

## A portrait of an EFL learner's explanation text: cohesion and coherence

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### Abstract

*This study aims to explore cohesion and coherence in an explanation text written by an EFL learner. To do this, the cohesive devices of the explanation text are analyzed. Also, the text is analyzed using the Thematic progressions theory to find out the logical relationship of the sentences and whether or not the text can meet the readers' expectations. There are several steps to analyze both elements. The first is broking up the paragraphs of the text into sentences. The second is using Thematic progressions to analyze the text. Finally, the writer analyzed the cohesive devices which function to connect sentences. All those data later are elaborated in paragraphs as descriptive-qualitative research design is employed in this study. The results shows that, in term of cohesive devices, the writer uses direct repetition, partial repetition, and same lexical set to build lexical cohesion. It is also found that the writer uses reference, substitution, and ellipsis to build grammatical cohesion. However, the writer seems to have insufficient knowledge to use the cohesive devises correctly. Additionally, the analysis of Thematic progressions shows that some sentences in the text have no logical relationship. Lastly, this study finds that the writer also seem to have insufficient knowledge of schematic structures of the explanation text.*

**Keywords:** Exposition text; Cohesive Devices; Thematic Progression

### INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to investigate cohesion and coherence in one explanation text written by an EFL learner. Writing explanation text is not easy (Palmer, 2011). The writers have to explain how and why something happen (Anderson & Anderson, 1997). Moreover, unlike speaking, writing gives no possibilities for the writers and readers to interrupt or signal each other in exchanging information (Thornbury, 2005). It means the clear writing is needed to create a good text. Those circumstances lead the writer of this article to conduct the study which concerns on identifying cohesion and coherence in EFL learner's explanation text.

Dealing with identifying cohesion and coherence, this study analyzes the cohesive devices which according to Thornbury (2005) are divided into lexical, grammatical and rhetorical cohesion. Similarly, Paltridge (2000) points out five main patterns of cohesion which consist of reference, lexical cohesion, conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis. The analysis of those cohesive devices reveals the macro-level coherence of the text. Meanwhile, to reveal the micro-level coherence of the text, this study analyzes the sentences' logical relationship. The Thematic progressions of the text are also analyzed to figure out whether or not the text meet the readers' expectation.

## METHOD

The data of this study is from one explanation text written by an EFL Learner in discourse study class. In the discourse study class, the learners, including the writer of this study, were assigned to listen to two cartoon videos which are about why and how mosquitoes bite. They have to pay attention to the two videos as the content of both later were used as the content of their explanation texts. Then, the lecturer gave each learner time to write. Once they finished, they were asked to swap their text with their friends. In the case of the writer of this study, he swapped his explanation text with the one written by a friend beside him. In sum, the data of this study are naturally occurring data. Furthermore, the writer of this study conducted three main steps to analyze the text. The first is broking up the paragraphs of the text into sentences. The second is using Thematic progressions to analyze the text (Eggins, 2004). Finally, the writer analyzed the cohesive devices which function to connect sentences. All those data later were elaborated in paragraphs as qualitative research design is employed in this study (Ary et al, 2014)

## RESULTS

### Logical Relationship Analysis of the Text

Sentence 1: Mosquitoes that bite are the female ones.

The topic of this sentence is represented by *mosquitoes that bite*. It is because *mosquitoes that bite* is the theme of this sentence. Then, the comment is represented by *are the female ones* as it is the rheme of the sentence.

Sentence 2: Female mosquitoes are always in a look for blood on animal or human for food.

In this sentence, *female mosquitoes* represents the old information as it is the theme of the sentence that is actually taken from rheme 1. Meanwhile, *are always in a look for blood on animal or human for food* is rheme 2 as it gives a new information that explains the theme 2 more.

Sentence 3: Blood gives female mosquitoes nutrition needed for energy.

The case of this sentence is similar with the previous one. The word *blood* is theme 3 which is taken from rheme 2. It means *blood* represents the given or old information. Afterwards, *gives female mosquitoes nutrition needed for energy* is rheme 3 since it represents a new information of the sentence.

Sentence 4: They need a lot of energy to lay eggs as they need to breed.

This fourth sentence is the last sentence of the first paragraph of the text. The old information in this sentence is the theme *they* which is taken from rheme 3. Then, the new information or comment is represented by *need a lot of energy to lay eggs as they need to breed*.

