



Complexity in Syntax with the Use of an Adverbial Clause of Concession

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Abstract

The present study explores the use of adverbial clause of concession as a syntactic complexity measure among the National University of Lesotho (NUL) students. The research subjects were NUL fourth year students across the seven faculties namely, the Faculty of Agriculture (FOA), the Faculty of Education (FOE), the Faculty of Health Sciences (FOHS), the Faculty of Humanities (FOH), the Faculty of Law (FOL), the Faculty of Social Sciences (FOSS) and the Faculty of Science and Technology (FOST). Data was collected from their past examination papers (2016/2017). This paper employed the interpretivist paradigm and has analysed the data qualitatively. The study has also employed the descriptive and case study designs. The students' continuous writing was the focus of this study since Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and Cognitive Grammar (CG) are the theoretical frameworks which the present paper was based on and therefore require continuous writing. The findings of the present paper reveal that NUL students have a relatively low level of syntactic complexity in their writing as shown by how they used adverbial clauses of concession. The study therefore concludes that NUL students have a moderately low level of syntactic complexity demonstrated by how they used this feature.

Introduction

In this study, the researchers explore the syntactic complexity of NUL fourth year students' writing through their use of adverbial clause of concession. An adverbial clause of concession is a type of adverbial clauses which is used to make two statements to contrast with each other. It is introduced by the subordinating conjunctions such as although, though, even though, despite, in spite of, whereas, while, even if, and however (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). These subordinating conjunctions show contrast. That is, they are used to contrast two opposite meanings which are, positive and negative. Thus, they contrast two opposite facts. In this light, concessive clauses indicate that the situation in the matrix clause is contrary to the expectation with regard to what is said in the concessive clause (Quirk et al., 1985).

Adverbial clause of concession is classified as subordination in linguistics. It is one of the syntactic features that are used as measures of syntactic complexity in writing. Thus, it is used to form complex sentences. Complex sentence is a sentence with an independent clause and a dependent clause. That is, subordination is one of the syntactic complexity features. This implies that researchers use different syntactic complexity measures in their different studies while exploring syntactic complexity of the writing of their research subjects. An ability to produce complex sentences has been considered as a measure of developing syntactic complexity hence syntactic maturity.

The current paper explored the syntactic complexity of NUL students' writing through their use of adverbial clause of concession.

Earlier research

Research on syntactic complexity in English as a First Language has been carried out by linguists such as Hunt, (1965), O'Donnell et al. (1967), Hunt (1970a), Harpin (1976), Perera (1984), Beard et al. (2002), Keen (2004) and Mazur-Palandre (2007). With regard to English as a Second Language, different studies on syntactic complexity were conducted by researchers such as Schleppegrell (1996), Hinkel (2003), Ortega (2003), Myhill (2004) and Muñoz et al. (2010). Such researchers explored syntactic complexity of their research subjects using other measures of syntactic complexity that include subordination. That is, no researcher used an adverbial clause of concession as their syntactic complexity feature. Unlike other studies, Beard et al. 's (2002) study was on identification of different syntactic structures including subordination while tackling different tasks but the category of adverbial clause of concession was not among such measures. This observation implies that Beard et al. (ibid) used various measures in one study except the concern of the present paper.

The conclusions drawn from studies in L1 were that at first, when children try to use syntactic complexity measures in order to build syntactic complexity that include subordinate clauses, they use them erroneously, but later, they show signs of a general move towards the correct way of writing as they begin to transfer structures they have heard or have read to their own writing. In the case of L2, some of the studies such as Myhill (2004) conclude that syntactic complexity features such as subordination develops with age and a lot of practice. These two categories of studies have similarities somehow because they both explored syntactic complexity and most of them used subordination as their measure. In investigating this syntactic complexity, most of them used essay writing of their research subjects as their methods of data collection.

Amongst the reviewed literature in the present paper, three studies, Quansah et al. (2017), Starodubtseva (2019) and Mayuni and Zakiya (2020) are particularly discussed over the other ones because they have the same focus, adverbial clauses out of which two are specifically discussing the issue of adverbial clause of concession other than the general term, subordination.

