

## **Introduction**

The aim of English teaching is commonly defined in terms of four basic skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The writing skill is often perceived by the learners as the most difficult and hard-to-master one among the four. Writing is not merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks but instead it requires a higher level of productive language control than speaking. The written language is always required to be more accurate, more appropriate, more explicit and more effective than spoken discourse. Many researchers believe that knowing how to write efficiently is among the most important abilities that academically oriented language learners need to develop, because writing skills are essential to academic success and a requirement for many occupations and professions.

Most college students in China have acquired certain basic English writing skills in some sense. They could finish their writing tasks with few grammar errors. Their compositions are complete in content, clear in their idea. But their writing, even without grammar errors, would still seem very strange and unnatural to read, especially for native speakers. What are the reasons behind this fact? What makes their writing strange and unnatural to read? What are the basic difference between the Chinese English learners' English writing and that of the native speakers? The thesis tries to approach these issues on the basis of examining some sample compositions.

The English learners in Chinese colleges face lots of problems in English writing. To most of them, writing is always the last language skill to be acquired among the four basic skills. Most Chinese English learners start to learn English in primary school. But there what they learn are isolated words and sentences. In junior high school, students still have little chance to practice their writing skills. Even in senior high school, English writing has long been neglected, because more attention is paid to training speaking, listening and reading skills, and less emphasis is put on cultivating the ability to write. In college, English learners still put more emphasis on the training of listening and reading skills in order to pass all kinds of English test and gain various certificates.

The test-oriented educational system is partly responsible for the inefficient teaching in English writing. To many English teachers, good writing is simply defined as something with correct spelling and without grammatical mistakes. Some teachers even ask their students to produce only simple sentences in writing for fear of that the longer and more complicated the sentences are, the more mistakes may be produced and the lower the marks may be. For the English learners in China, most school related writing is destined for the teachers: Most writing tasks are assigned by their English teachers, and their teachers are the only reader of the writing. So their teachers' suggestions and guidance on writing are all for them to follow. Some teachers only pay attention to grammatical points in writing classes, such as sentences structures, spelling and so on. But a composition with just grammatical correctness by is far from being a high-grade piece of work.

We may find many problems in English learners' compositions. A common problem for English learners in China is that Many students have difficulties in using grammatical and lexical ties: they just put lots of simple sentences together and don't care whether these sentences cohere or not to each other leaving the readers an impression of discontinuity. They tend to transfer meanings of their native language to English by using Chinese writing strategies, so their articles are full of Chinglish and hard to interpret by readers. They have a relatively small vocabulary, so they tend to use the same words repeatedly in their writing. Among all the problems, the inadequate use of cohesive devices seems to be the most serious one. In other words, many students have difficulties in producing grammatically connected texts. Their writing, even without grammar errors, would still seem very strange, unidiomatic and incoherent to read. So how to help college students overcome these problems and produce coherent essays is a great challenge to English teachers in Chinese colleges.

### **1.1 Aim and scope**

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. In the analysis of these compositions, the essay focuses on the errors committed in using

cohesive devices and tries to find something in general about those errors. 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?

## **1.2 Material**

The materials in this study are 40 compositions from 40 English major students in a Chinese university. By the time of the study, the students are in their second term of the third year. All students are asked to write a composition of about 600 words under the same topic. The students involved in the study have been learning English since junior middle school for over 10 years, so they have the ability of writing an article of 600 words. Before they were involved in the study, they had known little about the notion of cohesion theory and had not been exposed to any explicit writing instruction based on cohesion theory.

Students involved in the study were required to write an argumentative composition of about 600 words on the given topic: Whether Euthanasia Should Be Legalized in China. In order to make sure that all of the subjects be under identical conditions: a total of 30 minutes was given to finish the writing task without referring to anything or anybody for help as they were having a formal examination. The compositions collected all met the writing requirement: finished in the due time, reached the standard for the number of words, developed under the given title.

## **1.3 Method**

All the data in the thesis came from the compositions of the students. 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 terms of reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. 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. All the cohesive devices and cohesive errors are identified, categorized, counted and analyzed manually by the author of the essay.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 The Definition of Cohesion**

What's cohesion? Halliday first elaborated on the concept of cohesion in 1962. The publication of *Cohesion in English* by Halliday and Hasan in 1976 made cohesion a popular term in text linguistics. Like many other terms in linguistics, the definitions of cohesion are diverse. It was first used by early linguists before 1962 to refer to the degree of connection between two or more words, or morphemes, within one grammatical structure. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics* describes cohesion as “the grammatical and lexical relationship between the different elements of a text. This may be the relationship between different sentences or between different parts of a sentence.” (Richards & Plait, 1992: 77). For example:

*A: Is Jenny coming to the party?*

*B: Yes, she is.*

There is a link between *Jenny* and *she* and also between *is...coming* and *is*

“Halliday & Hasan’s account is by far the most comprehensive treatment of this Subject and has become the standard text in this area” (Brown & Yule, 1983: 190). Halliday and Hasan describe cohesion as follows: “the concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relation of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text” (Halliday& Hasan, 1976: 4). The following example is given to explain such a cohesive relationship by them:

*Wash and peel the two potatoes. Put them on the white plate.*

They point out that the word *them* presupposes for its interpretation something other than itself. This requirement is met by the *two potatoe* in the preceding sentence. The presupposition and the fact that it is resolved, provide cohesion between the two sentences, and in doing so create text.

Halliday and Hasan also define a concrete form of a tie. “A tie refers to a single instance of cohesion, a term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items. The concept of a tie makes it possible to analyze a text in terms of its cohesive properties, and give a systematic account of its patterns of texture.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 4) Any part of a text can be characterized in terms of the number and kinds of ties which it contains. In the above example, *Wash and peel the two potatoes. Put them on the white plate.* The relation between *them* and *the two potatoes* constitutes a tie, and there is just one tie, of the reference kind. A tie is a complex notion, because it includes not only the cohesive element itself but also that which is presupposed by it. A tie is best interpreted as a relation between these two elements.

Under Halliday and Hasan’s assumption cohesion is a semantic concept. “Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it could not be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. ”(Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 4) They think that a text is not a structural unit and cohesion is not a structural relation. Cohesion is a combined result from grammar and lexical items. In Baker’s opinion, “cohesion is the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations which provide links between various parts of a text.” (1992: 180) The readers have to defer the relationships of the sentences of a paragraph by clues of words scattered around the paragraph.

Zhang Delu argues that cohesion is more than the literal meaning of a sentence. It also connects different sentences on the basis of something common of these sentences, or on certain context. “Cohesion is the textual meaning that expresses the semantic relations

linking the clauses and units larger than the clause, and relations linking the text with the context of situation.” (Zhang Delu, 2001: 85)

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that, firstly, cohesion is a relational concept. It is not the presence of a particular class of item that is cohesive, but the relation between one item and another. Secondly, in a semantic sense, cohesion means the links between a sentence and another sentence which mutually offer information or clues to each other. The special function of cohesive devices makes the sentences or the passages appear as a whole. In other words, cohesion serves as glue that sticks elements of a sentence or a passage together. A cohesive device means much more between lines than just within a sentence containing it. Thirdly, cohesion isn't just structural conformity, but also echoes in meaning. “Cohesion is a more general notion, and one that is above considerations of structure.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 5)

## **2.2 Previous Researches on Cohesion and Writing**

Before 1970, the search of cohesion was very few. From the mid 1970s onwards, in particular with the publication of Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English*, cohesion becomes gradually popular in English teaching and learning as a second language. The following are some major researches done in the order of year:

Hartnett (1980) introduces some relevant theories of cohesion to an American College. He hopes to make students master the skills of using cohesive devices in writing and give the scores on the basis of that. Witte and Faigley (1981) find the writing quality is influenced by the use of cohesive devices after they do an experiment with a group of college students. Fitzgerald and Spiegel (1990) conduct a research on children's writing with focus on the effect of cohesion to a whole writing. The result shows the quality of children's writings is not greatly influenced by their use of cohesive devices and there is not a big gap in the skills of cohesion between different grades.

