

Investigating the Use of Paratactic and Hypotactic Conjunctions among Iranian Pre-university Students

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Abstract

In an attempt to dispel the persisting fallacy that an individual's grammar knowledge is indicative of the way they put this knowledge into practice, this study seeks to highlight the inconsistency which resides between one's competence and performance in the domain of conjunctions. It aims to shed light on the discrepancy which lies between the knowledge and production of conjunctions. The research context was an Iranian high school in Tabriz and the participants included 40 pre-university students whose knowledge of conjunctions was checked once by analyzing the results of a grammar test of conjunctions and once more through the administration of a sentence-combining test of conjunctions. Eventually, the obtained results were juxtaposed for consistency comparison, the ultimate outcome of which suggest that an individual's demonstrable knowledge of conjunctions in a grammar test cannot be necessarily generalized to the proportional use of them; hence, a set of correct responses given to the questions of a grammar test of conjunctions is not necessarily a valid indicator of their actual use or production. Overall, it is concluded that the participants tend to choose paratactic extending conjunctions over hypotactic ones and hypotactic enhancing conjunctions over paratactic ones despite their adequate knowledge of both.

Keywords: paratactic conjunctions, hypotactic conjunctions, competence, performance

Introduction

“Competence in linguistic theory, especially in generative grammar, refers to the knowledge of language or the system of rules mastered to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences and recognize grammatical mistakes and ambiguities. It is said to be an idealized conception of language, which is seen in opposition to the notion of performance which refers to the specific utterances of speech.” (Kadhim & Taha, 2008). Chomsky (1965) makes a distinction between competence and performance by referring to 'competence' as an idealized capacity that is located as a psychological or mental property and 'performance' as the production of actual utterances. Furthermore he states that “competence involves “knowing” the language and performance involves “doing” something with the language.” What lies at the heart of the problem in Iranian high schools is the fact that language instruction programs place the emphasis more upon the “knowing” part of learning a language wherein words and sentences are presented and practiced to best help learners internalize the forms. For instance, knowing the importance of grammar, many learners practice language forms out of context to do well on language tests, and as a result, many of them gain a segmented partial knowledge of decontextualized language structures. Doubtless, this inevitably leads to the assumption that once the learners possess mastery of the forms they will be able to use them accurately through reading, writing, listening and speaking. Nevertheless, the major drawback of this approach is that this knowledge is not functional. That is, learners run into a multitude of problems and can hardly put their knowledge into practice and actually do something with the language by the fact that the emphasis has been mostly laid on learning the language through knowing. In a nutshell, accurate assessment of whether the learners' imperfect proficiency has its roots in the limitations of competence or the breakdown of performance will be beyond the realms of possibility. It is noteworthy that performance may accurately reflect competence; though, according to Chomsky (1965), memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention, interests and errors lie among factors which may distort actual performance. In other words, perfect competence is not necessarily indicative of flawless or proportional performance. Chomsky (1965) argues that only under an idealized situation whereby the speaker-hearer is unaffected by grammatically irrelevant

conditions will performance be a direct reflection of competence. Furthermore, despite the thorough knowledge of; for example, grammatical forms one has mastered, the ultimate productions are often put in more simple grammatical constructions. That is, performance can be disproportionately reflective of actual competence. This provides a ripe field for debate and discussion within the domain of conjunctions on which this study tends to home in. Studied under numerous labels such as linkers, coordinators, discourse markers, pragmatic markers, discourse connectors, and many others, conjunctions have received considerable attention in linguistics and that they play a prominent role in discourse is an undisputable fact as they are used as coordination to conjoin “different grammatical units: clauses, clause elements, words” (Leech & Svartvik, 1994:264), (see also Greenbaum & Quirk, 1993:265; Carston, 1994:692). There are two types of meaning residing in any conjunction: experiential meaning and logical meaning. From the logical point of view, they appear in either a local context or a global context; and from the experiential viewpoint, they establish three semantic relationships; that is, elaboration, extension and enhancement, between clauses (complexes). (Asadi & Pandian, 2011).

