

A Discourse Analysis of Formal Links Used in English Texts in National High School Entrance Exams

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Abstract. Language is a magical key that human beings hold in their hands to open the door of communication. To succeed in communication, formal links are one of the aspects of language that need to be known and used in discourse in addition to the contextual factors (Cook, 1992). Hence, systematic exposure to them is essential for satisfactory language acquisition, and assessment should be in line with this as well. Consequently, this study aimed to reveal whether a national exam English as a foreign language (EFL) learners take include these links. Based on this purpose, English texts taking place in the last five years' national high school exams (LGS) held in Turkey annually were analyzed by the discourse analytical framework of formal links suggested by Cook (1992) as a part of the qualitative design. The analysis indicated that the types of formal links included in majority of the exams were found to be verb forms, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition, ellipsis, and conjunction. Moreover, outnumbering uses of referring expressions and the infrequency of substitution were revealed. In the light of these findings, high school EFL teachers and the material developers in the ministry were suggested to include different types of formal links in their lessons/materials more frequently so that students could internalize such aspects of language at early stages of their EFL learning process and be one step closer to a balanced acquisition process.

Keywords: Discourse, discourse analysis, formal links, English as a Foreign Language

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1. INTRODUCTION

Being in spoken, written and non-verbal forms primarily, language is a magical key that human beings hold in their hands to open the door of communication. This key possesses such a magic that it enables people to select the accurate words and phrases out of the system, put them together as sentences and paragraphs, and form a unified whole for their interlocutors to keep the communication going. What this magic enables people to do here describes the whole process of discourse at the same time. In discourse, which refers to spoken or written uses of language to construct meaningful units in the course of communication (Cook, 1992), not only the language production but also the context, including sender and recipient are of importance.

Language could be used in many ways; however, this is highly limited by formal and contextual factors. That is using language in a way that could be meaningful for the recipient and appropriate for the context, the sender and recipient without any communication breakdowns, which is called the recipient design (Atar, 2017). For this reason, how this process takes place is examined under the title of discourse analysis with the aim of gaining a better insight into it. Being the first discourse analyst, Harris (1952) defines it as an examination of a continuous sequence of spoken or written language that exceeds the limits of one single sentence. On the other side, Brown and Yule (1983) encapsulate discourse analysis as “the analysis of language in use” (p. 113). In this type of analysis, the main aim is to reveal the aspects enabling a discourse to be coherent and interpreted by everyone meaningfully.

According to Cook (1992), formal links are of the aspects having a place in this coherent and meaningful interpretation. In his seminal book, *Discourse*, the linguist defines them as features creating a link between sentences and enabling them to have a unity (p. 14). Based on this, he classifies the formal links into several main categories, seven of which are the categories of verb form, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition and lexical chains, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction.

To start with verb form, it suggests that the form of the verb in one sentence affects the *verb form* in the following one (1989, p. 15). To exemplify:

Matthew had cooked the meals before Sally came home.

Here, the sentence signals that a verb in the simple past tense form (e.g., ‘came’) should be used in the sentence, which follows the one including a verb in the past perfect tense form (e.g., ‘had cooked’).

The next formal link, *parallelism*, implies that the structural forms of successive sentences should be in line with each other (p. 15). Here, grammatical, semantic, or sound patterns enable separate clauses to be linked to each other. Coming to *referring expressions*, it is seen that Cook defines them as words not having a clear meaning until they are referred by other preceding or ensuing ones, and gives the third person pronouns (e.g., ‘she’, ‘her’, ‘hers’, ‘herself’ etc.) as an instance (1992, p. 16). In the light of this, the linguist divides these expressions into two categories as *anaphora* and *cataphora*. According to him, anaphora occurs when the identity of a person or object is

revealed preliminarily and referred to with a following pronoun just like it is demonstrated below:

A: Have you talked to James yet?

B: No, not yet. I am planning to call him up tomorrow.

On the other hand, cataphora occurs when this is the opposite case (p. 18). To be more precise, it refers to the state, in which the pronoun is given first, and the referent is revealed in the sequel. For instance:

Nobody thought they could go that far, but Sam and Brian burned a house down yesterday.

Repetition and lexical chains are also among the formal links Cook (1992) includes in his book (p. 19). A lexical chain could be created by means of the repetition of words with the use of the same words and phrases. Upon this definition, the instance of this category could be as follows:

I saw a dog today. The dog was dalmatian.

