Importance Of Coherence and Cohesion in Writing

Barakatova Dilorom Aminovna,   Bukhara engineering-technological institute

ABSTRACT

This article defines the most effective and useful ways of teaching academic writing and to identify the significance of cohesion and coherence in academic writing .

Keywords:	Cohesion, Coherence, Essay Writing, Writing Quality, Essential Reason, Unlinked Utterances.

The role of cohesion and coherence is very important in writing. Cohesion links together the elements that are structurally unrelated through the dependence of one on the other for its interpretation. Moreover, cohesion distinguishes texts from non-texts and enables readers or listeners to establish relevance between what was said, is being said, and will be said, through the appropriate use of the necessary lexical and grammatical cohesive devices. 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" [12,94] and is "an essential feature of a text if it is judged to be coherent". Coherence creates the semantic unity between the ideas, sentences, paragraphs and sections of a piece of writing.

Students' writing in an EFL classroom context should show their awareness of their own communicative goals, of the reader, and of the writing context. Essay writing, which constitutes a problem for many ESL/EFL students worldwide, is a major challenge for many student teachers of English at the universities and the institutes in many countries in the world, as well as in Uzbekistan. Despite numerous approaches to the teaching of writing having evolved from different teaching methods, tackling EFL writing is still one of the most challenging areas for teachers and students. Uzbek student teachers to pass many academic modules. Nevertheless, these students still experience some problems in the cohesion and coherence of their essay writing as indicated by the results of a preliminary essay writing questionnaire administered to fifty students. To the best of our knowledge, most of the Uzbek studies conducted in the field of essay writing at the university level are, however, quantitative. As many teachers have noted, acquiring the writing skill seems to be more laborious and demanding than acquiring the other language skills. In fact, producing a coherent piece of writing is an enormous challenge, especially in one's second language. This is magnified by the fact that the rhetorical conventions of English texts- the structure, style, and organization-often differ from those in other languages as they require a great effort to recognize and manage the differences. The essential reason of not having an excellent coherent piece of writing in English as a foreign

language is that the writing skill has not been taught as a separate class in a traditional system of education in Uzbekistan and for this cause students have faced certain challenges in writing, especially in academic writing. Therefore, we should help them to achieve better writing results. And since cohesion and coherence are essential part in writing effectively. Without cohesion and coherence the writing cannot be efficiently activated at all.

Some linguists state that cohesion and coherence differ somehow because some texts may not show explicit cohesive ties and still be coherent but some texts that contain numerous cohesive ties may not be coherent at all [19,67], [23,201].

Accordingly, the basic difference drawn between cohesion and coherence is that coherence "is the totality and unity of „sense" in a text" which means this concept is "global in nature" [21,19] and as Thompson suggests it is "a mental phenomenon" [23,179] while cohesive ties may be "local or global", and these are intratextual relations [21,19]. This means that the concept of cohesion relates to surface links; thus, is comprised of grammatical and lexical relations "within-sentence, inter-sentence and cross-section interdependency" and the interpretation of one element is crucial to the other one. Coherence, on the other hand, regards the relations concerning "thematic development, organization of information, or communicative purpose of a text" [19,48]. Basically, cohesion differs from coherence as it includes linguistic features that contribute to its perception of texture, but coherence is concerned with "the relevance and continuity in meaning", and it is dependent on reader's knowledge of the world and his or her experience in it[23,64]. Hoey adds that cohesion "is a property of the text that is objective, capable in principle of automatic recognition", and coherence "is a facet of the reader's evaluation of a text that is subjective and judgments concerning it may vary from reader to reader" [16,12]. Moreover, Witte and Faigley add that "cohesion defines those mechanisms that hold a text together, while coherence defines those underlying semantic relations that allow a text to be understood and

used" [34,202]. The distinction between these two concepts seems tentative but basically the implication is that cohesion is concerned with semantic links within the text and coherence refers to the overall sense and meaning that the text imparts. But their relationship seems to be very close while talking about texture of a text, and as Connor states these "two aspects of writing interact somewhat", but as was mentioned before, not always, because sometimes a text does not have to be coherent to be cohesive and vice versa [5,302].

