

# *A Study on the Use of the Adversative Conjunction in Chinese College Students' English Writing*

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**Abstract:** This paper, by adopting the method of quantitative analysis, investigates the use of the adversative conjunction in 129 Chinese college students' English writings. And it aims to learn about the general characteristics of the use of the adversative conjunction in Chinese college students' English writing. Besides, it is also expected that the results can help Chinese college students better use adversative conjunction in their English writing so as to finally improve their English writing ability.

## 1. Introduction

The adversative conjunction, as one of the frequently used conjunctions, plays a vital role in making a good English writing, and it is at the same time an important factor in making an essay precious in its structure as well as appropriate in its cohesion. Therefore, how to make good use of the adversative conjunction in English writing has already attracted much attention from both teachers and students. And they've, actually, made efforts to realize this purpose. However, the result is far from satisfactory. In view of this, the author, by mainly adopting the method of quantitative analysis, investigated the general characteristics of the use of the adversative conjunction in Chinese college students' English writing in order to find a good way to help the students better apply adversative conjunction in their English writing and therefore efficiently improve their English writing ability.

## 2. Methodology

The study selected 129 junior English majors from one of the Universities in Shaanxi province as the subjects, whose age ranged from 21 to 23 with the average 22. Besides, the study adopted mainly the quantitative analysis, which is conducted through an English writing task. Specifically, the requirement of the English writing task is to ask the subjects to write a response composition with its topic "*The Effects of Examination*". The author, with the help of the tutor, distributed the paper to the subjects, who were required to hand in their writings within 45 minutes with no less than 300 words. Moreover, during this process, for the sake of ensuring students' real English writing ability, they were not allowed to use any reference. Then 45 minutes later, the author collected all of the 129 compositions, with its response rate one hundred percent. In the end, the author carefully checked the 129 samplings and found out that all of them can be used for the final data analysis.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Results

In order to explore the general characteristics of the students' use of the adversative conjunction in their English writing, the author input the 129 samplings into the *Corpus Cloud*, and then analyzed the use of the adversative conjunction in them, whose results can be seen in Figure 1.

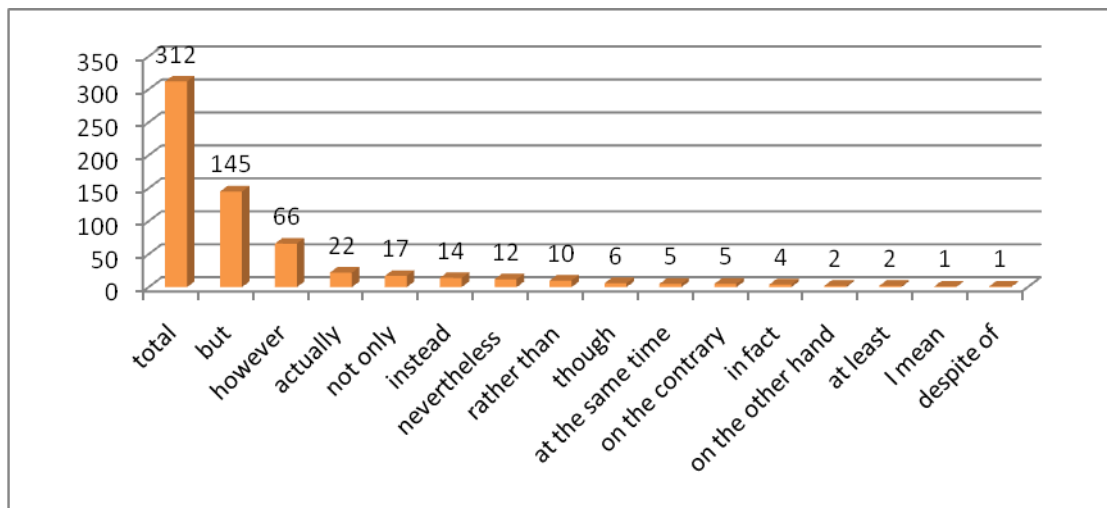


Figure 1: Overall use of the adversative conjunction.

From Figure 1, it can be discovered that the adversative conjunction appears totally 312 times in the subjects' English writings. And the kinds of the adversative conjunction students use are limited, most of which only cluster in some fixed ones.

