LEARNERS' PROBLEMS WITH THE TEXTUALITY
OF THEIR WRITTEN DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The article attempts to provide a real account of problems faced by learners of English in producing a piece of written discourse. So it deals with data of second language acquisition (SLA) not with theory of SLA. A micro study was conducted aiming at finding out what textuality elements are problematic to the learners.The findings, hopefully, may serve as a reflective measure in preparing and focusing on what to be thaught and emphasized in teaching writing courses.

Key words: SLA, textuality, written discourse, grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

The article deals with data of second language acquisition (SLA) not with theory of SLA. SLA refers to the fields within the applied linguistics of language teaching that studies the development of communicative competence (CC) in second language (SL or L2) and fpreign language (FL0 learners. Sla is used as a general term that embraces both untutored (naturalistic) and tutored or classroom acquisition (Ellis, 1985: 148)

For more than three decades CC has enjoyed tremendous popularity in the field of language teaching that views language in communicative contexts. CC has aroused considerable theoretical controversies as well as various models of CC proposed by scholars – the most widely cited and riviewed of which are those of Hymes' (1967). Canale and Swain's (1980), Canale's (1983), Bachman's (1990), Celce Murcia et al's (1995) and Bachman and Palmer's (1996).

CC is defined by Canale and Swain (1980) as the underlying systems of **knowledge** and **skill** required for communication – e.g.: knowledge of vocabulary and skill in using the sociolinguistic convention for a given language (Canale, 1983:5). Knowledge refers to **what** learners know abaout the language and other aspects of communicative language use (**declarative knowledge)** and skill refers to **how** well learners can perform this knowledge in actual communication (**procedural knowledge).** CC, then, covers both the Chomskyan's notion of competence and performance.

Communicative language teacing (CLT) actually sets a variety of communication abilities (both spoken and written) that lerners should exhibit within a prescribed course or period of learning. The article aims at exploring the writing performance of learners of English at the English department of FBS-UNNES.

In producing a piece of written discourse learners have to deal with complex problems at various levels: the substance, text and discourse levels (James, 1998:130). At the substance level they have to cope especially with spelling and punctuation as well as other writing conventions. At the text level they are supposed to employ appropriate lexico-

grammar items that best express the intended meaning and mesaage to be communicated. At the higher level of discourse they are expected to create a unified text encoded in senteces that display some kind of mutual dependence that makes up the text's texture (Halliday and Hasan's term, 1976) or **textuality** (Renkema's, 1993).

Research into written discourse mostly focused on the rhetorical development of various written genres found in a given culture (e.g. Kaplan's *Contrastive Rhetoric*) and the textuality of L2 learners' writing (especially that of Cohesion, for example investigated by Hubbard, 1989; Tang and Ng,1995) The article attemps to investigate the latter plus another textuality criterion of invormativeness by addressing the following questions:

(1) What type(s) of grammatical cohesion is/are found problematic in the investigated data?

(2) What type(s) of lexical cohesion is/are found problematic in the investigated data?

(3) Does each writing in the investigated data exhibit the textuality criterion of informativeness?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Text in linguistics refers to any passage, SPOKEN or WRITTEN of whatever length, that forms a unified whole. It is a unit of language in use realized by, or encoded in snetences which are linked coherently to one another (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:2). In order to qualify as a text, a piece of writing should display features of textuality (Renkema, 1993: 34-7) as follows:

(1) **Cohesion** is the connection which results when the interpretation of a textual element is dependent on another element in the text.

(2) **Coherence** is the connection which is brought about by something outside the text. This 'something' is usually knowledge which a listener or a reader is supposed to possess.

(3) **Intentionality** means that the writers and speakers must have the conscious intention of achieving specific goals with their message.

(4) **Acceptibiliy** requires that a sequence of sentences be acceptable to the intended audience.

(5) **Informativeness** that means a text must contain new information. If a reader knows everything contained in a text, then it does not qualify.

(6) **Situationality** refers to the situation in which the text has been produced and dealt with.

