

Lexical Cohesion Found in Students' Argumentative Essays

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to find lexical cohesion in high graded and low graded students' argumentative essays, and to find similarities and differences between them. The present study uses combination of lexical cohesion taxonomy as proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989) and Halliday and Matthiensen (2014). The lexical cohesion items consist of repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponym, superordinate, and meronymy. The data of this research are derived from students' essays which were written for their semester test assignment in the third semester. From 35 essays, only 10 essays were taken for the sample of this study with the consideration of scores given by two raters. The essays are divided into two categories, i.e., high graded and low graded essays. By using descriptive qualitative, the result shows that from both level of writing are found all lexical cohesion types (repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, superordinate, antonymy, and meronymy). The similarities of both level of writing regarding the use of lexical cohesion are that basically both groups of essays share all types of lexical cohesion which repetition as the most used type, and share similar number of superordinate. The difference of them is that high graded essays share higher occurrences of lexical cohesion rather than low graded essays.

Key words: Writing, Cohesion, Lexical cohesion, Argumentative essay

Introduction

Writing essay in a foreign language can be a difficult task for some EFL students. Nunan (1999) stated that producing a coherent piece of writing is an enormous challenge especially in

second language. Many ESL or EFL students encounter difficulties in both formulating and organizing their ideas, and translating their ideas into a readable text (Richards and Renandya, 2002, cited in Ghasemi, 2013). Specifically in Indonesia, researches into EFL learners' writing discovered that students find some problems when transfer ideas from L1 to L2 because of differences rules between *Bahasa Indonesia* and English, and the lack of knowledge and linguistic features in English (Ariyanti, 2016; Rahmatunisa, 2014). These problems cause some EFL students have lack of writing performance with the result that their writing becomes awkward, and hard to interpret the information and catch the meaning of their writing.

To produce a good writing, one of many ways to deal with the problem regarding the writing quality, is by giving more attention to cohesion and coherence in arranging text; as a result, the text will be easier to be understood by the readers (Hanata and Sukyaadi, 2015). Cohesion is semantic relation which ties one sentence to other sentences to flow together so it creates continuity of the text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). A text which consists of more than one sentence can be connected to each other depend on cohesive relations in a text. These cohesive relations are manifested by cohesive device as surface signal to create writing unified a whole. Some researchers even find that cohesion through cohesive devices does play a part to the coherent of the text (Hoey, 1991; Ahmadi and Mirzapour, 2011; Tanskenen 2006).

Halliday and Hasan (1967) in their book *Cohesion in English*, introduced cohesive devices as tools for signaling cohesiveness in text, which consist of references, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical cohesions. References, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions are classified as grammatical cohesion which is achieved through grammar, meanwhile lexical cohesion is achieved by the selection of vocabulary. The cohesive devices have important role because of their capability of signaling connections and unity of the text.

Because of its importance role in maintaining unity in writing, research on cohesion devices – grammatical, lexical, or both – in writing had been done to investigate correlation between cohesive device and the quality of writing, or to see variation of cohesion device. In Indonesia, research on cohesive device in students' writing have been done quantitatively or qualitatively to find variations of cohesion device (Ayub, Seken, and Suarnajaya, 2013; Mawardi, 2014; Hanata and Sukyadi, 2015; Suningsih, 2016). However, the focus is more on grammatical cohesion rather than lexical cohesion. This may be caused by the effect of grammatical cohesion which is clearer than lexical cohesion (Tanskanen, 2006:16).

Particularly, at Jambi University, one study that ever been conducted on cohesive device at English department was the one done by Tristasari in 2015. Her research in EFL's writing was done to investigate variation of cohesive device and the problem in using cohesive device in students' writing. In line with her, the present study also wants to investigate cohesive device but in different area of concern and objectives. The present study specifically focused on lexical cohesion found in high graded and low graded students' argumentative essays of third semester students of English Department in Jambi University. This study is interested to see semantic variation made by students through their vocabulary choices in order to create a good piece of writings.

Methods

This study used descriptive qualitative design to find variety of lexical cohesion and the differences and similarities of lexical cohesion found in high graded and low graded students' argumentative essays. The data of this study were 35 students' argumentative essays collected from Essay Writing Class of Academic year 2016/2017. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 out of 35 essays and classify students' argumentative essays into high graded and low graded essays as the main source of data. These classifications were taken based on scoring assessed by raters using holistic assessment. The range of scoring rubric that was given to rates is in scale 4 (the highest score) to 1 (the lowest score). The ten selected essays were pseudonyms as presented in Table 1 bellow:

