

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:  
EDU-2024-13018220

Volume: 13

Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2320-2653

E-ISSN: 2582-1334

Received: 02.10.2024

Accepted: 15.11.2024

Published Online: 01.12.2024

Citation:

Subasi, G., & Uner, S. (2023). What are the cohesive devices in opinion essays written by Turkish EFL students across different proficiency levels?. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 13(1), 11-22.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v13i1.8220>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

# What are the Cohesive Devices in Opinion Essays Written by Turkish EFL Students across Different Proficiency Levels?

**Gonca Subasi**

Anadolu University, Turkey

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7049-5940>

**Seda Uner**

Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Turkey

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5991-745X>

## Abstract

Effective writing requires important features and one of them is cohesion which is necessary to bind a text. [Halliday and Hasan \(1976\)](#) state that grammatical and lexical devices which are called cohesive devices (CDs) create texture. To make a text coherent and understandable, CDs should be used frequently and skilfully. The present study aims to investigate the students' employment of CDs in a specific genre. The participants were 60 EFL students enrolled in the beginner and pre-intermediate preparatory classes at a state university in Turkey. The student's opinion essays were examined via the modified version of [Halliday and Hasan's \(2001\)](#) taxonomy of CDs developed by [Yang and Sun \(2012\)](#). The collected data were analysed by calculating the frequency of CDs and comparing the means of CDs used correctly or incorrectly by the participants. The outcomes yielded that the pre-intermediate level students used cohesive devices more frequently and accurately in their opinion essays compared to the beginner-level students. In addition, it was diagnosed that the most problematic area for both levels was the use of conjunctions. Hence, as a pedagogical implication, it is recommended that cohesive devices be taught at the core of writing instruction.

**Keywords:** Cohesive Devices, Opinion Essays, Turkish EFL Students, Proficiency Levels, Writing Skill

## Introduction

Writing is one of the most complex skills of the four basic language skills because, as [Hedge \(1988\)](#) highlights, to write effectively, it is necessary to organise ideas and information accurately without being ambiguous and to use complex grammatical devices vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures carefully. Because of these challenges writing is 'frequently accepted as being the last language skill to be acquired' ([Nunan, 1991](#)), that's to say, mastering written skills is highly difficult for learners.

Effective writing requires important features and one of them is cohesion which is necessary to bind a text as a whole. [Halliday and Hasan \(1976\)](#) point out that grammatical and lexical devices which are called cohesive devices (CDs) create texture- the property of being a text in every language. These devices form cohesive relations between sentences and elements in sentences. Therefore, CDs should be used frequently and skilfully to make a text coherent and understandable.

Recognising the importance of cohesive items there have been research studies on CDs in students' compositions in English either as a native language or a second or foreign language. Most of these studies focused on the

relationship between the use of CDs and writing quality (Bui, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023; Sanosi, 2024; Saputra & Hakim, 2020; Siregar et al., 2023). These empirical studies demonstrate that many ESL/EFL learners cannot use CDs in writing appropriately and this requires further and upgraded research. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the employment of CDs by students across different proficiency levels with the hope to shed some insights into the related literature.

## Theoretical Background

### Cohesion and Cohesive Devices

Cohesion was first introduced in Halliday and Hasan (1976) and has attracted the attention of researchers focusing on writing. According to these two scholars, a text is a semantic unit, the parts of which are linked together by explicit cohesive ties. Hence, cohesion defines a text as a text.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorise cohesion into two groups: 'grammatical cohesion,' and 'lexical cohesion'. They classify grammatical cohesion into four types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction.

**1. Reference:** Reference occurs when the identity of one element of a text can be retrieved from either outside the text (exophoric relationship) or from within the text (endophoric relationship). Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify references into three types:

- Personal (personal and possessive pronouns)
- Demonstrative (this, that, these)
- Comparative (adjectives like 'same, equal, similar, different, else, better, more', etc. and adverbs like 'so, such, similarly, otherwise, so, more', etc.)

**2. Conjunction:** Halliday and Hasan (1976) define conjunctions as one of the cohesive devices which 'express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse'. According to the relationship they express, these are additive, adversative, causal and temporal.

- Additive: They introduce discourse units that repeat and emphasise the key points or add relevant new information to the prior expression. (e.g., and, moreover)
- Adversative: The expressions indicate a contrary

result or opinion to the content mentioned previously. In this sense, the adversatives signal the beginning of a different viewpoint. (e.g., however, but, rather)

- Causative: They express result, reason, or purpose. (e.g., therefore, hence)
- Temporal: They introduce the time order of events. To manifest the temporal relations of successive and simultaneous events, this category includes the preceding, sequential, and simultaneous connectives. (e.g., then, next)

There are other conjunctive items (continuative). This is a residual category of the usual 'miscellaneous' type used with a cohesive force in the text. They are six items: now, of course, well, anyway, surely, after all.

