A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Cohesion and The Writing Quality of Saudi Female EFL Undergraduate Students

Khawater Fahad Alshalan
Department of English Language and Literature
College of Languages and Translation
Al Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia

Author: Khawater Fahad Alshalan
Thesis Title: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Cohesion and The Writing Quality of Saudi Female EFL Undergraduate Students
Subject/major: Linguistics
Institution: Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, College of Languages and Translation, Saudi Arabia.
Degree: MA in Linguistics
Year of Award: June 2019
Supervisor: Dr. Ibrahim H. Almaiman
Key Words: cohesion, cohesive devices, essay writing, systemic functional linguistics (SFL)

Abstract
This study aims to investigate how frequently Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive devices were used as well as their relationship with the writing quality of 100 Saudi EFL undergraduate students in Al Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It uses a mixed method approach, where the students’ essays were analyzed using systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in terms of the textual meta-function of cohesive devices. The five types of the cohesive devices are the following: lexical cohesion, reference, conjunction, substitutions, and ellipses. Moreover, each of their subcategories were analyzed in the students’ texts. The NVivo qualitative data analysis software and the corpus analysis (conducted using AntConc) were used to calculate the frequencies of each cohesive device found in the data. The IELTS writing assessment scale was also used to evaluate the students’ writing scores. The results show that the most frequently used device was lexical cohesion, specifically repetition. Saudi EFL undergraduate students tended to repeatedly stay focused on the central idea of the topic. Furthermore, Pearson’s correlation coefficient found a relationship between the students’ writing scores and length of their essays, the use of cohesive ties and the scores, and cohesive ties and the length of the students’ essays. This study recommends that EFL teachers provide Saudi EFL students several cohesive tools in order to help them improve their writing skills and connect their ideas smoothly.

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/th.241

Arab World English Journal
ISSN: 2229-9327
www.awej.org