Cohesive Devices Analysis: Mind Your Writing Texture!

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Abstract. Writing ability is one of the most important yet difficult skill to be mastered. It has many components to make the good writing. The problematic aspect is to deal with lexical cohesive devices in general. This issue is being concerned especially for those who are going to take an IELTS Academic test. This study aims to examine the most lexical cohesive devices used by Undergraduate students in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. There are some researchers who conducted research on this field, on the other hand, this phenomenon is not a common topic discussed in Indonesia. Document analysis was done and accompanied by the interview in conducting this research. The respondents of this research were 14 who were willing to do the IELTS writing task 2 and being interviewed. The document analysis was conducted for students' writing of IELTS writing Task 2. The result indicated that the most undeniable difficulty by the test-takers in the use of lexical cohesive devices was *repetition.* The lack of vocabulary was the main reason for the respondents, especially for the academic words. All test-takers could repeat the same words as many as 602 times. Hence, the impact of this research would enlighten the readers and the tutors to pay more attention to the use of lexical devices in writing.

Keywords: *Cohesive, English Learning, IELTS, Writing*

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills but also difficult and challenging at the same time for the foreign language students (Al Badi, 2015; Fareed & Ashraf, 2016; Husin & Nurbayani, 2017). It needs the ability to deliver the meaning and intention of the writer. Moreover, writing could be the determinant to graduate, because the requirement could be in the form of written assignments, publish papers, and write theses and dissertations (Bagheri & Riasati, 2015). In the Indonesian context, where English as a foreign language, the students are considered as low achievers in many aspects (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). The majority of the students are having some problematic issues to deal with writing tasks or academic writing.

Writing is a phantom for them because it will show their weaknesses. The complexion of vocabularies, grammar, knowledge, moreover expansion of ideas. The errors found out if those obstacles which felt by the students, are caused by some phenomena. Richards and Schmidt (2010) reveal if the errors could come from the target language, borrowing patterns from the mother tongue. Some researchers prove if the influence of the mother tongue could be used by the students to arrange and create a sentence, even though it is not a correct pattern. They are also showing purposes in utilizing the grammar and words that they already know at that moment. Thus, the writing skill requires more attention without excepting other skills.

Furthermore, difficulties in writing could be causes by many other factors as delivered by Adas and Bakir (2013), which are (1) teachers' teaching method, the ability of the teachers to get students attention and let their motivations up are one of the keys to minimize the problems; (2) students' limited vocabulary, the lack of words range could be the main reason why students usually repeat their previous words; (3) students' miss-spelling, the more words they know this kind of difficulty would be decrease gradually; (4) students' tenses mastery, the most well-known tense among the students are simple present tense and it dominates the whole writing; (5) students' miss-structured sentences, the structure and composition of the sentences by the students are sometimes confusing because it is not well-organized; (6) lack of peer review/feedback, it is being a necessarily done by the students to help others and as reflection for their own writing task; (7) students' ability in distinguish their own writing, because of many difficulty in writing it makes them difficult to determine theirs are right or wrong.

Many undergraduate students in Indonesia have a higher expectation related to their education. Due to the professional demands, a wide chance in the job field and as self-actualization are being their major reasons (Kristanti, 2019) to continue their study either in Indonesia or outside Indonesia. ICEF Monitor has released the data in 2019 about the number of Indonesian students who continue their studies abroad. Australia is the most favorite country for Indonesian students and it is proven that the number has held steady over the last few years as many as 16.500 students per year. It is followed by other countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, the US, Japan, UK, Germany, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. The basic requirement to continue their study is their English proficiency, IELTS (The International English Language Test System) Academic score. It is believed as a valid

and reliable test for non-English speakers to know their English level (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018). This test is required for Indonesian students as the non-English speaking country citizens to have a good performance on all skills, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Hence, it becomes a new challenge for them since it has some different parts with other English proficiency tests such as TOEFL. Therefore, many of them are trying to study more to get an adequate score by attending a course or study by themselves.

In fact, if we take a look at the scoring rubric of the writing IELTS, there is a column about cohesion and cohesive. To get a high score, the candidates should use the cohesive devices correctly and not over-use it. The importance of cohesive devices is to be taught by the teachers or tutors of IELTS. And they need to take a look more on what Halliday and Hasan have been worked on. Those two famous researchers formulate the ingredient to develop good writing by beware of the writing texture. The texture of text comprises unity and distinctive from a non-text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Bahaziq, 2016) and as a meaning relation issue (Halliday and Hasan, 1989). It also contains register and cohesion (Carrel, 1982). The register refers to the language variation used in a particular situation. Then, cohesion invokes with the semantic relations in a text to be the great writing. There are some previous researchers done their work in this field (Al Badi, 2015; Fareed and Ashraf, 2016; Ostovar-Namaghi and Safaee, 2017; and Alshalan, 2019).

