

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis in three sections and a discussion of the results. The first section presents the demographic information of the Malaysian and Thai respondents. The second section presents the qualitative findings on coherence in the narrative and argumentative essays of the Malaysian and Thai respondents. The third section contains the results and comparisons of the types and frequencies of cohesive devices used in Malaysian and Thai narrative and argumentative essays. The last section presents a discussion of the results found in the Malaysian and Thai narrative and argumentative essays.

4.1 Background Data

The background data was collected through implementing Section 1 of the research instrument attached in Appendix A. The background data revealed general demographic characteristics of the Malaysian medical students and the Thai medical students in terms of their personal backgrounds, native language, English language backgrounds, and attitudes towards writing English essays.

4.1.1 Background Data of the Malaysian Respondents

Results of the background data of the Malaysian respondents (see Table 4.1.1) were obtained from 14 subjects: 10 females and 4 males. The first language spoken by the respondents was: Malay (7), Chinese (4), English (1), Tamil (1), and other (unspecified).

On average, the number of years spent studying English by the Malaysian respondents was 14.5 years. The average age when they first began to study English was 5.7 years. Eight of the Malaysian respondents said that they enjoyed writing in English, while the other six gave a neutral response. Overall, four respondents

described writing in English as easy; nine as difficult; and one as moderately difficult; and no one of the Malaysian respondents considered writing in English most difficult.

The last part of Section 1 elicited information on the three factors: grammar, idea and structural organization that are important for writing. The respondents were asked to rank the factors from the most important to the least important one. The factor of *grammar* included the rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences. The factor of *idea* included the main idea, knowledge and opinions related to the topic. The factor on structural organization included the right order, the sequence of paragraphs, and the suitability of ideas for the paragraphs. The Malaysian and the Thai respondents had a variety of opinions as shown in Tables 4.1.1 & 4.1.2.

Table 4.1.1
Demographic Information of the Malaysian Respondents

Item	Characteristics				
1. Gender	10 females		4 males		
2. First language	Malay 7	Chinese 4	English 1	Tamil 1	Other 1
3. Years of studying English	14.4 years average				
4. Age first began studying English	5.7 years average				
5. Attitudes towards writing in English	Positive 8		Negative 0		Neutral 6
6. Degree of difficulty when writing in English	easy 4	difficult 9	most difficult 0	other 1	
7. Most to least important factors to consider when writing in English	most	3		grammar	
	moderate	9			
	least	1			
	most	10		idea	
	moderate	2			
	least	1			
	most	0		organization	
	moderate	2			
	least	11			
	1		non-response		

Table 4.1.1 reveals the Malaysians' perceptions of the importance of grammar, idea and structural organization in writing an essay. Nine of the Malaysian

respondents considered *grammar* as moderately important. Three respondents considered *grammar* as the most important factor. Only 1 respondent considered *grammar* as the least important factor, and one of respondents did not respond to the question. With regards to *idea*, the majority (10) considered the *idea* as the most important factor when writing, while only 2 respondents ranked it as moderately important and 1 ranked it was the least important factor. With regards to *structural organization*, 11 respondents regarded it as the least important factor to be considered when writing, two of them considered *structural organization* as a moderately important factor, and one respondent did not respond to the item. Overall, it is shown that the majority of the Malaysian respondents ranked *idea* as the most important factor, *grammar* as moderately important, and structural organization as least important when writing an English essay. This indicates that the Malaysians likely present relevant ideas in their essays, and probably have few difficulties in choosing parts of speech or putting words together to make sentences. Also, ranking structural organization as least important may be considered as such because organizing the structure is one of the final steps in their writing process. Therefore, the Malaysians may think that ideas or content come first.

4.1.2 Background Data of the Thai Respondents

The background data of the Thai respondents (see Table 4.1.2) reveals 14 respondents: 13 females and 1 male. All respondents spoke Thai as their first language.

On average, the number of years studying English by the Thai respondents was 13.3 years. The average age when they first began their English lessons was 7.4 years of age. Overall, three Thai respondents described writing in English as easy; ten as difficult, and one as most difficult.

