

Exploring NUL Students' Syntactic Complexity through the use of Adverbial clause of Purpose

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Abstract

The present paper explores the usage of the adverbial clause of purpose as a syntactic complexity measure among the National University of Lesotho (NUL) students. The research subjects were NUL fourth year students across the seven faculties namely the Faculty of Agriculture (FOA), the Faculty of Education (FOE), the Faculty of Health Sciences (FOHS), the Faculty of Humanities (FOH), the Faculty of Law (FOL), the Faculty of Social Sciences (FOSS) and the Faculty of Science and Technology (FOST). Data was collected from their past examination papers (2016/2017). This study employed the interpretive paradigm and has analysed the data qualitatively. The study has also employed the descriptive and case study designs. The students' continuous writing was the focus of this study since Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and Cognitive Grammar (CG) are the theoretical frameworks which is the basis of the present study and therefore require continuous writing. The findings of the present study reveal that NUL students have a reasonably high level of syntactic complexity in their writing as shown by how they used adverbial clause of purpose. The study therefore concludes that NUL students have a reasonably high level of syntactic complexity demonstrated by how they used the adverbial clause of purpose.

Keywords: Syntactic complexity, Content analysis, General complex sentences

Introduction

Adverbial clause of purposes observed in complex sentences. Thus, this feature is used to form a complex sentence. A complex sentence has an independent and a dependent clause and in such a structure, adverbial clause of purpose is a dependent clause. The ability to produce complex sentences is generally considered a measure of developing syntactic complexity and maturity (Hunt, 1965). Adverbial clause of purpose is also the feature of syntactic complexity. Leech and Svartvik (2002:109) explain that in the situation where the adverbial clause of purpose is revealed, the proposed result or purpose is defined by an adverbial clause of purpose, usually a **To-**

infinitive. They claim that an adverbial clause of purpose is a finite verb clause beginning with **so that** and the present paper adopts Leech and Svartvik's (ibid) definition.

Adverbial clauses are finite subordinate clauses whose main function is to show an adverbial element in the sentences. Leech and Svartvik (2002:238) claim that adverbials usually tell something extra about an action, happening or state as described by the rest of the sentence. That is, adverbial clauses occur in various ways namely, adverbial clause of time, reason, condition, purpose, concession and place. Maleke (2011:7) supports Leech and Svartvik's (ibid) opinion that adverbial clauses are of different types such as time clauses, place clauses, reason clauses, concessive, purpose and conditional clauses. The present study affirms with Maleke's (ibid) view that adverbial clauses are of different types. Berk (1999:200) observes that adverbial clause of purpose is the same as adverbs of reason because according to him, they both illustrate why or to what purpose something happens. They are grouped together because semantically, they overlap. The paper starts by showing that in English language, syntactic complexity features such as subordination that include adverbial clause of purpose, are used as measures of syntactic complexity in written texts. Adverbial clause of purpose is introduced by so that as its subordinating conjunction.

Background Information

Many studies on syntactic complexity in English as a First Language has been carried out by many linguists in English as the First Language (L1) and English as a Second Language (L2).

These researchers used different measures of syntactic complexity that include subordination. Unlike other studies, Beard et al. (2002) focused on identification of different syntactic structures including subordination. The conclusions drawn from studies in L1 acquisition were that initially children produce clauses which are subordinated but some of them fail to connect ideas appropriately; as a result, they write disjointed sentences. Some of them produced floating clauses as shown in example (1) below.

Or [if it is the other way round] you turn the black over (Beard et al., 2002:23). Example (1) is disjointed and a subordinate clause observed in it is floating because it requires a main clause in order for it to convey a complete thought. Thus, this sentence does not have meaning.

The study

The current paper explores the NUL (English L2) students' syntactic complexity in their written texts. It answers the questions:

- 1) Do NUL students use adverbial clause of purpose in their writing?
Do they use it appropriately?
- 2) What are its syntactic functions in the students' sentences?
- 3) Which textual functions does it perform?

The first objective of the present study was to examine the syntactic complexity of NUL students' writing through the use of adverbial clause of purpose. The second objective was to explore its syntactic use in order to observe whether it has any syntactic functions or not and to observe whether students are aware of its textual functions.

