

## VIETNAMESE LEARNERS' ATTENTION AND USE OF COHESIVE DEVICES IN ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING AT DONG THAP UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

The present study made an investigation on the attention to and the use of cohesive devices (CDs) in English essays written by fifty third-year EFL majors at Dong Thap University, located in one of the remote areas of South Vietnam. The questionnaire and the essays were the instruments in this study. The results demonstrate that the students' attention to CDs use in writing essays was not very high although they were nearing the end of their writing series classes required. Secondly, the frequency and errors in CD use were in line with other previous studies related outside Vietnamese setting. Generally, the researched students inclined to rely on certain types of CDs while underuse or ignore others. That is lexical CDs occupied the highest percentage of CD use in the assigned essays, followed by reference and conjunctive CDs. Based on the present study's findings at Dong Thap University together with those of the previous relevant ones elsewhere, it is suggested that insufficient use or making errors of CDs in English essay writing is universally a learning step for EFL learners in their course of the target language acquisition and writing skills mastered in particular.

**Keywords:** cohesive device, essay writing, lexical, reference, conjunction.

### INTRODUCTION

A great deal of studies conducted in the field of academic writing such as by Al-khasawneh (2010), Bachman (1990), and Ghasemi (2013), reveal common problems committed by EFL learners in academic essay writing. One of the most dominant problems is that EFL learners have inadequate knowledge and use of English CDs. In fact, writing cohesively remains a challenging task for many EFL learners and users of English, even at advanced level (Hinkiel, 2004). Halliday and Hasan (1976/1989) believe that cohesion as a significant feature of good writing. Indeed, language learners indispensably need to write cohesive texts through various semantic forms, namely CDs to convey messages to readers eloquently and effectively. Consequently, CD use in writing essays has attracted the attention of many researchers who are endeavoring to examine the issue of insufficient cohesion in students' writing (Tanskanen, 2006). Despite the crucial significance of cohesion in EFL writing, the investigation of CDs use in essay writing has not been found adequately and systematically in Vietnam. Especially, no research in the field has been done at *Dong Thap University*, one of the remote areas in the South of Vietnam. For these reasons, the present study was conducted to make an effort to investigate EFL learners' attention to and use of CDs in essay writing at this university in order to improve writing skills in general and essay quality in particular.

## Research Aims

The current research was conducted (1) to explore the target students' attention to CD use in English essay writing; (2) to investigate what CD types and how frequently the students use them to achieve textual cohesion in an assigned essay.

## LITERATURE REVIEW Essay Writing

An essay is a group of paragraphs that develop one central idea (Ruetten & Smalley, 1994). As a result, essay writing is a complex process, which requires writing well at sentence, paragraph, and organizational/discourse level. At the sentence level, learners should be able to identify and write simple, compound, and complex sentences. At the paragraph, they should be able to identify and write paragraphs including topic sentences and supporting ideas. At the organizational, they should learn how to write essays (Hyland, 2002). Regardless of whatever types of essay, the organization has three main parts: *introduction*, *body* and *conclusion* with different functions. Namely, the introduction is usually one paragraph that introduces the topic to be discussed and the central idea, the thesis statement of the essay. The second part, the body, includes several developmental paragraphs, which develops various aspects of the topic and the central idea. The conclusion concludes the thought developed in the essay. The different essay types are of narration, description, exposition, and argumentation.

## Cohesion

Cohesion in practice can be interpreted as the set of semantic resources for linking a sentence with what has been presented previously, which enables the passage of speech or writing to function as a text. Cohesion exists where the interpretation of some element in the discourse/text is closely connected and dependent on that of another (McCarthy, 1991). When this happens, textual cohesion is set up, and the two elements, "the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p.4).

## Taxonomy of CDs

Cohesion can be established by various means including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical relationship. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify these devices into two main types, namely grammatical and lexical cohesion.

