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Research Article

How Do Master's Students Link Their Ideas? A Comparative Lexico-Grammatical Analysis of Conjunctions in Professional Master's Dissertations and Their Cited Research Articles

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Abstract

This paper studies conjunctions in dissertations written by professional master's students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax. Since conjunctions are important for linking parts of texts together and contributing to a clear writing style, SFL's classification was adopted to analyse the dissertations and to compare them with the research articles they cited. The purpose of this comparison was twofold: first, to situate students' writings with respect to professional authors in their fields, and second, to check if the students learnt the style of writing from these research articles. To achieve these purposes, ten master's dissertations and ten research articles were gathered and manually annotated using UAM CorpusTool. A system network, based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), was built, distinguishing three types of meaning: elaboration, extension and enhancement. The findings revealed an overuse of conjunctions by master's students, a focus on extension for adding ideas to previous ones and an inappropriate use of certain conjunctions. The study suggests teaching professional master's students using authentic research articles to be able to identify the correct use of conjunctions in academic discourse.

Keywords: Conjunction; Master's Dissertation; Research Articles; Academic Discourse.

1. Introduction

In academia, language use is specialised and precise. Researchers in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have sought to analyse this type of discourse to help learners overcome its difficulties and master its use (Hyland & Shaw, 2016, p. 1). Academic discourse varies across disciplines, genres and also levels of participants. In a single discipline, there are expert authors, early-career researchers and students, who, on entering university, find themselves engaged with writing and reading new and unfamiliar genres. Consequently, EAP instructors are tasked with developing material to meet their learners' specific needs, and this explains the amount of research in EAP, as each group of learners has its unique characteristics and needs.

One of the fields that has largely influenced EAP practice and research is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Gardner & Donohue, 2019; Hyland & Shaw, 2016; McCabe, 2017). SFL is a theory of language that foregrounds meaning in its accounts as it explains how language users make meaning within particular social contexts (Matthiessen 2012, p. 436). The accounts that SFL provide are therefore 'appliable', that is, capable of addressing problems that arise within particular contexts. In the context of EAP, SFL provides tools for linguistic analysis to identify disciplinary fields, to track the progress of learners, to examine undergraduate writings, or to understand classroom discourse (Hood, 2016). SFL can also inform EAP research by focusing on students' apprenticeship into their field of research. Gardner (2012) specifies that students are 'socialised' into "the language and ways of thinking of academic disciplines" through their interaction with the diverge genres available to them (p. 54).

This study focuses on professional master's students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax. After three semesters of coursework in Business English and communication, these students undertake an internship and

subsequently write a master's dissertation about a topic they observed in their internship companies. Writing this dissertation is a major challenge for the students as they are denied access to previous dissertations due to plagiarism concerns. Students, however, attend an academic writing course that introduces key components of the dissertation, and are highly encouraged to read internationally published research articles to inform their methodological choices. These research articles are the genre that the master's students interact with, and from which, they can learn their fields' ways of writing.

One of the key features of good and understandable writing relates to the use of 'conjunctions'. Conjunctions are "clue words" that make the text hold together as a unity and give it its texture (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). They are part of the textual dimension, which is mainly about "creating relevance to context" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 85), that is, how to build a text that makes sense within its context. In order to study how master's students organise their messages in ways that are similar to other writings in the field, this paper focuses on the use of conjunctions in professional master's dissertations and compares it to their cited research articles. The point from the comparison is to identify the influence of these research papers on the students' dissertation writing, first, to understand their socialisation process into their respective fields, and second, to improve the teaching of the academic writing course.

The paper is structured as follows: section two, immediately following this introduction, provides the necessary literature to contextualise the study within its theoretical background. A third section details the methodology employed in this research, and section four presents the results. The discussion of these results is located in section five, followed by the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

This section presents the literature needed in the study of conjunctions in professional master's dissertations and their cited research articles. A first sub-section presents conjunctions, while a second sub-section deals with the genres studied. The last sub-section presents previous research about the topic.

2.1. Conjunctions

Conjunctions are cohesive devices used to link segments in texts. According to Halliday and Hasan (1989), cohesion, in general, can be defined as a set of semantic relations that holds between two items in a text. These cohesive ties are considered part of the textual metafunction of language because they help readers understand the coherence of the text by showing them how meanings are organised (Thompson, 2014, p. 215). Cohesive devices build the 'texture' of the text, that is, they make it sound like a logical unit rather than a mere collection of words and clauses. These devices can be either grammatical or lexical. Grammatical cohesive devices, according to Clarke (2017), "embody a one-way, dependency relation" between the two parts of the link, and lexical cohesive devices "embody a two-way, mutually defining relation" (p. 404). Conjunctions are considered as grammatical devices (Clarke, 2017; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Conjunctions are also different from the logico-semantic relations that hold between clause complexes in that they provide "the resources for marking logico-semantic relationships that obtain between text spans of varying extent, ranging from clauses within clause complexes to long spans of a paragraph or more" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 609). This implies that they specify only the logico-semantic relation without focusing on the degree of interdependency (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). To be distinguished from clause complexes, these devices have been given different names such as 'linking adverbials' (Biber et al., 2007, p. 875) or discourse markers (Fraser, 1999).

Semantically speaking, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) outline the system of conjunctions classifying them into elaborating, extending and enhancing. Relations of elaboration are cases where one element "elaborates on the meaning of another by further specifying or describing it" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 461). Two types of elaboration exist: apposition, where an element is "re-presented, or restated, either (i) by exposition, the 'i.e.' relation, or (ii) by example, the 'e.g.' relation", or clarification, that is, when an element is "reinstated, summarized, made more precise or in some other way clarified for purposes of the discourse" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 615-616). Relations of extensions represent cases where something new is added either through addition or through variation. The third relation of enhancement occurs when an element "enhances the meaning of another by qualifying it in one of a

number of possible ways: by reference to time, place, manner, cause or condition" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 476). This system of conjunction is summarised in the following table:

Table 1. *System of Conjunction (Based on Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 613-614)*