The examination scripts of fourth year students of the National University of Lesotho (NUL) were purposively, systematically and randomly selected. Regardless of the faculties, all the NUL students are normally introduced to Communication and Study Skills (CSS) and Remedial Grammar of English in the first year of their university study. By the time they get to the fourth year, they have been involved in continuous writing for three years. The researcher was interested in investigating whether NUL students use adverbial clause of purpose to form complex

sentences in their continuous writing and whether they use it appropriately or not. She was also examining its syntactic functions and exploring the environments in which this category is reflected in their sentences.

The students from the Faculty of Education and from the Faculty of Humanities language departments are extensively exposed to English language and linguistics courses throughout the four years of their university study. Their scripts were not included in the study. These students whose scripts were in the sample share the level, time frame, setting and genre.

In Lesotho, there are church, government and privately owned schools. The church and Government schools constitute the majority and in such schools, Sesotho, the mother tongue, is used as the medium of instruction from Grade 1 to Grade 3. From Grade 4, English, the second language (L2) is used as the medium of instruction up to tertiary education level. The fourth year students at NUL are therefore advanced ESL students. The high school graduates are admitted to NUL only if they obtain credit (high marks) in English Language examinations. However, those who fail to obtain credit are admitted into the Faculty of Science and Technology as long as they meet all the other criteria.

The data was collected from the continuous writing taken from the fourth year students' examination scripts for the academic year (2016/2017) across the faculties. Wendy et al. (2002) observe that written language can provide a rich data base for studying complex structures because it is likely to have longer sentences with more complex syntactic structures than spoken language. Kemper et al. (1989) and Weisberg (2000) also note that writing is the modality through which L2 learners initiate the use of new syntactic structures.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively, hence the reason for employment of the interpretive paradigm and the Content Analysis (CA). In order to conduct a CA, the text was broken down into sentences. Then the text was examined using one of the CA basic methods, namely, the conceptual analysis, because it begins with identifying the concepts present in a given text.

The researcher first identified the sample scripts from the students' essays, read them and identified adverbial clause of purpose.

Findings

The findings are that, the use of adverbial clause of purpose as a syntactic complexity feature is noted in four (FOA, FOHS, FOH and FOSS) of the seven faculties at NUL. Thus, it is not observed in the FOE, FOL and FOST. The students use this feature as a syntactic complexity measure in their writing and they use it appropriately. They build their complex sentences through the following subordinating conjunctions: **so that**, **so as**, **in order for** and **in order to**. The examples which reflect how this category is used in this paper are given in (a) – (i).

(a) *That is the economic status of the people, crops, local available resources, tradition and culture [so that the programme could be a success]. (FOA)*

(b) *Programme planning is a well written organised situation, objectives with plan of work [inorder [sic] to achieve a community development in [specified area] and within given period of time]. (FOA)*

(c) *Nurses and midwives have to refer cases of gender based violence to the chief [so that he can deal with them]. (FOHS)*

(d) *Each and every product should have its suitable packaging [sic] [in order for it to be easily used]. (FOHS)*

(e) *The government also made the marriage preparation and bridal price costly [so as to promote the non-married population hence fertility will lowers [sic]. (FOSS)*

(f) *Democratization involves the adoption of electoral systems to elect leaders into power and adopting electoral reforms [in order to fulfill the process of democratic consolidation]. (FOSS)*

(g) *Programme planning is the assessment of the programme [in order to assess the strength and weakness of the programme [in order to facilitate planning efficiently and effectively]. (FOA)*

(h) *Again, the outbreak can be handled by down time, [which refers to a time taken without contact with pigs*

[in order [to enable the visitor [to enter the farm]]. (FOA)

(i) *It is a strategy used for making the experiences and concerns of both men and women an integral part in the design, implementation, formulation, monitoring and evaluation of a project or policy, [so that men and women benefit equally]. (FOH)*

All these examples, demonstrate purpose clauses at the end of the sentences as shown in (a) – (i). This result conforms to Kies' (1999)'s argument that subordinate clauses can be placed at the end of the sentence. Crystal (2004:274) maintains that adverbial clause of purpose, is much less mobile and it turns to appear at the end of the sentence. That is, it does not occur in different syntactic complexity like other subordinate clauses but mostly reflected at the end of the sentence. In this regard, NUL students use purpose clause at sentence-final position and based on this result, the present paper concludes that NUL students' sentences show syntactic complexity.

