



Examining Coherence Markers Use on the Abstracts of English Graduate Students' Final Academic Writing

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Abstract

Coherence plays an important role in academic writing, such as in writing an abstract. It needs to perform between sentences coherently. This study aims to describe the use of coherence in the thesis abstract. Qualitative descriptive analysis was applied as the method. The data were twenty (20) selected abstracts from the repository UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. In data analysis, the researchers used the theory by Kehler (2002) to examine the topical subject and progression related to how the authors build coherence in the abstracts. The results show that four of the eleven types of coherence are used in the twenty abstracts, including parallels, contrasts, generalizations, and explanations. Topical analysis of the subject shows that most adjacency pairs are different; this indicates that the authors should briefly describe the entire research contents because the abstract only consists of a few words. Sequential progression becomes the dominant type of topical progression. In addition, the topic of discourse is difficult to analyze because the abstract only has one paragraph, so it was analyzed based on the terms that often appear to interpret the topic of discourse. This research is expected to contribute to the development of language studies to improve the quality of written English in the abstracts of students' research papers.

Keywords: Abstract; Coherence; Topical Structure Analysis; Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Research constitutes a process of rigorous investigation that aims to find, interpret, and revise facts (Kaya & Yağiz, 2020). In presenting and developing the results, it is usually recorded in a paper intended to be valuable data, references, and insight for the readers and other researchers. It is also required for certain people; for example, university students who undergo formal education at the university both at the bachelor's degree, which is recorded as *skripsi*, for postgraduate is recorded as a *thesis*, and for doctoral degree level, is recorded as a *dissertation*.

Moreover, writing scientific papers is one of the graduation requirements. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta is one of the universities in Indonesia that also requires students to conduct a study at the end of their final formal education. The university also usually provides classes that guide them to complete the process of writing research papers. Furthermore, the lecturer and students conduct the learning and teaching activities to write a good research paper in the class.

Moreover, in writing a research paper, the students need to be concerned about many aspects to accomplish their research paper; one of them is abstract. An abstract is a brief description of the full content of the research that usually comes at the beginning of the research paper, and it constitutes one of the academic genres with its organizational framework and linguistic options (Firdausyiah, Hermawan, & Muniroh, 2021). Abstracts are also guided by movements that distinguish every connection device of the discourse (Suwandi, 2016). It should inform the readers briefly and precisely about all main points of the research that guide the readers to understand the overall materials. Therefore, the authors should concern with the rules for writing abstract. For example, it should be written on no more than one page and encompass 150–300 words (Luthfiyah, Alek, & Fahriany, 2015). The abstract also can be considered a persuasive rhetorical instrument that describes the importance of the text (Jiang & Hyland, 2017). Because the abstract is a group of words that form a complete discourse, so the authors are asked to write clear abstracts, and they need to master the ability to write well and be concerned with many aspects of writing, such as cohesion and coherence.

Defining coherence is complete with defining cohesion because they are interrelated. Both coherence and cohesion are two aspects essential to building a discourse. Cohesion and coherence are related but differ in some significant areas. Cohesion is found in using devices in the text, such as connecting words or repeated word stems. Meanwhile, coherence is the property that distinguishes texts from arbitrary sets of sentences. It is said to be coherent if it is feasible to generate a coherent text representation (Chatterjee & Chakraborty, 2019). The coherence relationship can be determined when attempts are made to discern syntactic and semantic relationships when given dialogue word sequences. The arrangement of concepts clearly and logically is called coherence. The reader can readily understand the primary points when a document is cohesive and coherent. To summarize, coherence is linking words or phrases inside a text to form a logical thread that allows readers to understand the idea contained within the text (Ye and Liu, 2020). Although coherence is more closely related to meaning and dependent on how the reader perceives the text, cohesion adds to coherence because a cohesive text leads to a coherent text. The writing is coherent when a document's clauses, sentences, and paragraphs address the same idea or subject.

