

Coherence on Undergraduate Thesis Abstract Written by English Language Students

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Abstract

Coherence is one of the important aspects in academic writing. It affects the reader's understanding about a text. Particularly in education, academic writing becomes the requirement for undergraduate students to claim their graduation by writing a thesis. Thesis has some important parts, one of them is a thesis abstract which delivers a brief summary about the whole thesis. Therefore, the students need to write the thesis abstract coherently to provide positive first impression and build the reader interest toward the thesis. However, many of the students are not aware to this demand. Based on the issue, this study aimed to reveal the coherence on undergraduate thesis abstract written by English Language Education Study Program students of Lambung Mangkurat University. This study applied descriptive qualitative approach. There were four abstracts from higher grade theses and four abstracts from lower grade theses analyzed in this study that were selected by using purposive sampling. The analysis of coherence in this study was conducted by content analysis method based on the topical subject progressions applied in the abstracts. This study found that the coherence in the four abstract theses was consistent and the coherence in the four abstracts of lower grade theses was varied by the finding of two from four abstracts had failed to reach coherence. Based on the findings, it was suggested for the students to improve and build awareness in writing a coherent abstract for their thesis as an academic writing product.

Keywords: Coherence, topical subject progression, undergraduate thesis abstract

Introduction

Academic writing is essential in education. It becomes the final task for college students as a requirement to claim their graduation. Therefore, the students have to be able to write academically well as the needs of their study. One of the academic writing products is a thesis, including the abstract as one of the important parts. An abstract delivers some important points consist of overview, aim, reason, methodology and finding of the research in limited words as a summary of thesis that provides the first impression for the reader before reading the full thesis (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Since it provides the first impression, an abstract should be written in well-structured writing (Jalalian, 2012). As a consequence, the students have to be able to write academically well as the needs of their study and be more concern about the writing of abstract.

One of the characteristics in a well-structured writing that students should be aware in writing an abstract is coherence. Coherence refers to the organization of written discourse of text which has a consistent development of ideas, concepts, or argument by which all elements are clearly and logically joined to each other (Almaden, 2006). According to Oshima and Hogue (2006), coherence will be achieved when the ideas in text move smoothly and logically. In addition, according to Halliday, as cited in Arifin (2020), a text must be consistent with the context and must have cohesion where the ideas are connected by cohesive devices to be considered coherent. In brief, coherence relates on how the writers

organize and connect the sentences in developing the ideas, concepts, or arguments clearly and logically integrated.

It is important for the students to write an abstract of a thesis in a well-developed structure which is clear and logically linked known as coherence. Certainly, there are some reasons that lead it to be an important issue. The first reason, it is essential to write an abstract coherently as it is required for academic writing and further studies, particularly as one of the graduation requirements. The second reason, the coherence of an abstract will facilitate the readers in interpreting the abstract accurately. Since the abstract is a summary, the coherence of an abstract will have effect on how the readers interpret the abstract and understand the whole thesis. The third reason, it is because the readers will decide whether they are interested or not to read the whole thesis by reading the abstract. It becomes the point of entry which provides the first impression for the readers. Therefore, it should be written well. Thus, by writing a coherent abstract, the students will provide positive first impression and assist the readers in understanding the abstract accurately which persuade them to read the whole thesis.

Based on the explanation above, the coherence of an abstract is essential. It is important for the students to be aware and writing an abstract coherently for their thesis. One method that the students may use to analyze and achieve coherence in writing is topical structure analysis (TSA). TSA was proposed by Lautamatti in 1987 to investigate how is the coherence in texts formed based on the topic progression in the texts (Flores & Yin, 2015).

As stated in Flores and Yin (2015), there are three sentence elements to be identified in the application of TSA before proceed to the analysis of progression. The first element is initial sentence element which comes first in a sentence. The second element is the mood subject which refers to the grammatical subject of the sentence. The third element is the topical subject of the sentence which refers to the idea being discussed in the sentence; it may or may not be the mood subject and may come in another lexical form.

After all of the topical subjects in a text identified, the analysis proceeded to analyze the progression of the topical subjects which revealed the coherence of the text. The analysis of progression in TSA involves parallel progression, extended parallel progression and sequential progression which proposed by Lautamatti (1987), also extended sequential progression which proposed by Simpson (2000) (Flores & Yin, 2015). Parallel progression occurs when two consecutive clauses have the same topical subject, identically or even as the synonym. Extended parallel progression is a parallel progression which occurs in two clauses that are non-consecutive. Sequential progression is a progression when the rheme element of a clause becomes the theme element of the consecutive clause. Then, extended sequential progression occurs when the rheme element of a clause becomes the theme element in non-consecutive clauses.

