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THE ROLE OF GRAMMATICAL COHESION IN THE TEXT
QUALITY AMONG JORDANIAN EFL STUDENTS IN
EXPOSITORY ESSAYS

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Abstract:

The present paper shares interest that many scholars and linguists have highlighted in investigating the relationship between writing quality and grammatical cohesion devices. The aim of this study is to find out the relationship between the use of grammatical cohesive devices on the overall quality of expository essays produced by EFL fourth-year undergraduate students majoring in the English language at the Department of English language and literature Hashemite University in Jordan. It seeks to determine the efficacy of academic writing by Jordanian EFL students. Thirty purposive samples of compositions were collected and analyzed by the researcher to measure the relationship between the score of the writing quality and the grammatical cohesion devices in students' writing based on (1) analytical scale Jacob et al., (1981), and (2) Halliday and Hasan (1976) taxonomy of grammatical cohesion. The results showed that grammatical cohesive devices did not constitute a statistically significant correlation with the score of writing quality. It also revealed that the EFL students' written compositions were not successful due to their incapability to utilize the different forms of grammatical cohesive devices and their lack of knowledge about effectively using these devices in their academic writing.

Keywords:

Cohesion, Writing Quality, Linguistics, Expository Essay

Introduction

Generally, writing in an ESL/EFL language is challenging and demanding for non-native speakers, especially English learners. They would need to get familiar with many components of writing that may aid them in writing successfully, as non-native English writers' work should be coherent and cohesive for readers. Thus, to produce a written text, the writer not only is able to compose sentences correctly but also to employ cohesive devices effectively to build a coherent text. According to Dastjerdi and Talebinezhad (2006, p.59), a text is coherent "when it hangs together, i.e., for every sentence in the text, there is a sequence of preceding and/or following sentences that provides a 'context' for it." Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1985) argue that the necessity for the effective integration of ideas, i.e., establishing coherence, is cohesion, which refers to the relationship of meaning between the text's basic surface linguistic features. They do not propose a theory of text structure or examining how text is produced, but they try to describe the concept of text. To them, a text is a semantic unit in which unified links explicitly connect parts. Therefore, cohesion defines a text as text. A cohesive tie "is a semantic relation between an element in a text and some other element that is crucial to the interpretation of it" (1976, p.8). The two elements which have been semantically related may lie inside the text or a part outside the text. They point out that cohesive ties within the text are called anaphoric, and reference items outside the text are called exophoric. Cohesion relies on lexical and grammatical relationships that make it possible to understand sentence sequences as related discourse rather than independent sentences.

Thus, cohesive ties within sentences across sentence boundaries and allow making sequences of the sentences to be interpreted as text. Bander (1983) remarks paragraph coherence as a logical sequence of ideas that establish a consistent connection between one sentence and another. Cohesion creates unity, linking things together at the level of a sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. According to Wee, Sim and Jusoff (2009), EFL students have challenges when using grammatical cohesive devices in their written text. These difficulties may reduce their ability to express their ideas in their written works. Therefore, most EFL students often committed grammatical errors in their writing irrespective of a long period of English study. Particularly, students in the Department of English in higher education are required to write academic papers in English. Writing is one of the tasks that students cannot avoid as they must write essays, articles, reports, and research papers (Hanata & Sukyadi, 2015).

Literature Review

English writing skills are essential to (ESL / EFL) learners. Therefore, writing is not a simple task for ESL / EFL learners. They must have the knowledge and skills related to coherence and cohesion devices that enable them to write correctly. Most university learners are asked to write various writing genres, including summaries, reports, and research proposals. Unlike in spoken language, there is a long gap between the writer and the reader in written text because the reader cannot get either clarifying or confirming when further clarification from the author is required. Therefore, the author should write the message cohesively and consistently so that the readers can easily understand and interpret the messages conveyed in the text. As Hadley (2014) has mentioned, "A written text conforms to certain rules that most good writers unconsciously follow and native readers unconsciously expect to find" (p. 2). Grabe and Kaplan (1998) describe the nature of writing in terms of the rhetorical triangle, which includes textual structure, cognitive processing, and social contexts. Therefore, writing is characterized as an

interaction between writer, reader, subject matter, and text; consequently, writing synthesizes cognitive, social, and textual aspects (Grabe & Kaplan 1998).

Many studies have been conducted on cohesion devices, which have demonstrated the relevance of cohesion in ensuring the quality of writing. Sanchez (2019) investigated the relationship between conjunctions and writing quality in Argumentative essays by Learners of Spanish. He analyzed 64 articles from 5 levels of proficiency were analyzed to identify connectors by using a mixed-method approach. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in the use of conjunctions between the beginners and the advanced levels. As proficiency levels increased, so did the precision of the usage of conjunctions. In addition, conjunctions were shown to be more critical for essay quality at the advanced levels; a more significant number and a wider variety of conjunctions were found to be more closely related to quality ratings.

