

## Referential Cohesive Devices In Efl Learnes' Writing

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### Abstract

This research paper investigates how properly students use referential cohesive devices in their essays and what is the frequency of using each type of these devices. Fifteen essays from second year students of the Translation Department of the College of Languages of Duhok University were collected. After collecting essays, all the cohesive devices are classified according to their three types personal pronouns, demonstratives, and comparatives. The frequency of using each cohesive device is detected by a statistic procedure. The Microsoft Word program is used to encode the data. Then the Microsoft Excel program is used to draw a chart in order to visualize the results. Generally speaking, the findings show that the frequency of using personal pronouns as a cohesive device is the highest one among all the three types of referential cohesive devices. In addition to this, a large number of students have avoided using demonstratives and comparatives. Such results show lack of familiarity of students with these referential cohesive devices which affect the organization of their essays.

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## الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية في كتابة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

دلفين احمد مجيد \*

المستخلص :

الأدوات الترابطية مهمة في الكتابة لأن تنظيم النص يعتمد على العلاقات بين عناصره. وتعد الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية واحدة من أنواع الأدوات الترابطية التي تلعب دوراً مهماً في إنتاج كتابة مرتبة ومنظمة. الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية هي كلمات تشير إلى شيء أو كائن سواء كان في الماضي أو المستقبل. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية في اللغة الإنجليزية، وفحص كيفية استخدام الطلاب لهذه الأدوات الترابطية بشكل صحيح في مقالاتهم، وإظهار تكرار استخدام كل نوع من الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية. طُلب من خمسة عشر طالباً كتابة مقال. بعد جمع المقالات، تم تصنيف جميع الأدوات الترابطية وفقاً لأنواعها الثلاثة: الضمائر الشخصية، والإشارات، وأدوات المقارنة. تم تحديد تكرار استخدام كل أداة ترابطية من خلال إجراء إحصائي. تم تقسيم العدد الإجمالي لكل نوع من الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية على العدد الإجمالي للكلمات في المقالة التي تحتوي على حوالي 2553 كلمة، ثم ضرب الناتج في 100. تم استخدام برنامج Microsoft Word لترميز البيانات، ثم تم استخدام برنامج Microsoft Excel لرسم مخطط لتصور النتائج. وكان تكرار استخدام

الضمائر الشخصية كأداة ترابطية هو الأعلى بين الأنواع الثلاثة للأدوات الترابطية الإشارية. ومع ذلك، يعاني عدد كبير من الطلاب من نقص في المعرفة باستخدام هذه الأدوات الإشارية، خاصة الإشارات وأدوات المقارنة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأدوات الترابطية الإشارية، الضمائر الشخصية، أدوات الإشارة، أدوات المقارنة.

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Cohesive devices are important in writing because the organization of the text depends on the relationships among its elements. Referential cohesive devices are one of the types of cohesive devices which play a significant role in producing a neat and organized writing. Referential cohesive devices refer to words that refer backward or forward to a person or an object. It is important that students be familiar with these expressions and their proper use in text. Yet students faced difficulties of using these referential devices properly. Especially demonstratives and comparatives. They usually avoid using them in their writings. While as far as personal pronouns are considered, since learners start learning them from early stages of learning, they face no difficulties using them in their essays.

### **1.2 Aims of the study**

This study aims to discuss the referential cohesive devices in English language. It also aims to examine how properly do students use these referential cohesive devices in their essays. And also, the frequency of using each type of referential cohesive device and which one is most frequently used by the participants of this paper.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The study will answer the following questions:

1. What is the frequency of using each type of referential cohesive device in the participants' essays?
2. Which referential cohesive device is used most frequently in the essays?
3. Do the participants use these referential cohesive devices properly in their essays?

### **1.4 The Model**

The model adapted in this research is Halliday and Hasan (1976). They presented and discussed the referential cohesive device in detail and very clearly.

