

Awareness of Transitional Cohesive Devices in Text and ELT Learners' News Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to figure out if learners' awareness of transitional textual indices can lead to an improved news reading comprehension. To do this, we selected four groups of transitional cohesive devices, namely, giving examples, result, contrast, and summarizing. These four groups were chosen from two grammar books of (Communicate what you mean) and (Using and Understanding English Grammar). These are two main college books to teach EFL grammar in Iran. Thirty one students were randomly selected from English students studying teaching and literature at a private college in Tabriz. They all were male students and their ages ranged from 19 to 25 years of old. To make sure about the homogeneity of the group, we selected all from term four and based our selection on their reading scores of reading 3. A reading test was taken as a pretest including three news articles each followed by ten multiple-choice questions. These were chosen from English newspapers of Tehran Times and Iran News having been published in Iran for many years. The subjects were taught two groups of cohesive devices, namely, giving examples and results using examples of news texts and highlighting examples by asking and answering questions. This lasted for 5 sessions and a second test was given almost at the same level and format as the pretest. Then, two other groups were taught, namely, contrast and summarizing. This lasted for five sessions. The post test was then given, which included three news articles each followed by 10 multiple choice tests. Statistical analysis of the means performed through a t-test revealed a statistically significant difference for the two post tests. In the end, some pedagogical implications were given.

Keywords: News reading Comprehension, Textual indices, cohesive transitional devices, ELT students.

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INTRODUCTION

Cohesion

Cohesion has been defined in a number of ways. Halliday and Hassan [1] put the view that the primary determinant of whether a set of sentences do or do not constitute a text depends on cohesive relationships within and between sentences. They consider a text as a unified whole which is easily recognized from one which is not. They put the view that cohesion is a set of linguistic means we have available for creating texture. It is a property of the text of being an interpretable whole rather than unconnected sentences. Singh [2] holds that cohesion is the property that distinguishes a sequence of sentences that form a discourse from a random sequence of sentences. According to Cook [3], cohesive devices are formal links between sentences and clauses.

Dubin and Olshtain [4, 5] remark, "The most important characteristic of cohesion is the fact that it does not constitute a class of items but rather a set of relations". A similar but rather a more comprehensive view, is given by Steffensen [6] that the intersentential ties are more important than the intersentential ones.

Transitional words

The four groups of transitional words included in this paper were as follows:

Examples: These include expressions like "for example, for instance, a good example of this is, such as, to illustrate, in particular, particularly, namely, specifically".

Result: They include expressions like "therefore, as a result, thus, so, consequently, admittedly, so that, depending on".

Contrast: These include words like "on the other hand, however, despite this, conversely, in contrast, on the contrary, although, while, though, compared with, in comparison with, rather, whereas, but, instead of, in spite of, still, nevertheless, regardless, otherwise".

Summarizing: They include expressions like “in brief, on the whole, summing up, to conclude, in conclusion, as I have shown, as I have said, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently”.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The subjects of this study were 30 students studying English language literature and translation in a private college in Tabriz, Iran. For the sake of group homogeneity they were all selected from term 4 students. They had all passed three reading comprehension courses before. Their reading scores in the previous term were also taken as a basis for this selection and this was another guarantee for their homogeneity. To control the gender factor, we selected all from male students and their ages ranged from 19 to 25.

Instruments

Three tests were taken from the subjects. The pretest consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions, which were designed by the researchers. Three articles were selected from two English newspapers, namely, “Tehran Times and Iran News”. These have been published daily in Iran for almost 25 years. The texts selected were loaded with transitional cohesive devices. Every article was followed with 10 questions. The post tests were exactly in the same format as the pretest.

Procedure

The transitional devices were selected from two commonly used grammar books of “Communicate What You Mean” and “Using and Understanding English Grammar”. We provided them with many examples and explained them how they are used. We also used different news texts and involved them in how these connected sentences by asking questions. In the end, they were asked to write sample sentences by using transitional devices, which were corrected and enough feedback was given to the group in choral and in individually if required. The pretest was given before the treatment to test the learners’ news reading ability. After teaching and making the subjects aware of two groups of transitional devices, the first posttest was given. When the other two groups were taught, the second posttest was administered. Every treatment took five sessions.

RESULTS

Table (1) shows a descriptive statistics of the three groups of scores, namely, pretest and two posttests.

Table(1)- Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
pretest	16.23	5.920	31
post1	17.71	5.261	31
post2	18.81	5.724	31

Based on the design of this study that is experimental, the following null hypothesis is stated:

Null hypothesis

Teaching cohesive transitional devices of summarizing, contrast, result, and exemplification cannot improve ELT learners’ news reading ability.

To test this hypothesis, “Repeated Measures or Multivariate Test” was employed. The results can be observed on table (2) as follows:

Table (2)- Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
factor1 Pillai's Trace	.645	26.378 ^a	2.000	29.000	.000
Wilks' Lambda	.355	26.378 ^a	2.000	29.000	.000
Hotelling's Trace	1.819	26.378 ^a	2.000	29.000	.000
Roy's Largest Root	1.819	26.378 ^a	2.000	29.000	.000

a. Exact statistic

b. Design: Intercept

Within Subjects Design: factor1

As it is seen above, the hypothesis has been tested based on four statistical procedures of Pillai’s, Wilk’s lambda, Hottelling’s trace, and Roy’s largest root. Regarding the amounts of Significant Level shown as Sig. that are all below 0.05, the null hypothesis can be rejected and we may claim that the mean score of

post 1 and post 2 exceed that of pretest. So teaching and making ELT learners aware of cohesive transitional devices in text can improve their news reading comprehension.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper we came to the conclusion that transitional cohesive devices, which are a subpart of cohesive devices, are an integral part of a text and play an important part in every reading comprehension process. It was seen that teaching these devices can significantly improve the reading comprehension of English students in general and their news reading ability in particular. However, here only four groups of these devices were tested and further studies can be designed to test the other groups. It should also be mentioned that the study can be done with larger groups of students and considering other genres in ESP courses. Different skills can also be evaluated other than reading.

Pedagogical implications

Some pedagogical implications of this study can be drawn for both EFL reading and translation equivalence. As it was mentioned before, cohesion is a semantic relation and functions to pair and chain items across sentences that are related. It brings about semantic continuity in a text. It can be claimed that comprehension of a text partly depends on recovering the cohesive devices in general and transitional ones in particular. So teachers who attend to these devices and make their students aware of them in a reading class are in a better stance to have students with higher comprehension. Translation is defined as establishing equivalence in textual material between the source and target language. Newmark [7] cited in Fleet and Thread gold states that the topic of cohesion is the most useful area of discourse analysis applicable to translation. Lotfipour Saedi [8] offers a discursal framework for the characterization of translation equivalence. He states that equivalence is established in terms of eight dimensions, namely, vocabulary, structure, texture, sentence meaning versus utterance meaning, language varieties, presuppositions, cognitive effect, and aesthetic effect. Thus, in establishing translation equivalence between the source and target language, these dimensions need to be met. Of these only the third one 'texture' is related to our study.

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