Names	Score			Score	Classification
	Rater I	Rater II	Rater III	Average	
H-S1	4	4	4	4	High graded essays
H-S2	4	4	4	4	
H-S3	4	4	4	4	
H-S4	3	4	4	3.7	
H-S5	3	4	4	3.7	
L-S1	2	2	2	2	Low graded essays
L-S2	2	2	2	2	
L-S3	2	2	2	2	

L-S4	2	2	2	2	
L-S5	2	2	2	2	

Table 1. Selected students' argumentative essays

The selected essays, after that, were analyzed to find various lexical cohesion, and similarities and differences of lexical cohesion of those groups of essays with the following steps:

- a. giving index number for each sentences.
- b. counting how many cohesive ties contain in each sentence by reading the text several times.
- c. specifying what type of lexical cohesion is involved by using following code:
- d. specifying whether the identified lexical cohesion is immediate or non-immediate tie, and distance among the sentences
- e. classifying lexical cohesion and finding out the differences and similarities from both high graded essays and low graded essays.

Findings and Discussion

Lexical Cohesion Found in High Graded and Low Graded Argumentative Essays

Lexical cohesion is the cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary. For the present study, lexical cohesion consists of repetition, synonymy, supordinate, antonymy, hyponymy, and meronymy as the summarizing of taxonomy proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989) and Halliday and Mathiensen (2014).

Generally, all types of lexical cohesion found in both high and low graded essays. Particularly, in high graded essays, repetition, synonymy, and hyponymy are found in all five high graded essays; antonymy is found in four high graded essays; and superordinate is only found in one high graded essay; also meronymy is found in two high graded essays. Whereas in low graded essays, repetition, synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy are found in all five low graded essays; and each superordinate and meronymy is only found in one low graded essay.

From the table about, the occurrences of each types of lexical cohesion which is found in high graded and low graded argumentative essays can be seen as follow:

Essays Classification	Code	Repetition	Synonymy	Hyponymy	Superordinate	Antonymy	Meronymy	Total
High graded essays	H-S1	71	8	1	-	-	-	80
	H-S2	55	4	3	-	2	-	64
	H-S3	60	4	6	-	1	2	73
	H-S4	48	5	4	-	1	1	59
	H-S5	70	5	5	1	1	-	82
Total of occurrences		304	26	19	1	5	3	358
Low graded essays	L-S1	51	1	3	-	1	-	56
	L-S2	64	9	4	-	1	1	79
	L-S3	35	4	3	1	1	-	44
	L-S4	46	5	4	-	2	-	57
	L-S5	55	4	2	-	2	-	63
Total of occurrences		251	23	16	1	7	1	299

Table 2: Occurrences of lexical cohesion found in high and low graded essays

a. Repetition

From five high graded and five low graded essays, repetition is found in all ten essays included lexical item and lexical unit. Repetition is mostly used from all type of lexical cohesion. Here is example of repetition as follow.

“Actually, we have already know what’s the main function of using social media (6). Of course, social media is the fastest way to communicate around the world (7). By using social media, it makes people can still keep in touch with those live far away (8).” (H-S2)

The repetition of these words is caused by a move when the writers restate and elaborate their argument in the next sentence. And the repetition of some words show continuity and relation between the previous sentence and the next sentence.

b. Synonymy

Synonymy occurs when lexical items are identical and have the same meaning. Synonymy may not be in the same word class such as *cheered* (verb) – *applause* (noun) (Halliday revised by Matthiensen, 2014). In other word, one lexical item can be substituted with another because it has similar meaning or has related meaning.

Synonymy is found in all high graded and low graded essays. Salkie (1995) stated that one reason to use synonymy is to avoid the use of repetition many times which can be boring in writing. However, unlike repetition which have a lot of numbers of occurrences, the used of synonym is only pretty less than repetition. here is example of synonymy as follow.

“I thought that social media will bring goodness to Indonesian, but it is depends how the way everyones applied it in daily life (4). ... It is one of the information that social media is the most frequently used in Indonesian (6).” (L-S2).

c. Hyponymy

Hyponymy is relation that holds between general class and its sub-class (Halliday and Hasan, 1989). Hyponymy occurs when a lexical item refers to its sub-classes such as *chair*, *table*, *bed* are ‘kinds’ (hyponyms) of *furniture* (Halliday, revised by Matthiensen, 2014).

Hyponymy is found in all both high and low graded essays and the occurrence of hyponymy is pretty less than synonymy. Hyponymy found in both level of essays is used to elaborate or clarified something general to be more specific by providing various kinds of general things. Hyponymy is common where a passage of text is being developed by means of elaboration (Halliday, revised by Mathiensen, 2014).