**3. Ellipsis:** It can be regarded as substitution by zero and has three types: nominal, verbal or clausal (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

- Nominal (e.g., All the photos were taken between 1980 and 1981 and nearly all were shot in the vicinity of Petticoat Lane.)
- Verbal (e.g., It might be true that Rose was the father. It might not.)
- Clausal (e.g., Bob is flying to Finland. I can tell from his expression.)

**4. Substitution:** Instead of repeating one element, it is replaced by another element in the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) (e.g., We are out of drink and need to steal some).

**5. Lexical Cohesion:** Halliday and Hasan (1976) define lexical cohesion as a semantic relationship between lexical items and classify it into two types:

- Reiteration: covers repetition- the lexical recurrence of an item
  - a. The same word (a boy can be replaced with the boy)
  - b. A synonym/near-synonym (a boy can be replaced with the lad)
  - c. A superordinate (a boy can be replaced with the child)
  - d. A general word (a boy can be replaced with the idiot)
- Collocation: Lexical cohesion is determined by the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur within and across the sentence boundaries.

According to [Alarcon and Morales \(2011\)](#), a text is coherent when a reader penetrates the function of each part of the text in terms of its overall or global meaning. That's to say, with the help of CDs, readers can both understand the meaning of the sentences within a text and the argument of the author. In brief, coherence is needed to encode and decode the correct messages in a text. To enhance the reading comprehension of language learners and improve their writing skills to generate coherent texts, researchers seek feasible ways to deal with this complex phenomenon because coherence is regarded as an abstract, elusive and controversial notion that is difficult to teach and learn ([Garing, 2014](#)). This situation paves the way for scholars to investigate this complicated concept ([Tahsildar & Yusoff, 2018](#)).

### **Empirical Studies on Cohesive Devices**

There have been a great number of research studies about cohesion and most of them centred on the role of the cohesive system in text analysis and language teaching. There have been studies (e.g., [Alqasham et al., 2021](#); [Connor, 1984](#); [Darweesh & Susan, 2016](#); [Green et al., 2000](#); [Johnson, 1992](#); [McCarty, 1991](#); [Nindya & Widiati, 2020](#); [Nurhidayat et al., 2021](#); [Siregar et al., 2023](#)) which have investigated the employment of CDs in various text types. In some of them, the relationship between the writing quality and CDs was studied. However, the findings were conflicting. Some of them pinpointed that cohesion did not show the writing quality (e.g., [Bakhshivand & Rezapour, 2018](#); [Crossley et al., 2016](#); [Johnson, 1992](#); [Todd, 2007](#); [Meisuo, 2000](#)). [Johnson \(1992\)](#), [Todd \(2007\)](#) and [Meisuo \(2000\)](#) investigated the degree of cohesion between 'good' and 'weak' compositions. They concluded that there was no difference in the degree of cohesion between low quality and high-quality compositions. On the other hand, other researchers found that there was a correlation between the use of CDs and the quality of writing (e.g., [Chiang, 1999](#); [Jafarpur 1991](#); [Liu & Braine, 2005](#); [Saputra & Hakim, 2020](#)). To illustrate, in their study, [Liu and Braine \(2005\)](#), analysed argumentative essays to investigate if the frequency of CDs used by Chinese students was correlated with the quality of writing. The results revealed that there was a correlation, which means that a higher frequency of CDs brought higher essay scores.

Apart from the studies which focused on the relationship between cohesion and the quality of writing, there are studies which found several problems with cohesion in the EFL learners' essays. For example, in a study conducted by [Blagoeva \(2004\)](#) it was revealed that some CDs were used redundantly and inappropriately in students' writings. In another study, [Kang \(2005\)](#) made a comparison between the use of CDs by American students and Korean students. Similar results emerged; it was found that Korean students used some reference devices excessively. All in all, these researchers claimed that may be the result of interference with students' native language.

Although there are many studies on the incorrect use of CDs, they donot present a detailed classification of cohesion errors. For example, in [Kang \(2005\)](#) and [Meisuo's \(2000\)](#) studies, the change features in cohesion problems produced by learners of different proficiencies were not checked. [Chiang \(1999\)](#), [Johnson \(1992\)](#) and [Meisuo's \(2000\)](#) studies also focused on learners at a single proficiency level; therefore, results may differ at different proficiency levels. On the other hand, studies done by [Cox et al. \(1991\)](#), [Crowhurst \(1987\)](#), and [Spiegel and Fitzgerald \(1990\)](#) showed an attempt to investigate the CDs in essays of learners at various proficiency levels, but these studies were conducted with native English writers. Their research findings were also contradictory. In some of these studies such as [Spiegel and Fitzgerald \(1990\)](#), it was found that there was not a significant relationship between the use of CDs and learners' proficiency levels. Conversely, [Cox et al. \(1991\)](#), and [McCutchen and Perfetti \(1983\)](#) claimed that the number of CDs varied significantly with the proficiency levels. In another study designed by [Yang and Sun \(2012\)](#), it was aimed to explore the differences and similarities in the use of CDs by second-year and fourth-year undergraduate Chinese EFL learners in their argumentative writings. It was revealed that EFL learners at different proficiency levels significantly differed from each other in their adoption of some cohesive items.

