

A Study on the Use of Conjunction by American Chinese Learners based on HSK Corpus

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Abstract

The study takes 112 Chinese compositions written by American Chinese learners collected from HSK corpus to analyze the use of conjunctions from the perspective of corpus linguistics and interlanguage theory. The study tries to find the most frequently misused conjunctions by American learners and the reasons why they tend to make such errors based on the classification of Chinese conjunctions in Chinese Proficiency Test Program. It is found that American Chinese learners tend to use conjunctions when writing Chinese compositions through qualitative, quantitative and error analysis. The most frequently used conjunction types include disjunctive, causal and progressive conjunctions. The most frequently used conjunctions are “因为”、“但是”、“所以”、“而且”. The most frequently misused conjunction types include causal, progressive and associated conjunctions. The most frequently misused conjunctions are “但是”、“而且”、“所以”. The error rate is also calculated to explore the reasons for errors. The study may provide pedagogical guidance for TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language).

Key words: American Chinese learners, Chinese conjunctions, HSK corpus

I. Introduction

With the widely spread of Chinese culture, more and more people start to learn Chinese. Even if they have excellent Chinese proficiency, there is still a certain gap between them and native Chinese speakers in Chinese writing ability.

Conjunction is a kind of functional word in Chinese. It can not act as an independent component in a sentence, but only as a connection between a word and a word, a phrase and a phrase, as well as a sentence and a sentence^③. Conjunctions are frequently used in the writing of native Chinese speakers. This paper aims to study the use of conjunctions by American Chinese learners in Chinese writing.

Jinming Zhao puts forward that “the purpose of teaching grammar in TCFL is to help foreign students to understand the characteristics of Chinese grammar, master the rules of Chinese grammar, so as to use Chinese correctly, develop language communicative competence and effectively improve the level of Chinese”^④.

The study takes 112 Chinese compositions written by Americans collected from HSK corpus. HSK corpus is composed of answers of Non-Chinese Native Language Foreigners Participating in HSK Composition Examination.

The study tries to analyze the use of conjunctions in Chinese writing in HSK corpus to study the features of conjunction use for American Chinese learners and to analyze the reasons for conjunction errors and the types of errors.

II. Literature Review

Chinese conjunction plays an important role in connect words and words, phrases and phrases, sentences and sentences, paragraphs and paragraphs. Different conjunctions express different logic relationship and indicate different types of compound sentence. Although the amount of conjunctions is not large, conjunction is widely used and plays a key role in Chinese text structure.

Corpus linguistics has become mainstream of language research. Research based on corpus is no longer the particular field of computer researchers, but plays larger and larger influence in language research.

Yueguo Gu points out that corpus linguistics has become the mainstream of linguistics in Europe. It is believed that corpus linguistics can draw more and more attention in China and be a great success.

Therefore, there have been some scholars who take corpus as research tool to study Chinese writing by students abroad and the use of conjunctions in speaking.

Shujuan Zhang finds that conjunction errors are most frequently happened in overseas students' writing. According to statistics, the distribution of textual cohesion is unbalanced. The errors are most happened in conjunctions, ellipsis and pronouns cohesion. The major reasons for errors include interlingual interference, learning strategies interference, errors in teaching process and inadequate compilation of teaching materials.

III. Research Tool and Methods

(1) HSK corpus

This research takes 112 compositions written by American Chinese learners collected from HSK corpus as research objects through nationality retrieval tool.

(2) Qualitative and quantitative analysis

This research counts the using frequency of each type of conjunctions and the frequency of errors in 112 compositions are counted. Besides, the typical cases of conjunction errors are analyzed.

(3) Error analysis

The typical conjunction errors are analyzed to explain the error reasons.

This research tries to answer three research questions through employing above research method and tools:

1. How is the use of conjunctions written by American Chinese learners?
2. In which type of conjunctions American Chinese learners most frequently make errors?
3. What are the error reasons according to the errors made in compositions by American Chinese learners?

