

Analyzing Cohesion and Coherence in Malay as a Second Language Writing by Tamil Learners

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Abstract

This small-scale study attempted to investigate the use of cohesive devices and its relation to overall textual coherence in writing Malay as second language learning by Tamil language learners. The respondents were 5 4th semester students studying at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI). This study employed one of the qualitative research method, descriptive approach to identify the use of cohesion and its relation to overall textual coherence. The objective of this study is to identify the use of cohesion in respondents writing and its relation to textual coherence in Malay writing. Analysis of finding revealed that the respondents encounter some difficulties in using proper cohesion which interrupts the coherency of the sentences. This paper provides a general overview of the use of cohesion in second language writing to create text coherence.

Keywords: Cohesion; coherence; textuality; second language learning

1. Introduction

Malay as a second language learning has been a very important area of research in the education field in Malaysia as Malay language is the national language and is also used to teach other subjects in mainstream education level. Therefore, any writer of second language including the Malay language learners should master the ability to express their ideas by writing them in their own words (Faradhibah & Nur, 2017). In continuation to this, to produce a logically written piece of writing, any second language learners including Malay second language learners should carefully consider how to write sentences and convincing supporting sentences, and finally edit them (Kafes, 2012).

Mastering Malay language as a second language is not only to master the language but also the learners should be able to use the language in any other subjects or fields that requires the language. In academic writing, learners must know where to start, what to do at each stage and what is expected of them when writing texts (Diliduzgun, 2013). Gholami and Alizadeh (2017) says that that writing greatly influence learners process of learning the language. Writing is one of the basic skills that any language learners should master. This is because, compared with other skills, writing is often considered the most difficult one to be acquired as it is seen as a big challenge for the language learners to express their thoughts by writing them coherently. If the writing lacks coherence then it may result in poor comprehension among the readers.

Coherence is an important quality for good academic writing. This is because, in an academic writing the flow of ideas from sentence to the next one should be smooth and acceptable. Meanwhile without cohesion, the readers will not understand the content that is being conveyed by the writer. When the reader can understand clearly what is being said by the writer, meaning that cohesion can cater readability. Therefore, cohesion is very important in producing coherence.

Malay writing is not an easy skill to be achieved especially in a second language learning context and in a multilingual context. That is why this small scaled study emphasized the importance of implementing cohesion and coherence in teaching any language including Malay as a second language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cohesion and coherence

The term “cohesion” was introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976), whose major concern is to investigate how sentences are linked in a text. According to them as a writer one should know how to hold the meaning with inter related sentences. To create inter related sentences, the writer needed cohesion. They also said, that cohesion merely can assure that sentences in a text is connected properly and thus coherence is achieved.

On the other hand, coherence is viewed by Widdowson (1978) as the relationship between

illocutionary acts. The speech acts are not interconnected until the reactions of the speech acts are seen are related. This is because any written or speech act that is within a context has to be interpreted through the understanding; for example, the comprehending of it.

Therefore, it could be said that coherence is a relation that connects any speech or text with an understandable meaning (Schiffrin, 1987). Also in his view, cohesion occurs in various discourses and can be recognized with the reaction from the reader or hearer. To Schiffrin (1987), cohesive devices are clues that help identify the locate meanings and accommodate the understanding of a conversation.

Coherence also plays a role as a “semantic property of discourses, based on the interpretation of each individual sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences”. Coherence between sentences is “based not only on the sequential relation between expressed and interpolated propositions, but also on the topic of discourse of a particular passage” (Van Dijk, 1977).

Following are some examples of the relationship between cohesion and coherence:

Adakah awak nampak Sree? Dia ada di sini semalam.

Have you met Sree? **She** was here yesterday.

In above example, both the sentences are related with the use of the pronoun *she* and it also creates a semantic relation between the two. That is why, both the sentences are cohesive and indirectly coherent too.

Liverpool telah menjaringkan satu gol. Wisel telahpun ditiupkan.

Liverpool shot a goal. The whistle blew.

In the above example, there are no cohesion used in both sentences but the sentences are coherent. Therefore, the sentences are coherent although without being cohesive.