Grammatical cohesion is achieved by means of *reference*, *substitution*, *ellipsis*, and *conjunctions*. *Reference* refers to resources for referring to a particular or circumstantial element whose identity is recoverable (Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2001). Reference accelerates the flow of understanding what presented in a text (McCarthy, 1991). Reference can refer backward to the item presented before in the text, called *anaphoric reference*, or refer forward where the referent will appear in the upcoming text, called *cataphoric reference*. Reference can be categorized into three subtypes. First, **personal reference** is achieved through the use of personal and possessive pronouns, and possessive adjectives. They refer to individuals and objects that are presented in some parts of a text. Another subtype is **demonstrative reference**, which is mainly realized by demonstratives such as *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, or the definite article "*the*." The last subtype of reference is **comparative reference**. Comparative reference is used to

compare the similarities, differences, or identities between items in a text. The adverbs and adjectives of comparison or the words such as *the same*, *difference* are employed to achieve the comparative relationship.

Unlike reference, *substitution* has nothing to do with specifying or identifying particular. Substitution occurs when one linguistic item is replaced by another that contributes new information in a text. Substitution involves the use of such terms as “*one/ones*” or “*the same*” for nouns, “*do, so*” for verbs, “*so*” or “*not*” for clauses. Considered as the equivalent of substitution by zero, *ellipsis* refers to “the omission of an item” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p.88) that is already understood from the antecedent context.

Conjunction is the type of cohesion, which links whole clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In English, conjunctive relations are usually established through the use of conjunctive ties, which consist of coordinating conjunctions (*but, and, so, or*), adverbs (*in addition, however, thus*) or prepositional phrases (like *beside that, despite the fact that*). Conjunction is divided into four broad categories: **additive**, **adversative**, **causal**, and **temporal**, each of which is further divided into several subcategories. The four broad types of conjunction function differently to express the ideas convincingly and impressively to the audience. **Additive conjunctions** function as means to repeat, emphasize the key points, or add relevant new information to the prior expression. The additive relation can keep track by using simple forms such as *and, or, neither...nor, not only...but also*, etc; or through emphatic forms like *in addition, moreover, and alternatively*. **Adversative conjunction** is employed to express contrary to expectation. The adversatives expressing the contrastive relations includes *but, however, on the other hand*, etc. The others indicate corrective relations are *instead, rather, at least*, etc. The conjunctions revealing the dismissive relations consist of *no matter...still, whichever, at any rate*, and the like. **Causal conjunction** is used to connect the clauses or sentences related to each other in the cause-and-effect or in the conditional relations. Specifically, causal conjunctions are used to express the relation of result (*as a result, consequently, in consequence*), reason (*for this reason, on account of this*) purpose (*for this purpose, to this end*) and condition (*otherwise, under circumstances*). **Temporal conjunction** serves to create a sequence in time indicating that one event occurs simultaneously, before or after another (*first, then, previously, finally*) or express the conclusive sense (*at last, in the end, inclusion*).

Lexical cohesion involves the repetition of a noun phrase, or the use of another noun phrase bears a relation to the antecedent noun phrase (McCarthy, 1991). Lexical cohesion is a cohesive relation whose cohesive effect is achieved by the selection of vocabulary. The two subtypes of lexical cohesion are *reiteration* and *collocation*. Reiteration means either restating an item in a later part of the discourse by direct repetition or reasserting its meaning by exploiting lexical relations (McCarthy, 1991). Reiteration involves the use of repetition, synonym (including near-synonym and antonym) super-ordinate/hyponymy and general nouns. Hyponymy (Richard & Schmidt, 2002) concerns a relation between two words, in which the meaning of one of the words includes the meaning of the other word.

Meanwhile, collocation refers to the restrictions on how words can be used together. Halliday and Hasan (1976) state that collocation pertains to lexical items that are likely to be found together within the same text or they tend to occur within the same lexical environment.

## EFL Learners' Errors Using CDs in Essay Writing

Various studies have been conducted in the field and the findings have figured out several common errors that EFL learners make in the use of CDs in their writing essays. The results of research by Castro (2004); Chen (2008), Crewe (1990), Fan, Hsu and Yang (2006); Kanno (1989); Sadighi (2012) and others have indicated that errors of **overuse, underuse, and misuse of conjunction** are common problems of EFL learners. **Lexical CD misuse** is another type of errors EFL learners often have in writing essays. Limited choice of lexical items, misuse of collocation, and unrelated or redundant reiteration are revealed in previous findings. The present study did not focus on CD errors, but rather looked at them as an evidence of the concerned learner in the process of internalizing the target language in use. It is also the call for more attention from both teachers and students to improvement in the subject matter in question.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Questions

The present study has been conducted to answer two specific questions: (1) To what extent do the target students pay attention to using CDs in English essay writing? (2) What CD types and how frequently do the students use them to achieve textual cohesion in an assigned essay?

