



The Use of Cohesive Devices in Academic Writing Written by English Language and Literature Department Students

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Abstract

This research was aimed to find out and analyse the type of Cohesive Devices used, and errors made by English Department Students at Universitas Negeri Padang in academic writing. This research was classified as a descriptive qualitative research. The instruments used in this research were the researcher herself and two tables: The Indicator of Using Cohesive Devices table and Analysis table. The data of this research were documents of the students' final academic writing products in the forms of mini theses focusing on the background of the problem. The data was taken by simple random sampling which resulting 25 academic writing documents of English Department Student at Universitas Negeri Padang of academic year 2017. The results in this research showed that the students use all types of cohesive devices, but they only use a small amount of examples from each the types. Next, there are 102 transitions signals are used appropriately and 36 used inappropriately. Then, 368 repetitions of key words or nouns are used appropriately and 25 are used inappropriately. The last 447 consistent pronouns are appropriately used and 115 are inappropriately used.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is one of the sub-skills in writing that students must learn. Academic writing is a non-fiction paper written based on facts and academic needs in learning and education. According to Brown (2004, p. 2018) second language learners are expected “to write coherent essay with artfully chosen rhetorical and discourse devices”. Hatcher & Goddard (2005, p.7) said that “good writing is like lots of intangibles, like beauty or art – we can’t define it but we think we know it when we see it”. In academic writing, it involves a formal writing without the use of slang or contractions, and it has to have good complete sentences organization in a specific way (Oshima & Hogue, 2007, p. 3). Academic also means writing that is supported by theory, data and accurate references from researchers: quotation or paraphrasing, and written in academic or formal language. According to Jordan (1999, p. 88) the main features of academic writing are as follows:

It is a formal and an impersonal or objective style (often using impersonal pronouns, and phrases and passive verb forms); cautious language is frequently used in reporting research and making claims; vocabulary appropriate for particular academic contexts is used (this may involve specialist or technical words); the structure of the writing will vary according to the particular type (genre), for example essay, report, thesis, etc.

In the process of academic writing, connecting ideas is very important because, if our ideas are not related, the reader will have difficulty understanding what we write. Alley (2018, p.74) stated that “making a strong connection in the sentence’s beginning is an effective strategy not only to strengthen the connection between ideas, but also to achieve sentence variety”. If students are able to connect ideas in writing well, then the writing will have a good coherent, so that the writing can be referred to as academic writing. According to Crossley &Mcnamara (2016, p. 354) “cohesion is specific to the text. Coherence, on the other hand, is specific to the reader and refers to the understanding that the reader derives from the text (i.e., coherence is in the mind of the reader)”. So, one way that can be used to connect ideas with one another can be done using language aspects such as using cohesive devices.

Cohesive devices are words or phrases that connect between two ideas. They are divided into three parts. The first is transitional signals. They relate the ideas so that the writing will have the coherence and accuracy. As Werner & Nelson (2007, p.131) said “transition are word or phrase that link to related ideas, and transition are particularly common in formal situations and in writing”. The second is repetition of key words. The repetition of key words control and help the writer focus on the main ideas in a paragraph. The last is pronouns. Pronouns are used to replace the nouns that the writers used to avoid over repetitions of words or nouns.

However, not all the students can use and choose cohesive devices correctly in their writing. Some students make mistakes or errors in using cohesive devices. Sawalmeh (2013, p.5) said that “Committing error is one of the most unavoidable things in the world”. Related to students’ problem in using cohesive devices, some the related findings also found by the researcher in their studies. Ahmed (2010) suggested that some of the students writing problems is about the coherence and cohesion of the ideas in their writing caused by the difficulty of students to use cohesive devices and sequence the ideas. Bennui (2008) research; related to interference in the writing of Thai EFL students. He analyzed the three levels of interferences; one of them is error analysis. He found that the students use the various cohesion makers made overly long or Run-on sentences in their paragraph. The students wrote the run-on sentences by using several transition signals such as because, before, and, but, that, for. Thus, from his findings, it clearly shows that the students cannot use the transition correctly in their writing.

