

The challenges of conjunctively written adjectives in the learning of Sesotho

Malisema Francina Makoa^{1*}

¹University of the Free State; MakoaMF@ufs.ac.za (M.F.M.).

Abstract: The use of adjectives in a sentence is a critical issue in various settings, especially when learning grammar, and is essential for comprehending the qualities that are associated with nouns. Adjectives are the words that add more information to the substantive (noun and pronoun) or the words that qualify the substantive, and they are one type of qualificative. Different languages have different orthographies of the adjectives. Some scholars have already shown the importance of adjectives in a sentence; however, some studies have indicated that some students have some challenges in writing the adjective in a sentence. Therefore, this study aims to find the challenges that conjunctively written Sesotho adjectives bring in the learning of Sesotho and how students can be assisted in writing the adjectives correctly. This interpretive study employed a qualitative approach where documents were used to gather data, and the data collected were analyzed thematically. The study found that students write the adjectives conjunctively instead of writing them disjunctively, which happened to be the problem under study. It concludes that students write adjectives conjunctively because they cannot separate the adjectival prefix from the adjectival stem. Therefore, the paper recommends that students be taught the structure of the Sesotho adjective as a separate entity in the text.

Keywords: *Conjunctive writing, Disjunctive writing, Orthography, Qualificatives, Sesotho adjectives.*

1. Introduction

Adjective usage in sentences is an important subject in many contexts, especially while learning grammar. Alwiah et al. (2018) state that students are expected to learn about nine interrelated factors, including use, usage, synonym, antonym, meaning, pronunciation, spelling, collocation, and order, as well as adjectives as one of the possibilities to add to their vocabulary. They further showed that an adjective is a crucial component of sentences in all languages. Similarly, Taljard and Bosch (2006) indicate there are two linguistic classifications for South Africa: Nguni and Sotho, with Sesotho falling under the Sotho category.

Unlike Nguni languages like isiZulu, which are written conjunctively, Sesotho is written disjunctively. The difference between conjunctive writing and disjunctive writing is that disjunctive means that the various elements of a word (such as a verb and its person) are written separately, while a conjunctive orthography puts these elements together as one-word Taljard and Bosch (2006). Conjunctive orthography results in large word units, which produce "dense" texts, that's according to Spaull and Mohohlwane Pretorius (2018). "Dense" texts are the ones that include a lot of ideas, information, or words that are difficult to interpret. Disjunctive orthography, on the other hand, produces substantially shorter word units. Contrary to conjunctive writing, which separates grammatical categories, disjunctively written texts are one-word texts that do not do so Sesotho is disjunctively written language because the sentence starts with the Subject Verb and object (SVO) and each aspect in a sentence is written separately Lekhotla la Sesotho (1981). The subject is built with the substantive and the qualificative, both written separately. For example, *Mosali enoa o khathetse* (this

woman is tired). *Mosali* is the subject qualified by *enoa* followed by the verb *o khathetse*. The subject *mosali* is written disjunctively with its qualifier. Also, the verb *o kgathetse* is written disjunctively from the qualificative. In Sesotho, the majority of qualificatives have the same morphology except for the demonstrative; every qualificative has the concord and the stem. As defined by Destiny Destiny (2020), Simply said, concord describes the agreement that exists between the different elements of the statement. (2020). The morphological structure of the adjectival concord, unlike other qualificatives, has two parts from noun class 1 to noun class 15, like the numerical qualificative. The first part of the concord is written disjunctively from the second part. Below is the illustration of the adjectival concords from noun class 1 to 15 and examples of adjectival stems. It should be noted that the adjectival stems are used for all noun classes; they are not specific for a certain noun class. Below are the adjectival concords and adjectival stems as extracted from Lekhotla la Sesotho (1981):

Adjectival concords

1. e mo-
2. ba ba-
3. o mo-
4. e me-
5. le le-
6. a ma-
7. se se-
8. tse n-
9. e n-
10. tse n-
14. bo bo-
15. ho ho-