However, this style is not approved by the British. Instead of writing the same words again and again, they adapt it to elegant repetition by substituting words with more general or specific ones or their synonyms as the following instance:

The laptop, the marvelous device, the new product of today's technology.

Apart from these, Cook (1992) adds *substitution* to the pool of formal links in his book and propounds that a word or group of words in one sentence could be substituted in the following one with the use of 'do' or 'so' as exemplified in the following dialogue (p. 20):

A: Do you like extreme sports?

B: Yes, I think so.

Hence, instead of risking the coherence by repeating the same part as "*No, I do not think I like extreme sports.*", a unified whole could be constructed more briefly. Moreover, it is also possible to omit the repetitive part without making any substitutions (Cook, 1992, p. 20). Instead of responding to the question "*What are you doing?*" with "*I am reading a book.*", in *ellipsis*, the response could simply be shortened to "*Reading a book.*", and it could still be interpreted by the recipient correctly.

As for the last category, which is *conjunction*, it is defined by Cook (1992, p. 21) as a word or phrase linking sentences or clauses by signaling the aim of building a bridge between them. Accordingly, the aim could be to add more information (e.g., and, moreover), to give an instance (e.g., for instance), to state an opposite idea (e.g., or, however), to establish a cause-and-effect relationship (e.g., so, because), to indicate the time or sequence (e.g., before, next), and to summarize (e.g., to sum up, in short).

For decades, formal links, also known as cohesive devices (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), has been considered among aspects language learners need to be aware of in order to provide their interlocutors with unified and meaningful stretches of language and take a concrete step towards succeeding in communication (Cook, 1992). Starting from this,

the analysis of formal links in discourse has become a focus in literature to enable language learners to be more aware of them (Furi, 2005; Kulsum, 2007; Adiantika, 2015; Bahaziq, 2016; Sijono & Aristo, 2018).

Accordingly, Furi (2005), asserting that formal links enable recipients to interpret what senders produce as discourse more accurately, analyzed the poem “The Sick Rose” by William Blake and ascertained that it had included several uses of repetition. Hence, that formal link was found to be a discourse-analytical resource for the poet, the sender of the discourse, in the process of making it more comprehensible for his recipients. However, Adiantika (2015), who analyzed the formal links in students’ essays in her study, detected the overuse of the same formal link in some of the collected data, along with referring expressions and conjunctions, and propounded that repetition does not have a positive impact on discourse when it is excessively used. Thus, it could be suggested that teachers should include all the different categories of formal links in their classrooms to ensure that their students can acquire a second or foreign language successfully specifically with regard to cohesion and coherence by touching upon appropriate ways to use them in discourse.

In another analysis of formal links in students’ essays, what Bahaziq (2016) deduced supports the study mentioned above. Revealing that referring expressions and conjunctions were the ones encountered in those essays, she alleged that the two formal links could contribute to the unity of written discourse but only to a certain extent. Therefore, the researcher considered formal links as gaps waiting to be compensated for with the help of language teachers. Examining the analysis of Sijono and Aristo (2018), in which they focused on twelve different songs by Westlife, a music band, it was seen that they included verb forms, referring expressions, repetition, parallelism, conjunctions, and substitution. The variety of the formal links in a single song demonstrated the variation depending on its context. In that case, language teachers might be recommended to create different contexts in their classrooms to teach each formal link effectively.

As for Kulsum (2007), sharing the same focus with the present study, the scholar analyzed the formal links taking place in a national high school entrance exam in Indonesia. In a similar vein to Adiantika (2015) and Bahaziq (2016), the researcher found that the formal link that was used the most commonly in discourse was conjunctions. However, it was also possible to encounter the examples of repetition, verb forms, referring expressions, parallelism, and ellipsis in the texts of that exam, which demonstrated that the developers of the Indonesian examination system was aware of the place formal links have in discourse according to Kulsum (2007).

Considering the emphasis on the significance of formal links in the literature by stating that they act as a glue holding stretches of language together and enabling them to seem unified and meaningful, this study concluded that students should not only be taught formal links in classes, but they should also be included in the assessment process to achieve constructive alignment (Walsh, 2011). In this way, they could form a sound basis

to succeed in communication, and high school is the exact level at which these aspects could successfully be internalized.

