AN ANALYSIS OF CHINESE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN IELTS ACADEMIC WRITING (TASK 2)

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the cohesion and coherence problems in EFL essay writing in terms of the second part of IELTS academic writing task. There are fifteen sample articles written by fifteen Chinese students who studied in BJ IELTS School in Beijing. These texts consist of 3 levels : band 5, band 6 and band 7 and the articles have an equal number in each level. The selected data were analyzed with Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework.

The result of the study revealed that there were five major types of cohesive devices in these writings. It involved reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion. In terms of the frequencies of occurrences, reference was the highest, followed by conjunction and lexical cohesion, while substitution was the lowest among the five types of cohesive devices in the three levels. There were few ellipses appearing in the data.

Moreover, the study highlights some of the cohesive problems found in writing. Those problems were misused, overused and mechanical use of conjunctions and reference, and lack of substitution devices due to a large number of repetitions appearing, as well as some cohesive problems were influenced by grammatical mistakes and inappropriate task response.

The study suggests that EFL teachers and students should foreground the importance of cohesion and coherence in their text. In addition, they should not overemphasize the quantity of cohesion used but also focus on other factors such as task response, lexical resource and grammatical features.

Keywords: cohesion, coherence, reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, lexical cohesion, IELTS academic writing.

Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese people study abroad. All of them are required to provide an English achievement score according to the English language proficiency requirements before they begin their studies. The International English language Testing System (IELTS) is one of specific testing systems which are designed to assess the English language ability of candidates who are non-English speakers. The IELTS results are widely accepted by most of the English speaking countries. There are two formats of the test, including academic and general training. The academic purpose of IELTS is to measure the English language proficiency of international students who want to study in English speaking countries, universities and schools. Most of the candidates appear for the IELTS (A: academic) to study overseas.

It covers four basic language skills which are listening, reading, speaking and academic writing. For the IELTS academic writing test, the candidates are allowed one hour to complete two tasks. In writing Task 2, they are required to write at least 250 words in a formal and academic style within 40 minutes. Candidates are given a topic to discuss or analyze. Some tasks may require them to discuss an opinion, problem or issue. They may be asked to give solutions to problems, present and justify an opinion, compare and contrast evidence or opinions, or evaluate and challenge an argument or idea. Examiners assess the answers according to four criteria which include task response, coherence and cohesion , lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy.

Weigle (2002:5) states that writing is an essential part of the curriculum in schools from the earliest grade to the university level. Particularly, English academic writing is essential for university students and many universities require a high score of IELTS (A) writing. Consequently, academic writing ability in L2 plays an important role in every undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral overseas student's learning. Those who want to study abroad practice academic writing in order to succeed in IELTS (A) writing test.

However, the majority of the students, especially, EFL students do not know how to improve their skills even though they have realized the importance of English writing. Also, English education in China pays more attention to vocabulary, grammar and memorization. It is reported that the average score of Chinese IELTS academic writing is still behind many Asian countries even though they have a large vocabulary, good grammar foundation and they work hard on academic writing. Moreover, the majority of the Chinese students who have been accepted by universities in English speaking countries can get a high score on the IELTS, but their English performance ability especially in academic writing are not particularly good. Their low language proficiency and poor research is evident after they go overseas even if they had performed well on the IELTS.

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), the writing process is necessary for being a successful writer in a second or foreign language is the ability to express ideas with reasonable coherence and accuracy. In addition, cohesion is important factors that can help EFL develop their writing skills. As stated by Alonso and McCabe (2003), English as Second Language (ESL) students often write essays consisting of sentences that do not seem to connect into a cohesive text. Part of the problem seems to be the issue of cohesion and coherence playing an essential role in the IELTS academic writing task 2 as it covers cohesive devices, information and idea origination and paragraphing.

It is also necessary for the students to know the way clauses join in order to provide a logical sequence to their discourse and know how to use linguistic devices to produce a good piece of coherent text. In order to make cohesive writing in the IELTS academic writing test, Chinese candidates are faced with numerous writing barriers and strategic choices in their writing which involves how to skillfully fuse their scattered and independent ideas into a cohesive whole within a short time. The students need to be taught and trained before the examination to make sure that they are aware of how a cohesive and coherent article is constructed.

Research questions

(1) What is the frequency of each type of cohesive devices found in sample writings?

(2) What are the problems of Chinese IELTS candidates in the second part of an academic writing task from band 5 to band 7 in terms of cohesion and coherence?

Literature Review

Definition and main purpose of academic writing

Milanovic claims that academic writing, particularly by non-native speakers of English, but increasingly even by native speakers, has come under attention from university faculty. (Milanovic, 1993) Academic writing is a kind of writing that the students are required to do in college or university.

According to Bailey (2011), "writers should be clear why they are writing. The most common purpose for writing include:(1) to report on a piece of research the writer has conducted (2) to answer a question the writer has been given or chosen (3) to discuss a subject of common interest and give the writer's view (4) to synthesize research done by others on a topic." Another purpose pointed out by Weigle (2002), is that the main goal of academic writing, especially at the university level, is to train students "to produce writing under timed conditions in their academic courses, and thus it is essential for them to be able to organize, write, and edit a composition in a relatively short amount of time" (Weigle, 2002.).

Academic writing allows the writer to speak on a particular topic from an authoritative point of view by first consulting existing source material on the topic. Academic writing addresses topics of interest to the academic community. The objective of academic writing is a clear explication of what is currently known about a given topic as the foundation for new views on the topic which the author is presenting.