(7) **Intertextuality** means that a sequence of sentences is related by form or meaning to other sequences of sentences. It is only dealt with in Discourse Analysis that analyses text typology.

The criteria of intentionality, acceptibility and informativeness are somewhat subjective and observer-dependent considered to be of secondary omportance. Yet along with the criterion of situationality, they do become the main focus of research into textual functions where function is defined as the goal (intentionality) and effect (primariluy the transfer of information) in a specific situation. The criterion of acceptibility is important in normative approaches to Discourse Analysis while the concept of coherence is the primary concern of text interpretation. It is cohesion that has received the most attention in SLA

research dealing with analysis of a piece of writing produced by L2 learners.

Cohesion, the internal properties of a text, refers to the way a writer relates or ties together bits of his/her discourse. Halliday and Hasan explain that cohesion occurs where the INTERPRETATION of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one PRESUPPOSES the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by resource to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text (1976:4). We can readily consider the following example:

I walked down to my mother. A broom was pitched against the wall.
They picked up their food carelessly. We went to Disneyland. I worried about you.

as a non-text, for at least, the following reasons: (!) the clauses do not hang together; each is self-contained, unrelated to other having no contribution to the interpretation of others, and (2) the participants in each clause keep changing and are never referred again, except for *I* in clauses 1 and 5. What the clauses have in common is grammatical parallelism which is not enough for providing the creation of situational coherence due to lack of internal organization, that is lack of cohesion.

Cohesion is the area of discourse competence most closey associated with linguistic competence (Celce-Murcia, et. Al, 1995:14). It is a semantic notion referring to relations of meaning between elements of a text (Johnson and Johnson, 1999:55). It deals with the bottom up elements that help generate texts accounting for how pronominals, demonstratives, articles, etc. signal textual co-referentiality in oral or written discourse which are of three main types: homophoric, exophoric, and endophoric. It is endophoric reference which creates cohesion, since endophoric ties create internal texture of a text, while the first two contribute to the text's situational coherence (Eggins, 1994:97). Endophoric ties are subdivided into three kinds: anaphoric, cataphoric and esphoric.The first two are the most common types of endophoric ties found in a text. Each type will be briefly illustrated below:

(1) *Anaphoric* is a type of endophoric tie in which the referent has appeared at an earlier point in the text so we have to look backward for the interpretation. For example,
    <u>Candour</u> *is a compliment;* <u>*it*</u> *implies equality.* <u>*It*</u>*'s how true friends talk.* The pronoun <u>it</u> refers back to <u>candour</u>.

(2) *Cataphoric* in which the referent is provided subsequently. For example, *There are <u>three wants</u> which can never be satisfied: <u>that of the rich wanting more; that of the sick wanting something different; and that of a traveller, who says, "anywhere but here."</u>* (R.W. Emerson). The instantial lexical cohesive device <u>*three wants*</u> refers to the rest of the underlined clauses.

Cohesion also accounts for how conventions of **substitution** and **ellipsis** allow speakers or writers to indicate co-classification and to avoid unnecessary repetition. Another important cohesive device that indicates explicit intersentential relations between the parts of a text is **conjunctions** which are of three types: **elaboration,**

extension, and **enhancement** which are used to indicate additive, adversative, causal, temporal relations, etc. (see: Halliday, 1985: 303-4; Martin et. Al, 1997: 104). Yet, conjunctive relations can also be expressed implicitly thgough the simple juxtaposition of sentences. For exampe:

> *Mother bought a silk nightgown. She wanted to impress Dr. Spritzer on their first date.*

Substitution, ellipsis and conjunctive are grammatical cohesive devices operate on closed-class items of prepositions, pronouns, articles, and auxilliaries that do not encode lexical content and cannot enter into lexical relations (Eggins, 1994: 101). Grammar is said to be organized in "closed" systems – systematic and regular that can be described in terms of generalizations or rules while lexis is, by contrast, said to consist of "open" systems, to be irregular and unsystematic. The former deals with 'rule learning', and the latter with 'item learning' (James, 1998:142-3). According to Eggins (1994:101) there are two main kinds of lexical relations that can be recognized between words:

(1) *Taxonomic* lexical relation where one lexical item relates to another through either class/subclass (*simian/monkey*) or part/whole (*earth/universe*) relations that generally links lexical items that refer to people, places, things and qualities and are expressed in nominal groups. They can also link processes (e.g.: *drink/sip*).