Adik saya telah pulang. Saya akan menziarahinya esok.

My brother has back. I shall see **him** tomorrow.

In the above example, both the sentences are cohesive but lacking coherent. This is because the sentences although containing cohesive device but not conveying the right semantic meaning.

2.2 Research on cohesion and coherence in writing

Thouqan (2019) has investigated cohesion and coherence in the writings of Saudi undergraduates majoring in English. He analyzed essays using three rating scales, namely a holistic rating scale for the effectiveness of each essay, cohesion rating scale and

coherence rating scale. He found out that undergraduates' essays were not well written as they are without cohesion. On the other part Thauqan (2019) also found that, the students were repeated the same ideas, improper paragraphing in terms of context and main ideas, and the students are unable to express their their ideas according to the problem statements which inhibits coherence in the writing.

Qingxin (2019) conducted a research to study the problems concerning cohesion and coherence that most students in Ordos Institute of Technology (OIT) face in writing, reasons, and ways to help students exploit cohesive devices properly to ensure the coherence of the text and improve their writings. In the research it was found that most students do not know how to use cohesive devices properly. Some omit referential items, some repeat the same word or phrase over and over again, not knowing how to substitute or omit it, and others cannot use conjunctives or continuatives correctly and appropriately.

3. Focus of Study

The main focus of this study is to explore the relationship between the cohesion devices and overall textual coherence in Malay as second language learning by Tamil learners.

4. Significance of the Study

The current study contributes significantly to Malay as second language writing context of Tamil learners at higher education in Sultan Idris Education University especially Tamil programme learners especially pre service Tamil teacher education learners, the current study has the potential to improve the writing of Malay as second language in number of ways :

- It aids an understanding between the use of the right cohesive device and coherence in the respondents writing. This in turn, is significant for teacher educators in the future since it aims to provide implications for developing their essay writing abilities and methods of second language learning.
- It also highlights the significant development in the academic achievement of respondents in their other courses especially their ability to produce more quality essays.

5. Problem Statement

Second language writing is as important as first language writing. In order to make the readers to comprehend the meaning from the writing especially in a second language writing context, cohesion and coherence have significant role as they create a text that has ideas connected in order (Ahmadi & Parhizgar, 2017). Also, a text with cohesive ties and coherence is also more convenient for the readers to interpret the message that is being conveyed through the writing by the writer.

In second language learning, as any other academic writing, the logicity and readability between sentences and within sentences and paragraph is important. In this study, the respondents learn Malay language under the influence of their mother tongue to a larger extent as they are Tamil program learners. In order to produce quality writing in a second language, the writer has to use proper choice of vocabularies to express meaning in a foreign language. As for this, any second language learner should develop skills to use cohesion to attain textual coherence in their writing. Being said this, cohesive and textual coherence are two essential components of any academic writing including second language writing. So, as to facilitate the readers comprehension, all the sentences in the writing have to connect to each other to produce a continuation based on the message that is being conveyed by the writer.

Therefore, this study attempted to analyse the level of cohesion usage among the participants in their writing and its influence on overall textual coherence.

6. Methodology

The method used in this study was qualitative design, a descriptive approach. The types of cohesion used by the respondents and its contribution to the coherence were analysed and described. The data collection method was carried out by instructing the students to write a 200 word descriptive essay entitled 'The Use of Mobile Phones' and was given 40 minutes.

6.1 Respondents

The participants of this study were 5 final year students who were studying the degree of Tamil Education at Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI). The participants were limited to 5 as only the 5 students volunteered to participate in the study.

6.2 Data analysis procedure

Analysis of the essays were carried out by applying a qualitative method in particular to discourse analysis. Firstly, the cohesive devices in the essays were identified. It was based on a simplified classification of cohesive devices based on Halliday and Hassan (1976). The classification included the following categories:

- a) Lexical Cohesive Devices
 - Word Repetition
 - Substitution (synonyms, antonyms and hypernyms)
- b) Grammatical Cohesive Devices
 - References Words or pro forms (Pronouns, Adverbials, Comparative Construction)
 - Ellipsis
 - Connectives (Conjunctions, Adverbs, Prepositions and Comparative)

The second step was the qualitative analysis of coherence and the overall text quality. This step was done by checking the error analysis of the used cohesive devices and the text / readability.

