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The Use of Cohesive Devices in the Compositions of Chinese College Students

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Aim and scope.....	2
1.2 Material.....	3
1.3 Method.....	3
2. Theoretical background	4
2.1 The Definition of Cohesion.....	4
2.2 Previous Researches on Cohesion and Writing.....	6
2.3 The Classification of Cohesive Devices.....	7
2.3.1 Reference.....	8
2.3.2 Substitution.....	9
2.3.3 Ellipsis.....	10
2.3.4 Conjunction.....	12
2.3.5 Lexical Cohesion.....	13
2.4 Identification of Cohesive Devices.....	14
3. Results and Analysis.....	17
3.1 A General Description of the Use of Cohesive Devices.....	17
3.2 The Use of Reference.....	21
3.3 The use of Substitution and Ellipsis.....	26
3.4 The use of Conjunction.....	27
3.5 The Use of Lexical Cohesion.....	29
4. Summary and Discussion.....	31
4.1 Summary of Analysis.....	31
4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions.....	35
4.2.1 Implication.....	35
4.2.2 Suggestions.....	36
5. Conclusion.....	41
References	
Appendix	

Abstract

Writing plays an important role in people's daily communication. But for Chinese university students, writing an English composition constitutes a tough task, in which the use of cohesive devices is one of the major problems. Though cohesion has a lot to do with the quality of a composition, the empirical study of their relationship from the perspective of quantitative research is rarely done.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the real use of cohesive devices on the basis of the theories related to cohesion and Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy of cohesive devices. The following questions are to be explored in the study: 1. What is the frequency of cohesive devices in the sample compositions? 2. What is the distribution of cohesive devices in the compositions? 3. What are the errors in using cohesive devices in the compositions? 4. What are the features of the cohesive errors in the compositions? 5. What are the causes of these errors committed in the compositions?

In the analysis of cohesion in a composition, the cohesive items or ties would be underlined and coded based on Halliday and Hasan's classification of cohesive devices and identification scheme. Then the number of cohesive ties would be counted. For each of these ties, the type of cohesive device they belong to would be specified. In the same time, the errors committed in the use of cohesive devices would also be examined: the number of the cohesive errors, the classification of cohesive errors, the features of the errors, the possible causes of these errors.

From the findings of the study, it could be seen that the features of cohesive errors are 1) overuse and misuse of personal reference; 2) frequent shift of pronouns; 3) overuse and misuse of *the*; 4) misuse of conjunctives; 5) overuse of simple repetition; 6) misuse of collocation; 7) the restricted choice of lexical items.

Key words: cohesion, coherence, cohesive devices, pedagogical implications

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Appendix (Sample Composition)

Whether Euthanasia Should Be Legalized in China

Euthanasia, or mercy killing, is the practice of hastening a terminally and incurably ill patient's death in order to relieve his great pains and sufferings. Euthanasia is a controversial issue through out the world. In regard to the hopelessly ill patient's unbearable anguish, his family's emotional, physical and economic heavy burdens and the cost of society, euthanasia should be legalized in China. Euthanasia can relieve the suffering of the terminally ill patients both physically and mentally. Some people may argued that euthanasia is inhumane because it strips the patient's right to live. However, I would rather say that it is quite humane because it frees the patient from anguish and gives him back the dignity of death. Many euthanasias were committed under the strong request of the helpless patients. The reason why they chose death instead of life was that life was no longer enjoyable and meaningful for them. They couldn't do anything for society or their families. Every moment they lived, they suffered, both from their own physical pains and the emotional pains seeing their families suffered. Only death could give the peace and relief. Since death is their only enjoyable destination, it is quite humane to give them a ride and let them die with peace and dignity rather than dying bit by bit with all kinds of tubes plugged in their bodies. Euthanasia also can release the heavy burdens of the patients' families. The family suffers too when watching their beloved relative waiting for death painfully. They also have to look after the patient day after day. Some people even quit their jobs in order to take care of their relatives. China is a developing country. People are poorer than those in the developed countries. If they stop working, their incomes which support the basic life of the whole family will also stop. In addition, the medical fee for a terminal patient is very expensive. For example, a comatose patient costs 26,000 yuan a year. It is really a heavy burden for the family. Generally, a common family in Chinese family can not afford such expensive fee without the free-medical care service , Therefore, hastening the death of a terminally ill patient liberates not only the patient himself but also his family. Euthanasia will save money, medical sources of the whole society. Artificially prolonging a patients life needs a lot of expensive medicine and equipments. In the case of China, a large proportion of such medicine and equipments are

imported so that they are even more expensive. Doctors and nurses are needed to treat the patient. However, for a patient who will never regain consciousness and die sooner or later. Such great efforts are in vain. In this sense, it is a waste of medical sources. It is more meaningful to save these sources and help other curable patients. Under the free medical service system, euthanasia can save a large sum of medical cost for China. There is a Chinese saying "Fa Lui Bu Wai Hu Ren Qin", which means that laws do not go beyond human feelings. Most of the people who committed mercy killing in America were acquitted by law. For instance, Dr. Herman N. Sanders, Mrs. Ross and Lester M. Zynamiak who killed his incurable patient, her disformed baby daughter and his paralyzed brother in order to relieve their pains, were all acquitted. Since the motive of euthanasia is to relieve pains of patients and their families, and save money for the country, the cases of foreign countries proved that it was reasonable from the perspective of human feeling, euthanasia should be legalized in China.