

CONJUNCTIVE COHESION IN PAKISTANI RESEARCH ARTICLES: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND ARTICLE SECTIONS

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Abstract

This corpus-based study examines the use of cohesive conjunctions in Pakistani research articles. Drawing on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) classification of additive, adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions, the study analyzes 400 research articles published in 2017 and 2018 across psychology, engineering, English linguistics, English literature, economics, zoology, information technology, and business. The cleaned corpus consisted of 1,896 section-based files and 1,465,710 words. Multidimensional Analysis Tagger was used for tagging, AntConc for frequency and functional analysis, and SPSS for disciplinary and sectional comparison. The results showed a normalized frequency of 6.441 conjunctions per 1,000 words, indicating moderate use. Additive conjunctions were most frequent, followed by adversative and causal conjunctions, while temporal conjunctions were absent. Functional analysis showed listing, summative, appositional, resultive, inferential, and contrastive uses, but no transitional use. Psychology showed the highest mean frequency and differed significantly from all other disciplines, whereas engineering showed the lowest mean. Results and discussion sections had the highest descriptive frequency, while literature review sections had the lowest; however, sectional differences were not statistically significant. The study concludes that Pakistani research writers use conjunctions productively but unevenly, suggesting the need for explicit academic writing instruction on conjunction types, functions, and section-sensitive cohesive strategies.

Keywords: *conjunctive cohesion; Pakistani research articles; corpus-based analysis; academic writing; disciplinary variation; article sections; Halliday and Hasan*

Introduction

Cohesion is a central feature of academic writing because it links linguistic elements within and across sentences and contributes to the development of unified meaning. In the thesis from which this article is derived, cohesion is treated as a textual resource that enables phrases, clauses, and sentences to work together in discourse. Within Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, cohesion consists of grammatical and lexical cohesion, and grammatical cohesion includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Conjunctions are therefore examined as cohesive devices that help writers connect concepts, organize discourse, and guide readers through academic arguments.

The research article is described in the thesis as a major academic genre at undergraduate and graduate levels. It typically includes sections such as abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion. Each section performs a particular communicative function, and effective academic writing requires writers to organize ideas through appropriate linguistic resources. Conjunctions are especially important because they express semantic relations between parts of a text. The thesis adopts Halliday and Hasan's (1976) view

that conjunctive elements are cohesive not simply because they point backward or forward, but because their meanings presuppose relations with other discourse components.

The study is situated in the context of Pakistani academic writing. The thesis notes that previous work on Pakistani academic writing has identified weaknesses in organization and writing skills, while research specifically focused on conjunctions in Pakistani research articles had not been conducted. Previous studies had examined conjunctions in other genres, in native and non-native writing, or in research articles from other national contexts, but the Pakistani research article context remained underexplored. On this basis, the study investigates how Pakistani researchers use cohesive conjunctions across disciplines and across article sections.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in the study is the lack of specific corpus-based research on the use of conjunctions in Pakistani research articles. Although cohesive devices and academic writing have been examined in previous studies, the thesis states that no study had specifically explored conjunctions in research articles written by Pakistani researchers. It also identifies a further gap concerning variation across disciplines and article sections. This absence limits understanding of how Pakistani academic writers use conjunctions as organizational resources in research writing.

Research Objectives

The study pursued five objectives: to investigate the use of conjunctions in research articles written by Pakistani authors; to explore the functions of conjunctions in Pakistani research articles; to compare the frequency of cohesive conjunctions used by native and non-native writers as reported in previous research; to investigate the use of conjunctions across different disciplines in Pakistani research articles; and to observe the frequency of conjunctions across different sections of Pakistani research articles.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of conjunctions in Pakistani research articles?
2. What is the order of conjunction types in Pakistani research articles?
3. What functions are performed by conjunctions in Pakistani research articles?
4. How far do the results vary among different disciplines?
5. How far do the results vary among different sections of research articles?

Literature Review

The literature review in the thesis establishes conjunctions as linguistic items that link textual features into coherent units. Aarts (2001) is cited for the view that conjunctions are words with a joining function, while Thompson (2014) is cited for the idea that conjunction involves linking textual features into a coherent meaningful unit. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Kintsch and van Dijk (1978), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), and Geva (1983) are used to support the role of conjunctions in signalling logical relations, discourse composition, and relations between concepts in written language.

The study adopts Halliday and Hasan's (1976) fourfold classification of conjunctions: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. Additive conjunctions add or extend information and include examples such as furthermore, moreover, in addition, for example, likewise, and similarly. Adversative conjunctions signal contrast, correction, or comparison and include however, nevertheless, on the other hand, rather, and in contrast. Causal conjunctions express cause, consequence, or result and include therefore, hence, as a result, consequently, and because.

