

Adversative Connectors Use in EFL and Native Students' Writing: A Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract

A compelling body of evidence suggests that EFL students have problem with logical connectors' appropriate use in writing. This study explored Iranian EFL students' adversative connectors use in their essay writing course. To this end, a Learner Corpus of 60393 words consisting of 156 essays was compiled. LOCNESS was chosen as the criterion corpus. AntConc, a freeware concordance program, was used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that, in general, learners underused adversative connectors; both native and non-native students used *but* the most; *on the other hand*, and *while* were overused and *despite*, *yet*, and *instead* were underused by the learners suggesting that the top five most overused adversative connectors make up around 72% of learners' adversative connector use indicating that learners tend to use the same adversative connectors at the cost of underusing the other ones. Analysis of concordance line also illustrated that the learners tended to misuse the subordinating conjunction *whereas* and *though* in the initial position. It seems that learners need to be taught how to distinguish between different types of adversative connectors and how to use a wider variety of adversative connectors to reach a better coherence and cohesion in their writings.

Keywords: adversative connectors, coherence, misuse, overuse, underuse

In today's world as a global village, learning English has turned into a requirement almost throughout the world, and being able to communicate in English and conveying meaning have gained importance for many EFL/ESL students. Writing, among other language skills, is one of the most complicated and challenging areas that second and foreign language learners need to meet (Harris & Graham, 2005). In this skill, communication of meaning is achieved through a process of situated interpretation in which readers deduce what writer has implied in between lines. The readers read the text and contextualize the messages intended through using linguistic cues available in discourse. Such cues are called contextualization cues (Beheshti Sefat, 2018). They provide an interpretive framework for referential content of a message. One of the key elements in communicating the meaning successfully is text coherence.

Coherence, among other factors, is the key element in successful communication in writing. Coherence is the logical bridge between words, sentences, and paragraphs. Although coherence is an essential quality of writing, it is not always clearly defined and can, therefore, be challenging both to teach and to learn. Coherence and clarity are features of an effective writing which can be met by precise and appropriate use of logical connectors (Chafe, 1994). As Tuten (2018) puts it, coherence in writing is the "logical glue" that allows readers to move smoothly from one idea to the next. One way of achieving coherence is through appropriate use of logical connectors in the form of subordinating conjunctions, coordinating conjunctions, prepositions, conjunctive adverb, and transitions. Logical connectors, according to Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999), are words and phrases whose function is to show logical relationship between two or more basic sentences or between a basic sentence and a noun phrase. In other words, logical connectors assist readers with comprehending and making sense of written discourse.

A compelling body of evidence has shown that EFL students have problems with logical connectors' appropriate use (e.g., Alaro, 2020; Crewe, 1990; Field & Yip, 1992; Flowerdew, 1998; Hamed, 2014; Jones, 2010; McCulloch, 2009; Narita et al., 2004; Tang & Ng, 1995). Due to the significance of logical connectors for EFL learners, especially for the purpose of effective writing, many studies have considered them in terms of their syntactical positions, frequencies, range, and appropriate use (e.g., Alaro, 2020; Hamed, 2014; Jones, 2010; McCulloch, 2009). From among these studies, many have shown that EFL learners have difficulty using adversative connectors. For example, Hamed (2014) asserted that the highest frequency of misuse of conjunctions by learners was in use of adversatives connectors among other logical connectors.

Therefore, it seems that logical connectors are an important aspect of writing which, when used well, contribute to coherence; however, the evidence show that they are often misused and leave a negative impact on text quality (McCulloch, 2009). Not being able to use logical connectors seems to be a big problem especially for the EFL learners because it usually results in an incoherent writing that impedes communication. Considering this problem, the present study targeted the cases of misuse, overuse, and underuse of adversative connectors (ACs) in the essays of Iranian EFL learners and compared them with a corpus of essays written by native speakers. It seems that a detailed analysis of learners' difficulties achieved through the comparison between the learner corpus and native speaker corpus in terms of adversative connector use might help learners appreciate how to contextualize adversative connectors at syntactic as well as discourse level.

Literature Review

Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion refers to the presence or absence of explicit cues in the text that allow the reader to make connections between the ideas in the text. Whereas cohesion refers to the explicit cues in the text, coherence refers to the understanding that the reader derives from the text, which may be more or less coherent depending on a number of factors, such as prior knowledge and reading skill (McNamara, et al., 1996; O'Reilly & McNamara, 2007; Tuten, 2018). Cohesion is employed to link words, phrases, clauses and sentences into larger units and making them form a cohesive text (Wales, 2011). Bahaziq (2016) states that a text is characterized as cohesive if its elements are well-related or tied together in a way that is meaningful to the readers.

Coherence and clarity are features of understandable and effective communication in both written and spoken English, which can be achieved through immaculate and appropriate use of logical connectors of different types. According to Chafe (1994), logical connectors coordinate chunks of text and organize information flow in discourse. In other words, logical connectors help listeners comprehend and make sense of discourse. Coherence in writing is the logical bridge between words, sentences, and paragraphs. One characteristic of effective communication in both spoken and written language would be coherence and clarity, which can be achieved by the appropriate use of various types of connectors indicating contrast, reason, listing, etc. As Chafe (1994) mentioned, connectors organize chunks of text and maintain textual coherence and organization of information flow at the discourse level.

