

COHESION AND COHERENCE ASPECTS IN THE STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Cohesion and coherence aspects are the essential components of writing, including descriptive and narrative texts. Those writing components are inevitably required to build a readable written text. This research mainly attempts to investigate the aspects of cohesion and coherence in the students' writing tasks on descriptive and narrative text genres. 390 students were randomly selected as the subjects from thirteen senior high schools in Langke Rembong district. The students were assigned to write both descriptive and narrative text genres concerning the given prepared topics. The topics were familiar with the students. The data were analyzed in a descriptive quantitative model of analysis in light of percentages and counted scores. Accordingly, cohesion and coherence aspects were subsumed under some levels. The research revealed that cohesion and coherence aspects were poorly employed in the students' writing. Only smaller amount of the writings were partially cohesive and coherent texts, while most writings were fully incohesive and incoherent. Cohesion and coherence aspects found in the students' descriptive and narrative texts were categorised into the lower level.

Keywords: cohesion and coherence aspects, descriptive and narrative texts.

INTRODUCTION

Basically, writing is the activity of expressing ideas into a written text. In writing, ideas must be well-organised in such a way that creates a text in a logical sequence. They are also textually interwoven to keep the unity of idea. By this way, a written text conveys clearer meaning to the readers. Hence, writing or composition is fundamentally a process of putting words into a readable text.

In conjunction with writing a good composition, the learners should consider some required standard aspects of quality. In line with that, Brown (2001) mentions some elements that must be carefully paid attention in producing a well-written text, such as content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. These components are related to the

aspects of cohesion and coherence in a written text. Cohesion is dealt with the accuracy of using grammatical markers in a written text, or what is called discourse markers. It establishes and ties the lexical and grammatical relationship that allows the sequence of sentences for a connected written text. Moreover, a cohesive written text is more accurate in organizing words and sentences, and thus the flow of ideas is understandable. However, building a cohesive written text is insufficient in creating a readable text without consideration of coherence. Coherence deals with the unity of ideas between sentences in a written text. As with the concept of coherence, Butt (1995) asserts that coherence organizes a text with interrelated ideas.

The issue of cohesion and coherence has been widely praised as an interesting topic in second/foreign language studies. Since the existing investigations were previously conducted, there has been growing a body of knowledge concerning cohesion and coherence in a written text. McCarthy (1991) emphasizes that the matter of cohesion and cohesive devices are of paramount importance for writing a readable text. Likewise, Kent, as cited in (Hwang and Merrifield, 1992), considers that coherence is very influential for creating a written text communicative and comprehensible to the readers. It is, therefore, realised that cohesion and coherence are essentially required for writing a good composition, and it directly affects its quality of writing.

The importance of cohesion and coherence have been examined and revealed in several studies. In his study, Hinkel (2001) explored cohesion in academic texts. By a comparative analysis method, he measured the median frequency rate of cohesive devices employed in academic texts. The results demonstrated that transition and demonstrative pronouns were significantly higher. Another study was conducted by Crossley and MacNamara (2016) who examined whether there is a connection between writing quality and text cohesion. Based on these investigations, it is evident that cohesion and coherence aspects are crucially significant in writing a well-written text.

Drawing upon the related investigation, this article is mainly concerned with cohesion and coherence aspects in the students' writing tasks on descriptive and narrative text genres. For senior high school student, writing skill is learnt in English subject. In this level, writing skill deals with the ability to use appropriate words, accuracy of grammar, organising the content, and mechanics in both descriptive and narrative texts. Based on the writing

competence that is to be achieved, the students must be able to write descriptive and narrative texts. Regarding cohesion and coherence components in the students' writing projects, two questions are addressed to be explored, namely : (1) how are cohesion and coherence used in the students' writing on descriptive and narrative texts? And (2) how is the level of their writing performance in terms of cohesion and coherence.

Cohesion

To build a cohesive text, the writers must possess sufficient knowledge of joining sentences in a paragraph through correct grammatical and lexical ties. Tie indicates the relationship between an item and another item it presupposed in a text (Martin, 2001:37). Similarly, Hasan and Halliday (1976) argue that cohesion qualifies a meaningful text. A meaningful text is created through grammatically-well form sentences in every paragraph in a written text.

