Texture in EFL Learners' Expository Essays: An Exploratory Approach

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Abstract

Although grammatical range and accuracy have been widely explored in EFL learners' expository essays, texture, which is realized through linguistic resources related to cohesion, has remained relatively unexplored. Guided by Halliday and Hassan's (1976) model, this study aimed at exploring the frequency and use of these resources by analyzing a random sample of essays written by MA TEFL students at Shahrood University of Technology. Analyses revealed that the participants overused common forms of lexical cohesion, such as repetition and synonymy, but rarely did they use grammatical cohesive ties such as ellipsis and comparative references; hence, the analyzed essays were found to be underdeveloped as far as texture is concerned. The findings of this study have clear implications for materials developers, language teachers, and educators who are involved in second language writing instruction.

Keywords: texture, cohesive devices, academic writing, discourse analysis

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Introduction

Writing is a critical skill particularly at academic and professional levels. It is then incumbent on language instructors to bring under the spotlight the issue of how the awareness of text, context, and their interaction gives rise to a remarkable command of writing in English. EFL learners need to realize that grammatically correct sentences do not necessarily create a cohesive piece of writing. To create one, they need to forge a link between separate sentences of a text, on the one hand, and between the text and the social context in which the text is taking place, on the other. This link of meaning between separate sentences of a piece of writing which turns it into a unified text is known as texture.

It is taken for granted in systemic functional linguistics (SFG) (Halliday, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014) that a text is not a random constellation of sentences; instead, a text emerges when it has texture (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 2009; Paltridge, 2012; Webster, 2019); that is, the building blocks of a text are grammatically and lexically glued together to constitute a coherent whole which is perceived as appropriate by a certain community according to the socio-cultural and discourse environment that the text inhabits. As Forey and Thompson (2009, p.1) straightforwardly put, creating texture within the text is a tool at a writer's disposal to "monitor and control the flow of information through the text in a manageable way so that the reader is guided towards the kind of interpretation intended by the writer". Put another way, texture is the process whereby different threads of meaning are interwoven and worded via lexicogrammar into an interpretable current of discourse instead of "spilling out formlessly in every possible direction" (Halliday, 1994, p. 311).

Crucially, one aspect of the study of texture is cohesion which deals with how successive strings of clauses are lumped together to form a text. The term owes its emergence to research inspired initially by Halliday (1964) in a paper entitled *cohesion* written for teachers taking part in the schools Council Programme in Linguistics and Language Teaching. The paper opens with the following paragraph:

> *'Cohesion' refers to the way in which sentences of a text hang together. An awareness of cohesion is one of the basic kinds of intuitive knowledge that everyone has about their native language once they have mastered it. The mature person can tell, if faced*

with a set of sentences in speech or in writing, whether they make up a coherent whole or not. Such a coherent whole is what is referred to in linguistics as a TEXT (spoken or written): we could say therefore that the mature person is aware of 'texture' in his language. (Cited in Bartlett, 2019, p.288)

Cohesive ties introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976) are a set of nonstructural resources in language providing the writer with a certain kit that enables her to construct relations in discourse. Cohesion, studied within the textual metafunction (as opposed to ideational and interpersonal metafunction) is realized across the text via an inventory of grammatical and lexical resources. Interestingly, texture is thought to be intimately associated with coherence, which is defined in terms of a process whereby the interpretation of a text becomes possible in the spirit of what is referred to as *context of situation*. In connection with this, Martin (2001, p. 25) maintains that coherence has to do with "understandings and expectations about the social context a text dynamically construes" and that texture arises out of the naturalization of a reading position by the text for listener/readers. This explains why the creation of texture is indebted to semantic configurations of two kind- namely register, characterized with reference to variation according to use (Halliday, 1989, p. 41), and cohesion. The interwovenness of cohesion, texture, and register is vividly expressed by Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 23) in the following quote:

The concept of cohesion can therefore be usefully supplemented by that of register, since the two together effectively define a text. A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of situation, and therefore consistent in register; and it is coherent with respect to itself, and therefore cohesive.

