

## Cohesion Analysis of L2 Writing: The Case of Iranian Undergraduate EFL Learners

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**Abstract:** *This study aimed at investigating the most frequent cohesive errors committed by Iranian undergraduate EFL learners at different levels of proficiency as well as the sources of cohesive errors. An overall number of 67 undergraduate students at Shiraz Azad University participated in this study. To have three groups of learners with different proficiency levels, Oxford Placement Test 1B1 (Allan, 1985) was administered. To achieve the objectives of the study, the participants were given a writing task requiring them to write an approximately 200-word narrative composition. Then, the compositions were scored based on the taxonomy developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Finally, the data were analyzed through appropriate procedures using quantitative methods. Regarding the frequencies and percentages of errors it was found that low-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in references (20), followed by errors in lexical (14), and conjunctive cohesion (1). Besides, the findings showed that errors in references were the most common (17), followed by errors in lexical (13), and conjunction cohesion (2) in the mid-level learners' narrative compositions and, finally, the high-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in lexical cohesion (17), references (14), conjunction cohesion (3), and substitution (1). This study also allowed for an examination of the sources of cohesive errors. It was found that errors in the use of relative pronouns, conjunctions, along with different forms of repetition appeared because of the incomplete knowledge of the learners—intra-lingual causes. Furthermore, in this study, the errors in the use of personal-, possessive-pronouns, demonstratives and collocations were among the inter-lingual causes of errors.*

**Keywords:** *Error analysis; Cohesion analysis; Cohesive devices; L2 writing; Cohesive errors; Sources of errors*

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### Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing research interest in the analysis of errors adults make while learning a second language. The study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners (i.e. Error Analysis or EA), either in their speech or writing or both has been brought under consideration by many educators, EFL teachers, linguists, and researchers throughout the world. In fact, learners' errors have been the subject of controversy for a long time.

Generally, as Keshavarz (1999, p. 11) stated, "there have been two major approaches to the study of learners' errors, namely Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis." He further discussed that, "Error Analysis emerged on account of the shortcomings of Contrastive Analysis which was the favored way of describing learners' language in the 1950s and 1960s" (p. 42).

The process involved in CA is the comparison of learners' mother tongue and the target language. Based on the similarities or differences between two languages, predictions were made on errors that learners would be likely or disposed to make as a result (Kim, 2001). As Kim (2001) explained, by early 1970s, CA lost its favor because of the inaccurate or uninformative predictions of learner errors; errors did not occur where predicted, but instead errors showed up where CA had not predicted. More serious criticism was

raised on account of its adopted views from structuralism in linguistics and behaviorism in psychology. Being questioned about the reliability of the CA research, it yielded to Error Analysis in 1970.

Unlike CA which tries to describe differences and similarities of L1 and L2, James (1998 cited in Kim, 2001) stated that, EA attempts to describe learners' interlanguage (i.e. learners' version of the target language) independently and objectively. He believed that the most distinct feature of EA is that the mother tongue is not supposed to be mentioned for comparison. The studies in EA have for the most part dealt with linguistic aspects of learners' errors; not enough attention has been paid to the errors at discourse level and in particular to cohesive devices that are very important in the organization of the texts. Identifying and describing the origin of the learners' errors is now an activity that has received much attention during the last three decades.

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), cohesive devices are formal elements in the text that function to make links between the components of the text. Two broad categories and some subcategories have been identified for cohesive devices. These are grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. The grammatical one includes reference, conjunction, substitute, and ellipsis while the lexical cohesive devices are reiteration and collocation.

## Review of the related literature

### 1. Cohesion Analysis

Of course, studying writing issues involving cohesion deserves much attention. This is because as Ting (2003, p.1) believed, "cohesion as an indispensable text-forming element plays a critical role in composing a text."

