

ABSTRACT

The present thesis analyses the use of the clausal comma in academic prose. The aim of this diploma thesis is to examine the hypothesis of relative inconsistency in the use of the comma in a multiple sentence formed by a native speaker of English. In Modern English, the descriptive approach prevails and therefore it is assumed that the comma usage varies. The factors that affect or, by interacting with other factors, contribute to the inclusion or the omission of the comma in a sentence are the length of the clause in both compound and complex sentences, the position of the clause in a sentence as well as the syntactic function of the adverbial clause in a complex sentence. The coordinate clauses are studied in terms of the presence and absence of the subject in the second conjoined clause and the semantic tightness of both clauses.

Based on an analysis of 200 two-clause sentences (both compound sentences and complex sentences comprised of the matrix clause and an adverbial clause) excerpted from linguistic articles written by native speakers of English, the thesis categorises the sentences according to the dependency relation between the clauses, evaluates the frequency of the inclusion of the comma against its omission, and describes the potential factors that influenced the comma usage. The analysis confirmed the findings that were hypothesised on the basis of the reviewed literature to a considerable extent. The assumptions about the comma usage in the coordinate clauses also proved correct. In copulative coordination, the comma was largely motivated syntactically, significantly varying in use, whereas in adversative coordination the comma was systematic and semantically motivated. By contrast, the comma in the adverbial clauses was rather consistent, with a lower percentage of usage variability being explained by the stylistic optionality of the comma.

Key words: comma, comma usage, punctuation, coordination, subordination, multiple sentence, adverbial clause, conventions