

Exploring the Use of Cohesive Devices in Argumentative Essays: A Study of Thai English-Major Students at a Public University

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays written by Thai second-year English major students at a public university. Students in an English Writing course were assigned to write a 300–350-word argumentative essay on a specific topic. However, only 40 students agreed to participate in the research and provided their essays for analysis. The study, drawing on Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion framework, examined the most frequently used cohesive devices. The findings indicate that references and conjunctions accounted for more than 80% of the cohesive devices used, followed by lexical cohesion, substitution, and ellipsis. The results show that both the frequency of cohesive ties and students’ knowledge of cohesive devices significantly impact the overall quality of their argumentative essays. Cohesive devices help students enhance the effectiveness of their writing, making argumentative essays more logical, coherent, and easier for readers to understand the writer’s perspective.

Keywords: Cohesive devices, Argumentative essays, Thai EFL students

Received 23 April 2025; Received in revised form 18 June 2025; Accepted 20 June 2025

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1. Introduction

Writing is a fundamental part of the curriculum at every educational level, from elementary schools to universities (Weigle, 2002). Among the various writing genres, argumentative writing is notably demanding because it compels authors to adopt a stance on a controversial issue and support this stance with reasoning in order to persuade readers (Intraprawat, 2002). As Connor (1987) highlights, composing an argumentative essay is a complex cognitive endeavor that involves considering the writer's intent, the audience's expectations, rhetorical structures, and contextual factors. For students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), this complexity is often heightened. Specifically, Thai EFL students tend to struggle with elements that make argumentative writing both cohesive and coherent, such as selecting appropriate linking devices and organizing logical argument chains (Baker & Boonkit, 2004).

Despite this recognition, existing literature on cohesion in ESL/EFL writing has not fully addressed the specific patterns of cohesive device use among Thai EFL students, particularly in argumentative contexts. While Pawapatcharodom (2007) and Baker and Boonkit (2004) report that students frequently rely on metacognitive strategies for writing, the precise ways in which Thai EFL learners employ cohesive devices to construct persuasive arguments remain underexplored. Insights into these patterns can guide targeted instructional interventions that address the unique needs of Thai EFL writers.

In seeking ways to improve students' argumentative essays, many researchers have singled out the role of cohesive devices, which can strongly influence clarity and persuasiveness. Halliday and Hasan (1976) were among the first to conceptualize cohesive devices, defining them as linguistic mechanisms that connect parts of a text and facilitate understanding. Cohesion complements coherence, which refers to the logical relationship between ideas, enabling readers to follow the text's overall meaning (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Johns (1986) emphasizes that coherence in written text involves cohesion and unity as well as the reader's interaction with the text, while Johns (1986) maintains that cohesion is crucial for creating coherence. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classify cohesive devices into five categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

Studies have explored the role of cohesion in evaluating writing quality. For instance, Faigley and Witte (1981) found that essays rated more favorably tended to have a higher density of cohesive devices than those with lower ratings, although cohesion and coherence were only weakly correlated. Still, excessive errors can lead readers to perceive a text as less coherent (Tanawong, 2014). However, most of these studies have focused on general EFL or ESL populations without specifically focusing on Thai EFL undergraduates in argumentative writing. These findings underscore an importance of understanding how Thai EFL students,

in particular, select and use cohesive devices to make their argumentative writing more effective. By examining how Thai second-year English majors use these devices, this study offers evidence-based guidance for Thai EFL writing instruction.

This study aims to investigate the cohesive devices that second-year English major students use in their argumentative essays. By identifying the frequency and accuracy of different types of cohesive ties, we seek to inform pedagogical practices that can help Thai EFL students produce more coherent and persuasive argumentative texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cohesion in Writing

Halliday and Hasan (1976) emphasize that cohesion is crucial for creating meaningful connections in texts, with each sentence typically containing at least one cohesive element that links it to surrounding sentences and guides the reader through the discourse. Cohesion itself does not determine whether a text is “good” or “bad,” but rather clarifies why a reader perceives it in a certain way and explains how conversational inferences arise—how listeners or readers infer meanings not explicitly stated. Because cohesion is a semantic concept, it focuses on the meaningful relationships among elements in a text, shaping them into a unified whole (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). To illustrate these relationships, Halliday and Hasan introduced the term “tie,” referring to moments when two elements in a text are linked cohesively, and identified five principal cohesive ties: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

2.2 Types of Cohesion

Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify five main categories of cohesion—reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion—each connecting parts of a text to ensure clarity, coherence, and smooth progression of ideas.

2.2.1 Reference

Reference involves pointing to another element for interpretation. Endophoric references direct readers within the text (anaphoric looks backward; cataphoric looks forward), while exophoric references point outside the text. Common types include personal references (e.g., *he*, *she*), demonstrative references (e.g., *this*, *that*), and comparative references (e.g., *as many*, *more*). Such indicators help maintain continuity by linking each new mention to previously established points.