Text coherence depends on the success of the writer integration of various contextualization devices for placing the message in the interpretative frame. Conjunctions, as a part of the Logical connectors' linguistic category, are one of these contextualization devices. The function of conjunctions is to explicitly express the logical flow of the text and to provide the reader with an interpretation of the text (Tseng & Liou 2005).

Adversative Connectors

One way of achieving coherence in the writing is through logical connectors. Logical connectors or "discourse markers" (Fraser, 1999) or "connectives" (Crewe et al. 1985) are "Words and phrases whose function is to show some logical relationship between two or more basic sentences-or in some cases-between a basic sentence and a noun phrase" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 323). To put it differently, logical connectors assist readers with comprehending and making sense of the written discourse. Logical connectors can be used to join or connect two thoughts that are connected by distinctive kinds of relationship. Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorize logical connectors into four subcategories: *additive*, *adversative*, *causal* and *temporal*.

Adversative connectors, among other logical connectors, are the most problematic connectors for EFL/ESL learners (Hamed, 2014). The basic meaning of the adversative relation is contrary to expectation. The expectation may be derived from the content of what is being said, or from the communication process, or the speaker-hearer situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Following some researchers like Wu (2019), this study also adopted Sorensen's classification of part of speech and Halliday's classification of relationship as the framework of the study. Simplicity of both classification of part of speech and classification of the relationship and covering the most comprehensive account of adversative connectors were the main rationales for adopting this classification. Table 1 provides a summary of adversative connectors in Sorenson's (1997) and Halliday's (1976) model of adversative connectors.

Table 1. Summary of adversative connectors based on Sorensen (1997) and Halliday (1976)

Adversative Connectors	Subordinating conjunctions	Coordinating Conjunctions	Prepositions	Conjunctive adverbs and transitions
	even though, although, while, whereas	but, yet, but...still, yet...still	despite, in spite of	however, nonetheless, nevertheless, in contrast, on the other hand, in fact, on the contrary,

According to Sorensen (1997), four kinds of function words can be adversative connectors: (1) subordinating conjunctions, (2) coordinating conjunctions, (3) prepositions, and (4) transitions and conjunctive adverbs. A subordinate conjunction, or connective, introduces an adverbial clause and connects it with a word in the main clause. Either dependent clause or independent clause may come first in the sentence, with no change in meaning (Wishon & Burks, 1980). A coordinating conjunction is a word that connects words, phrases, or sentences. When a coordinating conjunction joins together two sentences, the resulting sentence is called a compound sentence (Wishon & Burks, 1980). A preposition, as the head of an adjunct prepositional phrase, connects a subordinate structure. A preposition, unlike a subordinator, carries meaning. Depending on its meaning, it may take a noun phrase, a clause, or another structure as its complement. A connective adverb, also called conjunctive adverb, expresses a relationship between two clauses. Conjunctive adverbs join two sentences separated by a period or two clauses separated by a semi-colon.

As the purpose of the current study is to compare the use of adversative connectors, the definition of “use” is of great importance. Bolton et al. (2002), in a corpus-based study, attempted to investigate the use of logical connectors by learners in academic writing. They identified “use” as “the identification of linguistic items as ‘connectors’, the measurement of the ratio of occurrence of connectors in the dataset, and the calculation of ‘overuse’ of connectors” (p. 173). Lee (2004) compiled a Korean EFL learner corpus by collecting 202 academic essays written by Korean EFL learners. Using this corpus, he analyzed the learners’ use of conjunctive adverbials and compared the results with several native corpora. He identified “use” as the raw frequency of the logical connectors, the functional types of discourses, and the syntactic positions of the sentences. For the purpose of this study, first, the instances and frequencies of adversative connectors were calculated and, then, to shed light on the overuse and underuse of logical connectors, the difference between the two corpora was computed.

Research into Logical Connectors in EFL/ESL Writing

Applied linguists have long recognized that the proper employment of logical connectors is a source of difficulty for second language writers (e.g., Ahmadi & Nadoushani, 2017; An & Xu, 2018; Hamed, 2014; Leedham & Cai, 2013; Milton, 1999; Paquot, 2010; Park, 2013; Randy, 2020; Shaw, 2009; Uçar & Yükselir, 2017; Yoon, 2006, 2019). Therefore, many researchers in their studies have focused on the analysis of usage patterns of logical connectors in ESL/EFL academic writing in terms of overuse, underuse, and misuse of logical connectors.

Three broad patterns of logical connectors use by L2 writers could be commonly found across these studies. First, when normalized frequencies compared, the L2 writers have been found to

use logical connectors more frequently than native speaker student writers. Researchers have attributed this high frequency of logical connectors in L2 writing to the characteristics of the learner genre where students usually turn to logical connectors to “impose surface logicity” (Crewe, 1990, p. 320) on their writing at the expense of propositional content or organization of ideas (Crewe, 1990; Leedham & Cai, 2013; Milton, 1999; Shaw, 2009).

