Cohesion Tendencies: Most Frequently Used Classification of Cohesive Devices in Electronic Mails

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A B S T R A C T

The aim of this study was to determine the competence of English teachers in using cohesive devices particularly in email messages that center on communication of concerns regarding learners by determining the frequency of using such in their mails. Furthermore, this research was also conducted to recognize the role of cohesive devices in elevating the quality of a message. This was a corpus-based study which focused on electronic mails as the source of data. The participants in this research were 9 private school English teachers who utilize email as their means of communication to parents. These participants sent screenshots of 5 sample emails that they have sent to parents right after the researchers have communicated to them through a formal letter asking for their permission and assuring confidentiality of personal information. There were a total of 45 sample emails which were analyzed through frequency count to determine the most frequently used classification of cohesive devices and which classifications are often used incorrectly. To classify the cohesive devices, the researchers adapted the ones introduced in the book of Bigornia et al. (2015). The results revealed that Addition was the most frequently used classification as counted from the sample emails of the participants with 64 frequencies counted. Moreover, there were no incorrectly used cohesive devices in the emails which means that the participants are knowledgeable of the proper use of the words and phrases that ensure cohesion. However, it was observed that in some sample emails, some participants' messages are not rich in cohesive devices even if they are deemed applicable to be used in the context. Thus, the researchers recommend that teachers and other professionals must orient themselves of the role of cohesive devices and their capacity to elevate the quality of their letters.

Keywords:cohesion, writing competence, communication, e-mail, English teachers

Introduction

Cohesive devices play an essential role in cohesion by organizing and elucidating the relationships of the ideas within the context. In an email, used as a communication, cohesive devices are necessary for comprehensible and effective communication between English teachers and parents. Using cohesive devices ensures that the intended information is properly disseminated and understood.

The usage of cohesive devices in email communication has received significant importance in the field of discourse analysis. Researchers have investigated various aspects of cohesion in both spoken and written forms, but few researches have specifically focused on cohesive devices used in email communication among English teachers. Understanding the patterns and preferences of cohesive device usage in this particular context can contribute valuable insights into the communication implementation and norms of this professional group.

Previous studies have identified a range of cohesive devices frequently used in written texts, such as reference, ellipsis, conjunctions, lexical cohesion, and substitution (Halliday&Hasan, 1976; Halliday&Matthiessen, 2014). These cohesive devices function to generate connections and maintain coherence within the discourse. However, the usage and relative importance of cohesive devices may differ across contexts, discourse types, and even professional groups.

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English teachers' reliance on using email has increased as the main source of communication. It made a big difference in its importance and defied the specification of explored cohesive devices which are easily seen when creating texts. By examining the compiled emails sent by English teachers, the purpose of this study was to identify the most frequently used cohesive devices and their patterns. Furthermore, the category and classification of these cohesive devices have determined the frequently used classification system that the email communication practices of English teachers are commonly adapted.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the competence of English teachers in using cohesive devices, particularly in email messages that center on communication of concerns regarding learners. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

- What is the most commonly used classification of cohesive devices in the emails of English teachers?
- What cohesive devices are commonly used incorrectly by the teachers in their emails?
- Which of the incorrectly used classification of cohesive devices is most frequently observed in the email of English teachers?

Theoretical Framework

Halliday and Hassan (1976) first introduced the theory of cohesion which includes the use of substitution, ellipsis, reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion which practically aims to build and establish the relationship between and among the ideas presented in a paragraph or even a sentence. Suningsih, Putri, and Waziana (2021) reiterated in their study that such theory promotes the idea that creating connections or linkages in the text strengthens it and that is only possible if one uses cohesive devices. Aside from the above-mentioned types of cohesion, some scholars who further expanded the notion brought by the theory from the perspective of cohesion conditions, phonology, and structural relations at the level of meaning and discourse.

Looking at the salient points of the theory of cohesion, it is imperative that cohesive devices are not just mere components of the language which a writer or speaker can place anywhere in the context but must be anchored to the fact that they play different functions to create well-established ideas pointed in the composition. When it comes to its usage, one must be knowledgeable about the context to observe appropriateness so as not to give the readers or message recipients confusion caused by ambiguousness. Thus, the writer of a message must do his or her part in ensuring that the desired points to convey are expressed well through proper cohesive devices used in the sentence as these words or phrases contribute to the building up of the main point of the message.

