



**THE QUALITATIVE ASPECTS OF THE COMPOSING ABILITY OF SUBORDINATION  
ACQUIRED AT A SPECIFIC GRADE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Research in Second Language Acquisition has been the subject matter of linguistic interests since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although multiple dimensions of written language are examined by researchers, very few studies have focused on the acquisition of grammatical structures specific to a particular grade in the Indian setting. The purpose of this study is to investigate the subordinating quality of written constructs produced by students at a particular grade – in this study Std VI students studying in schools in Mumbai metropolitan city. In order ascertain that the set of structures acquired are specific to Std VI a comparison was made by examining the subordination in structures produced by the students of the preceding grade and the succeeding grade i.e Std V and Std VII. Kellogg Hunt's use of the T-Unit (Hunt, 1965) has been replicated in this study. The students were assigned essay topics and the essay was analysed to assess the quantity and quality of the multi clause T-Units produced. Based on this analysis, the subordinators acquired were clearly identified as being specific to Std VI students, in contrast with the subordinators acquired by students of Std V and the grammatical patterns produced by students of Std VII. The results lend support to development of pedagogy in writing connected discourse as it lay bare a the quality of subordinators that could be expected from students at a particular grade. i.e. Std VI.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In the SSC curriculum, the dominant curriculum in the State of Maharashtra, writing skill is taught by teaching grammatical components/syntax in isolation. This method of direct teaching of grammar does not help in the acquisition of language. In the morpheme acquisition studies (Krashen, Dulay & Burt, 1974) one finds that there exist a sequence in the acquisition process, and that learners cannot acquire an item, however often it might be presented, in class or outside, unless his/her mind is ready to accept the item. The study done here shows that there is evidence of the development of the quality of T-units distinct to students of a particular grade.

The aim of the study is to investigate how subordination in syntactic structures produced in one standard differs from subordination in syntactic structures produced at another. Only "average" IQ students as decided by their class teacher based on their past year academic scores in English will be used.

The study endeavors to figure mean sub-ordination ratio. Subordinate clauses are divided into nominal, adverbial and adjectival clauses and adverbials are sub- classified according to different categories of meaning.

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In this endeavor, the study replicates Kellogg Hunt's use of the T-unit. It attempts to determine if certain subordinators can be identified in student writing in a certain Standard and if these can be considered to be characteristic of that Standard. The area of focus is English-medium students of Std VI and the subordination normally acquired by them during that year.

**LITERATURE SURVEY**

There is a strong distinction between learning academic syntax as rules and learning it unconsciously (Krashen, 1983). It is agreed that certain syntactic structures, such as subordinate clauses allow students to express complex ideas (Berman, 2002). However research provides us with evidence that writing competence is acquired only in a developmental progression (Chomsky 1959; Krashen, 1974; Dulay & Burt 1974; Larsen-Freeman 1975; Englert & Thomas, 1987). Moreover the facility in understanding and producing written genres is found to be acquired gradually. (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). It was without doubt then that writing proficiency in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century focused upon grammar and sentence-level exercises (Connors, 2000). It was evident that sentence combining instruction was effective in improving writing performance (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1986; O'Hare, 1973; Saddler & Graham, 2005). Research on syntactic complexity has shown that students use increasingly complex syntactic structures as they

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gain familiarity and skill with school-related writing (Reilly, Zamora, & McGivern, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2004). However, little research has focused on how this development occurs during early grade levels (Purcell-Gates, 1988; Tower, 2003). Hunt (1965, 1970) determined that clauses per T-unit were one of the most reliable indicators of increasing maturity in writing.

Though it was established that learners could benefit from this approach in terms of writing proficiency, it received little attention in the Indian setting.