Temporal conjunctions indicate sequence or time relations and include next, then, finally, meanwhile, and eventually. Although the thesis also reviews Good's (2002) classification into coordinating, subordinating, and correlative conjunctions, Halliday and Hasan's model is selected as the analytical base.

The thesis reviews several functional accounts of conjunctions. Previous studies cited in the thesis describe conjunctions as resources for creating logical relations, linking clauses or sentences, adding information, signalling comparison and contrast, developing intertextuality, and contributing to cohesion and coherence. Quirk et al. (1985) provide the functional categories used in the study: listing, contrastive, transitional, resultive, summative, inferential, and appositive functions.

The review also places the study within second language writing, academic writing, and multidimensional analysis. Academic writing is described as organized writing shaped by purpose, audience, presentation, and flow. The thesis cites previous work indicating that disciplinary variation exists in academic writing and that linguistic features are used differently across fields to develop knowledge and convey disciplinary meanings. The multidimensional analysis approach is presented through Biber's work, especially Dimension 5, abstract versus non-abstract information, where conjuncts are treated as features associated with organized relations among clauses.

The thesis identifies methodological issues in earlier research, including limited explanation of data cleaning, absence of normalization, unequal corpora, and lack of sectional or disciplinary comparisons. The current study is presented as a response to these gaps because it provides a large self-made corpus, explains the cleaning and normalization processes, and compares conjunction use across both disciplines and research article sections.

Methodology

Research Design

The study used a quantitative, corpus-based research design. It focused on the use of conjunctions in Pakistani research articles and employed corpus tools and statistical procedures to examine frequency, type distribution, function, disciplinary variation, and sectional variation. The study followed Biber's multidimensional analysis orientation and used normalized frequencies to enable comparison across files of unequal length.

Corpus and Sampling

The population consisted of Pakistani research articles published in 2017 and 2018. The sample consisted of 400 research articles, with 50 articles from each of eight disciplines: economics, English literature, information technology, zoology, engineering, English linguistics, business, and psychology. For each discipline, 25 articles were selected from 2017 and 25 from 2018. The thesis describes the sampling method as quota sampling because articles were collected from different disciplinary categories.

The disciplines were drawn from four broad domains: basic science, science and technology, business administration, and arts and social sciences. The selected journals were Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics, Journal of English Linguistics and Literature, Pakistan Journal of Engineering, Technology & Science, Pakistan Journal of Zoology, Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Pakistan Journal of Translation Studies, Pakistan Business Review, and Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research.

Table 1
Corpus Composition by Discipline

Discipline	Journal	Years	Number of articles
Economics	Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics	2017-2018	50
English Literature	Journal of English Linguistics and Literature	2017-2018	50
Information Technology	Pakistan Journal of Engineering, Technology & Science	2017-2018	50
Zoology	Pakistan Journal of Zoology	2017-2018	50
Engineering	Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences	2017-2018	50
English Linguistics	Pakistan Journal of Translation Studies	2017-2018	50
Business	Pakistan Business Review	2017-2018	50
Psychology	Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research	2017-2018	50

Data Preparation

After downloading the research articles, the files were renamed according to discipline, section, year, and author-name code. Discipline codes included I.T, PSY, BUS, ZOO, ENG, ELING, ECO, and ELIT. PDF files were converted into Word files; where necessary, optical character recognition was used before conversion. The data were then cleaned by removing journal and author names, headers, footers, titles, graphs, figures, tables, and page numbers. After cleaning, the articles were divided into section files: abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion. The files were then converted into text format for analysis. The final corpus consisted of 1,896 section-based files and 1,465,710 words.

Table 2
Files and Word Counts by Discipline

Discipline	Number of section files	Number of words
Zoology	240	129,904
English Literature	196	233,819
Economics	251	216,099
Business	267	92,099
Information Technology	229	113,968
Engineering	202	105,518
English Linguistics	265	365,734

Discipline	Number of section files	Number of words
Psychology	246	208,569
Total	1,896	1,465,710

Analytical Tools and Procedures

Three tools were used. Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT), version 1.3.1, was used to tag and analyze text files. AntConc, version 3.4.4, was used for raw frequency analysis and concordance-based functional analysis. SPSS, version 25.0, was used to conduct two-way ANOVA and pairwise comparisons to examine variation across disciplines and sections. Because the files differed in length, raw frequencies were normalized to 1,000 words using Biber's formula: frequency of linguistic feature multiplied by 1,000 and divided by the total length of the text.