Type of Conjunction	Sub-Type			Item
Elaboration	Apposition	Expository		in other words, that is (to say), I mean (to say), to put it another way
		Exemplifying		for example, for instance, thus, to illustrate
	Clarification	Corrective		or rather, at least, to be more precise
		Distractive		by the way, incidentally
		Dismissive		in any case, anyway, leaving that aside
		Particularizing		in particular, more especially
		Resumptive		as I was saying, to resume, to get back to the point
		Summative		in short, to sum up, in conclusion, briefly
		Verificative		actually, as a matter of fact, in fact, indeed
Extension	Addition	Positive		and, also, moreover, in addition
		Negative		nor
		Adversative		but, yet, on the other hand, however
	Variation	Replacive		on the contrary, instead
		Subtractive		apart from that, except for that
		Alternative		alternatively
Enhancement	Spatio-temporal:	Simple	Following	then, next, afterwards [including correlatives first ... then], secondly ('my next point is')
			Simultaneous	just then, at the same time, at this point, here, now
			Preceding	before that, hitherto, previously, hitherto, up to now
			conclusive	in the end, finally, lastly, last of all, finally
		complex	Immediate	at once, thereupon, straightaway
			Interrupted	soon, after a while
			Repetitive	next time, on another occasion
			Specific	next day, an hour later, that morning
			Durative	meanwhile, all that time
			Terminal	until then, up to that point
			punctiliar	at this moment
	manner	Comparison	Positive	likewise, similarly
			negative	in a different way
		means		thus, thereby, by such means
	Causal-conditional	general		so, then, therefore, consequently, hence, because of that; for
		specific	Result	in consequence, as a result
			Reason	on account of this, for that reason
			Purpose	for that purpose, with this in view
			Conditional: positive	then, in that case, in that event, under the circumstances
			Conditional: negative	otherwise, if not
			concessive	yet, still, though, despite this, however, even so, all the same, nevertheless
	matter	Positive		here, there, as to that, in that respect
		negative		in other respects, elsewhere

The system presented in Table 1 is the comprehensive summary of conjunctions following Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) that will be used in the analysis of the academic genres studied in this paper: professional master's dissertations and their cited research articles.

2.2. Academic Genres

In academic writing, language is precise and specialised. It is precise because authors are expected to provide a clear, unambiguous content that is also concise (Biber & Gray, 2010). These restrictions mean that every word used needs to be informative. Additionally, the language of academia is specialised as this type of writing is characterised by its

unique genres and disciplines. Academic genres are varied and play a crucial role in a researcher's journey. In fact, they are about "how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (Martin, 1985, p. 250). Learning how things are done through language in a particular discipline is very important for students to be accepted as members of the community, but it is also challenging.

One of the key genres in a student's career is the master's dissertation. Master's dissertations are challenging for students because they are "the most sustained and complex piece of academic writing they will undertake" (Swales, 2004, p. 99), compared to the genres they have been familiar with during their study. These dissertations are not really meant for publication, but they are rather a major requirement to obtain the master's degree. In the professional setting, students need to attend an internship and problematize their professional practice, which then will be the basis for their dissertation (Anderson et al., 2006). Coming up with a problematic to write one's dissertation can be achieved only with the help of the readings that students make. Their knowledge of the genre of dissertations is therefore built on these readings and any guidebook about writing successful dissertations covered in the academic writing class.

In the case of the professional master's of English for Communication at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax, the students attend subjects related to communication, to English language and to business field. During the third semester, they receive a course on academic writing meant to prepare them for the writing of their dissertations. The course is genre-based: it focuses on the different sections of the dissertation and presents what they should write in each. The dissertation is basically divided into two major sections: a first one presenting the company and the internship experience, and a second one focusing on a research topic. Lexicogrammatical choices are studied but not deeply investigated because of time constraints. Students, however, are encouraged to read research articles to decide on the topics they are going to work on and the methodology they are going to use, and to discuss their findings. These research articles are the only source of authentic material they come across during the process of dissertation writing, as they are not allowed access to previous ones, mainly at the early phases, due to plagiarism concerns. In fact, the risk of plagiarism might emerge from the difficulty of identifying a topic of research. Long et al. (2023) maintain that "many postgraduates face confusion and problems at the beginning of the topic, such as they do not have the clue of designing experimental framework, what preparation they need to do before the experiment, and how to design comparative experiments" (p. 1153) and this confusion might lead some of them to copy ideas from others.

The genre of research articles is well established as the main means for the dissemination of new knowledge in the community (Khany, 2016; Koutsantoni, 2006). Research articles go through different stages of corrections before being published in journals. Generally speaking, a research article is written in a concise way following the IMRAD model (standing for Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion), which facilitates retrieving the researched details. In addition to the content, which should be innovative and bringing new claims into the community, the language of research articles is strictly studied by reviewers and editors and should follow the norms established by the community of practice. In fact, research articles can be rejected not only because of their irrelevant content but also because the language used is not adequate. Research articles are therefore a very good source of content details and also a model to follow in terms of language use.

The two genres studied in this article, namely master's dissertations and research articles, show some similarities. In fact, the structure of the research article is quite similar to the research section in the professional master dissertations under scrutiny. They both present some literature about a topic, outline their methodologies, analyse the results and then discuss them. Additionally, in terms of research topic, the chosen articles and dissertations are comparable, as master's students are expected to replicate some kind of study. Therefore, their cited research articles are likely to be similar. Previous studies on these two genres and on the use of conjunctions in academic discourse are outlined in the following sub-section.

2.3. Previous Studies

Although the genre of research articles has been widely studied, dissertations, and mainly master's dissertations, have received little attention (Yazdani & Alimorad, 2022). Previous research on research articles include, for instance, a focus on the way to formulate research questions (Ghanbar, & Rezvani, 2023) and on the use of finite adverbial clauses (Hernandez, 2023). The lack of focus on master's dissertations is related to the fact that most students go for a professional career after finishing their dissertations rather than a PhD program (Swales, 2004). PhD theses, on the other hand, received

more attention (Hafez et al., 2023). Among the few studies comparing research articles and dissertations, Koutsantoni (2006) studied the rhetorical strategies in engineering and concluded that students hedge their claims more frequently than expert authors because of the power asymmetries between the authors and readers of each of the genres.

Another study by Ben Amor and Derbel (2025) compared cohesive devices, including references and conjunctions, occurring in non-finite clauses in journal articles and students' theses (both MA and PhD). The analysis highlights the differences in using these devices between the expert authors of journal articles and the novice Tunisian researchers. The study calls for 'data driven learning', that is, using an authentic corpus to teach grammatical constructions. The study, however, focuses only on conjunctive devices used in non-finite clauses. The full potential of using conjunctions has been explored by a study by Jalilifar (2008) focusing on graduate students' writings. Jalilifar's study (2008) highlights the importance of discourse markers (conjunctions) in enhancing students' writing quality claiming that they (conjunctions) are a sign of good or bad writings.

