An Investigation of Lexical Cohesion in Kurdish EFL Students Emails

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Abstract:

Cohesion, the most important principle and criterion of textuality, is the connection or the connectedness manifested when the interpretation of one textual element, i.e., a word located in one sentence is dependent on another element in the text.

Cohesion is thus one of the text properties that contribute to the organization of discourse. Coherence has to be clearly distinguished from cohesion. Hence, cohesion refers to the overt semantic relations in the text, whereas coherence refers to semantic and pragmatic relations between the parts of the text.

The three main categories of cohesion are referential cohesion (anaphoric chains), relational cohesion (connectives and ellipsis) and lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesion, which is the focus of this research paper, contributes to the ideational (semantic) structuring of discourse. It refers to the semantic relations between the lexical items in the text; thus it provides information about the way lexemes are organized in the discourse.

Lexical cohesion is the dependency relationship between words based on associative relations in common knowledge. Lexical coherence plays a dominant role in text structure. However, the lack of cohesion in writing is a problem that plagues many EFL students. The present paper goal is to help students to overcome this problem in which it has been a challenge to EFL teachers and researchers alike. Thus, the present research paper aims at analyzing Kurdish EFL students' emails for the purpose of finding out their tendency towards using lexical cohesion devices, i.e., the extent to which they use or avoid using these devices. It also aims at

finding out the most frequent lexical cohesion devices in their writing. On gaining the results of this research paper, the researcher hopes that it will help the students to enhance their ability to write good and neat academic texts.

1. Introduction

Words and phrases in a text display a kind of mutual dependence which creates a coherent texture; they do not occur at random. The texture is what distinguishes a text from something that is not a text. According to Grosz and Sidner(1986: 175- 204) recognizing the coherent text structure is an essential task in text understanding. In other words, specific meaning of a lexical item in a text, especially of a pronoun

(e.g she) and a ddefinite noun phrase (e.g the box), can only be determined when placed in the whole structure of the text. The threads of the textual structure are called cohesion or cohesive relations (Halliday and Hasan, 2010: 2).

Cohesion plays a special role in the creation of text because it can provide continuity that exists between one part of a text and another. And readers or listeners can rely on the continuity provided by cohesion to fill in the missing information, which are not present in the text but are necessary to its interpretation.

Cohesion is defined as the set of linguistic means we have available for creating texture (Halliday and Hasan, 2010:2), i.e., the property of a text of being an interpretable whole (rather than unconnected sentences). Cohesion occurs "whern the interpretation of some element in the text is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it." (Halliday and Hasan, 2010: 4).

Crystal (2007: 162) also agrees that in order to call a sequence of sentences a text to imply that the sentences display some kind of mutual dependence; they are not occurring at random. Sometimes the internal structure of a text is immediately apparent and sometimes it has to be carefully demonstrated. Accordingly, the task of textual analysis is to identify the linguistic features that cause a coherent sentence sequence.

Cohesive relations within a text are relationships between items of any size, from single words to lengthy passages. They are established where the

interpretation of some items in the text is dependent on that of another. As Fairclough (1995: 122) puts it, "cohesive relations between clauses and sentences of a text are not objective properties of the text, they are relations that have to be established by people interpreting it." Accordingly, Crystal (2010:123) believes that a text plainly has to be coherent as well as cohesive, in that the concepts and relationships expressed should be relevant to each other, thus enabling us to make plausible inferences about the underlying meaning.

The present study aims at shedding light on the importance of lexical cohesive devices in which they provide an easy-to-determine context to aid in the resolution of ambiguity and in the narrowing to a specific meaning of a word. They also provide a clue for the determining of coherence and discourse structure, and hence the larger meaning of the text.

