A comparative study of discourse connectors used in argumentative compositions produced by Thai EFL learners and English-native speakers

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of discourse connectors (DCs) in argumentative compositions of Thai undergraduates and English-native speakers. Out of 44 compositions, 24 were collected from third-year English major students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Thaksin University, Songkhla Campus whereas 20 compositions of English-native students at University of Michigan were retrieved from the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS). Following the taxonomy adopted from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Biber et al. (1999), and Cowan (2008), a list of 140 DCs were classified into 8 semantic categories. Findings revealed that both groups of students shared similar characteristics with regard to the types of DCs used in their essays, but with different degree of occurrence. Among a wide range of DCs, and, but, because, for example and also were mostly found in the compositions of the two groups. In terms of syntactic distribution, the Thai learners had a tendency to employ the top five DCs inter-clausally as coordinators followed respectively by conjunctive adverbials and subordinators while the native speakers used them mostly as conjunctive adverbials in sentence-initial, medial and final positions, followed by coordinators and subordinators. Although both groups used these DCs in similar functions, preliminary findings suggest that the Thai learners apparently had difficulties with such DCs as but, part of which can be attributed to the influence of the native language.

Keywords: Discourse connectors (DCs); Corpus-based study; Argumentative compositions
Background

Writing has been proven to be the most difficult language skill even for native speakers (Norrish, 1983). Apparently, it is more difficult than speaking since in written communication there is no additional means of help in terms of nonverbal cues (e.g. facial expression, gesture) to ensure that the message is accurately understood. Hence, it is very important for novice writers to write in a way that makes the message clear, succinct, and easily interpretable for the readers.

A written academic text in particular requires more than just the ability of the writers to construct sentences accurately in the standard language, but also an ability to use cohesive devices to create cohesion and coherence of a text. These cohesive devices have been referred to in the literature by such terms as cohesive elements (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), logical connectors (Quirk et al., 1985), linking adverbials (Biber et al., 1999), conjunctive adverbials (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), connectives (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002), and discourse connectors (Cowan, 2008). The term discourse connectors (DCs henceforth) is used in this study. The primary function of DCs is to explicitly signal the connections between passages of text and to state the writer’s perception of the relationship between two units of discourse (Biber et al., 1999).

Showing different understandings of DCs in terms of its content, connective, and pragmatic meaning, Blakemore (1987) developed the idea of procedural meaning and used the following examples to illustrate this idea:

(1) John can open Bill’s safe. He knows the combination.

(2) a. John can open Bill’s safe. After all, he knows the combination.

   b. John can open Bill’s safe. He knows the combination, then.

As in example (1), the listener/reader may not be able to immediately interpret the message the speaker intends to convey in the second clause. In (2a), after all ensures that the clause it introduces is interpreted as a premise; then in (2b) marks the preceding clause as a conclusion. Not contributing to truth-conditional content, the role of DCs is to reduce the listener’s processing effort by limiting the range of interpretive hypotheses he has to consider; thus, they contribute to an increase of the efficiency of communication.
It, therefore, seems reasonable to suppose that inappropriate use of DCs in a second language (L2) could, to a certain degree, hinder successful communication, leading to a misunderstanding between message sender and receiver. Hence, as part of communicative competence, L2 learners must acquire the appropriate use of DCs of their target language (TL). It is plausible to suppose that L2 learners who are competent in the use of DCs of the target language will be more successful in both verbal and non-verbal interaction than those who are not (Warsi, 2000). For these reasons, the study of the use of DCs in an L2 merits attention.

Research questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What DCs are most frequently used by Thai EFL learners and English native speakers? And how are the DCs used by the two groups?
2. Do the learners differ from the native speakers in their use of DCs? If so, how?
3. What problems do Thai learners have when using DCs in their writing?

Technical terms

1. **Discourse connectors** are words and phrases that typically connect information in one clause to that in a previous clause and also broadly defined as linguistic clues which signal a relationship between prior and subsequent segments in order to facilitate the text interpretation. Discourse connectors here can be coordinators, subordinators, and conjunctive adverbials that connect clauses or larger units together (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983; Fraser, 1999; Cowan, 2008).
2. **Coordinators** are those DCs used to combine two independent clauses together, usually accompanied with a comma, as in *They got into the car, and they began to argue.*
3. **Subordinators** are DCs used to connect a main clause with a dependent clause, as in *When he handed in his homework, he forgot to give the teacher the last page.*
4. **Conjunctive adverbials** are the DCs used to modify an independent clause or a verb phrase. They may be found sentence-initially, medially, or finally as in the
following examples. *However, I do believe they are legible. I do, however, believe they are legible, however.*

5. **The argumentative essay** is a genre of writing that requires the writers not to just give information but to establish a position on the topic and present an argument with the PROS (supporting ideas) and CONS (opposing ideas) or comparison and contrast of an argumentative issue (Lai, 2008).