Table 4.1.2
Demographic Information of the Thai Respondents

Item	Characteristics		
1. Gender	13 females	1 male	
2. First language	Thai 14		
3. Years of studying English	13.3 years average		
4. Age first began studying English	7.4 years average		
5. Attitudes towards writing in English	Positive 8	Negative 1	Neutral 5
6. Degree of difficulty when Writing in English	easy 3	difficult 10	most difficult 1
7. Most to least important factors to consider when writing in English	most	0	grammar
	moderate	3	
	least	10	
	most	13	idea
	moderate	0	
	least	0	
	most	0	structure
	moderate	10	
	least	3	
		1	non-response

From the data reported in Table 4.1.2, ten of the Thai respondents indicated that *grammar* was the least important factor when writing in English. While 3 of the Thai respondents considered *grammar* as moderately important. One subject did not respond to the item. Thirteen of the Thai respondents, considered the *idea* or content as the most important factor, and there was only 1 non-respondent. Thus, 10 of the Thai respondents considered the *structural organization* as moderately important, followed by 3 who considered the structural organization as least important. There was 1 non-respondent.

It seems obvious that the Thai respondents considered *ideas* as most important, *organizational structure* as moderately important, and *grammar* as least important when writing in English. This likely leads to the production of good content and highly structured writing with occasional mistakes in the word order. Interestingly, this way of ranking was consistent with the theory of writing process as proposed by Celce-Murcia (2001) indicating that to be a successful writer is to be able to express

ides with reasonable coherence and accuracy (organization and grammar). One possible reason for the idea ranking as the most important might be because the students think that to produce a piece of writing means to begin with having relevant ideas on the topic, then to think about how to organize the ideas with reasonable accuracy. Another possible reason might be that as writing is always the last skill to be taught at schools or universities in Thailand (Barber, 2002). In the classroom, students are taught reading, vocabulary and grammar. Subsequently, they find themselves having problems with writing. As a result, they wouldn't rank grammar as the most important factor to be considered in writing.

4.1.3 Comparative Analysis of the Background Data

When comparing the first language of the 2 subject groups, it is apparent that the Malay sample is more culturally diverse, with respondents speaking Malay, Chinese, English, Tamil and other (unspecified) languages, while the Thai respondents were homogeneous 100% Thai native speakers.

Table 4.1.3

Malaysian and Thai Comparative Summary Data*

Item		Malaysian	Thai
Gender	Female	71.4	92.9
	Male	28.6	7.1
First language	Malay	50	0
	Chinese	29	0
	Thai	0	100
	English	7	0
	Tamil	7	0
	Other	7	0
Years of studying English		14.4 yrs	13.3 yrs
Age first began studying English		5.7 yrs	7.4 yrs
Attitudes towards writing in English	positive	57	57
	negative	0	7
	neutral	43	36
Degree of difficulty when Writing in English	easy	29	21.4
	difficult	64	71.4
	most difficult	0	7.1
	other (moderate)	7	0

* % unless otherwise indicated

A comparison of years studying English reveals that the Malaysian respondents studied English for 14.4 years, and the Thai respondents studied for 13.3 years. Thus, the Malaysian respondents had an additional 13 months (approximately an additional one academic year). The age at which respondents first began to study English was 5.7 years for the Malaysian respondents and 7.4 years for the Thai respondents. This is a difference of 1.7 years or 20.4 months. In terms of their attitudes towards writing in English, which may lead to the respondents' general openness to learning and exploring other cultures, e.g. obtaining information in English, expressing emotion in English, or socially communicating using English (Walqui, 2000), it is shown that 9 Malaysian respondents and 9 Thai respondents had a similar degree of openness and positivity to writing in English. Ten of the Thai respondents found writing in English to be difficult, in comparison to only 9 of the Malaysian respondents.

With regard to production factors in essay writing, the Malaysian and the Thai respondents valued the *idea* as the most important. Unlike the Malaysians, the Thai respondents considered *structural organization* more important than *grammar*. This concludes the comparative analysis of the background data of the Thai and Malaysian respondents.

