
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Importance of Cohesion in Academic Writing

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| ABSTRACT

This paper aims to help the flow of writing of academic pieces of work. As it is known, it is difficult to define what academic writing is because it depends on the purpose of the writer and the reasons that they are writing. Therefore, there are many different forms of academic writing pieces. This paper focuses on pieces written by international university students for education, teaching or social studies. It could help, for example, with an essay, an assignment, a report, or research. Correspondingly, cohesion is crucial; it helps the academic work to be more understandable and worthy to read. In addition, it enables the writer to express their idea coherently in writing. Consequently, this paper illustrates some authors' advice and views that should help students and researchers improve their academic writing skills. It also analyzes some academic essays written by non-English major Libyan students.

| KEYWORDS

Cohesion, academic writing, learner corups.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Writing is one of the most important ways to communicate with people. It helps them to become a better communicator in life and also to represent their ideas clearly. In addition, it improves their reading skill, which is very important to collect information and ideas about the objective topic.

On the other hand, as Hayland (2003) asserted, writing is one of the toughest and most challenging skills to be mastered proficiently in all languages, not only English. In addition, Hayland (2003) mentioned that being able to write well helps students deal with academic demands and perform effectively in their tracks. Correspondingly, Jordan (1997) stated that being good at writing is not an easy thing because it is a lengthy process, which may end up making learners frustrated and anxious. Therefore, writing has been proven to be the most difficult language skill for both English and non-English learners. Likewise, students are supposed to have good writing skills at all levels of the education system.

This paper will illustrate some principle points to help cohesion in a particular piece of academic writing work.

1.1 What is cohesion?

Cohesion is the flow of a writing piece, which might be an assignment, a report, an essay, an article or a research. Cohesion is the general organization of the academic writing project. It is the structure of it, the way in which the different parts are linked together. As Halliday and Hasan (2014) note, "the concept of the cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text".

This research paper will focus on the common structure of coherent academic writing pieces. As well as illustrate some alternative words and ideas to help the writer avoid repetition and some errors that may affect their project. I will also illustrate some non-English students' academic writing texts and evaluate them.

2. Literature Review:

Many worthy books and academic journals have been written about the importance of cohesion in writing.

In an academic piece of work, all the sentences and paragraphs should be related together to be as clear as possible. As a result, many things the writer needs to do before writing an appropriate writing piece, such as cohesive ties. According to Jago. C (2002) " To write cohesively means doing many things at once-wrestling with ideas, balancing form and functions, pushing words this way and that, attending to syntax and diction, and employing imagery and metaphor until a coherent message emerges."

Silvia (1993) states that L2 learners use fewer cohesion devices, such as conjunctives and lexical ties. These devices are crucial to writing academic essays, which have considerable persuasive power. As well Bloor and Bloor (2004:84) observe that " Texture is simply the quality of being a text rather than a set of unconnected bits of language." Also, Halliday and Hasan (1976:299) note that "Cohesion expresses the continuity that exists between one part of the text and another."

According to Thompson (2004), cohesive parts can be classified into five main types:

1. Reference: It can be cohesive when two or more expressions in the text refer to the same person, thing, or idea.
2. Ellipsis: can be used to avoid the repetition of a lexical item and is able to draw on the grammatical resources of language to replace the item.
3. Substitution: can be used for the omission of words, groups or clauses.
4. Conjunctions: can be used to describe the cohesive tie between clauses or sections of text in such a way as to demonstrate a meaningful relationship between them.
5. Lexical cohesion refers to the cohesive effect of the use of lexical items in discourse where the choice of an item relates to the choices that have gone before.

The aim of this paper is to guide L2 English writers in writing an appropriate academic essay by investigating effective strategies to make the text more organized and clear for the reader.

