
Role of Cohesive Devices in Enhancing the Writing Skills of the Tertiary Level Learners

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Abstract

The English language has been taught as a subject rather than a language, and the students are made to learn so much about the language, focusing less on the prime objective of using it to communicate. Writing is considered a painstaking and challenging task in second language learning. So, a paradigm shift from the traditional language teaching and learning methodology to a more learner-centric application-oriented learning style has become the need of the hour. This paper focuses on using cohesive devices by learners in various writing tasks and thereby understands strategies that will help learners to use such linguistic devices effectively. English language teachers will also be able to exploit the findings of this research in devising classroom activities to develop learners' ability to use cohesive devices effectively. This paper also aims to facilitate English language learners (ELLs) in structuring their sentences better in their writings and in achieving communicative goals like grammatical and lexical Cohesion.

Keywords: task-based, learner-centric, writing skills, cohesive devices, communicative competence,

Introduction

The growing demand in all the fields expects the workforce to have at least a minimum proficiency in communicating in the language, which will enable them to sustain themselves in the global market. In recent days, the focus has shifted from speaking and is concentrated more on writing skills since it has become a pre-requisite requirement. Chow (2007) cites writing as an essential tool for the students to comprehend better. Though learners are familiar with the scheme of writing skills, they still couldn't have mastery over it. Kroll (1990) states that writing is a painstaking task for native and second language learners. It is widely observed that even the students who are good at speaking find it tough to write a piece of text. Li (2010) says that a good amount of writing should have proper grammar and the aspects of coherence and Cohesion. Cohesive devices must be considered to write a structured text and help the readers understand the text more meaningfully.

Crane (2016) refers to the term put forth by Eggins (1994) and Schegloff & Sacks (1973), "sequential implicativeness," which implies that language has a linear pattern that links one line to another. This linking provides contextual meaning to a paragraph, otherwise known as coherence and Cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1976) say it as semantic ties employed within the text create a link between the words to give a complete meaning.

Theoretical Framework

Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory of Cohesion, cohesion framework, and taxonomy are followed to analyze and understand the cohesive ties. There are two types of Cohesion, namely grammatical Cohesion, which deals with the structural unit, and lexical Cohesion, which deals with the text's semantic unit. The cohesive ties are further classified into five major divisions and numerous subcategories. The five main classes are reference, substitution, Ellipsis, Conjunction, lexical reiteration, and collocations. Reference points backward or forwards to other words or concepts that have already appeared in the text or are about to appear. Neisi & Gorjian (2017), referring to Yule (1996), describe reference as a linguistic form of words that help listeners or readers to identify something. Reference may be further divided into exospheric and endophoric. Exophoric reference points backward to other words that have already appeared in the text, While Endophoric is further divided into anaphoric and cataphoric references. Bahaziq stated that Paltridge (2012) quoted that Anaphoric refers to the words already used within the text.

Cataphoric reference points forward to another word that is to appear later in the text. Mankevych (2016) has quoted the Types of References based on Halliday and Hasan, which can further be divided into pronominal (I/me, you, we/us, he/him, she/her, it, they/ them, one, my/mine, your/yours, our/ours, his, her/hers, its, their/theirs, one's), demonstrative (this/that, these/those, here/there, definite article: the) and comparative (same, identical, similar(ly), such, different, other, else more, so many, better). Substitution is a word that replaces a word or phrase with another. Bahaziq says, "The difference between substitution and reference is that substitution lies in the relation between words, whereas reference between meanings. Nominal (substitutes another noun), Verbal (substitutes another verb), and Clausal (substitutes with "so" or "not") are three types of substitutions. Nominal Ellipsis (Noun is omitted), Verbal Ellipsis (Verb is omitted), and Clausal Ellipsis (Clause is omitted) are the types of Ellipsis that omit a word or phrase that is already said in the sentence. Conjunctions are otherwise known as linking words or discourse markers linking two terms and sentences together. It is divided into four categories, namely additive (connects sentences that have similar meaning), adversative (expresses results and opinions), causative (introduces reasons and purposes), and temporal (depicts time order and sequence of an event). Lexical Cohesion is established through Reiterations (repetition of words) and Collocations (combination of words that go together). The reiteration forms are

repetition, synonymy, antonym, and super ordination.

