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العدد الثامن

عشر

التحقق في استخدام متعلمي اللغة الأنكليزية كلغة أجنبية الكورد لادوات الربط في الكتابة باللغة  
الإنكليزية

رعد محمد علي - كلية التربية الأساسية / جامعة دهوك

raad81mohammed@gmail.com

لازكين خدر باراني - أستاذ مساعد - كلية اللغات / جامعة نوروز

lazgin.barany@uod.ac

المستخلص :

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقق من ادوات الربط التي يستخدمها طلبة اللغة الإنكليزية الكورد ، ومدى تكرار ادوات الربط هذه ، وكيفية مساهمتها في جودة النص ، وأخيرا التحديات التي يواجهها هؤلاء الطلبة في استخدام هذه الادوات في نصوصهم. تبني البحث الحالي التحليل الكمي و النوعي للبيانات. استخدمت الدراسة اوراق الامتحان النهائي لعشرين مقالة كتبها طلبة السنة الثالثة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية ، كلية التربية الأساسية ، جامعة دهوك كبيانات. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام نظرية التماسك لـ (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) ، والتي تشمل الضمائر المنفصلة ، والاستبدال ، والحذف، وحروف العطف ، بالإضافة الى الادوات المرتبطة بالمفردات مثل التكرار والجمع بين الكلمات. تشير النتائج إلى أن الطلبة قيد البحث استخدموا في الغالب أدوات ربط مثل الضمائر المنفصلة و حروف العطف، فيما تجاهلوا تماما استخدام الادوات المرتبطة بالمفردات مثل التكرار والجمع. بناء على النتائج ، يوصى بأن يقوم مدرسو اللغة الانكليزية بتوجيه طلابهم لاستخدام ادوات الربط بشكل مناسب في كتاباتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية : أدوات الربط ، تماسك وترابط النص ، كتابة المقالة .

## Investigating the Use of Cohesive Devices in Kurdish EFL Learners' Writing

Raad Mohammed Ali Mahmood,



College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, Duhok, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Iraq.

raad81mohammed@gmail.com

Lazgin Kheder Barany, Assistant Professor

College of Languages, Nawroz University, Duhok, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Iraq.

lazgin.barany@uod.ac

### Abstract :

This paper aims at investigating the cohesive devices used by Kurdish EFL learners, their frequency, how they contribute to the text quality, and finally the challenges these learners face in using the appropriate cohesive devices in their writing tasks. The current research utilizes a mixed-method research design for analyzing twenty essays written by third-year students at the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. It uses students' final examination answers as data. The data are analyzed by using Halliday & Hasan's (1976) theory of cohesion, which covers grammatical cohesion such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion such as repetition and collocation. The findings indicate that the learners under investigation mostly used grammatical cohesion devices, namely reference, and conjunctions, and totally ignored lexical cohesion markers, namely repetition, and collocation. Based on the findings, it is recommended that EFL university teachers guide their students to use cohesive devices appropriately in their writing.

**Keywords:** cohesive devices, cohesion, and coherence, essay writing .

### Introduction

There is a consensus among teachers and scholars in the EFL setting that using cohesive devices by EFL learners is one of the most difficult skills to enhance (Abdul Rahman, 2013; Waller, 2015). According to Enkvist (1990), achieving cohesion in writing is considered a difficult concept to teach and learn.



Halliday & Hasan (1976) define a text as any spoken or written discourse which forms a unified whole and is regarded as a semantic unit. They further believe that utilizing appropriate cohesive devices leads to discourse unity. Alarcon & Morales (2011) also support this position and maintain that cohesion refers to the linguistic elements which help make a sequence of sentences a text. In the same vein, Tanskanen (2006) asserts that the appropriate utilization of cohesive devices creates a unified whole. Furthermore, Abdul Rahman (2013) believes that the command of cohesive devices is an important element of effective writing and crucial for academic success.

### 1. Aims of the Study

This study aims at examining the cohesive devices used by Kurdish EFL learners' at the Department of English, college of Basic Education, University of Duhok. It also aims at finding out how cohesive devices create discourse unity and the problems that learners encounter in using the appropriate cohesive devices in writing essays.

