Grammaticality or Lexicality: Iraqi EFL University Students' Utilization of Cohesion in Narrative Essays

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Abstract- It is often expected that Iraqi EFL students have mastered the use of cohesive devices that are essential in almost every written text. Nevertheless, their written texts reveal that they have confronted difficulties in the use of these devices. The problem is attributed to the students' uncertain and incorrect use of these devices or sometimes in the avoidance of using them. This paper intends to investigate the use of grammatical and lexical devices employed by students in their narrative essays, focusing on the purposes behind the use of these cohesive agencies. Fifty narrative essays written by Iraqi EFL students of College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University are collected to constitute the data for the present paper. Data and results analysis is conducted. The result shows that students have more tendencies to use grammatical devices than lexical devices. They rarely use "synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and general word" in their narrative essays.

Key Words: Iraqi EFL students, Cohesion, Lexical Cohesion, Grammatical Cohesion, Narrative Essays

I.   INTRODUCTION

Cohesion is concerned with the association between lexical items that occurs when the understanding of an element in a text (an element in a clause) is reliant on a second element in the same text (an element which is often found in the same or another clause). Cohesion is often used to indicate the semantic connection within text by which a relation is established; that is, when there exists a certain connection between elements that are linked to produce meaning. In other words, cohesion occurs when "*the interpretation of a discourse element is dependent on another element that can be pointed out in discourse*" (Renkema, 1993: 40).

In this sense, 'connectedness' is associated with the drift of information which is replicated through the selection of lexical words or "*grammatical linking words that contribute to textual relations*" (Flowerdew and Mahlberg 2009: 106). This, in turns, entails that there may be several means and resources in a language which contribute to the creation of the association between elements in a text. In this respect, cohesion is seen as a fundamental means of assuring connectedness between elements in the text.

For Tarnyikova (2009:30), cohesion exhibits "*a surface structure linkage between elements of a text*". Thus, it is frequently manipulated to describe "*the way certain words or grammatical features of a sentence can connect that sentence to its predecessors and successors in a text*" (Hoey, 1991: 3).
An essential characteristic of a text is linked to the connection between sentences. A text is effectively understood when its constituting portions join together. This is due to the fact that the "*human mind can only grasp what relates logically both to our existing knowledge and to the rest of the text*" (Callow and Callow, 1992: 8). Generally, a text is made coherent when its constructive sentences are reasonably organized and linked, particularly when this reasonable link is obvious and ostensive. Furthermore, the "*transition from one sentence to another should be easy and natural*" in a way that the receiver can perceive the interconnections between the pieces of information and sentences of each paragraph in the text. Subsequently, he/she can effortlessly "*follow the flow of ideas and get at the thread of discourse"* (Hopper et al., 2000: 145).

Likewise, Halliday and Hasan (1976: 71) describe cohesion as a semantic notion that is linked to the associations of a sense that are present in a discourse or text. Above all, cohesion is "*the grammatical and/or lexical relationships between the different elements of a text*" (Richards et al., 1985: 45). Placed another way, cohesion can be described as "*the strategy a language uses to create texts*" (Aziz 1998: 77).

Elaborately, de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 3) suggest a more illuminating perspective maintaining that cohesion "*concerns the ways in which the components of the surface text, i.e., the actual words we hear or see, are mutually connected within a sequence*". This view is emphasized by Leech and

Short; as they maintain "*the units of a text must be implicitly or explicitly bound together; they must not be just a random collection of sentences*" (1981: 244).

II. COHESIVE DEVICES

In correlation with the above discussion, cohesion must be realized partly through the utilization of grammatical elements and realized partially via the lexical items, known as ***"lexical cohesion"***. Grammatically, cohesion is conveyed through syntactic tools, known as ***"grammatical cohesion"***. These tools include "*reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction''*, whereas lexically, cohesion can be realized via "*repetition, synonymy, antonymy*, *hyponymy, general word* and *collocation"*. Through the use of these tools, the employed patterns and structures can be mentioned in different manners. The significance of their employment centers upon the idea that they shorten and abridge the texts and pay out for the steadiness and shortness when suitably utilized.