2.1 The structure:

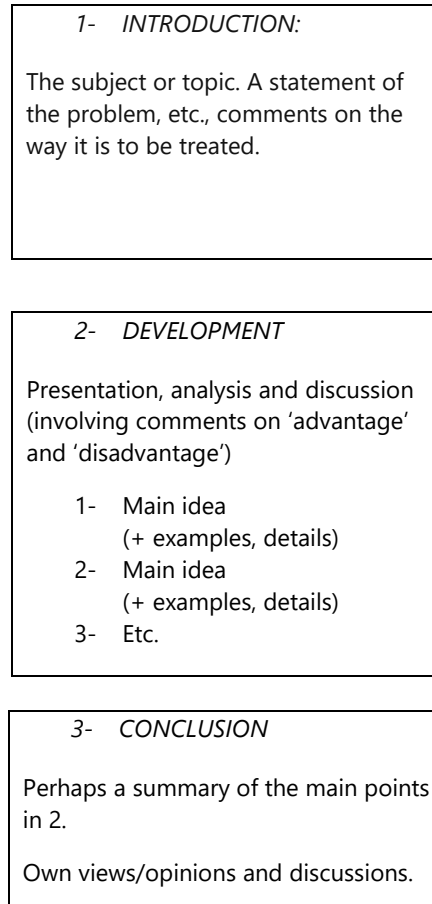
According to Jordan(2003-p.9), "most pieces of formal writing are organized in a similar way- introduction; development of main ideas or arguments; conclusion." Therefore, the formal writing pieces consist of these three main parts. In addition, the language used in writing is according to the specific purpose of the writer and the ideas that they have in their mind, as he noted.

Firstly, as known, to write a good piece of academic writing, it is essential for the writer to read a lot of similar topics and books that relate to the object before starting to collect the most information and ideas about the topic. This step will help the writer create a good presentation of the topic.

After that, start writing, which is the most time-consuming stage. In this stage, the writer will write out all their thoughts and ideas and craft their piece based on their outline. The writer will work on developing the ideas and fleshing them out throughout the introduction, body, and conclusion.

Jordan (2003) illustrates the overall structure and the general organization of a piece of academic writing (e.g. a report, an essay, an assignment, or a project) in this diagram:

Structure



1- Introduction:

Introduction is the first part, and, as mentioned in the diagram above, it usually consists of the topic sentence, historical background and statement of the problem. The length of the introduction paragraph should depend on the purpose and the type of writing piece. As Jordan (2003, p82) cited, "A good induction will not be too long, but its length will vary according to the type of writing. In an essay, it may be a maximum of half a page (divided into paragraphs); in a dissertation, it may be several pages."

One of the essential functions of an introduction is to capture the reader's attention and make an impression on the reader. It also gives the background on the topic by giving an overview of the content in sequence. Some said that it does not matter if it comes at the beginning of the paragraph, in the middle or at the end, but it must be included.

2- Development:

This is the part where the writer illustrates their own views, argues and discusses the information that they have collected. Consequently, this paragraph usually is the longest part of the project.

As Newsome (2015) mentioned, "**Research** is the process or product of acquiring knowledge.

Analysis is the process of disaggregating, categorizing, and relating something in order to better understand it.

Writing is the process of recording what you mean to communicate."

Thus, ideas, opinions, and views that the writer has in his mind are illustrated here and should be discussed, as well as giving his own opinion; these steps are related to information processing. As a result of that, many writing errors and mistakes can appear. For instance, repetition of the same word, such as pronouns and connective words, some grammar errors and sentence structure and length have a huge impact on the cohesion of the writing piece.

Liki (1998) notes that "nearly every writer, native speaker or non-native speaker, makes errors in writing, but some errors are more 'serious' than others either because:

They make the sentence difficult to understand, or they are, for one reason or another, especially jarring for most native speaker readers”.

Writing an academic paper requires just more than bookish knowledge. It requires deep research, expertise in formatting and referencing, formal writing style, and much more.

Here is a list of the most common mistakes and errors that the writer may make during their academic writing, which has a huge impact on the cohesion of their writing piece:

1. A lack of knowledge: some start writing before having enough information about the topic that they pretend to search for. This makes the work unorganized; there is wrong information, and the idea of the topic sentence is unclear. At this point, the writer should ask himself, why am I writing this research? Here, the answer is the topic sentence. If the writer knows what the main topic is going to be before starting writing, they are much more likely to stick to that topic throughout the paragraph.
2. Another mistake that the writer may make is the poor use of transition signals. For example, connective words and referencing pronouns.

Connectives are used to show the relationship between the ideas in one paragraph.

