

A Study on Cohesive Devices in English Language Learning

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Abstract

Cohesive devices are typically single phrases or words that basically make the text hang together. Lack of Cohesion in writing is a problem that plagues many English language learners and it results from many factors such as incoherent ideas and misuse or insufficient use of functional connectives. EFL learners should realize the functions of cohesive devices through reading the passages. This paper includes types of cohesive devices, the construction of sentences, the linking of sentences into paragraphs and the organization of ideas to improve their writing skill gradually.

Key words: *grammatical cohesive devices and lexical cohesive devices.*

I. Introduction

Writing, one of the productive skills, has been the target skill for English language learners. To be able to write correct and meaningful sentences in English is the most useful skill for English language learners. Success in writing skill depends not only on their ability but also on effective use of cohesive devices. Cohesive device is a word or phrase used in a text to connect ideas together. The role of cohesive devices is to hold words, phrases and clauses together, to group and to correct the various sentences into a whole text. For English language learners, writing is a troublesome experience either because they lack confidence in their grammatical and discourse competence or because they do not know the importance of cohesive devices. In learning English as a foreign language, English language learners' proper use of cohesive devices demonstrates an understanding of coherence in writing. When sentences and ideas fit together clearly, English language learners can produce clear, meaningful and coherent sentences, paragraphs and texts. They can write long sentences which include signal words as well as coordinating or subordinating conjunctions. When English language learners understand cohesive devices that link the information in the texts, their writing is coherent and their ideas tie together smoothly and clearly. They can produce clear, meaningful and coherent texts. This paper helps English language learners write more cohesively due to the different kinds of conjunctions. They can understand the functions of cohesive devices.

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2. Aim and Objectives

This paper aims to improve writing skill for English foreign language learners.

The objectives of this paper are as follow:

- to investigate the functions of cohesive devices
- to utilize cohesive devices correctly and
- to produce meaningful sentences, paragraphs and texts through the understanding of cohesive devices.

3. Literature Review

According to the cohesive system by Halliday and Hasan (1976), conjunction is one of the ties which makes a text coherent one at the grammatical level. Halliday and Hasan (1976:P.277) show that conjunctive relations are tied to any particular sequence in the expression. Conjunction performs as a semantic cohesive tie within text in four categories. They are additive conjunction, adversative conjunction, causal conjunction and temporal conjunction.

According to Winter (1977), Cater and McCarty (1988), “Text-structuring words, are those that fall somewhere between what have been traditionally called content and functional words”.

As descriptions of English syntax, it is appropriate to begin with sentences. Lester (1990:P.71) offers the following definition of a sentence: “A sentence is a group of words expressing a complete thought”.

According to Bloor (1995:P.98), conjunction acts as a cohesive tie between clauses or sections of text in such a way to demonstrate a meaningful pattern between them. Conjunctions link the information included in the text logically. So they can also be identified as logical connectors. Logical connectors have meanings in just the same ways as other words and expressions and sentences have meanings.

According to Salkie (1995:PP.28-30), Carter and McCarthy (1988: PP.206-210); Lexical cohesion refers to the coherence of a text formed by the use of repetition, synonyms, antonyms, superordinate / hyponyms, related words and text-structuring words. In a superordinate / hyponym relationship from Gibbs’ (1990) article, superordinate are general words that refer to a class, whereas hyponyms are specific members of the class.

3.1 Theoretical Background

All languages have a creative aspect. It involves the ability of native speakers to understand and produce sentences that they have never encountered before. The number of sentences in a language is endless, and so no language could be described by listing these sentences. For example, the linguist devises a grammar that tells, step by step, how to construct any sentence in the language.

The grammar acts its function by telling how to build new sentences out of old ones.

e.g. (1) The sentence “The astronomer counted the star” could be substituted for it in the sentence, “The queen believed the astronomer counted the stars”.