In their study, Quansah and Tetteh (2017) carried out a study where they analysed the use of adverb and adverbial clauses in the sentences of two Junior High School pupils in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The schools were Junior High school 1 and Junior High school 2. Junior High school 1 is one of the schools that have adequate facilities and the pupils attending in there are from higher socio-economic background while Junior High school 2 is one of those schools with limited infrastructure facilities and the pupils in this school are from low socio-economic background. The researchers selected fifty (50) students from each school and that made the total of 100 pupils. Data was collected from the pupils' essays and the structured interview guide. The extent to which the pupils in these two schools used adverbs and adverbial clauses in their sentences was examined.

The findings reflect that while all pupils from different backgrounds created varying kinds of sentences in the essays, most pupils (68%) from Junior High School 1, which are schools with adequate facilities and are from higher socio-economic background produced complex sentences in comparison to the ones from Junior High school 2, who were from poor background with inadequate facilities, since (47%) of those pupils produced simple sentences in their essays. This implies that the pupils from poor background produced simple sentences while the ones from decent background produced complex sentences.

The researchers established that for both schools, the adverbial clauses of concession were absent in pupils' essays. There were few instances of the use of adverbs of manner, time and place. In this regard, Quansah and Tetteh (2017) maintain that these findings support Skinner's

(1957) Behaviourist theory which states that precise input from the teacher is regarded as very crucial because pupils from Junior High School 1 had access to highly qualified teachers and adequate facilities to conduct language learning as compared to Junior High School 2 pupils with little or no access to qualified teachers.

Quansah and Tetteh's (ibid) study is relevant to the current paper because adverbial clauses of concession which is the focus of the present paper is classified as one of the types of adverbial clauses which has been discussed in their study.

Starodubtseva (2019) also conducted a study which focused on inversion in the English adverbial clause of concession and its translation into Russian language. The author paid attention to the polysemantic nature of the conjunctions in adverbial clause of concession as part of complex sentence. Findings of Starodubtseva (2019) revealed that there are inverted and non-inverted adverbial clauses of concession, and in Russian language, they serve the emphatic function.

Another study carried out by Mayuni and Zakiya (2020) analysed the kinds and functions of conjunctions expressing time and concession in an English novel entitled *The Winner's Curse* written by Marie Rutkoski. When analysing the conjunctions expressing time and concession, the researchers employed a theory of Murphy and Quirk. As relates the conjunctions expressing concession, the researchers found three kinds of conjunctions, namely, although, though and even though. These conjunctions were used to connect independent and dependent clauses in order to form complex sentences. The findings of their study indicate that these conjunctions appeared at the beginning of sentences in that English novel. Thus, the position of these conjunctions is at sentence-initial position in that novel.

Rationale

Unlike other studies that used subordination as a whole, that is, both finite and non-finite subordinate clauses to explore the syntactic complexity of their research subjects, the paper focused on the use of adverbial clause of concession in order to explore the NUL students' syntactic complexity in their writing. Regardless of the faculties, all the NUL students are normally introduced to Communication and Study Skills (CSS) and Remedial Grammar of English in the first year of their university study. By the time they get to the fourth year, they have been involved in continuous writing for three years. The researchers were interested in investigating whether NUL students use adverbial subordinate clause of concession in their continuous writing and whether they use it appropriately or not. The researchers were also examining its syntactic functions and exploring the environments in which this category is reflected in their sentences.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the employment of the interpretivist paradigm as well as descriptive and case study designs. Data was analysed qualitatively, following the Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and Cognitive Grammar (CG), both of which formed the theoretical frameworks for the paper. The theories of Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) (Chomsky, 1957) reviewed by Thinker (2005) in Matthiesen (2009) and Cognitive Grammar (CG) which was proposed by (Langacker, 1987) and reviewed by Tehan (2010) are discussed in this section in order to explain the theoretical framework for the analysis of the use of adverbial clause of concession as a syntactic complexity measure in the writing of NUL students. The current study relates these theories as appropriate for the analysis of the syntactic structures and the grammar observed in the students' writing. Thus, these theories explain the types of sentences realised in students' writing.

