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A comparison of the use of major English conjunctions by American and Hong Kong university students (Using the HKUST corpus, HKBU corpus and the ICLE corpus of American English)

Outline

I. Introduction

Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to compare the use of three major conjunctions "and", "or" and "but" by Chinese (Hong Kong) and American university students. The study is also concerned with the position and functions of major conjunctions. Materials from three corpora are used with the help of a concordance for functional analysis, which may be applied to ELT material design and classroom methodology. The results show that non-native speakers use fewer conjunctions and demonstrate less varieties of usage than native speakers. There are also other factors such as syntactic transfer from L1 (Chinese) to L2 (English) which might contribute to the results. Some other differences of usage will also be looked at in this study.

I. Introduction

Conjunctions contribute to a better understanding of the use of discourse and they affect the way how texts are perceived. Studies have shown that the use of conjunctions can be problematic for EFL learners (Chan, 2004:65; HKCEE Annual Reports, 1996). Therefore, their use of conjunctions is worth studying more extensively in order to distinguish the difficulties and thus to provide solutions for learners to help master the use of English conjunctions. Since the focus of this paper is on the usage of conjunctions, the approach for analysis will be a functional one depicting the discourse structures. It is also hoped that the results will provide insights into the ELT material design and classroom methodology.

I. A. Conjunctions

The study of conjunctions has received considerable attention in linguistics. They have been studied under numerous labels such as linkers, coordinators, discourse markers, pragmatic markers, discourse connectors, and many others (see also section I. D). Indeed, conjunctions play an important role in discourse as they are used as coordination to conjoin "different grammatical units: clauses, clause elements, words (Leech & Svartvik, 1994:264)" (see also Greenbaum & Quirk, 1993:265; Carston, 1994:692). Generally speaking, conjunctions are the most common way of coordination and the most frequently used and central conjunctions are *and*, *or* and *but* (Leech & Svartvik, 1994:264, Greenbaum & Quirk, 1993:263). These conjunctions are often used to link equivalent units. Observe the grammatical features and examples by Leech and Svartvik (1994:24) on conjunctions, including orthographic conventions:

I.A.a.   To link parts of clauses (clause elements):
   i. noun phrases:
      Her mother needed *a chat* and *some moral support*.
   ii. verb phrases:
      Many of the laws *need to be studied* and *will have to be revised*.
   iii. complements:
      The laws are *rather outmoded* or *totally inadequate* and *often ambiguous*.
   iv. adverbial:

You can wash this sweater *by hand* or *in the washing machine*.

v. subject and verb phrases (right-node raising):

The papers say, and *most people believe*, that the opposition party will win the next election.

vi. subject and complement (gapping):

Dr Horgan's eyes behind his spectacles were *friendly*, and *his smile kind*.

I.A.b.   To link words such as nouns or adjectives:

"Tomorrow will be *nice* and *sunny*."

Except for the above grammatical features, the syntactic and orthographic features of the three major conjunctions should also be paid attention to:

I.A.c.   These three major conjunctions can be merely used with a preceding comma or without a punctuation mark but never a full stop or a semicolon (Greenbaum, 1993:122);

I.A.d.   They should be inserted between the last two units once only if more than three units are linked by coordinators; they can be repeated when there is a polysyndetic (multi-linked) coordination (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1993:262);

I.A.e.   They should be of clause-initial position of the second clause and this is sequentially fixed (263, see also section I. C.);

I.A.f.   They do not allow another conjunction to precede them (264).

I. B. Conjunctions and connectors

I. B. 1. The differences between conjunctions & connectors

Although conjunctions are used mainly for linking, a number of researchers distinguish their grammatical, syntactic and functional features and claim that there are differences between conjunctions and connectors. It is therefore essential to understand the differences of conjunctions and connectors in order to have a better knowledge and thus usage of these coordinators. To put it simply, conjunctions conjoin related or unrelated units together in a sentence; connectives conjoin units that are somewhat related or to show the reason or result for something (such as *therefore*, *thus* and *as a result*).

Chalker (1996:vii, 3) gives in her book an explanation on what connectors are:

"…adverbs or other adverbial that can link two separate sentences, e.g. *I can't do anything just now. It won't matter a lot, though*."...Another, looser, way of showing a connection between two clauses, and particularly between separate sentences, is to use a rather special type of adverb called a ***connector*** (sometimes also called a ***conjunct*** or a ***linking adjunct***). Some examples of connectors are 'moreover', 'nevertheless', and 'otherwise'".

Chalker's explanation (that connectors can also be adverbs) helps explain why connectors may move around within the sentence while conjunctions are sequentially fixed (see also section I. A and I. C.). The Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics (1994:706) also points out that "the function of connectors…is to express various kinds of relations between utterances". Though similar in their usage, Chalker (1996:2) also provides in her book the differences between conjunctions and connectors, which contain a lot of orthographic conventions:

I.B.1.a. conjunction normally combines two (or more) clauses into one sentence, often with a comma separating them, but sometimes with no punctuation mark;

I.B.1.b. a conjunction belongs to its clause, so it is not normally separated from it by punctuation;

I.B.1.c. a conjunction (with the exception of *and*, *or* and *but*) usually introduces a finite clause, complete with subject and finite verb; some conjunctions can also introduce a reduced clause;

I.B.1.d. a conjunction's position is sequentially fixed and it cannot move around;

I.B.1.e. a connector shows a connection between two separate sentences and there is usually a full stop at the end of the first sentence;

I.B.1.f. a connector has a rather "detached" role in its clause prosodically. So, it is often separated by a comma or commas from the rest of its clause;

I.B.1.g. a connector is there to indicate the speaker's or writer's assessment

of how some second utterances relates to the preceding clause or sentence. Therefore the second utterance cannot be 'reduced' to a connector followed by a phrase or single word;

I.B.1.h.   a shift of position is possible with certain connectors such as *though*, they may move around within the clause.