Most of the studies carried out in the field used argumentative essays to collect data. There is a need to investigate the employment of CDs in various text types. In the present study, a different

genre, namely opinion essays written by students from two proficiency levels is taken as a departure point and it is hoped the analysis of the adoption of CDs in different genres will lead to fruitful outcomes to enrich the related literature. To have a deeper understanding, it is necessary to examine the research studies in which opinion essays are used to gather data. In fact, there are two important research studies specifically conducted to investigate the use of CDs in opinion essays. In his study, [Abu-Ayyash \(2020\)](#) discussed the linguistic devices linking the text to its physical world and cultural contexts which are termed exophoric and homophoric devices. 8 postgraduate students' opinion essays and two UK-based newspaper opinion articles were chosen on purpose to gather data at the British University in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. By employing [Halliday and Hasan's \(1976\)](#) model of cohesion and [Hatch's \(1992\)](#) taxonomy of deictic markers, the researcher used colour coding to analyse categories. The results of the study revealed that exophoric and homophoric devices fulfilled several functions in the articles and essays such as supporting the main argument, reflecting the assumptions of the authors, pointing out the emotional state of the authors, and setting the ground for arguments. The outcomes also highlighted the assumptive and supportive roles of CDs to help readers understand the messages; thus, these devices should be placed at the core of instructional practices to teach writing skills.

Being one of the recent studies exploring the use of CDs in opinion essays was conducted by Nirwanto in 2021 in the Indonesian context. The researcher attempted to examine the types of CDs and errors made in using these devices by the collected data from 26 undergraduate EFL students. [Halliday and Hasan's \(1976\)](#) model of cohesion was utilised to count the number, frequency and percentage of CDs manually. The findings yielded that the reference had the highest percentage followed by lexical cohesion and conjunction, yet substitution and ellipsis were found to be absent. It was also observed that participants made conjunction errors such as but, so, and in a small proportion. As an implication, it is recommended that the teaching of CDs should be an integral part of writing instruction.

## The Present Study

Previous empirical studies indicate that cohesion is an important element of any type of writing and English learners have difficulties in employing CDs. However, the results of these studies are contradictory and the studies on the use of CDs by EFL writers across proficiency levels are scarce. In addition to this, in most of the studies, argumentative writing was selected for data collection. Therefore, there is a need to conduct relevant research studies on the use of CDs in different type of essays written by students of different proficiency levels. In the present study, specifically opinion essay, which differs from an argumentative essay at some points, was chosen. The main difference between these types of essays is the fact that in an opinion essay, the writer does not try to change other people's points of view. In contrast, in an argumentative essay evidence is given to support a point of view. In addition, there should be a refutation part to underline the weaknesses of counterarguments.

Adopting [Halliday and Hasan's \(1976\)](#) cohesion theory as the framework, this study aims to identify the CDs in opinion essays written by Turkish EFL students across different proficiency levels. Hence, four research questions were posed to design the current study:

- Do beginner and pre-intermediate level students use CDs? If any, what are the CDs used by them?
- What are the similarities and differences between the use of CDs by learners at beginner and pre-intermediate levels?
- Do beginner and pre-intermediate level students use incorrect CDs? If any, what are the incorrect CDs used by them?
- What are the similarities and differences between the incorrect use of CDs by learners at beginner and pre-intermediate levels?

## Method

### Context and Participants

The participants were 60 Turkish EFL students enrolled in prep classes at a state university preparation programme in Turkey. The student participants had beginner (A1/A2 of CEFR) and pre-intermediate (A2+ of CEFR) levels of English according to the scores they got in the Inhouse

Placement Exam administered at the beginning of the fall term. They had a multiple-choice exam consisting of grammar, listening and vocabulary questions. They had also taken a separate speaking and writing exam, which means their speaking and writing proficiency were adequately evaluated. In each proficiency level, 30 students were chosen randomly from pre-grouped students as the subjects of the present study. The student participants' ages range from 17 to 19, and their majors are Architecture, Aeronautics Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Electrical Engineering, English Language Teaching, International Relations, and Mechanical Engineering.

In this preparation programme integrated course is followed and there is not a separate writing course. Beginner-level students have 24 hours of English, and pre-intermediate-level students have 22 hours of English every week since they are only studying English in the School of Foreign Languages. Students follow a coursebook, beginner-level students follow Focus 1 and Focus 2, and pre-intermediate level students follow Focus 2 and Focus 3 by Pearson, together with some supplementary materials prepared and provided by the Curriculum & Materials Development Office of the institution.