Local conjunctions are concerned with the relationships within the clause and between clauses. These conjunctions are encoded by prepositional phrases within the clause and by coordinators or subordinators between clauses. The relationships between clauses are set by two different types of conjunctions: paratactic and hypotactic which are the focal center of attention in this study. Global conjunctions go beyond the scope of the structure of the clause to include the relationships between clause complexes and paragraphs across the text. They typically appear at the beginning of a sentence or a paragraph and presuppose the presence of another semantic element in the preceding text.

Example 1: He could hardly keep his eyes open. However, didn't stop working.

As said earlier, both local and global conjunctions convey three semantic relationships; namely, elaboration, extension, enhancement. Elaboration involves restatement, exemplification or clarification; extension includes addition, adversative and variation; and enhancement involves time, place, manner, cause, condition and matter. In short, the conjunctive relations revolve around four categories: additive, adversative, spatio-temporal and causal-conditional. (Asadi & Pandian, 2011).

This study mainly concentrates on the relationships between clauses set by paratactic and hypotactic conjunctions. According to Asadi and Pandian (2011), paratactic conjunctions give rise to the interdependency relationships between two independent clauses of equal status. For example:

Example 2: Ten years have worn on since her son's death, but she hasn't come to terms with the fact yet.

Linked by means of the conjunction 'but', the two equal clauses in the clause complex are joined paratactically and the events in the clauses joined paratactically are arranged sequentially, so any change in the order will affect the chronological occurrence of the events.

Hypotactic conjunctions, on the contrary, give rise to the dependency relationships between two clauses of unequal status. That is to say, a conjunction-bearing clause called dependent clause (β) rests on another clause called dominant clause (α). Unlike the paratactic sequencing, the hypotactically-related clauses can appear as either ' α plus β ' or ' β plus α ' (Asadi & Pandian, 2011). In English, the former is unmarked (as in Example 3), and the latter is used only when there is an acceptable reason (as in Example 4).

Example 3: Alice decided to resign because she was tired of office work. (α plus β)

Example 4: Before I go, I'd like to visit the museum. (β plus α)

Paratactic and hypotactic conjunctions can also be viewed from another angle which concentrates on semantic rather than logical relationship in which the secondary clause in the every clause complex has an elaborating, extending or enhancing relation to the primary clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Paratactic elaborating clauses are preceded by restating expressions such as *in other words*, *that is to say*, *or (rather)*, *I mean (to say)* and by exemplifying expressions such as *for example*, *for instance*, *in particular* or by clarifying expressions like *in fact*, *actually*, *indeed*, *at least*. Hypotactic elaborating clauses are the same as non-defining relative clauses in traditional grammar giving extra but unnecessary information about some part of the primary clause or the whole part of the primary clause and appear within commas or dashes.

In paratactic extending clauses, the second clause extends the primary one by means of such coordinators as *(both...)* *and*, *not only...but also*, etc.

Hypotactic extending clauses can be expressed by: i) *while, whereas, except, that, if not... then* ii) a non-finite clause beginning with expressions like *as well as, except for, apart from* iii) by a non-finite clause which carries the meaning of addition. For example:

Example 5: She burst out of the room in floods of tears, slamming the door shut behind her.

Paratactic enhancing clauses add a circumstantial flavor to the primary clause. This is done through the coordinating clauses beginning with *now* (time: point), *then* (time: subsequent), *so* and *for* (cause: reason), *thus* (cause: result/cause: condition), *otherwise* and *though* (cause: adverbial clauses in traditional grammar, which provide the dominant clause with such background information as time, place, cause, manner and so forth.

