

Exploring Students' Competence in Mastering Cohesion

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Abstract Cohesion is an important element in writing that must be fulfilled by students as competence to develop systematic and logical texts in expressing ideas. The paper describes the cohesion mastered by the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts. It belongs to quantitative method. The data are authentic written data of grammatical and lexical cohesion mastered by the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts. The writers analysed the students' written texts in terms of their cohesion employment. The paper reports the findings that all of cohesive devices are mastered by the students but in different intensity: the most dominant grammatical cohesive device used by the students is reference, while for that of lexical cohesive device is repetition. The students' competence in mastering cohesion is different from one text to another, but in general it is sufficient. Their competence in writing narratives is better than that in recounts and reports. It indicates that the students' narrative texts are readable than the other texts. Cohesion needs to be emphasized in teaching writing so that students can be competent in writing texts.

Keywords Competence, Cohesion, Narrative Text, Recount Text, Report Text

1. Introduction

In this globalization era, the developing country needs to improve the students' competence; Indonesia is not an exception. University level students focus on improving text-level composition and lexical development components [1]. There are four skills in English, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among the four

language skills, writing is considered as the most sophisticated skill which is not fully mastered by all language learners, even in their native language. Writing is not easy because it demands the ability of the students to express their ideas clearly as well as to use the language appropriately [2]. It is not a spontaneous activity and needs stages and continues practices. That is why there are lots of people who are proficient at speaking, for example, but not so proficient at writing. Writing assessments are linguistic and neural analyses that become two common approaches to develop the writing process [3].

Today, writing skill is a necessary prerequisite for getting employment in many walks of life and is simply taken for granted in literate cultures. Writing is an effective and good job to use as a profession in various fields [4]. Therefore, students should be given authentic tasks when they learn to produce writings [5].

Writing can be used in a variety of purposes and among others are to retell stories, to tell events or activities that happened in the past or to tell someone's experience, and to give general information of the result of an investigation [6]. The first category is usually referred to as narrative, the second is recount, and the last is report.

One of the criteria of a good writing is its coherence. Coherence means how the sentences that make up the text relate to each other. Coherent texts are those sequences of sentences or utterances which seem to "hang together" by means of so-called text-forming devices. It must deploy the resources of cohesion in ways that are motivated by the register of which it is an instance. Therefore, one of the criteria in assessing writing is the ability of the students in handling cohesion. Cohesion itself consists of grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion.

This study aims at describing the cohesive devices which are mastered by the students in writing narrative, recount,

and report texts. It also describes the competence of the students in mastering cohesion in writing those texts.

Text and Discourse

The term text is defined differently by different writers and often contrasted with the term discourse [7]. Yet some commentators appear to use the terms interchangeably. It is often a language unit with definable communicative function, such as a conversation and a poster. At the same time, discourse is a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as a sermon, argument, and a joke. The term text refers to any written record of a communicative event. It may involve oral language (for example, a sermon, a casual conversation, a shopping transaction) or written language (for example, a poem, a newspaper advertisement, a wall poster, a shopping list, a novel). In contrast, discourse refers to the interpretation of the communicative event in context. Readers must understand actual words, know the meaning in the context of the sentence, and apply the knowledge to get the conclusion or the content of the text [8]. Besides, the implementation of lexical bundles has an impact on certain elements of the writing context [9].

Text refers to a written or taped record of a piece of communication, whereas discourse refers to the piece of communication in context. There are two types of context, namely the linguistic context – the language that surrounds or accompanies the piece of discourse under analysis and the non-linguistic or experiential context within which the discourse takes place. People produce texts to get a message across, to express ideas and beliefs, to explain something, to get other people to do certain things or to think in a certain way. Meanwhile, the term discourse refers to what texts produce and what texts receive. Therefore, discourse analysis is different from text analysis. Discourse analysis involves the study of language in use, while text analysis refers to an analysis of the structural properties of language divorced from their communicative functions. Linguistics and discourse are formal expressions, but both are not special elements of formality [10].