3.1.1 The Components of Grammar

The grammar of a language has three components: (a) the phonological component, (b) the semantic component, and (b) the syntactic component.

(a) The Phonological Component

The phonological component involves rules that tell how to pronounce words and sentences. The phonology of one language may differ greatly from that of another.

e.g. (1) Spanish phonology does not distinguish the pronunciation of the two English vowels in the words sheep and ship.

(b) The Semantic Component

The semantic component tells what sentences mean. It shows whether one sentence means the same thing as another and whether one sentence implies another.

e.g. (2) “The students managed to pass the test” implies “The students passed the test.” However, the sentence “The students tried to pass the test” does not imply “The students passed the test.”

(c) The Syntactic Component

The syntactic component shows the relationship between the meaning of a sentence and the arrangement of the words in the sentences. It may tell that two or more arrangements of words have a single meaning.

e.g. (3) The two sentences “The line manager gave the report to the manager” and “The line manager gave the manager the report” mean the same thing.

3.1.2 Cohesion

Cohesion is expressed partly through the grammar and partly through the vocabulary. Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical relationship within a text or a sentence. Cohesion can be defined as the links that make the text hang together and give it meaning. It is related to the broader concept of coherence. There are two main types of cohesion: grammatical, referring to the structural, and lexical, referring to the language content of the piece. A coherent text is created in many different ways.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) classified cohesive devices into two categories: grammatical devices and lexical devices. Grammatical cohesion includes four different devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction.

(a) Reference

Reference is the relation between something else and an element of the text by reference to which it is interpreted in the given instance. Reference is a potentially cohesive relation because the thing that acts as the source of the interpretation may itself be an element of text. There are three referential devices that can create cohesion: anaphoric, cataphoric and exophoric reference.

Anaphoric reference, the backward reference to something that has been mentioned before, occurs when the writer refers back to someone or something that has been previously identified, to avoid repetition. For example: replacing “three boys” with the pronoun “they” or “the housewife” with the pronoun “she”.

e.g. (1) Use of a pronoun to refer back to an already-mentioned noun.

Bob likes ice-cream. He especially likes chocolate ice-cream.

Cataphoric reference, forward reference, is the opposite of anaphora. Before it is identified, something is introduced in the abstract.

e.g.(2) Someone is standing in front of the class.

He is a teacher. He is U Khin Maung.

Without ever identifying generics or abstracts, exophoric reference is used to describe them.

E.g. (3) The writer refers to it by a generic word such as “everything” rather than introduce a concept. The prefix “exo” mean “outside”, and the events or persons referred to in this manner will never be identified by the writer.

(b) Substitution

As in ellipsis, a word is not omitted, but is substituted for another, more general word.

e.g. (4) A: “Which ice-cream do you want?”

B: “I want the pink one.”

“One” in the example sentence is used instead of repeating “ice-cream”.

(c) Ellipsis

Ellipsis is another cohesive device. This is the omission of words on the hypothesis that the reader or listener will be able to supply them mentally.

A simple conversational example:

A: Where are you going?

B: To Town.

The full form of B’s reply would be, “I am going to town”.

A simple written example:

I’d rather talk to someone on the phone than send them an email. Wouldn’t you?

The full form of the sentence is “I’d rather talk to someone on the phone than send them an email. Wouldn’t you rather talk to someone on the phone than send them an email?”

(d) Conjunction

According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1985), conjunction is defined as a word which joins words, phrases, or clauses together. There are two types of conjunction: coordinating conjunction and subordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions (also known as coordinators) such as and, or, but connect words or phrases that have the same function in a sentence.

The coordinating conjunction “and” joins two or more words, phrases, or clauses of similar function and is used to show addition.

e.g. (5) A leader should have physical and mental courage.

The coordinating conjunction “but” joins two or more words, phrases, or clauses and is used to show contrast.

e.g. (6) Mya Mya is ugly but good-nature.

