

## ANALYSIS OF COHESIVE DEVICES IN STUDENTS' ESSAYS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN UZBEKISTAN

*Ilgor Asrorov*

*International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan*

[i.asrorov@iiau.uz](mailto:i.asrorov@iiau.uz)

**Abstract:** *This study analyzes the use of cohesive devices in students' essay at university level in Uzbekistan. Using frameworks by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Hoey (1991), the analysis identifies the problematic applications of grammatical and lexical cohesion. The findings reveal several challenges such as excessive repetition and ambiguous references. Issues with contrastive conjunctions and synonym misuse also highlight developmental gaps in the writer's second-language proficiency. The study emphasizes the significance of mastering cohesive ties to enhance clarity, coherence, and overall writing quality in L2 learners.*

**Key words:** *cohesion, cohesive devices, L2 writing, essay analysis, university level.*

### **Introduction**

Cohesion defined as “the way certain words or grammatical features of a sentence can connect that sentence to its predecessors and successors in a text” is a cornerstone in effective communication (Hoey, 1991, p.3). A cohesive text not only enhances readability but also reflects the writer's proficiency in organizing and connecting thoughts. This, in turn, can be a significant marker of the writer's overall skill in language use, impacting how their message is received and understood. Hence, examining cohesion offers valuable insights into the quality and clarity of L2 writing (Stoddard, 1991).

This paper will aim to analyze the use of cohesive elements in a student's essay which was written by a fourth-year student highlighting areas of challenge.

By integrating the frameworks proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), alongside Hoey (1991), the analysis will scrutinize how effectively the student employs cohesive devices identifying successful implementations and potential gaps in their usage of cohesive ties.

### Literature review

Cohesion, as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976) in their work “Cohesion in English”, refers to the linguistic elements that connect sentences and clauses in a text, creating a sense of unity and understanding of intended meaning. The main categories of cohesion identified by these authors usually include grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is further subdivided into reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, while lexical cohesion is divided into reiteration and collocation. However, the limited focus on this phenomenon in previous studies is criticized by Hoey (1991) and various types of lexical cohesive devices were developed by him with greater detail. Therefore, grammatical cohesion and its subcategories will be defined and described according to Halliday and Hasan (1976) while lexical cohesion will be examined in the light of Hoey’s (1991) work in the subsequent paragraphs.

Reference, as a cohesive device, marks the relationship between lexical items, tapping into the semantic layer of a text. There are two main categories: exophoric reference, which relates to elements outside the text (situational context), and endophoric reference, which connects to elements within the text itself (textual). Endophoric reference further divides into anaphoric and cataphoric reference. Anaphoric reference occurs when a word or phrase refers back to something previously mentioned in the text. Conversely, cataphoric reference points forward. Personals (*e.g. he, she they*), demonstratives (*e.g. this, that*), and comparatives (*e.g. same, better*) are given as categories of endophoric reference by Halliday and Hasan (1976).

Substitution, as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), is a cohesive device where one item is replaced by another to avoid repetition and maintain text flow. This process differs from simple lexical repetition or use of synonyms, as it

involves replacing a word or phrase with a pro-form. There are three types of substitution: nominal substitution (a noun or a noun phrase is replaced with words like *one*, *ones*, or *the same*), verbal substitution (replacing a verb or verb phrase, often with *do*, *does*, or *did*), clausal substitution (a whole clause is substituted with words like *so* or *not either*).

Ellipsis, as described by Halliday and Hasan (1976), is a cohesive device that involves the omission of a word or phrase that is contextually understood. Ellipsis is categorized into three types: nominal ellipsis (a noun or noun phrase is omitted but it is clear from the context), verbal ellipsis (a verb or verb phrase is omitted e.g. “*I can play the piano, and my brother can too*”, where “*play the piano*” is omitted), clausal ellipsis (an entire clause is omitted e.g. “*If you can come, please do*”, where “*come*” is understood in the second part).

Conjunction, as outlined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), is a cohesive device that connects clauses or sentences, guiding the reader through the text’s logic and structure. Unlike other cohesive devices that may omit or substitute elements, conjunctions explicitly signal the relationship between different parts of the text. Halliday and Hasan identify four main types of conjunctions: additive (e.g. *and*, *also*), adversative (e.g. *but*, *however*), causal (e.g. *because*, *therefore*), temporal (e.g. *then*, *after*). These categories have been reviewed and further elaborated upon by Paltridge (2006), who notably distinguishes between four distinct types of conjunctions: additive, comparative, temporal, and consequential.

