

Bangladeshi EFL Learners' English Connectors: Overused or Underused?

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Abstract—The paper investigates the answer scripts of an “English Writing” exam of 72 students in a Bangladeshi university in order to find out the nature and extent of the use of connectors in their second semester-final exam. It also tries to find out similarities and differences between the connector use of Bangladeshi non-native speakers (BNNS) and that of French, Japanese, Swedish, and Chinese non-native speakers on the one hand and between the connector use of BNNS and that of the native speakers of English (only British and American) on the other. To this end, the secondary data for other non-native and native speakers (NS) of almost the same age and level were collected from some published articles. The paper finds that in comparison to NS, BNNS, like most other non-native speakers, underuse most of the connectors.

Index Terms—connectors, native speakers, non-native speakers, underuse, overuse, Bangladesh

I. INTRODUCTION

Bangladeshi tertiary level English teachers often grumble that their students' texts usually lack coherence and appropriate cohesive ties. It is commonly believed that Bangladeshi Non Native Speakers (BNNS), like some other non-native speakers, either overuse or underuse them. But no other study has yet been conducted in order to find out the cohesive ties that BNNS most frequently use or to find out whether they use them appropriately or not. In this context, this paper investigates the scripts of a final writing exam of 72 students studying in the 2nd semester of Business Administration Department in East Delta University (EDU), Chittagong, Bangladesh. The study focuses mainly on two aspects—the cohesive ties that BNNS use most frequently and their use, i. e. whether they are overused or underused. Their overuse and underuse are measured against the way the native speakers use them. In addition to that, BNNS are also compared with four other groups of non-native speakers—Swedish Non Native Speakers (SNNS), Japanese Non Native Speakers (JNNS), French Non Native Speakers (FNNS), and Chinese Non Native Speakers (CNNS).

We did not collect any primary data for NS and other non-native speaker groups. The data for these groups were collected from the following studies—Heino, (2010); Shea, (2009); Tapper, (2005); Narita, Sato, and Sugiura, (2004); Yaochen, (2006); and Granger and Tyson (1996). All of these studies used the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) corpus as the source of their data. The corpus contains essays written by English language learners with many different language backgrounds (Granger et al, 2002). Each sub-corpus, for each group of non-native speakers, contains about 200,000 words, representing approximately 400 essays each of which has around 500 words. All learner writers have submitted detailed learner profiles where information about their sex, native language, education, and under which conditions the essay was written is provided (Granger, 1996, p. 71). For native speakers, the data were collected from a sub-corpus, Louvain Corpus of Native Essay Writing (LOCNESS), which consists of what is described as comparable types of essays written by American and British university students. As they were born and brought up in America or England, they are considered to be the representative of Native Speakers (NS).

II. ROLE OF CONNECTORS AND THEIR USE IN NON-NATIVE LEARNERS' TEXTS

Sparked off by Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* in 1976 a number of studies of cohesion and coherence have been carried out over the last 40 years. Many of these studies tried to find out whether there is a correlation between cohesive ties and coherence. On the whole, no positive correlation has been found between these two variables. For example, Tierney and Mosenthal (1983, p. 225) find out that cohesion is “causally unrelated to coherence.” Neunar (1987) finds that the quality of American essays does not depend on the number of cohesive ties. Witte and Faigley (1981, p. 200) state that there is positive correlation between cohesion and coherence to some extent but “a cohesive text may be only minimally coherent.”

However, no significant studies have been carried out regarding the interaction between cohesion and coherence in the texts written by the non-native speakers of English. It can be assumed that for the non-native speakers it is not easy to use connector appropriately. For them it is difficult because in English writing connectives are optional (Hartnett, 1986). They only enhance coherence in a text. Therefore, if they are used wisely, they aid the communicability, and if

they are used poorly, they create confusion. The hypothesis of most of the studies was that the non-native speakers of English tend to overuse the connectors. It was believed that the overuse is found particularly in Sentence Initial Connectors (SIC). However, the hypothesis was not always substantiated by the findings.

For example, Granger and Tyson (1996) hypothesized that French learners would overuse connectors in their essay writing though at the end of the study they find that French learners overuse the semantic categories of connectors and underuse the others like stylistic and syntactic categories. They argue that this happens because of the difference in French/English argumentation. Milton and Tsang (1993, p. 239) conclude their study of Hong Kong learners' use of connectors in the following way: "there is a high ratio of overuse of the entire range of logical connectors in our students' writing, in comparison to published English." Field and Yip (1992) has similar findings. They find that Cantonese EFL learners use far more linking devices than their English-speaking counterparts. Evensen and Rygh (1988) compare some Norwegian students' L1 and L2 (English) writing and find that they use more connectors in L2 than in L1. These findings are strongly supported by the contrastive literature on French/English connector usage (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1977; Newmark, 1988).