In spite of what has been mentioned by Adas and Bakir (2013), there are many obstacles that are faced by the test-takers of IELTS in writing. Lack of vocabulary seems a common problem for EFL students. Moreover, in the IELTS writing test the use of academic words is needed and it found out difficult to be done and this matter is faced by the respondents of the previous researches. Related to the words which are used by the test-takers, repetition, as one of the lexical cohesive devices, is the most difficult obstacle which mostly occurred in writing (Alshalan, 2019). Therefore, the disability in the use of cohesive devices apparently followed by less-knowledge of coherence (Al Badi, 2015; Fareed and Ashraf, 2016 and Ostovar-Namaghi and Safaee, 2017). Related to some barriers in IELTS writing by the test-takers, they would have an improvement on writing by using some techniques such as exposing them to sample answers, teaching vocabulary and grammar as a prerequisite, teaching fixed phrases, raising their awareness of scoring criteria, teaching discourse markers, and raising their content knowledge (Ostovar-Namaghi and Safaee, 2017).

Cohesive is one of the important aspects to be known and mastered. The previous researchers focus on what obstacles are faced by the test-takers of writing, especially IELTS (Al Badi, 2015; Fareed and Ashraf, 2016; Ostovar-Namaghi and Safaee, 2017; and Alshalan, 2019). They are not particularly identifying the miss-use of the cohesive devices in the test-takers' writing. In the Indonesian context where English is a foreign language has not found much researches of that field by the IELTS test-takers. Therefore, this research is needed to be done to reveal the specific issue. The cohesion has several sub-topics to be understood by the test-takers to ensure their quality of writing and gain a high score. This research would

discuss lexical cohesion aspect to describe the arrangement of sentences to become interesting writing and not monotone.

The cohesive has a tie to connect each sentence or to relate to building a complete meaning and semantically related. For example, *John makes good meals. Last night he cooked spaghetti*. The pronoun *he* in the second sentence is the presupposing item. And *John* in the first sentence is the presupposed item (Carrel, 1982). There is also a lexical cohesive which has two types, *reiteration* and *collocation (*Halliday and Hasan, 1976 & 1989). *Reiteration* has five components to be considered. The first one is *synonym*, where there are two or more words that have the same semantic meaning. For example, *woman* and *lady* and *buy* and *purchase*.

The second one is antonym where the words have their opposite meaning. For example, *dead* and *alive* and *big* and *small* (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Then, *hyponymy* describes the relationship between a general class and its sub-classes. The general class is known as superordinate. For example, the superordinate is *animal,* therefore the *hyponymy* of *animal* are *cat, dog, bear*, etc*.* The fourth is *meronymy*, which refers to the part of the superordinate. For example, *tree* is the superordinate and *tree, limb* and *root* are the *co-meronymy*. The last one is *repetition*. It indicates to mention the same lexical units when explaining something.

There are many aspects to be considered by the test-takers while doing their writing. The objective of this research is to help the students who want to take a course to pay attention and mind on the importance of cohesion aspect. The common issue in IELTS is how to not overuse linking words, moreover the presence of lexical cohesion in the material is essential as well. The higher score requires the test-takers to be able to manage all aspects of cohesion well. Therefore, for the IELTS tutors or teachers who still emphasize only about linking words (Ostovar-Namaghi and Safaee, 2017) but also the use of lexical cohesion oi their writing. The high demand for IELTS score has also the high attention. Furthermore, the present research aims to look for only the lexical cohesion of the Undergraduate students' writing who have the willingness to take a course before an official IELTS test. Thus, to examine the problem, the researchers formulated it into a research question, "What is the most frequently used of lexical cohesive devices by Undergraduate students in Yogyakarta?"

