



A Corpus-Based Study on Grade 9 Thai Learner's Use of Coordinating Conjunction in their Essays

Lannys Entierro Tianzon¹, Esperval Cezhar Cadiao²

¹Faculty of Distance Education, West Visayas State University, Luna St, La Paz, Iloilo City, 5000 Iloilo Philippines

²Professor, West Visayas State University, Luna St, La Paz, Iloilo City, 5000 Iloilo Philippines

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a corpus-based study in which the essays of Grade 9 Thai learners were examined. The purpose of this study, though very simple, is essential to the development and improvement of the students' written outputs in their reading and writing class. The result will also help English teachers on how to incorporate more activities and exercise in their lessons to give more attention to coordinating conjunction usage. Like other skills in English, correct use of coordinating conjunctions should be emphasized and should be given more attention if teachers want to produce learners who can write in depth and with sense. The paper has a purpose of giving readers an idea on how ESL learners use coordinating conjunctions to connect and contrast their ideas coherently.

Keywords: Conjunctions, usage

Introduction

Background of the Study

A conjunction is a word that is used to connect words, phrases, and clauses. They may often be small words, but conjunctions are highly functional and very important for constructing sentences. There are many conjunctions in the English language, but some common ones include and, or, but, for, yet and so. We use coordinating conjunction specifically when we want to put equal emphasis on the words and phrases or independent clauses that we are connecting. These coordinating conjunctions are very important if one wants to write long and complex sentences in their writing.

Coordinating conjunctions are particularly important if one wants to write elegant sentences and avoid choppy multiple short sentences. Without the conjunction, one part of the sentence wouldn't make sense grammatically. As conjunctions convey different meanings which will indicate the relationship between words in the sentence, it is important that students use conjunctions correctly when writing. Choosing the wrong conjunction to connect your ideas will simply affect the meaning of the ideas you are writing. For teachers, it makes our task easier when assessing our students' written outputs as using coordinating conjunctions will make their writing coherent and easier to comprehend.

Kham sǎn-thaan (คำสันธาน) or "conjunction" in Thai are used to connect sentences. Thais use conjunctions for them to express their ideas better. There are several Thai conjunctions that are very similar in meanings to English coordinating conjunctions.

There are very few Thai coordinating conjunctions. This could be the reason why Thai learners would only use very few of the English coordinating conjunctions in their essays as most of the Thai coordinating conjunction can be used interchangeably not like English coordinating conjunctions that each has a distinctive use in the sentence.

Writing in length doesn't come naturally especially to ESL students. ESL students struggle in writing because they must spend more time finding the right words to express their thoughts in English. This can be very frustrating for Thai learners but when they are taught how to use coordinating conjunctions there is a big difference in their academic writing. They can vary their sentences and they are able to write in length. As a teacher, I have observed that writing skill appears to be more challenging compared to other language skills therefore it needs more attention and constant practice on the part of the learner and of course more guidance from the teacher.

Statement of the Problem

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the use of coordinating conjunctions of Grade 9 Thai learners in their essays. Its purpose is to provide answers to the following:

1. What are the most common coordinating conjunctions used by Grade 9 Thai learners in their essays?
2. How frequently are they using a particular coordinating conjunction in their essays?

Review of Related Literature

In the English Language, coordinating conjunctions are used to join clauses and make it one complete thought. Coordinating conjunctions link thoughts and ideas of equal emphasis. It includes words like ‘for, and, nor, but, or, yet and so’ to connect independent clauses within the compound sentences.

The use of coordinating conjunctions becomes important in academic writing because you will be creating more complex sentences as your ideas become more elaborate.

According to Rebecca Agosta’s blogpost (2007), coordinating conjunctions connects words, phrases and clauses that are of the same syntactic importance together. As you can observe, the coordinating conjunctions with its cheesy acronym “FANBOYS” perform the same purpose and that is linking two words, phrases and clauses together. Whatever coordinating conjunction you choose will affect your writing whether you are comparing, contrasting, or explaining to expound your ideas.

A good piece of writing calls for different discipline when it comes to content and arrangement of ideas. There should be balance in everything. For ESL students, writing in length is quite challenging because a simple piece of writing may require a lot of effort to do. It becomes complicated and demanding as ESL students encounter more problems in writing like vocabulary and grammar difficulties.

Moreover, Erika Septianingrum (2007) indicated that conjunction is essential to be learned. She conducted the study “A Descriptive Study on the Students’ Mastery in Using Conjunction”. After she conducted the study, she was able to understand the students’ mastery in using conjunctions and she was able to conclude that teachers should give more exercises and more attention to teaching conjunctions to students of the second language.

Furthermore, Yi-hui Chiu (2007) mentioned that coordinating conjunctions did not receive much attention in learning the second language because everybody thought that coordinating conjunctions are easy to learn.

Choosing the correct conjunctions in writing can greatly impact the overall meaning of the writer’s ideas. Correct use of conjunctions can make our sentences more interesting and will allow the writers to skillfully provide detailed information about the topic. Coordinating conjunctions also improve the variety of sentences making our piece of writing interesting to read.

Research Method

Resign Design

Quantitative Research is the process of gathering and analyzing information. It is a method of research that depends on calculating variables using a numerical system, analyzing these calculations using various statistical tools and reporting the relationships and generalized results of the studied variable. It is the characteristic of this type of research to illustrate the results in number form.

According to Best et. al. (2016:24) quantitative research is a process that involves describing, recording, analyzing and interpreting conditions that exist. This research method is effective in knowing what the most common coordinating conjunctions are used by Grade 9 Thai learners and how frequently are they using a particular coordinating conjunction in their essays.