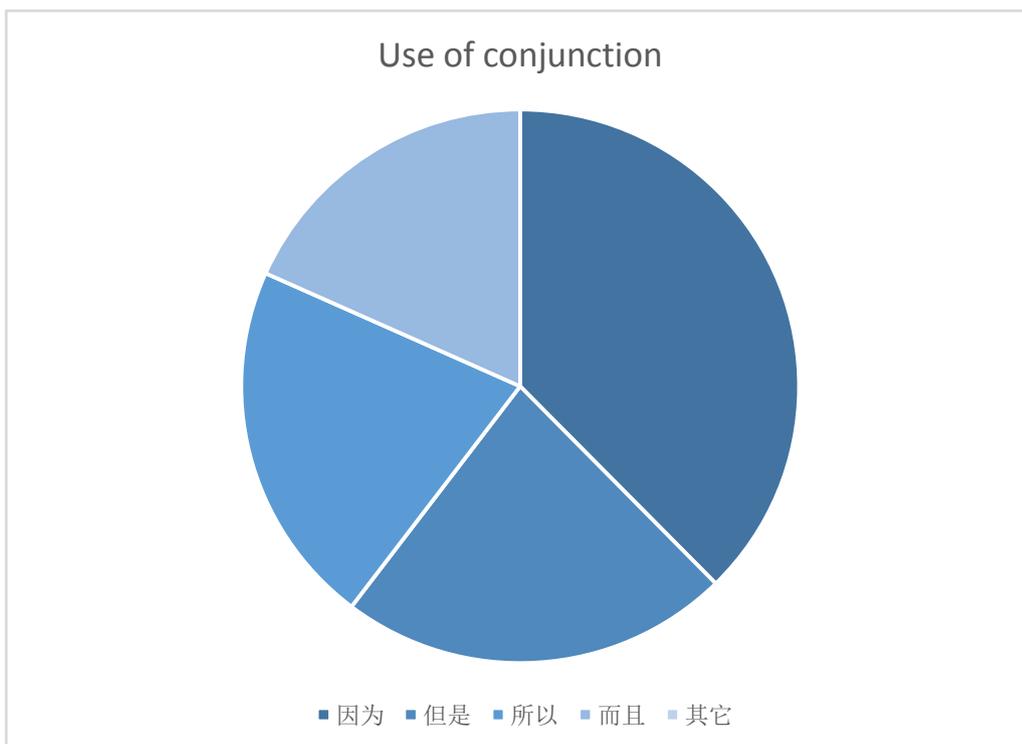
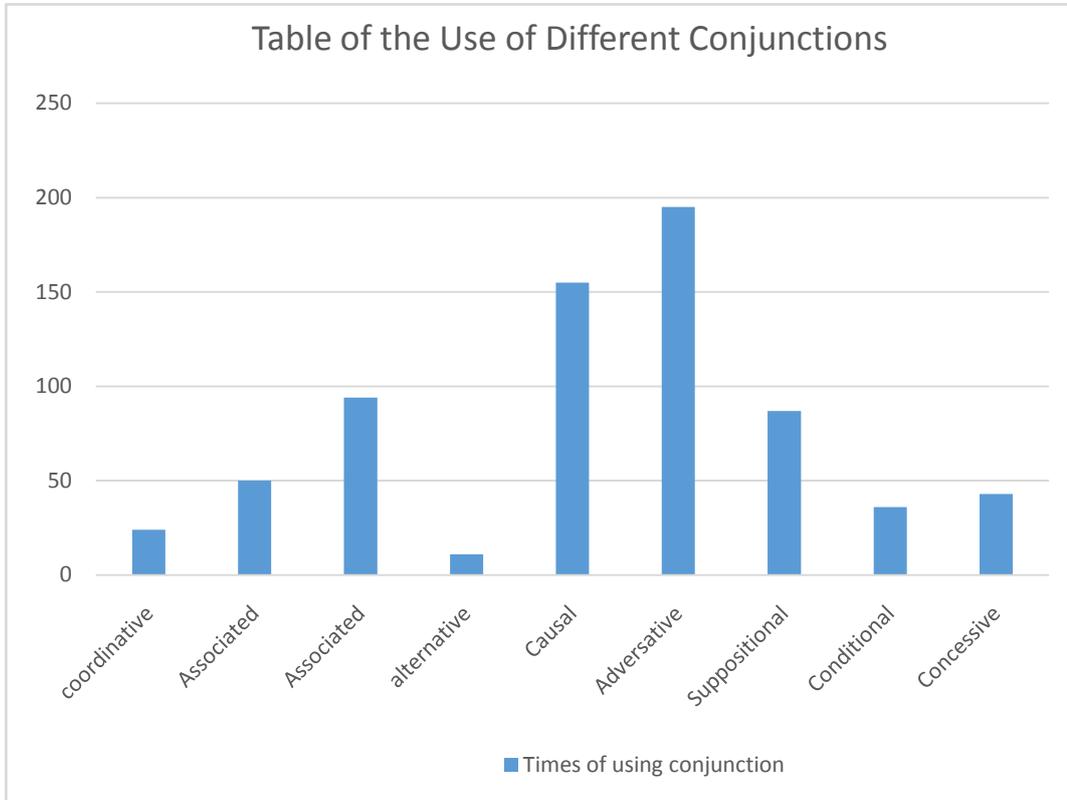
IV. Analysis