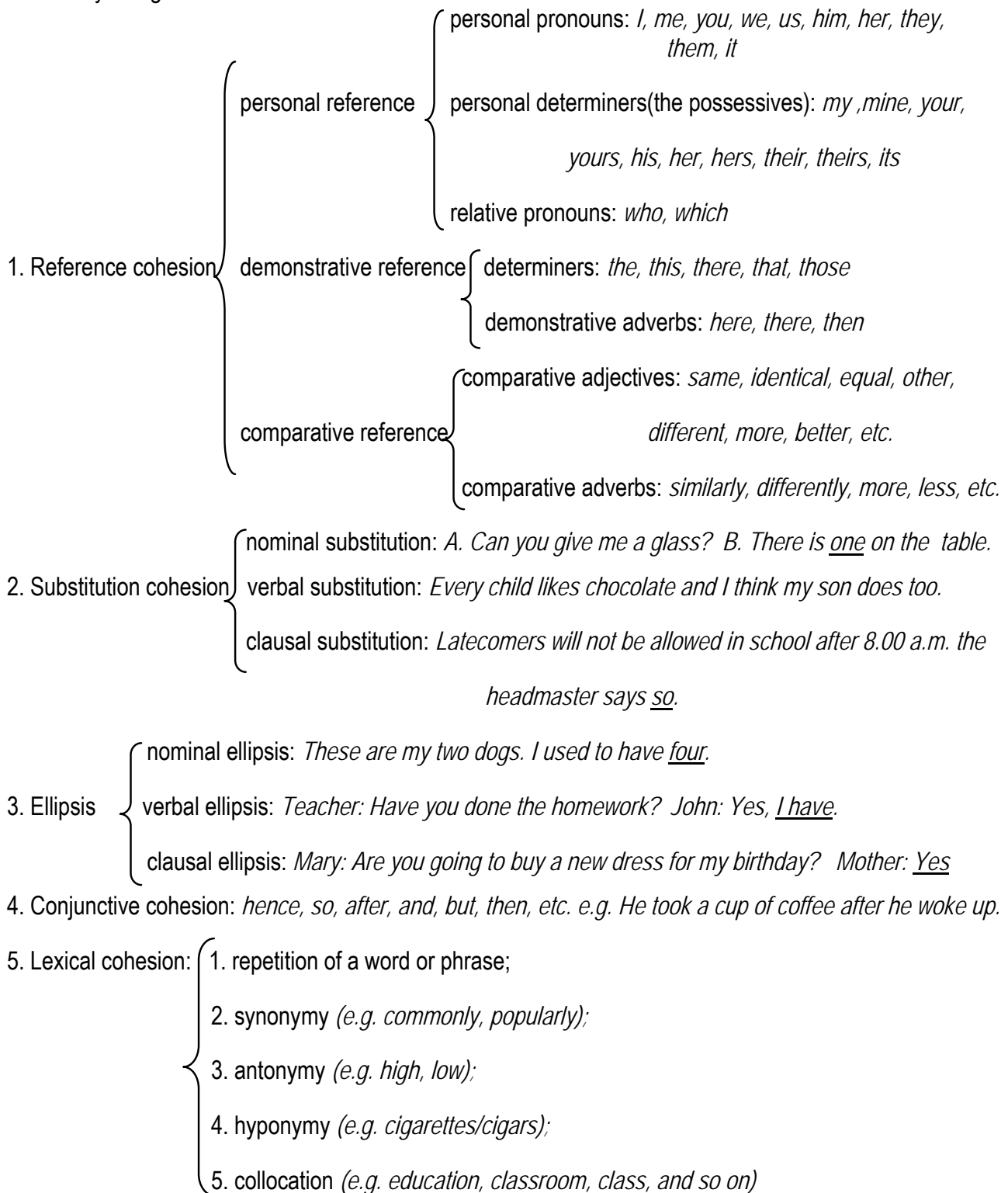
The appearance of Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* (1976) had a major impact on the understanding and teaching of coherence features. Although linguists speak of coherent text as, "having two characteristics such as cohesion (ties between sentences) and register (coherence with a context)" (Choi, 2005), this book focused almost exclusively on cohesion as a text feature. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion is realized through cohesive ties which link the presupposing and the presupposed across sentence boundaries. In other words, cohesive ties create intimate intersentential relationships which to a large extent distinguish a text from a sequence of isolated sentences.

Following the publication of Halliday and Hasan (1976), language educators and teachers have become interested in the use of cohesive devices in language students' written compositions. In fact, lots of research has been done in this respect and several researchers have used the outline of cohesion in English presented by various experts particularly the one presented by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Thus, since the present study did so, it is important first to become familiar with the cohesion taxonomy presented by Halliday and Hasan in 1976.

#### 1.1 Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Cohesion Taxonomy

In their classic study of cohesion in English, Halliday and Hasan (1976) defined cohesion as what occurs when the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identified five types of cohesion: reference cohesion, substitution cohesion, ellipsis, lexical cohesion and conjunction cohesion. The first three types fall under the category of grammatical cohesion. Lexical cohesion on the other hand refers to relationships between any lexical item and some previously occurring lexical item in the text quite independently of the grammatical category of the items in question. For example, lexical cohesion can exist between the noun *magistrate* and the verb *judge*. Conjunctive cohesion lies on the borderline between grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Conjunctive cohesion is affected

by cohesion elements that are called conjunctives. This is the Halliday and Hassan's (1976) Cohesion Taxonomy in a glance:



(see Halliday & Hasan, 1976, pp.274-292)

## 2. Cohesion Studies

As mentioned before, Halliday and Hasan indicated that cohesion is in effect a linguistic property in relation to

textual features. This is while other language researchers have tended to interpret the message of Halliday and Hasan (1976) as follows: given that cohesive devices are important elements for constructing a coherent text, their appearance should cause coherence and therefore contribute to the quality of the text (Ting, 2003). As a result, a number of language researchers adopted Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy and framework of cohesion to conduct empirical studies examining whether the use of cohesive devices in students' writing correlates with coherence or the overall writing quality. In this section, some of the researches done in this respect will be reviewed briefly.