**Data Collection**

The students were asked to write an opinion essay on the topic ‘Is watching TV harmful or not?’ approximately 250 words in a class period (50 min.). Dictionaries were not allowed, and they were asked to write independently. Data was collected while students attended the prep class towards the end of the second semester in the academic year 2022-23. For the ethical issues, their consent forms

were collected, and the head of the programme was also informed about the purpose and content of the current study to get approval.

**Framework for Data Coding**

As a framework, Halliday & Hasan’s (1976, 2001) taxonomy of cohesion devices was chosen because in previous studies the most adopted framework was this one. In this study, the modified version developed by Yang and Sun (2012) was adopted. Their modification was enlightened by Halliday & Hasan (1976, 2001), and Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2001). According to this developed version,CDs as variables in the current study were as follows: Reference (personal pronoun, demonstrative, comparative), Conjunction (additive, causative, temporal, adversative), Substitution/ ellipsis, Lexical cohesion (repetition, synonym/ antonym, superordination, collocation)

**Data Coding**

In each essay, the number of CDs was identified and counted by two independent co-raters, namely the researchers of the present study in isolation (inter-rater reliability was .87 calculated by point-by-point method). To find the frequency of CDs per 100 words, the number of devices was divided by the number of words in the essay, and then they were multiplied by 100. Next, the quantity of each category and subcategory of CDs were computed. To compare the incorrect use of cohesive items between two groups of students, cohesion errors in the essays were quantified and the number per 100 words was adjusted (see Figure 1). Subcategories of cohesion errors were also counted manually as seen insome studies (e.g., Yang & Sun, 2012).

**Figure 1 Samples of Erroneous Sentences from Two Levels**

Error type	Beginner level	Pre-intermediate Level
Reference	Watching TV for too long can hurt your eyes, but they watch. (ambiguous reference)/ <i>Watching TV for too long can hurt your eyes, but people/viewers still watch.</i>	Watching TV for many hours can make you feel tired, but it doesn't care about your health. (unclear/wrong reference) / <i>Watching TV for many hours can make you feel tired, but people don't care about their health while watching TV for hours.</i>
Conjunction	TV helps you relax, but it can also teach you new things. (wrong conjunction) / <i>TV helps you relax, and it can also teach you new things.</i>	Some parents don't let their kids watch TV. Therefore, kids insist on watching. (wrong conjunction) / <i>Some parents don't let their kids watch TV. However, kids insist on watching.</i>



Substitution / ellipsis	Too much TV is bad for your eyes, and too much TV can make you lazy. (unnecessary repetition-ellipsis) / <i>Too much TV can harm your eyesight and also affect your sleep.</i>	Watching TV can improve your language skills, and watching TV can also help you learn about different cultures. (unnecessary repetition-ellipsis) / <i>Watching TV can improve your language skills and also help you learn about different cultures.</i>
Lexical cohesion	Watching TV can teach you a lot, and sitting for hours can also help you learn. (inconsistent word choice) / <i>Watching TV can teach you a lot, and watching it for hours can also help you learn.</i>	Violence on TV can change how kids behave, and watching harmful shows can also make them behave more aggressively. (inconsistent word choice) / <i>Violence on TV can change how kids behave, and watching violent shows can also make them act more aggressively.</i>

### Data Analysis

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to find out and compare the correct and incorrect use of CDs by the two groups of students. The proficiency levels (beginner and pre-intermediate) were regarded as the dependent variables and the frequency of CDs per 100 words and each category of cohesion errors per 100 words in each group were regarded as dependent variables. Data was analysed by examining the frequency of CDs and comparing the means of CDs employed by the beginner and pre-intermediate level students.

### Results

#### The Similarities and Differences between the Use of CDs by the Beginner and Pre-intermediate Level Students

To investigate the effect of different proficiency levels on the use of CDs, independent samples t-tests were run. The results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=4.33, SD=2.56) and pre-intermediate (M=6.03, SD=2.27) level students

in terms of reference ( $t(58)=.22, p<.01$ ). Therefore, proficiency level has a significant effect on the use of reference. As for conjunction, there is also a significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=5.04, SD=2.48) and pre-intermediate (M=6.93, SD=1.67) level students in terms of conjunctions ( $t(58)=.125, p<.01$ ). It can be concluded that proficiency level has a significant effect on the use of conjunctions. On the other hand, the results revealed that there is not a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=.52, SD=.50) and pre-intermediate (M=.63, SD=.49) level students in terms of substitution/ellipsis ( $t(58)=.34, p<.01$ ). It can be concluded that proficiency level does not have a significant effect on the use of substitution/ellipsis. In terms of lexical cohesion, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=1.18, SD=.72) and pre-intermediate (M=2.22, SD=.88) level students ( $t(58)=.56, p<.01$ ). This indicates that proficiency level has a significant effect on the use of lexical cohesion (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Independent Samples t-test Results for Each Category of CDs across Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner		Pre-intermediate		t	Dt	P
	M	SD	M	SD			
Reference	5.04	2.57	6.93	2.28	58	.22	.001
Conjunction	4.33	2.48	6.04	1.67	58	.125	.000
Substitution/ellipsis	0.52	0.5	0.63	0.49	58	.34	.324
Lexical cohesion	1.18	0.72	2.22	0.88	58	.56	.012