### 2. Research Questions

The main goal of this study is to examine the cohesive devices in the essays written by Kurdish undergraduate students. Accordingly, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What kinds of cohesive devices are used by the learners under study?
2. How frequently are cohesive devices used by the learners under study, in terms of gender?
3. What is the extent to which students under study use cohesive devices correctly and appropriately?
4. What challenges do EFL learners face in skillfully utilizing cohesive devices?

### 4. Limits of the Study

This research examines cohesive devices in randomly selected essays written by EFL learners from the Department of English, College of Basic Education, and University of Duhok.



The study includes twenty essays written by 20 (10 females, 10 males) third-year EFL learners in final examination sheets at the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok during the academic year 2021-2022.

## 5. Theoretical Background

To effectively communicate through writing, writers must move beyond the sentential level to the production of multi-paragraph essays. Abdul Rahman (2013) and Waller (2015) maintain that writers need to appropriately employ cohesive devices and coherence to bind sentences together once they are composing two or more interconnected sentences. They should also be able to organize thoughts into a coherent whole. According to Cox et. al., (1990), as cited in Abdul Rahman (2013), cohesion helps the reader to create meaning from discourse and assists the writer in making a text that can be easily comprehended. Similarly, cohesion can be attained by employing explicit cohesive devices which show relationships between sentences and the elements within texts (Connor,1984). This denotes that readers may better understand the connectedness between what comes before and after when cohesive devices are used appropriately. Thus, connectedness is a crucial element in any written discourse. Additionally, Waller (2015) believes that cohesion is typically viewed as one of the most significant defining aspects of text quality. Likewise, Witte & Faigley (1981) assert that different cohesive devices and their frequency indicate the writers' creativity and the effect of stylistic elements on the essays they produce. Ahmed (2010) , Waller (2015),Zahra,Yusuf ,Samad & Singh (2023 ) among others, assert that there is a link between cohesion and text quality. Other studies, such as those by De Beaugrande & Dressler (1981) and Castro (2004) found contrasting results.

According to Salkie (1995), cohesive devices act as glue that holds the various elements of a text together. For many readers, enhancing the quality of the text makes it easier for them to understand (Bui, 2022). McNamara et. al., (1996) state that the connectedness of ideas in a text will ultimately result in discourse unity which helps the reader comprehend the text more easily.



Malmkjaer (2001: 549), as cited in Abdul Rahman (2013), argues that the interplay between the reader's world knowledge and the written discourse leads to coherence, with the reader making reasonable interpretations. Therefore, a reader continuously tries to make sense of the text depending on schemata (the shared background knowledge beyond the text). Despite some researchers' viewpoint that cohesion adds to coherence (Tanskanen, 2006; Waller, 2015; Nurhidayat, Apriani & Edy, 2021; Aminovna, 2022), others deny any link between the two concepts (De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981; Castro, 2004). In this regard, Oller & Jonz (1994) and Yule (2006) assert that cohesive texts do not necessarily result in a unified whole.

The current study will focus on cohesion as the bulk of research indicates that coherence is ultimately resulted from the proper utilization of different cohesive devices in academic writing. The following section deals with previous related studies dealing with cohesive devices and their importance in coherence in writing.

## 6. Previous Studies

Mohammed & Mudawi (2015) probed the impact of utilizing cohesive devices and writing techniques in improving EFL learners' writing skills at Sudan University of Science and Technology. To collect data for the study, the quantitative approach, a questionnaire, and a test were used by the researchers. The sample included (100) first-year students studying English at (SUST). They were divided into two groups: experimental and control. The first group took a test before being instructed on how to use cohesive devices, and the second took a test after being instructed on how to employ cohesive devices in writing. The findings, on the one hand, showed that the experimental group faced challenges in utilizing cohesive devices in writing. On the other hand, the second group performed slightly better.

