

CARAC TERES

Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

En este número participan ■ Elvira Blanco Santini, Sébastien Doubinsky, Daniel Escandell Montiel, Rosana Fuentes Fernández, Beatriz Garrido Ramos, Jan Gregor, Jindřiška Kračková, Darío Lanza Vidal, Alejandro Lozano, Miguel Ángel Motis Dolader, Daniel Raušer, Petr Sádlo, Karim Sidibe, Věra Sládková, Libuše Turinská.

Dossier: Current Research Approaches in Humanities through the Eyes of Czech Linguists (1)

Caracteres. Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

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DOSSIER: CURRENT RESEARCH APPROACHES IN
HUMANITIES THROUGH THE EYES OF CZECH LINGUISTS
(1)

Coord. Jan Gregor & Libuše Turinská

**THE LANGUAGE OF THE INTERNET - THE USE OF
CONCESSIVE CONJUNCTIONS IN BLOGS BY COMPANIES
PROVIDING PRIVATE TUITION**

**MEDIOS EXPRESIVOS DEL LENGUAJE DE INTERNET:
CONJUNCIONES CONCESIVAS EN EL CONTEXTO DE BLOGS
POR EMPRESAS DE CLASES PARTICULARES**

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RESUMEN:

Se dice que la concesión adverbial es un elemento clave en la semántica inglesa, ya que las construcciones concesivas permiten el contraste y la contradicción. Hay varios estudios publicados sobre este tema (es decir, el tema de la posición y colocación de conjunciones concesivas, interferencia lingüística etc.) El artículo tiene como el objetivo el análisis de la frecuencia del uso de las conjunciones concesivas más comunes en los foros de debates de Internet donde los hablantes nativos discuten sobre las clases particulares. El trabajo se centra solamente en las conjunciones concesivas que aparecen en blogs sobre clases particulares y que se consideran principales y las más usadas.

ABSTRACT:

Concessions are said to be a key aspect of English semantics because concessive constructions create a place for contrast, i.e. contradicting relations. Several studies have been carried out on this topic (i.e. on the positioning of conjunctions, linguistic interference, etc.). The aim of this paper is to focus on the frequency of use of the most common concessive conjunctions in Internet

discussions with native speakers who give private tuition. The focus is primarily on the main, most commonly used concessive conjunctions in tutoring blogs.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Conjunciones concesivas, uso, contraste, clases particulares, blog

KEYWORDS:

Concessive conjunctions, use, contrast, private tutoring, blog

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The scientific study was created during the project No. 201609 of the Internal Grant Competition at the Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with concessive conjunctions e.g. *although* and *even though* (the latter carries a stronger contrast than *although*), *while* (or *whilst* which is more formal and more commonly used in British English), *in spite of (the fact that)* and *despite (the fact)*. These conjunctions are considered to be the basic ones and the most frequently used for expressing a concession. They introduce concessive clauses, thereby making a link between several statements or pieces of information. The conjunctions stated above can either be placed at the beginning of a sentence or they can follow the main clause. Some examples are given below.

Although he tried hard and studied a lot, he failed the examination.

They decided to travel to that unknown piece of the world although everyone made efforts to put them off their purpose.

Even though you clarified the issues, they may not have understood the situation; they come from a completely different cultural background.

The employees managed to produce the required goods even though the order was placed very late.

While he doubted the benefits of private tutoring, the others felt it could be a great opportunity.

Peter found out that his neighbour fainted due to exhaustion while the passers-by thought he was drunk.

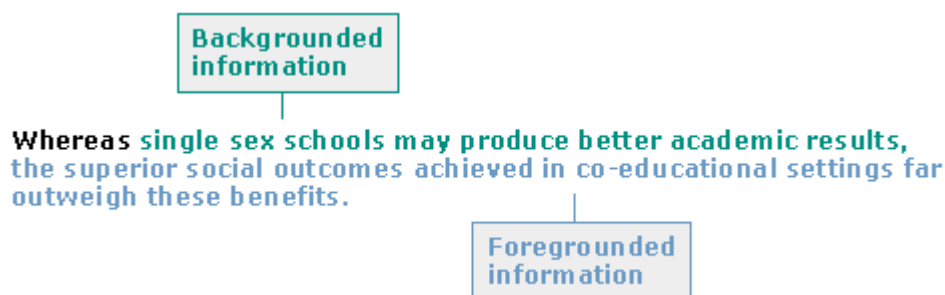
In spite of the recent increase in property prices, they have bought a new flat.