### **1.5 Limits of the Study**

1. This study is limited to the analysis of referential cohesive devices only, other cohesive devices as conjunction, ellipsis, substitution are not discussed in this research.
2. The study is limited to a group of students from second stage of Translation Department, College of Language, UOD.
3. This study is limited to check only the frequency of using referential cohesive devices in essays.

## **1.6 Value of the study**

This study is significant for the learners of English and whoever interested in maintaining cohesion in essays. Because it gives a detailed description of the referential cohesive devices. The paper is significant for teachers of English as a foreign language since it can attract their attention to focus on these aspects of difficulties that students face in using these referential cohesive devices in essays.

## **Literature review**

### **2.1 introduction**

Texts have seven standards which are called the seven standards of textuality that include: cohesion; coherence; intentionality; acceptability; informativity; situationality; intertextuality (Beaugrande & Dressrel, 1981, p 2). Acceptability and unacceptability of a text depend on these standards and they distinguish an utterance from a random collocation of words (Sigar, 2007, p 19). The focus of this research is on cohesion and specifically referential cohesive devices, yet it is important to distinguish between coherence and cohesion.

Cruse (2006) stated that “Cohesion is a matter of form and concerns (mainly grammatical) ways of connecting one piece of language to another, such as agreement and anaphora. Coherence is a matter of meaning compatibility and relevance” (p 27). According to Beaugrande and Dressrel, (1981) coherence is concerned with meaning, continuity of senses, and concept relations on the other hand cohesion is concerned with the syntactic relations of words, phrases and clauses, how these components are connected with each other. (p 3-4). Crystal (2008) defined coherence as a term “referring to the main principle of organization postulated to account for the underlying functional connectedness or identity of a piece of spoken or written language (text, discourse) (p 85). While he defined cohesion as “A term often used in grammar to refer to a defining property of the word, seen as a grammatical unit; also called cohesiveness (ibid). Both coherence and cohesion refer to the relations that organize a text, cohesion is concerned with the surface structure of a text while coherence is concerned with the conceptual realities of a text (Sigar, 2007, p 24).

“Cohesion is mainly described with regard to grammatical cohesive relations that organize sentences and clauses into one whole. A short account of lexical cohesion is provided to show that connectedness in texts is also reflected by vocabulary words” (Tsareva, 2010, p 4). Halliday and Hasan (1976) recognized five types of cohesive tie which are: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion (p 4). They are also called markers of cohesion. The first four cohesive types are concerned with grammatical cohesion. This paper is concerned with reference (referential cohesive device).

### **2.2 Reference (referential cohesive devices)**

Reference is one of the cohesive relations. Halliday and Hasan (1976) stated that “cohesive relations are the same whether their elements are within the same sentence or not” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 9). It can be interpreted that cohesive relations are both found within sentences and between sentences (Tsareva, 2010, p 8). Concerning reference, the author added that “This type of cohesion is always expressed when one entity is referred to one or more items in a sentence, the entity may be named again at

the second mention, or it may be referred to by a pronoun” (ibid). Halliday and Hasan (1976) defined reference as “a case where the information to be received is the referential meaning, the identity of the particular thing or class of things that is being referred to” (p 31).

Generally speaking, Halliday and Hasan (1976) divided reference into two patterns, exophoric (situational) and endophoric (textual) (p 18). Endophoric reference is also of two types: anaphoric and cataphoric (Sigar, 2007, p 34).

**Anaphoric reference:**

“Anaphoric reference is where a word or phrase refers back to another word or phrase used earlier in a text” (Paltridge, 2012, p 115). So anaphoric reference is when a pronoun for example refers back to a word mentioned earlier in the sentence.

(1) *Azad is studying very hard. He has an exam tomorrow.* (He refers back to “Azad” so it has anaphoric reference).

**Cataphoric reference:**

“Cataphoric reference describes an item which refers forward to another word or phrase which is used later in the text” (Paltridge, 2012, p 116). In the case of cataphoric, the reader is aware of that the item that referred to is yet to come in the text.

(2) *It is going down quickly, the sun.* (It refers forward to “the sun”, and thus it has a cataphoric reference (Brown & Yule, 1983, p 193; cited in Sigar, 2007, p 34).