Zhang and Hyland (2021) studied the feedback given to literature reviews of PhD theses and research articles to track authors' apprenticeship through their dialogic interaction with the advisers. By foregrounding a thematic and intertextual analysis, this study proved the importance of an expert community feedback on the writing skills of researchers. The study, however, considers only the interactional aspect of apprenticeship. Similarly, Rashidi and Esmaeeli (2023) explored how EFL students learn to express their identities, and concluded that learners' identities are to be implemented in pedagogy to help students in this regard.

These studies reveal the importance of studying the lexico-grammatical choices of students' writing, and more particularly conjunctions. This study, however, seeks to compare them to genres written by more expert authors first, to situate the students' level with respect to these expert authors and second, to improve the teaching of the academic writing course designed to this master's programme.

3. Methodology

This section presents the methodology undertaken in this article. After presenting the corpus and its selection criteria, the procedure of data analysis is identified.

3.1. Corpus

The corpus is a collection of ten master's dissertations and ten research articles, cited by the master's students. The dissertations have been randomly and conveniently selected from master's dissertations defended at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax in fulfilment of the requirements for the Professional Master's Degree in 'English for communication'. These master's students are asked to replicate a study that has been already published and to rely on it for their data collection method (questionnaire, interview, etc.). After reading the chosen master's dissertations, the research articles they relied on are identified and then selected for analysis. The following table summarises the distribution of the corpus.

Table 2. *The Corpus*

Dissertation	Number of words	Research article	Number of words
Diss-1	7495	A-1	4216
Diss-2	9252	A-2	2636
Diss-3	17486	A-3	4713
Diss-4	21288	A-4	6711
Diss-5	16548	A-5	6686
Diss-6	8711	A-6	6323
Diss-7	3821	A-7	3592
Diss-8	14184	A-8	8120
Diss-9	14138	A-9	6900
Diss-10	11472	A-10	4750
Total	124395		54647
179042			

Table 2 summarises the codes given to each dissertation and article, after omission of extra sections and details of authors for anonymity. The research articles are downloaded from online available international journals such as: Managing Global Transitions, the International Journal of Behavioural Medicine, the Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, the Journal of Business Market Management, the International Journal on E-Learning, the International Journal of Public Information Systems, the Journal of Information and Optimization Sciences, the European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, SSRN Electronic Journal and the Rajshahi University Journal of Social Science and Business Studies. The total number of words in the dissertations outnumbers that of the research articles because of the differences between the genres.

3.2. Data Analysis

To study the use of conjunctions in the corpus, UAM CorpusTool (version 2.8) is used (O'Donnell, 2007). This software allows the manual annotation of texts following SFL's system networks. In the present case, a system network, based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), as presented in Table 1, is built.

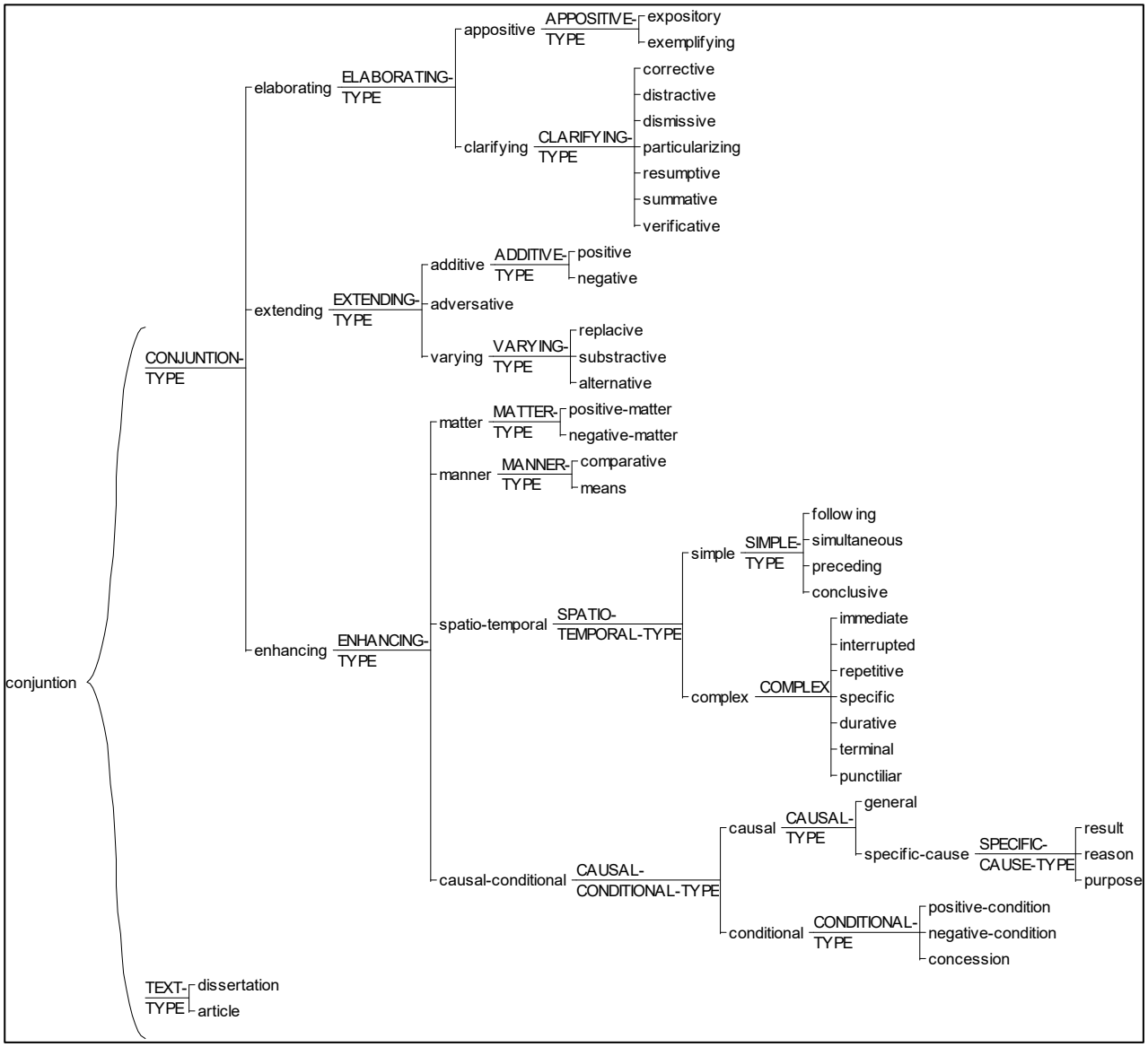


Figure 1. System Network for Conjunctions

According to Figure 1, the conjunctions in the corpus are manually annotated according to their meaning: elaboration, extension or enhancement and according to the genre of the document: dissertation or article.