Discourse is different from text in that it embodies more than just the text, understood as a collection of sentences. Discourse is what makes the text context-bound, in the wider sense of the term. The effect of text-based systems is one way to analyse text semantic through accurate words [11]. This term thus serves to indicate not only the immediately perceptible context, such as a conversation, a job interview, and a medical consultation, but also the hidden conditions that govern such situations of language use. Nowadays, the term discourse community is very important in improving the writing competencies that can shift the cross-cultural [12].

Genre

Genre is conceptualized as typified rhetorical actions

based on recurrent situations and how text functions within a social and interactional context. Genre can be defined as culture-specific text type, which results from using language (written or spoken) to accomplish something. Genre is culture-specific and associated with particular purposes, particular stages including distinctive beginning, middles, ends, and specific linguistic features. Another linguist defines genre as commonly identified with the analysis of texts. Linguistic knowledge is a very important element for students who can improve their competence in contextual writing [13]. Besides, in the field of academic writing, most of the analyst does not always pay attention to contexts in the text that they are investigated when it is very important in the genre and registers [14].

In the learning process, linguistic accuracy is crucial to be given to students in the writing class [15]. The students have to read and produce texts in different genres [16]. In university contexts, the literary narrative is more important in the genre. Genres are also called text types. We can find them in many texts which are broadly used in education.

Genres are also called text types. We can find them in many texts which are broadly used in education. There are two text type categories: story genre and factual genre. This classification is based on the fact that the social processes we have in our reality can be derived from stories and facts.

Story genre is further sub-divided into four types, based on the stories that are staged, into 4 types: recount, anecdote, exemplum, and narrative. Story genre is also called literary text types, which explore personal experience to evoke emotions. Meanwhile, factual genre presents information or ideas and it aims to show, tell or persuade the audience. This type of texts has eight main text types: recount, explanation, discussion, information, report, exposition, procedure, and response.

In the learning process of writing, students have to read and produce texts in different genres, so that linguistic accuracy is crucial to be given to them. In university contexts, the literary narrative is more important in the genre. We can find them in many texts which are broadly used in education.

The narrative is a story that is concerned with a protagonist who faces and resolves problematic experiences. Narrative texts are usually found in novels, fairy tales, and short stories. The recount is about events or activities that happened in the past. Recount texts are usually found in diary, personal letter about the experience history, and a famous biography. Writing is one way to express ideas about identity, fill time, and tell someone's experience [17]. The report is about the results of observation or analysis and also describes the natural process, social process, or environment. Report texts are usually found in biology material, internet articles, scientific articles, and lectures.

Cohesion

Everyday we meet words in our surroundings. When

these words are put together to communicate a meaning, a piece of text is created. When we speak or write to communicate a message, we are constructing a text. When we read, listen, or view a piece of text, we are interpreting its meaning. However, not all sentences are interesting, relevant, or suitable; one cannot just put any sentences after another and hope that it will mean something. People do not always speak or write in complete sentences, yet they still succeed in communicating. Also, something is called a text when it is meaningful. It is a piece of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence, and its size does not define it. In this case, the text should be meaningful, unified, and appropriate to its context.

Studies on writing systems add new information to students in improving writing competence [18]. Therefore, language writing influences cohesion in the text. A Second Language (L2) learning is very different from the first language (L1) because it will lead people towards meaningful insight into language writing [19]. Good writing quality should use cohesion feature that is often forgotten by many people [20]. Besides, cohesion is an aspect of the text that can be used as a linguistic marker [21]. There are two dimensions of the text: contextual properties and internal properties. Contextual properties can be called as coherence, while internal properties as cohesion. Coherence refers to the way a group of clauses or sentences relate to the context. The acquisition of cohesion is one of the aspects that are owned by the readers who have great knowledge of science [22]. Moreover, cohesion refers to the resources within the language that provides continuity in a text, over and above that provided by clause structure and clause complexes, since in the systemic model, we recognize two levels to context (context of culture, i.e., genre) and context of situational or registerial coherence, and generic coherence. Besides, linguistic devices tie ideas together across a text.