The coordinating conjunction “or” is used to give a choice.

e.g. (7) In my spare time, I enjoy reading novels or listening to music.

A subset of the coordinating conjunctions are the correlative conjunctions. They perform the grammatical function of correlator. These are two-part coordinators such as both...and, neither...nor, either....or, and not only....but also.

e.g. (8) Both U Tayza and U Tawdar attend to the meeting.

Either Ma Ma or Mya Mya listens to the radio.

Subordinating conjunctions (also known as subordinators) such as because, when, unless join an independent clause and a dependent clause. Simple subordinators and complex subordinators are subordinating conjunctions.

Simple subordinators involves single words that introduce dependent clauses. This means that they depend on the preceding clause. Simple subordinators can belong to three clauses: adverbial clauses (after, as, because, if, since, although, whether, while), degree clauses (as, than, that) and complement clauses (if, that, whether).

e.g. (9) If you come my party, you must behave.

My aunt brought me up since I was young.

Complex subordinators are phrases that made up of two or more words. Complex subordinators act the same function as simple subordinators. There are some examples of complex subordinators.

e.g. (10) As long as you are happy, it doesn't matter what you do.

Mg Mg was so late that he could not hear the first speech.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify the four types: additive, adversative, causal and temporal conjunctions.

Additive conjunction performs to structurally link or coordinate by adding to the presupposed item and is signaled through “and, also, too, furthermore, additionally”, etc. Additive conjunction may also perform to negate the presupposed item and is signaled by “either, and.....not, neither, nor, etc.”

Adversative conjunctions act to indicate “contrary to expectation” (1975:P.250) and are signaled by “yet, though, only, but, in fact, rather”, etc.

Causal conjunction says “reason, result and purpose” and is signaled by “for, so, because, for this reason, then, in this respect, as a result, etc.”

The last conjunctive category is temporal. It links by signaling sequence or time. Some sample temporal conjunctive signals are “next, after that, then, next day, until then, at this point, at the same time, etc.”

3.1.3 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical Cohesion can be attained by the selection of vocabulary. These kinds of cohesive devices that categorized are as follows;

- (a) Lexical repetition (Hoye, 1991) which concerns with the repetition of lexical items with or without an alternation.
- (b) Synonym (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) which is understood as the repetition of a synonym, near synonym or use of a general word.
- (c) Antonym (Ellis, 1992) which describes pairs of opposites.
- (d) Hyponym (Ellis,1992) which includes the use of superordinate
- (e) Related words (Ellis, 1992) which are normally not considered synonyms or antonyms but that form a synonymic, antonymic, or superordinate/ hyponym relationship in the context.
- (f) Text-Structuring words (Ellis, 1992) which fall somewhere between what have been traditionally called content and functional words.

(a) Repetition, Synonyms, and Antonyms

The uses of repetition, synonyms, and antonyms for forming text cohesion should be easy to understand because they are well-known.

e.g. (1) The main aim of the course is to improve your writing. The objectives are to understand the use of various words and to produce meaningful sentences, paragraph and text.

In the second sentence “objectives” functions as a synonym for aim. Although the second sentence could begin with “aims” the synonym used adds word variety to the text, helping the reader stay focused and interested in the idea being discussed.

(b) Hyponyms / Superordinate, Related words and Text-structuring words

Hyponyms or Superordinate, text-Structuring words and related words are much less familiar nomenclatures.

Superordinates are general words that refer to a class, whereas hyponyms are specific members of the class.

e.g. (2) Animal is a superordinate whose hyponyms include words like dog, cat, and chicken.

The writer may go from a superordinate to its hyponyms or to create text coherence depending on the context,

According to Cater and McCarthy (1988): Salkie (1995), related words refer to those that are normally not considered synonyms or antonyms but that forms a synonymic, antonymic, or superordinate/hyponym relationship in the context. They are situational or textual synonyms or antonyms.

e.g. (3) Wild optimism is youth's prerogative, but older women should shudder slightly at giddy expectations of today's high school and college students.

