

# Exploring Patterns of Cohesion in Class Presentations by Native Speakers of English

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**Abstract** Some English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners avoid speaking and do not participate in class presentations because they are afraid of not being cohesive in speaking. In coping with such a problem, some crucial solutions of using the patterns of cohesion in speaking are required to teach the learners of English how to be cohesive in speaking. An appropriate task in this regard was studying and analyzing native contexts. The interpretation could be taken from exploring some class presentations that occur in an English native context. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the cohesive patterns used by native speakers of English in 8 class presentations which are taken from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). The analysis began with the collection of the data, which is the transcription of the class presentations. Then, the patterns of cohesion- reference, conjunction, ellipsis and substitution- were identified. After tabulating the findings, they were discussed to see how native speakers of English use these patterns of cohesion in making their speaking more textual in interaction. The findings showed that the native speakers of English in class presentations frequently used reference, conjunctions, and ellipsis, and they rarely used substitutions in the class presentations. The findings could be taken out to act as a model to guide EFL students to use these patterns to be more cohesive in their class presentations.

**Keywords** Cohesion, Patterns of cohesion, Class presentation, Native speakers, EFL learners

## 1. Introduction

In the study of grammatical and lexical devices that form cohesive relations between sentences and elements in sentences, the notion of cohesion is an area of language in which grammar and discourse are highly integrated, and it plays a very important role in interaction between people through both written and spoken texts [1]. To produce language successfully, writers and speakers should be aware of textuality in production, and one of the most important folds in this regard is the cohesion, because it makes sense in understanding and positive feedback in interaction [2]. When analyzing utterances, it is not enough to only describe its structure; it is necessary to approach it with respect to the actual communication situation. According to cohesion which belongs to the standards of textuality, spoken and written discourses display grammatical connections between individual clauses and utterances [3]. The present study intends to investigate how English native speakers use the patterns of cohesion in their interaction, and how they make textuality in speaking. To this end, the current study analyzed the language produced by English native students in class presentations.

Even though many studies (e.g. [4, 5, 6, & 7]) have been done in the area of cohesive devices in written discourse, studying the patterns of cohesion in spoken discourse received little attention. Thus, it is important to develop an investigation of cohesion in spoken discourse. This importance becomes more vital when it comes to the difficulty that non native learners, especially Iranian EFL learners, may have in the use of cohesive patterns in their class presentations. Thus, this study aims to investigate the cohesive patterns used by native speakers of English in class presentations. Therefore, it reflects on the following questions:

1. What are the most frequently used cohesive patterns by native speakers of English in class presentations?
2. How are the patterns of cohesion manifested in the class presentations?
3. How can the investigation of these patterns contribute to the similar EFL class presentations?

One of the biggest problems in class presentations is the fear of not being cohesive in speaking. For this reason, some EFL learners avoid speaking and do not participate in class presentations. In coping with such a situation, a model is required to use the patterns of cohesion in speaking to teach the learners how to make textuality in speaking. An appropriate task in this regard is taking a useful model from native contexts. This model can be taken from exploring some class presentations that occur in an English native context.

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## 2. Literature Review

In recent years, considerably a lot of works have focused on investigating cohesion [4-7]. Korani [4] studied the use of lexical cohesion in history books of grades 2 and 3 in junior high schools in Iran. Her study, though useful for those interested in written text analysis, might help very little in fostering our understanding of spoken discourse. Struthers *et al.* [5] also developed and evaluated a checklist designed to assess the types of cohesive devices present in the writing of children. A large-scale research project investigated the use of English in the documents of the European Union (EU) [6]. The documents of the EU showed various features of texts written for legal, business and other specific purposes. The aim of the study was to examine the use of conjunctions in EU documents in English. Conjunctions are used to express logical relations within the text, and their use can influence how a text is interpreted to a considerable extent.

The majority of the studies dealing with learner language have concentrated on the learner's production data at the sentence level. This is in keeping with the general interest expressed by theoretical linguists in sentence grammar [8]. Some linguists have shifted their focus of attention away from analyzing sentence structure towards analyzing the process by which language is utilized by human beings; thus, it is very necessary to explore the spoken discourse that has been introduced as legitimate units of linguistic analysis beyond the sentence level [9]. It is worth mentioning that speaking is the most difficult skill in EFL contexts and one of the main reasons that most EFL students do not participate in classroom presentations is that they cannot speak cohesively. Moreover, it is very important to explore how native speakers use the patterns of cohesion to be more cohesive in interaction and to show the contribution of cohesion in textuality.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Corpus

This study relies on a corpus of eight class presentations performed native speakers of English extracted from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). The class presentations occurred in an English language institute in the University of Michigan.

