

The Use of Connectors in the Writing of Libyan EFL Students: A study in the English Department, Sirte University

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This study explores the sorts of problems Libyan Learners of English as a Foreign Language (LLsEFL henceforth) have in using connectors. Composition essays written by participants of this study were used to measure the proper and the improper use of connectors. The essays were then analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings revealed that the problems LLsEFL experience in using connectors can be classified into three categories: misuse, underuse and overuse. Results indicated also that misuse was the most common problem followed by underuse and overuse respectively. In addition, they showed that adversatives were the most commonly misused category whereas additives were the most overused and temporals were the most underused. The qualitative analyses suggested that the cause for the majority of misuse of connectors was generally attributed to semantic, stylistic and discursal problems. The underuse and overuse were mainly attributed to first language interference.

Keywords: connectors/misuse/overuse/underuse/composition/Libyan EFL Students

1. Introduction:

The unity of a written text requires the writer to exploit the linguistic resources available in language. One of these resources is cohesive devices. These are crucial in writing because they turn separate clauses, sentences and paragraphs into connected prose signalling the relationships between ideas and making obvious the thread of meaning the writer is trying to communicate. Various devices connect ideas in writing. In their exploration of connecting devices, Halliday and Hasan (1976), identified five major categories of connecting devices: lexical cohesion, reference, substitution, ellipsis and connectors. While English language students need to learn to identify and use the whole variety of linking devices, they particularly need careful instruction in the use of connectors. Connectors establish the relationship between ideas in successive sentences. Without connectors, it would be extremely difficult to make sense of the connections between ideas. Connectors have an anticipatory role, preparing readers for the ideas that follow and the way the argument is developing. They tell the reader what to expect; for example, the word 'however' alerts the reader that there is likely to be a contradiction ahead, while the word 'moreover' signals that another point will probably be added to what has already been stated, whereas the word 'therefore' means that a conclusion or consequence is approaching. In other words, connectors function as signposts to guide the reader or the listener through the text in order to facilitate the process of comprehension. However, despite their obvious importance in connecting a text together, connectors in English create problems for LLsEFL. It is probably for this reason that there has been substantial research conducted on the use of connectors by LLsEFL' all of which concluded that their use is often problematic to EFLs from various different backgrounds. Crewe (1999:317) maintains that "the misuse of logical connectives is an almost universal feature of LLsEFL' writing, though it may also occasionally happen with experienced writers".

The purpose of this study is to look at the sorts of problems that LLsEFL have in their use of connectors. Investigating the use of connectors by LLsEFL is needed because there is a need to investigate the use of connectors by learners "from various mother-tongue backgrounds to increase our knowledge of L1 related and universal features of connectors' usage" (Altenberg and Tapper 1998:93). There are many studies on the use of connectors among learners of different linguistic backgrounds. However, there is still a need for studies involving Arabic-speaking students to give a clearer picture of how these learners use these devices in their writing. Moreover, all previous studies on the use of connectors compare EFL learners with native speakers of English. I believe that such comparisons are not always the best way to measure the performance of LLsEFL. The comparison of non-native learners with native learners now judged to be grossly unfair and is discouraged by many Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers such as Cook (1999:185) who argues that "because L2 writers differ from monolingual native speakers in their knowledge of their L2s and L1s and in some of their cognitive processes, they should be considered as speakers in their own right, not as

approximations to monolingual native speakers”. For other areas of language study, Labov (1972, cited in Othman 2004) also argued that it represents “discrimination to treat one group in terms of another group that they can never belong to, whether women as men, black Americans as white Americans, or working-class as middle-class”. I totally agree with these statements and, unlike previous studies, this research will not compare the use of connectors by LLsEFL with native learners of English and will only judge the appropriateness or otherwise of Libyan learners’ use of these devices in relation to the texts they write as part of this study.

2.1 Previous studies on the Use of Connectors in by Arab EFL Learners

There has been, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, couple of studies (Ayisha, 1993; Meygle’s, 1997) which have briefly touched upon the use of conjunctions by Arab EFLs. However, Meygle’s (1997) study on Syrian EFLs was mainly concerned with other aspects of writing and did not examine the use of conjunctions in a very detailed manner. In Meygle’s analysis of texts written by learners with supposedly different levels of language proficiency (passing and failing second and fourth year students), a few instances of problems such as unnecessary or redundant use, insufficient utilization, and misuse of these devices particularly in the use of ‘and’ and ‘but’ were briefly reported. Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) conducted a study based on assumption of interrelatedness or association between the writing ability of their students in English (L2) and Arabic (L1), and hence between their writing errors (or weaknesses) in the two languages. The study confirmed that “poor writing in English correlates with similar deficiencies in mother tongue” (ibid: 174). What is particularly relevant in their findings to the present study in terms of the difficulty of conjunctions for LLsEFL is that “the lack of cohesion and coherence” was the most obvious linguistic weakness noted in both the Arabic and English compositions. One prominent form of this lack of cohesion and coherence was the underproduction of logical connectors (i.e. conjunctions) (Khuwaileh and Shoumali 2000). In their conclusions, they asserted that “given the strong association between L1 and L2 performance, deficiencies in writing English are not solely the responsibility of the English teachers. The problem already exists in L1” (ibid: 181). This implies that some students’ problems in English writing “can be linked to the deep-rooted problems in Arabic writing” (ibid: 182), in response to which they suggested that “learners of English need to be taught about the English text awareness rather than transferring. This can be done by guiding learners to look critically and analytically at English texts which in turn support their own writing” (ibid).

