

EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' DEFICIENCY IN USING COHESIVE DEVICES IN WRITING ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT: *This study is an approach to investigate how far EFL students at University Level use cohesive devices skilfully in writing their essays . The important issue addressed in the study is closely related to what extent do students perceive the basic aspects of writing coherent essays as one of the requirements of graduation. The most critical question addressed was: To what extent do students use cohesive devices in the clarity and organization of their essays.? The study adopted an analytical-descriptive method. The students answered questionnaires to check their skills in mastering writing skill. In addition, samples of essays were examined and analyzed to evaluate the students' writing abilities in using these semantic markers. A number of findings were found out. The most critical finding was that the students did not fully master the basic necessary skills required of applying these cohesive markers appropriately.*

KEYWORDS: Cohesive Devices, Style, Coherent

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore how far the EFL students at University Level are competent to apply cohesive devices correctly in writing their essays . And to what extent they are able to make explicit connection between different parts of their essays by using cohesive markers and varying written sentences.

As writing is one of the basic skills like listening, speaking and reading, it needs careful planning and strategies. For this reason, current pedagogic writing focuses on the writing process, not simply on the end process. Furthermore, this process will help students to be proficient in producing acceptable essays . Also, the students need to write papers of various kinds in accordance with the rules of Academic English.

These papers may be implicated for work , business reports or newspapers articles. They must all be written in readable Standard English.

Theoretical background

The terms cohesion and coherence are crucial elements in writing texts at both the explicit and implicit levels. Therefore, these terms are discussed by many writers to produce coherent written texts. Cameron (2000:35) defined cohesion on the bases of grammatical features according to the coming linguistic devices:-

- A- References which include pronouns, demonstratives, comparisons, adverbs and articles.
- B- Ellipsis deal with omitting of a clause; its part or group in context when it can be assumed.

C- Substitutions are related to small closed classes of items. And conjunctions that are linkers of holding sentences to each other (clauses within or between sentences).

D- Lexical cohesion concern features such as synonymy, antonymy, metonymy, collocations and repetitions.

Moreover, Cutting (2002:24) analyzed these semantic devices in terms of anaphora : pronouns refer to something in the preceding text, cataphora: pronouns link for referent in the text that follows and endophoria: refers to items within the text. Whereas, Gonzalez (2000:59) discussed coherence in term of thinking process in which language works within textual world. This process is represented in configuration of concepts and knowledge. However, Gee(1999:149) tackled cohesion and coherence at semantic level analysis of clauses which mediate between lower-order units(words and clauses) and the higher –order ones (sentences). The same writer(2005:95-96) presented words on bases of different situational usages which vary their meanings and that people of particular domain share specific discourse.

Furthermore, De Beaugrande, R.A and Dressler, W.V (1981:3 -10) presented seven semantic elements that develop text's clarity.

- 1- Cohesion: it relates to surface connection between the sentences and the clauses that form a text.
- 2- Coherence: it deals with the process of organizing and understanding a text from the smallest unit (clause) to a large text's elements.
- 3- Intentionality: it means the writer's attitude to achieve the required message of the text.
- 4- Acceptability: a reader's acceptance of the text's informatively and whether it provides the required details.
- 5- Normativity: it concerns the clarity of presented information and if it is new and understandable to the reader.
- 6- Situationality: it deals with the reader 's interpretation of the text and its relevant to the situation of occurrence.
- 7- Intertextuality: it is based on a reader's previous that enables him to understand the new text's intended message.

Methodology of the study

The study adopted the analytical – descriptive method . An evaluation Sheet and questionnaire were used to determine the strength and weakness of the students in applying cohesive devices in writing an essay and varying their styles of presenting sentences.

Statement of the problem

Meticulous analysis of the samples of the students' written essays and questionnaire were thoroughly examined . The analysis shows that most EFL students at the University Level lack the theoretical and practical knowledge of effective use of cohesive devices in producing well-organized and coherent written texts. Hence, it is assumed that they do not fully perceive the most fundamental aspects of writing represented in usage of cohesive devices.

Significant of the study

As writing an essay is one of the most crucial courses at the University level, EFL students need to master the strategies of producing a coherent and an organized piece of writing. The target is not only confined to meet the academic requirement, but it is extended to include how students communicate effectively and efficiently in their professional life. Based on that, the significance of the study lies in the fact that what holds students back from being successful writers has much been debated by concerned persons for a better handling of obscurities associated with writing skill.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study could be summarized in the following points

- 1- To check the students' understanding of applying cohesive devices for clarity of their writing.
- 2- To check their abilities in dividing their essays into paragraphs.
- 3- To investigate their mastering the strategies of using variety of sentences.

Questions of the Study

- 1- In what ways do the students use cohesive devices for the clarity of their writing ?
- 2- To what extent do they perceive the fundamental aspects of dividing their writing into paragraphs?
- 3- How far they are able to vary their style of writing English sentences?

Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that

- 1- The students do not fully master cohesive devices properly to produce coherent written texts.
- 2- They can not divide their written essays into paragraphs.
- 3- They can not vary their style of writing sentences.

Participants

50 students were selected from Bisha University, who were in the 4th academic year, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They reached advanced level of language proficiency, based on the number of courses they had passed. They were chosen to answer the questionnaires. And a sample of (20) essays were corrected and evaluated by the writer.

Instruments

A number of instruments were used for the purposes of generating data for obtaining persuasive answers to the questions formulated. These instruments were:

- 1- An evaluation sheet was formulated to obtain the required data related to the students' competence in producing coherent essays by using 100 scale point to rate their points of strength and weakness in terms of writing proficiency.