However, the definitions given above are not clearly distinguished by Halliday and Hasan (1976). They omit to give an account on distinction between cohesion and coherence. In their view, cohesion is "a semantic relation between an element in the text and some other element that is crucial to the interpretation of it" [13,8]. Thus, cohesive devices are meaning relations that contribute to the unity, continuity of a text and ease interpretation of that text, thus contribute to the perception of a text to be coherent. In general, Hasan (1985) perceives a concept of cohesion to be "the foundation upon which the edifice of coherence is built" [27,94], and as Parsons adds it is "an essential feature of a text if it is judged to be coherent" [27,415]. In addition to that, Halliday (1985) illustrates the relation between coherence and cohesion by stressing that a text is both a text and context, thus cohesion is an important contribution to coherence by linking one part of a text to another, and this establishes internal expectations that are matched with the external ones taken from the context of situation and of culture, in that case a text "hangs together" [14,48].

A text is cohesive if its elements are linked together. A text is coherent if it makes sense. It should be clear that these are not the same thing. That is, a text may be cohesive (i.e. linked together), but incoherent (i.e. meaningless). Here is one such (invented) text:

I am a teacher. The teacher was late for class. Class rhymes with grass. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. But it wasn't.

Each sentence is notionally linked to the one that precedes it, using both lexical and

grammatical means, but the text is ultimately senseless- to us anyway (and we wrote it!).

The following (much quoted) exchange, however, is coherent to most people, even though there are no obvious links between its parts:

A: There's the phone.

B: I'm in the bath.

A: OK.

It is coherent because we can easily imagine a context in which it would make sense. Just as we can imagine a context in which the following would make sense:

A: Whose hands are these?

B: They're your hands.

A: Good.

Put simply, then: cohesion is a formal feature of texts (it gives them their texture), while coherence is "in the eye of the beholder" – that is to say, it is the extent to which the reader (or listener) is able to infer the writer's (speaker's) communicative intentions. Thus cohesion is objectively verifiable, while coherence is more subjective.

The relationship between cohesion and coherence is evident in studies that have investigated these two constructs and attempt to integrate them into a unified theory to account for writing quality. Cohesion analysis has been used to characterize the essays written by native speakers of English in studies that investigated writing quality. Witte and Faigley(1981) analyzed cohesion and found that highly rated essays were longer, had more nonrestrictive modifiers, had fewer errors, and were cohesively denser compared to poorly rated ones. In addition, well-written essays had twice as many instances of reference, conjunctions, and lexical collocation.

Coherence therefore is broadly construed as "the relationship that links ideas in a text to create meaning for readers" [20,135]. In short, coherence results from the meaningful interaction between the text and the reader [14,96]. This idea is supported by the cognitive theory of discourse. A more complex relationship is proposed by the interactional theory of discourse which introduces the writer's intentions, the writing context and the relationship between the writer and the

readers as factors that bring about coherence [20,138].In other words, a purely text-based construct of what constitutes writing quality may not substantially contribute towards a better understanding of textual coherence [4,479]. Tierney and Mosenthal (1983) analyzed the relationship between coherence and cohesion in the essays of twelfth graders and found no causal relationship between the two constructs, suggesting that a purely text linguistic approach in analyzing essays may not paint a complete picture of what constitutes writing quality [32,215].