Two caveats here are in order. Firstly, cohesion *per se* does not guarantee the constitution of texture although non-cohesive texts can be rendered as coherent, given "the bridging assumptions brought to bear by a reader's real-world knowledge and expectations" (Bartlett, 2019, p. 290). Secondly, the texture of the text needs to be differentiated from the structure of the text, which pertains to the appearance and sequencing of the different stages that it moves through to achieve its social purpose (Hasan, 1989, 1996). The structure of the text comes in two guises: *generic structure*

potential (GSP) and *schematic structure*. The former represents "the total potential of structures for a genre" while the latter represents a "particular configuration permitted by the GSP itself" (Hasan, 1996, p.53).

Literature Review

Research on texture takes different guises. Some studies (Ahmed, 2019; Ahmadi & Parhizgar, 2017; Juniardi, 2013; Masadeh, 2019) have explored the features of cohesion and coherence in learners' writing. For instance, Ahmed (2019) studied errors of unity and coherence in writing exam scripts written by EFL learners along with structured interviews. To this end, he explored unity in students' writing based on Connor and Kramer's (1995) perspective and in line with Oshima and Hogue's (1999) definition of coherence. The results of his research revealed that students commit errors both in unity and coherence due to their inadequate knowledge of coherence and unity techniques in paragraph writing, their lack of motivation, interference of their first language in the EFL learning process, and unsuitable teaching strategies and techniques employed by teachers in teaching coherence and unity of English paragraph writing. Furthermore, Ahmadi and Parhizgar (2017) studied coherence errors according to Mann and Thompson's (1988) Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) in Iranian EFL learners' writing and found that students make frequent errors due to their tendency to write inductively (viz. writing without any advanced thinking or outline), their lack of competence in writing coherently and finally the genre variation. This results from the belief that the coherence depends on the writers' cognitive knowledge of that specific genre. Juniardi (2013) also investigated the coherence and text unity in students' research paper using the 'variation analysis approach' and found that students apply a narrative style in their abstracts and that they lack language productivity and creativity in their writings. Accordingly, Masadeh (2019), using three constructed rating scales for measuring coherence, including holistic rating scald, cohesion rating scale, and coherence rating scale showed that cohesion and coherence were not highly established on undergraduates' essays. The most problematic areas that students faced were: very low ability to use synonymous words/phrases when needed, the bad use of accurate conjunctions and transition words to link sentences and/or paragraphs together to convey relationships throughout the essay, the

repetition of the same ideas, their failure to split their paragraphs in terms of content relevance, as well as their inability to elaborate their ideas.

In a similar line, several researchers (Altikriti & Obaidat, 2017; Bahaziq, 2016; Satria & Handayani, 2018) investigated cohesive devices in different texts. For instance, Altikriti and Obaidat (2017) explored cohesive ties in scientific texts and found that reference as a grammatical cohesive tie and reiteration as a lexical cohesive tie carry the highest frequency among others. These results confirmed the significant role of cohesive ties in scientific texts. Similarly, Bahaziq (2016) studied cohesive devices in an essay written by one of the students in a standardized exam for assessing foreign language learners' proficiency called The Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB). He found that although cohesion is clearly apparent in student's writings and that they apply grammatical and lexical devices in their writings, still they need improvements on these areas. Additionally, Satria, and Handayani (2018) studied the use of grammatical cohesive devices in student's descriptive writing and discovered that, even though students use grammatical cohesive devices in their writings, they are yet unaware of the appropriate use of such devices, for the most part conjunctions.