### 3.2. The Framework

Cohesion is the grammatical and/or lexical relationships between the different elements of a text. This may be the relationship between different sentences or between different parts of a sentence [10]. An area of language in which grammar and discourse are highly integrated is in patterns of cohesion [2]. The main patterns of cohesion, which were traced in the corpus of this study, are references, conjunctions, ellipsis and substitution. The particulars of these patterns are discussed below:

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the class presentations

| Presentation | Words        | Time <sub>min</sub> | Students   | Speakers   |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|------------|------------|
| 1            | 9791         | 69                  | 20         | 12         |
| 2            | 3317         | 29                  | 7          | 6          |
| 3            | 12354        | 72                  | 17         | 11         |
| 4            | 6575         | 51                  | 40         | 18         |
| 5            | 5264         | 32                  | 20         | 15         |
| 6            | 9282         | 66                  | 17         | 13         |
| 7            | 10585        | 66                  | 30         | 26         |
| 8            | 5241         | 32                  | 8          | 5          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>62409</b> | <b>417</b>          | <b>159</b> | <b>106</b> |

#### 3.2.1. Reference

Reference refers to the situation where the identity of an item can be retrieved from either within or outside the text. Reference is the most identified cohesive device in early studies of cohesion; however, Halliday and Hassan [1] include a variety of other patterns in their taxonomy of cohesive devices. In addition to pronouns, they list the use of the specific determiner to be added as a reference.

- (1) *When **she** arrived, Rose noticed that the door was open.*
- (2) *I went out with Albert. **He** looked awful.*

#### 3.2.2. Conjunction

Another way in which language contributes to the texture of a text is through the use of conjunction. Conjunction refers to words, such as 'and', 'or', 'however', 'in addition', 'whereas', 'but', 'while', 'when', 'after', 'then', 'finally', 'so that', 'because', 'since', 'thus', 'if', 'therefore', etc, that join phrases, clauses or sections of a text in such a way that they express the logical-semantic relationship between them [10]. It is somewhat different from reference, ellipsis and substitution. A conjunction does not set off a search backward or forward for its referent, but it does presuppose a textual sequence, and signals a relationship between segments of the discourse [3].

#### 3.2.3. Ellipsis

Ellipsis is another cohesive device, which is the omission of elements normally required by the grammar which the speaker /write assumes are obvious from the context and therefore need not be raised. It happens when, after a more specific mention, words are omitted when the phrase needs to be repeated. English has broadly three types of ellipsis, nominal, verbal, and clausal [3].

- (3) *Sarah liked the green tiles; myself I preferred the blue [tiles].*
- (4) *A: Will anyone be waiting?  
B: Nickel will [waiting], I should think.  
A: You might **do it**, but I won't*

#### 3.2.4. Substitution

With substitution, a substitute form is used for another

language item, phrase or group. In this view, an expression may simply be replaced by another in the text [11]. In other words, in substitution a word is not omitted, as ellipsis, but is substituted for another, more general word. It can involve substituting an item for a noun. In the following example, 'one' substitutes for the noun 'book':

- (5) *I offered him a seat. He said he didn't want one.*  
 (6) *Try reading this book. That one is not very good.*

### 3.3. Procedure

The procedures applied in this study began with the collection of the data, consisting of eight class presentations available by MICASE. To facilitate the process of analysis, the collected data (e.i. the transcriptions of the class presentations) were converted to micro soft word format, and then the cohesive devices, that of references, conjunctions, ellipsis and substitutions were identified. To mitigate the threat to reliability in the analysis, three class presentations from the corpus were also analyzed by an experienced researcher in Applied Linguistics, and any disagreement in this regard was subjected to discussion. Afterwards, the findings are tabulated and discussed to see how native speakers of English use these patterns of cohesion in making their speaking more cohesive in interaction.

## 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of data analysis are presented and discussed. The presentations of the results and discussion are based on the frequency of the used cohesive patterns from the highest to the lowest. To have a clear plot of the results, Table 2 displays the overall results.

**Table 2.** Frequency and percentage of the patterns of cohesion used by native speakers of English in class Presentations

| Pattern of cohesion | Frequency    | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------|------------|
| Reference           | 8639         | 54.7       |
| Conjunction         | 4820         | 30.5       |
| Ellipsis            | 2117         | 13.4       |
| Substitution        | 225          | 1.4        |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>15801</b> | <b>100</b> |

### 4.1. Reference

It can be seen from the data in the Table 2 that the most frequent pattern of cohesion is the reference. The considerable use of the references compared to other cohesive devices could be discussed on the ground that reference takes the position of the grammatical subject and object in the sentence. These positions are obligatory parts of English sentence structure. One reason for the wide use of reference is the avoidance of repetition of some items in speaking to skip pauses and to improve the fluency in interaction. Another reason behind the great use of reference is the context of interaction in which the demonstrative pronouns e.g. 'that' and 'this' proceeding nouns are used in a

wide range by the native speakers in the class presentations, and they take the role of references. The other reason for the extensive use of reference could be the widespread use of the article 'the' which takes the role of reference. The larger use of references could highlight that EFL learners must be aware of the importance of referring to the context when they are speaking, pointing at the items through the use of reference in spoken discourse. There is a greater sense of interaction as references include personal pronouns. We need to make the EFL learners aware that the use of references not only makes their speech more textual or cohesive, but also it could help in catching the attention of listeners and also make sure that they are following their speech as they have to connect the reference items to the antecedent to get the meaning.