All in all, it could be fathomed that formal links have an impact on the process of constructing a unified whole in interaction (Cook, 1992). Considering their significance in discourse, it is suggested that formal links should be a part of what students' English language teaching program includes and that they need to be aware of them in order to achieve higher order discourse skills. In this regard, whether formal links are given due consideration in countries, where English is learned as a foreign language, should be revealed with the analysis of their national exams so that English language teaching can be realized much more successfully. Accordingly, the research question of the present study is as follows:

- What are the types and frequency of formal links used in English texts taking place in the Turkish national high school entrance exams (LGS) of the last five years?

2. METHOD

This study was carried out on the basis of a qualitative research design. Throughout the paper, English texts taking place in the national high school entrance exams (LGS) that were administered in Turkey in the last five academic years (i.e., 2021-2022, 2020-2021, 2019-2020, 2018-2019, 2017-2018) were analyzed by taking into account the classification of formal links as suggested by Cook (1992).

The instruments of this study were English texts included in the national high school entrance exams, being held in Turkey in the last five years, namely, the academic years 2021-2022 (MEB, 2022; See Appendix A), 2020-2021 (MEB, 2021), 2019-2020 (MEB, 2020), 2018-2019 (MEB, 2019), 2017-2018 (MEB, 2018). The name of the exam is LGS, meaning "High School Transition Exam", and it is held once in a year and consists of two sessions. In LGS, taken by the eighth graders, the first session is based upon verbal courses such as Turkish, Revolution History and Kemalism, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge, and English while the second session is based upon math and science. Consisting of 90 questions in total, LGS allocates 10 of them to English. Accordingly, the present study focused on the English texts taking place in fifty English questions in total.

The data were collected from booklets of the LGS exams administered in the last five academic years, which could be seen from Appendix A to E. Afterwards, the five tables attributed to the analyzed LGS exam of each academic year and demonstrated in the Findings section were adopted by Kulsum (2007) in order to detect the formal links taking place in texts. By taking into account the seven categories of the formal links propounded by Cook (1992), 50 English questions were analyzed in total. After detecting any formal links, the texts containing them were added to the adopted tables. In the sequel, those texts were marked on the same table in brackets depending on the type(s) of the formal links they included.

3. FINDINGS

Analyzing the texts included in a total of 50 English questions taking part in the LGS exams of the last five years pursuant to the types of formal links taking place in them, a variety of findings were obtained. In the sequel, the formal links detected from the 10 English questions in the LGS exam of the academic year 2021-2022 were demonstrated in *Table 1*.

Table 1

Formal Links Detected from the English Texts in the LGS Exam of the Academic Year 2021-2022

Data No	Text
1	<p>Sally's friends are talking about Sally.</p> <p>Christina : She (C) is the best student in our (C) class. Her (C) exam results are (B) always good.</p> <p>Helen : We (C) have similar interests and (G) we (C) like (A, B) spending time together.</p> <p>Sue : We (C) get on well (A) and (G) share (A, B) our (C) secrets with each other.</p> <p>Amanda : She (C) is very good at Physics and Chemistry.</p>
2	<p>You (C) work at the call center of a company. You (C) are talking to a customer on the phone. He (C) has a problem with the device that he (C) bought.</p>
3	<p>Your (C) friend Jack went hang-gliding in Fethiye and (G) shared (B) the photo above.</p> <p>You (C) posted a comment to say that you (C) really liked (A) the photo (D). What was (A) your (C) comment?</p>
4	<p>Jane wants to buy a concert ticket for Susan for her (C) birthday. She (C) reads (A, B) Susan's comments on different bands in her (C) blog.</p> <p>World of Rock: My best friend said nice things about this band but (G) I (C) don't think I (C) will listen to them (C) again.</p> <p>Rap Park: I (C) have listened to them (C) many times and (G) I (C) think they (C) are great.</p> <p>Jazz Boys: Their (C) music is not very good. They (C) should (A) improve themselves (C).</p> <p>Pop Time: The concert was boring. Their (C) music is unbearable.</p>