**Exophoric reference:**

“This type of reference directs hearers or readers to look outside the text and to interpret the information from the context of situation” (Tsareva, 2010, p 13). Which means that the reference is made to the context of situation.

(3) *Look at that.* (that refers to something in the outside world, and its meaning is interpreted by the context of situation, so it has an exophoric reference) (Sigar, 2007, p 34).

## 2.3 Groups of reference words

There are three types of referential cohesive devices: personal, demonstratives and comparatives; the definite article is included into the sub-type of demonstratives (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 37).

### 1 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns are referential cohesive devices. Buscemi (2002, p 71) stated that they refer to people and things and include:

Subject pronouns: I, you, we, they, he, she, and it

Object pronouns: me, you, us, their, his, her, and it

Possessive determiners: my, your, our, their, his, her, and its

Possessive pronouns: mine, yours, ours, theirs, his, hers, and its

First and second personal pronouns *I*, *we*, and *you* include the speaker/writer and the hearer/reader, so they usually have an exophoric reference; while the third person pronouns *he*, *she*, and *they* can have both endophoric and exophoric reference (Sigar, 2007, p 35).

(4) *Anne should get a promotion; after all, she has published two books.* (she is a personal pronoun refers back to “Ann”) (Rouchota, 1998, p 15).

(5) *Anne visited her sister in Spain.* (her is a possessive pronoun which refers back to “Anne”) (Rouchota, 1998, p 15).

## 2 Demonstratives

Halliday and Hasan (1976) stated that demonstrative reference is referred by means of location, on a scale of proximity (p 37). Demonstratives include determiners and adverbs that imply proximity, like: *this*, *these*, and *here*; also, determiners and adverbs that imply distance like: *that*, *those*, and *there* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 38). The author added that despite these demonstrative references, there is also the definite article *the* which does not imply proximity or distance (neutral) (ibid).

(6) *We went to the opera last night. That was our first outing for months.* (That refers anaphorically to last night.) (Tsareva, 2010, p 14).

(7) *Listen to this news. Bill will get married next month.* (the demonstrative this has a cataphoric reference) (Sigar, 2007, p 36).

(8) *Don't go the train is coming.* (the definite article “the” indicates that “train” is specific and identifiable) (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 71).

## 3 Comparatives

Halliday and Hasan (1976) mentioned that comparative reference items are two types: General Comparison and Particular Comparison (p 76). General Comparison refers to expressing likeliness (identity or similarity) and unlikeliness between two things by means of adjectives or adverbs but without referring to a specific property (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 76-77). Some adjectives and adverb that are usually used for expressing general comparative are the following: *same*, *equal*, *identical*, *identically* (these are used to express identity); *such*, *similar*, *so similarly*, *likewise* (these are used to express similarity); *other*, *different*, *else*, *differently*, *otherwise* (these are used to express difference) (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 76).

(9) *It's the same cat as the one we saw yesterday.* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 78).

(10) *It's a similar cat to the one we saw yesterday.* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 78).

(11) *It's a different cat from the one we saw yesterday.* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 78).

As it is clear from the previous examples that the likeliness and unlikeliness is expressed generally without referring to a specific property of the cat. While as far as particular comparative is concerned,

particular comparative terms express comparison in respect to quantity or quality by means of ordinary adjectives and adverbs, so a particular comparison could be enumerative or epithet (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 77).

(12) *There were twice many people there as last time.* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 82)

(13) *The little dog barked as noisily as the big one.* (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p 82).

The previous examples show that the comparison is not a general one but specific. Examples number (12) is comparison of quantity, and example number (13) is the comparison of quality.