Table 2 reveals that the number of CDs which are used by pre-intermediate level students (N=405.49) is more than that used by beginner-level students (N=328.86). For both levels, reference is the most

frequently used item (beginner=39,51%, pre-intermediate=181,19%), and substitution /ellipsis (beginner=4.74%, pre-intermediate=19%) are the least frequently used items.

**Table 2 Distribution of CDs by Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner (n=30, 50%)		Pre-intermediate (n=30, 50%)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Reference	129.91	39.51	181.19	44.6
Conjunction	88.05	26.78	92.8	22.8
Substitution	15.60	4.74	19	0.4
Lexical cohesion	95.20	28.95	112.5	27.7
Total	328.76	100	405.49	100

Independent samples t-tests were also conducted to see the effect of proficiency level on the use of CDs in subcategories for reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

**Reference**

The results yielded that there was a significant difference only between beginner (M=.33, SD=.15) and pre-intermediate levels (M=.12, SD=2.84) in terms of the use of demonstrative pronouns (see Table 3).

**Table 3 Independent Samples t-test Results for Reference across Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner		Pre-intermediate		t	dt	P
	M	SD	M	SD			
Demonstrative	0.33	0.15	0.22	0.12	2.84	58	0.006
Personal pronoun	0.54	0.25	0.49	0.16	0.922	49.42	0.361
Comparative	0.25	0.12	0.31	0.13	1.548	58	0.127
Lexical cohesion	1.18	0.72	2.22	0.88	58	.56	.012

When their frequencies were examined, it was found out that the most frequently used reference was personal pronouns (beginner=51.7%, pre-intermediate=56.9%). Also, demonstrative pronouns (35.7%) were used more frequently by pre-intermediate level students (see Table 4).

pre-intermediate (M=.73, SD=.17) level students in terms of the use of additives (t(48.431)=-4.525, p=.000) (see table 5).

**Conjunctions**

The findings pointed out that there was a significant difference between beginner (M=.53, SD=.13) and pre-intermediate (M=.42, SD=.17) level students in terms of the use of additives (t(58)=2.86, p=.006). There was also a significant difference between beginner (M=.56, SD=.10) and

**Table 4 Distribution of Reference Subcategories by Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner (n=30, 50%)		Pre-intermediate (n=30, 50%)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Demonstrative	35.02	30.9	42.2	35.7
Personal pronoun	56.34	51.7	67.33	56.9
Comparative	16.7	15.8	8.66	7.3
Total	108.84	100	118.19	100

**Table 5 Independent Samples t-test Results for Conjunctions across Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner		Pre-intermediate		t	Dt	P
	M	SD	M	SD			
Additive	0.56	0.13	0.73	0.17	2.861	58	0.000
Causative	0.43	0.09	0.43	0.12	-0.06	58	0.953
Temporal	0.2	0.12	0.23	0.15	-0.621	58	0.537
Adversative	0.53	0.1	0.42	0.17	-4.525	48.431	0.006

In terms of frequency, in both levels, additive is the most frequently used item (beginner=28.5%, pre-intermediate=35.2%). In addition, temporal is the least used item (beginner=19%, pre-intermediate=16.3% (see Table 6).

**Lexical Cohesion**

The outcomes revealed a significant difference between beginner (M=.48, SD=.18) and pre-intermediate (M=.52, SD=.19) level students only in terms of the use of synonyms or antonyms (t(58)=-.629, p=.005) (see Table 7).

**Table 6 Distribution of Conjunction Subcategories by Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner (n=30, 50%)		Pre-intermediate (n=30, 50%)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Additive	28.5	32.2	35.2	37.9
Causative	18.4	20.7	18.2	19.6
Temporal	19	21.4	16.3	17.5
Adversative	22.6	25.5	30.6	32.9
Total	88.5	100	92.8	100

**Table 8 Distribution of Lexical Cohesion Subcategories by Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner (n=30, 50%)		Pre-intermediate (n=30, 50%)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Repetition	12.5	13.1	19.3	17.1
Synonym/ antonym	36.2	38	42.5	37.8
Superordination	22.4	23.5	24.4	21.6
Collocation	24.1	25.3	23.3	20.7
Total	95.2	100	112.5	100

**Table 7 Independent Samples t-test Results for Lexical Cohesion Across Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner		Pre-intermediate		t	Dt	P
	M	SD	M	SD			
Repetition	0.3	0.15	0.3	0.17	-0.023	58	0.982
Synonym/antonym	0.48	0.18	0.52	0.19	-0.034	58	0.005
Superordination	0.22	0.09	0.24	0.13	-0.629	58	0.532
Collocation	0.29	0.11	0.39	0.17	1.537	50.947	0.130

Table 8 shows that in terms of frequency, synonym and antonym category was the most used item for both levels (beginner=36.2%, pre-intermediate=42.5%) and it was used more frequently by pre-intermediate learners. Repetition is the least frequent item for both levels (beginner=12.5%, pre-intermediate=19.3%).