Adjectival stem

- tle
- be
- lelele
- khutšoane
- tenya
- sesane
- holo
- nyenyane

Morphologically, the first part of the adjectival concord is written disjunctively from the second part of the adjectival concord. The second part of the concord is written conjunctively with the adjectival stem, for example, *Ngoana e mokhutšoane o jele* (A short child has eaten). In the above sentence, /e-/ is written disjunctively with /mo-/, but /mo-/ is written conjunctively with the stem /-khutšoane/. Nevertheless, in the study conducted in some schools in Thaba-Tseka by the researcher, the students had a problem writing the adjectives separating the parts of the concord and the stem. The writing problems have been discussed and identified by different researchers in different languages (Singaravelu 2021, Maharani et al. 2023, Kardena et al. 2020). The problem is not only found in the African language. The aim of the study, therefore, is to discuss the challenges of conjunctively written Sesotho adjectives in the learning of Sesotho. The following research question will help to address the aim of this study.

- What challenges do students have when writing the Sesotho adjectives?
- What can be the cause of the mistakes in writing Sesotho adjectives?
- How can students be assisted in writing the Sesotho adjectives?

2. Literature Review

The challenges of conjunctively written adjectives in the learning of Sesotho present a significant linguistic hurdle for students. These adjectives, which are often complex and context-dependent, require a deep understanding of the language's grammatical structure. The literature below discusses the problems students regularly come across when they are writing adjectives. The following subtopics will be discussed: adjectives, Morphology Conjunctive and disjunctive writing.

2.1. Adjectives

The topic of adjectives has been discussed by several authors in various languages, who have provided definitions, examples of how they are used in various languages, varieties of adjectives, and sentence structures. Jitpranee (2017) highlights that adjective in the grammatical sense are thought of as functions that are made up of two aspects: predictive and attributional functions. Different types of adjectives have been discussed by Mason (1858), Khamying (2007), and Zerkina et al (2017). Among others, Khamying (2007) listed the following types of adjectives in English: descriptive, proper, numeral, demonstrative, possessive, quantitative, interrogative, distributive, emphasizing, exclamatory and relative. Some authors further show the morphology of adjectives in some languages. This study also analyses the morphology of adjectives in Sesotho, orthographical mistakes students make in the writing of adjectives, and how these mistakes can be rectified.

A few academics have talked about the difficulties in writing adjectives. According to Alwiah et al. (2018), a lot of pupils still struggle with learning, remembering, and recognizing adjectives. They go on to say that because adjectives fall into so many different categories, children are unable to effectively use them in sentences. Furthermore, Kurniasari et al. (2019) assert that interference from the mother tongue, overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and insufficient application of rules are among the reasons why students struggle to write adjective phrases. Furthermore, Oktavia and Noviani (2022) emphasize that students continue to struggle with adjective clauses, particularly when it comes to turning them into participial phrases and eliminating the relative pronouns from them. More specifically, they struggle more with the irregular verb forms of past participles that change over time. According to information gathered from their documentation, the majority of Sesotho students also face some challenges when writing Sesotho adjectives which will be discussed in the analysis.

2.2. Morphology

Morphology, according to Aronoff and Fudeman (2011), is the field of linguistics that studies words, their internal structures, and how they are generated through the identification and study of morphemes. It is also defined as the mental system involved in word construction. Furthermore, according to Carstairs-McCarthy (2013), the behaviour of words that are members of open classes—that is, nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs—is the primary focus of morphology. Furthermore, Akbulut (2017), notes that morphology refers to the application of or study of morphemes, which are the elements of words that convey meaning. Depending on the word arrangement forms used in each dialect, the precise morphological component varies from dialect to dialect and further explains the ability to identify and pay attention to the structure and meaning of the morphemes that make up a word or are related to it referred to as "morphological awareness." This morphological awareness is also needed in Sesotho, Sesotho is spelled differently than other languages since morphology is expressed in it as well. This article supports the study of the language's writing style since it provides an illustration of the internal or orthographical structure of Sesotho adjectives.