The shockwave continued in spite of the fact that new elections had been organized.

Despite the fact that it was raining heavily and they were soaking wet, they managed to reach the top of the hill.

Her fellow colleagues made a really good impression on Susan despite the workload which was really demotivating.

Concessive conjunctions are used to express contrast in terms of something being partly unexpected, or surprising. They oppose the information in the main clause: *Although the background to the two cases is very different, in some respects they are similar.* (Dušková, 2006: 642). Clauses with concessive conjunctions give background information, whereas the main clause endorses foreground information (such as evidence, an argument, a new piece of information, a fact, or an idea) (The University of Sydney, 2012: web)



Source: The University of Sydney: Order of information when using concessive clauses

Concessive clauses and their conjunctions have been the focus of many studies, including: König and Siemund (2000: 341-360) who focused on the formal and semantic relations among causal and concessive clauses; Crevels (2000: 313-340) who in his

taxonomy of concession clauses, claims that concessive clauses can form four different relations, i.e. content, epistemic, textual and speech act; Izutsu (2007: 646-675) approached them on the basis of semantic analysis; Swetser (1990: 13-16) and Azar (1997: 21-39) took a more pragmatic approach when studying the conjunctions; Wiechman and Kerz (2012: web) concentrated on the positioning of concessive adverbial clauses in English; Mizuno (2007: web) dealt with concessive conjunctions in his dissertation, entitled “Although Clauses in English Discourse: A Functional Analysis”; Latos (2009: web) studied concession clauses on different levels of linguistic connection.

At this point, it is necessary to define the terms “concession” and “blog”. Dagmar Barth-Weingarten, in her work on concession in spoken English, found that, from a semantic point of view, there are several definitions connected with the notion of concessivity (Weingarten, 2003: web):

- a possible problem / issue / obstacle (*The clouds have grown dark although the weather forecast promised sunshine all day.*)

- not observing the rules / standards (*He drove more than 190 km / h despite the speed limit*)

- not fulfilled expectation, or surprising impact (*Even though Norbert Hofer’s chances of winning the presidential election were high, he didn’t obtain enough votes.*)

In his article, entitled “*Clauses of Concession in Written Present-Day British English*”, Bas Aarts states that the notion of concession has not been focused on very closely yet. He notes that linguists such as Curme, Jespersen and Quirk perceive the notion of concessivity and its relations from various angles. He claims that the linguists note a certain discrepancy in these relations: matrix clauses and concessive clauses. Within this context, Aarts speaks

of central concessivity and peripheral concessivity (Aarts, 1988: 40).

The word “blog” is a shortened version of “weblog”. The very first use of this word dates back to 1999 (Meriam-Webster, 2016: web). A blog often takes on the form of an Internet diary. This is a sort of information / discussion webpage. These are not only used by individuals, but also, for example, by companies for work purposes. The bloggers enter (post) their views and comments on various topics ranging from personal experiences to politics. The entries are usually in reverse chronological order. There are two kinds of blogs: single-author; and multi-author. The person(s) who runs(run) the blog need to contribute regularly, otherwise they risk the blog account being closed down. A typical blog usually consists of a textual part, pictures, Internet links, and videos. Nowadays, the range of blogs is widening e.g. videoblogs, photoblogs, etc.

2. Material and Methods

The conjunctions, whose frequency of use in private tutoring blogs was to be observed and analysed, were *although, even though, while, whilst, despite, in spite of*. They were selected because they are commonly used in both formal and semiformal contexts, which corresponds to the circumstances in the blogging sphere. Two private tutoring blogs were found at random via the Internet search engine Google. These were TutorCruncher and Tutorhub. The only selection criteria was that the blogs had to be run by native speakers. Their individual contributions / posts were examined for the use of the concessive conjunctions identified above for a period of one year, namely 2016. The decision to only examine the posts from the last 12 months was made due to the

shorter existence of the TutorCruncher blog (established in 2013). The assumption was that the number of posts in the first year were fewer and of poorer quality. To ensure that there were enough blog contributions, 2016 was therefore selected as the sample year.