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was using qualitative method and analyzing through document analysis (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). To collect the data, the researchers asked the respondents to answer the IELTS writing task 2. In the end, the researchers tried to collect information about their perspective and difficulties through the interview. There were 14 students who willingly contribute to this research. They were coming from different universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia and various backgrounds of interest and had a plan to take a course in the future. The majority of the respondents were at the final semester of their undergraduate programs. The respondents would be coded as R1, R2, and so on to simplify the data. They were given the same question or topic of the IELTS writing task 2. The question was, "It is important to ensure that children with a wide range of abilities and from a variety of social backgrounds mix with each other at school. To what extend do you agree or

disagree? Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience. At least 250 words." Hence, the respondents' writing was analysed using cohesion devices by Halliday and Hasan (1976 & 1989).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There were 14 participants involved in this research. The researchers then collected their writing IELTS part 2 to be analyzed. From those writings, the researcher found the monotony of word choice. The result of the study displayed as follow

Table 1. Result of Lexical Cohesive

Respondents	Lexical cohesive				
	Repetition	Antonymy	Synonymy	Hyponymy	Meronymy
R1	33	0	1	0	0
R2	45	1	2	4	0
R3	56	0	3	1	0
R4	34	0	3	0	0
R5	59	0	3	1	1
R6	45	0	3	1	1
R7	39	0	3	1	1
R8	35	1	0	1	1
R9	36	1	2	0	0
R10	55	4	4	2	0
R11	18	0	1	0	0
R12	52	0	2	0	0
R13	57	2	0	2	0
R14	38	0	1	0	0
Total	**602**	**9**	**28**	**13**	**4**

Repetition

The respondents were asked to write down an IELTS writing task 2 related to the topic given. According to the meaning of repetition which the respondents were rewriting their previous words. Therefore, from their writings, it found out that they were done many repetitions. *Children* was written by most of the respondents and it had reiterated 79 times among all words. The highest repetition of this word was done by R1 as many as 14 repetitions. Meanwhile, the lowest repetition was done by R11. The respondent number 11 had the lowest repeated word for *children* as many as 5 times.

Table 2. The most repetitive words

Word	Number of Repetition
Children	79
Social	51
Different	50
Students	47
School	43

Background	40
Abilities	37
Skill	29
Mix	26
Friend	11

Antonymy

The second lexical cohesion discussed in this study is *antonymy*. From the result table above, the majority of the respondents did not explore their ability in this aspect. The most frequent *antonymy* used by R10. The respondent mentions *lacks* and *strength* where both words had the opposite meaning. The other *antonymy* she tried to put on her writing are *heterogenous* and *homogenous, rich* and *lack* of *economy,* etc. To avoid the repetition of *abilities,* R13 was found to use *incapability* for the next sentence, which meant he applies *antonymy*.

Table 3. *Antonymy applied by respondents*

Respondent	Word	Antonymy
R2	Positive	Negative
R8	High salary	Low income
R9	Positive	Negative
R10	Lacks	Strength
	Soft skill	Hard skill
	Heterogenous	Homogenous
	Rich	Lack of economy
R13	Ability	Incapability
	Loved	Hated

Synonymy

The *synonymy* aspect had low users even though most of the respondents found the way to change the words. The average of the respondents was put three equivalent words on their works. The R10 had the highest frequency in using synonyms. The respondent succeeds to avoid repetition of the word *abilities* and change it into *skills, talent,* and *potential.* R2, R3, R6, R7, R9, R10, R11, and R14 were found out to do the same thing. Other synonyms that have been discovered are as follow,

Table 4. *Synonymy applied by respondents*

Respondent	Word	Synonymy
R1	Different	Diversity
R2	Various abilities	New skills
R3	Children	Kids
	Abilities	Skills
	Different	Variety
R4	Different	Variety and diversity
	Social identities	Social background
	Performance	Show

R5	Abilities	Competencies
	Students	Pupils
	Different	Diverse
R6	Different	Diverse and variety
	Abilities	Skills
	Globalization	World without borders
R7	Different	Various and variety
	Abilities	Skills
	Opinions	Views
	Bad	Negative
R9	Different	Variation
	Abilities	Skills and capabilities
R10	Abilities	Skills
	Talent	Potency
	Different	Variety
	Poverty	Lack of economy
R11	Abilities	Skills
R12	Different	Variety
	Friends	Peer
R14	Abilities	Skills and capabilities

Hyponymy

The respondents had a similar number in terms of using *hyponymy* on their writing tasks. Besides, six respondents who preferred to avoid the use of the superordinate category. There was one respondent who braves to use four hyponymies over the whole text, R2. The respondent mentioned *music genre*, and it followed by *jazz, rock,* and *pop music* as the hypernym. Those were belonging to the *music genre* as the superordinate.