4. Results

The annotation of the conjunctions used in the master's dissertations and the research articles has yielded the following results.

Table 3. *General Distribution of Conjunctions*

	Dissertations	Research Articles	Total	Chi-square
Total Units	1397 (1.12%)	392 (0.7%)	1789	
Elaborating	273	79	352	0.072
Extending	645	128	773	22.793
Enhancing	479	185	664	21.846

According to the general results presented in Table 3, the number of conjunctions in the corpus is 1789, which highlights their importance as a way to link ideas. This reflects the findings of Biber et al. (2007), who claimed that "[l]inking adverbials are considerably more common in conversation and in academic prose than in fiction and news" (p. 880), mainly because of their major function of explicitly signalling the links between passages in the text. Building clear connections between ideas contributes to the clarity of the message, which is a major requirement of academic discourse.

Additionally, the results in Table 2 reveal that the types of conjunctions are not equally used in the corpus, as meanings of extension and enhancement are more frequent than elaboration. This result is also foregrounded by Biber et al.'s (2007) study of linking adverbials in different types of discourse. In fact, they concluded that meanings of result and inference (enhancement) are mostly found in academic prose and conversation, while enumerative conjuncts (extension) are mainly used in their academic corpus. The relative rarity of elaboration, what they refer to as transition adverbials, is actually persistent in all the studied corpora. Academic discourse seems to be distinguished by its use of extension as it helps in presenting arguments, while enhancement is mainly used for supporting one's point.

Furthermore, Table 2 also shows that more conjunctions are used in dissertations compared to research articles. It is to be noted that percentages are compared because the sub-corpora are not equal in terms of number of words (1.12% versus 0.7% of the total number of words). What is also depicted in the results is that in dissertations there are more extensions, while in research articles, meanings of enhancement are more frequent. This result is highlighted by the chi-square test, which shows a high significance for these two lines (highlighted in Table 2). The study by Biber et al. (2007) has revealed that despite the frequency of these two meanings, results and inference (enhancement) are more frequent than enumeration (extension), and this mirrors the result of the research articles genre. This can be explained by the fact that the studied dissertations are written by students who are still learning the academic way of writing. This piece of research is meant to identify the weaknesses of these students by comparing their use of conjunctions to those of experts. For a better analysis of these writings, the following sub-sections focus on each of the meanings separately.

4.1. Conjunctions of extension

According to the system network used in the analysis of the corpus, conjunctions of extension can have an additive (positive or negative), adversative, or varying meaning. The following table summarises their distribution by genre.

Table 4. *Conjunctions of Extension Across the Two Genres*

		Dissertations	Research articles	Total
Additive		376	67	443
Adversative		246	57	303
Varying		23	4	27
	Replacive	21	4	
	Substractive	0	0	
	Alternative	2	0	

Table 4 shows that additions are more frequent in both genres, followed by adversatives, while varying conjunctions are mostly found in dissertations. Examples of additive meanings are:

> [1] As can be seen from the pie chart (Figure 30), half of the customers (50%) questioned agreed with Création Sola's use of prominent trends for its activities across its media. On the contrary, a small percentage of 6.66% presented their

> disagreement. ***Plus***, slightly 16.66% of the customers have remained neutral, while a considerable portion encompassing 27% strongly agreed with Création Sola's incorporation of prevailing trends… ***Also***, a considerable percentage of the population strongly agreed that it interacts swiftly with the latest tendencies (23.33%)…
>
> As illustrated in Figure 32, only 3.33% disagreed that covering required information is available on the social media account of this brand, ***Additionally***, 10% of the participants have selected the neutral choice…..
>
> According to the data in Figure 33, the largest part of customers (66.66%) agreed that the brand's social media fulfil their informational needs effectively. ***Added to this***, 6.66% of the respondents strongly agreed on the effectiveness of providing important information supplied by Création Sola. ***Also***, 6.66 % strongly agreed that the brand provides necessary information via its SM channels. ***Moreover***, 20% of respondents have remained neutral and have shown no opinions. (Dissertation 10)
>
> [2] Seo and Park (2018) applied entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and perceived risk as SMMAs components, while, another study has characterized SMMAs components as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization and word-of-mouth (Godey et al., 2016). ***In addition***, Bilgin (2018) explored entertainment, interaction, trendiness, advertisement and customization as the SMMAs components.
>
> Thus, informativeness of a particular brand's social media sites helps customers in the evaluation of alternatives that facilitate their choice (Aladwani &Palvia, 2002). ***Furthermore***, studies suggested that SMMAs assists consumers to confirm their expectations for value-conscious consumers (Ismail, 2017). (Article 10)

These two examples are extracted from dissertation 10 and Article 10, respectively. These two examples are different not only in terms of number of occurrences but also in terms of type. The student, in example 1, uses a variety of additives (***additionally***, ***also***, ***added to that*** and ***moreover***) and uses the less formal '***plus***'. These conjunctions are mainly used to enumerate the results of the study or to list previous studies. While studying the major sections of a research article, Swales and Feak (2012) call for using comparative statements to describe one's results (p. 316). The results show that the students find it difficult to interpret their findings. Master's students seem to use enumeratives instead of other more specific meanings.

On the other hand, the author of A-10 opts for only four occurrences, namely '***in addition***' and '***furthermore'*** (repeated three times in A-10). These conjunctions are used in some cases to list previous studies in the introduction section. According to Swales and Feak (2012), it is obligatory in the introduction to introduce previous studies, in order to situate one's research and prepare for the research gap. Swales and Feak (2012) indicate that in the introduction section, the author needs to create a research space, which can be done via presenting previous literature and then indicating a gap in what has been reviewed (p. 331). The use of these additives may emanate from the fact that the author wants to cite different sources and could not find a linking thread of causality between them.

