

Investigating lexical Cohesion in the Essays of EFL learners at the University of Basra

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Received: 24- June -2023

Revised: 27- July -2023

Accepted: 21- August -2023

Abstract:

The present study investigates lexical cohesion in the essays written by third-year students at the University of Basra, College of Education. The study adopts Halliday and Hasan's model of lexical cohesion, which divides it into two types: Reiteration and Collocation. Reiteration is further divided into four categories: Repetition of the same word, synonyms and near-synonyms, superordinate words, and general words. The results indicate that students rely heavily on Reiteration in their writing, which accounts for 89% of the total lexical cohesion used. Collocation represents only 11% of the total lexical collocation used. The repetition of the same word is the most frequent, accounting for 60% of the total. The second category is superordinate words, with a total of 16%, followed by synonyms and near-synonyms with a total of 8%, and general words with a frequency of 4% of the total. EFL students tend to overuse the repetition of the same word, particularly nouns.

1. Introduction

Having strong writing skills is essential for students to succeed in both their academic and professional endeavors. Writing serves as a vital tool for communication and fosters the development of analytical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and critical thinking skills. However, for students learning foreign languages, writing in a non-native language can be quite challenging. To communicate effectively through writing, it is important to ensure that ideas flow logically and are easy to understand. This requires creating a sense of cohesion in written texts, which helps in conveying concepts clearly and facilitating comprehension.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze *lexical Cohesion* in the essays of EFL learners at the University of Basra, with a particular focus on third-year students at the College of Education for Human Sciences. The study aims to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of students' essays concerning *Lexical Cohesion*, identify the areas that need improvement, and provide recommendations for enhancing their writing abilities.

The sample of the study comprises of 300 essays from the College of Education. The essays were collected after the students' first semester exam in academic writing, providing a snapshot of their writing abilities at this stage of their academic journey.

In conclusion, this paper will contribute to the literature on EFL writing by shedding light on the writing abilities of third-year students at the University of Basra, College of Education. This study's findings may inform the development of effective instructional strategies and interventions that improve students' writing skills. In addition, the findings may have implications for university-level curriculum development.

2. Problem Statement

The problem is that students at the University of Basra, particularly those in their third year, have difficulties in writing cohesive texts. Many students lack an understanding of the principles of lexical cohesion, which negatively affects the quality of their writing. This issue is evident in the essays produced by these students, which often contain errors in grammar, cohesive and coherent devices, and structure.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the essays of EFL learners at the University of Basra and identify the challenges they face in producing cohesive texts in terms of lexical cohesion. By examining the essays of third-year students at the College of Education, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the issues that students face in their writing.

3. Cohesion

The first standard of textuality is **cohesion**. Cohesion is about how the parts of the text surface, or "text-syntactic," fit together. The order of words and phrases in a text is not random; it is based on grammatical rules and dependencies. Cohesion is the name for all the functions that are used to make connections between surface elements (Titscher et al., 2000 :22).

Therefore, Cohesion is about how the parts of the SURFACE TEXT, which are the words we hear or read, fit together in a logical order. The parts on the surface depend on each other based on grammatical forms and rules. This is why cohesion is based on grammatical dependencies. Linguists have said many times that the surface sequences of English can't be changed a lot without causing problems (Beaugrande & Dessler, 1981:3).

According to Beaugrande and Dessler (1981), "sticking together" is the most accurate method to define cohesion and it also serves as a great example of the significance of syntax and perhaps a means to stress the significance of syntax in communication (P.48). Baker and Ellece (2011:16) asserted the view of syntax as well, they argued that the term "cohesion" refers to the manner in which a piece of writing generates syntactical sense; in other words, it is concerned with grammar.

The concept of cohesion is more straightforward when it pertains to a phrase, clause, or sentence, as opposed to cohesion between multiple units. Cohesion is maintained within these tightly-knit units through the integration of their constituent parts into short-term grammatical dependencies. However, when dealing with longer passages of text, the primary challenge becomes how to reuse, modify, or condense previously established elements and patterns (Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981: 50-54).