### Participants

The participants are fifty third-year EFL majors of Spring Term 2014 at Dong Thap University, 38 females and 12 males. Their age ranged between twenty-one and twenty-three years old. They all come from provinces in the Mekong Delta, South of Vietnam. All of them have learned English for over ten years at secondary, high school and three years at university. None of them has experienced living or studying in English speaking countries.

The students have 150 hours in total of 6 writing classes (one semester each) in the undergraduate program and have been trained to write paragraphs, and essays such as narrative, descriptive, expository including analysis, definition, cause-effect, process, and compare-contrast essay. The assumed level of their English proficiency was upper-intermediate at the research time. The study was conducted at the end of their sixth semester of the undergraduate program, which is the last semester in their writing course series at university. They were expected to be able to write several kinds of essays at this stage in theory.

### Research Instruments

The questionnaire (which provided data for research question 1) in this study contained two main sections (see Appendix 2). The first was comprised of two questions regarding the participant's personal information such as their genders and ages. The second included 22 items with Likert scale and boxes to be checked. The items were categorized into three clusters. The first was the students' cohesion understanding (item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) which ranged from "strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree" basing on a five-point Likert scale with "Strongly agree" assigned a weight of five points and "Strongly disagree" one point. The second cluster, to what extent the students pay attention to using specific types of cohesive devices (e.g., reference, conjunction and lexical) to achieve cohesion in essay writing, consisted 9 items (item 8, 9, 10,

11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18). The last cluster, the students' attention to cohesion in essay writing in general, included 4 items (item 18, 19, 20, 21, 22). The five-point scale which ranged from "never, seldom, sometimes, often, always" was utilized for cluster 2 and 3. "Always" is coded 5 points while "never" one point. Besides, an English essay was assigned for the target students to write in class as a test (which provided data for research question 2 of the present study). The essay topics (see Appendix 1) were suggested by the present researchers and approved by the writing teacher in charge. The students were asked to write an essay from 250 to 300 words in length without using any sort of dictionary or document resource in 60 minutes on one of the topics provided. They were not allowed to use any dictionary or document so that the findings could be reliable regarding their ability to use CDs in writing an essay.

### Data Collection Procedure

In order to test the reliability of this instrument, the questionnaire was delivered to 20 third-year EFL majors at Dong Thap University, who assumed to have the same level of English proficiency as the target students. The Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) = .856 (see Appendix 3) showed the questionnaire was reliable. The questionnaire was then provided to 50 target students and completed in class. The students were encouraged to answer honestly and to ask any questions about the items they did not understand. Two weeks later (near the final week of the semester), they were asked to write an essay in class as a test by their teacher, who was currently in charge of teaching the writing course. They were not informed that their writing would be the data for the research. Hence, they tried best to write because the writing results were recorded as regular tests in class. Furthermore, they were not informed that the use of CDs were the focal point of the study so that they would perform the way they regularly did.

### Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, the taxonomy of cohesive devices proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) cohesion framework was employed due to its comprehensive and well-developed taxonomy. However, substitution and ellipsis were not counted because these are hardly applied in academic writing and mainly found in spoken discourse. The cohesive devices and their code utilized in the research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of CDs and Codes (in the present study)

| Type of cohesive devices |                 | Code                    |    |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----|
| Grammatical cohesion     | Reference (R)   | Personal reference      | R1 |
|                          |                 | Demonstrative reference | R2 |
|                          |                 | Comparative reference   | R3 |
|                          | Conjunction (C) | Additive conjunction    | C1 |
|                          |                 | Adversative conjunction | C2 |
|                          |                 | Causal conjunction      | C3 |
|                          |                 | Temporal conjunction    | C4 |
| Lexical cohesion         | Reiteration (L) | Repetition              | L1 |
|                          |                 | Synonym/ near           | L2 |
|                          |                 | Superordinate/hyponym   | L3 |
|                          |                 | General noun            | L4 |
|                          | Collocation     | L5                      |    |

The table demonstrates the type of cohesive devices and their codes which were utilized to count their tokens in the essays. Research question 1: The questionnaire was employed. The descriptive statistics was utilized through the means of the software: Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the series of one sample t-tests were conducted.

