

Problems of University ESL students for using Metadiscourse markers and cohesive devices in Essay Writing

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Abstract: The word metadiscourse is used in writing. It reveals the writer's awareness of the reader and need for interaction or communication. Metadiscourse can be imagined as a rhetorical strategy used by speakers and authors to talk about their own talk (Chrismore 1989: 86). Metadiscourse markers guide the reader through the text and establish a means for the writer to interact or influence the reader. Developing competency in writing has always been a goal of education. Most students can write but they cannot write well enough to meet the demands of higher education and the increasing demands of the work environment. This study aims to find the use of metadiscourse markers and highlights the problems that university ESL student's face in writing essays. The findings show that how different markers of metadiscourse and cohesive devices are equally relevant for essay writing. The research method is descriptive, qualitative and quantitative design and data collection will be done via questionnaire and interviews. Ten participants are selected randomly from ESL university students, for testing their ability to use cohesive devices in essay writings. Finally, the data gained from questionnaire and interviews analyzed by SPSS software to explore metadiscourse markers usages in essay writing. Findings show that even university ESL students have many problems when they want to write an essay, they don't have enough information about cohesive devices. This study can be used by university ESL teachers and students for empowering their writing ability and being familiar with different elements of essay writing.

Key words: Metadiscourse markers, cohesive devices, essay writing, ESL students.

Introduction

Metadiscourse creates a connection between a writer, readers and a text. According to (Kaplan, 1966), the more we consider the conventions, culture and thinking of the audience for whom we produce a written text, the more communicatively acceptable and effective piece of writing is produced. Metadiscourse is discourse about discourse or text about the text. The elements of metadiscourse are rhetorical tools which enable the writer to attract the audience attention. One way to study the academic writing is through metadiscourse knowledge. In fact, many ESL students view writing as a challenging task. This is because writing skill involves dominance to cope with cohesive devices, while at the same time taking into account the expectations of the reader. Cohesive devices build connectivity to the text through words. Cohesive devices are single words that tie different parts of the text. They act as a bridge between parts of student's paper. Cohesion is an important part of linguistic system, without which semantic system cannot be effectively affected. Different types of cohesive devices are references, conjunctions, lexical items, ellipsis and substitution. They hold different parts of sentences together.

Reference: is used to describe the different ways in which people, things or events are referred to within text.

Substitution: is a replacement of one linguistic item with another item.

Ellipsis: it is omission or deletion of a linguistic item.

Conjunction: is a word which joins words or sentences

Lexical Cohesion: Tends to link much larger parts of the text

Introduction

Most of the studies have found that cohesive devices indeed facilitate students writing process. They concluded that cohesive devices contribute to the meaning-making process of the text and play a key role in achieving cohesion in writing. They found that there is a positive relation between the frequency of cohesive devices and the quality of students' essay writing. That is, the higher the occurrence of cohesive devices is, the better the quality of the essay is. The analysis of data indicated that students who scored high marks in their essays used all cohesive devices, namely reference, conjunctions and lexical cohesion, ellipsis and substitutions. It was concluded that cohesive devices enhance the quality of students' expository writing.

Mawardi (2014) conducted a study on the cohesion of students' writings in the English language education department of Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram University. The results of the study indicated that reference was used predominantly (50, 22%), followed by lexical cohesion (30, 02%), conjunction (16, 93%), ellipsis (2, 73%), substitution (0, 10%). Substitution and ellipsis were not used much in the essays because of the fact that the students overused the repetition of lexical items, or they were confused. There were four types of cohesive devices which were often used inappropriately. Conjunction device was the most inappropriately used in the students' story writing (50% out of the other types of cohesive devices), then followed by lexical cohesion (33,33%), reference (16,67%), and ellipsis (1,51%).

The Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to determine the cohesive devices degree of importance in essay writing. Generally having cohesive information for essay writing has great influence on writing proficiency, because cohesive devices help students carry over a thought from one sentence to another, from one idea to another or from one paragraph to another with words or phrases. They link your sentences or paragraphs together smoothly so that there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas.

There are several types of cohesive devices, and each category leads your reader to make certain connections or assumptions about the areas you are connecting. Some lead your reader forward and imply the building of an idea or thought, while others make your reader compare ideas or draw conclusions from the preceding thoughts. Most of the ESL students don't have information about these important devices for creating metadiscourse. They write their essays without pay attention to references, conjunctions, substitutions, ellipsis or lexical cohesions. While paying attention to these devices play a central role in the creation of a text. The present study aims to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What are the most common problems of university ESL students for using metadiscourse markers and cohesive devices in essay writing?

Methodology

Participants

The participants for this study were 10 university EFL students. They were selected randomly from university students who study English language as their foreign language.

Method

In order to get data, the students were asked to write expository essays by choosing the following topics which include:

- 1) What is the useful aspect of using mobile and computer in learning English language?
- 2) How to prevent contagious diseases?
- 3) Why some people are addicted to smoking?

The data were analyzed based on cohesive devices covering reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

Results and Discussion

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify and analyze the frequency and functions of Metadiscourse markers in university ESL students' essay writing. A number of steps were taken to carry out this study. Firstly, the data were collected and manually analyzed. In the qualitative phase, all the occurrences of each marker were investigated in their context to determine and classify its main discourse function. Lastly, the examples were extracted from the original scripts to discuss the use of each of these metadiscourse markers and see how the ESL students perceived them in writing their essays. Research results contain the types, the frequency, the distribution and the percentage of the requirements of good essays consisting of general statement, thesis statement, topic sentences, and concluding sentence.