2.2 Previous studies on the Misuse, Underuse, and Overuse of Connectors in EFL Learners Compositions

Granger and Tyson (1996) compared a sample (89,918 words) of the French mother-tongue sub-component of the International Corpus of Learner English with a sample (77,723 words) of writing from the control corpus of English essay writing. The texts analysed in both corpora were of a similar nature in the argumentative genre. The researchers hypothesised that they would discover a general overuse of connectors by French learners. Although their analysis of the overall frequencies of these items did not support this hypothesis, a qualitative

analysis yielded strong evidence of the overuse of individual connectors such as ‘actually’, ‘of course’, ‘moreover’, and ‘on the contrary’, as well as underuse of ‘however’, ‘hence’, ‘therefore’, and ‘thus’ (ibid: 17). Other studies were set out to explore similar issues in the writing of EFLs with other L1 backgrounds. Tanko (2004), for example, conducted a large-scale study focusing on the use of connectors (or adverbial connectors as he called them) in highly-rated argumentative essays written by Hungarian EFLs. An in-depth study of the texts revealed that “Hungarian writers share the problems of writers with other cultural backgrounds” (ibid: 157). Altenberg and Tapper (1998), contrasted Swedish EFLs’ English texts with those of French EFLs. Both samples were reported to lack the awareness of register necessary for the appropriate use of connectors in academic writing. Ting (2003) analysed the errors made by Chinese tertiary students’ in the use of connectors. According to this researcher, lack of appropriate use of connectors can safely be attributed to “inter-lingual interferences” and “intra-lingual interference”. She goes on to also explain the redundant use of certain connectors such as ‘because’ and ‘since’ in students’ texts as a result of the influence of “spoken language habit”, and, therefore, she suggested the need for them to learn how to write formal/academic essays.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question

The study is set to answer the following research question:

- What sorts of problems do LLEFL have in their use of connectors?

3.2 Participants

Participants of this study are fourth year students in the English Department at Sirte University (Libya). More details about the participants are presented in table 1 below:

Table 1: Some demographic information on the study’s participants

No	Nationality	L1	Age	Gender		Years of Learning English	English Proficiency
				F	M		
20	Libyans	Arabic	21-24	18	2	10 years (7 years pre- university, 3 years at university)	Fourth year undergraduate

3.3 Research Design:

This study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches. These approaches are appropriate for this study because it uses frequency counts of connectors used by the EFL learners and the data collected are quantified. It also uses content analysis method in order to provide possible explanations for some of the problems concerning the use of connectors.

3.4 Data Collection

Writing essays is the instrument for data collection in the present study. The data (compositions) in this study were collected from the participants through three argumentative essays on three different topics. The essays were rated by two experienced EFL teachers in the English department.

3.5 Data Analysis

A framework of identification, classification and specification of inappropriate use of connectors were adopted from the study conducted by Ong (2011:33) and it was adapted to suit the objectives of the present study. The data was analysed as follows: First, all the connectors in the essays were identified and counted manually. Secondly, the classification of connectors was according to their semantics function, and based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976: 238) taxonomy of connectors (see table 2). Then, connectors that were found in the essays were classified into (1) misuse, (2) underuse and (3) overuse according to definitions, selection and extracting procedure discussed below.

Table 2: Halliday and Hasan (1976) classification of connectors

Research	Semantic Function	Instance
Halliday and Hasan (1976)	(1) Additive	And, furthermore, in addition, similarly, that is, in other words, for example, by the way
	(2) Adversative	But, yet, though, however, in fact, on the other hand, actually, instead, rather
	(3) Causal	So, thus, because, therefore, consequently, for this reason, as result, otherwise
	(4) Temporal	Then, next, first, secondly, to sum up, finally, briefly, meanwhile

3.6 Definition of Connectors

As pointed out earlier, this study is based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) definitions of connectors. According to these authors, a connector is a cohesive device signalling a semantic relation, which specifies "the way in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before" (ibid: 227). Halliday and Hasan adopted a criterion for including an expression under the heading of connector: "given a particular semantic relation which CAN operate conjunctively (i.e. which takes on a cohesive function when expressed on its own)" (ibid: 231); that is, "unaccompanied by other explicit connecting factors", such as structural means" (ibid).