However, some overuse transition signals, so they use words like *first, second, third, next, finally, and moreover* between each sentence, which makes the passages not relate well to each other. On the other hand, others use only some of them over the whole project, which makes the project look weak. As well as cause repetition as Guest. M (2018, p.151) cited, “Of the total number of FP/PS presenters I observed, almost 40% performed CPs in which some combination of ‘and, then, next, so, ‘or ‘also, served as the only transition marker(s) used between sections and slides.”. To solve that, the writer should have a good knowledge about the use of connective words, how and where they can be used according to their functions and the specific purpose that the writer has in mind. There are many words that mean the same as the usual connective words like *but, and, or ...etc.* which are used to link the ideas in the sentence or paragraphs that indicate a logical relationship between them. To avoid repetition, writers should be aware of how to link the sentences by means of connectives. Below are some:

- 1) ‘And’ type, connective of result: *so, therefore, as a result, accordingly, consequently, thus, hence*. For example, *he passed his examinations; therefore, he had some good news to tell his parents.*
Here, the connectives join a cause with a result, effect or consequence.
 - 2) ‘Or’ type, connectives of reformulation: *in other words, to put it more simply, it would be better to say*. For instance, *he said that he had kept the library book for several years. *In other words*, he had stolen it.*
Here, the reformulation appears in different words and is used to make the idea clearer or to explain or modify it.
 - 3) ‘But’ type, Connectives of Concession: *however, nevertheless, nonetheless, yet, in spite of that, all the same*. To illustrate that, the time available for discussion was very limited. *In spite of that*, it was still possible to produce some interesting arguments. At this point, the connectives in italics indicate the surprising nature of what follows in view of what was said before; a kind of contrast is indicated.
 - 4) Cause and effect: *causes, as a result, due to*. For example, *heat causes iron to expand.*
As can be noted here, the reason is coming first, then the connective word and the effect is coming finally. Another example is that the prices are higher *because* the diamonds have increased. Here is different: the effect comes first, and the reason comes after the connective word.
 - 5) Interpretation of data:
 - A- Referring to the diagram, chart, etc.: *as can be seen, according to, as(is) shown in, it can be seen from the..* For example, *it can be seen from the chart, diagram, table, graph, figures or statistics that ...*
 - B- Describing change. *Minimal, slight, small, slow, gradual, steady, marked, large, dramatic, steep, sharp, rapid, sudden*. For instance, there was a(n) (very) *minimal increase...*
 - C- Comparing: *in relation to, compared with*. For example, *compared with (twice/ three times) as (high/ large/ many) as ...*
 - D- Useful vocabulary for describing the information in a graph: *trend, curve*. To illustrate that, *a trend involves a direction / a curve involves a shape or position.*
 - 6) Discussion: at this point, the writer should use the language functions that have been illustrated before in order to express their own ideas and views. Such as developing an argument or discussion, and then they need to conclude. (Jordan 2008)
References such as ‘*this, that, those, these, it, they*’ are used to help cohesion and also to avoid repeating the same words during the paragraph. However, the writer should be careful when using pronouns; they must refer to the object clearly. In other words, which word are they referring to?
3. Another mistake affects the cohesion and cohesive of writing, which is the progression of ideas and information. Each sentence should add something new for the reader. Such as ideas, information, or support previous ideas or writer views. According to Wallwork. A & Southern. A “If your paper is relatively easy to read and each sentence adds value for the reader, then you are much more likely to be cited in other people’s work. If you cited, then your work as an academic will become more rewarding”.

4. The writer should use fairly short sentences to be more confident with their formal style and correction. As Jordan (2003, p.126) notes, "If you write in a long, complex sentence, it is easier to make mistakes: the sentence becomes complicated, and the subject and verb tenses may become confused."
5. The overuse of high level vocabulary during the context may cause confusion. In other words, makes it difficult to understand. Thus, the use of simple expressions and vocabulary makes the piece easier to read and understand and creates a better impression.

3- Conclusion:

The conclusion is the last part of the writing operation; its function is to give an overview of the whole previous work on the topic. According to Jordan (2008), "A conclusion is needed to show that the writing is finished. Drawing a conclusion often involves making a summary of the main points already made."

Therefore, this paragraph sums up the preceding above; hence, it usually starts with one of these phrases *in conclusion, to conclude, to sum up, in brief, to summarize and overall.*

4- Quotation References:

One of the principal points in academic writing is clear referencing books. As a result of reading books, journals, and other academic works about the objective topic, the writer may use some quotations(direct or indirect) to support their views or widen the information in their academic work. According to Jordan (2008, p.98), "It is important to acknowledge the source of the quotations; otherwise, you may be accused of plagiarism."

5- Proofreading:

This step is not particularly included in a writing project. However, many academic authors recommended doing it before submission. This stage is to give the first draft to a teacher or academic person to revise the work word by word, line by line, to make corrections and evaluate the work. Dahl (2006) asked and answered a question he said "why is evaluation so important?" and then answered, "As you progress in production, the option decreases, and the cost of changing your mind increases, as does the cost of making corrections. A critical point is the proofreading stage."