Text is thus a unit of discourse, a semantic unit. Although a text is physically made up of grammatical units (clauses, phrases, etc.), the text is not just a collection of clauses. Text has a relationship with texture created through patterns of cohesion. It is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text. Text is also closely related to coherence. An important element that is important to be mastered by people to produce coherent text is to pay attention to the text scheme to know the content [23].

In talking about texture, the most important concept is that of a tie. The term tie implies a relation. We cannot have a tie without two members, and the members cannot appear in a tie unless there is a relation between them. The concept of a tie makes it possible to analyse a text in terms of its cohesive properties and give a systematic account of its patterns of texture.

The simplest and most general forms of cohesive relations are 'equal' and 'and': the identity of reference, and conjoining. Cohesive devices are the other names of

types of cohesion. They are non-structural relations which work to help a text hang together. There are five different types of cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Then, the five categories have been reduced to four, with substitution being seen as a sub-category of ellipsis. The following is the description of each of the categories.

Reference refers to how the writer/speaker introduces participants and then keeps track of them once they are in the text. Participants are the people, places, and things that get talked about in the text. There are two kinds of reference, namely endophoric reference and exophoric reference. Endophoric reference is divided into two, anaphoric reference and cataphoric reference. Anaphoric reference points the reader or listener 'backward' to a previously mentioned entity, process, or state of affairs. In contrast, cataphoric reference points the reader or listener forward-it draws us further into a text to identify the elements to which the reference items refer. On the other hand, an exophoric reference is a reference that is interpreted in the immediate context. It is a form of context-dependence. It does not contribute to the cohesion of the text. Additionally, it does not constitute a cohesive tie. It can be called as cohesive devices. Earlier researchers suggested that a cohesive device written by L1 writers is more than that of L2, because of the minimum knowledge belonging to L2 students [24]. Moreover, the use of cohesive devices for students and intermediate writers is lower than that of professional writers [25].

From the elements of cohesion, substitution is the replacement of one item by another. Ellipsis is the omission of an item. These two types of cohesion are essentially the same. Substitution and ellipsis are divided into three categories, nominal, verbal, and clausal.

Conjunction is not a device for reminding the reader of previously mentioned entities, actions, and state of affairs. It signals relationships that can only be fully understood through reference to other parts of the text. The conjunction is the semantic system whereby speakers relate clauses in terms of temporal sequence, consequence, comparison, and addition. Hence, there are four different types of conjunction, i.e., temporality, causality/ consequential, addition, and adversity/ contrast. Temporal relations connect clauses depending on whether the actions they encode take place at the same time or one after the other. Consequential relations connect clauses as cause and effect. Comparative relations pick out contrast and similarities between clauses. Additive relations simply add or substitute extra alternative clauses to a text.

Lexical cohesion is a cover term for the cohesion that results from the co-occurrence of lexical items that are in some way or other types associated with one another because they tend to co-occur in a similar environment. The two major categories of lexical cohesion are reiteration and collocation. Reiteration is ten divided into four types: repetition, synonym, superordinate, and general word.

Lexical cohesion occurs when two words in a text are semantically related in some way. In other words, they are related in terms of their meaning.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper applied the quantitative method. The subject in the paper was the active students of English Education Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Universitas Muria Kudus Indonesia from the fifth semester, of which the number was around 200. The number of the sample was 61, which was divided into three categories: 26 students for narrative text, 15 students for recount text, and 20 students for report text.

The data were authentic written data, i.e., grammatical and lexical cohesion mastered by the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts. Therefore, the data sources of the paper were narrative, recount, and report texts written by the students. Each student was assigned to write a narrative, recount, or report text. From the task given to the subjects, the researchers got 26 narrative texts, 15 recount texts, and 20 report texts as the sources of the data to be analysed.