1. The use of conjunction

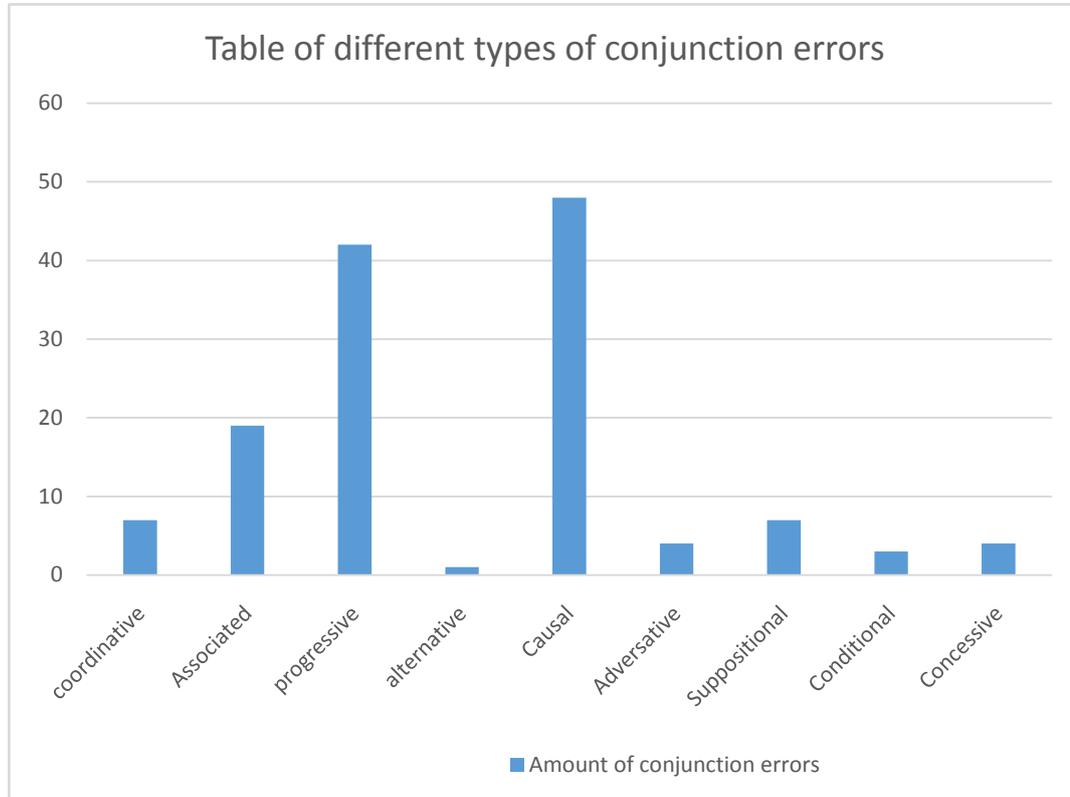
Jianming Lu and Zhen Ma puts forward that there are about 120 conjunctions in modern Chinese, and 90 of them are frequently used. Generally, conjunctions are divided into two major types based on semantics, one is coordinative (including 和、或、还是、与其、宁可、不但、而且) and the other is collateral (including 虽然、但是、即使、因为、所以、如果).