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- 5 Teacher : What is **your** (C) opinion about rock music? / What do **you** (C) think about jazz music? / What can **you** (C) say about pop music?
 Ted : **I** (C) think **it** (C) **is** (A) the best music ever.
 Betty : **I** (C) **can't** (A) say that **I** (C) **like** (A) **it** (C).
 Lily : **It** (C) **makes** (A) **me** (C) feel happy.
 Joe : **I** (C) **can't** (A) stand **it** (C), **it** (B, C) **is** (A, B) unbearable.
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- 6 Every year thousands of people from all over the world come to Rome, Italy to attend the Pizza Vita Festival. **This** (C) **is** (B) one of the biggest food festivals in the world. In the festival, **you** (C) **can** (B) eat many different types of pizza, **make** (A, B) **your** (C) own **pizza** (D), **enjoy** (A, B) folk music **and** (G) **buy** (A, B) local souvenirs. **If** (G) **you** (C) love pizza, **don't miss** (A) this festival.
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- 7 Laura has some guests for dinner **but** (G) **she** (C) **will arrive** (A) home late after the guests. **So** (G), **she** (C) **asks** (A, B) **her** (C) husband Matt to prepare the dinner **before** (G) the guests arrive.
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- 8 Tina **is having** (A) a birthday party tomorrow. **She** (C) invites **her** (C) friends, **but** (G) four of **them** (C) **have** (A, B) excuses **and** (G) **they** (C) **can't go** (A, B) to the party.
 Jessy: Thanks for **your** (C) invitation, **but** (G) **I** (C) am going to the hospital to visit **my** (C) grandfather who is ill.
 Terry: **I** (C)'m sorry **but** (G) **I** (C) **am** (B) ill. **I** (C) **have** (B) an appointment with **my** (C) doctor.
 Amy: **I** (C)'m afraid, **I** (C) **can't come** (A, B). **I** (C)'m going to the hospital to conduct a survey for **my** (C) project.
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- 9 John did research on important inventors and **their** (C) lives. **Then** (G), **he** (C) **filled** (A, B) in the table below.
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- 10 Jenny and Amelia are students in Istanbul. **They** (C) **want** (A, B) to go to a cooking course together. Jenny **can** (B) attend the course on weekdays. Amelia **is** (B) busy only on Fridays. Jenny **has** (B) £500 **and** (G) Amelia **can't pay** (A, B) more than £400.

Categories: A: Verb Form, B: Parallelism, C: Referring Expressions, D: Repetition, E: Substitution
 F: Ellipsis, G: Conjunction

According to *Table 1*, it was found out that five types of formal links were included in the English texts taking place in the 10 English questions of the LGS exam administered in the academic year 2021-2022. In that regard, this demonstrates that it included a variety of formal links. These five types were found to be verb form, parallelism, referring

expressions, repetition, and conjunction. To go into more detail, sixty-eight instances of referring expressions, twenty-six instances of verb form, nineteen instances of conjunction, nine instances of parallelism, and one instance of repetition were identified. In the light of those numbers, it was revealed that the mostly encountered formal link was referring expressions whereas the least encountered one was repetition. On the top of that, no instances of substitution and ellipsis could be identified among the 10 questions analyzed. Accordingly, all those findings imply that although the test included most of the types of formal links, there is an imbalance in their distribution.

Passing to the past, the formal links detected from the 10 English questions in the LGS exam of the academic year 2020-2021 were demonstrated in *Table 2*.

Table 2

Formal Links Detected from the English Texts in the LGS Exam of the Academic Year 2020-2021

Data No	Text
1	<p>Andy : Our (C) basketball team plays (A) a match this Saturday. The match (D) starts (A, B) at 2 p.m. Would you (C) like to watch the match with us (C)?</p> <p>David : I (C) have to finish my (C) project on Saturday but (G) I (C)'ll join you (C).</p>
2	<p>Linda: Hi Jane, I (C) am organizing a movie night on Friday evening. It (C) will be fun! Would you (C) like to come over?</p> <p>Jane: Hi Linda, I (C) would really love to join you (C) but (G) my (C) cousin is visiting me (C) on Friday. Can she (C) come with me (C)?</p>
3	<p>Sam : I (C) want to have steak for dinner. Can (A, B) you (C) cook it (C) for me (C), mom?</p> <p>Mother: Sure.</p> <p>Sam How long does (A, B) it (C) take to cook it (C)?</p> <p>Mother: About 30 minutes (F).</p>
4	<p>II. Hi, this is Kevin. How can (A, B) I (C) help you (C)?</p> <p>IV. Hi, this is (A) Adam. May I (C) speak to Frank, please?</p> <p>I. I (C)'m sorry. He (C) is (B) not here at the moment. Would you (C) like to leave a message?</p> <p>III. Could you (C) tell him (C) to call me (C) back, please?</p>

