

Cohesion and Coherence for English Writing—A Case Study of Argumentation

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Abstract: Cohesion and coherence play an important role in writing. Writing is the one of the most important four basic English skills and also it is viewed as the most difficult to improve. However, most Chinese students generally lack the awareness of discourse construction and the mechanism of explicit and implicit cohesion and coherence in their English essay writing. Based on the study of the theory of discourse cohesion and coherence, this paper shows the importance of discourse cohesion and coherence to English argumentative essay writing by giving examples from the following three aspects: grammar, lexical cohesion and logical coherence. Through this paper, the author hopes that students can clearly understand the definition and means of discourse cohesion and coherence, so as to help them achieve the effect of discourse cohesion and coherence in their English argumentative essays and thus improve their English writing ability and level.

Keywords: cohesion; coherence; argumentation; essay writing; Teaching Strategies

1. Introduction

In 1976, the publication of *Cohesion in English* co-authored by Halliday and Hasan marked the establishment of cohesion theory, and classified lexical cohesive devices into five categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Coherence is another major concept in discourse analysis. The study of coherence began in the 1960s, and many linguists have explained the meaning of the concept of coherence from different research perspectives. With the passage of time, more and more researchers have paid attention to cohesion and coherence, but they rarely pay attention to the significance of cohesion and coherence in English writing, especially in argumentative writing, which requires this study. English writing has become a common topic no matter in the classroom or in the examination and assessment, which tests the writing ability of logic, grammar and vocabulary of students or participants. Writing is not simply to put together the fragmentary knowledge of scholars, but to pay attention to the cohesion and coherence of discourse, especially argumentative essay. Argumentation is characterized by clear viewpoints, sufficient arguments, concise language, reasonable argumentation and strict logic. Argumentation should have clear logical relations between sentences and paragraphs, which reflects the importance of cohesion and coherence. After the in-depth research of cohesion and coherence, the author has found that cohesion and coherence play an essential role in English writing, especially in the argumentation. Thus, this thesis will focus on the significance of cohesion and coherence for English writing.

Through the study of the subject, the reader will clearly know the meaning of discourse cohesion and coherence, their forms and their signification in English writing, especially in argumentation, so that the reader is able to pay more attention to cohesion and coherence in writing, note the completeness and relevance between content, to further improve their writing ability and level.

2. Cohesion and Coherence

2.1. Cohesion

Cohesion is a semantic concept that refers to the semantic connection between the linguistic components of a discourse, which occurs when one component depends on another component for its interpretation (Halliday, 1976) [1]. Cohesion can be defined as the syntactic connection of linguistic forms in a surface structure. There are two major categories of cohesion devices: one is grammatical devices; the other is lexical devices, each of which contains several specific forms. In China, the

important means used to represent the “cohesion” between chapter components are: grammatical means, lexical means, logical links and pragmatic and semantic meanings, etc. Next, the author focuses on the grammatical means of cohesion (*Huang Guowen, 1987*)^[2].

Correspondence refers to the use of grammatical devices such as pronouns to indicate semantic relationships. There are personal, indicative and comparative references. Substitution refers to the use of alternative forms to replace words that appear in context. Substitution is used to avoid repetition and to better connect the contexts. There are mainly noun substitution, verb substitution and clause substitution. Some common substitutions are “one, do, same” and so on. For non-critical words, omission allows for a closer relationship between sentences and a clearer meaning, thus allowing for a quicker extraction of the main message. The use of English signal words is an important means of discourse connection. Conjunctions play the role of linking the context, not only helping the author to present the communicative intent of the text, but also helping the reader to grasp the general idea and discourse structure of the text and predict the information to be conveyed in the following in a relatively short period of time. Conjunctions, adverbs, etc. can be used to achieve connections, of which connecting relationships can be classified as cause-and-effect, transitive, progressive, contrastive, etc., reflecting the logical relationship between one sentence and another within a discourse, not independently. English argumentative essays, in particular, need to use these connectives to present the author's logical thinking.

2.2. Coherence

Coherence is a psychological phenomenon that exists in the mind of the grammarian and cannot be clued from the surface of the discourse. Coherence is a semantic feature of discourse that relies on the relationship between the interpretation of each single sentence and the interpretation of other sentences (*Van Dijk, T. A., 1997*)^[3]. In China, coherence is a semantic concept that refers to the connection in meaning between different components within a discourse in two ways: (1) the propositions expressed by different components within a discourse are related to each other; and (2) the propositions expressed by different components within a discourse are related to each other (*Zhu Yomgsheng, 1997*)^[4]. It has been argued that articulation is the tangible network of discourse, while coherence is the invisible framework of the overall meaning of discourse (*HuangGuowen, 2002*)^[5]. In exploring discourse coherence, it is important to focus not only on the explicit connections that use linking words, but also on the invisible connections that are realized without the use of linking words, i.e., semantic coherence, by the use of discourse and context.

