

Error Analysis of Cohesive Devices in Non-English Major College Students' English Writing

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Abstract:

The theory of cohesion plays a vital role in writing to realize coherent discourse and natural logic. Whether the writings can be appropriately used the cohesion devices is the key to improve the writing ability, especially in learning foreign languages. Whether the writings can be appropriately used the cohesion devices is the key to improve the writing ability, especially in learning foreign language. Based on the framework of Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory, this thesis aims at analyzing the use of cohesion in writing. Based on the framework of Halliday and Hasan's cohesion theory, this thesis aims at analyzing the use of cohesion in English compositions of non-English major college students. subjects, the author chosen those non-English majors who have passed College English Text Band 4 in their freshman and sophomore years at Shandong University of Finance and Economics. Based on the methodology of combining qualitative and quantitative methods and bias analysis, the analysis mainly includes the frequency of cohesion use. Based on the methodology of combining qualitative and quantitative methods and bias analysis, the analysis mainly includes the frequency of cohesion use and cohesion errors, the degree of influence of negative mother tongue transfer.

Keywords: Cohesion, College English Writing, Error Analysis, Negative Native Language Transfer

1. Introduction

Of the four major components of English language teaching: listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is recognized as the most difficult. It is because writing not only requires that each sentence be written accurately and vividly, but also requires that

the sentences be linked together in a specific way to form a complete and coherent discourse. At present, more and more attention has been turned to the study of writing in China, but both teachers' teaching effect and students' performance in the examination still reflect that writing is still a difficult problem for the Chinese education field.

However, domestic students tend to pay more attention to the accuracy and complexity of language forms rather than cohesion. As for the understanding of cohesion: correlation and coherence (Cohesion and Coherence), domestic students simply understand that it is enough to mechanically superimpose logical words between sentences, and there are different degrees of bias in the understanding and application of “cohesion”, which leads to a large number of cohesion errors in English writing by current English language learners, especially college students [1]. As a result, English learners, especially college students, have more cohesion errors in their English writing [1]. According to Han Lide, cohesion is an aspect of contextual studies; it can be defined as the process by which a meaning is channeled into an intelligible discourse rather than spreading formlessly in every possible direction. Cohesion is the basic criterion of discourse coherence and is necessary to constitute a discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). According to research, the correct use of cohesive devices in discourse helps readers to understand and interpret the text (McNamara et al, 2014). Writing is the process of organizing a text that expresses the writer’s ideas and is also a communicative process. Coherence and cohesion help to write well. Cohesion plays an important role in writing. However, throughout the history of research, studies on the use of cohesion tools in China started late and were mostly limited to the relationship with writing quality. In China, more and more learners and teachers realize the importance of writing. However, in examinations, we find that writing is still the most difficult for students. Therefore, this paper focuses on the use of cohesion theory to analyze the writing of non-English major college students. Through the study, we can find out the errors in students’ writing and analyze the categories in which they are most influenced by their mother tongue to make targeted suggestions.

2. Theoretical analysis

2.1 cohesion theory

Cohesion theory emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the concept of “cohesion” referred to the function of connecting sentences in a discourse by means of certain lexical and grammatical features. 1964, as the progenitor of systemic-functional linguists and the real founder of the cohesion theory, Han Lide made a detailed discussion on the means of cohesion. Thesis. In 1964, as the originator of Systemic Functional Linguists and the real founder of cohesion theory, he firstly defined the scope of cohesion, which is divided into two main categories: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion.

1968, Hassan discussed “cohesion” in detail. In 1968, Hassan discussed “cohesion” in detail. Subsequently, in 1976, Hanleid and Hassan published the book “cohesion in English”, which marked the formal establishment of cohesion theory. In this book, it is clearly pointed out that cohesion is not a structural form, but a reflection of linguistic proficiency. They never stopped their research, but kept exploring along their own research direction, further developing and improving the cohesion theory.