Halliday and Hasan set out a general principle which describes connectors in a way that could help text analysts identify them more easily and accurately, which is that "a conjunctive adjunct normally has first position in the sentence (with some exceptions), and has, as its dominant, the whole of the sentence in which it occurs: that is to say, that, its meaning extends over the sentence unless it is repudiated" (ibid: 232). However, this general principle cannot be always strictly followed, especially when analysing a written text. The reason for this, according to Halliday

and Hasan, is that the sentence itself is “a very indeterminate category”, “as evidenced by the indeterminacy, or perhaps flexibility”, of the English punctuation system, “and it is very common to find conjunctive adjuncts occurring in written English following a colon or semicolon” (ibid). Accordingly, in investigating LLEFL’ use of connectors not only those considered which occur at the beginning of sentence following a full stop, but also any case similar to ‘but’ as long as it: (a) reinforces the internal texture within the sentence; (b) presupposes a previous clause/part of the sentence; (c) has a repudiating effect, and/or (d) can be preceded by a full stop instead of the punctuation mark used by students.

3.7 Selection and Extraction of Connectors

Even though it was developed over three decades ago, Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) framework still serves as the basis for many recent investigations on cohesive devices. Therefore, the selection of connectors in this study was based on their taxonomy of connectors. Each instance of a connector was highlighted and recorded manually in the present study. To be marked as a connector, the expression must be in Halliday and Hasan’s list. Moreover, they must satisfy the conditions of the definition of connectors discussed above. In terms of grammatical status, connectors must belong to one syntactic category which constitute connectors; that is, coordinating (e.g. ‘and’, ‘but’), and subordinating connectors (e.g. ‘because’), adverbs (e.g. ‘however’, ‘nevertheless’), or prepositional phrases (e.g. ‘in addition’, ‘in other words’). Secondly, connectors must connect linguistic units within and/or above the sentence level.

3.8 Definitions of Misuse, Underuse and Overuse

For the purpose of carrying out the error-analysis of students’ writing, three major problems were identified and they are defined operationally as shown in Table 3 (connectors are highlighted in bold):

Table 0.: Definitions and examples of misuse, underuse and overuse of connectors

Categories	Definitions	Examples
Misuse	1-The connector used is not consistent with the relationship that exists between the sentences it connects.	I think the old generations of people know better than now. Today young people don't have wise decisions because they don't learn from this life as our grandmother and grandfather. Moreover , the young generation have advantages because they have technologies like mobiles, TV, and electronic games and others good things that didn't have in the past days. (ESSAY: PRCG35, Appendix 4)
	2-The connector used is often associated with a different register such as spoken/informal.	1-....After what happening in USA in September the 11, USA was crazy and they say they wanted to kill all terrorism in the world. So Iraq was occupied because of its religion because it's a Muslim country... By the way , may be they will come next to any another Arabic or Muslim countries saying they wanted to kill... (ESSAY: PRCG15, Appendix 4)
Underuse	1- A connector is not used where it is needed.	The education ministry always try for changes and to do some changes in the education system to improve it better. [For example] Six years ago they introduced the postgraduate studies in Libya. The students now able to now do masters and in other subjects also PhD. [However] The postgraduate system is still not good and it needing many of improvements. [Thus/Therefore] Many Libyan students like to go to other countries and complete their education. (ESSAY: PRCG14, Appendix 4)
Overuse	1-The use of a particular connector that has appeared repetitively in an essay when it is not necessary.	...I know other things in the world better than the wars and killing and we can spend the world money and resources for these things. And we can spend the money to help the poor people living without any foods and waters in some areas in the world. And we can be spending the money and resources and in how we can to protect the planet what called the climate change in the world. And we should concerned in how to make the energy resources in for futures. And the money for the war of Iraq can be spended for the drugs and diseases such AIDS and is killing millions in African countries and in parts...(ESSAY: PRCG13, Appendix 4)

4. Results & Discussion

As illustrated in the table 4 below, the misuse tops the list as the most common feature whereas underuse comes in second place. The least-occurring category is overuse.

Table 4: Overall results of the Use of Connectors

Category	Correct Use	Misuse	Underuse	Overuse	Total
Number	70	101	85	29	285
Percentage	14.20%	45.30%	19.30%	11.20%	100%

4.1 Results for Misuse

As revealed in the quantitative results, misuse is the most common feature in the data. Moreover, further analysis also showed that participants tended to misuse a specific category compared to others, as illustrated in Table 5.