Review of Related Literature

This review explored the existing literature on the common classification of cohesive devices found in emails written by English teachers. Cohesive devices play an important role in enhancing the clarity and coherence of written communication, making their understanding essential for effective email communication among educators. This literature review aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the most frequently used classification systems and their application in the context of emails from English teachers.

Cohesive Devices

As cited in the paper written by Bahaziq (2016), Hassan and Halliday (1976) defined cohesion as the semantic relation found between two elements that is observed when those two elements are connected and found sensible by the readers. Bahaziq also presented a point that cohesion is achieved when there is a sense of unity created in how the ideas are arranged in the composition. Such unity is ensured through the use of cohesive devices. Cohesive devices may also act as transitional devices which play significant functions in sentences which one may use to show time and sequence, talk about place and position, indicate comparison and contrast, build cause-and-effect relationships, and also add, emphasize, and repeat ideas (Bigornia et al., 2015). It also increases comprehension leading to the integration of information between the ideas conveyed by the sentences (Sedita, 2020).

Moreover, various researchers have proposed different classification systems for cohesive devices in written discourse. Halliday and Hasan (1976) introduced the widely accepted taxonomy that categorizes cohesive devices into five major types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. The following types are defined.

- Reference- is the act of citing information from another source while using your own words as well as comparatives and demonstrative pronouns.
- Substitution- when a device is replaced by another through the process of substitution, which has three different types: verbal (do), clausal (so and not), and nominal (one, ones, and some).
- Ellipsis- to omit a component where it is possible without losing the sentence's meaning or to substitute a nominal item, verbal item, and clause, with zero (Ø) (Halliday&Hasan, 1976).
- Conjunction- words or phrases expressing a specific link in the chain are referred to as conjunction. Discourse that instructs readers about the writer's method of concept organization, such as coordinating compound adverbs, conjunctions, and subordinating conjunctions.
- Lexical Cohesion- the use of lexical items to create cohesion. Lexical cohesion which can be demonstrated by repetition of a word or phrase, synonyms, antonyms, hyponymy, and collocation (Halliday&Hasan, 1976).

A text is qualified as cohesive when its structure is unified with the ideas as part of it links with one another (Halliday& Hassan, 1976). Possessing cohesive devices in between ideas also clarifies the relationship or connectedness of one idea to another (Hoey, 1991). It is important to note that by using cohesive devices in writing, one must be able to apply appropriateness. It is of no use when such words or phrases are placed in the sentences or paragraphs without giving prior consideration to what their functions are whereas the connection being aimed to secure by cohesive devices is also important to their function (Crossley, Kyle, & McNamara, 2016a; 2016b; Ruegg& Sugiyama, 2013).

Cohesion in Emails

Feedback emails are an essential aspect of communication among English teachers. As cited in the paper written by Wanchid (2015), Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) assessed the cohesive devices utilized in feedback emails from teachers to students. The research identified that lexical cohesion, which includes reiteration of words or synonyms, played a prominent role in feedback emails. The repetition of specific vocabulary or related terms reinforces key ideas, such as constructive criticism or praise, enhancing clarity and coherence. Teaching professionals educating the context to their students in creating academic writing has made the project to be more innovative by connecting their work and how they will utilize aid to improve their first draft with online influence (Sain and Soo, 2013).

Giving informative feedback delivers a development on language with the bigger discovery of online-based literacy work where cohesive text is constructed by the students. Cohesion in connection with feedback is generally described as a defined and focused reason with the audience being known with the purpose of evaluating writing with three stages which are the Feedback Preview, Feedback, and Feedback Review. Academic emails that are commonly observed by academic instructors are used with formality and proper use of spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Corrigan and McNabb, 2015).

In a study conducted by Mahboob (2015), the SLATE Project has provided and developed an online-based language and literacy that advocates the development of academic institutions with a focus on teachers and students being more disciplined in academics with the adaptation of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the informed genre pedagogy and teaching learning cycle that constructs the online environment with literacy support. The feedback made a major role to tool the learning cycle and not only looking for errors in the lexico-grammatical mistakes.

Correctness and organization are always considered important aspects of language (de Silva, 2015) most particularly in writing development and writing quality. These are the characteristics that, when observed, bring formality and quality to the composition.   In the conclusion of the study of Mahboob (2015), it details that regularly using cohesion in feedback will create consistency and the correct response by the students. It also delivered a purpose for the teacher to correctly understand the impact of feedback done to students. He further reiterated that the feedback preview has the purpose to provide a proper greeting and positive comment towards the student and the feedback itself. While feedback will directly anticipate the students' work and criticize the content and create a cohesive adaptation of the work presented, feedback review provides the summary of the comment as well as the support for the student.