2.2.2 Substitution

Substitution replaces one linguistic element with another at the lexicogrammatical level. Halliday and Hasan (1976) categorize it as nominal (*one/ones*), verbal (*do*), or clausal (*so/not*). For instance, the nominal substitute *one* may stand in for a previously mentioned

noun, while verbal substitution (e.g., *runs faster than I do*) helps avoid repetition by substituting the verb. Substitution thus ensures conciseness without sacrificing meaning.

2.2.3 Ellipsis

Ellipsis likewise reduces redundancy by omitting elements that are understood from context. Halliday and Hasan distinguish nominal ellipsis (omitting a noun), verbal ellipsis (omitting the verb or operator), and clausal ellipsis (omitting part of the clause). For example, in *They started early, and we [Ø] later*, the missing phrase is inferred, allowing concise, clear communication.

2.2.4 Conjunction

Conjunctions create logical and semantic links among sentences or clauses. They do more than just connect text; they guide readers through relations such as addition (*and*), opposition (*but*), cause (*so*), and sequence (*then*). This alignment of ideas into a coherent chain is vital for reader comprehension, giving structure to arguments and explanations.

2.2.5 Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion pertains to word choice and recurrence. Reiteration refers to repeating terms, using synonyms, or employing superordinates (e.g., *forest* → *woods*). Collocation involves words that frequently appear together (e.g., *north* and *south*). By echoing or associating terms within a text, lexical cohesion strengthens the overall unity and helps readers track themes and topics seamlessly.

2.3 Argumentative Essay

An argumentative essay is a type of academic writing that presents a claim and supports or challenges another statement whose validity may be subject to debate (Hatch, 1992; Kopperschmidt, 1985). Kopperschmidt (1985) noted that argumentation involves evaluating the validity of statements to assess facts or actions. Hatch (1992) explained that while the structure of an argumentative essay is flexible, the classical model typically consists of an introduction, explanation of the issue, outline of the arguments, supporting evidence, refutation, and conclusion. Nonetheless, alternative organizational patterns are also widely recognized.

Maccoun (1983, as cited in Hatch, 1992) identified several organizational structures for argumentative writing. One such structure adopts a "zigzag" pattern, alternating between supporting and opposing arguments. Another presents a problem, refutes the opposing view, and proposes a solution. Some essays adopt a "one-sided argument," presenting only one viewpoint without counterarguments. Others follow an "eclectic approach," selectively acknowledging or rejecting different perspectives. Additional patterns include presenting the opposing view before the writer's stance or questioning opposing arguments without direct refutation. Regardless of structure, argumentative essays generally comprise three essential components: pro-arguments, counterarguments, and refutations.

For instructional purposes, students in this study were guided to follow the organizational model proposed by Reid (2000), structured as follows:

- I. Introduction with thesis statement (intent and opinion)
- II. Background paragraph (optional)
- III. Pro-argument #1 (weakest argument in support of the opinion)
- IV. Pro-argument #2 (moderately strong argument)
- V. Pro-argument #3 (strongest argument)
- VI. Counterarguments and refutation
- VII. Conclusion (summary, recommendation, solution, and/or prediction)

Although this structure differs from Maccoun's (1983) patterns, it was selected to help students build upon their prior knowledge of expository writing. This approach allowed them to develop well-organized argumentative essays incorporating the key elements of argumentation: pro-arguments, counterarguments, and refutations.

2.4 Relevant Research Studies

Researchers have frequently examined how cohesive devices correlate with writing quality and textual coherence. One such study, conducted by Tanawong (2014) at Srinakharinwirot University, investigated how Thai EFL students employ cohesive ties in their writing. His study involved 23 students who completed a writing task for a composition course. Findings revealed that *lexical cohesion* and *reference* were employed most frequently, followed by *conjunctions*, *substitution*, and *ellipsis*. He also identified cohesive errors—both grammatical and ungrammatical—stemming from students' limited grammar knowledge. A significant, though moderate, correlation between cohesion and coherence was discovered, implying that Thai EFL learners who use cohesive devices carefully tend to produce more coherent texts.

Similar tendencies are also observed in the work of Saputra and Hakim (2020), who analyzed cohesive devices in argumentative essays. Their research, which looked at the types of cohesive devices used by top-performing Indonesian university students, showed that *ellipsis* and *substitution* were rarely used. This underuse was attributed to students' unfamiliarity with these devices. Instead, *synonyms* were most commonly employed under lexical cohesion, a practice consistent with studies by Alarcon (2013) which found that the frequent use of synonyms can be a marker of higher-rated writing. Saputra and Hakim also noted that the article "the" was used more than other cohesive devices because it can function as both a connector and an article, reflecting a certain degree of stylistic sophistication among proficient writers.