To be specific, the most frequently used adversative conjunction is *but* with its times 145. Then comes the use of *however* with its times 66, followed by the use of *actually* with its times 22.

In addition, the times of the use of the adversative conjunction like *not only* (17 times), *instead* (14 times), *nevertheless* (12 times) and *rather than* (10 times) are less than 20 times.

Furthermore, the times of the use of the adversative conjunction like *though* (6 times), *at the same time* (5 times), *on the contrary* (5 times), *in fact* (4 times), *on the other hand* (2 times) and *at least* (2 times), which, compared with the adversative conjunctions mentioned above, are even less.

At last, the least frequently used adversative conjunction for subjects are **I mean** and **despite of**, both of which are only used for one time.

#### 3.2. Discussion

From the results obtained above, it can be deduced that the adversative conjunction the students use in their English writings lacks diversity and flexibility, and the most frequently used one is only *but*. This result is in accordance with Chu Lianglong and Zhao Chengfa's. They, in 2011, carried out a study to examine the use of adversative conjunctions in English argumentative essays by a group of Chinese engineering majors and found out that students inclined to use *but* in their writings. And as for the reasons for this phenomenon, it may lie in the two factors as following.

To begin with, it is the difference existing between Chinese and English that leads to such kind of situation. As we all know, there is a distinguished difference between Chinese and English in the aspect of the use of the conjunction. Specifically, English writing is reader-centered, whose expressing is more direct. Therefore, some words, especially the conjunctive words, cannot be

omitted in the writing. However, Chinese writing is author-centered, whose expressing is not as serious as that of the westerners. As a result, Chinese English learners will often choose to leave out some discourse cohesive devices as long as the meaning among the sentences can be understood. Take one of the subjects' sampling for example: *We may meet someone surrounding us who don't like study, we surely can't regard him an inability person.* Obviously, there exist two clauses in this sentence. And according to the rules of English grammar, an adversative conjunction should be used here to link the two clauses together. However, due to the difference between Chinese and English mentioned above, the subject chose to omit the adversative conjunction, which causes the whole sentence to violate the English grammatical rules. In view of this, the correct form of the sentence should be "*We may meet someone surrounding us who don't like study, but we surely can't regard him an inability person*".

Secondly, the teachers' being short of the teaching on the use of adversative conjunction during the teaching process may account for such kind of issue. For example, to dig deeper the reasons of the phenomenon mentioned above, the author also made the face-to-face interview with ten students, who were randomly selected by the author from the subjects. And when asked about the reason why they usually use some fixed adversative conjunctions like *but* in their English writings, almost all of the interviewees responded that the teachers, in teaching the English writing, do not attach importance to the use of the adversative conjunction and most importantly, they haven't imparted more kinds of adversative conjunctions to students. Therefore, the students, when using the conjunctive word to express the contrastive relationship between two sentences, will tend to apply *but* instead of other types of adversative conjunctions in their English writing. Here is another example selected from the subjects' samplings: *But there is no doubt that examinations do have some advantages. But, compared with its merits, it is acknowledged that it brings students more pressure, not the knowledge itself.* With regard to this example, it can be discovered that although there exists no apparent grammatical error, the effect of expression is far from the native language learners' writings. That's because the subject doesn't know how to make a flexible use of English adversative conjunction. And the same expression in the native learners' writing should be "*On the other hand, there is no doubt that examinations do have some advantages. However, compared with its merits, it is acknowledged that it brings students more pressure rather than knowledge itself.*"

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be concluded that the use of the adversative conjunction in Chinese college students' English writing is far from satisfactory, and it is also far from the level of the native learners' writing. On account of this, it is suggested that above all, some measures should be taken to deal with it. For example, in English writing class, teachers ought to actively guide students to pay more attention to the utilization of the adversative conjunction in their English writing. Besides, they are also expected to input more kinds of adversative conjunctions to the students. In addition to this, it is also advocated that teachers should pay high attention to instruct some knowledge about the difference between English and Chinese to students in order to help them avoid making mistakes on the use of the adversative conjunction in their English writing. Only in these ways, can the students make good use of the adversative conjunction, and therefore effectively improve their English writing ability.

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