Research question 2: CDs found in essays were categorized into subtype of reference, conjunctions and lexical CDs. The number of devices that occurred in each category was counted. The percentage of CDs found in the fifty essays was calculated separately. The SPSS was employed to figure out the frequency of CDs by giving descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, and the percentage of each type. Next, the number of CDs per 100 words was calculated and grouped into categories of reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion and the subtypes.

## RESULTS

### Questionnaire Results

Table 2. Overall Mean Scores

| N  | Min. | Max. | Mean. | SD Overall |
|----|------|------|-------|------------|
| 50 | 2.95 | 4.50 | 3.63  | .34        |

The overall mean score of the questionnaire shown in Table 2 is  $M=3.63$ . One sample t-test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean was significantly different from 4.0 (i.e. the accepted mean for high level of perception). The sample mean ( $M=3.63$ ,  $SD=4.14$ ) was significantly different from 4.0, the high point ( $t=-7.71$ ,  $p=.00$ ). It indicates the students' attention to CD use to achieve cohesion in writing essays was not very high. In details, their cohesion understanding (cluster 1-7), attention to CD use (cluster 8-18) and attention to cohesion creation (cluster 19-22) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Item Clusters' Mean Scores

| Item cluster                   | N  | Min  | Max. | Mean | SD  |
|--------------------------------|----|------|------|------|-----|
| Cohesion understanding         | 50 | 3.29 | 5.0  | 4.08 | .41 |
| Attention to CD use            | 50 | 2.64 | 4.64 | 3.42 | .43 |
| Attention to cohesion creation | 50 | 1.75 | 4.75 | 3.42 | .63 |

The results from Descriptive Statistic Test and one sample t-test demonstrate the students were aware of cohesion. The sample mean ( $M=4.08$ ,  $SD=4.14$ ) was not significantly different from 4.0 ( $t=1.41$ ,  $df=49$ ,  $p=.16$ ). It indicates that they highly understood the role of cohesion in essay writing.

Next is their attention to CD use to achieve cohesion (item 8-18). The five-point scale from "never", "seldom", "sometimes", "often" and "always" were implemented. The sample mean ( $M=3.42$ ,  $SD=.43$ ) was significantly different from 3.0, i.e. the medium frequency level ( $t=6.84$ ,  $df=49$ ,  $p=.00$ ). It means that their attention to CD use was just above medium frequency-level "sometimes".

For the last cluster (items 19-22), the sample mean ( $M=3.42$ ,  $SD=.63$ ) was different from 3.0 ( $t=4.29$ ,  $df=49$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Thus, their attention to cohesion creation was statistically above average level.

## Essay Writing Results

Table 4. Overall CD Tokens in the Essays

| CD Types      | Reference (R) | Conjunction (C) | Lexical (L) | Total |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| Frequency     | 847           | 844             | 1043        | 2734  |
| Per essay     | 16.9          | 16.8            | 20.86       | 54.68 |
| St. deviation | 4.40          | 4.61            | 5.73        | 12.69 |
| Percentage    | 30.98%        | 30.87           | 38.15%      | 100%  |

Clearly, the students were able to use various CDs in their writing; however, they tended to use specific types rather than equally of three groups. The lexical device (38.15%, 20.86 per essay) was employed more frequently than reference (30.98%, 16.94/essay) and conjunction (30.87%, 16.88/essay). The standard deviations of the three CD groups were fairly similar between 4.40 and 5.73.

For subtypes of reference CDs, Table 5 illustrates that personal reference occupied the most (87.13%, 14.76/essay). The personal dominantly outnumbered the comparative (6.85%) and demonstrative (6.02%). A slight difference was seen between the token numbers of demonstrative and comparative references.

Table 5. Reference CD Tokens

| Reference types | Personal (R1) | Demonstrative | Comparative(R3) | Total |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|-------|
| Frequency       | 738           | 51            | 58              | 847   |
| Per essay       | 14.76         | 1.02          | 1.16            | 16.94 |
| St. deviation   | 4.22          | 1.02          | 1.36            | 4.40  |
| Percentage      | 87.13%        | 6.02          | 6.85%           | 100%  |

For the subtypes of conjunctive CDs, Table 6 displays that the additive remarkably came first (60.31%, 10.18/essay), and all the three others accounted for less than 40% of the tokens.