## 2.4 Previous studies

A number of studies have been conducted on cohesive devices and especially referential cohesive devices in essays. Tsareva (2010) in her research entitled as “Grammatical cohesion in argumentative essays” investigated some argumentative essays written by students from two different linguistic backgrounds learning English as a foreign language – Norway and Russia, in order to know to what extent does the use of grammatical cohesion differ in argumentative essays of Norwegian and Russian students. The use of personal pronouns was the highest among all the three types of referential cohesive devices in both essays of Norwegian and Russian. While in the Norwegian essays both demonstratives and comparative had the same percentage. As far as essays of Russian students are considered, students used demonstrative references more than comparative references. Some Russian learners do not distinguish between the general demonstrative meaning of *these* and *those* as of relatively near and distant reference in time or space. Almutairi in his research entitled “Discourse analysis of cohesive devices in Saudi students’ writing” (2017) investigated the cohesive ties found in a Saudi student’s essays of high school English class in order to examine and criticize Saudi high school English writing classes. Among the three types of references, personal references were used the most with fifty-one incidences, dominating 76% of the total usage of references in the text, followed by demonstrative references with four incidences. There were only two incidences of comparative references. In the context of Iranian EFL learners, Dastjerdi and Hayati (2011) in their research entitled “Quality of Iranian EFL learners’ argumentative essays: Cohesive devices in focus” investigated the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays. Their analysis revealed that lexical devices were the most frequently used, followed by reference and conjunction devices. Interestingly, the study found no significant correlation between the number of cohesive devices used and the quality of writing, suggesting that the mere presence of cohesive devices does not necessarily enhance writing quality. This finding highlights the need for effective teaching strategies that not only increase the use of cohesive devices but also improve their appropriate application. Similarly, Rudiana (2021) in her research entitled as “The Realization of Grammatical Cohesion Devices in EFL Students’ Argumentative Essays” analyzed grammatical cohesion devices in EFL students’ argumentative essays, focusing on reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. The study found that personal references and additive conjunctions were the most frequently used devices. It also noted that while the use of these devices contributed to text cohesion, some students overused certain devices, leading to redundancy. The research underscores the importance of teaching students to use a variety of cohesive devices appropriately to improve the quality of their writing. Saputra & Hakim (2020) in their research entitled “The usage of cohesive devices by high-achieving EFL students in writing argumentative essays” examined the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays by high-achieving college students in Indonesia and their awareness of them. The analysis found that students effectively used grammatical cohesive devices, especially reference devices, but some were

unaware of using other devices like "the" as a cohesive tool. They mostly used synonyms for lexical cohesion. Although students acknowledged the importance of cohesion for coherence, some argued that sophisticated language and text complexity were more important for high-quality writing. While, to the best of the researcher's knowledge hardly any studies have discussed referential cohesive devices in essays of Kurdish learners of EFL in the translation department, college of languages, UOD. This study is an attempt to fill this gap.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The researcher applies both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in order to answer the research questions. The qualitative approach is applied to analyze referential cohesive devices in English language. While the quantitative approach is applied to answer the questions raised by this paper which questions Kurdish EFL learners' knowledge to use these cohesive devices in writing, the frequency of each cohesive device, and the cohesive device which is most frequently used.

### **Participants**

The participants of this research are fifteen EFL learners of second year of Translation Department, College of Languages, UOD. Their age is averaged between 19 to 22 years. They have been taking two courses on reading and writing and they have been fully instructed on how to write an essay. Participants have been chosen randomly. All of the participants have been studying English as a school subject for more than 10 years. Kurdish language is the mother tongue of all of the participants.

### **Materials and data collection**

In order to answer the questions of this study, which questions Kurdish EFL learners' knowledge to use these referential cohesive devices, the frequency of each type of referential cohesive device, and the most frequent referential cohesive device used by students in essays. The researcher started to collect data. The data were taken from fifteen EFL learners of second stage of Translation Department, College of Languages, UOD. Learners were asked in a midterm exam to write an essay on one of these two topics either "The effects of internet on kids" or "Are online friends effective?". The researcher has borrowed their essay from the examiner, and has chosen the first topic of essay as the data of this paper. About sixty students have written about "The effects of using internet on kids" and about 20% of the sample have been chosen to be analyzed in this paper.

