

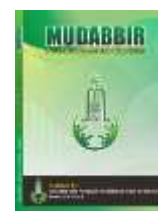


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Syntactic Differences Between Simple, Compound And Complex Sentences

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ABSTRACT

Sentence structure plays an important role in shaping clarity, coherence, and academic accuracy in scientific writing. This study aims to examine syntactic differences in the use of simple, compound, and complex sentences in two academic essays written by EFL students. Using a qualitative descriptive research design, this study analyzes two student essays entitled "Technology: Addressing Inequality, How Technology Can Promote Inclusive Education in the Digital Revolution" and "The Impact of Electronic Media Radiation Often Overlooked by Many People". Data were collected through document analysis and classified based on clause structure, sentence types, as well as the use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. The findings reveal a clear difference in syntactic patterns between the two texts. The first essay shows a strong dominance of complex and compound-complex sentences, reflecting higher syntactic complexity and analytical depth, while the second essay primarily uses simple sentences with few complex constructions, indicating a more informative and linear writing style. These differences suggest that sentence structure choices are closely related to rhetorical purposes and the level of academic literacy. The study highlights the importance of syntactic awareness in academic writing and suggests that explicit instruction on sentence variation can support EFL students in developing more sophisticated and effective written discourse.

Keywords: Syntax, Simple, Compound, Complex Sentences

INTRODUCTION

Sentence structure occupies a central position in academic writing because it shapes how ideas are organized, connected, and communicated to readers. In scholarly environments where accuracy, logical coherence, and well-developed reasoning are crucial the ability to construct effective sentences reflects not only linguistic competence but also the writer's overall academic literacy. Within syntactic theory, the long-established classification of sentences into simple, compound, and complex structures provides an essential analytical framework for understanding how writers encode meaning, develop arguments, and articulate relationships among concepts. Each structure contributes differently to the flow of information: simple sentences convey singular points, compound sentences link ideas of equal relevance through coordination, and complex sentences build layered meanings by establishing dependent relationships between clauses. As a result, the integration of independent and dependent clauses becomes a vital mechanism for achieving sophisticated academic expression (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber & Gray, 2010).

Despite the fundamental role of these structures, many writers particularly those using English as a Second Language (L2) frequently encounter challenges in employing them appropriately. Deciding when to coordinate ideas and when to subordinate them requires a nuanced understanding of clause relationships, rhetorical priorities, and cohesion. Common difficulties include an overuse of simple constructions, limited employment of complex syntactic patterns, and inconsistent or inaccurate use of connecting devices. Such issues often derive from incomplete mastery of syntactic principles or insufficient familiarity with academic discourse conventions. As noted by Nurmala Hendrawaty (2018), these challenges may hinder writers from producing texts that are coherent, precisely structured, and rhetorically convincing. Consequently, examining the distribution and use of sentence types within academic writing becomes a productive way to evaluate syntactic maturity and writing proficiency.

The significance of such analysis increases when two texts are examined comparatively. A comparative perspective not only reveals individual stylistic tendencies but also highlights how different writers negotiate structural choices, manage clause complexity, and construct argumentation within varied academic contexts. Through comparison, it becomes possible to identify patterns of similarity and contrast in syntactic strategies, which can offer meaningful insight into how authors approach sentence construction and how these choices affect the clarity and persuasiveness of their writing. With this purpose in mind, the present study conducts a comparative syntactic examination of two academic essays: "Technology: Overcoming Disparities, How Technology Can Promote Inclusive Education In The Digital Revolution" and "The Impact Of Electronic Media Radiation That Many People Ignore." These texts serve as a focused corpus for analyzing how writers employ simple, compound, and complex

sentences within real academic communication. By measuring the frequency, proportional distribution, and structural tendencies of each sentence type, the study seeks to identify which forms dominate each text and how the writers balance coordination and subordination. Special emphasis is placed on the kinds of conjunctions used, as these linguistic markers illuminate the ways in which clauses are interconnected to build meaning.

Through a combination of quantitative evaluation and qualitative interpretation, this research compares the syntactic complexity and variation present in the two essays. By examining their similarities and differences, the study aims to deepen understanding of how academic writers utilize syntactic resources to construct coherent, well-organized, and conceptually rich texts. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform writing pedagogy by identifying specific areas of syntactic development that may require instructional attention, particularly for learners striving to enhance their ability to produce structurally complex and rhetorically effective academic writing (Lu, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design:

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design, which is suitable for investigating how writers construct meaning through syntactic choices in authentic academic texts. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of sentence structure, focusing not only on numerical patterns but also on how and why certain forms are used. As noted by Merriam (2009), a qualitative design makes researchers to interpret linguistic features in their natural context, making it appropriate for analyzing sentence types, clause relationships, and structural preferences in student writing.