Table 0: The most misused semantic category

Category	Misuse	%
Adversative	57	68.88
Additive	30	46.08
Causal	09	44.82
Temporal	3	36.36

The results show that the order of the most misused semantic category by participants' is the adversatives followed by additives, causal and temporal connectors. These findings are in line with those of Ting's (2003:4) that adversatives were the most difficult for Chinese EFLs. She attributed this difficulty largely to L1 (Chinese) interference since most of the errors, according to her, reflected the use of such adversative connectors as 'on the other hand' and 'however' without any explicit or implied contrast. To return to the data, it is perhaps not surprising that the adversative category was the most misused in the data taking into account the complexity of this category as explained earlier. The other noticeable feature of these results is that the additive category seems to be more challenging to students than the causal, which is often considered relatively more difficult for EFLs. However, this unexpected result might be partially explained by the fact that the additives category was used significantly more often (almost four folds), whereas causal and temporal connectors were in fact rarely used. A further qualitative analysis was needed to infer the possible causes and nature of such misuse. The results revealed that the majority of cases could be generally attributed to the following: (i) confusion over the semantic functions of connectors (semantic misuse); (ii) insensitivity to the functions of connectors in different registers (stylistic misuse); and (iii) discourse organization (discoursal misuse). These three sources of misuses are discussed further in the following subsections:

i. Semantic Misuse

Semantic misuse means that a participant chose an inappropriate connector from within the same semantic category of connectors (e.g. additive) where other connectors from within that category could have been used. The qualitative analysis revealed that this type of misuse was quite frequent in the data, especially with adversatives. It is assumed that such misuse is probably due to listing connectors together according to their semantic functions under one category without any further information which could help learners to decide which connector would best express the intended relationship between their sentences. The lack of information and context often mislead learners who then believe that connectors listed together serve the same functions. The following example further illustrates how listing connectors which serve similar semantic functions together in the same category without any further information about the often subtle differences between them can lead to an inappropriate choice of connectors:

Example (1)....The war in Yemen is still there going it will not stop. For my view the war was not justice and the Saudis with support of US goed to the war for to occupy the country and kill the ordinary people. The reasons the Saudi government was made were no good reasons for me. This war is only for killing the humans and destroying the country of the Yemen. I do not blame the Americans for this war and I blame the Arab world and their reaction on the war. **On the contrary**, the Arab people may do little about this thing because we do not have the needed power and strong army....

Although the use of ‘on the contrary’ occurred very infrequently in the participants’ essays (4 occurrences in the data and all used inappropriately), it seems to cause some problems for the few who did use it, as shown in example (1). The connector’s phrase ‘on the contrary’ is used to introduce a reiterative statement which, in view of the statement prior to ‘on the contrary’, emphasises the opposite of what has been stated is true. It has the sense of “not...but...” What precedes it should be denied so that there is space for the endorsement of what follows. Lake (2004:142) reported that ‘on the contrary’ is often found in a specific contextual environment and the common features of its lexico-syntactical context include the following four points: one subject; two contrasting qualities; one positive and one negative statement open to similar interpretations; an argument, either genuinely present or implied, to which the two statements adjacent to the phrase both form a refutation. On the basis of these features, it can be noted that what ‘on the contrary’ brings to an argument is something contrasting, although such an opposition may usually implicitly exist between alternative phenomena.

Returning to the example given above, the student writer seems to be unaware of these conditions and his/her use of the term ‘on the contrary’ seems to be inappropriate since it does not meet the required conditions. The likely reason for this misuse, and similar ones in the data, is due to presenting students with connectors in lists categorized according to their semantic functions. Because connectors are listed together, students get the impression that they can be used interchangeably, as suggested by the type of misuse in example 1 above. In fact, I believe such a way of teaching connectors, and other aspects of grammar, might be responsible not only for this type of misuse but also for most of the problems that face LLEFL in using connectors because it does not allow the learner to appreciate the function and use of connectors beyond the sentence level.

ii. Discoursal Misuse

Another type of misuse frequently found in the data is discoursal misuse. This means that a student chooses a connector which may be misleading since it does not express the relationship implied by the sentences it connects, as illustrated in the following examples:

Example (2)...(1) I finding it this curriculum make the teacher in the class absent, because if he couldn't explain to the student or they don't understand any lesson they says to the student that go to the home and ask your parents help you in your doing homework.(2) **However**, they didn't teach or include this program in the curriculum

of the university because the student get out of university and become the teacher in the future.... (ESSAY: PRCG47).

Example (3).....(1) I think the old generations of people know better than now. Today young people don't have wise decisions because they don't learn from this life as our grandmother and grandfather.(2) **Moreover**, the young generation have advantages because they have technologies like mobiles, TV, and electronic games and others good things that didn't have in the past days.

Example (3a)...I do not blame the west for this war **and** I blame the Arab world and their reaction on the war...

