ABSTRACT

Coherence and cohesion are two major sense-making aspects of a text that largely affect its quality. Without cohesion and coherence, the text is simply incomprehensible. There are certain devices in the text that join the sentences and interweave the ideas and give a sense of connectedness and unity to the readers. Some of these features are syntactic and some are semantic. The syntactic features include reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. The semantic features include lexical cohesive devices such as collocation and reiteration.

The proper use and distribution of these cohesive devices play a vital role in the quality of a text. Overuse, underuse or misuse of these devices can degrade text quality. For instance, using too many pronouns can lead to the ambiguity and difficulty of the text or using too many sentence connectors can give the false impression of coherence of the text and signaling wrong coherence relations among the ideas. It has been found out that ESI and EFL writers overuse or underuse certain discourse makers. The use and the distribution of these cohesive elements in the learners’ compositions largely depend on the learners’ proficiency level, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate possible differences between Iranian EFL and Indian ESL students’ essays regarding their use of cohesive devices. Using a web-based software, the researcher analyzed 179 essays written by Iranian EFL and Indian ESL students. The results demonstrated that the Iranian students’ essays contained significantly more explicit cohesive devices such as personal references and connectives (particularly additive, temporal, and causal connectives). Moreover, there were significantly more semantic and conceptual similarity (LSA) as well as coreferential and lexical features such as the overlap of arguments (reiteration of nouns and pronouns) and content words. The Indian students made more frequent use of definite article the in their essays.

Iranian and Indian students also differed in the number of the topical progression patterns in their paragraphs. Indian students preferred to use more parallel and extended parallel progressions, and Iranian students, on the other hand, used more sequential progressions. As far as the Persian English students are concerned, some of these differences could be attributed to the students’ low proficiency level of English and some to their mother tongue background.