

**Article information**

Article Received: 13/10// 2024

Acceptance: 29/10/ 2024

Volume 10, Number 4 (2024)**ISSN: 2395-0595****Conjunction Errors: A Case Study of EFL Libyan Students at the University Level****¹Farida Farj Emhemed Elshtiwi , ²Rabab Sabri Ayad Shahbon****¹f.eshtiwi@zu.edu.ly , ²r.shahbon@zu.edu.ly**¹Zawia University, Faculty of Education, Zawia, Libya² Zawia University, Faculty of Arts, Zawia, Libya

Abstract

Connectives act as cohesive markers in discourse, guiding the reader or listener by indicating the relationships among successive parts. Conjunctions clarify text organization, making the structure of the text more explicit and aiding in the formation of textual schemata. The use of conjunctions is particularly challenging for EFL learners, especially at the university level, as they often face difficulties in understanding and using them correctly. These challenges can lead to misleading or ambiguous usage. This descriptive quantitative study examines the errors in conjunction usage made by 110 EFL Libyan students at the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Zawia University during the academic year 2013-2014. The purpose of the study is to raise awareness among students, teachers, and material designers regarding this issue. Two instruments were utilized for data collection and analysis: A pilot study presented as a test to confirm the need for the study, and the main test composed of three parts. The results indicate that students commit errors in using conjunctions at both sentence and discourse levels, with adversative conjunctions proving to be the most challenging for participants, followed by additive and causal conjunctions.

Keywords: *Conjunctions, Adversative, Causal, Additive, Errors*

1. Introduction

The accurate use of conjunctions is a critical aspect of mastering the English language, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Conjunctions serve as the glue that binds words, phrases, and clauses, enabling coherent and meaningful communication. However, many EFL learners, particularly those in non-English-speaking countries, struggle with their proper usage. This issue is particularly evident among Libyan students at the university level, where errors in the use of conjunctions can hinder academic success and overall language proficiency.

In the context of Libyan EFL learners, the misuse of conjunctions can be attributed to several factors, including the influence of the native language (Arabic), insufficient exposure to English, and a lack of emphasis on functional grammar in formal education. These errors not only disrupt the flow of communication but also reflect deeper challenges in understanding the syntactic and semantic functions of conjunctions in English. Understanding these common errors is essential for educators and curriculum developers aiming to improve the linguistic competence of EFL students.

This case study focuses on analyzing the types and frequency of conjunction errors made by Libyan university students learning English. By identifying common patterns of misuse, the study aims to provide insights into the underlying causes of these errors and offer practical solutions for teaching conjunctions more effectively in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of targeted grammar instruction and error correction strategies to help Libyan students overcome these linguistic challenges.

2. Research Problem

Libyan EFL students at the university level face significant challenges in using conjunctions correctly, which affects the cohesion and coherence of their written discourse. Despite years of language instruction, many students continue to struggle with adversative, additive, causal, and temporal conjunctions. This issue is exacerbated by pedagogical gaps, first language interference, and the complex semantic functions of conjunctions. There is a need to examine these errors systematically to provide solutions that can improve students' writing proficiency and instructional methods.

3. Research questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following questions were imposed:

1. What are the most common conjunction errors committed by EFL Libyan students in their writings?
2. How can these errors be analyzed statistically and presented in order to contribute for further studies?

4. Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyze and identify the common conjunction errors made by EFL Libyan students at the university level. The research seeks to provide insights into the nature and causes of these errors and to explore strategies for improving conjunction usage among students learning English as a foreign language.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the most frequent types of conjunction errors made by EFL Libyan university students.
2. To analyze the potential causes of these errors, considering factors such as first language interference, lack of exposure, and instructional methods.
3. To assess the impact of conjunction errors on students' overall writing and communication skills.
4. To recommend practical teaching strategies and corrective measures that can help reduce conjunction errors and enhance EFL students' grammatical proficiency.
5. To contribute to the improvement of curriculum design and teaching methods in EFL programs, particularly concerning grammar instruction for Libyan students.

5. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the common errors made by EFL Libyan university students in their use of conjunctions and to understand the underlying factors contributing to these mistakes. By identifying and analyzing these errors, the study aims to provide insights that can inform and enhance teaching practices, helping educators address the specific challenges faced by students in mastering conjunctions. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies that improve students' writing cohesion and overall proficiency in English.

6. Literature review

The use of conjunctions in English is a critical component in creating cohesive and coherent written discourse, especially for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Leech and Svartvik (1994) pointed out that conjunctions serve as logical connectors that bind ideas, sentences, and paragraphs, enabling smooth transitions and clear relationships between different parts of a text. However, despite their importance, EFL learners frequently struggle with the appropriate use of conjunctions, which often leads to ambiguity or miscommunication in their writing. This literature review explores various definitions, classifications, and roles of conjunctions while examining the challenges faced by EFL learners in mastering their use. It also discusses the impact of pedagogical approaches on students' ability to effectively incorporate conjunctions into their writing.

6.1 Definitions and Classifications of Conjunctions

Conjunctions, often referred to by various labels such as linking words, signal words, discourse markers, and logical connectors, play a fundamental role in establishing logical relationships between parts of a text. According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983), conjunctions are words or phrases that express logical relationships between two or more sentences. Conjunctions can be categorized into coordinating conjunctions, which link clauses of equal syntactic status, and subordinating conjunctions, which connect unequal clauses Hinkel (2001). These classifications are essential for understanding the multiple functions of conjunctions in text cohesion.

6.2 The Role of Conjunctions in Cohesion

Cohesion refers to the quality of writing in which parts of the text are connected and logically related. Halliday and Hasan (1976) viewed cohesion as the relationships between sentences, achieved through the use of conjunctions, lexical cohesion, and references. Conjunctions, in particular, create cohesive effects by linking sentences, clauses, or paragraphs to indicate logical connections. Raskin and Weiser (1987) further argue that conjunctions do not merely refer back to preceding text elements but express meanings that presuppose the presence of other discourse components. The use of connectives, therefore, serves as a key mechanism for organizing text and ensuring that ideas are cohesively presented.

6.3 Importance of Conjunctions in Text Processing

The use of conjunctions is crucial not only for linking ideas but also for aiding cognitive processing in readers. Olshtain and Cohen (2005) emphasized that connectives play an important role in minimizing the cognitive load for readers by signifying relationships between sentences and making the text easier to follow. Conjunctions guide readers through local and global interpretations of a text, thus facilitating comprehension and easing prediction during the reading process. However, mastering these functions remains a challenge for many ESL/EFL learners, who often struggle with the nuanced roles conjunctions play in discourse.

6.4 Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Using Conjunctions

EFL learners frequently encounter difficulties in understanding and using conjunctions correctly, as noted by Parrott (2000). One of the main challenges lies in the procedural nature of conjunctions, where meaning is context-dependent rather than fixed. Steffani and Nippold (1997) highlighted that the conceptual complexity of conjunctions can confuse learners, particularly when a single conjunction can serve multiple functions. For instance, McCarthy (1991) points out that conjunctions like “and” may signify either additive or temporal relations, depending on the context, leading to potential misuse by learners. Zamel (1983) pointed out that these challenges are further compounded by the presentation of conjunctions in textbooks, where lists of conjunctions based on their semantic or syntactic functions may not adequately demonstrate their role in forming coherent text structures.

6.5 Impact of Instructional Methods on Conjunction Use

The instructional methods employed in teaching conjunctions can significantly impact learners’ ability to use them correctly. Halliday and Hasan (1976) explained that textbooks often categorize conjunctions without providing sufficient context for their use, which can result in misuse. Zamel (1983) argued that such approaches fail to address the semantic restrictions of conjunctions, leaving students with the erroneous belief that conjunctions are interchangeable. This contributes to a pattern of incorrect usage, as learners are unable to grasp the nuanced relationships that conjunctions establish between ideas. Effective teaching strategies should thus focus on contextual usage and the multiple meanings that conjunctions can convey, rather than solely relying on lists and rote memorization.

7. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive and quantitative research design to gather, analyze, and interpret data regarding the usage of conjunctions by Libyan EFL university students. The methodology focused on evaluating the students' abilities to use conjunctions accurately and cohesively in written discourse. The following sections outline the participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis methods used in the study.

7.1 Participants

The participants of this study were fourth-year students from the English Department, Faculty of Arts, at Zawia University, Libya. A total of 160 students, aged between 19 and 23, were initially selected. However, 50 answer sheets were excluded due to incomplete responses, leaving 110 valid participants (116 females and 44 males). The fourth-year students were chosen as the sample because they were expected to have a relatively high level of English proficiency and a good understanding of conjunctions, given their academic background and the completion of advanced courses in English.

7.2 Instruments

The study utilized a three-part recognition test to evaluate the students' use of conjunctions. Initially, the researchers intended to conduct a production test, in which students would write essays on topics of their choice. However, due to the students' inability to complete the essays, the researchers developed an alternative recognition-based test. The test was designed to assess the students' abilities to recognize, choose, and apply conjunctions correctly in different contexts.

1. **Pilot Study:** A pilot test was conducted with a small group of students to validate the need for the study and to refine the test design. The results confirmed that the students encountered significant difficulties in using conjunctions, thereby justifying the continuation of the full-scale study.

2. **Main Test:** The main recognition test was divided into three parts:

Part 1 (Multiple-choice): This section evaluated the students' ability to recognize the correct conjunction to link sentences. Students were provided with multiple options for conjunctions and were asked to select the most appropriate one for each sentence.

Part 2 (Sentence Combination): In this section, students were required to choose suitable conjunctions from a provided list to combine individual sentences. This part assessed their conjunction use at the production level.

Part 3 (Fill in the blank): Students were presented with paragraphs containing blanks, and they were asked to insert the correct conjunctions from a given list. This section measured their ability to use conjunctions in both recognition and production contexts to form coherent texts.

7.3 Procedures

The study followed a structured procedure to collect data. After obtaining approval from the university, the researchers administered the recognition test to the selected sample of 110 students during regular class hours. Each student completed all three sections of the test within a fixed timeframe. The researchers provided clear instructions to ensure that the participants understood the tasks. The pilot test, conducted earlier, served as a preparatory stage to ensure the reliability of the test items.

8. Data Analysis

The data collected from the tests were analyzed quantitatively. The students' responses were coded and classified based on the four types of conjunctions: adversative, additive, causal, and temporal (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The analysis focused on identifying error patterns in the students' use of conjunctions, particularly in terms of the types of conjunctions they found most challenging. Descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequencies, were used to summarize the error rates across the three test sections. These statistics provided insights into the students' strengths and weaknesses in conjunction with usage.

9. Results

The subject's performance in the first part was better than in the second and third one. Students have difficulties when using conjunctions in a context. This may be due to the inefficient knowledge and lack of awareness in the third part. Students have serious problems in the second and third parts.