Cohesion is a collective term for the grammatical and lexical devices that bring utterances together, and is a linguistic phenomenon visible at the surface of discourse. Coherence is a feature of discourse in which words and sentences are conceptually and logically linked together in a rational and appropriate way, reflecting the coherence of the discourse. Although cohesion and coherence are two different concepts, they work together to build discourse.

3. Cohesion and Coherence for Argumentative Writing

3.1. Argumentation

An argumentative essay, also known as a reasoning essay, is a style of writing that analyzes and discusses things, expresses opinions, expresses views, and makes claims. It is a style of writing in which the writer presents his views in an argumentative manner by presenting facts and reasoning. The argumentative essay is divided into a stand-up essay and a rebuttal essay: A stand-up essay is argumentative, in which the writer directly expresses his or her opinions and claims by presenting facts and reasoning. The requirements are to have a correct view of the issue under discussion, to use sufficient convincing arguments, and to be reasonable and logical. A rebuttal essay is an argument in which the opponent's point of view is refuted, and the point of view of the opponent is presented, proved, and finally summarized. The refutation essay is a combination of pointing out the essence (reason) of the opponent's error, then refuting the wrong argument, and putting forward one's own correct point of view at the same time or after the refutation.

Before starting an argumentative essay, the writer must find a point of view that he or she agrees with, clearly present his or her opinion, and then analyze his or her argument. In terms of language, the language of the essay is first of all accurate and strict, with the characteristics of generality and simplicity, and the appropriate use of rhetorical techniques, reflecting its sharp, vivid and emotional

wording.

3.2. Grammatical Cohesion and Coherence

Among the articulation devices mentioned above, the grammatical devices such as illumination, substitution and omission are used to achieve articulation and coherence in the discourse. In the argumentative essay, these devices can also be used to achieve grammatical cohesion and coherence.

(1) Demonstrative reference is used to indicate correspondence can be divided into three categories: (a) noun indicative: this, that, these, those; (b) definite article the; (c) indicative adverb: here, there, now, then. Please see the following examples. The comparative relation is expressed by the comparative form of adjectives or adverbs and other words with comparative meaning.

(2) The comparative relation is expressed by the comparative form of adjectives or adverbs and other words with comparative meaning

(3) Substitution means replacing words that appear in context with their correct form. The purpose of using substitution is both to avoid repetition and to better connect the contexts. There are mainly noun substitutions (e.g. one, ones, some, etc.), verb substitutions (e.g. do, does, did, etc.) and subordinate substitutions (e.g. so, not, etc.).

(4) Ellipsis is to avoid repetition and to highlight the main message of the statement. Appropriate use of ellipsis is a common phenomenon in language use, where one sentence provides the basis for understanding another sentence, and where a connection is formed between them.

3.3. Lexical Cohesion and Coherence

Halliday and Hasan (1976) divided lexical articulatory relations into two categories, one is Reiteration and the other is Collocation. The recurrence relation of vocabulary means that a word is repeated in the original word, synonym, near-synonym, contextual word, generalization word or other forms in the discourse.

In a discourse, the most direct way of lexical articulation is the repeated occurrence of words with the same semantic meaning and the same form. Synonyms or near-synonyms refer to words or phrases with the same or similar meanings. In the contextual relationship of vocabulary, the upper meaning is the general and abstract description of things, and the lower meaning is the concrete expression or more specific description of things. General words refer to words that express general meaning. When words related to people, things, things or places are encountered in the discourse, they can be replaced by words that refer to these concepts in general, such as people, man, thing, etc., in order to strengthen the coherence of the whole discourse.

Antonymous relations refer to word relations with degree of difference in semantic meaning that can be equated. There are three main sub-categories of antonym in linguistics: hierarchical antonym, complementary antonym and reverse antonym. A complementary relationship consists of two words that are in opposition to each other, where the existence of one presupposes the existence of the other, and the affirmation of one implies the negation of the other, forming a unity of opposites.

In the language system, some words are arranged according to certain rules, such as the order of the first, second and third. For example, in the argumentative essay, we often use the words “Firstly, Secondly, Last but not least” and so on

3.4. Logical Cohesion and Coherence

Logical connectives are the bridges that form the articulation and coherence of a discourse, and they refer to those connecting devices that express various logical meanings and function to form logical relationships between sentences and sentences, paragraphs and paragraphs.), transitions or contrasts (such as but, yet, while, however, instead, etc.), causes or results (such as because, as, since, thus, as a result, etc.), and times (such as first, second, third, then, during, etc.) (Li Changzhong, 2002)^[6]. In the following, the author will give examples for analysis.

To earn some pocket money, you only need an odd job. While to accomplish something remarkable, you must spend lots of time and energy.

In these two sentences, the original author used “while” for comparison, but “while” can only be

used within a sentence, not between two sentences, so “while” should be changed to “but”.