4.2 Coherence Analysis

In order to achieve the results of the coherence analysis, the raters employed the Test of Written English Scoring Guide (Bailey, 1998) shown in Table 3.4.1 (Chapter 3) for analyzing the narrative and argumentative essays. The scale was 1-6: 1 being the lowest and 6 the highest (see also Appendices F and G). The coherence analysis of the narrative essays of the Malaysian respondents is presented in Table 4.2.1 with a 3-6 range. The coherence analysis of the narrative essays of the Thai respondents is presented in Table 4.2.2 with a 2-5 range.

Table 4.2.1

Coherence Analysis of the Malaysian Narrative Essays

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
No. of essays	0	0	2	6	4	2	14
%	0	0	14	43	29	14	100

Table 4.2.1 shows the coherence analysis of the Malaysian narrative essays using Bailey's Test of Written English Scoring Guide. The results showed that there were no levels 1 or level 2 narrative essays written by the Malaysian students. Two of the Malaysian narrative essays holistically scored 3; 6 essays scored 4; 4 essays scored 5; and 2 essays scored 6.

Table 4.2.2

Coherence Analysis of the Thai Narrative Essays

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
No. of Essays	0	3	4	4	3	0	14
%	0	21.4	28.6	28.6	21.4	0	100

From the data reported in Table 4.2.2, two Thai narrative essays scored 3. Level 3 and 4 had 4 essays. Three essays scored 5. No Thai narrative essays ranked at level 1 or level 6. It is important to note that almost one fourth of the Thai respondents did not pass the narrative test.

Table 4.2.3

Coherence Analysis of the Malaysian Argumentative Essays

Scale	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
No. of Essays	0	0	0	4	7	2	1	14
%	0	0	0	29	50	14	7	100

Table 4.2.3 shows the coherence analysis of the argumentative essays of the Malaysian respondents on a scale from 3-6. Four of the Malaysian argumentative

essays were ranked level 3. Seven essays ranked level 4, 2 essays ranked level 5 and 1 essay ranked level 6. This is similar to their display of competence as noted in their narrative writings, i.e. coherence ranging from 3-6. The researcher thus concluded that a Bailey's scale of 3-6 adequately describes the Malaysian medical student respondents in terms of their general competence level when writing in English.

For the argumentative essays, the researcher differentiated amongst the lowest ranking essays, and therefore gave scores of 1 and 0 as follows:

- 1: as incompetent in writing
- 0: as significantly incompetent

Thus, the argumentative essays of the Thai respondents revealed a coherence analysis range from 0 – 5. When compared to the Malaysian respondents, the young Thai medical student respondents had a significantly lower level of English writing proficiency (see Tables 4.2.3 & 4.2.4).

Table 4.2.4
Coherence Analysis of the Thai Argumentative Essays

Scales	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
No. of Students	4	2	2	2	2	2	0	14
%	28.5	14.3	14.3	14.3	14.3	14.3	0	100

Table 4.2.4 shows the coherence analysis of the Thai argumentative essays. The Thai argumentative essays equally scored at levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, with 2 essays in each level. Four of the Thai respondents could not write an argumentative essay and thus scored 0. There were no Thai argumentative essays which ranked level 6.

Table 4.2.5

A Comparison of the Coherence Analysis of Malaysian and Thai Essays

Scale	Narrative (%)		Argumentative (%)	
	Malaysian	Thai	Malaysian	Thai
6	14.3	0	7	0
5	28.5	21.4	14	14.3
4	42.9	28.6	50	14.3
3	14.3	28.6	29	14.3
2	0	21.4	0	14.3
1	0	0	0	14.3
0	0	0	0	28.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 4.2.5 presents a comparison of coherence analysis of the Malaysian and Thai narrative and argumentative essays. The minimum score of the Malaysian narrative and argumentative essays was level 3. Whereas the minimum score of the Thai narrative essays was at level 2, and of the argumentative essays level 0. Neither the narrative nor the argumentative essays written by the Thai respondents scored level 6.

The analysis of coherence in essays written by both Malaysian and Thai students was the first step towards answering research question 4 which stated: Is there a relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and the text coherence in essays written by Malaysian and Thai students? Subsequently, the coherence scores were grouped into high and low-rated essays using the method as explained earlier in 3.4.1. It should be noted that there was a limitation in the comparative analysis as the coherence scores referred to as high and low were relative as the Thai low scores fell below the Malaysian scores, and like wise the Malaysian high scores rose above the Thai high scores.