To analyse the students' written texts in terms of their cohesion employment, the following steps were carried out: first, breaking up the texts into paragraphs for effective analysis, second marking the cohesive devices in the paragraphs for the grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. The next step was to classify the types of

cohesive devices and put them in the appropriate column. Then, giving a checkmark in the respective cohesive device and accounting for the number of cohesive devices used beside the checkmark. The following step was analysing the appropriate and inappropriate use of cohesive devices in the paragraphs grammatically and lexically. The last step was scoring each text using the rubric and stating the students' competence in mastering cohesion based on the Mean of the score.

3. Results and Discussion

The paper aims at identifying and describing the cohesive devices mastered in the texts written by the students and it justifies the texts with reference to the rubric that has been determined to measure the competence of the students in mastering cohesion. Description of the cohesive devices used in the texts includes the description of the dominant cohesive devices which appeared in the texts. This paper focuses on two types of cohesion: grammatical and lexical cohesion. The number of the narrative texts is 26, the recount texts is 15, and the report texts is 20.

Grammatical Cohesion Mastered by the Students

Table 2 presents the summary of the grammatical cohesion mastered by the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts.

Table 1. Scoring Rubric of Students' Competence in Mastering Cohesion

No	Category	Description
1	Good	1. Most of the students' clauses are coherence. 2. The students used >85% of grammatical and lexical cohesion 3. The students do not use exophoric reference.
2	Sufficient	1. There are one or more students' clauses are not coherence. 2. The students used 51%-84% of grammatical and lexical cohesion. 3. The students do not use exophoric reference.
3	Bad	1. Most of the students' clauses are not coherence. 2. The students used 50% of grammatical and lexical cohesion. 3. The students use exophoric reference.

Table 2. Summary of Grammatical Cohesion Mastered by the Students

Text Type	Types of Grammatical Cohesion								Total
	Reference		Conjunction		Substitution		Ellipsis		
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Narrative (26 texts)	596	60.45	360	36.51	12	1.22	18	1.83	986
Recount (15 texts)	434	68.24	161	25.31	7	1.10	34	5.35	636
Report (20 texts)	179	54.41	118	35.87	3	0.91	29	8.81	329
Total	1.209	61.03	639	32.56	22	1.08	81	5.33	1.951

Table 2 shows that the most frequently used cohesive device in narrative texts is *reference* (60.45%). The next cohesive device which is dominant is *conjunction* (36.51%), while for the other two cohesive devices, *substitution* and *ellipsis*, they are only used 12 (1.22%) and 18 (1.83) times, respectively.

Table 2 also reveals that in recount text the mostly used grammatical cohesive device is also *reference* (68.24%), and in the second place is also *conjunction* (25.31%). The rest number of the cohesive devices used is distributed into the other three, with the lowest one is *substitution* (1.10%).

In writing report texts, *reference* and *conjunction* are the two most dominant cohesive devices used by the students. The percentage of reference used by students is 54.41%, while that of conjunction is 35.87%. As it happens in the preceding two types of texts, the least dominant grammatical cohesive device used is substitution (0.91%).

Hence, the most dominant grammatical cohesive device used by the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts is *reference* (61.03%). The fact that *reference* is the most dominant cohesive device used by the students

is an interesting phenomenon to discuss, and so are *substitution* and *ellipsis* as the least dominant cohesive devices used by them.

Lexical Cohesion Mastered by the Students

The lexical cohesion mastered by the students in each type of texts is as the following table 3.

Table 3 indicates that the most dominant lexical cohesive device, which is used by the students in writing narrative texts, is *repetition* (516 of 544 or 94.85%). The rest of 5.15% is distributed almost equally into the other four cohesive devices (*synonymy*, *antonymy*, *hyponymy*, and *meronymy*). In writing recount texts, the most frequently used cohesive device is *repetition*. This is the same as that which happens in narrative texts, although the percentage is not as high as that in narrative texts. The mostly used cohesive device in writing report text is also repetition (86.15%). In general, the lexical cohesive device used by the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts is repetition.