Hanleys theory of cohesion is an important part of systemic functional linguistics that aims to talk about coherence within texts and across sentences. According to Hanley and Hassan (1976), cohesion is a semantic concept that refers to the semantic relationship between the linguistic components of a discourse. Cohesion arises when the interpretation of one semantics depends on another part. The linguistic components are structurally unrelated, but they depend on each other at the semantic level and are unified by means of cohesion such as reference, substitution, omission, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

Cohesion theory emphasizes that the above five categories of cohesion means in the actual use of language to play a common role in order to make the text in the surface is each independent sentence at the same time, the formation of a kind of internal meaning coherence, thus enhancing the text of the whole and comprehensibility.

2.2 Error Analysis Theory

Bias analysis focuses on the systematic analysis of the regular errors made by L2 learners in the process of language acquisition, to study their sources and causes, so as to understand the process and rules of the learners’ acquisition. The theory of bias analysis is one of the theories of second language acquisition, developed from the theory of contrastive analysis. “Bias analysis is an integral part of mediated language theory”, and the development of mediated language theory promotes the pioneering of bias research in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The psychological basis of bias analysis is cognitive theory, and the linguistic basis is Chomsky’s theory of universal grammar. In the 1970s, the theory of bias analysis gradually developed into a mature theory, which was accepted by the linguistic community and applied to the study of L2 learner’s acquisition, and provided researchers with new perspectives on the linguistic phenomenon of L2 learner’s deviation from the target language. Corder put forward five basic steps of bias analysis Corder proposes five basic steps for bias analysis: collecting corpus, identifying errors in the corpus, categorizing the errors, explaining the reasons for the errors, and evaluating the level of the errors.

3. Research design

3.1 Object and content of the study

The research subjects of this paper are students whose undergraduate degree at Shandong University of Finance and Economics is a non-English major (Chinese International Education). In order to ensure the universality of the sample, as all the research subjects have passed the English IV level examination, and their scores are all 500 and above. This paper first determines and identifies the five types of cohesive devices (reference, substitution, omission, connection, lexical cohesion) in the 50 compositions, and organizes the analysis of the number of uses, the number of biases and the types of biases; then analyzes the reasons for each type of bias according to the biases in the samples, and analyzes in a comparative manner the types of cohesion that have been the most affected by the negative transfer of mother tongue; finally, it puts forward the suggestions of writing strategies according to the conclusions reached, hoping to help the teachers and students to learn English in a more representative and universal way. It is hoped that this can help teachers to design teaching more

effectively, help students to reduce the errors in discourse cohesion and deepen their understanding, so as to improve the quality of writing.

3.2 Research methodology

This paper uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses to analyze the cohesion means bias in English compositions of non-English majors. Quantitative methods were used to analyze the number of uses, the number of biases and the rate of bias for each of the five types of cohesive devices (referent, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion) in 50 English compositions, and the overall usage rate and rate of bias for discourse cohesive devices were also statistically analyzed; on the basis of the quantitative analysis, the type of bias and its causes were qualitatively analyzed for each type of cohesion device.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Statistics on specific types of cohesion means

	illumination	substitution	omission	connection	lexical
usage	200	55	26	179	160
error	28	2	3	18	30
proration	0.14	0.036	0.115	0.101	0.188

Figure 1 Statistics on the number of uses and biases of the five types of cohesion means

1. Illumination: the use of certain linguistic components (such as pronouns, articles, etc.) in the text to refer to the concepts of things, people or events that have already been mentioned in the previous text or are about to be mentioned in the subsequent text, so as to realize the echo of the previous and subsequent texts and coherence. There are three main types of illumination:

(1) Referring back: the accusative refers to what has already been mentioned in the previous text

e.g. in the sample, "Customers can buy any quick sellers at Amazon easily, as it sells everything from electronic products to any fashion clothes.". The word "it" in "Amazon" refers to the word "Amazon" in the previous sentence.

(2) Downward pointing: opposite to the forward pointing, pointing to what will be mentioned later in the text

e.g. When he arrived, John saw the new building.

"he" is used to refer to "John", but before the specific reference.

(3) External reference: the referent points to something actual outside of the context, and usually makes sense in a specific context. The general co-referential pronouns are

by default known to the interlocutors.

e.g. Looking at Annie's picture, they said she is a power woman.

"Annie" does not exist in this conversation, but the parties are aware of Annie's existence and are certain that they are talking about her now, so "she" can be used as an external reference.