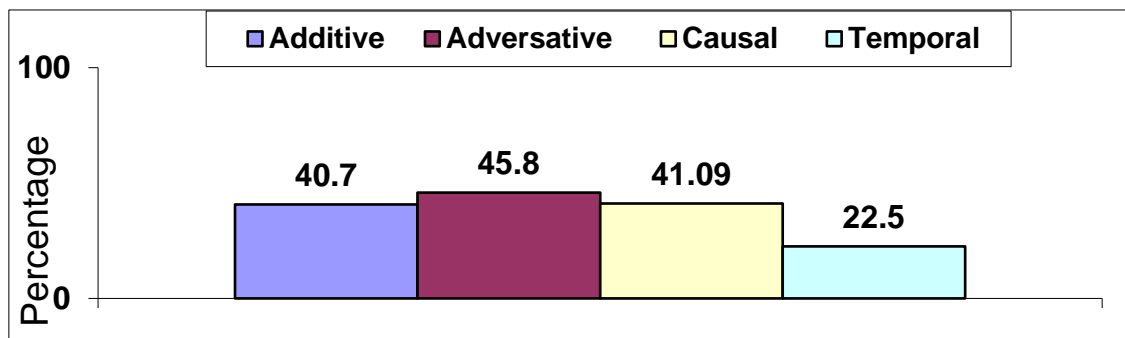


Figure 1: Percentage of incorrect answers in the first part

figure (1) shows the total number of incorrect answers in the recognition part. This indicates that the subjects face more difficulties in adversative conjunctions followed by causal, additive, and temporal. The percentages were from the highest 45.8%, to the lowest 22.5%, respectively.

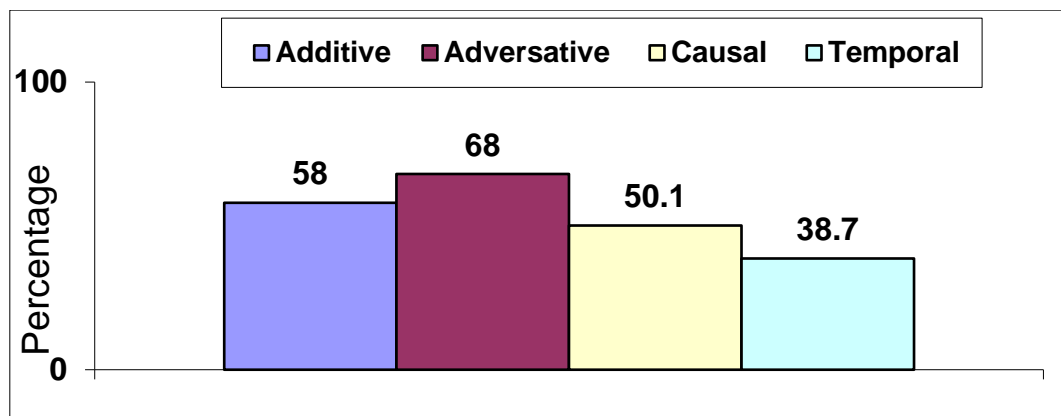


Figure 2: Percentage of incorrect answers in the second part

figure (2) shows the total number of incorrect answers in the production part. The subjects in this part face more difficulty in using adversative followed by additive, causal and temporal. The percentages were from the highest 68% to the lowest 38.7%, respectively.

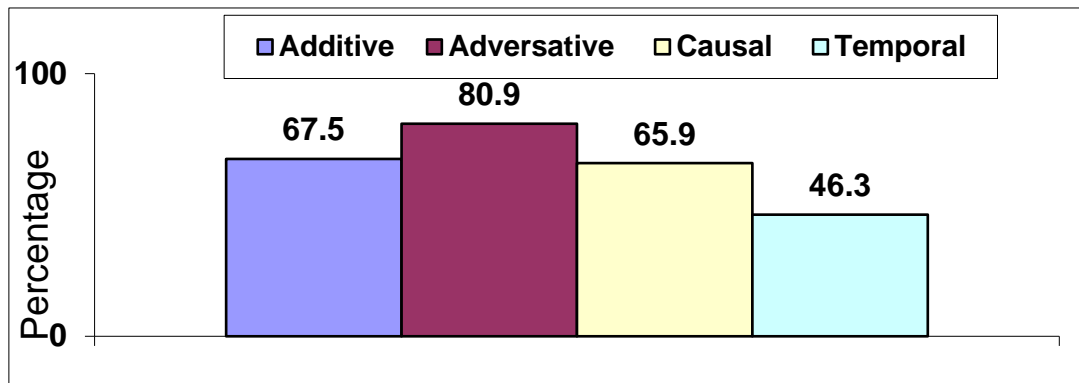


Figure 3: Percentage of incorrect answers in the third part

Figure (3) shows the total number of correct and incorrect answers in the recognition/production part. In this part, the most problematic conjunctions for the subjects were adversative followed by additive, causal and temporal. The percentages were 80.9%, 67.5%, 65.9%, and 46.3 respectively.