Lexical cohesion, as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), is a form of cohesion achieved through the choice of vocabulary. It is divided into two main categories: reiteration and collocation. The former includes repetition (the exact repetition of words or phrases e.g. “*The forest was peaceful. The peaceful atmosphere calmed her mind*”, where “*peaceful*” is repeated for emphasis), synonymy (different words with similar meanings e.g. “*difficult*” and “*challenging*” being synonyms), superordinate (using a more general or broader term for other words e.g. “*flowers*” is a superordinate term for roses, lilies),

general words (words that can refer to a broad category of items or ideas e.g. “*activities*” is a general word for *soccer, basketball, and tennis*). In contrast to Halliday and Hasan’s broader view, Hoey (1991) offers a more specific perspective on lexical cohesion, categorizing reiteration into repetition (using the same term multiple times, like “*river*” in a paragraph discussing water bodies), synonymy (using similar terms, such as “*stream*” and “*brook*”), hyponymy (specific instances of a general term, like “*trout*” as a type of “*fish*”), antonymy (opposites, e.g. “*hot*” vs. “*cold*”), and meronymy (part-whole relationships, like “*wheel*” to “*car*”).

Collocation, or collocational cohesion, as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), refers to “the cohesion that results from the co-occurrence of lexical items that are in some way or other typically associated with one another, because they tend to occur in similar environments” (p. 278). For instance, words like “*bright*” and “*sun*” often appear together, as do “*hard*” and “*work*”. These pairs are not just random combinations but are collocations that readers instinctively recognize due to their common usage. Tanskanen (2006) claim that although this above definition for collocation by Halliday and Hasan is criticized by other linguists due to its vagueness, it will be basis for majority of analysis on collocation in scientific literature.

### **Methodology**

Having defined cohesive ties in the above paragraphs, this paper now endeavors to analyze the essay in terms of the writer’s challenges applying cohesive devices. To scrutinize grammatical cohesion, we will apply the framework established by Halliday and Hasan (1976). For lexical cohesion, our analysis will be guided by Hoey’s (1991) categorization. It is important to note that due to space constraints, not all examples of cohesive ties in the essay can be discussed within this paper. The sample essay was taken from student’s work that is studying English at university and preparing for an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam. The work contains 250 to 350-word and

a formal essay on the given topic by his English teacher according to provided criteria with the topic.

### **Analysis and Discussions**

Prior to a comprehensive analysis, an initial observation reveals that the term “history” appears ten times within this relatively brief 304-word essay. Such frequent repetition naturally prompts questions regarding the text’s quality, specifically whether the repetition of the same word is necessary or effective. This observation underscores the potential benefit of analyzing cohesive devices. By examining how these devices are employed throughout the essay, we can gain deeper insights into the writer’s overall writing performance and skill in creating a cohesive and engaging narrative.

A careful analysis of cohesion within the essay reveals certain difficulties faced by the writer particularly with the endophoric reference “this”. For instance, the sentence: “There are a number of reasons behind this point of view” lacks clarity. The preceding sentences presents three distinct points of view, making it ambiguous as to which one “this” is referencing. Similar issues arise where the use of “this” again becomes problematic. The lack of clear antecedents for “this” in these instances means that the specific reference intended by the writer remains unclear, detracting from the overall cohesion of the text. This suggests a need for more precise use of endophoric references to enhance clarity and understanding in the writing. The endophoric reference “them” in line 9 also seems to be problematic. It appears the writer is using “them” to refer to “a huge amount of knowledge” in the same line, however, “knowledge” is an uncountable noun and using “them” to refer to this noun is not grammatically correct.

