

Cohesion and Coherence: Beyond the Sentence

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Outline

- 1) What are cohesion and coherence?
- 2) Problem in writing classroom
- 3) Why teach cohesion and coherence?
- 4) How would you teach cohesion and coherence?

What are cohesion and coherence?

- Cohesion—Linked together; Sense of sentence-by-sentence flow; each sentence connects to the previous one and the one that follows
- Coherence—Unified as a whole; each sentence is related to the main idea

Examples of cohesion

- Pronouns

I met Sally Yamanaka. **She** was very pretty.

- Determiners (the, this, etc.)

Jane has a new house. **The front door** is blue.

Susan sent her meal back. **The steak** was undone.

(Examples taken from Wilson & Matsui, 1998)

Examples of cohesion

- Paraphrasing

Kumiko had a hard time making herself understood when she had an argument with her co-workers in English. Her inability to express herself in English made her decide to go to a language school.

I recommend reviewing your lecture notes before the test. This helps you remember the points the professor highlighted.

Examples of text without coherence

I like Jessica because she is cute. Cute girls like spaghetti. Spaghetti is easy to cook. Cooking has changed my life.

- Each sentence talks about a different idea.
- What the main idea is is not clear.

Problems in writing classroom

In writing class, students need to write how to write in English.

However, in reality:

- Students can't write anything in English—even a sentence.
- Students write something, but it doesn't make sense.

Problems in writing classroom

How are they taught?

- T teach only grammar and vocabulary (fill-in-blank, sentence translation, etc.)
- T give S writing assignments → Grade them (point out grammatical errors, comments on ideas, etc.)

Why teach cohesion and coherence?

- Just because they have learned grammar and vocabulary doesn't mean that they can use them.
- They should be able to put sentences together to carry a meaning.
- Creativity might be a gift. / T should appreciate each students' ideas → Rather than changing their ideas, T should help how they can be better understood.

How would you teach cohesion and coherence?

- Teach logic (= flow of language) in English
- Three basic principles
 - 1) Abstract to concrete (in J, often concrete to abstract)
 - 2) General to specific (in J, often specific to general)
 - 3) Known to new (J readers can often read between the lines and seldom feel bothered by information gap)

How would you teach cohesion and coherence?

Suggestive activity

Give two sentences that make sense if they are put together in the correct order

- Which comes first?
 - a) Tokyo is an international city.
 - b) Tokyo has 400,000 people from other countries.

How would you teach cohesion and coherence?

Suggestive activity

Grammar/vocabulary exercises beyond the sentence

1. My favorite singer is Taylor Swift. _____ (she) sings country songs, but a variety of people listen to _____ (her) song.
2. It is good to read a lot of novels. _____ (reading) novels stimulates your imagination.
3. Darin is very tall. His _____ (height) is over 6 feet.

How would you teach cohesion and coherence?

These are good:

- Teaching text types (narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive)
- Giving Ss an outline for each
- Teaching discourse markers

But, just be aware that students may only use the surfaces...

Your students often write like this...

I would like to write about bullying. I have three reasons to support my opinion.

First, my friend committed suicide. For example, some bullies got him naked and confined him into the storage room in the gym for more than ten hours. He was found crying next morning. The next day, he died.

Your students often write like this...

Second, bullies never stop. For example, I was bullied in elementary school. I didn't like the treatments I received from those obnoxious bullies.

Finally, there are adult bullies. For example, they do sexual harassment and power harassment. They are really bad.

In sum, we should stop bullying. Thanks for reading.

How would you teach cohesion and coherence?

Before having students write in accordance with an outline

- They should be fully exposed to good examples
- They should understand the functions of discourse markers
- They should have the image of what cohesive and coherent texts are.

References

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