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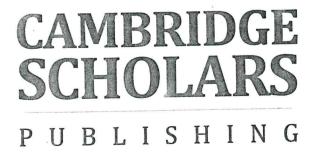# MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

EDITED BY
HASAN ARSLAN
GEORGETA RAŢĂ
ERCAN KOCAYÖRÜK
MEHMET ALI İÇBAY

Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Education

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VIEWS ON THE USE OF CONNECTIVES IN STUDENTS' WRITTEN DISCOURSE

GÖKHAN ÇETINKAYA, HAKAN ÜLPER AND ERGÜN HAMZADAYI

Introduction

Connectives play a significant role in linking propositions in text and organising information flows (İşsever, 1995). Inaccurate use of connective elements may lead to disconnections between the message that the writer wants to convey and the message formed in the text (Kurtul, 2011). Similarly, to allow the reader to process and interpret the text, connectives should be used accurately and appropriately. There is a correspondence between expression and comprehension skills. An individual who cannot use connective elements competently in written expression cannot be expected to decode these elements fully in the reading process; that is, comprehension power corresponds to expressive power. Connectives, which are subtypes of conjunctions, are clarification instruments that ensure the receiver, namely the reader or listener, understands the semantic relations among the consecutive statements in the small-scale structure of the text. In this respect, they signify the joints between consecutive statements and define the small-scale meaning relationships that emerge because of this jointing (Uzun-Subaşı, 2006).

For the last few decades, linguists have recognised not only that communication is based on sentence-level criteria (lexis and sentence structure) but also that the study of language and language learning should involve longer stretches of text or what has come to be known as *discourse*. Many linguists have more enthusiastically explored the relationship between sentences in a text and labelled this relationship *texture*. A set of sentences constitute a text if there is a relationship within and between the sentences; otherwise, they would be only a bunch of unrelated sentences. These relationships are called cohesive relations. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), since conjunction is not simply an anaphoric relation, it is rather different in nature from other types of

ohesive relations, such as reference, substitution and ellipsis. These uthors state that conjunction elements are cohesive not in themselves but ndirectly, by virtue of their specific meanings; they are not primarily evices for reaching out into the preceding (or following) text, but they xpress certain meanings that presuppose the presence of other omponents in discourse.

The hypothesis that cognitive complexity sets the pace for the cquisition of causals seems to fit available data. The results both from naturalistic and from experimental studies of first language acquisition how that additive relations are acquired before causals, and that additive onnectives are acquired before causal connectives, which appear around ige two. The acquisition of connectives in child language occurs in the ollowing way (see Table 4-14): In the usage-based approach, grammatical levelopment is based on inductive learning. It involves general psychological mechanisms such as habituation, entrenchment and analogy. Habituation involves the routinisation or automatisation of complex verbal and nonverbal) activities, entrenchment concerns the strength of mental epresentations and analogy acts as a mechanism for the derivation of new cnowledge. All three mechanisms are affected by frequency of occurrence: inguistic patterns that are frequently processed become routinised and nutomatised, their level of entrenchment is strengthened in mental grammar and they are often involved in analogical reasoning (Diessel, 2004). Discourse connectives are classified in terms both of syntactic and of semantic properties in recent studies such as the Penn Discourse TreeBank, one of the leading studies on connectives, and the METU Spoken Turkish Corpus. Accordingly, there are three classes: (1) coordinating conjunctions (CC), (2) subordinating conjunctions (SC) and (3) discourse adverbials (DA) (Zeyrek, 2008, in Kurtul, 2011).

Table 4-14. The acquisition order of connectives in child language

Additive	Temporal	Causal	Adversative
and	and then	because	so/so but

The aim of this study is to identify the connectives used by 4th grade primary school, 8th grade secondary school and 12th grade high school students in text construction and the extent to which they use these connectives appropriately in Turkish. The answers to the following questions have been sought: What is the type, frequency and distribution of connectives in the texts constructed by 4th, 8th and 12th graders? What are the most frequently used connectives in the texts constructed by 4th,

8th, and 12th graders? To what extent are these connectives used accurately and appropriately?

Methodology

Set of participants. This study was conducted on three randomly determined groups: one 4th grade, one 8th grade and one 12th grade. The 4th grade students numbered 30, of which 16 were female, 14 were male and all were 10 years old. The 8th grade students numbered 28, of which 13 were female, 15 were male and all were 14 years old. Finally, the 12th graders numbered 30, of which 12 were female, 18 were male and all were 18 years old.

Data collection. Data collection took place in the 2012–13 academic year. Students were given a persuasive essay topic and asked to write a composition on the benefits and harms of the internet.

Data analysis. Data collected from students' essays were evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively. Three different instruments were used in the evaluation. The purpose of using these connectives and the consistency relationships they signify was measured using a scale developed by Kurtul (2011) on the basis of Penn Discourse TreeBank (Prasad et al. 2008). In this scale, each connective in students' essays was first structurally classified as a (1) coordinating conjunction, (2) subordinating conjunction or (3) discourse adverbial. Following this, the frequency and percentage of these conjunctions in the essays were calculated. The conjunctions in students' essays were evaluated both qualitatively and quantitatively. To this end, the third and fourth research questions (to what extent students use connectives accurately and appropriately) were investigated on the basis of scales formed by Cho (1998) and developed by Altunay (2009, 59–60). In these scales, connectives were evaluated in terms of appropriateness and structural accuracy. There are two main parts in the scale: accurate use and inappropriate use. The inappropriate use section is also divided into four parts: erroneous use, overuse, incomplete use and grammatical error.