Semantic relationship		Conjunction
Coordination	coordinative	此外、连同、同样、以及、另外、还有
	Associated	此后、从此、接着、可见、那么、于是、至于、总之、然后
	progressive	并且、不但、不仅、不只、而且、何况、进而、况且、甚至、甚至于、再说
	alternative	不如、还是、或是、或者、宁可、宁肯、宁愿、要不、要么、与其
Subordinate	Causal	从而、既然、加以、结果、看来、免得、难怪、省得、所以、以便、以免、以至、以至于、以致、因此、因而、因为
	Adversative	不过、但是、反之、可是、然而、虽说、只是
	Suppositional	不然、否则、假定、假如、假若、假设、假使、如果、倘若、万一、要不然、要不是、要是
	Conditional	不管、不论、除非、等到、无论、只要、只有
	Concessive	固然、即便、即使、尽管、就是、就算、哪怕、虽然

In collected 112 compositions written by American Chinese learners from HSK corpus, only one use no conjunctions. It is shown that almost all American Chinese learners tend to use conjunctions in writing.

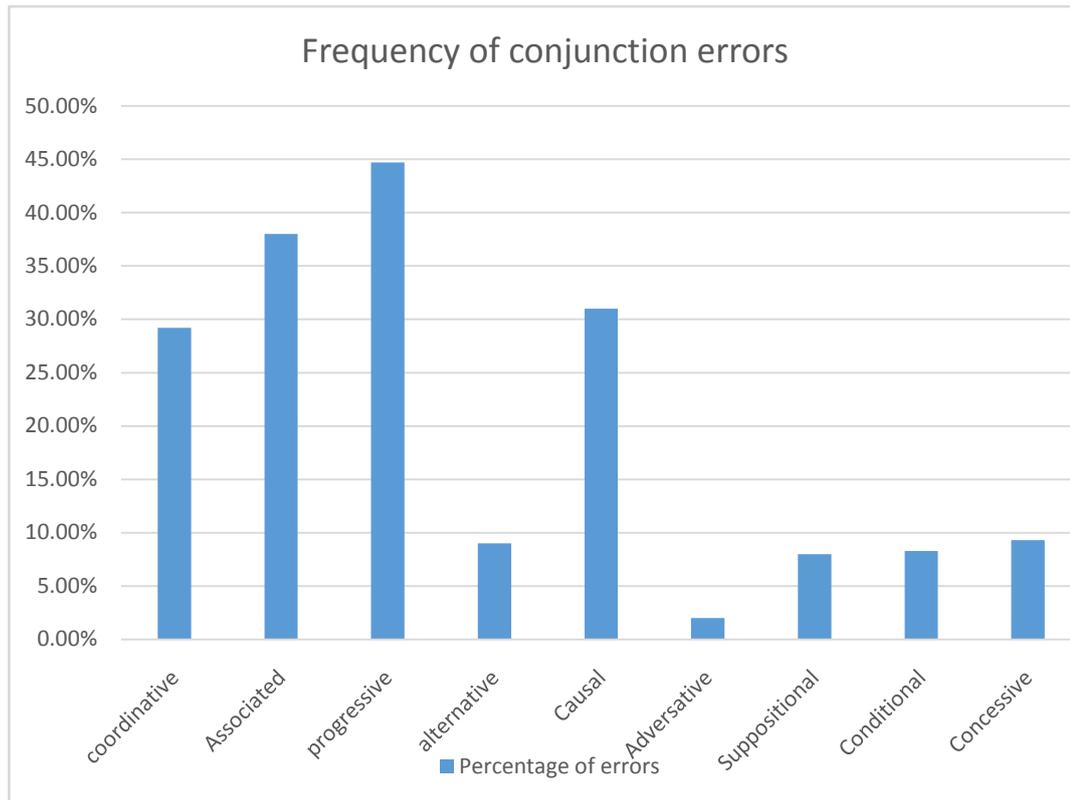


According to statistics, The most frequently used types of conjunctions in 112 compositions are disjunctive, causal and progressive conjunctions. The most frequently used conjunctions are “因为”、“但是”、“所以”、“而且”.



It is found from the statistics that the most frequently misused conjunction types include causal, progressive and associated conjunctions. The most frequently misused conjunctions are “但是”、“而且”、“所以”.