Main Features of Academic Writing

It is important for student writers to be familiar with certain genres in the writing process. As Foley (2011:218) said, certain types of texts (Genres) or ways of writing within a community are more powerful than others. There

are different kinds of categories according to different books that are related to academic writing and the features serve as some general conventions of academic language. There are three main features of academic writing that make it differ from other genres of writing.

First, academic writing style is formal that is, according to Jordan (1997),'objective' not 'subjective' and 'formal' rather than 'colloquial'. In academic writing, personal pronouns will be rarely used. Fairclough (1989) claims that formality is a common property in many societies and it is also a part of the discourse of high social prestige. It is a contributory factor in keeping access restricted, for it makes demands on participants above and beyond those of most discourse, and the ability to meet those demands is itself unevenly distributed. It can also serve to generate awe among those who are excluded by it and daunted by it. Therefore, formality is the most notable feature of academic writing. It can have a critical impact not only on how easy the text is to read, but also on the way readers perceive their relationship with the writer. Swales and Feak (1994) also claims that NNS (non-native speaker) writers need to maintain objectivity in their writing focus on the appropriate use of pronouns, impersonal passive, and hedged. In other words, if the author mixes personal or subjective ideas, the academic paper may inform some incorrect ideas.

Second, according to Foley (2011:80), 'Tense' shows the time of the action or state (aspect) in relation to the time when the writer is writing. He also stated that texts (written) could be grouped together into types and texts belonging to a certain type will share common language features because they share a common purpose (Foley, 2011:6). Therefore, verb tenses are used consistently in academic writing. One tense is employed continuously throughout the writing. For example, the past tense should be used in explaining facts such as the purpose of a study, or the findings.

The last characteristic of academic writing is passive sentence construction. Foley (2011:89) also pointed out a passive verb group is used if the subject is not the actor (the one who does something), but rather the "object" that something happen to. Thus, it is frequently found that academic writing consists of a relatively large number of passive constructions.

Studies of Cohesion in English

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the concept of cohesion deals with relations of elements within discourse. The relations are realized by cohesive devices, which are classified on the basis of their functions. Cohesive devices are divided into five main groups. The following is an outline of the five classifications of cohesion in English: substitution, ellipsis, reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion

1. **Substitution** is the replacement of one element with another which is not a personal pronoun. Substitution can be classified into three sub classes: nominal, verbal, and clausal. It is coded as S.

2. **Ellipsis** is the omission of a word, phrase or clause. The omission is possible if we can assume the meaning from the context. Ellipses can be classified into three sub classes such as nominal, verbal and clausal. It is coded as E.

3. **Reference** is the item that points to another element for its interpretation. References can be classified into three sub classes: pronominal, demonstrative and comparative references. It is coded as R.

4. **Conjunction** is the element that shows us a certain meaning which presupposes the presence of another component in the discourse. Conjunctions can be classified into five subclasses: additive, adversative, causal, temporal, and continuative. It is coded as C.

5. **Lexical Cohesion** refers to the use of a phrase or lexical items related in the same way to those in the earlier part of the text. Lexical cohesion can be classified into two groups: reiteration and collocation. It is coded as L.

Table 1   Coding of Cohesive Categories

Type of Cohesion	Coding
Reference	R
-Pronominal reference	R1
-Demonstrative reference	R2
-Comparative reference	R3
Substitution	S

-Nominal substitution	SI
-Verbal substitution	S2
-Clausal substitution	S3
Ellipsis （φ）	**E**
-Nominal ellipsis	EI
-Verbal ellipsis	E2
-Clausal ellipsis	E3
Conjunction	**C**
-Additive conjunction	CI
-Adversative conjunction	C2
-Causal conjunction	C3
-Temporal conjunction	C4
-Continuative conjunction	C5
Lexical cohesion	**L**
-Repetition	LI
-Synonym/near synonym	L2
-Super-ordinate	L3
-General word	L4
-Collocation	L5

Methodology and Paticipants

Description of the Research Context

There are many English language institutions in Beijing. These schools can give what normal Chinese schools in terms of English cannot offer: small classes, native- speaker teachers, conversation-based teaching methods, professional teachers and flexible timetables. The school that the researcher chose for this study is BJ IELTS School which is a famous school for professional IELTS training in Beijing. This institution provides students with various training courses in terms of listening, reading, speaking, especially writing to improve their English language proficiency. The majority of their target learners are Chinese students who are preparing for IELTS examination. For the training course of IELTS academic writing, this school sets a series of writing courses for learners such as four-week classes, eight-week classes, VIP course and so on.

Description of the Population

The study has 15 writings selected from the exercise of 15 different Chinese IELTS candidates who have undertaken an eight-week specific writing training in BJ IELTS School. All of them plan to appear for the IELTS and wish to pursue a master's degree course in English speaking countries.

Research Design

This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative research approaches for data collection and analysis. The 15 sample answers from Chinese IELTS candidates have been chosen and the researcher look at the aspects of cohesion and coherence discussed earlier.

Method of Data Collection

In the eight-week training course, the participants are required to complete an exercise within 40 minutes in the class. The writing sub tests come from the book of Cambridge IELTS and model writing exams. The data are selected from all the exercises that involved 15 sample writings from band 5 to band 7 and each band has 5 articles. The scores are given by four professional IELTS training teachers according to the IELTS (A) writing criteria. The highest and lowest scores are not considered and the average scores are used as a final result.

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed as follows:

(1) The study analysed 15 pieces of Chinese students' written texts which consist of 3 levels (band 5, band 6 and band 7).

(2) Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework was used to investigate the use of cohesive devices and the use of cohesive devices across the three levels was compared.

