

THE USE OF CONJUNCTIONS IN TAMIL LANGUAGE ESSAYS AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS

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Abstract. The aim of the paper was to assess learners' knowledge on conjunctions, identify the conjunctions used by the learners in essays, and analyse the correlation between the use of conjunctions and the learners' essays grade. This descriptive research explains the use of conjunctions in essays written by Tamil secondary school students. The researcher used a quantitative method in this research, which involved 48 students in a secondary school in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The researcher employed two instruments: The first instrument is Multiple-choice questions (MCQ) consist of 40 objective questions on conjunctions and the second instrument is an expository essay test. All the essays were marked holistically based on the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) format by the researcher. The researcher adapted Halliday and Hasan (1976) concept of conjunctions. The findings showed that the students have a better knowledge on additive, adversative and causal conjunctions as compared to temporal conjunctions. Furthermore, additive conjunctions were frequently used 855 (59.8%) times in the students' essays. It is followed by causal conjunctions 312 (21.8%) times and temporal conjunctions 175 (12.2%) times. Meanwhile, the use of adversative conjunctions was the least frequent at 88 (6.1%) times. Besides, the study also indicated significant correlation between the use of conjunctions and the students' grade at 0.01 in which the value of p is ≤ 0.05 . The implication of this study, Tamil language teachers were able to identify the flaws in the usage of conjunction words, particularly in students' essays writing. Thus, teachers are made aware of the importance of conjunctions, especially in

terms of meaning usage and conjunction functions.

Keywords: Conjunctions, writing skill, Tamil Language, expository essay, secondary school.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is an essential component that improves writing quality. One of the biggest issues students face in academic writing is their understanding of how to use grammatical rules effectively in their writing (Sang et al., 2022). Heaton (1988) defines an essay as follows:

“The writing of composition is a task which involves the students manipulating words in grammatically correct sentences to form a piece of continuous writing which successfully communicates the writer’s thoughts and ideas on a certain topic.” (page:18)

In that regard, conjunctions are used to link sentences and create meaningful content, which is a form of grammatical cohesiveness in writing (Afrianto, 2017). Language learners ought to comprehend that conjunctions are essential elements of presenting a well-written work (Maulana et al., 2021). Conjunction are used to connect various types of sentences. Improper use of conjunctions in language learning can lead to poor sentence quality, affecting meaning, function, and coherence (Hasson, 2023).

Therefore, language teachers should inform students about key areas of writing to enhance sentence quality (Alnefaie, 2023). Shahid and Irfan (2021) stated that creating an understandable essay necessitates a fundamental understanding of punctuation and grammatical rules, particularly connectors. Students should understand the meaning and function of each conjunction. As stated by Rizki (2022), it is essential to expose students to many different kinds of examples of how to use various conjunctions to improve their ability to use them effectively in a given situation. Language teachers should provide specific guidance on conjunctions and reflect on students' mistakes.

According to Amayreh and Abdullah (2021), the use of conjunctions should be considered in all parts of an essay, including the introduction, the topic description, and the conclusion. As a consequence, using the appropriate words is vital for presenting a systematic description of the subject's content. The features of word use will impact on processing, sentence structure, abstraction, vocabulary, and language in general.

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Attention to this element is required in order to develop quality writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language acquisition involves various stages and skills, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Scholars contend that speaking and writing are the most difficult language skills to master. Additionally, writing skills is determined by several aspects, one of which is the proper use of conjunction (Mustafa, 2024). According to Khaled Salem and Ahmad Taufik Hidayah (2022), combining sentences is a technique that might enhance not just the fluency of syntax, but also the overall quality of the sentence. Combining sentences is another approach for diversifying the structure of writing by using a mix of simple and compound sentences with connecting words.

Othman (2019) stated that phrases can be combined with conjunctions to form connections between sentences. Written exercises aims to vary the sentence structure during the narrative writing process. Furthermore, the necessity of using conjunctions in the writing compositions increases performance in writing variety and conveys ideas more. Tieu & John (2023), Mohammad (2015), and Paramasivam (1998) agree with Othman (2019). To write a successful essay, students have to be able to combine sentences using proper and relevant conjunctions. This is because students must combine basic sentences to create a compound sentence (Abbas, 2020). He highlighted the ability to integrate sentences with conjunctions, which helps students create ideas when writing essays, but also helps students convey ideas more clearly and correctly.