The essay indicates that the writer struggles with the use of contrastive conjunctions, specifically “whereas” and “although”. “Whereas” is also employed to contrast two ideas, but its placement within a single sentence, as done by the writer, is unconventional. Typically, “whereas” should either link two independent sentences or be positioned at the start of the first sentence, followed by a comma to introduce the second sentence. Similarly, the writer uses “although” in a

comparable manner, which is not grammatically standard. The appropriate use of these conjunctions is critical for accurately conveying contrast and enhancing the clarity of the text. This suggests a need for the writer to refine their understanding and application of contrastive conjunctions in sentence construction. Schleppegrell (1996) emphasizes that what seems like ill-usage of conjunctions might actually signal a general clause chaining strategy. This strategy could indicate the writer's spoken and written language skills in their second language (L2). He also suggests that analyses of cohesion should recognize these strategies, as they can provide insights into the developmental phases experienced by L2 writers.

In examining the student's use of lexical cohesive devices, particularly reiteration, certain concerns arise. Notably, the frequency of repetition in the text is striking. As highlighted, the words "*history*" (10 occurrences), "*learn*" (5 occurrences), "*school*" (4 occurrences), "*children*" (4 occurrences), and "*reason*" (3 occurrences) are used multiple times. While repetition is a common cohesive device and does not inherently indicate poor cohesion, its application in this brief essay, where these words are repeatedly used in close proximity, raises questions on range of vocabulary in the essay. This pattern suggests a possible reliance on a limited vocabulary by the writer, which could impact the text's overall effectiveness and diversity of expression.

The student's employment of synonyms warrants scrutiny. A case in point is found in line 12, where the term "offsprings" is seemingly used as a synonym for "children" and "pupils" mentioned. However, the usage of "offspring" in this context is questionable. Firstly, the term does not align semantically with "children" or "pupils" in the given educational context. Moreover, the addition of a plural "s" to "offspring" — as "offsprings" — is grammatically incorrect. This is supported by Stevenson (2010), who clarifies that "offspring" is both singular and plural. Such a choice not only disrupts the flow of the text but also indicates a misunderstanding of word usage and grammatical conventions. Liu (2000) asserts that while many students understand the importance of content lexical

words for ensuring cohesion in their writing, they often struggle with their correct application. He proposes that this difficulty may arise because students attempt to use these lexical words to enhance the cohesion throughout their text, yet they lack awareness of the proper way to employ these content lexical words.

### Conclusion

Upon initial examination, the student's essay might seem to contain many cohesion errors. However, a more thorough examination reveals that the framework used effectively highlights the student's successful attempts at employing cohesive devices to construct a coherent and meaningful piece, with a wide array of these devices being utilized. The essay also aptly demonstrates that an abundance of cohesive devices does not inherently equate to high quality, especially considering the overuse of repetition and the ineffective application of conjunctions. This observation, however, does not imply that cohesion analysis is the sole indicator of the essay's merit. At the same time, the analysis distinctly points out that inadequate utilization of cohesion can disrupt the text's natural flow and result in ambiguous interpretation. Therefore, it is crucial for second language (L2) learners to cultivate an understanding of cohesive ties to enhance their writing skills.

### REFERENCES

- Asrorov, I. (2024). SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN UZBEKISTAN. *Oriental renaissance: Innovative, educational, natural and social sciences*, 4(9), 84-90.
- Fayzi ogli, A. I. (2022). Teaching English to Students with Visual Impairments: Problems and Solutions. *Thematics Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1).
- Fayzi ogli, I. (2021, May). PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS OF TEACHING CLASSES WITH BLIND STUDENTS. In *Archive of Conferences* (Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 13-15).
- Hafizov Abror Alisher Ugli (2021). THE LINGUODIDACTIC POTENTIAL OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION.

- Oriental renaissance: Innovative, educational, natural and social sciences, 1 (5), 817-826.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Hoey, M. (1991). *Patterns of Lexis in Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liu, D. (2000), Writing cohesion: Using content lexical ties in ESOL. *English Teaching Forum*, 38(1), 28–35.
- ogli Asrorov, I. F. (2020). The Content Of Teaching Foreign Languages. *Scientific Bulletin Of Namangan State University*, 2(11), 322-326.
- Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Schleppegrell, M.J. (1996). Conjunction in Spoken English and ESL Writing. *Applied Linguistics*, 17 (3), 271-285.
- Stevenson, A. (2010). *Oxford dictionary of English*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Stoddard, S. (1991). *Text and Texture: Patterns of Lexical Cohesion*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Tanskanen, S-K. (2006). *Collaborating towards Coherence: Lexical Cohesion in English Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.