



## A Corpus-Based Study of Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials in Spoken English of Chinese EFL Learners

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### Abstract

This paper reports a corpus-based study on the usage patterns of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in Chinese EFL learners' speech. The results suggest that: a) compared with English native speakers, the Chinese learners tend to significantly underuse contrastive/concessive adverbials in their speech; b) while both the learners and the native speakers rely heavily on a limited set of contrastive/concessive adverbials in their speech, the learners are found to overuse certain adverbials and underuse others; c) the learners prefer to use contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in initial position of a sentence. The factors underlying what is found in learners' use of contrastive/concessive adverbials are multifold, such as mother tongue influence, teaching instructions, and semantic misuse. Pedagogical implications of the present study are drawn and research suggestions are presented at the end of the paper.

**Key words:** Linking adverbials; Contrast/concession; Corpus-based study; Spoken English; Chinese EFL learners

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### INTRODUCTION

Linking adverbials, alongside coordinators and subordinators, are important cohesive ties to serve a

connective function in both speaking and writing in that they explicitly indicate the relationship between two units of discourse (Biber et al., 1999). It has been widely recognized that linking adverbials play an important role in textual cohesion and the conveyance and interpretation of meaning in communication. A comprehensive understanding of how these adverbials are used is, therefore, instrumental in language use and learning, especially in second language acquisition (Liu, 2008). Furthermore, an accurate and clear description of the use of linking adverbials by EFL learners provides helpful information to the knowledge of learners' interlanguage, textual cohesion of learner language in particular. Though quite a few studies have been conducted to examine the usage patterns of these items by learners at different levels and from various mother-tongue backgrounds, most of the research concentrates on writing (e.g. Field & Yip, 1992; Milton & Tsang, 1993; Granger & Tyson, 1996; Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; Bolton et al., 2002; Chen, 2006; Lei, 2012; Leedham & Cai, 2013).

The present study, based on the comparison of data from a learner corpus and a control native speaker corpus, intends to explore the overall usage patterns of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in speaking by the two groups, and describe in detail the features Chinese EFL learners demonstrate in their use of such linking devices. Some specific adverbials are also analyzed with regard to semantic properties, register appropriateness, and flexibility of positioning to draw a clearer picture of universal and L1-related features of learners' use of linking adverbials.

### 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some grammarians make a distinction between linking adverbials and other linking devices. According to Liu (2008), terms such as "connective adjuncts",

“connectives”, “linking adjuncts”, and “logical connectors” are used covering all linking devices, including adverbials and conjunctions (coordinators and subordinators like *but* and *although*), while terms such as “conjunctive adverbials”, “conjuncts”, “connective adverbs”, and “linking adverbials” are used to refer specifically to one group of linking devices, i.e. those functioning as adverbials. The current study adopts the term “linking adverbials” proposed by Biber et al. (1999) in that it is clearer and more inclusive, as suggested by Liu (2008).

A number of studies have demonstrated the difficulties EFL learners experience in grasping the use of linking adverbials. Common problems such as overuse, underuse and misuse of these linking devices have been identified. Field and Yip (1992), for example, investigate the use of linking adverbials in argumentative essays by Hong Kong high-school learners and Australian high-school students. Their findings suggest that Hong Kong English learners use far more linking devices in writing than their English-speaking counterparts. They argue that Hong Kong learners may have relied more on linking devices to shape the essay due to the limited time for completing the writing task. Another noticeable finding in their study is that Hong Kong learners “tend to choose the initial paragraph and sentence position rather than to place devices within the sentence” (Ibid., p.27). Accordingly, they suggest that formal teaching be approached to avoid the transfer of linguistic patterns and writing habits from L1.