Secondly, the overall overuse of logical connectors was mainly caused by particularly high frequencies of certain informal logical connectors such as *besides* and *what's more* and prepositional adverbials like *on the other hand* and *at the same time* (Lee, 2004; Leedham & Cai, 2013; Milton, 1999); while some single word connectors such as *however*, *therefore*, and *yet* or logical connectors of adversative functions were generally underused (Gardezi & Nesi, 2009; Park, 2013).

Lastly, the L2 learners showed a much greater tendency of putting logical connectors at the sentence-initial position than the native speakers and accomplished writers although the degree of the tendency varied for specific connectors (Milton, 1999; Paquot, 2010; Yoon, 2006). This mainly stems from learners' lack of awareness about how functions of logical connectors can differ based on their positions in a sentence. It was suggested that without such awareness, L2 writers tend to simply prefer using connectors as signposts for information structure of their writing and thus put them in the sentence-initial position (Milton, 1999; Paquot, 2010).

As inferred from the previous studies, the tendency to misuse, underuse, and overuse of adverbial connectors, especially the adversative connectors, has been consistently identified as a source of difficulty for second language writers. Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore the use of adversative connectors in the Iranian EFL context. More specifically, this study tries to provide answer to the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of use of the adversative connectors in the Iranian EFL learners' and native speakers' essays?
2. What are the similarities and differences (underuse, overuse, and misuse) in using adversative connectors between the essays written by Iranian students and native speakers?
3. What categories of adversative connectors (misuse, overuse, or underuse) differentiate the Iranian EFL writings from the native English writings?

Methodology

Corpus

The study adopted a descriptive corpus-based approach as the main research method. To answer the research questions of the study, two corpora were employed: A Learner Corpus to represent non-native students and a criterion corpus to represent the native students. So, The Learner Corpus (TLC) and The Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS) were utilized.

The Learner Corpus was compiled of essays written by upper-intermediate and advanced Iranian BA students of English language and literature. The first researcher of this study (the students' teacher) had informed them that their essays would be used as the data for a research study, and they had kindly consented. For the purpose of compiling this corpus, both male and female students' essays were used. The essays which had been written for the final examination were either persuasive (argumentative) essays, compare and contrast essays, or discussion essays. Each essay consisted of about 400 words that had been written in about an hour. The Learner Corpus was compiled of 188 essays and 75501 words.

The Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS) written by British and American university students was used as a criterion corpus to compare the results found in the Learner Corpus with this criterion corpus. LOCNESS was corpus of native English essays consisting of 324,304 words which split into four sub corpora. USARG, a corpus of 149,574 words of argumentative essays written by American university students; USMixed, a corpus of 18,826 words of literary-mixed essays written by American university students; BRSURS, a corpus of 95,695 words of argumentative and literary essays written by British university students; and a-level, a corpus of 60,209 words of British a-level argumentative essays. It should be noted that a-level, as a sub corpus of The Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS), was used in this study to be compared with the Learner Corpus. This was done to have two corpora with almost the same size, as the Learner Corpus with 60393 words and a-level, a sub corpus of the criterion corpus, with 60209 words furnished the ground for a sound comparison between the two corpora in a contrastive corpus-based study.

Instrument

AntConc, as a corpus analysis tool, was employed to analyze the data. AntConc is a freeware concordance program developed by Prof. Laurence Anthony, Director of the Centre for English Language Education, Waseda University (Japan). The program can be downloaded at the following page, which also contains links to online guides and video tutorials http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html. The program is downloaded as a single .exe file. It can be run simply by double-clicking this file, from wherever the user chooses to store it on the computer. AntConc, as a corpus analysis tool, has many advantages. It includes an easy-to-use and intuitive graphical user interface and enjoys a powerful concordancer, word and keyword frequency generators, tools for cluster and lexical bundle analysis, and a word distribution plot. Contrary to other programs such as *WordSmith Tools* and *MonoConc Pro* which are not either accessible due to existence of filtering or not free, AntConc is free and lends itself well to small scale corpora like the ones used in this study.

Data Collection Procedure

In order to compile a corpus of Iranian EFL learners' essays, 188 essays written by male and female Iranian BA students majoring in English language and literature for their essay writing course were employed. These essays were gathered and moved to a Word document file. This file later was converted to a usable file using AntConc converting tool, so that it could be used in AntConc. Then, this corpus was compared with the criterion corpus (i.e. LOCNESS), a corpus of native English essays, which was compiled of total number of 324,304 words and split into four sub corpora (i.e. a-level, BRSUR, USMixed, and USARG). Using these corpora, a list of 20 adversative connectors based on Sorensen (1997) and Halliday's (1976) classification was searched in both corpora to find the raw frequency of each connector. These connectors consisted of five subordinating conjunctions (although, though, even though, while, and whereas), four coordinating conjunctions (but, yet, but....still, and yet....still), two prepositions (despite and in spite of), and nine conjunctive adverbs and transitions (however, instead, nonetheless, nevertheless, in contrast, on the contrary, on the other hand, in fact, and rather).

