

Attempting the Difficulties Faced by EFL Students in Using Cohesive Devices in Writing at University Level

¹Hajr Hamad Idris Ibrahim, ²Ishag Adam Hassan Ahmed

¹Assistant Professor, University of Bahri- College of Languages- Department of English Language Khartoum. Sudan.

²Assistant Professor University of Bahri- College of Education- Department of English Language and Literature- Khartoum- Sudan

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the difficulties encountered by EFL students in using cohesive devices in writing. The researcher adopted the descriptive analytical method for data collection. The researcher used test to collect the data of the study. The researcher gave a test to 40 students of second year English major at University of Bahri 2022 college of Education department of English language. The researcher used SPSS programme to analyze the data, which showed in percentage and numbers of the students. The result obtained confirmed that second year students at university of Bahri have difficulties in using grammatical and lexical cohesive devices in writing. Moreover, the researcher recommended that, English teachers should encourage the students to use different types of cohesive devices in their writing.

Keywords: cohesion, investigation, adopted, encountered and encouragement.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Background of the study the researcher is going to give a theoretical study focusing on English language is the most spread language all over the world. Therefore, teaching and learning English language have been popular in the world. However, learning English language goes through different aspects of language skills. One of these aspects is writing skill. Writing skill is an important part of communication or discourse. Moreover, writing has faced many difficulties through the process of learning. One of these difficulties is using cohesive devices in writing an English text in order to make it well-structured for readers. Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that structure a text together and gives it meaning. It is related to the concept of coherence. However, cohesion has two main kinds: one is grammatical cohesion and second is lexical cohesion. The former one is based on structural content and the later one is based on lexical content. These dices are linking words, connectors, discourse markers, which show relationship between paragraphs or text. (Halliday and Hassan, 1976 Cohesion in English London: Longman). This study is going to investigate the difficulties which face foreign learners of English language in using cohesive deices in their writing English.

A. Statement of the Problem

The researcher noticed that the foreign learners of English language exactly (2nd year at University of Bahri college of Education, Department of English language and Literature 2022) have difficulties in using cohesive devices in their writing and communication in English. Using cohesive devices is very important in English Writing and discourse communication. If the students don't know how to use these devices, they may make mistakes in structure of English writing, this may result into linguistic different points of view:

- From Syntax, they don't know how to use grammatical and lexical cohesive devices in writing a paragraph. E.g. Ali is a student. He studies in KDS. Here we have the cohesive device the pronoun (he) shows the relationship between first clause and the second and agreement of the subject and pronoun.

- From Semantic, they don't know which correct device they use in the structure of text; this can change the meaning of structure of text. E.g. the using AND or BUT

The public transport in this city is unreliable and it is cheap.

B. Question of the Study

The present study will attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do 2nd year students of University of Bahri, college of Education have difficulties in using grammatical cohesion devices?
- 2- To what extent do 2nd year students of University of Bahri, college of Education have difficulties in using lexical cohesion devices?
- 3- What are the main reasons that make the teachers neglect teaching cohesive devices as a part of writing?

C. Hypothesis of the study

The present study has the following hypothesis:

- 1- 2nd year students of University of Bahri, have difficulties in using grammatical cohesive devices.
- 2- 2nd year students of University of Bahri have difficulties in using lexical cohesive devices.
- 3- Teachers at University of Bahri neglect teaching cohesive devices as a part of writing for many reasons.

D. Objectives of the study

The present study aims to:

- 1- Investigating whether 2nd year students of University of Bahri have difficulties in using grammatical cohesive devices.
- 2- Exploring whether 2nd year students at University of Bahri have difficulties in using lexical cohesive devices.
- 3- Finding out whether teachers of English at University of Bahri neglect teaching cohesive devices in writing for many reasons.

E. Significance of the study

The significance of this study stems from the fact that, it is investigating the difficulties and errors encountered by foreign students at University level when they use cohesive devices in writing text. It shows the importance of cohesive devices in writing skill and discourse. Also it will shed light on different types of cohesive devices such as lexical and grammatical and the causes which led to errors. Finally, it will be targeting English teachers and students.