(4) Personal reference: mainly includes all adjectives as well as one, it, they, etc.

e.g. We will encounter many challenges in our future life and the ability we acquire in working hard can make us have more choices to solve them.

"them" is a reference to the previous word, "challenges."

(5) Indicative referent: It indicates the form of instruction by means of indicative words, and often the speaker chooses different linguistic items by means of different scales of proximity and distance. Mainly including the adverb of instruction there, here; selective indicator this, these and non-selective indicator the. Among them, the only expresses the sense of cohesion when referring back.

e.g. Here is an advertisement about my bicycle that I used at college.

“Here” indicates the content of the advertisements that will be referred to below.

(6) Comparative references: they can be divided into general and special comparisons. General comparisons are concerned with simple comparisons within things; while special comparisons are more focused on qualitative or quantitative comparisons, such as the highest level of comparison.

e.g Thus, if the price can be lower, there will be a huge income good reputation.

The comparative “lower” is the special comparative.

2. Substitution: it is the substitution of one constituent for another, which is a grammatical level relationship, and the constituents involved in the substitution need to have the same structural function (e.g. lexicality, etc.), which can be further categorized into three subcategories

(1) Noun substitution: mainly “one” and “same”, where “same” is usually used in conjunction with “the”

(2) Verbal substitutions: mainly “do”, but only “do” denotes a verb rather than an auxiliary verb plays an cohesive role

(3) clause substitution: instead of a word, a complete clause is substituted, often in the form of “so” and “not”

3. Omission: Often omission can be regarded as a special kind of substitution, “non substitution”

4. Connection: Connection is not a means of extending the preceding or following text, but expresses meaning between fragments of language and presupposes the existence of other components. Connections between sentences can be strengthened through the use of conjunctions, adverbs with connecting meanings, or prepositional phrases. The main relationships include additions, transitions, cause and effect, and time.

5. lexical cohesion; mainly consisting of recurrence and collocation.

4.2 Analysis of the current situation

From the above table, it can be seen that the current frequency of non-English majors’ use of various cohesive devices varies, and the gap is more obvious: the cohesive devices with the highest frequency of use are illumination and cohesion; and the ones that produce the highest number of biases are vocabulary and illumination. This frequency ranking is basically consistent with the results of other researchers.

Most of the students consciously and frequently used the means of illumination, cohesion and vocabulary for text cohesion, but the use of omission and substitution was less. This shows that the study participants recognize that the use of some cohesion means is beneficial to the coherence and cohesion of the text, but they have not yet mastered and used some of the methods flexibly.

Through the sample analysis, it is found that the students’ bias mainly focuses on the improper collocation of vocabulary, the changing use of pronouns and the omission or misuse of the definite article [2]; due to the stereotyped thinking of the students, they are more accustomed to writing the meanings they want to express through the direct translation, which results in the mistakes of authentic English collocation or idioms; they are more accustomed to blindly using the second-person pronouns, or plural forms of the second person pronouns. forms. This creates inconsistencies in reference, which can confuse readers and even create comprehension problems. Students sometimes confuse the use of definite and indefinite articles. This causes them to omit or add necessary articles in their writing, most commonly with the misuse of “the”.

To summarize, there is still some room for improvement in college students’ mastery and use of cohesive devices, especially omission and substitution. However, through reading the literature and research, it is found that Chinese university teachers teach students too little about vocabulary explanation and collocation, which indicates that the research on English vocabulary education in China still needs to be strengthened and deepened [3]. Teachers should strengthen the explanation and practice of this part in the process of teaching activities, and combine with the deepening of the relevant theories to carry out systematic practical training in discourse writing.

5. Comparison of causes and relevance of bias

5.1 Analysis of causes of bias

In order to further understand high school students’ use of cohesive devices, this study explored and categorized students’ errors in the use of cohesive devices in conjunction with text analysis and inferred their causes.

