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Negotiating Meaning Relationships in the Rhetorical Structure of EFL Argumentative Writing through Text Cohesion

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Abstract

Being a configuration of logically interconnected statements realized in moves and stages, an argumentative essay is built around the notion of textual unity achieved through lexico-grammar and semantic associations. The study attempted to analyze the role of cohesion in the rhetorical structure of undergraduate EFL students. Hence, the 13 moves in the three-stage argument structure were analyzed on a preset framework of cohesion analysis. Discourse analysis as a research method was used to ascertain how cohesion functioned in the rhetorical structure of these argumentative essays. The results revealed the presence of cohesive associations between the different moves of the rhetorical structure which corresponded with the move length. Referential and Lexical cohesion had a more frequent and dense presence than the co-referential element in the sample texts; however, the relatively low incidence of conjunctives pointed towards the relative scarcity of rhetorical functions in students' writing. The study proposes a research initiative that could use frameworks other than the present study or compare two or more sub-genres for the use of cohesion in the rhetorical structure.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Argumentative Essay, cohesion, Genre, Rhetorical Structure

1. Introduction

Argumentative writing despite its challenging nature and "underresearched" status (Pessoa, 2017 p.42) is one of the most common types of academic discourse in the academia. Contemporary practices in argumentation studies involve an analysis of the linguistic, cognitive and social dynamics to comprehensively account for the diversity of features that constitute an academically appropriate text. Apart from persuasion which is considered to be the most common use of argumentative discourse (Meiland, 1989), scholars in argumentation studies have also proposed other characteristic features of the argumentative texts. Blair (2004) in Gilbert (2005), for instance, suggests that argumentative writing is primarily concerned with proof or demonstration, justification, persuasion, inquiry, and resolution of a disagreement. Gilbert (2005), however, argues that proof-demonstration and disagreement-resolution patterns do not feature prominent in students' academic writing. Seyler (2008) in Lap and Truc (2014 p.68), on the other hand, proposes "purpose, arguable issues, evidence, audience, and recognition of topic's complexity" as the most frequently recurring elements of argumentative texts. An argumentative text in academic contexts, thus, may be a possible configuration of appropriate audience analysis and purpose; generation and structuring of the content; and the linguistics resources that could produce a cohesive and coherent text.

2. Literature Review

The argumentative essay as a sub-genre of the academic essay (Hyland, 2006) can be assumed as a plausible manifestation of students' ability to create a variety of rhetorical functions in conformity with the norms and conventions of the academic discourse community (Ahmad, 2019a). This manifestation of a variety of language functions in the rhetorical structure is based on the acquisition of a set of skills in argumentation which, according to Promwinai (2010), aid comprehension of the cognitive organization of knowledge. Cognitive organization of knowledge which Swales (1990 p.84) dubs as "formal schemata" includes "rhetorical elements of the genre, such as structure, style, and register" (Wingate, 2012 p.147). Formal schemata are believed to manifest a student writer's ability to comprehend, generate and organize relevant content to facilitate the production of a genre specific text which meets the expectations of the academic discourse community (Ahmad, 2019b). An equally crucial feature of the formal schemata is to prepare student writers acquire appropriate *voice* and *stance* for their arguments which Street (2009) thinks are not explicitly taught but are crucial to successful academic writing. Moreover, students might engage with supporting more than one claim for the proposition, and this requires them to create a logical text organization at both the micro and the macro level. Following Schleppegrell (2006) in Pessoa et.al. (2017), stance in argumentative writing can be achieved only if students connect their ideas and progress their argument by using modality and consequential relationships. Similarly, Hyland's (1998) notion of metadiscourse seems to correspond with Swales' (1990) formal schemata and includes both the lexico-grammatical elements such as the conjunctives which help in organization and interpretation of the text, and the more specialist language features and rhetorical techniques to create a text macro-structure that not only implies the purpose of the writer but also enables the text to qualify for its discourse community's approval.