4.3 Cohesion Analysis

By using Halliday & Hasan's (1976) framework for analyzing cohesion, the researcher came up with the results of the composite frequency of cohesive ties used

in the narrative and argumentative compositions written by the Malaysian and Thai students, as presented in Table 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 below (see also Appendices H and I).

Table 4.3.1

Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties Across Narrative Essays by Malaysian and Thai Students

Cohesive Devices	Malay N=14		Thai N=14		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Reference	50.07	17.70	38.73	14.15	1.94	28	.063
Conjunction	18.80	7.63	17.80	5.93	.40	28	.692
Reiteration	6.60	4.07	3.87	3.04	2.08	25.94	.047*
Collocation	6.20	2.40	5.07	2.76	1.20	28	.240
Average ties per essay	80.07	24.18	65.79	20.50	1.69	26	.104

* $P < 0.05$ calculated from the total number of cohesive ties in each essay, which were then summed and averaged across all essays in each group

Table 4.3.1 presents the mean frequency of cohesive ties used in narrative essays by Malaysian and Thai students. According to this table, it is clear that the Malaysian respondents used more cohesive devices in every instance with a mean frequency of 80.07 in each composition, which is 14.28 marks higher when compared to the Thai group with a mean of 65.79. Cohesive devices, when broken into the subcategories of reference, conjunction, reiteration and collocation, revealed that the Malaysians' average frequency in the use of reference accounted for 50.07. This was followed by conjunction (18.80), reiteration (6.60) and collocation (6.20). The Thai average frequency in the use of reference, on the other hand, was 38.73 followed by conjunction (17.80), collocation (5.07) and reiteration (3.87). Although the Malaysian used more cohesive items than the Thai group, it didn't show any significant difference between the two. However, in the category of lexicons, specifically reiteration, the Malaysian students used significantly more reiteration than the Thais at 0.05 level ($t = 2.08$, $p = .047$).

Table 4.3.2

Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties Across Argumentative Essays Written by Malaysian and Thai Students

Cohesive Devices	Malay N=14		Thai N=14		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Reference	25.87	11.04	32.87	7.45	2.035	28	.053*
Conjunction	18.60	8.29	14.06	4.12	-1.674	28	.105
Reiteration	8.13	6.95	3.20	4.54	-2.302	28	.030*
Collocation	6.47	3.82	6.60	2.90	.108	28	.915
Average ties per essay	63.25	18.93	57.71	14.05	.884	26	.385

* $P < 0.05$ calculated from the total number of cohesive ties in each essay, which were then summed and averaged across all essays in each group.

Table 4.3.2 presents the mean frequency of cohesive ties used in argumentative essays written by Malaysian and Thai students. The frequency of cohesive devices used per essay by the Malay respondents was on 63.25 and that by the Thai 57.71. Unlike in their narratives, the Thai respondents used more references (at the mean of 32.87) than the Malaysians (25.87) (see also Appendices J and K). The mean frequency of references used in essays written by these two groups proved statistically significant at .05 level ($t = 2.035$, $p = .053$). The average frequency of collocation by the Thais and the Malay's was similar. However, in the instance of reiteration, it was found that this type of cohesive ties was more frequently used in the Malaysian essays than in the Thai essays at a .05 level of significant difference ($t = -2.302$, $p = .03$).

In order to examine the frequency of cohesive ties used between high and low-rated essays, the researcher subsequently began examining the Malaysian essays and clustered the data according to *high* and *low* 27% (Hughes, 1983). Johnson (1992) in her study, referred to these two terms as "Good" and "Weak" while Neuner (1987) preferred to use the terms "Good" and "Poor." The high-rated narrative essays from the Malaysian samples had coherence analysis scores of 6 and 5. This clustered sample did not contain any level 4 essays according to Bailey's (1998) holistic scoring. The low-rated narrative essays from the Malaysian sample had coherence analysis scores of 4 and 3 according to the same scoring guide. There were no level 2 or 1 essays. The overall results are presented in Table 4.3.4.