(3) When the analysis was completed, each type of cohesive device was analyzed and presented in percentages of total ties, in order to find the frequency of certain devices in Band 5, Band 6 and Band 7. Meanwhile,

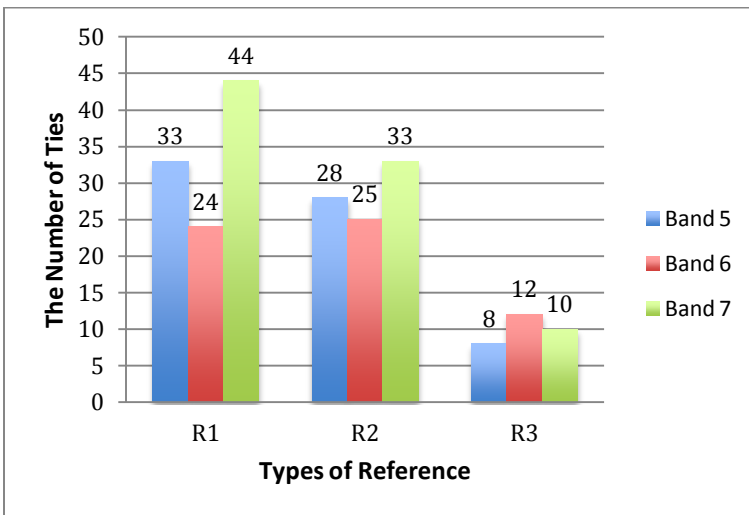the common problems of the sample writings in each band were examined in the study.

Data Analysis and Results

A sample of the text analysis of three levels (Band 5, Band 6 and Band 7) can be found in appendix.

References

The occurrence of references in three levels, appearing in the sample writings, is presented in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 'References' in the data

| R1: Pronominal Reference | R2: Demonstrative Reference | R3: Comparative Reference |

1. In Band 5 writing, students misused and overused the Pronominal Reference.

Pronominal reference, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 43), includes the use of personal pronouns, possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns. In this study, the researcher found personal pronouns and possessive determiners (possessive adjectives) play a part as pronominal references in

academic articles. Their roles are 'human': he, she, they (subject personal pronouns); him, her, them (object personal pronouns); his, her, their (possessive adjectives); It is important to note that the avoidance of I, you, we (subject personal pronouns); me, you, us (object personal pronoun); and my, our, your (possessive pronouns). As stated earlier, writers need to present their work "objectively" in academic writing. However, that is often ignored by most of Band 5 candidates. The following examples taken from the students' articles demonstrate this problem.

Examples:

(1)

> With technologies progressing, the products of modern technologies have greatly facilitated <u>our</u> life, changing the way <u>we</u> eat, <u>we</u> work, <u>we</u> learn and even <u>we</u> think.

(From the first paragraph of Band 5- Example 4)

(2)

> Although this kind of work pattern which make work efficient perhaps is of benefit for employers and companies and even <u>our</u> country, more and more people feel depressed. <u>I</u> think there are two main contributing factors for this issue.

(From the first paragraph of Band 5- Example 5)

As shown, A coherent piece of writing, does not depend on how many references the students used, but depends on how many those of references are correctly and appropriately used.

Substitutions

The occurrence of substitutions in three levels, appearing in sample writings analyzed, is compared and presented in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Substitutions in the study

| SI: Nominal Substitution | S2: Verbal Substitution | S3: Clausal Substitution |
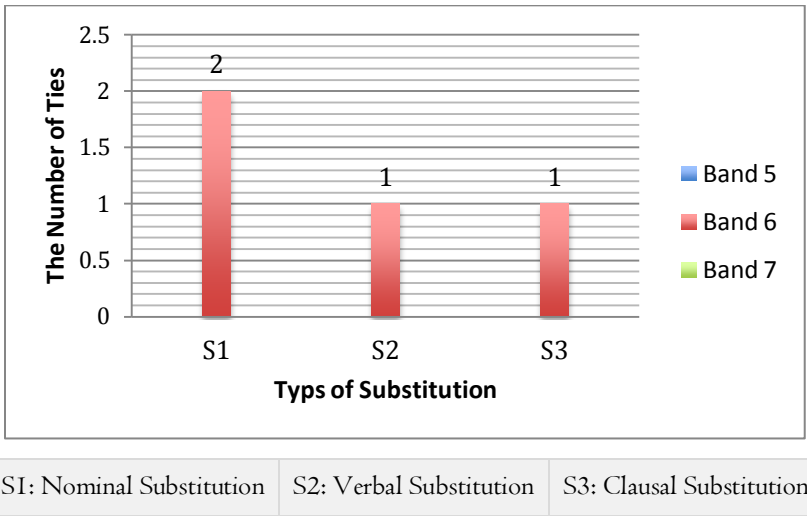
2. Band 5 writing lack substitution.

Writers avoid the repetition of a word or a phrase that has been used before. One way of doing this is to use a general purpose substitute word like **it, that, one, do, there** and **so**. However, no substitution was found in Band 5 writings.

Examples

In the Band 5- Example 3, the "academic subjects" or "academic work" frequently appears about five times as follows:

Sentence 2: However, some people think school should concentrate on academic subjects.

Sentence 10: In addition, learning academic subjects make them more knowledge.

Sentence18: And there is a phenomenon that some children are not good at academic subjects, instead of other fields.

Sentence 20: Meanwhile, some subjects like music or P.E. lessons can help release their pressure and tension suffering from their heavier academic work.

Sentence21: To conclusion, while it is necessary to learn <u>academic work</u> for children's development, other subjects also have an essential role.

3. In Band 7 writing, students under-used Substitution.

As previously stated, writers avoid the repetition of a word or a phrase that has been used before. One-way of doing this is to use a general-purpose substitute word like **it, that, one, do, there** and **so**. However, few substitutions were found in Band 7 writings, but it does not affect a coherent article.