In the American National Assessment of Educational Progress Writing Evaluation of 1978-1979, McCulley studies about 500 papers which are written by senior high school students who are mainly 17 years old. He wants to find if there is any relationship between the writing quality and textual cohesion. The sample papers show that textual cohesion is of great importance to the writing quality. The relationship between them is fairly obvious. Crowhurst (1987) investigates the role of cohesion in argumentative and narrative compositions in middle school students. The students are from 3 different grades. Crowhurst adopts the classification of cohesive devices of Halliday and Hasan to analyze the compositions. He gets the conclusion that generally students don't use cohesive devices more when they are in a higher grade.

### **2.3 The Classification of Cohesive Devices**

Cohesion is a property of the text and is displayed in terms of cohesive markers. "It is simply the lexical and grammatical device for a text, to make relations of the sentences explicit." (Baker, 1992: 218) However, coherence is the effect of the use of this device. In order to make a text coherent, cohesive devices will be employed. What kinds of cohesive devices exist in English? That is one of the major concerns of cohesion. This linguistic field has been explored by a lot of scholars around the world.

In *Cohesion of English*, Halliday and Hasan outline classification of types of cohesive devices—reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion—which play their role of connecting sentences with the help of cohesive ties. Hu Zhuanglin (1994) divides cohesive devices into four groups: reference cohesion, structural cohesion, logical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Hu's first group is equivalent to Halliday and Hasan's reference; Hu's second group contains substitution, ellipsis and collocation ; Hu's logical cohesion is equivalent to Halliday and Hasan's conjunction ; Hu's lexical cohesion is the equivalent of Halliday and Hasan's lexical cohesion.

Since Halliday and Hasan's classification of types of cohesive relationships is by far most popular in the field of text linguistics, many previous studies on the role of cohesive devices to the whole composition were based on Halliday and Hasan's concept of cohesion and their classification of cohesive devices as the theoretical framework. The thesis also adopts Halliday and Hasan's classification of cohesion as the framework. The thesis shall briefly outline the categories of cohesive devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

### **2.3.1 Reference**

Reference is the specific nature of the information that is signaled for retrieval. "In the ease of reference the information to be retrieved is the referential meaning, and the cohesion lies in the continuity of reference, whereby the same thing enters into a discourse a second time." (Halliday&Hasan, 1976: 31). Personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference are the universal reference forms in almost all the languages in the world.

"Personal reference is reference by means of function in the speech situation, through the category of person." (Halliday&Hasan, 1976: 42) The category of personal reference includes personal pronouns (*I, you, he, she, him, etc*), possessive determiners (usually called possessive adjectives) (*his, her, their, our, your, etc*) and possessive pronouns (*mine, yours, hers, theirs, etc*)

"Demonstrative reference is reference by means of location, on a scale of proximity. It is essentially a form of verbal pointing. The speaker identifies the referent by locating it on a scale of proximity." (Halliday&Hasan, 1976: 57) Demonstrative reference contains two sub-types: adverbial demonstrative and nominal demonstrative. The former one has *here, there, now* and *then*, which can represent both time and place in general. The latter one has *this, these, that, those*, and *the* which can represent time and place in particular.

"Comparative reference is indirect reference by means of identity or similarity."

(Halliday&Hasan, 1976: 81). There are two kinds of comparative reference: general comparison and particular comparison. By *general comparison* is meant comparison that is simply in terms of likeness or unlikeness, without respect to any particular property. General comparison is expressed by a certain class of adjectives and adverbs, and the reference items such as *same, equal, additional, identical, other, such, so, otherwise, etc*, all can contribute to cohesion when they provide the source of interpretation for reference item.

### 2.3.2 Substitution

Substituting devices replace certain word to make the sentence concise and coherent. If a word or term is repeated several times in a sentence or a paragraph, then it gives the reader the impression of redundancy and the reader feels hard to go on reading. Substitution is an important skill in writing. For example, in

a. *Jane's coat is too dirty. She goes to change a cleaner one.*

b. *Whom do you suggest fits this task? — Anybody does.*

*one* and *does* are both substitutes: *one* substitutes for coat, and *does* for fits.

Generally, the substituting device and the word to be substituted have the function in a sentence. In the example, *one* and *coat* are both nominal “Head” and *does* and *fits* are both verbal “Head”. “Substitution, being a verbal relation, is essentially confined to the text. Substitution is a textual relation and it exists primarily as an anaphoric device.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 130). In the category of substitution, there are three sub-types: nominal (*one, ones, same, etc*), verbal (*do*), and clausal (*so, not, etc*).

#### (1) Nominal substitution

Nominal substitution refers to the replacement of a noun by another noun. The substituting nouns are *one, ones, and same*. The device *one* or *ones* usually plays the role of nominal “Head” in a sentence. For example:

*Mary filled the water into the cup made of ceramics. If she used a plastic one, there will be chemical smell because of the heat.*

In above example, *cup* is the “Head” of the nominal group *cup made of ceramics* and one is “Head” of the nominal group *plastic one*. *One* or *ones* usually replaces a noun to play the role of “Head” in a sentence.

## (2) Verbal substitution

The devices for verbal substitution are *do* and its variations *does, did, doing, done*. They function as verbal “Head” of a sentence. They always appear with a proposition to make the sentence complete. For example:

*The bus did not arrive at the usual time as it used to do.*

“*Do* may substitute either for a verb, or for a verb plus certain element in the clause and it is almost always anaphoric.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 130). Besides replacing certain word in a sentence, it often replaces a whole sentence entirely.

## (3) Clausal substitution

“Clausal substitution is the type of substitution in which what is presupposed is not an element within the clause but an entire clause.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 130) The devices for clausal substitution are *so* and *not*, replacing the entire clause. For example:

*Will Jone come to collect the rent this weekend? —I hope not.*

Here the *not* refers to the clause *Jone will come to collect the rent this weekend*. The device *not* makes the reply short and clear.

### 2.3.3 Ellipsis

The difference between substitution and ellipsis is very subtle. When substitution appears by default, it is ellipsis. The following example illustrates how to distinguish from substitution from ellipsis.

*a. She has a nice skirt. I've never seen a more beautiful one.*

b. *She has a nice skirt. I've never seen a more beautiful.*

Example a and b are substitution and ellipsis.

In the category of ellipsis, there are nominal ellipses, verbal ellipsis, and clausal ellipsis.

#### (1) Nominal ellipsis

Nominal ellipsis works as the “Head” of a word that usually functions as a modifier in a sentence. “Nominal ellipsis involves the upgrading of a word functioning as deictic, numerative, epithet or classifier from the status of modifier to the status of Head.”

(Halliday&Hasan, 1976: 148) For example:

*Five cats had just passed by my house.*

*Another two came immediately.*

*Two* in the second sentence is a numerative and it often functions as modifier. But here it is used as “Head” of a sentence.

