

CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Bloomfield (1963) defined the word as a "minimal free form," that is, the smallest unit which may be spoken alone. Morphology is the study of the structure of words, i.e., the study of rules governing the formation of words in a language. Matthews (1974) describes morphology as being concerned with "the forms of words" in different constructions and uses. Taylor & Taylor (1990) describe words as linguistic units that play grammatical roles in a sentence and have sound structures, that is:

"a word may be defined as the union of particular meaning with a particular complex of sounds, capable of particular grammatical employment."

(1990: 146)

This means that words may have grammatical roles of either content words (e.g. nouns, verbs) or function words (e.g. articles, conjunctions). The linguistic term is morphosyntactics as it refers to grammatical categories or properties for whose definition the criteria of morphology and syntax both apply as in

describing the characteristics of words (Crystal: 1985).

Though familiar, the definition of 'word' is hard to pin down. The frequency and familiarity of words must be considered. We have 'word types' and 'word tokens'. 'Types' refer to different items and 'tokens' refer to the repeated occurrences of one type (Taylor & Taylor, 1990: 147). The most frequent word types are prototypical function words such as articles (e.g., 'a', 'the') and prepositions (e.g., 'in', 'from') and conjunctions. Conjunctions are therefore, grammatical morphemes, i.e., words or morphemes whose main functions in a sentence are syntactic rather than semantic. Crystal (1985) states that several terms can be used for this notion of function word, namely, FORM WORD, GRAMMATICAL WORD or FUNCTOR. This study focusses on that part of morphology concerned with subordinating conjunctions.

1.2 The Importance Of Conjunctions In The Learning of English

In this world of 'state-of-the-art', combining messages is a daily affair, since knowledge is expanding and new words are required to express complex thoughts, new ideas and new discoveries. Consequently, when we want to make

a statement which is too complex to be expressed in a single clause, we make statements by putting two or more clauses together in one sentence. Students, would need to combine sentences using conjunctions as a means of communication. Since there is a correlation between structure and function as means of communication, there is a need for students to **extend and expand** basic grammar and vocabulary , so as to express themselves effectively. Thus, there is a need for the use of conjunctions both in and out of the classroom. Conjunctions are a manifestation of the effective expression of complicated meanings. Conjunctions help to reduce sentences by the process of embedding. They help to prevent a monotonous repetition of words, phrases and sentences.

ESL learners should master the use of conjunctions because it is a frequent feature in the English language. Conjunctions are also an essential lexical component and morphosyntactic feature of language expansion. Taylor & Taylor (1990: 147) quote Denes (1963) and Francis & Kucera (1982), in saying that the average adult is said to use a vocabulary of 3000 - 6000 words, most of them infrequently. The fifty most frequent word types are function words that make up 60 per cent of spoken word tokens and 45 per cent of written word tokens. After

all, the number of subordinating conjunctions in this study sum up to 20 and according to a research done by Miller, Newman & Friedman (1958), the number of function words is 363. Working out the percentage of conjunctions used here (i.e., $20/363 \times 100$), we get 5.5 per cent. This shows that the subordinating conjunctions researched here, represent 5.5 per cent of the function words.

Therefore an adequate knowledge of subordinating conjunctions together with the understanding of their meanings and functions, as well as the ability to use them correctly would be useful in learning and mastering the English language.

1.3 A Brief Outline Of English Conjunctions

1.3.1 The Use Of Conjunctions

Conjunctions are of two kinds: **basic co-ordinators** that link parallel constituents (e.g. 'and', 'but') and **basic subordinators** (e.g. 'when', 'since', 'while') that link main and subordinate clauses. Two clauses joined by a co-ordinating conjunction form a compound sentence whereas two clauses joined by a subordinating conjunction form a complex sentence.

Grammatical clauses such as conjunctions are called **function words** as their main functions are syntactic -- connecting, relating and modifying content words in sentences. Since conjunctions are function words, they form a **closed class** in that their number is fixed. They have these characteristics. They are:

- (i) highly frequent
- (ii) short and often monosyllabic
- and (iii) not used alone as complete utterances.

People use conjunctions as linguistic units to arrive at their message. Conjunctions are crucial in a clause. Taylor & Taylor (1990) say that a clause serves as a major processing unit in the sense that at its end, the interpreter can **integrate information** and **extract its gist**. Thus, most academic disciplines use conjunctions to **integrate, expand and extend** on their information or message.

1.3.2 Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions are used when you add a clause to develop some aspect of what you are saying. A clause which begins with a subordinating conjunction is called a **subordinate clause**. Sentences containing a main clause

and one or more subordinate clauses are often called complex sentences. Here are some examples:

(i) The dog jumped onto my mother's chair
while she was watching television.

(ii) **When** an atom is split, it produces
energy.