Based on Halliday & Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion, Bahaziq (2016) conducted research on cohesive devices used by EFL learners. It aimed at emphasizing how important these devices are via analyzing a Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB) sample examination of students' essay writing. The analysis of learners' compositions showed obvious proof of cohesion and the use of cohesive





devices. It was noted that the most utilized grammatical devices were "reference" and "conjunction" and the least used were lexical cohesive devices.

Kashiha (2022) conducted a study to investigate the use of cohesive devices by ESL learners who were struggling while producing essays. The study was carried out using a mixed-method research approach. The selected sample included 100 diploma Malaysian students participating in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at a Malaysian private institution. 100 essay scripts from the final examination's essay writing section were assessed using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion. The results showed that reference markers were the most utilized cohesive device, whereas "substitution" was the least employed cohesive device. The findings also indicated that ESL learners overused or misused certain cohesive devices. Finally, it was found that the sample linguistic competence had an impact on their choice of cohesive devices since the majority of them proved to be unclear of the necessity of using cohesive devices in their text writing.

This paper is expected to add and contribute to the literature already written on cohesion, in general, and employing cohesive devices in academic essay writing, in particular, as it has Kurdish EFL learners as the sample of research.

## 7. Research Methodology

To attain the objectives of the study and to answer its questions, the study employs a mixed-method research design, namely qualitative and quantitative. Accordingly, 20 essays have been taken from 20 students' (10 males and 10 females) final examination answer sheets of essay writing at the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. The students understudy wrote an argumentative essay entitled "E-Learning vs. Campus Learning". The researchers have made use of the following concepts in the analysis of the essays under consideration:

1. This study has made use of and depended on Halliday & Hasan's (1976) concept of cohesion in its analysis and investigation. All the cohesive devices according to Halliday & Hasan (1976) have been pinpointed, statistically counted, and analyzed. They include grammatical cohesive



markers such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction as well as lexical cohesive markers such as repetition and collocation as explained in Table 1 below.

2. A descriptive and statistical comparison, in terms of the use of cohesive devices, has been made between the male students and female students' writings in order to find out whose writing is more or less coherent and why.

3. Finally, after finding out the reasons behind students' failure and problems in the use of cohesive devices suggestions have been forwarded to overcome those problems.

Table (1) Cohesive devices as suggested by Halliday & Hasan (1976)

Type	Category	Subcategory	Example
Grammatical	Reference	Anaphoric	Reference to a preceding text, e.g., Mr. Andrew went to Manchester in a shower of rain. He stepped in a puddle right up to his middle.
		Cataphoric	Reference to the following text, e.g., Despite calling her every week, my sister still complains.
	Substitution	Substitution means replacing a word previously used with another word. Common words to do this are: <i>do/does, one/ones, here, there, that, so, then.</i>	
	Ellipsis	Ellipsis is the absence of a word or phrase rather than its repetition. e.g. I'm going to eat spicy food but do you think you should?	
	Conjunctions	Additive	In addition, also, etc.
Adversative		In fact, however, etc.	



		Causal	Because, because of, etc.
		Temporal	First, second, finally, etc.

## 8. Data Analysis

The following section deals with the descriptive analysis of the essays written by third-year students at the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok. Also, the results will be analyzed and discussed. Reference will be made to similar previous studies wherever it is possible. As mentioned in the section on the methodology, this study will make use of Halliday & Hasan's (1976) grammatical and lexical types of cohesion.

Table (2) Frequency of male students' use of different cohesive devices

Aspect	Type	Category	Frequency	Percentage%	
Cohesion	Grammatical	Reference	62	23.3	
		Substitution	3	1.13	
		Ellipsis	2	0.75	
		Connectives	Additive	111	41.88
			Adversative	21	7.92
			Causal	24	9.05
			Temporal	42	15.84
	Lexical	Repetition and Collocation	-	-	
			-	-	
			-	-	
Total			265	100	





According to Table (2), the most commonly employed cohesive device among male students is "additive," which was used (111) times (41.88%). Furthermore, "reference" was used (62) times (23.3%), whereas "temporal" was used (42) (15.48%). Furthermore, "adversative" was used (21) times (7.92%), and "causal" was used (24) times (9.05%). Both "substitution" and "ellipsis" had the lowest frequency among other devices, being used (3) times (1.13%) and (2) times (0.75%) respectively. It is worth noting that male students ignored all lexical devices.