Table 4.3.3

Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties in High and Low-Rated Narrative Essays Written by Malaysian Students

Cohesive Devices	High N=4		Low N=4		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Reference	47.50	13.70	40.50	19.23	.593	6	.575
Conjunction	17.25	5.44	15.00	8.04	.464	6	.659
Reiteration	11.00	4.90	7.50	2.38	1.29	6	.246
Collocation	5.75	2.50	7.50	2.38	-1.01	6	.350
Average ties per essay	81.50	21.49	70.50	27.30	.633	6	.550

Table 4.3.3 shows the mean frequency of cohesive ties across narrative essays written by Malaysian high and low scorers. The average cohesive ties found among the high Malaysian narrative essays were 81.50, while 70.50 were found in the low Malaysian narrative essays. Almost three-fourths of the average cohesive devices in all high and low essays were the use of reference with the mean frequency of 47.50 in high-rated and of 40.50 in low-rated essays. With reference to conjunction, the mean frequency found in high-rated essays was 17.25 while 15.00 was found in low-rated essays. In addition, the mean frequency in the use of reiteration and collocation in high-rated essays was 11.00 and 5.75; and those in low-rated essays was 7.50 and 7.50 respectively. More syntactic ties were used when compared to semantic ties in the Malaysian high-rated and low-rated essays. Even though there were some slight differences in the mean frequency of cohesive ties used by these two groups, the high-rated essays and the low-rated narrative essays of the Malaysians revealed no significant difference.

Then, the researcher examined the Thai essays and clustered the data according to “Good” and “Weak” essays as was done by Johnson (1992). The high-rated essays for the Thai sample had coherence analysis scores of 5 and 4 according to Bailey’s *Learning About Language Assessment’s* (1998) Test of Written English Scoring Guide. The Thai sample did not contain any level 6 essays. The low-rated essays for the Thai sample had coherence analysis scores of 3 and 2 according to the same scoring guide. The results are presented in Table 4.3.4 below.

Table 4.3.4

Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties in High and Low-Rated Narrative Essays Written by Thai Students

Cohesive Devices	High N=4		Low N=4		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Reference	48.00	19.58	32.50	9.57	1.42	6	.205
Conjunction	20.00	4.00	18.75	6.55	.33	6	.756
Reiteration	3.75	2.22	2.75	2.87	.55	6	.601
Collocation	5.00	2.94	5.25	2.06	-.14	6	.894
Number per essay	76.75	23.61	59.25	16.09	1.23	6	.267

Table 4.3.4 shows the mean frequency of cohesive ties in high and low-rated narrative essays written by Thai students. The two most frequently used cohesive devices in the Thai high-rated and low-rated essays were reference and conjunction (syntactic ties). The mean frequency of use of reference in the high-rated essays was 48.00, and that of conjunction was 20.00. Whereas the mean frequency of use of reference in the low-rated essays was 32.50, and that of conjunction was 18.75. The mean frequency of use of reiteration and collocation in the high-rated and low-rated essays was nearly the same (i.e. 3.75 and 2.75, and 5.00 and 5.25, respectively). A greater use of syntactic ties was found in both high-rated and low-rated essays written by Thai students in comparison with their use of semantic ties. Although the mean frequency of cohesive ties used in the high-rated and the low-rated essays was slightly different, there was no statistically significant difference at 0.05 level.

After the cohesion analysis in high and low-rated narrative essays written by Thai students, the cohesion analysis in high and low-rated argumentative essays written by the Malaysian students was conducted as shown in Table 3.4.5.