Not only does Sesotho have morphological challenges, but other languages also face them. According to Ticharwa (2022), a considerable proportion of students made mistakes in adjective morphology due to incorrect application of adjectival rules. Even though they may have previously been aware of the rules, they were unable to use them to create proper comparative forms of adjectives. Similarly, Al-Jarf (2019) notes that while morphology can be a useful technique in supporting the learning and application of L2 vocabulary, Saudi EFL freshman students at COLT appear to have a number of issues with English adjective morphology. The participants struggled to spell suffixes correctly, match suffixes with the appropriate portion of speech, and link suffixes with words. Furthermore, according to Fitriyeni (2024), the students who participated in the study made morphological errors in both bound (inflectional and derivational) and free (lexical and function) morphemes. The most common mistakes were those involving misselection, omission, overuse, and redundancy, as well as derivational adjectives. Some of the morphological mistakes made by pupils in the Sesotho language are also listed above.

2.3. *Conjunctive and Disjunctive Writing*

Most authors who have addressed the issue of disjunctive or conjunctive writing wrote around the years 2006 to 2017. Taljard and Bosch (2006) Anderson and Kotže (2006) Pretorius et al (2009), Lee and Hlungwani 2017. These scholars discussed the issues of conjunctive and disjunctive writing in languages such as Northern Sotho, isiZulu, Setswana, and Xitsonga. Their studies show the difference between disjunctively and conjunctively written languages. This conjunctive and disjunctive writing in these languages has caused some challenges in the writing of these languages. Sesotho is not an exception in this regard because the conjunctively written adjectives make reading difficult in Sesotho.

3. Methodology

This section discusses the method used for collecting data and how it was analyzed

This study utilizes the qualitative approach because the data will be collected and analyzed thoroughly in words. Jansen and Warren (2020) assert that qualitative research concentrates on gathering and analyzing words (written or spoken) and textual data. Moreover, Ugwu and Eze (2023) add that “Although there are numerous approaches to qualitative research, they all share a tendency to be adaptable and a focus on preserving rich meaning when interpreting data.” Busetto et al (2020) assert that document analysis refers to the analysis by the researcher of written materials

3.1. *Data Collection*

The data used in this study has been collected primarily from the students' examination scripts. Taherdoost (2021) explains primary data as data that is not published yet and is first-hand information that is not changed by any individual. The examination papers were collected from three high schools in Thaba-Tseka. In each school, the researcher collected ten scripts randomly from students in grade 11.

3.2. *Data Analysis*

This study used document analysis, which, according to Morgan (2022), is the method consisting of analyzing various types of documents, including books, newspaper articles, academic journal articles, and institutional reports. Additionally, Kayesa and Shung-King (2020) explain that document analysis aims to synthesise and appraise textual data to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. This paper used document analysis to analyze data; that is, the data collected from examination scripts was descriptively analyzed, looking for the explicit meaning of the data collected.

3.3. *Analysis*

This section shows the analysis of the morphological, syntactic, and semantical status of the adjectives used by students in the Sesotho language. Adjectives are used in the Sesotho language to qualify the substantive. The substantive has two different types: the noun and the pronoun, and the pronoun has two types: the absolute and the qualificative pronoun. This is illustrated in the tree diagram below showing the substantive types.

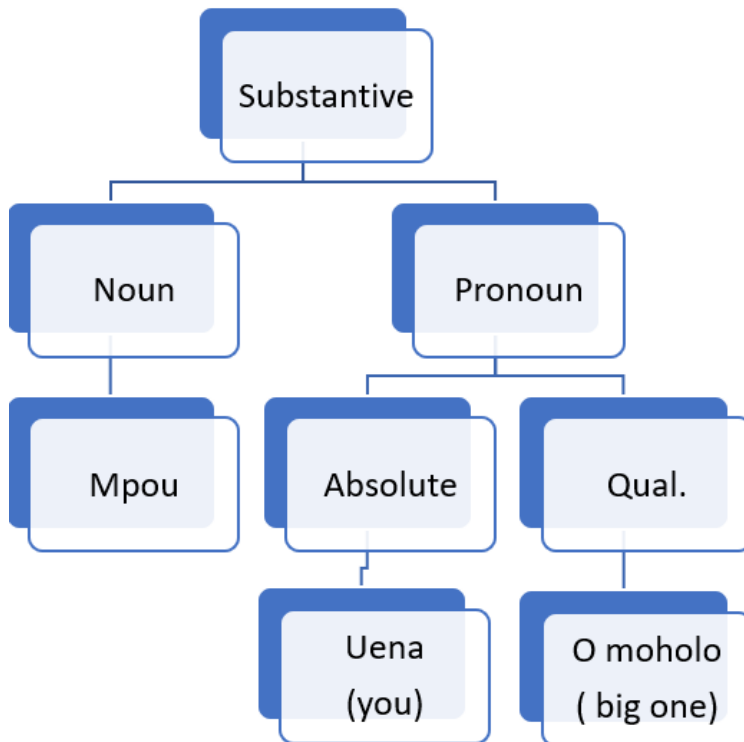


Figure 1.
The substantive.