Examples

In the Band 7- Example 5, the "adult", "school leavers " "young employers" refer to "young people" which appeared in the task. The sentence examples are as follows:

Sentence 2: What's more, long-term unemployment in early <u>adult</u> life can cause feelings of alienation among those affected.

Sentence 9: To encourage <u>employers</u> to provide more job opportunities for school leavers, the government should pay subsidies to those who take on <u>young people</u>.

Sentence18: These <u>young employers</u> could shadow experienced members of staff with the aim of gaining work experience.

Conjunction

The occurrence of conjunctions in all three levels, appearing in sample writings analyzed, is compared and presented in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2.3 Conjunctions in the study
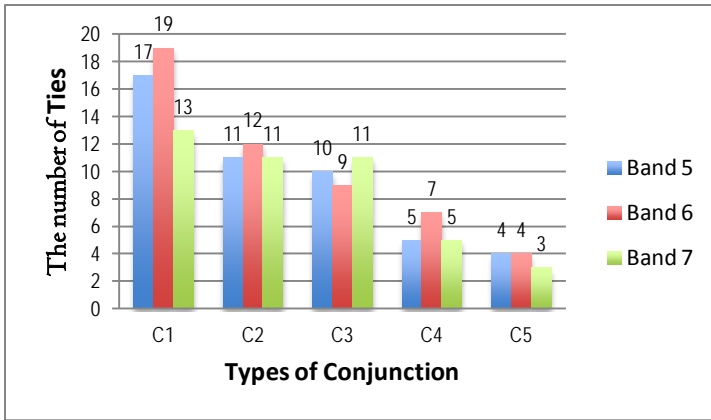
CI: Additive Conjunction	C2: Adversative Conjunction	C3: Causal Conjunction
C4: Temporal Conjunction		C5: Collocation

4. Some conjunctions were over used in Band 5 samples

Another serious problem that the Band 5 students had was overuse of conjunction devices. The students might have been encouraged by textbooks or teachers to use such cohesive devices to make their writing cohesive and coherent. However, some students may have formed the impression that "the more, the better" The following examples display the students' overuse of conjunction devices.

Examples:

(1)

Other people who think teachers should teach students to judge right from wrong may believe for a student who are growing, a moral consciousness is pivotal importance instead of academically. In fact, to measure a people's value, we are not concerned with their success in academy or in career, <u>but</u> to see their moral quality. If one is successful in his/her business, <u>but</u> does not have a highly moral quality, we don't admit he/she is a truly successful man. <u>Conversely</u>, if one doesn't gain NO.I, <u>but</u> treats others very nice, everyone are willing to interact with him/her. <u>Therefore,</u> teachers should not neglect the obligation.

(From the third paragraph of Band 5- Example 2)

(2)

> Of coursee, these non-academic skills, like judging do and do not and behaving well, are essential and are equipped by each student. But the time on campus is limited and teachers have to take care of many students. So, if all things relying on teachers to finish are unfair and their energy are out of reach. Therefore, in this regard mortally,   I think both parents and teacher should take the responsibily together to teach children. After all, each child is different and only biological parents acknowledge their own kids most.

(From the fourth paragraph of Band 5- Example 2)

5. Some inappropriate or mechanical conjunctions were used in Band 6 samples

It is very necessary for students to use cohesive devices in their writing to make sure that a cohesive article can be produced. However, there are also inappropriate in terms of the topic of the sentence or mechanical cohesion within and/or between sentences such as (and, moreover, in addition) Additive Conjunctions, (but, however, on the other hand) Adversative Conjunctions and (firstly, next, then, after, before, finally) temporal Conjunctions.

Examples:

> **First of all, there** is no need to construct all the buildings in the old style. **The value of Buildings** should be firstly considered in what functions they would provide, being an office block, **for example, not much relation with which kind of architectural style** it has adopted. **And buildings appearance** plays a meaningless role in cultural heritage protection, without carrying out any practical measures.
>
> **In addition, there** exist a number of effective ways in term of culture preservation. **For instance, museums,** which organize a mixed various of exhibitions and display regularly, make a significant contribution on the enhancement awareness of cultural preservation, as well as promotion in historical culture and traditio protection. **At the same time, governments** should take the responsibility by spending more money on exploring and repairing cultural relics. **Cultural protection** is not merely demonstrated in buildings, but other extensive fields.

(From Band 6- Example 4)

Consider the **Themes** in each of the clauses in two paragraphs and they are listed as follows:

(Paragraph 2)

<u>First of all</u>, there…
The value of Buildings…
for example, not much relation with which kind of architectural style…
And buildings appearance…

(Paragraph 3)

<u>In addition</u>, there…
For instance, museums,…
At the same time, governments…
Cultural protection…

It is worth noting that there is a thematic material, in the first clause of paragraph 3: First of all, there… and it includes textual meaning and acts as a linking word for the next section as well. From the perspective of linguistic feature, "First of all" is a temporal conjunction that expresses relationships with time or sequence of events. However, this relationship was not presented from the following information. It began with another thematic material "In addition, there…" "In addition" is an additive conjunction that simply adds more information to what is already there. Apparently, this student gave another example to support the same viewpoint in the following explanation. Actually, these two paragraphs expressed a progressive relationship rather than in a chronological order. Therefore, the temporal conjunction "first of all" was mistakenly used in this writing.

6. Some conjunctions were over used in Band 6.

As stated in the problems of Band 5 students, the candidates who got Band 6 have this problem as well. The following examples demonstrate the Band 6 students' overuse of cohesive devices.