**Table 1** List of subordinators in relation to type of clause used by Std VI students at the beginning of the year (July-August)

Student No	2. Subordinators used	3. Adverbial of time	4. Adverbial of reason	5. Adverbial of condition	6. Words introducing noun clauses	7. Words introducing adjective clauses
1	that is why		that is why			
2	After	after				
3	-					
4	Because		because			
5	Because		because			
6	When because that is why	When	Because that is why			
7	Because		because			
8	Because if		Because	if		
9	-	-	-	-		
10	Because		Because			
11	Then when	Then when				
12	Because		because			
13	if..then because		because	if...then		
14	Because		Because			
15	When	When				
16	Because that is why		because, that is why			
17	Whenever, when	whenever, when				
18	Because		because			
19	-	-	-	-		
20	Because ,after, when, as	after, when	because, as,			
21	because, while, that	while	because, Because		that	
22	Because					
23	so if		because, so	if		
24	if..then.			if...then		
25	-	-	-	-		
26	Because		because			
27	If			if		
28	that is why		that is why			
29	When because	When	because			
30	Because		because			
31	Because		because			
32	Which Because					which
33	if while	while	because	if		
34	because, if Because		because	If		
35	if.. then that is why Because		Because that is why	if.. then		
36	If after	after	because	If		
37	Because		because			
38	When that is why	when	that is why			
39	because, when	When	because			
40	Because		because			
41	because, if		because	if		
42	Because		because			
43	When while	When while				
44	For		For			

45	Because if., while	While	Because	if.	
46	That, when, because	When	because		That
47	-	-	-	-	
48	Because		Because		
49	since, when	since, when			
50	If that is why, because		That is why, because	If	
51	Which	-	-	-	which
52	While	while			
53	Because		Because		
54	Because		because		
55	Because, when	when	Because		
56	because, if		Because	If	
57	-	-	-	-	
58	If, that is why.		that is why	if	
59	Because, while.	while	Because		
60	because, if, while	while	Because	if	

N.B.: Essay: 'Do You like going for Tuitions?'  
Number of students: 60

## METHODOLOGY

### Subjects

The subjects chosen were of 60 average intelligence (which was decided by the teacher of that class) students VI, from three English-medium schools of Mumbai, affiliated to the Maharashtra State Board of Education. They all shared a strong Marathi background, and mainly used Marathi and Hindi outside school. The schools chosen for this experiment were considered to be average in quality as indicated by Board results, and even here within the school, only average students were selected for study, on the basis of the previous year's marks in English. The results can be considered to be representative of the composing ability of Mumbai school students at Std VI, as such.

### Experimenters

The researcher assigned the task of making the students write the essays to the regular English subject teachers.

### Material and Procedures

Two written assignments at Std. VI were assigned to the students as part of the regular classroom teaching. In July/August the essay 'Do You like going for Tuitions?' and in January/February the essay 'Is the Television Important to You?' were assigned. The essays thus were at the beginning of the first term and towards the end of the school year. The essay assigned was discursive and hence provided a platform to produce a variety of grammatical patterns. The writing was segmented into units based on Kellogg Hunt's concept of the T-unit. The average length of Single-clause T-units (those with only a main clause, like a simple sentence) was separated from the average length of a Multi-clause T-unit (a main clause plus one or more dependent clauses, like a complex sentence). The time given for writing each essay was 45 minutes. The types of sub ordinators correctly used in these scripts at Std VI were listed, along with the number of occurrences of each type. Those multi clause T-Units which were completely correct were differentiated from those with even some degree of incorrectness.

### FINDINGS

After the analysis of the structures produced by the class, the types of subordinators were analysed.

Table 1 reflects the subordinators used in the T-units produced by each student. Further, an analysis of the features of subordination is done in order to ascertain the words frequently used to introduce the adverbial, noun and verb clauses. Coordinators such as *and, so, but, yet, or, for* and *nor* were evident in the writing but were not investigated as they only functioned as a link between T-units.

An argumentative essay like *Is television important for you?* allowed for the most scope for variation in writing. Within the argumentative form one could expect Std VI students to use the following words to introduce adverbial clauses like *when, whenever, even when, while, until, till, after, before, since, because, so, as, if, if then, so that, that, which, unless..* In the essay produced in July-August, Std VI students relied heavily on three categories of adverbials, namely, of time, reason and condition. Table 2 and Table 4 show the frequency of the use of the various words used to introduce adverbials.

Tables 1 and 3 are structured into rows numbered 1 to 60 which contain subordinators actually used by the students in essays produced in July-August and in February respectively. Column 2 shows the subordinators used. The subordinators are further classified in columns 3, 4 and 5 as words introducing adverbials of time, reason, and condition. Columns 6 and 7 classify the words introducing noun and adjective clauses.