#### (2) Verbal ellipsis

Verbal ellipsis contains two sub-types: Lexical ellipsis and Operator ellipsis. In lexical ellipsis, the lexical verb does not appear in the sentence, while in operator ellipsis, the operators do not appear in the sentence. Modal operators such as *can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must, ought to, and be to* are similar. They have a common characteristic, that is, they can not work as a lexical verb. Therefore, if a sentence takes a modal operator as the only verb, then this sentence involves lexical ellipsis. For example:

*Will Mary take part in the exam?—She would. She was to, but she might not.*

*—She must, if she wishes to go to university.*

In the case of operator ellipsis, the operator is missing. Moreover, all the components of a sentence might be missing according to the situation except the lexical verb. But it is usually seen in dialogues of clear relationships between sentences. For example:

*Has John been doing homework? —No, watching TV.*

### (3) Clausal ellipsis

In a clausal ellipsis, a clause is missing from the sentence completely. This case is commonly seen in reply to a question. The listener will find no difficulty in understanding the reply with the preceding information. When it comes to interpretation of these replies, the omitted clause could be interpreted, or still omitted if the speakers know about the situation very well.

For example:

*a. Did he go to the cinema last night? —Yes, he did.*

*b. When will the flight arrive? —At 9 o'clock..*

### 2.3.4 Conjunction

Conjunction serves as a function word which joins words or sentences together. Conjunctive words do the task of linking through the connotation they contain. The reader can easily defer the relationship between one sentence and another by referring to the conjunctive words. Generally the conjunctive words express certain connecting meaning and denote correspondent elements in the surrounding sentences very clearly. Halliday and Hasan (1976) explain four types of conjunction:

(1) Additive: *and or, also, furthermore, besides, etc.*

(2) Adversative: *yet, though, but, in fact, instead, etc.*

(3) Causal: *so, for, because, therefore, etc.*

(4) Temporal: *then, next, after that, later, etc.*

Here is the illustration of each:

*For the whole day he climbed up the steep mountainside, almost without stopping.*

*a. And in all this time he met no one. (Additive)*

*b. Yet he was hardly aware of being tired. (Adversative)*

*c. So by night time the valley was far below him. (Causal)*

d. *Then, as dusk fell, he sat down to rest. (Temporal)*

(Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 243)

“Additive relation indicates a relationship of coordination, and they establish what we call the ‘and’ links”. (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 244) For example:

*Do you wish to go to the cinema now? Or do you want to wash the clothes first?*

Adversative cohesion shows relationship of opposite. The reader is likely to draw a conclusion from the preceding words or sentences. However, the adversative cohesive device brings the reader to a different result. “Adversative items establish what items establish what we call the ‘yet’ links” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 244) For example:

*John went over the lessons till 23 o’clock last night; he made every question clear. Yet he still failed in the exam.*

“Causal conjunction marks a cause-and-effect or reason-and-consequence relationship, and it establishes what we call the ‘so’ links.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 244) It is a fairly common cohesive device which could be seen in almost every kind of texts including report, newspaper article or announcement. For example:

*Mary felt relieved when she heard her stock did not go down, for she had put all the savings in it.*

“Temporal conjunction marks the relation of sequence in time, the one is subsequent to the other, and it establishes what we call the ‘then’ links.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 244) For example:

*The owner of the house noticed there was another man in the kitchen just then.*

*Joseph stopped swearing at those who did laundry at his time finally.*

### **2.3.5 Lexical Cohesion**

Lexical cohesion contributes a lot to the quality of writing. Xu Weicheng's (2000) finding shows that there is a significant correlation between the number of lexical cohesive devices and quality of writing. Zhang Meishuo (2000) has a similar finding as Xu that there is a relation between lexical cohesion and the quality of writing, especially when using synonymy, antonymy and collocation. A rich vocabulary will make the lexical cohesive devices more effective in linking the paragraphs.

Halliday&Hasan (1976) classify lexical cohesion into two main groups: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration is a form of lexical cohesion which involves the repetition of a lexical item, or the use of a general word dominating the entire class to refer back to a lexical item, or the use of a synonym, near synonym, or superordinate. For example:

*I see a shepherd jumping up the roof.*

*a. The shepherd will get scared on the roof. (repetition of the same word)*

*b. The puppy will get scared on the roof. (synonym)*

*c. The dog will get scared on the roof. (superordinate)*

*d. The cutie will get scared on the roof. (general word)*

“Collocation is the cohesion between any pair of lexical items that stand to each other in some recognizable lexicosemantic relation.” (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 285) In this category, pairs of synonyms, superordinates, complementaries, antonyms and converses are included. For example: *praise...compliment* (synonyms), *shepherd...dog or television...furniture* (superordinate), *man...woman or step forward...step back* (complementaries), *admire...despise or bright...dark* (antonyms), and *beg...agree* (converse). Words belonging to the same topic can also be counted in this category. For example: if June occurs in one sentence and July in another, the effect will be cohesive. The other examples of this kind are *penny...pound, east...west, ceiling...floor, analog...digital*.

## **2.4 Identification of Cohesive Devices**

Halliday and Hasan suggest a method for the analysis of cohesion in a text in Chapter 8 in

*Cohesion in English* (1976: 329-330). The coding scheme provides a means of identifying the cohesive devices in the texts of the present study. Each sentence is given an index number, and the total number of ties in that sentence will be counted. And for each tie, the specific type of cohesion will be identified. This method is followed in this study to analyze the use of cohesive devices in a text.

Reference	Coding
	R
1. Pronominals	1
(1) singular, masculine <i>he, him, his</i>	11
(2) singular, feminine <i>she, her, hers</i>	12
(3) singular, neuter <i>it, its</i>	13
(4) plural <i>they, them, their, theirs</i>	14
2. Demonstratives	2
(1) demonstrative, near <i>this/these, here</i>	21
(2) demonstrative, far <i>that/those, there, then</i>	22
(3) definite article <i>the</i>	23
3. Comparatives (not complete lists)	3
(1) identity <i>same, identical</i>	31
(2) similarity <i>similar, such</i>	32
(3) difference <i>different, other, else, additional</i>	33
(4) comparison <i>more, less, as many</i>	34
(5) comparison <i>as+adjective (comparative, or Superlatives)</i>	35
Substitution	S
1. Nominal ellipsis <i>one/ones, the same, so</i>	1

2. Verbal ellipsis *do* 2
3. Clausal ellipsis *so, not* 3

Ellipsis E

4. Nominal ellipsis 1
5. Verbal ellipsis 2
6. Clausal ellipsis 3

Conjunction C

1. Addictive *and, or, also* 1
2. Adversative *yet, though, but* 2
3. Causal *so, for, because* 3
4. Temporal *then, next, after that* 4
5. Other (continuative) *now, of course, well* 5

Lexical L

1. Same item 1
2. Synonym or near synonym (include hyponym) 2
3. Superordinate 3
4. General item 4
5. Collocation 5

The following is a sample text from *Cohesion in English* by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 340).  
*She looked at the Queen, who seemed to have suddenly wrapped herself in wool (1). Alice rubbed her eyes, and looked again (2). She couldn't make out what had happened at all (3). Was she in a shop (4)?*

Sentence Number	No. of ties	Cohesive item	Type	Presupposed item
1	3	she	R12	Alice

		the queen	L1	The queen
		wool	L5	sheep
2	3	Alice	L1	Alice
		looked	L1	looked
		again	C44	Looked at the Queen
3	1	She	R12	Alice
4	1	she	R12	Alice

### 3. Results and Analysis

Here first, an overview of the use of cohesive devices is presented. In the overview, the frequency of cohesive ties and errors will be summed up including the distribution of cohesive devices by categories and the distribution of errors in the use of cohesive devices will also be analyzed in a detailed way. Next, cohesive devices of each category will be discussed in a detailed way in order to find out sufficient information related to errors.