Narita, Sato, and Sugiura (2004) analyze 25 logical connectors in advanced Japanese university students' essay writing and compare them with those used by French, Swedish, and Chinese learners of English. They find that Japanese EFL learners overuse some connectors like "for example", "of course", and "first" in sentence-initial positions and on the other hand they underuse such connectors as "then", "yet", and "instead". In the comparative study among the four learner groups, they find that all of them except the Chinese learners overuse the appositive items like "for example" and "for instance" and the additive connectors like "moreover". Tapper (1998) finds that in all the semantic categories Swedish learners overuse the connectives — particularly in the corroborative and clarifying categories. Similar findings are found in Swedish students' expository essays (Wikborg and Björk, 1989). Regarding appositive conjuncts Altenberg and Tapper also find the instance of overuse.

There is also a significant difference between the positional tendencies of the connectors used by native and non-native speakers. For example, Japanese learners are quite different from the English native learners. Japanese EFL learners clearly prefer sentence-initial position, whereas English native students use the connectors in sentence-medial positions. Field and Yip (1992) find that sentence-initial position, or ISP as they call it, is the most common position for all L2 writers and that "L1 writers used the NIP (non-initial position) significantly more than L2 writers" (1992, p. 22). They also find that the impression of overall overuse of connectors is increased by L2 preference for placing connectors in sentence and paragraph initial position: "The impression of too many devices in the L2 scripts may be compounded by a strong use of the initial sentence and paragraph position" (1992, p. 25). They continue "it is possible that the NIP position may have a positive effect beyond variation in that it points the reader more firmly to content than the ISP position" (1992, p. 26). Therefore, the use of ISP points the reader towards both the organization of the text and the role of writer.

In this context, this paper tries to find out the nature and extent of connectors used by BNNS and compares them with FNNS, JNNS, SNNS, and CNNS on the one hand and with NS on the other. To this end, the paper tries to answer the following research question: *Do advanced Bangladeshi EFL learners use the connectors in the same way as the advanced EFL students of France, Japan, Sweden and China?*

III. METHOD

As this study compares some primary data with secondary data, both of the following sub sections— participants and procedure—consist of two parts: one (primary data) is for BNNS and the other (secondary data) is for NS, CNNS, JNNS, FNNS, and SNNS.

Participants

The study was conducted in East Delta University, a private university in Chittagong, the second biggest city in Bangladesh. The data collection process was integrated with a regular writing course of the 1st year students. The number of students was 72 aged between 18 – 20. Among them 52 were male and 20 were female students. They were studying in BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration). At secondary level, most of them (60) studied in Bangla medium schools and the rest graduated from English medium schools.

The studies for NS, CNNS, JNNS, FNNS, and SNNS had similar kind of participants. Apart from the differences in nationalities they were of the same age group and were between the second and the fourth semesters during the time when the studies were conducted. Students of this particular level were chosen because at this "advanced" stage they were supposed to make relatively few morphosyntactic errors. It is to be noted here that all the learners were learning English as a foreign language not as a second language. The homogeneity was maintained keeping Nickel's (1989, p. 298) observation in mind that in many cases EFL learners differ from ESL learners, particularly as regards the question of transfer.

Materials

The data for other native and non-native speakers were taken, as mentioned before, from ICLE. The data for native speakers were taken from a sub-corpus of ICLE, LOCNESS (Louvain Corpus of Native Essay Writing), which consists of 53 argumentative essays (30, 531 words) written by American university students (mostly 17-23 years old). The CNNS corpus contains 200 argumentative essays (56,293 words). The learners were second or third year Chinese

university students. The JNNS corpus contains 75,794 word tokens (6,014 word types) used by the Japanese third or fourth year college students in order to write argumentative essays. The FNNS corpus containing 89,918 words is slightly bigger than the Japanese corpus. The SNNS corpus contains 30,595 words. The Swedish EFL students from Lund University and Gothenburg University in their third or fourth semester of English studies wrote 53 argumentative essays each of which had a mean length of 577 words.

As the purpose of the study is to compare the connector use of BNNS with that of FNNS, JNNS, SNNS, CNNS, and NS, we tried to get the data from similar kind of text in Bangladesh. Following ICLE, we instructed the students to write argumentative essays, as connective usage is shown to be closely related to register and discourse type (Biber, 1988; Altenberg, 1984 & 1986).