Examples:

(1)

Firstly, if more females become leaders in workplace, the competition is not as fieced as males do. The reason for this is that females are often warm <u>and</u> is not as aggressive as males. <u>Therefore</u>, when they become leaders in companies, the atmosphere in workplace will be considerably harmonious <u>and</u> employees will work in a relaxing working environment.

(From the second paragraph of Band 6- Example 5)

(2)

<u>Of course</u>, females are often entrusted <u>and</u> long regarded as the person to look after their families <u>and</u> raise children. <u>However</u>, everyone has the right to challenge the position in workplace, females are no exception. In fact, today many female are successful both at home and abroad. <u>And</u> more and more males are trying to play the role of mother in family.

(From the fourth paragraph of Band 5- Example 2)

Lexical cohesion

The occurrence of lexical cohesion in the three levels, of the sample writings analyzed, is compared and presented in Figure 2-4.

Figure 2.4 Lexical cohesion in the study
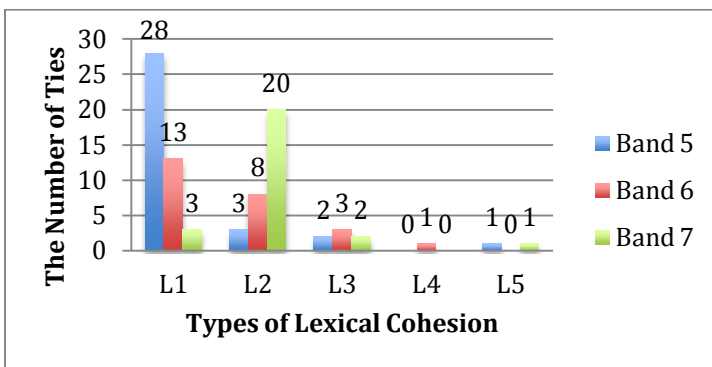
LI : Repetition	L2 : Synonym/near synonym	L3 : Super-ordinate
L4 : General word	L5: Collocation	

7. Under-used lexical items in Band 7 writing

Various lexical items like super-ordinate and synonyms are widely and appropriately used in Band 7 articles. However, as illustrated in Figure 2-4, there might be some under-use appearing such as general word and collocation.

As stated in the literature review, a general word is a word which concerns or expresses the broad meaning of a thing. For example: The poor live in the old building. That old thing is dangerous. But "General word" didn't occur in the sample writings of Band 7.

Moreover, collocation is the tendency or expectancy in which one word occurs frequently in the environment of another, or both two words occurring in a range of environments common to both. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define collocation as 'cohesion that is achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur'. It is common for long cohesive chains to be built up like candle...flame...flicker, poetry.... literature.... reader...writer...style. The typical example in the Band 7 writing as follows:

> What's is more, long-term unemployment in early adult life can cause feelings of alienation among those affected, leading to higher levels of crime, drug abuse and social unrest.

(From the first paragraph of Band 7- Example 5)

As demonstrated above, those were under-used by Band 7 students, but to some extent, they did not affect communication.

8.   Students repeated a large number of words in Band 5.

The Band 5 candidates used a large number of repetitions in their writing and it indicated their limited vocabulary.

Examples.

In the Band 5- Example I, the "import product" or "import product" frequently appears about five times as follows:

Sentence 2: a large amount of <u>importing goods </u>swarmed into our life

Sentence 6: One reason why I am in favor of the view is that<u> import products</u> enrich our daily life more.

Sentence19: When people heavily rely on<u> import products</u>, domestic firms and goods would be posed a threat.

Sentence 20: In addition, <u>import goods</u> are more expensive and easy to rot without special preservation.

Sentence25: In terms of <u>import products</u>, this trend is more of help to individual country.

Ellipsis

The occurrence of ellipsis in three levels, appearing in sample writings analyzed, is compared and presented in Figure 2-5.

Figure 2.5 Ellipsis in the study
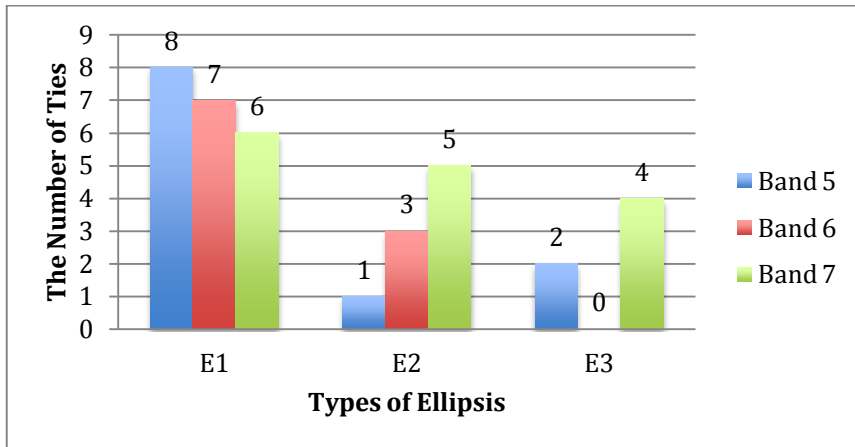
| E1: Nominal Ellipsis | E2: Verbal Ellipsis | E3: Clausal Ellipsis |

9. In Band 5 writing, some cohesive problems were influenced by grammatical mistakes and inappropriate task response.

Examples:

(1)

> The question of Band 5- Example 4 as follows:
> Some people think traditional libraries will be replaced by computers. Do you agree or disagree?
> (answer)
> With technologies progressing, the products of modern technologies have greatly facilitated our life, changing the way we eat, we work, we learn and even we think. However, some people think traditional libraries should be replaced by <u>computer</u>, which is more beneficial to our life. Personally, I am not convinced by their view and I think both libraries and <u>computers</u> have their own advantages for readers.