These features will also be taken into consideration in the discussion of results in section III.

I. B. 2. Types of connectors

Other than the three major conjunctions, which will be further studied later in the present study, there are quite a number and types of connectors that encode different meanings in comparison to conjunctions. It would be useful to know these connectors (see Appendix) also as they are widely used in both written and spoken discourse.

It can be noticed that some of the connectors display overlapping meaning. One of these connectors is *anyway*, whose function can be categorized as adding, correcting, as well as being a hedge[1] (Warner, 1985:23). This phenomenon also exists in conjunctions. In section III it can be shown that the overlapping of conjunctions sometimes cause confusions for the learners. The frequencies of the above-mentioned connectors found in the corpora used for this paper can be referred to in Table 9 in the appendix.

I. C. Major conjunctions: *and*, *or* & *but*

As mentioned in the abstract, the focus of this paper will be on the major three conjunctions *and*, *or* and *but*. It is indisputably crucial to understand the grammatical and functional features for the purpose of this study and as we go on with the discussion later on.

The position of the three conjunctions is fixed, joining any phrase of the same type. In most cases, clauses using *and* and *but* follow a sequence of time or show tendencies of time sequence. Therefore these clauses beginning with *and* and *but* are chronologically and sequentially fixed in the initial position of the second clause as the conjunction cannot refer forwards (Greenbaum and Quirk 1993:264). Observe the following examples:

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[1] Hedgess are intentionally non-committal or ambiguous sentence fragments, such as "sort of" or "kind of".

He went shopping and bought the book. (1.C.i)

*? He bought the book and went shopping. (*1.C.ii)

Logically one will tend to think that the subject went shopping first and then he bought the book, but not the opposite. The sequence of time here is encoded.

The conjunction *or*, however, does not normally indicate sequence of time. Observe example 1.C.iii and 1.C.iv:

They are living in England, <u>or</u> they are spending a vacation there. (I.C.iii)

They are spending a vacation there, <u>or</u> they are living in England. (I.C.iv)

Except for *but*, which is restricted to link only two units, *and* and *or* can link more than two clauses and subordinate clauses. Consider the following examples by Greenbaum and Quirk (1993:265):

He asked to be transferred, because he was unhappy <u>and</u> <u>because</u>

he saw no prospect of promotion. (I.C.iv)

I wonder <u>whether</u> you should go and see her <u>or</u> <u>whether</u> it is better

to write to her. (I.C.v)

In the above examples, it can be realized that a conjunction and a subordinator can be present in a sentence (*and*, *although*; *whether*, *or*). Note that this usage is not possible and is ungrammatical for *but* (see below section I. C. 3.), nor can *but* link two subordinate clauses.

Though divided when used as conjunctions, the core meanings and functions of *and*, *or*, *but* can be concluded as follows (Chalker, 1996; Fraser, 1998, 1999; Quirk *et al.* 1985).

I. C. 1. *and*

And is the most common and general conjunction. It can be used to simply add one statement to another or more, provided that there is some connection of meaning between the clauses. Observe the following examples:

The vehicle was muddy <u>and</u> the carpet inside needed sweeping. (I.C.1.i)

She caught Mark's arm <u>and</u> pulled him to his feet. (I.C.1.ii)

The discourse features of *and* can be summarized as follows:

    I.C.1.a . it is to show:

        sequence/contrast/concession/condition/addition/comment/explanation (Quirk *et al*. 1985:930);

    I.C.1.b .it can be used with endorsing sentences (Greenbaum & Quirk 1993:269) to form correlatives (*both...and*);

    I.C.1.c . in spoken discourse, according to Collins Cobuild English Dictionary (1995:57), *and* is used by the media or spokesman and the like "to change a topic or to start talking about a topic they have just mentioned".

The conjunction *and* may also contain a "reciprocal relationship" (Leech & Svartvik 1994:265). Observe the following example (265):

Last night our dog and the neighbour's were having a fight. (I.C.1.iii)
(Our dog and the neighbour's were having a fight with *each other*.)

I. C. 2. *or*

The conjunction *or* is frequently used in discourse to give alternations. This conjunction is sometimes categorised as inclusive but in most cases exclusive (Leech & Svartvik, 1994:267). With its exclusive use, the possibility of both clauses being true or to be fulfilled is excluded (267). That is, only one action in either clause can be performed or only one alternative is true in either clause. Never will two actions or two alternatives in both clauses within a sentence be performed or true. Study the following example (267):

You can sleep on the couch in the lounge or (else) *you can go to a hotel*. (I.C.2.i)

Its general discourse features are as follows:

I.C.2.a . it suggests an alternative; there is also the more emphatic expression *or else*;

I.C.2.b . it can link more than two sentences; see the above example;

I.C.2.c . to show correction or restatement (267);

I.C.2.d . to indicate negative condition (268), which typically follows a negative imperative clause;

I.C.2.e . it can also be used together with *either* or *whether* to form correlatives such as *either...or*, *whether…or*.

I. C. 3. *but*

"*But* is the favourite link word of contrast (Ball, 1996:28)". This statement best explains the major function of *but*, which is to introduce a contrast, something surprising. As explained earlier in this section, this conjunction is more restricted than *and* and *or*, therefore it is not used as frequently as the other two conjunctions. Its other discourse features include:

I.C.3.a . it is used very commonly in spoken discourse to denote contrast (Altenberg, 1996: 27; Ball, 1996:28);

I.C.3.b . it cannot normally join categories other than clauses or subordinate clauses except in combination with a negative (Leech & Svartvik, 1994:265) or phrases with meanings which somehow contradict each other are coordinated:

   i.   *The weather was <u>warm</u> but <u>cloudy</u>.*
       (2 adjectives)
       (?The weather was <u>warm</u> but <u>sunny</u>.)

   ii. *I have been <u>to Switzerland</u>, but not <u>to the Alps</u>.*
       (2 prepositional phrases)

   iii. *He <u>tried</u> but <u>failed</u>.*
       (2 verb phrases)

I.C.3.c . it can sometimes be used as an interactional move or point-making device (Schiffrin, 1987:61) or for emphasis (Ball, 1996:30);

I.C.3.d . the content of the first clause will be the opposite but still compatible

of the second clause beginning with *but* to show contrast:

i. He was young but old.

