



*Conectores de contraste en la composición escrita en inglés para estudiantes
adultos de B1 EFL*

Contrast Connectors In English Written Composition In B1 Efl Adult Learners

*Conectores de contraste na escrita escrita em inglês para alunos adultos do nível
B1 de inglês como língua estrangeira*

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Resumen

Este estudio explora cómo los jóvenes adultos que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) utilizan conectores discursivos para estructurar ideas y establecer relaciones en la comunicación oral. Mediante una tarea de expresión oral sobre el tema "¿Qué es un héroe?", se analizó el uso de conectores aditivos, secuenciales, contrastivos, causales y de ejemplificación en 50 estudiantes de nivel B1. Los resultados revelan que, si bien los estudiantes demuestran una capacidad básica para usar conectores como "y", "pero" y "porque", su alcance sigue siendo limitado. Conectores más complejos, como "por ejemplo", "y", "so", aparecieron con poca frecuencia, lo que indica una dependencia de expresiones familiares. Los hallazgos destacan una etapa de desarrollo en la competencia discursiva, donde los estudiantes pueden construir coherencia, pero requieren mayor instrucción para diversificar sus estrategias conectivas. Esta investigación enfatiza la necesidad de un enfoque pedagógico en los dispositivos de cohesión para promover un discurso oral en inglés más efectivo y variado.

Palabras Clave: Conectores de contraste; Cohesión; Conjunciones adversativas; Escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera; Marcadores discursivos; Estudiantes de B1.

Abstract

This study explores how young adult EFL learners use discourse connectors to structure ideas and establish relationships in spoken communication. Through a speech task on the topic "What is a hero?", 50 B1-level learners were analyzed for using additive, sequencing, contrastive, causal, and exemplification connectors. The results reveal that while learners demonstrate a basic ability to use connectors like and, but, and because, their range remains limited. More complex connectors such as for example and so appeared infrequently, indicating a reliance on familiar expressions. The findings highlight a developmental stage in discourse competence, where learners can construct coherence but require further instruction to diversify their connective strategies. This research emphasizes the need for pedagogical focus on cohesive devices to support more effective and varied spoken discourse in English.

Keywords: Contrast Connectors; Cohesion; Adversative Conjunctions; EFL Writing; Discourse Markers; B1 Learners.

Resumo

Este estudo explora como os jovens adultos estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira utilizam conectores de discurso para estruturar ideias e estabelecer relações na comunicação falada. Através de uma tarefa de discurso sobre o tema “O que é um herói?”, foram analisados 50 alunos do nível B1 quanto à utilização de conectores aditivos, sequenciais, contrastivos, causais e de exemplificação. Os resultados revelam que, embora os alunos demonstrem uma capacidade básica para utilizar conectores como e, mas, e porque, o seu alcance continua a ser limitado. Conectores mais complexos, como por exemplo e assim, apareciam com pouca frequência, indicando uma dependência de expressões familiares. As descobertas destacam um estágio de desenvolvimento na competência do discurso, em que os alunos podem construir coerência, mas precisam de mais instruções para diversificar as suas estratégias de ligação. Esta pesquisa enfatiza a necessidade de foco pedagógico em dispositivos coesos para apoiar um discurso falado mais eficaz e variado em inglês.

Palavras-chave: Conectores de contraste; Coesão; Conjunções Adversativas; Escrita em inglês como língua estrangeira; Marcadores de Discurso; Alunos B1.

Introduction

When referring to written discourse, coherence, and cohesion are essential for constructing meaning and guaranteeing an effective communication between the writer and reader. The ladder refers to the connection between sentences and ideas; on the other hand, coherence relates to the logical progression and comprehensibility of the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Logically, connectors guide relationships between propositions, arguments, and ideas. Specifically, the contrast connectors allow the writer to express opposition, concession, and contradiction within the discourse.

In the field of language acquisition of English as a foreign language, using contrast connectors is important to achieve fluency and proficiency in academic writing. However, these connectors are often misused or underused in EFL learners' compositions, leading to incoherent texts.

Systemic Functional Linguistics and Conjunctive Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976) introduced a model of cohesion in English that categorizes cohesive devices into five types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion, and conjunction. Concerning to conjunctions, they link textual elements to indicate relationships such as addition,

contrast, cause, and temporality. Contrast connectors belongs to the adversative category of conjunctive relations, and include forms such as "however," "on the other hand," "nevertheless," "although," and "in contrast."

The contrast connectors contribute to the textual metafunction, which organizes language to make a text coherent (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Adversative conjunctions explicitly mark a deviation from a previous proposition, structuring argumentative and expository texts in a logically contrastive manner.

Additionally, Martín Zorraquino and Portolés (1999) expanded the studies in the area of discourse markers, proposing a classification based on their textual and interactional functions. Contrastive markers are part of what they refer to as *organizadores del discurso*". They are elements that organize textual information and simultaneously provide interpretation guidelines for the reader or listener comprehension. They argue that connectors like "pero," "sin embargo," and "no obstante" (in Spanish) and their English equivalents serve to guide the interlocutor in understanding the structure and argumentative direction of a text. Moreover, these markers create opposition or counterargumentation and demonstrate the writer's stance, intention, and evaluative positioning.