The adjective is one of the seven qualificatives in Sesotho, namely: the possessive, demonstrative, enumerative, relative, quantifier, and interrogative. These qualificatives come immediately after the substantive which it qualifies. For example,

3.3.1. Mosali E Molelele O Fihlile. "A Tall Woman Has Arrived".

NP Qual VP

Syntactically, the adjective *e molelele* "a tall one" comes immediately after the substantive, which is a noun phrase (NP) *mosali*, "a woman," because it qualifies it, that is the status of all qualificatives in the sentence.

Furthermore, for words to be called qualificatives, they must have the same properties. The syntactic status of all qualificatives has been discussed in the above paragraph. All Sesotho qualificatives have the same morphology except for the demonstrative; that is, they all have the qualificative concord and the qualificative stem. The qualificative concord and the qualificative stem are written disjunctively; the adjective is not an exception because it has the adjectival concord and the adjectival stem written disjunctively. The adjectival concord has two parts. It should be noted that the first part is the concord that agrees with each noun class, and the second part of the adjectival concords is made up of the prefix of each different noun class, for Sesotho has 15 noun classes. It should also be noted that Sesotho does not have the noun classes 11, 12, and 13. The first part is separated from the second part, but the second part is joined with the adjectival stem; for example

3.3.2. Mose O Moišo O Chele. "The Black Dress is Burnt."

NP Qual Vp

/o mo/ is the adjectival concord, */o/* is the first part of the concord and */mo/* is the second part of the concord. As illustrated in sentence 2 above, */o/* is separated from */mo/* and */mo/* is written jointly with

the adjectival stem /-tšo/. The table below shows data collected from students' scripts and it shows how they write the adjectives

Table 1.
Conjunctively written adjectives.

Source text	Correct version	Translation
a. Elengoe	e le 'ngoe	Only one
b. emong	e mong	one of them
c. entle	e ntle	Beautiful
d. entšo	e ntšo.	The black one
e. emo holo	e moholo	The big one
f. baba soeu	ba basoeu	The white one

From the table above, the adjectives in (a) – (d) have been written conjunctively, whereas morphologically, they were supposed to be written disjunctively. The adjectival concords /e le/, /e mo-/, /e n-/ and /e n-/ are written conjunctively to the adjectival stems -'ngoe, -ng, -tle, and -tšo respectively. The first part of the adjectival concords from (a) – (d) /e/ should be written disjunctively from the second part /le/, /mo-/, /n-/ and be written conjunctively with the adjectival stems /-ng/, /-tle/ and -tšo/ and /le/ should not be joined with either the first part or the second part of the adjectival concord and the adjectival stem, this is because /le/ is the conjunction. This can be seen in the following illustration as per noun classes as extracted from Lekhotla la Sesotho (1981).

1. a le mo-
2. ba le ba-
3. o le mo-
4. e le me-
5. le le le-
6. a le ma-
7. se le se-
8. li le li
9. e le –
10. li le li-
11. ---
12. ---
13. ---
14. bo le bo
15. ho le ho

For the adjectives in (e) – (f), what the students did was to write the adjectival concord disjunctively from the adjectival stem instead of separating only the first part of the adjectival concord and joining the second part with the adjectival stem. /emo/ and /baba/ should be separated and be /e mo/ and /ba ba/, and the two parts should be disjunct from the second part and the second part be joined to the adjectival stem.

The conjunctive and the disjunctive of these adjectival concords and adjectival stems change the meaning of the adjectives or distort the meaning of the adjectives. The words /Elengoe/, /emong/, /entle/, /entso/, and /emo/ are non-existent in Sesotho; this means the meaning of the text is distorted altogether because of the conjunctive writing. Emike, and Ocheme (2024) explain that meaning is executed by recognizing the irrevocability of processing written and spoken language use. Unlike the above-mentioned words, /baba/ is a newly formulated word with a different meaning; baba in Sesotho means bitter; when it is followed by the adjectival stem -soeu “white,” the whole phrase becomes meaningless.