Data Source:

The data for this study was collected from two academic essays written by students in the same class:

1. The Impact of Electronic Media Radiation That Many People Ignore. By: Rahma Laita
2. Technology: Overcoming Disparities, How Technology Can Promote Inclusive Education In The Digital Revolution. By: Najwa Ramadhani Tarigan& Indah Alya Isnani

The essays were deliberately selected because they represent authentic student writing and provide different examples of how individuals use simple, compound, and complex sentences in an academic context. Each text serves as a standalone unit of analysis from which sentence patterns can be identified and compared. The data was collected through document analysis, a method commonly used in qualitative linguistic research. The steps included:

1. Obtaining the essays from the authors with their permission to be used for academic research.
2. Reading both essays repeatedly to familiarize the researcher with the overall content, structure, and stylistic characteristics.
3. Dividing the text into individual sentences to prepare for syntactic classification.
4. Identifying the types of sentences (simple, compound, complex) based on clause structure and the use of conjunctions.
5. Highlighting relevant syntactic features, such as coordinative and subordinative markers, relationships between clauses, and patterns of sentence construction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of the two essays reveals significant syntactic differences in the use of simple, compound, and complex sentences. In this study, the analysis was conducted by identifying clause patterns appearing in each sentence and then categorizing sentence structures based on the number of clauses, types of clauses, and logical relationships constructing the sentences. The data were examined in depth using a qualitative content analysis approach to explore not only grammatical structures but also the rhetorical functions emerging from these structural differences. The two analyzed texts are *Overcoming Disparities: How Technology Can Promote Inclusive Education in the Digital Revolution* by Najwa & Indah and *The Impact of Electronic Media Radiation That Many People Ignore* by Rahma Laita. Each text serves a different rhetorical purpose, resulting in distinct sentence structure patterns.

Overall, the essay by Najwa & Indah shows a strong tendency to use complex sentences extensively. This is evident from the frequent integration of dependent clauses such as *although*, *when*, *while*, *since*, and *because*, as well as relative clauses such as *which* and *that* within a single sentence unit. These sentence structures are used to explain cause-and-effect relationships, compare ideas, and develop arguments supported by academic references. In contrast, Rahma's essay demonstrates a simpler syntactic pattern, dominated by simple sentences with more limited use of complex structures. This suggests that differences in writing purpose and level of academic depth significantly influence structural variation between the two texts. To further illustrate these differences, Table 1 summarizes the syntactic tendencies of both essays.

Dominance of Sentence Types in Essay A and Essay B

Sentence Type	EssaEssay A	Essay B
Simple Sentences	Low- Moderate	High
Compound Sentence	Moderate	Moderate
Complex sentence	Very High	Moderate
Complex- Compound	Present	Absent

These differences become more apparent when analyzed in terms of rhetorical function. In the first essay, simple sentences are strategically employed to emphasize key ideas before being elaborated through more complex constructions. For example, the statement “Technology can be especially beneficial for students with special needs” functions as an introductory claim that is subsequently developed through complex sentences in the following lines. In contrast, simple sentences in Rahma’s essay serve as the primary means of information delivery, as seen in the sentence “Some cancers have been linked to exposure to electromagnetic radiation,” which is presented without additional clauses. This highlights the informative nature of Rahma’s text, which aims to provide general understanding rather than in-depth academic analysis.

In addition, differences in the use of compound sentences are also evident. In Najwa & Indah’s essay, compound sentences are used to balance two equally important academic ideas, such as when discussing the roles of schools and governments. Conversely, Rahma’s essay employs compound sentences more frequently to express simple contrasts or emphasis, for instance, stating that radiation issues concern not only radiation itself but also how it is used. This distinction indicates that both writers employ syntactic structures in accordance with the rhetorical needs of their respective texts.

The most prominent difference lies in the use of complex sentences. Najwa & Indah’s essay utilizes complex sentences in nearly every paragraph. For example, the sentence “Although technology enhances accessibility, it must still be supported by proper infrastructure and teacher training” combines a subordinate clause and an independent clause to construct a research-based argument. Meanwhile, Rahma’s essay also includes complex sentences, but with considerably lower frequency. A sentence such as “Although many studies have been conducted to evaluate its impact, there is no clear consensus on how harmful this radiation is to humans” demonstrates an emerging ability to express logical relationships, although not as extensively as in more advanced academic writing.