Table 4.3.5

Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties used in High and Low-Rated Argumentative Essays Written by Malaysian Students

Cohesive Devices	High N=4		Low N=4		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Reference	29.00	5.60	21.75	5.25	1.690	6	.142
Conjunction	19.50	7.94	15.75	5.25	1.690	5.87	.143
Reiteration	12.25	6.02	7.50	7.60	.980	6	.365
Collocation	5.75	2.75	5.50	2.89	.125	6	.904
Number per essay	66.50	12.61	50.50	15.16	1.623	6	.156

From the data reported in Table 4.3.5, a greater use of syntactic ties (reference and conjunction) was found in the high-rated essays than in the low-rated essays written by the Malaysian group. The Malaysian high-rated essays' use of reference was at the highest frequency of 29.00 followed by their use of conjunction (19.50). With regard to low-rated essays, the average frequency of reference accounted for 21.75 and the use of conjunction for 15.75. In terms of semantic ties (reiteration and collocation), the use of reiteration and collocation in high-rated argumentative essays written by the Malaysian respondents was 12.25 and 5.75, respectively. The use of reiteration and collocation in low-rated essays written by this group was 7.50 and 5.50, respectively. The average frequency of the high-rated group was higher in each case than the low-rated group, yet this difference revealed no statistical significance. It may be concluded that the frequency of use of cohesive items in the argumentative essays written by the Malaysians had no relationship with the coherence or quality of their essays.

Next, the researcher analyzed the cohesive ties used in the high and the low-rated argumentative essays written by Thai students. The results are presented in Table 4.3.6.

Table 4.3.6

Mean Frequency of Cohesive Ties in High and Low-Rated Argumentative Essays Written by Thai Students

Cohesive Devices	High N=4		Low N=4		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.			
Reference	37.75	7.50	28.75	4.03	2.114	6	.079
Conjunction	14.25	5.50	15.25	3.30	-.312	6	.766
Reiteration	5.75	5.50	1.25	2.50	1.490	6	.187
Collocation	6.75	3.30	6.25	4.35	.183	6	.861
Number per essay	62.00	20.54	51.50	7.37	.962	6	.373

As shown in Table 4.3.6, the mean frequency of cohesive devices used in the high and low-rated essays written by the Thai respondents was 62.00 and 51.50, respectively. The mean frequency of reference used in the high-rated essays written by the Thai respondents accounted for 37.75. This was followed by the use of conjunction (14.25), collocation (6.75), and reiteration (5.75), respectively. In low-rated essays, conjunction and collocation were used almost as frequently as in the

high-rated essays, which were 15.25 and 14.25 of conjunction; and 6.25 and 6.75 of collocation, respectively. Nevertheless, the Thai low-rated essays contained only 28.75 on the average of reference use and only 1.25 on the average use of reiteration. Therefore, the high-rated essay writers used reference and reiteration more than the low-rated essay writers. However, there was no statistically significant difference at a .05 level in the use of cohesive ties between these two groups.

4.4 Discussion of Results

As stated in Chapter 1, there are three purposes of the present study. First, it seeks to find the type and frequency of cohesive devices in essays written by Malaysian and Thai students. Second, it attempts to identify what types of cohesive devices are most prominent in essays written by Malaysian and Thai students and then identify the similarities and differences in the types and frequency of cohesion and coherence used in these two groups of students. Third, the present study tries to investigate if there is a relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and the writing quality. Based upon these aims the findings of the study were discussed as follows.

4.4.1 A Comparison of Types and Frequency of Cohesive Devices in Essays Written by Malaysian and Thai Students

The results showed that cohesive devices used in the narrative and argumentative essays written by the Malaysians contained references the most, followed by the use of conjunctions, reiterations and collocations respectively. This was also the case found in the narrative and argumentative essays written by the Thai respondents. There are some similarities and differences in the frequency of cohesive devices used by the Malaysian and the Thai respondents.

The Malaysian and Thai groups shared similarities in the use of four categories of cohesive ties: high use of references, medium use of conjunctions and low use of reiterations and collocations. Hence, this similar patterns in the use of cohesive devices in English essays written by the Malaysian and the Thai respondents is

consistent with Indrasuta's (1988b) study which found that when American and Thai students wrote essays in English, they used reference the most, followed by conjunction, reiteration and collocation, respectively. The similarities in the use of cohesive devices in both cases might be because the native speakers of the two language groups (Malay & Thai) share some patterns of use of devices for unifying their texts cohesively. The results of this study also suggested that both Malaysian and Thai respondents used more cohesive devices in the narrative mode than in the argumentative mode. Moreover, the use of references and conjunctions in their narratives and argumentative essays was above the use of reiterations and collocations. It is reasonable to say that it was the nature of the narrative conventions which required the writers to use sufficient cohesive elements in order to make their texts (plot/story) coherent (Nicholas and Nicholl, 2000).