I.C.3.e . it can also be used as correlatives: *not only...but also*.

I. D. Past research

Conjunctions have been studied under various labels and have drawn much attention in the field of linguistics. They are treated as *discourse markers* by Schiffrin (1987) and a pragmatic class of lexical expressions by Fraser (1998,1999) using the pragmatic framework (also see Warner, 1985). Others researchers (Rouchota, 1998; Blakemore, 1987) who work within the Relevance Theory Framework treat them as "a type of Gricean conventional implicature (Fraser, 1999:936)" or simply, "pragmatic markers". Rouchota (1998:2) also states in his article that conjunctions encode different meanings, and that they can be a procedural device (see also Fraser, 1998), that is, conjunctions may encode concepts or procedures in the mind. In fact, within Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, discourse conjunctions shall be interpreted by the "linguistically encoded meaning and the contextual assumptions that are brought to the hearer (Rouchota, 1998:12)", while Halliday and Hasan treat them as "linguistic devices that create cohesion (13)".

Conjunctions, as Caron explains (1994:706), are used "to express various kinds of relations between utterances". The author further states that there is a polysemy of conjunctions in the cognitive sense, and that the interpretation of conjunctions is dealt with first the semantic meaning and then the pragmatic factors. The polysemy of conjunctions can be seen in the multiple meanings of certain connectors. However, as Caron reveals, if connectors are to be treated as containing meanings solely involving pragmatic features, 'their primary function would not be to denote factual relations between events, or states of the world, but to signal argumentative relations between speech acts (pragmatics)'. In this case, the problem of the polysemy of conjunctions can be easily handled. Furthermore, they have to be perceived as "markers of cognitive operations and instructions for handling information (Caron, 1994:707)". Carston's article also gives further details on the pragmatic effects of conjunctions.

It is worth noting that within the field of relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson, "discourse connectors are not seen as linking devices (Rouchota, 1998:12)." Within the pragmatic field, the truthfulness of *and* is not guaranteed. "In logical terms, *and* merely

conveys (for declarative clause) that if the whole sentence is true, then each of its conjoined clauses is true. But the pragmatic implications of the combination vary, according to our presuppositions and knowledge of the world (Quirk *et al.* 1985:930) (see also Carston, 1994)".

Conjunctions have also been studied in terms of their grammatical features, functional features and discoursal functions (Schiffrin, 1987:61; Ball, 1996; Altenberg, 1996; Leech & Svartvik, 1994; Greenbaum & Quirk, 1993; Quirk *et al.* 1985; Chalker, 1996; Fraser, 1998, 1999).

One thing notable is the presence of "dual/double conjunctions" in the Chinese language (Matthews & Yip, 1994: 293; Dai & Zhang, 1999: 225; Lau, 1972:357). In the Chinese language, as explained by Matthews and Yip (1994:65,293), "parataxis (the juxtaposition of two clauses) is involved rather than hypotaxis (the linking of a dependent element in a sentence through subordination) or subordination". That is, when subordinator is used to introduce a concessive clause, it is required to introduce a balancing clause with another matching conjunction. The combination of two conjunctions[2] within a sentence is therefore acceptable, but is ungrammatical in English. The following two examples by Lau (1972) on Cantonese may help explain what "dual conjunctions" means:

I.D.i <u>Sui yin</u>   kui hai Faat Gwok Yan, <u>daan hai</u> kui m   yam   jau.
Although he is Frenchman,   but   he not drink wine.
(*Although* he is French, *but* he doesn't drink wine.)

I.D.ii <u>Jau suen</u>   ngoh ho kung, ngoh <u>doyiu</u>   duk   daai hok.
Even though I   very poor, I   also-must   study   university.
(*Even though* I am poor, I *also*/*too* must study (at) university).

II. Methodology

II. A. The aim of the present study and hypothesis

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[2] Other combinations of dual conjunctions include *because…therefore, therefore…so, if…then, even if…still, since…then, as long as…then, as soon as…then, although…nevertheless, although…but*. Further discussion concerning *because* and *although* can be read in Iten's article (see Works Cited page).

The aim of the present study is to look at the position and usage of major conjunctions by American and Hong Kong university students.

In view of the HKCEE's report (1993:105) on "the excessive use of connectives" by Hong Kong students, I will also argue in the present study that Chinese students use more connectors than conjunctions.

II. B. Materials and experimental design

The material used for the present study is taken from The International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) of American English, The HKUST (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) Corpus of Learner English and The HKBU (Hong Kong Baptist University) Corpus of Learner English. The three corpora contain essays written by university students in America and Hong Kong with the former being native English speakers and the latter non-native English speakers. The HKUST and HKBU corpora are combined for analysis as material representing non-native students. Since the sizes of the original corpora chosen are too large for the purpose of this study, the total size has been reduced to approximately 50,400 words for each group (native and non-native) to give a more genuine, detailed account and results of the research with the help of a concordance[3].

Due to the special design and purpose of the original HKBU corpus, some of the sentences are disregarded for incompleteness[4] in the present study. Quotes and slogans are also omitted in all three corpora as they are not the students' own written work. There are a number of marginal cases because of the overlapping of their semantic meanings. These sentences will be pinpointed and analyzed in section III. D. 2. to see what problems they pose to written discourse.