### **Procedure and Data analysis**

After collecting essays from students, the researcher started to read each essay carefully. Then all the referential cohesive devices used by learners in their essays have been identified. After that, all the cohesive devices are classified according to their three types personal pronouns, demonstratives, and comparatives. The frequency of using each cohesive device is detected by a statistic procedure. The total number of each type of referential cohesive device is divided by the total number of words in the essay which are about 2553 words multiplied by 100. The Microsoft Word program is used to encode the data. Then the Microsoft Excel program is used to draw a chart in order to visualize the results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the findings and discussion of the study are presented. Firstly, the frequency of each type of referential cohesive device is detected. Secondly, the percentage of each type of referential cohesive device is detected. Thirdly, the most frequent type of referential cohesive device is identified.

The researcher will give some examples of using referential cohesive devices in essays by the participants.

### Personal reference:

*“the kids cannot benefit from internet. Because they did not know how to use internet for good things...”*. In this example the third person pronoun they refers back to “kids” and it has an anaphoric reference.

*“parents are responsible for this thing. They have to watch their kids and lead them into the right way”*. In this example the possessive determiner pronoun they refers back to “parents” and it has an anaphoric reference.

*“we have to be careful when we use internet”*. In this example the first person pronouns we refers back to the speaker, which means it refers back to something out of the linguistic context so it has an exophoric reference.

### Demonstratives:

*“internet is that thing we use for information and looking book and knowledge”*. in this example the demonstrative determiner that refers back to “internet”, it has an anaphoric reference.

*“it is important we block all bad sites for children after that give them the internet”*. In this example the demonstrative pronoun that refers back to the whole clause “blocking bad sites for children”, again it has an anaphoric reference.

*“looking at the bright side of the internet, it expands the children’s minds...”*. In this example the referential cohesive device, the definite article “the” indicates that “bright side” is specific and identifiable.

### Comparatives:

*“nowadays kids who have smart phone with internet know read and write very good not the same as past”*. In this example this participant is comparing kids of nowadays with kids of the past year through using “the same” and it is a general comparative.

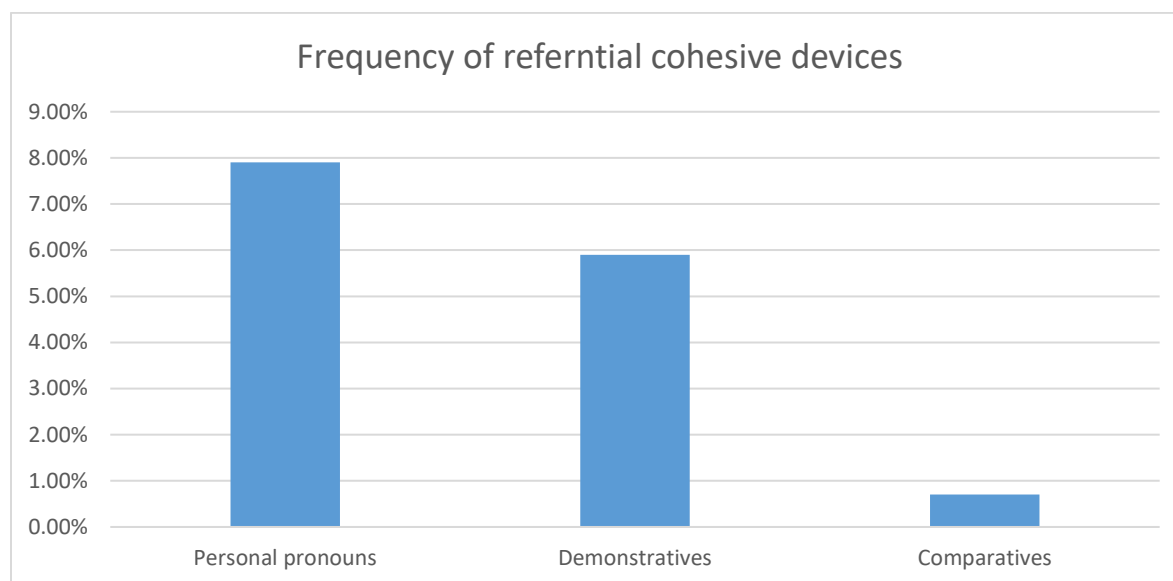
The table and figure below will show the total number and percentage of each type of referential cohesive device in participants’ essays.