To clarify the syntactic differences further, the following findings can be categorized by sentence type:

1. Simple sentences appear more frequently in Rahma's text, reflecting a writing style that prioritizes clarity and ease of comprehension over extended elaboration.
2. Compound sentences are used by both writers, but with different functions: Najwa & Indah employ them to integrate academic arguments, while Rahma uses them to express informative contrasts.
3. Complex sentences dominate Najwa & Indah's text, indicating a higher level of academic literacy and the need to connect multiple ideas within a single discourse unit.
4. Compound-complex sentences are found only in the first essay, signaling the writers' ability to construct layered arguments suitable for formal academic contexts.

These findings demonstrate that differences in sentence structure are not merely stylistic choices but also representations of academic competence and writing purpose. For early-stage students such as Rahma, simpler sentence structures support direct and clear content delivery. In contrast, more advanced academic writing, as seen in Najwa & Indah's essay, relies on more complex syntactic constructions to elaborate theories, expert perspectives, and multidimensional relationships within the topic of inclusive education. Consequently, these syntactic patterns also reflect the development of students' writing abilities in an EFL context, where the use of complex sentences serves as an important indicator of increasing academic literacy.

A. Coding Najwa and Indah's Essay

Title: Overcoming Disparities: How Technology Can Promote Inclusive Education in the Digital Revolution.

(Referred to as Najwa and Indah's Essay) Essay A

No	Sentence Quotation	Sentence Type	Coding	Rhetorical Function
1	According to the Asian Development Bank (2023), although technology enhances accessibility, it must still be supported by proper infrastructure and teacher training.	Complex	COMPLEX - CONTRAST	Shows contrast between benefits and required support.

2	Inclusive education faces significant challenges due to access gaps, limited resources, and lack of teacher training.	Simple	SIMPLE - EXPLANATION	States the main idea directly.
3	Schools play a crucial role in integrating technology in the classroom, but government support is essential for proper regulations, infrastructure, and resources.	Compound	COMPOUND - BALANCING	Balances two academic roles.
4	This technology enables students in remote areas to attend classes without being restricted by physical infrastructure, while also ensuring that minority groups receive equal access.	Complex-Compound	MULTILAYERED COMPLEX	Combines multiple benefits.
5	Technology can be especially beneficial for students with special needs.	Simple	SIMPLE - TOPIC SENTENCE	Introduces main topic.
6	To that extent, inclusive education faces two main obstacles: inadequate digital infrastructure and cultural hurdles.	Simple	SIMPLE - DEFINING STATEMENT	Defines key obstacles.

B. Coding Rahma's Essay

Title: The Impact of Electronic Media Radiation That Many People Ignore

(Referred to as Rahma's Essay) Essay B

No	Sentence Quotation	Sentence Type	Coding	Rhetorical Function
1	In today's digital age, electronic media has become an integral part of everyday life.	Simple	SIMPLE - GENERAL STATEMENT	Provides general context.

2	Although many studies have been conducted to evaluate its impact, there is no clear consensus on how harmful this radiation is to humans.	Complex	COMPLEX – CAUSE/EVIDENCE	Explains scientific uncertainty.
3	One of the most feared impacts is the increased risk of cancer.	Simple	SIMPLE – FACTUAL CLAIM	States a factual claim.
4	However, it is important to remember that it is not the radiation itself that is the problem, but rather how we manage the use of electronic devices.	Compound	COMPOUND – CONTRAST/REDEFINITION	Reframes the issue.
5	Excessive use of electronic devices can lead to social isolation, distraction, and decreased quality of human interaction.	Simple	SIMPLE – LISTING EFFECTS	Lists social effects.
6	As technology continues to evolve and scientific research continues, we must remain vigilant of the potential impacts.	Complex	COMPLEX – CAUTION/RECOMMENDATION	Gives recommendation.

C. Cross-Essay Coding Summary

Syntactic Element	Essay A	Essay B
Simple Sentence	Topic statements & definitions	Main sentence structure
Compound Sentence	Balances arguments	Simple contrasts
Complex Sentence	Highly dominant	Moderately used
Complex-Compound	Present	Not found
Main Function	Academic & analytical	Informative & linear

CONCLUSION

This study shows clear syntactic differences in the use of simple, compound, and complex sentences between the two analyzed academic essays. Najwa's and Indah's essays show a strong dominance of complex and compound-complex sentences, indicating a higher level of syntactic complexity as well as the ability to develop analytical and academic arguments. In contrast, Rahma's essay relies more on simple sentences, with limited use of complex structures, reflecting a more informative and straightforward writing style.

These findings suggest that sentence structure choices are closely related to the purpose of writing and the level of academic literacy. While simple sentences support clarity, the effective use of complex structures allows writers to express relationships between ideas more precisely. Therefore, increasing students' awareness and control over sentence variation can contribute to the development of more coherent writing that is appropriate for an academic context in learning English as a foreign language.

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