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## Cohesive Devices Used in COVID – 19 News Articles: the Case Study of BBC\*

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### Abstract

Today, it is undeniable that the most prevalent reported life-threatening disease since late 2019 has been the Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID – 19. Previous studies examined the media language of COVID – 19 news in terms of move analysis, morphological process, readers’ opinion, and other issues. However, the use of cohesive devices had received little attention. Linguistic devices can create better coherence which contributes to the understanding of texts. This study, consequently, aims to identify the use of cohesive devices in COVID – 19 news reported in the BBC. The researchers mainly used the qualitative corpus research design and framework from Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Tangpijaikul (2013). The academics defined that discourse markers have consisted of six sub-categories, namely: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, adverbial transition, as well as lexical cohesion. To gather data, the corpus used in this study was purposively selected from twenty coronavirus news articles. The results revealed that the two most frequently employed types are references and lexical items. The findings could concentrate on the necessity of grammatical and lexical cohesion in news writing. In order to find out cohesive devices in other texts, it is recommended that further studies should examine other media texts such as television, radio, magazines, and others.

**Keywords:** COVID – 19, cohesive devices, news articles

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### ***Introduction***

According to World Health Organization (WHO), COVID – 19 has been the most alarming health issue since late 2019. The fearful virus was initially prevalent in Wuhan, China, and spread around the world later (stated by Department of Disease Control, 2019). The spread of the dreadful pandemic is because the coronavirus can be transmitted person-to-person. Anyone who is already infected may not know they are the carriers. Thus, it is undeniable that tens millions of people have been infected because of physical contact with a victim of the awful disease (Ahmed, 2015). This spread has led to outrage and panic among some people.

Reporting on the news which is related to coronavirus, news reporters must be effective journalists. British Broadcast Corporation (BBC), which is one of the most reliable-ranked of the fifteen news sources with millions of visitors (cited in [www.alexacom.com](http://www.alexacom.com)), is one of those.

In terms of conducting research, many studies were made about the language of COVID –19 news, but little attention was given to cohesive devices. That is the reason why this study will analyze linguistic devices found in COVID – 19 news published in the BBC. This is important; the way cohesive devices are used in sentences affects how they may be understood. If used effectively, cohesive devices may likely make the readers better informed about the dreadful disease and how to protect themselves appropriately. The mass media – such as print, broadcast, or online – is one the most crucial institutions of society thanks to its responsibility in informing and educating people. In the aspect of performing its responsibilities, the media exploits the intensive source of three major aspects including vocabulary, grammatical structure, and writing style in order to make the connectivity in language. Likewise, understanding cohesive devices as an important tool for effective communication can be useful to reading audiences, journalists, and linguists because of the communicative importance of cohesion and news.

### ***Significances of the study***

The study is expected render the following advantages: writing and reading.

First, cohesive devices are able to make the unity and connectivity to each type of writing (Tangpijaikul, 2016). Thus, this study can be the approaches in the aspect of writing in four text types, including narration, description, information, and persuasion. Not to mention, linguistic devices are commonly used because of two major reasons: (1) to link the relationship between ideas and thoughts and

(2) to describe the authors' attitudes (Li and Wang, 2018). In terms of writers, they should avoid repeating words in order to make their works more interesting (Pattapong, 2017).

Second, the use of cohesive devices assists reading audiences better informed (Tangpijaikul, 2013) about the disease and how to protect themselves correctly from the outbreak. Additionally, cohesive devices function as context clues in sentences, paragraphs, and texts, so readers can assume the definitions of unseen words without looking up from dictionaries and/or IT applications (Pattapong, 2017).

### ***Objectives of the study***

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. This study explores the use of cohesive devices in British English in news writing.
2. This study aims to analyze the similarities and differences of cohesive ties used in different text types.

### ***Literature Review***

The literature review consists of three major parts, which include the concept of cohesive devices, text and text types, as well as relevant studies.

#### 1) Cohesive devices

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Tangpijaikul (2013), cohesive devices are words or phrases that show the relationship between sentences and paragraphs of a text, and different types of cohesion can be categorized into six sub-categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, adverbial transition, as well as lexical cohesion.

1.1) Reference is traditionally used in the semantic relationship between a word and what it points out to the real world, that is, the identity of the particular thing or class of things that is being referred to. References can be three sub-categories: personal, demonstrative, and comparative. The following are an example of references:

*Personal reference:*

*Jane Austen* wrote *six major novels* in her short life. They were interpreted, critiqued, and commented upon the British landed gentry at the end of the eighteenth century.

From the example above, "her" and "they" are references that refer to the things already mentioned in the sentence, that is, Jane Austen and six major novels, respectively.



*Demonstrative reference:*

Recognizing that his country had to change, Gorbachev could have become a cautious modernizer in the Chinese fashion, promoting economic reform and sponsoring new technology while holding firm against political change. ***This*** did not happen.