The exact relationship between cohesion and coherence is a matter of contention, however. While it is true that a sequence of unlinked utterances can make sense, it is often the case that some form of linking, e.g. with cohesive devices such as *and*, *but, so*, can make it easier for the reader (or listener) to process and to make sense of what they read (or hear). Nevertheless , a text which is basically poorly organized is not going to be made more coherent simply by peppering it with moreover, however and notwithstanding. The following text (devised by the reader on writing, Ann Raimes) is an example of a text that is "over-egged" with cohesive markers, and which is typical of the kind of texts that many students produce as a result of an over-emphasis on linking devices at the expense of other ways of making texts cohesive (of which probably the most important is lexis):

Louie rushed and got ready for work, but, when he went out the door, he saw the snowstorm was very heavy. Therefore, he decided not to go to work. Then, he sat down to enjoy his newspaper. However, he realized his boss might get angry because he did not go to the office. Finally, he made another decision, that he must go to work. So, he went out the door and walked to the bus stop.

We may only speculate – independently of whether cohesion is a cause or a consequence of coherence – that different types of texts make different sorts of demands on their textual properties for effective communication. For instance, essays may depend more on textual organization for their message than narratives, which may depend

more on events themselves for their effectiveness. If textual elements make different contributions to the overall coherence of texts, then it is only natural that cohesion analysis may correlate with coherence in certain types of discourse, but not in other types. What is implied in my speculative explanation is that there cannot be a general and constant relationship that applies to all kinds of discourse. Different kinds of discourse dictate different kinds of relationships between cohesion and coherence. If this is so, then it seems that even the question

"what is the relationship between cohesion and coherence?" does not hold,

instead, a more appropriate question may be "what is the relationship between

cohesion and coherence for different types of discourse?" But as was pointed out earlier, cohesion is just one part of the web of relations that make up text. Therefore, whatever relationship a researcher may find to exist between cohesion and coherence, he should keep in mind that cohesion can account for no more than part of that relationship. In conclusion, we can say that there is can be a relationship between cohesion and coherence for different types of texts (essays, narrative, argumentative and etc.) [21,109].

2.2. Practical analyses of academic writings written by university students.

Basing on the studies that we spoke about in the first chapter we tried to analyze some pieces of writing. We asked university students to write an essay in order to explore the usage of cohesion and coherence in their writings. These essays were written by the second year students of Bukhara State University, Faculty of English Philology. The students were at the intermediate and upper intermediate levels of English, as studying English in the higher institutions requires that. All students attended writing classes where they trained their skills in academic writing. The mode of essays was the same as all the students were required to write a letter of complaint. There were given several topics (to complain about a cassette player, washing machine, holiday resort, and language learning center) for the academic writing and each student had to choose one

topic. They had thirty minutes for this task. All writings were written without notes or dictionaries. We analyzed thirty letters and selected three letters given the highest score. Students were required to write about 200-250 words in their essays.

The first step in the analysis was to identify, count, and label all instances of cohesive ties. After grouping ties into the categories, a table with all ties is provided for the clarity of the frequency of use. As shown in Table 1, Essay 1 (Student A) contains the majority of lexical cohesion ties, followed by reference, and conjunction links. The essay 1 contains 201 words.

Table 1.

Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Ellipsis / Substitution	Lexical cohesion	
Number of ties	27	13	4	12	6
Average per 100 words	13,43	6,46	1,99	5,97	27,85

As regards the reference ties distribution, the text contains three types of reference devices, namely personal, demonstrative, and comparative. The highest number of reference ties were established by demonstratives, such as *this* and *the.* For instance, the demonstrative *the* in *the player* refers back to the cassette player which is bought by the author.

The study of cohesion and coherence provides an insight into how texts are organized and meanings are expressed through investigating the patterns of cohesion and coherence that help to understand the text in terms of its representation of ideas; for example, patterns of lexical cohesion make the reader focused on the field of the passage, patterns of reference devices relieve the reader's track of entities mentioned in the passage, and patterns of conjunctive relations

show the purpose of the passage. Accordingly, investigation of the text as regards the use of cohesive ties shows how meanings are realized and contribute to the consistency of that text. Cohesion can be examined in a variety of texts, but, especially, in the EFL writing it has a significant role as investigating this aspect of texture in essay writing reveals how students organize their texts by showing meaning relations between sentences.

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