#### 3.1 A General Description of the Use of Cohesive Devices

For convenience of the description, all compositions are identified with numbers from 1 to 40. (See Table 1)

Table 1. The Frequency of Cohesive Ties and Errors in the Composition

Sample	Number of ties	Number of errors	Error rate
1	32	5	15.62%
2	19	3	15.78%
3	25	3	12.00%
4	27	4	14.81%
5	29	3	10.34%
6	23	3	13.04%
7	25	5	20.00%
8	13	3	23.07%
9	22	4	18.18%
10	30	4	13.33%
11	22	1	4.54%

12	17	2	11.76%
13	31	4	12.90%
14	20	3	15.00%
15	11	2	18.18%
16	33	7	21.21%
17	16	3	18.75%
18	16	4	25.00%
19	26	5	19.23%
20	14	3	21.42%
21	27	5	18.51%
22	23	2	8.69%
23	11	1	9.09%
24	21	3	14.28%
25	8	1	12.50%
26	18	3	16.66%
27	16	4	25.00%
28	17	2	11.76%
29	23	5	21.73%
30	30	4	13.33%
31	21	3	14.28%
32	22	5	22.72%
33	16	2	12.50%
34	25	7	28.00%
35	32	5	15.62%
36	22	3	13.63%
37	30	2	6.66%
38	27	4	14.81%
39	21	4	19.04%
40	24	7	29.16%
Total	885	143	16.15%

Table 1 shows the frequency of cohesive devices in each sample composition. Sample 16 has the highest frequency: 33 cohesive ties; and Sample 25 has the lowest frequency: 8 cohesive ties. Altogether, there are 885 cohesive ties in the random sample. So the average frequency is 22.1 cohesive ties per composition. From Table 1, it could be seen that the frequency of errors committed in the utilization of cohesive devices in each composition. All compositions have some cohesive errors, more or less. Sample 11, 23, 25 have only one error each, and Sample 16, 34, 40 have the highest frequency of 7 errors. Altogether, there are 143 errors in the random sample. And the average frequency is 3.57 cohesive errors per composition. As

for the error rate, Sample 11 has the lowest error rate: 4.54% and Sample 40 has the highest error rate among all compositions: 29.16%. The average error rate is 16.15%.

	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
Error Rates	16.15%	15.31%	5.47

Figure 1

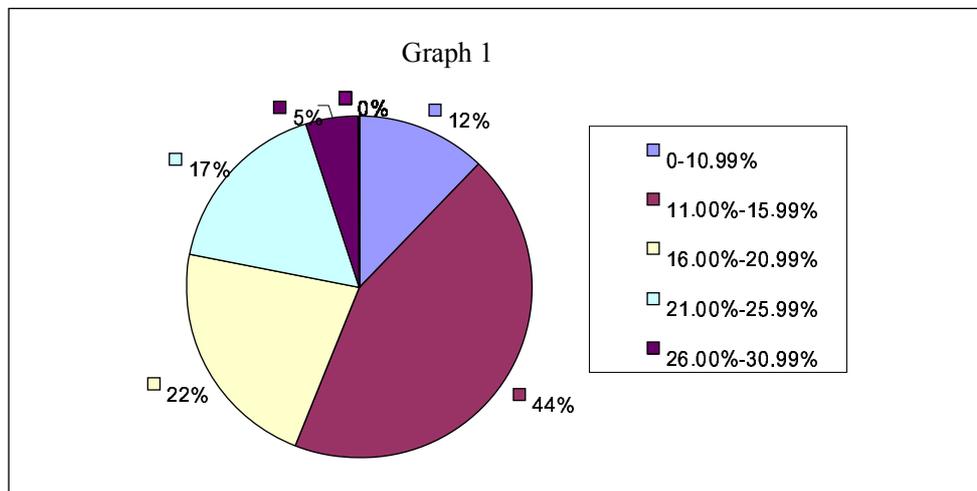


Figure 1 contains the average, median and standard deviation of error rates. The median is 15.31%, meaning that if one student's error rate is 15.31%, then this is the middle level of all the students surveyed. The standard deviation is 5.47. It is not a big number, and it shows the difference in the students' levels is not very big. Graph 1 describes the percentages held by different error rates. The error rates ranging from 0 to 10.99% account for 12%. The error rates between 11.00% and 15.99% have the largest percentage 44%.

From the table, graph and figure, it could be concluded that the utilization of cohesive devices is different from student to student. Since the relationship between the number of cohesive ties and the quality of writing is not the focus of the present study, the study does not rate and classify the compositions as good and poor compositions. But from previous

studies, we get the impression that there are more cohesive devices used in good compositions than in a poor one.

The purpose of the present research is to give a general description of the actual use of cohesive devices in the compositions. However, from the table, we could not get more detailed information for the real use of cohesive devices by category, since this table only offers a general description of the numbers of cohesive ties used in the sample compositions and errors in the use of cohesive devices. For further information about the utilization of cohesive devices, see Table 2.

Table 2. The distribution of Cohesive Devices by Categories

Type of cohesion	Reference	Substitution	Ellipsis	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Total
Number	374	29	8	161	313	885
Percentage	42.25%	3.27%	0.9%	18.19%	35.36%	100%

Table 2 shows the distribution of cohesive devices used in the sample compositions by categories. It is found that the students are able to use a variety of cohesive devices in their writing. Of the 5 types of cohesive devices, reference has the highest frequency. There are 374 reference cohesive ties altogether, and that is about 42.25% of all cohesive devices used in the sample compositions. The second highest frequency belongs to lexical cohesion with 313 cohesive ties which represent 35.36% of all cohesive devices. Then, the third one is conjunction with 161 cohesive ties. Substitution and ellipsis only represent a very small percentage. So, from the table, it could be seen that students tend to use reference items and lexical items in their discourses to connect sentences and make their writing coherent.

Fitzgerald & Spiegel (1990) find in good compositions, lexical cohesion has the highest frequency of use; reference has the second highest frequency. In poor compositions, reference has the highest frequency. The high frequency may indicate a low level of writing quality. But in the present study, the compositions are not rated as good or poor ones, since

the relationship between the use of cohesive devices and the quality of writing is not the focus of the present study. The essay pays more attention to the use of cohesive devices: What devices are used? What is the distribution of cohesive devices? What errors are committed? What is the distribution of cohesive errors?

The study shows that substitution and ellipsis are least often used in Chinese college students' English writing. One reason for that could be writing strategy. Students have little training on substitution and ellipsis, and tend to avoid using these cohesive devices in their writing.

Table 3. The Distribution of Errors in the Use of Cohesive Devices

Type cohesion	Reference	Substitution	Ellipsis	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Total
Number errors	61	5	0	28	49	143
Percentage	42.65%	3.49%	0	19.58%	34.26%	100%

From Table 3, it could be seen that the students made more errors in the utilization of reference than in other categories. The errors in the category of lexical cohesion represent 34.26% of all errors, which is slightly smaller than the percentage of reference cohesive errors.

### 3.2 The Use of Reference

Table 4. The Distribution of Reference Items and Errors in the Use of Reference by Subcategories

Type of Reference	Personal	Demonstrative	Comparative	Total
Number of ties	271	58	45	374
Percentage	72.45%	15.5%	12.03%	100%
Number of errors	41	10	10	61

Percentage	67.21%	16.39%	16.39%	100%
Error rate	15.12%	17.24%	22.22%	16.31%

Table 4 shows the use of reference in the sample compositions. Of the three subcategories, the students used far more personal reference items than demonstrative and comparative reference items in their writing. Personal reference is reference by means of function in the speech situation, through the category of person (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The category of personals includes personal pronouns (*I, you, he, she, him, etc.*), possessive determiners (usually called possessive adjectives) (*his, her, their, our, your, etc.*) and possessive pronouns (*mine, yours, hers, theirs, etc.*). When a personal reference is used, it must refer to somebody or something in another sentence in the text for its interpretation. The following are some examples taken from the sample compositions:

Euthanasia is different from murder, though both of them are killing.

