# Cohesive Devices used in Students' Argumentative Essay; A Discourse Analysis

**\*¹Ifoni Ludji, ²Erny S.N.Hambandima, ³Yuningsih Nita Christiani**

¹⁻³Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana, Indonesia

**\*Correspondence:**
ifoniludji@gmail.com

## Abstract

The cohesive devices are one of the important aspects of academic writing that has been recognized as a fundamental characteristic of good writing. This study aims to find out the types of cohesive devices used by students and to identify the error of using cohesive devices when composing an argumentative text. This study recruited ten students from the fifth semester of the English language program in the 2021/2022 academic year. The research approach used in this study was descriptive qualitative. The entire data were analyzed by identifying the kind of cohesive devices used and also errors in using the cohesive devices. Based on the documentary results of the student's argumentative essay, it indicated that the students used only three types of cohesive devices as reference, conjunctions, and substitutions. While there are two types of errors revealed in student essays of using cohesive devices, namely; references and conjunctions. The types of references included personal references, such as; they, them, and it, as well as demonstrative references, such as; that, those, and these. Furthermore, there are errors with additive conjunctions such as the use of and or. The Errors in causal conjunctions, such as; using the conjunctions so and because. The students often used the cohesive devices inefficiently, incorrectly, or excessively. In other words, the sentences are not linked correctly and properly. It seems that students cannot use cohesive devices in writing because they do not understand how to use them properly.

**Keywords**: Cohesive devices, Cohesion, Argumentative Essay

## INTRODUCTION

Students should be convinced that their text runs through a series of phrases while communicating their ideas in writing. Each sentence in a text could be understood and

represent the author's concept when they are linked to one another (Nurhidayat et al., 2021). The link is called cohesive devices. Further, the quality of a phrase or text is determined by its coherence and unity, not length (Adiantika, 2015)As a result, English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers should encourage students to write a variety of texts.

The most problematic issue comes up when EFL students have a variety of challenges when it comes to delivering a decent piece of writing, (Taplo, 2016). As a result, most of their text lacks texture, which allows words to "stick together" or meaningfully be captured in a single text (Iseni, A., Almasaeid, A.A., & Younes, 2013). This texture is caused by the interaction of two components, which are called coherence and cohesion. To be a text, these minimal units of meaning should therefore be related cohesively and coherently (Rahmawati, 2015).

The problem of cohesion may be a problem in writing proper sentences (Almutairi, 2017). The element of cohesion is the mark of communicative and effective text (Latifah & Triyono, 2020). Moreover, the text is categorized as readable text (Alarcon & Morales, 2011). In addition, demonstration of cohesiveness to ensure the surface or cohesiveness of text production is the same as cohesive discourse (Andayani et al., 2013). Cohesive devices provide readers with appropriate confirmation. They drive readers to describe the structure of the text (Albana et al., 2020). The linkers also give the readers instructions on how to link sentences (Bahaziq, 2016). In other words, linkers play a critical role in creating logical text because they indicate the continuity of a sentence that exists between one phrase and another sentence, and even between one paragraph of a sentence and another paragraph in the text (Eun, 2009). Another concept which is proposed by (Halliday, 1976) has a view that variation incoherence is a function of variation in the cohesive harmony of a text. It means that a text is not only about the word and sentence constructions but also contextual meaning that triggers language sense. Further, sentence argument as in syntactic rules needs variation as in diction.

The previous study on Cohesive Devices in Student's Writing (A Discourse Analysis on Argumentative Text written by Alban at all, 2020) has a similar topic to this recent article, unfortunately, it focused on the frequency and percentage of errors committed in student's writing. It is not elaborating on the concept behind the frequency and the percentage of using cohesive devices in student's writing, then it could be hard for others to measure the standard of high-quality standard composing text (Darweesh, 2016). Another case in that we could take a lesson from this previous article is implementing mixed-method. It indicates that the researcher relied on quantitative and qualitative methods. Nevertheless, we need to make sure the balancing of their contribution to elaborating the concepts.

In that study, the qualitative method cannot be explored detailed. Thus, in this recent article, the qualitative method is going to be the foundation. Elaborating meaningful quantitative figures are going to be the supported aspect of the qualitative method (Disman et al., 2017). Further, related to the discussion section, there is no detailed concept of

cohesive devices elaborated. For instance, in the section on Ellipticals and substitution, the previous researcher failed to explore the use of the sort of grammar as the cohesive markers.