“Social media have affected people in Indonesia in various ways (1). Today,we are influenced by many kinds of social media (2). They are: Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and Instagram (3).” (H-S4)

d. Superordinate

Superordinate is also relation that holds between general class and its sub-class. Superordinate is lexical item, which refers to its general class (Hasan, 1989). The example of superordinate is *furniture* as general class of *chair* and *table*.

The occurrence of superordinate is the lowest one than other lexical cohesion types. From whole essays, it is found only two occurrences of superordinate from one high graded essay and one low graded essay. Surprisingly, there is no differences between high and low graded essay in using the superordinate. One examples of superordinate is quoted bellow.

“Social media as a fraud (J.A Barnes, 1954) (9). If someone in touch via social media, they relate only indirectly or face to face, although there is now a social media facilitated us with the video call feature, but did not rule out the existence of crime, especially fraud through social media (10). For example facebook, facebook social media is one of the most in general by the whole society (11).” (L-S3)

f. Meronymy

Meronymy is a term, which refers to a part-whole relation. Or in other word, meronymy is ‘be part of’ (Halliday, revised by Mathiensen, 2014). For instance: *root* and *limb* are part (meronymy) of *tree*.

Meronymy just appear in two high graded essays and one low graded essay. One example of meronymy is found in one high graded essay is *West Java*, as part of Indonesia. Here, the writer try to give picture why social media can be harm for Indonesian by giving one case that happened in West Java as West Java itself is one of provinces in Indonesia.

“Internet and social media are widely used by many people in Indonesia¹. ... Despite the fact that social media bring good effects for Indonesian, I will argue that statement with the following reasons; firstly, addicted, secondly, medium of crimes, and thirdly, unreliable information⁴.> One of the real examples is a raping case that is done by underage children¹⁵. KYA (6) is a victim of raping by ED (5), RI (9) and FA (11)¹⁶. It was happen on June 2nd 2015 in the West Java of Indonesia¹⁷. (H-S3)

Similarities and Differences of Lexical Cohesion Found in High and Low Graded Essays.

Similarities.

The similarity from high and low graded essays regarding to the use of lexical cohesion is found that repetition have the most occurrences from other lexical cohesion types. Total occurrences of repetition in high graded are 304, meanwhile total occurrences in low graded is 251. This finding is also similar to a research done by Kai (2008) who observed NN and NNS' abstract. His finding also showed that repetition tend to be used than other types of lexical cohesion. According to Hanata and Sukyadi (2015) stated the excessive use of repetition is simply caused by there is a move in the argument stage, the writers need to rephrase and repeat their propositions toward the end of the paragraphs—from the beginning to the end. Such a move is intended to establish a chain-like attempt in reminding the readers of the previous points (Hanata and Sukyadi, 2015:53)

Another similarity found in that both level of writing is they share the same occurrences of superordinate. Superordinate which is found only have one occurrence that is one in high graded essays and one occurrence in low graded essays.

Differences

The occurrences of lexical cohesion. The striking differences lies in the fact that high graded essays tend to use more lexical cohesion rather than low graded essays. From whole total, high graded essays almost have higher occurrences of lexical cohesion type meanwhile low graded essays only have higher occurrences of antonym than high graded essays.

Types of lexical cohesion. High and low graded essays are categorized based on scoring assessed by raters. Each high and low graded essay consists of five essays. An interesting finding is found that four types of lexical cohesion are fulfilled by all low graded essays that are repetition, synonymy, hyponym, and antonymy. Meanwhile, three types of lexical cohesion are fulfilled by all low graded essays that are repetition, synonymy, and hyponymy. It shows that even though low graded essays have low score, and share less number lexical cohesion, the whole low graded essays are able to use four types of lexical cohesion, rather than high graded essays which can use three types of lexical cohesion in whole.

Conclusion

The intention of the present research is to find various lexical cohesions found in high and low graded essays, and to find differences and similarities of the use lexical cohesion between them. The findings reveal that from lexical cohesion types proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989) and Halliday and Mathhiensen (2014), both high and low graded essays generally share all type of lexical cohesion. In particular, repetition, synonymy, and hyponymy are found in all five high graded essays; antonymy is found in four high graded essays; superordinate is only found in one high graded essay; meronymy is found in two high graded essays. Meanwhile repetition, synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy are also found in all five low graded essays; superordinate and meronymy is only found in one low graded essay.

There are also similarities and differences in using of lexical cohesion in high and low graded essays. What seems to be similar is that basically both groups of essays share all types of lexical cohesion which repetition as the most used type. Also, both high and low graded essays share similar number of superordinate. What seems to be different between high and low graded essays is that high graded essays share higher numbers of occurrences of lexical cohesion rather than low graded essays. However, four types of lexical cohesion are able to fulfill by all low graded essays, meanwhile three types of lexical cohesion are able to fulfill by all high graded essays.

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