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THE COHESIVENESS OF STUDENTS' WRITING: AN ANALYSIS OF THESIS
DISCUSSION SECTION OF ENGLISH GRADUATE STUDENTS

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In relation to writing a thesis, qualified writing is expected to meet certain standard. It must be carefully organised, and must follow no ambiguity and redundancy. For this purpose, it is worth noting Raimes's identification of the aspects of writing which contributes to the clear, fluent, and effective communication of ideas in writing. The aspects are *syntax, content, mechanism, organization, word choice, purpose, audience, and writing process*.

In organization aspect, cohesion and unity determine a qualified writing. It is built by features of grammatical and lexical devices, such as, reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. These devices give a *texture* to a text by creating cohesive relations between sentences and elements in sentences, and at the end, constituting the coherence of the text.

In writing a thesis, one of the parts that mostly needs a writer's expression is discussion section. The writer discusses and interpretes the meaning of the findings, related to *how* and *why* it happens, which are supported by the related theories. For this purpose, the writer will apply her/his knowledge of a scientific writing. In applying the theories, English graduate students of State University of Padang seem to face some problems. They faced double difficulties, namely in elaborating the content of each section of a thesis report and in writing the paragraphs well.

Students' difficulty in writing the paragraphs is apparently because of their lack English competence. This causes more meaningless sentences. Besides, many of them also have lack skill to apply the knowledge of academic writing. The relationship between paragraphs they made sometimes raised misunderstanding of the concept. It clearly showed the problem of the cohesiveness of writing discussion section of their thesis. Thus, this article is mainly aimed at describing how cohesive devices are used in the writing of *discussion section* of the students' thesis and suppose there is inappropriate use exists in their writing, to what extent it influences the meaning of the text.

Cohesion, then, refers to the relation of meaning that exists within a text, resources within language that provide continuity in a text and that define the property of being a text (Halliday and Hasan, 1985 : 4) and Gerot and Wignel (1995:170). This tendency is to connect the string of sentences to a text rather than a series of unrelated statements. The connectedness between parts in writing is established by using cohesive features which function to analyze text (Halliday and Hasan, 1985: 288). These cohesive features are classified into five types: reference, conjunction (connectives in Salkie's term), substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. Each of the types has its own reference and kinds.

In writing a research report, the discussion section should be presented in a creative, clear and concise style of language use. Even the most profound ideas can be best explained in simple language, short and coherent sentences. There are several factors that should be considered, namely, avoiding using personal pronouns, using expressions of *the investigator, or the researcher*, using titles (Dr, prof). Past tense should be used in describing research procedures that have been completed (Best, 1977: 317).

Textual discussion may be used to point generalizations and significant interpretations. It has the purpose of evaluating and interpreting the results, especially with respect to the original research question. It tells the readers about the main findings without using statistical terminology. The implications of the findings should be discussed in detail. It emphasizes any theoretical consequences of the results. Any limitations of the research and suggestions for future research should also be discussed in this section. Therefore, it should follow a clear and logical sequence (Best, 1977: 313).

Since the discussion section considers the nuances and shades of the research, the perspectiveness and creativity of the researcher and writer are finally given chance. Writers's opinion and words are needed as the summary to the answers of what the researcher believes have emerged (Miller (1998: 148-149). This automatically invites broad ideas of the writer on the topic discussed. It ties the results of the study to both theory and application by pulling together the theoretical background, literature reviews, potential significance for application. And within this frame of reference, the writer is free to use whatever art and imagination he can to show the range and depth of significance of his study (Tuckman, 1972).

This study gained the data from documents (the theses of the English Language Education section students of (2007-2010). They were analyzed descriptively through the steps of identifying all cohesive devices, grouping them into sub-kinds. In this grouping, the appropriate use and inappropriate use of cohesive devices were symbolized respectively by (+) and (-).

The emergence of all types of the cohesive devices in the students thesis, especially in the discussion section, has shown their knowledge on cohesiveness. Nevertheless, the availability is still with the problems. Generally, the data appeared with many grammatical errors. This case probably occurred because the content of the data was only the restatement of the findings, in which many numerical results, statistical terminology, and the factual things are presented. While the content of discussion section, as Best (1977: 317) claims, should be further explanation of the findings with the evaluation and interpretation of the results, which is presented critically, concisely, and clearly. It is the writers's opinion and words in summarizing the answers of what the researcher believes have emerged (Miller, 1998: 148-149).

Specifically, repetition type of lexical cohesion emerged mostly. Otherwise, the repeating words sometimes failed to make the text cohesive because too many similar words having been repeated. These cases can be understood that certain topics should be developed by using various kinds of paragraph development. In doing so, repeating the key words or phrases is needed to avoid misunderstanding at any time, instead of using pronoun (Oshima and Hogue, 1999: 41). Besides, repeating certain words to express further ideas seems the safest way to do. The writers who have lack vocabulary, for example, cannot think much of the alternative words or phrases to finish their writing. As a result, the product of writing could not be considered valuable.

Another important thing to discuss is that personal reference in reference type. The availability of more frequency of personal reference in the data indicates that the writers generally used pronouns seemingly for their good competence. In any case, the use of the same pronoun for different reference and the inconsistent use of pronoun also appeared in the data, which leads to presenting unacceptable texts. Related to the profile of the written products of the discussion section report, the problems of reference may be caused by the lack competence of the writer in using grammar. The effect of lack competence on grammar can be regarded as the cause. Ostler, Emmitt and Pollock (1992:101) claim that *grammar* refers to the basic rule that explains the way the language works, not *determines* the habit of using the language. While Hammer (2002) states almost every language has different grammar rules. So, the understanding of the users influences their writing product.

The average use of each type of connectives shared in the data determines the familiarity of the writers of connectives as the instrument to link ideas in the text. Nevertheless, the appropriate and inappropriate use of connectives from the data is found almost the same. It is in line with the profile of written products which showed more use of transition signals that lead to broken ideas and less structured. The problem may be classified as intralingual error, as stated by James (1998: 179), in which the writers have lack knowledge of transition signals.

The degree of the inappropriate use of cohesion devices influences the meaning of the text in the writing of Discussion Section of graduate students' thesis. It makes the understanding of the text blurred. The lack competence of the writers on certain cohesion devices and the lack knowledge on the content of discussion section of the thesis leads them to the use of quite meaningless text.

It would be very important for the lecturers to find out suitable strategies of consultation to handle students problems in writing the research report. At the same time, the educational institution, particularly, the English Section of Language Study program of PPs UNP Padang should consider offering the subject dealing with writing research report to the curriculum. And lastly, further study on the content of the research report writing is suggested to be conducted.

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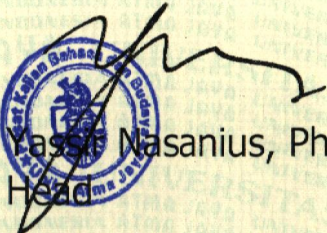
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