TSA has been applied successfully in writing studies in ESL and it has been applied by many researchers (Almaden, 2006). However, there is still a little information and studies which involve TSA in EFL where writing helps the writer to learn English as a new language. In addition, the undergraduate thesis abstract written by English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) students of Lambung Mangkurat University is not explored yet in terms of coherence. Therefore, this present study is conducted to analyse and describe the coherence of undergraduate thesis abstract written by ELESP students of Lambung Mangkurat University by the use of TSA. Specifically, this present study is aimed to answer a question of “how is the coherence of undergraduate thesis abstract written by ELESP students of Lambung Mangkurat University?”. Furthermore, this present study is expected to contribute and provide information about the application of TSA in EFL writing.

Theory and Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach as the data analysis will be elaborated and reported in words, phrases and sentences. The source of data in this study are the undergraduate thesis abstracts written by ELESP students of Lambung Mangkurat University batch 2014 which match the nature of qualitative design as it focuses on process and product, and the natural setting as a direct source of data (Fraenkel, et al., 2011, p. 440). The undergraduate thesis abstracts were purposefully selected by the researcher from JTAM. It is because the thesis abstracts published in JTAM are already considered official. In addition, the thesis abstracts were selected from the theses written by students from batch 2014 because they are considered new. The sources of data in this study involve two groups of data sources consisting of 4 abstracts from higher grade theses and 4 abstracts from lower grade theses which are believed to be sufficient to provide maximum insight and understanding to answer the research question. The information about the thesis grade was obtained from the ELESP administrator.

This study is conducted through content analysis based on topical structure analysis to reveal the coherence of the undergraduate thesis abstracts written by ELESP students of Lambung Mangkurat University batch 2014. The topical structure analysis conducts the analysis from the sentence elements until the progression of ideas and presents how the topical development is carried out in the two groups of data sources which describe the coherence of abstracts and answer the question in this study as reflected by the progression in the text. The technique of data collection was done by using following steps:

1. Preparing the two groups of data sources which consist of 4 abstracts from the higher grade of thesis and 4 abstracts from the lower grade of thesis
2. Analysing the topical subjects in independent clauses as the data to be analysed.

Then, in order to analyse the data, the researcher employs the procedures or stages as adopted from Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson and Razavieh (2010: 481), there are as follow:

1. Organising and familiarizing

In this stage, the data are put into a table to provide the better view of the progression based on the topical subjects in each abstract.

Lautamatti's (1987) parallel progression, extended parallel progression, sequential progression and Simpson's (2000) extended sequential progression are the types or patterns of progressions involved in this analysis. Then, the researcher familiarize the data through reading, rereading and reviewing.

2. Coding and reducing

The data coding is done by using necessary codes initially from the actual words of respondents or aspects. In this study, the data coding is aimed to respect the sources of data by keeping the writers' identity anonymously.

3. Interpreting and representing

In this study, the researcher delivers the result of the analysis through detail explanation in words as this study applies qualitative design.

In addition, this study also applies investigator triangulation and involves two experts which are the lecturers from English Language Education Study Program of Lambung Mangkurat University as a validator for the instrument and as a rater. It is aimed to fulfill the concept of making valid inferences from data and the consistency of data which are important in a qualitative research that indicate the quality of data (Ary, et al., 2010).

Findings and Discussion

The results are arranged based on two groups of abstracts analysed in this study, abstracts of higher grade theses and abstracts of lower grade theses. In abstracts of higher grade theses, the researcher found that the coherence of the abstracts is consistent. On the other hand, the abstracts of lower grade theses are varied in terms of coherence. The researcher found that two of four abstracts analyzed in this study have failed to reach coherence.

The analysis of coherence was based on the progression of topical subjects in each abstract. There were four types of progressions or patterns involved in the analysis. Those types of progressions were parallel progression, extended parallel progression, sequential progression and extended sequential progression. Those patterns describe the progression of topical subjects and show the relation of ideas in text. In the analysis, it was found that all of the progression patterns are already applied in the abstracts, however, there are still many ideas introduced as new topics.

Therefore, the researcher conducted the analysis of ideas movement based on the use of cohesive devices and logical order of the ideas or topics in the analysis of progression. It was aimed to provide comprehensive analysis. First, the ideas movement relates to the transition of ideas in text. To write a coherent text, the transition from one idea to the next should be smooth. The writer may apply cohesive devices to write smooth transition in their writing text. The next is about logical order, it means the writer has clear arrangement of ideas. For example, the writer makes logical division of ideas and organizes the idea from general to specific, or arranges their writing based on chronological order. A text is considered incoherent when the text is illogically arranged. In the analysis, there are some ideas or topical subjects that not smooth in the movement of ideas and not arranged in logical order which found in the two abstracts of lower grade theses. As a result, those two abstracts are considered incoherent.