In an effort to have a sound and complete comparison between the two corpora in a contrastive corpus-based study, we needed to have two corpora with almost the same size. To fulfill this, 32 essays from The Learner Corpus were randomly deleted to reach the size of the criterion sub corpus (i.e., a-level) with around 60300 words. The reason behind this was the fact that this study had limited access to the learners' essays and increasing the size of The Learner Corpus to match the criterion corpus was not an option. Hence, the comparison was conducted

between The Learner Corpus with 60393 words and a-level, a sub corpus of the criterion corpus, with 60209 words.

Another important point to note was the exclusion of the phrases like “for a while”, “after a while”, and “while children”. The reason behind this exclusion was that these phrases could hinder the results since they did not have anything to do with the adversative function of the subordinating conjunction *while*, and if not excluded, the results would be invalid and not usable for this study.

In order to find the frequency of the adversative connectors in both corpora, a list of 20 adversative connectors was prepared and searched in both corpora using AntConc. The frequency of adversative connectors alongside their concordance lines in both corpora were recorded on an excel sheet for a further analysis. Using the frequency of the adversative connectors, the researchers measured the ratio of the adversative connectors per 1000 words for a better comparison.

Data Analysis

AntConc was used to find the frequency of 20 adversative connectors in both the learner and the criterion corpus. To this end, first, the instances of adversative connectors were identified in both corpora; then, the ratio of occurrence of adversative connectors were measured; finally, the underuse and overuse of the adversative connectors were calculated. In other words, the total frequency of adversative connectors and the ratio of frequency of adversative connectors per 1000 words were used to provide answer to the second research question. The ratio of frequency per 1000 words was, then, used to calculate the overuse and underuse of the adversative connectors in that the results from the learner corpus was deducted from that of the criterion corpus. A positive value denoted overuse and a negative value denoted underuse of the adversative connectors. For instance, the coordinating conjunction *but* in the Learner Corpus was seen 266 times; then, the Frequency of *but* was 266, the Ratio of Frequency $266/60,393=0.0044044$ (4.40‰), RF per 1000 words 4.40. Following the same procedure, one can easily find out that the RP per 1000 words of *but* in the Criterion Corpus was 4.24. Then, considering these two numbers, one can reach the difference between 4.40 and 4.24 which is 0.16. This positive value signals the overuse of *but* in the Learner Corpus. This calculation method was employed to compare the two corpora to specify the overuse and underuse of the adversative connectors. Regarding the misuse of the adversative connectors, the concordance tool of AntConc was used and the concordance lines were captured to see how students misused the adversative connectors in their writings. To this end, the concordance lines generated by AntConc were analyzed to find the instances of misuse by the learners with regard to punctuation, certain structures, or using wrong ACs. The misuse in The Learner Corpus was generally regarding the punctuation in that the learners missed the comma that separated the subordinate clause from the main clause when using subordinating conjunction. The same was seen in the use of coordinating conjunction and preposition as well. For example, the subordinate connectors “whereas” and “though” were misused whenever they were used in the initial position.

Results

Overall Frequency of Adversative Connectors

The first research question of the study investigated frequency of use of adversative connectors in Iranian EFL learners' and native speakers' essays. Table 2 displays learners utilized 595 adversative connectors in their writings with ratio of 9.85 per 1000 words in a corpus of 60393 words. Nevertheless, criterion sub-corpus (a-level) indicated that native writers employed 608 adversative connectors in their writings with ratio of 10.10 per 1000 words in a corpus of 60209

words. Thus, it can be concluded that adversative connectors are less frequently used by Iranian EFL learners ($9.85 < 10.10$).

Analysis of Adversative Connectors in Detail

The purpose of the second research question of the study was to find out whether there were any similarities and differences (underuse, overuse, and misuse) in using adversative connectors between the essays written by Iranian students and native speakers. In order to examine the second research question, the two corpora were needed to be analyzed in details. Frequencies and ratios for total adversative connectors in The Learner Corpus and The Criterion Sub-Corpus are summarized in Table 2. A cursory look at the table hands on that the EFL learners generally underused (-0.25) adversative connectors.

Table 2. Frequencies and ratios for total adversative connectors in the learner corpus and the criterion sub-corpus

Adversative Connectors	The Learner Corpus		(+/-)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
Total	595	9.85	-0.25	608	10.10

Note: a-level is the sub-corpus of the criterion corpus (LOCNESS)
(A Positive Value Denotes Overuse, A Negative Value Denotes Underuse)

For further detailed analysis, the similarities and differences in using different adversative connectors by Iranian students and native speakers in terms of underuse, overuse, and misuse were analyzed and the related results are demonstrated in the following tables.