Population / Sample

Random Grade 9 students (10 students from each section) who are enrolled in the English Program in Mathayomwatsing School Annual Year 2023 will be included in the study.

Research Tool

The researcher will use a simple survey using students’ essays to gather data.

Data Collection

To find out the lists of coordinating conjunctions used by Grade 9 Thai students, the researcher gathered the students’ essays. The essays were written just recently in Mathayomwatsing School this month of February 2023

Data Analysis

The researcher will use descriptive statistics such as the mean and measures of frequency. Moreover, the researcher will present the data in tables and discuss the findings in the Results and Discussion section.

Results and Discussion

The coordinating conjunction ‘and’ is the most frequently used in Grade 9 students’ essays.

Table 1:*Coordinating Conjunctions Used by Grade 9 Thai learned in their essay.*

Student participant	For	And	Nor	But	Or	Yet	So	TOTAL number of Conjunctions used by each students on their essay
1		7		2				9
2		6		1			1	8
3		5		4				9
4		9		3	1			13
5		8		3				11
6		10		2				12
7		5		3			3	5
8		6		1			4	11
9		6			1			5
10		3		6	1			10
11		12		4	5			21
12		8		1	2			11
13		11		1	4			16
14		6		2	4		1	13
15		5		5			1	11
16		7		9			1	17
17		8		2				10
18		9		3				12
19		4		3			1	8
20		7		2				9
TOTAL number of times a specific conjunction is used	0	143	0	55	21	0	12	231/20

After collecting the students' essays, the researcher corrected the paper and encircled all the coordinating conjunction being used and tallied it on a table. Table 1 shows the frequency of usage of a specific coordinating conjunction. It is very clear that the Grade 9 students used the coordinating conjunction 'and' very frequently compared to the rest of the coordinating conjunctions namely 'but, so and or. coordinating conjunction "and" scored 143, followed by coordinating conjunction "but" which scored 55 on the tally. The next is coordinating conjunction 'or' which scored 21. The least frequently used coordinating conjunction is 'so' which scored only 12. The coordinating conjunctions 'for, nor and yet' were never used by Grade 9 students in their essays so they had scored zero on the tally.

Table 2:*Mean Distributions of Coordinating Conjunction Types*

TOTAL number of times a specific coordinating conjunction is used by a student participant	MEAN scores of how Many times a specific coordinating conjunction is being used by students participant
For= 0	0
And= 143	7.15
Nor= 0	0
But= 55	2.27
Or= 21	1.05
Yet= 0	0
So= 12	0.6

Table 2 illustrates the mean scores to show the average value of distribution of each coordinating conjunction that appeared in Grade 9 Thai learners' essay while Table 3 shows the ranking of each coordinating conjunction as they emerged in Grade 9 Thai learners' essay.

Formula:

Using this formula, the mean scores were calculated.

Mean Scores =	$\frac{\text{Total number of times a specific coordinating conjunctions is used by a student participant}}{\text{Total Number of student participants}}$
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Using this formula, the overall mean score was calculated.

$$\text{Overall mean scores} = \frac{\text{Total Number of conjunctions used by each student participant in their essay}}{\text{Total number of student participants}}$$

$$11.55 = 231/20$$

Table 3:

Ranking of Coordinating Conjunction Types Used by Grade 9 Thai learners in their essay.

Coordinating Conjunction	Frequency	Rank
and	143	1
but	55	2
or	21	3
so	12	4
Others combined (for, nor yet)	0	0

Table 3 shows that Grade 9 Thai learners used the coordinating conjunction “and” significantly in highest recurrence in their essay to link ideas and phrases, followed by the coordinating conjunctions ‘but’ and the remaining casual coordinating conjunctions ‘so’ and ‘or’ scored at a minimal rank. Coordinating conjunctions ‘for’, ‘nor’ and ‘yet’ were never used in their essay. First language interference is believed to be a contributing factor to this phenomenon. The use of coordinating conjunctions ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘so’ and ‘or’ are similar in terms of usage, purpose, and position and the frequency of usage in Thai language. Thai learners find it easier to use these particular coordinating conjunctions in ESL written output.

Conclusion

The analyzed data are discussed according to the research question of the study “What are the most common coordinating conjunctions used by Grade 9 Thai students and how frequently do they use a particular coordinating conjunction in their essays?”

The results showed that the mean score of the coordinating conjunction “and” is 7.15 which is the highest, coordinating conjunction “but” mean score is 2.75, followed by coordinating conjunction “or” which has the mean score of 1.05 and coordinating conjunction “so” got the mean score of 0.6.

It is therefore revealed that through the results that the Grade 9 Thai students used the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ most frequently in their essays and they have used the coordinating conjunctions ‘but, or and so’ sometimes in their essays. They have never used coordinating conjunctions ‘for, nor and yet’. The overall mean score is 11.55 which means that Grade 9 students participants used average number of conjunctions in their essays. This suggests that they need more practice and writing opportunities to use the different coordinating conjunctions. Grade 9 students need to explore more using coordinating conjunctions which never appeared in their essays.

As a researcher, I conclude that based on the results, my Grade 9 Thai students need more explanation and exposure so that they can distinctively use coordinating conjunctions correctly when they write. As their Reading-Writing teacher, I wanted to do more and feel fulfilled after the end of the semester. My students may not be the best as I understand their struggle as learners of the second language but I see how diligent they are to learn new things. It urges me to prepare more challenging activities to bring fun inside the classroom and at the same time have students learn something new after every class. It is my sincerest hope that this corpus-based research may serve, however humbly, the needs of my students who are studying English as a second language and at the same time facilitate and give better focus to my work as an English teacher.

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