As far as additives are concerned, it seems that the student is not influenced by the research article relied on in the study, neither in terms of type nor communicative purpose. In addition to additives, adversatives are frequently used in the dissertations and less frequent in the research articles. The following paragraphs exemplify their use:

> [3] Added to that, the employee motivation concept is also different from employee engagement since "employee motivation is about an employee getting something in return for their efforts" (Barden, 2018, p20). ***However***, "employee engagement is a completely different attitude…
>
> Questionnaires were used to collect the quantitative data. ***However***, the qualitative data was collected through the interviews.
>
> As shown above, there is an absence of interpretation regarding the directive communication since it is insignificant ($p = .157 > .05$). ***However***, the correlation between employee absorption and indirective communication is moderate ($r = .521$).
>
> In summary, according to the six workers the communication frequency is sufficient and satisfying for most of them (W2, W3, W5, and W6). ***Yet***, for some of them, it is occasionally sufficient (W1 and W4).
>
> This goes hand in hand with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory in which "people are motivated by five levels of needs namely: … alongside McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, where in "theory X manager believes that people want to have direction in order to evade responsibility. ***On the other hand***, Theory Y managers feel that people want

to do what is best for the organization and can direct themselves under the right conditions" (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2012, p.133). (Dissertation 4)

[4] While drivers of employee fengagement have been identified as perceived support, job characteristics, and value congruence, internal communication is theoretically suggested to be a key influence in both the process and maintenance of employee engagement efforts. ***However***, understanding the mechanisms by which internal communication influences employee engagement has emerged as a key question in the literature.

Although this research contributes to academic and practitioner knowledge, each research design contains inherent limitations. ***However***, these limitations can be addressed by future research. (Article 4)

These instances illustrate the adversative use of certain conjunctions like '***however***', '***yet'*** and '***on the other hand'***. The adversative use of these conjunctions does not presuppose unexpectedness but simply highlights a contrast between sentences. In example 3, the student seems to overuse the conjunctions '***however***' and uses it to contrast quotes, data collection techniques, and to highlight one's results. In example 4, the author of A-4 uses the adversative '***however***' to show a gap in the literature or to address the limitations of the research. One possible explanation is the difference between the genres. In fact, in a dissertation, the students do not have limits on number of words, unlike research articles, which have to be as concise as possible. Another possible explanation can be the need of master's students to express their ideas clearly and to argue for the importance of their dissertations. This can be reflected in Hyland's (2004) claim that students seek "to craft more ''academic'' reader-friendly prose and make more concerted attempts to engage with their readers" (p. 141). On the other hand, expert authors "tend to be less explicit in their expositions" (Swales, 2004, p. 117).

The last function of the extension conjunctions are those expressing variation. These conjunctions are not frequent in the corpus, and they are mostly found in the students' dissertations to express replacement (Table 4). The following instances illustrate their use in the corpus:

[5] This initial analysis of the quantitative data revealed that the most prominent motivators among the employees are identified regulation and introjected regulation, which indicates that employees are driven primarily by a sense of obligation to their work as well as by the value they attribute to their jobs. ***Contrarily***, external regulation, whether social or material, displays low percentages and does not seem to represent a strong motivator to the employees. (Dissertation 8)

[6] The second model fitted the data less well. ***In contrast***, the fit of the first alternative model was within acceptable range in the three languages (see Table 2 and Figure 1)

Though not explicitly stated in any writing, we often assume that self-determination theory would predict negative relations between controlled types of motivation and outcomes. ***Instead***, most of the research (Chemolli, Gagné, & Koestner, 2012), including the present study, shows that external regulation is not highly related to any of the antecedents and outcomes that are typically related to autonomous forms of motivation, and that introjected regulation is often positively related to them, albeit with smaller effect sizes. (Article 8)

These conjunctions are used in cases where the author wants to propose another perspective to what has been said. In example 5, the student contradicts types of 'regulation'. In example 6, on the other hand, the author of A-8 uses this function in two instances: to describe the contrast in the data and to propose a new perspective to 'self-determination' that refutes the literature. The difference between the two uses can be seen in what is contrasted: expert authors tend to contrast elements from their own research, thus showing a great understanding of their own research, or their own research to previous ones, and this actually reveals a more confident perception of their own status with respect to other research work. However, the students' use reveals a rather simplistic understanding of the role of these conjunctions in academic discourse, as they tend to use them to highlight their understanding of previous literature.

In addition to conjunctions of extension, the second more frequent use in the corpus is that of enhancement (Table 3).

4.2. Conjunctions of Enhancement

According to Table 3, conjunctions of enhancement are the most frequent conjunctions used by expert authors. Enhancement can be classified into matter, manner, spatio-temporal and causal-conditional types.

Table 5. *Conjunctions of Enhancement*

	Dissertation	Research Article	Chi-square
Matter	6 (1%)	2 (1%)	0.033
Manner	46 (9.6 %)	32 (17.3 %)	7.62
Spatio-temporal	276 (57.6 %)	81 (43.8 %)	10.278
Causal-conditional	151 (31.5 %)	70 (37.8 %)	2.396

Table 5 shows that spatio-temporal meanings are the most frequent in the corpus, followed by causal-conditional and manner meanings, while matter conjunctions are uncommon. The difference between the genres is indicated in the frequencies of these functions: students tend to use more spatio-temporal conjunctions, while expert authors counterbalance this use with manner conjunctions. This result is highlighted by the high significance of the chi-square test, which shows an uneven distribution in these two functions.

Starting with spatio-temporal conjunctions, they can be either simple or complex, as shown in the following table.

Table 6. *Spatio-temporal Conjunctions*

		Dissertation	Research article
Simple		258 (93.5 %)	76 (93.8 %)
	Following	94	24
	Simultaneous	8	6
	Preceding	63	20
	Conclusive	93	26
Complex		18 (6.5 %)	5 (6.2 %)
	Immediate	0	0
	Interrupted	0	1
	Repetitive	1	1
	Specific	0	1
	Durative	17	0
	Terminal	0	0
	Punctiliar	0	2

Table 6 shows that simple conjunctions are more frequently used, particularly the conclusive and following functions. As for the complex conjunctions, the only remarkable use is that of the durative function in the master's dissertations. To illustrate their use, the following examples of simple functions are analysed.