(2) *Expectancy* relations where there is a predictable relation between a process (verb) and either the doer of the process or the one affected by it (e.g.: *pilot – manoevre; take – action*). These relations link nominal elements with verbal elements.

Hasan (1989:82) provides a summary of cohesive devices based on the development of Halliday and Hasan's previous viewpoints (1976) which can be presented below:

NON-STRUCTURAL COHESION

COMPONENTIAL RELATIONS		ORGANIC RELATIONS
Devise	**Typical tie relation**	
GRAMMATICAL COHESIVE DEVICES	**A. Reference** 1. Pronominals 2. Demonstratives 3. Definite article 4. Comparatives **B. Substitution & Ellipsis** 1. Nominal 2. Verbal **3.** Clausal	**A. Conjunctives** e.g.: causal tie concession tie **B. Adjacency pairs** e.g.: question - answer offer – acceptance order - compliance

	A. **General**	**Continuatives**
LEXICAL COHESIVE DEVICES	1. Repetition 2. Synonymy 3. Antonymy 4. Meronymy B. **Instantial** 1. Equivalence 2. Naming 3. Semblance	(e.g.: still, already . . .)

STRUCTURAL   COHESION

A. **Paralellism**
B. **Theme – Rheme Development**
C. **Semblance**

Cohesion, that has other equivalent terms popular at one time or another like **inter-sentence linkage/concord, supra-sentential relations** and **connectivity** (Wales, 2001:65), has been a major focus under study in written discourse analysis, some of which are briefly reviewed here as comparisons.

James (1998:159-160) reviewed some studies conducted by Leinonen-Davies (1984), Hubbarb (1989), and Tang and Ng (1995). Leinonen-Davies analysed 38 Finnish teenagers' EL2 compositions of approximately 150 words each in length and found out that: (1) the learners were very economical in using conjunctives, (2) they also tended to under exploit the ellipsis and substitution types, and (3) they mostly made excessive use of lexical cohesive ties. Hubbarb investigated the cohesion errors made in the academic writing of EL2 students in South Africa and his study revealed: (1) very rare error in ellipsis, and (2)

most frequent errors involving the reference and conjunctive types. Tang and Ng particularly focused their investigation on the use of logical connectors (conjunctions) in the academic writing of Hong Kong EL2 learners and the findings revealed: (1) underuse of the inferential, transitional and summative subtypes, (2) misuse of *however* which was assumed to be the alternative to *but,* (3) misuse of *besides,* and (4) misplacement of a few conjunctives in the initial position, whereas the more natural position should be in the middle between the two clauses.

The present article will look into learners's problems with both the grammatical and lexical cohesion that are in the area of non-structural cohesion without further looking inti the ones (if any) belonging to the structural cohesion. Yet it will analyse the informativeness of each piece of the investigated data whether or not they contain the required information to be provided.

METHODS

Ten out of forty texts were chosen to be analysed in terms of the cohesiveness and informativeness. The investigated data were written based on some reading materials the learners of the course of Extensive Reading they were taking that semester (November 20th 2002). In the course they were assigned to read some selected reading materials. The reading was done outside the classroom setting and then they were to write about their appreciation of the material(s) the read by stating whether they enjoyed or did not enjoy reading the material(s) as well the reasons of doing or not doing so. They were also to comment the overall classroom interactions we had conducted that served as a kind of feedback for me as the lecturer.

The ten chosen texts were selected on the basis that they were written not simply by picking up sentences from the assigned reading materials they read since they were viewed as reflecting the real writing abilities of the learners which in turn also representing originality.