(From the first paragraph of Band 5- Example 4)

As stated above, "computers" which is a plural noun that mentioned in the task topic, but in the first paragraph, the candidate claim that "traditional libraries should be replaced by computer" which is a singular form. Moreover, the word "computers" in plural form repeated at the end of the paragraph. By doing so, the examiner may be confused when the candidates actually means a computerized library.

(2)

> However, it does not mean that non-academic subjects should be neglected. In fact, these subjects can maximum to inspire their potentials, which is the same important for children's furture. This is mainly due to the fact that everyone's capability in a particular field is unknown and need develop. <u>So this trend these subjects to generate their poentials and interests.</u>

(From the third paragraph of Band 5- Example 3)

There are no verbs and conjunctions between two nouns, "this trend" and "these subjects" in the underlined sentence. It is difficult for examiners or readers to identity the subject. Therefore, it is another typical example to support this point.

10. In Band 6 writing, some cohesive problems were influenced by grammatical mistakes and inappropriate task response.

Examples

The topic of Band 6- Example 3 as follows:

> Developments in science and technology have caused environmental <u>problems</u>. Some people say that a simpler way of life will protect the environment, while others believe that science and technology can solve environmental <u>problems</u>. Discuss both views and give your opinion.
>
> (answer)
> While there are different opinions over the current environmental <u>issue</u>, I agree with the view that modern technology can deal with the environmental <u>issue</u>.

(From the first paragraph of Band 6- Example 3)

As stated above, "problems" which is a plural noun mentioned in the task topic, but in the first paragraph, the candidate claims that "the current environmental issue" which is a singular form. Moreover, there is more than one environmental problems such as emissions and garbage. By doing so, the examiner may be confused which issue the candidate actually wants to talk about.

Conclusion

This study investigated cohesion and coherence in 15 sample essays written by Chinese students who studied in BJ IELTS School. The data collected in this study consist of 3 levels (Band 5, Band 6 and Band 7) and each article contained approximately 250 words. Two types of data analysis were conducted: qualitative analysis on coherence, and quantitative analysis on cohesion. They involved the analysis of the overall quality of essay writing and dealt with the analysis frequencies of cohesive devices used by these three sample groups. Later, the common problems of these sample writings in each band were examined from the analysis. The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

The findings showed that the participants employed a variety of cohesive devices in their essay writing, including reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Among the five cohesive devices examined, references were the most frequently used, followed by conjunctions and lexical cohesion. The lowest preference was substitution but there were few ellipses appearing. In addition to the frequency and percentage of cohesive devices used, the study also presented several writing problems that 15 Chinese IELTS students had: misused, overused and mechanical use of conjunctions and references, and lack of substitution devices due to a large number of repetitions, as well as some cohesive problems which were influenced by grammatical mistakes and inappropriate task response. These problems can be regarded as common errors in 15 Chinese students' academic writing.

Application

The results of the study could be applied as follows:

1. The findings of this study can be applied as a guideline in a classroom where the English teacher wants to develop the students' English academic writing ability. When the EFL teachers give students some examples of how the use of cohesive devices affects writing scores, students will realize the importance of cohesion and coherence in their writing text, and be more empowered to write a quality article.

2. The results of this study show that the use of cohesive devices was not the differentiating factor between the high and the low-rated essays; it was the factor of coherence which exemplified the high from the low-rated essays. Thus, when teaching English writing, ESL/EFL teachers should not overemphasize the quantity of cohesion used or ignore other factors such as task response, lexical resource and grammatical features. What is more important is that they should probably focus more on the appropriate use of those ties in students' writing as well.

3. The method of this study can be applied to analyze cohesion and coherence in other types of texts, such as narratives, exposition writing, English texts and essays translated by students in high school.

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Appendix

Band 5- Example I

WRITING TASK 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on the task.

Write about the following topic:

Aircrafts have been increasingly used to transport fruits and vegetables to some countries
where such plants hardly grow or are out of season. Some people consider it a good trend,
but some people oppose it. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Give reasons for your answers and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge
and experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Sample:

After our country participated in World Trade Organization, a large amount of importing goods swarmed into our life by air transport methord. However, while some people insist that this trend brough about negative influence, I believe that it is preferable to say that no matter it is concerned about individual or countries.

Well, why I think so? One reason why I am in favor of the view is that import products enriched our daily life more. Compared with domestic goods, they provided more varity of products for we eating, using and even thinking. Today, the phenomenon that due to seasonal factors, we did not eat vagetable and fruits we like in the past is no longer taking place. By contrast, if aircraft transport had not come into our life, then our dish tables would not have appeared fresh salmon, sushi and Korean barbecue. Therefore, an air transport mode is pivotal importance to daily life.

Another reason to support this view is that by air transporting mode, it can help our country participate in the world economic globalisation process easily. For example, goods featuring our nation can export into foreign countries, this would propaganda our national feature and greatly facilitate national development in many aspects. It is sure that this trend is a win-win situation dor individual our coutries.

Of course, this trend also bring its cons. When people heavily rely on import products, domestic firms and goods would be posed a threat. In addition, import goods are more expensive and easy to rot without special preservation. Even though some foods can save for a period of time, most of them contained preservatives which are harmful to our health. But the fact is that we know how to make good use of these resources and get rid of those foods containing bad ingredients.

In conclusion, I tend to believe that in terms of import products, this trend is more of help to individual or country. By doing this, our country can maintain a sustainable development.