In Granger and Tyson’s (1996) study, linking adverbial usage is investigated by comparing the essay writing of French EFL learners in the sub-corpus of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE) with that from the Louvain Corpus of Native Essay Writing (LOCNESS). The quantitative analysis reveals no overall overuse of adverbials by French learners. A more detailed qualitative investigation, however, shows that learners overuse certain linking adverbials and underuse others. French learners’ misuse of adverbials is attributable to insufficient knowledge of the semantic properties of particular adverbials, unawareness of their stylistic restrictions and inexperience in manipulating adverbials within the sentence structure. They thus propose that it is necessary to lay stress on examining the use of linking adverbials semantically, stylistically and syntactically in authentic texts.

The study conducted by Altenberg and Tapper (1998) compares the material taken from the Swedish component of the ICLE corpus with that from LOCNESS. The overall frequencies of linking adverbials show that advanced Swedish EFL learners tend to underuse adverbials in their essays than the native English students. However, this feature is primarily confined to resultive (e.g. *hence*, *therefore* and *thus*) and contrastive (e.g. *however*, *though*

and *yet*) adverbials, which partly reflects a tendency to avoid formal adverbials and replace them by less formal ones. They conclude that “a major problem for the Swedish learners is their lack of register awareness” and consequently suggest that Swedish EFL learners “be exposed to a greater range of registers” (Ibid., p.92).

Chen (2006) probes into the use of linking adverbials by comparing the academic writing of Taiwanese MA TESOL students with published TESOL-related journal papers. Student writers are found to slightly overuse adverbials when the word-based analysis is used. In addition, the qualitative analysis uncovers learners’ misuse of *besides*, which is common in oral communication but inappropriate in formal academic writing. Another problem identified is that learners tend to make use of linking devices to string sentences together but fail to establish any logicity, resulting in incoherence of the text. The pedagogical suggestions proposed by Chen are to raise learners’ stylistic awareness and to train learners to think logically instead of relying too much on linking adverbials.

Over the last two decades, interest in English discourse of Chinese EFL learners has also grown dramatically in mainland China. Widespread corpus-based studies of linking devices have been carried out. The aim of many of these studies is to discover the differences in the use of linking devices between Chinese learners and native speakers, discuss the causes for such differences and draw pedagogical implications for EFL teaching and learning. By and large, a majority of the studies have yielded similar findings, that is, in quantitative terms, Chinese learners tend to use more linking devices than native speakers in writing (e.g. Luo, 2003; Zhao, 2003; Mo, 2005; Yan, 2009; Chu & Zhao, 2011; Lei, 2012; Wang, 2014) and in speaking (e.g. Liu & Miao, 2011; Sun & Yu, 2016). However, in Pan and Feng’s (2004) and Pan’s (2012) studies based on the English writing by non-English major graduate students, they find the learners underuse most of the 20 connectors in their writing.

Although Bolton et al. (2002) raise three major methodological issues in the previous research, namely a) the identification of linking devices; b) the calculation of the ratio of frequency; and c) the choice of control or reference corpus, the aforementioned studies render an informative discussion on the topic. The current study intends to examine the use of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in speaking of Chinese EFL learners and compares it with that of native speakers. The significance of this in-depth study is at least two-fold. First of all, given that most of the previous studies are concerned mainly with the use of linking devices in learners’ written English, there is a pressing need for more studies on linking adverbial usage in learners’ speech in order to obtain more accurate and holistic information of cohesion and coherence problems EFL

learners are likely to face. Secondly, a study of the use of contrast/concession-specific linking adverbials can allow us to obtain a more detailed description in this area, as a number of studies have indicated that the use of contrastive/concessive adverbials is most problematic for EFL learners (e.g. Granger & Tyson, 1996; Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; Lei, 2012).