The texts under study can be considered as 'naturally occuring' data since they were produced in a real communicative setting. The analysed are labeled A to J with each clause/clause complexes munbered for ease of reference. Any existing lexico-grammatical mistakes remain uncorrected (see the Appendix at the end of this article).

DISCUSSION

In general all the ten texts are quite short containing only two to eight sentences (mean 4.8) that do not provide sufficient development of cohesive links to be analysed. The learners were required to write their personal comment within 30 minutes of a classroom session. Their written products may serve as further proof that writing is not as automatic as speaking (which is especially true in L1 setting, whereas both speaking and writing in L2 setting may more or lest impose equally the difficulties.

Learning to write in either L1 or L2 is one of the most difficult tasks a learner encounters since it is the least natural of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. No wonder only few people are fully proficient in it. Yet good writing skills are important to academic and professional success. Davies and Widdowson (cited in Richards, 1990:10) state that in adult life people's writing needs are both institutional and personal. Institutional writing is writing produced in the professional and institutional role, such as that of business person, teacher, or student, and conforms to institutional conventions. Personal writing includes personal letters and creative writing. The data can be considered as belonging to the latter, that is creative writing in which they shared their personal views and comments of some written texts they read.

Text **A** reveals the wrong use of a conjunction *otherwise* that occurs twice in (3) and (4) that obscures the interrelatedness of the preceding and following propositions it connects. As it can be seen from the summary table of conjunctive relations (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:142-3), *otherwise* indicates both internal and external causal relation of conditional subtype expressing reversed polarity. The logical link needed to connect (2) and (3), and (3) and (4) of text **A** should be that of **adversative** type (e.g.: *but, as a matter of fact*). However, this text

provides information on what was liked and disliked of the course.

Text **B** employs pronominal *them* in (2) referring anaphorically to *all what I've read* which is unproblematic. *It* in (3) cataphorically refers to *choosing different aspects of life* which is also unproblematic; yet *this* in the same clause is problematic since it is used to refer to a plural entity *different aspects.* The text uses a lexical cohesion *the story* in (7) that refers to an article entitled *Desert Flower.* To a certain extent text **B** fulfills the textuality criterion of informativeness because it provides me with the intended feedback.

Text **C** has a pronominal *it* that occurs five times. In (1) *it* is wrongly chosen in place of *I* or *we*. Furthermore, ulike other pronominals, *it* has the property of EXTENTED REFERENCE and TEXT REFERENCE (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:52), as it has the ability to refer to longer stretches of text and diffuse propositions not necessarily paraphraseable by any direct quotation from the text (McCarthy, 1991:36). *It* serves as topic continuation within a given segmet I a discourse following a full, identifying nou phrase (when it refers to a participabt) or verbal phrase (when it refers to an event or a phenomenon) that serves as the point of departure (Theme- what serves as the focus of interest). Consequently *it* in (2) is inappropriate as it is topicalized and serves as a shifting point of a new focus, while the function of *it* simply keeps going what it is we are taliking about or focusing on (McCarthy, 1994:271). It is also the case of *it* in (3) that occurs twice that idicates focus shift within the same segment. The demonstrative *this* should have been chosen instead of *it.* Text **C** gives useful comment dealing with the learner's

objection to the writing activities that s/he did not like.

Text **D** contains a lexical cohesive device in the form of **repetition:** *all the article* in (1), (2) and (3) which should be pluralized as actually there were approximately 30 articles and 10 book sections for them to read based on their own selection. The deictic *those* in (5) meant to refer anaphorically to *the feeling of boredom* in (4) is grammatically wrong. *The* or *this* should have been used instead of *those.* Text **D** fulfills the textuality criterion of informativeness regardless of its substantial lexico-grammatical mistakes.

Text **E** informs me the benefits of doing a lot of the assigned reading. Yet it reveals grave lexico-grammatical mstakes that might have been due to ignorance of the target language lexico-grammatical application rules. The deictic *her* and *his* in (2) have no explicit referents within the text and the reader is forced to assume that they must have been meant the author of each reading material s/he read. A collocational error occurs in (6) *enlarge our experience* which is interlingual in nature.