Cohesion is defined as a unity or the integration of sentences in a text. On the integration of sentences in a text, Tarigan (1987:96) explains that a formal language aspect which is related to cohesion is how propositions relate one another to form a text. Cohesion is a syntactical organization that governs sentences in a tied and concise way to create a coherent text. Hasan and Halliday (1976) have proposed cohesion and its subtypes which cover *reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion*.

Reference

Reference is one kind of cohesive ties in texture. The reference refers to how the speaker or writer introduces participants and then keeps track of them once they are in the text (Eggins, 1994:95). Its elements establish a semantic relationship between them, in which one of the elements provides the other with the meaning. Concerning reference, Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out types of reference that contain several linguistic items to create reference cohesion. Reference cohesion is categorised into *personal reference; demonstrative reference and definite article; and comparative reference*. Among these types, personal reference is proved to be mostly found in the students' writing texts as yielded in the research findings by Maryati and Suprapti (2019).

A personal reference is a reference employing function in the speech situation through the category of person. Nunan (1993: 23) states that personal reference items are expressed through pronouns and determiners. They serve to identify individuals and objects that are named at some other point in the text. It relates to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 48) that the third person is only inherently cohesive, in that a third person form typically refers anaphorically to a preceding item in the text. First and second person forms do not normally refer to the text at all; their referents are defined by the speech roles of speaker and hearer.

Comparative reference is an indirect reference using identity or similarity. With comparative reference, the identity of the presumed item is retrieved not because it has already been mentioned (or will be mentioned) in the text, but because an item with which it is being compared has been mentioned (Eggins, 1994: 98). In addition to that, the comparison includes at least two things that are being compared and any comparative attached to one entity or concept thus implies the existence of the other entity or concept. According to Thompson (1996: 151), the comparative marker may refer to an item in the text or the other item out of context (situational). It is called an exophoric reference. Nevertheless, references which have a contribution to the integration of the texts considered cohesive.

Substitution

Substitution is the replacement of a word (group) or sentences segment by a "dummy" word. The reader can fill in the correct element based on the preceding sentences (Rankema, 1993: 37). Substitution is the replacement of language element into others in a bigger composition to get a clearer difference or to explain some certain language elements. It is an item or items replaced by another item or items. There is a distinction between substitution and reference in which substitution is a realization in the wording rather than in the meaning. Substitution is a relation between linguistic items such as words and phrases in the level of lexicogrammar (Halliday and Hassan, 1976: 89). It resembles reference in being potentially anaphoric and constitutes a link between parts of a text. They also explain that since substitution is a grammatical relation, a relation in the wording rather than in the meaning, the different types of substitution are defined grammatically rather than semantically. Substitution is subsumed under three types such as *nominal, verbal and clausal substitution*.

Ellipsis

Ellipsis is the omission of a word or part of a sentence. It occurs when some essential structural elements are missing from a sentence or clause, which can only be figured out by referring an element in the preceding text (Nunan, 1993). Similarly, Halliday and Hasan (1976: 144) describes ellipses as “something that is structurally necessary is left unsaid, there is a sense of incompleteness associated with it”. The information is understood, but not stated. Like substitution, the ellipsis is a relation within the text and in the great majority of instances, the presupposed item is present in the preceding text. Ellipsis is also normally anaphoric relation in the level of words and structures. The difference between substitution and ellipsis is that in the former a substitution counter occurs in the slot and the presupposed item is replaced, whereas in ellipsis the slot is empty. It is often called as substitution by zero. In addition, ellipsis is classified into three types: *nominal, verbal and clausal ellipsis*.

Conjunction

Conjunction is mostly found in written text. Baker (1992) asserts that conjunction is a relationship which indicates how the subsequent sentence or clause should be linked to the preceding or the following sentence or clause by using cohesive ties which relate a sentence, a clause or a paragraph to each other. Moreover, conjunction deals with the way the writer wants the reader to relate what is about to be said to what has been said before. It is subsumed mainly under five types, namely: *additive, adversative, causal, temporal and continuation*.