Because of the scope of this paper, it is difficult to include and study all aspects of conjunctions, which might also interest readers concerned. For the same reason, this paper does not examine other frequently used conjunctions, which are also worth studying more and deserve attention. The reason why there are only three major conjunctions selected for analysis is because they are the three central conjunctions (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1993:263). It is also more comprehensible to focus on and study in detail three major

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[3] The concordance used for analysis is downloaded from the internet (vlc.polyu.edu.hk).

[4] Sentences such as this one are disregarded as they are incomplete:

(HKBU-or11) …or intelligent singer

conjunctions rather than conjunctions in general.

In order to have a more detailed analysis, the types of clauses or phrases that precede or follow the major conjunctions will also be divided into different groups such as noun phrases or verb phrases and so on (see Table 10). Since the number of examples retrieved using the concordance for each conjunction is quite large, for the purpose of the present research, the total number of examples will be reduced to 300 for each conjunction, meaning 150 for each group (i.e., American and Chinese learners).

Since the mother tongue of most university students in Hong Kong is Cantonese, which is a dialect of Chinese, the use of the word *Chinese* throughout this paper refers to standard written Cantonese.

II. C. Data analysis

Three major conjunctions are examined in this paper: *and*, *or* and *but*. The present study will also look at these conjunctions' positions in discourse and discourse functions. As the discourse functions of the three conjunctions are treated in a similar fashion in the grammar books and dictionaries, the discourse functions are therefore grouped, classified and then categorized according to their discourse structures and usage. They are concluded as follows:

II. C. 1 Functions of *and*
a.　　to link two or more words, groups or clauses;
b.　　to link two clauses when the second clause is a result of the first clause or two statements about events when one of the events follows the other;
c.　　to link two identical words or phrases in order to emphasize the degree of something or to suggest that something continues or increases over a period of time; for instance: *Day by day I am getting better and better*;
d.　　to interrupt yourself in order to comment on what you are saying;
e.　　to be used at the beginning of a sentence to introduce something else that you want to add to what to have just said;
f.　　to introduce a question which follows logically from what somebody has just said;
g.　　to be used in the adding of numbers in calculation.

II. C. 2 Functions of *or*

a.   to link 2 or more alternatives and to give another alternative with "either" or "whether";

b.   to be used between numbers to give estimation (e.g. *We will stay there a day <u>or</u> two*.);

c.   to introduce a comment for correction or modification;

d.   to be used for warning (as *or else*; to introduce a statement that indicates the unpleasant results that will occur if someone does or does not do something);

e.   to introduce something for explanation or justification;

f.   to be used as *or no*/*or not* (for emphasis);

g.   to be used as *or no* (2 occurrences of the same noun, e.g. *She is moving there anyway, job <u>or no</u> job.*).

II. C. 3 Functions of *but*

a.   to show contrast;

b.   for adding (including *but also*);

c.   to change the subject;

d.   to introduce a reply which indicates surprise, disbelief, refusal, or protest;

e.   to mean "except", "*cannot but*/*could not but* (formal use); *but for* (the only factor causing it not to happen or not true); *anything but* (to emphasize something which is not the case, that is, except);

f.   to mean "only (formal use)";

g.   to be used as *but then*/*but then again*.

There are a few points that should be clarified here concerning the categories of the discourse functions. As the materials used are written discourse, certain functions of spoken discourse are not assimilated into the study. For instance, according to Collins Cobuild English Dictionary (1995:221), *but* can be used "after one has made an excuse or an apology for what one is about to say". This function is not included for the reason stated above.

The HKBU Corpus of Learner English and The HKUST Corpus of Learner English are extracted from the corpora with the same titles. The materials used for this paper are a small part of the original corpora. For The HKBU Corpus of Learner English used in this

paper, it consists of descriptive essays of 25,113 words written by some sixteen undergraduate students under the topic: "An unforgettable event". Those students come from different departments except the English department. As for The HKUST Corpus of Learner English, it contains thirty-seven argumentative essays of 25,304 words written by thirty-seven undergraduate students. They are from different departments taking the same English language course and these essays are an assignment for the course. The topics include sex selection, wider practice of alternative medicine, using animal organs for human transplants, cloning, virtual money replacing cash, legalized cannabis, euthanasia, animal testing, linking economic policies to human rights issue and advantages and disadvantages of plastics.

43 argumentative essays of 50,427 words written by 43 American undergraduate students are extracted from The International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE). The extracted part is also a small part of the original corpus. The students come from the same university. It is, however, not known which departments they belong to. The topics include surrogate motherhood, adoption, sex education, drinking problems on campus, genetic research, violence on television, corporal punishment, euthanasia, abortion, death penalty, affirmative policy, discrimination against AIDS patients, praying in public schools and use of steroids in sports.

As mentioned before, a concordance is used to aid analysis. This is done by downloading the concordance from the internet. Sentences containing the three conjunctions are extracted using the concordance search function and typing in the target conjunction (*and*, *or* and *but*). Very often the tagged sentences are too long to be shown because of the limited sentence length set by the concordance, a considerable amount of time has been spent on referring back to the original corpora.

For the analysis of positions, the findings from the HKBU Corpus of Learner English are not discussed because of the special purpose and design of the original corpus to which essays are sub-divided into single utterances. The absence of the whole essays makes it difficult to analyze the positions and the purpose or indications, especially sentences with the conjunction in the sentence-initial position. In the same corpus, quite a number of grammatical mistakes are found in the tagged sentences. There are sentences with conjunctions conjoining different units (clause elements). For instance, two different clause elements are connected by *and* while they should not. This is because the original HKBU Corpus was designed and tagged for special purposes; the corpus was rather

"incomplete" when the author received it. Since this paper will focus on the functional aspect of conjunctions and the grammatical aspect is out of our scope, those sentences will not be discussed nor analyzed in this paper.

After obtaining the results with the aid of the concordance, the figures are calculated, added up and put in the tables below for easy observation.