An **adverbial clause** is the main kind of subordinate clause that uses conjunctions. There are eight types of adverbial clauses (CoBUILD: 1990). These clauses use eight types of subordinating conjunctions. Here are some examples of subordinating conjunctions:- 'when', 'before', 'after', 'if', 'although', 'so that', etc.

1.3.3 Co-ordinating Conjunctions

These are conjunctions that are used when we want to combine two or more clauses of equal importance. Co-ordinating conjunctions are also used to link words and word groups. Clauses joined together by co-ordinating conjunctions are called co-ordinate clauses and sentences which contain these clauses are called compound sentences. Here is a list of the most common co-ordinating conjunctions:- 'and', 'nor', 'then', 'but'.

'or', 'yet', etc.

****Co-ordinating conjunctions are not the subject of this study****

1.4 Explanation Of Terms And Their Functions

(a) Morpheme

A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of a language and it is indivisible. It can either be a word or part of a word. In this study, conjunctions can be regarded as meaningful linguistic units or structures.

(b) Clause

A term that refers to a unit of grammatical organization smaller than the sentence, but larger than phrases, words or morphemes. Clauses can be classified into main (independent) and subordinate (dependent) clauses.

E.g. The rain arrived | after the monsoon season started

(Main clause) | (subordinate clause)

(c) Complex Sentence

A sentence consisting of more than one clause i.e., a main clause and a subordinate clause.

(d) Compound Sentence

A sentence containing two or more clauses.

(e) Subordinating Conjunctions**(i) Temporal Conjunctions**

These are conjunctions that are used to say when something happens by referring to a period of time or to another event. They can be used after adjuncts of time.

(ii) Conditional Conjunctions

These are conjunctions that are used when you want to talk about a possible situation and its consequences.

(iii) Conjunctions of Purpose

These conjunctions are used to indicate the purpose of an action.

(iv) Conjunctions Of Reason

These are conjunctions that are used when you want to indicate the reason for something.

(v) Conjunctions Of Result

These are used to indicate the result of something.

(vi) Concessive Conjunctions

These conjunctions are used when you want to make two statements, one of which contrasts with the other or makes it seem surprising.

(vii) Conjunctions Of Place

Sometimes, when you want to talk to indicate the location or position of something, you use these conjunctions.

(viii) Conjunctions Of Manner

These are conjunctions used when you want to talk about someone's behaviour or the way something is done.

(f) **Target Language**

The second language being learned by the learner when he is using it. It is the language in which communication is being attempted. It is represented by L2.

(g) **Mother Tongue**

One's native language or source language represented by L1 / MT / NL.

(h) **Second Language**

A language usually acquired in a formal environment apart from the official language. In Malaysia, English is the second language.

(i) **Errors**

In second language learning, errors are basically the inaccurate or inappropriate use of certain phonological, syntactic or semantic items and structures of the target language with regard to accepted usage.

(j) Error Analysis

This is concerned with the identification, description and explanation of errors made by language learners, either in its spoken or written form. It investigates the significance and systematicity of errors made by learners in the learning process.

(k) Interlingual Errors

This term refers to that group of errors, the causes of which can be traced to some form of transfer influence or interference of Bahasa Melayu in the learning of ESL.

(l) Intralingual Errors

These are errors which occur because of the difficulty posed within the language, that is, problems caused by the nature of the target language itself. Such errors may be largely redundancy errors in English since the language has lots of words to express the meaning that is already suggested by another feature in the same sentence (Wilkins: 1974).

(m) Interlanguage

A learner constructs a language system out of the linguistic input to which he has been exposed. This has been referred to as an 'approximate system' (Nemser: 1971), 'idiosyncratic dialect' or 'transitional dialect' (Corder: 1971) and an 'interlanguage' (Selinker: 1972). The term 'interlanguage' suggests that the learner's language will reflect systematic features of both the IL and of other languages he may know (e.g., nfi). Consequently, the learner's language system is a mixed or intermediate one, i.e., a continuum between L1 and L2. Although this suggests a rule governed language that is common to all learners, differences occur as a result of differences in their learning experiences.

1.5 The Subordinating Conjunctions Investigated In This Study

Subordinating conjunctions express subordinate meaning in adverbial clauses. Altogether, twenty conjunctions are covered in this study and they can be classified into seven categories as seen in table 1 (on the next page). For ease of test administration and scoring, the conjunctions of reason and result were combined into one category.

Table I

**Categories Of Subordinating Conjunctions
In The EL**

Categories	Example
1. Temporal/Time	when, before, until, after, while, since
2. Conditional	if, unless
3. Purpose	so as to, in order that
4. Reason and Result	because, in case so that
5. Concessive	although, despite, not that
6. Place	where, wherever
7. Manner	like, as though