Lexical Cohesion

The types of cohesion we have discussed so far all involve grammatical resource/items (conjunction, reference items, substitutes items) and grammatical structure. Cohesion also operates within the lexical zone of lexicogrammar by choosing of lexical items. Lexical cohesive devices refer to the role played by the selection of vocabulary in organizing relation within a text (Baker, 1992: 202). It does not deal with grammatical and semantic connection but with the connection based on the words used. Meanwhile, Nunan (1993: 28) says that lexical cohesion occurs when two words in a text are semantically related in some way. They

are related in terms of their meaning. There are two kinds of lexical cohesion: *reiteration and collocation*.

In general, reiteration is divided into five types. They are *repetition, synonym, hyponym, metonym and antonym*. Repetition is a word or words which has been started, and then it is repeated. We can tie sentences or paragraphs together by repeating certain keywords from one sentence to the next or one paragraph to the next. It is in the case of the clearness of the main idea of the writing (Kilborn and Kriesi, 1995).

A synonym is a relationship between two words which have the same meaning. A hyponym is defined as a sense relation between words (sometimes longer phrases) such that the meaning of one word (or phrase) is included in the meaning of the other (Hurford & Heasley, 1983). It is a semantic relation between specific and general meaning, between general class and its sub-classes. The item referring to the general class is called super-ordinate and those referring to its sub-classes are called hyponym. Antonym is opposite in meaning while metonym is a term used to describe a part-whole relationship between lexical items. The second type of lexical cohesion, collocation, deals with the relationship between words based on the fact that these often occur in the same surrounding (Rankema, 1993).

Coherence

A cohesive text does not guarantee a coherent text itself. The writer needs to ascertain coherence of a text by a well-organized paragraph. Coherence means to hold together. It means that a text has a clear, related main idea and then supported by explanatory sentences. A coherent text consists of interrelated sentences which move smoothly one for another. Therefore, a writer needs to inform well about his/her composition. He needs to give clear information about what the text is about. To organize any text to be coherent, the writers need to keep their readers well informed about what they are and where they are going (Butt *et al.* 1995: 90).

To achieve a coherent text, the paragraphs as a crucial building block must be organized in a good way. Two things must be met. First, the paragraph must have a single generalization that serves as the focus of attention, that is, a topic sentence. Secondly, a writer must control the content of every other sentence in the paragraph's body such that (a) it

contains more specific information than the topic sentence and (b) it maintains the same focus of attention as the topic sentence. Coherence refers to the overall structure, plan or schema that orders the propositions of text. Concerning with coherence, Halliday suggests two elements considered important for the unity of the text. They are theme and rheme and thematic progression. These elements are divided in the light of text organization, management and development.

METHOD

As the main data of the research are pertaining to cohesion and coherence aspects, descriptive quantitative research design was employed. The population was all the students of grade XI from thirteen selected senior high schools in Manggarai district, whereas the samples were randomly taken from the existing classes at the schools, with a total of 390 students. The data were gathered through writing tasks on descriptive and narrative texts which were assigned to the participants. Accordingly, the students' writings task were scored and determined the percentages. This is to measure the level of cohesion and coherence in the students' writing performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the students' writing is based on the aspects of cohesion and coherence. The results of data analysis are further used to determine the level of the students' writing in terms of cohesion and coherence. In this part, the data are displayed accordingly in conjunction with aspects of cohesion and coherence. Table 1 reveals the aspects of cohesion and its level related to the students' writing of the descriptive text.

Table 1. The Aspects of Cohesion of the Students' Descriptive Text

No	Aspects	Average Scores	Percentages
1.	Reference	60	30%
2.	Substitution	0	0%
3.	Ellipsis	0	0%
4.	Conjunction	60	50%
5.	Lexical cohesion	30	20%
		22.5	100

The data demonstrate that the students' writing did not achieve the level of good cohesion. It can be seen that the reference aspect only accounted for 60 (30% of the writing), substitution and ellipsis got zero (0%). Conjunction accounted for 60 (50 %) and lexical cohesion accounted for 30 (20%). The average score of the overall aspects was 22.5. By these data, it seems that the student's descriptive writings were categorized into poor cohesion. Due to this aspect, the students' descriptive writings were partially cohesive. The cases of cohesion were found in their writings that the students could not write a written text cohesively. Consequently, the written texts that they created were unreadable. For instance, reference was used in their writings inaccurately. The case in point is shown below:

I have an animal pet a dog. *Her* name is Dayu. I (...)very like with animal pet.

Because of *her* body very beautiful, *her* eyes round. Hair colour that sported black.