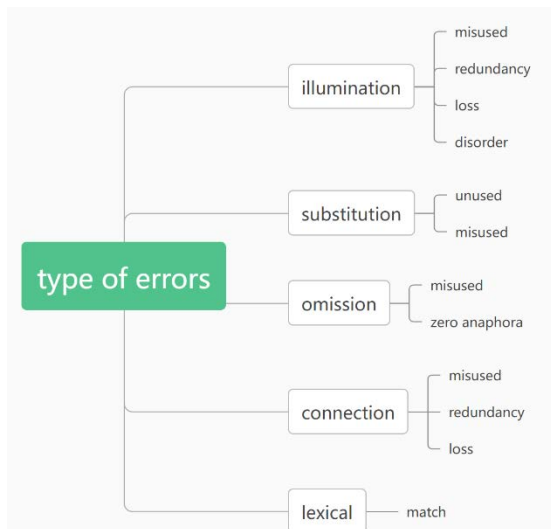


Figure 2 type of bias

Combined with the findings of existing studies, it is easy to conclude that the causes of cohesion means bias can be divided into two main categories: students and teachers.

Students' own native language negative transfer and the generalization of the target language: firstly, students still receive the interference of Chinese thinking in English

writing and directly translate what they want to express in English without considering the problem of the contrasting differences between the Chinese and English languages, which leads to the problems of stiffness and unnatural transitions in their writings; secondly, students' accumulation is too little, which leads to the fact that students directly copy and use a new knowledge point without considering the context after mastering it, so that they encountering the same problem, the phenomenon of repeated multiple errors will occur.

Teachers' teaching deficiencies: Teachers lack systematic explanations of the means of English cohesion, and teachers themselves do not have in-depth and systematic knowledge and understanding of the theory, which further leads to the inability to comprehensively and meticulously teach in the process of teaching activities. In addition to the words, teachers do not pay enough attention to the cohesion means in the feedback process, and the target is not strong. This also leads to the inability of students to recognize their own problems and deficiencies.

5.2 Comparison of correlations with negative native language transfer

	illumination	substitution	omission	connection	lexical
usage	28	2	3	18	30
migration	7	0	1	8	18
proration	0.25	0	0.33	0.44	0.6

Figure 3 Negative mother tongue migration correlation statistics

According to the table, it can be seen that the means of cohesion most affected by the negative transfer of the mother tongue is vocabulary, in which the type of error is improper collocation; the next most affected by the negative transfer of the mother tongue is cohesion, which is mainly characterized by the improper use of logic.

The reason for this is mainly because the difference between Chinese and English for vocabulary collocation is more obvious, especially the use of verbs and prepositions, which is often translated from Chinese to one-to-many, leading to the fact that students unconsciously will write according to the incorrect way of translating into Chinese and then choosing. As for the wrong use of cohesion, the reason can be attributed to the contrast between the Chinese and English structures. The logical structure of English is more explicit and direct, while Chinese is more implicit and indirect, relying more on the meaning of sentences than on obvious logical words.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study explores the overall situation of the use of dis-

course cohesive devices in the English writing of non-English-major college students by means of essay sample analysis and statistics, centering on two research questions. The results of the study show that the frequency of the use of various cohesive devices by non-English major college students varies and the gap is relatively obvious: the most frequently used cohesive devices are illumination and cohesion; among the five modes of cohesive devices, the most significant category affected by the negative transfer of the native language is the vocabulary mode. Based on this, this paper puts forward the following suggestions:

First of all, teachers should strengthen the teaching of each cohesion means, focusing on teaching synthesis: according to the level of students and the requirements of the new standard, timely follow up and improve the teaching content, focus writing teaching on chapter structure, paragraph cohesion and other aspects of the writing teaching to guide students to pay attention to the use of cohesion means [4].

Secondly, teachers should fully consider the individual differences of students, through classroom questioning

and timely and effective post-class feedback to enhance students' attention to the cohesion means.

Finally, teachers should improve their own ability to deepen their research and understanding of the theory and other knowledge related to cohesion means; students need to strengthen the accumulation and use more comparative thinking.

Students can visualize the differences between Chinese and English and cultivate their English thinking by comparing articles in Chinese and English, focusing on cohesion means such as phrase collocation [5]. Changing attitude, in-depth learning and continuous experimentation. Comprehensively understand the five means of cohesion, consciously apply the relevant methods in daily practice, summarize the problems in time and keep practicing.

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