**Framework of the study**

1. This comparative study reports on the use of eight categories of discourse connectors used in argumentative compositions of Thai EFL learners who were third-year English major students at Thaksin University, Songkhla, and argumentative compositions of English-native speakers from Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS).

2. This investigation will provide insights into similarities and differences in the use of DCs by native and non-native speakers of English.

3. The investigation of the use of discourse connectors was carried out under the taxonomy of discourse connectors adapted from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Biber et al. (1999), and Cowan (2008). The classification and functions of DCs examined in this study are described in the data analysis section.

**Research methodology**

**Research participants and data collection procedure**

In this study, 44 argumentative compositions were collected for data analysis by means of the following ways:

1. *Thai EFL learners’ compositions*

   The participants were 24 randomly chosen third-year undergraduates majoring in English at Thaksin University, Songkhla Campus. In the student setup, there were 20 females and 4 males at the age of 20-21. The reason for the purposive selection of the participants at the educational level was that the third-year students had previously taken several English courses such as Advanced Translation, Basic Writing, Business English Writing and
**Academic Writing.** Therefore, they were expected to have been exposed to formal writing instruction in class and to have attained a level of proficiency high enough to produce extensive and meaningful compositions for the analysis of their use of cohesive devices.

Within two hours, each Thai EFL learner wrote a 500–1000-word composition to argue for or against one of these four statements:

- **Computer games should be forbidden in universities;**
- **Sex and violence should be banned from the media;**
- **Love in schools is not suitable;**
- **Nowadays women and men are treated equal.**

The argumentative genre was chosen because it had been shown in the literature that the discourse connectors are likely to be embedded more prominently in an argumentative genre rather than in a narrative essay (see, e.g., Granger & Tyson, 1996). Four topics under the argumentative genre were provided out of concern that the students might lack ideas about or familiarity with a single topic. The topics selected for this study were adapted from related studies found in previous literature. They were assured to be most familiar to Thai students at this age and controversial enough in Thai contexts to elicit substantial argumentative essays.

For reasons of data originality and significance, the use of dictionaries, course textbooks or any grammar book was not permitted in class in accordance with all the same criteria of NSs’ writing.

A questionnaire was designed to probe into demographic data of the students. It contained personal information and English language background. The questionnaire was administrated subsequent to the writing task.

2. **English-native speakers’ compositions**

Argumentative essays of English-native speakers were collected from the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS), which distributes a learner language corpus free of charge as a service to the growing community of linguists who carry out corpus-based research in learner language.

20 English essays retrieved from LOCNESS were written by native speakers of the age of 19-23 from the University of Michigan. The genre required was argumentative writing on the topic of “Great inventions and discoveries of 20th century (computer, television, etc.) and their impact on people’s lives.” Altogether, there were 43 argumentative essays in the
corpora coded ICLE-US-MICH-0001.1-45.1, but 20 essays were randomly selected for analysis in this study.

Table 1: Corpus size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NNSW</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of texts</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>7,887</td>
<td>8,350</td>
<td>16,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of text</td>
<td>328.6</td>
<td>417.5</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: NNSW=Non-native speakers’ writing; NSW=Native speakers’ writing

As shown in Table 1, although the number of compositions elicited from the two groups is different (24 from NNSs and 20 from NSs), it assured that the total number of words and the average length of the compositions produced are similar.

Data analysis

The data obtained were examined in the following aspects:
(a) the DCs frequently used in students’ and native speakers’ writings
(b) the use of DCs by the Thai learners and native speakers
(c) the similarity and differences in the use of DCs between Thai learners and native speakers
(d) the problems the Thai learners have in the use of DCs.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the two comparable data sets of compositions involved the following steps. Each composition was computerized and examined sentence by sentence following the taxonomy of discourse connectors adapted from Halliday and Hasan (1976), Biber et al (1999), and Cowan (2008). 140 discourse connectors identified were classified into 8 semantic categories. To be marked as discourse connectors, the expressions must be contained in the list of semantic classification and functions of DCs stated below.