F. Methodology of the study

This study is investigating the difficulties that foreign learners make in using cohesion devices. Therefore the researcher uses descriptive analytical method to carry out the data collection of the study which collects through test and questionnaire as the tools to collect the data of the research. The study population will be a representative sample of level two at University of Bahri, college of Education.

G. Limitation of the study

This study is limited to investigate the difficulties encountered by EFL university students in using cohesive devices in writing at university level, particularly students of English language at University of Bahri college of Education in Department of English Language. The sample of the study is the students (40) are given a test, during the academic year 2022.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of cohesive devices is tolerated on cohesion can be defined as the property that distinguishes a sequence of sentence. It is a series of lexical, grammatical and other relations which provide links between the various parts of a text. (Indah Wardy Saud). Halliday and Hassan (1976) point that “cohesion expresses the continuity that exists between one parts of a text and another”. (p.299). They also identify grammatical and lexical cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. Reference shows the relationship between a word and what it refers to. Baker (199) argues that substitution and ellipsis show grammatical relationships, in substitution one item is replaced by another item, but ellipsis includes the omission of an item. Halliday and Hassan (1976) argue the lexical cohesion such as reiteration and collocation. The former covers repetition of lexical item while the later covers lexical items which co-occur with each other in the language. Coherence and Cohesion are tolerated on there are several researchers and articles differentiated the difference between coherence and cohesion. According to Haillday and Hassan (1976) that coherence is a means that makes the sentences semantically well structure. Werth (1984) states that we achieve well-form of discourse through “connectivity” that exists of form of coherence, cohesion, connectors and collocation” In many languages cohesion can established through the employment of discourse markers. All of writers cohesion is divided into two components namely: grammatical component which concerns with structural content and lexical component which concerns with language content (ArurimIseni, Alisasaeid and M. Ali, research paper). According to Halliday and Hassan cohesion deals with semantic relation than grammatical relation. Cohesive keep cohesion in the text. It conveys the meaning of the text and they preserve meaning in the text. **Types of Cohesive Deices.** There are two types of cohesion namely: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. **Grammatical cohesion.** Which is renamed on structural content or syntax. They are used to connect sentences and phrases in a text. According to Halliday and Hassan there are four grammatical cohesive deices namely: **Conjunction, Substation, Ellipses, and Reference.** **Conjunction:** They are used to tie sentences meaningfully. Such as and, but, so, because, nevertheless, rather.....etc generally, conjunctions connect the meanings of the speech to achieve coordination between sentences. For example **Mohammed** is a manager of a company **and** works in Omdurman. Conjunction is divided into four categories, namely: **Additive, Adversative, Casual and Temporal.** **Additive conjunction** is a type of conjunction relation which is closer to coordination. Additive words such as (and, or, else, in addition, thus, for instance, nor.....etc). For example: **Perhaps he went there, or he changed his mind** .Additive conjunction divided into five types namely: additive (expressed y the use of and, besides, in addition.....etc) negative (using cohesive devices such as, nor andnot, noteither.....etc.) comparative (using expressions like: in the same way, contrast.....etc) and appositive (for exposition or exemplification, for instance....etc). (Hadjira, p.13.2013). **B: Adversative conjunction.** Words such as (yet, however, despite this, other hand, anyway, rather.....etc). For example: Despite he revised his lessons **but** he failed in exam. **Casual conjunction are** words such as (so, in that case, otherwise, as a result, because.....etc. For example: Ali failed in the exam **because** he did not study his lessons. **Temporal conjunction are words** such as (then, next, afterwards, finally, meanwhile, hence.....etc. for example He **finally** got a good result. **Substitution.** Substitution can be defined as a word or a phrase that is not deleted from the text, but it replaced by another linguistic form (Halliday and Hassan) according to them there is difference between reference and substitution in the way which are function, the former deals with meaning relation, while the later with words and their use to replace each other to a void repletion in a text. **Reference** can be defined as the situation in which one element cannot be semantically interoperated unless it is not referred to another element the text. Such as pronouns, articles, demonstratives and comparatives which are used as referring devices to refer to items in linguistic texts. **Ellipsis.** Ellipsis is the process of omitting an unnecessary items, which has been mentioned earlier in a text and replacing it with nothing. Ellipsis is like substitution because Halliday and Hassan (1976) argued that “ Ellipsis is simply substitution by zero” There are three types of Ellipsis namely: Normal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis examples: My brother like sports. In fact [0] both love football. (normal ellipsis). But the verbal example like A: Have you been studying? B: Yes I have [0] in both example (0) means studying But in clausal ellipsis, it occurs when the clause is omitted. In example mentioned below, the clause writing on the board is excluded in (B) A: Who is writing on the board? B: Ali is (0) In this example (0) means the clause (writing on the board)

