of content analysis in line with the research purpose are presented below. Accordingly, the general perspective to the conjunctions which Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 have structured in their written texts is as follows:

Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 were seen to mostly use additive, time and causal conjunctions; however, the least frequently- used conjunctions were revealed as coordinating and exemplificatory conjunctions. These findings are in accordance with prior studies (Karadeniz, 2015; Keklik and Yılmaz, 2013). Karadeniz (2005, 10) determined that undergraduate students mostly used additive and expository conjunctions; nonetheless, the least frequently- used conjunctions used by them were exemplificatory conjunctions. Furthermore, Keklik and Yılmaz (2013, 10) observed that secondary school students mostly used additive and time conjunctions in their narrative texts; nevertheless, the least- used conjunctions by those students were exemplificatory and expository conjunctions. In this regard, it may be concluded that students have difficulty in using coordinating and exemplificatory conjunctions and they learn those conjunctions more slowly. Conjunctions, as structures providing semantic and structural cohesion, are semantic and grammatical connectives that establish a meaning by relating the sentences in a text or a clause (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). The proper and functional use of conjunctions, as sub- components of cohesion, exert direct effects on meaning as well as writing, speaking, reading and listening skills where meaning analysis is performed (Coşkun, 2005; Crosson and Lesaux, 2013; Duggleby, Tang and Kuo-Newhouse, 2015; Karatay, 2010; Khatib and Safari, 2011). Therefore, integration of teaching of conjunctions which students have difficulty in learning with basic language skills may foster gaining experience and permanency.

In this study, the most frequently used conjunctions by Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 were *additive, causal, adversative and time*; on the contrary, the least frequently used conjunctions were *coordinating,*

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics concerning the Conjunctions used by Arab Students at B1 and B2 Language Level

B1 and B2 levels	Additive	Coordinating	Contrast	Time	Conditional	Expository	Exemplificatory	Causal
Mean	5.70	0.35	1.34	1.14	0.75	0.47	0.51	2.21
Total	513.00	32.00	121.00	103.00	68.00	43.00	46.00	199.00
Percentage	45.6	2.8	10.8	9.2	6	3.8	4.1	17.7

expository, exemplificatory and conditional. Additionally, when comparing the types of conjunctions used by Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2 in their written texts, the order of conjunctions use was seen not to change to a greater extent. These findings are in line with the results of the studies conducted by Aramak (2016), Ercan and Us (2019), Manti (2017) and Coşkun (2011) who carried out research with foreign students. Besides, Coşkun (2011) determined additive conjunctions in the first place and time conjunctions in the second in terms of connectives. The fact that time conjunctions were determined in the second place may be due to the fact that the study was conducted on narrative texts. In above-mentioned studies, congruent with the results of the present study, coordinating, expository, exemplificatory and conditional conjunctions was found to be used least-frequently. As a result, Arab students who are studying Turkish were seen to use coordinating, expository, exemplificatory and conditional conjunctions to a lesser extent, compared to other types of conjunctions, in their written texts.

The general perspective to the conjunctions used by Arab students whose language level was B2 showed significant difference compared to B1 level students. Based on these results, it may be alleged that Arab students whose language level was B2 were better at the use of conjunctions. A significant difference was observed among the use of ‘contrast, conditional and exemplificatory’ conjunctions used by Arab students whose language levels were B1 and B2. In this regard, it was determined in certain studies carried

out with foreign students studying Turkish that students’ use of cohesion components was generally low (Aramak, 2016; Manti, 2017) and that the students hardly used coordinating, sequencing, expository conjunctions and hypotheses in their written texts in all language levels (Manti, 2017). Similarly, in the current study, it was indicated that the use of ‘coordinating, additive, causal and expository’ conjunctions did not show an increase at expected level as language level improves. This may be due to course books. Indeed, Karatay and Kara (2019) stated that course books did not include activities concerning the use of conjunctions sufficiently and those books utilized same teaching techniques. According to research results, conjunctions were included most in C1 and the least in A1 language level. With this regard, the low use of conjunctions or the conjunctions students have difficulty in learning may be organized based on language levels.