To that end, the present study is carried out to address the following research questions:

a) What are the usage patterns of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in speaking by Chinese EFL learners?

b) How does learners' use of these items differ from that by native speakers?

c) What contributes to such differences? Is there any evidence of mother tongue transfer?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Corpora

The learner corpus used in the present study is the Spoken English Corpus of Chinese Learners (SECCL), a sub-corpus of the Spoken and Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners (SWECCL) (Wen, et al., 2005). SWECCL is a two-million-word learner corpus constructed by a group of researchers headed by Wen Qiufang at Nanjing University. Its sub-corpus, SECCL, contains 1.2 million words of transcribed and tagged speech taken randomly from TEM-4 (Test for English Majors Band Four) oral tests between 1996 and 2002. The

learners taking the test are second-year Chinese college students majoring in English. The oral test is comprised of three tasks: a) retelling a story of about 300 words; b) talking on a given topic related to the story; and c) dialogue in the form of discussion or debate. It can thus be representative of learner speech in academic settings.

The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) (Simpson et al., 2002), the control corpus in the study, is a collection of 1.8 million words of transcripts of academic speech recorded at the University of Michigan. MICASE contains data from a wide range of speech events between 1997 and 2001, including lectures, office hours, colloquia, student presentations, seminars, study groups, classroom discussions, lab sections, advising sessions, etc. The 152 transcripts cover such academic divisions as biological and health sciences, humanities and arts, physical sciences and engineering, and social sciences and education. MICASE is chosen as the control corpus in the current study for two reasons. First, the recording time and corpus size of MICASE are similar to those of SECCL and thus they are comparable in these two important aspects. Second and more importantly, both of the corpora have some similarities in register, that is, speech events are not limited merely to such scholarly discussion as lectures and seminars. In the MICASE corpus, academic speech is defined as speech that occurs in academic settings, where we might, for instance, find speech acts such as jokes and personal anecdotes, as well as explanations and intellectual justifications. It is therefore more suitable for register-specific comparison with SECCL. See Table 1 for the details of the corpora.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Data of the Corpora in the Present Study**

	SECCL	MICASE
Types of transcripts	Retelling, monologue, dialogue	Lectures, colloquia, presentations, seminars, study groups, discussions, labs, advising
Number of transcripts	1,148	152
Recording time	1996-2002	1997-2001
Corpus size	1,287,096	1,802,097

### 2.2 Taxonomy and Identification of Linking Adverbials

Although most of the studies reviewed point to overuse of linking devices, few of them deal with the same list. The classification of linking devices has long been a challenging task in that the semantic relationships they convey vary greatly. Furthermore, the way their semantic types are classified and the terms used to refer to their semantic types also vary greatly. For example, Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify conjunctions into additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. The follow-up classifications of linking devices include, among others, Quirk et al.'s (1985) listing, summative, appositional,

resultive, inferential, contrastive, and transitional; Biber et al.'s (1999) enumeration and addition, summation, apposition, result/inference, contrast/concession, and transition; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (1999) additive, adversative, causal, and sequential; and Leech and Svartvik's (2003) listing and adding, reinforcement, summary and generalization, explanation, and reformulation.

The current study adopts Biber et al.'s (1999) framework and employs the list of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in Biber et al. as the basis of analysis. Their grammar book, based on the Longman Spoken and Written English (LSWE) Corpus of over 40 million

words, investigates linguistic patterns used by British and American speakers and writers. More specifically, the frequencies and functions of linking adverbials are systematically examined and explained in the LSWE corpus across such registers as conversation, fiction, news, academic prose, non-conversational speech and general prose. In this sense, their findings and conclusions can function as reference for the current study.

The semantic category of contrast/concession contains “items that in some way mark incompatibility between information in different discourse units, or that signal concessive relationships” (Biber et al., 1999, p.878). A list of 22 contrastive/concessive adverbials analyzed in the present study is presented as follows. Adverbials focusing on contrast include: *conversely, instead, rather, on the contrary, on the other hand, in contrast, by contrast, in comparison, by comparison* and those focusing on concession include: *anyhow, anyway(s), though, however, nevertheless, nonetheless, yet, even so, admittedly, after all, in any case, at any rate, in spite of this/that*.