2.1 Grammatical Devices

These devices mainly involve four grammatical agencies: "*Reference, Substitution*, *Ellipsis* and *Conjunction". ....*

2.1.1 Reference

Reference exists when an item designates that "*the identity of what is being talked about can be retrieved from the immediate context*". In this case, both determiners and pronouns are used as reference elements (Hoey, 1991: 5). Pertaining to reference, a lexical item that *"cannot be interpreted in its own right, can be determined by what is imparted before or after the occurrence of that dummy"* item (Renkema, 1993: 38). Reference (i.e., co-reference) can be attributed to the meaning by which a speaker/writer can refer to the associated entities, the concrete and abstract ideas (Brown and Yule, 1983: 205). Consider:
- I had **a dream** last night. **It** was too awful.
Here, the pronoun ***it*** refers anaphorically to the noun ***a dream***.

2.1.2 Substitution

Substitution is defined as *"a term used in linguistics to refer to the process or result of replacing one item by another at a particular place in a structure*" Crystal (1997: 371). Similarly, substitution is identified by deBeaugrande and Dressler (1981: 49) as "*replacing content-carrying elements with short placeholders of no independent content*". When the lexical items are manipulated, they signify fuller forms existing "*elsewhere in the context or they replace the repeated occurrence of the antecedent*"(James, 1980: 107). In consequence, a listener or reader can guess the proper element, making reference to the previous sequence of text (Quirk et al., 1985: 863).

Further, substitution can function as a "*device for abbreviating and avoiding repetition*" (ibid: 294), i.e. a substitute item indicates "*something already introduced in the text*" (Larson, 1994: 72). In the example, '*the **knife** is not so sharp for cutting the meat, so I must buy a new **one***'**,** the word (*one*) substitutes its predecessor (*knife*) and reveals that both words have similar syntactic job; both *"knife* and *one"* are main words in "the nominal phrase" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 89).

2.1.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis is described as "*substitution by zero*" or it can be "*something left unsaid*". At this point, the "unsaid" is not involved in what is "*not understood*"; in contrast, it entails "*but understood nevertheless*" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 142). The ellipted item is that item that "*leaves specific slots to be filled from elsewhere*". In this case, presupposition is made similar to substitution with the exception that in the process of substitution the two lexical items "*one*" or "*do*" are utilized, while in ellipsis nothing is introduced into "*the slot*". Consider

- Tina **bought** some flowers and Jessica some beautiful gardenia.

This example shows that the "verb in the second clause" is deleted, yet its retrieval from the preceding clause is possible, and thus, can be construed as "*Jessica **bought** some gardenia*"(ibid.).

2.1.4 Conjunction

An effective way of linking sentences is through the use of conjunctions. In effect, Fries (1940: 206) describes conjunction as "*a word that joins together sentences or parts of a sentence*". In the use of conjunction, the connective elements reflect specific senses which assume the occurrence of other constituents in the text or discourse. These connectives have the function of combining linguistic constituents taken place in sequence but are not connected by other syntactic manners (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 226). For instance, the **afterwards** (having a connective function) is employed to connect the first clause to the next.

-"They fought a battle. **Afterwards**, it snowed".

2.2 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion in a text occurs as a consequence of the "*chains of related words that contribute*" to the connection of the "meaning of lexical items" The occurrence of the "*lexical chains*" is due to a straight outcome of components of text being "*about the same thing*" (Morris and Hirst, 1991: 21). Elaborately, the term 'lexical cohesion' points to the *"cohesive effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary*" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 274).

Generally, two main groups of lexical cohesion are known, "*reiteration* and *collocation*" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Reiteration refers to the direct recurrence of a certain lexical item, (such as synonymy, hyponymy, or superordinate) or indirect recurrence through the utilization of "generally related word". Collocation is associated with words that are expected to be combined "together within the same" discourse or text. It plays "an essential role in establishing cohesion" in a discourse or text. In other words, cohesion signifies the semantic and syntactic relationships between or among words, which a native speaker can unintentionally utilize for the understanding or construction of a discourse or text.

Undoubtedly, the choice of lexical items from "*a common semantic domain, adds greatly to the cohesion of a* text", for instance, when the lexical items in a reading passage are drawn from "*the same semantic domain this adds a unity to the paragraph*" (Larson, 1984: 395).