5	This is Milo. It (C) helps (A) us (C) with the kitchen chores.
6	Daniel has read the books above. He (C) wants (A) to buy a new book on a similar topic.
7	Mike is a university student in İstanbul. He (C) is going to (A) visit his (C) friends in Ankara next weekend. He (C) has ₺70 for transportation and (G) he (C) wants (A, B) to go there in the shortest time possible.
8	Hello friends. Today, I (C) will answer your (C) questions. Let's start with the first question. I (C) love (B) reading about famous people's lives. You (C) see some comments about rafting in Rize below. Cindy: I (C) think it (C) was an amazing experience! I (C) will do it (C) again. Fred: It (B, C) was both challenging and exciting. I (C) liked (A, B) it (C). Tom: It (B, C) was (A) not exciting. I (C) didn't find (A, B) what I (C) looked for. Kate: It (B, C) was (A) very dangerous. You (C) shouldn't do it (C) without your (C) helmet.

Categories: A: Verb Form, B: Parallelism, C: Referring Expressions, D: Repetition, E: Substitution
F: Ellipsis, G: Conjunction

When examining *Table 2*, it was disclosed that six types of formal links were included in the English texts taking place in the 10 English questions of the LGS exam administered in the academic year 2020-2021. In that regard, this demonstrates that it included a variety of formal links. These six types were found to be verb form, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition, ellipsis, and conjunction. To elaborate on that, fifty-six instances of referring expressions, twelve instances of verb form, eleven instances of parallelism, two instances of conjunction, one instance of repetition, and one instance of ellipsis were identified. In the light of those numbers, it was revealed that the mostly encountered formal link was referring expressions whereas the rank for the least encountered one was shared by both repetition and ellipsis. In the same vein as the LGS exam of the previous year, no instances of substitution could be identified among the 10 questions included in the one administered in the academic year 2020-2021. Accordingly, all those findings indicate that although the test included most of the types of formal links, there is an imbalance in their distribution.

Going back in time for another year, the formal links detected from the 10 English questions in the LGS exam of the academic year 2019-2020 were demonstrated in *Table 3*.

Table 3

Formal Links Detected from the English Texts in the LGS Exam of the Academic Year 2019-2020

Data No	Text
1	<p>You © work at a call center and (G) answer (A) customers' questions on the phone. You (C) are (B) there to solve their (C) problems.</p> <p>If (G) you © have (B) a problem again, please contact (A) us (C).</p> <p>After (G) I © talk to our © team, I © will call (A) you (C).</p>
2	<p>William : We © must listen (A) to our (C) teachers while (G) they (C) are talking (A).</p> <p>Charles : We (B, C) must (B) come home early in the evenings.</p> <p>Jane : We (B, C) mustn't (B) drink or eat during our (C) lessons.</p> <p>Rachel : We (B, C) mustn't (B) talk to each other during the exams.</p>
3	<p>Alice: There is too much black pepper in this soup. I © hate (A, B) spicy food.</p> <p>Brad: This lemonade is really sour. Can you © add some more sugar, please?</p> <p>George: My © brother likes eating sweet things. He © always buys (B) chocolate, cookies and cakes.</p>
4	<p>First, put some oil into a pan and (G) heat (A) it (C).</p> <p>Add (A, B) onions and peppers into the pan (D).</p> <p>Dice (A, B) the tomatoes and (G) add (A) them (C) into the pan (D).</p> <p>Pour (A, B) the eggs into the pan (D) and (G) add (A) some salt. Then (G) fry (A, B) the mixture for 5 minutes.</p> <p>Your © meal is ready. Enjoy!</p>
5	<p>Greg: Hello, It ©'s "Green Mobile". How can (A) I (C) help you (C)?</p> <p>Mr. Carter : Hello, my © computer is not working (A) properly. I (C) think it (C) is (B) broken.</p> <p>Greg : Oh, OK, I © understand. Can (A) I (C) take your (C) address, please?</p> <p>Mr. Carter : 8 Freeway Street (F).</p> <p>Greg : Thank you ©. Our © team will be there in an hour to check your © computer.</p>