So far, in the realm of ELT, a significant number of studies have been devoted to highlight the prominence of conjunctions. Generally, they have been under detailed examination in reading, writing and discourse studies under such labels as conjuncts, connectives, conjunctives, logical connectors, discourse markers, textual metadiscourse, and so forth (Fraser, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Martin, 1992; Quirk et al., 1985; Nippold et al., 1992; Vande Kopple, 1997; Asadi 2011). For example, previous studies carried out to explore the efficacy of conjunctions have demonstrated a close interrelationship between the knowledge of conjunctions and reading comprehension (Cain, 2003; Geva, 1992; Robertson, 1968). Moreover, several comparative studies of the use of conjunctions by different EFL learners have been carried out to explore the type of conjunctions used in spoken and written discourse. For instance, according to Carrie Leung (2005), who compared the use of three major conjunctions “and”, “or” and “but” by Chinese (Hong Kong) and American university students, nonnative speakers use fewer conjunctions and demonstrate less varieties of usage than native speakers. However, the prime reason behind running this study was to check the extent to which Iranian pre-university students are capable of putting their knowledge of conjunctions into practice and also to identify the type of conjunctions Iranian pre-university students tend to use more.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study included 40 male pre-university students aged 17 to 18. Their native languages were Persian and Azeri Turkish. The sample was selected out of a pool of 60 Iranian pre-university students studying in three separate classes of Meshkat high school in Tabriz. Out of 60 applicants who took a placement test, 40 participants were chosen for the study based on their placement test scores.

Instrumentation

The instrument initially utilized was a placement test taken one week prior to the commencement of the study with the aim of ensuring the homogeneity of the participants. The placement test was a multiple-choice test of English embracing 100 items all extracted from entrance examinations for Iranian universities.

The second set of instruments included two different tests both aimed to test the participants' knowledge of conjunctions. The first one was a multiple-choice grammar test of conjunctions comprising 50 items all of which were taken from English tests of entrance examinations for Iranian universities. The latter included 30 sentence-combining exercises extracted from *Intermediate Grammar In Use*, to complete which the participants were provided with a set of conjunctions preceding the exercises included in the test.

Procedure

The study commenced a week after the selection of 40 homogenous participants, with the administration of the first test which was a multiple-choice test of grammar intended to test the participants' knowledge of conjunctions. The test included 50 items to whose completion 30 minutes of class time was allocated. The second phase of the study, which was carried out two weeks after the administration of the first test, embodied 30 sentence-combining exercises which took a whole session's class time and required the participants to choose from a range of both paratactic and hypotactic conjunctions preceding the exercises to join the clauses. What the

two tests employed in this study had in common was the symmetry between the items included in both tests. In other words, since this study attempted to check the extent to which the conjunctions chosen in the multiple-choice test match those used to join the clauses in the sentence-combining test, each item included in the multiple-choice test had a counterpart in the sentence-combining test in order to place in the hands of the researcher the opportunity to investigate the consistency between the knowledge of conjunctions and their use.

Results

The data obtained from the placement test were analyzed by means of the statistical package for social sciences version 16 (SPSS, 16). A one-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the pretest scores of the participants in the placement test taken to ensure the homogeneity of the participants in the study the results of which are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for the results of the proficiency test

	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Scores	40	57.65	7.678	1.214

Note: SD= Standard Deviation, SEM= Standard Error Mean

Table 2
One-Sample Test for the results of the placement test
Test Value = 0

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Scores	47.49	39	.000	57.65	55.19	60.11

Note: MD= Mean difference, CI= Confidence Interval, LL=Lower Limit, UP= Upper Limit

As indicated in Table 1 and Table 2, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the participants ($M = 57.65$, $SD=7.67$); $t(39)=47.49$, $p=.000$. This guaranteed the equivalence of the participants in the study.

Table 3 shows the total number of paratactic and hypotactic conjunctions of both extending and enhancing types used by each participant.