Results

Overall Frequency of Conjunctions

The corpus contained 9,442 raw occurrences of conjunctions. After normalization against the total corpus size of 1,465,710 words, the frequency was 6.441 conjunctions per 1,000 words. The thesis compares this value with Biber's range for academic prose, where 12.0 is identified as the maximum and 0.0 as the minimum. The result is therefore interpreted as moderate use of conjunctions in Pakistani research articles.

Order of Conjunction Types

The type-based analysis showed that additive conjunctions were the most frequent category, followed by adversative and causal conjunctions. Temporal conjunctions were not found in the Pakistani research article corpus.

Table 3

Normalized Frequency of Conjunction Types

Conjunction type	Normalized frequency
Additive	1.06
Adversative	1.02
Causal	0.59
Temporal	0

The dominance of additive conjunctions indicates that Pakistani research writers most often used conjunctions to add, extend, or reinforce information. Adversative conjunctions were also frequent, suggesting substantial use of contrast and comparison. Causal conjunctions were less frequent, while the absence of temporal conjunctions suggests a gap in the use of sequence-oriented cohesive relations.

Table 4

Most Frequent Subtypes of Additive, Adversative, and Causal Conjunctions

Category	Subtype	Normalized frequency
Additive	Thus	0.07
Additive	Moreover	0.05
Additive	Similarly	0.04
Additive	e.g.	0.03
Additive	Furthermore	0.03

Category	Subtype	Normalized frequency
Additive	In addition	0.02
Additive	For instance	0.01
Additive	Likewise	0.01
Additive	Namely	0.009
Additive	In contrast	0.009
Additive	In other words	0.008
Additive	Conversely	0.003
Adversative	However	0.14
Adversative	i.e.	0.07
Adversative	On the other hand	0.03
Adversative	Instead	0.02
Adversative	Rather	0.016
Adversative	In contrast	0.01
Adversative	Nevertheless	0.01
Adversative	In comparison	0.006
Adversative	Otherwise	0.006
Adversative	On the contrary	0.004
Adversative	Nonetheless	0.002
Adversative	In any case	0.0008
Causal	Therefore	0.10
Causal	Hence	0.04
Causal	As a result	0.019
Causal	Consequently	0.019
Causal	As a consequence	0.001

Functions of Conjunctions

The functional analysis followed Quirk et al.'s (1985) categories. The thesis reports six functions in the corpus: listing, summative, appositional, resultive, inferential, and contrastive. Transitional conjuncts were not present in the Pakistani research articles. Listing conjunctions were used to sequence or enumerate information; summative conjunctions held together preceding information; appositional conjunctions explained or clarified previous points; resultive conjunctions presented reasons or outcomes; inferential conjunctions indicated conclusions based on logic or supposition; and contrastive conjunctions signalled opposition or comparison.

Table 5

Functions of Conjunctions Identified in the Corpus

Function	Role in the thesis	Status in corpus
Listing	Provides numerical or additive ordering and reinforces listed information	Present
Summative	Establishes a feature that holds preceding information together	Present

Function	Role in the thesis	Status in corpus
Appositional	Explains or restates a preceding point	Present
Resultive	Explains a result or reason for an utterance or action	Present
Inferential	Signals a result based on supposition and logic	Present
Contrastive	Shows contrast in relation to preceding information	Present
Transitional	Shifts attention to another event or related topic	Not present

Disciplinary Variation

Descriptive statistics showed that psychology had the highest mean frequency of conjunctions ($M = 1.413$, $SD = 2.002$), while engineering had the lowest mean frequency ($M = 0.130$, $SD = 0.182$). The thesis interprets the higher psychology mean as reflecting the social-science orientation of the discipline, where writers discuss human behavior, society, and conceptual relations. Engineering is interpreted as less frequent in conjunction use because it deals more with applied scientific knowledge, structures, figures, and formulas.

Table 6

Overall Mean Frequency by Discipline

Discipline	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Business	0.141	0.159	267
Engineering	0.131	0.182	202
Economics	0.148	0.204	251
English Literature	0.149	0.187	196
English Linguistics	0.145	0.232	265
Information Technology	0.148	0.218	229
Zoology	0.213	1.314	240
Psychology	1.413	2.003	246
Total	0.317	0.972	1,896

Pairwise comparisons showed that psychology differed significantly from all other disciplines, with $p < .001$ in the thesis table. Other disciplinary comparisons were reported as non-significant. The results therefore indicate that the main disciplinary contrast in the corpus lies between psychology and the remaining disciplines. The thesis concludes that social science writing, particularly psychology, contains more cohesive conjunction use than science-oriented disciplines.

Sectional Variation

The section-based descriptive statistics showed that the results and discussion section had the highest overall mean frequency of conjunctions ($M = 0.453$), followed by introduction ($M = 0.392$), conclusion ($M = 0.336$), abstract ($M = 0.256$), methodology ($M = 0.222$), and literature review ($M = 0.144$). The thesis interprets results and discussion as the most cohesive section

because it presents findings, compares them with previous studies, and develops contrastive and explanatory relations. Literature review was identified as the least cohesive section in terms of conjunction frequency.