> [7] One of the key areas of these recruitment strategies is the target market or in other words, who does the association want to reach (Rossel, 2016). ***First***, the target market simply put is a subset of individuals who are most likely to react favourably to offers (Dahikar, 2020). According to Rossel (2016), one tactic is to harvest the association's database by conducting a census of names kept in the association to find potential members with whom you may already have a record and a relationship. Another is to create a database of potential customers by improving social media accounts, employing content marketing and paid marketing strategies, and displaying targeted advertisements on other websites. This process facilitates the collection of voluntary and contact information from potential members who have expressed interest and need for association resources. **Moreover**, conducting outside list research can increase the target audience engagement. It consists of considering where similar organizations also promote and exhibit as subscribers and members of these organizations are likely to be strong prospects. **In addition**, compiling lists from several sources, including professional licensure listings is another way to find prospects. They are flexible and may be rented for a single use or leased for a year or more (Rossell, 2016). (Dissertation 5)

> [8] There are several difficulties encountered in the use of Short et al.'s (1976) social presence instrument. ***First***, these four items are too general to measure the computer-mediated communication (CMC) user's perception of social presence. Social presence in a CMC learning environment is a complicated human perception and is, obviously, more complicated than just these four items. Many different variables are cited in the literature (Tu, 2000) that may contribute to the degree of social presence, such as the recipients, topics, privacy, task, and so forth. ***Second***, the semantic differential technique may be faulty in that respondents tend to ascribe different definitions and meanings to the keywords. ***Third***, Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) created a new social presence instrument that is still unable to capture a thorough perception of social presence. This is so because it doesn't consider several important variables of

> social presence—privacy, recipients, and topics—and some of the questions are created for specific groups of students. (Article 5)

Examples 7 and 8 reveal that, in the studied corpus, simple spatio-temporal conjunctions are mainly used as enumeratives, which are important in academic prose (Biber et al., 2007). The studied examples, however, reveal a difference in terms of how these lexico-grammatical resources are exploited. In fact, in example 7, the author starts defining 'target market' by using the conjunction '***first'***. Then, instead of using other following conjunctions, s/he uses additives (in bold). Example 8, however, shows a different use of these conjunctions. The author enumerates the difficulties, and it is easy to follow them through the use of '***second'*** and '***third'***. Although the master's students use enumeratives frequently in their texts, their use is not appropriate and reader-friendly. The conjunctions, in this case, do not perform their main function: to "lead the reader through a text" (Hyland, 2005, p. 91).

As for complex spatio-temporal conjunctions, Table 6 shows that they are used for a durative function in dissertations, as shown in the following examples:

> [9] Only 4 respondents, based on the figure, saw the invitation on LinkedIn. This represents 9.8% of the alumni that were recruited. ***Meanwhile***, 51.2% of the participants saw it on Facebook.
>
> Based on the data displayed in the figure, the majority of respondents clicked on the registration link from Email. Indeed, 24 respondents, or 58.5% of the total, registered from Email… ***Meanwhile***, only 1 respondent joined through the link posted on LinkedIn which amounts to only 2.4% of the total sample. (Dissertation 5)

The qualitative analysis has revealed that almost all the cases are found in dissertation 5 and they are related to the use of the conjunction '***meanwhile***'. Obviously, the student uses this conjunction to mean a contradiction, which is the secondary meaning of the conjunction, while its original meaning is that of a durative event taking place at the moment of speaking. This use of the conjunction is the same throughout the dissertation. The student's choice of the secondary meaning over the original one can be related probably to an ignorance of the conjunction's meanings. This explains the absence of this meaning in the other dissertations and research articles, as they are texts written to be read not at the moment of speaking.

The use of the spatio-temporal conjunctions in the students' dissertations seems to be counter-balanced by the conjunctions of manner in the research articles, according to the chi-square result in Table 5. Manner conjunctions are either comparative or means, as shown in the following table.

Table 7. *Conjunctions of Manner*

	Dissertation	Research article	Chi-square
Comparative	19 (41%)	5 (15.6 %)	5.842
Means	27 (59%)	27 (84.4 %)	5.842

Table 7 shows that comparative conjunctions are rather associated with dissertations, while conjunctions of means are relatively used in research articles. To study the difference, the following examples are extracted.

> [10] For example, celebrities and influencers are more likely to use Instagram rather than Facebook, whereas ordinary people mainly prefer Facebook. ***Likewise***, older adults mostly use Facebook, while teenagers and young adults prefer Instagram more frequently. (Dissertation 9)
>
> [11] Women were for home and considered as homemaker their role was not efficient in economy or commerce. ***Similarly***, the word 'entrepreneur' was also considered for men, but with changing of technologies growing industrialization, globalization and social norms along with the spread of knowledge awareness effected the shifting of women toward success step by step from home household to the highest-ranking professions. (Article 9)

Examples 10 and 11 use conjunctions of comparison, realised via '***likewise***' and '***similarly***', respectively. In example 10, the similarity is not obvious as the student compares the users of Facebook and Instagram. In example 11, the author of the research article is trying to apply a similarity of notion across gender. This example reveals a deeper understanding of the role of comparison than does example 10. As for conjunctions of means, they are mainly realised, in the present corpus, via '***thus***', according to the adopted classification (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

[12] Since, as it is demonstrated in figure 18, the p value p = 0.033 is below the threshold of 0.05, H0 is successfully rejected and H1 is proven. There is, ***thus***, a significant difference between motivation scores before and after the intervention. (Dissertation 8)

[13] Notably, results from the Chinese sample did not stand out in relation to the "Western" samples. Variation in the correlations are ***thus*** likely not due to national culture (e.g., collectivism), but from other sample differences. (Article 8)

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the conjunction '***thus***' is synonymous to '***by such means***' (p. 614). In the present corpus, the conjunction has a general meaning of result, which is actually part of the causal-conditional meaning continuum, presented in the following table.

Table 8. *Causal-Conditional Conjunctions*

	Dissertation	Research Article	Total	Chi-square
Causal	123	61	184	1.109
General	92	56	148	7.494
Specific	31	5	36	7.494
Conditional	28	9	37	1.109
Conditional	5	3	8	2.5
Concessive	23	6	29	0.9

Table 8 presents the distribution of the causal-conditional conjunctions in the corpus. Causal conjunctions are more frequent in the studied texts, and especially those expressing general cause. According to the chi-square test, which shows a high significance, the distribution of general and specific cause is not even across the two genres. Specific cause is mainly associated with dissertations, while general cause is rather used in research articles, as illustrated by the following examples.

[14] Whilst soft business support reduces uncertainty and gives reassurance, hard support reduces cost and promotes profitability (Ramsden & Bennett, 2005). There is ***therefore*** no doubt that businesses that can access such support may be able to reap some real benefits.