Semantic relationship		Error amount	Times	Percentage
Coordination	coordinative	7	24	29.2%
	Associated	19	50	38%
	progressive	42	94	44.7%
	alternative	1	11	9%
Subordinate	Causal	48	155	31%
	Adversative	4	195	2%
	Suppositional	7	87	8%
	Conditional	3	36	8.3%
	Concessive	4	43	9.3%
Total		136	695	19.6%



In collected compositions, American Chinese learners use 695 conjunctions in total and 136 of them are misused. The total error frequency is 19.6%. It is seen in histogram that progressive, associated, causal and coordinative conjunctions are most misused.

2. The analysis of typical error cases

After analyzing error cases in using conjunction in 112 compositions, the study finds that the errors can be classified into three types, including lack of conjunctions, redundancy of conjunctions and misuse of conjunctions. In addition, the misuse of conjunctions could be classified into misspelled conjunction, semantically misunderstanding and collocation error.

Types of conjunction errors	Times of conjunction errors	Frequency of conjunction errors
lack of conjunction	31	22.8%
Redundancy of conjunction	22	16.2%
Misuse of conjunction	83	61%
Total	136	100%

(1) Lack of conjunction

There are 31 errors happened as lacking conjunction. The frequency is about 22.8%. Following the typical cases in lacking conjunctions will be analyzed.

例 1：虽然我不能亲眼看得到他，（但是）我知道有一天一定会看到。

In this sentence, the second clause is lack of conjunction “但是”. “虽然……但是……”is a pair of collocation. “但是” indicates adversative meaning to the first clause. In this sentence, “我不能亲眼看得到他”and“我知道有一天一定会看到”is adversative. However, there is no semantic conjunction

between them. Therefore, “但是”is need for linking two clauses.

Lacking of conjunction “但是”is not only existed in “虽然……但是……”pattern, but also existed in sentence without“虽然”.

例 2：写汉字也帮你更了解中国人的思想，（但是）小的时候学生没办法背字。

Although there is no “虽然”in the first clause, the semantic meaning is the same as the Example 1. “写汉字也帮你更了解中国人的思想”and“小的时候学生没办法背字”are adversative. The two clauses are also lacking a linking conjunction “但是”.

例 3：很多家长认为，分班可以避免学生早恋。（但是）早恋是一个一直存在的社会问题，是少男少女在青春发育期对异性产生好奇而引起的。

This sentence is also adversative semantically and lacks of the linking conjunction “但是”between clauses. The meaning of this sentence is abrupt without the conjunction. Not only adversative but also clausal sentence could lack of conjunction.

例 4：我刚来到中国的时候，对中国不习惯，（因为）中国和美国的习惯完全不同的。

In this sentence, the first clause “我刚来到中国的时候，对中国不习惯”and the second clause“中国和美国的习惯完全不同的”are in clausal relationship. The second clause explains the first clause. However, a conjunction which express clausal meaning is lacked between them, like “因为”.

It is analyzed that sentences lacking conjunction are mainly in adversative and clausal relationship. The error of lacking conjunction is most frequently happened in two conjunctions, “但是”and“因为”.

Adversative and clausal relationship are most frequently employed semantic relationship in Chinese, while the conjunctions which express adversative and clausal relationship are most frequently used. It can be concluded that “但是”and“因为”play very important roles in Chinese conjunction. Therefore, teachers should pay comparatively more attention in these two semantic relationship and these two conjunctions.

(2) Redundancy of conjunction

There are 22 errors happened as redundancy, and the misused frequency in this type is 16.2% in 112 collected compositions.

例 5：他活着所以他就会具体帮助我。

The semantic relationship in this sentence is not clausal. The conjunction“所以”expressing clausal meaning between two clauses is not match the semantic meaning in this sentence. This sentence is already semantically completed with the conjunction“就”, the conjunction “所以”is redundancy.

例 6：我妈妈原来的爱好是跳英国的一种传统舞蹈，所以为了她的生日她安排得特别周到，她请了一个音乐队来表演。

This sentence has no clausal relationship, but uses the conjunction “所以”which expresses clausal meaning. Therefore, this conjunction is redundant.