Table 6. Conjunctive Tokens

| Conjunctive   | Additive (C1) | Adversative | Causal (C3) | Temporal | Total |
|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------|
| Frequency     | 509           | 68          | 163         | 104      | 844   |
| Per essay     | 10.18         | 1.36        | 3.26        | 2.08     | 16.88 |
| St. deviation | 3.50          | 1.20        | 2.03        | 0.88     | 4.61  |
| Percentage    | 60.31%        | 8.06        | 19.31%      | 12.32%   | 100%  |

Next is the statistics of lexical CDs. Among the five subtypes of lexical CDs, repetition of the same word had the highest percentage (77.76%, 16.22/essay), followed by collocation (12.27%). Synonym (near-synonym/antonym included) and super-ordinate were relatively less used. No general word was found.

Table 7. Lexical CD Tokens

| Conjunctive   | Repetition | Synonym/Antonym | Super-ordinate | General word | Collocation (L5) | Total |
|---------------|------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|-------|
| Frequency     | 811        | 84              | 20             | 0            | 128              | 1043  |
| Per essay     | 16.22      | 1.68            | .40            | 0            | 2.56             | 20.86 |
| St. deviation | 5.50       | 1.67            | .73            | 0            | 1.92             | 5.73  |
| Percentage    | 77.76%     | 8.05%           | 1.92%          | 0%           | 12.27%           | 100%  |

The following table summarizes insufficient CD use/errors in the assigned essays:

Table 8. Insufficient CD Use Noted

| CD errors                          | Frequency  | Per essay   | St.         | Percentage  |
|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Personal reference                 | 95         | 1.9         | 1.04        | 25.89       |
| Demonstrative adjective            | 9          | .18         | .60         | 2.45        |
| Definite article "the"             | 21         | .42         | .73         | 5.72        |
| Comparative reference              | 1          | .14         | .20         | 0.27        |
| Overuse of conjunction             | 90         | 1.8         | .83         | 24.52       |
| Lack of conjunction                | 27         | .54         | .71         | 7.36        |
| Misuse of conjunction              | 69         | 1.38        | .97         | 18.80       |
| Misuse of lexical item/collocation | 55         | 1.1         | 1.22        | 14.99       |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>367</b> | <b>7.34</b> | <b>2.25</b> | <b>100%</b> |

## DISCUSSION

### The Students' Attention to CD Use in Essay Writing

Their overall attention to CD use in English essay writing was not very high (3.63 out of 5 points). Although they were aware of and got sufficient knowledge of cohesion (4.08 out of 5), they paid just more or less an average attention to CD use (3.42 out of 5). This might explain that they did make effort to create cohesive essays but not very often. This makes sense because the act of essay writing in another language is a hard job requiring a number of elements involved at content/ideas, language use and discourse levels.

They themselves reflected that they acquired limited CDs at the time. Hence, they relied too much on certain types of CDs, particularly repetition of the same (key) words. The findings illustrate that cohesion might not be placed an appropriate focus in their writing course while it was one of the most fundamental characteristics of writing quality. Hence, using CDs effectively should be in need of more attention by both writing teachers and learners.

### The Frequency and Weaknesses in CD Use

In general, the findings obtained clearly demonstrate the students' tendency of CD use in essay writing. Specifically, they employed most lexical CDs (20.86 per essay), followed by references (16.94/essay) and conjunctions (16.88/essay). For reference CDs, they used the personal the most (87.13%), and for conjunctions the additive was mostly seen in their essays (60.31%). This indicates that the students were able to and did use several types of CDs as expected (at least in just one assigned essay). Their CD use covered all the three categories of reference, conjunction and the lexical.

In addition to the frequent use of different CDs mentioned above, there is still room for improvement. First, they seemed to rely too much on repetition of the same words, especially personal references as seen in the following extracts (from the researched essays):

#### Extract 1

(a) *The first quality is responsibility. When I become a leader, I have to be responsible with my decisions.*

*Everything I do or I say, it should be good for my school and my colleagues. When I make a decision, I must consider if it is good or not. If it is good for my school, I will try my best to make it true and I will do anything for good results.*