The phrase ‘high school and college students’ and the word ‘youth’ form a hyponym/superordinate relationship in which youth is a superordinate to high school and college students. As for related word in the above sentence, ‘youth versus older’ is an obvious example that may be considered either antonyms or situational antonyms.

According to Cater and McCarthy (1988): also see Winter (1977), “Text-structuring words, are those that fall somewhere between what have been traditionally called content and functional words”.

e.g. (4) “This car has a shortcoming, though it has many good features”

Both the words shortcoming and features fall into the category of text-structuring words because the readers have to go back to the previous sentences to understand what the good features mean, and wait for an explanation about the shortcoming before learning what it is. That is, both the words features and shortcoming have to be lexicalized before they make full sense.

4. Research Methodology

Grammatical cohesion can be defined as the study of the logical and structural rules that govern the composition of clauses, phrases and words in a language. Lexical cohesion can be formed by relational patterns in text in a way that links sentences to create an overall feature of coherence. Grammatical cohesion includes four different devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunctions. Lexical cohesion includes six kinds of cohesive devices: lexical repetition, synonyms, antonyms, superordinate/hyponym, related words and text structuring words.

Comprehending reading passage, understanding the functions of grammatical cohesive devices, and lexical cohesive devices, answering the questions in complete sentences to strengthen the conjunctions and creating meaningful long sentences, creating essays successfully and writing short paragraphs coherently by using cohesion devices help English language learners to develop the ability to create or use the functions of conjunctions and to increase their vocabulary in their writing.

4.1 Data Collection

In order to point out the usage of conjunctions in different texts, the exercises on cohesive devices from “Business Result” (Intermediate Student’s Book) written by John Hughes and John Naunton (2008), “Grammar Builder 1 and 2” written by Amin, Eravelly and Ibrahim (2004), reading passages prescribed in the text of first year and some old questions are used for collecting data.

4.2 Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

Exercise (1) Fill the blanks with these linking words.

but, although, because, due to, if, in order to, so, so that, unless,

- (1) We need to give everyone a password ----- prevent unauthorized access.
- (2) I have dirty hands ----- I have been trying to fix the photocopier.
- (3) ----- the security breach, we were asked to change our passwords.
- (4) Can you give me your passport ----- I can arrange your visa?
- (5) An employee has had her bag stolen from her office desk. ----- we've decided to install a PIN number system of security.
- (6) Their head office was impressive, ----- the firm was losing money.
- (7) -----the meeting was a total disaster, we felt really happy.
- (8) ----- I get a pay rise, I will buy a house.
- (9) -----you have good financial planning, your expansion plans will end in disaster.

In exercise (1), the learners have to fill in the given linking words. These linking words are “so, so that, unless, although, but, because, due to, if, in order to.” The learners need to understand the use of causal conjunction “in order to” to link the ideas in the question (1). For giving the answer to the question (2), the learners need to know the use of causal conjunction “because” to fill the blank. For giving the answer to the question (3), the learners need to understand the use of causal conjunction “due to”. The learners need to choose the causal conjunction “so that” to link the ideas in the question (4). For the answer of the question (5), the learners need to know the causal conjunction “so” to fill the blank. For the question (6), the learners need to know the adversative conjunction “but” to show the contrast. For giving the answer to the question (7) the learner also need to know the use of adversative conjunction “although”. For linking the idea in the question (8), the learners need to understand the use of adversative conjunction “if” to show the probable condition. For linking the ideas in the question (9), the learners need to realize the use of adversative conjunction “unless”.

Exercise (2) Choose the correct words in the brackets to complete the paragraph.