(From sample 32)

But we can not help him at all. In such a strictly-disciplined army hospital, euthanasia is absolutely not permitted. We hope that the laws on euthanasia can be made as soon as possible so that it will be our responsibility to help those desperate patients release their great pains which are unimaginable for healthy people.

(From Sample 22)

In the sample compositions, the pronouns are used with different frequency as shown in Table 5. The Frequency Distribution of Pronouns

Type	I, me, my	you, your	we, us, our, ours	It, its	They, them, their	He, his
Frequency	26	17	74	46	103	5

Table 5 shows that *they, them, their* as third person plural forms have the highest frequency. Students tend to use these words when they describe a common phenomenon or situation which is far from them as writers; or when they talk about an event in which they have no part to play; or when they just describe a phenomenon objectively. The following examples illustrate that:

Maybe some people will feel it is difficult for them to accept Euthanasia, for they have never encountered the brutal experience of dying with hopeless recovering. And they can never imagine how the torture will be to a hopeless person.

(From sample 9)

It is lucky for many people that they do not have any relatives or friends who seriously ill and only kept alive by artificial means. They are fortunate and do not have to witness their beloveds' suffering. They also do not have the burden both in mind or physical condition.

(From sample 5)

From the table, it could be seen that the number of third person forms in the sample compositions is 154, which represents 57% of all personal reference items in the sample compositions. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 51) point out that when we talk of the cohesive function of personal reference, it is particularly the third person forms that we have in mind. It can explain the fact that third person forms have the highest frequency in the sample compositions and in the present study, the third person plural forms have the highest frequency. First person plural forms *we, our* have the second highest frequency in the sample compositions. Students tend to use these pronouns to talk about a situation or an event in which the students themselves as writers and the readers may have the same experience. Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out that: *we* mean *you and I*—the writer may refer either to himself as, or *we*, or to his readers, as *you*, or to both. And *I* is always used to express their personal opinions by the students in their writing. The following examples illustrate this point:

Nothing is perfect; I think we should not refuse to eat for fear of choking. That is, we should not extend other's suffering just for the sake of ourselves.

(From Sample 24)

Besides, we Chinese people believe that we are the master of our life, death is part of life, it should be our right to choose death.

(From Sample 9)

The errors in using personal reference have a high frequency: there are 41 errors committed

in the compositions. These errors represent 67.21% of all reference errors. The errors in using personal reference mainly fall into two groups:

(1) Redundant use of pronouns or overuse of pronouns. In some compositions, too many pronouns are used, while some of them are actually not necessary and even bring ambiguity to readers.

If they have money and bread, they would use them to fill up their stomach rather than cure their disease. They need them in many more important ways rather than for the treatment of the disease. For example, they will use them to pay for the education fees for their children or to buy some warm clothes.

(From sample 35)

The underlined *they* and *them* are redundant and bring ambiguity to readers who may not be clear about the real referents of them. In this case, it is necessary to combine the sentences and repeat one referent of them:

They need money and bread in many more important ways rather than for the treatment of the disease, such as paying for the education fees for their children or buying some warm clothes.

(2) Frequent shift of pronouns

In some compositions, the students frequently shift pronouns from the singular to the plural form, from the first person to the second or third person, or vice versa. The reference items are used inconsistently throughout the text and bring ambiguity to readers and even mislead them.

In those countries, some nursing homes sponsored by the government can provide perfect service to the aged until their death. However, in China, it is impossible and unpractical to do that. Though, they will make the patients' life easier, people can just dream of it now.

(From Sample 29)

Some people might say euthanasia is against the natural process of human life, ethics and morality. I must say everyone has the right to choose his life style himself. You have the

right to end your meaningless and hopeless life.

(From Sample 7)

In the subcategory of demonstrative reference, the definite article *the* has the highest frequency. In the use of *the*, the main problem lies in the fact that many students overuse or misuse the definite article.

In addition, the medical treatments for the patient with incurable disease are extremely expensive, which is a heavy burden to the patient's family.

(From Sample 32)

The underlined *the* is not necessary. In English, the definite article has no meaning in itself. When it is combined with a noun or nominal group, it specifies that the referent of the noun phrase is assumed to be known to the speaker and addressee. But in the above case, *medical treatments* is to be retrieved from nowhere, in other words, the presence of *the* creates no link between the sentence in which it occurs and any preceding or following sentences. Since it could not fulfill its role as a cohesive item, it is not necessary here. So is the following example:

It is reasonable that people should have the right to die, because death is as normal and natural as the birth.

(From Sample 32)

Under the topic *Whether Euthanasia should be Legalized in China*, the students were expected to use more comparative reference items than usual in their writing to talk about the changes and to compare life in the past and today. But there are only 45 comparative reference items used in the compositions altogether.

The students in their writing use little general comparison. Of the three forms of general comparison (identity, similarity and difference), the form of difference is the only form which could be found in the sample compositions. For example:

The situation is different from the past.

(From Sample 40)

The attitudes of the patients' family are different from the old days in many aspects.

(From Sample 38)

Particular comparison expresses comparability between things in respect of quantity or quality. Compared with general comparison, the students use more particular comparison in their writing to talk about *Whether Euthanasia should be Legalized in China*. For example:

They often hold worse jobs, earn a lower income and live a more miserable and lonely life than before.

(From Sample 32)

Particular comparison, like general comparison, is also referential; there must be a standard of reference by which one thing is said to be superior, equal, or inferior in quality or quantity.

In the subcategory of comparative reference, the errors mainly occur as follows:

More and more high technical medical machines are widely used in the treatment.

(From Sample 29)

People spend more and more money on health check too.

(From Sample 5)

### 3.3 The use of Substitution and Ellipsis

Table 6. The Distribution of Substitution and Substitution Errors by Subcategories

Type of reference	Nominal substitutes	Verbal substitutes	Clausal substitutes	Total
Number of ties	27	2	0	29
Percentage	93.1%	6.89%	0	100%
Number of errors	5	0	0	5
Percentage	100%	0	0	100%
Error rate	18.51%	0	0	17.24%

Table 7. The Distribution of Ellipsis and Ellipsis Errors by Subcategories

Type	Nominal	Verbal	Clausal	Total
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of ellipsis	ellipsis	ellipsis	ellipsis	
Number of ties	5	0	3	8
Percentage	93.1%	0	37.5%	100%
Number of errors	0	0	0	0

From Table 6, 7, it could be seen that fewer cases of substitution and ellipsis are involved in the sample compositions than other categories. Another finding is that there are fewer cases of substitution and ellipsis in students' writing than other categories. The following are some examples of the students' use of substitution and ellipsis:

Compared with the former medical treatment, the modern one is chemistry-oriented.

(From Sample 5)

It is the same with education.

(From Sample 24)

### 3.4 The use of Conjunction

Table 8. The Distribution of Conjunction and Conjunction Errors by Subcategories

Type of conjunction	Additive	Adversative	Causal	Temporal	Total
Number of ties	37	35	26	63	161
Percentage	22.98%	21.73%	16.14%	39.13%	100%
Number of errors	6	7	3	12	28
Percentage	21.42%	25%	10.71%	42.85%	100%
Error rate	16.21%	20%	11.53%	19.04%	17.39%

Conjunctive ties have the third highest frequency in the present study. Among the subcategories, temporal conjunction has the highest frequency. The reason for that may lie in the type of the writing. The students are asked to describe and express their ideas about the changes in family life. So they tend to use *firstly*, *secondly*, *thirdly* or *first*, *then*, *finally* at the beginning of a sentence or a paragraph to list the changes or express their opinions. In doing so, they want to make the order clear and make the readers follow their ideas. For example:

Firstly, the modern medical treatment in our life has been equipped with better machines.