Thus, an argumentative essay which unfolds itself in a "connected series of statements" (Andrews, 1995 p.3), or as the "sequence of interlinked claims and reasons" Toulmin et al (1984 p.14) involves an analysis and evaluation of the content knowledge (Wu, 2006). This entails that the students attempting an argumentative essay are expected to display "a process of systematic and methodical reasoning with the aim of arriving at a conclusion or solving a particular analytic problem by formulating a set of coherent and relevant arguments" Aarts as cited in Jenkins (2006 p.157). The more specific aim of an argumentative essay, however, is to "convince, get an adhesion, justify a way to see facts, refute interpretations about an event, or persuade the reader to change an opinion about a subject" (Chala and Chapetón, 2012 p.28). Typically, the students use comparison and contrast, cause and effect, claim and refutation, exemplification etc. as rhetorical strategies to develop their opinion in support or opposition of the argument they engage with. The development of the authorial stance thus presupposes that these clause relation patterns in the text are semantically related to each other within and across the moves and stages of the argument structure. One of the linguistic resources that ensures these meaning relations is the system of cohesion which through its text-forming potential and system of 'tie' give the text its textual identity (Halliday and Hasan, 1976 p.3). Moreover, following English for Academic Purposes (EAP) perspectives (e.g. Hyland, 2006; Swales, 1990 etc.) and Systemic Functional Linguistics' (SFL) traditions (e.g. Christie, 2000; Martin, 1992 etc.) the argumentative writing is embedded in its socio-cultural context which dictates the choice of register and rhetorical conventions, thereby resulting in a piece of discourse which is, at one level, a reflection of how socio-cultural priorities shape discourse, while at the other, an illustration of how register choices through the repertoire of the lexico-grammar culminate in a specific genre i.e. the argumentative essay. These lexico-grammatical resources are no other than the cohesive devices which being non-structural sources of text formation are semantic in their functional orientation, and therefore, central to the internal unity of text. A study of cohesion in the rhetorical or argument structure of an argumentative essay can, potentially, reveal not only how the student writers organize content but also how they establish meaning relationships between and among different moves and stages of the argument structure to create texture through textual unity (Ahmad, 2020).

2.1. Hyland's (1990) framework for the argumentative essay

According to Hyland (1990), the rhetorical structure of an argumentative essay is based on three stages: Thesis, Argument and Conclusion. Each stage has further sub-stages called moves, and which are, in fact, "rhetorical instruments that realize a subset of specific communicative purposes associated with a genre." (Bhatia, 2001 p. 84). Moves can also be understood as "semantic/functional units of texts, which can be identified through their

communicative purposes and their typical linguistic boundaries." (Upton and Connor, 2001 p. 317). The moves in an argumentative structure can either be mandatory or optional. Below the system of moves is the language system which through its lexicon and grammar assigns various forms to the moves. Following (Tankó and Tamási, 2008), it can be inferred that writing a piece of argumentation for academic purposes poses serious challenges to the students as they are expected cognitive process, rhetorical conventions, lexico-grammar, and the socio-cultural setting.

Hyland's (1990) model has been adopted by various researchers, partially though. For instance, Henry and Rosemary (1997) investigated introductions and conclusions of student' writing using Hasan's (1989) taxonomy, and the move analysis was conducted in comparison with Hyland's (1990) framework. Moreover, a paragraph level move analysis of the rhetorical devices was done by McGee (2014). Another significant research was initiated by Schmeer (2014) who applied Hyland's (1990) framework to study the rhetorical organization of the argumentative opinion blog. The results of the study revealed significant differences in the rhetorical structure and which do not comply with the Hyland (1990) model as adopted for teaching purposes. A study of Pakistani student writers was made by Imtiaz and Mahmood (2014 p.99) which analyzed the move-step structure of the argumentative essays on Hyland's (1990) framework. The researchers concluded that the model was a useful tool for teaching argumentative writing. They could also discover two additional moves "contradiction" and "suggestion" which were not in the original framework. Liu (2015) also applied the same model for analyzing Chinese students' argumentative essays in his comparative study. The units of analysis were the moves and the concluding sentences of 184 Chinese student writers. The results indicated significant differences between the Chinese and English texts in the moves which signaled conclusion. Similarly, a study by Boukezzoula (2016) applied Hyland (1990) model to analyze moves to find out the effectiveness of the framework for teaching and learning argumentative writing. Experimental research done by Malekie and Moghaddam (2017) also attempted to gauge the usefulness of Hyland's model for teaching argumentative essays in academic contexts. However, the findings did not show performance variation between the control and the experimental groups. Kanestion et al.'s, (2017 p. 39) based on Hyland's (1990) model unveiled the role of linguistic elements in the formation of moves and steps of argumentative texts. The findings revealed that the moves created by the pre-university students in the study had visible variation from the framework since new moves were identified in each stage.