TGG concentrates on syntactic structure. It helps in the identification of types of sentences in order to observe whether there are complex sentences in the students' writing. It identifies different syntactic complexity features used in the formation of complex sentences whether there are features such as the use of subordinate clauses in their writing, sentence-combining, embedding of subordinate clauses and ellipsis of some words. CG was used to describe their grammar. Thus, the collective use of these theories (TGG and CG) in this paper enabled the researchers to observe whether the sentences produced by the students are complex, using adverbial clause of concession, its syntactic and thematic functions. This is why the present paper employed TGG as the theory that can probably respond positively to the researchers' concern, and might enable a detailed examination and discussion on the use of adverbial clause of concession as a syntactic complexity measure in NUL students' writing.

Thinker (2005:25) as quoted by Matthiesen (2009:272) states that TGG is "any formal description of a language consisting of an algorithm which generates sentence structures and of a set of transformations which modify them systematically". He argues that all transformations are based on deletion or insertion of elements that result in substitutions or "permutations" of which it is the case in this paper since insertion of adverbial clause of concession is observed while forming the complex sentence, He did not listen, though he was advised. In this sentence, there is an insertion of the adverbial subordinate clause of concession and which is appropriately attached to the preceding main clause, He did not listen. This process is referred to as merge Chomsky's Minimalist Program that results in recursive constructions in TGG.

On the basis of Matthiesen's (2009:273) claim, subordinating conjunctions and recursive constructions explained in TGG are the features which were analysed in this data, especially because specifically, adverbial clause of concession was a feature used to explore syntactic complexity in the paper.

TGG also enfold the Minimalist Program (MP). Neske (2014:47) reports that the goal of uncovering the most general and the only indispensable aspects of phrase structure rules is manifested in Chomsky's Minimalist Programme. It has Strong Minimalist Thesis and Merge. According to Chomsky's Minimalist Programme, syntactic structure is built from the bottom up through a single operation called Merge. Through Merge, the operation used in the Minimalist Program, syntactic objects are combined to form a new set of sentences. Lexical items are combined recursively by this operator to generate new lexical items. "These new lexical items can then be merged with other lexical items to generate yet another lexical item, and so forth during the build-up of the complete syntactic structure". This theory was applied in the data analysis section of the paper and it is shown in figure 1 which has been adapted from Neske (2014).