Cohesion, as a textual feature, is characterized by different components. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) have classified cohesion into seven types, namely recurrence, partial recurrence, parallelism, pro-form, ellipsis, tense and aspect, and junction (P. 54-73). Conversely, Halliday and Hassan (1976) proposed a distinct categorization of cohesion, which is composed of five main components: reference, substitution, conjunction, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion, each of which can be further subcategorized. The upcoming chapter three will provide a comprehensive explanation of cohesion and its various components.

4. Lexical Cohesion

According to Woods (2006: 137), cohesion is reliant on clear connections within language that demonstrate how different parts of a text are related and contribute to the overall structure and texture of the text. Lexical cohesion, therefore, refers to the connection between words and phrases based on their meanings. One way to achieve lexical cohesion is by repeating the same word or phrase or using chains of related words that enhance the continuity of the lexical meaning. For example, in the sentence "Every day she went down into the underground with Tom and Peter or just with Tom and played her violin," the name Tom is mentioned twice to clarify the identity of the person being referred to, which wouldn't have been clear with a pronoun. Another way to establish lexical cohesion is through the use of related words in place of the original reference. For instance, in the sentence "Father Death climbs the tree to get a red apple, but as soon as he touches the fruit, he is caught," the word "fruit" is used in place of "apple" later in the sentence. A further type of lexical cohesion is achieved by repeating another member of the same semantic group. Consider the sentence "To the right, a brick-red dune stood alone among golden-yellow ones," where both "brick-red" and "golden-yellow" are regarded as colors (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 69.). Earlier, we mentioned that Halliday and Hasan categorized lexical cohesion into two primary types: collocation and reiteration.

4.1 Reiteration

When we address Reiteration, we are not only concerned with the repetition of the same lexical element, but also the occurrence of a related element. There are four different types of repetition: (a) the same term, (b) a synonym or near-synonym, (c) a superordinate word, and (d) a general word. For example: There is a boy climbing that tree.

- a. The boy's going to fall if he doesn't take care.
- b. The lad's going to fall if he doesn't take care.

c. The child's going to fall if he doesn't take care.

d. The idiot's going to fall if he doesn't take care.

In sentence (a), a boy and the boy are interchangeable; in statement (b), the lad is a synonym/near-synonym of a boy; in sentence (c), the child is the superordinate term for a boy; and in sentence (d), the idiot is a general term for a boy. General words, particularly those that pertain to persons, convey a message concerning the speaker's attitude, which is often one of familiarity (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 279-280).

4.2 Collocation

Collocations pose the biggest challenge in achieving lexical cohesion, which is the connection between words and phrases frequently used together. By linking such combinations of words, collocation creates cohesion within the text. The scholars assert that more research is needed to understand the origins of lexical cohesion. They maintain that any two lexical expressions with a clear lexico-semantic relationship demonstrate consistency, which supports their position (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 284-285).

Collocation is used in two main ways, according to Cruse (2006:27). The first one is part of any well-organized series of things that make sense and don't seem out of place, "It's an excellent performance". For example, the word "excellent" can "collocate with" the word "performance" that comes next. This means that the two words often go well together. Excellent can also be "a normal collocate" of performance. While the second meaning refers to a series of things that make up a unit in some way (as opposed to, say, a prototypical idiom), it is not a unit in and of itself. This is because they are often found together, and the order also makes sense when you think about it. For example, one or more of the words that make up a compound may have a special meaning that only shows up in that compound, or in a small group of related compounds. In this way, words like a high wind, high seas, high office, and have a high opinion of are often used together. In each case, the word "high" means something different, and this meaning is different from what the word means by default, as in "a high wall." In fact, this kind of phrase is sometimes called an "encoding idiom."