3. Aim and Significance of the Study

Most studies which used Hyland's (1990) framework did not investigate language elements such as the cohesive devices as they unfolded in different moves and stages of an argumentative essay. The researcher, therefore, initiated to adopt the framework to see how student writers negotiate meaning relationships in the rhetorical structure through cohesive features and the use of these text forming resources helped in the development of their argument. The researcher assumed this study to be the first of its kind and is expected to inspire more research efforts in the domain. The rationale behind the use of Hyland's (1990) model was its prior application in academic writing, and the researcher believed that this would be more conclusive in providing an accurate analysis of the argumentative texts in comparison with other frameworks such as that of Coffin (2006) which had four stages namely: Background; Thesis; Supporting Arguments; and Reinforcement but did not specify moves as were done in Hyland's (1990) framework or Toulmin's (1958; 2003) which "imposes a judicial procedure on the execution of argument and ultimately restricts our interpretation of argument structure and function" (Gilbert, 2005 p.132).

4. Method

This qualitative study adopted discourse analytical model for the analysis of (n=30) undergraduate argumentative essays produced in the Mid and Final Term examinations at the English Language Center at Yanbu Colleges and Institutes, Saudi Arabia. More specifically, textual analysis is an effective research method to explain the form and function of language use "through the deployment of specific textual features" (Griffin, 2007 p.93). For the analysis of rhetorical structure, the researcher chose Hyland's (1990) framework for analysis which comprised of three main stages with 13 moves in between these stages. For cohesion analysis, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of cohesive devices and sentence unit/s was adapted for observing the behaviour of cohesive ties in the rhetorical structure. The researcher took percentage count of the incidence and frequency of the cohesive element

that was identified in each move and stage along with the presupposed item/s which had been referred to. For purpose of the use of cohesion in the rhetorical structure, the devices in each move were analyzed in view of the rhetorical function which the move and the stage were expected to perform according to Hyland's (1990) framework. This way, the researcher was able to analyze and explain the more prominent ties in context of their use and application in the rhetorical organization of the sample texts. The researcher, however, did not consider errors or mistakes except for those of the misuse or overuse of the cohesion devices. Since the subjects of this study were not acquainted with Hyland's (1990) framework, and had been instructed in writing argumentative texts from a coursebook by Oshima and Hogue's (2006) which had its own prescriptive model of argumentation, the researcher expected the deviations in the sample essays from the chosen model.

5. Results

The sample texts (n=30) had 1954 cohesive devices which were unevenly distributed over the three stages and 13 moves of students' writing. The Introduction stage had 326 devices, the Argument 1382 and the Conclusion housed 246 cohesion devices. The detailed results for the presence and use of cohesion in each stage and move are presented below:

5.1. Cohesion in the Thesis/Introduction stage

There was visible frequency of cohesive devices which indicated the presence of strong coreferential feature in the Introduction stage.

