

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study investigated cohesion and coherence in narrative and argumentative essays written by Malaysian and Thai second year Medical students. The essay data collected in this study contained approximately 250 words in length. Two types of data analysis were conducted: qualitative analysis on coherence, and quantitative analysis on cohesion. The first involved the analysis of the overall quality of essay writing by using the Holistic Scoring Guide. The latter dealt with the analysis frequencies of cohesive devices used by the two sample groups. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. There is a greater density of syntactic ties (reference and conjunction) in all narrative and argumentative essays written by the Malaysian and Thai students than semantic ties (reiteration and collocation). In addition, the use of cohesive devices in the narrative essays written by the Malaysian and the Thai respondents was much higher than in their argumentative essays.

2. Overall, the use of cohesive devices in the narrative and argumentative essays written by the Malaysian medical students was higher than in the narrative and argumentative essays written by the Thai students.

3. The two differences between the use of cohesive devices by the Malaysians and the Thai respondents were: a) the Malaysians used more reference in their narrative essays but less in their argumentative essays. However, the statistical difference at a 0.05 level was only found in the latter. b) The Malaysians' use of reiteration in both narrative and argumentative essays proved statistically far greater than the Thai use at a 0.05 level significance. As a result, it seemed that the use of reiteration was the only factor which distinguished essays of writers from varying language backgrounds. As semantic reiteration deals with vocabulary and the Malaysian use of vocabulary and the Thai use of vocabulary may be different. This might be because the Malaysians are provided with more opportunity to use

vocabulary which they have previously learned both inside and outside the classroom (in context) while the Thais may have fewer opportunities to do so.

4. There was neither a statistical difference at 0.05 level in the frequencies of cohesive items used between high and low-rated essays written by the Malaysian students, nor between the high and low-rated essays written by the Thai students.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

On the basis of these findings, the following implications for EFL and ESL teachers can be suggested.

1. This study indicates that students used semantic ties less frequently than syntactic ties. As a result, EFL/ESL teachers should give emphasis to an improved use of semantic ties. This may be done through vocabulary building, especially teaching word relations, i.e. the repetition of the same words and the use of synonyms to connect sentences in writing classes. In addition, joining reading and writing activities is also a good way to enhance the teaching of coherence and cohesion in our English lessons (Palmer, 1999). For instance, a teacher may give students a text and ask them to analyze if the text is coherent. Students can find and underline the use of lexical reiteration and collocation, and thereby learn about coherence. Also, a teacher may discuss the use of devices, such as synonyms, hyponyms and repetition of the same words for creating coherence in a text.

2. The results of this study prove that the use of cohesive devices was not the differentiating factor between the high and the low-rated essays but it was the factor of coherence which exemplified the high from the low-rated essays. Hence, when teaching writing, ESL/EFL teachers should not overemphasize on the quantity of cohesion used but should probably focus more on the appropriate use of those ties in students' writing. However, what is more important was that these findings can give some ideas for the EFL/ESL teachers in their move towards teaching coherence via ideas and organizational emphasis rather than teaching cohesive elements as the main concern in writing class. Lee (2002a) suggested that there are four steps to teaching students coherence in their writing class. First, the students can be introduced the concept of coherence by means of a discussion to stimulate their interest in the topic.

For example, students are required to read, discuss a text and see if the text is coherent. Second, the teachers should provide students with handouts about the six coherence topics. They are: (1) purpose, audience and context of situation; (2) overall structure of texts; (3) information distribution and topical development; (4) propositional development; (5) text cohesion; and (6) metadiscourse. Third, coherence awareness in students should be raised through mini-text analysis tasks by which students apply what they have learned. For example, to discuss the topic of text cohesion, students may be asked to read a text, analyze cohesive features, and then rewriting the text in order to improve its cohesion. At this stage the teacher may act as a helper or facilitator while students are working on the task. Last, it is the teachers' responsibility to offer as many as opportunities for students in order to follow-up their writing practice independently.

3. It was found that students were able to write narrative essays but had difficulties in writing argumentative essays. For example, the low average coherence scores of the Thai students' argumentative essays suggested that this type of writing is not well developed among Thai students. Because of this, it can be inferred that the pedagogy of argumentative writing in Thai educational institutions is still lacking. This is congruent with the research of Samabuddhi (1991) who said that even though the Thai curriculum covers the teaching of argumentative writing, this aspect has been neglected by Thai schools and universities. Thus, EFL/ESL teachers must realise the fact and see the importance of argumentative writing. By doing this, we may open the door to train students' minds and thought processes in critical thinking and reasonable argumentation through frequent writing practices.

4. It is important to mention that the teachers' evaluation of students' essays is another important factor in achieving coherence. Teachers or graders should use marking profiles which list the basic assessment criteria for evaluating an essay. For example, the marking on 'content' 'organization' sections should be explicitly stated. By doing this, students can refer to their teachers' evaluation easily and make corrections accordingly.

5. Due to the fact that language is used for communication, and learners are expected to be able to use the language they learn, any language teaching arena that focuses only on grammatical competence alone may be deemed inefficient because it is only one part of communication strategies not the complete whole.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations of this study should be noted:

1. The high and low-rated essays written by the Malaysian and by Thai in this study did not come from the same coherence scoring level. So the comparison of cohesive devices used between the high and low-rated essays might have its own shortcoming.

2. As this study only examined the data of 14 second year medical students at one university in Thailand, and 14 second year medical students at another university in Malaysia, the results of this study cannot be generalized.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, some recommendations for further research are offered below.

1. The findings of this study were based on the data from only 28 second year medical students from two universities of a specific program. To confirm the results of this study, this research should be replicated with more students at different universities and at different educational levels in various academic disciplines.

2. This study merely focused on investigating the relationship between the number of cohesive ties and the quality of writing. Further research should also take into account whether or not the cohesive ties in the weak compositions were properly used in the writing context, and discern whether errors of cohesive items used in good compositions differs from those in weak compositions. In addition, further research should try to find out to what extent that cohesive ties can contribute to the quality of writing.

3. To obtain further information on the use of cohesion and coherence in students' compositions, a personal interview with each participant should be incorporated in order to investigate the writing type models in the students' native language and culture.