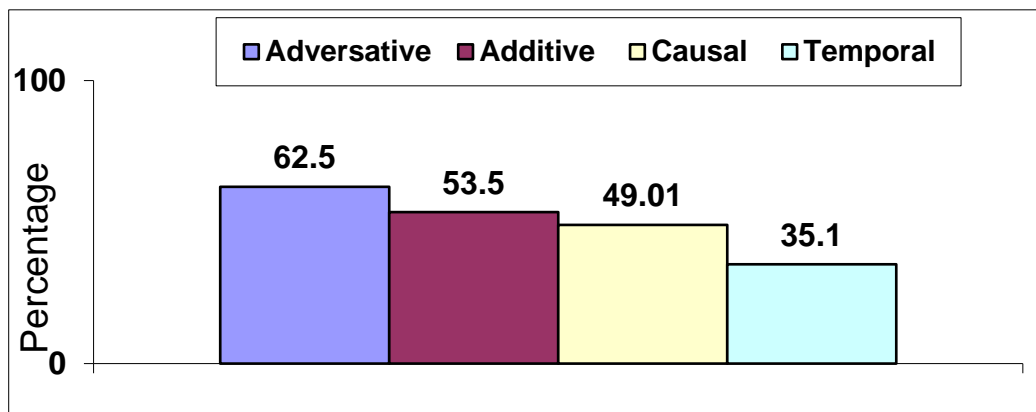


Figure 4: The hierarchy of difficulty of correct use among conjunctions

The results also give insight into the hierarchy of difficulty of correct use among conjunctions. Figure (4) shows that the adversative conjunctions were the most problematic ones for the subjects of the study followed by the additives, causal and temporal. The percentages were 62.5%, 53.5%, 49.01%, and 35.1%, respectively.

10. Discussion of the results

The analysis of the data collected from the recognition test revealed significant insights into the conjunction usage among EFL Libyan students. The findings indicate that students struggle particularly with adversative conjunctions, followed by additive, causal, and temporal conjunctions. The results are summarized as follows:

1. **Error Rates in Conjunction Use:** The subjects displayed a high percentage of incorrect responses across all three parts of the test. Specifically, in the recognition section, the overall incorrect answer rate for adversative conjunctions was 45.8%, while causal conjunctions had a rate of 41.09%. Additive conjunctions and temporal conjunctions recorded lower incorrect rates at 40.7% and 22.5%, respectively. This aligns with the findings of Ting (2003) and Ong (2011) that this trend indicates that adversative conjunctions are particularly challenging for students, confirming previous studies which highlighted the difficulties faced by EFL learners in using such conjunctions
2. **Performance in the Production Section:** In the production section of the test, students exhibited even greater difficulty. The incorrect response rate for adversative conjunctions rose to 68%, indicating a significant challenge in using these conjunctions correctly in context. The rates for additive, causal, and temporal conjunctions were also substantial, at 58%, 50.1%, and 38.7%, respectively. This aligns with the findings of Hamed (2014) that these findings underscore the students' struggles with the functional application of conjunctions in written discourse
3. **Recognition/Production Performance:** In the final part of the test, which assessed both recognition and production capabilities, adversative conjunctions again posed the greatest challenge, with an incorrect rate of 80.9%. Additive conjunctions followed closely at 67.5%, with causal and temporal conjunctions at 65.9% and 46.3%, respectively. This aligns with the findings of Parrott (2000) that the high error rates in this section suggest that students are not only failing to recognize the correct conjunctions but also struggling to produce them appropriately within written texts.
4. **Hierarchy of Difficulty:** The data revealed a clear hierarchy of difficulty among the types of conjunctions used by the students. Adversative conjunctions emerged as the most problematic, followed by additive, causal, and temporal conjunctions. This aligns with the findings of Biber et al. (2002) who documented similar patterns of difficulty among EFL learners in various contexts.
5. **Common Misuses:** The analysis of specific conjunctions indicated that phrases such as “on the other hand” were frequently misused, often being employed inappropriately to express causal rather than adversative relations. Similarly, additive conjunctions like “not only... but also” were commonly misapplied, suggesting that students have not fully grasped their semantic functions. This aligns with the findings of (James (1980) and Zamel (1983) that this confusion may be attributed to first language interference and the lack of effective pedagogical strategies focused on the nuances of conjunction usage