1. Addition: adding information to what comes before and showing information as parallel to preceding information
   additionally, alternatively, also, and, and also, besides, by the same token, further, furthermore, in addition, in the same way, likewise, moreover, neither, nor, not…either, on top of that, or, or else, similarly, too, what’s more
(2) Enumeration and ordering: signaling the order of main points that speakers or writers want to make and indicate a sequence of steps in a process

As a final point, at this point, finally, first, firstly, first of all, for a start, for another thing, for one thing, from now on, henceforward, here, hitherto, in the first place, in the second place, last, lastly, last of all, next, second, secondly, then, third, thirdly, to begin with, up to now

(3) Exemplification and restatement: signaling information in form of examples or expansion or explanation of what preceded

For example, for instance, in a word, in other words, namely, more precisely, that is, that is to say, to put it another way, what is to say

(4) Concession and contrast: introducing information that is somewhat surprising or unexpected in light of previous information; linking information that is viewed as straight contrast that does not involve surprise

Although, and (contrastive), anyhow, but (as against), but (in spite of), by comparison, by contrast, by way of contrast, conversely, despite this, even though, however (as against), however (in spite of), in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, rather, still, though, whereas, while, yet

(5) Cause and result: introducing information that is a result or consequence of preceding information

Accordingly, arising out of, as a consequence, as a result, aside from this, because, consequently, due to, for, for this purpose, for this reason, hence, in consequence, in that case, in this respect, in such an event, on account of, on this basis, or (=otherwise), otherwise, so, then, therefore, thus, under the circumstances, with regard to, with this in mind, with this intention

(6) Summation: showing that a unit of discourse is intended to conclude or sum up the information in the preceding discourse.

All in all, anyway, briefly, in conclusion, in short, in sum, in summary, overall, to conclude with, to get back to the point, to resume, to summarize, to sum up

(7) Stance: expressing the writer’s attitude regarding the truth of preceding content and introducing content in support of cognitive stance

Actually, as a matter of fact, as it happens, at any rate, at least, in actual fact, in any case, indeed, in either case, in fact, in reality, to tell the truth
(8) Topic shift: marking a sudden transition from one topic to another, which is often peripherally related to the topic described in the preceding sentences

*Incidentally, by the by, by the way*

After the computation and classification of DCs, the top three DCs which were most frequently used by the two groups were described and discussed as to how the two groups used these DCs in terms of their syntactic distributions, semantic functions, and discourse organization.

**Findings and discussion**

**Overall frequency**

Table 2 presents the total number of words and the total number of DC tokens in NNSW and NSW. The frequency of DCs based on 1,000 words is given to facilitate a comparison of overall figures for DCs in the two corpora.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Overall frequency of DCs in NNSW and NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NNSW</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of words</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of DC tokens</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DC tokens per 1000 words</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DC types</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from Table 2 reveal that out of the total number of 16,237 words, 552 DCs can be identified. In every 1,000 words of essays, there are approximately 34 DCs used by the two groups. The native speakers use fewer DCs in their essays (27 per 1,000 words) than the non-native speakers (41 per 1,000 words). This is partly due to the fact that some of the DCs such as *and* and *but* were superfluously used by the Thai learners. In terms of the types of DCs used, native speakers and non-native speakers use 53 and 51 types of DCs, respectively. Out of 104 types of DCs, there are 35 that are commonly shared by the two groups. This indicates that the two groups have a few dispositions in common with regard to the use of DCs.

**Frequency of individual DCs**
The top six DCs most frequently used by Thai EFL learners and English native speakers are shown in Table 3. And, but, because, and for example were used in the same degree. In other words, both Thai learners and English native speakers tend to use these four DCs in their writing.

Table 3: Top six DCs in NNSW and NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCs (NNSs)</th>
<th>Token</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
<th>DCs (NSs)</th>
<th>Token</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>because</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17.26</td>
<td>17.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11.66</td>
<td>23.62</td>
<td>also</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>28.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10.74</td>
<td>34.36</td>
<td>but</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.62</td>
<td>38.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for example</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>43.26</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>46.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>47.25</td>
<td>for example</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>50.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>51.24</td>
<td>however</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>54.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% = ratio of frequency counts of an individual DC to the overall frequency of the DCs examined