III. Discussion of results

III. A. *and*

Table 1 Position of *and*

POSITION	American	Chinese	Total
Sentence-initial	9 (1%)	16 (2%)	25 (1%)
Non-sentence-initial	1133 (99%)	794 (98%)	1927 (99%)
Total	1142	810	1952

As shown in Table 1, the dominant position of *and* remains the non-sentence-initial position (clause-initial position of the second clause). This confirms the function of this conjunction as one of connection. The actual numbers of occurrences for both groups, however, show a difference in terms of frequencies. It is obvious that non-native speakers (Chinese students) use *and* less often than native speakers (American students) with a ratio of 810 to 1142. It can also be observed that more non-native speakers put *and* in the sentence-initial position (16 to 9).

Sentences with *and* in the sentence-initial position, as shown by the native speakers, tend to indicate a turn in discourse or a change of focus by adding more information (function f., see II. C. 1). Observe the following sentence:

> *The consequences of these long battles, to the children, may not even show up until 10 years later. <u>And</u> what if all this struggle could have been avoided by one simple signature on the adoption papers, or one more question asked by the adoptive parents?*
> (ICLE and-1138)

The use of *and* in this sentence can actually be omitted as it is perfectly correct to formulate a question with a *wh-* word. In this sentence, the author is not trying to ask questions concerning adoption: he/she is trying to express or provide his/her opinions and solutions on adoption. By placing *and* in the sentence-initial position, the author is trying to draw attention and to direct the readers to jump from one eternal problem ("long battles to the children") to simple solutions that can solve that eternal problem easily. In the meantime, placing *and* in the sentence-initial position shows a strong bond between the sentences. This position can also be interpreted as a pragmatic signal of emphasis. The use of *and* in the sentence-initial position is successful and powerful in terms of making comments and in this case, attracting attention and directing the readers.

Observe another example in the findings:

> *Just what is the moral decision, though? Can one really justify an innocent child being denied a chance at life as moral? <u>And</u> is it moral for doctors who have been sworn to abide by the Hippocratic Oath to turn their backs to that oath and perform abortions? The answer to the two aforementioned questions is a resounding no.*
> (ICLE and-878)

In this example, the writer fuels the argument with a series of questions. It can be understood that the writer is against abortion, and by placing *and* in the sentence-initial position for the final question, it is shown that the author intends to again guide the readers to focus on this particular question after the previous usual questions raised by abortion. The focus is not anymore one of morality, but one concerning the doctors and their conscience. Without *and* in the sentence-initial position, the last question, which is more of an accusation from the author, will appear less compelling and powerful. The effect of *and* here leads the reader to follow the author's viewpoint and direction on the issue.

The following example by a non-native speaker also places *and* in the sentence-initial position for the similar purposes stated above:

> *The most effective way of dealing with it (cannabis) is to list it as a kind of hard drug and prohibit the selling and using of it strictly. <u>And</u> in the long run, educating the next generation will be the only*

solution of the problem. (HKUST and-412)

The author also places *and* at the front of a sentence in order to locate more attention on the second question, which is also (as stated by the author) the only solution to the cannabis problem. The position of *and* here indicates a shift of focus and a turn for emphasis. Without putting *and* in this position, both solutions would seem plain and the author's purpose of showing a shift of focus and a turn for emphasis would not be achieved.

Table 2 Functions of *and*

FUNCTIONS	American	Chinese	Total
a. to link two or more words, groups or clauses	1099	751	1850 (95%)
b. to link two clauses when the second clause is a result of the first clause or two statements about events when one of the events follows the other	25	36	61 (3%)
c. to link two identical words or phrases in order to emphasize the degree of something or to suggest that something continues or increases over a period of time	1	7	8 (0.4%)
d. to interrupt yourself in order to comment on what you are saying;	1	-	1 (0%)
e. to be used at the beginning of a sentence to introduce something else that you want to add to what to have just said;	9	15	24 (1.2%)
f. to introduce a question which follows logically from what somebody has just said	3	1	4 (0.2%)
g. to be used in adding of numbers in calculation	4	-	4 (0.2%)
Total	1142	810	1952

As shown by Table 2 here, both groups use *and* to link two or more words, groups or clauses together (function a, 95%). This also shows that function a is the dominating function of this conjunction. Observe the following examples by both groups:

This is when teachers, administrators, and parents must take care

not to impose any negative attitudes on to the children. (ICLE and-184)

Their attention <u>and</u> memory will be impaired. (HKUST and-403)

My teachers <u>and</u> classmates (are) willing to be my royal listeners and helping (helpers). (HKBU and-11)

The second most used function is function b (61 occurrences). This function concerns linking two clauses when the second clause is a result of the first clause or two statements about events when one of the events follows the other. This function also includes the indication for a reciprocal relationship in a sentence. Observe this example by the Collins Cobuild English Dictionary (1995:57):

He asked for ice for his whiskey and proceeded to get drunk.

In this example, the action "ask for ice for whiskey" should precede the following action, which is "to get drunk". By using *and*, the two actions can be linked together and with its reciprocal relationship (see I. C. 1) indicated. The following example by a native speaker can further explain the use of this function:

For example, Sam Walton, founder of Wal-mart, treated his employees and customers with respect, thus building friendships <u>and</u> becoming successful. (ICLE and-617)

It can be understood that with these clauses, there are steps to which the subject takes to become successful in business. These steps are clearly described by the author and by using *and* in the last clause, these steps are linked together and the sequence is indicated.

The figures in Table 2 also show that non-native speakers use *and* less frequently than natives, with a ratio of 810 to 1142. However, they demonstrate more occurrences with functions other than function one:

- function b, 36 to 25;
- function c, 7 to 1:

faster and faster (HKBU and-22);

more and more (HKUST and-27, ICLE and-843);

- function e, 15 to 9.