As another line of research, several studies (Assadi Aidinlou & Shahrokhi Mehr, 2012; Allami & Serajfard 2012; Yunus & Haris, 2014) considered the application of discourse markers in EFL Learners' Writing. For example, Assadi Aidinlou and Shahrokhi Mehr (2012) found that teaching discourse markers significantly affects students' appropriate use of DMs in their writing as well as raising students' awareness of discourse, consequently improving their writing proficiency. Similarly, Serajfard and Allami (2012) found that teaching engagement markers leads to more effective writings by IELTS students. Furthermore, the results of the study conducted by Yunus and Haris (2014) revealed three categories of discourse markers in EFL Learners' writing in terms of misused, overused and advanced used.

On the other hand, some studies (e.g., Andrews, et al. 2006; Collins & Norris, 2017; Farrokhi, Ajideh, Zohrabi, & Panahi, 2018; Nur Amin's, 2009) have explored the effect of teaching grammar on writing development. For instance, Andrews, *et al*. (2006) found that teaching sentence-combining grammar is more effective than teaching formal grammar; however, there is insufficient quality of

research to prove the case with either approach. Similarly, the results of the study by Collins and Norris (2017) on the effect of teaching grammar within the context of reading and writing on written language performance revealed improvements in written grammar following a very short period of instruction. Farrokhi, Ajideh, Zohrabi, and Panahi (2018) also conducted a research to see how teaching grammar in authentic context (discourse-based grammar) enables EFL learners to overcome the difficulty they encounter when engaged in writing. The results showed instructing discourse-based grammar teaching positively effects learners' writing. Accordingly, the results of the study of Nur Amin's (2009) showed that teaching grammar in context reduces grammatical errors in students' writing, illustrating that the students who learned grammar in context made less grammatical errors in writing than those who conventionally learned grammar.

Focusing on effective interventions, other studies have explored the effect of instructional strategies on students' writing development (e.g., Anson & Beach, 1995; Fitzgerald & Markham, 1987; Graham & Harris, 1997). To start with, Anson and Beach (1995) described the rationale and purposes for using journal writing as a tool for improving students' writing fluency and critical thinking skills in their book *Journals in the Classroom: Writing to Learn*. Similarly, Fitzgerald and Markham (1987) studied the effects of instruction in revision strategies on children's writing improvement. The researchers concluded that while instruction affected students' knowledge of the revision process and enhanced their revision efforts, it seemed unlikely that short-term instruction would have a significant impact on the overall quality of writing. On the other hand, Graham and Harris (1997) reported that providing direct and systematic instruction in writing strategies may be beneficial to students who experience difficulty with writing.

Reviewing previous studies, we note that many studies have been conducted on the basis of finding the causes of students' lack of proficiency in writing and finding solutions to improve this skill. For instance, some have studied the impact of instructional strategies on writing skill; some have examined the impact of teaching discourse markers and others have investigated grammar instruction effect on writing skill. There have also been some researches on the account of cohesion (unity), coherence and cohesive ties in students' writings, which reveal that: (1) students have difficulty with both coherence and cohesion due to the

lack of knowledge of these two important features of writing, unsuitable teaching strategies, their mother tongue interference, and students' tendency to write inductively (without having any plan in advance); (2) cohesive ties are an integral part of writing any sort of text, be it scientific or general; (3) although students have problems with almost all components of cohesion, it seems that conjunctions baffle them most; (4) there's a scarcity of research on investigating texture in students' writing particularly based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) perspective for educational purposes.

A critical review of the previous studies showed that texture has been misinterpreted. While the previous studies have considered any appearance of grammatical or lexical device as a cohesive device, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976) only those which create a bond *between* separate sentences of a text are considered as cohesive devices. To fill this gap, based on Halliday and Hasan's view, this study will explore texture in expository essays written by undergraduate students of English language and literature studying at Shahrood University of Technology (SUT), Iran. We have particularly chosen Halliday and Hasan's perspective on texture since they offer a comprehensive and complete view of texture, offering distinct and measurable criteria to study this phenomenon. The goal is to see how far students are aware of the available linguistic resources required for writing an expository text and the extent of their mastery over these resources.