### 2.3 Concordancing, Frequency Calculation and Significance of Difference

AntConc 3.4.3 developed by Laurence Anthony is used for item concordancing and text analysis. The software provides raw frequencies, collocates and contexts of the search items and the word list of the corpora. There are, however, at least three usage issues of linking adverbials that have search implications. First, some adverbials, such as *yet* in (a) and (b), have different meanings, so it is necessary to peruse the search results of these items to help decide their appropriate meaning. Second, a few items may function as either a conjunction or a linking adverbial. For example, *though* is used as a subordinator in (c), while it functions as a linking adverbial in (d). The last usage issue that may have semantic and syntactic implications is the different positions in which many linking adverbials appear in a sentence. Meanwhile, the position variation of adverbials seems register-specific as pointed out by Liu (2008).

- (a) And they’re all nice to me. *Yet*, only one of them can touch my bottom of the heart and she still inference me till now. (SECCL, 01-67-07.txt)
- (b) I haven’t decided *yet*. How about you? (SECCL, 01-67-12.txt)
- (c) I was I’m wondering about what the university life would be, *though* I’ve heard a lot of it. (SECCL, 00-58-27.txt)
- (d) What is even more important, *though*, is that she not only tells us a fascinating and disturbing story, but she has some important ideas about how we might do better, in providing what adolescent girls need, to survive. (MICASE, COL605MX039.xml)

Regarding frequency calculation, this study adopts a word-based method, i.e. raw frequencies and normalized

frequencies (per million words) are calculated as the frequency of occurrence. Those items that are not categorized as linking adverbials or used to denote contrast/concession are excluded. Frequencies of the items in different positions of the sentence are calculated respectively. Pearson’s chi-squared test is employed to evaluate how significant the difference in frequencies of linking adverbials is between the learner corpus and the control corpus.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Overall Frequencies of Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials

A total of 647 and 1,426 contrastive/concessive linking adverbials are identified in the SECCL and MICASE corpora respectively. Table 2 presents the raw frequency and the normalized frequency of such linking adverbials in the two corpora. As can be seen from Table 2, the Chinese EFL learners in the current study use contrastive/concessive linking adverbials less frequently than the native speakers in speaking. The result of Pearson’s chi-squared test, with *p* value below 0.001, indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the use of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials between the Chinese learners and their English-speaking counterparts in speaking. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a general tendency of underusing such linking adverbials in learner speech.

**Table 2**  
Raw and Normalized Frequency of Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials in the Corpora

	SECCL	MICASE
Corpus size	1,287,096	1,802,097
Raw frequency	647	1,426
Frequency per million words	503	791

It is likely that this tendency for EFL learners to underuse contrastive/concessive linking adverbials is universal, whereas the factors underlying what is observed may be different. For example, in Granger and Tyson’s (1996) and Altenberg and Tapper’s (1998) studies, they find that French and Swedish learners underuse contrastive or adversative linking adverbials in their writing. They suggest that it might be due to learners’ avoidance of using formal linking devices and their preference for less formal ones. Pan and Feng (2004), Pan (2012) and Lei (2012) also find the feature of underuse of adversative adverbials by Chinese students. Pan and Feng’s (2004) and Pan’s (2012) explanation is that Chinese is a paratactic language, while English is a hypotactic one. In the Chinese language, discourse units are mostly arranged without connectives showing the semantic or logical relationship between them. Influenced

by their mother tongue, Chinese learners tend to underuse linking devices in their language productions. This claim might be proved by some cases of underuse to some extent. Yet, we agree with Lei (2012) that the more practical account is that the use of adverbials denoting contrast/concession is rather difficult for learners to grasp. Compared with linking adverbials in other categories, contrastive/concessive adverbials “clearly mark contrasts, alternatives, or differences” or “a concessive relationship, showing that the subsequent discourse expresses some reservation about the idea in the preceding clause” (Biber et al., 1999, p.878). In other words, they signal a much more complicated relationship between units of discourse, which makes it difficult for even advanced learners to use appropriately. Assuming that learners are not certain about the use of such linking devices or find it difficult to manipulate those items, they are more likely to avoid using those adverbials.