Several text coherence analysis studies have been conducted, especially in teaching English. Sapriawan, Chandra, & Fadilla (2022) reveal the coherence of the undergraduate thesis abstract. The results show that two abstracts are considered incoherent because of the smooth ideas movement, where no cohesive device is used to relate the ideas and the arrangement of ideas that are not logically ordered. Fitriati and Yonata (2017) also investigated the analysis of text coherence in English argumentative writing graduate students. Using discourse analysis case studies, the

findings show that students still experience difficulties achieving coherence because they do not maximize the use of cohesive devices, especially conjunctions, to connect sentences. Furthermore, Ye and Liu (2020) analyzed cohesion and coherence in the paper. The results of this study reveal that students use cohesive devices to achieve coherence even though it is still far from the readers' expectations.

Based on the results of previous studies, the level of coherence of written work still needs much improvement. Many existing studies still find texts that need better coherence. In this case, discourse analysis is essential, especially in language learning (Trisnaningrum, Alek, & Hidayat, 2019). Discourse is the most complex and most complete element of language. Supporting units include phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs up to total composition (Nurwahidah, Hidayat, Husna, & Alek, 2022). Writing discourse must be interconnected from one series to another to discover the ideas conveyed. A text or discourse is cohesive if a form of language suitable to the context exists. Discourses by the text and context are built from the internal structure of the discourse, namely cohesion, sentences used in interrelated discourse, and one understanding that connects the other understanding sequentially; these aspects also make the discourse suitable (Rahman, 2020).

As the highest level in the language hierarchy, discourse is not a random arrangement of sentences but is a unit of language, both oral and written. A reasonable discourse is a discourse that must pay attention to intercultural relations to maintain interconnectedness and interrelationships. Discourse can be divided into two kinds: oral and written discourse. Verbal discourse is a type of discourse that is delivered verbally or directly with verbal language. This type of discourse is often referred to as utterance. Content or information is delivered in written form for discourse submitted in writing. This is intended so the reader can understand and interpret the writing. Intercultural relations in a written discourse are arranged continuously and form cohesion. Therefore, the unity of meaning and neatness of form in writing space is one of the essential factors in improving readability (Nassi & Nasser, 2018).

In writing research, an author needs to master writing since they must convey their results so readers can comprehend (Dewi, 2015). After all, writing is one of the most challenging and complex skills to master for most individuals, including researchers, because it necessitates a process of deep, critical, logical, and systematic thought, which makes it challenging for a writer to figure out what they want to express. In this view, authors must possess the ability to employ precise grammatical forms and terminology and understand how a text is ordered and how ideas are related to form its wholeness. Unlike oral communication, a large gap between the writer and reader can occasionally be observed in written communication since the reader needs clarification or confirmation from the writer when more explanation is required. As a result, the authors should write their thoughts consistently and coherently for the readers to understand and follow the message given in the text. In addition, Sidek (2018) has remarked, "A written text conforms to certain rules that most good authors unconsciously follow, and native readers unconsciously expect to find." Writing has its own set of norms to follow, and sticking to the target community's writing standards is challenging to fulfill in either the first or second language.

Writing a research paper or thesis is very challenging for university students because it consists of many chapters and discussions. They should write the ideas of the materials coherently so that the readers can easily understand the thesis. In addition, the thesis will also be examined by the examiner or the lecturer, who will also read the thesis's content. Two distinct factors that must be considered throughout the writing process are how sentences are organized into paragraphs, how sentences are connected, and how thoughts are generally organized into coherent discourse. If the written material is cohesive, readers can understand the relationships between ideas across phrases and sentences. Readers can follow the sequences of thoughts and points since the writing is coherent. As a result, writing must be consistent and logical.