Sentence 5: Female mosquitoes have specialized sense organs to detect where they can find blood source.

This sentence is the first sentence of the second paragraph of the text. The given or old information in this sentence is same with the theme of the previous sentence. It means the same topic is carried over and a new comment or information is made about it. This new comment is represented by rheme 5, *have specialized sense organs to detect where they can find blood source*.

Sentence 6: They know where they have to bite by substances on skin.

The case in sentence 6 is similar with sentence 5. The reason is because the same theme is carried over. The theme *they* refers to *female mosquitoes* which is the theme 5. Then, the new information is represented by *know where they have to bite by substances on skin*.

Sentence 7: Their needle stab through skin and look for blood vessel,

Sentence 7 above seems to be separated from sentence 6 which tells about the fact that the female mosquitoes know the best part of the victims' skin by their substances. In sentence 7, the theme is *their needle* and the rheme is *stab through skin and look for blood vessel*. Therefore, the theme 7 does not do its function well. It should be taken from rheme 6, or alternatively, it can be the same topic which is carried over from the theme 6. Also, the fact that there is no any cohesive device to connect both sentences makes this sentence more irrelevant.

Sentence 8: but before they stab, they spit on the skin to numb it.

The theme of this sentence is *but before they stab*. It functions as old information as it is taken from the rheme 7. Meanwhile, the rheme is *they spit on the skin to numb it* since it gives the new information of the sentence.

Sentence 9: Their needle looks for the blood vessel and inject saliva to prevent blood clotting.

*Their needle* which is the theme in this sentence and theme 7 are carried over and a new comment is made about it. this new comment is represented by the rheme *looks for the blood vessel and inject saliva to prevent blood clotting*.

Sentence 10: They feed themselves until their belly get full or until they get killed.

This is the last sentence in the second paragraph of the text. The theme is *they* which is the repetition of theme 6. That is why *they* in this sentence functions as an old information that is followed by *feed themselves until their belly get full or until they get killed* as the new information. Therefore, *feed themselves until their belly get full or until they get killed* is the rheme of the sentence.

Sentence 11: Mosquito bites cause itchy bump because saliva causes allergy for the skin.

This sentence opens the last paragraph of the text. However, it seems to be irrelevant with the previous paragraphs as it discusses itchy bump which is not the center of the previous paragraph. The reason is because the theme in this sentence is *mosquito bites* which is not explained whether in theme 10 or rheme 10. In term of rheme, it is represented by *cause itchy bump because saliva causes allergy for the skin*. Finally, the absence of cohesive device gives the readers more difficulty to understand the text.

Sentence 12: Various size of itchy bump may appear depending on how much mosquitoes inject saliva.

The old information in this sentence is represented by the theme *various size of itchy bump*. It actually has been mentioned in rheme 11. Then, the new information in this case is the rheme *may appear depending on how much mosquitoes inject saliva*.

Sentence 13: The itchy feeling are momentary but the irritations last longer.

This is the last sentence of the text. In this sentence, the old information is represented by the theme *the itchy feeling* and the new information is represented by the rheme *are momentary but the irritations last longer*. That is why this sentence seems to be separated from the previous sentence because they talk different things. The previous ones talk about why the itchy bumps happen, while, sentence 13 talks about the itchy feeling. The existence of cohesive device likely is the solution to connect the sentences. Unfortunately, there is no any cohesive device.

### **Cohesive Device Analysis of the Text**

Based on the analyses, the cohesive devices found in this study are categorized into two types. Those are lexical and grammatical cohesion. The complete findings are presented below.

#### **Lexical Cohesion**

1. Direct Repetition: Mosquitoes (2x), female mosquitoes (2x), blood (6x), stab (2x), look for (2x), skin (4x), itchy bump (2x), inject (2x), saliva (2x), vessel(2x), bite (2x), get (2x), cause (2x), needle (2x), female (4x).
2. Partial Repetition: Bite (verb), bites (noun).