Secondly, the government is investing more money in medical care services.

Thirdly, patients can cure themselves by adopting a happy mood.

(From Sample 14)

The high frequency of temporal conjunctive devices results in the misuse or overuse of the temporal conjuncts in some compositions. For example:

First, old hospitals have been greatly renovated or even rebuilt.

Second, medical payment has become much easier because of online channels.

Third, media has reported the improvement of the situation of poor families.

(From Sample 13)

In the example, the first two sentences are used to talk about the changes in medical service, but the third sentence has nothing to do with the changes. The temporal conjunctive item, *third*, was expected to give coherence to these sentences but failed.

In the subcategory of additive conjunction, conjunct *and* occurs most often. From Table 6, 7, it could be seen that fewer cases of substitution and ellipsis are involved in the sample compositions. In the subcategory of adversative conjunction conjunct *but* and *although* are used most often. In the subcategory of causal conjunction, conjunct *because* and *so* are used most often. The errors in this category are as followings:

Let's talk about the situations of medical service at first. ...Then, patients have also changed their habits of going to hospital.

(From Sample 2)

*At first* means *in the beginning before something changes*. In the above example, the student wanted to list the changes, so *at first* should be changed to *first* or *to begin with*.

There is a noticeable difference on many aspects of our life, for example, on people's income, on medical care service, on consumption habits, and so on.

(From Sample 2)

*For example* is always followed by a full sentence. In this case, *for example* should be

replaced by *such as*.

Having accepted more treatment, the patient becomes more optimistic, even though the family becomes more impoverished.

(From Sample 2)

*Even though* here cannot build coherence between *the patient becomes more optimistic* and *the family becomes more impoverished*, but mislead the readers. It is better to change the conjunct to *but at the same time* to indicate that both *the patient becomes more optimistic* and *the family becomes more impoverished* are the results of *having accepted more treatment*, even though they contrast to each other.

Nowadays, although they have enough money, but they are not willing to spend on expensive medical care.

(From Sample 8)

### 3.5 The Use of Lexical Cohesion

Table 9. The Distribution of Lexical Cohesion and Lexical Errors by Subcategories

Type of lexical cohesion	Same item (repetition)	Synonym near synonym	Superordinate	General item	Collocation	Total
Number of ties	138	43	25	21	86	313
Percentage	44.08%	13.73%	7.98%	6.7%	27.47%	100%
Number of errors	32	2	2	3	10	49
Percentage	65.3%	4.08%	4.08%	6.12%	20.4%	100%
Error rate	23.18%	4.65%	8%	14.28%	11.62%	15.65%

In the present study, lexical cohesion has the second highest frequency. Lexical cohesion contributes a lot to the quality of writing. The difference between native speakers' writing and Chinese students' English compositions is largely due to the utilization of lexical cohesion and reference. There is a significant difference in the utilization of lexical cohesion between Chinese college students' English compositions and the writing of native speakers of

English. Of the 5 subcategories, the students in the present study use repetition most frequently. In other words, about half of the cases of lexical cohesion are just repetition of the same items. For example,

Old medical treatment and modern medical treatment are different in the patient's mentality. Modern medical treatment lays emphasis on the confidence of the patient himself, while old medical treatment focuses on the role of medicines and operations. Of course, modern medical treatment is better than old medical treatment.

(From Sample 32)

As a cohesive device, the repetition of the same lexical item contributes to the coherence of a text. Hoey (1991) divided repetition into simple repetition and complex repetition. Simple repetition is the simplest and the most direct form of lexical cohesion. Although the use of simple repetition can benefit the coherence of the article, the overuse of simple repetition may bring side-effect to the coherence, or even ruin the coherence and make the writing boring and dull. By complex repetition, Hoey meant inflectional variants and derivational variants of lexical items. Complex repetition is closely related to simple lexical repetition. This occurs either when two lexical items share a lexical morpheme, but are syntactically different (e.g. develop, development, developing and developed), or when they are identical in spelling and sound, but have different grammatical function (e.g. work (n.) and work (v.)). In authentic English writing, it's the complex repetition rather than simple repetition that is more often employed.

Other types of lexical devices such as synonym or near-synonym, superordinate and general items are rarely used in the samples. Maybe the students knew it is not good to use the same word excessively, but they had tried desperately to find some proper words from their vocabulary to replace the repeated ones, but in vain.

Collocation has the second highest frequency in this group. Collocation is the kind of lexical cohesion that is achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly co-occur. Whether the collocation occurs within the sentence in general sense or above the sentence,

both of them can create the cohesion. In the sample compositions, quite a few lexical items were misused in this subcategory.

Only in this form did nurse study the knowledge. (From Sample 21)

In Chinese, we often use the phrase *study the knowledge*, but in English there is no equivalent to *study the knowledge*, but *acquire knowledge*. In this case, the error is due to the negative transfer of Chinese.

Some patients are equal to healthy people and even more outstanding in overcoming difficulties compared to healthy people.

(From Sample 21)

*Equal* and *outstanding* are not a pair of lexical items that could co-occur. The sentence could be changed as following:

- (1) Some patients are equal to healthy people and even more strong-willed in overcoming difficulties.
- (2) Some patients are as strong-willed as healthy people and even more outstanding in overcoming difficulties.

Deng Yanchang and Liu Runqing (1989) in their book, *Language and Culture*, talk about the misuse of collocation and regard them as “little more than word for word translations of Chinese expressions”. The reasons for that mainly lie in the interference or influence of Chinese and the students’ restricted choice of lexical items.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Summary of Analysis**

In the general description of the use of cohesive devices, it could be concluded that the students use the cohesive devices of reference most often in their writing. There are no errors in the use of ellipsis. But this does not mean that students are good at ellipsis. On the contrary, it simply shows that students hardly ever use ellipsis. The possible reason may be that they

simply wanted to make themselves understood and would rather to express their ideas with some redundant language. That, too, is a strategic decision. Students have little training on substitution and ellipsis, and tend to avoid using these cohesive devices in their writing. They seem to believe that the less they use cohesive devices, the fewer cohesive errors would they commit in their writing. This fact indicates that we teachers should bring cohesion and coherence into the teaching of English writing and properly introduce cohesive devices to students and encourage correct use of these devices.

In the use of reference, the overuse of pronouns and frequent shift of pronouns may result in ambiguity in the use of reference and make it harder for the readers to follow the writer. Most of the personal reference errors could be identified and corrected by the students themselves upon revision after writing their compositions. The main reasons behind these errors may be the students' carelessness in using personal reference items and the interference of Chinese. Some cases of misuse of personal reference are simply word for word translation of Chinese expressions. For example:

Some people might say euthanasia is against the natural process of human life, ethics and morality. I must say everyone has the right to choose his life style himself. You have the right to end your meaningless and hopeless life.

(From Sample 7)

This example shows that expressions that are perfectly natural and entirely appropriate in Chinese, if translated into English, may have a result that would be quite awkward. So during the process of writing, Chinese students should avoid word or word translation.

The overuse and misuse of *the* may due to two factors: 1) the difference between English and Chinese language: there is no equivalent in Chinese to the English article *the*. So it's hard for some Chinese students to master the use of the definite article; 2) the definite article has no meaning on its own. That's where the difficult point lies. Sometimes, it is really hard for the Chinese students to figure out whether they should use *the* or not.

