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Iraqi EFL Learners' Knowledge of Cohesion Devices

A paper

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by

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DEDICATION

For my lovely family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A special feeling of gratitude goes to my loving parents, brothers and sisters whose words of encouragement have helped me to go forward with my studies.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is entitled “

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Section One: Introduction

1.1 The Problem

Writing as one of language skills is really difficult to implement. In presenting ideas in writing, people should be encouraged to make sure that their text flow through a sequence of sentences. Cohesion is very important to make a message get through and transfer thoughts into words in a written form. Cohesion occurs when the semantic interpretation of some linguistic element in the discourse depends on another. It is the foundation upon which the edifice of coherence is built (Halliday & Hasan, 1985:94)

This study is trying to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are the main difficulties facing Iraqi EFL learners in using cohesive devices?
2. Can Iraqi EFL learners use cohesive devices correctly?
3. Can they understand cohesive devices accurately?
4. Are they better in recognition or in production level?

1.2 Aims

This paper aims at:

1. Defining cohesion in English.
2. Identifying cohesion devices used in English
3. Investigating difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners in using cohesive devices

١.٣ Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

١. Cohesion and cohesive devices are very important in English
٢. Cohesion is especially important in written English
٣. Most Iraqi EFL learners lack knowledge cohesion and cohesive devices and expressions

١.٤ Procedures

To achieve the above aims, the following procedures are adopted:

١. Investigating types of cohesive devices.
٢. Presenting a theoretical background about the different types of cohesive devices used in English language.
٣. Designing a suitable test that examines the recognition as well as the production ability of Iraqi EFL learners in regard to the cohesive devices.
٤. Administering the test for ٣٠ students from the fourth stage of English Department to identify main difficulties they are facing in using cohesive devices.

١.٥ Limits

This paper is limited to identifying main cohesive devices. Any other devices like coherence devices are not included. Regarding the sample of the study, only Iraqi EFL university students participated in the current study.

1.7 Value

The study is useful to learners of English as a foreign language since it tackles the problematic area of cohesion and cohesive devices. It is also of use to teachers and learner of English, and curriculum designers.

Section Two : Literature Review

۲.۱ The Definitions of Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (۱۹۷۶) view cohesion as a semantic concept referring to meaningful relations within the text, and give it the property of texture. It occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on presence of another. One element presupposes the other one and its interpretation requires going back to the other one. Cohesion is part of the system of language and its potential lies in the systematic resource of reference, ellipsis, and so on that are built in language. Hence, cohesion is not a structural relation that holds the different parts of sentences, but rather is a semantic one that links text parts based on their meaning relations and in such case each element is interpretable by recourse to another.

As argued by Halliday (۲۰۰۲: ۲۲۳) cohesion is a way to approach coherence and it is a necessary, but not sufficient factor to text coherence. The different types of cohesive categories are the fundamental resources for the creation of coherence. Yet, the mere presence of these devices is not enough to grant coherent texture.

As a semantic relation, cohesion is expressed within the stratum organization of language. Language can be expressed as a multiple coding system comprising three levels of coding: the semantic, the lexico-grammatical, the phonological, and the orthographic. Meaning is recoded as expressions within these layers by being put into wording, and wording into sound or writing (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 5).

Widdowson (1978: 26-27) argues that cohesion is the way by which sentences and their parts are tied together to guarantee the presence of propositional progress. Commonly, sentences that are used in discourse communicatively do not express propositions independently, but depend on other values in the neighbouring sentences. So, this will enable discourse to be cohesive. In this respect, cohesion is a matter of the contextual appropriacy of linguistic forms that distinguishes propositional relations depending on participant's knowledge about language facts.

Fairclough (1992) views cohesion as one among four headings of text analysis beside grammar, vocabulary, and text structure which deals with the way of linking clauses and sentences together. While Wright & Hope (1996:

137) consider cohesion as involving formal linguistic ties between classifiable text sections. It is a surface aspect that is directly distinguished.

Barker & Galasinski (2001: 80) regard cohesion as the source which enable a text to 'stick together'. It concerns how the various units of a text are connected to each other to make a larger element. This connection is achieved by the categories of reference, conjunction, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. Yet, Baker & Ellece (2011: 16) see cohesion as the way through which a text makes sense syntactically and it is the opposite concept of coherence which denotes ways that make text semantically meaningful.

Cohesion is a semantic relation that is a vital factor for text coherence which is achieved by the cohesive devices of reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, & lexical cohesion. It is a non-structural concept that operates beyond sentence borders. In so far, two types of cohesion are figured out as grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion.

2.2 Types of Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976) regard cohesion as a semantic concept. It is mainly achieved through the availability of two types of cohesive categories, grammatical and lexical. Grammatical cohesion is created by reference,

substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Lexical cohesion is brought by reiteration and collocation. To this point, Hasan (1989) classifies cohesion into two main types as structural cohesion and non-structural.