The Analysis of Cohesive Devices of the Ist student in the First Sample Writing

No.	Sentences	No of Ties	Cohesive Items	Types of Cohesion	Presupposed Items
1	After our country participated in World Trade Organization,	I	- After	C4	- our country participated in World Trade Organization
2	a large amount of importing goods swarmed into our life by air transport method.	-	-	-	-
3	However, while some people insist that this trend brought about negative influence,	3	-However	C2	-(No.2)
			-that	R2	-some people insist
			-this	R2	-(No.2)
4	I believe that it is preferable to say that no	I	-that	R2	-I believe

	matter it is concerned about individual or countries.				
5	Well, why I think so?	I	-well	C5	- why I think so?
6	One reason why I am in favor of the view is that import products enriched our daily life more.	3	-that	R2	-I am in favor of the view is
			-import products	L1	-import goods(No.2)
7	Compared with domestic goods, they provided more variety of products for we eating, using and even thinking.	I	-they	R1	- import products
8	Today, the phenomenon that due to seasonal factors,	I	-that	R2	- the phenomenon
9	we did not eat vegetable and fruits we like in the past is no longer taking place.	-	-	-	-
10	By contrast, if aircraft transport had not come into our life,	-	-	-	-
11	our dish tables would not have appeared fresh salmon, sushi and Korean	-	-	-	-

	barbecue.		-		
I2	Therefore, an air transport mode is pivotal importance to daily life.	2	-Therefore	C3	-(No.7)
			-air transport	L1	-aircraft transport(No.10)
I3	Another reason to support this view is that by air transporting mode,	2	-that	R2	-Another reason to support this view is
			-this	R2	-(No.4)
I4	it can help our country participate in the world economic globalization process easily.	-	-	-	-
I5	For example, goods featuring our nation can export into foreign countries,	-	-	-	-
I6	this would propaganda our national feature and φ greatly facilitate national development in many aspects.	3	-this	R2	-(No.15)
			-national	L1	-national
			-φ	E1	-this
I7	It is sure that this trend is a win-win situation dor individual our countries.	I	-that	R2	-It is sure
I8	Of course, this trend also bring	2	-Of course	C5	-(No.17)

	import products, this trend is more of help to individual or country.				
26	By doing this, our country can maintain a sustainable development.	I	-this	R2	-(No.26)

Band 6- Example I

WRITING TASK 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on the task.

Write about the following topic:

> *It is generally believed that some people are born with certain talents, for instance for sport or music, and others are not. However, it is sometimes claimed that any child can be taught to become a good sports person or musician.*
>
> *Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.*

Give reasons for your answers and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge and experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Sample:

Nowadays, **some people** argue that only the children who hold the talents can be excellent in some field, **and others** claim that any child who is not a genius will also be a specialist. **From my opinion, I** firmly believe that nature and nurture are equally important.

On the one hand, children possessing innate abilities and capacities are better than ordinary children in terms of understanding and applying. **For example, Mozart**, a very famous musician, could imitate rhythm and melody and got a strong memory when he was three. **When he** was six, **he** had composed three pieces of minuet, which apparently proved his excellent application ability and outstanding talent in music that were beyond the peers. **By contrast, ordinary children at that ages** might not know what was the music score, let alone creating music.

On the other hand, those children who are regarded as less-gifted are usually more industrious than genius. **Talents** are not as diligent as ordinary ones **because they** are over-confident in their abilities **and they** can immediately digest what teachers impart to. **However, common children** always spend more time on studying and exercising for making up the inherit disadvantage. **If they** do not put a lot of effort in, **there** would be little possibility for them to get success, such as a well-known athlete and musician.

Therefore, after taking everything into account, we may safely draw the conclusion that talent and cultivation （nature and nurture） play the same vital role for children to be professional people. **Talented people** would not get success without working hard, **and, at the same time, common people** would not easily make a success only by practicing. **So I** believe that we should take both sides into consideration.

The Analysis of Cohesive Devices of the 6th student in the Sixth Essay

No.	Sentences	No of Ties	Cohesive Items	Types of Cohesion	Presupposed Items
I	Nowadays, some people argue that only the children who hold the talents can be excellent in some field,	I	-who	R2	-children
2	and others claim that any child who is not a genius will also be a specialist.	3	-and	CI	-(No.I)
			-who	R2	-any child
			-any child	LI	-children(No.I)
3	From my opinion, I firmly believe	3	-I	RI	-my
			-that	R2	-I firmly

						believe
	that nature and nurture are equally important.			-equally	R3	-important
4	On the one hand, children possessing innate abilities and capacities are better than ordinary children in terms of understanding and applying.	I		-On the one hand	C2	-(No.11)
5	For example, Mozart, a very famous musician, could imitate rhythm and melody	-		-	-	-
6	and φ got a strong memory when he was three.	4		-and	C1	-(No.5)
				-when	R2	-he was there
				-he	R1	-Mozart
				-φ	E1	-Mozart
7	When he was six	I		-he	R1	-Mozart
8	he had composed three pieces of minuet,	I		-he	L1	-he(No.7)
9	which apparently proved his excellent application ability and outstanding talent in music that were beyond the peers.	I		-his	R1	-Mozart
10	By contrast, ordinary children at that ages might	I		-By contrast	C2	-(No.8)

	not know what was the music score, let alone creating music.					
I I	On the other hand, those children who are regarded as less-gifted are usually more industrious than genius.	3	-On the other hand	C2	-(No.4)	
			-who	R2	-children	
			- more industrious	R3	-less-gifted	
I2	Talents are not as diligent as ordinary ones	3	-ones	SI	-Children	
			-Talents	L2	-genius	
I3	because they are over-confident in their abilities	3	-because	C3	-(No.I2)	
			-They	R I	-Talents	
			-their	R I	-they	
I4	and they can immediately digest what teachers impart to.	2	-and	C I	-(No.I3)	
			-they	L I	-they(No.I3)	
I5	However, common children always spend more time on studying and exercising for making up the inherit disadvantage.	3	-However	C2	-(No.I3)	
			-common children	L2	- ordinary ones	
I6	If they do not put a lot of effort in, there would be little possibility for them to get success, such as a well-known athlete	2	-they	R I	-common children	
			- them	R I	-they	