TutorCruncher has been active in the private tutoring industry for three years. It was established in 2013 in the United Kingdom by Malachy Guinness. As an online service company, it not only operates nationwide, but also worldwide. The company has offices in the US, UK (headquarters) and Canada. Their sophisticated software enables the provision of private tuition services not only on a one-to-one basis, but also with multiple learners and multiple tutors (Tutor Cruncher, 2016: web).

Tutorhub is a British online service which was set up by Kevin Gibson and Jon Ellis in 2010. They provide online tutoring in a wide range of subjects. They offer their clients single-session help or long-term tuition as required. The company strongly recommends one-to-one teaching because tutors can better respond to their learner's needs. Tutorhub incorporates state-of-the-art technology which enables their learners to acquire knowledge in an efficient way (Tutorhub, 2016: web).

The field of private tutoring was specifically selected by the author due to the nature of her doctoral thesis. This is closely connected to the private tuition of English as a second language to freshmen attending a bachelor study programme at an unidentified higher education institution.

The aim of this analysis is to confirm or refute the author's assumption that the most frequently used concessive conjunctions in blogs is *although*. This assumption is in part based on the claim made by Mizuno in his doctoral thesis that *although* clauses can

“express at least three types of concessive relations, i.e. standard, rhetorical, and rectifying.” (Mizuno, 2008: 3).

3. Results

The results of the analysis of the individual posts on the TutorCruncher and Tutorhub blogs are presented in the tables below.

The TutorCruncher blog was created and developed to be an advertising and information tool. The contributions on the blog were posted three times a month on average (usually a standard page).

TutorCruncher blog	
Examined period – 2016 (approx. 30 posts)	
Conjunction	Frequency of conjunction use
although	4x
even though	0x
while	8x
whilst	7x
despite (the fact that)	1x
in spite of (the fact that)	0x

Table 1. TutorCruncher blog.

The table above shows the frequency with which the stated concessive conjunctions were used in approximately thirty contributions posted during 2016. The concessive conjunction *although* was used only four times, with *while* and *whilst* having

been employed the most. *Despite* was only used once, with *even though* and *in spite of* not being applied at all.

The following examples are taken from the blog (some conjunctions, such as *although*, *while*, *whilst*, offer both pre- and postposed positions / preceding / following the main clause).

Concessive conjunctions	Examples from the blog
<i>Although</i>	
a) preceding	<i>Although</i> girls continue scoring higher grades and are being admitted to their first choice institutions more often than boys, the gender gap has begun to narrow for the first time in five years.
b) following	Though these changes may be frustrating, they will mean your emails are much more secure. It should also improve your delivery rate (<i>although</i> most TutorCruncher clients already have excellent delivery rates).
<i>While</i>	
a) preceding	<i>While</i> using irony or references in your marketing campaign might seem like a good idea when trying to engage more customers, keep in mind that more often than not both of these factors are linked to one's cultural background and might not necessarily work as well with foreign customers as they do with domestic ones.
b) following	The 1.6% increase in university admissions of female applicants was surpassed by a 2.5% rise in successful male applicants, <i>while</i> the disparity regarding average grades has shrunk by 0.1%.
<i>Whilst</i>	
a) preceding	<i>Whilst</i> it might be unrealistic for you to get out on the street connecting with potential clients, take a moment to think how you can personalize your communications.

b) following	<i>If you take the average salary of an admin to be £15,000 not including pension and national insurance contributions, a TutorCruncher Premium plan of £99 per month would be saving your business £13,800/year, whilst giving yourself the time to supply the service your clients expect!</i>
Despite	
a) following	<i>It is a question of educational philosophy - the U-turn came the same week as a more head-line grabbing article reported that the daughter of schools minister Lord Nashis was teaching in one of the academies he helped found, despite having no formal teaching qualifications.</i>

Source:Tutor Cruncher, 2016: web

The Tutorhub blog was designed on the same basis as its competitor. However, the number of posts in 2016 differed to that of TutorCruncher. Whereas the TutorCruncher blog consisted of almost 30 contributions, the Tutorhub blog consisted of only six posts in 2016. The reason for this may be the sudden death of a close friend of the founder, as referenced in one of the posts in the blog. On the basis of this information, it was decided to also analyze the posts for 2015 to achieve the same number of contributions.