4. Teaching Methods for Argumentative Essay Writing

4.1. Focusing on Grammatical Cohesion and Coherence

In argumentative essay writing, students are accustomed to using nouns repeatedly, and they do not apply the person-aligning words enough, which results in high repetition of words in essays and lack of concise text; or they use wrong person-aligning words, resulting in incomprehensible semantics (Li Zhixue, 2000)^[7]. Please see the following two examples:

a) *Another important cause is low salary. In China, since the economic reforms, people's salaries have increased rapidly, especially in those private enterprises and foreign enterprises. It is common that everyone wants to earn more money than he has already had ...*

b) *The relationships worry you very much, and you will find you are not fit for the job, and become dissatisfied with your job .*

In example a, “he” is a personal correlative of “everyone” and is used appropriately; in example b, the noun “your job” should not be repeated, but the correlative “it” should be used instead.

Use the demonstrative reference; The words used to indicate correspondence can be divided into three categories: (1) noun indicative: this, that, these, those; (2) definite article the; (3) indicative adverb: here, there, now, then. Please see the following example.

Nowadays, some people are putting on too much weight because the life standard is rising. And some people are losing weight because of hard work. But if you follow these steps, to keep fit is nothing difficult .

The word “these” cannot be found in the above text, so replace “these” with “the following”.

Use the comparative reference; The comparative relationship can effectively link the context and make the sentences coherent. In their writing, students fail to use comparative correspondence correctly, thus making the sentences obscure and difficult to understand. For example: *In the evening the cars are not more than the cars in the day.* The sentence reads logically because the author fails to use comparisons properly, so the correct usage is “There are not more cars in the evening than in the day.”

Use the substitutions; The purpose of using substitution is both to avoid repetition and to better connect the contexts. There are mainly noun substitutions (e.g. one, ones, some, etc.), verb substitutions (e.g. do, does, did, etc.) and subordinate substitutions (e.g. so, not, etc.) (Dong Junhong, 1999)^[8]. For example: *There are some bad manners nowadays, such as being impolite to people, spitting everywhere, and so on. All these bad ones can make people uneasy.* Here the word “ones” should be replaced by “manners”.

Use ellipsis; Omission is generally divided into three categories: noun omission, verb omission and clause omission. In composition, it is often the case that omissions are not made or are inappropriate, resulting in uncomplicated language or incomprehensible semantics (Li Changzhong, 2002)^[6]. Please see the following examples: *In the view of workers, life, happy or not, is tangible and around. They do not have much expectation but have a lot of enjoyment in their life.* In this example, the second “have” in the second sentence should be omitted, as it will not affect the reader's understanding of it.

4.2. Focusing on Lexical Cohesion and Coherence

Reproduction of the original word; The repeated use of vocabulary in a certain situation can not only play a role of chapter articulation and coherence, but also highlight the theme of the text and express the author’s thoughts and feelings.

Recurrence of synonyms and near-synonyms; The use of synonyms or near-synonyms can not only form the articulation of discourse, but also avoid monotony due to repetition of words and make the language lively and interesting.

Top and bottom word recurrence; The upper and lower meanings are the embodiment of the “inclusiveness” relationship between words, that is, two words have the semantic relationship of containing and being contained. The use of superordinate and hyponym not only diversifies the vocabulary, but also makes the hierarchy of the discourse more clear.

Recapitulation of generalized words; The meaning of the generalized words completely includes one or several words of similar meaning above, so as to avoid monotonous repetition of words and at the same time to echo each other.

The use of antonymous words can promote the effect of articulation in order to achieve the purpose of coherent and smooth discourse. Use the complementary relationship; the existence of one presupposes the existence of the other, and the affirmation of one implies the negation of the other, forming a unity of opposites.

4.3. Focusing on Logical Cohesion and Coherence

That refers to those connecting devices that express various logical meanings and function to form logical relationships between sentences and sentences, paragraphs and paragraphs.), transitions or contrasts (such as but, yet, while, however, instead, etc.), causes or results (such as because, as, since, thus, as a result, etc.), and times (such as first, second, third, then, during, etc.).

In the following, the author will give examples for analysis.

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In these two sentences, the original author used “while” for comparison, but “while” can only be used within a sentence, not between two sentences, so “while” should be changed to “but”.

5. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can find that this essay can be a model essay because the author has skillfully used different lexical cohesion in the organization of the whole essay, and the essay closely follows the theme, expresses the ideas accurately, has a coherent meaning, and is logical.

Writing is one of the most common types of exams, and it provides an important channel for developing people’s logic, especially for argumentative essays, where each paragraph and sentence does not exist in isolation. If the essay lacks articulation and coherence, it is difficult to call it a qualified essay. Articulation and coherence can strengthen the rhythm, balance and strength of expression between sentences and even paragraphs, which makes the discourse magnificent on the one hand and easy to read and understand on the other. Coherence is the invisible network of the discourse, which is reflected in the deep structure of the discourse. Articulation is the tangible network of discourse, which is reflected in the surface structure of discourse. Although articulation and coherence are two different concepts, they complement each other and interact with each other.

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