Table 7

Overall Mean Frequency by Article Section

Section	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Abstract	0.256	0.610	395
Introduction	0.392	1.202	394
Literature Review	0.144	0.285	162
Methodology	0.222	0.637	287
Results and Discussion	0.453	0.976	321
Conclusion	0.336	1.366	337
Total	0.317	0.972	1,896

Despite these descriptive differences, the pairwise section comparison table showed no statistically significant differences among sections. The thesis therefore concludes that while Pakistani research writers use conjunctions unevenly across sections, sectional variation was not statistically significant. The accessible thesis text does not provide a complete omnibus ANOVA table with F values; therefore, exact F statistics for discipline, section, and interaction effects are not reported here.

Discussion

The findings show that Pakistani research writers use conjunctions at a moderate level. This result is important because conjunctions contribute to the organization of academic discourse by connecting ideas, signalling logical relations, and supporting cohesion. The normalized frequency of 6.441 per 1,000 words places Pakistani research articles between the low and high values described in the thesis through reference to Biber's academic prose range. The thesis interprets this as evidence that Pakistani writers are aware of conjunctions but remain at a developmental stage in producing fully cohesive academic writing.

The type-based distribution shows a clear preference for additive conjunctions. This suggests that Pakistani academic writers commonly rely on addition, elaboration, and reinforcement to develop textual relations. The high frequency of adversative conjunctions also indicates frequent use of contrast and comparison, which are central to academic argumentation. Causal conjunctions occurred less frequently, suggesting that cause-and-effect relations were present but not as dominant as additive and contrastive relations. The absence of temporal conjunctions is one of the strongest findings of the study. The thesis interprets this absence as indicating limited awareness of temporal conjunctive resources among Pakistani writers. Because temporal conjunctions are useful for sequence, process, and textual progression, their absence points to a specific area for pedagogical attention.

Functionally, the corpus demonstrates a wide range of conjunctive roles. Listing, summative, appositional, resultive, inferential, and contrastive uses were identified, showing that Pakistani research writers do not merely insert conjunctions mechanically; they use them to develop several types of discourse relations. However, transitional conjunctions were not identified, which again suggests that certain cohesive functions remain underused. This

unevenness supports the thesis conclusion that Pakistani academic writers have functional awareness of conjunctions but require more explicit instruction in less frequently used categories and functions.

Disciplinary variation was most visible in the contrast between psychology and the other seven disciplines. Psychology showed the highest mean frequency and differed significantly from every other discipline in pairwise comparisons. The thesis explains this by linking psychology to social-science writing, where discussion of human behavior, social relations, and conceptual explanation may invite more cohesive and abstract language. Engineering showed the lowest mean frequency, and science-oriented disciplines were generally interpreted as less frequent in conjunction use because they include more facts, figures, formulas, technical structures, and less situation-based discussion. These interpretations should be read cautiously because they are based on the thesis analysis and not on additional external evidence; nevertheless, they are consistent with the thesis argument that disciplinary discourse shapes conjunction use.

Sectional variation showed that results and discussion sections had the highest descriptive frequency of conjunctions. This is expected within the thesis argument because results and discussion sections compare findings, explain outcomes, connect results with previous studies, and construct interpretive relations. Literature review sections showed the lowest mean frequency. Although the thesis describes Pakistani researchers as needing more knowledge of section-sensitive conjunction use, the statistical comparison among sections was not significant. Thus, the study supports a descriptive claim of uneven section-level use, but not a statistically significant section effect based on the reported pairwise comparisons.

Conclusion

This corpus-based study examined conjunctions in 400 Pakistani research articles published in 2017 and 2018 across eight disciplines. The findings show that conjunctions were used moderately, with an overall normalized frequency of 6.441 per 1,000 words. Additive conjunctions were most frequent, followed by adversative and causal conjunctions, while temporal conjunctions were absent. Functional analysis showed listing, summative, appositional, resultive, inferential, and contrastive uses, but no transitional use. Disciplinary analysis showed that psychology had the highest conjunction frequency and differed significantly from all other disciplines, whereas engineering had the lowest mean. Sectional analysis showed the highest mean in results and discussion and the lowest in literature review, although no statistically significant sectional differences were reported. Overall, the study concludes that Pakistani research writers use conjunctions as cohesive resources, but their use is uneven across types, functions, disciplines, and sections. The absence of temporal conjunctions and transitional functions indicates a specific need for greater pedagogical emphasis on the full range of conjunctive cohesion in academic writing.

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