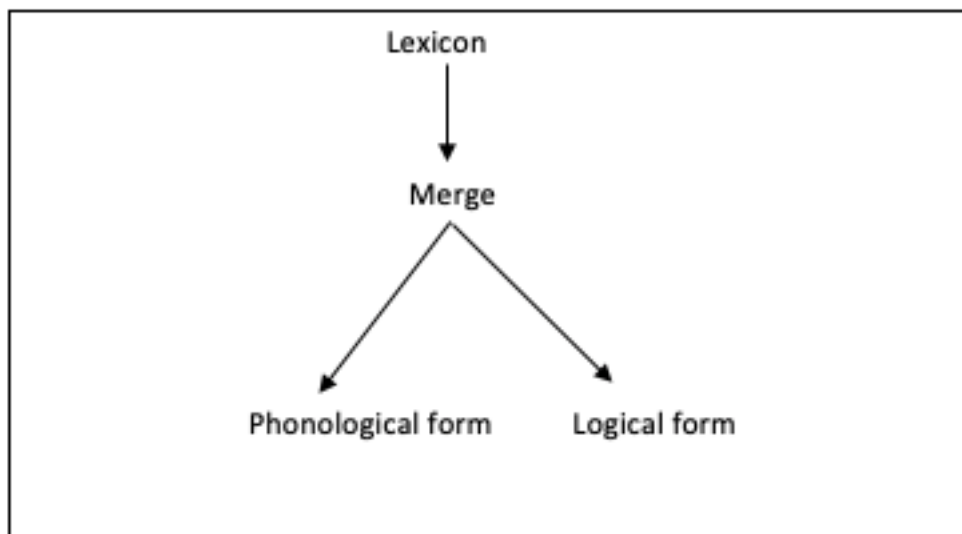


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

TGG overrides all the other theories in this paper because it unfolds a response to the objectives of the paper. It is therefore the best preference in the current paper. However, TGG has drawbacks which have been identified by other researchers such as Katz and Paul (1964) and Thinker (2005) in Matthiesen (2009). The drawbacks include the argument that TGG is a purely syntactic theory. This is the reason why the present paper combined TGG with Cognitive Grammar (CG) incepted by Langacker (1987) and reviewed by Tehan (2010) in Matthiesen (2009), to analyse its data. This Cognitive Grammar (CG) focuses on grammatical structure and proposes that language occurs in a natural way (Langacker, 1987:1). Langacker reports that in cognitive grammar, syntax and semantics are inseparable “at the time when the status of syntax as an autonomous formal system is accepted by most theories as an established fact” (Langacker 1987:1). It has a central claim that grammar forms a continuum with lexicon and can be fully described. Cognitive grammarians propose that language is not an independent system of the rest of cognition.

The paper is therefore conducted within a combination of two theories namely, Transformational-Generative-Grammar revised by Thinker (2005) in Matthiesen (2009) as it basically analyses the structure of the sentences of the language, and CG modified by Tehan (2010) in Matthiesen (2009) that complements TGG in the paper as it does not separate syntax from grammar in a grammatical analysis. The combination of these two theories were applied to analyse the complexity of sentences found in the data as well as to relate those complexities to the meaning enfolded in the used structures.

Methods

Based on the research questions that must be answered by this paper, qualitative approach was adopted in the present study. The research questions in the paper require the research subjects’ experiences with regard to the investigation of the use of adverbial clause of concession as a syntactic complexity measure in students’ writing. This is confirmed by McMillan et al.’s (2006:15) view that qualitative studies describe and analyse thoughts, perceptions, ideas and experiences about a phenomenon under investigation.

As it has been mentioned earlier in this paper, its aim was to investigate the use of adverbial clause of concession as the syntactic complexity measure in students’ writing. The qualitative approach was therefore appropriate in this paper because students’ experiences were analysed

and described. As a result, in the current paper, the most accurate means to obtain data was to use students' essays. The qualitative approach was also selected as the best alternative for the paper for the reasons that the researchers were not interested in number of the students who may produce complex sentences but they were interested in the depth of reality in the phenomenon they were investigating. The students' experiences revealed the truth that the researchers hoped to obtain in this paper.

Data Collection Method

The data was collected from the fourth year students' examination scripts (essays) for the academic year 2016/2017. These examination scripts were used because they were the most accessible ones for the period of five years, from 2012/1013 to 2016/2017 since they were the recent ones. The researchers know that at NUL, examination scripts are disposed of after every five years. So the recent consecutive academic years are from 2012/2013 to 2016/2017.

The examination scripts of fourth year students of the National University of Lesotho (NUL) were purposively, systematically and randomly selected. The total number of twenty scripts from the identified departments across the faculties depending on the number of departments each faculty had were selected. A sample of twenty scripts which brought the sample size to 140 scripts were selected based on Brynard et al.'s (2005:43) claim that a sample refers to a small group selected from the entire population which is believed to present the characteristics of the entire population. Wagner et al. (2012:87) also note that qualitative studies use small samples. That is, data was collected from all the departments in each faculty except in the case where the departments do not have continuous writing but figures or symbols. This means that if the faculty has five departments to involve in the paper such as in the FOA and FOSS, four scripts were randomly selected from each department, five scripts from those faculties that have four departments such as in the FOH, FOST.

In the case in which the faculty has three departments, such as in the case of FOE and FOL, seven scripts were randomly selected from two departments which themselves were randomly selected and six from the last department. Regarding the FOHS, two out of four departments were involved because the Heads of the Departments (HODs) of the other two departments declined the researcher's request of collecting data from their departments despite the authorisation given by the NUL registrar and their Dean. First of all, the researchers purposely checked and confirmed that all the scripts had answers for continuous writing. They then purposely selected those with at least one page long which could be analysed. If the students had choice, she checked the scripts to identify the questions with continuous writing. One essay was chosen from all the essays and the descriptive essay type was chosen. When choosing the type of essay to use as data, the researchers based themselves on the task focusing terms used by lecturers while setting the questions because such task terms determine the type of essays to be written.