Her also like watching tv.

The example above indicate that the student had employed pronoun 'her' in the wrong way. The adjective possessive pronoun does not refer to the antecedent noun 'a dog' that is impersonal. It should be "its" as the accurate one. Therefore, the text conveys unclear ideas.

In terms of grammar, the descriptive text written by the students were also not cohesive. Many sentences were constructed without considering the accuracy of tense and subject-verb agreement. The other cases were missing auxiliary verbs and main verbs in the sentences. The following data show the case in point.

Table 2. The Aspects of Grammatical Cohesion

No	Aspects of Grammar	Average Scores	Percentages
1.	Subject-verb agreement	40	20%
2.	Auxiliary verbs	20	40 %
3.	Main verbs	20	40 %
		40	100

In line with the data, the cases of auxiliary verbs and main verbs were at higher percentages. While in the case of subject-verb agreement, it was lower. The average scores were under average. These imply that the students' writings were lack of grammatical cohesion. To prove the inaccuracy of grammar, the instance is as follows:

Among pet animals, I like a cat. Because they have fur the soft. They can be *to* a friend. I have a wonderful cat. I named *her* Manis. Manis is a female cat. She (...) a funny cat, she (...) already two years old. My cat (...) great. She has white fur, small ears and cone shape mouth. She *has* a long nail.

In addition to the aspects of cohesion, good writing fulfils the grammatical cohesion related to those elements in table 2 above. This writing was grammatically incohesive. In this case, the auxiliary verbs were missing, and the subject-verb agreement was not accurately used in the sentence. The whole meaning of the text was vague.

Further, the other data yielded that the students' writing of narrative text was poor at the aspects of cohesion. The case is displayed in table 3 as follows.

Table 3. The Aspects of Cohesion of the Students' Narrative Text

No	Aspects	Average Scores	Percentages
1.	Reference	50	30%
2,	Substitution	0	0%
3.	Ellipsis	0	0%
4.	Conjunction	30	40%
5.	Lexical cohesion	20	30%
		20	100

The data figure out that when writing narrative texts, the students did not consider the aspects of cohesion accurately. All the aspects of cohesion were given bad scores. It means that the aspects of cohesion were poorly employed. This case is shown in the instance below.

My first memories began when I started school at about six years old. *I* lived in Wae Koe. *I* have a happy childhood. I remember playing in the river. I fell from a big stone broke my head. I remember I had a friend named Colin. One I hit her over the head with a stone. Parents (...) very angry with me *but* after that we friendly. It was such an unforgettable childhood.

Concerning the case, it is apparent that the student did not use the aspects of cohesion accurately. For instance, the personal pronoun (*I*) was repeated many times throughout the

text, which made the ideas running into a flat tone. The repetition may occur in the text to address the keywords and to convey the clarity of the main ideas (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Martin, 2001). Also, the flow of events was chronologically arranged as there were hardly a few conjunctions in the text. Hence, the ideas are not connected. Based on the data presented, the level of cohesion and coherence can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Level of Cohesion and Coherence of the Students' Writing

No	Number of samples	Types of texts	Cohesion	Coherence	Level
1.	60	Descriptive	Partially cohesive	Partially coherent	Poor
2.	330	Descriptive	Fully incohesive	Fully incoherent	Unscorable
3.	75	Narrative	Partially Cohesive	Partially coherent	Poor
4.	315	Narrative	Fully incohesive	Fully incoherent	Unscorable

The data indicate that the level of cohesion and coherence categorized into poor and unscorable. The implication of the findings shows that the students' writing skill is lower. They do not know how to put ideas into cohesive and coherent written texts. Moreover, in the English classroom, writing skill has not been much practised and incorporated in-class activities. It is related to the results of an in-depth interview that most students (90%) at the senior high schools, where this research was conducted, admitted that during the English class they mainly focus more on the improvement of reading skill than writing skill.

CONCLUSION

Cohesion and coherence, as the components of writing, are indispensably integrated to have a meaningful written text. As it is demonstrated in the findings, the students' writing performance was categorised into poor level. In this case, the students were unable to organize their ideas cohesively and coherently. It is evident that the students' writing ability was not sufficiently developed. Therefore, the students should be given more opportunities to do more writing tasks, and the English teachers should help the students learn how to create cohesive and coherent written texts.

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