2.2.1 Repetition

Repetition is "*an important communication strategy used in language*" (Smith 1987: 47). Its importance comes from the point that the reiteration of central lexical items in "a paragraph" makes the receiver constantly "*aware of the subject and binds the sentences together in a tightly unified whole*" (Hopper et al., 2000: 146f). The recurrence of the same lexical items in the given text may be the most direct one, for example:

- Ahmed met a **rabbit**. The **rabbit** was dead.

The two lexical items **a rabbit** and **the rabbit** in the two sentences refer to the same referent, in a way, **'The rabbit'** in the second is cataphorically linked to **'a rabbit'** in the first, i.e. it is repeated.

2.2.2 Synonymy

A synonymy points to the word that shows the same meaning to another word in the context. It involves the occurrence of lexical items that relatively holds somehow the same or partial meaning. The synonymous "lexical items bear a special sort of semantic resemblance to one another" that it becomes possible to use them interchangeably in certain contexts without a great change in the meaning of the context in question (Salkie, 1995: 9). For example:

- An **assembly** will be held on international economy planning. This promising **meeting** will be concerned with international issues.

2.2.3 Hyponymy

Hyponymy refers to the semantic concept of "inclusion" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:238-338). It is a method "of linking words in a text". This connection is "between two items, one is a specific instance of the more general word."

- I want a **hot drink**. I prefer **tea**.

Here, the link between **'hot drink'** and '**tea'** is a hyponymous relation as '**tea'** is considered as a part of the whole **'hot drink'**.

2.2.4 Antonymy

Words that do not have one common referent but still hold lexical cohesion among them are those which hold some semantic relationship between them, such as the relationship of oppositeness.

Antonymous words such as *like/hate, open/close*, can achieve lexical cohesion if they occur in one text (Salkie, 1995: 23).

- The **old** movies seem to be more fruitful. Yet, the **new** ones are more attractive.

2.2.5 General word

As a cohesive device, a general word refers to the relation between a general item in meaning, such as 'thing, place, and man'; having anaphoric reference, with another one previously occur (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 277). Consider:

-I've just read **Ali's story**. The whole **thing** is very well thought out.

Here '***thing***' refers anaphorically to ***'Ali's essay'***.

2.2.6 Collocation

The term 'collocation' is recognized "*through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur*" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 248). It deals with relationships between lexical items on the condition that they *"often occur in the same surroundings"*. For instance, the lexical items "*sheep*" and "*wool*"; "*congress*" and "*politician*" collocate with one another (Renkema, 1993: 40). That is, they habitually co-occur together.

Thus, collocation can be said to imply the habitual occurrence of two or more lexical items and this means that one word may occur with several or even many words in the sentence or the whole text, for example, '*elephant*' co-occurs with '*egg*' and '*bacon*' in "*elephant enjoys eggs and bacons*"(Wilkinson, 1971:25).

Sinclair (1966: 41) indicates that there is no impossible collocation, but there is habitual (more convenient) collocation. Thus, '*warm*' is commonly used with '*weather*', but figuratively with '*war*'. Similarly, Palmer (1981: 77) maintains that collocations are not limited to co-occurrence of associated words, but they extend to involve special forms of co-occurrence which are unique patterns of certain writers or speakers. Thus, to guess the meaning of certain collocations through their single items is not always accurate.

III.   METHODOLOGY

The researcher uses both qualitative and quantitative procedures in analyzing her data and arriving at the ultimate findings. After delivering the sheet papers to the students and asking them to write a narrative essay on "Unexpected Phone Call", she collects these sheets and analyzes them in accordance with the occurrence of lexical and grammatical cohesive strategies. Then, she tabulates the results to get at the findings which go in correlation with the aims placed at the beginning of the study.

A sample of 50 students is selected to be the participants in the present study which constitutes nearly % 50 of the whole population (101) of the fourth year students of the Department of English, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University, during the academic year (2016-2017). It is believed that subjects of fourth year are expected to achieve satisfactory results as far as writing narrative essays is concerned. This random sample involves subjects who share the same linguistic background, age, nationality, years of learning, and level of study. Moreover, female-to-male ratio is 64 %, in favour of females. This is often the case in almost all departments of English in Iraq.