2- questionnaires were answered by the students to check their ability in using cohesive devices and they were analyzed by using (SPSS) program.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 . The students' responses to the questionnaires

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
You can divide your essay into Paragraphs	21	12	5	1
You can easily use connective word	5	21	11	1
You can easily use transitional words	10	14	6	4
You can use synonym(substitute a word with another) to avoid repetition of the same word	6	15	9	9
You can vary your sentences(sentence order)	9	13	8	9

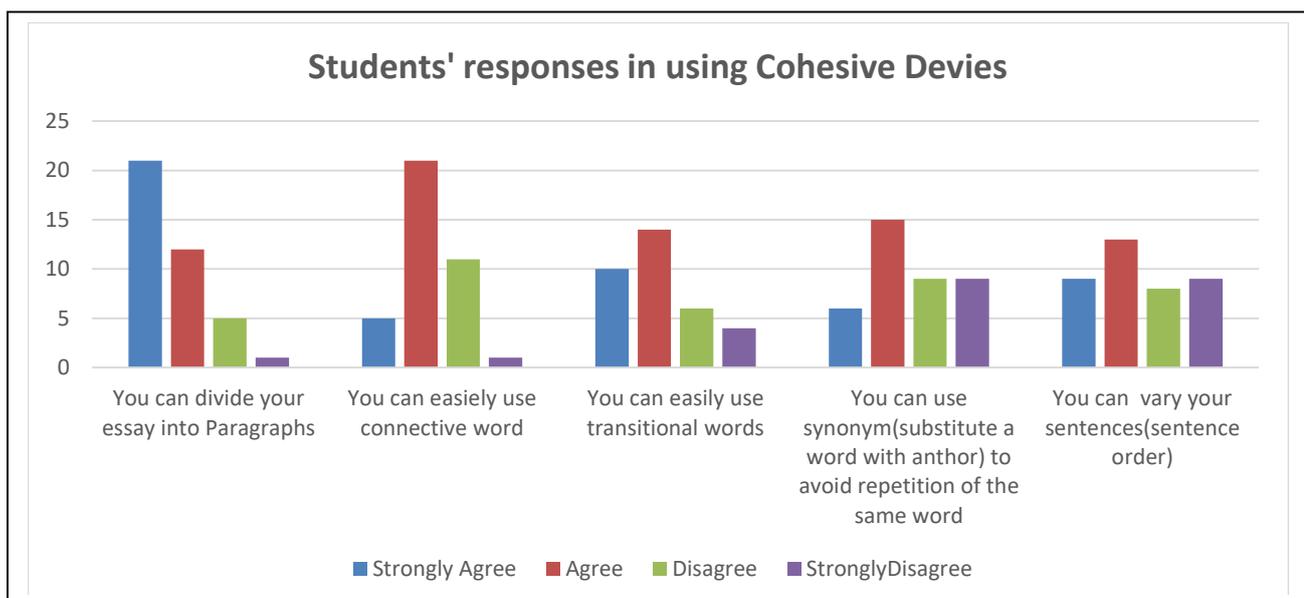


Figure 1 students' Responses

Table 2.The analysis of the students' Linguistics' errors in writing essays

Cohesive devices	Percentage of misused	Number of essays
Sentence patterns	78	20
Pronouns	45	20
Transitional words	88	20
Synonyms	57	20

The statistical analysis in table (1), shows the students' responses about their capabilities in effectively using cohesive devices in writing their essays. Table (2), deals with the students' essays where they were rated critically using evaluating rubric designed by the writer, the overall essays were low rated in terms of sentence patterns, pronouns, transitional words and synonyms. Despite the students' claim of being competent in using cohesive devices and grammatical features in their responses to the questionnaires, the analysis of the 20 samples of the students' essays has revealed a critical deficiency in using cohesive devices and grammatical features in producing well-organized and coherent essays. The result generated from the analysis shows the students' weakness to use cohesive devices. Therefore, the students lack the ability of dividing their essays into paragraphs and vary their sentences. And the bond between grammatical and lexical relationship, and meaning were totally missed from their essays.

Summary of Findings

Some important findings of the paper can be described in the following points:

- 1- The students do not fully master the basic skills of grammatical features to vary their sentences style in writing their essays.
- 2- They suffer from severe shortage of knowledge of cohesive device usage.
- 3- The students' deficiencies were obviously seen in many critical areas of writing essays such as : content , organization , style and arrangement their writing in forms of paragraphs.

Implication to the paper and practice

EFL students should be familiarized with different strategies and meanings of cohesive devices in writing their essays.

The knowledge of these devices could be achieved through a systematic and well-planned practice based on texts of different aspects of cohesive devices and grammatical patterns to vary their sentences style. Through this practice, the students could perceive the explicit and implicit of using the semantic markers. Moreover, the students' deficiencies in using these devices can be addressed throughout the writing Courses at the university.

CONCLUSION

The writer have investigated a critical issue to writing essays from scope of cohesive devices. The results show that the students have critical discrepancy associated with their language proficiency and their readiness to write essays. Based on that, students have to spend more time in mastering cohesive devices as they are some of the most fundamental aspects of writing. And these semantic markers are crucial to produce well-organized and coherent essays. The writer can claim that cohesive devices may considerably help to solve some of the problem of writing essays in coherent way.

Future research

Although the study was done on a limited sample , it is strongly recommended that further researches on the same area needed to be carried out for more deeper perception of tackling deficiencies related to applying cohesive devices in writing essays.

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