	Mr. Carter : Thank you ©.
6	<p>Dear friends,</p> <p>Our © school basketball team has (A) a match with a team from Johnson High School this Saturday at 3 p.m. Let's watch (B) the match (D) together!</p> <p>Ted</p> <p>- Matt likes basketball matches and (G) he © will be there.</p>
7	<p>Tomorrow is Kate's birthday. So (G), Joe decides (A) to buy her (C) a book and (G) asks (A) Kate's friends about the books she (C) has read or bought. These (C) are their (C) answers:</p> <p>Max : I © know she © has finished "The Friendship".</p> <p>Zack : She © wanted to read "The Old World" and (G) Jane bought (A) it (C) for her (C).</p> <p>Rose : She © wanted (B) to buy the book "The Indian Music" but (G) she (C) bought (A) "The Great Dog".</p>
8	<p>Suzanne : Hello, this is Suzanne Jordan, I ©'m calling you © for the English Day event.</p> <p>Secretary : Hello Suzanne. How can I © help you ©?</p> <p>Suzanne : What should (A) I (C) do to join the event?</p> <p>Secretary : Just bring your © project to the Concert House.</p> <p>Suzanne : Oh, OK! Thank you ©.</p>
<p>Categories: A: Verb Form, B: Parallelism, C: Referring Expressions, D: Repetition, E: Substitution F: Ellipsis, G: Conjunction</p>	

Considering *Table 3*, it was unveiled that six types of formal links were included in the English texts taking place in the 10 English questions of the LGS exam administered in the academic year 2019-2020. In that regard, this demonstrates that it included a variety of formal links. These six types were found to be verb form, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition, ellipsis, and conjunction. To go into particulars, fifty-six instances of referring expressions, twenty instances of verb form, fifteen instances of parallelism, twelve instances of conjunction, four instances of repetition, and one instance of ellipsis were identified. In the light of those numbers, it was revealed that the mostly encountered formal link was referring expressions whereas the least encountered one was ellipsis. Similarly, no instances of substitution could be identified among the 10 questions included in the one administered in the academic year 2019-

2020. Accordingly, all those findings indicate that although the test included most of the types of formal links, there is an imbalance in their distribution.

Continuing with the previous exam session, the formal links detected from the 10 English questions in the LGS exam of the academic year 2018-2019 were demonstrated in *Table 4*.

Table 4

Formal Links Detected from the English Texts in the LGS Exam of the Academic Year 2018-2019

Data No	Text
1	This afternoon, Jane's mother is coming home from a short trip. Jane's mother (D) can't (A) stand dirty dishes.
2	Mike: Good afternoon. This is Mike. Sally: Good afternoon, Mike. This (D) is (A) Sally. Mike: Is (A) Nick there? Sally: Hold on a moment, please. I (C)'ll get him (C) .
3	David and Martin decided to read the same book and (G) discuss (B) it (C) later.
4	Garry: Hello everybody! Today, our (C) guest is (A) Michael Miller. What is (A) your (C) favorite sport, Michael? Michael: It (C) is (A) paragliding. Garry: How often do you (C) do it (C) ? Michael: Twice a week (F) . Garry: Why do you (C) like it (C) ? Michael: Watching the scenery is fascinating (i.e., is: A, the whole sentence: F). Garry: What do you (C) need for it (C) ? Michael: A helmet and a parachute (F) .
5	Researchers asked (A) teenagers and adults the types of transportation they (C) preferred (A) .

6	<p>Nikola Tesla was born on July 10, 1856.</p> <p>He (C) became (A) interested in physics when (G) he (C) was (A) just a small boy.</p> <p>He (B, C) learned (A, B) different languages because (G) he (B, C) wanted (A, B) to read about scientific achievements in different parts of the world.</p> <p>He (B, C) invented (A, B) many new things during his (C) life.</p>
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Categories: A: Verb Form, B: Parallelism, C: Referring Expressions, D: Repetition, E: Substitution
F: Ellipsis, G: Conjunction

As seen in Table 4, it was noticed that six types of formal links were included in the English texts taking place in the 10 English questions of the LGS exam. Hence, this demonstrates that it included a variety of formal links. These six types were found to be verb forms, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition, ellipsis, and conjunctions. To expound on that, twelve instances of referring expressions, 10 instances of verb form, six instances of conjunctions, four instances of ellipsis, three instances of parallelism, and two instances of repetition were identified. In the light of those numbers, it was revealed that the mostly encountered formal links were referring expressions and verb form while the least encountered ones were repetition and substitution. These findings suggest that although the test included most of the types of formal links, there is an imbalance in their distribution.