2.2.1 Grammatical Cohesion

Grammatical cohesion is classified according to the categories of reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. According to Halliday & Hasan (1976) the first three types are purely grammatical while the fourth category of conjunction occurs in between the grammatical and lexical classification, but it is closer to the former. Each one of these categories has three sub-divisions according to the grammatical items used in realizing them.

2.2.1.1 Reference

Reference items are those items which are interpreted by relating them to something else instead of being interpreted semantically in their own right. In English, these items are personals (i.e. John, he, the book, it), demonstratives (i.e. here, there) and comparatives (i.e. fewer). Accordingly, this interpretation is achieved via two ways of reference either internal reference in which the referred to items are inside the text or by the aid of the outer context. In both cases a phoric relation is set up, but in each case, certain phoric relation is made. Within the text an endophoric reference is made while beyond the text borders an exophoric reference is used (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 31).

Reference is a relationship between things, or facts. It may be established at varying distances although it usually links functional elements inside clause borders. Two types of phoric relations are recognized: exophoric underlies situational reference and endophoric that describes internal textual links(Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 36).

2.2.1.2 Substitution

Substitution and ellipsis are two related cohesive devices and both of them are related to wording rather than meaning. Substitution refers to the process by which linguistic item is replaced by another while ellipsis is another form of substitution indicates zero replacement to the omitted item. The two categories mainly share a common set of mechanisms, but ellipsis is a more complex one. It is differentiated from reference in being concerned with wording rather than meaning. But the two devices interfere in many cases where a semantic component has a different interpretation from that of the grammatical one. In such case, we have to adopt the two depending on certain general conventions. Generally, substitution is a relation that occurs inside the text. It is a kind of strategy used to avoid repetition. As a general

condition, the substitute item should have the same structural function (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 88).

2.2.1.3 **Ellipsis**

The third grammatical device of cohesion is referred to as ellipsis. The common view of ellipsis is that it is something-unsaid but understood. Something understood in the special sense of understood as ‘going without saying’. Understood in the sense that language does not function in isolation: it functions as text in real context. The unsaid is brought down by language users from the context of situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 142).

2.2.1.4 **Conjunction**

As a cohesive category, conjunction possesses both of the grammatical and lexical aspects of the lexico-grammar, but it is closer to the grammatical in identity. Conjunction is not an anaphoric relation and this what distinguishes it from other categories. Conjunctive items are not self-cohesive, but cohesiveness is attributed to their own senses. Moreover, they are not phoric relations that presuppose other items in the discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 226).

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 238-239) point out that there is no single and unique classification to the cohesive conjunctive elements and they have various classifications which are based on their private criteria. They adopt a classification of four types of cohesive conjunction as: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal.

2.2.2 Lexical Cohesion

As a device for establishing text coherence, lexical cohesion was first introduced by Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Cohesion in English and their ideas were widely elaborated by their later works and other linguists such as de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) and Michel Hoey (1991) who presented a graphical analysis of the structure of text by showing the connection and nodes of connection via lexical items or words by means of lines and arrows (Bayraktar, 2011: 45).

2.2.2.1 Reiteration

In its simplest forms, lexical cohesion occurs where the same word is repeated and has the same referent on both occasions. There is no necessity for the second example to be exactly an identical item; it works within the

Reiteration categories as being either synonym, superordinate, or general word (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 282; Crystal, 2008: 410).

2.2.2.2 Collocation

Halliday & Hasan (1976: 287) use the notions of collocation and collocational cohesion as an umbrella term for the kind of cohesion produced by the co-occurrence of lexical elements that are in certain point or another typically linked with each other due to their identical context. Furthermore, Halliday & Matthiessen (2004: 577) define collocation as a particular association between words based on their tendency to accompany each other. Most of time, collocations are linked with a certain kind of register or a function as a variety of language.

Collocation is an important device to provide connectedness to text segments. It is not limited to a couple of items, but it builds up lexical links of long cohesive chains within the whole text. A collocation of longer cohesive chain is a stronger one in having more cohesive force because these long chains contribute to the expansion of the discourse topic. So, it is a vital

factor in developing one's perspective and acting as a thread of the text (Wu, 2010:100).

CHAPTER THREE

Data Collection and Analysis

٣.١ The Sample

A random sample of students is chosen from the four stage in the Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, for the academic year ٢٠٢١-٢٠٢٢. This sample consists of (٢٠) students. They are native speakers of Arabic.

٣.٢ The Instrument

Only one instrument used in the current study that is a test. Black and William (١٩٩٨:٩١) define test as "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities. Such assessment becomes formative assessment when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet student needs".