Less, think resources are insufficient, while few think it is sufficient. ***So*** according to young entrepreneurs, the financial resources available are mostly partial more than sufficient, or insufficient. (Dissertation 1)

[15] Schumpeter (1934) explained the entrepreneur as one who is involved in innovative thinking, in what he called the gale of creative destruction, replacing new products and services on the market with new or better ones; and ***as a result***, creating new markets or industries. (Dissertation 1)

[16] …discovered that measuring satisfaction with entrepreneurship education on a single six-point scale ranging from 'very satisfied' to 'very unsatisfied' results in a very skewed answer distribution, which may not be usable for analysis with continuous variables. ***Therefore***, satisfaction was measured with eight items on seven-point semantic differential scales answering a question about the respondents' general feeling about the education they engaged in….

The focus of the paper is, ***hence***, entrepreneurship education, which can be defined as structured, formal conveyance of entrepreneurial knowledge; entrepreneurial knowledge meaning the concepts, … (Article 1)

Examples 14 and 16 are cases where general cause is expressed in the two genres. Both use the conjunction '***therefore'***, but while the expert author (example 16) uses the more formal '***hence'***, the student (example 14) rather opts for '***so'***. Writing a research article goes through different stages of corrections and proofreading, which makes this genre a good exemplar of academic discourse. Students still use everyday vocabulary in their formal academic writings. As for example 15, the conjunction '***as a result***' is used to indicate a specific cause, and more particularly a direct result. The use of these conjunctions can be linked to the overuse of conjunctions in the genre of dissertations. This usage can be explained by the need of master's students to demonstrate their understanding of their topics, which often leads them to incorporate a variety of conjunctions into their writing. In fact, Jalilifar (2008) studied students' writings and concluded that better students "tended to use a larger variety of markers in their compositions" (p. 119).

On the causal-conditional continuum of meanings, conjunctions expressing condition are not frequently used in the studied corpus (Table 8). Cases of concession seem to outnumber those of condition, and they are realised via the conjunction '***however'***, as shown in the following examples.

[17] The description of the website content is done according to the different website parts explained on the blog of 11web13 by Dunn (2018). ***However***, the website design is described according the website design elements explained on the blog of DreamHost14 by Ellice (2018). (Dissertation 6)

[18] Internal reliability problems with the external regulation subscale (Cronbach's alphas in the .50s), and face validity problems encouraged Tremblay, Blanchard, Villeneuve, Taylor, and Pelletier (2009) as well as Gagné et al. (2010) to improve the scale (simultaneously in French and English). These scales, ***however***, still had some problems, as we discuss later, which led to the development and validation of the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS), presented herein. (Article 8)

In examples 17 and 18, the conjunction '***however***' is used to express concession, or "counter expectedness" (Loghmani et al., 2018). These conjunctions reveal that the author acknowledges other propositions than those being advanced (Loghmani et al., 2018). In example 18, the author of the research article acknowledges that the scales used have problems, thus revealing a deep understanding of the scales used and their bases. However, in example 17, the countering conjunction is used to advance the use of another tool in the analysis of the website, without expressing the cause of the concession. Again, the student's use of the conjunction shows a lack of deep understanding of the meanings expressed by these conjunctions.

In addition to extension and enhancement, this paper focuses on the meanings of elaboration expressed by the conjunctions used in professional master's dissertations and their cited research articles.

4.3. Conjunctions of Elaboration

Conjunctions of elaboration are the least frequent in the corpus. The following table summarises their distribution across the two genres.

Table 9. *Conjunctions of Elaboration*

		Dissertation	Research Article	Chi-sqaure
Appositive		117	39	1.05
	Expository	54	8	8.03
	Exemplifying	63	31	8.03
Clarification		156	40	1.05
	Corrective	1	2	4.01
	Distractive	0	0	0
	Dismissive	0	0	0
	Particularising	15	10	6.77
	Resumptive	0	0	0
	Summative	67	16	0.13
	Verificative	73	12	3.65

Conjunctions of elaboration are either appositive or clarifying. These two sub-meanings are almost equally used in the studied corpus, as shown in Table 9. Apposition is used when some elements are restated by exposition or example. The chi-square test revealed a highly significant uneven distribution of these two types within the corpus. In fact, research articles are thought to use more examples than dissertations. Signals of exemplification are meant to highlight the transition between theory and examples in a research article, which adds to the clarity of the message. These conjunctions are illustrated by the following examples.

[19] There are many other evaluation methods from different perspectives, ***that is to say***, there are multiple frameworks for website evaluation. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the website evaluation framework, it also depends on the website type, whether it is commercial, educational, media and entertainment, e-commerce, blog...

As shown in figure 9, the secondary navigation menu includes different parts. At the top, there are navigation buttons, ***for example***, here there are three buttons: study, planning and implementation, and logistics. (Dissertation 6)

[20] Researchers in the field use the terms "Web evaluation methods" (WEMs) and "website evaluation methods" (WSEMs) interchangeably. ***That is***, they do not differentiate between diverse platforms of assessment methods; neither do they consider the purpose of the evaluation. ***For example***, some studies evaluate the Web as a whole

> phenomenon for the purpose of site ranking or the connectivity and visibility of sites, such as Dhyani et al. (2002) and Stolz et al. (2005). (Article 6)

Example 19 contains two instances of elaboration: the conjunction '***that is to say***' has an expository meaning while '***for example***' is exemplifying. The same examples are selected from Article 6 (example 20). The author of article 6, however, seems to use the same conjunction in a simpler way: '***that is***' instead of simply '***that is to say***'. In terms of content, the student seems to simply paraphrase the first sentence. This contrasts with the expert author (example 20), who not only restates the initial idea but also expands upon its meaning.

Regarding exemplification, the author of article 6 follows the restatement by giving an example of previous studies, thereby strengthening their argument. The example of the student (example 19), however, is not a real example, thus indicating an inappropriate use of the conjunction. In both cases, however, there seems to be a similarity between the dissertation and the article as far as the use of apposition and exemplification are concerned. It can be claimed that the student follows a pattern similar to that of the research article, as far as this type of conjunctions are concerned.

Cases of clarification are also frequent in the corpus. Cited below are examples of particularising, summation and verification.