Subjects are asked to write a narrative essay (of 200-250 words) entitled "Unexpected Phone Call". This type of writing is carefully chosen since this variety includes "*a story line or plot*" mostly commonly employed in their everyday life (Hew, 1944 cited in Dueraman, 2007: 2). In comparison of with other types of writing, it seems easier for students because it is "*the reflections of the past events or an exploration of their [students'] values in a story form*" (Henley, 1988 cited in ibid). They are to submit their essays with the time-limit of (45 minutes). They are asked to take the task of writing this essay seriously. The researchers' aim is to find out how cohesive devices are manipulated by Iraqi EFL learners. Therefore, first, they numerates the sentences of each written essay. Second, they underline the cohesive devices in the texts written by students' .Third, they distribute these devices on a table after classifying them

according to their type and frequency. Finally, frequencies and percentages for each type are calculated to evaluate its recurrence.

<center>IV.   DATA ANALYSIS</center>

Data analysis involves three phases: (i) identification of frequencies and ratios of the students' production of grammatical cohesive devices, (ii) identification of frequencies and ratios of the students' production of lexical cohesive devices, and (iii) comparison between the frequencies and ratios of the" grammatical and lexical devices".

4.1 Grammatical Cohesion

An investigation of the written essays has shown that Iraqi EFL students abundantly manipulate grammatical cohesive devices in their essay writing, particularly conjunction (412 times, constituting %61.309) and reference (245 times, constituting %36.458). Conversely, they less use substitution (13 times with the amount of %1.934), and lesser ellipsis (2 times with the rate of % 0.297). Consider table 1, summing up the frequencies and percentages of the grammatical cohesive devices manipulated by the EFL testees.

<center>**Table (1) Frequencies and Percentages of Grammatical Devices**</center>

Grammatical Cohesion									
Reference		**Substitution**		**Ellipsis**		**Conjunction**		**Total**	
No	**Per.**	**No**	**Per.**	**No**	**Per.**	**No**	**Per.**	**No**	**Per.**
245	36.458	13	1.934	2	0.297	412	61.309	672	100

The number of occurrences and percentages of each grammatical category can be more obviously depicted in Figure (1); they are organized, from top to bottom: Conjunction, Reference, Substitution and Ellipis.
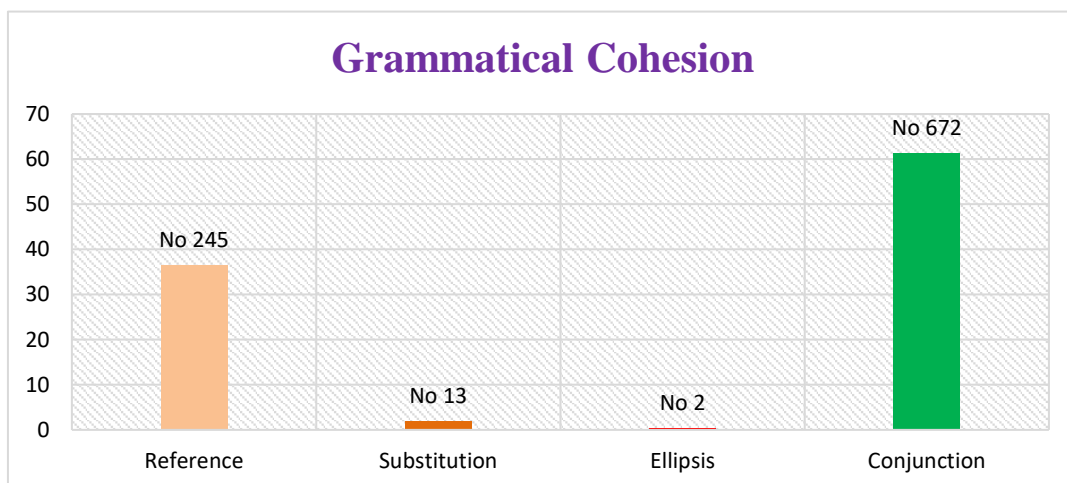

<center>**Figure (1) Frequencies and Percentages of Grammatical Cohesion**</center>

4.2 Lexical Cohesion

An examination of the employment of lexical cohesive devices in students' narrative compositions has revealed that some devices, such as repetition and collocation, are widely used (the former records 292 occurrences with the percentage of %77.453, while the latter has 74 occurrences with the rate of

19.628). Nevertheless, other devices (synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy and general word) are less used, as shown in table 2 below:

Table (2) Frequencies and Percentages of Lexical Devices

Lexical Cohesion													
Repetition		Synonymy		Hyponymy		Antonymy		General Word		Collocation		Total	
No	Per.	No	Per.	No	Per.	No	Per.	No	Per.	No	Per.	No	Per.
292	77.453	3	0.795	1	0.265	5	1.326	2	0.530	74	19.628	377	100

The categories of lexical cohesion can be clearly shown in Figure (2); they are put in order, from highest to lowest, as follows: Repetition, Collocation, Anotnymy, Synonymy, General word and Hyponymy.
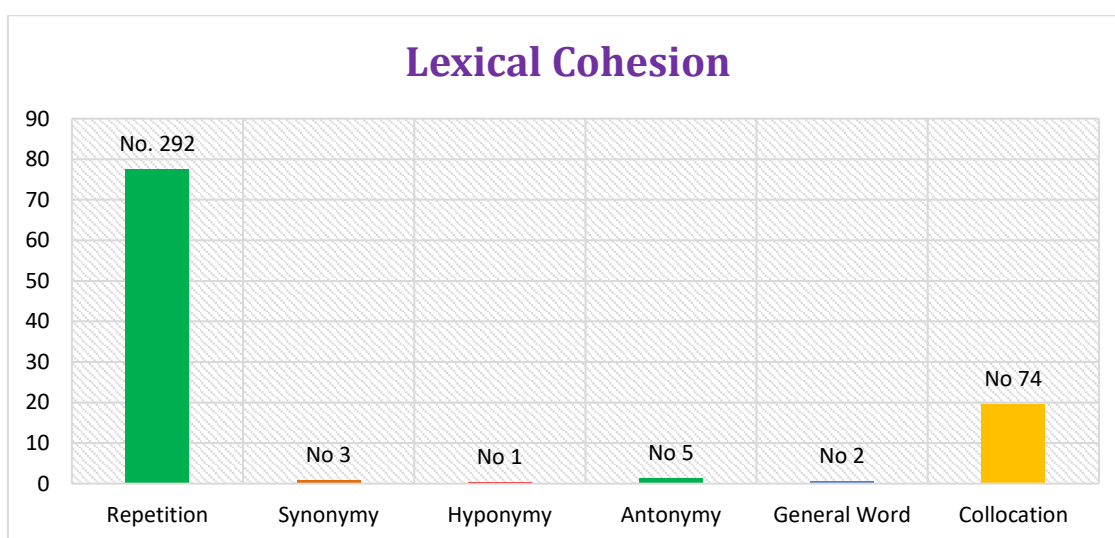

**Figure (2) Frequencies and Percentages of Lexical Cohesion**

4.3 Grammatical and Lexical Devices

A general survey of the employment of both the grammatical and lexical cohesive elements has shown that students have more tendency to use grammatical than lexical devices. Grammatical agencies score 672 with the rate of % 64. 061, in contrast, lexical agencies score 377 with the rate of 35.938. This is clearly displayed in Table 3:

Table (3) Frequencies and Percentages of Cohesive Devices

Cohesive Devices					
Grammatical Devices		**Lexical Devices**		**Total**	
No	**Per.**	**No**	**Per.**	**No**	**Per.**
672	64.061	377	35.938	1049	100