**Table 2** Frequency of adverbials in relation to type of clause used by Std VI students at the beginning of the year (July-August)

Adverbial of time	No. of students	Adverbial of reason	No. of students	Adverbial of condition	No. of students
When	12	Because	38	If	13
While	7	That is why	8	If then	4
Since	1	For	1		
After	3	As	1		
Then	1	So	1		

N.B.: Essay: 'Do You like going for Tuitions?'  
Number of students: 60

With reference to Table 1, it is observed that only two students have used the word *that* to introduce noun clauses and also, only two students have used the word *which* to introduce adjectivals.

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**Table 3** List of subordinators in relation to type of clause used by Std VI students at the end of the academic year (February)

1. Student No.	2. Subordinators used	3. Adverbial of time	4. Adverbial of reason	5. Adverbial of manner	6. Adverbial of condition	7. Words introducing noun clauses	8. Words introducing adjective clauses
1	Because due to		Because due to				
2	because, which		because				Which
3	Because if		Because		If		
4	Sometimes When After that is why	Sometimes, when, after	that is why				
5	Because, while, if.,	While	because		If		
6	as, because, if		as, because		If		
7	which						which
8	Because if, when ,then, that is why	When then	Because, that is why				
9	because, that		because			That	
10	Because		Because				
11	because		Because				
12	if, that is why		that is why		If		
13	Because, when	when	Because				
14	because, when	when	Because				
15	because that		because			That	
16	Because When, if	When	Because		If		
17	Because		Because				
18	because		because				
19	when	when					
20	which, who						which, who
21	Because		Because				
22	if, when, because	when	because		If		
23	Because		because				
24	If				If		
25	what, because		because			What	
26	that, what, because, which		Because			that, what	which
27	as that		as			That	
28	Because that is why		Because that is why				
29	Because How this is why		Because this is why	how			
30	Which that because		because			That	Which
31	Because, what		Because			What	
32	because		because				
33	what, because		Because			What	
34	because, what, which		because			What	which
35	because, which, that		because			That	which
36	-						
37	If, if, which				If		which
38	because, that, what		because			That	what
39	What, if				If		What
40	Because, what, which, if, when, while	when, while	Because		If	What	which
41	What					What	
42	That after, which, if	after			If	That	which
43	Because, which ,that		Because			That	Which
44	because, that, which		because			That	which
45	what, that					what, that	
46	If, that				If	That	
47	whenever, because, when	whenever, when	because				
48	Because, that is why, that		Because, that is why			That	
49	Because if, who although which ,that is why		Because that is why		if., although		Who which
50	because, what, when, if	when	because		If	What	

51	That, And		as	If	That	
52	If, as when	when				
53	Which, if			If		Which
54	Which that				That	Which
55	because, when	When	because			
56	If			If		
57	whenever, when	whenever, when				
58	that, what				that, what	
59	-					
60	-					

N.B.: Essay: *Is television important for you?*  
Total number of students: 60

**Table 4** Frequency of adverbials in relation to type of clause used by Std VI students at the end of the academic year (February)

Adverbial of time	No. of students	Adverbial of reason	No. of students	Adverbial of condition	No. of students	Adverbial of manner	No. of students
When	12	Because	37	If	17	how	1
Whenever	2			Although	1		
While	2	That is why	7	If then	-		
Since	-	For	-				
After	1	As	3				
Then	-	So	-				
Sometimes	1						

N.B.: Essay: *Is television important for you?*  
Total number of students: 60

With reference to Table 3, it is observed that there is evidence of students using noun clauses and adjective clauses. The words *that* and *what* are used to introduce noun clauses. The word *that* is used by 16 students and *what* is used by 10 students. 15 students have used the word *which* and 2 students have used the word *who* to introduce adverbials. When compared to the July-August essay (Table 1) it is found that at the beginning of the year, only the words *that* and *which* are used to introduce the noun clause and the adjective clause is used by two students only. So, there is considerable progress. Some sample student scripts, randomly chosen, are analysed below to get an understanding of the nature of their writing, and, in particular, the effect of subordinators on their writing. Two scripts from Std VI are given below and analysed.