3. Same lexical set: blood, vessel, nutrition, saliva, substances, skin, energy (Lexical related to biology).

### Grammatical Cohesion

1. Reference
  - Reference using articles
    - The female: back reference to a *mosquitoes*.
    - The skin: reference outside the text – the skin that the mosquitoes presumably bite.
    - The blood: reference outside the text – the blood of the victims that the mosquitoes presumably pump.
    - The itchy feeling reference outside the text - The itchy feeling that the victims presumably feel after the mosquitoes bites.
    - The irritation: reference outside the text – the irritation that the victims presumably feel after the mosquitoes bites.
  - Reference using pronouns
    - A subject personal pronoun: They (reference to *female mosquitoes*)
    - An object personal pronoun: It (reference to *needle*)
    - An adjective pronoun: Their (reference to *female mosquitoes*)
    - A relative pronoun: That (reference to *mosquitoes*)
  - Referents
    - They: anaphoric reference to *female mosquitoes*.
    - It: anaphoric reference to *needle*.
    - Their: anaphoric reference to *female mosquitoes*.
2. Substitution: *Mosquitoes that bite are the female ones*
3. Ellipsis: Their needle stab through skin and look for blood vessel, but before they stab [it].
4. Conjuncts (also called linkers): and, or, because, until.
5. Tense: present tense throughout.

### DISCUSSION

The explanation of this part is divided into three based on the number of paragraphs of the text. Each paragraph is identified, particularly the logical relationship, in order to reveal whether or not the text meet the readers' expectations. Also, the findings of cohesive devices are elaborated to figure out whether or not they create coherent text.

In the first paragraph of the text, the logical relationship can be clearly identified as the old and new information of the sentences are related each other. It means the first paragraph can meet the readers' expectations. One of the examples can be seen in sentence 2 whose theme, *female mosquitoes*, is taken from rheme 1. Moreover, in term of lexical cohesion, there are several words from same lexical sets, such as blood, nutrition

and energy, which relate to biology. This indicates that the text is consistent to talk about one topic. Besides, there is also direct repetition represented by *female mosquitoes* that is mentioned two times. It actually is not necessarily needed as the referent *they* can be used in order to create more natural sentence.

Furthermore, the first paragraph of the explanation text should be a general statement about the event or thing. It functions not only as an introduction to the explanation, but also as a preview of what the rest of the text will be about. The case of the explanation text in this study shows that the first paragraph does not clearly mention what the text will be about. The readers likely do not expect that the rest of the text is about how and why mosquitoes bite. Instead, the readers likely to expect that the text is about how the female mosquitoes lay eggs and breed.

In the second paragraph, the opening sentence can connect with the first paragraph as theme 5 is taken from theme 4. They both are about *female mosquitoes*. However, the logical relationship of the second paragraph cannot clearly be identified. The example is sentence 6 and 7. Theme 6 represented by *they* as the topic and rheme 6 is represented by *know where they have to bite by substances on skin* as the comment. Meanwhile, sentence 7 suddenly talks about *their needle* as the theme and *stab through skin and look for blood vessel* as the rheme. Therefore, there is no logical relationship between both sentences.

There are several direct repetitions in the second paragraph, such as blood, skin, vessel and needle. Also, there are some words which are form same lexical set, such as skin, substances, blood, vessel and saliva. Unfortunately, those lexical cohesion still cannot make the paragraph coherent since the logical relationship is absent. Moreover, in the second paragraph, there are no any important conjuncts, such as firstly, secondly, another reason and finally, that have function to introduce another part of explanation. It means that the second paragraph cannot give explanation sequence to tell how and why clearly.

In the third paragraph, the opening sentence is not connected with the second paragraph as theme 11 is not taken from theme 10. It shows that the third paragraph talks about the different topic. The readers expect that the last paragraph will provide the conclusion of the main topic of the text, namely why and how mosquitoes bites, not the effect of mosquitoes bites.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, the explanation text in this study cannot be categorized as the cohesive and coherent text. It is because some cohesive devices are used incorrectly. For example, the writer wastes the words through repetition, instead of using reference that actually can create more natural text. Also, the writer does not use essential conjunct as the transition that is actually important for explanation text to relate ideas to tell how and why. Besides, some sentences have no logical relationship. Therefore, the readers' expectations are not fulfilled.

In addition, the writer seems to have insufficient schematic structures or generic structures of explanation text. He does not provide any thesis or general statement about what the text is all about in the first paragraph (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). He also writes the different topic in the last paragraph that actually should be a conclusion of what the previous paragraphs elaborate. Therefore, lecturers who teach writing are suggested to provide many writing practices in order to improve the learners' writing ability. Lastly, more extensive studies dealing with EFL learners' writing are also suggested to be researched by the future researches in order to enrich the knowledge in the area writing, particularly cohesion and coherence.

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