	and musician.					
17	Therefore, after taking everything into account, we may safely draw the conclusion that talent and cultivation (nature and nurture) play the same vital role for children to be professional people.	4	-Therefore	C3	-(No.3)
			-after	C4	-taking everything into account
			-same	R3	-role
			-talent and cultivation	L2	- nature and nurture
18	Talented people would not get success without working hard,	-	-	-	-
19	and, at the same time, common people would not easily make a success only by practicing.	I	-and	CI	-(No.18)
20	So I believe that we should take both sides into consideration.	I	So	C3	-(No.18)and -(No.19)

Band 7- Example I

WRITING TASK 2

You should spend about 40 minutes on the task.

Write about the following topic:

Some people think it is beneficial for children to watch TV or play video games, while others think TV and video games are harmful for children. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

Give reasons for your answers and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge and experience.

Write at least 250 words.

Sample:

In recent years parents have had to make tough decisions about how much time their kids should spend watching TV and playing computer or video games. **Some** have argued that they are not only a waste of time, but potentially harmful. **Others**, however, claim that kids should be kids and deserve some entertainment. **Personally, I** feel that the best approach is moderation.

On the one hand, too much TV and gaming can have a negative influence. **Physically, hours in front of a monitor** are harmful on the eyes. **And mentally if kids** spend too much time living in a virtual world, **they** may lose the ability to make friends and socialize in a normal way. **Moreover, seeing too much violence and questionable content** could influence young people's behaviour, as they are impressionable.

On the other hand, all children need to have fun and play. **If students** only study, **they** will surely suffer from mental and emotional pressure and stress. **Also, not all content on TV or online** is unhealthy; **there are lots of educational shows and content** that is positive.

Speaking from personal experience, I think the right approach is to have a healthy balance. **In this regard, parents** have a responsibility to set boundaries and make sure that the content their kids are viewing is appropriate. **As well, TV and video games** are not the only ways to have fun, **so parents** should encourage their kids to interact and play with other kids in person too.

> **In the end, we** should follow our common sense. **Parents** should be firm but fair with letting their kids play online or in front of a TV screen. **Most things in moderation** are healthy, **and TV and video games** are no different.

The Analysis of Cohesive Devices of the 11ᵗʰ student in the Eleventh Sample Writing

No.	Sentences	No of Ties	Cohesive Items	Types of Cohesion	Presupposed Items
1	In recent years parents have had to make tough decisions about how much time their kids should spend watching TV and φ playing computer or video games.	2	-their	R1	-parents
			-φ	E2	-spend
2	Some have argued that they are not only a waste of time, but φ potentially harmful.	3	-they	R1	-parents
			-that	R2	-Some have argued
			-φ	E2	-are
3	Others, however, claim that kids should be kids and φ deserve some entertainment.	3	-however	C2	-(No.2)
			-that	R2	-others claims
			-φ	E1	-kids
4	On the one hand, too much TV and gaming can	2	-On the one hand	C2	-(No.9)
			- TV and	L3	-

	have a negative influence.		gaming		entertainment
5	Physically, hours in front of a monitor are harmful on the eyes.	-	-	-	-
6	And mentally if kids spend too much time living in a virtual world,	I	-And	CI	-(No.5)
7	they may lose the ability to make friends and φ socialize in a normal way.	2	-they	R I	-kids
			-φ	E3	- they may lose the ability to
8	Moreover, seeing too much violence and questionable content could influence young people's behaviour, as they are impressionable.	2	- Moreover	CI	-(No.4)
			-young people	L2	-kids
9	On the other hand, all children need to have fun and play.	2	-On the other hand	C2	-(No.4)
			-children	L2	-young people
10	If students only study, they will surely suffer from mental and	3	-they	R I	-students
			-students	L I	-children
			-pressure	C5	-stress

	emotional pressure and stress.						
I1	Also, not all content on TV or online is unhealthy;	I	-Also	C1	-(No.11)		
I2	there are lots of educational shows and content that is positive.	I	-that	R2	-content		
I3	Speaking from personal experience, I think the right approach is to have a healthy balance.	-	-	-	-		
I4	In this regard, parents have a responsibility to set boundaries	-	-	-	-		
I5	and φ make sure that the content their kids are viewing is appropriate.	4	-and	C1	-(No.14)		
			-that	R2	-make sure		
			-their	R1	-parents'		
			-φ	E3	- parents have a responsibility to		
I6	As well, TV and video games are not the only ways to have fun,	3	-As well	C1	-(No.15)		
			- TV and video games	C5	-ways to have fun		
			-have fun	L2	- entertainment		

17	so parents should encourage their kids to interact	2	-so	C3	-(No.16)
			-their	R1	-parents'
18	and φ play with other kids in person too.	2	-and	C1	-(No.17)
			-φ	E3	-parents should encourage their kids to
19	In the end, we should follow our common sense.	1	-In the end	C4	-(No.18)
20	Parents should be firm but φ fair with letting their kids play online or in front of a TV screen.	3	-but	C2	-fair
			-their	R1	-parents'
			-φ	E2	-be
21	Most things in moderation are healthy,	-	-	-	-
22	and TV and video games are no different.	2	-and	C1	-(No.21)
			-different	R3	- TV and video games