Significance of the Study

The use of electronic mail for communication has been widespread among professionals as means of formal communication. This has been more relevant when the pandemic started which required all sectors including the educational field to use online platforms to do transactions. The results of this study will be a great help to teachers since the data of this study come from the sample emails of their fellow educators, they will be able to realize how important the proper use of cohesive devices is. Through this, they will gain knowledge that using such devices possesses consideration as they have to be used in the sentence appropriate to their deemed functions. This study can also help learners as they can use the results of this study as a reference for how and why they should use cohesive devices in their email messages most particularly when they make a formal transaction or raise their concerns to their teachers and other people as well. Furthermore, teachers are not the only ones who utilize electronic mail in formal transactions but so are other professionals. Thus, the latter can also view this study as their basis for the proper use of cohesive devices. Through that, the letter they would construct and send to their clients, partners in the field, corporations, and others will also possess cohesion and appear well-written. In addition, as this study only focuses on the English teachers' way of using cohesive devices, future researchers can make this a reference for their study where they can consider focusing on other professionals and different platforms.

Methods

Research Design

This research intended to find out the most frequently used classification of cohesive devices used in an electronic mail sent by English teachers to parents. This was a corpus-based research since it aimed to analyze a collection of texts that represents a language that is considered the corpus (Biber, Conrad and Reppen, 1998: 246). In this study, the corpus was electronic mails of the teachers and the point of inquiry for this, as presented above, is the use of cohesive devices in the said corpus.

Participants

The participants of this study were the English teachers who are working in different private schools in Iloilo City and whose means of communication with parents is electronic mail. There were 13 English teachers invited to be the respondents. Among the 13 chosen English teachers, 9 of them agreed to participate. The other 4 were not able to do so for a reason the schools they are affiliated with do not utilize email to communicate with the parents. The respondents contributed to this study by sending screenshots of their sample emails to the researchers.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers sent formal letters to the private school English teachers who are considered participants of the study. In the letters sent, the English teachers were assured that the information such as their name, the schools where they are affiliated, the email recipients, and the learners concerned will be kept confidential. The participants were instructed to send screenshots of their email through the researchers' email accounts. After the said participants sent their screenshots of the sample emails, the researchers determined the classification of devices where the phrases and words used in the electronic mail for the purpose of establishing cohesion will be included. After that, the frequencies of those cohesive devices identified were determined based on the classifications presented by Bigornia et al. (2015). It was also indicated if the specific words or phrases were used properly or not.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researchers used the dataset containing cohesive devices and their corresponding classifications. The data was derived from the 45 screenshots sent by the respondents. As the emails sent are classified, the researchers calculated their frequencies to identify the most frequently occurring cohesive devices. After that, the researchers identified whether these specific words or phrases were used properly or not in the usage, the researchers then used the categorization to label the entire dataset accordingly. The final output of the data analysis included the frequency distribution of cohesive devices used in emails, and their classification as correctly or incorrectly used.

Results and Discussions

The study resulted in a coherent classification of data which varied to a wider understanding of the cohesive devices being examined by the researchers. With further elaboration and connection, it has led into the results shown below. Based on Bigornia et al,. (2015), cohesive devices can be classified on use to show time and sequence, talk about place and position, indicate comparison and contrast, build cause-and-effect relationships, and also add, emphasize, and repeat ideas. This part includes the results of the frequency counting done by the researchers as well as the interpretation behind the numbers reflected in the findings. Furthermore, with the study creating a collective idea, it has detailed the described state of cohesive devices.

Table 1 - Frequency of the Use of Classification of Cohesive Devices (Bigornia et al., 2015) in sample emails of every participant

Participant	Time/ Sequence	Comparison/ Contrast	Cause & Effect	Addition	Repetition	Emphasis	Reformulation	Enumeration	Transition
1	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
2	0	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	1
3	1	0	0	9	0	2	0	0	1
4	3	0	1	10	2	3	0	0	3
5	1	0	0	7	0	3	0	0	2
6	3	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	3
7	1	0	1	8	0	3	1	0	2
8	0	0	0	8	1	0	0	0	3
9	3	0	0	6	0	2	0	0	2
Total	**12**	**1**	**2**	**64**	**3**	**15**	**1**	**0**	**18**