Methodology

Research Context

The participants who shared their writing samples for analysis were all undergraduate students studying English Language and Literature at the English department of Shahrood university of Technology, Iran. One of the main courses of this program is advanced writing. In collaboration with the professors who ran this course, a sample of the expository essays, which were handed in as partial fulfillment of the requirements of "Advanced Writing" were randomly selected for analysis.

Data Analysis

The sample texts when gathered were analyzed based on the criteria

associated with the constitution of the texture as defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976). As stated by Halliday and Hasan (1976), texture is the relation of meaning between separate sentences of a text. They name every single one of these relations in the text a "tie", and use this concept to study the texture of the text systematically by finding and categorizing the linguistic resources which contribute to generating each one of these ties. These linguistic resources are called cohesive devices and are categorized into grammatical cohesive devices and lexical cohesion devices.

Hasan and Halliday (1976) categorized grammatical cohesion into reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. According to Hasan and Halliday (1976) only references which repeat a certain meaning in the text (endophoric reference) are considered as cohesive devices (p. 37). These references may refer back to another word or phrase used formerly in a text (Anaphoric reference) or a word or phrase which would be mentioned later in the text (cataphoric reference). In addition, among different types of reference, just *third person personal* pronouns, demonstrative, and comparative references that refer to items mentioned in the text are considered cohesive (p.48). Substitution is also subcategorized into nominal, verbal, and clausal. Ellipsis consists of nominal (a noun is omitted), verbal (a verb is removed), and clausal (removing the whole clause). In addition, conjunctions are divided into additive, adversative, causal and temporal by Halliday and Hasan (1976).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorized lexical cohesions into two main groups of reiteration and collocation. Reiteration consists of repetition, synonyms or near-synonyms, super-ordinates and general words. Instances of reiteration are as follows: repetition, synonymy and near-synonymy, and hyponymy. Collocation is the second category of lexical cohesion. It is very significant to mention that according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), collocational phrases that we are familiar with (e.g., the combination of verbs and nouns and alike) are so tied up together that they are considered as one lexical item; therefore, they cannot contribute to the cohesion of the text. Cohesion is made when two lexical items which have a similar collocational pattern appear in adjacent sentences.

Considering Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework as the basis of analysis, first, any form of lexical or grammatical device used in any sentence is found, afterwards its tie to other items in the text is explored. If the tie is found, then

it is considered a cohesive device. It is very significant to note that since texture is about the cohesion between separate sentences of a text, considering the cohesion made in a sentence through grammatical structure is irrelevant (p.9). Therefore, only devices that create a tie between individual sentences are considered as cohesive devices. This tie may be present in instant or distant sentences of the text. Finally, the frequency of cohesive devices used is calculated.

Results

In line with Halliday and Hassan's (1976) conceptualization of texture, this study aimed at exploring cohesive ties in a sample of expository essays written by undergraduate students of English Language and Literature. Table 1 schematically represents the number and percentage of each element that contributes to the overall texture of the sample essays.

Table 1

Cohesive Ties Distribution

cohesion ties	Number of ties	Percentage
References	185	15%
conjunction	224	18%
Ellipsis	3	0.2%
lexical	822	67%
Total	1234	

As shown in Figure 1, the occurrence of cohesive ties is not evenly distributed in the sample essays. It clearly shows that at a discourse level learners connected sentences by relying solely on lexical ties while their use of grammatical ties is far less frequent.