III. PREVIOUS STUDIES RELATED TO THE STUDY

There are many studies and researches conducted in cohesion devices in writing an English text. Many researchers show that foreign learners of English language have difficulties in using cohesive devices in their writing. However, below are some studies conducted by different researchers in this field. **Afnan Bahaziq** conducted a study in cohesive devices entitled written discourse and Analysis of students essay writing. He conducted critical analysis of text and investigates the use of

grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. His data is taken from the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). His sample is an examination easy writing who scored 73 in the text. The text takes about 30 minutes to write one topic. (MELAB sample essay and contemporary, 2013) moreover he found that the result of the analysis reveals that 71.08 % of grammatical used in the essay is reference. This might indicate that the writer has little background of the appropriate method of using reference. The remaining percentage (28.92 %) of the total grammatical devices applied in the text is divided between conjunctions and ellipsis. There is no evidence of substitution. **AfinaBahazq, English Language Teaching vol,9, No. 7, 2016. MELAB) Asami Nakayama** conducted study in cohesive devices entitled. The analysis of Academic essays written by Japanese university students. However, he found that their writings have a lack of coherence and weak structure. He conducted micro-Analysis based on a student's essay by using learner corpus consisting of 21 student's essays. The findings show that Japanese students have difficulty with using cohesive devices. His participants were 21 students from science and engineering Department at university in 2009. They were all fresh men. However, the result shows that they faced many difficulties in using cohesive devices (articles, the importance of cohesion in Academic writing)

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

A descriptive and analytical approach is adopted throughout this study. The present study tries to describe the nature of phenomenon and the problem and present it as it is, and consequently highlight the area of weaknesses which needs more concentration. The information was gathered through answering a small test given to a group of students in University of Bahri.

V. THE SAMPLE, PROCEDURE AND THE DATA OF THE STUDY

The sample of the study involved 40 students of EFL of second year students at department of English language in college of Education at University of Bahri. They are both male and female; all of them study English language as a foreign language in second level. They have been chosen randomly to set the diagnostic test. The instruments which were used for data collection is only test. In the procedure of study, the researcher goes through the test then give to the sample which described above. The text consists of two activities given to 40 students at University of Bahri, college of Education Department of English language in order to collect data of the study. The first activity was about grammatical cohesive devices. Devices used to fill the gaps between sentences to complete the sentences correctly. While the second one, about lexical cohesive devices used to fill the gaps between sentences. However, the test well- designed by the researcher. The test involves different types of grammatical cohesive devices (reference, conjunctions, ellipses and substitution). Moreover the researcher used statistical program (SPSS) to analyze the result of the test. The (SPSS) program distributed the result in tables and figures to show the correct and incorrect answers which obtain through the test.

VI. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE TEST

First, the reliability of the test was conducted by the researcher then given to the 2nd year students at University of Bahri, college of Education Department of English language and literature. The test consists of two questions in order to test two hypotheses of the researcher. Also, reliability is define by the degree of accuracy of the data which the test measures. Second, the validity of the test, to ensure the validity of the test the researcher prepared a test, then showed it to three lecturers (doctors) of English language at University of Bahri namely: Dr, Nasir Ali, then Dr, Hagir Hamad, therefore Dr, Nagla Elhadi Adam. They expressed their opinions and advised me to make some addition, omission and modifications related to the test.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS, RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1: CONJUNCTIONS

Options	Frequency	Percent
Correct	12	30%
Incorrect	28	70%

The data in table (4.1) shows the distribution of the students according to their achievement in using conjunction in writing. The data presented that 30% of students fail to insert the correct conjunction to complete the sentences in the test, while 70% of the students fail to insert the correct conjunctions to tie the sentences correctly. This results that most of the students do not focus on using conjunctions correctly in their writing process.