#### Incorrect Use of Cohesive Devices

When reference errors are examined, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=1.13, SD=.84) and pre-intermediate (M=.55, SD=.61) level students in terms of lexical cohesion ( $t(58)=3.02$ ,  $p=.004$ ). It can be concluded that proficiency level has a significant effect on the use of reference incorrectly. In terms of conjunction errors, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=.99, SD=.88) and pre-intermediate

(M=.53, SD=.65) level students; in terms of lexical cohesion ( $t(58)=2.33$ ,  $p=.023$ ). It can be concluded that proficiency level has a significant effect on the incorrect use of conjunctions. In terms of substitution/ellipsis, there is not a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=.32, SD=.72) and pre-intermediate (M=.55, SD=.88) level students ( $t(37.708)=1.514$ ,  $p=.138$ ). It can be concluded that proficiency level has a significant effect on the use of substitution/ellipsis. In terms of lexical cohesion errors, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of beginner (M=.38, SD=.173) and pre-intermediate (M=.22, SD=.23) level students; in terms of lexical cohesion ( $t(58)=3.027$ ,  $p=.004$ ). It can be concluded that proficiency level has a significant effect on the incorrect use of lexical cohesion (see Table 9).

**Table 9 Independent Samples t-test Results for Each Category of CDs Across Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner		Pre-intermediate		t	Dt	P
	M	SD	M	SD			
Reference errors	0.72	0.84585	0.45	0.61616	3.027	53.015	0.004
Conjunction errors	0.99	0.88	0.53	0.65	2.23	58	0.023
Substitution/ellipsis errors	0.32	0.30103	0.54	0.76788	-1.514	37.708	0.138
Lexical cohesion errors	0.38	0.173	0.22	0.23	3.027	58	0.004



Table 10 shows that the total frequency of errors made by beginner-level students (85.01) was higher than pre-intermediate-level students (39.54). At both levels, the misuse of conjunction is the most frequent (beginner=33.85%, pre-intermediate=37.6%).

**Table 10 Distribution of CD Errors by Proficiency Levels**

	Beginner (n=30, 50%)		Pre-intermediate (n=30, 50%)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Reference errors	29.97	35.2	9.50	24
Conjunction errors	33.85	39.8	14.90	37.6
Substitution errors	9.6	11.2	8.44	21.2
Lexical cohesion errors	11.59	13.6	6.70	16.9
Total	85.01	100	39.54	100

### Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the CDs employed by students at different proficiency levels and to explore whether there was a similarity or difference between CDs used in opinion essay writing across different proficiency levels. The results revealed that except for substitution and ellipsis, there was a significant difference between these two levels in terms of the use of the reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

When subcategories were examined, it was found that the personal pronouns were the most frequently used items by both levels with no significant difference. The frequent use of personal pronouns may result from the type of essay they wrote. While writing an opinion essay, learners are expected to express their personal beliefs regardless of evidence and counterargument (Cottrell, 2003). Chafe (1982) argues that with the frequent use of personal pronouns, the writer is directly involved in the text, which is a necessary feature in an opinion essay.

There was a significant difference between these two proficiency levels regarding the use of demonstrative pronouns. Beginner-level students employed demonstrative pronouns more frequently than pre-intermediate-level students. It is claimed

by Maimon et al. (2007) that the frequent use of demonstrative pronouns may lead to vagueness in the text. Hence, according to them, writers should avoid using these pronouns in formal writing. This may reveal the fact that when students become more proficient, they are able to write more appropriately.

As for the conjunctions, in general beginner level students used them less than the pre-intermediate group. This may indicate that the pre-intermediate level students' essays contained more opposing ideas than beginner students. As stated by Connor (1996), learners need sophisticated cognitive processing and reasoning abilities to state opposing ideas, and this shows that more proficient learners are more competent in writing an opinion essay. However, there were also examples of incorrect use of conjunctions by pre-intermediate level students. As Granger and Tyson (1996) pinpoint, it is difficult to master conjunctions even if learners reach the advanced level. This result is in tune with the findings of the studies carried out by Liu and Braine (2005), Rahman et al. (2023), Yang and Sun (2012) and Meisuo (2000). In addition to this, the most frequently used conjunctions were additives at both levels, and this may result from the fact that they help connect phrases, clauses, and sentences in every piece of writing (Liu & Braine, 2005; Saputra & Hakim, 2020).