One of such researchers was Neuner (1987). He analyzed twenty good essays versus twenty poor essays written by college freshman students. The essays were randomly selected from a pool of 600 essays on the topic "write a letter giving advice to students at school." Two readers from a panel of twelve holistically rated each essay using a four-point scale. Three independent coders conducted analysis on the essays after instruction and practice. Finally, the results revealed that the frequency or percentage of cohesive ties did not distinguish good from weak essays, and good from poor essays did not differ significantly in cohesive distance.

Likewise, using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model in his study of cohesion and coherence, Khalil (1989) investigated the relationship between cohesion and coherence in 20 compositions in Arab EFL students' college writing. The relationship of cohesion and coherence was tested by the use of multiple correlation statistics. Finally, a weak correlation ( $r=0.18$ ) was found between the number of cohesive ties and coherence score of the text.

Another researcher was Jonson (1992), who examined cohesion in expository essays written in Malay and in English by native speakers of both languages and in ESL by Malaysian writers. Sample compositions evaluated holistically as good or weak in quality were submitted by Malaysian teachers of composition in Malay and by American teachers of native and non-native speakers of English. The results indicated no differences in the amount of cohesion between good and weak compositions written in Malay by native speakers (20 persons) or in English by native (20 persons) and Malay speakers (20 persons). His empirical study on cohesion in written discourse of native and non-native speakers of English also indicated that judgments of writing quality may depend on overall coherence in content, organization, and style rather than on the quantity of cohesion.

The study of the relationship of cohesion to coherence has continued to dominate the literature of the last two decades. Zhang in 2000 did one such study. He conducted a study to reexamine the same research question by investigating cohesive devices in the writing of Chinese undergraduate EFL students. He asked 107 students of two different universities to participate in his study. The results revealed that no statistically significant relationship exists between the frequency of cohesive ties used and the quality of writing.

Generally, most of the researchers have found that there is no significant relationship between the quantity of cohesive devices used and the quality of writing. However, there are studies in which opposite results were reported. For example, Tonder and Louise (1999), in their study, explored the relationship between densities of lexical cohesion and lexical errors on one hand and the perceived coherence ratings and academic scores of student academic writing on the other. Findings indicated that densities of lexical cohesion generally and derivational ties specifically showed highly significant relations with the coherence ratings.

It has to be pointed out that in any study which intends to examine the relationship between the number of cohesive devices and the quality of writing, counting all the cohesive devices present without taking into account whether or not the cohesive devices are properly used in the context, to some extent makes the study questionable. Furthermore, the inconclusive results reported in the studies reviewed indicate that the relationship between writing quality or textual coherence and cohesive device use has not been concretely established. In the opinion of Castro (2002), such studies yielded conflicting results due to their small sample size, the variability in the L1 subjects involved, and lack of robust statistical analyses to support qualitative descriptions. In short, he continued that cohesion analyses did not consistently reveal differences in cohesive device use in good versus weak essays or between L1 versus L2 writing.

Generally, most of the cohesion analyses have conducted to reexamine the same research question. As it is obvious, despite the significant role of cohesive device in writing, the topic of cohesive errors in composition seems not to have received as much attention as it deserves. There are only a small number of studies exclusively aimed at cohesive errors. Given the fact that cohesive errors have been either neglected or examined incompletely in previous cohesion-related studies, the present study tries to deal with a cohesion analysis of Iranian L2 writing. In doing so, this study attempts to identify the errors using the cohesion taxonomy presented by Halliday and Hasan (1976).

### Objectives of the study

The purpose of the present study is to empirically investigate, classify, and analyze the cohesive errors which L2 learners make in their written productions at different levels of proficiency. Moreover, this study tries to investigate whether the identified errors are due to their L2 proficiency level or the L1 interference phenomenon. Hence, the following questions are to be answered through this study:

1. What are the most frequent cohesive errors committed by L2 learners at different levels of proficiency?
2. Are there any differences in the L2 learners' cohesive errors which can be attributed to their L2 proficiency level?
3. Are there any differences in the L2 learners' cohesive errors which can be attributed to L1 interference phenomenon?

### Method

#### Participants

67 male and female EFL undergraduate students at Shiraz Azad University participated in this study—42 female and 25 male. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 26. All of the students speak Persian as their native language and learn English as a foreign language. The type of sampling involved non-random procedures for selecting the members of the sample. In other words, the selection procedure was a non-probability one. The specific selection procedure employed was that of convenient sampling.

#### Instruments

To have three groups of learners with different proficiency levels, Oxford Placement Test 1B1 which is a standard test including 50 multiple choice items identifying and assessing the learners' level of English proficiency (Allan, 1985) was administered. The validity of the Oxford Placement Test 1B1 is taken for granted and with regard to the reliability of the test, the Kurder-Richardson formula 21 was used and the results showed the reliability of 0.86.

In order to conduct the study, the participants were asked to write a composition. The composition is beneficial in such cases because it will bring naturally occurring data for the study. Instead of administering multiple-choice exams such as tests of grammar or vocabulary that draw the students' most attention and consciousness towards the grammatical and lexical points, the composition test draws the attention of the students towards the topic. In this way, the participants are unaware of grammatical and lexical issues and focus on the subject they want to develop.

