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

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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.

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