- (b) *Secondly, we should do exercise every day to have strong health and good mind. In fact, doing exercise makes you stronger. The people who do exercise often are more flexible and stronger than the people who do not do exercise.*
- (c) *Children tend to copy what actors or actresses do... If they see the actors or actresses do something that is beautiful or good in the movie, they will do what the actors or actresses do...*
- (d) *Firstly, smoking in public places should be banned because other people who do not smoke become passive smokers. Passive smokers are known to face equal or more harm than smokers of having diseases related to smoking. Passive smokers such as children are not always aware of the harm from passive smoking. Therefore, passive smokers are accidentally victims of the unfair act of smoking in public places. Passive smokers should utter their voice to ban smoking in all public places.*

The over-reliance on certain types of CDs not only reduced the essay quality, but signals the students' weakness in employing the target devices to achieve textual cohesion. There is no doubt that at this learning stage their ability to use a wide variety of CDs appropriately and alternatively in writing is still on its way to refinements. The results are in the line with other previous relevant studies elsewhere outside Vietnamese setting such as Lee (2002), Olateju (2006), and Rahman (2013).

Another noted point that should be improved is that in the present study the students had a strong tendency to use single words rather than phrases. For instance, they seldom employed "on the other hand", "on the contrary", "from the perspective of", "all in all" in their writing. Instead, they inclined to use "and", "but" "so" or "because". The fact that simpler conjunctives were dominantly used in the essays could indicate their certain difficulty or lack of confidence in employing conjunctive phrases. For instance, one-word conjunctions "or", "because", "but", "and" were repeatedly found in the next extract.

#### Extract 2

*Firstly<sup>C4</sup>, children will have bad behavior if they watch TV a lot, because<sup>C3</sup> they tend to copy what actors or<sup>C1</sup> actresses do. Indeed<sup>C1</sup>, they are too young to know what they should do or<sup>C1</sup> should not do. If they see the actors or<sup>C1</sup> actresses do something that is beautiful or<sup>C1</sup> good in the movie, they will do what the actors or actress do without checking they are good or<sup>C1</sup> bad. It is not hard for us to see that many children or<sup>C1</sup> teenagers copy the actors' appearance whom they like. They create new and<sup>C1</sup> strange hair-styles; buy a lot of eerie clothes. Moreover<sup>C1</sup>, they try to speak or<sup>C1</sup> move as the actors. But<sup>C2</sup> the most vital danger is they copy many violent actions in the movies and<sup>C1</sup> do them in a real life. That is the reason why in modern society, there are more criminals and<sup>C1</sup> they are younger. In fact<sup>C1</sup>, the young will have strange behavior or<sup>C1</sup> violent actions when<sup>C4</sup> watching TV.*

Other errors of overuse (a), misuse (b), lack of conjunction (c) and inappropriate collocation (d)

are provided in the following: Extract

3

- (a) *Although smoking is very bad for health but many people cannot give up smoking.*
- (b) *Nowadays, television is very popular and watching television is the most favorite activity of all children.*  
*There are many educational programs on television.\*In addition, television has many programs which are not suitable for children. They can easily find many violent movies on television. (→ However,...)*
- (c) *Passive smokers are the victims of smokers in public places. They can inhale dangerous poisons from smoke. \*Smoking in public places is an impolite behavior. (→ Therefore, smoking....)*
- (d) *We should avoid strong coffee or tea before going to bed. Because coffee and tea may might me difficult to have a deep sleep. (sound sleep)*

## CONCLUSION

The present study based on Vietnamese-speaking students (of Dong Thap University) has made certain insights into EFL learners' process of understanding and using English CDs in their essay writing. Based on the findings and those of previous relevant studies, it is suggested that insufficient CD use or making CD errors explicitly found in essay writing is universally a definite step for EFL learners in their course of the target language acquisition and writing skills mastered in particular. Repetition (of grammatical and lexical items) is clearly the initial strategy to make discourse cohesions among the concerned learners. This strategy should be refined and modified by other advanced strategies of CD use such as (near-) synonym and super-ordinate. Therefore, the teacher's role should be realized in raising the learner's attention to the significance of CD use in the task of essay writing. In practice, teachers are advised, together with other regular in-class activities (i.e. presenting essay models, processes of writing, brainstorming, draft-writing, editing and so on), to provide supplementary CD use exercises and purposely assist learners correct their CD use errors in essay writing practice.