Table 3

Participants	Paratactic extending	Hypotactic extending	Incorrect conjunctions	Paratactic enhancing	Hypotactic enhancing	Incorrect conjunctions
1	8	4	3	3	8	4
2	10	2	3	5	8	2
3	11	2	2	3	11	1
4	10	1	4	2	10	3
5	6	3	6	2	9	4
6	12	0	3	5	8	2
7	9	6	0	5	8	2
8	8	5	2	5	9	1
9	9	3	3	6	9	0
10	7	6	2	0	10	5
11	8	3	4	2	9	4
12	9	6	0	4	8	3
13	9	1	5	4	8	3
14	6	7	2	4	9	2
15	9	4	2	3	10	2
16	10	5	0	5	9	1
17	8	4	3	6	8	1
18	8	3	4	5	8	2
19	10	4	1	5	9	1
20	10	5	0	1	10	4
21	11	1	3	2	11	2
22	7	4	4	0	13	2
23	10	4	1	2	12	1
24	11	2	2	6	9	0
25	6	6	3	5	10	0
26	8	4	3	2	11	2
27	9	4	2	2	12	1
28	5	8	2	1	13	1
29	9	3	3	5	8	2
30	7	4	4	4	9	2
31	8	3	4	7	7	1
32	10	4	1	0	14	1
33	6	7	2	0	13	2
34	10	4	1	0	15	0
35	6	5	4	6	7	2
36	7	3	5	4	8	3
37	7	5	3	4	8	3
38	7	6	2	4	9	2
39	7	6	2	4	10	1
40	6	4	5	0	11	4

As illustrated above, out of 505 extending conjunctions used by participants in the sentence-combining test, 344 were paratactic in

comparison to 161 hypotactic conjunctions. On the other hand, out of 521 enhancing conjunctions, 388 were hypotactic which outnumbered the paratactic ones. (=133)

Table 4 and Table 5 below provide the data for the paired samples *t*-test which was conducted to compare the number of paratactic and hypotactic extending conjunctions used by participants in the sentence-combining test.

Table 4

Paired Samples Statistics for the number of paratactic and hypotactic extending conjunctions

		Mean	N	SD	SEM
Pair 1	Hypotactic	4	40	1.79	.28
	Paratactic	9	40	1.73	.27

Note: SD: Standard Deviation, SEM: Standard Error Mean

Table 5

Paired Samples Test for the number of paratactic and hypotactic extending conjunctions

	Mean	SD	Std.Error Mean	Paired Differences 95% CI		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				LL	UL			
Pair number of hypotactic- number of 1 paratactic	-4.33	3.20	.51	-5.35	-3.30	-8.55	39	.00

Note: SD: standard Deviation, CI: confidence Interval, LL: Lower Limit, UL: Upper Limit

The results, as shown in Table 4 and Table 5, revealed significant difference between the mean of the paratactic extending conjunctions ($M=9$, $SD=1.73$) and the hypotactic extending conjunctions ($M=4$, $SD=1.79$); $t(39)=8.55$, $p=.00$. The mean difference was -4.33 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -5.35 to -3.30.

Similarly, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the number of paratactic and hypotactic enhancing conjunctions the results of which are shown in Table 6 and Table 7 below.

Table 6

Paired Samples Statistics for the number of paratactic and hypotactic enhancing conjunctions

		Mean	N	SD	SEM
Pair 1	Hypotactic	10	40	1.95	.31
	Paratactic	3	40	2.03	.32

Note: SD: Standard Deviation, SEM: Standard Error Mean

Table 7

Paired Samples Test for the number of paratactic and hypotactic enhancing conjunctions

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Std.Error Mean	95% CI				
				LL	UL			
Pair number of hypotactic- number of 1 paratactic	-6.38	3.78	60	5.17	7.58	10.67	39	.00

Note: SD: standard Deviation, CI: confidence Interval, LL: Lower Limit, UL: Upper Limit

As can be seen from the Table 6 and Table 7 above, the data obtained from the paired samples *t*-test revealed significant difference between the mean of paratactic enhancing conjunctions ($M=3$, $SD= 2.03$) and hypotactic enhancing conjunctions ($M=10$, $SD=1.95$); $t(39)= 10.67$, $p=.00$. The mean difference was 6.38 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 5.17 to 7.58.