Every Saturday, my family and I go to the seaside. (1) (and/ but/ or) we all have fun. Dad, Pat and I swim in the sea (2) (and/ but/ or) Mum sits under a tree (3) (and/ but/ or) listens to music. Dad and Pat are strong swimmers (4) (and/ but/ or) I am not. Mum is

afraid of the sea (5) (and/but/or) soon, She joins in the fun. On a hot day I usually join Mum under the tree (7) (and/ but/ or) I will get sunburn (8) (and/ but/ or) my skin will peel. After lunch Dad takes out his fishing-rod (9) (and/ but/ or) fishes in his favourite place (10) (and/ but/ or) we all go for a boat ride. (Amin, 2004)

In Exercise (2) the learners have to choose the correct words from the given in the brackets. If the learners understand that the blank (1), (3), (6), (8), and (9) should be linked with the additive relation, they are able to use additive conjunction “and”. The additive conjunction “and” joins two or more words, phrases, or clauses of similar function and is used to show addition. For giving the answer to the blank (2), (4) and (5), the learners need to understand the adversative conjunction “but”. The coordinating conjunction “but” joins two or more words, phrases or clauses and is used to show contrast. The learner needs to know the use of the additive conjunction to fill the blank No. (7) and (10). The conjunction “or” is used to give a choice.

Reading Passage I

A detective recently watched a well-dressed woman who always went into a large store on Monday mornings. One Monday, there were few people in the shop than usual when the woman came in, so it was easier for the detective to watch her.
(htt)

e.g. (1) What does the underlined word “her” in the passage refer to?

Answer: The underlined word “her” in the passage refers to “the woman”.

The underlined word “her” in the passage is used to refer back to an already- mentioned noun “the woman”. Instead of repeating the same noun, it is replaced with a pronoun. The backward reference to someone or something occurs when the writer wants to avoid repetition. Pronominal reference (he, her, they, she, it) is an item that refers to someone in the passage for its interpretation.

“The woman” in the second sentence is used to qualify a noun “a well-dressed woman” in the first sentence.

The use of the definite article “the” refers back to a noun that has already been introduced with the indefinite article “a, an”.

e.g.(2) Why was it easier for the detective to watch the woman?

The conjunction “so” in the second sentence is crucial for the junction and meaning of the reading passage to answer this question.

Answer: It was easier for the detective to watch the woman because there were few people in the shop than usual.

Reading passage II

Experts believe the builders of Stonehenge knew about design, engineering and sound. These ancient people did not have highly developed tools. But they built a huge monument of heavy stones. (htt2)

e.g.(1) What does the underlined word “These ancient people” in the passage refer to?

Answer: The underlined word “These ancient people” refers to “the building of Demonstrative (this, these, that, those, here, there) are items that refers to someone or something in the passage.

The pronoun “they” in the third sentence is used to refer back to an already-mentioned noun “the builders of Stonehenge or these ancient people”.

The conjunction “and” in the first sentence is an additive conjunction. The conjunction “but” in the third sentence is the contrastive conjunction.

e.g.(2) Why do expert believe the builders of Stonehenge knew about design, engineering and sound?

To be able to answer this question, the leaners must trace the idea by means of the contrastive conjunction “but” in the passage.

Answer: Experts believe the builders of Stonehenge knew about design, engineering and sound because they build a huge monument of heavy stones although they did not have highly developed tools.

e.g. (3) What did the builders of Stonehenge know?

To be able to answers this questions, the learners must trace the idea by means of the additive conjunction “and” in the passage.

Answer: The builders of Stonehenge knew about design, engineering and sound.

Reading passage III

Because it was first discovered coming up between rocks, it was named petroleum.

e.g.(1) What does the underlined word “it” in the passage refer to?

Answer: The underlined word “it” refers to “petroleum”.

The pronoun “it” refers forward to “petroleum” something is introduced in the abstract before it is identified.

e.g.(2) Why was it named petroleum?

To be able to answer this question, the students must trace the idea by means of the causal relation “because” in the passage.

Answer: Because it was first discovered coming up between rocks, it was named petroleum.