The low rate of function d may stem from the fact the essays that this study uses for analysis are argumentative and descriptive essays. It is therefore not appropriate to present figures or alike in the texts.

The figures in Table 10 (see Appendix) also provide some indications on the usage. Chinese students tend to use *and* to link the following elements more than native students:

- predicate adjectives (14:5)

    With regard to great progress in technology, tests and research of AM have become more systematic and scientific. (HKUST and-25)

- attributive adjectives (13:7)

    It must be the most embarrassing and humiliating moment of my life. (HKBU and-22)

- two clauses without subject (27:21)

    Suddenly a friend came to me and persuaded me to look at it. (HKBU and-57)

Chinese students also link less the following elements with *and*:

- two clauses (25:31)

    He told me not to inform his parents and some day he would tell me the truth. (HKBU and-31)

- noun phrases (67:50)

    How can we enhance the safety and reliability? (HKUST and-42)

III. B. *or*

Table 3 Position of *or*

POSITION	American	Chinese	Total
Sentence-initial	1 (0.5%)	- (0%)	1 (0.3%)

Non-sentence-initial	221	111	332
	(99.5%)	(100%)	(99.7%)
Total	222	111	333

The majority of students prefers the non-sentence-initial position when using *or*. There is only one occurrence found in the ICLE corpus by a native speaker placing *or* in the sentence-initial position:

Sadly enough more than 200,000 women in the United States endure the above procedure (abortion) every year. Or "endure" the right word? (ICLE or-178)

The position of *or* in this example can be interpreted as an indication for introducing a comment for correction or modification (see Table 5, function c). The conjunction *or* here is placed in the sentence-initial position to introduce the author's comment (a question) concerning abortion. It can be observed that the author is trying to make a pragmatic shift of focus with the use of *or*, which modifies the previous statement making the question more of a comment rather than an actual question.

The figures also show, similar to *and*, that non-native speakers' use *or* two times less than non-native speakers with a ratio of 111 to 222.

Table 4 Inclusive use and exclusive use of *or*

	American	Chinese	Total
Inclusive	10	10	20
	(4.5%)	(9%)	(6%)
Normally exclusive	212	101	313
	(95.5%)	(91%)	(94%)
Total	222	111	333

As mentioned in section I. C. 2., *or* can be interpreted as inclusive or exclusive. From the findings, it is clear that the majority of the tagged sentences are exclusive (94%) with only 6% being inclusive.

Table 5 Functions of *or*

FUNCTIONS	American	Chinese	Total
a. to link 2 or more alternatives and to give another alternative with "either" or "whether"	199	104	303 (91%)
b. to be used between numbers in calculation	9	4	13 (3.9%)
c. to introduce a comment for correction or modification	7	1	8 (2.4%)
d. to be used as warning (*or else*)	1	-	1 (0.3%)
e. to introduce something for explanation or justification	1	-	1 (0.3%)
f. to be used as *or no/or not* (for emphasis)	5	2	7 (2.1%)
g. to be used as *or no (*2 occurrences of the same noun)	-	-	-
Total	222	111	333

The conjunction *or* is most frequent (91%) when used between two alternatives and to give another alternative with "either" or "whether" (see section I. C. 2). This also shows that function a is the most preferable function among native and non-native users. Study these examples found:

> *…improve or harm…* (ICLEor-48)
> *…reducing or preventing…*(HKUSTor-1)
> *…happy or unhappy…*(HKBUor-13)

The second most frequent function of *or* is in calculation (function b: 3.9%). From the Table, it can be noticed that non-native speakers use *or* less both generally and in terms of varieties (see Table 5).

Function d (as warning) is rarely used in writing nowadays. There is only one example found both corpora:

> *In business there is more involved than just making a profit and getting ahead; it involves relationships throughout the business*

environment and there must be a sense of respect and trust involved

or else the business will fail. (ICLE or-130)

The conjunction is used here to indicate that the unpleasant will occur ("business will fail") if someone (here it refers to dealing with business) does not do something (getting a sense of respect and trust involved in business). In fact, *or else* has a rather strong connotation. The extremely low rate of frequency might suggest that speakers from both groups tend to avoid such strong conjunction or correlative conjunction. This claim can be supported by the absence of occurrences of function e (using *or* as a warning).

The figures in Table 10 (see Appendix) show only very slight difference in the elements linked by the conjunction *or* between native and non-native students.

III. C. *but*

Table 6 Position of *but*

POSITION	American	Chinese	Total
Sentence-initial	27 (16%)	28 (25%)	55 (20%)
Non-sentence-initial	137 (84%)	83 (75%)	220 (80%)
Total	164	111	275

As shown in table 6, the non-sentence-initial position is generally preferred (80%). This also explains the position of this conjunction is sequentially fixed to the second clause (see section I. C.). Sentences with *but* in the sentence initial position are usually preceded by a long sentence of the related subject matter. *But* is then introduced to give a signal that what follows is related, or there will be a change of subject or it will be contrary to what has been expressed in the first clause.

As shown by the figures in Table 6, non-native speakers use *but* less often than native speakers with a ratio of 111 to 164. This phenomenon also occurs with the other two conjunctions. Even with the restriction of *but*, there is a relatively high frequency (native: 27; non-native: 28) of occurrences with this conjunction being placed in the sentence-initial position. This contradicts the figures of *and* (9 to 16) while it is less restricted than *but* in terms of its position.