5. Procedure

The researcher will analyze lexical cohesion presents in the essays. Halliday and Hasan's model has been selected to investigate *Lexical Cohesion* in the students' essays. The essay question was assigned by the teacher. The essay question at the College of Education is "Write a well-organized essay about the various career options that are available to graduates in your field of study." Following the students' exams, the researcher obtained their essays prior to the teachers' corrections.

6. The Investigation of lexical Cohesion in the Essays of EFL learners

There are four types of reiteration according to Halliday and Hasan (1976): same word, synonym or near-synonym, superordinate word and general word.

6.1 Same Word

Students often fall into the trap of using excessive repetition of nouns in their essays. This tendency is evidenced by the frequent recurrence of the same words throughout their essays, which has been found to occur as many as 1400 times. While there are instances where repetition is used effectively and appropriately, there are also instances where it is overused to the point of exaggeration. Additionally, some students may opt to replace the repeated word with a pronoun in an attempt to avoid redundancy. To illustrate these points, we will provide a few examples taken from students' essays.

(a) Teachers of English is a special *teacher* between the other *teacher*, so that it is why I want to be *teacher*.

In (a), the key noun in this sentence is "teacher". The second repeated noun "teacher" is in its correct place. However, the third and fourth uses of the noun "teacher" are an exaggeration. The student simply, in this case, could have used personal pronouns to refer back to the key noun "teacher", or they could use a substitution or an ellipsis. So a better version of this sentence would be "I want to be an English teacher because I think it is a special job that is different from other teaching jobs."

(b) When you want to chase your *job* after finishing your study. You must chase *it* carefully because your future depends on this *job*. There are some steps may help you chase your *career*.

In (b), the repetition of the noun "job" is in the correct place. This is a good use of repetition of the same word. The student repeated the same word once and then used a pronoun to refer back to the key noun before using a synonym to refer back to the main noun.

(c) Study is very important to knowledge, and to get a good *career*. When you graduates in your field of study you can have the various *career* option, and you can chose any *career* you prefer it.

In (c), the noun "career" has been repeated redundantly.

(d) *Company* is a second thing I will do after graduate, like work in bank *company*.

In (d), the word that is repeated is "company". This is a correct way of using or repeating the same word within a sentence.

Therefore, most of the repetition in students' essays consists of nouns. Students tend to repeat many words while writing. Some of the repeated words are in their correct position, but usually students exaggerate by repeating the same word excessively, as we have provided such examples previously.

6.2 Synonym or near synonym

The table below would give an outline of synonyms that have been found in students' essays:

Table 31 displays the frequencies of synonyms used by students in their essays for three main words: "various," "career," and "option." The word "various" was found to have five different synonyms used in the essays, with "a lot of" being the most commonly used, appearing 32% of the total. "Many" was the second most frequently used synonym for "various," appearing 23% of the total, while "plenty" appeared only 5% of the total usage. For the word "career," the synonym "jobs" was used most frequently, appearing in 26% of the total. The word "option" was found to have only one synonym, with "chose" appearing in 14% of the essays.

Table1: Synonyms or near synonyms

Synonym- near synonym	Various	career	Options	Number	Frequency
Many is a synonym for 'various'				44	23%
A lot of is a synonym for 'various'				60	32%
Plenty is a synonym for 'various'				9	5%
Jobs is a synonym for 'career'				49	26%
Choses is a synonym for 'options'				26	14%
Total				188	

(a) There a lot of *career* that I can work but I should choose the good *job* for me.

In (a), the vocabulary "job" is a synonym for the noun "career", so it helps connect the preceding and following clauses, and therefore, it can be considered a lexical cohesive tie.

(b) There are a lot of *career* that everyone you can work it just like the teacher, so everybody should work in what the *job* they like after graduation.

In (b), the word "job" is a synonym for "career".

All of the examples below are the same; they are all synonyms from the vocabulary provided in the table above, and they are all considered to be lexical cohesive ties.

(c) There are *various* career options that are available to graduate in my field of study. Actually, when I graduate from college there *many* careers I will do like master degree, company, and work in salon.