7. Results

After evaluating the written samples, it was found that the respondents lacked awareness of cohesive devices and hence their writing lacked coherency. This is because their writing consists of many cohesion errors. Below are samples of the respondents' writings and the sentences were numbered for the convenience of discussion.

S1 *Telefon bimbit merupakan satu alat yang penting pada masa kini. Telefon bimbit merupakan satu alat telekomunikasi.*

(Mobile phones are an important device at this moment. Mobile phones are telecommunication devices).

Corrected: *Telefon bimbit merupakan satu alat telekomunikasi yang penting pada masa kini.*

(Mobile phones are an important telecommunication device at this moment).

In the above example, the student has repeated the word mobile phone twice. This sentence can be rewritten without the word repeated by combining the both sentences into one.

S2 *Telefon bimbit boleh digunakan dalam bidang pendidikan. Telefon bimbit mempunyai pelbagai kebaikan.*

(The mobile phones can be used in the education field. Mobile phones have many benefits).

Corrected: *Telefon bimbit mempunyai pelbagai kebaikan dan salah satunya ialah ia boleh digunakan dalam bidang pendidikan.*

(Mobile phones have many benefits and among them one of them is it can be used in the education field).

In the above example, the student has not used any conjunction to join the both sentences but has written two different sentences. With the conjunction the sentences can be interconnected.

S3 *Para ibu bapa haruslah mengawal selia anak-anak. Jika tidak penggunaan telefon bimbit boleh membawa keburukan.*

(The parents should monitor the children. If not the mobile phone usage can cause harm).

Corrected: *Para ibu bapa haruslah mengawal selia anak-anak dalam penggunaan telefon bimbit. Jika tidak, ianya boleh membawa kemudaratan.*

(The parents should monitor the children using mobile phones. If not it can cause harm).

In the above sentence, the students' first sentence meaning is not clear. It is not clear that parents should be monitoring what.

S4 *Penggunaan telefon bimbit dalam kalangan remaja semakin berleluasa. Pengguna harus sedar kebaikan dan keburukan.*

(The use of mobile phones among teenagers is getting wide. The users should be aware of the good and bad).

Corrected: *Penggunaan telefon bimbit dalam kalangan remaja semakin berleluasa. Mereka harus sedar tentang kebaikan dan keburukan penggunaan telefon bimbit.*

(The use of mobile phones among the teenagers is getting wide. They should be aware of the good and bad of using mobile phones).

In the above example, the student did not use the proper pronoun to connect both sentences. This causes the sentences not to correlate to each other.

S5 *Tidak semua isu yang disebarkan melalui telefon bimbit adalah benar. Ada berita palsu. Jadi kena survey sebelum percaya.*

(Not all the issues spread over mobile phones are true. Has wrong information, so, must survey before in believing any).

Corrected: *Tidak semua perkara yang disebarkan melalui telefon bimbit adalah benar. Ada kemungkinan berita palsu juga disebarkan. Maka, sebagai pengguna telefon bimbit, kita seharusnya menyasat sebelum mempercayai sesuatu perkara yang disebarkan melalui telefon bimbit.*

(Not all the issues that are being spread over mobile phones are true. The possibility of wrong information being spread exists too. So, as a mobile phone users, we should investigate before in believing an issue that is being spread over the mobile phones).

In the above example, the students' vocabulary choice is confusing, and also the sentences are not connected over proper pronouns.

In all the above sentences it can be clearly seen that the students are still making mistakes in using cohesive devices properly which directly contributes to incoherency in the texts. As a writer, the respondents should practice to produce writing with proper vocabulary choices, interrelated sentences, clear ideas, and to make the paragraphs more coherent. Based on the data, the Malay as a

second language learners from UPSI who are Tamil language majoring learners, indicates that the learners are still not aware of the importance of coherence and cohesion in academic writing, yet they find achieving them quite difficult.