Table 3 demonstrates a list of four coordinating conjunctions used in the two corpora. Table 3 displays that coordinating conjunction *but* is the most frequent and *yet....still* is the least frequent in both corpora. What makes The Learner Corpus different from The Criterion Corpus is the fact that learners overused *but*. In fact, the results revealed that EFL learners underused *yet* (-0.50), *but....still* (-0.05), and *yet....still* (-0.03), whereas they overused *but* (0.16). In general, the results revealed that EFL learners underused (-0.41) coordinating conjunctions.

Table 3. Frequencies and ratios for coordinating conjunctions in the learner corpus and the criterion sub-corpus

Coordinating Conjunctions	The Learner Corpus		(+/-)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
But	266	4.40	0.16	255	4.24
Yet	5	0.08	-0.50	35	0.58
But....Still	2	0.03	-0.05	5	0.08
Yet....Still	0	0.00	-0.03	2	0.03
TOTAL	273	4.51	-0.41	297	4.93

(A Positive Value Denotes Overuse, A Negative Value Denotes Underuse)

The results of nine conjunctive adverbs and transitions used in the two corpora are laid out in Table 4. It indicates that *however* was the most frequent conjunctive adverb in both corpora and *nonetheless* was not used at all in both corpora. The similarities can be seen in *rather* and *in fact* as they are among the frequently used adversative connectors in both corpora as well. EFL learners overused conjunctive adverb *nevertheless* (0.02), *in contrast* (0.17), *on the other hand* (0.76), *in fact* (0.02), and *on the contrary* (0.03), but they underused *however* (-1.38),

instead (-0.23), and *rather* (-0.23). Generally, the results showed that the EFL learners underused (-0.71) conjunctive adverbs and transitions.

Table 4. Frequencies and ratios for conjunctive adverbs and transitions in the learner corpus and the criterion sub-corpus

Conjunctive Adverbs and Transitions	The Learner Corpus		(+/ -)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
However	63	1.04	-1.38	146	2.42
Instead	8	0.13	-0.23	22	0.37
Nonetheless	0	0.00	0.00	0	0.00
Rather	16	0.26	-0.08	21	0.35
Nevertheless	2	0.03	0.02	1	0.02
In contrast	10	0.17	0.17	0	0.00
On the other hand	48	0.79	0.76	2	0.03
In fact	15	0.25	0.02	14	0.23
On the contrary	4	0.07	0.03	2	0.03
TOTAL	164	2.71	-0.71	207	3.43

(A Positive Value Denotes Overuse, A Negative Value Denotes Underuse)

Table 5 summarizes the results of two prepositions recorded in the two corpora. Table 5 shows that *despite* was more frequent preposition than *in spite of* in both corpora. What differentiates these two is the fact that *in spite of* was not recorded by the native speakers while it was observed four times in EFL learners' writings. In fact, EFL learners have underused *despite* (-0.20), however, they overused *in spite of* (0.07). Overall, the results indicated that EFL learners underused (-0.13) prepositions.

Table 5. Frequencies and ratios for prepositions in the learner corpus and the criterion sub-corpus

Prepositions	The Learner Corpus		(+/ -)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
Despite	6	0.10	-0.20	18	0.30
In spite of	4	0.07	0.07	0	0.00
TOTAL	10	0.17	-0.13	18	0.30

(A Positive Value Denotes Overuse, A Negative Value Denotes Underuse)

The results of five subordinating conjunctions found in the corpora are provided below. Table 6 demonstrates that *while* was the most frequent subordinating conjunction applied in The Learner Corpus, whereas *although* was the most frequent one observed in The Criterion Corpus. In fact, the results revealed that EFL learners underused *even though* (-0.03), *although* (-0.27), and *though* (-0.13), and they overused *while* (1.29) and *whereas* (0.15). One similarity observed was the use of *even though* with close frequency in The Learner Corpus ($F = 5$) and The Criterion Corpus ($F = 7$). Overall, the results showed that EFL learners overused (1.01) subordinating conjunctions.

Table 6. Frequencies and ratios for subordinating conjunctions in the learner corpus and the criterion sub-corpus

Subordinating Conjunctions	The Learner Corpus		(+/-)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
Even though	5	0.08	-0.03	7	0.12
Although	34	0.56	-0.27	50	0.83
Though	5	0.08	-0.13	13	0.22
While	88	1.46	1.29	10	0.17
Whereas	14	0.23	0.15	5	0.08
TOTAL	146	2.41	1.01	85	1.42

(A Positive Value Denotes Overused, A Negative Value Denotes Underuse)

Overuse, Underuse, and Misuse of Adversative Connectors

Examination of individual adversative connectors indicated their underuse and overuse by the EFL learners. Table 7 and Table 8 demonstrate the five most overused and the five most underused adversative connectors by the learners, respectively. According to the results appeared in Table 7, learners' five most frequently used adversative connectors comprise 71.5% (426/595) of total number of adversative connectors; in contrast, these five adversative connectors only account for 44.77% (272/608) of total number of native speakers' use of adversative connectors. Repeated number of the same kind of adversative connectors have inflated frequencies of adversative connectors with a percentage of 71.5%, which indicates that EFL students tended to more frequently use the same adversative connectors than native speakers did.