The Types of Cohesive Devices in the Essays

In order to describe the types of cohesive devices to be used in students' essay, there are two steps to be taken. First, the distributions of each of elements of cohesive devices are shown in six tables. Next, the general distribution of ten students are calculated. They are presented in the following ways:

Table 1. The Distribution of the Use of the Reference.

No.	Types of Reference	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
1	Personal Reference	10	100%
2	Demonstrative reference	10	100%
3	Comparative Reference	1	10%
	Total students	10	100%

As it is seen from table 1. 100% (all 10 students) know personal references, about 100% (all 10 students) use demonstrative references but most of the students didn't have information about comparative references in their essay writings.

Table 2. The Distribution of the Use of the Substitution.

No.	Types of Substitution	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
1	substitution	0	0%
	Total students	0	0%

All of the 10 mentioned students didn't have information about linguistic replacement or substitution and they didn't use it.

Table 3. The Distribution of the Use of the Ellipsis.

No.	Types of Ellipsis	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
1	ellipsis	4	4%
	Total students	10	100%

Few number of students (4 students from 10 students) used ellipsis without having exact information about this kind of metadiscourse which refers to the deletion of the linguistic items.

Table 4. The Distribution of the Use of the Conjunction.

No.	Types of Conjunction	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
1	Additive	10	100%
2	Adversative	10	100%
	Causal	8	80%
3	Temporal	9	90%
	Total students	10	100%

All of the 10 students had exact information about conjunctions especially additive and adversative conjunctions (100%) which are the most popular kind of metadiscourse. They have used other types of conjunctions such as

causal and temporal but they didn't have academic knowledge about them and they used them based on their habits.

Table 5. The Distribution of the Use of the Lexical Cohesion.

No.	Types of Lexical Cohesion	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
1	Reiteration	0	0%
2	Collocation	3	30%
Total students		10	100%

10 mentioned students knew collocation but they didn't use it enough in their essays. They didn't hear even the word reiteration and after hearing all of them go back to check the meaning of the word. Not only they had never heard the word but also they didn't know its usage.

Table 6. The Distribution of the Use of General Lexical Devices.

No.	Types of Cohesive Devices	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
1	Reference	10	100%
2	Substitution	0	0%
3	Ellipsis	4	40%
4	Conjunction	10	100%
5	Lexical Cohesion	3	30%
Total		1	100%

Table 7. The Distribution of the Use of Cohesive Devices by Each of the Students.

Name	Reference		Substitution		Ellipsis		Conjunction		Lexical Cohesion		Total
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(F)	(%)	
A	10	100%	0	0%	3	30%	8	80%	0	0%	10
B	10	100%	0	0%	2	20%	10	100%	0	0%	10
C	5	50%	0	0%	2	20%	10	100%	0	0%	10
D	8	80%	0	0%	2	20%	10	100%	0	0%	10
E	10	100%	0	0%	3	30%	7	70%	0	0%	10
F	6	60%	0	0%	1	10%	5	50%	0	0%	10
G	5	50%	0	0%	0	0%	4	40%	0	0%	10
H	10	100%	0	0%	1	10%	4	40%	0	0%	10
I	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%	10	100%	0	0%	10
J	10	100%	0	0%	2	20%	10	100%	0	0%	10
Total	10	100%	10	100%	10	100%	10	100%	10	100%	100

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusions

After measuring data, for answering research question, this study concludes that ESL student don't have enough information about cohesive devices and the benefits of using metadiscourse for their writing essays. Among different kinds of references, they are familiar with personal references (85%), all of the 10 students had used personal references for their articles. According to this study ranking, conjunctions are in the equal positions by using (and), (80%). Some points should be mentioned here:

First point is that, there are a few cohesive devices to be used, the majority of the students did not use cohesive devices effectively in writing an expository essay. As a matter of fact, their essays were not cohesive. Second, substitution and ellipsis are not found. But, substitution and ellipsis are more found in spoken discourse dialogue (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Third, since students' essays didn't follow cohesive standards, their essays are not considered as a complete essay. However, some of the cohesive devices were wrongly used so made it difficult to comprehend the text. Among the five cohesive devices explained before, references and conjunctions formed the highest percentage of the total number of cohesive devices used in the essay writings.

Regarding to the qualitative analysis of the essays, the participants

Preferred using simple conjunctions like: (and), (but), (because) more frequently than (meanwhile) or (on the other hand), because they need to follow grammatical rules, the majority of ESL students don't have enough information about complex details of English grammar which are necessary for writing an essay. It may be due to the fact that the students learn the simple ones in early stages of second language learning, so feel more comfortable using them. The final conclusion is that university ESL students are weak in using cohesive devices for their essay writings.

Suggestions

According to the above conclusion of the study, the purpose of this study is checking some weaknesses and then give suggestions for solving student's problems, it is better to solve at early stages of study English academically.

The most important suggestion is that, paying attention to the student's weaknesses for writing and understanding technical techniques are vital, so syllabus designers should allocate a practical university course or courses for practicing the usage of cohesive devices in different passages.

Then, knowing cohesive devices for metadiscourse should be separated from teaching writing skill. Because course of metadiscourse has special rules which are somehow different with writing.

Of course it is necessary for teachers to provide more and more exercises so that the students can use cohesive devices effectively. Since the teacher plays an important rule for mentioning students to use cohesive devices. teaching cohesion and metadiscourse should be taught repeatedly, by repetition and practice students will have strong dominance and knowledge about cohesion. If teachers and students pay attention to different researches, by the help of each other they can produce fruitful essays with following accepted rules.

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