### 3.2 The Most Frequently Used Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials

As for the use of individual contrastive/concessive linking adverbials, Table 3 presents a list of the top ten most frequently used adverbials, with their raw frequencies, normalized frequencies (per million words) and percentage of all such adverbials used. As shown in Table 3, the Chinese EFL learners and the native speakers share the similar tendency of using contrastive/concessive linking adverbials, that is, high proportion of the top ten items and commonalities in their choices of adverbials. First of all, the top ten most frequently used contrastive/concessive linking adverbials account for 99.53% of all

such adverbials used in the learner corpus SECCL and 96.29% in the control corpus MICASE. More remarkably, the top five account for over 88% of all contrastive/concessive linking adverbials used in both the two corpora. Similar results are also found in Chen (2006) and Lei (2012). In Chen’s (2006) study, she examines the use of conjunctive adverbials in the academic writing of Taiwanese MA TESOL students. Results indicate that the top ten most frequently used conjunctive adverbials account for 65% and 67% of all the adverbials used in the learner corpus and the reference corpus respectively. Lei (2012) investigates the use of linking adverbials of Chinese doctoral students in their academic writing. In his study, the top ten most frequently used linking adverbials account for 59% and 60% of all adverbials in the student and the control corpora. A possible reason for the much higher proportion in the current study is that only 22 contrastive/concessive linking adverbials are examined here, while 78 linking adverbials are investigated in Chen’s (2006) study and a total of 110 items in Lei’s (2012) study. As Chen (2006) and Lei (2012) claim, the high proportion of the most frequently used linking adverbials indicates that the learners and the native speakers rely heavily on a limited set of adverbials in their writing. The results of the current study may prove that this claim also remains valid in their speech. Furthermore, of the 22 contrastive/concessive linking adverbials examined in the present study, the Chinese EFL learners use 13 adverbials, while the native speakers use 21 adverbials. This shows that the native speakers use a wider range of those adverbials than the learners in speaking.

**Table 3**  
**The Top 10 Most Frequently Used Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials**

Rank	SECCL Linking adverbials	Raw frequency	Normalized frequency (/pm)	Percentage	MICASE Linking adverbials	Raw frequency	Normalized frequency (/pm)	Percentage
1	However	207	161	31.99%	Though	439	244	30.79%
2	Anyway(s)	122	95	18.86%	Anyway(s)	353	196	24.75%
3	Instead	100	78	15.46%	However	330	183	23.14%
4	On the other hand	85	66	13.14%	Instead	70	39	4.90%
5	After all	82	64	12.67%	On the other hand	65	36	4.56%
6	On the contrary	25	19	3.86%	After all	39	22	2.73%
7	Anyhow	15	12	2.32%	In contrast	22	12	1.54%
8	Yet	3	2	0.46%	Rather	21	12	1.47%
9	Even so	3	2	0.46%	In any case	17	9	1.19%
10	Though	2	2	0.31%	Nonetheless	17	9	1.19%
Total		644	501	99.53%		1373	762	96.29%

Another finding in point is that among the top ten most frequently used contrastive/concessive linking

adverbials in speaking, six adverbials are the same (i.e. *though, anyway(s), however, instead, on the other hand,*

and *after all*). Among the top four, three items are the same, though their rankings are different. Chen's (2006) and Lei's (2012) data analyses have also yielded similar findings in writing. Chen (2006), for example, finds that the top four most frequently used linking adverbials in the student and the reference corpora are the same (i.e. *however*, *for instance/example*, *thus*, and *therefore*), but with different rankings. Lei's (2012) finding is that in the top ten most commonly used linking adverbials in the two corpora, nine items are the same. The top three items and their rankings are the same (i.e. *also*,

*however*, and *thus*) in the student and the control corpora.