Another article that has similar point is 'Errors in the use of grammatical cohesive devices in argumentative text written by Yemeni EFL learners (Nasser, 2017). It is good enough as academic writing but it is not deep enough to drive how grammatical sentences are composed. The researcher only focused on the number of errors. It is only relying on figures and numbers using cohesive markers. It contributes to discourse markers. Nonetheless, it has no linguistic approach in terms of text organization. Thus, this recent article comes up as the complete written text.

The next study deal with Cohesive devices in argumentative essays by Indonesian EFL learners (Nindya & Widiati, 2020). This descriptive qualitative study aimed at investigating Indonesian EFL learners' ability to use cohesive devices in their writings. The results showed that the total number of grammatical connectivity used by the students was 2386, with 175 of them making mistakes. It has also been found to be highly dependent on the use of certain binders. Intra-lingual translation was the most frequent cause of mistakes made by students. Translation cannot be taken directly as the strategy of composing a text since, an author can be trapped in composing his or her ideas in another language (Hatim & Munday, 2019). It will be better if the author thinks in the same language as what he is writing about. This meant that academic writing teachers need to implement strategies to develop the writing ability of EFL students, such as showing students exercises, using collaborative learning, providing feedback, and using a learning management system (Chanyoo, 2018).

The last study deals with the types of cohesive devices used in Headline News of The Jakarta Post (Jambak, n.d.). The findings show that there are 162 references, four (4) substitutions, thirty-four (34) Ellipsis, 349 conjunctions, and thirty-six (36) lexical cohesion that occur in this study. The most dominant type of cohesive device is conjunction because the writer would like to connect ideas within the text to make its readers easy to understand (Mohammed, 2015). Then the writer would like to make their news more informative. Even, the result was indicated conjunction as the dominant one, it cannot be figured out that conjunction is the only determining element of creating informative text (Huang, 2015). The previous researcher did not mention it.

Regarding the result from the previous studies above, it indicates that students have had difficulty in effectively presenting the cohesive devices in their writing. However, considering the students' status as Foreign Language Learners – EFL, it is might be acceptable if most of them faced difficulties in composing their ideas in good writing. Moreover, it looks like cohesiveness is one of the factors that influence the quality of writing (Hidayat, 2017)

The cohesive devices are important because they have grammatical and lexical features that help them develop sentences and make them more accurate and contextually understandable (Uru et al., 2021). Therefore, based on the various issues mentioned above regarding cohesive devices, the current research will rely on the types and errors done by

students. Those types of cohesive devices in this research are explicated in terms of the syntactic rules as the novelty of this research. Thus, it goes to investigate the kinds of cohesive devices used by the students in their argumentative writing and the errors of using cohesive devices when composing an argumentative text to be coherent.

## METHOD

The data for this study were taken from the results of 10 (ten) written documents from the fifth-semester students of the English education Study program. They finished their argumentative essay in two hours and fifteen minutes. The students' handwriting on the topic tells them which topic they are familiar with. Thus, the students had to write the following topic "Social media has destroyed real communication". Further, the length of the writing is not limited since it has been bordered by the duration.

The Primary data, provided in the form of student argumentative text, was examined using a theoretical framework based on the idea of cohesive devices analysis by (Halliday, 1976) and the interpretation of cohesive links. To examine the data, the researchers split each paragraph into clauses. The identification was then made by identifying terms that belong to the cohesive devices, highlighting the types and the errors in using the cohesive devices. In addition, in the final step, the researchers categorized the underlined words into the appropriate kinds of cohesive devices and explained the mistakes in using the cohesive devices.

Argumentative text is a kind of composing where the writer is either for or against an issue or subject (Suhartoyo et al., 2020). This kind of text was taken as the sample of sort of research since, it enables students (respondents) to be free in arguing an issue (Prananda, 2016). Even more, it could be easy in employing cohesive markers in the text. That is why this kind of text was relying on as the discourse source of the student's way of writing argumentative text.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Halliday and Hasan (1976) stated that cohesive devices are divided into five categories. They are reference, conjunction, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. Reference is expressions whose meanings can be understood by referring to other words. Halliday and Hasan (1976) divide it into three types; ***personal reference*** (using function in speech situation through the category of person), ***demonstrative reference*** (means of location on a scale of proximity), and ***comparative reference*** (means of similarity or identity).