Taken together, these studies indicate a shared pattern across different contexts: although writers learning English as a second or foreign language tend to use certain cohesive devices—particularly reference, conjunctions, and lexical items such as synonyms—other

forms like substitution and ellipsis are relatively underutilized. Scholars commonly argue that limited exposure and explicit instruction in these areas may constrain students' ability to diversify their cohesive strategies. These findings highlight the importance of teaching a broad range of cohesive devices in ESL writing courses, as they directly influence writing clarity, coherence, and overall quality. By focusing on less familiar but potentially powerful devices like substitution and ellipsis, educators may be able to improve learners' written expression, fostering a richer, more versatile control of discourse.

In summary, the literature underscores cohesion as a key component of effective writing. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework remains influential, providing a systematic way to identify and categorize cohesive devices, while empirical studies across diverse ESL/EFL contexts consistently show that employing a wide array of such devices can enhance both cohesion and coherence. Nonetheless, the uneven usage of different forms (particularly substitution and ellipsis) points to an ongoing need for targeted pedagogical strategies to ensure students gain both awareness of and confidence in deploying the full range of cohesive tools.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays written by undergraduate students. This approach enabled an in-depth analysis of how students applied cohesive devices in their academic writing. The analysis specifically focused on identifying patterns of use and evaluating both the appropriateness and accuracy of these devices within argumentative texts.

3.2 Population and Sample

The participants in this study were second-year English major students, aged 19 to 20, enrolled in the English Writing (01355231) course at a public university in Thailand. Their English proficiency level was generally at the pre-intermediate, based on curriculum expectations. All students had previously completed the prerequisite course, *Introduction to English Reading and Writing Skills* (01355131), and their first language was Thai. Of the 81 students enrolled in the course, 40 voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and submitted their essays for analysis.

3.3 Research Instrument

The main research instrument was a writing task designed to explore the use of cohesive devices in students' argumentative essays. The essays were analyzed following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework. The analysis followed several steps:

- (1) Each essay was divided into three main sections—introduction, body, and conclusion;

- (2) Sentences were sequentially numbered to facilitate the identification of cohesive devices;
- (3) All cohesive ties were categorized according to Halliday and Hasan's classification;
- (4) The frequency of each type of cohesive device was calculated as a percentage.

After completing the qualitative analysis, the accuracy of cohesive device usage was evaluated. The researcher carefully examined each cohesive tie to determine its correct use within context. To ensure the reliability of the findings, an expert in cohesion analysis—an experienced English lecturer at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus—independently reviewed and verified the classification.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from second-year English major students enrolled in the English Writing (O1355231) course. As part of the final examination, students were assigned to write a 300–350-word argumentative essay, choosing from one of the following topics:

- University students working part-time: Do the benefits outweigh the disadvantages?
- Environmental conservation on campus: Should students at Kamphaeng Saen Campus be prohibited from using motorcycles and private cars?

Following the examination, the researchers invited students to participate in the study. Those who agreed signed consent forms, and their essays were collected for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis focused on identifying and classifying the cohesive devices used in students' argumentative essays. In the first phase, the frequency of cohesive devices was quantified and categorized according to Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, as shown in Table 1. In the second phase, the distribution and use of cohesive devices were analyzed to evaluate their contribution to the coherence and effectiveness of the essays. Following this classification, the accuracy of cohesive device use was evaluated. Each essay was reviewed individually to determine whether cohesive ties were appropriately applied within their contexts.

For the in-text citation, if there is a single author, please follow this pattern (Author's surname, year, page); for instance, (Hyland, 2007, p. 150). If there are two authors, please follow this pattern (1st Author's surname & 2nd Author's surname, year, page); for instance, (Baker & Boonkit, 2004, p. 305). If there are more than two authors, please follow this pattern (1st Author's surname et al., year, page); for instance, (Callaghan et al., 1993, p. 148-164). The content must employ 11 pt Georgia font with 1.5 line spacing. Each paragraph starts with a one-inch indentation and have full indentation.