**STD VI**

**Student 1**

S1 I don't go for tuition. S2 I study at home. S3 MY mother teaches me very well. S4 Because /I study at home/, I take very good marks in exams/. S5I will go for tuitions after 2years. S6 When /I study at home,/ I and my mother /play and study /.S7 Because of that, /I don't go for tuition.

S8 My mother tells me/ that /like my brother, /I can also go for tuitions.

**Student 2**

S1 I like to go for tuitions/ because/ it is very fun. S2My tuition timing is 2.30 to 4.30 p.m. S3We go to tuition every afternoon. S4 MY teacher's name is Kitty. S5 I don't like to study after 4.45/ because /it is my playing time. S6.When I don't understand any word/ she tells us the meaning of that word. S7 All my tuition friends go for overnight picnic. S8 I love my tuition very much.

**STD VI: Student 1**

Student 1 begins with using two single-clause sentences. These could easily have been connected with a word like *instead*. Though he doesn't do that, and so the writing is somewhat staccato. Nevertheless, the sentences make sense and they come in the right order. S3 is also a single-clause sentence. S4, S6, S7 and S8 each have two clauses. S4 and S7 deal with the adverbial of reason, S6 deals with the adverbial of time, while S8 actually brings in a noun clause. This adds both complexity of thought and variety of structure.

**STD VI: Student 2**

Student 2 has a number of single-clause sentences (S2, S3, S4 S7, S8), but also some two-clause sentences. S1 and S5 with the use of the word *because* indicate a reason for liking tuitions, or for not liking to study after 4.45 pm. In S6 he brings in the time element.

Std VI students have more complexity and more connectedness than Std V students.

The study further investigated the quality of the T-units produced in Std VI in terms of complexity. In order to arrive at this, the multi-clause T-units, produced were further analysed in terms of features of subordination. A list of all subordinators used by each student of Std V, Std VI and Std VII was made and the types of clauses they signaled, were indicated. It was found that students at Std VI produce T-units with adverbial clauses more often than noun clauses and adjectival clauses. The adverbial clauses produced by Std VI students were further analysed and it was found that it was mainly adverbial clauses signaling time, place and condition that were being produced and the words most frequently used to introduce them were *when, because* and *if*. Noun clauses and adjectival clauses were also in evidence, being introduced by the words *what* and *that* for noun clauses and *which* and *who* for adjectival clauses.

## CONCLUSION

The present study originated with the need to raise the standards achieved in written English, a need to learn how to write in a connected discourse/text and not just produce sentences in isolation.

The findings indicate that we can get parameters to set the basic level of student written performance in each class. This finding, if incorporated into the school curriculum, could fix reasonable and eminently achievable levels for students to reach at Std VI. The work could be fleshed out to set achievable levels at each of the standards in school.

This measure of proficiency has yielded results which could be considered to represent the average student's proficiency level at Std VI in Mumbai English-medium schools. After analyzing the writing of Std VI students in July-August and at the end of the year in February, it was found that the performance at the end of the year was different from the performance of these students at the beginning of the year. The study presented here shows that it is possible to state in terms of T-units the goals that are realistically possible for Std VI students.

Some recommendations that can be put forth as an approach to teaching grammar in the context of writing are as follows.

Studies like the one presented here need to be done with different groups of students and at different grade levels in order to come up with realistic expectations of levels it is possible to achieve. With such a profile of student writing ability at Std VI, it is now possible to have expectations of the extent to which language learning can take place at Std VI, in terms of grammatical structure in writing. The curriculum therefore can be designed according to the above expectations. Since at Std VI the student is attempting to handle the three-clause T-unit, teaching could be directed to that area.

Further it is recommended that parts of the syllabus could be designed to also cater to brighter students as well as students having problems with English. The exercises thus would take into account of both higher and lower levels in the class though mainly concentrating on the average level students.

This is a pilot study of what can be achieved at the Std VI of English-medium schools of the SSC Board in the State of Maharashtra. Such a profile of student ability in English provides a realistic standard/ goal for the teaching of English at Std VI in other English-medium schools as well. Being based on actual data, realistic goals can be held out for students and not something that they cannot hope to achieve. Courses based on such data are likely to lead to much better learning.

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