Table 7 Functions of *but*

FUNCTIONS	American	Chinese	Total
a: contrast	139	91	230 (84%)
b: adding (including *but also*)	10	12	22 (8%)
c: change the subject	6	2	8 (3%)
d: to introduce a reply which indicates surprise, disbelief, refusal, or protest	3	4	7 (2.5%)
e: to mean "except", "*cannot but*/*could not but* (formal use); *but for*; *anything but* (that is, except)	6	1	7 (2.5%)
f: "only"	-	1	1 (0%)
g: *but then/but then again*	-	-	-
Total	164	111	275

The most favourable usage of *but* is for showing contrast (function a, 84%), followed by the adding function (function b, 8%). It is used to add something further in a discussion in the form of *but also*. One thing notable is the usage of the cliché "last *but* not least". This usage is not found in the *ICLE* but three occurrences are present in the other two corpora for non-native speakers. The low or even zero rate of functions f and g by both groups indicates that the functions of using *but* to mean "only" or "except" are almost obsolete, therefore the frequencies of these functions are extremely low.

Shown by the figures in Table 10 (See Appendix), it can be observed that non-native students use *but* to link two clauses without subject far less often (4:18):

> *And parents who have always wanted a child <u>but</u> could not physically have their own.* (ICLE but-128)

Non-native students, on the other hand, use *but* more often to link two sentences (40:27):

> *People always argue that cloning should not be allowed*
> *because it is absolutely against the sanctity of human life and*
> *traditional family values, <u>but</u> I am (do) not agree with that.*
> (HKUST but-74)

III. D. Punctuations

Some violations of the grammatical rules (syntactic features), which are found in the results, do not result in wrong usage as current discourse usage changes. However, the occurrences suggest more than just a violation of grammatical rules.

The use of comma following or both preceding and following *but* can be found in both groups (American 5, Chinese 2). The commas are used in such a way for emphasis, indicating that the author has an important point to make and that what follows is the gist of the sentence. Observe the following two examples:

> *It is not an easy decision to make. <u>But</u>, it is our choice to make: this*
> *is our life, our death that we are talking about.* (ICLE but-112)

> *The cloned person may experience concerns about his distinctive*
> *identity not only because he will be in genotype and appearance*
> *identical to another human being, <u>but</u>, in this case, it will be to a*
> *twin who might be his "father" or "mother" -- if one can still call*
> *them.* (HKUST but-59)

Though not used very frequently, the meaning of "but" in *anything but* actually overlaps the meaning of *except* in this case. The overlapping within the semantic level of usage and its confusion seem to suggest that it might be the reason why students simply do not use *but* in certain ways.

The usage of function number four can easily be confused with function number one, though it is mostly found in spoken discourse.

III. E. Transfer from L1 to L2

Table 8 below shows the results that non-native speakers use fewer conjunctions and certain connectors more (see also Table 9).

Table 8 Overall results of conjunctions and some connectors (see also Table 9 in Appendix).

Conjunctions	American	Chinese
and	1142	810
or	222	111
but	164	111
Connectors	**American**	**Chinese**
after	49	123
besides	3	21
except	2	5
Afterward (s)	1	8
before	36	79
then	53	85
however	56	149
still	36	100
nevertheless	1	14
so	80	183
moreover	1	19
like	55	73

The figures provided by Table 8 and 9 may reveal the reason why non-native students use fewer conjunctions and more connectors than native students. From Table 8 and 9 it can be observed that non-native speakers use certain connectors more, such as *after*, *before*, *then*, *however*, *still*, *nevertheless*, *so*, *moreover*, *besides* and *like*. From the author's experience, Hong Kong students were taught from an early age in school to use certain connectors when writing essays. The above overused connectors are the ones that are widely taught in schools. It is believed that the overuse is due to the teaching of overemphasis on certain connectors. This is supported by the HKCEE Annual Report (1993:105), which states that one of the problems with English usage among Hong Kong students is the "excessive use of connectives". Another reason can be mother-tongue interference (Chan, 2004:56) That is, non-native speakers directly transfer the conjunctions and connectors from their first language (in this case, Chinese) to their second language (English), which result in the underuse of conjunctions and overuse connectors.

According to the HKCEE Annual Report in 1996 (104), both "except (apart from)"

and "besides (in addition to)" can be translated into the same Chinese term as "tsœy4…jy5 __6 (_… __)". Chinese students can therefore easily confuse the two connectors. Both figures for the two connectors are also higher than the frequency for native speakers (*except*, 5:2; *besides*, 21:3). The frequencies for certain connectors are also much higher than those by native speakers (*however* 149:56; *nevertheless* 1:14; *still* 36:100).

Although dual/double conjunctions are "a common feature of Chinese speakers' English (Matthews & Yip, 1994:66)", this phenomenon is not found in the results. This is probably because university students have already achieved a rather good competence in English. It is suspected that more errors of this kind can be found in younger ESL groups. However, some common errors among Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners [5] (Chan, 2004:58) can still be found in the results.

Observe the following example by a Chinese student:

> *People always argue that cloning should not be allowed*
> *because it is absolutely against the sanctity of human life and*
> *traditional family values, but I <u>am (do)</u> not agree with that.*
> (HKUST but-74)

The confusion of the English verb *be* in this example may due to a syntactic transfer from Chinese to English as many Chinese ESL learners tend to have problems using the copula verbs correctly (Chan, 2004:58) [6].

The findings that Table 10 (see Appendix) provide show only slight differences in the elements linked by the major three conjunctions for both groups, which suggest that

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[5] Common errors types attributed to syntactic transfer from L1 (Cantonese) to L2 (English):
(a) confusion in verb transitivity (e.g., "*I like *listen* music");
(b) calquing (e.g., "I *every year* birthday was very happy");
(c) using an independent clause as the subject of a complex sentence (e.g., "*She do this thing* is my most important thing in my life");
(d) topicalization (e.g., "And *played the table-tennis* I am very bad");
(e) vocabulary compensation (e.g., "*I *opened* the T. V. and *opened* the play station");
(f) use of *there have* instead of the verb *be* in existential construction (e.g., "**There has* a book on the table").

[6] The copula verbs corresponding to the English *be* in standard written Chinese and Cantonese are "si4" and "hai6". They, however, do not co-occur with auxiliary verbs such as "nang4" (can) and "wui5" (will). Such a subtle difference often poses difficulty for Chinese ESL learners.

non-native students, despite some minor errors, have obtained a rather thorough understanding of the usage of major conjunctions.