Another study was conducted by Astanti et al. (2016) analyzed the use of cohesive devices in discussion text written by the students of SMAN 12 Padang. They found that there are 29 transitional signals used appropriately, and 35 others used inappropriately. There are 35 repetitions of key words or nouns used appropriately and 36 others inappropriately and also 44 pronouns used appropriately and 21 others inappropriately. It was also supported by the study of Sudirman & Tiasari (2017). They conducted a research about cohesion in undergraduate theses written by the students.

They found that the students used all types of cohesive devices, but it was hard for them to apply the cohesive devices comprehensively and appropriately in their writing.

Based on the previous researches, the researcher wants to investigate about cohesive devices use by the students in their academic essay. In this research, the researcher wants to know whether the second year's students of the English Department at Universitas Negeri Padang have the same problem with the previous study having been conducted by some researchers. The researcher also wants to see how the students use cohesive devices in their academic essay, and whether they use them appropriately or not. Precisely, the researcher will conduct a research entitled *The Use of Cohesive Devices in Academic Writing Written by English Language and Literature Department Students*.

METHOD

This method applied to the research was descriptive qualitative research. The instruments used in the research were the researcher herself and two tables: *The Indicator of Using Cohesive Devices* table adapted from Astanti et al. (2016, p.34) and *Analysis* table. The data of this research were documents of the students' final academic writing products in the forms of mini theses focusing on the Background of the Problem. The data was taken by simple random sampling which resulting 25 academic writing products of English Department Student at Universitas Ngeri Padang of academic year 2017. The data were collected from each of the students. The documents were collected one by one from the student, and it was placed in a file. For the data analysis, it derived from Gay, et al (2012, p. 468) and the steps used are: reading/ memoing, describing, and classifying data. Thus, to see the coherence of students writing by using cohesive, the indicators of cohesive devices and analysis tables used can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. The Indicators of Using Cohesive Devices

Indicators	Sub Indicators
The Use of Transitional Signals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitions Phrases • Conjunctive Adverbs • Coordinating Conjunctions • Subordinating Conjunctions • Others
Repetitions of Key Words or Nouns	The use of repetition of key words is appropriate and effective applied.
The Use of Pronouns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Pronouns • Reflexive Pronouns • Intensive Pronouns • Reciprocal Pronouns • Demonstrative Pronouns • Relative Pronouns • Interrogative Pronouns • Indefinite Pronouns

Table 2. Error Analysis

Document	Transition Signals/ repetitions of key words or nouns/ consistency of pronouns	Appropriate	Inappropriate
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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

Based on the description and result, the researcher found what the type of cohesive devices used by the students and errors related to the use of cohesive devices in students' academic writing. The first is the type of cohesive devices used in students' writing. It was found that all of the students use all the types of the cohesive devices: transitional signals, repetition of key words or nouns, and pronouns. For transitional signals, all the students use them but only some examples from each type that they applied in their writing. They only use several examples of the type of transitions that they familiar with. The other examples of the types of transition signals seem to be rarely used in their writing. Moreover, the most common used of transitional signals is Conjunctive Adverbs.

For repetitions of key words and nouns, the students also use this type of cohesive devices in their writing. They do use many some variations of key word or nouns. Most of them are depending on their own title of mini theses. There is no most common repetition of key words or nouns used in students' academic writing because there is no specific rules on how many times key words or nouns should be repeated.

Furthermore, for the use of pronouns, the students use seven types of pronouns except reciprocal pronouns. The most common used of pronouns in students' academic writing is indefinite pronouns, and the least use are reflexive pronouns, intensive pronouns, and interrogative pronouns.

The next is errors made by the students in using cohesive devices. It was found that there are 102 transitions signals are used appropriately and 36 were used inappropriately, 368 repetitions of key words or nouns are used correctly and 25 are incorrectly used, and 447 inappropriate uses of consistent pronouns and 115 are appropriately used. The causes of errors are different depending on the rules of using each type of cohesive devices.