Abstracts of Higher Grade Theses

In the analysis, there were four abstracts from higher grade theses analysed by the researcher. Based on the analysis, it was found that the four abstracts from higher grade theses analyzed in this study are consistent in terms of coherence based on the findings of the progressions of topical subjects in those abstracts. It is because they apply the progression patterns, smooth in terms of ideas movement and logically ordered.

In this point, the researcher presents the samples for the analysis of every progression pattern, ideas movement and logical order. First, parallel progression which applied appropriately like in clause number (2) and (3) in abstract HA 2:

(C3) ***This research** is limited only to investigate the principles violation.*

(C4) ***This research** is descriptive qualitative research.*

The topic in clause number (3), “This research”, is repeated in the next clause, that is clause number (4). Second, extended parallel progression which applied in clause number (8) and (11) in abstract HA 4 as the topic “the lecturers” is repeated in non-consecutive clause number (11):

(C8) *The research result indicated that in the process of teaching English, **the lecturers** sometimes switched their languages: English, Bahasa Indonesia, Banjarase, and Arabic. (C9) There were three **types of code-switching** used by the lecturers which were tag-switching, intrasentential-switching, and intersentential switching. (C10)*

While for the function, there were three **functions of code-switching** used by the lecturers which were topic-switch, affective-function, and repetitive function.

(C11) In conclusion, **the lecturers** switched their languages in some types and for various functions depend on the situation of their teaching activity and students' need.

Third, sequential progression applied in abstract HA 2, as the topic in clause number (2), "The principles", is already mentioned in the previous clause as rheme:

(C1) **This study** is aimed to describe the implementation of principles in constructing multiple-choice items in *Buku LKS Bahasa Inggris for the eight-grade students published by Kartika Prima*. (C2) **The Principles** are from Heaton (1977), Madsen (1983) and Brown (2010).

Fourth, extended sequential progression applied in abstract HA 3 when the topic in clause number (8), "the students", refers to the students which mentioned in clause number (6) as rheme:

(C6) **The sample** was 37 students from A3 and A4 class of Advanced Writing course.

(C7) **The data** were gathered by using observation, questionnaire and interview.

(C8) The result of this study shows that **the students** have good attitude and perception toward the use of LINE group when it can facilitate them to post ideas, encourage them with like and comment feature and be a medium for shy students to speak up and involve themselves in the class discussion.

Next, the analysis about ideas movement like in abstract HA 1:

(C2) **This research** is limited only to evaluate the appropriateness of content, language, and presentation using the checklist of Rubric Assessment from BSNP. (C3) **The design of this study** was mixed methods.

The topic in clause number (3), "The design of this study", discusses and explains about the design applied in the research or study. The existence of cohesive device in the topical subject makes the transition become smooth. Finally, about logical order, the ideas or topics arranged in abstracts from higher grade theses are logically ordered. Here is presented clause number (10) and (11) in abstract HA 3 as a sample:

(C10) This research also reveals that **the students** still faced some obstacles in the use of this application as teaching and learning media, such as bad internet connection and the distractions of other LINE's features.

(C11) **The solutions** are given in this research for teachers, students, institution and other researchers.

The topics in clause number (10) and (11) are arranged in logical way, as the topic "The solution" answers the previous clause which informed that the students faced some obstacles.

Abstracts of Lower Grade Theses

In the analysis, there were four abstracts from lower grade theses analyzed by the researcher. Based on the analysis, it was found that two of four abstracts have failed to reach coherence. The two abstracts which considered coherent are abstract LA 1 and LA 4. The other two abstract which considered incoherent are abstract LA 2 and LA 3. However, based

on the findings of the progressions of topical subjects in those abstracts, all of the abstracts are already applied the progression patterns. The problems which caused abstract LA 2 and LA 3 incoherent are the ideas movement which not smooth and unlogic arrangement of ideas.

In this point, the researcher presents the coherence problems which occur in abstract LA 2 and LA 3. First, in abstract LA 2, the movement of idea which not smooth occurs in clause number (9) when the writer mentions reading test as topic without any connector or cohesive device in that clause while there is no relation to the previous clause:

(C8) Total number of students were 70 of eleventh grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Banjarmasin as the representative that got highest score in English based on the researcher pre research and the teacher's experience. (C9) Researcher used reading test that consists of 3 set of narrative text and 25 questions related to the text.

Second, in abstract LA 3, the problems occur in clause number (3), (4), (8), (9) and (10).