Another new notable finding is that apart from the subordinator, **so that**, adverbial clauses of purpose are introduced by the subordinating conjunctions, **in order to**, **in order for** as indicated in example (d) and **so as to** in this paper. This finding goes beyond what Leech and Svartvik (2002) found as they observe the subordinator, **so that** as being the only subordinating conjunction used to introduce adverbial clause of purpose. This is a new observation indicating that NUL students in the FOA, FOHS, FOH and FOSS are fully aware of different subordinators that can signal purpose clauses particularly the subordinator, **so as to** which is noted in the FOSS. In this respect, NUL students show an ability to form syntactic complex sentences through the use of **so that**, **in order to**, **in order for** and **so as to**. They show syntactic complexity because they employ the use of subject and the predicate in their sentences.

Another observation made here is that three (FOE, FOL and FOST) faculties do not show the use of adverbial clause of purpose. Based on this finding, the present paper indicates that some disciplines at NUL do not employ the use of this category. Thus, NUL students' writing shows syntactic complexity. This observation responds to the objectives of the paper because they

reflect that NUL students' writing demonstrates syntactic complexity.

A further fascinating result of the paper is that embedding of subordinate clauses is perceived in the present data as far as the use of purpose clause is concerned as indicated in examples (b) in which an adverbial clause of purpose embeds the **–ed** participle, **specified area**. In example (g), the purpose clause whose subordinator is **in order to**, embeds another purpose clause with the same subordinating conjunction, **in order to**. Example (h) further indicates a **wh**-relative clause embedding the purpose clause, *[in order [to enable the visitor [to enter the farm]]*. This purpose clause embeds two consecutive clauses of **To**-infinitive, *[to enable the visitor [to enter]]*. This issue of embedding strengthens the fact that embedding is fundamental in the use of syntactic complexity. NUL students in the FOA have supported this view with their writing which shows embedding of purpose clause. This finding responds to the objectives of the present study since it is observed that NUL students' writing demonstrates syntactic complexity and they use it appropriately.

With regard to the syntactic functions that are performed by adverbial clause in the writing of NUL students, the findings reflect that adverbial clauses are finite subordinate clauses whose main function is to show an adverbial element in the sentences. As Leech and Svartvik (2002:238) claim that they usually tell something extra about an action, happening or state as described by the rest of the sentence. Berk (1999:200) observes that adverbial clause of purpose illustrates why or to what purpose something happens. NUL students' writing syntactically indicates adverbial element wherever purpose clauses are reflected.

In relation to the last objective of this paper, the findings reflect that NUL students are fully aware of the textual functions of this feature because it is demonstrated at sentence-final position only in their writing. This concurs with Kies' (1999)'s argument that subordinate clauses can be placed at the end of the sentence. Crystal (2004:274) affirms Kies' (ibid) observation that adverbial clause of purpose, is much less mobile and it turns to appear at the end of the sentence. That is, it does not occur in different syntactic complexity like other subordinate clauses as shown in the present paper.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the NUL students make a use of adverbial clause of purpose and where it is reflected, it has been used appropriately. The paper has achieved the proposed aims. The first research question of the paper was to find out whether NUL students use this structure, whether they use it appropriately or not. The second one was to investigate its syntactic functions while the third research question was to identify its textual functions. The assumption was that the use of this feature is frequent in students' writing.

The second assumption was that the students are aware of syntactic and textual functions of this feature. The two assumptions are supported. The students have a reasonable use of adverbial clause of purpose. This is an indication that they have a fairly good control of the syntax of English. However, this feature is observed in four faculties namely, the FOA, FOHS, FOH and FOSS. A further conclusion is that students have an intuitive awareness of the syntactic functions of adverbial clause of purpose as the feature that show adverbial element in sentences. The NUL students are fully aware of the textual functions of purpose clause because their writing reflects it at sentence-final position. Based on these results, the present paper concludes that NUL students' sentences show syntactic complexity.

Recommendations

The paper recommends that the students must be given a lot of exercises with regard to the textual functions of purpose clauses in order to prove whether its environment is only at the final position of the sentence as confirmed by this paper and supported by Kies (1999).

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