Related to the errors in transitional signals, some errors happened because the students did not use them as their functions. It was found that the students did not use the transitions as the connector from the previous ideas to the new ones. So, it made the paragraph become unrelated with each other. Some students also double used or overused the transitions signal in a sentence and paragraph. Also, the students don't use the transitional signals as the formula. For instance, the transitional signal formulas used should be transitions + noun, but they write them not as it should be.

Furthermore, some errors also occur in the repetitions of key words or nouns. It was found that the errors occur because the students tried to replace the key words or nouns by using pronouns. Some pronouns replacing the key words or nouns do not really give clear meaning, so it makes confusion where actually the pronouns refer to. Another caused of errors in repeating the key words or nouns found are when the students repeating the key words, they are not consistent using the number of nouns.

The key words or nouns should be repeated in plural, but they repeated with singular and vice versa.

The last, it was errors in using consistent pronouns. It was found that the errors mostly occur because the students did not use the same person or number in replacing or using the pronouns. The students substitute the pronouns from plural to singular and from singular to plural.

2. Discussion

Based on the finding in the research, it needs to be discussed related to the theories. In this research, the researcher discussed the findings of the research based on the research questions which are the type of cohesive devices used in students' academic writing, and the common error made by the students in using cohesive devices.

The finding of this research showed that the students use the three types of cohesive devices in their academic writing; however, not all of the options of the examples of the type of the cohesive devices are used by the students. They only use the examples they are familiar with their writing. So, the result was not similar with the study of Djahimo (2018). Her research only focused on the analysing one type of cohesive devices that is transition signals and the use of the transition signals in discussion texts written by the six semester students in UNDANA University. She found that all the students use all types of transitions proposed by Oshima and Hogue, and the most common type of transition used by the students was addition. The result was different from this research because she used discussion text test as the instrument for data collection. The result of her data analysis also showed that all the students used all kind of transition signals while in this research the students only use some examples of transition signals and not all of them.

It was also different with the research conducted by Nugraheni (2016). She analysed the use of cohesive devices in students' writing focusing on the use of conjunctions. She analysed eight students' essays. She found 37 forms and 12 types of conjunctions use in students' essays. She found that the most significant conjunctions use by the students was 'and' and the significant type of conjunctions was 'addition'. She also found that most of the conjunction sill inappropriately used by students in their writing. Her research also was not similar with this research because she used content analysis method while in this research the method applied was qualitative descriptive. Also, the data used in her research only eight students' essay while in this research the data were 25 documents of students' academic writing.

Beside the type of cohesive devices used in students' academic, there also some errors found related to the use of transitional signals, repetition of key words and nouns, and pronouns.

It was found that there are some appropriate and inappropriate used of the three types of cohesive devices in students writing. The first one is transition signals. It was found that there are some errors or inappropriate uses of transition signals by the students because they don't use them as the functions. Also, some students don't use transitions in their academic writing so there is no connection between the ideas of their paragraph and it make the paragraph incoherence. So, the result was not similar with the research conducted by Sattayatatham and Ratanapinyowong (2008) in

Mahidol University, Thailand. Their research was conducted to see the errors in writing of the first year medical students from the four Medical Schools at Mahidol University. They indicated that students' still have higher percentage of errors in their writing related to the paragraph organization and connecting ideas. They found that most of the students' writings did not use the transitional signals and were incoherent. The result of this research was different from their research in the numbers of data. Their research employed One hundred and thirty four medical students from four medical schools at Mahidol University that were assigned to write an opinion paragraph in English on medical ethics based on a reading passage chosen from the Internet, while in this research the data were 25 students' academic writing documents. The result also different because they calculated the errors percentage and compared them with the errors found from others school by using Chi-square test, while in this research, it only see the type used and common errors made by the students in using cohesive devices.