According to Siti Ramlah Bakri (1997) and Mohd Nadzri (2006), Dwi Intan Yusti, Abdul Rosyid and Yanti Suryanti1 (2022), the synthesis of sentences in writing essays emphasizes the syllabus in terms of syntax. Based on the KBSR language manual for level one, students learn how to use simple connective words such as and, or, but, and while. Second-grade students were also taught how to use several types of conjunctions, such as conjunctions, such as 'and,' 'but,' 'or,' 'then,' 'which,' 'that,' 'for,' and 'if, which play a significant role in writing essays. In this context, conjunctions play an important role in combining phrases to phrases, clauses to clauses to create structured sentences, combining sentences to create paragraphs, and combining paragraphs to create high-quality narrative.

Ahmad Khair Mohd Nor (2006) argued that to combine a sentences, language users have to use multiple conjunctions. This helps them avoid overusing common conjunctions in their writing. As a result, he stated that knowing a variety of verbs can help the user vary the types of sentences used in writing. Khairudin Ismail (1997) also suggested that the correct and appropriate usage of connective words should be given more emphasis because the misuse of conjunctions causes the created sentences to become ungrammatical.

One of the problems that students commonly face is maintaining a continuity of ideas in their writing (Nathesan, 1995). This is because students do not utilize proper and effective grammar when writing an essay. Conjunctions are usually used to describe an idea within a sentence, as well as between sentences and paragraphs. There are various kinds of conjunctions used in writing. One of the most often used conjunctions is are 'on the other hand,' 'certainly,' 'additionally,' 'yet,' 'but,' 'next,' 'then,' 'that,' and so on. The most frequently used conjunction in writing essays include 'for example,' 'temporarily,' 'moreover,' 'nevertheless,' 'other than that,' 'yet,' 'so,' and 'additionally'. The efficiency and expertise with which such conjunctions are used allow a writer to connect their thoughts and ideas in an efficient, clear, and engaging manner, as well as convey information to readers more clearly (Qadeer & Chow, 2022).

Thus, this demonstrates that many of the scholars mentioned above believe that conjunctions play a significant part in the connection of sentences, creating high-quality writing essays. At the same time, given Tamil's development across various domains, the study of the use of conjunction in Tamil should be further explored.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In Malay language, mastering the writing skills is one of the important elements in the KSSM (Secondary School Standard Curriculum). According to Rohaida et al. (2020), the aim of the KSSM Malay language curriculum is to equip students with linguistic skills and the ability to communicate in order to meet their personal needs, acquire knowledge, skills, ideas, and build social relationships in daily life. However, writing is one of the skills that is difficult for students to master because it requires individuals to write grammatically correct words or sentences while adhering to grammatical rules (Rozana, 2020). Rohaida et al. (2020) further add that writing problems remain an unresolved issue to this day. They note that even now, there are still primary and secondary school students who are unable to write, and this situation needs to be addressed immediately, as difficulties in mastering writing skills can affect students' overall performance.

Khaled Salem Ahmad Amayreh and Ahmad Taufik Hidayah Abdullah (2022) stated that high school students are incapable of producing stable and effective writing. This problem arises not only among high school students but also among college students. According to them, there are two main causes of lack of consistency, namely weakness in linguistics and failure of students to combine sentences accurately. In Malay language writing for example, some candidates fail to get a good score on general exams. This is not because the candidates failed to submit the desired content, but simply because there may be a language error (Yaakub, Abd. Mutalib & Halim, 2021).

This situation is not just a problem in Malay language writing but also in the Tamil language writing. A study by Yaakub, Abd. Mutalib & Halim (2021) found that students frequently use conjunction incorrectly and do not differentiate them in essay writing. This indicates that students still have a low level of knowledge about the use of conjunction in writing. If a weak student combines sentences incorrectly, the content becomes difficult for the examiner to understand. Therefore, students need to be skilled in the technique of combining sentences by using the correct and appropriate syntax because it can produce a strong sentence in something written. To address this problem, the researcher is studying the use of

Tamil conjunctions in high school students' essays

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts Halliday and Hassan's (1976) concept of 'conjunction' as an operational definition since it is all-inclusive and categorically clear. Halliday and Hasan (1976) divide conjunctions into four categories: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. The four categories are described as follows:

First (i), the additive elements, for example 'and', 'additionally', 'for instance', and 'similarly' are used to connect discourse units with semantic similarity. The additives emphasize and highlight the essential idea or add significant additional information to the previously expressed terms. Second (ii), the adversative discourse conjunctions 'but', 'nonetheless', 'although', 'in fact', and 'instead' bring information that indicates corrections, contrasts, and opposites in light of prior information. Third (iii), information that is a result or consequence of the previous speech is introduced using causal devices like 'hence', 'therefore', 'because', 'as a result', and 'in this regard'. Finally (iv), the temporal devices for instance, 'first', 'at last', 'next', 'previously', and 'concurrently' are used to connect two discourse units through sequential, simultaneous, and preceding links. These four categories represent four semantic relationships among sentences in a text. Students must thus comprehend the role of conjunctions in the structure of written essays. Figure 1.1 below shows the types of conjunctions suggested by Halliday and Hasan (1976).

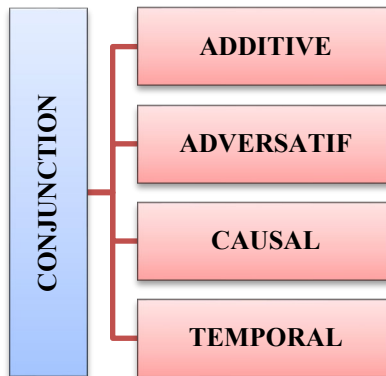


Figure 1.1 Type of conjunction adapted from the concept Halliday and Hasan (1976)

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to:

- i. Assess the students' level of knowledge of conjunctions in the Tamil language.
- ii. Identify the types of conjunctions words frequently used by students in their essays.
- iii. Identify the correlation between the use of conjunctions and the students' grades.

Research Questions

- i. What is the students' level of knowledge of conjunctions in Tamil?
- ii. What Tamil conjunctions are frequently used by students in their writing?
- iii. Evaluate the correlation between conjunction usage and student grades?

METHODS

i) Research Design

The researcher used quantitative methods to analyse the data. The quantitative method is used to assess the students' level of knowledge of conjunctions, the type of conjunctions frequently used in essay writing, and to identify the correlation between the use of conjunctions and the students' grade in essays.

ii) Location of the study

The researcher collected the data at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan in Kuala Kangsar, Perak. The school was selected because many students take Tamil subjects as electives. Tamil subjects are taught as part of the school timetable, which helps the researcher in selecting a sample for the study.

ii) Sample of the study

The study's target population was 56 form five students, 13 of whom were male and 43 of whom were female. All of these students were selected as a purposive sample because they had at least grade C scores on the monthly Tamil language test. This helps determine whether the sample is considered representative for this study.

The researcher determined the sample size by using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) calculation, which specified the size of a suitable sample relative to the population size. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination chart, for a population of 56, a suitable sample size is 48. Thus, the researchers randomly selected 48 samples from the study population to ensure equal opportunity to each subject.

iii) Data Collection

In this study, the researcher uses two instruments: an objective test and a writing essay test. This objective test assesses the level of knowledge of Tamil conjunctions among the sampled studies. It consists of 40 objective items based on the four types of conjunctions suggested by Halliday and Hasan (1976): additive, adversative, causal and temporal with ten items for each type. The time allocated for the test is one (1) hour. The objective items were selected and modified from the "*Tamil moli illakkanappayirci*

puttagam” (Velumani, Govindan, Sivakumar, Thamil Selvan, Kumaran, Kamal Nathan, et al. 2003). Two lecturers with expertise in the field of Tamil language checked the test items for content accuracy.

The second instrument used in the study is the writing essay test. This tool aims to determine the types of Tamil conjunctions frequently used by the sample and to identify the correlation between conjunction usage and student grades. The researcher selected an expository-style essay title, as it is a common question format on the Tamil paper for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) exam. The essay title was revised and validated by two lecturers from the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics at the Universiti Malaya. The time limit for this test is 1 hour and 15 minutes, and students are required to write an essay of at least 250 words. The total score for the test is originally 70%, but it has been transformed to 100% scale for ease of administration and evaluation.

iv) Data analysis

The researcher used a simple percentage calculation to determine the frequency with which conjunction words were used in an essay. Simple percentage calculations were also used as for objective test instruments to determine the level of knowledge of conjunction words in the sample study. Additionally, the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software to determine the relationship between conjunction usage and student grades. Below is the percentage calculation formula for the first and second research questions:

- i)
$$\frac{\text{Total of objective answers for each type of conjunction} \times 100}{\text{Total number of objective answers of conjunction}}$$
- ii)
$$\frac{\text{Number of each Tamil type of conjunction} \times 100}{\text{The total amount of type conjunction}}$$

FINDINGS

To present the findings, the results are organized according to the research questions: RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3.