(C1) Teaching-learning process cannot be separated from strategies of teaching. (C2) The strategies of teaching are important components of teaching and learning process to build students' ability in reading. Through strategy in teaching reading to make students interested to learning reading. (C3) The problem of this study are focused on how is the implementation of teaching strategies and what strategies are the teacher used in reading comprehension in reading comprehension at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin. (C4) The research objective are to describe the implementation of teaching strategies in reading comprehension and find out the teacher's strategies used in teaching reading comprehension. (C5) This research used descriptive qualitative method.

In clause number (3), the topic “The problem of this study” is considered not logically ordered as the writer directly discuss about the problem when there is no discussion about the study before. The topic in clause number (4), “The research objective”, is also unlogic. The topic discuss about the research objective while using reference device *the* when there is no discussion about the research in the previous lines. Instead, the topic “This research” that should be an opening for the research discussion is introduced lately in clause number (5).

(C8) The result of the research showed that the teacher used group discussion; is used to answer the questions based on their read in a group. (C9) Gallery walk; is used for the students after they finished see the pictures and read the text, the teacher asked students questions related the pictures. (C10) Mind mapping; is used for students make mind mapping based on their thinking.

Then, in clause number (8), (9) and (10), the topical subjects are actually the explanation of the research result as initially introduced in clause number (8), however, the ideas movement are not smooth and the arrangement is not in a logical way. There is no cohesive devices used in those clause, which then caused the movement of ideas becomes unsmooth. Also, the arrangement of ideas needs to be improved.

Based on the findings from abstracts of higher and lower grade theses, it can be understood that coherence of a text can be described by the topical subject progression in the text. It confirms the theory from Lautamatti (1987) that was mentioned again in Flores and Yin (2015) that coherence of texts is formed based on the sequencing of topics per sentence within a paragraph. It also confirms the theory from Oshima and Hogue (2006) and Halliday

theory cited in Arifin (2020) which stated that repeating the key nouns being discussed, using consistent pronouns and consistent with context in which it is created will form the coherence of a text. In the analysis of progression, the coherence of the abstracts was analyzed by the topical subject progressions based on Topical Structure Analysis which involved parallel progression, extended parallel progression, sequential progression and extended sequential progression, also based on the ideas movement and logical order.

The findings showed that almost all of the patterns of progressions were found in every abstract in the analysis. It is in line with the findings of some studies (Flores & Yin, 2015; Liangprayoon, Chaya, & Thep-ackraphong, 2013; Almaden 2006; Simpson, 2000) which found that the presence or use of topical progressions is highly evident in the students' writings. However, all of the patterns of progressions found in every abstract in the analysis were not enough to reveal the coherence of the abstracts. It was because not all ideas in sentences of the abstracts were introduced by using the progression patterns. Instead, some of them were introduced as new topical subjects.

In order to obtain more comprehensive findings, it was required to conduct more analysis towards those new topical subjects introduced in the abstracts. The analysis involved the movement of ideas and logical order analysis. As Oshima and Hogue (2006) stated that a text can be said coherent when the ideas move smoothly and logically. Based on the findings in this study, it was found that two of four abstracts from lower grade theses have failed to reach coherent because of the ideas movement which not smooth, because there is no cohesive devices to relate or reinforce the ideas, and unlogic arrangement of ideas. It confirms the theory from Halliday which cited in Arifin (2020), theory from Suwandi (2016) and theory from Oshima and Hogue (2006) which stated that cohesion or the use of cohesive devices including transition signals to connect and show the relationship between ideas in sentences indicates the coherence of a text. It also confirms the theory from Oshima and Hogue (2006) and Irawan (2019) which stated that the ideas should also be arranged in order or in a logical way so that text could be said as a coherent text.

Conclusion

In the analysis of topical subject progressions based on topical structure analysis conducted in this study, it was found that almost all of the progression patterns were applied, however, there were still many ideas introduced as new topics in the abstracts. Therefore, the researcher conducted the analysis of ideas movement based on the use of cohesive devices and logical order of the ideas or topics in order to obtain the comprehensive result of coherence analysis. The results of the analysis showed that the coherence in the four abstracts of higher grade theses is consistent and the coherence in the four abstracts of lower grade theses is varied by the finding of two from four abstracts have failed to reach coherence. The two abstracts are considered incoherent because of the ideas movement which not smooth where there is no cohesive devices used to relate the ideas and the arrangement of ideas which not logically ordered. It can also be concluded that thesis grade does not have any relation with the coherence of the thesis abstract, as the findings showed that there are two coherent abstracts even the abstracts were taken from lower grade theses. Moreover, this study also implies that topical structure analysis could be applied in EFL in order to examine and achieve coherence in writing. Based on the conclusion, it is suggested for the students to build their awareness in writing a coherent abstract for their thesis by paying attention to the topical subject progression. The students may apply progression patterns, cohesive devices and arrange their ideas in logical order to connect and make the movement of ideas becomes smooth.

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