Old Q.(1) Instead of saying the following what can we say?

To avoid repeating the same words, synonyms are excellent alternatives. In reading texts, the learners have to study the synonyms.

1. The dry region is a rice producing area.

Instead of using the word region, the author says the word zone.

2. Farmers plant the young plants in a new place.

Plant... in a new place = transplant

3. Some scientists search into the world around us.

Search into = investigate

4. The effective communication throughout the world is now increasing.

effective = efficient

5. She is like her mother only in appearance.

is like= resemble

Old Q. (2) Rewrite each of the following according to the instructions given in brackets.

The use of conjunctions can help learners to join the sentences in an effective ways.

1. The Ayeyarwady is a great river. The Amazon is a great river. (join, using “both... and”)

The learners must understand the additive conjunction “both...and”.

Answer: Both the Ayeyarwady and the Amazon are great rivers.

2. The wind was strong. Many roofs were blown away. (Join, using “so...that”)

The learners must understand the function of the correlative conjunction “so...that”.

Answer: The wind was so strong that many roofs were blown away.

3. Astronomers use telescopes. They study the heaven. (Join, using “in order to”)

The learner has to trace the linking word “in order to” which gives purpose.

Answer: Astronomers use telescopes in order to study the heaven.

4. I don't know her address. I don't know her telephone number. (Join, using “neither...nor”)

The learners must understand the conjunction “neither...nor”.

Answer: I know neither her address nor her telephone number.

5. He is blind. He is like a bat. (Join, using “as...as”)

The learners must understand the conjunction “as...as”.

Answer: He is as blind as a bat.

Old Q. (3) Choose, from those given, the correct expression to fill in each blank.

Understanding cohesive devices help the learners choose the correct answer.

1. ----- it is getting dark, we have to continue our journey. (However, Although)

Answer: Although

2. Which do you prefer, mohinga ----- noodle? (and, or)

Answer: or

3. She looks after her elderly mother: ----- none of her family thanks her. (however, so, in addition)

Answer: however

4. Journals, ----- magazines, are available in this shop. (as well as, moreover)

Answer: as well as

5. ----- thinking a long time, she chose the right one. (After, Without)

Answer: After

5. Findings and discussion

In this research paper, the findings of learning cohesive devices are classifying words into synonyms and antonyms, and creating meaningful sentences and paragraphs coherently. The functions of cohesive devices are to identify grammatical cohesive devices and lexical cohesive devices. The English language learners increase their vocabulary in their writing and they comprehend their reading passages and answer the questions in an effective way by doing these exercises themselves. Understanding cohesive devices is to create meaningful sentences and paragraphs coherently. The learners can comprehend to answer back reference and question in complete sentences in the reading passage because of the use of cohesive devices.

Learning synonyms or instead of saying in the text can increase the learners' vocabulary according to the reading passage. The learners have to join two sentences by using coordinate conjunctions and subordinate conjunctions. They can construct the sentences correctly because they understand the use of cohesive devices well.

In conclusion, the effective way of cohesive devices helps the learners to answer the questions. Cohesive devices are the bridge between the learners and reading passage. Without cohesive devices, sentences and paragraphs can become disjointed and hard to comprehend. So the learners should pay attention to the use of cohesive devices to improve their writing skills.

6. Conclusion

In learning English as a foreign language, the knowledge of cohesive devices is important for the Learners. If the Learners understand the functions of cohesive devices, they will be able to use the functions of cohesive devices and to link their idea cohesively. And then, they will be able to understand their learning text and to become fluent readers, In learning English, the proper use of grammatical cohesive devices and lexical cohesive devices helps the learners produce the clear and meaningful sentences, paragraphs and texts.

Lack of cohesion in writing is a problem that plagues learners for their reading comprehension and results from many factors such as incoherent idea and misuse or insufficient use of functional connectives. Therefore, to overcome this problem, learners continue to focus mostly on learning the use of cohesive devices.

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