While the learners and native speakers share similar usage patterns of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in speaking as a whole, the overuse and underuse pattern begins to emerge when the use of individual items are closely examined. The results of Pearson's chi-squared test, as shown in Table 4, indicate that the learners significantly overuse such items as *after all*, *on the contrary*, *instead*, and *on the other hand*, and significantly underuse such items as *though*, *anyway(s)*, *rather*, *in contrast*, and *nonetheless*.

**Table 4**  
**Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials Overused and Underused by the Chinese Learners**

Linking adverbials	SECCL (raw frequency)	MICASE (raw frequency)	Chi-Square	Significance ( <i>p</i> value)	+/-
After all	82	39	33.9251	0.000***	+
On the contrary	25	2	28.8127	0.000***	+
Instead	100	70	20.5949	0.000***	+
On the other hand	85	65	13.8907	0.000***	+
Though	2	439	308.1960	0.000***	-
Anyway(s)	122	353	49.9148	0.000***	-
Rather	0	21	14.9987	0.000***	-
In contrast	1	22	13.1776	0.000***	-
Nonetheless	0	17	12.1418	0.000***	-

Note. Significance level: \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ . The "+" and "-" signs indicate overuse and underuse.

One of the possible reasons for learners' overuse of linking adverbials is that learners try to establish surface logicality by joining the text together with unnecessary linking adverbials (Chen, 2006; Lei, 2012). Another reason may be due to inappropriate information from teaching instructions and textbooks. A number of studies have suggested that language teachers in mainland China devote much attention to the function of linking devices in the text (e.g. Chu & Zhao, 2011; Lei, 2012; Wang, 2014). Learners are encouraged to use linking devices to connect sentences and are made to believe that the more linking devices they use, the more coherent their writing or speech will be. However, the point is that learners are not instructed on slight differences in semantic properties or the appropriate use of most of the linking devices in specific registers or contexts. In fact, few examples are provided from the naturally occurring discourse to illustrate how to use those linking devices in teaching materials. The third reason, we argue, might be that some cases of overuse are primarily due to misuse, probably due to L1 transfer. In example (e) from the learner corpus, two students are talking about whether it is a good idea for a high school graduate to go abroad for further study. When Student B persuades his friend to finish college before thinking about going broad by saying that he would confront many difficulties, Student A advises this friend

to go abroad by all means because it is worthwhile. The student wants to express "Whatever the situation is, it is a wonderful idea to go abroad". However, it is abrupt to use *after all* to express concession. The possible alternative would be without *after all* in this sentence. This case of overuse seems to provide evidence of mother-tongue influence. In Chinese, there exists such linguistic patterns as "*bù guǎn/wú lùn...bì jìng...*" meaning "No matter how/what...after all..." expressing concession. In Shi & Shao's (2016) study, they also find Chinese learners misuse *though* and *but* together in a sentence due to the transfer of linguistic patterns from the mother tongue.

- (e) A: No matter how difficult it is, *after all* going abroad is not a bad thing. You can learn more than home. And what is the most important you can im... improve your English more quickly. (SECCL, 01-50-03.txt)

The data in the MICASE corpus support Biber et al.'s (1999) finding that in the four linking adverbials that are especially common in conversation, two of these mark contrast/concession: *though* and *anyway*. Conrad (2004) suggests that *though* plays an important interactional function of softening disagreement in conversation and is less direct than *but* or *however*. Chinese learners, however, substantially underuse *though* in their speech. In addition to the aforementioned reason of the semantic