Procedure

The study conducted for BNNS was integrated with a writing course offered in EDU, Bangladesh. During the course, the teacher taught the learners the use of connectors among other sub skills of writing and time and again made the students aware of the importance of coherence and cohesion of a text. The teacher instructed the students that connectors are not to be used as “stylistic enhancers” but as higher level discourse units. He also advised the students to distinguish between semantic and syntactic connectors. Regarding semantic connectors, the students were advised to differentiate individual linking devices and regarding syntactic connectors, the students were advised to learn the flexibility of connector positioning by studying authentic texts. At the end of the course, he gave a test as he always does and the students always take in other courses. The students did not know that their use of connectors would be analyzed after the test. It means that the whole process happened without being affected by the researchers.

The first task, after the test, was to detect the connectors for study. Unlike the studies based on ICLE, here we marked all the connectors used in the texts manually. Like ICLE studies, we did not collect the data by computer for three reasons. Firstly, we thought while collecting data manually, we would have better idea about the connectors used by BNNS, and secondly, we wanted to analyze stylistic, semantic, and syntactic misuse of connectors, and finally, we wanted to see the connectors in context in order to disambiguate the uses of the connectors as Granger and Tyson (1996, p. 20) observe “‘so’ can function both as adverb and as connector.”

After detecting every instance of each of the connectors, their raw frequencies were recorded and then they were calculated per 30,570 words in order to make the data comparable with the data of the studies carried out before on the basis of ICLE.

As for NS, all tokens were extracted by hand. The researchers began with the list of connectors provided by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 530). Later on they added other connectors to the list when encountered in the text. For CNNS, according to semantic relations, all adverbial connectors were classified into seven categories: Resultive, Listing, Contrastive, Appositive, Corroborative, Summative, and Transitional. Then the researchers first used Word Smith tools, a word list made for each corpus used in the study to get the frequency for each adverbial connector. Then they made concordances for the adverbial connectors which also have usages other than linking. Next they compared the overall frequencies of adverbial connectors so that they could find out how learners overused and underused the adverbial connectors. Afterwards they compared the difference in the distribution of semantic categories between the two corpora namely: the Corpus of Chinese University Student English and the Corpus of Canadian Native University Student English. Finally they conducted the chi-square tests to see whether the differences were significant or not ($p < 0.05$).

In the case of JNNS, the researchers extracted all instances of target logical connectors from the target corpus with its adjacent contextual information. Then they discarded irrelevant instances by manually checking all the instances. Finally, they computed frequency counts of each logical connector per its occurrence position. For FNNS, the researchers first made a list of 108 connectors. Next they applied TACT concordancing software to extract all instances of each of these connectors from the corpus. The task of this TACT concordancing software is to provide raw frequencies of particular words and strings of words and to display these words and phrases within five lines of context. Here contextualization was important because many connectors may have two or more different uses (for example ‘so’ can function both as adverb and as connector). After contextualization overall frequencies were calculated (raw frequencies and per 100,000 words). Finally the researchers examined and analyzed all the connectors including cases of stylistic, semantic and syntactic misuse.

For SNNS, the researchers used a synthesis of Quirk et al’s (1985) and Martin’s (1992) models. They categorized the connectors into six divisions: additive, clarifying, contrastive, resultive, transitional and corroborative. They took the term “corroborative” from Ball (1986) (see Granger (1996) for discussion). However, they included only non-clause-integrated adverbial connectives in this new classification. As according to Granger (1996), connectives denoting a temporal relationship were regarded as external to argumentative text types, these were not included. Finally they came up with a list of 170 adverbial connectives. They wanted to develop a detailed systematic classification of connectives in order to facilitate the analysis, and identify differences in the usage of connectives between the two groups.

Tapper, (2005) compared native speaker students and Swedish EFL learners calculating the connector frequencies out of 30,595 words. Therefore, in order to make the other EFL learners’ corpora comparable with them we converted all the data, including BNNS’s raw data, and calculated them out of 30,595 words.

IV. RESULTS

The statistics are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 presents all the connectors used by Bangladeshi university students and Table 2 shows the comparison among five groups of learners: BNNS, NS, CNNS, JNNS, FNNS, and SNNS.