From the data it can be seen that majority of the respondents find it difficult in using proper cohesion to create text coherence in producing a quality piece of writing in Malay. One reason for this is very clear that the respondents are unaware of the forms and functions of the use of cohesion in their writing.

8. Discussion

Based on the analysis of the respondents' Malay as a second language writing, it was found that the respondents had some difficulties in using the right cohesion in relevance to its function to achieve textual coherence in their writing. This is because all the respondents had faced difficulties in choosing the correct cohesion to attain the coherence of the sentences. As mentioned before, a right selection of cohesion will be the key for the successfulness in expressing the respondents ideas accurately which can lead to a coherently in their writing. Also, a good sentence will make a good writing. A good sentence will attract the readers to continue read the whole writing (Karadeniz, 2017).

As we can see from the results, the respondents were faced with difficulties in maintaining their cohesion and coherence in the writing process, whether in stating their main ideas, completing their supporting details. Findings from the current revealed that the respondents faced difficulties in using the right cohesion in their writing to achieve textual coherence. When the respondents used a correct cohesion the sentences have a clear meaning especially the topic sentences when the sentences have a clear meaning, the sentences are coherent. Comparatively, when the respondents used wrong cohesion, the sentences failed to produce a clear meaning which disturbed the coherency. Also, when the used cohesion was wrong as it raised a lot of confusion on what is being told by the respondents. And when the sentences were unclear, the sentences were even worse when the respondents attempted to write longer sentences. Therefore, it can be concluded that the longer sentences needed more cohesive devices to attain coherency. Hananta and Sukyadi (2015) found that there is a high-level relationship between the uses of cohesion in producing a quality writing. This is better explained as said by Karadeniz (2017) can be said whereby the more use of cohesion the more text coherence occurs and increases overall quality of the text.

This is because the cohesion are indicators of the respondents Malay as second language writing ability and to produce quality writing. The frequency of the use of the conjunction elements arises as an indicator of the text coherence and overall quality. In

total, the results revealed that there is a relationship between the use of cohesion and the textual coherence in Malay as second language learning.

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the results, it can be seen that cohesion is an important element that must be mastered by the second language learners of Malay to write a quality writing. Which is cohesive and coherent. Cohesion also inhibits the learners from producing non logical ideas which are not interconnected which also affects the overall coherence. This is because most second language learner are concerned about acquiring the language vocabularies in order to write, and the teaching of cohesion and coherence will enhance their understanding that writing in a foreign language is not only that (Kuzu, 2016). Lessons on cohesion and coherence can raise Malay second language learner's awareness of the vocabulary choices and will train them on how to express their thoughts clearly.

On the basis of the results of this study, some solutions can be suggested to avoid Malay as a second language writing problems which can be beneficial in the future to enhance the writing. For example, the learner should practice to write more with the proper cohesion by knowing the forms and functions of it in Malay writing (Abdulkareem, 2013). Therefore, as stated by Tahaineh (2010), second language writing should be considered as an important element in university courses as students at this level need effective writing skills to score marks in their assignments or even to take lecture notes.

In reference to the results of the study, the following recommendations can be put forward to develop Tamil respondents in Malay as second language writing ability:

- It is necessarily to include exercises focusing the forms and functions of cohesion in respondents writing to achieve textual coherence.
- Teachers should teach respondents how to use cohesive devices in sentences, between sentences and between paragraphs to achieve textual coherence.
- Doing more writing exercises with using more cohesive devices to prevent the respondents from writing unclear sentences or introduce the use of synonyms or the reference elements as this approach will also help to increase the students' vocabulary choices.

The teaching materials of writing used with Tamil program respondents in learning Malay as a second language should cover a wide range of cohesion and coherence activities. The writing feedbacks by the language instructors especially by second language instructors should combine both types of oral and written feedback in order to help them to develop the ability to use more cohesive devices in their writing to achieve overall textual coherence. Finally, teaching and learning of second

language activities should be varied to enhance the students abilities to use more cohesive devices in their writing to achieve textual coherence.

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