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**APPENDIX 1:****ESSAY WRITING TEST**

Time allotted: 60 minutes

Write an essay of 250 - 300 words length on one of the following topics:

**Topic 1:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*Smoking should be banned in all the public places.*

Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion

**Topic 2:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *Watching television is bad for children.*

Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion

**Topic 3:** Suppose you were appointed head of a company, a school or an organization.

Write an essay analyzing factors that contribute to success as a leader.

**Topic 4:** What we should do to be in good health.

**APPENDIX 2:****STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE**

*This questionnaire was designed in order to conduct "an investigation into EFL learners' use of cohesive devices in essay writing". Your assistance in completing the following questions is greatly appreciated.*

Please put a tick (☐) in the box beside the option(s) you choose.

**Part I: Personal information**

1. Gender:  Male,  Female; 2. Age:.....years old

**Part II EFL learners' perception of the use of cohesive devices in essay writing in English**

(1)=Strongly disagree; (2)=Disagree; (3)=Neutral; (4)=Agree; (5)=Strongly agree

| Statements   | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Cohesion signals relations, joins ideas and enhances connectedness of the elements in sentences, between sentences in a paragraph and across paragraphs in an essay.  |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2. Cohesion is like glue to stick all elements and ideas to make a text.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 3. The connectedness of sentences/ideas makes an essay unified and meaningful.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 4. If an essay is not cohesive, it is a group of unrelated individual sentences.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 5. Cohesion is of crucial significance in an essay.  |     |     |     |     |     |
| 6. Cohesion makes essay ideas presented clearly, comprehensively and smoothly.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7. Cohesion is achieved by appropriate use of words, linking adverbs, conjunctions, phrases to express the connectedness of the elements/ideas in a sentence, between sentences and paragraphs in an essay.  |     |     |     |     |     |
| (a)=Never; (b)=Seldom; (c)=Sometimes; (d)=Usually; (e)=Always  |     |     |     |     |     |
| 8. You pay attention to personal pronoun use ( <i>he, she, it, they</i> , etc.), possessive adjectives (e.g. <i>his, her, my</i> ) possessive pronouns (e.g. <i>mine, ours theirs</i> ) when referring item(s), person/people or thing(s) mentioned earlier in an essay.<br><b>Ex:</b> <i>Neil is a devoted teacher. He always prepares his lessons carefully.</i>         | (a) | (b) | (c) | (d) | (e) |
| 9. You pay attention to the comparative forms of adjectives and adverbs to discuss difference, similarity, or identity between elements.<br><b>Ex:</b> Most people have the <b>same</b> breakfast every day.<br>We are demanding <b>higher</b> living standard.  |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10. You pay attention to linking adverbs to express addition such as <i>in addition, moreover, furthermore, besides, also, additionally</i> , etc.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 11. You pay attention to adverbs/adverbials to express comparison and contrast such as <i>likewise, similarly, meanwhile, in the same way, by contrast, on the contrary, yet, however, conversely, on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless</i> , etc.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 12. You pay attention to adverbs/adverbials to express cause-effect such as <i>therefore, consequently, for that reason, thus, as a result, hence, thereby, accordingly, as consequence</i> , etc.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 13. You pay attention to adverbs/adverbials to express time sequence, or sequences of events: <i>first(ly), second(ly), next, then, at first, first of all, finally, later, initially, last, in the end, in the long run, last but not least</i> , etc.  |     |     |     |     |     |
| 14. You pay attention to the definite article "the" instead of using personal pronoun ( <i>he, she, it</i> , etc) to refer the person, thing, or item mentioned earlier.<br><b>Ex:</b> <i>I am having <u>a problem</u> at work now. Though <u>the problem</u> is not very serious, it really makes me unhappy.</i> )   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 15. You pay attention to demonstratives <i>this, that, these, those</i> when referring to the participants mentioned earlier in an essay.<br><b>Ex:</b> a) Many companies are going to build new factories in the area. <b>This</b> creates many new job opportunities for local people.   |     |     |     |     |     |
| b) <i>Seven blackbirds began to sing in the morning. <b>These birds</b> were singing beautifully.</i>  |     |     |     |     |     |
| 16. You pay attention to the use of synonym, near synonym, antonym, in context to avoid repeating the same words several times in an essay.<br><b>Ex:</b> <i>I heard a <b>sound</b>, but I couldn't figure out where that <b>noise</b> came from.</i><br>Mr. John was <b>unsuccessful</b> in the competition last week. The <b>failure</b> made his fan very disappointed. |     |     |     |     |     |