(d) I like to teaching from my childhood my father is a teacher at school. I was going with him last fifteen years ago. So there are *a lot of* options to choose when I graduate but I will choose to teach that why I am here in this department. Therefore, there are *many* options available but I will graduate and teach and my career waiting for me.

(e) The English section has different career *options* are available in the field. Most of the graduates have different desires to chise the right option. There are two *chooses* with English section that are available to work.

Students do not tend to use a multitude of synonyms or nearly identical words in their writing. However, their use of synonyms is adequate, with a total frequency of 188. The majority of this number can be attributed to the frequent use of two specific synonyms like " a lot of," and "many." Therefore, we can conclude that students' use of synonyms is moderate.

6.3 Superordinate Words

The table below would give an outline of Superordinate words that have been found in students' essays:

Table 2: Superordinate words

Superordinate Words	Number	Frequency
Teacher-School	40	11%
Translators; Interpreter- Company	29	8%
English- Language	90	24%
English teacher- Job	127	34%
Teaching- Career	88	24%
Total	374	

Table 32 displays the frequencies of superordinate words used by students in their essays. The superordinate words refer to broader categories or concepts that encompass other related words or terms. The word "teacher" was found to be a subordinate or a hyponym term for the superordinate word "school," appearing in 11% of the total usage. Similarly, the subordinate words (hyponyms) "translators" and "interpreter" were used to refer to the term "company," appearing in 8% of the total usage. The subordinate word "English" was used to refer to the superordinate word "language," with a frequency of 24%. The word "English teacher" appeared most frequently, with a frequency of 34%, as a subordinate term for the superordinate word "job." Lastly, the subordinate word "teaching" was used to refer to the word "career," with a frequency of 24%.

These findings suggest that students tend to use certain superordinate words more frequently than others when writing about specific topics. This may be due to a variety of reasons, such as familiarity with certain terms or expressions, limited vocabulary, or a preference for specific words. It is important to note that the distribution of these superordinate words is not equal, with some being used more frequently than others. To illustrate these points, we will provide examples taken from students' essays.

(a) As a student in English department, you have many or various career to work in. first, you can be a *teacher* at a *school* or *translator* at *company*.

In (a), there are two subordinate words: "teacher" and "translator." The superordinate word for "teacher" is "school," and the superordinate word for "translator" is "company." These superordinate words function as cohesive ties that link the ideas together. "School" is a superordinate word that refers back cataphorically to the subordinate word "teacher." Therefore, this is how a lexical cohesive tie is created by these superordinate words. The same thing applies to "translator," which is a subordinate word, and the superordinate word is "company."

(b)*Teaching* is one of the most common *job* nowadays. You can teach primary or secondry school. Teaching in primary school is difficult more than secondry school according to American magazine in 1999.

In (b), the subordinate word is "teaching," and the superordinate word is "job." Therefore, "teaching" refers anaphorically to the subsequent noun, which is "job," and can be categorized as a form of lexical cohesion.

(c) For example, one of the best *jobs* that one can have after graduate of English department is become *English teacher*.

In (c), the subordinate word is "English teacher," and the superordinate word is "job." Therefore, the superordinate word refers anaphorically to the subsequent phrase "English teacher," and can be categorized as a form of lexical cohesion.

(d) English is a global language.

In (d), "language" is the superordinate word, and the subordinate word is "English," which functions as a cohesive tie to link the sentence together.

6.4 General Words

The table below would give an outline of General words that have been found in students' essays:

Table 3: General words

General word	Number	Frequency
Thing	38	40%
Place	33	35%
Person	20	21%
Women	1	1%
Men	2	2%
Move	1	1%
Total	95	

Table 33 shows the frequency of different general words used in students' essays. The general words are six , including "Thing", "Place", "Person", "Women", "Men", and "Move". The table indicates that the word "Thing" is used 38 times, accounting for 40% of the total general words used. The word "Place" is representing 35% of the total usage. The word "Person" accounts for 21% of the total. The remaining 4% of the general words used are divided into three categories, including the word "Women" which is used only once, the word "Men" which is used twice, and the word "Move" which is used once.