Discussion

This study was intended to check the extent to which the conjunctions Iranian high school students choose to combine the clauses in the multiple-choice test are directly proportional to their conjunctive counterparts in sentence-combining exercises. To reach this purpose the participants' choices of conjunctions on the multiple-choice test were compared with the conjunctions they used to join the separate sentences in the sentence-combining exercises. The findings brought home the fact that despite the mastery of both paratactic and hypotactic conjunctions participants displayed on the multiple-choice test of conjunctions, their use of conjunctions to join the sentences in the sentence-combining test was not proportional to choices they made on the multiple-choice test. What particularly caught the researchers' attention was the dominance of paratactic extending conjunctions over hypotactic extending conjunctions and the prevalent use of hypotactic enhancing conjunctions over paratactic enhancing conjunction. In other words, although hypotactic extending conjunctions such as "while" and "whereas" were accurately chosen to fit into the sentences on the multiple-choice test, it came to the researchers' notice that paratactic extending conjunctions such as "and" and "but" remarkably outnumbered their hypotactic counterparts on the sentence-

combing test. As an example 36 out of 40 participants selected answer “c”, that is, the hypotactic extending conjunction “*whereas*” in the following multiple choice test:

Some people prefer to work for the government,others like to be self-employed.

a) *otherwise* b) *thus* c) *whereas* d) *although*

But the sentence-combining test taken two weeks afterwards did not yield the same results as 32 students used the paratactic extending conjunction “*but*” to join the same clauses above, that is, only 8 out of 40 participants used the hypotactic conjunctions “*whereas*” and “*while*” as they did on the multiple-choice test.

Another example goes to the dominant use of hypotactic enhancing conjunctions “*although*” and “*even though*” over their paratactic counterpart “*though*”. As the results in this study indicate 30 participants made the correct choice “b” in the following multiple-choice question which is a paratactic extending conjunction :

They didn't hurry,they were very late.

a) *thus* b) *though* c) *otherwise* d) *but*

Likewise, an overall majority of participants, that is 28 out of 40, used the hypotactic enhancing conjunction “*although*” and 10 used “*even though*” to complete the same sentence-combining exercise.

The similar trend was noticeably prevalent between all equivalent items of the multiple-choice and sentence-combining tests. Not only did this lead the researchers to the conclusion that Iranian pre-university students have the tendency to choose the paratactic extending conjunction “*but*” more than the hypotactic extending conjunctions “*while*” and “*whereas*”, but also the findings were indicative of the dominance of the hypotactic enhancing conjunctions “*although*” and “*even though*” in comparison to the paratactic enhancing conjunction “*though*”. What is more, an additional point the findings of this study reinforce is the inconsistency which lies between ones competence and performance. The findings in this study tend to support Widdowson (1990), who asserts that performance is not always supported by an underlying competence and it can be flawed for a variety of reasons such as, in the case of this study, interests. This is also in line with

Chomsky (1965) who asserts that only under idealized circumstances can performance be a direct reflection of competence. In other words, with respect to the purposes of this study, the thorough knowledge of conjunctions may not be necessarily reflected in their production and use. However, this research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. Since the researchers are mainly concerned with the discursual functions of connectors, working with a more functional definition of discourse in future research is suggested. It is also recommended that further research be undertaken to see how language users utilize a formal property of language in performing various communicative tasks which is a true definition of performance, and the test designed for eliciting this performance should operate in a true functional level.

Conclusion

The present study confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence that suggests the explicit, declarative knowledge of a linguistic form does not necessarily lead to the procedural level of manipulating that knowledge in the functional uses of language. The current findings add substantially to our understanding of Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. In other words, although, according to Chomsky (1965), performance must be clearly projected from competence, and hence be referable to it, it does not correspond to it in any direct way. We do not necessarily draw and act upon what we know as our linguistic knowledge is constrained and conditioned by factors other than the knowledge of the language.

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