Table 7. Top five most overused adversative connectors by the EFL learners

Adversative Connectors	The Learner Corpus		(+/-)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
1. While	88	1.46	1.29	10	0.17
2. On the other hand	48	0.79	0.76	2	0.03
3. In contrast	10	0.17	0.17	0	0.00
4. But	266	4.40	0.17	255	4.24
5. Whereas	14	0.23	0.15	5	0.08
TOTAL	426	7.05	2.54	272	4.52

According to the results shown in Table 8, learners' five least frequently used adversative connectors comprise only 19.49% (116/595) of total number of adversative connectors used by them; in contrast, these five adversative connectors account for 44.5% (271/608) of total number of native speakers' use of adversative connectors. The repeated number of the same kind of adversative connectors have put importance to the frequencies of the adversative connectors with a percentage of 44.5%, which indicates that native speakers tended to more frequently use the same adversative connectors than Iranian EFL students did which resulted in learners' underusing them.

Table 8. Top five most underused adversative connectors by the EFL learners

Adversative Connectors	The Learner Corpus		(+/-)	The Criterion Corpus	
	Freq.	RF per 1000 words		Freq.	RF per 1000 words
1. However	63	1.04	-1.38	146	2.42
2. Yet	5	0.08	-0.50	35	0.58
3. Although	34	0.56	-0.27	50	0.83
4. Instead	8	0.13	-0.23	22	0.37
5. Despite	6	0.10	-0.20	18	0.30
TOTAL	116	1.92	-2.58	271	4.50

When analyzing the concordance lines generated by AntConc, the authors took into account the misuse of the adversative connectors. The misuse in The Learner Corpus was generally regarding punctuation in that sometimes learners missed the comma that separated subordinate clause from main clause when using subordinating conjunction. The same was seen in the use of coordinating conjunction and preposition as well. In addition, when the learners used conjunctive adverbs, they sometimes missed the semicolon followed by comma.

Another salient misuse was in the use of subordinating conjunction in initial position. As was mentioned before, subordinate connectors function to introduce information that contrasts or differs from information given in the same sentence. Either dependent clause or independent clause may come first in a sentence, with no change in meaning (Wishon & Burks, 1980). A subordinator marks a clause as subordinate to (a dependent of) the main clause.

Figure 1, however, demonstrates that whenever the learners used *whereas* in The Learner Corpus and in initial position, they misused it (7 out of 7 cases) in that they either did not use a dependent clause or an independent clause. In fact, they could use a conjunctive adverb or transition to make a sound sentence, and simply avoid this misuse.

and amity in their activities because they are proud of their choice.	Whereas , organized activities cannot really bring happiness for them because
will secure a good spot for himself in his future social life.	Whereas , the other type may find the whole life easier and zealous. It
authorities will make sure that the child has the chance to educate.	Whereas , in older generation there wasn't such opportunity for every child an
fall into the habit of getting what they want without really trying.	Whereas , in older generation, even for the smallest things, people needed to
n extended vacation 60% of people travel to other country and cities.	Whereas , in short time there is a less chance to travel and just 30%
iors, which he will mostly need when growing up and entering society.	Whereas an overscheduled child who never had enough time to learn essential
ut also they abuse their children and sacrifice their innocent lives.	Whereas families' who are wealthy, provide stable condition for their childre

Figure 1. Concordance lines with the subordinating connector *whereas* initial position misuse in the learner corpus (Concordance lines are processed by AntConc 3.4.4m)

Suppose that in the first example above *whereas* is replaced by *however*:

Therefore, they choose childish activities and you can see the joy and amity in their activities because they are proud of their choice. However, organized activities cannot really bring happiness for them because it is not their choice.

As it is obvious, the change in sentence makes it more meaningful in that the adversative idea is easily accounted for and there is no structural problem as well. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the subordinating conjunction *whereas* was misused. The same results were observed in some of the other subordinating conjunctions when they occurred in initial

position, where *while* was misused in 5 out of 20 cases, *although* in 6 out of 24 cases, and *though* in 1 out of 1 case in that the learners used them in the initial position without any following main clause that contrasts or differs from information given in the same sentence.

According to what was mentioned, there is a pattern of misuse in subordinating conjunctions when used in initial position. Hence, it can be concluded that the learners tended to misuse subordinating conjunctions when used in initial position, and among them *whereas* and *though* were the most frequently misused since they were misused whenever learners used them in initial position and in doing so, they either missed subordinate clause or main clause. In fact, this could be avoided simply by using a conjunctive adverb or transition. As a result, another category that differentiates writings of learners from that of their native counterparts would be the misuse of subordinate conjunctions *whereas* and *though* in initial position.

Discussion

The present study was an attempt to investigate a group of EFL learners' use (overuse, underuse, misuse) of adversative connectors in their essay writings. To this end, a learner corpus was compiled, and it was compared with a criterion corpus. AntConc, a freeware concordance program, was used to find frequency of adversative connectors in the corpora. Findings were in line with other studies which demonstrated that the overall frequency in The Learner Corpus was lower than the criterion corpus and that, in general, learners underused adversative connectors. Similarities and differences between the corpora also showed that both native and non-native students were inclined to use *but* the most and that learners used *while* and *on the other hand* the most; however, they tended to use *despite*, *yet*, and *instead* the least. Analysis of concordance line also illustrated that the learners tended to misuse the subordinating conjunction in the initial position.