Referential cohesive devices	Frequency of referential cohesive devices	Percentage of frequency of referential cohesive devices
Personal pronouns	204	7.9%



Demonstratives	153	5.9%
Comparatives	18	0.7%

**Table 1: The total number and percentage of frequency of each type of referential cohesive device**



**Figure 1: The frequency of referential cohesive devices**

The frequency of using personal pronouns as a cohesive device is 7.9%, the frequency of using demonstratives is 5.9%, and the frequency of using comparatives is only 0.7%. It is clear from the figure 1 that the frequency of using personal pronoun references is the highest one among all the three types of referential cohesive devices. This result goes along with the results of Almutairi (2017) and Tsareva (2010). As in essays of Saudi, Norwegian and Russian students the use of personal pronouns as cohesive devices was the highest. While in Rudiana's (2020) article, both personal references and additive conjunctions were the most frequently used devices. Since Kurdish students start taking personal pronouns from the first stage of learning English and they have a good knowledge on how to use personal pronouns in their essays, this might have led to the frequency of using personal pronoun.

Demonstrative references are the second most used referential cohesive devices used by the participants of this research in essays. But it was very clear that the participants need more knowledge as far as using demonstratives is concerned. Many misuses of demonstratives have been committed by the participants. This is one of the examples "*in this days a lot of kids have smart phons*" in this example *this* has been used instead of *these* as there is a plural noun following it "days" so this student was supposed to use "these". In addition to this, students frequently misused the definite article "the", as it has been used in may positions in which there was no need to be used. This result goes along with the results of Russian students as mentioned by Tsareva (2010) that some Russian learners do not distinguish between the general demonstrative meaning of *these* and *those* as of relatively near and distant reference in time or space.

As far as comparatives are concerned, it is clear from the chart that the participants have rarely used them in their essays. This can be found in the essay of the Saudi students by Almutairi (2017) as he mentioned that there were only two use of the comparative references which is a very low incidence comparing to other cohesive devices. There is a possibility that these participants avoided using comparative references because the type of compositions did not require the use of the comparative expressions.

Participants have used personal pronouns references properly in their essays while they were not that much successful as far as demonstrative are concerned. Though Dastjerdi and Hayati (2011) in their study found no link between the number of cohesive devices and writing quality, indicating that their mere presence doesn't guarantee better writing. This underscores the need for teaching strategies that focus on both the use and correct application of cohesive devices. Also, Saputra and Hakim (2020) mentioned that a high-level language and text complicity are more important for high-quality writing than referential cohesive devices. Yet, it is known that the correct use of the referential cohesive devices has an impact in achieving a better-quality writing. The researcher can see it clearly that the participants face difficulties with writing in the target language. Although the participants have been fully instructed how to write an essay and the structure of essay yet the results were not satisfied. This leads to the fact that they need more practice in this field.

## CONCLUSION

Referential cohesive devices used by students in their essays have been identified which are personal pronouns, demonstratives, and comparatives. The frequency of each type has been detected. The frequency of personal pronouns was 7.9, the frequency of demonstratives was 5.9%, and the frequency of comparatives was 0.7%. This answers the first question of the article which investigated the frequency of using referential cohesive devices. The most frequent referential cohesive device used by the participants in their essays was the personal pronoun references. And this is the answer of the second inquiry raised by this research. Participants used pronouns properly in their essays as they have a good knowledge about them. While as far as demonstratives are concerned, students misused some types of demonstratives as *this* and *these*, which means they lack enough knowledge about that. While the participants have rarely used comparatives in their essays. And this answers the third question raised by this research that investigated the proper use of the referential cohesive devices by the participants. Students' essays were coherent but as language learners of English they need more practice in writing a neat and organized essay.

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