The reason for misuse of particular comparison may be the negative transfer of Chinese. In Chinese, we tend to use *more and more* to describe the changes in respect of quantity or quality in all contexts. So many students simply transfer meanings of Chinese to English by using Chinese writing strategies. And this kind of sentences is just a little more than word for word translation of Chinese expressions and these grammatical structures could be regarded as Chinglish. Although understanding may not be a problem, Chinglish is unacceptable. Students should be encouraged to check their own writing carefully to avoid such Chinglish. And teachers should try their best to help the students decrease the interference of Chinese in writing.

As regards substitution and ellipsis, it is found that students are not good at using the two cohesive devices. One reason for that is writing strategy. Students have little training on substitution and ellipsis, and tend to avoid using these cohesive devices in their writing. Another reason may be the type of the writing, because according to Halliday and Hasan, substitution and ellipsis are typically found in dialogues. In future teaching of cohesive devices, more emphasis should be put on these two types of cohesive devices. Introduce substitution and ellipsis in a systematic way and in a proper context other than in isolation. Correct use of substitution and ellipsis should be encouraged.

In the use of conjunction, students tend to make errors with *although* and *but*. *Although* and *but* cannot co-occur, because a structure cannot be hypotactic and paratactic at the same time. The reasons behind the errors may lie in that:

(1) The negative transfer of Chinese: In Chinese, we could say *although...but...*, but in English, we could not put *although* and *but* in one sentence. The students are always affected by the Chinese language and sometimes translate Chinese into English word for word in their writing.

Some students organize their ideas in Chinese when required to write English compositions

on a certain topic. They create the text indirectly by translating their thoughts word for word from their native language to English, often with undesirable results. In using conjunctive ties, the students take it for granted that they can translate directly what is correct in Chinese into English, without thinking about whether it is acceptable in English. That's why their expressions seem very unnatural, strange and unacceptable.

(2)The misunderstanding of some conjuncts: It leads to the misuse of the conjuncts. For example, in some samples, some adversative devices such as *on the other hand* and *at the same time* are given all additive function without any *contrary to expectation*.

In the use of lexical cohesion, the main errors in this category lie in that students often overuse the cohesive device of simple repetition in their compositions. Simple repetition is the simplest and the most direct form of lexical cohesion. Although the use of simple repetition can benefit the coherence of the article, the overuse of simple repetition may bring side-effect to the coherence or even min the coherence and make the writing boring and dull. The main reason for the overuse of repetition is the students' small vocabulary or their restricted choice of lexical items. Limited by their small vocabulary, the students repeat certain words again and again in their writings. As regards the underuse of repetition, Chinese students make relatively fewer mistakes. Most common mistakes in this aspect maybe that they fail to use enough repetition in stressing what they advocate.

From the findings of the study, it could be seen that the students are able to use a variety of cohesive devices in their writing, among which reference devices form the largest percentage of the total number of cohesive devices, followed by lexical cohesive devices and conjunctives. There are some differences in this respect from some previous studies. Most previous studies show that lexical cohesion has the largest percentage followed by reference and conjunction. 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.

## **4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions**

### **4.2.1 Implication**

The actual use of cohesive devices and the cohesive errors in the sampled compositions are a true reflection of the teaching of English writing some colleges. The findings from the present study also have pedagogical implications for the teaching of English writing. In the teaching of English writing, words and sentences are the focuses of teaching. In other words, words and phrases are taught and memorized as isolated, translatable items rather than as part of a semantically related chain. Usually, certain words would be picked out from the text and explained to students as isolated ones with examples within no context. It's little wonder that students have made so many lexical errors in their English writing. To raise students' awareness of cohesion and coherence is a task that lies not only with the teachers who teach English writing but also with all other teachers who teach English in Chinese colleges. In the teaching of English writing, it is necessary for the teachers to analyze the features of cohesion and coherence in the text, since the texts in the course books are all original and authentic English writing by native speakers, and in doing so the students could be aware of cohesion and coherence and learn from the native speakers the technique of using cohesive ties.

From the above description of the use of cohesive devices and the cohesive errors in the sampled compositions, it could be concluded that the reasons for these errors mainly fall into 4 aspects:

- (1) Little knowledge of cohesion and coherence
- (2) The students' small vocabulary
- (3) The misunderstanding of some cohesive items
- (4) The negative transfer of Chinese

### **4.2.2 Suggestions**

In order to help the students raise awareness of cohesion and coherence, avoid making such errors in later writings, develop their writing skills and improve their writing performance, some training based on Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory and their taxonomy of cohesive devices should be provided. The training could be given in the following forms:

(1) Lectures on cohesive devices

In introducing cohesion and coherence to students, there are some guiding principles we have to stick to: 1) introducing each device in a systematic way; 2) introducing each device in a proper context rather than in isolation; 3) raising students' awareness of the importance and the functions of cohesive devices.

In the lectures, cohesive devices in English will be introduced to students by category in a systematic way. The meanings and functions of cohesive devices are illustrated in proper context by adequate examples. This does not necessarily mean teachers should list all the rules and principles of cohesion and cohesive devices so as to burden the students with terminology. The purpose is to make students be aware of the cohesive devices, and their function and usage in English writing. Awareness is a condition for effective learning, especially for adults. Only when they realize the importance of the utilization of cohesive devices and the general rules of cohesion, could they make conscious use of these devices in their writing.

It's recommended to introduce cohesive devices to students by category in a systematic way, not all categories altogether: from more frequently used items to less frequently used items, from the given (learned) items to the new (not learned) one. The findings of the present study show that the most frequently used cohesive devices are reference, lexical cohesion and then conjunction. Substitution and ellipsis are least frequently used. So we could introduce cohesive devices in the order of reference, lexical cohesion, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis. In the introduction, for students' better understanding, adequate examples should be offered for each category of cohesive devices. Because context plays a crucial role in learning of cohesive devices and as we all know, certain cohesive devices are much

represented in some texts but not in others, adequate examples could provide the students with a better context or environment to understand the use of the cohesive devices.

Fitzgerald & Spiegel (1990) all find that lexical cohesion has the highest frequency in writing and contributes most to the quality of writing. They suggest that the emphasis should be put on the introduction and practice of lexical cohesion and reference in the teaching of English writing, because these cohesive devices contribute more to the quality of writing than others. But the introduction of conjunction, substitution and ellipsis can not be ignored just because they contribute less to the quality of writing.

After the introduction of cohesive devices, exercises should be designed for students to practice the usage of these devices. It is noted that the exercises for the use of cohesive devices should be designed to provide the students with original and authentic passages in which the type of cohesive devices practiced is typical. The exercises may take the following forms:

(a) Exercise of recognizing cohesive devices

The exercises are designed by the author of this study for students to figure out the cohesive devices in the given discourses and help them have a better understanding of these devices: How are the cohesive devices used in discourses? In doing the exercises, students are asked to underline the cohesive items and judge what cohesive devices they are. The following is all activity conducted for the recognition of the cohesive devices of reference.

Directions: Read the text carefully, underline the reference items and tell what subcategory they belong to. (C for comparative reference, D for demonstrative reference and P for personal reference)

*The (D) schoolmaster was leaving the (D) village, and everybody (P) seemed sorry. The (D) miller at Cresscombe lent him (P) the (D) small white tilted cart and horse to carry his (P) goods to the (P) city of his (P) destination, about twenty miles off, such a (C) vehicle proving quite sufficient size for the departing teacher's effects.*

(b) Proofreading and error correction.

The exercises are designed to test students' sensitivity to cohesive devices. In the given discourses, some cohesive devices are deliberately misused or omitted. Students are asked to proofread and correct the errors. The following is an activity conducted for error correction.