complexity of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials and the difficulty for learners to grasp their use, we argue that the learners underuse such items probably for two other reasons as follows. First, in Conrad's (2004) view, there is an inadequacy of coverage of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in the existing textbooks. She examines textbooks' coverage of the most common linking adverbials denoting contrast and concession and compares these adverbials' usage patterns in textbooks with corpus findings. She finds some noticeable mismatches. For example, corpus evidence clearly indicates that while *though* can function either as a subordinator or a linking adverbial, it is more commonly used as an adverbial expressing contrast/concession. However, in the four textbooks she examines, three of them do not even include *though* in the discussion of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials. In the textbook that includes *though* only mentions its contrastive meaning. As an important adverbial of contrast/concession in conversation, *though* is ignored in textbooks. Such information is thus misleading for learners. The second reason is closely related to the previous one. Provided that some linking adverbials of contrast/concession are ignored, learners will turn to other linking devices. For example, without knowing the semantic properties of *though* as an adverbial commonly used in conversation, learners are more likely to choose coordinator *but* expressing contrast or subordinator

*although* expressing concession. Corpus data and Pearson's chi-squared test uncover that the occurrence of *but* is substantially more in SECCL than in MICASE (10,441 vs. 6,438 times per million words, with *p* value below 0.001), and the occurrence of *although* in the two corpora is 290 vs. 126 times per million words, with *p* value below 0.001. Apparently, learners' underuse of certain contrastive/concessive adverbials in speech is confirmed by their preference for conjunctions.

### 3.3 Positioning of Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials

Single adverbs, the most syntactically varied structure, account for the majority of linking adverbials in conversation (Biber, et al., 1999). These linking devices can occupy initial, medial or final positions in a sentence. The top three most frequently occurring contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in the two corpora, namely *though*, *anyway(s)*, *however*, and *instead*, are chosen to study syntactically. All of the four adverbials are single adverbs, and they account for over two-thirds of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials used in the two corpora. Table 4 presents the distribution of positions of the four adverbials in SECCL and MICASE, with their raw frequencies, percentage and significance of difference. Sentence-initial *though* is not included in that it functions as a subordinator.

**Table 5**  
**Distribution of Positions of Some Contrastive/Concessive Linking Adverbials**

Linking adverbials (position)	SECCL Raw frequency	Percentage	MICASE Raw frequency	Percentage	Significance ( <i>p</i> value)
Though (medial)	0	0	55	12.53%	0.000***
Though (final)	2	100%	384	87.47%	0.000***
Anyway(s) (initial)	112	91.8%	168	47.59%	0.572
Anyway(s) (medial)	0	0	11	3.12%	0.005**
Anyway(s) (final)	10	8.2%	174	49.29%	0.000***
However (initial)	202	97.58%	300	90.91%	0.517
However (medial)	5	2.42%	29	8.79%	0.001**
However (final)	0	0	1	0.3%	0.398
Instead (initial)	86	86%	32	45.71%	0.000***
Instead (medial)	1	1%	10	14.29%	0.028*
Instead (final)	13	13%	28	40%	0.196

Note. Significance levels: \*\*\*, *p*<0.001; \*\*, *p*<0.01; \*, *p*<0.05.

As shown in Table 5, the data analyses in the MICASE corpus support Biber et al.'s (1999) finding that the high proportion of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in final position in conversation are *though* and *anyway(s)*. Learners, however, prefer to use most of these items in initial position, with *though* underused in medial and

final positions, *anyway(s)* underused in final position, and *however* underused in medial position. It is possible that a heavy use of adverbials in initial position is not language-specific. Similar tendency is also found in Field and Yip (1992), Granger and Tyson (1996) and Zareva (2011). Granger and Tyson (1996) agree with Field and

Yip (1992) that in the non-initial position, the focus is shifted away from organization to content of the text. Field and Yip (1992) also point out that learners' use of initial position may be due to their lack of abilities in organizing complex sentences. In Zareva's (2011) view, learners' initial-position preference shows that they intend to facilitate listeners' interpretation of the complex content by explicitly showing relationships between discourse units before they state the content. However, we claim that the positional tendency might be L-1 related in the case of Chinese learners. In view of the fact that linguistic patterns of contrast/concession in Chinese are less varied than those in English, Chinese learners' tendency to use these items in initial position is not accidental. For example, *however* is rendered into "rán ér", "bù guò", or "kě shì" in Chinese, which are conjunctions instead of adverbials. These conjunctions always occupy the initial position of a sentence. Thus, Chinese learners are more likely to avoid using those items in medial or final positions due to mother tongue influence.