Based on the results of previous studies, there needs to be further research related to coherence, especially at the master's level, which is already at a high level in writing papers. Therefore, it is essential to discuss how students use elements of coherence to influence the quality of their writing (Karadeniz, 2017). This phenomenon encourages researchers to investigate further how master's students build the abstracts of their thesis. Specifically, this study aims to answer the question, "How were the roles of coherence in writing the abstracts of the Graduate Program of the English Education Department of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta?"

Method

The method of this study is descriptive qualitative analysis; to find the types of coherence and how the relation of a topic among sentences in building coherence of a paper. The data of this study are twenty thesis abstracts written by the master students of the English Education Department of Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Twenty abstracts were randomly selected from around a hundred theses, and it was decided that ten abstracts would be qualitative and ten for quantitative research. In collecting data, the researcher used content analysis regarding the coherence in words, phrases, clauses, or even selective sentences related to the abstract's coherence type. The researchers collected sentences in adjacency pairs and numbered them correspondingly for each text for ease of identification. Firstly, sentences are organized into adjacency pairs and numbered in sequence. Each adjacency pair comprises two sentences/linguistic units, with the second sentence of the adjacency pair becoming the first sentence of the adjacency pair before it, and so on. The first section will be labeled with a number and a letter (a) for the first pair and (b) for the second pair. Second, each adjacency pair in the texts will be thoroughly reviewed and scrutinized to find the types of coherence proposed by Kehler (2002) & (Hoenisch, 2009). In data analysis, the researchers used several steps:

1. Examining the type of coherence present in each text's adjacency pair.
2. Determining the occurrence (frequency) of Coherence in the texts using the following formula:

$$\frac{X}{Y} \times 100\% = N$$

Y: Total number of data

X: Number of types of Coherence

N: Percentage of Coherence

3. Interpreting the analyzed data
4. Concluding on the data analyzed.

Results

This is the Way You Write the Subheadings

Table 1 The Way to Write Subheadings

Text	The number of TS	TS as Grammatical Subject	TS in another position in the sentence	The text's dominant type of progression
Text 1	19	16 (8.00%)	3 (16.67%)	Sequential
Text 2	16	16 (8.00%)	-	Parallel
Text 3	10	10 (5.00%)	-	Extended Parallel
Text 4	18	16 (8.00%)	2 (11.11%)	Parallel
Text 5	8	8 (4.00%)	-	Sequential
Text 6	10	10 (5.00%)	-	Sequential
Text 7	10	8 (4.00%)	2 (11.11%)	Sequential
Text 8	13	13 (6.50%)	-	Sequential
Text 9	13	13 (6.50%)	-	Sequential
Text 10	14	13 (6.50%)	1 (5.56%)	Sequential
Text 11	7	6 (3.00%)	1 (5.56%)	Sequential
Text 12	14	11 (5.50%)	3 (16.67%)	Sequential
Text 13	11	8 (4.00%)	3 (16.67%)	Sequential
Text 14	8	7 (3.50%)	1 (5.56%)	Sequential
Text 15	5	5 (2.50%)	-	Sequential
Text 16	14	14 (7.00%)	-	Sequential
Text 17	6	6 (3.00%)	-	Sequential
Text 18	9	9 (4.50%)	-	Sequential & Extended Parallel
Text 19	6	6 (3.00%)	-	Parallel
Text 20	7	5 (2.50%)	2 (11.11%)	Parallel

The types of coherence proposed by Kehler (2002) in twenty chosen abstract

theses are varied. The most used type of all the abstracts is Parallel, found in 10 abstracts, and Explanation type of coherence, found in nineteen abstracts. Only a few were used besides the two types mentioned: Contrast in four abstracts, Generalization in two abstracts, Elaboration in four abstracts, and Result in six abstracts. Furthermore, many abstracts used a type of explanation to briefly explain to the readers the full content of the research.

The references (personal and demonstrative references) and noun phrases that appear most frequently in the texts are topical subject categories. The categories in which the discovered topics fit: 1) ISE (Initial Sentence Element). That is, any linguistic component at the beginning of a sentence, 2) those in the grammatical subject, which is the subject of the sentence in the grammatical sense, as in subject-predicate, and 3) those in other positions in the phrase, such as in the middle or at the end, as in a cleft sentence.