The Malaysian respondents differed from the Thai respondents in their use of cohesive devices in three ways. One was that the Malaysians used more devices in their narrative essays and fewer in their argumentative essays when compared to the Thais. The other difference was that the Malaysian's use of reiteration through repetition of the same word and the use of synonyms was significantly higher than the Thai's in both narrative and argumentative essays. Therefore, it is worth saying that the only characteristics which can differentiate the essays written by the Malaysians and the Thais was the use of reiteration. One possible explanation would be that the Thai students did not realize the importance of reiteration, i.e. that it connects parts of their writing. This might be due to the fact that they were not properly taught in their early education. This was evident that, the Thai were able to write an argumentative essay after the treatment. Last, the Malaysians differed from the Thais in their use of references. This is true when we take a closer look at the Thai use of references in their argumentative essays which was much higher than the number of references used in the Malaysian argumentative essays. This finding was consistent with the study investigated by Indrasuta (1988b) who found that Thai students used "I" as a reference at a high frequency and had a minimal use of lexical ties in their narrative writing. This is because Thai students used their personal experiences to support their arguments as seen in the following example, when one of the Thai respondents herein wrote:

“Most of foods from restaurant are bizarred. I can select different kind of foods everyday. Having food prepared at home is make me tired and bored. Cooking make my kitchen dirty” (Sample 8).

From the excerpt above, the recurrent personal pronouns appears in the sentences. Thus the study indicated that the Thai respondents tended to write about what really happened in their lives. According to Indrasuta’s (1988b) findings, the Thai students perceived narratives as the vehicle for exposition and instruction. They didn’t create the story to entertain the readers, but to instruct. It is more likely that their perceptions on narrative writing might influence the way they write arguments as well because they had less experience in producing an argumentative essay. This is in contrast with English students from other countries of the world. For example, American students said that they wrote stories in order to entertain the readers. They were not interested in whether or not the story really happened (Indrasuta, 1988b). In contrast, this study indicated that Thai students wrote their true stories.

4.4.2 Cohesion and Coherence Characteristics in the Malaysian and Thai Essays

According to Kaplan (as cited in Takala, Purves and Buckmaster, 1982), writers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds organize discourse differently as a reflection of their native language and culture as explained in the first chapter. So, the cultural convention of the Malaysian and the Thai respondents which was transferred to their narrative and argumentative essays can be referred to as collectivist one. This means that one culture is interdependent within members of a group (Wu and Rubin, 2000). For example, one Malaysian student wrote: *“Fortunately, I have a group of close friends who continuous give me moral support and help me through the hard times”* (sample 3).

And one Thai student wrote: *“I felt depressed many times but I didn’t give up because I always got encouraging words from my mom, my dad, my friends and my senior as well”* (sample 3).

So, here the writer believes in the effect of one's actions upon his/her success in life and feels that individuals see themselves as an inseparable part of a group and are expected to work towards the group goal. Moreover, the actors "close friends," "mom," "dad," etc., express other-oriented and caring attitudes. Hence, the meaning of one's life depends so much on one's contribution to society (Wu and Rubin, 2000). This was also found in the study conducted by Littlewood (1999). Littlewood pointed out that people in East Asian countries showed a much stronger collectivist orientation than people in Western countries.

Besides, the Malaysian students' first language convention which was transferred into their essay writings was positive. It is important to note that the Malay language shares common norms in sentence-structure writing with English as well as a common alphabet. So, the Malaysians did not have many problems with punctuation marks, in contrast to the Thais. As for the Thai respondents, the interference of their first language cultural conventions in their narrative and argumentative writings appeared when the structural organization of their English texts were similar to those written in their first language. This was evident in their writing of run-on sentences and lack of sentence and paragraph divisions. This is because, according to Thai linguistic convention, the writer is not required to show any breaks or punctuation in the writing process.