Contrast Connectors in English Discourse

Contrast connectors, also called adversative conjunctions, establish oppositional, concessive, or contrastive relationships between textual elements. They are commonly used in argumentative and analytical writing, in which establishing and refuting positions are important parts of discourse. Some common contrast connectors in English include: coordinating contrast: "but", subordinating contrast "although," "even though," "whereas", and adverbial contrast: "however," "nevertheless," "on the contrary," "in contrast". These connectors vary in syntactic flexibility, pragmatic strength, and register, and their placement within sentences can be initial, medial, or final, and punctuation conventions such as commas, semicolons., contribute to their rhetorical effect.

Many studies have been conducted to examine how EFL learners present and contrast connectors in their writing. Some of the common findings are related to the overuse of familiar connectors like "but" and the underuse or misuse of more formal alternatives like "however" or "nevertheless." Bolton et al. (2002) stated that intermediate EFL learners often used "but" excessively, which resulted in repetitive sentence structures and reduced textual sophistication.

In addition, Crewe (1990) maintained that learners frequently confuse contrastive connectors with causal or additive ones, especially when their first language or mother tongue (L1) does not clearly distinguish among the functions. Also, Jalilifar (2008) found that while advanced EFL learners used a wide range of connectors, their usage was not always contextually appropriate, affecting the texts' coherence and argumentative strength. Similarly, Lei (2012) identified that students often incorrectly placed connectors within sentences, disrupting the logical flow.

Considering the importance of contrast connectors for academic writing, this study aims to identify the contrast connectors that adult learners use in their essays.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How frequently do B1 adult learners use contrast connectors in essays?
2. What contrast connectors are mainly used in these essays?

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative-descriptive and quantitative content analysis, to investigate how B1-level adult learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) employ contrast connectors in their written discourse. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical model of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically focusing on the concept of conjunctive cohesion as introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976), integrating both linguistic theory and empirical examination of textual data.

The study involved a group of 50 adult EFL learners participating in an intensive English course at a university. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), their language proficiency corresponds to the B1 level. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to include students who demonstrate competence in using contrastive discourse features. Ethical procedures were strictly followed, with all participants being informed about the purpose and scope of the research and providing written consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded under institutional ethical standards.

Data collection was carried out through a controlled classroom writing task. Learners were instructed to compose a 1000–1500-word argumentative essay on the topic of education's significance. The task was purposefully designed to encourage the use of contrasting ideas, thus

prompting the inclusion of contrastive connectors. All essays were handwritten under supervised conditions to preserve authenticity and prevent reliance on digital tools such as translation software, grammar checkers, or artificial intelligence platforms.

After transcription, each essay was processed using AntConc, a specialized linguistic analysis tool. The identification of contrast connectors was guided by the adversative subclass of conjunctions defined in Halliday and Hasan's cohesion taxonomy (1976). Each connector instance was annotated, classified by type, and analyzed quantitatively. This included measuring the total number of contrast connectors per essay, calculating the average frequency per text, and identifying the most commonly employed connectors throughout the corpus.

RESULTS

The results of the data analysis related to the frequency of appearance of contrast connectors are shown in Table 1. most learners used only one contrastive connector in their essays, followed by two appearances in the essays. Those values are the most important in terms of quantity, while the lack of connectors and more than three are the minimum values in the group.

Table 1.

Frequency of contrast connectors in essays

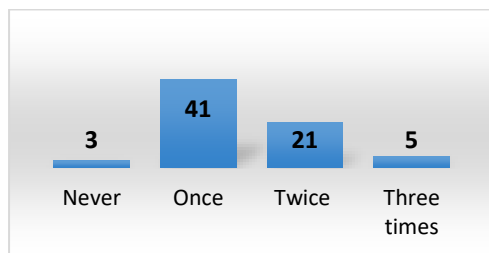
Items	Frequency
Never	3
Once	41
Twice	21
Three times	5
Total	70

Note. Gathered from the written production of learners.

The findings demonstrated that almost all learners used at least one contrastive connector in their essays, mainly to present opposing ideas in the elaborated narrative.

Figure 1.

Frequency of contrast connectors in essays

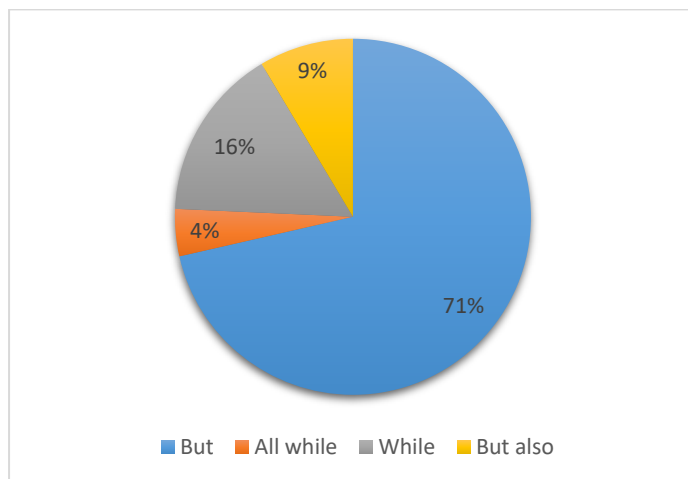


Note. Gathered from the written production of learners.