Jordan also cites that after proceeding with the rough version of the writing and revising it, It will be necessary to proofread it before submitting it. This involves checking carefully the academic style and the details of grammar, spelling, punctuation and capital letters.

From the preceding discussion and as mentioned before, writing tasks in a foreign language is the hardest skill of the language to be mastered. The present study aims to identify the most common types of academic writing errors of non-English major Libyan students, which can be helpful and beneficial for teachers to discover the areas that need further attention when teaching writing. The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the popular writing errors that are made by non-English students major Libyan students?
2. Are they concerned with cohesion while writing?

3. Method:

3.1 Participants and data collection:

The participants of this study were 25 Libyan students enrolled in the English language centers around Elbayda City in Libya in 2022. They were all intermediate-level general English students at Al Mukhtar, Omar Al Mukhtar, and Muhammed Ben Ali Elsunosy universities' language centers. They were assessed by their scores in the centers' placement and entrance examinations.

The students were compulsorily required to write about three different topics, approximately 400 words easy in given topics:

Topic 1: what are you going to do after study?

Topic 2: describe a place you are living in.

Topic 3: write to your overseas friend to motivate them to visit your country.

3.2 Micro-level analysis: a sample essay

I chose one average essay of the group written by intermediate level students who were graded after a result of the entrance examination for the university placed them at this level.

According to the Flesch-Kincaid readability test, 'whose formula indicates readability is determined by two important variables: average sentence length and average number of syllables per word', the writer's result is shown in figure 1. (downloaded from [http// flesch.sourceforge.net](http://flesch.sourceforge.net))

Words	447
Sentences	24
Syllables	693
Average Syllables per word	1.55
Average Words per sentence	17.27
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	9.97
Flesch Reading Ease Level	56.77

Figure 1: The results of Flesch Test

Score	Notes
90-100	easily understood by an average 11-year-old student
80-90	easy to read
70-80	fairly easy to read
60-70	easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students
50-60	fairly difficult to read
30-50	difficult to read, best understood by college graduates
0-30	very difficult to read, best understood by university graduates

Figure 2: Criterion of Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level

90-100: Very Easy
80-89: Easy
70-79: Fairly Easy
60-69: Standard
50-59: Fairly difficult
30-49: Difficult
0-29: very confusing

Figure 3: Criterion of Flesch Reading Ease Level

This essay, as mentioned before, is written by a Libyan intermediate student level, as shown in Figure 1 above; also, according to Figures 2 and 3, the student level is equivalent to a college graduate. Their writing was evaluated as fairly difficult. In spite of the fact that the sentences of the essay are structured using relatively many words, some are not from an academic level perspective. To judge that, it is essential to observe the ideas' organization as well as how powerful the essays are in convincing readers.

3.3 Sample essay

I live in Shahat (cyrene), a small *village* situated near the sea, which is surrounded by beautiful features, making it one of the most attractive villages in the County (1). My *village* is densely populated, with less than 43,000 people (2). Life in the *village* is simple and peaceful (3). My city is famous for An Archaeological site of cyrene; it is an ancient city founded by the Greeks in the District of the Green Mountain (Jabal Al-Akhdar), north-eastern Libya (4).

As well as the big Masjid building dominates every other building located in the main town; the big Masjid building is the *village's* landmark (5). It located in the middle of the *village* (6). We have no shopping malls (7). **Instead,** we rely on individually owned shops (8). I love the clear air that comes from the mountain; I prefer walking to the main town while breathing the fresh morning air (9). **Additionally,** it takes only thirty minutes to reach all the ends of my town (10). **Despite** its small size, I *don't* feel limited; there are plenty of activities that keep us going (11). I actively participate in many events organized by the local district (12). I attended cooking competitions and cultural events hosted by the local recreation board (13).

On the other hand, our *village* floods every year; **interestingly,** the geographical features still interact, villagers try to solve that with their own simple materials (14). There are several trees like apples, figs and pomegranate (15). I live in the most beautiful section of the *village* where you can smell flowers; the beautiful colors of flowers attract everyone's attention (16).

The *village* houses are variable small and big, houses and flats with one floor and big with two and three floors, which we call villas (17). Each house has a front and backyard; some have beautiful gardens, while some have a small courtyard (18).

The *village* climate is good; it is not so cold or so hot (19). On a bright morning, if you take a morning stroll along the field, you can see beautiful birds *and* some small animals on the farm fields (20).

Most villagers are farmers who produce all kinds of seasonal vegetables, *and for this reason*, the *village* hosts merchants who come to collect fresh fruits *and* vegetables (21).