Basic lexico-grammatical mistakes and distortions are terribly glaring in text **F** but left unanalysed in order to keep focused on the issue of textuality under study. The deictic *it* in (4) is used wrongly to refer back to *all the stories* in (3). The instantial lexical cohesive tie *the similarities* in (3) seems to refer cataphorically to the processes mentioned in (4) and (5): *not to give up* and *become extender of forgiveness.*

Text **G** contains no new I formation at all as long as I am concerned since it simply describes a book section that I myself have already read. It fails to fulfill the textuality

criterion of informativeness as required. The text contains a lexical cohesive device of naming: *the cruel practice* in (2) that anaphorically refers to *circumcision in her genital* in (1).

Sentence (3) in text **H** abruptly mentions a lexical item *the story* that has no retrievable referent within the text even though it appears in (4) as a lexical cohesive tie of repetition. Text **H** fails to provide the intended feedback required and consequently it has no the textuality criterion of informativeness.

In term of the required feedback, text **I** provides the most complete information as it faithfully answers the questions about what article(s) a learner liked or disliked together with the reason(s) of doing or not doing so. The use of the indefinite article *a* in (4) *a gap* and (4) *a new knowledge* and the missing definite article *the* in (5) . . . *life of the writer* indicates the learner's lack of automatic rule application in such contexts.

Text **J,** like the other nine texts, also reveals unexpected basic lexico-grammatical mistakes that are often disheartening since they heve been made by learners of English in their junior year. Text **J** contains three sentences and in (3) the use of a lexical item: *ladies* is utterly inappropriate since it refers to very young girls (as young as five years old) that cannot be said to have become ladies at such an age. The problem lies in the lexical cohesive tie of **naming.** Text **J** lacks the textuality criterion of informativeness.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the discussion above that the investigated data bear quite substantial cohesive problems in thr forms of:

(1) grammatical cohesion that can further be sub-categorized into: (a) wrong use of conjunction; (b) wrong use of demonstratives; (c) wrong use of pronominals, and

(2) lexical cohesion in the forms of: (a) lexical repetition with irretrievable referents within the texts; (b) **naming:** the use of a more specific term (subordinate term) in place of a more general (super-ordinate) one.

In addition to the two problems above, it can be said that:

(3) Seven (70%) texts fulfill the iformativeness criterion, while the other three (30%), namely tetxs **G, H, J** fail to do it.

It is worth mentioning here that junior students of the English department of FBS UNNES still suffer from limited English writing abilities as it can be seen from their written dsicourse under study. The present article reveals substantial basic lexico-grammatical mistakes that could be due to: (1) **ignorance of rule restrictions:** e.g. as seen in text **E** in which a learner produced deviant forms: *can sharing, can known, is can help;* (2) **false concepts hypothesized:** e.g. as seen in text **D** in which a learner thought that *opini* is an English word; (3) **incomplete application of rules** in which motivation to achieve communication may exceed motivation to produce grammatically correct sentences: e.g. ommisions of plural markers which are prevalent I most of the texts analysed, and (4) **overgenerelaization:** e.g. as seen in text **B:** "*I think it is good ...*" *M*ost of the mistakes reflect their developmental errors that indicate what EFL learners fall short of.

Since language is **rule-governed,** it can be said that mastering a language means mastering a given set of rules that makes up a language. Consequently, **rule learning** should become the major prerequisite focus in order to equip learners to proceed more communicatively oriented learning. Grammar testing should emphasize leraners' productive, procedural knowledge rather than the receptive, declarative one that heavily relies on the use of the objective test types.

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This should automatically gear the teaching-learning processes and classroom activities that enhance learners' awareness of grammatical rules and their appropriate applications, because **grammaticality** is especially important in writing. And it may worth trying to give more attention to grammar in the teaching of the Intensive Course to the first year English students by allocating at least 50 per cent of the teching-learning hours for it.

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