Figure 1

Frequency Percentage of Cohesive Ties
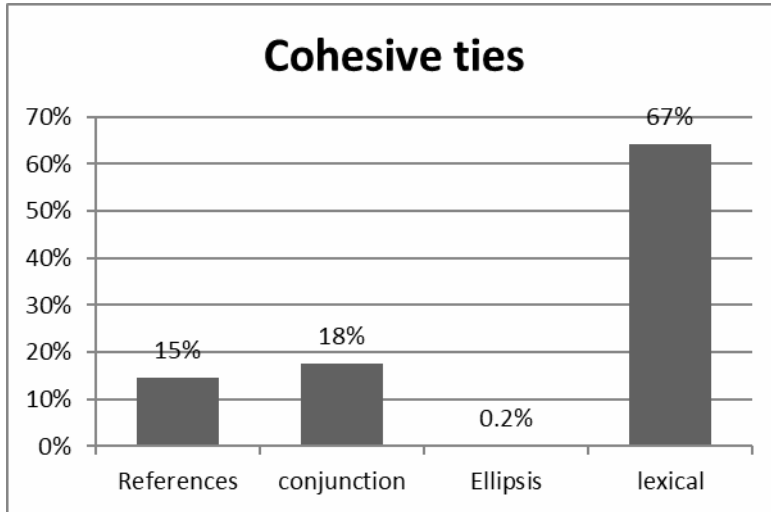
As shown in Table 1, the most cohesive ties used in students' writings were of lexical cohesion type which covered 67% of the ties used in students' sample expository essays. Conjunctions and references were the second and third most frequently used ties, each consisting 18 and 15 percent of the ties, respectively. Nevertheless, very few applications of ellipsis and no tokens of substitution were found. All in all, the results revealed the students' lack of mastery over grammatical cohesive ties. In what follows, each of the cohesive ties will be discussed separately.

Reference

Table 2 displays the frequency and percentage of each type of reference used by the participants in this study.

Table 2

References Distributions

References	Number of ties	Percentage
reference /demonstrative	47	25%
reference /personal	137	74%
reference/comparative	1	1%
Total	185	

In line with Halliday's taxonomy, we explored three types of reference including demonstrative, personal, and comparative. As shown in Table 2, in 185 instances students used references to creates texture in their texts. 74 percent of the references used were personal references such as *it*, *they*, *their*, *them* and demonstrative references including *this*, *that*, *these*, and *the*, covering 25% of the references. Comparatives were hardly ever used as cohesive ties, allocating only 1 percent of the total references used. Figure 2 visually represents students' use of reference.

Figure 2

Frequency Percentage of References
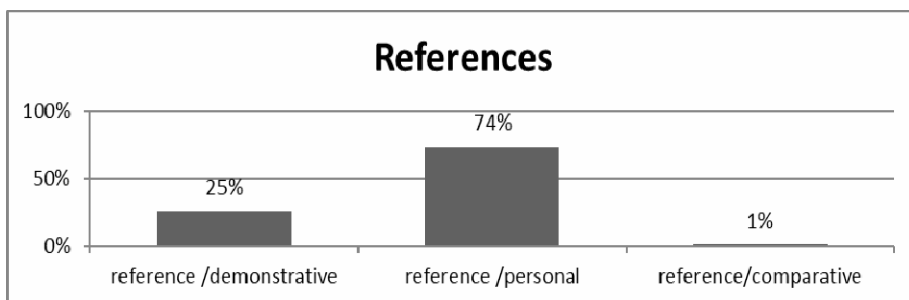
The most frequent references used were personal references such as *they* (50 times) and *it* (46 times), consisting together about half the references used. Here are some examples:

(1) Today, the internet has become one of the most important tools in human life that helps people in various stages of life. **It** is also accessible and usable for most people these days.

In example (1), the participant used *it* to refer back to the *internet* in order to tie the two sentences.

(2) Students do not have to carry heavy backpacks full of books. **They** can easily enter a classroom where all this equipment is already placed.

In example (2), *they*, a personal reference, refers to *students* in the preceding sentence.

(3) Online businesses include activities like advertising, online shops and content creation. **This** type of business is becoming more and more popular among people.

In example (3), *this* (*type of business)* as a demonstrative reference refers to *online businesses* mentioned in the preceding sentence, hence constituting anaphoric reference.