Like many neighboring, we experience power cuts regularly, *and* people seem to be accustomed to it (22). One surprising fact is that nobody has ever raised any complaint about the situation (23). **In conclusion**, *the village* seems to be peaceful, we have a police station *and* local court, *and* both are available in the neighboring village too (24).

3.4 References

This essay is in reference to its distinctive lexical choice. Word repetition is used more than reference words, which affects the essay's academic level. To illustrate that, the word *village* appears in most sentences; it appears in (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (14), (16), (17), (19), (21), (22) and (24). Although there are many words in English that can replace this word to avoid this mistake.

Moreover, the overuse of the pronouns is noticeable here, the writer used both subject and possessive pronouns too much, which appear in (1), (2), (3), (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), (10), (11), (12), (13), (14), (16), (17), (19), (20), (22) and (24). As it is noticeable, the essay starts with the first person pronoun *I* and is used in many other places in this work, according to Fairbairn. J and Fairbairn. A "the third person and the third person alone should be used in academic work". To solve that, the reference words can be used instead.

Other features are noticeable in this text; for example, conjunction (*and*) is also used many times, some are in the same sentence to illustrate that in (17) is used four times as well as in (21) two times; furthermore, it mentioned in another sentence like in (3) (12) (15)(18) (20) (22) and (24).

Another interesting feature in this text is the use of contractions; in (11), the student used the contraction of (do not- don't), which is not appropriate in academic works such as Mc Garry's. J mentioned that contraction is good to use in speaking, but the writer should not engage in text speak; they should write the words in full form, which is essential, as well as grammar in academic writing. He adds, "The academic style also means that you should not use contraction. A contraction is a single word derived from two words, with absent letters being signified by an apostrophe."

Interestingly, although a high ratio use of repetition, first person pronouns and contraction are noticeable, a few cohesive devices occur during the work. For example, *the* and *that* are used in this text. Thomson (2004) said that *the* is used to 'point forward to a post modifying propositional phrase within the same nominal group' and *that* is used 'to refer back to participant mentioned in the same sentence, not an earlier sentence.' Moreover, as mentioned before, some cohesive devices are used, such as linking words and conjunctions, such as *additionally*, *as well as*, *on the other hand*, and others are marked in bold during the text. These conjunction words help the text flow and make it easier to understand.

In sentence (24), the writer concludes the essay by adding more positive points about their village. However, it would be better if they added some suggestions or a solution to solve the problems that they face every year in their town, which are the flooding and the power cuts.

3.5 Macro-level analysis: learner corpus

This part is beneficial to investigate the potential frequent mistakes that Libyan students might make. As mentioned above, this study consists of twenty-five essays for students at an intermediate level; the one above (my village) was randomly selected to analyze.

Some mistakes were commonly used, such as grammar mistakes and the use of tenses. Moreover, it seems that they are a little confused about using conjunctions. For example, the overuse of coordinate conjunctions like *and*, *but* and *for* during writing is noticeable in some of them, instead of using the academic styles of these words, which are already mentioned in this paper.

Another feature noticed is the writing errors, especially with vowels and the use of uppercases; some of them tend to confuse the usage of uppercases before places, days of the week, and months.

To summarize, the result of this study discovered that the potential common mistakes among Libyan students are the same. This can help teachers coach students in writing powerful academic essays which engage people and convince them through explanation.

4. Conclusion:

The purpose of this study is to help the flow of academic writing pieces. The most common error types found in the students' writing were illustrated above; non-English major Libyan students were targeted in the present study.

The findings revealed that the most common types of errors found in these writings were grammar mistakes (tenses and pronouns), conjunctions, capitalization and varied words. These errors could be due to ignorance of the writing rules during writing because of the overgeneralization in the target language.

This study has focused only on twenty-five intermediate students in three language centers in Albayda city; thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all non-English students in Albayda and Libyan language centers. This study can help teachers know the most common writing errors that students may make and help them manage them in order to write powerful academic essays.

In addition, the present research has suggested some of the principal rules of academic writing, which can be a great help in improving academic writing skills.

On this basis, it can be inferred that there are many principle points that the writer should be aware of, to make appropriate coherence and cohesive academic piece of writing. Above all, they should be stuck on the topic sentence. Hence, all the sentences and ideas should serve the topic of the project and discuss, support, and reinforce it. Besides, do not make a digression anywhere to keep on the object. To help that, the writer must ask themselves every time during working, 'What is the object of this work?'

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