Accordingly, the participants were given a writing task requiring them to choose one of the three presented topics and write an approximately 200-word narrative composition. The three narrative topics were as follows:

1. A time and a place in the past
2. A melodic memory



### 3. A one-day visit to your country

The mentioned topics were selected from the e-book of *Answers to All TOEFL Essay Questions* by ToeflEssays.com, an e-book containing 450 model essays which offers an intensive preparation for the TWE test.

#### Data collection procedures

The scoring of Oxford Placement Test was based on the number of items answered correctly by the students. Each correct answer received one point and the total score of the test was 50. The participants were first assigned to three groups of low, mid, and high based on the results of the Oxford Placement Test—22 low-level learners, 27 mid-level learners, and 18 high-level learners. The criterion for this division was the standard deviation. Accordingly, participants with one standard deviation below the mean were assigned the low group and the ones with scores falling one standard deviation above the mean were assigned the high group. The remaining ones in the middle were assigned the mid group.

After dividing the participants into three different levels of proficiency, they were given two optional narrative topics on which they were required to write a composition in about sixty minutes. In selecting the topics from the e-book of *Answers to All TOEFL Essay Questions*, two factors were of concern: (1) learners' familiarity with the topics and (2) the topics being interesting and easy to write. The reason for choosing narrative topics was that it was found to be the easiest among other modes of discourse for the learners to write (Nemati, 1999). The data for this study were collected from compositions written by the students during one session. Then, they were scored based on the taxonomy developed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Consequently, all five cohesive devices consisting of reference (with differentiation made between pronominal, demonstrative, and comparative), substitution (discriminating between nominal, verbal, clausal), ellipsis (discriminating between nominal, verbal, clausal), conjunction and lexical cohesion were scored.

#### Data analysis procedures

The data were analyzed through appropriate procedures using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

For the first research question of the study investigating the most frequent cohesive errors committed by EFL undergraduate learners, the data were analyzed through descriptive statistics using frequencies and percentages.

For the next two research questions of the study investigating if there are any differences in the participants' cohesive errors which can be attributed to either their L2 proficiency level or L1 interference phenomenon, the data were analyzed using qualitative methods.

## Results

### 1. the most frequent cohesive errors committed by L2 learners at different levels of proficiency

As mentioned before, in order to analyze cohesive errors, the participants were asked to write narrative compositions. The five major categories explicated by Halliday and Hasan (1976) were used to systematically present a framework for the analysis of cohesion in this study. Based on these groupings, common error types which led to their deviation from standard English usage were established. The following discussion will present the major error types, those which were frequent at different levels of proficiency, separately.

#### 1.1. Low-level learners' most frequent cohesive errors

Investigating 22 compositions written by low-level learners identified the 35 cohesive errors in which the use of references were the most frequent ones (20), followed by errors in lexical (14), and conjunctive cohesion (1).

The results presented in Table 1 indicate the relative degree to which the items from each category and subcategory of cohesion were used incorrectly in creating overall cohesion together with a detailed discussion of the error analysis.

Table 1: The low-level learners' frequencies and percentages of errors in cohesion categories and subcategories

Cohesion Categories	Number of errors	Percentages of errors	Cohesion Subcategories	Number of errors	Percentages of errors
Reference	20	57.14%	Personal Demonstrative Comparative	19 1 0	95% 5% 0%
Substitution	0	0%	Nominal Verbal Clausal	0 0 0	0% 0% 0%
Ellipsis	0	0%	Nominal Verbal Clausal	0 0 0	0% 0% 0%
Conjunction	1	2.58%		1	
lexical	14	40%	Repetition Synonymy Antonymy Hyponymy Collocation	4 0 0 0 10	28.57% 0% 0% 0% 71.42%

As is clear from the table, the majority of the errors are referential cohesive devices and the second most frequent errors are those of the lexical type. Moreover, it is clear that the majority of the referential errors are personal and the majority of the second most frequent errors, lexical type, are involved in collocation and repetition, respectively. Examples from each of the error types are also presented in Table 2. In each of the examples, the devices which were used incorrectly are underlined.