As for substitution and ellipsis, the findings showed that these items were used less frequently than other cohesive devices and that there was not a significant difference between the two levels regarding this item. This result supports the claim of Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Liu and Braine (2005) that instead of writing it is common to use ellipsis or substitution in spoken language.

As aforementioned, one of the main reasons for the limited use of substitution and ellipsis could be that these two cohesive devices were frequently used in spoken medium compared to written medium as Liu and Braine (2005) pinpointed 'ellipsis and substitution seem not to have any application in written discourse'. The other researchers (Tajeddin & Rahimi, 2017; Todd, 2007; Yang & Sun, 2012) also claimed that these devices shape the naturalness of the language spoken and the students could not transfer this process to the written communication.

It can be argued that the less frequent use of ellipsis and substitution affect the quality of writing since these two devices contribute to the naturalistic communication in the written contexts maintaining the required naturalness (Japarfur, 1991; Tajeddin & Rahimi, 2017).

In terms of the use of lexical CDs, there was a difference between the two levels particularly, between the use of synonyms and antonyms. Pre-intermediate learners used significantly more synonyms or antonyms than beginner-level students. This indicates that when learners become more proficient, they avoid using the same words and try to use other words. This outcome is in tune with the study conducted by Jin (2001) who found that more proficient learners have a larger capacity of using different lexical devices than lower ones.

When an overall examination of errors was made, it was found that beginner-level students made errors more frequently. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between these two levels in terms of the use of the reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, except substitution and ellipsis. The most problematic area for learners was the use of conjunctions and there was not a statistically significant difference between the two levels. The results support the fact that conjunctions are difficult to master at high levels. As Bui (2022), Ellis (1994) and Sanosi (2024) state the misuse of conjunctions is global, and it may impair comprehension and sentence organisation.

### Conclusion and Implications

This study aimed to identify the differences and similarities in the use of cohesive items by beginner and pre-intermediate level Turkish EFL students in their opinion essays. In addition, it explored the incorrect use of these CDs. The results revealed that learners at higher proficiency levels use CDs more frequently and accurately in their opinion essays.

The current study may have some pedagogical implications. Especially beginner level students were found to have problems in using CDs effectively and accurately and the most problematic area for both levels was the use of conjunctions. Therefore, writing teachers should use more focused activities combined with explicit instruction and more time

should be devoted to writing activities which will make them use a variety of conjunctions. Apart from conjunctions, students' competence in using vocabulary effectively should be improved. Carter and McCarthy (1988) suggest raising learners' consciousness of vocabulary by examining the texts produced by native speakers. Liu (2000) and Nindya and Widiati (2020) recommend training students to use a wide range of vocabulary with the help of effective exercises, using collaborative learning, giving feedback and employing the learning management system to write a good essay. Another point is that as reading and writing are closely linked to each other, learners can be encouraged to read extensively (Rahman et al., 2023).

The present study has some limitations. To begin with, the sample size was quite small and consisted of only two proficiency levels; beginner and pre-intermediate; thus, there can be future investigations on learners at various proficiency levels with larger sample sizes. Moreover, only one genre, opinion essay was chosen to analyse the use of CDs. Hence, comparative studies focusing on various text types can be conducted to explore the employment of CDs. Finally, in this study, the incorrect use of CDs was not investigated in detail. Further research can be done to analyse the incorrect use of CDs elaborately with appropriate subcategories.

### References

- Abu-Ayyash, E. (2020). Context and culture via cohesive devices in higher education students' and professional writers' opinion articles. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 20(1), 106-120.
- Alarcon, J. B., & Morales, K. N. S. (2011). Grammatical cohesion in students' argumentative essay. *Journal of English and Literature*, 2(5), 114-127.
- Alqasham, F., Al-Ahdal, A., & Babekir, A. (2021). Coherence and cohesion in Saudi EFL learners' essay writing: A study at a tertiary-level institution. *Asian EFL Journal*, 28(1), 8-25.
- Bakhshivand, Z., & Rezapour, P. (2018). The effect of identifying cohesive devices in writing passages on Iranian intermediate EFL learners'