Findings for Research Question (RQ) 1

RQ1 explored the following question: What is the students' level of knowledge of conjunction in Tamil? The findings of this study show the analysis of students' knowledge levels of additive, adversative, causal and temporal conjunction as stated by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The types of additive conjunction, adversative conjunction, causal conjunction, and temporal conjunction are presented in Table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 below:

Table 1.1 The students' level of knowledge of additive conjunction

Objective Question	The number of correct answers by samples	Percentage (%)	The number of incorrect answers by samples	Percentage (%)
1	45	93.8	3	6.2
2	47	98.0	1	2.0
3	39	81.3	9	18.7
4	29	60.4	19	39.6
5	40	83.3	8	16.7
6	20	41.7	28	58.3
7	45	93.8	3	6.2
8	24	50.0	24	50.0
9	40	83.3	8	16.7
10	30	62.5	18	37.5

The number and percentage of samples that answered objective questions about additive related word types correctly and incorrectly are shown in Table 1.1. A total of 47 samples, or 98.0% of the sample, were able to answer the second highest question correctly, which involved providing the correct link to the item. Meanwhile, the word *um* (and) was correctly answered by 45 respondents, or 93.8% of the sample. Only 20 samples, or 41.7%, were able to use the conjunction "*poola*" (same as) correctly for the sixth question.

Table 1.2 The students’ level of knowledge of adversative conjunction

Objective Question	The number of correct answers by samples	Percentage (%)	The number of incorrect answers by samples	Percentage (%)
11	38	79.2	10	20.8
12	43	89.6	5	10.4
13	28	58.3	20	41.7
14	30	62.5	18	37.5
15	27	56.3	21	43.7
16	47	98.0	1	2.0
17	37	77.1	11	22.9
18	42	87.5	6	12.5
19	44	91.7	4	8.3
20	46	95.8	2	4.2

The number and percentage of samples that correctly and incorrectly responded to objective questions about adversative conjunctions are displayed in Table 1.2. Of the samples, 47 (98.0%) correctly responded to the sixteen most difficult questions. 46 samples or (95.8%) correctly answered the twenty questions involving the term "*iruppinum*" (despite). Only 27 samples (56.3%) correctly responded to the 15 questions involving the word "*eppatiyaayinum*". However, 21 samples (43.7%) were unable to respond appropriately to question 15. this indicates that the study sample frequently provided inaccurate responses to question 15.

Table 1.3 The students’ level of knowledge of causal conjunction

Objective Question	The number of correct answers by samples	Percentage (%)	The number of incorrect answers by samples	Percentage (%)
21	30	62.5	18	37.5
22	46	95.8	2	4.2
23	45	93.8	3	6.2
24	27	56.3	21	43.7
25	25	52.1	23	47.9
26	43	89.6	5	10.4
27	45	93.8	3	6.2
28	44	91.7	4	8.3
29	47	98.0	1	2.0
30	38	79.2	10	20.8

The number and percentage of samples that correctly and incorrectly responded to objective questions pertaining to the causal conjunction are displayed in Table 1.3. Question 29, which asks about the conjunction word “*aatalaal*” (thus), was correctly answered by 47 samples (98.0%), with the exception of one sample (2.0%) that was unable to answer. 46 samples (95.8%) correctly answered the word “*aagaiyaal*” in response to question 22. Question 25 was correctly answered by 25 samples (52.1%) who identified the conjunction word “*itan poruttu*” (for this reason).

Table 1.4 The students’ level of knowledge of temporal conjunction

Objective Question	The number of correct answers by samples	Percentage (%)	The number of incorrect answers by samples	Percentage (%)
31	25	52.1	23	47.9
32	28	58.3	20	41.7
33	41	85.4	7	14.6
34	35	72.9	13	27.1
35	20	41.7	28	58.3
36	30	62.5	18	37.5
37	24	50.0	24	50.0
38	38	79.2	10	20.8
39	32	66.7	16	33.3
40	28	58.3	20	41.7

The quantity and percentage of samples that correctly and incorrectly responded to objective questions pertaining to the temporal conjunction are displayed in Table 1.4. Only seven samples (14.6%) were unable to correctly answer question 33, which involved the conjunction word “*taRpootu*” (currently/adult). Overall, 41 samples (85.4%) were able to answer this question correctly. Out of the sample, 24 (50.0%) correctly answered the conclusive word “*iRutiyaaga*” (final/final) in question 37. However, 24 samples (50.0%) were unable to provide the correct response.