|   |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 17. You pay attention to what word can be used together. For example, which verb can collocate with which noun, or which preposition can be used with which verb.<br><b>Ex:</b> I often <b>make mistakes</b> in writing essays.<br>The doctors <b>performed the operation</b>   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 18. You pay attention to repeating key words appropriately to achieve cohesion in writing essays.<br><b>Ex:</b> It can be argued that all <b>children</b> in Australia have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. Many <b>children</b> in the past have spent months or years in school without understanding lessons. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 19. When writing an essay, you pay attention to the semantic connectedness within a sentence, between sentences in a paragraph and across paragraphs in an essay to achieve cohesion.   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 20. You pay attention to the effectiveness of cohesive devices because it is one of the most significant elements to demonstrate the quality of an essay  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 21. You revise correctness and appropriateness of cohesive devices in writing an essay.   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 22. In general, you pay attention to using a variety of cohesive devices to achieve cohesion in writing English essays.   |  |  |  |  |  |

**APPENDIX 3: Questionnaire Reliability**

| Item-Total Statistics |                            |                                |                                  |                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if Item Deleted | Scale Variance if Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
| q1                    | 80.350                     | 86.450                         | .451                             | .851                             |
| q2                    | 80.200                     | 79.011                         | .622                             | .841                             |
| q3                    | 80.050                     | 88.787                         | .144                             | .857                             |
| q4                    | 80.250                     | 84.408                         | .332                             | .853                             |
| q5                    | 80.450                     | 77.839                         | .678                             | .839                             |
| q6                    | 80.250                     | 81.671                         | .504                             | .847                             |
| q7                    | 80.150                     | 86.239                         | .329                             | .853                             |
| q8                    | 80.400                     | 82.568                         | .671                             | .844                             |
| q9                    | 81.050                     | 82.050                         | .539                             | .846                             |
| q10                   | 80.550                     | 86.576                         | .257                             | .855                             |
| q11                   | 81.300                     | 75.274                         | .710                             | .836                             |
| q12                   | 80.900                     | 87.042                         | .304                             | .853                             |
| q13                   | 80.500                     | 85.842                         | .293                             | .854                             |
| q14                   | 81.350                     | 78.239                         | .488                             | .848                             |
| q15                   | 81.000                     | 91.263                         | -.076                            | .869                             |
| q16                   | 81.450                     | 83.208                         | .458                             | .849                             |
| q17                   | 81.550                     | 76.050                         | .566                             | .844                             |
| q18                   | 81.150                     | 89.608                         | .075                             | .859                             |
| q19                   | 80.500                     | 80.895                         | .593                             | .843                             |
| q20                   | 80.550                     | 77.313                         | .758                             | .836                             |
| q21                   | 80.300                     | 83.379                         | .486                             | .848                             |
| q22                   | 80.250                     | 88.724                         | .115                             | .859                             |

One sample essay paper marked

Topic: What we should do to be in good health.....

Health is an important thing in human life. So how to keep good health is always a long question that many people wonder. Indeed, to be in a healthy health, there are many ways but from my point of view, doing exercises and eating enough nutritious are two perfect methods to keep good health.

Firstly, doing exercises every day is the most helpful way to maintain health. By taking joining in exercises, people can reduce stress after hard working day. People also can keep the balance of energy in their body so that they can avoid some diseases such as over-weight, diabetes, etc. As the result, people health will be people better. Moreover, doing some exercises like walking, jogging can supply people some useful things that are necessary for their health, for example when walking in the early morning people can be supplied Vitamin D which is very essential for their skin. In one word, take part in exercises can help people gain a good health.

Secondly, the variety of diet is also the best way to get good health. When people eat enough foods such as meat, beef, etc, they can be supported good health. Eating enough necessary nutritious can help people go far away diseases such as sickness. Some great scientists suggest that if we drink or use a tomato everyday we can need not go to see the doctor regularly. Furthermore, eating enough nutritious, people can have enough energy to cope with their trouble in their life. Therefore, they will not get stressful in their lives. In short, eating is an important way to maintain a good health. Because they are good for your health.

All in all, there are many ways that we can do to be in good health. However, doing exercises and eating enough nutritious are the wonderful couple because we can get lots of benefits that is support for our health.