The department and course to obtain data from were randomly chosen. Systematic sampling was used to pick every fifth or tenth script from the envelopes containing the students' scripts until the total number of twenty scripts was reached. If such a length of a page is there, such script was taken as one of the sample scripts but if the script did not have a one page long continuous writing, the researcher put it aside and looked for another script until she found what she was looking for. This procedure implies that in the case of the department of Science, the researchers collected data from written courses such as Biology, not Mathematics.

The students from the Faculty of Education and from the Faculty of Humanities language departments are extensively exposed to English language and linguistics courses throughout

the four years of their university study. Their scripts were not included in the study. These students whose scripts were in the sample share the level, time frame, setting and genre.

The researcher wrote a letter to the Registrar asking for permission to use examination scripts. After the Registrar's authorisation which was in a form of a letter addressed to the Deans across the faculties, the scripts were collected from the HODs' offices across the faculties. At NUL, examination scripts are kept in safe places under the authority of the HODs. Continuous writing was used on the basis of Wendy et al.'s (2002) claim that written language can provide a rich data base for studying complex structures because it is likely to have longer sentences with more complex syntactic structures than spoken language. Kemper et al. (1989) and Weisberg (2000) also note that writing is the modality through which L2 learners initiate the use of new syntactic structure.

Results and Discussion

Summary of Data Presentation

The presentation of data indicates two (2) sentences of how adverbial clause of concession has been used in the present data. The data shows that NUL students use adverbial clause of concession to form complex sentences and they use it correctly. The given sentences illustrate that the students place adverbial clause of concession at the end of the sentences and such structures demonstrate the function of this feature syntactically since they show adverbial element in that position where they are placed. Data further reflects that NUL students are not familiar with this feature since they rarely use it in their writing which is confirmed by the two sentences which are observed in two out of seven faculties.

The use of adverbial clause of concession is shown in examples (1) Gender main streaming can benefit every human being [even though some people do not see it that way]. (FOH) (2) It has been an important institution [even though it had many challenges]. (FOSS)

Data Analysis

Data was analysed qualitatively, hence the reason for adoption of the interpretivist paradigm and the Content Analysis (CA). In order to accomplish a CA, the text was broken down into sentences. Then the text was examined using one of the CA basic methods, namely, the conceptual analysis, because it begins with identifying the concepts present in a given text. The researchers first identified the same scripts from the students' essays, read them and identified adverbial clauses of concession.

The researchers identified adverbial clause of concession from NUL fourth year students' essays across the faculties. This feature is reflected in two faculties namely, the FOH and FOSS. This implies that adverbial clause of concession is rarely used by NUL students. Perera (1984) in Beard et al. (2002) explains that the adverbial clause of concession occurs late in the children's writing. She concludes that it is a sign of linguistic maturity.

The data shows an unproductive use of adverbial clause of concession. In the current paper, this category is noted in two faculties namely, FOH and FOSS possibly because of Perera's (ibid) claim as quoted by Beard et al. (2002) when she mentions that this category of adverbials occurs late in children's writing. Quansah and Tetteh's (2017) findings also reflect that for both schools where they collected data from, the adverbial clauses of concession were absent in pupils' essays. There were few instances of the use of adverbs of manner, time and place.

In the present paper, concessive clauses occur at sentence-final position and this observation is supported by Kies (1999) who says that when concessive clauses occur at the end of the sentences, it is because the speaker admits a weakness or problem in that particular argument.

The FOH and FOSS reveal that as far as concessive clause is concerned, NUL students are not aware of their textual functions (placement of subordinate clauses in three different contexts) since they place it at sentence-final position only. These given examples support Kies' (1999) statement since in (1), the writer admits weakness in this particular argument while in (2), the writer admits that there is a problem in the specified statement.