IV. Conclusion

As the findings reveal, Chinese ESL learners do not always use English conjunctions well, even at the university level. Confusion, L1 interference, overlapping of some connectors, or minor errors can be found in the corpora. It is suggested that Chinese students should pay more attention to the usage of English conjunctions as well as connectors, as more difficulties have been shown by their results compared to the control group. These difficulties embody interesting indications of usage by native and non-native students.

While the control group demonstrates a wider variety in the usage of conjunctions, non-native students use fewer conjunctions and certain connectors more than native speakers.

As explained in section I. C., *but* is more restricted than *and* and *or* in terms of its usage. As for its frequency, we can see in Table 8 that this conjunction is also the least frequent conjunction compared to the other two major conjunctions.

In short, non-native speakers of English show to a large extent a broad understanding in the usage of major conjunctions, despite some differences or even some minor grammatical mistakes. The possible reasons are syntactic L1 interference, the education received at schools about the usage of conjunctions in terms, and more prominently due to the carelessness of students when drafting or writing their essays even at university level.

V. Appendix

Table 9 Frequencies of connectors[7]

Semantic class	Discourse connectors	American	Chinese	Total	%
Temporal:	After	49	123	172	3
	Afterward (s)	1	8	9	-
	Later	15	11	26	1
	Before	36	79	115	2
	Earlier	2	1	3	-
	previously	6	0	6	-
	Meanwhile	1	2	3	-
	Simultaneously	3	3	6	-
	Then	53	85	138	3
Conditional:	otherwise	4	5	9	-
	except	2	5	7	-
	only	137	82	219	4
Concessive &	but	164	111	275	5
contrastive:	however	56	149	205	4
	though	21	28	49	1
	still	39	100	139	3
	nevertheless	1	14	15	-
	anyway	3	0	3	-
	at least	4	8	12	-
	for that matter	1	0	1	-
	instead	17	6	23	-
	in contrast	3	0	3	-
	on the other hand	9	11	21	-
	on the contrary	1	1	2	-
	at the same time	3	3	6	-
	despite	3	5	8	-
	in spite of	0	0	0	-
Causative:	so	80	183	263	5
	because	170	112	282	6
	consequently	2	0	2	-
	as a result	9	8	17	-
	accordingly	2	1	3	-
	hence	2	5	7	-
	thus	15	19	34	1
	therefore	33	34	67	1

	whereas	2	1	3	-
Additive:	and	1142	810	1952	39
	also	131	130	261	5
	too	31	26	57	1
	moreover	1	19	20	-
	furthermore	7	4	11	-
	further	10	12	22	-
	in addition	5	5	10	-
	besides	3	21	24	-
Giving examples:	for instance	1	3	4	-
	for example	13	14	27	1
	where	35	17	52	1
	like	55	73	128	3
Alternation:	or	222	111	333	7
	or else	1	0	1	-
Total		2606	2449	5055	

[7]Based on Warner's (1985) and Chalker's (1996) choices of connectors listed in their books, the semantic categories of connectors are summarized as follow:

    a.   indicating time/temporal: after, afterwards(s), subsequently, later, before, earlier, previously, hitherto, meanwhile, in the meantime, simultaneously, etc;

    b.   denoting condition/exception: otherwise, if not, if so; otherwise, except (that), only;

    c.   introducing concession & contrast: however, though, even so, still, nevertheless, nonetheless, all the same, anyway, anyhow, in any case, at any rate, in any event, at all events, at least, for that matter, having said that, that said, alternatively, instead, by/in contrast, conversely, on the other hand, on the contrary, at the same time, despite, in spite of;

    d.   showing purpose: to, in order to, so as to, in order for...to, so that, in order that (with subordinate clause), so, so as not to, in order not to, so that...not, in order that...not;

    e.   giving reason: for one thing...for another, in the first place;

    f.   showing result/causative: therefore, so, as a consequence, thus, because of this, in consequence, as a result, consequently, accordingly, hence, thereby, then, in that case, in which case;

    g.   giving alternations: or, or else;

    h.   explaining:

        i.   adding: moreover, furthermore, further, in addition, additionally, what is more, on top of that, besides, anyway, anyhow, after all, above all, indeed, to cap it all, to top it all, and, also, as well, too, similarly, likewise, equally, etc;

        ii.   giving examples: for instance, for example, etc;

        iii.   rewording: in other words, that is to say, that is, i.e., namely, etc;

iv.   correcting: or rather, or better still, at least, anyway, etc;

v.   listing: first, firstly, second, secondly, third, thirdly, then, next, first of all, in the first place, to start with, to begin with, for a start, finally, lastly, last but not least, one/a final point, etc;

vi.   summing up: to conclude, all in all, to sum up, in conclusion, altogether, in short, etc;

vii. stating a topic: as for, as regards, as to, with reference to, etc.

Table 10.

	US-and	Chinese-and	US-or	Chinese-or	US-but	Chinese-but
2 clauses (2cl)	31	25	17	14	70	71
2 clauses without subject (2cl, s-less)	21	27	4	1	18	4
Noun phrases (NP+NP)	67	50	67	69	8	7
Verb phrases (VP+VP, (V+V)	14	13	31	30	10	8
Adverbs (ADV+ADV)	-	2	-	4	1	-
Predicate adjectives (PA+PA)	5	14	7	10	4	4
Attributive adjectives (AA+AA)	7	13	7	8	1	3
Prepositional phrases (PP+PP)	4	-	4	7	5	3
Mixed (linking different elements)	-	-	-	1	1	1
Others (idioms, numbers, strange sentences, etc)	1	3	12	6	5	9
2S (2 sentences)	-	3	1	-	27	40
Total:	150	150	150	150	150	150

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