٣.٢ Characteristics of Good Test

There are two characteristics of a good test, namely validity and reliably, as explained below:

٣.٢.١. Validity

Validity is defines as the extent to which the instrument measure and calculates in many ways represents the easiest being the square root of the reliability coefficient Al-Hamash et al. (١٩٨٥:٢٠٠) state that " test is valid if

it measures what it is supposed to measure. It should be related to the content of the course." In fact, there are two kinds of validity but here the researcher is going to shed light on two of them

3.2.2. Reliability

In order to be reliable, a test must be consistent in its measurements.

Heaton (1970:172) states that "reliability denotes the extent to which the same marks or grades are awarded if the same test is marked by two or more different examiners or the same examiner under different occasions".

Reliability is defined as the extent to which a questionnaire, test, observation or any measurement produces the same results on repeated trials.

3.3 Test Design

The test consists of (2) questions the first measures the production level and the second measures the recognition level. Each question consists of (10) items. The students are given questions and they are required to respond according to their background knowledge.

3.4 Data Analyses

3.4.1 Subjects' Performance of the First Question

Question 1 is prepared to assess the subjects' acquisition at the production level. Their responses on each item are set down in the following table (See Table 1).

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of the test's items in Q II

No. of item	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
1	2	10%	18	90%
2	4	20%	16	80%
3	3	15%	17	85%
4	10	50%	10	50%
5	17	85%	3	15%
6	12	60%	8	40%
7	7	35%	13	65%
8	7	35%	13	65%
9	10	50%	10	50%
10	12	60%	8	40%
Total	84	42%	116	58%

The findings related to the production question (table 1) shows that only 84 out of 200 responses were correct. These results indicate that students face considerable difficulty in the production level. Students failed to give correct responses are 116 students (58%).

Students faced difficulty in both in underlying and identify the type of the correct cohesive devices. In all the items, only less than half students tested answered correctly. Items (1), (2), (3), (7) and (8) were the least answered correctly.

This indicates that most students make mistakes in giving identifying the correct cohesive device in a sentence. This means that students face problems in identifying and using the correct cohesive devices, leading to difficulty in making correct sentences.

۳.۵.۲ Performance of Subjects in the Recognition Question

Question ۲ tests the subjects' performance at the recognition level. The following table provides the results obtained on each test item in the question (See Table ۲).

Table ۲: Frequencies and Percentages of the test's items in Q I

No. of item	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
۱	۱۸	۹۰%	۲	۱۰%
۲	۱۶	۸۰%	۴	۲۰%
۳	۱۷	۸۵%	۳	۱۵%
۴	۱۰	۵۰%	۱۰	۵۰%
۵	۳	۱۵%	۱۷	۸۵%
۶	۸	۴۰%	۱۲	۶۰%
۷	۱۳	۶۵%	۷	۳۵%
۸	۱۳	۶۵%	۷	۳۵%
۹	۱۰	۵۰%	۱۰	۵۰%
۱۰	۸	۴۰%	۱۲	۶۰%
Total	۱۰۴	۵۲%	۹۶	۴۸%

The findings at the recognition level (table ۲) show that only ۱۰۴ responses (۵۲%) were correct and ۹۶ responses (۴۸%) were incorrect. These results indicate that a considerable number of students still encounter difficulty in distinguishing and selecting the correct cohesive device for the

given sentences in question ۲ The items that were answered correctly by most students were (۲), (۳), (۴), (۷), (۸) and (۹), rating ۶۵%, ۷۵%, ۶۵%, ۵۰% and ۸۵%, respectively.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Cohesion is a semantic concept referring to meaningful relations within the text, and give it the property of texture. It occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on presence of another. There are many types of cohesive devices including substitution, elision, repetition, reference, conjunction, etc.

The results of the test shows that Iraqi EFL college students face a problem at the recognition and production levels in identifying and using cohesive devices. Most students found difficulty at the production level; they failed to identify the cohesive devices and their types to most of the sentences given in the production level. This validates the third hypothesis “Most Iraqi EFL learners lack knowledge cohesion and cohesive devices and expressions”, and achieves the goal of the study.