TABLE 1:
CONNECTOR TYPES AND THEIR FREQUENCY IN BNNS

SL	Connector	Type	Total	Percentage
1.	But	Contrastive	107	20.42
2.	So	Resultive	103	19.66
3.	Because	Resultive	32	6.107
4.	However	Contrastive	30	5.725
5.	for example	Clarifying	23	4.389
6.	on the other hand	Contrastive	18	3.435
7.	Another	Additive	18	3.435
8.	Moreover	Additive	14	2.672
9.	in conclusion	Concluding	14	2.672
10.	Firstly	Additive	11	2.099
11.	Then	Resultive	10	1.908
12.	as a result	Resultive	10	1.908
13.	so that	Resultive	10	1.908
14.	Besides	Additive	9	1.718
15.	Like	Clarifying	9	1.718
16.	Secondly	Additive	8	1.527
17.	And	Additive	8	1.527
18.	that's why	Resultive	8	1.527
19.	for this	Resultive	8	1.527
20.	Finally	Concluding	6	1.145
21.	Overall	Resultive	5	0.954
22.	for that reason	Resultive	4	0.763
23.	such as	Clarifying	4	0.763
24.	Again	Additive	4	0.763
25.	Without	Additive	4	0.763
26.	Similarly	Additive	3	0.573
27.	Also	Additive	3	0.573
28.	One	Clarifying	3	0.573
29.	in summary	Concluding	3	0.573
30.	by this	Clarifying	3	0.573
31.	as	Resultive	3	0.573
32.	after that	Additive	3	0.573
33.	Thus	Resultive	2	0.382
34.	therefore	Resultive	2	0.382
35.	in addition	Additive	2	0.382
36.	furthermore	Additive	2	0.382
37.	that (is)	Clarifying	2	0.382
38.	otherwise	Contrastive	2	0.382
39.	Rather	Corrective	2	0.382
40.	Now	Temporal	2	0.382
41.	in contrast	Contrastive	1	0.191
42.	Thirdly	Additive	1	0.191
43.	Other	Additive	1	0.191
44.	Yet	Contrastive	1	0.191
45.	to sum up	Concluding	1	0.191
46.	at the end	Concluding	1	0.191
47.	to conclude	Concluding	1	0.191
48.	Though	Contrastive	1	0.191
49.	for instance	Clarifying	1	0.191
50.	on the contrary	Contrastive	1	0.191
	Total		524	

TABLE 2:
COMPARISON OF THE USE OF SEVEN CONNECTORS AMONG FIVE GROUPS

Connectors	LOCNESS		BNNS		CNNS		JNNS		FNNS		SNNS	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
However (contrastive)	174	15.9	44	5.72	20	5.06	36	18.36	16	4.83	129	8.7
Therefore (resultive)	81	7.4	3	0.38	—	—	—	—	11	3.32	75	5.1
Such as (clarifying)	68	6.2	6	0.76	—	—	—	—	—	—	40	2.7
For example (clarifying)	56	5.1	34	4.39	22	5.56	37	18.87	—	—	125	8.4
Also (additive)	53	4.8	4	0.57	72	18.22	—	—	—	—	—	—
Yet (contrastive)	45	4.1	1	0.19	—	—	2	1.02	6	1.81	—	—
So (resultive)	42	3.8	152	19.66	96	24.30	—	—	—	—	55	3.7

Table 1 starts with the most frequently used connector “but” (20.42%) and ends with the two least used connectors “for instance” (0.191%) and “on the contrary” (0.191%). Fifty connectors used by the Bangladeshi university students can be categorized in seven ways: contrastive (8), additive (15), resultive (12), clarifying (7), concluding (6), corrective (1), and temporal (1). Most of the connectors fall under additive and resultive categories.

In Table 2, there are two comparable contrastive connectors—“however” and “yet”. Both of them are underused. “However” is underused by BNNS (5.72%), like two other groups of non-native speakers—SNNS (8.7%) and CNNS (5.06%), whereas the native speakers’ use of the connector is 15.9%. Only one group of non-native speakers—JNNS (18.36%)—overuses it. Similarly, the proportion of “yet” in BNNS (0.19%) is far less than that in NS (4.1%), but slightly less than that in JNNS (1.02) and FNNS (1.81).

There are two resultive connectors—“therefore” and “so”. They are used quite differently in BNNS. In BNNS, “therefore” is underused at 0.38% while the proportions in the other groups like SNNS (8.7%) and FNNS (4.83%) are nearer to that of NS (7.4%). On the other hand, “so” is overused in BNNS (19.66%) like CNNS (24.30%), whereas in SNNS (3.7%) the use of this connector is almost equal to NS (3.8%).