(4) People cannot afford to live on low incomes because the cost of all living things [sic] has risen so much that it has eroded people's satisfaction with low incomes. We know that life and passing it comfortably became so hard for people and they don't know which ways they should go on to make an easier life for themselves. Well, as long as there are **such** problems, how can people live easily and be satisfied with low income?

In example (4), the participant used the comparative reference *such* to refer to the problems mentioned earlier in the text.

Conjunctions

Based on the results, among grammatical cohesion devices conjunctions were the most frequent ties used in students' writings with the frequency of 224. Accordingly, four different types of conjunctions, including additive, adversative, casual, and temporal were explored in students' essays. The results revealed that there is an almost normal distribution between different categories of conjunction use, ranging from 29% for temporal conjunctions to 20% for adversative conjunctions. Here are some examples of the conjunction use:

(5) Additive conjunction:

If the young do not sleep enough, their health will be affected seriously by losing weight or always feeling tired. Their brains **also** will not work effectively and they will be in a sleepy condition.

(6) Adversative conjunction:

People who were physically abused by their parents in their childhood might show aggressive behaviors in society. **Although** you may sometimes consider these

people selfish or even narcissist, deep down they are suffering from some problems and they choose the wrong solution to prove themselves.

(7) Casual conjunction:

Your job will have a big impact on your personality so that if your job is appropriate, others will ask you to do their important things and trust you. **As a result**, you will be a trustworthy person in the eyes of others.

(8) Temporal conjunction:

They help ease people out of social isolation or shyness and walking with them will increase social interaction. **Finally,** dogs can make you feel less alone and relieve your stress.

Table 3 shows the distribution of conjunction types. As shown, temporal conjunctions are the most frequently used conjunction type and the adversative type is the least frequently used conjunction. All in all, however, the use of different categories of conjunctions is roughly evenly distributed.

Table 3

Conjunctions Distributions

Title	Number of ties	Percentage
Conjunction/additive	64	28%
Conjunction/adversative	44	20%
Conjunction/casual	51	23%
Conjunction/Temporal	65	29%
Total	224	

Figure 3 better helps your come to grasp with the students' use of conductions. As vividly illustrated by Figure 3, students show a higher level of mastery over additive and temporal conductions and a lower level of mastery over adversative and causal conjunctions.

Figure 3

Frequency Percentage of Conjunctions
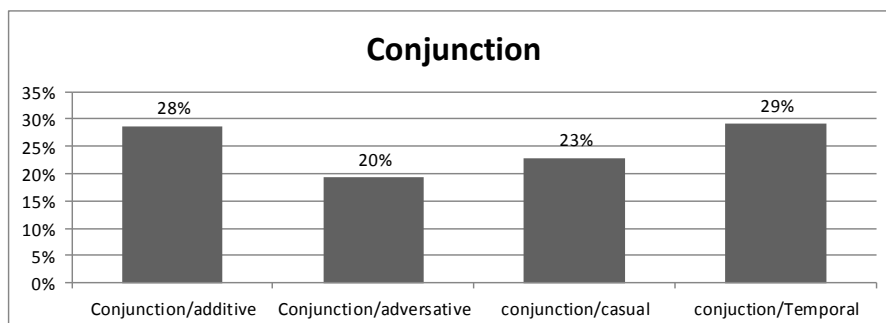
Ellipsis and Substitutions. **Analysis revealed that substitution was not used by participants and only in two occasions ellipsis was applied by students. The findings could reflect their lack of mastery over these two forms of cohesive ties. Take this example as a rare use of ellipsis:**

(9) Nowadays, I think most people are looking to immigrate. **Some** because of the bad economic conditions in Iran, and **some** exactly the opposite due to good financial conditions.

In example (9), the participant ellipted the word *people* in the second sentence using *some* instead of *some people*.

