

In His Name, The Almighty

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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
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Thesis Title:

**The Effects of Instruction of Corpus-Based Conjunction
Materials on Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Ability**

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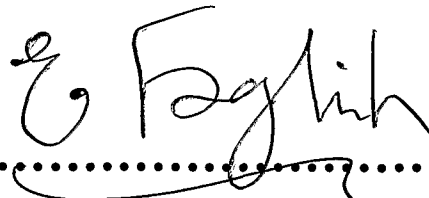
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Dedicated to
My great father, my lovely mother
And my patient husband
To whose kindness and generosity I am
Indebted a lot.

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Abstract

Electronic language corpora and their accompanying concordance software have outgrown their usefulness as a construct for teaching and learning. However, little has been done to examine the effectiveness of corpus-based materials in Iran. Thus, this study takes the advantage of the opportunities offered by availability of corpus resources to teach English conjunctions to Iranian EFL learners in order to improve their writing ability, since researches have shown that one of the major problems of creating a coherent text comes from learners' inability to use cohesive devices for sentence cohesion (Tseng and Liou 2005). Accordingly, two corpus-based conjunction units based on the semantic forces of each conjunction and the accompanying authentic examples drawn from British National Corpus (BNC), utilizing the MonoConc Pro (2.2), were designed for 30 undergraduate freshwomen EFL learners. After ensuring of the homogeneity of the two assigned groups to control and experimental using the writing subdivision of a recent version of IELTS (2005), the pretest consisting of a conjunction test, an essay writing task and a background questionnaire was held. After two weeks of treatment for the experimental group, the posttest consisting of another conjunction test, essay writing task and a perception questionnaire and after a period of another two weeks the delayed posttest consisting of a conjunction test to check the retention of taught

materials by the participants were administered. Results indicated that the members of the experimental group outperformed the control group and there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in both conjunction and essay writing tests. In addition, the participants' answers to the questionnaires revealed that they held a positive attitude toward the corpus-based instruction. This case study argues that pedagogically sound instructional design for corpus-based conjunction materials can help Iranian EFL learners write more accurate and coherent essays.

Keywords: English conjunction, corpus-based instruction, writing ability, coherence.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Overview

The concept of coherence is of central importance to discourse analysis. In writing a coherent text much attention has been paid to "the first criterion for textuality: 'cohesion', the apparent connections in discourse" (Renkema 1993).

Halliday and Hassan (1976) distinguish five types of cohesive ties: substitution, ellipsis, reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. In this study our focus is on conjunctions. Conjunction is a relationship which indicates how the subsequent sentence or clause should be linked to the preceding or the following sentence, and how this can be achieved by the use of conjunctions (Renkema 1993).

Conjunctions are of many types. Four frequently occurring types are addition, adversity, causality, and temporality (as it is displayed in British National Corpus 2001). My own experiences as an English teacher have shown that Iranian EFL students have many problems in using conjunctions. Therefore, as the computers have become smaller, cheaper and thus more widely available, both to teachers and to learners and the data stored on them has become more readily accessible to the user, the practical prerequisites for corpus-based teaching and learning have improved dramatically. So in this study my purpose is to examine whether the practice with corpus-based materials can help students learn how to use conjunctions in creating a coherent text.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Writing is the skill that most of our students in Iran have difficulty with. One of the major problems is that they can not properly link what they have in mind with what they put on paper. Actually, when they change thoughts into words, they come up with some unrelated, messy sentences which do not have a unity in meaning i.e. coherence .This is because of their inability to use cohesive devices appropriately and adequately. Of course this problem is not limited to Iranian EFL learners. For instance, from the error analysis of a small error-tagged learner corpus of college freshmen English major students in an Asian public university, National Tsing-Hua University, (Yu, 2004), together with the course instructor's observation of learners production in the university, the use of conjunctions and adverbial connectors was found to be one of the dominant sources of error in the learners' writings compared with the native speakers' corpora (Tseng and Liou 2005).

Different researches have been done to find the effective ways for teaching writing and especially conjunctions. For instance with the rapid advances of technology, Internet has been used to enhance the practices of teaching English. However, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has not found its proper place in our country yet, whereas its effective results have been witnessed all around the world. For instance Zhao (2003) in order to address the

effectiveness of CALL performed a meta-analysis of stringently selected studies published between 1997 and 2001. Including technologies ranging from video to speech recognition to web tutorials, Zhao found a significant enhancing effect for technological applications on student learning. Therefore, the present study too aims at examining the effects of instruction on the use of corpus-based materials on learning how to use conjunctions appropriately in writing a coherent text.

1.3. Significance and Justification of the Study

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is assumed to be superior to traditional instruction such as using textbooks in several respects, for instance, it creates the possibilities of easy access to numerous authentic examples and immediate learner-controlled and face-saving feedback. Furthermore, there is a general need to accommodate the apparent unpredictability of real data. In language teaching too, the preference for authentic texts requires both teachers and learners to cope with language which the textbooks do not predict (Wichmann 1997). In addition students should be prepared for communication in the real world and they should be encouraged to take charge of their own learning. Thus, this study is designed to investigate the effects of corpus-based conjunction materials on Iranian EFL learners' writing. It is hoped that the