Table 2: Low-level learners' cohesive errors

Categories	Subcategories	Low-level learners' cohesion errors
1. Reference	Personal (Pronoun)	1. She wanted to come home but <u>he</u> couldn't. (she) 2. My mother had to go because <u>he</u> was a teacher. (she) 3. My brother went to school, too. <u>She</u> was happy. (he) 4. Some of them were happy but some were not. Among <u>those</u> was a crying girl. (them) 5. The old woman went to the hospital. <u>He</u> was sick. (she) 6. They invited their friends to the party but <u>he</u> didn't came. (they) 7. She heard the news from TV. ...she talked about <u>them</u> with his neighbor. (it)
	Personal (Determiners)	1. She talked about them with <u>his</u> neighbor. (her)

		<p>2. My sister passed the course but <u>his</u> score was low. (her)</p> <p>3. When they were in Iran, they saw many things that they were not in <u>his</u> country. (their)</p> <p>4. We enjoyed from the movie and we talked about <u>their</u> events with ourselves. (its)</p> <p>5. When we want to migrate to another country, we might try to learn the culture and match <u>themselves</u> with them. (ourselves)</p> <p>6. ...keep in touch by his own family and friends at <u>their</u> original country. (his)</p> <p>7. <u>Her</u> wife saw the man which was thief. (his)</p>
	Relative Pronoun	<p>1. Her wife saw that man <u>which</u> was thief. (who)</p> <p>2. Education is the important criteria <u>who</u> can change the personality of person. (that)</p> <p>3. At first, I was introduced to a nice woman <u>which</u> became my teacher. (who)</p> <p>4. ...or call with the people <u>which</u> live there. (who)</p> <p>5. They didn't have a lot of time to think about the country <u>that</u> they born. (where)</p>
	Demonstrative	<p>1. To have some good friends is the best way to prevent <u>this</u> bad problems. (these)</p>
	Comparative	
2. Substitution	Nominal Verbal Clausal	
3. Ellipsis	Nominal Verbal Clausal	
4. Conjunction		<p>1. We can see <u>the</u> our personality has more effect in our life. (that)</p>
5. Lexical	Repetition	<p>1. After that I <u>returned back</u> to my home. (returned home)</p> <p>2. The most interesting day of my life <u>it</u> is the first day of my school. (repetition of a noun by its pronoun)</p> <p>3. The characteristics that we born with <u>it</u> is very important.</p> <p>4. When they were in Iran, they saw <u>many things</u> that <u>they</u> were not in his country.</p>
	Synonymy	



Antonymy	
Hyponymy	
Collocation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Foreign people have a different way <u>to</u> life. (way of life)</li> <li>2. For reduce the problems we <u>can use of</u> foreign web-site or... (make use of)</li> <li>3. I keep in touch <u>by</u> my family. (keep in touch with sb)</li> <li>4,5. ...keep in touch <u>by</u> his own family and friends at their <u>original</u> country. (keep in touch with sb, home country)</li> <li>6. I agree <u>with</u> this issue. (agree on sth)</li> <li>7. We can see the our personality has more effect <u>in</u> our life. (effect on sb/sth)</li> <li>8. We enjoyed <u>from</u> the road. (enjoy sth)</li> <li>9. We enjoyed <u>from</u> the movie. (enjoy sth)</li> <li>10. I run <u>to</u> home from my school. (run home)</li> </ol>

## 1.2. Mid-level learners' most frequent cohesive errors

Besides, a total of 32 cohesive errors in the narrative compositions of 27 mid-level learners were identified. The findings showed that errors in references were the most common (17), followed by errors in lexical (13), and conjunction cohesion (2). The frequencies and percentages of errors from each category and subcategory are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: The mid-level learners' frequencies and percentages of errors in cohesion categories and subcategories

Cohesion Categories	Number of errors	Percentages of errors	Cohesion Subcategories	Number of errors	Percentages of errors
Reference	17	53.21%	Personal	15	88.23%
			Demonstrative	2	11.76%
			Comparative	0	0%
Substitution	0	0%	Nominal	0	0%
			Verbal	0	0%
			Clausal	0	0%
Ellipsis	0	0%	Nominal	0	0%
			Verbal	0	0%
			Clausal	0	0%
Conjunction	2	6.25%		2	
lexical	13	40.62%	Repetition	4	30.76%
			Synonymy	0	0%
			Antonymy	0	0%
			Hyponymy	0	0%
			Collocation	9	69.23%

As this table show, the majority of the errors are in references and the second most frequent errors are in lexical type. Table 3 reveals that the majority of the referential errors are personal and the majority of the second most frequent errors, lexical errors, are involved in collocation and repetition, respectively. Examples from each of the error types are shown in Table 4. In each of the examples, the devices which were used incorrectly are underlined.

Table 4: Mid-level learners' cohesive errors

Categories	Subcategories	Mid-level learners' cohesion errors
1. Reference	Personal (Pronoun)	1. I think if a single woman live abroad, <u>they</u> will face many problems. (she) 2. My father gave me bunch of flower... <u>she</u> told me...(he) 3. Mina had a valuable experience... <u>he</u> remember it after that.(she) 4. My father couldn't start the car. <u>She</u> decided to...(he) 5. I saw a girl that were kind in the first day of school. <u>He</u> became my friend after that. (she) 6. My friend told teacher that <u>she</u> was wrong. (confusing pronoun)
	Personal (Determiners)	1. Finally he could found a way to improve his life of <u>hisself</u> and children. (himself) 2. If a student is worried all the time <u>their</u> scores will be not good. (his/her) 3. Teacher told us that we should study hard to good scores in <u>my</u> exams. (our) 4. my grandmother was sick. I bought <u>his</u> drugs. (her)
	Relative Pronoun	1. The students <u>which</u> know English have a better chance for work. (who) 2. The people <u>that</u> they saw this movie...(who) 3. This problems is worse for women especially <u>that they</u> live in the countries like Iran. (who) 4. the topic <u>in which</u> the teacher talked was...(that) 5. I saw a girl <u>that</u> were kind in the first day of school. (who)
	Demonstrative	1. This <u>problems</u> is worse for women especially that they live in the countries like Iran. (problem) 2. The husband's idea differed from wife's idea about <u>this</u> issues.(these)