5.2. Gambit

Following Halliday and Hasan (1976), there was rarity of cohesive element in the first sentence due to lack of the presupposed item, Gambit with 6.44% of the cohesion devices in Introduction did not reveal a high incidence and frequency of cohesive devices. The main use of Gambit was to create foreground relevance with the Proposition/Thesis so that both the element of persuasion and comprehension was established. The results mostly showed the use of referential and lexical items which developed a semantic association between the presupposing and the presupposed. The aim of leading the reader from general to specific detail was achieved as had been found in " *Culture is very important thing in every country*" where the general noun "thing" pointed back to "culture." The student writer tried to progress from the general to the specific to create proposition for the topic " *Saudi youth are losing their cultural identity*.":

5.3. Information

Information move contained 45.39% of cohesive element in the stage because it was like a link between the Gambit and Thesis and carried contextual material for the thesis statement. An example from a student essay would reveal the use of cohesive ties in this move:

College students suffering from this fact. They were not prepared for such stress from the high school level of education. And that ('is' missing) why they are facing a serious problems in college.

To associate with the topic, the student processed from the general to the specific. The use of the pronominal "they" referred to "college students" reflected objectivity which is an essential feature of academic writing. Besides, there were three other types of cohesion devices: recurrence of "school" and "college" tied with the similar devices in the Gambit. The general noun "fact" cohered with "difference ..." in the Gambit. "serious problems" collocated with "such stress" in the previous sentence. The move also revealed the use of sentence-initial "and" which, in fact, corroborated Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of additive conjunctive. "And" and "that is" were used for two important academic purposes: elaborating a previous concept and creating cause and result relationship.

5.4. Proposition/Thesis statement

Being the only mandatory move in Introduction, Proposition had 25.76% of the stage which were predominantly lexical and referential. The move was the most important for the whole argument of the essay was developed around this.

Although almost all educators support that college life must be challenging with this so many tests, there is many evidence show that it affect students grades and performance negatively.

The student writer in this example tried to foreground both the aspects of his argument. While the main clause had the main focus, the dependent clause expressed the opposing claim. The use of the demonstrative "this" was faulty; however, the pronominal "it" - an anaphor - encapsulated the entire idea elaborated in the dependent clause. The use of collocations "support - evidence - show; tests - grades- performance" was aptly used for an academic genre.

5.5. Evaluation

Evaluation as an optional move gave a "positive gloss" (Hyland, 1990 p.69) to the Proposition. Though rare in incidence, a few of the texts had this move which contained 12.88% of the cohesive ties in the stage.

(In the last six years with the smart phone revolution it start to weaken the personal relationships.) Kids with cell phone mobile applications and Internet are all taking part in this issue.

The example revealed the student's effort to consolidate the proposition which mentioned negative aspects of the use of phones. The semantic relationship between the stance in the two moves was established with the help of three lexical ties and a specific demonstrative pronoun. The writer used "Cell phone" as a synonym for "smart phone" referred to in Proposition; "internet" created part-whole association with "smart phone revolution," and "this" and "issue" was deployed as a demonstrative and a general noun to cohere with "it start to weaken the personal relationships." These examples supported Hyland's (1990 p.71) stance that "positive comment" depended on the structural and semantic ties which develop through a varied use of lexical and demonstrative reference devices.

5.6. Marker

This last and optional move in Introduction with 9.50% of the cohesive element, aimed to "structure discourse by signposting its subsequent direction" (Hyland, 1990 p.71).

However, Video games don't cause behavioral problems in youth and they have a lot of benefits such as releasing stress, learning and providing real life images.

The student writer employed the adversative instead of the formulaic chunks to signal the flow of discourse in the next stage i.e. Argument. The essentials of the main claim had been arranged in the sentence with lexical repetition of "video games" and "youth" and the use of the pronominal "they" developing semantic relationships at the intra as well as intersentential level to showcase unity and flow in discourse.

5.7. Restatement

Being an optional move, Restatement revealed only 6.72% of the unevenly distributed cohesive devices in Introduction. The move aimed at strengthening the stance developed in Proposition so that the reader could identify an association with the main concept of the topic as could be seen in the following example:

This seems to be true because there is an increase in murder crimes among young people.