Similarly, Kalajahi and Abdullah (2015) examined the relationship between the usage of discourse connectors and the writing quality of Malaysian school pupils. From the Malaysian Corpus of Students' Argumentative Writing, 90 samples of writing were randomly selected. The findings indicated that the relationship between writing quality and discourse connectors' Frequency was negatively correlated in Malaysian ESL students. Thus, the lack of a correlation between writing quality and discourse connectors suggests that Malaysian ESL students have not employed discourse connectors effectively or appropriately in their argumentative writing. Al-Shamalat and Ghani (2020) examined the impact of conjunction use on Jordanian students' overall quality of argumentative writing as foreign language learners. 60 purposive sampling of undergraduate students were collected at the Department of English Language and Literature at Mutah University in Jordan. The findings indicated a slight negative association between writing quality and the Frequency of conjunctions as a cohesive device, but that correlation was insignificant. Under any circumstances, this correlation indicates that Jordanian students' frequent and extensive usage of conjunctions in their writing did not improve its quality.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative method. This method is appropriate for this study because it uses frequency counts of grammatical cohesive devices used by the EFL students and quantified data. The analytical approach is also used to examine specific explanations of the difficulties that are highlighted. The current study uses expository writing to evaluate undergraduate students based on the purposive sampling techniques. Expository essays are selected because they are not just a standard form of writing in academic environments but also because they provide a perfect summary of the written skillfulness gained over the years by student writers. For textual analysis, expository essays are the information-rich source of data, from a perspective -the use of cohesive devices is significantly critical in written text.

Data Collection Procedure

Thirty students' essays written in the real-time examination are the primary data source during the first semester of the academic year 2020-202. The participants' ages ranged from 21-22 years old, and their mother tongue is the Arabic language. They have studied English for 12 years at schools and four years at Hashemite University, Jordan.

Research Question

This study addresses the following research question, “How does grammatical cohesion affect the quality of the written texts that Jordanian EFL learners produce at Hashemite University, Jordan?”

Therefore, the study explains the procedures to determine the quality of the compositions and the reliability scores. Also, the analysis used A Pearson product-moment coefficient test to determine if there is any relationship between the Frequency of the use of grammatical cohesive devices and the quality of the writing (score).

Evaluation Methods

In Bacha's opinion (2001), the most common techniques of assessing writing are holistic and analytical assessments. The holistic evaluation includes skimming a topic in order to have an overview of the ability of a writer. It is commonly utilized to make decisions and assess the performance of students. Jacob et al. (1981) believe that analytical scoring involves a comprehensive study that is also utilized to identify flaws in a student's writing. It analyzes a specific item, for example, using conjunctions or the correct word order in student writing pieces. In order to evaluate content in writing by varying percentages, Jacob's et al. profile is divided into five key components, i.e., content (30%), organization (20%), vocabulary (20%), language use (25%) and mechanics (5%). Each component provides a comprehensive writing skills explanation and a range of requirements from "excellent to very good" to "very poor" with a specified range of scores. For instance, a minimum of 27 and a maximum of 30 is very good to excellent for the essay written content. However, poor content has a minimum of 13 and the written text reveals that it is not subject-knowledgeable for a maximum of 16.

However, several studies have used Jacob's et al. (1981) analytical scoring tool to evaluate the quality of the writing samples. For example, Hamp-Lyons (1990) claims that their profile for scoring writing is the best-known scoring procedure for English second language writing. Some other studies have extensively used Jacob's profile (Ting 2003; Meisuo, 2000; Sasaki & Hirose, 1999, Perkins, 1983). Thus, the current study adopted Jacob's et al. (1981) analytical scoring EFL of written text produced by the students at Hashemite University. The relationship between the application frequency of grammatical cohesion devices and the written text is determined at different degrees of competence. Thus, this study depends on the component of "organization" because it is the only part that checks for the cohesion of an essay. Besides, grammatical relations are the primary language means of judging textual harmony.

Quality Assessment

To minimize the danger of subjectivity in evaluating the consistency of the composition and improve the reliability of the findings, thirty essays have been assessed by two EFL professional writing instructors, following the methodological rating tool by Jacob's et al. (1981) analytical scoring tool. The raters have PhD degrees in English and are experts in teaching writing courses. Finally, the results were tested for inter-rater reliability using the Cronbach's Alpha formula to ensure the raters' score accuracy. The inter-rater reliability was examined with Kappa statistics who considers the most common coefficient for rating agreement. However, Kappa has a scale of 0-100, which is higher in terms of reliability. By convention, a Kapa > 0.70 is considered as acceptable inter-rater reliability.

Table (1): Reliability Statistics of Writing Quality.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.879	2

The reliability of the two raters measured on the alpha reliability of the Cronbach was .879, which was highly satisfactory, as seen in the table. The findings indicate that the evaluation of the essay organizations is very similar to two independent raters.