Overall, the findings illustrate a clear need for enhanced instructional methods that address the specific difficulties faced by EFL Libyan students in mastering conjunctions. The data emphasizes the importance of contextualized practice and targeted feedback in helping students develop their proficiency in this critical area of language use.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the understanding and use of conjunctions among EFL Libyan students at the university level:

1. **Enhanced Teaching Methods:** Educators should focus on integrating a more context-driven approach to teaching conjunctions. Instead of relying solely on lists and definitions, instruction should include examples from authentic texts that demonstrate the use of conjunctions in various contexts. This could involve analyzing excerpts from academic articles, essays, and literature to illustrate how conjunctions function to create cohesion and coherence.
2. **Practice in Context:** Implementing activities that require students to practice conjunctions in meaningful contexts can improve their understanding and application. For instance, interactive writing exercises, peer review sessions, and collaborative group work can allow students to see the effects of using conjunctions in their writing. These activities should focus on both recognizing and producing conjunctions to reinforce their understanding.
3. **Error Analysis and Feedback:** Teachers should incorporate error analysis into their instructional practices. By identifying common errors made by students in their use of conjunctions, educators can tailor feedback and provide targeted support. This could involve reviewing students' written assignments and highlighting conjunction-related errors, followed by discussions on how to correct these mistakes.
4. **Focus on Semantic Functions:** The teaching curriculum should emphasize the semantic functions of conjunctions, especially those that EFL learners find challenging, such as adversative and additive conjunctions. Workshops or focused lessons could explore the meanings and uses of these conjunctions in detail, allowing students to practice them in a variety of scenarios.
5. **Utilization of Technology:** Integrating technology into the teaching of conjunctions can also be beneficial. Online platforms that offer interactive grammar exercises or apps that focus on language learning can provide students with additional practice and reinforcement outside of the classroom.

6. Ongoing Assessment and Adaptation: Continuous assessment of students' understanding and usage of conjunctions should be conducted to inform instructional practices. Regular quizzes, assignments, and formative assessments can help track progress and identify areas where students continue to struggle, allowing for timely interventions.

By implementing these recommendations, educators can better support EFL Libyan students in mastering the use of conjunctions, ultimately improving their overall writing proficiency and academic success.

12. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the prevalent conjunction errors made by EFL Libyan students at the university level, shedding light on the linguistic challenges they face in mastering this critical aspect of English grammar. The findings suggest that conjunction errors often stem from a combination of factors, including interference from the students' native language (Arabic), insufficient exposure to authentic English usage, and gaps in formal grammar instruction. These errors not only affect students' grammatical accuracy but also impede their ability to convey ideas clearly and cohesively in written and spoken English.

Addressing these errors requires targeted interventions, such as explicit instruction on conjunctions, focused grammar practice, and corrective feedback that considers the specific needs of Libyan learners. By implementing these strategies, educators can help students improve their proficiency and confidence in using conjunctions correctly, ultimately enhancing their overall language competence.

In conclusion, this case study underscores the importance of understanding the types and causes of conjunction errors to inform more effective teaching approaches. Improving conjunction usage among EFL students will contribute to their academic success and better equip them for future language learning challenges. Further research is encouraged to explore the long-term effects of such interventions and to extend the findings to broader EFL contexts.

