Skills of High School Students' Using Cohesive Devices in Written Expressions According to Their Functions

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the abilities of junior high school students to collate and combine cohesion modules together in their written expressions. Thereby, it will be possible to straightly put forward the forms of links the students make in a sentence, between sentences, in a paragraph and between paragraphs, yielding new suggestive approaches on how to establish such links in a healthier manner. The studied population consisted of 9th and 10th grade junior high school students currently enrolled at schools in Turkey during the academic term 2008-2009. Sampling was made with 524 students from Turkish population, selected from 23 cities and 32 public high schools. The basic conclusions reached during the study are as follows: Cohesion tools were used in lexical context by linking functionalities profoundly between sentences (by 47,32%) and then within sentences (by 31,60%), within paragraphs (by 15%) and between paragraphs (by 6,06%), in respective order. Junior High School students face certain problems when using cohesion tools within sentences, between sentences, within paragraphs and between paragraphs. These problems can be stated as follows: lack of clarity and distinction of personal pronoun replacements within sentences; lack of clarity and distinction of demonstrative adjective replacements between sentences; unnecessary use of demonstrative adjectives between sentences; references made between sentences causing singular-plural discordance; very frequent recurrence of elements of verbal expression associated with references made within paragraphs; singular-plural form discordances when using demonstrative adjectives in sentences, and, recourse to elliptical expression, where it is in appropriate, between sentences.

Key Words: cohesive devices, organization of the text, written expression

Extended Summary

Cohesion in linguistics can simply be defined as the grammatical and lexical relationship between elements that serve understanding by readers of a particular unit or module (which can be placed inside or between sentences or paragraphs) as a constituent of a lexical context and are semantically linked to one another and therefore require interpretation together. This concept refers to the forms in which various grammatical elements form textual units (words, word groups, sentences, paragraphs).

Cohesive relationships may occur in the same sentence or between consecutively running sentences or separately placed non-successive sentences in a paragraph and between paragraphs. If an articulation cannot be established in a sentence, between sentences or in a paragraph or between paragraphs, all being different levels of text, then these lingual units cannot form a semantically meaningful unity, when they come together. As a result, the text becomes a bulk of unrelated, independent thoughts which cannot be semantically associated with one another.

Those who have mastered in writing skills can establish cohesive relationships at any level, rendering independent lexical units (such as affixes, words, word groups, sentences, paragraphs) linked to one another in a consecutive order or as laid together or otherwise interconnected. Thus the text can be perceived easily in a line and without any discontinuities, by the reader, as a whole.

The cohesion tools provide the following opportunities, if used properly and in place within a text:

1. They allow for keeping narrations as short and concise as possible, eliminating unnecessary bulks of words and phrases.

2. They prevent monotony in expression by avoiding concomitant and reiterative use of a word in the same form, with features and opportunities they offer (pronouns (references), synonyms, circumlocution (use of many words to describe something for which a concise (and commonly known) expression exists), elliptical expression).

3. They allow a fair understanding of interdependent information in the expression (textual units), though expression may not be conceived in a truly distinct manner.

4. They provide and clarify the links established within a sentence, between sentences, within a paragraph or between paragraphs.

5. They prevent repetitive statements of certain information or text unit, which has previously been stated, through semantic relations and links they establish (like elliptical expression, substitution, referencing).

6. They eliminate ambiguities within textual boundaries, by identifying the text spots to be complemented by the reader in mind.

7. If used properly and in place, they prevent incomprehensibility.

8. They strengthen perceptibility of the text by showing which thoughts presented in the context belong to which information.

One of the most notable works ever written on cohesion is the one authored by Halliday and Hasan with the title "Cohesion in English" (1976). This work draws a classification of cohesion, as follows: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

Method

Mainly intended to determine the levels of success among junior high school students in assembling cohesion units at different levels in written expressions, this study bears the nature and character of descriptive assessment, one of the recognized research methodologies.

What are the problems encountered by secondary school students with the use of cohesion factors and their levels of employing cohesion factors depending on their manner of setting associations between various units of text, in their written expressions? In line with this problem statement, the following tributary problems were also attempted to be answered:

1. How often do Junior high school students use references in and between sentences and/or paragraphs?

2. How often do Junior high school students use elliptical expressions in and between sentences and/or paragraphs?

3. How often do Junior high school students use substitutions in and between sentences and/or paragraphs?

4. How often do Junior high school students use conjunctions in and between sentences and/or paragraphs?

The research sample consists of 9th and 10th grade secondary school students selected using the stratified sampling technique, from among random sampling methods, across Turkey. The sample size as calculated is 524 secondary school students in total, including 262 9th and 262 10th graders.

The basic data source for this study has been student manuscripts, each of which was considered as a document for the purpose of this study. In order to

identify convenient topics from among those presented, 20 experts were asked to evaluate by scoring these subjects according to the levels of 9th and 10th graders and subsequently, the top 10 subjects determined by the highest scores based on calculations of consensus and divergence of scores assigned to each subject.

The 10 subjects with highest level of confidence were then identified, in light of expert opinions. It is observed that all subjects identified had confidence levels of 77,5 points and above.

Application was made in 34 junior high schools at 23 provinces by the Educational Research and Development Department of the Ministry of Education, which gathered and returned study data back to the researcher for analysis.

Findings

Cohesion factors are observed to appear in four types: 1) In the same sentence, 2) Between consecutively running sentences (between 2 sequential sentences), 3) In a paragraph (in the same paragraph between non-successive sentences) and 4) between paragraphs.

Cohesion tools were used in lexical context by linking functionalities profoundly between sentences (by 47,32%) and then within sentences (by 31,60%), within paragraphs (by 15%) and between paragraphs (by 6,06%), in respective order.

Junior High School students face certain problems when using cohesion tools within sentences, between sentences, within paragraphs and between paragraphs. These problems can be stated as follows:

- Lack of clarity and distinction of personal pronoun replacements within sentences
- Lack of clarity and distinction of demonstrative adjective replacements between sentences
- Unnecessary use of demonstrative adjectives between sentences
- References made between sentences causing singular-plural discordance
- Very frequent recurrence of elements of verbal expression associated with references made within paragraphs
- Recourse to elliptical expression, where it is in appropriate, between sentences

Discussion and Results

In light of the above specified results, the following suggestions have been raised concerning the study: Students should be informed about functions of cohesion tools and receive a practical demonstration of how these factors can be

exploited when establishing links between various units of text. When so doing, pre-selected texts should be used and comparisons should be made between texts where cohesion factors are used successfully and unsuccessfully.

There is also an obvious need for conducting practical studies as separate for the cohesion relations that each cohesion factor establishes in a sentence, between sentences, in a paragraph and between paragraphs.

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