The student adhered to a different strategy. He employed the demonstrative "this" to cohere with the thesis and then wrote the causal conjunctive "because" to rationalize the claim made in the Proposition. "Young people" was a mere repetition of a previous identical item.

5.8. Cohesion in the Argument stage

There was predominant incidence and frequency of the coreferential element in the Argument stage both in and between the moves.

5.9. Marker

Marker had only 3.61% of the cohesive ties in the stage as, for example:

First opponents say that money can buy you desired goods.

The example shows the use of temporal conjunctive "first" whereby the reader could follow a chain of claims. Then there was the topic word "money" employed as lexical repetition to tie with an identical device in the previous sentence. The examples here confirmed Hyland's (1990) stance that the Marker not only initiated a stretch of discussion but also semantically associated itself with the Proposition. The sample texts revealed the use of temporals to signal the flow of ideas as they unfolded in the discussion that ensued after the Proposition but also formulaic expressions such as "I think", "in the following paragraph" etc.

5.10. Claim

Following Hyland (1990 p.72) that Claim "endorses the validity of proposition", it can be considered the most important stage in an argumentative text. The results revealed that 17.51% of the cohesive element in the Argument stage was situated in Claim

- i. *The idea that money can buy happiness is comon and mony people believe it.*
- ii. *Opponents claims that the result of a research indecates 90% of youth in Saudi Arabia did not lose their cultural identity. The research is insafficient and inconclusive.*
- iii. *The too much testing in Yanbu Industrial College is affect on phsycology state of students.*
- iv. *cell phones keep everyone in tech with his family or friends everywhere and any time.*

In example (i) the cataphor through "the idea" cohered with "money can buy happiness" not only signposted the topic but also could be traced back identifying with lexical items in the previous move. Similarly, "people" tied with a similar one used anaphorically to form lexical repetition, whereas the personal pronoun "it" cohered with "the idea" in the clause initial position. The second sentence of example (ii) substantiated how the student writer developed a claim by rebutting a counterclaim. The use of demonstrative "the" and lexical repetition "research" cohered with "a research" in the previous sentence as well as marked it for contrast through the use of emphatic words "insufficient" and "inconclusive." Example (iii) was grammatically wrong but had repetition of "the too much testing" signalled by "the." The claim in example (iv) demonstrated an instance of the lexical repetition "cell phones" - topic phrase, and the pronominal "he" that connected with the indefinite pronoun "everyone."

5.11. Support

Support, in an argumentative text, is premised on supplying, "explicit reinforcement for the claim" (Hyland, 1990 p.73), and could be achieve through a repertoire of rhetorical functions. This move had the highest incidence of cohesion devices (72.14%) not only in the Argument stage but also in the entire text.

- i. *Although some people got their money from their parents, many [E1] worked hard to reach where they are now. I also believe that with bigger achievements, your happiness will be more, and as they say "a success will bring another sucess," so you can keep your happiness with hard work.*

- ii. *on the other hand, there are people who see this as an innovative way and a chance to teach young people how to drive using simulation technology. In contrast, some people argue that these games are nothing but a kind of intertainment and to spend time and to have fun but what is fun about killing people, even if its veritual and unreal?*

In example (i), the writer used persuasion as a rhetorical strategy to support his claim. The cohesive devices he employed were the general noun "some people," the contrastive "many" and the nominal ellipsis. Further cohesive effect was achieved by the lexical repetition of "their money" and "their parents" which cohered with "some people." Another rhetorical function of creating cause-result association was manifest in the use of the causal "so" which not only gave semanticity to the proposition but also strengthened the supporting detail through unity and persuasion. Example (ii) also illustrated the use of persuasion but through adversative conjunctives such as "on the other hand," "in contrast," and "but" to mark contrast. Text unity and coherence were further established by the repetitive "young people" and "simulation technology." Likewise, the demonstratives "this" linked with an entire concept in the preceding lines whereas "these" cohered with a previous incidence of "games."