Table 3. Summary of Lexical Cohesion Mastered by the Students

Text Type	Types of Lexical Cohesion										Total
	Repetition		Synonymy		Antonymy		Hyponymy		Meronymy		
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Narrative (26 texts)	516	94.85	11	2.02	13	2.39	3	0.55	1	0.18	544
Recount (15 texts)	325	72.71	61	13.65	17	3.80	12	2.68	32	7.16	447
Report (20 texts)	398	86.15	13	2.81	20	4.33	18	3.90	13	2.81	462
Total	1.239	84.57	85	6.16	50	3.51	33	2.38	46	3.38	1.453

The Competence of the Students in Mastering Cohesion

In measuring and judging the competence of the students in writing narrative, recount, and report texts, the researchers evaluate and score the texts written by them with reference to the rubric in Table 1. The results of the scoring are as follow.

Table 4. Students' Competence in Mastering Cohesion in Narrative, Recount, and Report Texts

Text Type	Scores			Category
	Highest	Lowest	Mean	
Narrative (26 texts)	95.45	64.29	87.59	Good
Recount (15 texts)	97.68	71.04	79.92	Sufficient
Reoprt (20 texts)	88.80	71.04	81.97	Sufficient
Mean Total	93.98	68.79	83.16	Sufficient

From Table 4 we can see that the competence of the students in mastering cohesion in writing narrative, recount, and report texts is *sufficient*.

Discussion

In this part the researchers discuss the findings by comparing the result of each sub-finding for both the cohesion found in the students' written texts and their competence in mastering cohesion in writing narrative, recount, and report texts. In this way, the general picture of the students' use of cohesive devices and their competence in mastering cohesion can be figured out.

Cohesions in Narrative, Recount, and Report Texts

Table 2 is the summary of the grammatical cohesion used by the fifth-semester students of EED TTEF UMK in writing Narrative, Recount, and Report Texts. Meanwhile, the summary of the lexical cohesion used by the students is in Table 3.

The fact that *reference* is the most dominant cohesive device used by the students is an interesting phenomenon to discuss, and so are *substitution* and *ellipsis* as the least dominant cohesive devices used by them. If we examine what we talk or write in our everyday life, we always talk or write about something or someone, which is in language use, it is known as doing the act of referring, i.e., relating language and the world. It seems that people cannot stop doing the act of referring in their everyday life, even when they are gossiping.

When students narrate, they talk about something or *someone* such as *Lake Toba*, *Rabbit*, *Aryo Jipang*, *Joko Bodo*, and so forth. They are also doing the act of referring when they are recounting (or writing a recount text) and reporting (or writing a report text): something or someone is always the contents of what we talk and write. It is therefore very logical that in writing narrative, recount, and

report text, the cohesive device, which is very dominantly used (61.97%), is a *reference*.

The students use the second dominant cohesive device in *conjunction*. As we know, the function of conjunction is to relate clauses in terms of temporal sequence, consequence, comparison, and addition (Gerot and Wignell, 1994). Unless the students can use conjunction in their writing appropriately, the clauses they write will not hang together so that the ideas inside the writing will seem separated from each other. In spoken language, the text produced will sound like an interrogation, which is straightforward. The rather dominant use of conjunction by the students indicates that, more or less, they try to make their writing smooth.

Referring to Table2, we can see that the students are not familiar with the use of *substitution* and *ellipsis* concerning the use of other grammatical cohesive devices. Theoretically, *substitution* and *ellipsis* are not used as often as those *reference* and *conjunction*. The two cohesive devices are also more difficult to use and need a better understanding to use them appropriately so that it is possible that the students deliberately avoid using them. Thus, students avoid using ellipsis and substitution, probably because they are afraid of their appropriateness.