The first research question of the study explored the frequency of use of the adversative connectors in the EFL learners' and native speakers' essays. So, the overall frequency and the ratio of frequency per 1000 words were calculated in both corpora, and the results demonstrated two things. First, in line with other studies (e.g., Fei, 2006; Kang, 2005), it came to light that adversative connectors were less frequent in the learner corpus. It can be argued that since many studies (e.g., Alaro, 2020; Fei, 2006; Hamed, 2014; Jones, 2010; Kang, 2005; McCulloch, 2009; Narita et al., 2004) have shown that EFL undergraduate learners have difficulty using adversative connectors, the Iranian EFL learners, also, tried to avoid using them because they were probably concerned to use them inappropriately, and apparently this concern has culminated in the infrequency of the adversative connectors in The Learner Corpus. However, in order to keep the coherence in essays, they increased the frequency of the same adversative connector which later resulted in infrequency of many other adversative connectors and finally infrequency of them in general in The Learner Corpus. Second, as Ahmadi and Nadoushani (2017) put it, the discrepancy of L1 and L2 and the culture-bound factors associated with them are important reasons for inappropriate use of adversative connectors. If adversative connectors are not applied that much in the first language and there exist other cohesive devices contributing to the textuality of the text, EFL learners may not spot the difference it may make in the course of writing in the target language.

The second research question intended to find out whether there were any similarities and differences in terms of underuse, overuse, and misuse of adversative connectors between the essays written by EFL students and native speakers. When analyzed generally, the results illustrated that the learners underused three out of the four subcategories of adversative connectors which led to the underuse of the adversative connectors in general in The Learner Corpus. Detailed analysis of each adversative connectors also showed the underuse and overuse of certain adversative connectors which was in line with findings of other studies. For example,

Narita et.al. (2004) compared Japanese sub corpus of the ICLE and the LOCNESS to inquire into the usage of connectors in Japanese learners' argumentative essays in English. In their findings, they noted that Japanese EFL learners used such connectors as *yet* and *instead* less frequently. The same results were seen in this study as well since both of these adversative connectors were used less frequently in the writings of the Iranian EFL learners, too. This might be due to the EFL learners' lower familiarity with the usage of these words as adversative connectors, although they can freely use the other adversative connectors like *however*. Another possible explanation is that EFL learners are less familiar with the usage of these rather formal contrastive connectors, and thus they are likely to use other semantic equivalents that are already familiar to them (e.g., *but*, *on the other hand*, and *while*) in order to provide contrastive information.

Additionally, the results, particularly with relevance to the overuse of *but*, shed light on Fraser's inter-substitutability hypothesis. According to Fraser (1998), the adversative *but* can replace *however*, but not vice versa since *but* expresses a general contrast compared to *however*. According to Fraser (1998, p. 314), *although* and *however* are more restrictive than *but*. This can be seen wherever *however* occurs sentence initially; it can be replaced by *but*, but not vice versa. Looking at the adversative connectors in a hierarchy of specificity based on inter-substitutability hypothesis, it could be claimed that *but* is the most general connector followed by *however* and *nevertheless*, respectively, since there are contexts in which *however* is acceptable while *nevertheless* is not (Fraser, 1998). Bringing this perspective to the results of this study indicates that *but* (the least restrictive) was overused as the most frequent adversative connector, whereas *although* and *however* (which is more restrictive) occurred less frequently and they were underused. Additionally, the most restrictive adversative *nevertheless* was used only twice and *nonetheless* was not used in students' writing at all. From these results, it is clear that the learners tended to overuse *but* at the cost of underusing many other adversative connectors which resulted in underusing the adversative connectors in general; thus, particularly with reference to adversative connectors, the findings of this study support the hypothesis that the more restrictive an adversative connector is, the less frequently it is used.

The third research question of the study aimed to find out whether there were any categories of adversative connectors (misuse, overuse, or underuse) that differentiated the EFL learners' writings from the native writings. The findings demonstrated that what made the writings of the EFL students different from that of their native speaker counterparts was the fact that the learners tended to underuse adversative connectors in general. Specifically speaking, the comparison of the learner corpus and criterion corpus revealed that the learners used *while* and *on the other hand* more than the native speakers in that *while* was used eight times and *on the other hand* was used twelve times more than the native speakers. These results indicated that the learners were more willing to use the adversative connectors that were more familiar to them compared with others like *nevertheless* or *nonetheless*. A more plausible explanation of this massive overuse could be one of the lexical teddy bears (Leedham & Cai, 2013) in that EFL writers felt particularly comfortable and safe to use some specific adversative connectors.