Lexical Cohesion. Lexical cohesion was the most frequent cohesive tie used in the students' writings. In fact, most of the sentences were tied only via lexical cohesion. Between the different instances of lexical cohesion, repetition in reiteration lexical group was the most frequent group, covering 70% of lexical cohesive ties. Synonyms and superordinates were the second and third frequent groups among instances of reiteration, consisting 22% and 2% of the lexical ties, respectively. No example of hyponymy was evident. Finally, collocation covered 7% of the lexical cohesive ties.

(10) Repetition:

Children usually come up with the ideas that their **parents** are going to separate or they will be left alone. Or they start to compare themselves and their **parents** with their friends and their friends' **parents**.

(11) Superordinate:

There are some reasons that make **dogs** best things on the earth. A lot of families all over the world have **pets**, both those have children and those who do not.

Example (11) contains a superordinate lexical tie since animals such as *dogs* go under the category *pet*.

(12) Synonym:

Touch and movement are two healthy ways to quickly manage stress. **Stroking** a dog can lower blood pleasure and help you quickly feel calmer and less stressed.

In Example (12), *Stroking* is used as a synonym for *touch and movement*.

(13) Collocation:

By managing our waste properly, we are providing the future generation with a **clean environment** and a very strong economy. So, the governments must create new strategies to **reduce waste** and should also create awareness among people on the benefits of using **eco-friendly products.**

In example (13), *clean environment* and *eco-friendly products* and *waste* collocate with each other since based on our background knowledge, we know for having a clean environment, we have to reduce wastes and use eco-friendly products; therefore, we expect to see them in sentences that follow since they commonly appear together. This expectation creates cohesion. Table 4 summarizes the frequency of the distribution of lexical ties in sample essays.

Table 4

Lexical Cohesions Distributions

	Number of ties	Percentage
lexical/collocation	55	7%
lexical/repetition	575	70%
lexical/superordinate	15	2%
lexical/general word	0	0%
lexical/synonym	177	22%
Total	822	100%

As shown in Figure 4, the use of lexical ties is not evenly distributed in the sample essays. While instances of repetition are highly frequent, collocation and subordinate ties rarely happen in these essays. The second most frequent lexical tie is the use of synonyms which account for 22 percent of the lexical ties.

Figure 4

Frequency Percentage of Lexical Cohesions
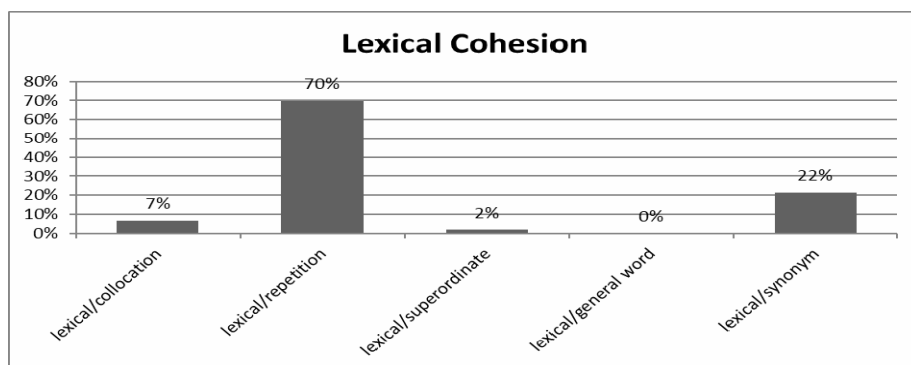
Conclusion and Implications

In this study, based on Halliday and Hasan (1976) we studied texture in sample expository essays written by undergraduate students of English Language and Literature studying at SUT. We explored the frequency and function of cohesive devices used by participants in their writings and found that lexical cohesion ties were the most frequent ties covering 67% of ties. The majority of lexical cohesion used by students was repetition, which is the simplest form of creating a tie. Synonyms accounted for 22% of the lexical cohesion used, and other instances of lexical cohesion comprised 11% of the lexical cohesion as a whole. These results reveal that although students used plenty of lexical cohesive ties in their writings, still they stuck to the simplest and most common forms such as repetition and synonyms. All in all, the results clearly show a limited use of lexical ties.