5.12. Cohesion in the Conclusion stage

Unlike packing up the main ideas as is common with conclusion in other essay types, conclusion in argumentative essays is "the fusion of constituents of this genre" (Hyland, 1990 p.73). Through reaffirmation, conclusion synthesizes the claim and the supporting evidence to produce persuasive argument. Only 12.58% of the entire cohesive devices of the corpus were found in the conclusion. The student writers mainly used conjunctives such as "in conclusion, in short, to sum up, therefore, thus etc." to foreground packing up of the argument.

- i. *The bottom line is, there are things in life that a person should be thankful for.*
 ii. *In short, I do agree that*
 iii. *To sum up,*

5.13. Consolidation

Being the only obligatory move in Conclusion, Consolidation accounted for 38.61% of CD use in Conclusion in the present study. A few extracts from students' essays are cited below:

- i. *Its not always about money, its about finding the true happiness which is something money can never buy*
 ii. *Saudi youth are losing their identity culture due to life defolopment and improvement by studing outside saudi, working with other nationalities and using high technology divices.*

The personal pronoun "it" in example (i), established a semantic relationship with the Thesis by showcasing the writer's stance against the role of money in happiness. The repetitive items "money" and "happiness" tied with the preceding instance of similar devices. In (ii), the writer tried to strengthen his stance by restating the main ideas and repetition of "Saudi youth," the grammatically incorrect "their identity culture," and "outside Saudi" could locate their presupposed items in the preceding move, and helped to created cohesion and semantic association of meaning.

5.14. Affirmation

The main use of Affirmation was to restate the proposition (Hyland, 1990). The sample texts had 35.36% of the cohesive element in Conclusion. An example from sample texts is given below for its cohesive functions:

infact the player can develop himself from video games as video games sometime become emotional. the player also can learn some cultures from video games.

The conjunctive "*in fact*" was used as an affirmation of and emphasis on the claim made by the student and which he reiterated in this move. The instances of lexical repetition of "*the player*," "*video games*," and "*emotional*" cohered with their presupposed items in the last move as well as in this on to lend the essay its cohesiveness.

5.15. Close

Close as an optional move only had 15.85% of the cohesion ties in the Conclusion. Unlike other moves on the stage, it was prospective in its manifestation.

- i. *I suggest that goveronment and educated people must interfere to prohibit the selling of violent video games.*
- ii. *Therefore, in my opinion, Yanbu Industrial College must change their rule about number of tests.*

The prospective feature of Close was seen specifically in the use of the modal "*must*," "*suggest*," and the causal "*therefore*" and "*so*." The instance of "*suggest*" in example (i) pointed to an expectation. He student writer in example (ii) used "*therefore*" to refer to the urgency of shift in testing procedures he wanted to occur.

6. Discussion

Text length and position of the move in the argument stage were the two determiners of the incidence and frequency of the cohesive element in the sample texts. Though a frequent move in the rhetorical structure, Information is not a mandatory move. Following Hyland (1990 p. 70) that Information is realized through limited range of rhetorical functions, this move in the sample essays is mostly cohesive in as much that it helps the student writers to perform some relevant discourse functions. Proposition as a move, on the other hand, tries to develop a relationship between the topic and the focus that emerges out of it. The writers, as a matter of fact, foreground what they intend to include in their arguments, especially through appropriate lexis and formulaic expressions such as "*I think*," "*in my opinion*" etc. Occasionally, and as a rhetorical strategy, the writers do introduce rebuttals or refutations to signpost their claims and support. The student writers of this study used cohesive ties to give semantic identity to their Thesis, whereby certain rhetorical functions like stating or refuting an opinion, contrasting information, and sequencing of ideas were realized. Except for putting Proposition in the clause initial position which is a knack of the expert writers, Proposition in these sample essays was observed to fulfill most of the ways proposed by Hyland (1990 p. 71) such as that it may be very "succinctly" created or it may emerge from the Information move or may embed "contextualizing information" in the "proposition itself." Marker as a move is a feature of examination papers and involves use of formulaic language with a limited range. The samples of writing had been produced as examination scripts and the results revealed use of the formulaic language with the intent of guiding the reader to the focus of the argument. By employing the conjunctive "*however*" the mature writers showed that adverbs could be used to substitute for the functional use of formulaic expressions. Assuming Restatement as a rhetorical strategy which signals the Proposition, the students used lexical devices, especially repetition to make the move cohesive as well as foreground different semantic associations to help the reader anticipate the writers claims and supporting arguments. However, the students could have adopted a range of cohesive ties such as the demonstratives and conjunctives to produce an effective Restatement.