Table 4: Top five DCs used by NNSs and NSs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>DCs</th>
<th>Token</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>13.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>but</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>for example</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>also</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3 and 4, some DCs are evidently employed more often than others. The DCs used in the highest frequency by the two groups are and (74 tokens or 13.41%), but (62 tokens or 11.21%), and because (55 tokens or 9.96%). Among 51 types of DCs identified in NNSW, the cumulative percentage of the first six most frequently used DCs reaches up to 51.24%, which is over half of the overall frequency. Likewise, in NSW the first six of 53 DCs occupy 54.87%, over half of the overall frequency. This implies that the Thai learners, similar to the native speakers, employed a rather small cluster of DCs in their writing.
Syntactic distribution

In terms of syntactic distribution, the Thai learners tended to employ most of the DCs as coordinators, combining two independent clauses, followed respectively by conjunctive adverbials and subordinators. In contrast, the native speakers used the top five DCs mostly as conjunctive adverbials, in sentence-initial, medial and final positions, closely followed by coordinators. But they hardly used DCs as subordinators as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic distribution</th>
<th>NNSW</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>46.36</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinators</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25.83</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conj. Adverbials</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>27.81</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% = ratio of frequency counts of an individual DC to the overall frequency of the top five DCs used by the two groups

It could be observed that for some DCs such as and and but, which can be used both as a coordinator and as a conjunctive adverbial, the Thai learners mostly use them inter-clausally as coordinators, leading to the relatively high number of occurrences (n=70). Apparently, the learners are more familiar with the interclausal rather than the intra-clausal use of DCs, associating them with clause-linking rather than intra-clausal devices.

Comparison of the use of DCs by Thai EFL learners and English native speakers

Based on the frequency of individual DCs employed by the Thai learners and native speakers, and, but, and because were the top three DCs most frequently used by the two groups. Thereby, and, but, and because were accordingly chosen to be compared and discussed in terms of use.

And
The Thai learners used *and* as a conjunctive adverbial much less than the native speakers as shown in Table 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic distribution</th>
<th>NNSW</th>
<th>NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>91.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conj. Adverbials</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Functionally, as stated in Ying (2009), *and* has *additive, adversative, causal and temporal* senses depending upon context. In this study, it is found that the Thai EFL learners used *and* in the senses of additive, causal and temporal in form of a coordinator and conjunctive adverbial, as shown in the following excerpts:

[04: NNS]  “I think love in school is a good moment *and* I believe that everyone used to in love and passed it.” (additive)

[19: NNS]  “Second, when they have the test, they can help each other to read the books and tutor each other, *and* it can make their grades up.” (causal)

[13: NNS]  “When I grew up, I go to school. I met people who is the boy. I fell in love *and* I love him so much.” (temporal)

[06: NNS]  “*And* the last reason that love in school is not suitable is student will waste a lot of money. If you have your lover, you will want to give good things for your lover.” (temporal)

In addition, the Thai learners used *and* in substitution of *so* to express causal relations between prior and following segments as exemplarily shown in the excerpts below.
“In the past, there are many things that women and men were treated unequally. They believe the man is the creator and (so) women must follow the men.”

“Perhaps, you will get money from your hobby. A student life is very wonderful, and (so) you should enjoy yourself for being the student life.”

However, NSs used the connector and both in forms of a coordinator and a conjunctive adverbial to express all the four senses mentioned above.

“Many larger factories and office building still remain downtown. And, the executives and business people rely on commuting to and from the city daily without taking advantage of what was once, a thriving neighborhood, and still could be!” (additive)

“While the rich got richer, they began building specialized shops and strip malls outside of the city limits. And, the more wealthy moved from the inner city (with help from the invention of the automobile) to the suburbs where they could keep a distance from the busy inner city.” (temporal)

“In America the military has been reduced by several thousand troops, and the production of nuclear warheads has virtually arrived a standstill.” (adversative)

“Finally, I asked him to put my sandwich in a zip-lock bag, and I never had a smelly locker again.” (causal)

But
The Thai learners did not use *but* as a conjunctive adverbial at all in their writing while the native speakers used *but* both in form of a coordinator and a conjunctive adverbial with similar degree of frequency as illustrated in Table 7:

Table 7: The use of *but* as a coordinator and conjunctive adverbial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic distribution</th>
<th>NNSW</th>
<th>NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinators</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conj. Adverbials</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One point worth noting here is the Thai EFL learners’ preference for frequently using *and* and *but* as coordinators. It is arguably due to the fact that the Thai learners often have more exposure to learning the two DCs as coordinators rather than as adverbials in Thai classroom contexts. In form of a coordinator, *but* was used by the Thai EFL learners to function as a connector marking contrastive facts and stances, concession, opposition to expectation, as well as addition.