Findings. The findings of the present study are described below within the framework of the research questions.

The first research question: What is the type frequency and distribution of connectives in the texts constructed by 4th, 8th and 12th graders? The results related to the frequency and distribution of connectives (CC, SC, DA) in the texts of 4th, 8th and 12th graders are presented in Table 4-15. As can be seen in Table 4-15, 4th graders used CCs in 77 different contexts (62.5%), 8th graders used them in 498

contexts (50%) and 12th graders used them in 245 different contexts (58.5%). It is understood that students of all grades mostly used CCs to maintain semantic links in the texts. As for SCs, 4th graders used SCs in 18 different contexts (14.46%), 8th graders used them in 347 contexts (34.7%) and 12th graders used them in 90 different contexts (21.1%). With regard to DAs, 4th graders used them in 28 different contexts (23.46%), 8th graders used them in 148 contexts (14.8%) and 12th graders used them in 87 different contexts (20.18%). In general, SCs were used more frequently in comparison with CCs. This was only irrelevant in 4th graders' texts, where SCs were used at a smaller rate than CCs.

Table 4-15. Frequency and distribution of connectives in terms of type

Grade level	Connective type					
	CC		SC		DA	
	F	Perc.	F	Perc.	F	Perc.
4th grade	77	62.5	18	14.46	28	23.46
8th grade	498	50	347	34.7	148	14.8
12th grade	245	58.5	90	21.1	87	20.18

The second research question: What are the most frequently used connectives in the texts constructed by 4th, 8th and 12th graders? The data on the most frequently used three connectives in 4th, 8th and 12th graders' texts are presented in Table 4-16. As can be seen, the most frequently used three CC connectives in 4th, 8th and 12th graders' texts are "and", "but" and "too". The connective "by V-ing" which is under the category of SC, was used frequently in all grade levels. On the other hand, it is understood that the DA connective "I think" is used frequently in both 4th and 12th graders' texts. In addition, the connective "for example" is also used frequently in 4th and 8th graders' texts.

Third research question: To what extent are these connectives used accurately and appropriately? The results related to the frequency and distribution of accurately and appropriately used connectives (CC, SC, DA) in the texts of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders are presented in Table 4-17. The connectives in students' texts were analysed in terms of appropriacy and structural accuracy and it was found that the related connectives are used appropriately within the utterances. The majority of the errors were found to be related to grammar or spelling. It is also striking that as educational level increased, the error rate decreased. In addition, unsatisfactory use was also observed in the texts constructed by fourth graders.

Table 4-16. Most frequently used connectives in texts

Grade level	Connective type CC	F	Per.	SC	F	Per.	DA	F	P
4th grade	and	47	38.2	by V-ing	5	4.06	I think	7	5.7
	but	10	8.1	If	3	2.4	That is	6	4.9
	too	9	7.3	When	2	1.6	For example,	5	4.06
8th grade	too	183	18,4	If	68	6.8	For example,	33	3.3
	and	137	13.8	To __	62	6.2	That is,	20	2,0
	but	56	5.6	By V-ing	53	5.3	In fact	16	1.6
12th grade	and	72	17	By V-ing	18	4.2	I think	27	6.3
	too	69	16.5	In order to	16	3.7	For this reason	9	2
	but	34	8	For this purpose,	8	1.9	Of course	7	1.6

Table 4-17. Frequency and distribution of accurately and appropriately used connectives

	Connective	Appropriate use		Inappropriate use		Inappropriate use types				Unsatisfactory use
						Inaccurate use		Overuse		
		F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%	f
4th Grade	Coordination	48	62	29	38	15	52	14	48	8
	Subordination	14	78	4	22	4	100	-	-	-
	Adverbial clause	22	78	6	22	6	100	-	-	4
8th Grade	Coordination	412	83	86	17	79	92	7	8	-
	Subordination	304	88	43	12	42	98	1	2	-
	Adverbial clause	112	76	38	24	34	89	4	11	-
12th Grade	Coordination	240	98	5	2	4	1.6	1	.40	-
	Subordination	84	93	6	7	6	7	-	-	-
	Adverbial clause	85	98	2	2	2	2	-	-	-

Conclusion

The findings obtained from this study reveal that students form sentences that are associated in terms of semantic links such as condition, cause-

effect and sequence. The connectives coded in students' texts are in the 62–98% frequency range of accurate and appropriate use. On the other hand, although connectives are necessary for understanding the relationship between sentences, there are also cases where the use of any connective is unnecessary. This case was observed only in the texts of 4th graders in eight SC contexts, and in four CC contexts. Connectives have an important function in terms of both comprehension and expression skills. Connectives, which have such an important function for the formation of a logical relationship between two propositions, should be incorporated into the curriculum and taught to students.

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