	Comparative	
2.Substitution	Nominal Verbal Clausal	
3.Ellipsis	Nominal Verbal Clausal	
4. Conjunction		1. <u>Because of</u> my sister was not good in English,... (because) 2. I met her <u>when</u> 11 years old. (incorrect use of conjunction)
5.Lexical	Repetition  Synonymy Antonymy Hyponymy  Collocation	1. The woman who was very kind <u>she</u> came near me. 2. I was very happy because my mother was beside <u>to</u> me. (redundant prepositions) 3. The people that <u>they</u> saw this movie... 4. Finally he could found a way to improve <u>his</u> life of <u>hisself</u> and children. (himself)  1. I wanted to <u>receive</u> my goals. (gain/reach goals) 2. We can describe idea <u>for</u> the other nation (describe sth to sb) 3. He appreciates <u>with</u> this situation. (addition of preposition) 4. So, it takes time to adapt <u>in</u> new situations. (adapt to sth) 5. Because of my sister was not good <u>in</u> English,... (good at sth/at doing sth) 6. <u>To my opinion</u> , there are lots of... (in my opinion) 7,8. The husband's idea <u>differed from</u> wife's idea <u>about</u> this issues.(differ with sb on sth) 9. At last, they <u>arrived to</u> Tehran. (arrive in)

### 1.3. High-level learners' most frequent cohesive errors

The high-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in lexical cohesion (17), references (14),

conjunction cohesion (3), and substitution (1), among the total of 35. The frequencies and percentages of devices from each category and subcategory that were identified as errors in the high-level learners set of essays are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: High-level learners' frequencies and percentages of errors in cohesion categories and subcategories

Cohesion Categories	Number of errors	Percentages of errors	Cohesion Subcategories	Number of errors	Percentages of errors
Reference	14	40%	Personal	12	85.71%
			Demonstrative	0	0%
			Comparative	2	14.28%
Substitution	1	2.85%	Nominal	0	0%
			Verbal	1	100%
			Clausal	0	0%
Ellipsis	0	0%	Nominal	0	0%
			Verbal	0	0%
			Clausal	0	0%
Conjunction	3	8.57%		3	
lexical	17	48.57%	Repetition	5	29.41%
			Synonymy	0	0%
			Antonymy	0	0%
			Hyponymy	0	0%
			Collocation	12	70.85%

Table 5 shows that the majority of the errors are in referential cohesive devices and lexical type in the high-level learners' compositions. Moreover, the majority of the most frequent errors, lexical type, are involved in collocation and repetition, and the majority of the second most frequent errors, referential type, are involved in personal and comparative respectively. Furthermore, examples from each of the error types are shown in Table 6. In each of the examples, the devices which were used incorrectly are underlined.

Table 6: High-level learners' cohesive errors

Categories	Subcategories	High-level learners' cohesion errors
1. Reference	Personal (Pronoun)	1. Genetic affect disease. <u>They</u> can also influence our characteristics. (it) 2. Although class was very crowd, but I liked <u>them</u> . (it) 3. The parents had argument with each other and finally <u>he</u> divorced. (they) 4. Roza's house was near school. <u>He</u> was on time. (she) 5. <u>It</u> was my teacher.(he/she) 6. My father... <u>She</u> wanted to wake me to go to school. (he)
	Personal (Determiners)	1. Although ... <u>class</u> was very crowd, but I liked them. (Ø) 2. Roza's house was near <u>school</u> . (the school)