Hyland (1990) mentions three strategies for the creation of claim in argumentative writing. First, a piece of information which is commonly assumed by both the writer and the reader can be used so that both the interlocutors agree on the claim. Secondly, a general statement duly supported by factual evidence or logical opinion can be used for persuasion. And finally, the writers employ emphatic adjectives and adverbs to persuade their readers agree with their claim. Following these strategies, the sample texts, notwithstanding the errors of form, exhibit a range of rhetorical features that corroborate the strategies. Cohesive ties facilitate not only text flow but also the rhetorical functions appropriate to the move and stage. The Support move is significant insofar that it validates the authenticity and appeal of the claim through the supporting evidence. However, it is relatively easier to validate those Claims which are not grounded in expert knowledge such as found in the sample texts as they bear a common understanding between the interlocutors involving rhetorical functions such as cause and effect, exemplification, comparison and contrast, fact and figure etc. On the other hand, Claims originating from specialist knowledge

such as themes from chemistry or mathematics may reveal big gaps between the presuppositions of the interlocutors, and therefore, could result in limited or conditioned acceptability.

The sample essays show use of the temporal conjunctives which marked the summing up of the argument and also created semantic association with other pieces of supporting evidence foregrounded by sequential adverbs such as "*first, secondly* etc."

The study was initiated to observe how cohesive devices function in the rethorical structure. Although the quality of the argument was not a priority, the analysis was a useful attempt to unfold the behaviour of cohesion devices in the structure of the argumentative essay. Discourse in Arabic differs from that in English, for instance, as for as the notions of paragraphing and punctuation are concerned. Text structuring in Arabic is influenced by culture (Ayari, 1996); however, this stance is refuted by a study by Ahmad (2022) which could not identify the impact of culture on text cohesion and text organization. Most of the sample essays could be aligned with the model of argumentation used as a framework for analysis. The findings also challenge Berzlanovich's (2008) stance that argumentative writing because of its explicit emphasis on the rhetorical organization ignores the ideational function and therefore, employs a very limited range of lexical devices for cohesion. The results also contradict Wang and Cho (2010) who claim that a predominant use of premodifications badly affects the cohesiveness of argumentative writing. In contrast, despite occasional misuse or overuse of the cohesive ties, the sample texts have generally been appropriately cohesive.

7. Conclusion

The present study is significant insofar that no other initiative both in the Arab EFL context or beyond was found which studied cohesion devices in the argument structure on Hyland's (1990) framework. The researcher, therefore, assumes that this might be the first attempt of its research focus on the subject area. Owing to the non-availability of previous research, the results for the present study could not be compared and contrasted with other result findings. Suffice it to say that cohesion in the argument structure of academic essays has two main purposes: create text cohesion which leads to better semantic flow and unity; and realize the rhetorical functions which are relevant to each stage and move in which the cohesion devices function.

Hyland's (1990) model for argument analysis is, however, not without its weaknesses, and further research on the topic can derive a few implications. As an instance, the present study did not gauge the quality of argument, and any further research can focus on the rhetorical functions, text quality and cohesion. Moreover, a comparative study including different frameworks of argumentation such as that of Toulmin (2003) can be conducted to find out similarities and dissimilarities. Another initiative could be to use narrative or expository texts to study cohesion in the moves and stages of the text structure. It is anticipated that the results from studies such as proposed here would positively impact the teaching and learning efforts for student writing.

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