Tabel 5. Hyponymy applied by respondents

Respondent	Word	Hyponymy
R2	Abilities	Playing music
	Music genre	Jazz, rock, and pop
	Instrument skills	Guitar, Violin, and piano
	Social background	Poor family
R3	Cultures	Balinese dance
R5	Social background	Cultures, ethnic, race and wealth
R6	Diverse	Race, religion, culture, education and family background
R7	Character	Bad character
R8	Social background	Different cultures and habituation
R10	Heterogenous students	Gender, talent, social status
	Psychological	Empathy
R13	Social background	Different races and religious

West Kalimantan	Pontianak

Meronymy

The last one is *meronymy* were dominated by zero points. The respondents did not show many of their ability in the use of *meronymy*. On the other hand, R5, R6, R7, and R8 applied the *meronymy* once of each. Most of them used the word *people* as the superordinate, after that followed by *people, adolescence,* and *children* as the co-meronymy.

Table 6. *Meronymy applied by respondents*

Respondents	Word	Meronymy
R5	School	Curriculum and learning system
R6	People	Adolescence and children
R7	People	Person and children
R8	People	Person

As has been shown from table 1, where the first rank in the use of lexical cohesion is held by *repetition*. The factors of this phenomenon need to be studied more. Hence, it is similar to what has been found by Fareed and Ashraf (2016) and Husin and Nurbayani (2017) which is the lack of vocabulary faced by the respondents. They repeat many times of one word could indicate their level of writing. The monotony while reading the writing with many repetitions could make the readers get bored. Al Badi (2015) has been revealed that cohesion is a big issue for the test-takers. This matter could be the pause stage for them to be able to reach a high score or a perfect score. Unfortunately, the present research found out the majority problem of the undergraduate students who aimed to take a course and an official test.

There are some ways to avoid repetition by using other lexical cohesive such as *synonymy* or substitution (Bahaziq, 2016). Teachers or tutors could suggest using *antonymy, hyponymy,* or *meronymy* as well. Those kinds would be very beneficial to be used to increase the IELTS score. To get the highest score, the test-takers need to pay attention to the writing band descriptor by the British Council. 'Uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention' is the demand of band 9 in writing IELTS.

On the other hand, the test-takers need to enhance their range of vocabularies if they want to improve their score (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018). That is why the use of different words could be the consideration to achieve a high score. The result indicates that repeating the same words is the highest phenomenon among others. The most frequent word in the repetition section is *children*. The top 10 words of repetition are mostly contained in the questions. According to the interview with the respondents that paraphrase the question is a hard job to do. The test-takers seem difficult to substitute the word into something else. R3 thought that he was trying to find out the synonym but it took many time moreover it was the beginning of the writing. However, two test-takers who found alternative words instead of repeating the word *children*. They are R3 and R5. R3 was changing the word with *kids*, then R5 was using *pupils*. There are some test-takers who tried

to find out the context of the word *children* in the question. Then, they sometimes changed it into *students* (exceptR3, R4, R6, R11, and R12).

This could be the suggestion since there are many repetitions that occur on the undergraduate IELTS writing assessment. To avoid repetition, they need to enrich their vocabulary to be able to substitute the word choice moreover, the students are expected to have a wide range of vocabulary. Therefore, for the IELTS tutors or English teachers, to be more aware of the word choice and it helps the readers enjoy while reading. Since English is not their first language, and writing becomes an asserted skill (Salma, 2015), therefore the intensive and continuous practices are needed. It is in line with what the respondents said in the interview. All of them were sounding the same notion that their vocabularies were not enough to avoid repetition and need to do more training and readings. Some of them specify that they were lack of academic and formal words as IELTS writing needs. R10 who had many repetitions (54 times) stated that she had to struggle a lot to change the word she already used for the next sentence. Even though she realized that she repeated the words, because of the limitation of time and amount of words in writing, she kept it redundant.

CONCLUSION

As a foreign learner, there are some difficulties faced and need to be deal with. In writing especially, the hard segment is to make sure that the quality of writing is not bad. One of the indicators to measure one of these productive skill is to check the lexical cohesive devices. The range of vocabulary used is a must to create interesting writing. Besides, in fact this is a big issue for the new IELTS students who want to take a course or an official test. They are repeating the same words many times indicate the limited vocabulary. The result of this study hopefully helps the test-takers consider more on their vocabulary variation. Since the texture of the test-takers' writing will increase their score and make theirs not as plain writing. Therefore, the tutors pay more attention to this part of scoring on IELTS writing.

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