In the whole passage in example 2, the student writer seems to be showing his dissatisfaction with the new curriculum and he/she seems to be particularly critical of the teachers who, according to him/her, seem unhelpful to students (sentence 1). In sentence 2, the same argument seems to be going on, in that the student writer is still being critical of the system in that he/she believes that the teachers' unfamiliarity with this new system has made it hard for them to teach their pupils. Given the fact that the second sentence seems to merely add another point to the argument, one would then expect an additive connector (e.g. 'in addition', 'moreover') to introduce sentence 2. However, the student writer, as we can see, used 'however' instead. In examples 3 and 3a, on the other hand, s/he used additive markers (i.e. 'moreover' in example 3 and 'and' in 3a) to express an apparently contrastive relation. I do not think such an inappropriate use in examples 2, 3 and 3a reflects a confusion of the abstract notions of 'addition' versus 'contrast' since these two notions are similar in all languages.

Looking at such misuse, my first impression was it could be that the student's writer may not have captured the fact that the implied relationship between the two sentences is an additive rather than contrastive one, which has led him/her to insert a marker which, in this case, does not reflect that relationship. However, the fact that connectors are mainly used to signal the relationship that already exists in the writer's mind may go against this claim. In the absence of the writer's view, which could have clarified the exact cause of such a misuse, I can only speculate that such errors, which are common in our data, are a result of the sentence-level grammar and writing instructions which are common in Libyan EFL teaching classrooms. Such practices do not provide learners with the opportunity to look at how larger stretches of language are connected together to form a unity.

The lack of practice beyond the sentence-level often leads to the production of sentences which are hardly connected to what precedes or follow them, as was the case with the use of 'however' and 'moreover' in the above examples. Moreover, such minuses, as those in examples 2, 3 and 3a above, could also echo Crewe's (1999:320) argument which is that EFLs sometimes tend to use connectors in

order to “impose surface logicity on a piece of writing where no deep logicity exists”. Additionally, he observed that this might even be seen as a way of “disguising poor writing”, where the writer attempts to overcome an area of difficulty by “the abundance of superficial links” (ibid: 321). Another type of misuse revealed by the qualitative analysis may well be related to the influence of Arabic. In some cases this influence is reflected in the function of the connector used and in others in the literal translation of a connector from Arabic into English, as illustrated in the following examples:

Example (4)... Having a degree don't mean we confirm our future but may be we can have a good with a good education. We will have more money. **Then** we have a social status in society as...

In the above example, the student writer uses ‘then’ to indicate an additive relation between sentences 1 and 2. The reason for this misuse might be L1 transfer. The connective ‘then’ is translated into the Arabic *‘li-ana’*, which shows both temporal and additive relation depending on the context.

Example (5)....(1) Some peoples admiring about nowadays the younger generations. This because they believed for the younger generation knowing the better things than them. (2) From generation to generation the young people become aware of more things. (3) They have education better. (4) **So**, they becomed in more interested in material life and other things...

In example 5, the cause/effect relation linked by ‘so’ is obscured, since sentence 4 does not seem to be the effect of what was mentioned in previous sentences which is the impression given by the presence of ‘so’. My understanding of what the student writer is trying to convey in sentence 4 is that he/she is merely adding another characteristic of the young generation which makes them admirable. For this reason, ‘so’ would be better substituted by an additive marker since it would better serve the intended relationship between sentence 4 and the preceding ones.

iii. Stylistic Misuse

Stylistic misuse is defined in this study as the use of a connector which is often associated with a different register. Such inappropriate use was reflected in our learners’ frequent employment of connectors such as ‘anyway’, ‘so’, and ‘by the way’, which are more common in spoken rather than formal written discourse. The following examples illustrate how learners used ‘so’, ‘by the way’ and ‘anyway’ in their writing.

Example (6) Actually women’s education in our society have changed lots last years. **So** we raise of the education level for woman because they are equal to man in society and in education... We know society is consists of the men and the women.

So the education for the men and the women make a better society.... (ESSAY: PRCG20).

Example (6a) ...Lots of the Yemeni people killed in this war, I mean innocent people. **By the way**, may be they will come next to any another country saying they wanted.... (ESSAY: PRCG15).

Example (6b)...there are the girls more in the schools than we have the boys. **Anyway**, our society can help the males and females because this is the good for... (ESSAY: PRCG20).

As can be seen from example 6, the student writer used the word 'so' to express a causal relation that their sentences seem to imply. Although the choice of 'so' to express this relation is correct, the problem in using this word is that it does not seem to be the most appropriate choice for the register, since 'so' is often associated with spoken rather than written discourse (Granger and Tyson 1996; Biber *et al.* 1999). If 'so' is a marker more common in spoken than in written English, then it could be claimed that our learners, unaware of other markers more commonly used in written discourse, have misused or at least overused it. The use of rather informal markers in our learners' essays might be due to their unfamiliarity with register differences.