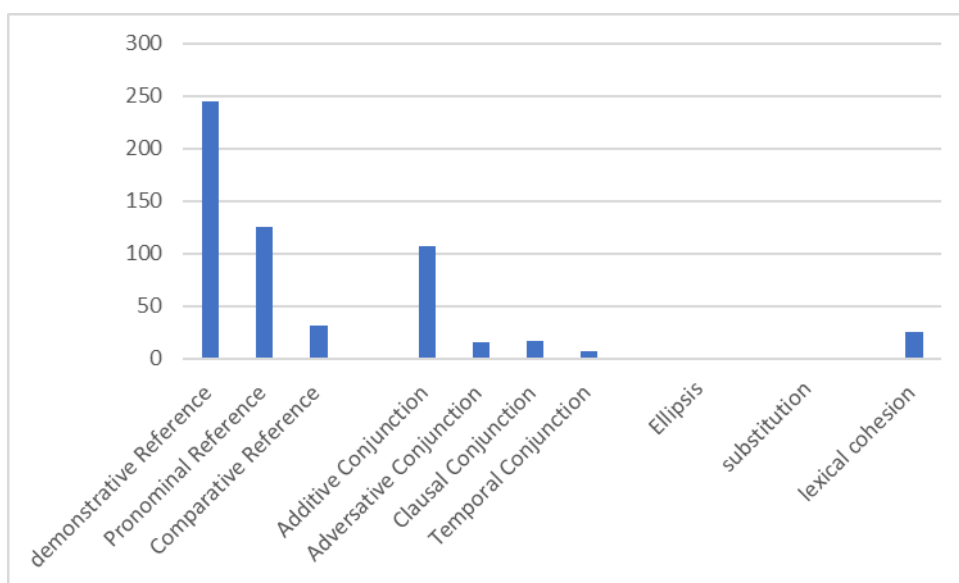
Data / Sample collection

A group of 25 tertiary-level engineering students is selected randomly. The students were made to write an essay on the given topic. After completing the task, the articles were read thoroughly to identify the cohesive devices used and certain language

aspects identified in each student's essay, where appropriate use of cohesive devices and range frequency of each cohesive device was placed. In addition, an attempt was made to identify the mistakes made by the students while using cohesive devices. An analysis is made to identify the strategies used and the problems faced by the students when carrying out the task.

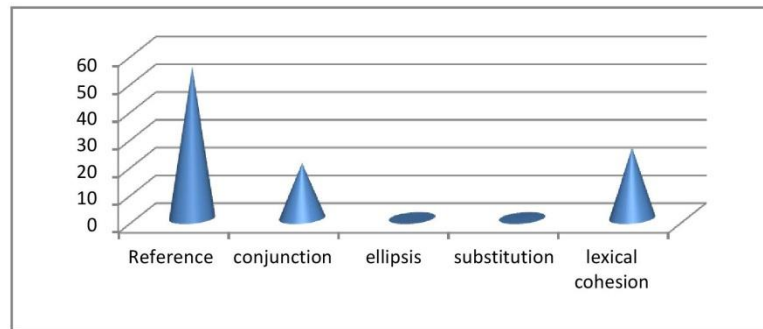
Data Analysis

The students' essays were thoroughly checked, and cohesive devices were noted. The number and types of cohesive devices used by the students are shown in 1.1.



4.1: Number and Types of cohesive devices used by the students

The quantitative analysis shows that students had extensively used the cohesive device reference with 54.54 %, among which demonstrative reference words were used 245 times more than Pronominal Reference, which was used 125 times, and Comparative Reference with 32. Additive Conjunction was used 107 times, Adversative Conjunction 15, Clausal Conjunction 17, and Temporal Conjunction 7, respectively. Conjunction and cohesive lexical devices were used reasonably in the essays, which is 19.81% and 25.37%, respectively, and other devices like Ellipsis (0 usages) and substitution (0.271) were used very rarely by the students. 1.2 shows the percentage of cohesive devices used by the ELLs while writing the descriptive.