Prior studies have revealed that conjunctions play a pivotal role in ensuring cohesion, a criterion for forming a text (Can, 2012; Coşkun, 2005; Coşkun, 2011; Dikilitaş, 2012; Karadeniz, 2015; Keklik and Yılmaz, 2013; Seçkin et al., 2014). When comparing the results of those studies, the types of conjunctions used by students in different class levels vary depending on text type chosen in accordance with the purpose. However, Coşkun (2011) highlighted that students used time conjunctions to a greater extent in narrative texts. On the contrary, time conjunctions used by Arab students studying Turkish in their free writing activities took the fourth place. Students preferred additive, causal and contrast conjunctions more in their free writing activities. According to these results, it can be said that the differences in types of conjunctions may be due to the types of texts used to collect data. In addition, similar to the results of the current study, Ercan and Us (2019) stated that foreign students studying Turkish used sequencing conjunctions most and exemplificatory conjunctions least. In this sense, it would be right to focus on the types of conjunctions that fail in the teaching

Table 6. Comparison of the use of conjunctions between groups- Mann Whitney U Test

Level	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
B1	45	36.81	1656.50	621.500	0.002
B2	45	54.19	2438.50		

Table 7. Comparison of the types of conjunctions between groups- Mann Whitney U Test

Types of Conjunctions	Level	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Additive	B1	45	40.23	1810.50	775.5	0.055
	B2	45	50.77	2284.50		
Coordinating	B1	45	42.77	1924.50	844.5	0.287
	B2	45	48.23	2170.50		
Contrast	B1	45	38.41	1728.50	693.5	0.007
	B2	45	52.59	2366.50		
Time	B1	45	43.92	1976.50	941.5	0.545
	B2	45	47.08	2118.50		
Conditional	B1	45	39.21	1764.50	729.5	0.010
	B2	45	51.79	2330.50		
Expository	B1	45	42.21	1899.50	864.5	0.134
	B2	45	48.79	2195.50		
Exemplificatory	B1	45	39.49	1777.00	742	0.007
	B2	45	51.51	2318.00		
Causal	B1	45	44.93	2022.00	910.5	0.759
	B2	45	46.07	2073.00		

of conjunctions, which have an important function in the development of literacy skills in any language.

Prior studies have revealed that students misused conjunctions in terms of necessity, meaning and function (Coşkun, 2005; Çetinkaya et al., 2016; Dolunay and Dölek, 2018; Hamaratlı et al., 2016). In the present study, the fact that the level of additive conjunctions use was high may be due to unnecessary use of 'and' conjunction. Besides, Ercan and Us (2019) determined in their study which was carried out with the students from Middle East, Africa and Asia that the level of conjunction use by the students from Middle East whose language level was C1 was relatively high and that these students particularly used intensive- alternation and sequencing conjunctions. This indicates that the use of conjunctions by students studying Turkish is affected from the characteristics of their mother tongue. In order to eliminate this situation and improve literacy skills in a foreign language, additional teaching activities can be planned in the target language in order to eliminate the negative characteristics transferred from the mother tongue.

CONCLUSION

In light of the research findings, the following recommendations concerning Turkish language teaching as a foreign language may be made:

In order to increase the literacy skills of students in teaching Turkish to foreigners, the teaching order of the types of conjunctions is to be taught to students in Turkish language teaching based on language levels should be determined. Planning plays a pivotal role during teaching process; therefore, in order to enhance students' writing skills, the use of conjunctions based on text types is required to be elaborated. For this reason, in order to improve students' writing skill development, the use of conjunctions based on text types should be probed in depth and results should be revealed. In this regard, teaching of the use of conjunctions can be organized and carried out systematically in order for foreign students who are studying Turkish to have a good command of reading comprehension in Turkish and to express themselves in written expression. In addition, in teaching Turkish to foreigners teaching of conjunctions in all language levels should be associated with basic language skills; reading and writing activities should be integrated.

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