4.4.3 Cohesion and Writing Quality

When the Malaysian and the Thai groups were clustered into high and low 27%, a technique as suggested by Hughes (1983), and were then independently analyzed, the results revealed that there was no relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and the writing quality of the Malaysian, as well as, of the Thai essays. The researcher was surprised to learn that this finding was in accordance with the study conducted by Johnson (1992) which found that there was no significant difference in the number of cohesive devices used between the "Good" and the "Weak" English compositions written by Malaysian students.

However, it is rather illegitimate to make a strong generalization from the analysis of the data herein as the sample size implemented in this study was small.

Nonetheless, the general findings of this study imply that cohesive ties are not the distinguishing features of high-rated and low-rated essays. This lack of distinction in the use of cohesive devices between the good and poor essays encourages the researcher to make three points of discussion.

First, the findings seem to support the theoretical distinction between cohesion and coherence in written discourse as characterized by Lautamatti (1990) and Yule (1996). According to Lautamatti, the lack of difference in terms of cohesive devices used in narrative and argumentative essays rated as high and low written by the Malaysians suggests that it is the coherence patterns or textual organization of the essays that characterize quality. Lautamatti didn't agree with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) definition of cohesion (ties & connections) as a crucial factor in determining whether a text is well written or not. Halliday and Hasan proposed that if there is cohesion in a text, there is coherence. Lautamatti argued that a text may contain a lot of connections between sentences but remains difficult to interpret. For example, the excessive use of connections in the text which follows shows no coherence, "*My father has a big house in the city. The city is very famous for art. The sculpture on the wall is very beautiful. The wall was painted in red. He doesn't like the colour.*"

Therefore, essays full of connections but lacking in communicative clarity fail to reach coherence. This indicates that the low-rated essay writers might apply the cohesive devices inappropriately or might have trouble in organizing ideas.

In contrast to Halliday and Hasan (1976), Yule proposed that there are types of discourse which show no overt cohesion yet are still coherent as shown below:

A: That's the telephone.

B: I'm in the bath.

C: OK.

(Widdowson, 1978; quoted in Yule, 1996).

In the above example, A informed B that the telephone was ringing. But B told the reason why he couldn't pick up the phone, and also wanted another person to pick it up for him. The communication was successful when the interlocutors were able to follow what had been said by each of them. They must share some characteristics so that they can make sense of the communication. Therefore, this study confirms that it was not because of cohesion that the writing failed to achieve

coherence but because of the failure in the interaction between the interlocutors or in this study, between the writers and the readers.

As for the factors of idea, grammar and structural organization as having crucial roles in writing production, the two sample groups identified idea as the most important factor in writing. This was consistent with the theory of writing production described by Scardamalia, Bereiter and Goeiman (1982) who explained that when writing a composition, there is an interaction between the writer's knowledge-generation including ideas, goals, plans, strategies and task-related knowledge, and the physical process of transcription (syntactic and semantic choices). Scardamalia, et. al. added that this involves the mental processes of the writer as planned ideas or words must be held in the mind while the transcription goes on. The success or failure of writing must depend on this process. In other words, if the right ideas were planned and were correctly transcribed then the writing would be successful. Despite this realization about the factor of *idea* as the most important in writing, the findings showed that the linguistic choices (cohesion) of both the Malaysian and the Thai respondents didn't differentiate between good and poor writers. Therefore, we may infer that something went wrong during their production process. This might be because of their lack of right ideas with clear goals, plans, strategies, or they might have had the right ideas in their minds but had trouble expressing them out linguistically. This deserves to be reconsidered when teaching writing.

Third, the findings of a lack of cohesion difference between the high and the low-rated narrative and argumentative essays written by the Malaysians and the Thais also support Chomsky's theory (1965) of linguistic competence and performance and the theory of Hyme's communicative competence (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 1997). Chomsky separates the idealized psychological and mental capacity (competence) from the production of actual utterances (performance). Hyme, on the other hand, viewed language in a broader sense, as a social whole, and introduced the concept of communicative competence. According to Hyme, there are four strategies in order to have successful communication, namely, grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Therefore, the situation of this study where in the low-rated essays used cohesive devices at almost the same rate as in high-rated essays but failed to achieve textual coherence, seems to

imply that students may have linguistic competence but lack the right performance or communicative competence as described earlier.