TABLE 2: SUBSTITUTIONS

Options	Frequency	Percent
Correct	14	35%
Incorrect	26	65%

The data in (4.2) shows the distribution if the students according to their achievement in using substitution in writing. The data presented that 35% of students use the correct substitution to complete the sentences in the test, while 65% of students fail to insert the correct substitution to tie the sentences correctly. This results that most of students do not aware of using substitution devices correctly in their writing.

TABLE 3: REFERENCE

Options	Frequency	Percent
Correct	26	65%
Incorrect	14	35%

The data in (4.3) shows the distribution of the students according to their achievement in using reference in writing. The data presented that 65% of students use the correct reference to complete the sentences in the test, while 35% of students fail to use the correct reference to tie the sentences correctly. This means that the students only focus on using reference devices in their writing, but they have weak background about other grammatical cohesive devices in writing.

TABLE 4: SYNONYMY

Options	Frequency	Percent
Correct	4	10%
Incorrect	36	90%

The data in table (4) shows the distribution of the students according to their achievement in using synonyms in writing. The data presented that 10% of students use the correct synonymy to complete the sentences in the test, while 90% of students fail to use the correct synonymy to tie the sentences correctly.

TABLE 5: REPETITION

Options	Frequency	Percent
Correct	19	48%
Incorrect	21	52%

The data in the table 5 shows the distribution of the students according to their achievement in using repetition in writing. The data presented that 48% of students use the correct repetition to complete the sentences in the test. While 52% of students fail to use the correct repetition to tie the sentences correctly. This means that the students don't know how to use repetition in their writing, it shows that students have weak knowledge of repetition, therefore they fail in using synonymy correctly. The result in the above three tables support and confirmed the researcher's second hypothesis which is the 2nd year students at University level have difficulties in using lexical cohesive devices in their writing as the results shows that most of the students have weak background in using lexical cohesive devices.

Diagnostic Test in English

Question One: Choose suitable grammatical devices in the following to complete the sentences:

- 1) My friend is a singer. He is intelligenthard worker.....he is creative.....he has never received any award in Sudan.....he won a prize in a competition in America last year. (*although, therefore, but, moreover*)
- 2)the room was small, we managed to live there for three years. (*however, when, although*)
- 3) New students often find University courses difficulty.....often get trouble to overcome difficulties. (*there, them, they, their*)
- 4) Mr Smith works with Mr Jones everydayworks from 7:00 AM till 4:00 PM. Mr Jones helpsin working (*he, his, him, her*).

5) Homework is essentialallows students to review. (*he, it, its*)

Question Two: Choose suitable grammatical cohesive devices in the following to complete the sentences:

1) There is a boy climbing the tree.....is going to fail if he doesn't care.

(**the boy, the lady, the man**)

2)is going to fail if she doesn't care. (**the child, the idiot, the lady**)

3) Mona is a student.....studies at University of Bahri (**Mona, the girl, the woman**)

4) What we read in a book is what we should get. In generalmany may be written in an old English. (**the article, the book, newspaper**)

5) **A:** Did you see our house in the garden?

B: Yes,are in the field. (**the animals, the things, the plates**)

VIII. CONCLUSION

According to the result of data analysis, the study reveals that EFL students have difficulties in using cohesive devices in their writing. However, the result test which has done by the students confirms the researcher's hypotheses which are 2nd year students have difficulties in using grammatical and lexical cohesive devices because the result which obtain through SPSS program show that (67%) of students did not use the correct cohesive devices to link the sentences correctly, and most of the students failed in using grammatical cohesive devices (conjunctions). This result shows that researcher's hypotheses are true and also reveals the weaknesses of students in using cohesive devices in writing.

IX. RECOMMENDATION

Teachers should help the students in using different types of cohesive devices. Also one solution to these difficulties is that the course and outline should involve cohesive devices through the course. Then the students should practice using different types of cohesive devices and they must pay much attention to different types of cohesive devices.

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