Two clarifying connectors—“such as” and “for example”—are used quite dissimilarly in BNNS. In BNNS, the connector “such as” is underused at 0.76%, like in SNNS (2.7%) whereas in NS the proportion is 6.2%. In the case of the other clarifying connector—“for example”—BNNS (4.39%) is similar to NS (5.1%) and CNNS (5.56%). In SNNS (8.4%), the proportion is a bit bigger but the highest proportion for this connector is found in JNNS (18.87%). The additive connector “also” is significantly underused by BNNS at 0.57% and remarkably overused by CNNS at 18.22%, whereas in NS its use is 4.8%.

There is also striking similarity between BNNS and other non-native speakers regarding the connector positions. In this study, the learners used all the connectors in sentence initial positions. In the interviews conducted after the data collection, some students informed the researchers that they thought that that was the only position where connectors could be used and some other learners found it difficult to use them in non-initial positions.

V. DISCUSSION

In the collected data, the total number of connectors used by BNNS is 524. Among them the most frequently used connectors are “but”, “so”, “because”, “however”, “for example”, “on the other hand”, “another”, “moreover”, “in conclusion” and “firstly”. Interviews with the students and teachers suggest that the reasons behind this are L1 influence and the way the teachers taught the connectors throughout their English education. Four of the six students said that they are used to use the Bangla counterparts of the connectors listed above—কিন্তু like “but” and “however”, তাই like “so” and “because” like উদাহরণ স্বরূপ like “for example”, অপরাপরক্ৰমে like “on the other hand”, তদুপৰি like “moreover” etc. In a similar vein, while analyzing their own teaching, two teachers realized that the similarities between L1 and L2 might have influenced the students to emphasize these particular connectors.

However, although *however* is in the list of frequently used words by BNNS, it is to be termed as underused connector when BNNS is compared to NS. The other least frequent words in BNNS—*also*, *such as*, *therefore*, *yet*—are to be categorized as underused connectors as well if their use in NS is considered. Like *however*, *for example* is also in the list of most frequently used connectors in BNNS and the proportion is almost equal to that in NS. Therefore, it is used neither as an overused or as an underused connector in BNNS.

In the last few years *so* has been used almost as a Bangla word by the rising middle class of Bangladesh. Naturally, this is counted not only as the most frequent connector in BNNS but also the most overused cohesive device in comparison to NS.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have reported on our quantitative analysis of 50 logical connectors used by advanced Bangladeshi students (BNNS) and then selected seven of them to be compared with their use by other groups—American and British (NS), Chinese (CNNS), Japanese (JNNS), French (FNNS), and Swedish (SNNS) advanced students. Only seven of them were selected as all of these connectors were used by NS and most of them were found in other groups. In fact, we tried to find out all the connectors which were used in the same way by both BNNS and NS in order to detect the overused and underused connectors by BNNS. At the same time, we also compared BNNS with other non-native speaker groups.

Among seven connectors, five of them—*however*, *therefore*, *such as*, *also*, and *yet*—are underused by BNNS, only one—*so*—is overused, and in the case of *for example*, there is no difference between BNNS and NS. It is interesting to note that the underused connectors are also used in almost the same way by other non-native speakers. For example CNNS, FNNS, and SNNS also underuse *however*. Only JNNS use the connector as the native speakers. The most underused connector in BNNS is *therefore*. This connector is also underused by FNNS and SNNS. We did not get any data regarding this connector in JNNS and CNNS.

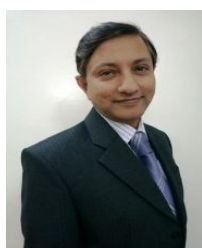
In the case of *such as*, we could find out the data in only one other group of non-native speakers—SNNS—and they also underuse the connector. In a similar vein, JNNS and FNNS—the only groups of non-native speakers where we got

the data for the connector, *yet*, show the tendency of underusing the connector like BNNS. The only connector *for example* is used almost in equal numbers by BNNS, NS, CNNS and SNNS. It is overused by only JNNS. No data was found for this connector in FNNS. Only one underused connector—*also*—is found to be overused by CNNS. The data for this connector was not found in the groups of other non-native speakers. *So* is the only connector which is overused but as it is already mentioned that nowadays Bangladeshi middle class people including Indian Bengalis use this connector as a Bangla word.

Therefore, in answer to the research question—*Do advanced Bangladeshi EFL learners use the connectors in the same way as the advanced EFL students of France, Japan, Sweden, and China*—it can be said that Bangladeshi advanced EFL learners like most other non-native advanced EFL learners underuse most of the connectors and use them mostly in sentence-initial positions.

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