Lack of familiarity with how register and text-type can affect the choice of connectors probably results from the traditional way of teaching connectors where only the names and the semantic meanings of these devices are provided. The difficulty for EFLs in differentiating between formal and informal registers in the use of connectors has also been widely reported in previous studies (e.g. Field and Yip 1992; Granger and Tyson 1996). For example, Granger and Tyson (1996:23) reported that French EFLs also tend to use informal connectors such as 'so' and 'anyway', and they attributed this to their learners' lack of sensitivity to style. Another possible reason for the tendency to use less formal connectors might be that learners feel less confident in using formal ones. Some evidence in the data supports this conjecture in the case of 'so'. A closer look at the connectors used within the causal category, which 'so' belongs to, shows that our learners hardly used other possible connectors such as 'thus', 'therefore' and 'hence' in their essays

Another reason for the frequent use of rather informal markers, especially in the case of 'so', could be transfer from Arabic. In other words, the word '*lidalika*', in Arabic is the only equivalent word to all connectors belonging to the causal category in English (e.g. 'so', 'thus', 'therefore', and 'hence'). Moreover, I also believe that the presentation of connectors in lists might also be responsible for giving the learners the impression that connectors within this category (regardless of register or text-type) serve similar functions. They are familiar with the two words 'because' and 'so', due to their frequent encounters with these words in spoken and written interactions, that they tend to rely on them to mark any causal relation.

4.2 Results for Underuse

It is apparent from the results, presented in table 6 below, that participants seemed to underuse connectors belonging to all semantic categories, with the adversatives at the top of the list followed by the temporals. The underuse of both casuals and additives stood at the lower rate of 21.17%.

Table 6: Underused semantic categories

Category	Total Underuse	Underuse in each category	%
Adversative	85	25	29.41
Temporal		24	28.23
Causal		18	21.17
Additive		18	21.17

Possible reason for the underuse of adversatives could be due to the difficulty experienced with this category not only among LLsEFL but other EFLs too, as reported in previous studies (e.g. Field and Yip 1992; Tanko 2004). Since they are cognitively more complex than those in the other categories, it is to be expected that learners will have resorted to an avoidance strategy in fear of committing errors. However, the identification of avoidance is not an easy task. Seliger (1989, cited in Ellis 1994) pointed out that it is not possible to claim that avoidance has taken place if the learner has demonstrated knowledge of the form in question, and if there is evidence available that NSs of the L2 would use the form in the context under investigation. In other words, it only makes sense to talk about avoidance if the learners know what they are avoiding. The student writers' views were not sought in this study, and, therefore, no decisive conclusion can be drawn on whether or not the learners avoided using adversatives.

What is clear from the results is that, on many occasions, participants did not use adversative in places where one could have been used. However, as illustrated in Table 6, underuse was not only limited to adversatives but also found in other categories such as temporals, as shown in example 8 below. Although some instances of underuse did not generally constitute a major obstacle in comprehending the text, the presence of connectors would have been beneficial and helpful for readers, as shown in the following examples:

Example (8)...There are many purposes of education in Libya. (1) Education is used to raise confidence to help the children to achieve their full potential in life. (2) And to preparing childrens for a particular jobs. Children may learn science and other subjects to develop critical thinking. (3)Education is also useful and important to give the child a body of knowledge about the society. (4)The most important thing about education is for to teach childrens to become polite and good manners and good tribe member... (ESSAY: PRCG3).

As can be seen in this example, the sentences lack the logical connectors of sequence and, therefore, the whole passage looks like a list of sentences. This is because all of the sentences in this quotation, except for the first, describe the purposes or aims of education, as the student writer claims. As a result, enumerators like ‘firstly’, ‘secondly’ and ‘finally’ could have been used to make the quotation more cohesive and coherent in forming a unity. Although it could be argued that even without the presence of connectors in the above example, readers can still infer the intended meaning, there is no doubt that their presence would help the reader to move smoothly and gently while reading and to continue his/her train of thought. Bjork and Raisanen (1997, cited in Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali 2000: 171) argued that:

...due to the slippery nature of language, it is impossible to determine the meanings of texts or even individual words...the logical linking of ideas is at the centre of written communication.

Example (9).....(1)The education ministry always try for changes and to do some changes in the education system to improve it better. (2) Six years ago they introduced the postgraduate studies in Libya. (3)The students now able to now do masters and in other subjects also PhD. (4) The postgraduate system is still not good and it needing many of improvements. (5)Many Libyan students like to go to other countries and complete their education... (ESSAY: PRCG14).

This extract is a good example of how the current study’s participants seem to have underused connectors from different categories. In example 9, a statement in sentence 1 says that the Ministry of Education is constantly trying to improve the system by introducing changes. In the sentence that follows it, the writer seems to be giving an example of one of these changes the Ministry of Education has brought out to the system in launching postgraduate studies. However, as we can see, the student writer did not use a marker to show that relation by using a connector such as ‘for example’ or ‘for instance’ between sentences 1 and 2. After providing an example of recent changes to the system, the student writer goes on to tell us about the result of this change which, according to him/her, seems to be positive in that it allows students to pursue their higher education at home. However, despite the cause-and-effect relationship that seems to be implied by sentences 2 and 3, there is no clear signal from the student writer to tell the reader that this is the case. To make that relation explicit, he/she could have used a connector from the causal category (e.g. ‘as a result’, ‘consequently’) to make the relationship more explicit to the reader and to help ease the processing effort. After giving a positive statement about these changes in sentence 3, in sentence 4 the student writer sounds somehow critical of that change, and therefore argues for more improvements in the system. This means that sentence 4 seems to provide a contradiction to what was stated in the preceding sentence.