2. Related Studies

Many studies have shown that lexical cohesive devices, which involve the use of repetition, synonymy/antonym, and superordinates/ hyponymy among other tools, are an essential cohesive device in native speakers' speeches and writing (Carter and McCarthy 1988; Halliday and Hasn 2010 ; Halliday 1994; McCarthy 1991; Salkie 1997; Winter 1977 and 1978). However, these studies seem to have failed to produce much impact on EFL writing instruction on cohesion. The researcher's search has yielded no direct studies on the teaching and the use of content lexical ties in English language, and most of these studies have either totally neglected the subject or merely mentioned it in passing.

Spencer and Arbon (1996) and Swales and Feak (1994) discussed only functional connectives in addressing the issue of cohesion in their composition books. Reid (1988), while rendering a four-page detailed discussion on connectives, offered only a sketch of less than one page on repetition and synonyms as cohesive devices. Similarly, Ruetten (1997) had merely a short unit on using repetitions for cohesion, while presenting in almost every chapter a unit on using functional connectives. More importantly, neither Reid nor Ruetten mentioned superordinates/ hyponyms as viable cohesive devices. Only Hamp-Lyons and Heasley (1987) included units such as "Class relationship: Classification" and "Class relationship: Definition" on how to use superordinates/hyponyms in writing.

3. Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion plays a special role in the creation of text because it can provide continuity that exists between one part of a text and another. And readers or listeners can rely on the continuity provided by cohesion to fill in the missing information, which are not present in the text but are necessary to its interpretation.

Hence, cohesion is the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations which provide links between various parts of a text (Baker, 1992: 180).

It should be noted that there is a confusion between the notion of cohesion and coherence. Brown and Attardo(2008: 51) supposes that cohesion happens at the level of the surface of the text, and coherence happens at the level of the meaning.

On the other hand, Hobbs (1978:168) believes that the difference between cohesion and coherence is that: cohesion is a term for sticking together; it means that the text all hangs together. While coherence is a term for making sense; it means that there is sense in the text. In addition, Dijk van(1989: 93) claims that coherence is a semantic property of discourse, based on the interpretation of each individual sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences.

Carrell (1982: 479) argues that cohesion is not coherence because the latter involves not only the writer, but also the reader .

The concept of cohesion in a text is related to semantic ties or "relations of meanings that exist within the text, and that define it as a text" (Halliday and Hasan , 2010: 4). However, cohesive ties exist between elements in connected sentences of a text in such a way that one word or phrase is linked to other words or phrases

(Brown and yule, 1989: 24).

In a text, if previously mentioned an item that is referred to again and is dependent upon another element, it is considered a tie. Without semantic ties, sentences or utterances would seem to lack any type of relationship to each other and might not be considered as a text.

Cohesion and coherence relations have been also distinguished by Hobbs (1978:168) in the following way. Coherence relation is a relation among clauses or sentences, such as elaboration, support, cause, or exemplification. Dijk van(1989: 96) also suggests that coherence relation exist between parts of sentences or propositions and the model structures involved must therefore be such that values can assigned to these parts. In contrast, cohesion relations are relations among elements in a text, such as reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion (Hobbs, 1978:168).

Generally speaking, there are three main categories of cohesion: referential cohesion (anaphoric chains), relational cohesion (connectives and ellipsis) and lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesion, which is the focus of this research paper, contributes to the ideational (semantic) structuring of discourse. It refers to the semantic relations between the lexical items in the text; thus it provides information about the way lexemes are organized in the discourse.

4. Lexical Cohesion

A text or discourse is not just a set of sentences, each on some random topic. Rather, the sentences and phrases of any sensible text will each tend to be about the same thing, i.e. the text will have a quality of unity. In text, lexical cohesion is the result of chains of related words that contribute to the continuity of lexical meaning. These lexical chains are a direct result of units of text being about the same thing. Accordingly, cohesion typically depends on the provision of explicit linguistic linking devices that serve to show how different parts of a text relate to each other and give the text its structure and texture (woods, 2006: 137). As a result, lexical cohesion is the cohesion that arises from semantic relationships between words.