Six out of eleven kinds of Coherence proposed by Kehler (2002) are identified in this study: Parallel, Contrast, Generalization, Explanation, Elaboration, and Result. The analysis analyzes The Coherence of the text proposed by Kehler (2002) in twenty abstracts. Then the following analysis analyzes coherence through the Topical Structure Analysis proposed by Hoenisch (2009). The followings are the analyses of them. Discourse Topic is to decide the main point of the discussion from every paragraph. Meanwhile, the abstracts usually only have one paragraph, so this topic discourse is hardly analyzed.

1) Parallel

Example:

*“The objectives of this study were to find out the readability levels of English textbooks for the tenth-grade of vocational school students **and** whether the readability levels of English textbooks matched the tenth-grade students’ readability at five vocational schools in Majalengka.” (Text 1)*

The type of Coherence used by the writer in the example above is Parallel; it is shown from the sentence that it provides the conjunction **and** indicates that the writer tries to connect the two points in that sentence.

2) Contrast

Example:

a. *“Furthermore, the finding showed that reference (56.3%) was the predominant grammatical cohesive feature used by the students in academic essay writing compared to other types.”*

b. *“**Meanwhile**, substitution (0.5%) was the least one.” (Text 5)*

The example above indicates that the coherence type used is Contrast; the writer explains the contrast condition of the discourse discussed.

3) Generalization

Example:

"The average correct answers of test participants in five vocational schools were between 35—50%." (Text 1)

The example above showed that the writer discussed the general point using the word **average**, indicating that this discussion talks about general things.

4) Explanation

Example:

"This study was aimed to investigate the effect of Directed Reading Thinking Activity and reading interest on students' reading comprehension at the 8th students of MTs Jamiyyah Islamiyyah Pd. Aren." (Text 3)

The example above seems to indicate that the writer tries to explain an explanation of the point that the writer wants to describe; this kind of Coherence is called Explanation.

5) Elaboration

Example:

a. *"It meant that 6.90% of the variance of students' reading ability on descriptive text is determined by the student's reading interest."*

b. *"Secondly, there is a positive relationship between X2 and Y variables." (Text 2)*

The example above indicates the type of Elaboration shown from cohesive devices; **secondly**, it indicates that the sentence elaborates on some points already mentioned in the previous sentences.

6) Result

Example:

a. *"Based on the information obtained by the writer in 2016, UMJ holds the method in students' oral presentations in a Speaking II class."*

b. *"This is the reason UMJ is interesting to be investigated deeply."*

The example above indicates the type of Result Coherence because the second sentence explains why UMJ is chosen.

1. Topical Structure Analysis

This section covers current topics, several sorts of advancement, and the abstract discourse topic. Topical progression functions at the inter-sentence and paragraph levels, while the topical subject serves at the sentence level, all of which help to build the discourse topic of the work.

a. Topical Subject

The topical subject in each sentence is found during the text analysis. Most of the recognized topical subjects are the same as the sentence's subject. However, some do not because their topical subjects are placed elsewhere, like in the adverbial position, other than the subject sentence. Here are a few instances of various viewpoints on current events.

a) *"Secondly, there is a positive relationship between X2 and Y variables."*

b) *"It showed from the r^2 : 0.427, coefficient of determination is r^2 : 0.182."* (Text 2)

In adjacency pair number 11 above, the topical subject for (a) is an adjectival phrase with **a positive relationship** placed in the middle, and that for (b) is a personal pronoun that substitutes the previous topical subject that comes at the beginning of the sentence. The chosen twenty abstracts have different numbers of topical subjects; they are 19 TS in text 1, 16 TS in text 2, 10 TS in text 3, 18 TS in text 4, 8 TS in text 5, 10 TS in text 6, 10 TS in text 7, 14 TS in text 8, 13 TS in text 9, 14 TS in text 10.

b. Types of Topical Progression

Following the identification of topical subjects, the type of progression about the prior sentence is examined using adjacency pairs. The paragraph's topical depth is then written down, and their types of progression are mapped in a table. Parallel, sequential, and extended parallel progression are the three types of progression used in this study. These types of Topical Progression are intended to identify the connection of the whole text. However, the abstracts analyzed have only one paragraph, so the topical progression of every paragraph cannot be identified.