Again, this relationship was not made explicit by the student writer in that s/he did not use any marker such as ‘however’ or ‘nevertheless’ which could have made the relationship between the sentences clearer to the reader. It is true that the effect of the absence of connectors in general as well as in these two examples may not be apparent, since the texts are, to some extent, comprehensible and readers can discern the intended message. This might be the case, but it has to be borne in mind that the above excerpts are rather short, which make them easier for readers to work out the intended message. However, since writing is characterized as a “detached” activity (Chafe 1982), which means that readers often have no access to the writer, it is the latter’s responsibility to try and make things as clear as possible and to not leave readers puzzled about what s/he intends to express.

Even my interpretation of what the student writer was intending to say in the above example could turn out to be wrong, since the writer could have meant something else. For example, although I have interpreted the relationship between sentences 1 and 2 as an additive, and suggested that the student writer could have used an additive marker (i.e. exemplification) of this relationship, it could also be interpreted as a cause-and-effect relationship where the introduction of a new curriculum is the effect of the Ministry of Education’s effort to improve the system. The only way for us, as readers, to be sure of what the writer has in mind is to clearly signal out that relationship using different linguistic devices such as connectors. The reason that the absence of connectors often does not hinder understanding of the intended message is because the sole function of connectors is that they “encode procedural rather than conceptual meaning” (Blakemore 1987:144). What is meant by connectors being ‘procedural’ and not ‘conceptual’ is that they do not contribute to the content of the message but rather encode information about how these conceptual words are to be interpreted.

As Fraser (1999) argued “the absence of discourse markers does not render the sentence ungrammatical or/and unintelligible. It does, however, remove a powerful clue about what commitment the speaker [or the writer] makes regarding the relationship between the current utterance and the prior discourse.” (ibid: 78). In fact, Fraser’s point regarding the speakers’ or the writers’ commitment raises an interesting issue of ‘reader-responsible’ versus ‘writer-responsible’ languages (Hinds 1987) which, I believe, might explain the general tendency among LLEFL to underuse connectors. One of the first attempts at describing cultural differences in structuring discourse was made by Hall (1976, cited in Hinds 1987) who distinguished between ‘high-context’ and ‘low-context’ cultures.

The main difference between the two lies in the need for explanation in discourse. In high-context cultures characterized by close long-term relationships between group members, much important information can be left implicit, while in low-context cultures in which group members form a large number of interpersonal connections of shorter duration, more information must be explicitly stated (ibid). A

visible manifestation of these cultural differences in writing is the approach the writer adopts for the reader's sake (Hinds 1987). In some cultures the responsibility for the success of the communicative act, which a text represents, rests on the writer. His/her writing should be as clear and reader-friendly as possible, which means that the ideas have to be laid out explicitly and the text should contain a variety of markers to signal the writer's stance and to guide the reader through the text. In a reader-responsible language, on the other hand, the responsibility to find his/her way through the text and extract the author's intentions and ideas is left to the reader (ibid).

Based on the differences discussed above between not only the Arabic and English languages but also their cultures, it could, then, be claimed that one of the reasons for the tendency of LLEFL to underuse connectors is due to the influence of Arabic language and also its culture which, for example, tends to be a relatively less explicit than English.

4.3 Results for Overuse

As revealed in Table 6 above, overuse is the third most common feature in our data. Moreover, further analysis reveals that participants tend to overuse one particular semantic category of connectors, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: The most overused semantic category

Category	Total No	Overuse	%
Additive	115	27	23.47
Adversative	45	2	4.44
Causal	29	0	00
Temporal	11	0	00

Table 7 suggests that the additive was by far the most overused category, followed by few cases of adversatives. No overuse was recorded in the causal and temporal categories. That additives being the most overused may not come as surprise, considering that their total usage was also much higher than for the other three categories. Another possible reason for the overuse of the additives could be the fact that 'and', belongs to this category, is often overused by LLEFL. The absence of overuse of causal and temporal connectors is also understandable considering their low overall frequency in the data. Furthermore, the low frequency of temporals might be due to the argumentative nature of the essays, which does not often require the usage of such devices. The analysis revealed that 'and' was responsible for nearly all of the instances of overuse found in the data. The most likely reason for the excessive use of 'and' is the influence of the L1 where 'wa', 'and' is very frequently used in Arabic texts. The high frequency of 'wa', 'and', in Arabic is probably due to the fact that although the spoken-written dichotomy (i.e. diglossia) prevails in Arabic, the contrast in communication modes does not entail corresponding structural distinctions. Consequently, the native Arabic user approaches the task of writing in standard Arabic with an awareness of

differences between the natural, domestic variety, on the one hand, and the standard written variety, on the other. This explanation of the possible transfer from Arabic is supported by the participants' actual use of this word, since it can be shown that the use and functions of 'and' resemble, in most cases, its uses and functions in Arabic, as further illustrated in the following example.