Tutorhub blog	
Examined period – 2016, 2015 (approx. 30 posts)	
Conjunction	Frequency of conjunction use
although	14
even though	1
while	5
whilst	4
despite (the fact that)	2

in spite of (the fact that)	0
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Table 2: Tutorhub blog

Table 2 shows the frequency with which the stated concessive conjunctions were used in the contributions posted on the Tutorhub blog. The most frequently used concessive conjunction was *although*, followed in second place by *while*, and in third place by *whilst*. In addition, there were two references to *despite* and one to *even though*.

The following examples are taken from the blog. It is clear that the application range in the Tutorhub blog is much wider than that for the TutorCruncher blog. In this case, *although*, *while*, *whilst*, and *despite* offer both pre- and postposed positions.

Concessive conjunctions	Examples from the blog
<i>Although</i>	
a) preceding	<i>And although some argue that good funding attracts good people, it is also the case that good teachers are as much a matter of personality and professionalism as anything which can be bought.</i>
b) following	<i>The concept of autonomous learning has gained most of its momentum in recent years, although the term was first used back in 1981 by Frenchman Henri Holec, largely regarded as the ‘father’ of learner autonomy.</i>
<i>Even though</i>	
a) following	<i>This would seem to be rather an extreme and controlled approach to take, even though I may understand the reason behind it. So what might constitute a balanced education?</i>
<i>While</i>	

a) preceding	While 14.6% of clever male maths bods got A or A*, 14% of clever female maths bods got A or A* grades.
b) following	That's 11,420 suspensions for physical assault against an adult in English state-funded primary schools in the year 2013/14, according to the Department for Education, while 240 pupils received permanent exclusions for physically assaulting adults.
Whilst	
a) preceding	Whilst a statement of SEN only lasts until the young person is eighteen, an EHC plan continues until they turn 26.
b) following	The legal criteria for issuing an EHC plan are the same as those for a statement, so if your child was statemented before September 2014, they will continue to receive this support whilst they are transferred on to an EHC plan.
Despite	
a) preceding	Despite fears that art subjects would be sidelined as a result of the government's education reforms, in 2013 GCSE Art and Design figured in the top ten of GCSE subjects taken – although it is in tenth place, taking up 3.36% of all GCSE entries (this compares with the highest percentage of entries, for maths at 13.96%).
b) following	The approach to learning that we're familiar with in the educational system generally expects all children to perform in the same way, with the same approach, at the same time, to the same level and with the same outcome, despite their differences, individual learning needs or characters.

Source:Tutor Cruncher, 2016: web

TutorCruncher blog		Tutorhub blog	
Examined period – 2016 (approx. 30 posts)		Examined period – 2016, 2015 (approx. 30 posts)	
Conjunction	Frequency of concessive conjunction use		
although	4x	14x	
even though	0x	1x	
while	8x	5x	
whilst	7x	4x	
despite (the fact that)	1x	2x	
in spite of (the fact that)	0x	0x	

Table 3. Comparison of concessive conjunction use on the TutorCruncher and Tutorhub blogs

4. Discussion

It is clear for the comparison in Table 3 that the blogs have a tendency to use different concessive conjunctions. Whereas the writers on TutorCruncher use *while* and *whilst* the most, those for Tutorhub use *although* (although *while* and *whilst* are also used quite frequently, too).

The reasons for these differences may lie in a wide range of factors, such as more contributing authors and the use of different vocabulary due to their differing professional backgrounds, life experience, the way contributors express their views and opinions in written form, or just due to a contributor's present mood. In addition, social and political issues could have played a significant role in the use of the concessive conjunctions selected.

5. Conclusion

The assumption that the concessive conjunction *although* would be used the most was only partially confirmed in the Tutorhub blog. However, the results from the TutorCruncher blog refute the assumption. This indicates that the language of the Internet is not predictable and always depends on what and for whom something is written, as well as on someone's personality and what wording they choose to express themselves with.

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Investigador predoctoral de la Universidad de Salamanca en la facultad de Filosofía. Su principal línea de investigación y el motivo de su tesis doctoral es la estética de las nuevas tecnologías, tema que al que se acerca a partir de las metamorfosis recientes en el imaginario social. Su segundo ámbito de trabajo, conectado estrechamente con el anterior, es la estética videolúdica y la exploración del juego como un componente clave en la constelación mediática actual.

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