*Directions: Read the text carefully, underline the cohesive errors and correct them.*

*A young man who expects to be somebody often turns to be somebody (the one). (The) Story about Disraeli is illustrative of (the) case. On entering public life, Disraeli aspired to be both scholar and orator. (He) Disraeli succeeded better in his literary work than in his oratorical efforts. (He) Disraeli was (at first) a total failure as a public speaker. (However), he felt sure that that he could deal with (overcome) every obstacle, (and) devoted himself with invincible purpose to the trial. Some of his friends thought he was foolish and even cranky. (But) he stuck to his purpose, (and) finally accomplished his purpose (it). He became one of the ripest scholars and most eloquent speakers that Great Britain has ever produced.*

(c) Blank-filling test

Some short texts are prepared in which some cohesive items are deliberately taken out and students are asked to fill in the blanks with appropriate cohesive items. The following is all activity created for the usage of conjunction in the form of cloze.

*Directions: Fill in blanks with proper conjunctions*

*Most copying machines work in a similar way. \_\_\_ you will find it easy to use if you do the following things. \_\_\_, you should find out the cost of each copy \_\_\_ get your money ready. \_\_\_ turn the machine. Set the page-length control and light/dark control. \_\_\_, lift the cover and place your book or paper face down on the glass. \_\_\_, put your money in coin slot. \_\_\_, press the "start print" button. \_\_\_ your copy tray, turn off the machine. \_\_\_, don't forget to lift the cover and remove your book or paper.*

(d) To combine sentences by using cohesive devices

Isolated and disordered sentences are provided. Students are asked to arrange the sentences in

the correct order and make them meaningfully and grammatically related to each other by adding cohesive devices. The exercises are designed to help students build a sense of coherence. The following is all activity conducted for building the sense of coherence:

*Directions: Rearrange the sentences in the correct order and make them meaningfully and grammatically related to each other by adding cohesive devices.*

- a. The story about Disraeli is illustrative of the case.*
- b. A young man who expects to be somebody often turns to be the one.*
- c. He succeeded better in his literary work than in his oratorical efforts.*
- d. He was a total failure as a public speaker.*
- e. On entering public life, Disraeli aspired to be both scholar and orator.*
- f. He stuck to his purpose. And finally accomplished it.*
- g. Some of his friends thought he was foolish and even cranky.*
- h. He became one of the ripest scholars and most eloquent speakers that Great Britain has ever produced.*

The above exercises would provide opportunities for students to practice the usage of cohesive devices and to test their knowledge of cohesive devices. These exercises would prepare the students for better performance in English writing.

## (2) Introducing original and authentic reading material to students

To read extensively will surely help to improve the students' writing ability. Being exposed to authentic reading material, the students have more chance to be aware of English coherence, to see how coherence is achieved by using proper cohesive devices. The students could learn a lot by reading. Proper input of original English works is necessary. Students should get acquainted with high-leveled English writings to reinforce their language awareness and to decrease Chinese interference.

## (3) Assessing compositions written by students

Writing is a social, communicative and interactive act that involves two parties: the writer

and the reader. We write to be read. For the English learners in China, most school related writing is destined for the teachers: most writing tasks are assigned by their English teachers, and their teachers are the only readers. Assessing English compositions written by students is not a pleasant job to do. Many teachers who teach English writing course take great pain in assessing the compositions. At the same time, the students care only about the score, and the underlined errors in their writing would not be corrected if the teacher did not ask them to hand in the corrected compositions. In order to overcome the obstacle, some strategies are offered here on assessing students' composition.

(a) Take some compositions as models and have the students examine them together with the teacher. The assessment should focus on the typical misuse in using cohesive devices. The discussion in the class could give students a deeper impression about cohesive errors and make them avoid making similar errors in their own compositions. And the discussion enables the students to know their own errors more consciously and have them corrected more readily.

(b) Students could be divided into groups of four or five to correct each other's composition. They should be trained to be a reader, a critical reader to find any possible or potential errors in the compositions. James (1998) points out that spotting one's own errors is more difficult than spotting other people's errors. It is quite natural that one is apt to see others' errors and ready to point them out, while he himself may often make the same mistakes. Upon pointing out others' errors, the student himself will become more careful with those forms as he writes compositions, trying to anticipate some possible criticisms. And in the assessment, they could consult each other in case of any disagreement. The teacher should give immediate help upon asking.

(c) In order to raise students' awareness of cohesion and coherence, self-assessment is needed. Students should be trained to examine their own compositions, identify and correct their own errors.

#### (4) Decreasing interference of Chinese

The negative transfer of Chinese is a great block in developing English writing abilities. Undoubtedly, there is cultural interference during the learning of the foreign language. Different people with different cultural background may have great differences in the style of literary and rhetorical patterns of expression in their native language. And such differences will naturally be carried to the learning of the foreign language. In order to decrease the interference of Chinese in English writing, it's recommended to provide students with various written samples in English by native speakers and cultural information of English, to raise students' awareness of the difference between Chinese and English language in the style of literary and rhetorical patterns of expression, and to encourage students to think in English.

#### (5) Enlarging students' vocabulary

Words and phrases teaching should be contextualized. It is recommended to offer students efficient methods to enlarge vocabulary. For example, we can learn English words by means of contrastive memory, which indicates that new words could be grouped into antonyms or phrases with the opposite meaning so as to make a sharp contrast. And this contrast will strengthen memory more consistently than other stimulus to the brain.

### **5. Conclusion**

The present study explores the use of cohesive devices in the compositions of Chinese College students. A sample of 40 students' compositions are studied in order to find out some common errors in using cohesive devices and to discuss possible reasons for the errors. In addition, suggestions for better teaching cohesive devices are provided in the study also so as to giving pedagogical advices to teachers.

The study shows that the students are able to use a variety of cohesive devices but that the utilization of cohesive devices is different from student to student. Some compositions have more than 30 cohesive ties; at the same time, some compositions only have less than 10

cohesive ties. Of the 5 types of cohesive devices, reference has the highest frequency. The second highest frequency belongs to lexical cohesion and the third one is conjunction. Substitution and ellipsis only represent a very small percentage. The study also shows that students tend to use reference items and lexical items in their discourse to connect sentences and make their writing coherent. As for reference, the students use personal reference most frequently. In the group of lexical cohesion, simple repetition has the highest frequency.

However, frequency of the utilization of cohesive devices does not indicate the quality of the writing, because overuse, underuse and misuse of cohesive devices may also disturb the textual coherence and thus bring obstacle to the understanding of a text. Certain cohesive error features are identified in the argumentative writing of the students whose writings include ambiguity in the use of reference items, overuse and misuse of conjunction, and restricted use of lexical cohesion. The errors in the sampled compositions show that many students have little knowledge about cohesion and coherence and their writings are always affected by Chinese language. So it is recommended to raise students' awareness of cohesion and coherence and decrease the interference of Chinese. Because of some practical reasons, there are some limitations in the present study, though some findings are obtained. Firstly, the sample size is somewhat small, so we are not sure whether such findings are statistically significant.

Secondly, the present study only investigates one type of writing-argumentative writing. As for other types of writing; further researches are needed to be carried out. Thirdly, since all the cohesive ties and errors were identified, coded and analyzed manually by the author of the thesis rather than automatically or using computers. Some subjective factors may exist in the examination of the cohesive ties and the cohesive errors.

It is recommended that, in future studies, the sample size of compositions should be enlarged and relatively large-scale studies should be conducted in order to construct a general picture

about the use of cohesive devices and cohesive errors in English writing. In the analysis of the use of cohesive devices and cohesive errors, more raters or examiners should be invited so as to avoid some subjective factors in the process. Besides argumentative writing, other main types of writing, such as narrative writing, description and exposition, should also be investigated so as to see whether there are any significant differences between different types of writing in the aspect of cohesive devices and cohesive errors.