Looking back for one more year, the formal links detected from the 10 English questions in the LGS exam of the academic year 2017-2018 were demonstrated in *Table 5*.

Table 5

Formal Links Detected from the English Texts in the LGS Exam of the Academic Year 2017-2018

Data No	Text
1	Jordan: My (C) cousin, Mary, feels (A) worried if (G) she (C) is offline even for a few hours. I (C) think (B) she (C) is a real Internet addict.
2	Kevin : What type of cities do you (C) like most, historical or modern? Kate: Historical cities are my (C) favourite because (G) their (C) architecture is (A) fascinating.
3	Mark : I (C) am going to see my (C) sister in the afternoon. Would you (C) like to come with me (C) ?

	Sarah : Why not? Where are you (C) going to meet?
	Mark : In front of the cinema (F). We (C) want to watch a movie together.
4	Erica : Hi, Laura. How are things? Laura : I (C) feel (A) terrible because (G) Paul has had a bad accident. He (C) has been in the hospital for three days. Erica : I (C) am (A) sorry to hear that! I (C) hope (B) he (C) gets (A) better soon. Laura : <u>Thanks for your (C) good wishes</u> (F).
5	Carla loves wearing trendy clothes, so (G) she (C) spends (A) a lot of money on them (C).
6	TOMATO SALAD - Wash some tomatoes, onions and parsley. - Cut (A, B) the vegetables into small pieces. - Put (A, B) the vegetables in a bowl and (C) mix (A, B) them (C). - Add (A, B) some olive oil. Enjoy (A, B) it (C)!
7	Sam always prefers doing activities with his (C) friends outside.
8	Hi friends! Welcome to my (C) blog. You (C) know (B) I (C) was (A) in Paris last weekend. On the first day of my (C) trip, I (C) visited (A) the Louvre Museum. I (B, C) even took (A, B) a photo of Mona Lisa's painting. On Sunday, I (B, C) visited (A, B) the Eiffel Tower. <u>Watching Paris from the top of the Eiffel Tower</u> (D, F) was (B) very exciting for me (C). Wait for my (C) new trips to new places. Until then (E), bye!

Categories: A: Verb Form, B: Parallelism, C: Referring Expressions, D: Repetition, E: Substitution
 F: Ellipsis, G: Conjunction

Scrutinizing Table 5, it was realized that seven types of formal links were included in the English texts taking place in the 10 English questions of the LGS exam administered in the academic year 2017-2018. In that regard, this demonstrates that it included a variety of formal links. These seven types were found to be verb form, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. To enlarge upon that, thirty-four instances of referring expressions, fourteen instances of verb form, twelve instances of parallelism, four instances of conjunction, three instances of ellipsis, and one instance each for repetition and substitution were identified. In the light of those numbers, it was noticed that the mostly encountered formal link was referring

expressions whereas the least encountered ones were both repetition and substitution. Among the analyzed LGS exams of the last five years, the one held in the academic year was the first one including at least one instance of all the seven types of formal links focused on in the present study. Despite that being the case, it could be asserted that the test including all the types of formal links still has an imbalance in their distribution.

To recapitulate the findings regarding the formal links detected from the English texts in the LGS exams from the academic year 2021-2022 to 2017-2018, it could be pointed out that the English texts of each exam gave place to referring expressions the most. On the contrary, substitution was the type of formal links that was present only in the LGS exam of the academic year 2017-2018. Even though repetition and ellipsis could be detected in most of the analyzed exams, there was a huge gap between referring expressions and them in terms of the number of their frequencies. For that reason, it could be enounced that the imbalance in the distribution of the seven types of formal links was active throughout the analyzed LGS exams of the last five academic years.

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Taking into consideration all that were found as a result of the analysis on the formal links used in the total of 50 English questions taking part in the LGS exams of the last five academic years, it could be argued that there were predominantly six categories of formal links (i.e., verb form, parallelism, referring expressions, repetition, ellipsis, and conjunction) given place in the English texts of the last five years' LGS exams (i.e., the exams of the academic years 2020-2021, 2019-2020, 2018-2019). Thus, regarding the variety of the detected formal links in the analyzed discourses, it is possible to suggest that the findings of this study are in line with the ones obtained in the study Sijono and Aristo (2018) in terms of the number of the categories that were detected in the analyzed data. However, they were divergent from each other due to the fact that the missing type of formal link in one of them was substitution while it was ellipsis in the other one. In contrast to Kulsum (2007) who focused on the English texts included in the national high school exam that was held in Indonesia in 2007 and found out that all the seven categories of formal links were observed in that exam, it was revealed in the present study that the English texts taking place in the LGS exams of the last five academic years were mostly devoid of substitution. Substitution is indeed a significant skill as it enables speakers to target a verb phrase (i.e., VP) from a syntactic skill (Dawson & Phelan, 2016). Accordingly, utilizing substitution successfully contributes to the mastery of the formal aspects of language competence. As a result, this should have been included in the exams as well.