Lexical cohesion differs from the other cohesive devices of referencing, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction in that it is a non grammatical function. Lexical cohesion is the central device for making texts hang together experientially. Lexical cohesion refers to the "cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary" (Halliday and Hasan ,2010: 274).

Lexical cohesion devices have been classified differently by many linguistics, such as Halliday and Hasan (2010: 270-286) in which they presuppose that there are five basic categories of lexical cohesion:

1) Reiteration with identity of reference:

- Tanya bit into a peach.

- Unfortunately the peach wasn't ripe.

2) Reiteration without identity of reference:

- Tanya ate some peaches.

- Tanya likes peaches very much.

3) Reiteration by means of superordinate:

- Tanya ate a peach.

- She likes fruits.

4) Systematic semantic relation:

- Tanya likes green apple.

- She doesn't like red ones.

5) Nonsystematic semantic relation:

- Tanya spent three hours in the garden yesterday.

- She was digging potatoes.

As a matter of fact, reiteration pertains to the repetition of a lexical item, either directly or through the use of a synonym, a superordinate or a generally related word. Collocation, on the other hand, pertains to lexical items that are likely to be found together within the same text. Collocation as a lexical cohesion device can be achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur within and across the sentence boundaries (Halliday and Hassan, 2010: 284). It is good to mention that this lexical cohesion device occurs when pair of words are not necessarily dependent upon the same semantic relationship but rather they tend to occur within the same lexical environment (ibid: 286).

Salkie (1997: 3- 29) has also classified the lexical cohesion devices into four categories:

1) Word repetition.

Repeating important words, whether they are function words or content words, makes texts coherent.

- Alfred saw a **dog**. The **dog** was wounded by the children.

- Alfred **arrived** yesterday. His **arrival** made his mother happy.

2) Using synonyms.

A synonymy is a word that has the same meaning as another word.

- What **people** want from the government is frankness.

- They should explain everything to **the public**.

3) Superordinates and generals.

It is a relationship between two words, in which the meaning of one of the words includes the meaning of the other. The general word is called the superordinate and the more specific one called a hyponym.

- A **flamingo** lives in water.

- This **bird** is white.

Superordinates are general words that refer to a class, whereas hyponyms are specific members of the class. Animal, for example, is a superordinate whose hyponyms include words like dog, cat, and chicken. Depending on the context, the writer may go from a superordinate to its hyponyms or vice versa to create text coherence as shown in the example below. Related words refer to those that are normally not considered synonyms or antonyms but that form a synonymic, antonymic, or superordinate/hyponym relationship in the context (Salkie, 1997:15-20).

4) Opposites and related words.

In this type of lexical cohesion, cohesion comes about by the selection of an item which is opposite in meaning to a preceding lexical item.

- I usually wear **dark** colours. I don't look nice in **light** colours.

A part from the opposites, the related words that help to create coherent texts, such as the use of the following words in the same text (fire, burn, hot,...etc.).

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5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Participants

The subject of the present study consists of 30 Kurdish of EFL students in the English department at the Garmian University.

5.2 Procedure

The researcher has adopted Salkie (1997: 3- 29) classification of the lexical cohesion devices, i.e., the students' emails have been analyzed according to the following categories: repetition, synonyms, antonyms (opposites), and superordinate/hyponyms.

The subjects have been asked to write an email about the following topic: " Write an email to your friend describing an imaginary dream you once had. The dream is about an action of stealing; describing how you discovered the coming of the thief and how you defend yourself and whether or not the thief was able to steal anything. Make use of the following list of words.

(You can add or delete some of these words if necessary).

dream, run away, gun, police, jewels, gay, car, house pistol, money, night mare, escape, break in, watch, man, thief, goods, enter, wheel.