(a) *Teaching* is a good career in our life and we cannot learn this *thing* without study and graduate from college.

In (a), the general word "thing" refers cataphorically back to the noun "teaching," creating a link between the clauses. Therefore, it can be considered a lexical cohesive tie.

(b) *Fashion* job is the perfect *place* for me.

In (b), the general word "place" refers cataphorically back to the noun "fashion."

Therefore, the two most commonly used general words by students are "thing" and "place," and when they occur in a text, both of them can serve as lexical cohesive devices.

6.5 Collocations

The table down below displays lexical collocations that have been found in students' essays: Table 34 lists different types of lexical collocations that have been found in students' essays. The most common collocation is "English Teacher," appearing 217 times and representing 83% of the total usage. Other frequently occurring collocations include "Private School", appearing 4% of the total of lexical collocations used, "Universal Language" representing 1% of the total and "Native speakers" and "Childhood Dream" both appeared 5 times,

accounting 2% of the total collocations used. The remaining lexical collocation appeared once such as "oil and gas," and "social media."

Table 4: Collocations

Collocation	Item	Frequency
Gulf Cup	1	0%
Silver Cup	1	0%
World Cup	1	0%
Online Education	4	2%
Native speakers	5	2%
Social media	1	0%
Oil and Gas	1	0%
Universal Language	2	1%
Childhood Dream	5	2%
Dream Job	7	3%
ELT	1	0%
Arabian Gulf Cup	1	0%
Private School	10	4%
Grammar Rules	1	0%
Oil Company	1	0%
Four skills	1	0%
English Teacher	217	83%
Total	260	

(a) Teaching is what I want to do, it my *childhood dream*, so I decide to become an *English teacher*.

In (a), there are two collocations in the sentence as mentioned before, namely "English teacher" and "childhood dream." Actually, the most common English collocation is "English teacher," and the reason for this is the essay question given to students about the various careers they may pursue after graduating from their field.

7. Misuse and Overuse of Lexical Cohesive Devices

We can tell that the most frequently used category of lexical cohesion is repetition of the same word. Specifically, third-year students tend to excessively repeat key nouns while writing, which can be seen as an exaggeration. Examples of misuse and overuse of lexical cohesive ties have been given down below:

(a) There are a lot of *English teachers* around the world but them is a little of good *English teachers*. *English teacher* is a fascinating career.

In (a), the sentence overuses the word "English teacher" multiple times, which makes it repetitive and awkward. This hinders the flow of the sentence and makes it less effective in conveying the message.

(b) Teaching in middle school is my dream my dream since I was child in school and there is many reason that make me close this dream.

In (b), there is an overuse of the noun "dream" and it makes the clauses redundant.

(c) Secondly, the *work* at school is another *choose option* to the graduate the *study* at school in my opinion is best *job*.

In (c), there is a misuse of synonyms and the same word which makes the sentence awkward.

(d) is important *thing* care for our study.

In (d), The word "thing" in the sentence lacks specificity and is too imprecise. Regarding the study, it does not impart precisely what should be prioritised. To enhance the sentence, "thing" should be replaced with a term that conveys the intended meaning more precisely.

8. 4.4.2.4 Summary of the Investigation of lexical Cohesion

the overall structure of lexical cohesion would be:

Table 35 shows the frequency of different types of lexical cohesion used in students' essays. It is obvious that the most common type of lexical cohesion used is the repetition of the same word. The use of synonyms and near-synonyms is the second most common type of lexical cohesion. The use of superordinate words is the third most common type of lexical cohesion. The use of general words is the fourth most common type of lexical cohesion, representing 4% of the total usage of lexical cohesion used. Finally, collocations, which refer to words that commonly appear together appearing 11% of the total instances of lexical cohesion.