Table 2 - Ranking of the Most Frequently Used Classification of Cohesive Devices (Bigornia et al.,2015)

Classification of Cohesive Devices	Total Frequency Count	Rank
Addition	64	1
Transition	18	2
Emphasis	15	3
Time/Sequence	12	4
Repetition	3	5
Cause and Effect	2	6
Comparison/Contrast	1	7.5
Reformulation	1	7.5
Enumeration	0	9

The data in Tables 1 and 2 present that the most frequently used classification of cohesive devices are those that indicate the addition of information with 64 frequency counts from the 45 sample emails of 9 private school English teachers. This indicates that teachers tended to use addition because of their extended knowledge of writing, which elucidates the perception that addition generally details fit together clearly, readers can follow along easily, and the writing is coherent. This only indicates that an important part of communication between teachers and parents is through email. In addition, as stated by Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin (2010) feedback emails frequently include lexical coherence, which comprises repetition of cohesive devices. Repetition of specialized language or associated phrases helps to strengthen important concepts, such as constructive criticism or praise and improves coherence and clarity.

Table 3 - Number of Correctly and Incorrectly Used Classification of Cohesive Devices

Participant	Time/Sequence ✓	Time/Sequence x	Comparison/Contrast ✓	Comparison/Contrast x	Cause & Effect ✓	Cause & Effect x	Addition ✓	Addition x	Repetition ✓	Repetition x	Emphasis ✓	Emphasis x	Reformulation ✓	Reformulation x	Enumeration ✓	Enumeration x	Transition ✓	Transition x
1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
3	1	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
4	3	0	0	0	1	0	10	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
5	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
6	3	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
7	1	0	0	0	1	0	8	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	0

8	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
9	3	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

Note: Numbers below the check marks (✓) indicate the number of cohesive devices used correctly by every participant while those which are under the cross marks (x) stand for the frequency of incorrectly used cohesive devices.

Table 4- Total Frequency of Incorrectly Used Classification of Cohesive Devices

Classification of Cohesive Devices	Total Frequency Count
Addition	0
Transition	0
Emphasis	0
Time/Sequence	0
Repetition	0
Cause and Effect	0
Comparison/Contrast	0
Reformulation	0
numeration	0

Tables 3 and 4, on the other hand, show that the English teachers have properly used the cohesive devices in their emails that contain information regarding student concerns sent to parents. This only indicates that they are indeed knowledgeable of the correct use of cohesive devices considering the classifications based on function and context. Moreover, the results of this recognize the cohesion of how such devices help in building consistency and correct response as stated by Mahboob (2015). The table clearly shows that English teachers do not face any problems in using cohesive devices in their emails to parents.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Cohesive devices play a paramount role in enhancing the effectiveness of email as a source of communication with parents in educational settings. The study has explored the various classification of cohesive devices commonly used in emails of English teachers. Understanding the common classification of cohesive devices in emails enables English teachers to improve the coherence and effectiveness of their communication with parents through email. The use of the different classifications of cohesive devices helps teachers deliver clear and comprehensible feedback and information to parents, aiding parents' understanding of their child's welfare. Exploring the most commonly used classification of cohesive devices in the English teacher's email provides valuable insights into their communication practices and preferences. Moreover, it can assess if English teachers are aware of the proper use of cohesive devices. The findings of this study can benefit both English teachers and researchers in the field of discourse analysis.

In view of the findings, the results revealed that cohesive devices that indicate the addition of information are the most frequently used in messages sent by private school English teachers in an electronic mail. Furthermore, the numbers also displayed that English teachers are knowledgeable of the proper and appropriate use of cohesive devices considering the context and their function in it as no incorrect use was observed and recorded during the gathering and analysis of data. However, it was also undeniable that such cohesive devices were not widely used and that some sample emails did not possess rich usage of cohesive devices which made the content of their message plain. The choice of enriching the sense of cohesion in emails could have been a great springboard to increase the quality of professionalism in the said emails. Therefore, it is a must that teachers, of English and other subjects, must equip themselves with enough competence in using cohesive devices to further elevate the quality of the message sent to parents, learners, other stakeholders,

and fellow professionals. Further research in this area is warranted to explore additional dimensions of cohesive devices and to enhance email communication skills among educators.

In this corpus-based study, there were 9 respondents with 5 sample emails each. While the result of this data is insightful, the study can be expanded by having a wider scope of participants. In addition, with the data gathered from the emails sent by English teachers, it would also be informative to conduct a comparative study between teachers of different subject areas.

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