[17: NNS] “*The men a king or leader but the women were slaves and suffered.*” (contrastive facts)

[02: NNS] “*So, I think love in school isn’t good if among teenager use unsuitable, but I think love is good if they have graduated from University.*” (contrastive stances)

[03: NNS] “*Love is beautiful and important thing for everyone, but sometimes it gives disadvantages to them too.*” (concession)

[24: NNS] “*You found that love often happen in school between boys and girls, but is not suitable.*” (opposition to expectation)

[04: NNS] “*In my opinion, I think love is a beautiful thing, in fact, it doesn’t make student to perform badly on a academic tasks but sometime it might make you study better.*” (addition)
Syntactically, it is noticeable that but was often used redundantly by the learners in concurrence with other connectors such as although and even though. This can partly be attributed to the influence of their native language, which permits such constructions as although...but. This ungrammatical feature of use was, however, not found in the native speakers’ writing. The following example illustrates but used along with although in the Thai learners’ writing to mark a contrastive stance.

[04: NNS]  Although people think love in school is not suitable but for me I think love is not suitable or unsuitable as a result we behave ourselves.

[04: NNS]  “Even though your end of love is happy or unhappy, but one thing you receive from it, is experience.”

Because

Compared to other DCs, because was most frequently found in Thai EFL learners’ writing, closely followed by but and and. Similar to native speakers, because was repeatedly used by the learners as a subordinator to mark a cause-effect and a reason in order to support a main idea and details in their writing. However, both the Thai learners and the native speakers tended to use because to mark a reason more than a cause-effect, as illustrated in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>NNS</th>
<th>NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause-effect</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that both Thai learners and native speakers tended to use because to state reasons more than causes; this is presumably because of the same genre of argumentative writing obliging the writers to give reasons for their arguments.
The two examples extracted from the Thai learners’ writing show how *because* was used as a linking device to express the learners’ opinions or personal reasons in support of the preceding main clause.

[07: NNS]  ‘You will make your parents and your family feel very sad and disappointed with you. Then your future is worse *because* you do not finish your education.’ (cause-effect)

[24: NNS]  ‘Love is wanted by everybody *because* it makes they happy.’ (reason)

**Conclusion**

Thai EFL learners have certain characteristics in common with English native speakers; namely, types and functional distributions of the DCs most frequently used. The Thai learners and the native speakers tend to use DCs *and, but,* and *because* in their writing. Surprisingly, the native speakers use fewer DCs in their essays than the non-native speakers. This is partially due to the superfluous use of coordinators by the Thai learners. The two groups have a few dispositions in common with regard to the use of DCs because they shared only 35 types of DCs out of 104. The over half cumulative percentage of top six frequently-used DCs indicates that both the learners and the native speakers rely on a narrow range of connectors to create coherence of their texts.

When comparing the use of *and,* *but,* and *because* by the Thai learners and the native speakers, the two groups used *and* to perform additive, causal and temporal functions, but the adversative function was only found in the native speakers’. Moreover, *and* was often used by the Thai learners to substitute *so* to mark causal relations of segments. The DC *but* was used by the two groups to function as a connector marking contrastive facts and stances, concession, opposition to expectation, as well as addition. Ungrammatically in the learners’ writing, *but* was used in concurrence with *although* and *even though,* a phenomenon which never appears in the native speakers’. In addition, *because* was used as a linking device to transfer the learners’ opinions to support the preceding independent clause and to argue for the main idea stated in the clause.
Differently, in terms of syntactic distribution, the Thai learners employed a large number of DCs as coordinators while the native speakers used them mostly as conjunctive adverbials. One point worth noting here is that although some DCs can be both a coordinator and as a conjunctive adverbial, the Thai learners mostly used them inter-clausally as coordinators. This apparently indicates that Thai EFL learners are much more familiar with the typical use of DCs, associating them with clause-linking devices, and need be made more aware of using DCs intra-clausally linking states of affairs.

Implications for classroom use

To increase the efficacy of the use of DCs in Thai EFL learners’ writing, the following points should be of more concern especially to language teachers:

1. It should be made clear to the students that DCs have syntactic distribution as a coordinator, a subordinator, and a conjunctive adverbial to avoid superfluous use of coordinators.

2. The intra-clausal use of DCs should be introduced to the students to create cohesion and coherence of texts.

3. Focus should be placed on helping students to master the primary functions of frequently-used DCs like the additive function of and, the contrastive function of but, and so forth.

4. Moreover, not only to use DCs correctly, the teachers should also encourage their students to use a wider range of the cohesive devices available.

References