3.4. *The Cause of Conjunctive Writing*

In MoET (2020) The National Curriculum Development Centre, in collaboration with the Examinations Council of Lesotho in their Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education Syllabus, has indicated how the marks should be awarded for different papers and sections for Sesotho. Moreover, MoET (2020) mentions that the marks are awarded based on paper one, creative writing; paper two, reading; and paper three, on Sesotho literature and culture. Paper two has three sections: section 1: reading for ideas, 20 marks; Section 2: Text analysis –reading for meaning, 20 marks; and Section 3: Language Proficiency, 10 marks. The teaching of grammar and syntactic categories are assessed in this section; students are expected to fill in the missing word, which every native speaker of Sesotho can fill. The morphology of the missing words is not considered but it helps the students to master their orthography.; the most important thing is the syntax. Can the students identify the missing word? Not how the students write the word.

According to Songxaba, Sincuba (2019), and Malatji (2019), using social media while writing is another problem. Malatji goes on to say that when African language speakers use social media, the majority of their texts have grammatical and spelling mistakes if they are written in any African language. The majority of students use social media platforms for study purposes and converse with friends in foreign languages, particularly with those in South Africa where conjunctive writing is used for languages like isiZulu.

3.5. *How Students Be Assisted in Writing Adjectives*

Students need to be taught the correct way of writing different qualificatives; this can be done through group work because, in group work, students help each other. In support of that, Ngubane, Ntombela, and Govender (2020) encourage that in order for instructors to effectively change their writing classrooms into social and supportive writing environments for students, they should receive training in interactive classroom pedagogy. Again, Students can be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Sesotho grammar books. Teachers can also take their time to teach students Sesotho grammar and not only concentrate on other issues because they are awarded more marks in their assessments. If they know how to write, they will pass even more. Afroogh (2019) argues that grammar is the foundation of the English language. It requires instruction because it is not something that is naturally acquired. Grammar controls the syntax or word ordering that are acceptable in a language at the sentence level.

4. Conclusion

This paper looked at the challenges of conjunctively written Sesotho adjectives in learning Sesotho and the causes of this challenge. It concludes that some students have problems in writing the adjectives and that students write the adjectives conjunctively instead of disjunctively. Since the adjectival concord has two morphemes or parts that are written disjunctively, students tend to write them conjunctively, and in some cases, they write the two parts and the stem conjunctively. This makes it difficult to read and get the correct message intended. This paper also finds that Sesotho curriculum gives grammar teaching fewer marks than other concepts like reports, articles, and comprehension. As a result, teachers tend to take more time to teach them than grammar. This makes students concentrate on other concepts for the examination, not grammar, for more concentration is needed to get higher grades. The literature reveals that Isizulu influences Sesotho's orthography because Basotho interacts with Zulus in South Africa through the media, and some meet physically. This paper suggests that curriculum developers and designers, examination officials, and senior education officials take into consideration the awarding of marks for grammar as it is the one which helps students on how to write Sesotho correctly.

Copyright:

© 2024 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

References

- [1] Afroogh, M. R. 2019. *Grammar is the Heart and Basis of Language Teaching and Learning: English Grammar and Its Role in ELT*. Annals of Language and Literature 3(1) pp 6-11.
- [2] Akbulut, F. D. 2017. *Effects of morphological awareness on second language vocabulary knowledge*. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, Vol 13 No.1 pp 10-26.
- [3] Al-Jarf, R. 2019. *Freshman students' difficulties with English adjective-forming suffixes*. Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (J-FLTAL), Volume 6 - Number. 1 pp. 169-180.
- [4] Alwiah, W. Akil, M. and Muliati, A. 2018. *The Effectiveness of Systemic Approach in Teaching Adjectives*. ELT Worldwide Volume 5 Number 1 pp 28-34.
- [5] Anderson, W. N and Kotze P. 2006. *Finite State Tokenization of an Orthographical Disjunctive Agglutinative Language: The verbal asgment of Northern Sotho*. <https://www.aclweb.org/anthology>
- [6] Aronoff, M and Fudeman, k. 2011 *What is Morphology*. Blackwell Publishing
- [7] Bussetto, L., Wick W. and Gumbinger 2020. *How to Use and Assess Quality Research Methods*. Neurological Research and Practice. Vol 2 No. 14 Pp 1-26.
- [8] Carstairs-McCarthy, A. 2013. *An Introduction to English Morphology Words and Their Structure*. Edinburgh University Press.
- [9] Deveci, T. 2021 *Qualitative Adjectives in Education Research Articles: The Case of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education*. Journal of Educational Theory and Practice Research, Vol 7, Issue 1, 132-146.
- [10] Emike A. J. and Ocheme W. 2024 *Semantics in Theory and Practice*. Global Journal of Research in Education & Literature. Vol 4 issue 1. Pp 12-16.
- [11] Fitriyeni, F. (2024) *Morphological analysis of students' writing*. JETAL: Journal of English Teaching & Applied Linguistics. Vol. (5) No. (2) pp 164-171.
- [12] Jansen, D. and Warren, K. 2020. *What (Exactly) Is Research Methodology? A plain Language Explanation and Definition*.
- [13] Jitpranee, J. 2017 *A study of Adjective Types and Functions in Popular Science Articles*. International Journal of Linguistics 9(2):57 – 69.
- [14] Kayesa N. K and Shung-King M. 2020. *The role of document analysis in health policy analysis studies in low and middle-income countries: lessons for HPA researchers from a qualitative systematic review*. Health Policy OPEN. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hpopen.2020.100024>.
- [15] Khamyng, S. (2007). *Advanced English Grammar for high learner*. Bangkok: V.J. Printing.
- [16] Kurniasari, Y. Priyantini, T. Suryant. Y. (2019) *Students' difficulties in writing adjective phrases*. P E D A G O N A L. VOL 3 NO 2 pp 18-32.
- [17] Lee, S. J. and Hlungwani, C. 2017. *Distribution of conjunctive and disjunctive forms in Xitsonga*. Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus (SPiL Plus) Vol 52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5842/52-0-712>.
- [18] Lekhotla la Sesotho 1981. *Sebopeho-puo sa Sesotho 1*. Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre.
- [19] Morgan, H. (2022). *Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis*. The Qualitative Report. 27(1) Pp 64-77. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044>.
- [20] Ngubane, N.I., Ntombela, B. & Govender, S., 2020. *'Writing approaches and strategies used by teachers in selected South African English First Additional Language classrooms'*, Reading & Writing 11(1), a261. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v11i1.261>.
- [21] Oktavia, W. and Noviani 2022. *Students' Difficulties in Reducing Adjective Clauses into Participial Phrases*. Lingua Didaktika Vol 16 NO 2 pp 132-143.
- [22] Pretorius, R., Pretorius L. and Viljoen B. 2009. *Setswana Tokenisation and Computational Verb Morphology: Facing the Challenge of a Disjunctive Orthography*. <https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W09-0710.pdf>
- [23] Taherdoost, H. 2021. *Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects* International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM), Vol. 10 No. 1. Pp 10-38.
- [24] Taljard, E. & Bosch S. E. 2006. *A Comparison of Approaches to Word Class Tagging: Disjunctively vs. Conjunctively Written Bantu Languages*. Nordic Journal of African Studies. Vol 15 No. 4: Pp 428-442.
- [25] Ticharwa, A. 2022. *Misappropriation of adjectives by grade 7 non-native English language learners: a case study of four independent rural primary schools in Man'ombe circuit, Mopani district*. MA Dissertation University of Venda.
- [26] Ugwu and Eze 2023. *Qualitative research*. Journal of Computer and Applied Sciences 8(1), Pp 20-35. <https://www.researchgate.net>.
- [27] Zerkinaa, N. N, Kostinaa, N.N., Urazayevaa, N. R., Lomakinaa, Y. A. Emetsa, T.V. Gallyamovaa, M. S., Melnikovaa, E. P., Trutneva, A. Y. and Lukinaa, O. A. 2016. *Axiological Role of English Adjectives in English Language Teaching*. International Journal of Environmental & Science Education. VOL. 11, NO. 12, pp 5146-5154.