The comparison between grammatical cohesive devices and lexical cohesive devices can be evidently manifested in Figure (3) shown below:
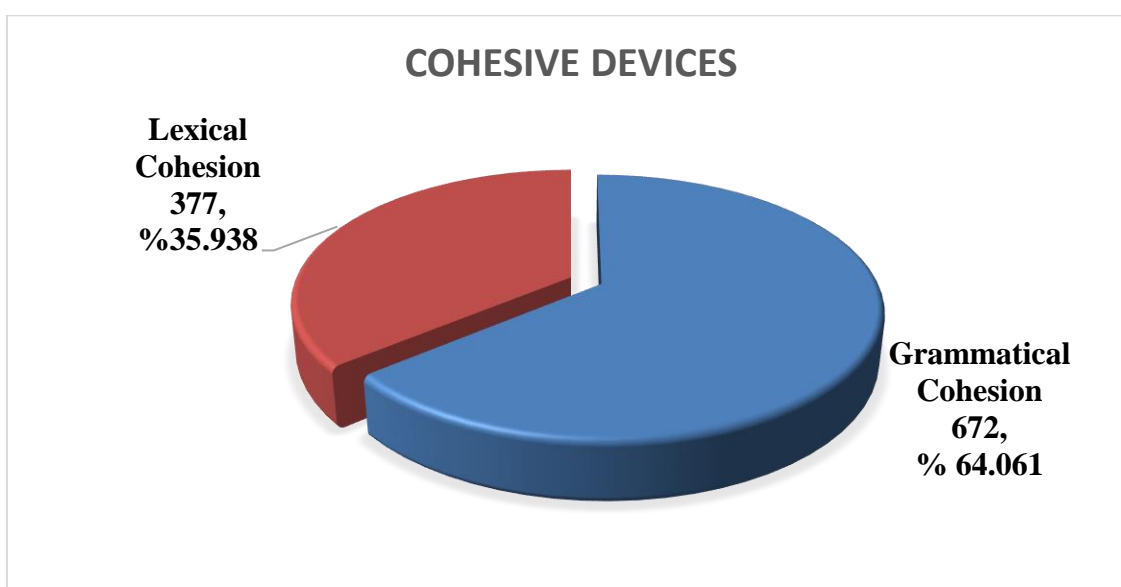
V. FINDINGS

The paper arrives at the following findings:

1. Students seem to have more tendency to use grammatical ties (such as reference and conjunction) than semantic (lexical) ties (such as repetition and collocation). This may be owing to the idea that students get more acquainted with grammatical devices than with semantic relations which focus on the overlap between form and function. In addition, teachers seem to lay more emphasis on the grammar of sentence structure and pay less on the analysis of semantic or discourse structure, a fact which clarifies why students master only fragmented constructions.

2. As far as grammatical devices are concerned, reference and conjunction are more manipulated by students than substitution and ellipsis. The former are most probably known by the students and seem to be easier than the latter, as the latter require that there should be a kind presupposition on the part of the user (speaker/ writer and listener/reader).

3. Although some grammatical cohesive devices are widely used, they are manipulated incorrectly or inappropriately. In case of conjunction , a lot of errors have been noticed, some of them are :
(i) overuse of conjunctions (as in, *The man replied and got the answer and went to the police station and ...* ,
(ii) improper use of conjunction(as in, *Although he was in hurry but he did not take a taxi* , and (iii) beginning a new full sentence with "and" (as in, *And she felt astonished*).

In case of reference, students commit the following errors:

(i) improper use of referential item (as in , _All the class gathered around the scene and students have his view point_) (ii) improper use of the definite article "the" (as in, _He got no the answer_), and (iii) use of the definite article for the first mention (as in, _He bought the newspaper yesterday_)

4. Avoidance of the use of substitution and ellipsis must be attributed to students' intimidating sense of failing to achieve decipherable constructions implying substitution and ellipsis. Such constructions are considered by students as cumbersome and tedious units of language.

5. As for the lexical cohesion, repetition (within a paragraph or across paragraph boundaries) occupies the highest frequency of occurrence among other lexical cohesive devices (i.e. collocation, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and general word). Using this technique, students find it easier to give more importance and emphasis to the repeated item.

6. Collocation occupies the second position after repetition. Students intuitively use this technique to preserve the tightness and cohesiveness of the written story. The tendency of the students to use collocation may be attributed to their background knowledge of knowing such formulaic structures as they inbuilt in their long memory. That is, they find no difficulty to retrieve these prearranged expressions.

7. Students less or rarely use other lexical devices (i.e. synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and general word). Such devices are exploited to express a variety of style and show avoidance of repetition, yet students seem to have little or lack knowledge of getting acquainted with such devices.

VI.   RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Knowledge concerning the use of grammatical and lexical cohesion should be emphasized in EFL classroom as it plays an essential part in handling a text.
2. Teachers should notice that a clear understanding of the formal connections and lexical ties between sentences may help EFL students to write a well-formed piece of writing.
3. Students should be sensible that the correctness and the effect of most cohesive devices cannot only be judged within the sentence, but must be judged in connection with other sentences in the discourse or text as well.
4. Teachers should concentrate on the need to allocate more time and effort to learning and practicing the use of cohesive devices in the English Departments.

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