The examples below are a few analyses; the complete version is attached to the appendices at the end of this paper.

Example of Parallel:

- a) *"**This study** was aimed to investigate the effect of Directed Reading Thinking Activity and reading interest on students' reading comprehension at the 8th students of MTs Jamiyyah Islamiyyah Pd. Aren."*
- b) *"**This study** is categorized as quasi-experimental research in which to investigate the effect of teaching method (DRTA) and reading interest on students' reading comprehension." (Text 3)*

The example above shows that the topical subject in the first sentence is **This Study**, while the topical subject in the second sentence is also **This Study**. Then, the adjacency pair above shows the same topical subject, so the type of progression in the adjacency pair above is Parallel.

Example of Sequential:

- a) *"**Data analysis** is processed by transcribing, creating dirty notes, cleaning notes, categorizing, integrating, and making themes of the research data."*
- b) *"After conducting the university research, the **findings** can be categorized into three parts." (Text 4)*

The example above shows that the topical subject in the first sentence is **Data analysis**, while the topical subject in the second sentence is **the research findings**. Then, they have a different topic of discussion; this phenomenon is called the Sequential type of progression.

Example of Extended Parallel.

- a) *"**The spokesmen** have a task as a representative audience group to deliver*

feedback assessment orally to the presenters' performance."

- b) *"Secondly, **the students** get involved in creating, filling in blanks of the self and peer assessment rubric, and giving feedback assessment orally to the presenters' presentation."*

The example above shows that the topical subject in the first sentence is **the spokesmen**, while the topical subject in the second sentence is **the students**. The type of progression of the example above is indicated as Extended Parallel. They are sequential in the adjacency pair, but the second sentence connects with the previous sentence (not in the adjacency pair) with the transition signal of the word **Secondly**.

c) Discourse Topic

Within and between paragraphs, the discourse topic of a text is based on the repetition of keywords and phrases, specifically sentential or topical subjects (Hoenisch, 2009). Ten discourse topics in twenty abstracts are interpreted about each text's sentential topics and progression types. After identifying topical subjects, discourse topics are generated based on the topical subjects or repeated words and generated from the researcher's interpretation. The discourse topics of this study's twenty abstracts/texts are varied and are all about the research. It is proven that most discourse topics consist of the word research. The analysis of the Discourse topic cannot discuss the relation among paragraphs because the abstracts usually consist of only one paragraph. It is proven that nine out of twenty abstracts have only one paragraph.

Discussion

After the study's results are revealed and the data are reviewed, some difficult questions relating to the conclusions of this study of coherence require further discussion. Seeing the Coherence proposed by Kehler (2002) in twenty abstracts chosen, four out of eleven kinds of Coherence are identified: Parallel, Contrast, Generalization, and Explanation. Almost all the text use Explanation kinds of Coherence, while only a few uses Contrast and Generalization. The use of Parallel in every text or abstract is expected because the writers need to connect the point in the abstract. In addition, this study also indicates that all text using an Explanation kind of Coherence indicates that the abstract tries to explain the point of the text. These results support the previous research, especially research conducted by Elfiana and Farkhan (2019), showing that these results show kinds of types of Coherence proposed by Kehler (2002), which means the twenty chosen abstracts are written discourses that are arranged according to the rules of writing written discourse so that readers can easily understand the meaning or message intended by the author. 131 Topical subjects are identified in this study; they are 19 TS in text 1, 16 TS in text 2, 10 TS in text 3, 18 TS in text 4, 8 TS in text 5, 10 TS in text 6, 10 TS in text 7, 14 TS in text 8, 13 TS in text 9, 14 TS in text 10. The form of the topical subjects varies. Although they vary in length and kind of noun, topical subjects should only be found in nouns. Many are in the form of personal reference; some are in abstract and concrete nouns or phrases.