From the example, “this” referred to “holding firm against political change.”

*Comparative reference:*

I wouldn’t like ***these*** plants. If I were you, I would buy ***those*** trees over there on the other side. They look greener.

From the example, the speaker compared that the trees over there on the other side are more colorful than these plants.

1.2 Substitution is explained as the replacement of word or phrase with the other (Tangpijaikul, 2013), and it involves grammatical relation rather than semantic relation (Flowerdew, 2013). In English, substitution can be nominal, verbal, and clausal. The following are the examples.

*Nominal substitution:*

A: ***This knife*** is too blunt to cut this meat.

B: You have to get a sharper ***one***.

From the example, “one” is the replacement of “this knife.”

*Verbal substitution:*

A: I really like that armchair.

B: So do I.

From the example, the modal verb “do” is a substitute for the previous verb phrase “really like”, and the presupposed item is in the same sentence.

*Clausal substitution:*

A: Let’s not go surfing. It’s going to rain.

B: No, I don’t think so.

From the example, the word used as a clause substitute is “so.”

1.3 Ellipsis is the leaving out of words or phrases from sentences where they are not necessary because they have earlier been first referred to (Tangpijaikul, 2013). Like substitution, ellipsis can come in three forms: nominal, verbal, and clausal. The following are examples of ellipsis:



*Nominal ellipsis:*

The woman went to the door and (...) opened it.

From the example, “the woman” was omitted.

*Verbal ellipsis:*

Liza ate an apple and Emma (...) a banana.

From the example, “ate” was omitted.

*Clausal ellipsis:*

A: I thought James said he was going to Tokyo.

B: Don’t know. He didn’t tell me (...).

From the example, “he was going to Tokyo” was omitted.

1.4) Conjunction is the type of cohesion that involves using linguistic ties that perform the main function of connecting sentences. Conjunctive items are usually classified into two sections: coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions. The following are examples of these:

*Coordinating conjunctions:*

This is my first time to try Korean food, **and** I like it very much.

Students wear uniforms, **but** teachers wear formal clothes, **and** lawyers wear suits.

People like spending, **yet** saving is a must.

According to the example, “and”, “but” and “yet” link the two equally important sentences.

*Subordinating conjunctions:*

The ASEAN summit has been postponed **until** the present crisis is over.

**Before** the developer came in, the town was known as historical heritage.

Public trains are under repair **because** there were frequent disruptions.

According to the example, “until”, “before”, and “because” function to connect the two sentences which are unequally important. One is an independent clause, and the other is a dependent clause.

1.5 Adverbial transitions are the words that function to associate and/or disassociate ideas of sentences with those of the previous ones are transition words (Tangpijaikul, 2013). They function as adverbs and normally appear at the initial position of sentence (Thanapakit, 2014). Besides, transitions also assist readers in following the logic of the writer’s thought (Tangpijaikul, 2013). Because of semantic aspects, adverbial transitions can be divided into several groups as follows.



*Additive:*

Today, mobile phones are getting cheaper and cheaper; *moreover*, their quality and functions are more reliable.

Bangkok has many interesting tourist attractions. *In addition*, it offers several cultural experiences.

From the example, “moreover” and “in addition” were used in order to add a similar idea.

*Comparative:*

Thai students are shy in expressing their opinions. *Similarly*, Japanese students are reserved in saying their views.

From the example, “similarly” was used in order to show the same direction of the situation.

*Contrastive:*

Learning to play the piano is painstaking. *On the other hand*, being able to play this musical instrument is worthwhile.

From the example, “on the other hand” was used in order that a complete contrast was added.

*Temporal:*

Mix the dry ingredients together in a small bowl then set aside. *After that*, mix together eggs, butter, and vanilla extract in a large bowl.

From the example, “after that” was used to show the chronological order of the process.

*Resultive:*

The city was unprepared for the big snowstorm; *consequently*, major highways were closed.

From the example, “consequently” was used to connect the two sentences to add an expected result.

1.6) Lexical cohesion is defined as the chain of related words that leads to continuous meaning.

Lexical items are grouped into four categories, and the followings are examples:

*Repetition:*

They were lost in *the woods* for three days. *The woods* were very frightening.

According to the example, “the woods” were used two times.



*Synonym:*

I **left** my house. Actually, I **departed** the whole area.

According to the example, “depart” has the same meaning as “left.”

*Superordinate:*

**Pneumonia affects** more than 500 million people every year. **The illness** was first diagnosed with malnutrition.

According to the example, “the illness” refers to “pneumonia.”

*General word:*

I don’t understand why so many people queue up for **Krispy Kream**. I won’t say I like **the thing** much.

According to the example, “the thing” refers to “Krispy Kream.”