Further, they classified comparative reference into two types; general and particular reference. Regarding substitution, Halliday and Hasan state that substitution takes place when one feature (in a text) replaces a previous *word* or *expression*, for instance: "I left my pencil at home, do you have one? In this example, "one" is replaced or substitution for "pen". Thus, it is not driving a concept of numeric. While, Ellipsis refers to "the omission of an item"

(Halliday and Hasan:1976: 88) that is already understood from the antecedent context (Li et al., 2012). For instance; "Sintia presented brilliant ideas on coronavirus impact in society and so did Michael". In that sentence, there are two clauses. *First*, "Sintia presented brilliant ideas on coronavirus impact on society". *The second one* is "Michael presented brilliant ideas on coronavirus impact on society". Since they bring a similar concept to agglutinative grammar then they can combine by implementing the elliptical phrase '*and so did*'.

Unlike reference, substitution, and ellipsis, the use of conjunction does not instruct the reader to supply missing information either by looking for it elsewhere in the text or by filling structural slots (Ayomi, Putu & Pratama, 2018). Instead, conjunction signals the way the writer wants the reader to relate what is about to be said to what has been said before (Rahman, 2017).

Based on the analysis, three types of cohesive devices are analyzed and found in this study they are reference, substitution, and conjunction. The frequency of the types and the errors of using the cohesive devices found in students' English argumentative text will be presented in Figures 1 and 2 below.
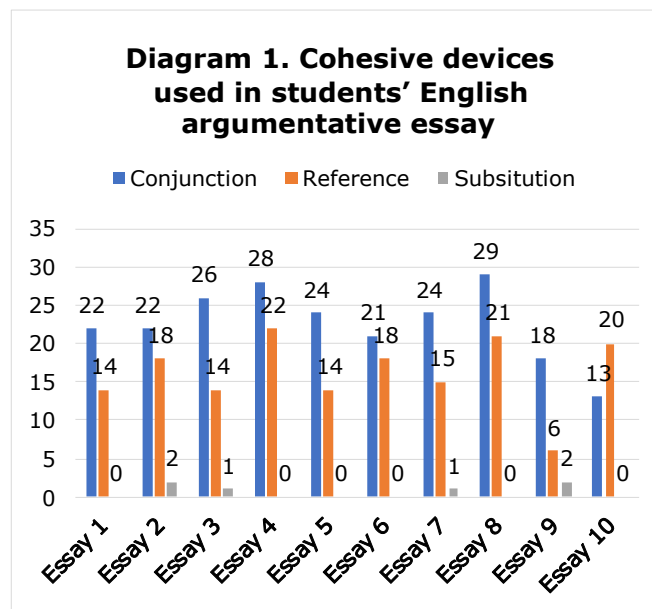


Figure 1. Cohesive devices used in students' English argumentative essay

From the table presented above, it can show us that the conjunction is mostly used by the students for 227 times, the reference was used 162 times while the substitution was used six (6) times. There are two types of conjunction categories namely, additive, causal, and adversative. The reference categories such as personal references as the most frequently then followed by the last was the demonstrative reference. Among the three types of cohesive devices used in students' English argumentative essays, substitution is the type that students useless, which is six (6) or 1.18%. This type of substitution consists of three

categories namely nominal, verbal, and clause. Actually, this text (data source) is a good one since it has words, sentences, and paragraphs, but when it is investigated deeply into the text, the number of using conjunction and reference cannot drive a reader into a comprehension zone. Even, we have no standards for using cohesive devices in a text, the co-text of every single sentence in the text needs structures of diction and cohesive markers (Graesser et al., 2004). Another finding could be represented in Figure 2 below;
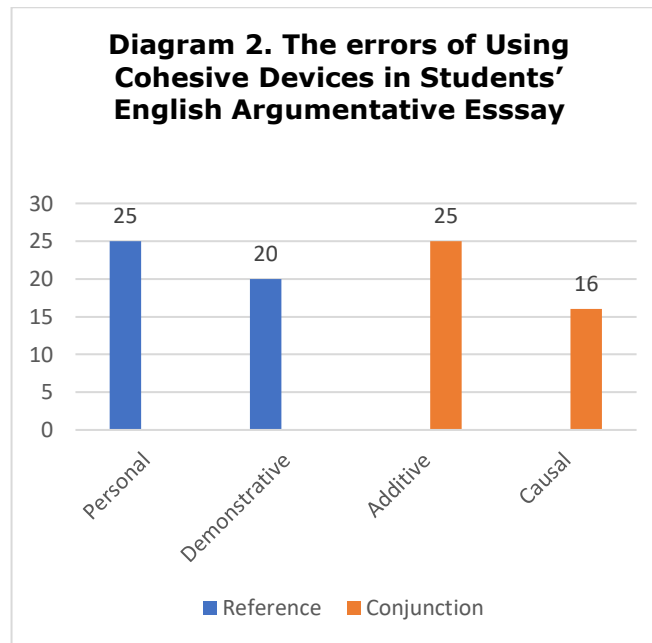


**Diagram 2. The errors of Using Cohesive Devices in Students' English Argumentative Esssay**

Figure 2. The errors of Using Cohesive Devices in Students' English Argumentative Essay

## Reference Makers

From diagram 2 above, it can be concluded that the reference type is the type with the most error done by the students compared to the other two types such as conjunctions and substitutions. In addition, the table also shows that only two types of references are used in students' writing, with the most dominant error being 25 personal references, it is the most widely used (Warna et al., 2019) and followed by 20 demonstrative reference types.