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Appendix I

The Test

Q\)- Underline the cohesive word/expression and identify the type of cohesion for each one:

١. The problem with contemporary art is that it is not easily understood by most people. Contemporary art is deliberately abstract, and that means it leaves the viewer wondering what she is looking at. (Type of cohesive device: repetition of key terms or phrase)
٢. Mary was late, so she took the bus. Mary was late, because she took the bus. (Type of cohesive device: transitional words 'yet, because')
٣. Myths narrate sacred histories and explain sacred origins. These traditional narratives are, in short, a set of beliefs that are a very real force in the lives of the people who tell them. (Type of cohesive device: synonyms)
٤. When scientific experiments do not work out as expected, they are often considered failures until some other scientist tries them again. (Type of cohesive device: pronouns 'reference')
٥. I like autumn, and yet autumn is a sad time of the year, too. (Type of cohesive device: transitional word 'yet')
٦. *There was a lot of food, but she only ate the bread.* (Type of cohesive device: substitution "substitute 'food' with 'bread')
٧. Baby turtles grow inside and in summer they wriggle. (Type of cohesive device: reference ('they' refers to 'baby turtles'))
٨. The leaves turn bright shades of red and the weather is mild, but I can't help thinking ahead to the winter. (Type of cohesive device: transitional word 'but')
٩. Firstly, Thank you for coming; secondly, let me introduce you to my friend, Rob. (Type of cohesive device: sequencing)
١٠. "Which ice-cream would you like?" – "I would like the pink one. (Type of cohesive device: ellipsis 'replacing 'one' for 'ice-cream')

Q² Read the text carefully, then choose one of the three words given between brackets to fill in the gap:

Get fat by dieting

A report revealed that ¹ (also/ if / for) a person follows one of the many 'Get Thin Quickly' diets ² (in order to / soon / which) have been invented by 'experts' all around the world,³ (this / what / but) person is more likely to gain weight than lose.....⁴ (who / it / him) in longer time.

A study has been recently conducted by Pr. Marianne Cluze of Arizona Statewide University over six months on 100 people who undertook a specialized dieting program. The participants selected⁵ (their / those / whose) choice of diet from a list taken from published dieting books. In the beginning of the dieting period, the participants were weighed. Of the 100 volunteers, 40 were considered to be overweight.....⁶ (in addition / until / whereas) the remaining ones were within the normal limits for their heights, gender and age.⁷ (them / they / their) were⁸ (before / during / then) all weighted at periods throughout the six months⁹ (but / and / still), a journal was kept on their eating habits during that time.

.....¹⁰ (until / once / at the end) of the research period, it was found that 10% of all participants had actually increased their weight.

Appendix II

Answers

Q\)- Underline the cohesive word/expression and identify the type of cohesion for each one:

١. The problem with contemporary art is that it is not easily understood by most people. Contemporary art is deliberately abstract, and that means it leaves the viewer wondering what she is looking at. (Type of cohesive device: repetition of key terms or phrase)
٢. Mary was late, so she took the bus. Mary was late, because she took the bus. (Type of cohesive device: transitional words ‘yet, because’)
٣. Myths narrate sacred histories and explain sacred origins. These traditional narratives are, in short, a set of beliefs that are a very real force in the lives of the people who tell them. (Type of cohesive device: synonyms)
٤. When scientific experiments do not work out as expected, they are often considered failures until some other scientist tries them again. (Type of cohesive device: pronouns ‘reference’)
٥. I like autumn, and yet autumn is a sad time of the year, too. (Type of cohesive device: transitional word ‘yet’)
٦. *There was a lot of food, but she only ate the bread.* (Type of cohesive device: substitution “substitute ‘food’ with ‘bread’)
٧. Baby turtles grow inside and in summer they wriggle. (Type of cohesive device: reference (‘they’ refers to ‘baby turtles’))
٨. The leaves turn bright shades of red and the weather is mild, but I can't help thinking ahead to the winter. (Type of cohesive device: transitional word ‘but’)
٩. Firstly, Thank you for coming; secondly, let me introduce you to my friend, Rob. (Type of cohesive device: sequencing)
١٠. Which ice-cream would you like?" – "I would like the pink one. (Type of cohesive device: ellipsis ‘replacing ‘one’ for ‘ice-cream’)

Q Read the text carefully, then choose one of the three words given between brackets to fill in the gap:

Get fat by dieting

A report revealed that 1 (also/ **if** / for) a person follows one of the many 'Get Thin Quickly' diets 2 (in order to / soon / **which**) have been invented by 'experts' all around the world, 3 (**this** / what / but) person is more likely to gain weight than lose..... 4 (who / **it** / him) in longer time.

A study has been recently conducted by Pr. Marianne Cluze of Arizona Statewide University over six months on 200 people who undertook a specialized dieting program. The participants selected 5 (**their** / those / whose) choice of diet from a list taken from published dieting books. In the beginning of the dieting period, the participants were weighed. Of the 200 volunteers, 100 were considered to be overweight..... 6 (in addition / until / **whereas**) the remaining ones were within the normal limits for their heights, gender and age. 7 (them / **they** / their) were 8 (before / during / **then**) all weighted at periods throughout the six months 9 (but / **and** / still), a journal was kept on their eating habits during that time.

..... 10 (until / once / **at the end**) of the research period, it was found that 10% of all participants had actually increased their weight.