> [21] The Pearson Coefficient varies between two values 1 and -1 indicating either a positive or negative relationship, or none at the value of zero (Guilford, 1942). ***More specifically***, these two types of relationships are divided into five stages… (Dissertation 4)
>
> [22] Calls have been made for more complex, empirical research on workplace relationships (see e.g., Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Van Knippenberg, Van Dick, and Tavares 2007; Masterson et al. 2000; Sluss et al. 2008). ***In particular***, the need for research focusing on exchanges between an employee and their organization and between an employee and their direct supervisor has been highlighted as an important area (Masterson et al. 2000; Sluss et al. 2008). (Article 4)
>
> [23] ***To conclude***, the qualitative data reveals that despite the hurdles Tunisian craftswomen face, they are successful in developing their businesses and sharpening their skills. (Dissertation 9)
>
> [24] Research interviews aim to seek out people's opinions, experiences, convictions, as well as motives about particular issues (Gill et al. 2008). ***In fact***, interviews are interactive which means they have the ability to elicit thorough responses and search deeper into any new subjects that may come up. (Dissertation 5)
>
> [25] Social presence theory was not originally designed to explain CMC. ***In fact***, it was initially studied in face-to-face (FTF), audio, and closed-circuit television encounters. (Article 5)

Examples 21 and 22 are cases of particularising, where a more particular detail follows a previous more general one. In article 4 (example 22), the conjunction '***in particular***' is used to indicate one kind of relationships, mentioned in the previous sentence. The conjunction, in this case, shows the precise kind of research requested. In example 21, the author of dissertation 4 uses the conjunction '***more specifically***' to describe the relationships between the values of the Pearson coefficient. It seems that in the research article, only necessary details are included, and the links between the clauses are well-considered. In dissertations, however, the students strive to demonstrate their knowledge of their topic of research.

Example 23 is one of many cases where summative conjunctions are used in dissertations (***to conclude***). These conjunctions are numerous because they are not only used in the conclusion of the dissertation but at the end of every section. Example 23 shows that the student is summarising a section in the analysis to move to the next one.

Examples 24 and 25 are cases where the verificative '***in fact***' is used. In example 24, extracted from dissertation 5, the second sentence clarifies the first one but the meaning expressed is rather 'particularizing'. In example 24, written by the author of article 5, the second sentence clarifies the first one, and more particularly expresses a verificative corrective meaning to the purpose of the social presence theory. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) indicate that there are seven subtypes of meanings for clarification conjunctions, and that they are "realized by different sets of conjunctions" (p. 616). The conjunction '***in fact***' is classified as a verificative, the student, in example 24, uses it to give more particular details about interviews. This wrong use of the conjunction can be related to the students' willingness to provide extra details in their dissertation, which might lead to overusing conjunctions and making inaccurate choices.

5. Discussion

This paper has aimed to study the use of conjunctions in dissertations written by professional master's students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax. These lexicogrammatical resources are important in linking ideas and parts of texts together, thus leading to better academic style. The use of conjunctions in master's dissertations is compared to those by cited research articles, first, to situate the students' choices with respect to expert authors in their fields, and second, to see if the students managed to learn from the articles they read. The analysis has revealed differences between the two genres that can be related to several factors. In terms of the frequency of conjunctions, master's students seem to use more conjunctions than expert authors do, and this can be linked to the size of each genre. Dissertations are longer than research articles and students tend to include all the details they know, as a way to demonstrate their understanding of their own research project and prove their knowledge of previous literature. The length of this document has lead to an overuse of conjunctions. Hyland (2013) claims that transitions are frequent in master dissertations as "students have to make greater use of interactive devices to structure more discursively complex arguments" (p. 84). Authors of research articles write a more concise and to the point text, where each argument and each lexicogrammatical choice, including conjunctions, is well-considered.

What is also noted from the frequency of conjunctions is that, generally speaking, the major communicative purpose of students' writing is to demonstrate their knowledge of what they have studied. This purpose is mostly associated with students who are sitting for exams, rather than researchers, who actually have other purposes like reading the literature with a critical eye to come up with a research gap or to situate one's research with respect to others (Swales, 2004). A master's dissertation is therefore a good exercise into the world of research for students, as it helps them move from the status of the student to that of the researcher. Consequently, the academic writing course should help students understand both the generic features and the communicative purposes of the research genres, and mainly the lexicogrammatical choices used to achieve them. Teachers need to guide students "towards control over disciplinary-sensitive writing practices" (Hyland, 2004, p. 148).

Furthermore, there are differences between the genres in terms of the functions used. In research articles meanings of enhancement are more frequently used by expert authors as among the 392 conjunctions in RAs, 185 express enhancement (Table 3). This reliance on enhancement reveals well-thought and clear links between parts of texts. Extension is rather linked to dissertations (Table 3), as students tend to use additives to link the large number of details they have included, instead of more precise causal meanings. What is more, master's students might use these conjunctions in an inappropriate way, undermining the meaning potential of these lexicogrammatical devices. In almost all the meanings studied, the students' use of conjunctions revealed a rather simplistic understanding of the meanings of the conjunctions, in comparison to the expert authors. Expert authors, however, seem to have a clearer understanding of their own topics, and its relation to previous literature, and this is reflected in their use of conjunctions.

Moreover, the comparison between the dissertations and the cited research articles did not reveal a transfer of style from the expert genre, except for dissertation 6, which bears some similarity to research article 6, as far as elaboration is concerned. In fact, while identifying the weaknesses found in the students' dissertations with respect to the use of conjunctions, it is important to note that these students did not learn much from the readings they made. Therefore, teachers need to draw the students attention to the writing mechanics in the research articles. This can be achieved via working on authentic texts in the classroom, and more particularly on research articles, as they are the model to be followed.

6. Conclusion

The present paper has studied conjunctions in professional master's dissertations written by students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax. The students' use of conjunctions is compared to those in the research articles they have cited to identify the level of these students with respect to expert authors within their field of study and to check if they were able to learn the use of conjunctions from them. To analyse the two types of text, SFL's system of conjunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) has been applied on the corpus. The model has proved to be helpful, first in identifying students' problems by comparing their choices to expert authors and second in pointing to the exact areas to be covered in the teaching of academic writing to these students in the future. The comparison revealed that the distribution of conjunctions is different across the two genres both quantitatively and quantitatively. More conjunctions

are found in master's dissertations for two major reasons: the length of the text, as master's dissertation are longer than research articles, and the status of the author, as students are more inclined towards explicitness and demonstrating knowledge. The comparison has also shown that most of the students were not able to learn the exact use of the conjunctions in the research articles. The paper, therefore, calls for a more explicit teaching of genre features and lexicogrammatical choices based on authentic material.

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