## Personal Reference

The personal reference was the highest number of errors done by the students in their writing. Further examination of the personal references utilized in the students' writing revealed that *"it"* was the most commonly mentioned item. According to the essay's analysis, the personal reference "*it* " is used to avoid repetition and rambling in a text, particularly, in this case, the repetition of people, readers, and users in the text (Riau, n.d.)

The sentence, *"many students using social media and Those statement reveals the error because the personal reference* **"it"** was used incorrectly. Regarding the word **it** refers to

"many students" as a plural noun thus it should be used **"they"** *to replace* **'it'.** In addition, the sentence meaning of that statement is to show about the feeling of *"many students" when they use the social media as a media of communication.* The function is to indicate the reference pronoun. Therefore, the correct sentence should be *"many students using social media and share news to other people so **they** feel it help them in communication."*

**Demonstrative Reference**

The second is demonstratives reference*.* It contributes to a significant portion of the error in students' writing. It could be seen in the following sentence *"recently, in facebook there are a lot of fake news disturb us.* **That** *fake news are increasingly day by day".* It contributes to a significant portion of the error in students' writing. It could be seen on the following sentence *"recently, in facebook there are a lot of fake news disturb us.* **That** *fake news are increasingly day by day".*

From the statement stated above it reveals the error since the use of demonstrative reference **that** is incorrectly in which the writer put the demonstrative **that** regarding to *"a lot of fake news" while the phrase "a lot of fake news"* is showing the plural form*.* Thus, the correct statement should be *"recently, in facebook there are a lot of fake news disturb us.* **Those** *fake news are increasingly day by day".* The demonstrative pronoun is point out things. "*That*" is using when the speaker is talking about plural things and it far from the speaker (Sanczyk, 2010).

**Conjunction**
**Additive Conjunction**

The second position is the errors of conjunction, with the majority most frequent is additive with 25 or 54.54% and follow by causal with 16 0r 45.45%. The following is data on additive conjunction errors in writing argumentative text essays. *"most young people* **but** *teenagers who are more familiar with social media seem to talk casually without paying attention to whom they are talking."*

Based on the data, there is one conjunction which is not placed correctly and appropriate because the use of the conjunction **but** should be used in the co-text to show an unexpected contrast or difference or in English it is called to show the contrast or unexpected difference (Lynch & Anderson, 2013) while in the sentence above as a whole the sentence does not contain a contrasting meaning (Andi Suprapto, 2014). On the other hand, the correct conjunction is "and" because the sentence tends to connect two or more things in one clause that has the same position (Mubenga, 2014). Then the correct sentence should be *"Most young people* **and** *teens who are more familiar with social media seem to talk casually without paying attention to whom they are talking to"* Based on the result the most common type of error in the next place is causal conjunction. There are still many students who use this type of conjunction in their writing incorrectly.

**Causal Conjunction**

The following data show the errors in causal conjunction made by the students in their writing. *"I do not agree social media destroying communication **so** it is helping to build and enhance our interaction".* The types and the errors found in the argumentative text written by fifth-semester students indicate that their language competency is not good enough in terms of grammatical point of view. It does not mean that lexical properties are not standard. This is simplified as in the sentence construction above. Further, the cognitive and language intuition of students goes with the inner contextual meaning stated in each argumentative text. Another point, the theoretical concept cannot cover all idiosyncrasies in the argumentative text since those texts are composed of different cultural backgrounds and ways of interpreting a theme*.*

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and the discussion described, it can be concluded that there are only three types of cohesive devices found in students' writing they are conjunction, reference and substitution. While there are two types of errors in using cohesive devices found in students' essays, namely *references* and *conjunctions*. The types of references include the choosing of personal such as *they, them, and it*, as well as demonstrative references, such as that, *those,* and *these*. Moreover, the errors of additive conjunctions such as *and*, *or*. The errors of causal conjunctions such as the use of conjunction *so* and *because*. These findings are close related to language in society. Students who are composing the argumentative text underwent language interference. The way they express ideas is based on their first language concept rather than the language sense they apply in writing.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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