It was also different with the result of the research conducted by conducted Bennui (2008) in University of Thaksin, Thailand. His research was related to the interference in the writing of Thai EFL students. He analysed the three levels of interferences; one of them is error analysis. He found that the students use the various cohesion makers made overly long or Run-on sentences in their paragraph. The students wrote the run-on sentences by using several transition signals such as because, before, and, but, that, for. Thus, from his findings, it clearly showed that the students cannot use the transition signals correctly in their writing. They cannot adjust and put it well in the sentences along with the correct punctuation or grammar. The result was different from this research in the data and source of data. The data used were paragraphs written by English-minor students in the Basic Writing course. The result in his research also showed that the errors in students writing affected by Thai cultural and knowledge, while in this research it did not discussed about the influence of cultures.

The second one is repetitions of key words or nouns. There were found some inappropriate used of repetitions of key words or nouns in students' academic writing. Some of the students replace the key words or nouns by using pronouns and it does not really give clear meaning to where actually the pronouns refer to, whether they refers to key words or other nouns. Also, some students did repeat the key words or nouns in their academic writing, but they repeat them differently from plural to singular or singular to plural; not consistent.

The last one is consistency of pronouns. There were found some inappropriate used of consistent pronouns by the students in their academic writing. Using the same person or number is important to make consistent pronouns (Oshima and Hogue, 2006). The use of pronouns was inappropriate because some of the students did not use the same person and number throughout the writing. So, it caused inconsistency of pronouns and it make the academic writing became less coherence.

Related to errors found in the use of transitional signals, repetition of key words and nouns, and pronouns. The result was significant with the study conducted by Astanti et al. (2016). They analysed the use of cohesive devices in discussion text written by the students of SMAN 12 Padang. They found that there were 29 transitional signals used appropriately, and 35 others used inappropriately. There are 35 repetitions

of key words or nouns used appropriately and 36 others inappropriately and also 44 pronouns used appropriately and 21 others inappropriately.

Furthermore, some errors or inappropriate use of cohesive devices in students' academic writing might be caused by many factors. Some of the factors that caused the errors of using cohesive devices are the lack of students' knowledge in using cohesive devices, lack of practice, and the students only focus on the lexical or sentence level rather than discourse level.

Thus, to make it easier for the students to use the correct cohesive devices in their academic writing, they have to improve their skill by practice a lot. So, from the finding it can be assumed that the errors in using cohesive devices in students' academic writing frequently happen, and it caused by some factors as stated in the findings.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

In academic writing, coherence is an essential aspect that the students should do in order to get a good writing product. The students have to relate one idea to the others ideas to achieve coherence. To relate the ideas, it needs the role of cohesive devices.

However, to choose use the correct cohesive devices is not easy, the students need to have the knowledge and do a lot of writing practice to have skill in it. Also, it is not uncommon for students to make errors in using cohesive devices. The errors can be in the type of transition signals, repetitions of key word, and pronouns

The errors are the students did not use transition signals as their functions, they double or over used the transition signals, they do not use them as the formula, they are not consistent repeating the key words or noun, they replace the key words or noun with wrong pronoun, and they use inconsistent pronouns from plural to singular or from singular to plural.

In short, errors may be occurred in students writing frequently, and it cannot be avoided. The transition error in students' writing may be caused by several factors such as the lack of knowledge about transition, lack of practice, and the influences of student's tendency to focus on lexical and sentence level, rather than discourse level.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion above, there are some points that can be suggested. The first is the students have to have lots of practices in using cohesive devices in their academic writing. By practicing, the students will have the skill in using cohesive devices appropriately for their future writing tasks. The next is the lecturer has to explain more about cohesive devices. So, the students will get the knowledge about types of cohesive devices that can be used and the functions for each of them. Cohesive devices are essentials part of writing in order to achieve coherence. The lecturers also have to give some grammar exercises or assignments in the form of writing essays so that the students can identify and obtain the knowledge of using cohesive devices correctly in their academic writing. It cannot be denied that cohesive devices have an important role in writing academic writing.

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