Findings for Research Question (RQ) 2

RQ2 identifies the following question: What Tamil conjunctions are frequently used by students in their writing? The findings of this study show an analysis of the frequency of use of four types of conjunctions: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal, as stated by Halliday and Hasan (1976). These findings are presented in Table 1.5 below:

Table 1.5: Frequency of use four types connections

Type of conjunction	Frequency of use	Percentage (%)
Additive	855	59.8
Causal	312	21.8
Temporal	175	12.2
Adversative	88	6.1
Total	1430	100

Table 1.5 shows that a total of 1430 conjunction words were used in composing the essays. The additive conjunction type had the highest frequency, occurring 855 times (59.8%). The second most frequent used type was causal conjunctions, totalling 312 occurrences (21.8%). Temporal conjunction was used 175 times overall (12.2%), while adversative conjunctions had the lowest frequency, with only 88 instances (6.1%).

Findings for Research Question (RQ) 3

RQ3 identifies the following question: Is there a correlation between conjunction usage and student grades? The findings show that the correlation between conjunction usage and students’ grades in the sample writing was calculated using SPSS software.

Table 1.6: Correlation between the use of conjunction and student grades

		Conjunction
Student Achievement Grades	Correlation	
	<i>Pearson</i>	.540**
	Sig. (2-arah)	.000
	N	48
		Conjunction

** significant correlation at the 0.01 level

notes: $p < 0.05$

Based on Table 1.6 above, the Pearson test indicated a significant correlation between the use of conjunction words and the students’ grades at a significant level of 0.01, where the p-value was <0.05 .

This study analysed the use of Tamil conjunctions in writing. In this regard, this study holds significant implications for various stakeholders involved, both directly and indirectly, in the Tamil language field. The study's conclusions are essential for understanding the research objective and its significance. Overall, the study sample was found to have answered all the questions on conjunction types in Tamil. However, the findings indicate that many of the samples were able to satisfactorily answer questions related to additive, adversative, and causal conjunctions. On the other hand, many samples answered questions on temporal conjunctions at a less satisfactory level.

In general, the study found that the use of additive conjunctions in essay writing recorded the highest frequency, with 855 occurrences, compared to other conjunction types. This was followed by causal conjunctions with 312 occurrences and temporal conjunctions with 176 occurrences. Conversely, adversative conjunctions recorded the lowest frequency. These findings are consistent with the study by Khaled Salem Ahmad Amayreh and Ahmad Taufik Hidayah Abdullah (2022), but differ slightly from Mustafa's (2024) study, which reported that temporal and additive conjunctions were the most frequently used in essay writing.

The findings also show a significant correlation between the use of conjunctions and students' essay grades at a significance level of 0.01, with a p-value < 0.05. This proves that the more conjunctions are used in essay writing, the higher the grades achieved by the students. This is consistent with the study by Kumaran (2006), which also found a correlation between the use of conjunctions and essay grades, with a correlation value of 0.846 at a significance level of less than 0.01. He concluded that an increase in the use of conjunctions in essay writing is closely related to higher achievement among students.

The study helps Tamil language teachers identify issues with conjunction usage, particularly in students' essay composing, which are crucial in the teaching and learning process. Armed with this knowledge, teachers can employ a range of strategies, tactics, and methods to improve their students' ability to use and write conjunction in Tamil language classes. Consequently, it becomes the responsibility of Tamil language

instructors to integrate conjunctions into their teaching across different topics to ensure students comprehension.

Additionally, the study underscores the importance for Tamil language teachers to teach their students the significance of using conjunctions to enhance the quality of their writing. It also assists Tamil language teachers in recognizing the specific of challenges students face when employing conjunctions to connect sentences. Thus, Tamil language teachers should concentrate on providing students with written examples illustrating common errors tin conjunctions usage across different contexts to strengthen their understanding of grammatical structure, meaning, and function of combining sentences with conjunctions.

The findings prompted school administration to organize classes and workshops aimed at educating both teachers and students on effectively employing different types of conjunctions in essay writing. These courses and workshops provide teachers with valuable strategies for teaching writing skills and support them in assisting students in producing high-quality written work.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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