Biber (1988) notes that in opening position, concessive adverbials although and though are used for framing purposes (the writer organises their message in a way that will make sense to the reader and suits the context in hand) and to introduce the background of the topic in question (introducing the topic to the reader). Biber (1988) and Kies (1999) claim that when a concessive clause appears at the beginning of the sentence, it is because the speaker introduces the background of the topic and for framing purposes. In this case, the FOH and FOSS demonstrate that NUL students have supported this view. It can be claimed that NUL students show ability of forming syntactic complex sentences using adverbial clause of concession. Contrary to these views with regard to the beginning and the middle of the sentences, NUL students do not confirm the issue of placing concessive clauses at the beginning and in the middle of the sentences since there are no incidences in the current paper that demonstrate these. The current paper therefore, concludes that though NUL students are competent in forming syntactic complex sentences with concessive clauses, they are not conversant with placing such clauses at sentence-initial and sentence-internal positions.

The Findings

The present analysis demonstrates that the students' sentences reflect complex sentences through the use of adverbial clause of concession and where they are noted, they have been used appropriately. Two faculties, FOH and FOSS reflect the use of this category while it is not noted in the five faculties which are: FOA, FOHS, FOE, FOST, and FOL. This observation implies that NUL students are not familiar with adverbial clause of concession since it is rarely used in their writing.

Conclusion

The current paper concludes that the sample students do not demonstrate a reasonably high level of syntactic complexity in their writing as shown by how they used adverbial clause of concession. The paper has responded to all the objectives and research questions and therefore it has achieved the proposed aims. The first research question of the paper was to find out whether NUL students have the ability to use adverbial clause of concession and whether they use it appropriately, to investigate the syntactic functions which are performed by this feature in the students' sentences as well as exploring the textual functions that are performed by adverbial clause of concession in their writing. The researchers assumed that there is a reasonably high level of syntactic complexity in their writing as shown by how they use it. The second assumption was that NUL students are aware of syntactic functions of this feature but not aware of its textual functions because in the given examples, this feature is placed at sentence-final position. Thus, this feature is not noted at sentence-initial and sentence-internal positions of the sentences in their writing. The findings of this paper, based on the essays written by the fourth year students across the faculties at NUL, prove the first assumption partly wrong in that, the findings reflect that NUL students are not familiar with this feature. They rarely use it in their writing as it is reflected in two faculties. With regard to whether they use it appropriately or not, the findings prove that they use it appropriately. The findings further prove the second assumption correct because in the two incidences where this feature is noted, it syntactically demonstrates adverbial element. The third assumption is proved wrong by the

findings of this paper because in the two given sentences, this feature is placed at sentence-final position.

The sampled students have a relatively low level of syntactic complexity in their writing as shown by how they used adverbial clause of concession since it is reflected in two out of seven faculties. The fact that NUL students are able to use this feature is an indication that they have a fairly good control of the syntax of English since they use this feature appropriately though they are not familiar with it. On the basis of the findings of this paper, it can be concluded that there is practically low level of syntactic complexity in NUL students' academic writing with regard to how they use adverbial clause of concession. The findings further indicate that NUL fourth year students are aware of the syntactic functions of adverbial clause of concession because where they are demonstrated; they show adverbial element. This finding proves the second assumption right because where the adverbial clauses of concession are demonstrated in the present paper, they indicate adverbial element which is the syntactic function of adverbial clauses. The third assumption is also proved wrong because the findings illustrate that NUL students are not aware of the textual functions of adverbial clause of concession since they are noted at final position in the two given sentences. The findings of this paper are supported by Quansah and Tetteh's (2017) that from both schools where they collected data, the adverbial clauses of concession were absent in pupils' essays.

Recommendations

This study recommends that the content in the common first year English courses, Grammar and Syntax courses in all years of study at NUL should be reviewed and improved upon to incorporate a lot of exercises on writing essays, with adequate time for the task. Such exercises should highlight the importance of adverbial clause of concession.

Finally, the present study recommends that more research should be carried out on adverbial clause of concession because it seems to be at relatively low of syntactic complexity at the moment of carrying out this paper.

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