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## CONCLUSION

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Given that linking adverbials are important devices to realize textual cohesion and the use of linking adverbials in speech is a largely under-researched area, the current study investigates Chinese EFL learners' use of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in speaking and compares it with that by the native speakers. It is important to note, however, that the analysis in this study should not be taken to suggest that the native speakers provide the model that the learners should follow. The main purpose of the analysis is to identify how the learners and the native speakers use contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in academic speech in terms of frequency, range, and positioning, and hopefully, to discover instances that the learners may need to be aware of in their language learning and use.

On the whole, there are several findings related to the use of contrastive/concessive linking adverbials by Chinese EFL learners. First, learners in the current study are found to significantly underuse adverbials in this category. This tendency of underuse may be due to learners' mother tongue influence as suggested by Pan and Feng (2004) and Pan (2012). However, Lei's (2012) explanation is more reasonable, that is, adverbials signaling contrast/concession are rather difficult for learners to use appropriately.

The second finding is that the learners and the native speakers share the similar tendency of using adverbials of contrast/concession in speech: high proportion of the most commonly used adverbials and commonalities in their choices of adverbials, which indicates that both the learners and the native speakers rely heavily on a small set of adverbials in their speech. Nevertheless, the learners

are found to overuse and underuse certain adverbials. Learners' overuse may be attributed to the fact that they try to join the text together with many adverbials for surface logicity as suggested by Chen (2006) and Lei (2012). Other possible reasons include inappropriate advice from teaching instructions and materials, and misuse of adverbials due to L1 transfer. Learners' underuse of adverbials may be due to an inadequacy of coverage of some important contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in the existing textbooks. Thus, learners may choose to use other linking devices such as conjunctions to express the same meaning.

The last finding is that the learners prefer to use contrastive/concessive linking adverbials in initial position. The reason might be that the learners are not competent in organizing complex sentences as suggested by Field and Yip (1992). In Zareva's (2011) view, the learners intend to facilitate the listeners' understanding by using adverbials in sentence initial position to show logical relationships explicitly. In the case of Chinese learners, a more reasonable reason might be due to mother tongue influence.

The use of linking adverbials is difficult to grasp even for advanced learners. If the aforementioned problems are to be addressed, it is necessary for teachers and learners alike to place more emphasis on how to use linking adverbials, as suggested by Granger and Tyson (1996). Learners should be aware that unnecessary use of adverbials may not facilitate the logical flow of the text. They should be given advice on slight semantic and syntactic distinctions between adverbials from naturally occurring discourse. An exposure to a wider range of registers is also required. In addition, stress should be laid on avoiding the transfer of linguistic patterns from the mother tongue in the process of language teaching and learning.

Academic speech is a unique academic register with linguistic features of its own. There are no clear boundaries between academic speech and conversation, or between academic speech and academic prose. It may demonstrate some features of both conversation and academic prose. More precisely, as Zareva (2011, p.509) suggests, it "seems to have features shared across a speaking/writing continuum". In this sense, there is a need for more detailed corpus-based research on the topic. The present study is carried out in this endeavor. However, this study is limited by the category of linking adverbials examined. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate learners' and native speakers' use of all linking adverbials to enable us to gain more features of their textual cohesion. Another limitation of the present study is that the learners are confined to English majors. Future research needs to be conducted on other types of learners, such as non-English majors and high school students, to investigate the developmental features of textual cohesion



in interlanguage. It is also hoped that more across-register studies will be conducted on learners' and native speakers' use of linking adverbials in speech and writing.

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