例 7：我们俩都不属于这座庙的主人，所以不应该这样算，反而应该由主人来决定。

This sentence contains three clauses. The meaning that the second clause expresses is a deny to the first clause. However, the conjunction“反而”express a kind of opposite or unexpected meaning to the second clause. Therefore,“反而” in the third clause is semantically repeated with the above context. In this case,“反而”is redundant.

It is found that conjunction redundancy is most frequently happened in the use of“所以”. English emphasizes hypotaxis while Chinese emphasizes parataxis. In Chinese writing, the relationship between clauses can be hidden. This may explain why native English speakers are more likely to use redundant conjunctions.

1. Misuse of conjunction

83 conjunctions are misused in 112 compositions and the frequency is 61%. It is analyzed that the misuse of conjunctions could be classified into three types:

- ① misspelled conjunction
- ② semantically misunderstanding
- ③ collocation error

(1) misspelled conjunction

例 8：但（旦）是在我的国家很多孩子没有我那么好的家里的情况。

例 9：虽（随）然还没出生，我们在母亲里面，能听到他的声音。

In example 8 and 9, the conjunctions “但是”and “虽然”are both mis-spelled. In this case, conjunction errors are happened.

(2) semantically misunderstanding

例 10：如果你很努力，而且（再说）很认真地干活，你一定会成功。

In this sentence, the first two clauses are coordinate instead of adding reasons. In this case, the conjunction “再说”is inappropriate. The reason for this error is the mix of conjunctions with similar semantic meaning.

例 11：自五十年代差异的扩大，主要是由于（基于）我们整个社会快速的现代化。

“由于”indicates reasons, while “基于”refers to consider, based on or according to. “基于”mainly indicates ensure the next step based on something. In this sentence, the second clause provides reasons for the first one. In this case, “由于”is appropriate rather than“基于”. The reason for misusing is the mix of conjunctions with similar semantic meaning.

例 12：他虽不像人们喜欢的那种管得很松的老师，反而（而相反的）非常严。

“反而”expresses an opposite or unexpected meaning with the context. In example 12, the writer uses “而相反的”, which expresses the same semantic meaning with “反而”. However, “反而”is much more concrete and accord to Chinese expression.

(3) collocation error

例 13：一方面，在公共场所，不管（不仅）是公园还是地铁，大众不喜欢吸二手烟，尤其在室内的场所。对别人的身体健康特别不利。

“不管……还是……”is the most commonly used collocation. In example 13, the writer makes errors in using collocations.

例 14：如果父母把孩子教对了，孩子（就）才不会走错路。

“如果……就……”is one of the most commonly used collocations. In example 14, the writer misuses the second part of the collocation.

V. Conclusion

By analyzing the Chinese compositions written by American Chinese learners in HSK corpus, this paper finds that American learners tend to use conjunctions in Chinese writing. The most frequently used conjunctions are those of transitive, causal and progressive relationship, while the most frequently used conjunctions are “因为”、“但是”、“所以”、“而且”. There are 136 conjunctions are used in 112 compositions. The total error rate is 19.6%. Among them, the conjunctions which are most frequently misused are causal, progressive and associated conjunctions, and the conjunctions which are most frequently misused are “但是”、“而且”、“所以”.

The conjunction errors can be classified into three types, including lack of conjunctions, redundancy of conjunctions and misuse of conjunctions. Among them, the error rate of lack of conjunctions is 22.8%, the rate of redundancy of conjunctions is 16.2% and the rate of the misuse of conjunctions is 61%.

It is found that American Chinese learners are prone to errors in using conjunctions in Chinese writing, and they should pay attention to the explanation of conjunctions in Chinese teaching. In addition, conjunction errors in 112 compositions include misspelled conjunctions, misuse of conjunctions due to semantic misunderstanding and misuse of conjunction collocation. It can be seen that American Chinese learners grasp the above knowledge comparatively bad. Therefore, when teaching Chinese as a foreign language, attention should be paid to the spell of words, the distinction of conjunctions with similar semantics and the teaching of collocations.

VI. Limitation

Although the research is carefully designed, it still has shortage. Firstly, the research only collects 112 compositions from HSK corpus and the length of compositions is not large enough. In addition, the research uses artificial statistics. It would be better to employ SPSS to ensure the objectivity and scientificity of the research.

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