The use of ellipsis and *substitution* is due to the learners' awareness about clauses that could be omitted or substituted. Therefore, *the* limited use of them may indicate that the students are not aware, may mean that they do not have enough knowledge about them, or they deliberately avoid using them. When in a certain part of writing, there should have been a substitution or an ellipsis, the text will sound straightforward. When this happens in a relatively long text, the reading will be tiring, because the text mostly contains simple sentences.

In mastering lexical cohesion, the very, very dominant lexical cohesive device used is *repetition* (84.57%) so that it is very interesting to highlight (Table 3)

The fact that *repetition* is the very, very dominant lexical cohesive device used by the students is in line with what Halliday and Hasan (2004:571) say that the most direct of lexical cohesion is the repetition of a lexical item. Since it seems that mastering repetition is simple, it is very logical that almost all students manage to use it. In contrast, *collocation* is used only 45 times in 61 texts, which means that not every text *collocation* is used. This probably because *collocation* includes all those items in a text that are semantically related. Therefore, in some cases, this makes it difficult to decide for certain whether a cohesive relationship exists or not, so that there may be two possibilities. The first possibility is that the students do not use it, while the second is that it is not identified.

The Competence of the Students in Mastering Cohesion

The main objective of this research is to investigate the

competence of students in mastering cohesion in writing narrative, recount, and report texts. The summary of the students' competence in mastering cohesion is in Table 4.

Comparing the competence, in what text the students are more or less competent, becomes the main issue. Besides, analysing the context is one way to limit the purpose of the text so that it can make students more focus on the genre [26].

The students are more competent in writing narrative than writing recount and report. Comparing recount and report, we can see that the students' score in the report is higher than that in the recount. However, the difference is not so large, so that both are categorized *sufficient*. As a whole, the competence of the students in mastering cohesion in writing narrative, recount, and report texts is *sufficient*. Therefore, higher education should always improve the competency of their students [27].

The fact that the students are more competent in writing narrative is probably because the social function of narrative text is to amuse, entertain, and to deal with the actual or vicarious experience in different ways, while the social function of recount text is to retell the past events to inform or entertain. The social function of report text is to describe the way things are, with reference to a range of natural, human-made, and social phenomena in our environment, so that reports are about results of observation or analysis and also describe natural process, social process, or environment. Therefore it may mean that it is easier for the students to narrate than to recount and let alone to report, because in reporting they have to be able to observe and analyse the objects of what they are going to write. It can be said that reporting needs more sensitivity, knowledge, and critical thinking than narrating does, in which the students write the objects as they are.

The second argument why the students are more competent in writing narrative than writing recount and report is because narrative texts are usually found in novels, fairytales, and short stories. In contrast, recount texts are usually found in dairy, the personal letter about the experience history, a famous biography, etc., and report texts are usually found in biology material, internet articles, etc. Therefore, the students have been more familiar with narrative texts than with the other two texts. They are probably not familiar with writing a diary and a personal letter. They are probably also not familiar with writing biology material and internet articles, which are more academic than writing stories. Besides, they also improve their English competency by associating relevant text and languages [28].

4. Conclusions

All of the cohesive devices are mastered by the fifth-semester students of English Education Department Teacher Training and Education Faculty Universitas

Muria Kudus. However, the highest frequency of occurrence for grammatical cohesion is *reference* (61.03%). The rather dominant use of conjunction by the students indicates that, more or less, they try to make their writing smooth. The next is a conjunction in 32.75%, while the last two are only used minimally.

For the lexical cohesion, the highest frequency is *repetition* in (84.57%). The next is synonymy in 5.85%. The other lexical cohesive devices are only used very minimally or below 5%.

The general competence of the students in mastering cohesion in writing narrative, recount, and report texts is *sufficient*. More detailed conclusions are as follows. The students are more competent in writing narrative than writing recount and report, and the students' score in the report is higher than that in the recount. However, the difference is not large enough, so that both are categorized *sufficient*.

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