Table (1)

The Frequency & Percentage of the Lexical Devices According to

Individual Students

St.	Repetition		Synonym		Opposite		Super./Hyponym		Total
No.	F	P %	F	P %	F	P %	F	P %	
1	4	80	0	0	1	20	0	0	5
2	2	20	3	30	1	10	4	40	10
3	3	25	2	16.666	1	8.333	6	50	12
4	5	45.454	3	27.272	1	9.090	2	18.181	11
5	5	50	1	10	1	10	3	30	10
6	4	57.142	0	0	0	0	3	42.857	7

7	7	58.333	0	0	2	16.666	3	25	12
8	5	55.555	1	11.111	1	11.111	2	22.222	9
9	4	66.666	0	0	0	0	2	33.333	6
10	7	58.333	1	8.333	2	16.666	2	16.666	12
11	7	50	1	7.142	1	7.142	5	35.714	14
12	5	41.666	1	8.333	0	0	6	50	12
13	4	44.444	1	11.111	2	22.222	2	22.222	9
14	3	33.333	0	0	2	22.222	4	44.444	9
15	2	50	1	25	0	0	1	25	4
16	6	54.545	0	0	2	18.181	3	27.272	11
17	3	60	1	20	1	20	0	0	5
18	3	33.333	0	0	2	22.222	4	44.444	9
19	5	35.714	2	14.285	1	7.142	6	42.857	14
20	9	64.285	3	21.428	0	0	2	14.285	14
21	3	42.857	1	14.285	0	0	3	42.857	7
22	5	41.666	5	41.666	0	0	2	16.666	12
23	7	58.333	2	16.666	1	8.333	2	16.666	12
24	4	30.769	5	38.461	1	7.692	3	23.076	13
25	2	28.571	1	14.285	2	28.571	2	28.571	7
26	5	35.714	2	14.285	1	7.142	6	42.857	14
27	4	40	2	20	1	10	3	30	10
28	3	50	1	16.666	0	0	2	33.333	6
29	5	50	1	10	1	10	3	30	10
30	2	40	0	0	0	0	3	60	5
Total	133	45.704	41	14.08	28	9.621	89	30.584	291

The Frequency & Percentage of the Lexical Devices According to the

General Performance of the Students

Repetition		Synonym		Opposite		Super./Hyponym		Total
F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	
133	45.704	41	14.089	28	9.621	89	30.584	291

5.3 Results

Lexical cohesion is the central device for making texts hangs together experientially. Therefore, the results prove that lexical cohesion is an important aspect for creating meaning within text. The researcher has analyzed the students' emails and found that they use four types of cohesion devices, i.e.; repetition, synonyms, opposites (antonyms), and superordinate/hyponym devices.

From table (1), it should be noticed the frequency and percentage of the lexical devices according to individual students. On the other hand, table (2) shows the general performance of the Kurdish of EFL students and it has revealed that "repetition" as a lexical cohesion devices has got (133) frequency and (45.704 %) percentage, in which it is the highest in the table, "synonyms" has got (41) frequency and (14.089 %) percentage, "antonyms" has got (28) frequency and (9.621 %) percentage, and the superordinate/hyponym has got (89) frequency and (30.584 %) percentage.

The analysis shows that "repetition" is the highest in the table, while "antonyms" is the lowest one. The researcher has concluded that Kurdish of EFL students should improve their use of cohesive devices to make coherent and tightly organized written discourses. She has also found that the overuse of repetition and superordinate/hyponym relationships is a common phenomenon in their written English, and the use of other types of lexical devices is far from satisfactory, especially, the opposites.

5.4 Conclusion

Studies have demonstrated that lexical cohesion devices are an important cohesive device in writing and that insufficient use of lexical cohesive by EFL students contribute to the lack of cohesion in their writings. Deficient lexical cohesion devices in EFL students' writing, like other problems that cause incoherence, often lead to confusion or misunderstanding. Yet in dealing with this deficiency, many teachers continue to focus mostly on teaching the use of functional connectives such as conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, overlooking another important element responsible for basic text cohesion: content lexical ties, i.e., the lexical cohesion devices. Therefore, more attention should be paid to this topic in research and classroom teaching. The teachers, on the other hand, must do their best to help the students better understand cohesive devices and create and use them in their writing. However, many more teaching and learning activities in this area need to be developed to help students write more cohesively. The researcher is also certain that new and more innovative activities will encourage the EFL students to pay more attention to lexical cohesion devices in their writings.