Table (3) Frequency of female students' use of the various cohesive devices

Aspect	Type	Category	Frequency	Percentage%		
Cohesion	Grammatical	Reference	98	34.14		
		Substitution	19	6.62		
		Ellipsis	8	2.87		
		Connectives	Additive	63	21.95	
			Adversative	20	6.96	
			Causal	37	12.89	
			Temporal	42	14.63	
		Lexical	Repetition and Collocation	-	-	-
				-	-	-
				-	-	-
Total			287	100		

Table (3) shows that the most used cohesive device by female students is "reference". It was used (98) times (34.14%). While "additive" was used (63) times (21.95%), "temporal" was employed (42) times (14.63%). In addition, "causal" was used (37) times (12.89%), and "adversative" was utilized (20)



times (6.96%). Furthermore, "substitution" was used (19) times (6.62%). Finally, "ellipsis" scored the lowest frequency among cohesive devices. It was used (8) times (2.87%). Like male students, female students totally ignored using lexical cohesive devices.

Table (4) Comparison of the frequency of the use of cohesive devices by male and female students

Aspect	Type	Category	Frequency of cohesive devices used by male students	Percentage %	Frequency of cohesive devices used by female students	Percentage %	
Cohesion	Grammatical	Reference	62	23.3	98	34.14	
		Substitution	3	1.13	19	6.62	
		Ellipsis	2	0.75	8	2.87	
		Connectives	Additive	111	41.88	63	21.95
			Adversative	21	7.92	20	6.96
			Causal	24	9.05	37	12.89
			Temporal	42	15.84	42	14.63
		Lexical	Repetition and Collocation	-	-	-	-
				-	-	-	-
		Total			265		287



Table (4) indicates that both female and male students used (552) cohesive devices in total. Female students used more cohesive devices than male students. They utilized (287) cohesive devices (51.99%) compared to male students who used (265) devices (48.007%). Also, the most used cohesive device by male students was "additive", which was used (111) (41.88%), whilst the most utilized cohesive device by female students was "reference" which was used (98) times (34.14%). In addition, "adversative" and "temporal" devices were used almost equally by both groups of students. On one hand, male students utilized "adversative" (21) times (7.92%) and female students used it (20) times (6.96%). As regards "temporal" device, it was employed (42) times by both groups; (15.84%) by male students and (14.63%) by female students. While male students used "causal" (24) times (9.05%), female students used this device (37) times (12.89%). Furthermore, female students used more "substitution" and "ellipsis" devices than male students. Female students used "substitution" (19) times (6.69%), while male students utilized it (3) times (1.13%). On the other hand, "ellipsis" was employed (8) times (2.87%) by female students, whereas male students used it only twice (0.75%). Neither female nor male students used any of the lexical cohesive devices.

## 9. Results and Discussion

Tables 2 and 3 provide answers to the first two questions of the research "What kinds of cohesive devices are employed by the learners under study?" and "How frequently are cohesive devices used by the learners under study, in terms of gender?" They include the frequency and percentages of the various cohesive devices utilized by the learners under consideration. In their attempt to create coherent texts, the learners employed a total of 552 cohesive devices; female students utilized 287, while male students used 265. When taking the number of cohesive devices utilized by the female and male students into consideration, it can be deduced that both groups do not differ greatly. This could be due to learners' lack of competence in employing and understanding the different types of cohesive devices, in addition to their limited repertoire of vocabulary. This finding is similar to the study conducted by Ong (2011).



It is worth mentioning that despite the fact that female students used more cohesion markers than male students, this does not necessarily indicate that they are better at utilizing these markers to produce coherent texts. It can be concluded that the excessive use of some cohesive devices by female students makes their texts redundant and, sometimes, difficult to understand.