Even though a variety of formal links were used in the texts involved in the LGS exams, the recipients of the written discourse should have been provided with the opportunity to be exposed to different products of the process of creating a unified whole and interpreting them correctly. The predominancy of referring expressions over them was

visible throughout all the five LGS exams and the tendency to include such a type of formal links frequently was a valid point indeed. It is something to be appreciated that the number of the types of formal links was not less than five in the analyzed data just like the ones in the majority of the literature because that, in a way, signals the fact that test developers in Turkey are aware of the place of formal links in constructing meaningful and unified stretches of language (Cook, 1992).

Nevertheless, the variety does not make everything perfect if the balance among the uses of the seven categories is not protected. Although some types are indeed common in real-life as well (such as referring expressions and verb forms), allocating more space to less frequent types of formal links will possibly help students avoid acquiring an artificial representation of the genuine interaction. For that reason, what needs to be done is to provide students with more chances of being aware of the fact that there are a variety of different categories of formal links, and they could be involved in written or spoken discourses in different ways depending on the contexts, in which discourse production takes place.

Formal links are like building blocks in fact. Depending on the building structure, different kinds of materials are required to be used so that the building could turn into a safe and coherent one. It may not be possible to use all of them in one building construction; however, they still are required to be known by building workers so that they could use the most appropriate ones in the most appropriate amounts to construct a unified whole. Otherwise, their deficiency or redundancy may cause the building to collapse, as a metaphor. Thus, in the construction of a unified whole, formal links are of the discourse materials language learners need to be aware of so that they could use the one or ones suitable for the context, in which they produce spoken or written discourse. In this way, the texts could be more meaningful for the recipients, and the communication between the two sides could be achieved more successfully (Cook, 1992).

As Kulsum (2007) also suggests in her study, formal links are of the significant aspects of language that are to be internalized by students in early stages of their language learning processes, and high school is the crucial stage for them to be able to build an understanding of the facts inside the language. They are not young learners anymore at this stage. Hence, they are more likely to be ready for the explicit aspects of languages, and accordingly, some explicit teaching and consciousness raising may be beneficial for them (Ellis, 2002). Thus, it is the responsibility of high school EFL teachers in Turkey to include all the seven types of formal links in their lessons through engaging activities, and as a part of the constructive alignment, test developers should also include what is taught in the class (Walsh, 2011). In this way, students could use them in different contexts and become ready to be successful senders and recipients of meaningful discourses while communicating with their interlocutors in their target language.

In the present study, the aim was to investigate whether EFL students were exposed to the formal links, a significant part of discourse, by which they can improve their skills in

constructing a unified whole to succeed in communication. Based on that aim, English texts included in the last five years' national high school exams (LGS) that were held in Turkey, where English is taught as a foreign language were analyzed to find out the types and frequency of formal links that were given place in them. As a result of the analysis, it was revealed that mostly six types of formal links as referring expressions, verb form, parallelism, conjunction, ellipsis, and repetition were used in English texts of the LGS exam. While it was shown that Turkish EFL learners were provided with opportunities to recognize the role of formal links in discourse, the obvious prevalence of referring expressions and the infrequency of substitution in the exam were regarded as the points needed to be worked on. Thus, high school EFL teachers should meet the deficit by including each type of formal links in their lessons through various in-class activities and enabling their students to take a significant step towards mutual understanding in communication at the early stages of their target language learning processes. In the same vein, policy makers, material developers, and test developers should also include a variety of the formal links in a more balanced way.

As for the limitations, this study focused on a single context (i.e., Turkey) and a specific level (i.e., lower secondary schools). Future studies may study the formal links in assessment in different countries and at different levels. Also, this study focused on five tests administered in the last five years. Future studies may study more years to understand whether there are longitudinal differences.

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