As for the grammatical ties, conjunctions and references are the most frequently used ties, accounting for 18% and 15% of the cohesive ties, respectively. A normal distribution of the four types of conjunctions was evident, ranging from 29% for additive and 28% for temporal conjunctions to 23% for casual conjunctions and 20% for adversative conjunctions, all contributing to the conclusion that participants

seem to have a rather fair knowledge of using different forms of conjunctions to tie the sentences together in order to create texture in the text.

The third frequent cohesive tie used was reference which comprised a quarter of the ties. Three main types of reference were analyzed in the samples including personal (pronominal), demonstrative, and comparative. Personal references were the most frequent types of reference used comprising 74% of the whole references used. Demonstrative references allocated 25% and comparatives included only 1% of the references. It seems that students tend to stick to the simplest forms of reference such as *it*, *they*, *that*, etc. And comparative reference also appeared to be the most complex form of reference for them. The least frequent cohesive tie used in students' writing was ellipsis with only two instances of use. It appears that ellipsis is the most complex form of the cohesive ties for students.

To summarize, the use of cohesive ties and patterns as evident in the sample assays show learners' (1) lack of mastery over grammatical ties, and (2) limited and challenging use of lexical ties. In other words, the sample expository assays lacked texture as specified by Halliday and Hassan (1976). And this lack of texture in essays is clearly related to the nature of language education, which takes the sentence as the unit of analysis. Although in theory there has been a shift away from grammatical competence towards communicative competence (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), in practice however, both methods and materials disproportionately focus on grammatical competence and ignore other aspects such as sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Comparing the results of our study with previous studies, we realized that the findings of our research's findings are in parallel with the results of the works conducted by Ahmed (2019), Ahmadi and Parhizgar (2017), Masadeh (2019), and Bahaziq (2016), who found that students lack proficiency in writing coherent and cohesive texts. Satria and Handayani (2018) also found that students have difficulty using grammatical cohesive devices. However, it is worthy of note that the results of our study show that conjunctions seemed to be the least troublesome area of cohesive ties whereas conjunctions are the most problematic part for students in their study. Likewise, the findings of the research conducted by Altikriti and Obaidat (2017) revealed that reference was the most frequent grammatical cohesive tie

whereas our findings showed that conjunctions were the most frequent grammatical cohesive tie used by participants.

Being both educators and practitioners, the authors of this study are quite cognizant of the wide gulf between theory and practice. While in theory everybody agrees that language education should aim at developing learners' communicative competence, in practice the vast majority of commercial textbooks available in the market follow tradition rather than research findings, and based on Tomlinson's (2010) study, a great majority of commercial textbooks currently available in the market are dead and deaf to principles of second language acquisition and development. Moreover, although language teaching has come of age and many language teachers are certified, they see themselves at the consumer end of materials development. One of the major pitfalls of textbooks is that they are grammar-based and they rarely contain tasks, activities, and exercises that aim at helping learners move beyond longer stretches of language and act at a discourse level. In short, students' lack of mastery as depicted by the analysis of their expository essays clearly reveals that methods and materials rarely reflect how language works at a discourse level. To help solve this educational ill, in EFL contexts in general and in Iranian context in particular, it is essential that:

- Materials developers and syllabus designers add discourse-based tasks and exercises that complement the already available and dominant grammar-based tasks and exercises and by doing this help students develop their discourse competence which is a significant and unalienable part of communicative competence;

- Language teachers develop discourse-based materials and present them through effective techniques that aim at raising learners' awareness of how language works at a discourse level and provide them with opportunities to use language at a discourse level and in this process learn how sentences are put together systematically to form coherent and cohesive texts;

- Both materials developers and language teachers leave room for the systematic introduction, practice and use of discourse markers and not take the operation of language at a discourse level for granted.

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