The Results of the Study

To show the impact of grammatical cohesion devices on overall the quality of the texts, correlation analysis is used to examine the extent and direction of correlation between grammatical cohesive device measures and text assessment scores. Thus, the study examines the taxonomy of frequencies of references, conjunctions and finally, the whole categories to classify the number and the mark assigned to the "organization" part of the essays used for the chosen samples, which were counted manually and inserted into SPSS version (25). A Pearson product-moment coefficient test was used in this regard to assess if the writing output was relevant to the use of cohesive devices. Coefficients of correlation are used to calculate the relationship between two variables.

Table (2): Overall Correlation between Writing Quality and the Frequency of References

		Frequency of References
Writing Quality	Pearson Correlation	.440*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015
	N	30

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table (2) shows the correlation coefficient between writing quality and the frequency of references as cohesive devices is a positive and statistically significant but irrelevant correlation between the use of reference devices by Jordanian EFL students and their writing quality because only the reference was highly correlated with score ($r(30) = .440, p < .005$). This revealed that students were able to use references partly to organize their written texts.

Table (3): Overall Correlation between Writing Quality and the Frequency of Conjunctions

		Frequency of Conjunctions
Writing Quality	Pearson Correlation	.33
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.068
	N	30

$P < .001$

As seen in the table, the correlation coefficient shows there is a weak negative correlation between the ratio of the frequency of conjunctions as cohesive devices and the quality scores of the compositions ($r(30) = .33, p < .001$). This correlation shows that the frequent and extensive use of conjunction relations among EFL Jordanian students in written texts did not contribute under any circumstances to the quality of their writing. Thus, the inappropriate and overuse of conjunction cohesive devices may affect the quality of the writing.

Table (4): Overall Correlation Between Writing Quality and The Frequency of Ellipsis and Substitution

		Frequency of Ellipsis	Frequency of Substitution
Writing Quality	Pearson Correlation	.011	.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.954	.879
	N	30	30

$P < .001$

Moreover, the analysis reveals ellipsis, substitution categories were found to be exceptionally negatively correlated writing quality as ellipsis represented ($r=30.011 P < .001$) and substitution ($r=30.029 P < .001$). Thus, the underuse of these two types does not establish a texture in expository texts because they are related to a part of speech rather than to written text.

Discussion

This study analyzed the correlation between the types of grammar cohesive devices, the frequency of references, conjunctions, substitutions, ellipses and the quality of written texts produced by EFL Jordanian students. The study also utilized Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of grammatical cohesion to evaluate the students' written texts. The text quality findings for all 30 participants demonstrate the statistically significant variation in writing and the use of grammatical cohesive devices. As a result, the analysis used correlation analysis to demonstrate the linear interaction between cohesive devices' measures and text evaluation scores.

The current study shows that only the reference cohesive device was correlated to the writing quality, with a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. In contrast, the other cohesive devices did not relate to text quality. The findings of Al Zankawi (2017) support the results of the current study. She found that the reference was the only device correlated with text quality. Additionally, the study found conjunctions and writing quality to be negatively correlated ($r 30 = .33, p < 0.01$). The findings seem to be in line with the results of Kalajahi and Abdullah's (2015) study, which examined undergraduate Malaysian ESL students and showed that conjunctions do not correlate significantly with the quality of the students' essays. The findings also agreed with other researches, which found no strong correlation between conjunction relations and the quality of the essays Sanchez (2019) and Al-Shamalat and Ghani (2020).

In comparison with the present analysis results with the previous studies mentioned, it can be claimed that the quality of text does not simply depend on the use of grammatical cohesive ties.

The present study indicated that EFL students in Jordan could use some cohesive devices, such as reference. In contrast, other devices, such as ellipsis and substitution, were used much less frequently. As the results of the current study show, EFL students writing expository texts faced problems using some grammatical cohesive devices.

Conclusion

This analysis has examined the correlation between the types of grammatical cohesion devices, the Frequency of references, conjunctions, substitutions, ellipses, and the quality of written texts by EFL Jordanian students. These textual organizations were the results of the text cohesion brought about the use and frequencies of the different types of grammatical cohesion devices in the written essays produced by Jordanian English as foreign language students at Hashemite University, Jordan. These devices were mainly related to textual organizations that were found in the students' expository writing. However, the results reveal that these devices did not significantly affect evaluating scores since reference cohesion was only correlated to writing quality. It also revealed a weak negative but insignificant relation between writing quality and the Frequency of grammatical cohesive devices. This relationship suggests that Jordanian students' frequent and extensive use of devices in their writing did not affect the quality of their writing under any circumstances. Moreover, it is also possible to rebuild the quality of writing on regular and wide-ranging usage of cohesive devices. Interestingly, it was shown that the expository writing by students with more coherence instruments would appear to the writer more consistent, and thus cohesive devices are by no means the only confirmation of a united and coherent text.

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