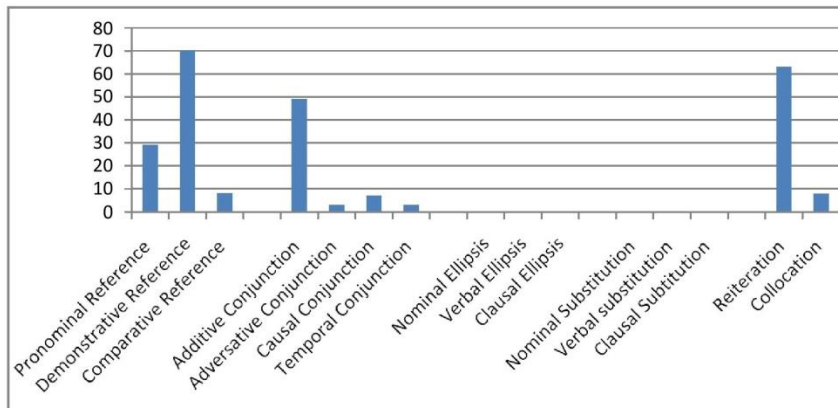


4.2: Percentage of cohesive devices used by the students

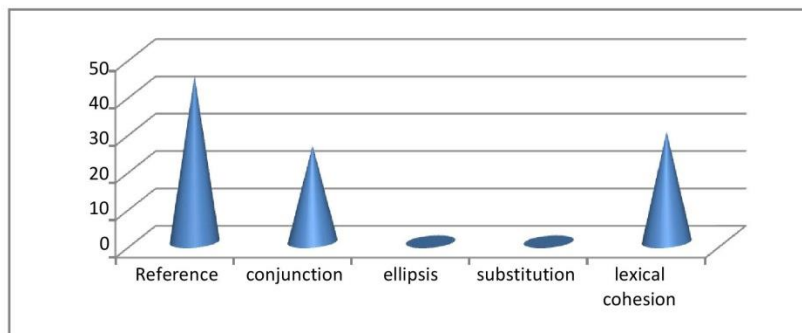
4.2: Percentage of cohesive devices used by the students

Students' essays were analyzed, and efforts were made to identify the errors made in the articles. 1.3 shows the number of errors made by the students in various cohesive devices in the descriptive writing. The quantitative analysis shows that the highest number of errors were made in the cohesive device reference (44.58%), among which the demonstrative reference (particularly the definite article "the") had the highest frequency of incorrect usage (65.42 %). Next is followed by pronominal connection with 27.1% and 7.47% of errors in comparative reference. The percentage of

mistakes made in the cohesive tie conjunction is 25.83%. The lowest number of errors was made in Adversative Conjunction and Temporal Conjunction with 4.83 % and followed by Clausal Conjunction with 11.29 %, and more mistakes were in the usage of "and" in Additive Conjunction with 79.03 % (mainly "and") Ellipsis and Substitution were used in a limited manner, and no errors were found. Errors were made not only in grammatical Cohesion but also in lexical Cohesion; 88.73% of errors were seen in reiteration and 11.26 % in collocation. 1.4 shows the percentage of errors made by the students in the descriptive writing.



4.3: number of errors made by the students



4.4: percentage of errors committed by the students

5. Findings

The students found the task demanding and challenging, and the analysis showed that they could finish the job in the given time. It is also understood that not all the students are familiar with the types of cohesive devices. They tried to use the known cohesive devices. The data clearly shows that the students are not entirely familiar with the coherent devices, and the essay could not show the links between the text and sentences. The quantified data evidence shows that the students have overused the reference more

significantly, but it contains incorrect usage, making the essay challenging to comprehend. The definite article 'the' was overused and misused in many places, and the conjunction 'and.' And devices like substitution, and Ellipsis, were used very minimally.

6. Strategies to Enhance the Use of Cohesive Devices

Besides class lectures on writing strategies and techniques, the ELLs can be exposed to more active learning strategies, which may help them enhance their writing skills. Reading and listening activities can

also be given to the students to make them comprehend how a piece of text is written with good connectivity, choice of words, and use of cohesive devices in appropriate places. For example, the learners can be made to read a text of their choice and identify the coherent devices used in it. And subsequently, the students can be asked to categorize the devices based on their function. Repeated activities of this sort will help the ELLs familiarize themselves with different kinds of cohesive devices and their use and increase the ability to produce a good text. Lexical Cohesion is as essential as grammatical Cohesion in a written text. To improve this, the learner should be given good practice using Collocations, repetition, synonymy, antonym, and super ordination. As a result, the students will have ample stock of vocabulary to use when writing a text. This, in turn, will help students make fewer writing errors. Making students aware of lexical and grammatical cohesive devices will allow them to write error-free paragraphs. Teachers should also spend sufficient time preparing activities and exercises for the students.

7. Conclusion

Writing a good piece of text is an uphill task. The essays written by the students were qualitatively analyzed by identifying the appropriate use of cohesive devices and the range frequency of each coherent device. In addition, an attempt was made to identify the students' mistakes in using cohesive devices while writing essays. The students overuse the cohesive device type reference more than the other devices. The ability to use various cohesive devices is less seen among the learners, and

they try to operate with limited cohesive devices in the essay, which becomes a repetition or inaccurate use of the coherent ties. Active learning strategies can be followed in the classroom to ensure students' participation in indulging themselves more into the task and understanding the intricacies of the topic. The teacher can pay more attention to teaching the learners the importance of cohesive devices, which will help the students achieve Cohesion while writing a text. An adequate amount of practice will also help the students enhance their understanding of using these devices.

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