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Awareness of Lexical Cohesive Devices in Text and Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

There is a plethora of research regarding contrastive analysis of cohesive devices in different languages or specific genres; however' very little can be found regarding student s' awareness of these devices in improving their language skills. So this study aimed to figure out if making students aware of lexical cohesion devices in text can improve their reading ability. Halliday and Hassan's (1976) classification of lexical devices, namely, repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, metonymy, antonymy, general nouns, and collocation was the basis of this study.

To do this, 30 male students were chosen out of 180 intermediate students at Iran Language Institute. The selection was made on the basis of their final scores on reading section of Intermediate 2 and all were Inter 3 students at the time of this study. They were randomly assigned to two Control and Experimental groups with 15 students in each group. 10 passages were taught during the term to both groups with the same method predetermined at the Institute except for the fact that subjects in the Experimental group were also given lots of examples for lexical devices and were asked to locate them in the texts taught through oral questions and group work. At the end of the term, a post-test was given and a t-test was performed. The results showed a significant improvement in the reading scores of the subjects in Exp group. In the end, some pedagogical implications were given.

Key Words: Cohesion, Lexical cohesion, Reading Compression.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is discursively viewed as an interactive process of communication between readers and writers through the text. A text has textual features which collectively constitute its "texture" and distinguish it from non-text. "Cohesion" of which lexical devices are sub-type helps bring about a semantic continuity and is very important to deal with in reading process.

According to Morris and Flirts (1991), "cohesion" is the textual quality responsible for making the sentences of a text seem to hang together".

In different languages various cohesive devices are employed to gain textuality; some languages may show tendency toward using some special kinds of them. Cohesive analysis; therefore, can shed light on these options.

Lexical Cohesion

Morris and Hirst (2003) put the view that "lexical cohesion occurs when related word pairs join together to form larger groups of related words that can extend freely over sentence boundaries". These assist in providing the continuity of lexical meaning in a text.

Lexical cohesion is a type of cohesion whereby certain lexical features of the text connect sentences with each other in the text (Classroom-discussions in discourse analysis)

Clarke and Nation (1980) hold the view that low-frequency words can be learned by practicing guessing new word meanings through clue words found in discourses. By guessing new word meanings through the knowledge of basic vocabulary, L_2 learners can interpret discourse more precisely.

According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), lexical cohesion is "phoric" relation which is established through the structure of vocabulary, and it is a relation on the lexicogrammatical level. It comes about through the using of items that are related in terms of their meaning. Reiteration and collocations are the two major types of lexical cohesion. Reiteration includes repetition, synonymy or near-synonymy, hyponymy (specific-general), metonymy (part-whole), antonymy, and general nouns.

Repetition

This is the most occurring form of lexical cohesion; eg. **dog** in Reza saw a **dog**. The **dog** was wounded by the children.

However, the repeated lexical item need not be in the same morphological shape.

Ali **arrived** yesterday. His **arrival** made his mother happy.

Synonymy

This is created by the selection of a lexical item that is in some way synonymous with the preceding one.

What **people** want from the government is frankness.

They should explain everything to **the public**.

Hyponymy (Specific-General)

It is a relationship between two words, in which the meaning of one of the words includes the meaning of the other. A **flamingo** lives in water. This **bird** is white.

Metonymy

This results from the selection of a lexical item that is in some sense in part-whole relationship with a preceding item.

I live in a large **house**. The **yard** is full of trees.

Antonymy

In this type of lexical cohesion, cohesion comes about by the selection of an item which is opposite in meaning to a preceding lexical item.

I usually wear **dark** colours. I don't look nice in **light** colours.

General nouns

In this type of cohesion two items have the same referent. **Military actions** against Iraq was not successful. **The moves** were illegal.

Collocation

This type of lexical cohesion results from the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur.

Yarmohammadi (1995) holds the view that collocation is achieved "through the association of lexical items that regularly tend to appear in similar environments. Such words don't have any semantic relationship".

Behnam (1996) considers collocation as "collocation is one of the factors on which we build our expectations of what is to come next". An example of collocation is as follows: a huge oil boat polluted the **sea**. Many fishes lie along the **beach**.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The subjects in this study were 30 male EFL learners. They were Intermediate 3 students and had studied almost seven terms at the Iran language Institute at the time this study was performed. They aged between 17 and 30.

Procedure

Ten passages were taught to both groups during a term including 20 sessions.

A predetermined method was employed, which was written in advance by the research team of the Institute. The subjects in the experimental groups were also trained to locate lexical cohesive devices in the texts and many examples were provided from other texts explaining the kind of lexical devices used. The subjects in the control group only received the method of the Institute. In the last session, two passages each followed by five multiple-choice questions were given. They were told that they would not be scored for the test to remove anxiety and motivate them for the final. A t-test was performed to compare the scores of two groups.

RESULTS

As it was mentioned, a t-test was taken to compare the mean scores of subjects in both groups. The following table shows the results:

Table1. Paired t-test for comparing the scores of control and T-value experimental groups

Groups	N	X	SD	T-value
Experimental	15	8.3	1.110	
Control	15	7.10	.910	
				.001

As it is seen on the table above, a t-value of .001 is statistically very significant at the .05 level of significance to support our claim. So we can support our hypothesis that preparing students with strategies to locate and be aware of lexical devices in text can improve their reading ability.

Pedagogical implication

Some pedagogical implications of this study can be drawn for both EFL reading and translation.

As it was mentioned before, cohesion is a semantic relation and functions to pair and chain items across sentences that are related. It brings about semantic continuity in a text. It can be claimed that

comprehension of a text partly depends on recovering the cohesive elements, so the reader needs to attend to them. These cohesive elements should be attended to in an EFL reading class. Translation is defined as establishing equivalence in textual material between source and target language. Newmark (in Fleet and Threadgold, 1987) states that the topic of cohesion is the most useful area of discourse analysis applicable to translation. Lotfipour-Saedi (1991) offers a discorsal framework for the characterization of translation equivalence. He states that equivalence is established in terms of eight dimensions: vocabulary, structure, texture, sentence meaning verses utterance meaning, language varieties, presupposition, cognitive effect, and aesthetic effect.

CONCLUSION

Thus, these dimensions of which "texture" is related to our study should be met in translation studies. The study can also be of significance in EFL writing classes. Being aware of lexical cohesive devices, EFL student can produce more cohesive essays in their writing classes produce more. Many students in Iran, who have graduated from high school, cannot write a coherent paragraph, even though they can write single isolated sentences which are correct. This can be explained by the assumption that sentence elements which create cohesion have not been taught.

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