Table 5: Lexical Cohesion

Lexical Cohesion	Item	Frequency
Same Word	1400	60%
Synonym- Near-synonym	188	8%
Superordinate	374	16%
General word	95	4%
<i>Collocations</i>	260	11%
Total	2317	

The most common error found in this category is the repetition of the same word. In most cases, this results in an exaggeration or overuse of the words in their essays. Therefore, it is important to use a variety of words to express the ideas effectively. To demonstrate things clearly, a chart has displayed below:

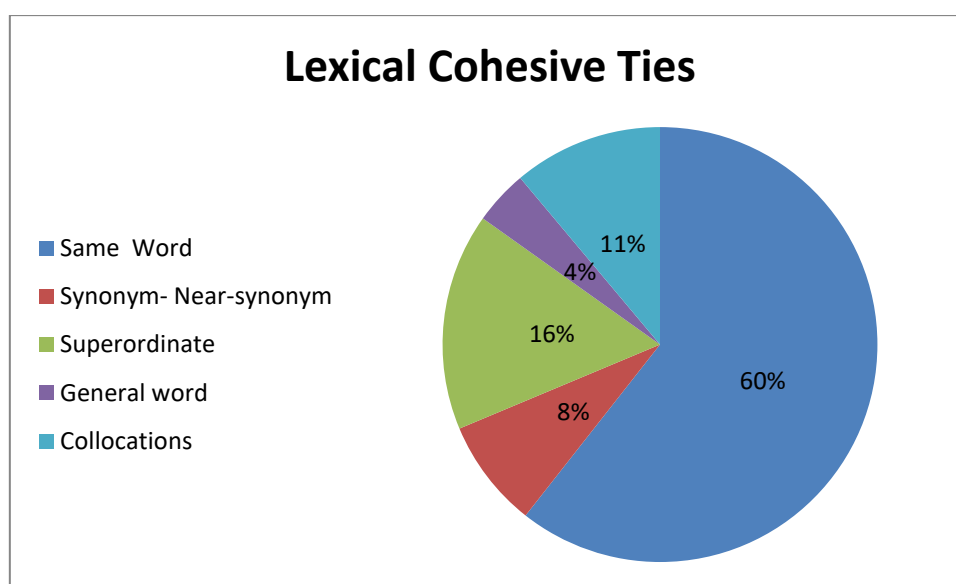


Chart 1: Lexical Cohesive Devices

8. Conclusions

Third-year students at the University of Basra's College of Education for Human Sciences tend to use all types of lexical cohesion, but with different ranges. That is to say, *reiteration* comes at the top of their writing, followed by collocation. EFL students tend to overuse *reiteration* in their writing, especially in the category "repeating the same word." They might lack vocabulary, so that is why they keep repeating the same words over and over again. The use of other types of *reiteration* was moderate, with some misuse and overuse of these categories. The frequency of collocation goes back to the use of lexical collocation "English Teacher." And the reason behind the excessive use of this collocation goes back to the title of the essay question.

9. Recommendations

1) Students at the University of Basra have difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences, according to this study. Consequently, it is essential to resolve this issue by providing instruction and practise in sentence structure and grammar.

2) It is crucial to provide students with abundant opportunities to practise and receive feedback on their writing. Assignments, exercises, and peer-review sessions can facilitate the application and refinement of the suggested concepts.

3) Students of English as a foreign language (EFL) should practise writing in a variety of genres, including argumentative essays, descriptive essays, and narrative essays, in order to develop their ability to use cohesive and coherent ties in a variety of contexts.

3) Integrate technological resources, using technological resources, like as online writing tools or interactive assignments, can help reinforce learning and implementation of cohesive devices.

4) These recommendations may help EFL students at the University of Basra improve their ability to use lexical cohesive devices, create grammatically sound sentences, use a variety of words, and organise their essays logically. In the end, this will improve the cohesiveness of their essays as a whole.

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