### 4.2. Conjunction

The second more frequent pattern of cohesion is the variety of conjunctions (see the Table 1). This variety helps the speakers to be more cohesive and fluent in speaking, and by using connecting words, they can avoid unwilling pauses to make more sense in interaction. The use of conjunction as a frequent pattern of cohesion could clarify that EFL learners need to make compound, complex, and compound – complex sentences while they are speaking or presenting items in class to be more cohesive in making texture. This could help other students to keep the track between the presented items. In EFL context, most students prefer to use simple sentences to guarantee the grammar correctness of their sentences. EFL learners could be reminded that the use of conjunctions creates not only syntactic relationships between the information, but also semantic information. Therefore, they are used more in the speech. Thus, we need to make the EFL learners to use the appropriate conjunctions in connecting the information to make their speech textual and carry out more meaning for the listener. This could help to come over the time limit in class presentations, as well as helping the listeners to get the relationship between ideas in the term of better comprehension.

### 4.3. Ellipsis and Substitution

According to the data analysis, the presenters used ellipsis unconsciously to avoid some unnecessary words to be brief and useful in speaking as well as saving time. By the use of ellipsis, the native speakers of English only used the information or those words that are necessary to transfer the meaning in interaction. The use of ellipsis could highlight the importance of being brief in speaking. It seems that EFL learners need to be aware that there is a difference between spoken discourse and written discourse. In the former, there is a context and the speakers may drop and delete unnecessary information that could be retrieved from the context. Therefore, in the later, the ellipsis could be used less, because the writer needs to mention all the points as s/he is absent when the reader is reading. Such a difference when notified by EFL learners could help them to be brave enough

to drop and delete unnecessary and redundant information as well as being brief while speaking. It seems that we need to inform EFL learners that there is no need to present or state all the information word by word; and they could delete some items as the listener could recover them from the context. Such a consciousness might be very helpful to save time in presentations as EFL presenters insist on presenting all the information even if they could easily retrieved from the context.

The results show that the less used pattern of cohesion by native speakers of English in the class presentations was the substitution. It made only 1% of the total number of used patterns of cohesion. The speakers rarely used substitutions in the class presentation and they often preferred to use the reference items. With substitution, the EFL learners could use some particular items instead of some other items to carry out the intended meaning for the sake of easy interpretation and comprehension in the listener side. In addition, the use of this cohesive pattern helps to give variety to their speech to be less boring in a class presentation when it is long.

## 5. Conclusions and Implications

The aim of this study was to find out the patterns of cohesion used by native speakers of English in class presentations. The data analysis indicated that different patterns of cohesion (reference, conjunction, ellipsis, and substitution) are used by native speakers of English in the class presentations. The analysis showed that the use of the patterns of cohesion helps the speakers to be more cohesive, and they enhance connectivity between ideas in speaking. The results also suggested that our understanding of how texts are created and interpreted would be much poorer without the concept of cohesiveness and textuality of the text in the class presentations. In the class presentations, the textuality helped guide the listeners through the logical paths constructed by the speaker. If little attention is paid to this, the speaker's attempt to help listeners to comprehend the text will be destroyed.

The results of the present study will benefit the Iranian EFL students and English language instructors in general and English language students in class presentations in particular. The use of cohesive patterns can help students to be trained in the way that they create cohesive speech. They should be aware that if they want to convey information effectively and successfully and to speak cohesively, a focus on the use of the patterns of cohesion is very important and has an immediate result in teaching speaking. If students become aware of how to arrange the information in the presentation, they would be able to make textuality in speaking. Teachers need to look beyond the traditional grammar of the clause and simple sentences when teaching speaking, and teach students how to connect their sentences, and produce cohesive texts [12].

### 5.1. Limitations

1. This study investigated the patterns of cohesion that of reference, conjunction, ellipsis, and substitution; however, it did not mention all the patterns of cohesion, and the exploration of lexical cohesion is absent.
2. Another limitation in this study was the number of class presentations because we might reach better results if there were more variety and a larger number of class presentations.
3. Since the researcher of this study is not a native speaker of English, it makes some limitations in finding the exact reason for the use of some patterns of cohesion by native speakers of English in class presentations.

### 5.2. Suggestions for Further Studies

The results of this study which aimed to find the patterns of cohesion used by native speakers of English in class presentations can illuminate a number of areas for further research:

1. This study investigated the patterns of cohesion that of reference, conjunction, ellipsis, and substitution; it is also possible to investigate other patterns like lexical cohesion in the class presentations.
2. The number of class presentations can be increased to reach better results by a large variety and a larger number of class presentations.
3. These class presentations also can be compared to non-native speakers' class presentations.

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