## 2) Text and text types

**Text** is defined as a book or other written work regarded in terms of its content rather than its physical pattern (Tangpijaikul, 2013). To categorise text, they are purposively separated into four types including narration, information, descriptive, as well as persuasion. Each text type will be defined below.

**Narrative text** is the news story that has a beginning, middle, and end, respectively. It is related to readers’ mind and heart (Tanapakit, 2014) as it has been created by writers’ sensory and emotional details (Savage and Shafiei, 2012). Both help readers form a very clear picture of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings that the writers experienced (Tanapakit, 2014).

**Descriptive text** explains a person, place, or thing; thus, readers can see it in their minds (Savage and Shafiei, 2012). The descriptive texts provide details about how something looks, feels, smells, or sounds, and describe what something is like and happened (Tanapakit, 2014).

**Persuasive text** is a type that attempts to persuade the reading audiences to the author’s attitude (Tanapakit, 2014). The writer can either be serious or funny, but always tries to convince the readers of the validity of their perspectives (Savage and Shafiei, 2012; Tangpijaikul, 2013). Additionally, persuasive news may openly argue, or it may attempt to subtly persuade the reader by using irony (Tanapakit, 2014).



*Informative text* is the facts that have been provided about something or someone, or what is conveyed by a specialized sequence or arrangement of things (Tangpijaikul, 2013).

### 3) Related research

Alarcon and Morales (2011) investigated the categories of grammatical and lexical cohesion in undergraduate's argumentative essays. The research was designed with the mixed-method approach. The results showed that the most outstanding type of linguistic devices was reference (90.6 per cent), and the least employed was substitution (0.25 per cent).

Bahaziq (2016) studied the use of cohesive devices in a student's essay. In terms of research methodology, the descriptive qualitative method was applied. The student's writing showed the evidence of cohesion and demonstrated that the use of grammatical and lexical devices. Finally, it was summarized that the most frequently used grammatical devices were reference and conjunction; on the contrary, there was little evidence of employing lexical devices.

Budi (2018) studies the cohesive ties used in headline news from Indonesian newspapers. The data were collected from the Jakarta Post Newspaper, and the research design was the descriptive qualitative method. In terms of framework, it was from Halliday and Hasan (1976), so cohesive devices were categorized into five types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. After the data were descriptively analyzed, the results showed that there were 144 lexical devices employed in headlines.

Hidayat (2016) analysed the grammatical cohesion in the short story, which is the Little March Girl by Hans Christian Anderson 2016/2017. The descriptive qualitative method was mainly applied in this study. The researcher mainly focused on the reference, and the results showed that there are eighty-seven referential items in this study.

Puangsuwan (2016) investigated cohesive devices in thirty argumentative essays produce by English-major postgraduate students at the University of Phayao in the 2011 academic year. In this study, the researcher used the quantitative method. The findings revealed that lexical items were used the most (67.84 per cent), followed by the reference (18.29 per cent), as well as a conjunction (13.42 per cent).



Rizulmi (2016) analyzed grammatical and lexical cohesion in political news texts from The Jakarta Post and Jakarta Globe articles, and compared the degrees of cohesiveness between The Jakarta Post and Jakarta Globe's article. The data was collected from The Jakarta Post and Jakarta Globe on 10 and 11 April, 2015. The research was qualitatively designed. The findings revealed that the discourse markers found in both articles were reference and conjunction. In addition, the difference between the two articles was that The Jakarta Post's articles were more cohesive than Jakarta Globe's articles.

Tambunan, Hanafiah, and Mono (2019) studied grammatical cohesion in Thai Cave Rescue News in an international newspaper. The research was designed in a qualitative method. The data was gathered from five sources containing British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Russia Today (RT), France 24 (F24), and China Central Television (CCTV) newspapers. The results showed that the most commonly used cohesive devices were reference, conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis.

According to the relevant studies, every text has different cohesive devices to connect the text's semantic relations in the text leading to its unity. News as a discourse consists of many texts that present various cohesive devices. In line with these previous studies, this study focused on using discourse markers in COVID –19 news from the BBC that have not been conducted before.

### ***Methodology***

This research mainly used a qualitative design to explain the phenomenal related to others (Frankhan, 2007). In addition, this research analyzed, described, and found the cohesive devices – reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, adverbial transition, as well as lexical cohesion – in the data by using the conceptual framework from Tangpijaikul (2013) and Halliday and Hasan (1976). The data in this study were the words, phrase, and clauses which include cohesive devices in COVID – 19 news. The sources of data were in news, which were twenty coronavirus news. The data was gathered by using the documentary technique. The documents were selected from BBC websites. And then, the news articles were read and analyzed and the text was separated into clauses respectively.

### Conclusion of the results

According to the study's objectives, the conclusion of the results will be separated into two parts.