The researcher has concluded that Kurdish of EFL students should improve their use of cohesive devices to make coherent and tightly organized oral discourses. She has also found that the overuse of repetition and superordinate/hyponym relationship is a common phenomenon in their written English, and the use of other types of lexical devices is far from satisfactory, especially, the opposites.

5.5 Recommendations

1) Providing the students with more fundamental training in vocabulary, especially in terms of word semantics in context and word collocations.

2) Enabling the students to learn the words in context or in relation to one another as synonyms, antonyms, superordinates, or hyponyms. Also, a better understanding of these words allowed students to use them to improve cohesion in their writing, hence enhancing their writing skills.

3) The teacher may give students a fairly large number of words - either all known words or some known and some new words - and have them use various diagrams to classify and arrange the words either as synonyms, antonyms, or superordinates/ hyponyms.

4) Creating lexical cohesion devices exercises directly helps students to develop the ability to create or use content lexical cohesive ties in their writing. It can be carried out in a variety of forms and be tailored for students at different levels. Such exercises as:

a) Give students a picture/diagram of the White House, for instance, and have them describe the United States government. The students have to come up with appropriate content lexical items that may serve as cohesive devices for their description.

b) Ask students to write short paragraphs or essays by using the lexical items in question to strengthen the cohesion. For example, have them write an essay on "troubles in English" in which they have to use a series of synonyms for the word *trouble*, such as *difficulty, problem,* and *headache*.

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ملخص البحث باللغة العربية

الترابط هو المبدا و المعيار الاكثر اهمية في النص, فهو الترابط الذي يظهر جليا عنـد تفسير احد العناصر النصية, اي ان الكلمة الموجودة في جملة ما تتوقف او تعتمد على وجـود عناصر او كلمات اخرى في النص.

الترابط اذن هو احد محتويات النص التي تساهم في تنظيمه. وعليه, فان الترابط يشـير الى العلاقات المعنوية او الدلالية الواظحة في النص. و يقسم الترابط الى ثلاثة اصناف رئيسية, هي: الترابط الاشاري, الترابط الوصلي, والترابط اللغوي. فالترابط اللغوي, والذي هو محـور هذا البحث, يسهم في جعل بنية النص المعنوية اكثر مثالية. وهو يشير الى العلاقات المعنوية بين المفردات اللغوية في النص, ولهذا فهو يزودنا بمعلومات عن الطريقة التي تنظم الكلمـات فـي النص.

و مع ذلك, فان عدم وجود الترابط في النصوص المكتوبة هي مشكلة تؤرق الكثيـرين من متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية.

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى مساعدة الطلاب لتجاوز هـذه المشـكلة التـي تعـد تحـديا للتدريسيين و الباحثين على حد سواء. ولذلك, فان هذا البحث يهـدف الـى تحليـل الرسـائل الالكترونية للطلبة الكورد الدارسين للغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية و ذلك لغرض ايجاد مدى ميلهم تجاه استخدام ادوات الترابط اللغوي, بمعنى الى اي حد يمكنهم استخدام او تجنب استخدام هـذه الادوات.

و هي كذلك تهدف الى ايجاد الاداة الترابطية اللغوية الاكثر تكرارا او اسـتخداما فـي كتاباتهم. و بالنظر الى النتائج المستحصلة من البحث الحالي, تأمل الباحثة ان بالامكان مساعدة الطلبة على تعزيزو تطوير قابليتهم في كتابة نصوص اكاديمية على مستوى عالي من الدقـة و الجودة.