

Writing academic english

Education



This study compares two small corpora, each comprising 300 words, taken from a linguistic journal and a transcribed interview. The texts are therefore diverse in terms of content, style, register, and their proposed audience, and are compared and contrasted in terms of the linguistic properties pertaining to the number and length of sentences, the number, and type of dependent clauses, and the use of contractions.

The focus on sentence constructions begins by ascertaining the number of sentences within each corpus. The purpose of this is that the number of sentences will provide insight as to the length of the sentences, which is measured in terms of the number of words within a punctuated sentence.

The higher the number of sentences found within a 300-word corpus, then the shorter the sentences would have to be. The fewer the number of sentences, therefore, would realize longer, compound and complex sentences and thus would be expected to render more dependent clauses.

The second property to be measured in this study is the number and type of dependent clauses used within each text. A dependent clause does not convey a complete idea and therefore is unable to stand by itself; in other words, a dependent clause relies on an independent clause for meaning.

Tallerman (2005) refers to dependent clauses as subordinate clauses and the independent clause, which must contain a finite verb, as the matrix clause.

She also tells us that subordinate clauses are often considered as embedded clauses because they are embedded within another clause and are “syntactically dependent on the matrix clause” (p. 77).

A dependent clause, or subordinate clause, is introduced with a subordinator (Oshima & Hogue, 1999) which can take the function of an adverb, adjective or noun; Tallerman (2005) refers to these words as ‘ complementizers’ (p.

81). If introduced with an adverbial subordinator, such as because, so, if, when and while, the dependent clause is called an adverbial clause because it works as an adverb and modifies the verb in the independent clause (Oshima & Hogue, 1999); for example,

(1) I work out regularly at the gym so that I can be fit and healthy.

For example (1) the dependent adverbial clause ' so that I can be fit and healthy' modifies the verb ' workout' in the independent clause, which in this case provides the reason why I workout.

Adverbial clauses may provide a reference to place, time, frequency, distance, reason, result, contrast, concession (results that are not expected), purpose and manner (Oshima & Hogue, 1999), some of which are illustrated below:

(2) Everywhere I go, I bump into somebody I know. (place)

(3) After I read the instructions, I understood how to use the machine correctly. (time)

(4) I go to the gym as often as I can. (frequency)

(5) I like to run the treadmill as far as I can. (distance)

A dependent clause introduced with a relative adverb such as when or where, or a relative pronoun such as which, who, that or whose, is called a relative clause and works as an adjective, meaning that it modifies or supports a noun or a pronoun (Oshima & Hogue, 1999); for example,

(6) Many aerobic classes, which are scheduled in the evenings, are too crowded.