<p>Relative Pronoun</p> <p>Demonstrative</p> <p>Comparative</p>	<p>1. The little girl <u>that</u> sleep on the bed...(who)</p> <p>2. The people <u>that</u> they don't eat meat are healthy(who)</p> <p>3. Different countries have different cultures and a person <u>which</u> live in a country .... (who)</p> <p>4. I saw a woman <u>whom</u> looked very seriously. (who)</p> <p>1. When we were in kindergarten or even in school, we think that we were <u>much</u> happier in those days. (more)</p> <p>2. I lost my notebook at the first day of school but my mother gave me <u>the other one</u> after that. (another one)</p>
<p>2.Substitution</p> <p>Nominal</p> <p>Verbal</p> <p>Clausal</p>	<p>1. I shouted and my classmates <u>do</u> too. (did)</p>
<p>3.Ellipsis</p> <p>Nominal</p> <p>Verbal</p> <p>Clausal</p>	
<p>4. Conjunction</p>	<p>1. <u>Although</u> class was very crowd, <u>but</u> I liked them. (although or but)</p> <p>2. She didn't really want to go <u>and</u> I insisted. (but)</p> <p>3. They grow up with a custom <u>an</u> culture that is different from another country.(and)</p>
<p>5.Lexical</p> <p>Repetition</p> <p>Synonymy</p> <p>Antonymy</p> <p>Hyponymy</p> <p>Collocation</p>	<p>1. Also joining to <u>group clubs</u> will be helpful. (clubs)</p> <p>2. He was the boy whom I talked to <u>him</u> in the first day of my school.</p> <p>3. The people that <u>they</u> don't eat meat are healthy.</p> <p>4,5. A person which live in a country <u>they</u> grow up with a custom an culture that is different from another country that they go <u>there</u>.</p> <p>1. He <u>congratulated</u> sincerely your marriage. (congratulate on sth)</p> <p>2. <u>From now</u>, I will study hard. (from now on)</p> <p>3. Foreigners need English <u>in</u> communication. (need sb/sth for)</p>

	<p>4. ..., although <u>to some extent</u> it is not tolerable. (to some extent)</p> <p>5. Also <u>joining to</u> group clubs will be helpful. (joining)</p> <p>6. <u>Beside</u>, you can ask your friend. (besides)</p> <p>7. The family thought that this may not fully but <u>in the great extent</u> reduces the homesickness. (to the great extent)</p> <p>8. do <u>to</u> me a favor (do sb a favor)</p> <p>9. ....from 1963 <u>until</u> 2001. (to)</p> <p>10. <u>In</u> the other hand,...(on the other hand)</p> <p>11. The film was funny and we <u>laugh to</u> it all the time (laugh at)</p> <p>12. She wanted to <u>wake me</u> to go to school. (wake me up)</p>
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## 2. The differences in the Iranian EFL learners' cohesive errors which can be attributed to L2 proficiency

The next step in this study was to investigate the sources of errors rather than the most frequent errors per se. Basically, most researchers have been satisfied with a general distinction between intralingual and interlingual causes of errors (Richards, 1974; Brown 1980 cited in Hasyim, 2002; James, 1998). Of course, although the distinction is not always clear-cut, the present study attempted to investigate the effect of L2 proficiency and L1 interference phenomenon on Iranian EFL learners' application of cohesive devices. Furthermore, within the discussion of the causes of errors, a fairly full range of examples are presented in order to provide a sense of variation that existed. Indeed, the examples should be viewed as only illustrative, indicating the general characteristics by which the error source could be identified. This part deals mostly with the intralingual causes of errors.

The majority of instances in which a noncohesive item replaced a necessary cohesive one appeared in relative clauses. See the examples below.

1. The people that they saw this movie...(who)
2. The wife saw that man which was thief. (who)
3. Call with the people which live there. (who)

Errors of this sort can be attributed to the effect of L2 proficiency because the learners did not fully understand the distinction in the target language.

A separate category that also may be the result of intralingual causes of errors is established here for items which were used repeatedly.

1. After that I returned back to my home. ("return" means "come back", repetition of words with similar meaning)

Of course, words with similar meaning should not be used consecutively in a sentence.

2. The most interesting day of my life it is the first day of my school. (repetition of a noun by its pronoun)
3. The woman who was very kind she came near me. (repetition of a noun by its pronoun)

It can be stated that such errors were caused because of the incomplete knowledge of the learners.

Besides, some other intralingual errors appeared in the category of conjunction, as in:

1. Because of my sister was not good in English,... (because)
2. I met her when 11 years old. (incorrect use of conjunction)

Errors of this kind are also the result of the incomplete learners' understanding of the rules in English.



### 3. The differences in the Iranian EFL learners' cohesive errors which can be attributed to L1 interference phenomenon

Surely, a proper attention needs to pay to learners' errors to see if they are really due to L1 interference. Therefore, this study also tried to describe and analyze learners' errors to find out how learners' mother tongue plays a role in second language writing. So, this part addresses itself to the interlingual causes of errors.

In fact, the inconsistencies in the use of references were by far the most common error in cohesion, occurring most frequently in reference devices. This can be attributed to the effect of native language, here Persian, because Persian does not make distinction between pronouns, in particular, personal-, possessive-pronouns, and demonstratives, for example:

1. The old woman went to the hospital. He was sick. (instead of personal pronoun she)

/Pirezæn be bimarestan ræft. ?u mæriz bud/

2. My father gave me a bunch of flower. ...she told me...(instead of personal pronoun he)

/Pedæram yek dæste gol be mæn dad...?u be mæn goft.../

3. My mother had to go because he was a teacher. (instead of personal pronoun she)

/Madæm mæjbur bud berævæd čon ?u yek moælem bud/

As it is obvious, /?u/ is used for indicating the personal pronouns he and she in Farsi.