1. According to Objective I: to identify the use of cohesive ties used in British English, the data was tabulated below.

**Table I:** The overall use of cohesive devices in COVID – 19 news from the BBC

Categories of cohesive devices	Percentage
Reference	33%
Ellipsis	1%
Substitution	0.12%
Conjunction	10.69%
Adverbial transition	2.75%
Lexical cohesion	52.44%
Total	100%

From the table above, it can be seen that the two most dominantly employed cohesive devices in the BBC are reference and lexical cohesion.

2. According to Objective II: to explore the similarities and differences of discourse markers used in different text types, the data was tabulated below.

**Table 2:** The percentage of cohesive ties used in each text type

Text types	Persuasive news	Descriptive news	Informative news	Narrative news
Reference	27.87%	30.8%	29.62%	42.54%
Ellipsis	1.23%	-	-	1.49%
Substitution	0.14%	0.4%	-	-
Conjunction	11.48%	13.6%	11.5%	11.57%
Adverbial transition	3.28%	-	1.39%	3.37%
Lexical cohesion	55.74%	55.6%	57.49%	40.96%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%



From the table above, it can be seen that every type of cohesive devices was used in persuasive news.

*Reference:* **People in the UK** were stocking novels and homes learning books last as **they** prepared for a spell in isolation.

According to the example, the pronoun “they” refers to “people in the UK.”

*Ellipsis:* Ms Sturgeon said local authorities in the area would pay close attention to hospitality and would encourage people to act responsibility while using bars and restaurants.

From the example, it can be seen that the clause omitted the subject referred to “local authorities.”

*Substitution:* The two-week meal plan comprises three meal a day, with each **one** delivered to student’s flat.

From the example, “one” refers to “the meal.”

*Conjunction:* The Coronavirus Act – which was passed in March – gave ministers emergency powers to respond to the pandemic **but** they were time-limit and need to be renewed by the House of Commons next week.

The example, “but” which is a coordinating conjunction, is connected with the first and second sentenced. Both must be equally important.

*Adverbial transition:* The relaxation of measures also applies to socially-distanced indoor shows and close-contact services such as facials. **However**, a ban on people from different household meeting indoors remains in all areas of Greater Manchester except in Stockport and Wigan.

From the example, “however” is a transition word linked to the former idea and the latter idea.

*Lexical cohesion:* **A football match** has been called off in South Tyneside, which has been added to England’s watch list as an area of concern over coronavirus. **The game** had been sold out, with 600 tickets bought.

According to the example, “the game” refers to “a football match” because the news writer avoided repeating a word.

### **Conclusion**

The use of cohesive devices is important to reading and writing instruction. After analyzing the data, there are six sub-categories of cohesive devices found in the data, namely reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, adverbial transition, and lexical cohesion. In terms of news writing, reference (35.28 per cent) and lexical features (50.51 per cent) were the two most common discourse markers used



in COVID – 19 news articles in the BBC. In the aspect of text types, as illustrated in Table 2, every type of cohesive devices was used in persuasive news, while some linguistic devices were employed in descriptive news, informative news, and narrative news.

### ***Discussion***

The use of linguistic devices in the data is based upon the text types. According to the results, it can be indicated that the two outstanding cohesive devices were found in the BBC, that is, reference and lexical cohesion. Conversely, ellipsis, substitution, and conjunction were the least used cohesive devices in COVID –19 news.

The results of the study were similar to the findings of Alarcon and Morales (2011), Bahaziq (2016), Hidayat (2016), Puangsuwan (2016), Rizulmi (2016), and Tambunan, Hanafiah, and Mono (2019). Hence, it can be stated that the most dominant frequency of the cohesive features was the reference, whereas the least used category of cohesive devices from the articles was ellipsis, substitution, as well as a conjunction. In the aspect of news writing, the authors seldom use the three previous cohesive devices as most researchers describe that ellipsis, substitution, and conjunction were prevalent in spoken language (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Tsarava, 2010).

Cohesive items are necessary for writing because they provide the concept of identifiability (Alarcon and Morales, 2011) to create connectivity and unity (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). That reference tends to be used in most news texts because most of them were familiar with reference and used it more to create the links between elements (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Tangpijaikul, 2013) rather than other types of cohesive devices. The findings of the study indicated that the news texts lacked other categories of linguistic devices. Moreover, ellipsis and substitution are usually found in speaking (Ghasemi, 2013).

In terms of text types, there are four major aspects: (1) there were six categories of cohesive devices used in persuasive texts (2) ellipsis and adverbial transitions were not found in descriptive texts (3) substitution and ellipsis were not employed in informative texts and (4) there were not any examples of substitution in narrative texts.

### ***Recommendations***

After the results and summaries were explained, there are three recommendations:

1. There is a need for other studies on discourse markers in broadcast and online media texts to be compared with other written texts.



2. There is a need for other analyses in order to concentrate in the semantic aspect of the use of cohesive devices.

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