- academic writing performance. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 5(6), 37-45.
- Biesenbach-Lucas, S., & Weasenforth, D. (2001). Institutional discourse in the real world: Professors' judgments of student requests. In *Georgetown Roundtable of Languages and Linguistics*.
- Blagoeva, R. (2004). Demonstrative reference as a cohesive device in advanced learner writing: A corpus-based study. In *Advances in Corpus Linguistics* (pp. 297-307). The Brill.
- Bui, H. P. (2022). Vietnamese EFL students' use and misconceptions of cohesive devices in writing. *Open Sage*, 12(3).
- Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (1988). *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. Longman.
- Chafe, W. (1982). Integration and involvement in speaking, writing, and oral literature. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy* (pp. 35-54). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Chiang, S. Y. (1999). Assessing grammatical and textual features in L2 writing samples: The case of French as a foreign language. *The Modern Language Journal*, 83, 219-232.
- Connor, U. (1984). A study of cohesion and coherence in ESL students' writing. *Papers in Linguistics*, 17(3), 301-316.
- Connor, U. (1996). *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-cultural Aspects of Language Writing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cottrell, S. (2003). *Skills for Success: Personal Development and Employability*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cox, B. E., Shanahan, T., & Tinzmann, M. (1991). Children's knowledge of organisation, cohesion, and voice in written exposition. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 25(2).
- Crossley, S. A., Kyle, K., & McNamara, D. S. (2016). The development and use of cohesive devices in L2 writing and their relations to judgments of essay quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 32, 1-16.
- Crowhurst, M. (1987). Cohesion in argument and narration at three grade levels. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 21(2), 185-201.
- Darweesh, A. D., & Kadhim, S. A. (2016). Iraqi EFL learners' problems in using conjunctions as cohesive devices. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(11), 175-179.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Garing, A. G. (2014). Coherence in the argumentative essays of first year college of liberal arts students at De La Salle University. In *DLSU Research Congress 2014*.
- Granger, S., & Tyson, S. (1996). Connector usage in the English essay writing of native and non-native EFL speakers of English. *World Englishes*, 15(1), 17-27.
- Green, C. F., Christopher, E. R., & Mei, J. L. K. (2000). The incidence and effects on coherence of marked themes in interlanguage texts: A corpus-based enquiry. *English for Specific Purposes*, 19(2), 99-113.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Longman.
- Hatch, E. (1992). *Discourse and Language Education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (2001). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Routledge.
- Hedge, T. (1988). *Writing*. Oxford University Press.
- Jafapur, A. (1991). Can naive EFL learners estimate their own proficiency?. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, 5(3), 145-157.
- Jin, W. (2001). *A Quantitative Study of Cohesion in Chinese Graduate Students' Writing: Variations across Genres and Proficiency Levels*.
- Johnson, P. (1992). Cohesion and coherence in compositions in Malay and English. *RELC Journal*, 23(2), 1-17.
- Kang, J. Y. (2005). Written narratives as an index of L2 competence in Korean EFL learners. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(4), 259-279.
- Liu, M., & Braine, G. (2005). Cohesive features in argumentative writing produced by Chinese undergraduates. *System*, 33(4), 623-636.
- Maimon, E. P., Peritz, J., & Yancey, K. B. (2007). *A Writer's Resource: A Handbook for Writing and Research*. McGraw-Hill.

- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCutchen, D., & Perfetti, C. A. (1983). Local coherence: Helping young writers manage a complex task. *The Elementary School Journal*, 84(1), 71-75.
- Meisuo, Z. (2000). Cohesive features in the expository writing of undergraduates in two Chinese universities. *RELC Journal*, 31, 61-95.
- Nindya, M. A., & Widiati, U. (2020). Cohesive devices in argumentative essays by Indonesian EFL learners. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 10(2), 337-358.
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*. Prentice Hall.
- Nurhidayat, E. F., Apriani, E., & Edy, S. (2021). The analysis of cohesive devices used by tertiary English students in writing English paragraphs. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 8(4), 70-81.
- Rahman, G., Zaigham, M. S., & Umer, M. (2023). A study of cohesive devices in students' academic writing. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(4), 372-384.
- Sanosi, A. B. (2024). Revisiting cohesion in academic writing: A corpus-based analysis of EFL learners' use of conjunctions. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 64-78.
- Saputra, A., & Hakim, M. A. R. (2020). The usage of cohesive devices by high-achieving EFL students in writing argumentative essays. *Indonesian TESOL Journal*, 2(1), 42-58.
- Siregar, J., Nurlela, & Zein, T. T. (2023). An analysis of cohesive devices in EFL students' essay writing. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 8(1), 39-53.
- Spiegel, D. L., & Fitzgerald, J. (1990). Textual cohesion and coherence in children's writing revisited. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 24(1), 48-66.
- Tahsildar, M. N., & Yusoff, Z. S. (2018). Impact of teaching cohesive devices on L2 students' language accuracy in written production. *Academy Journal of Educational Sciences*, 2, 16-28.
- Tajeddin, Z., & Rahimi, A. (2017). A conversation analysis of ellipsis and substitution in global business English textbooks. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 5(1), 1-14.
- Todd, R. W. (2007). Coherence, cohesion, and comments on students' academic essays. *Assessing Writing*, 12(1), 10-25.
- Yang, W., & Sun, Y. (2012). The use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing by Chinese EFL learners at different proficiency levels. *Linguistics and Education*, 23(1), 31-48.

### Author Details

**Gonca Subaşı**, Anadolu University, Turkey, **Email ID:** goncas@anadolu.edu.tr

**Seda Üner**, Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Turkey, **Email ID:** sedauner.2@gmail.com