Table (4) indicates that the most notable difference between female students and male students is the use of the "reference" cohesive device.; Female students used this device 98 times, while male students utilized it 62 times. On the other hand, male students used "additives" more than female students. It is worth noting that neither male students nor female students utilized any lexical devices. It can be noted that the two groups were not exposed to the appropriate use of cohesive devices during their undergraduate study although female students used cohesive devices more appropriately than male students and came out with relatively more coherent texts.

The preceding discussion of the results has answered question3 of the current study which read: “What is the extent to which students under study use cohesive devices correctly and appropriately? It has been found that although the majority of the students understudy used the cohesive devices fairly appropriately, they do not necessarily create a unified whole because they lack the skill to use a variety of cohesive devices and they just focused on the grammatical cohesion markers while they totally ignored using lexical devices. This result aligns with the findings by Mohseni & Samadian (2019). Finally, in the following lines, an attempt will be made to answer question 4 of the study which reads: "What challenges do EFL learners face in skillfully utilizing cohesive devices?"

The analysis shows that the students at the Department of English, the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok encounter the following problems with using cohesive devices in their writing:

1. No balance is maintained when utilizing the different types of cohesive devices. In other words, they excessively used grammatical cohesive devices, namely reference, and conjunction, while totally neglecting lexical



cohesion markers. This can lead to the writing of tedious and redundant texts.

2. The students faced difficulty in utilizing the appropriate cohesive devices; That is to say, they used a certain cohesive marker that is not required at the account of another required cohesive device.

3. The students are not equally accustomed to the different types of cohesive devices. As such, they just used the devices that are familiar to them since they found them easier to utilize. Consequently, they overused "reference" and "conjunctions".

The findings of the current study go in line with other studies conducted in the field, namely Khalil (1989), Ahmed (2010), Ghasemi (2013), and Othman (2019).

## 10. Conclusion

1. Based on the discussion of the results presented, it has been found that there was not a noticeable difference between the percentages of female and male students in using cohesion markers in terms of number and variety. The two groups could not keep a balance in utilizing the various types of cohesive devices; i.e. they used certain types excessively while neglecting others, namely lexical devices.

2. Despite being third-year undergraduates, such a finding indicates their lack of linguistic competence in using cohesive devices and their limited repertoire of vocabulary. The texts produced by some students were difficult to comprehend as a limited number of different cohesive devices were used.

3. Additionally, the sample of students under study tended to focus on the sentential level and ignore the relations of meaning that exist within the discourse. As such, there is a lack of connectedness that makes the flow of ideas illogical for readers.

4. This study has identified the challenges Kurdish EFL learners commonly encounter in their attempt to write coherent texts, i.e., their skill of using the different cohesive devices as required and appropriately needs reconsideration.

## 11. Pedagogical Implications, Recommendations, and Suggestions





Studying the pedagogical implications of cohesive devices in EFL learners' writing can greatly enhance their coherence and overall writing proficiency. This study puts forward the following pedagogical suggestions:

1. Introducing cohesive devices and explaining their functions in creating coherence in writing.
2. Providing explicit examples and modeling on the usage of the devices in sentences and paragraphs, focusing on how they contribute to coherence.
3. Designing guided practice activities that focus on using cohesive devices, engaging learners in analyzing cohesive devices in authentic texts.
4. Assigning writing tasks that specifically target the use of cohesive devices,
5. Giving scaffolded activities that support learners as needed throughout the learning process and emphasizing the importance of revising and editing for coherence by using cohesive devices appropriately. Finally, by incorporating these pedagogical approaches, teachers can help EFL learners develop a strong grasp of cohesive devices and improve their writing coherence.
6. It is essential to provide ample practice, feedback, and opportunities for application in authentic writing contexts to reinforce their understanding and usage of these devices. Furthermore, the study believes that students need to be taught how to think in English while writing rather than thinking and preparing their thoughts in their L1 and then transferring them into English.
7. The current study also suggests that cohesive devices should be given a place in the curriculum because academic writing instruction may not help the learners to utilize the appropriate cohesive devices.

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