Besides, /æsh/ in Persian is used for indicating the possessive pronouns her, his, their, and its in English as shown in the examples below:

1. My grandmother was sick. I bought his drugs. (instead of possessive pronoun her)

/Madærbozorge mæn mæriz bud. Mæn daruhayæsh ra xaridæm/

2. She talked about them with his neighbor. (instead of possessive pronoun her)

/?u dær morede ?anha ba hæmsayeæsh sohbat kærd/

Another identifiable set of error which may be the result of L1 interference was the misuse of demonstratives as in:

1. This bad problems (instead of these)

/in moshkelate bad/

2. This issues (instead of these)

/in mæsael/

Indeed, in Persian, there is no agreement between the determiner and its referent while this is not the case in English.

Moreover, a fairly wide variety of unidiomatic equivalents appeared in the subcategory of collocation. Most of the interlingual forms used for lexical cohesion reflect more general problems with the use of prepositions, as in the examples below:

1. He congratulated sincerely your marriage. (congratulate on sth)

/?u ezdevaje shoma ra samimane tabrik goft/

2. I agree with this issue. (agree on sth)

/mæn ba in mæsæle moafeqam/

3. We enjoyed from the movie. (enjoy sth)

/ma æz film lezæt bordim/

4. The film was funny and we laugh to it all the time (laugh at)

Film xandedar bud væ ma tæmame modat be ?an xændidim/

5. Do to me a favor. (do sb a favor)

/be man lotfi kon/

6. We can describe this idea for the other nation (describe sth to sb)

/ma mitævanim in æqide ra bæraye digær melætha tosif konim/

7. He appreciates with this situation. (addition of preposition)

/?u æz in moqeizæt qædrdani kærd/

## Discussion

In the current study, as mentioned before, the first step was to investigate the most frequent cohesive errors committed by Iranian undergraduate EFL learners at different levels of proficiency. With regard to the frequencies and percentages of errors shown in tables 1, 3, 5. it was evident that low-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in references (20), followed by errors in lexical (14), and conjunctive cohesion (1). Besides, the findings showed that errors in references were the most common (17), followed by errors in lexical (13), and conjunction cohesion (2) in the mid-level learners' narrative compositions. Finally, the high-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in lexical cohesion (17), references (14), conjunction cohesion (3), and substitution (1). This is because, as mentioned before, despite the significant role of cohesive devices in writing, the topic of cohesive errors in composition seems not to have received as much attention as it deserves and there are only a small number of studies exclusively aimed at cohesive errors.

The second goal in this study was to explore the sources of cohesive errors committed by Iranian EFL undergraduate learners. As obvious, classifying learners' sources of errors into well-defined, clean-cut categories is not always possible. However, researchers can gain a fine view of learner language by examining errors.

In this study, errors in the use of relative pronouns, conjunctions, along with different forms of repetition appeared because of the incomplete knowledge of the learners—intralingual causes. This result is consistent with those of Kim (1987), Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), Tabatabai (1985), and Ahmadvand (2008) who reported that the most frequent learners' errors were mostly independent of the learner's native language.

Furthermore, in the current study, the errors in the use of personal-, possessive-pronouns, and demonstratives and collocations were among the interlingual causes of errors. This result supports Ying (1987), Jiang (1995), Zhang (2007), Koosha and Jafarpour (2006), and khodabandes' (2007) findings which demonstrate the influence of one's native language to second language acquisition.

## Conclusions

As described, despite the significant role of cohesive devices in writing, the topic of cohesive errors in composition seems not to have received as much attention as it deserves. Furthermore, there are only a small number of studies exclusively aimed at cohesive errors and the origins of such errors. In an effort to fill this gap, the present study attempted to find Iranian EFL learners' L2 writing errors along with the origin of such errors.

With regard to the frequencies and percentages of errors, it was found that low-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in references (20), followed by errors in lexical (14), and conjunctive cohesion (1). Besides, the findings showed that errors in references were the most common (17), followed by errors in lexical (13), and conjunction cohesion (2) in the mid-level learners' narrative compositions and, finally, the high-level learners' most frequent errors were involved in lexical cohesion (17), references (14), conjunction cohesion (3), and substitution (1).

This study also allowed for an examination of the sources of cohesive errors. And, it was found that errors in the use of relative pronouns, conjunctions, along with different forms of repetition appeared because of the incomplete knowledge of the learners—intralingual causes. Furthermore, the errors in the use of personal-, possessive-pronouns, demonstratives and collocations were among the interlingual causes of errors.

## Pedagogical implications

The findings in this study have the following pedagogical implications:

1. In the case of substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, there were only seven errors in total. This probability reflects more the fact that few attempts were made to use these devices than any overall control over them.

2. Besides, the low incidence of various types of lexical devices, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, at least in part, may result from the training process. If structures are not presented and practiced, they will become much less likely that students will use them; they will, instead, use familiar structures.
3. The results of this study highlight the need to provide L2 learners with writing experiences by emphasizing the importance of cohesive devices in accomplishing the writing task.
4. Analysis of the written product is perhaps the most common approach to investigate characteristics of students' compositions.

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