Another aspect identified throughout this research is that the most used contrast connector by the EFL learners when making their essays is *But* with 71% of preference. Followed by *While* with 16% of preference among learners when writing their essays. On the other hand, *But also* and *All while* seem to be the least used with 9% and 4% of preference, respectively.

Figure 2.

Contrast connectors used in the written production



Note. Gathered from the written production of learners.

Table 2.

Contrast connectors used in the written production

Connector	Type	Frequency
But	Contrast	50
All while	Contrast	3

While	Contrast	11
But also	Contrast	6
Total		70

Note. Gathered from the essays.

A normality test was conducted to assess whether the distribution of connector usage in the written texts was statistically significant. The results showed that the data did not follow a normal distribution; therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis test was employed to analyze differences in the mean ranks.

As observed in Table 3, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test for Independent Samples indicate that there is not a statistically significant difference in the distribution of *the total of connectors* across the categories of Type of *Connector*, as evidenced by a significance value of $p = .142$, which is higher than the established alpha level of .050. The data showed some variation in connector usage across types of connectors; these differences are not statistically significant. Hence, this suggests that B1-level EFL learners did not favor or avoid any particular type of contrast connector to a degree that would indicate a significant pattern. Also, in terms of individual essays, the results demonstrated that the learner's use of contrast connectors is relatively balanced across the types analyzed.

Table 3.

Summary of Kruskal-Wallis Test for Independent Samples

Total N	50
Test Statistic	5.437 ^{ab}
Degrees of Freedom	3
Asymptotic Significance (Two-tailed)	.142

Note. Test statistics are adjusted for ties. Multiple comparisons are not performed because the global test does not show significant differences among the samples.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study demonstrates that the connector "but" possesses an important presence in the written production, observed in 71% of the total instances across the corpus. This finding is connected with Bolton et al. (2002), who found that EFL learners frequently devote their

production to basic contrastive markers such as "but" due to their early introduction to language curricula and perceived simplicity.

Another aspect to consider refers to the excessive dependence on this basic contrastive connector, which reveals a limited lexical storage and a limited exposure to a more diverse set of adversative connectors such as "however," "nevertheless," or "although. Similar findings were identified by Granger and Tyson (1996), who noticed that learners often fail to progress from familiar connectors to more formal alternatives, which restricted the rhetorical sophistication of their texts.

Moreover, the lack of frequency in the use of connectors like "all while" and "but also" is aligned with Uçar's (2023), argument that learners are often reluctant to use unfamiliar or syntactically complex discourse markers. According to Crewe (1990), this reluctance is the result of insufficient instruction, limited exposure to varied academic genres, or transfer effects from learners' first languages.

Despite the previous arguments, this study demonstrated what Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) stated about the capacity of learners to construct logical relationships between clauses even with very limited variety. Using contrast connectors suggests an understanding of contrastive relations to provide organization and clarity of argumentative discourse. Furthermore, the study supports Martín Zorraquino and Portolés (1999) claims about the functionality of connectors, which not only serve for structural functions but also help with an authorial stance, the frequent use of "but" indicates that learners' attempts to engage evaluatively with their arguments, even if they use repetitive forms.

Finally, Lei (2012) has emphasized the importance of correct placement and pragmatic appropriateness of connectors, noting that errors in positioning often appears at the textual coherence. In this study, even though the connectors were typically placed correctly, the results indicate that learners struggled to diversify their connector use, which limit their ability to construct adequate argumentative structures.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrated that while B1-level EFL learners can employ contrastive structures in their written discourse, their predominant dependence on a single contrast connector restricts the style and sophistication of written production. Although the use of "but" demonstrates an elementary understanding of contrastive logic and an attempt to structure opposing ideas within an argumentative framework, this overuse limits learners' capacity to develop more

rhetorically sophisticated writing. Hence, the repetitive use of familiar connectors, when not accompanied by instruction in broader discourse strategies, often leads to textual monotony, reduced argumentative clarity, and lexical stagnation.

The limited variety in connector use identified in this research may be attributed to several interrelated factors, including pedagogical emphasis on more common connectors, insufficient exposure to authentic academic discourse, and a lack of explicit instruction in the rhetorical functions of alternative adversative markers. In particular, connectors such as “however,” “nevertheless,” “in contrast,” and “although” carry different degrees of formality, rhetorical weight, and syntactic behavior that require targeted teaching and guided practice. Without this, learners remain confined to surface-level cohesion, unable to exploit the pragmatic and rhetorical affordances of contrastive language fully

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