About the Authors:

1. **Dr. Farida Elshtiwi** is a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Zawia, University of Zawia, Libya. She has been teaching at Zawia Faculty of Education for nine years. Her research interests include discourse analysis, Language and emotion, Language and creativity, and experimental applied linguistics.

2. **Dr. Rabab Shahbonis** a lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Zawia, University of Zawia, Libya. She has been teaching at Faculty of Arts for nine eight. Her research interests include emergent literacy, Language and cognitive development, Language and digital literacy, and Language in the arts.

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17. He worked seven days a week, twenty hours a day. _____, he got sick.
a. But c. because
b. as a result d. the
18. Living in a 200-year-old house would be interesting, _____it would probably be very expensive to maintain.
a. and c. because
b. on the other hand d. so
19. I studied Journalism in college. _____, I had a part-time job at a newspaper.
a. However c. because
b. But d. in addition

Part two

Combine the sentences below using the correct conjunctions from the box.

<i>And</i>	<i>but</i>	<i>not only....but also</i>	<i>moreover</i>	<i>so that</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>because</i>
<i>However</i>	<i>although</i>	<i>on the other hand</i>	<i>in addition</i>	<i>Furthermore</i>	<i>as a result</i>	<i>in spite of</i>
<i>therefore</i>	<i>after</i>	<i>then</i>	<i>Next</i>	<i>first</i>	<i>before</i>	

- John is a lazy student. He is always late.
.....
- Mr. Smith does not like his aunt. He invited her to his wedding.
.....
- I had already seen the show; I did not go to see it.
.....
- Lisa entered her nine digit secret password. She clicked the submit button.
.....
- I understand his reason. I cannot accept his poor behavior.
.....
- Tom was angry at his boss's order. He decided to obey it.
.....
- He decided to go into business for himself. He had worked for many other people.
.....
- Peter is saving his money. He can go to college.
.....

9. I decided to raise my hand in class. Nobody else wanted to answer the question.
.....
10. Going to the concert, we treated ourselves to dessert and drinks.
.....
11. It is too late to go to the movie. I do not like the picture they playing.
.....
12. We were tired and hungry. We stopped to rest and eat lunch.
.....
13. We have to buy bread. We need to take the car to the garage.
.....
14. Ahmed is a class president. He is a captain of football team.
.....
15. Growing apples is an interesting hobby which provides me with a lot of pleasure; I do not need to buy apples at the store.
.....
16. Having enough money. He refused to buy a new car.
.....
17. He worked seven days a week, twenty hours a day. He got sick.
.....
18. Living in a 200-year-old house would be interesting. It would probably be very expensive to maintain.
.....
19. I studied journalism in college. I had a part time job at a newspaper.
.....

Part three

Fill in the blanks with the correct conjunction from the box.

<i>Therefore</i>	<i>firstly</i>	<i>moreover</i>	<i>however</i>	<i>to sum up</i>
<i>in addition</i>	<i>in contrast</i>	<i>in conclusion</i>	<i>furthermore</i>	
<i>first of all</i>	<i>on the other hand</i>	<i>as a result</i>		

Living in the city

Living in the city is often the secret dream of certain city-dwellers (1) _____, in reality it has both its advantages and disadvantages.

There are many advantages to living in the country. (2) _____, you are much closer to nature and can enjoy more peace and quiet. (3) _____, life in the country is much slower and people tend to be more open and friendly. A further advantage is that there is much less traffic and (4) _____ it is much safer place to bring up young children.

(5) _____ there are certain drawbacks to life outside the city. (6) _____, because there are fewer people, one has a smaller number of friends. (7) _____, entertainment particularly in the evening is difficult to find. (8) _____, the fact that there are fewer shops and services often means that there are fewer employment opportunities. (9) _____, one may have to travel long distances to work elsewhere and this can be extremely expensive.

(10) _____, it can be seen that the country is more suitable for some people than others. (11) _____, it is often the best place for those who are retired or who have young children. (12) _____, young single people who are following a career and who want some excitement are better provided for by life in the city.