Example (10)...I think also education we need to use different tools like computer **and** power point machines **and** white board and other tools useful for us..... (ESSAY: PRCG18).

The use of 'and' to separate items in a list in this example is unnecessary and a comma could have been used instead. This use of 'and' suggests a direct transfer from Arabic where one of its common functions is to separate list items. In other instances 'and' was accompanied by another connector as in 'and but', 'and moreover', 'and on the contrary'. This again indicates a possible transfer from Arabic where, for stylistic and syntactic purposes, 'and' is used in combination with other connectors (Al-Batal 1990).

Example (11) ...I know other things in the world better than the wars and killing **and** we can spend the world money and resources for these things. **And** we can spend the money to help the poor people living without any foods and waters in some areas in the world. **And** we can be spending the money and resources **and** in how we can to protect the planet what called the climate change in the world. **And** we should concerned in how to make the energy resources in for futures. **And** the money for the war of Yemen can be spend for the drugs and diseases such AIDS **and** is killing millions in African countries and in parts... (ESSAY: PRCG13)

As we can see in the above example, and in other instances in the learners' data, the function of 'and' was sometimes simply to add a point. To this end, the student writer relied almost exclusively on 'and' to mark additive relations. The cause of this transfer from Arabic might be largely attributed to the learners' lack of proficiency in English in general, which led them to resort to translating literally from Arabic. This has been reported in previous studies which found that one of the reasons LLEFL resort to Arabic writing styles is their relatively low proficiency in English (El-Aswad 2002:207). However, the overuse of some grammatical items might also be due to the avoidance or underproduction of more difficult structures (Ellis 1994:305). There is a general agreement among SLA researchers (e.g. Ellis 1994) that the mismatch between a communicative goal and target-language knowledge where the linguistic means fall short of achieving communicative ends is a reason for reliance on inter-lingual transfer strategies which depend on similarities between the native and target languages.

In the face, given the lack of the requisite knowledge of the target language, reliance on the inter-lingual transfer strategy, among other strategies, is one way to compensate for inadequacies. However, in the case of the current participants, I

believe that they did not so much lack the 'declarative' knowledge but they rather lack the 'procedural' knowledge of language (Anderson 1985, cited in El-Aswad 2007), which sometimes led them to fall back on their L1. The results of overuse in the present study seem to be partially in line with previous research findings. Milton and Tsang (2003) also reported overuse in their EFLLs writing. In their corpus study of Hong Kong students' use of connectors, they concluded that there was a high ratio of overuse of the entire range of connectors in their student's writing, in comparison to published English. Granger and Tyson's (1996) study showed that 'moreover' and 'indeed' were the most overused connectors in their EFLLs' writing. Crewe (1999) also found that Chinese EFLLs overused connectors, especially 'in addition', 'of course' and 'moreover' in their writing. Crewe largely attributed this to a misconception the students held about the use of connectors, namely, "the more, the better" (ibid: 322).

5. Conclusion

This study was set out to explore the sorts of problems LLsEFL have in using connectors. The results have shown that the sorts of problems that face LLsEFL are misuse, underuse, and overuse. Misuse was found to be the most common feature in the learners' writing followed by underuse and overuse. These findings were somewhat contradictory to most previous research findings which tended to report that their EFLLs major problems lie in their overuse and misuse, whereas little or no evidence of significant underuse was revealed. It was assumed that one reason for these contradictory results, especially on underuse, could be due to the influence of the implicitness characteristic of Arabic language and culture on our learners' use of connectors as well as the way those studies measured their learners' overuse and underuse connectors which was set against their native speakers counterparts.

Another important finding of the present study was that the adversatives were the most commonly misused category whereas additives were the most the overused and temporals were the most underused. The qualitative analysis suggested that the cause for the majority of misuse of connectors was generally attributed to semantic, stylistic and discursal problems. The underuse and overuse were mainly attributed to the L1 (Arabic) influence. As for the causes of misuse in the present study, the results showed that most cases of misuse were due to confusion among learners' about the semantic functions of connectors, and their insensitivity to differences in register. As for underuse and overuse, most cases seem to suggest the influence from the L1. Although it was beyond the scope of this study to determine if improper use of connectors had an impact on writing quality, one would assume that would likely be the case since it has widely been documented in previous studies (e.g. Witte and Faigley 1981; Norment 1994; Martinez 2004) that using a small set of connectors does affect quality. Therefore, a further research is needed to investigate the extent to which the proper/improper use of connectors could affect the writing quality of the students.

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