Despite, *yet*, and *instead* were the other adversative connectors that made the learners different from the native speakers regarding the underuse of the adversative connectors. In fact, the learners only used *despite* six times, a couple of which was in the title of essays provided by the instructor, and they used *yet* five times and *instead* eight times and that their frequency was lower than ten. The findings regarding these underused adversative connectors showed that the EFL learners tended to avoid using adversative connectors that were unfamiliar to them or challenging to use; this may be due to the EFL learners' lower familiarity with the usage of these words as contrastive connectors. The connector *on the other hand* could be considered what totally differentiated the learners from the native speakers since the difference of use was

significantly high which might show that EFL learners may be used to using *on the other hand*, and that they might have created a habit in using it; thus, they should be guided to caution against overusing it simply out of habit.

In addition, the learners tended to misuse the subordinating conjunction *whereas* and *though* when used in the initial position. The cases of misuse were seen in all the instances where these connectors were used in the initial position. The learners missed either the main clause or used them instead of conjunctive adverb or transitions. Therefore, the solution for this was the replacement of subordinating conjunction with a conjunctive adverb or transition that would make the sentence sound both in meaning and structure. Accordingly, misuse of *whereas* and *though* in the initial position was another important category that differentiated the EFL students from the native English students, and the reason could be the fact that learners were not familiar enough with the adversative connectors to recognize, for example, when they use a subordinating conjunction they needed to provide both a dependent and an independent clause.

The general pattern of the adversative connector employment among the EFL learners revealed that the learners tended to use connectors that seemed more familiar or simple to them (as displayed in Table 7), and they also tended to avoid connectors that seemed unfamiliar or complex to them (as displayed in Table 8). The learner top 5 most overused adversative connectors show about 72% use, while in the native speaker this number was around 44%. As a result, it can be claimed that unlike the learners, the native speakers were willing to use a wider variety of adversative connectors in writing an essay. The cases of misuse in the subordinating conjunction also revealed that the learners were not familiar enough with the adversative connectors to have the ability to recognize different types of connectors and they just used them to convey what they wanted to express without paying attention to type or structure of the adversative connectors.

Conclusion and Implications

Investigation of EFL learners' use of adversative connectors in their essay writings and finding out what distinguishes EFL learners from native speakers in terms of overuse, underuse, and misuse of adversative connectors was the main purpose of this study. The findings revealed that the learners are mainly inclined to underuse adversative connectors in comparison with the native students.

Prepositions and conjunctive adverbs and transitions are the most underused adversative connectors in the essays of EFL students. Some of the adversative connectors such as *despite*, *yet*, and *instead* are drastically underused in the learner corpus, and the top five most overused adversative connectors by the learners make up around 72% of learners' adversative connector use indicating that learners tend to use the same adversative connectors at the cost of underusing the other ones. Hence, we can conclude that the EFL learners are mainly inclined toward the adversative connectors that are more familiar to them, and they try to avoid using those which seems difficult or unfamiliar to them. Moreover, it seems that the learners do not distinguish between different types of adversative connectors as it was seen in the misuse of *whereas* and *though* in the initial positions. Therefore, based on Fraser's (1998) inter-substitutability that states the more general adversative connectors are used more frequently, it can be concluded that learners just use adversative connectors to convey what they want to say without paying attention to different categories and in doing so they mostly use the more common and familiar ones to them like *but*, *on the other hand*, and *while*.

Insights gained from this study might help teachers, material developers and other interested stakeholders to redress this balance and to remedy the problems observed in this study. It seems

that the findings of studies like this study that compare the learner corpus and native speaker corpus lend themselves well to highlight language learners' deviations from the native norm and prepare the ground for developing corresponding teaching strategies and teaching materials. Considering the purpose of this study, the learners need to be presented with strategies and materials highlighting the problematic areas for the EFL learners in terms of underuse, overuse, and misuse of adversative connectors. Moreover, the studies focusing on the comparison between the learner corpus and native speaker corpus offer an effective means to help language learners notice the gap between their own performance and that of the native speakers and model their performance. Modelling an expert or learning from an expert is a well-known and established educational technique (Turula, 2016). In the same vein, they need to be taught how to distinguish between different types of adversative connectors and how to use a wider variety of adversative connectors to reach a better coherence and cohesion in their writings. It seems that a detailed account of learners' problems in terms of adversative connectors use obtained through the contrastive analysis of the learner corpus and native speaker corpus might help learners appreciate how to contextualize adversative connectors at syntactic as well as discourse level.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was not enough resources to compile a better learner corpus, so there could be a chance for future researchers to compile a better learner corpus and compare their findings with this study. Another limitation may stem from the genre of the essay writing because the type and frequency of use of adversative connectors might be subject to some variables such as genre and variety of English. The nature of the essay writing task might have influenced some participants to draw heavily upon some specific adversative connectors or neglect some other adversative connectors. This could be an inspiration for further study to explore the role of different genres in the frequency of logical connectors, in general, and adversative connectors, in particular. Finally, among the adversative connectors, some of them were drastically overused and underused. This could also be an interesting area for further study to investigate them more thoroughly to see the reasons behind their overuse and underuse.

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