Regarding topical subject identification, the findings show that up to 91.74% of topical subjects recognized correspond to the mood subject. This is unsurprising, given that the subject of a sentence (the topic) is frequently placed first in a sentence

before the comment and that subject-predicate construction is primarily parallel with subject-predicate construction from a grammatical perspective. As a result, it is asserted that, if in doubt, one should select the mood subject or grammatical subject as the topical subject, as Hoenisch (2009) indicated, which accounts for numerous topical issues in this study that coincidentally fall under the mood subject heading. The study's findings on many of these topical subject coincidences in the first sentence element are explained by this significant occurrence of topical subjects in coincidence with the first sentence element of a sentence. Despite the similarities in the functions played by the two entities in sentences, it is worth noting that. In contrast, the subject of a sentence may only consist of the headword, and the topic of a topical subject may consist of the entire noun phrase in which the subject is contained. These results support what had been done by Pratiwi et al. (2021), showing that the mood subject becomes dominant for topical subject identification.

However, it is worth noting that topical issues are also found in other places in sentences, accounting for 8.26% of the total. It could demonstrate the complexity of language forms and styles, as topical subjects could be placed in any sentence area other than the first element. Another concern is the type of topical progression discovered in the study. The analysis discovered that parallel progression dominates two abstracts, sequential progression dominates seven texts, and extended parallel progression dominates one text. Discourse topics cannot be interpreted smoothly because an abstract only consists of a few words and many points are written in it. In addition, because the corpus of this analysis is abstract, the readers already know that the abstract's main topic is research. These results contradict Pratiwi et al. (2021) research showing that this research is hard to analyze discourse topics because it analyzes one paragraph into another, while the abstract usually has only one paragraph. In addition, this phenomenon is strengthened by the previous statement that analysis of Discourse topics is unable to conduct since the text has only a few paragraphs.

In Addition, the result of this study is also different from Hasanah (2017) since she employed a qualitative method by giving a scale to measure or to see the score of Coherence from the expert judgment. Hence, the results of her study constitute several scales and look Quantitative. Compared to this current study, this used the qualitative method because this kind of content analysis needs deep analysis and interpretation from the researcher, so the better method for this kind of content analysis is qualitative. To that end, the theory used by Hasanah does not apply to her study.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the study shows that the topical subject in most adjacency pairs is different, which seems to indicate that the authors should describe the whole content of the research briefly because the abstract consists of only a few words. After topical subjects are identified and the progression types are determined, four abstracts are dominated by parallel progression, fourteen abstracts are dominated by sequential progression, and one text is dominated by extended parallel progression, while on abstract is dominated by sequential progression and extended parallel progression. In addition, the

arrangement of topics is well-organized but needs to be better connected because many sentences are in sequential progression. The study has shown that most texts are coherent, but some need more revision. For example, they need the proper devices that connect the points from one sentence to another. Furthermore, the authors tend to use sequential types of paragraph progression, which seems to indicate that they are urged to write many points briefly in the thesis abstracts. The researchers suggested that the students should be careful to write the thesis, especially the abstract, because it is a bridge for the readers to understand the whole content of the research; they have to pay attention to the connectedness of the points. In addition, the authors need to carry out some steps of writing, for example, revising, because sometimes typology might occur in the writing process that might decrease the quality of the text. For further researchers, this research will contribute to the current literature, and future researchers can extend the study to investigate coherence in an article or thesis to highlight the author's idea of how they connect the points in each text or sentence appropriately in a written work.

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