Table 1 Cohesive ties based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Cohesion in English

Cohesion Type	Subtype	Description
Reference	Personal, Demonstrative, Comparative	Links between pronouns and their referents
Substitution	Nominal, Verbal, Clausal	Replacing elements to avoid repetition
Ellipsis	Nominal, Verbal, Clausal	Omitting elements recoverable from context
Conjunction	Additive, Adversative, Causal, Temporal	Connecting clauses logically
Lexical Cohesion	Repetition, Synonymy, Antonymy, Collocation	Using lexical relations to create coherence

3.6 Statistical Analysis

All data collected from the students' essays in the final exam were compiled and analyzed quantitatively to determine the frequency and percentage of cohesive devices used. The following formula was employed to calculate the proportion of each cohesive device type:

Percentages Formula

$$P = \frac{F \times 100}{n}$$

Where: P = Percentage (%)

F = The frequency number of parts

n = The total number

The results were then interpreted to identify patterns in students' use of cohesion, highlighting both strengths and areas that require improvement in their academic writing.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, which are organized around two key aspects: (1) the frequency and types of cohesive devices used by students in their argumentative essays, and (2) the relationship between the use of these cohesive devices and the structure of argumentative writing. These findings address the research objective by illustrating how different cohesive ties contribute to the overall construction of the essays.

4.1 Overall Use of Cohesive Devices

The analysis revealed that students employed a range of cohesive devices in their argumentative essays, including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of these devices as a percentage of total cohesive ties identified.

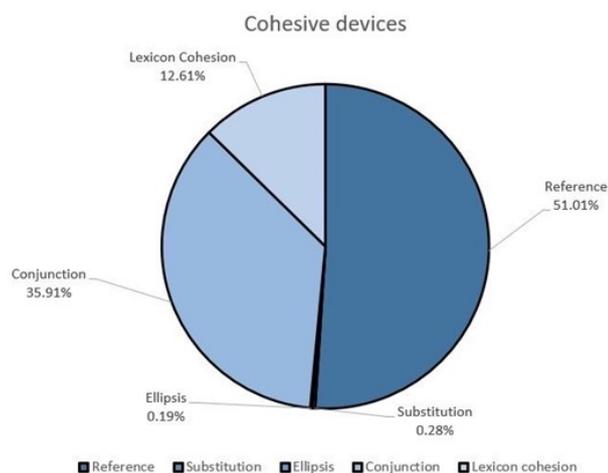


Figure 1 Distribution of cohesive devices in percentage

Among these, *reference* was the most frequently used device, accounting for 51.01% of the total. *Conjunction* followed at 35.91%, while *lexical cohesion* represented 12.61%. The least frequently used devices were *substitution* (0.28%) and *ellipsis* (0.19%). Each of these categories was further examined in terms of its subtypes.

4.2 Subtypes of Cohesive Devices

4.2.1 Reference Subtypes

As shown in Figure 2, *pronominal reference* dominated within this category, making up 75.72% of all reference ties. This was followed by *demonstrative reference* at 19.22%, and *comparative reference* at 5.06%.

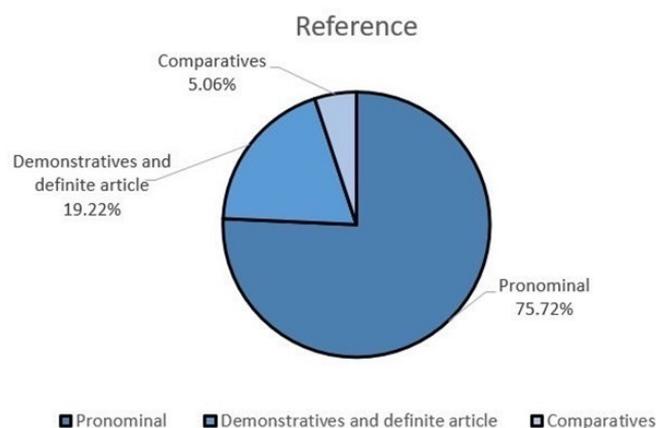


Figure 2 Distribution of reference subtypes

The frequent use of reference in students' writing reflects its essential role in argumentative essays. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), reference is used to point to elements within or outside the text for interpretation. By using references, students avoided excessive repetition of the same nouns and created clearer connections between ideas. This is

especially important in argumentative essays, where writers need to distinguish their own opinions from those of others, as demonstrated in Example 1.

Example 1 Use of reference in argumentative writing

Biking is useful for people who wake up late or hasten. When I was freshy I didn't had this problem by biking bicycle. But now I'm not freshy anymore, I have the problem. Due to a lot of work make me sleep plate often. I don't have energy enough if I wake up early. So, my motorcycle is my best friend; it can take me to my class in time like I have the wings.

In Example 1, the student uses pronominal references such as *I*, *me*, and *my* to maintain subject continuity and avoid repetition. The demonstrative *this* refers back to the earlier problem, supporting textual cohesion. Definite articles like *the* also help link ideas by signaling known or previously mentioned elements. These cohesive ties guide the reader through the writer's personal narrative.

4.2.2 Conjunction Subtypes

Figure 3 presents the distribution of conjunction subtypes. *Additive conjunctions* were used most frequently (46.03%), followed by *causal conjunctions* (22.84%), *adversative conjunctions* (17.70%), and *temporal conjunctions* (13.43%).

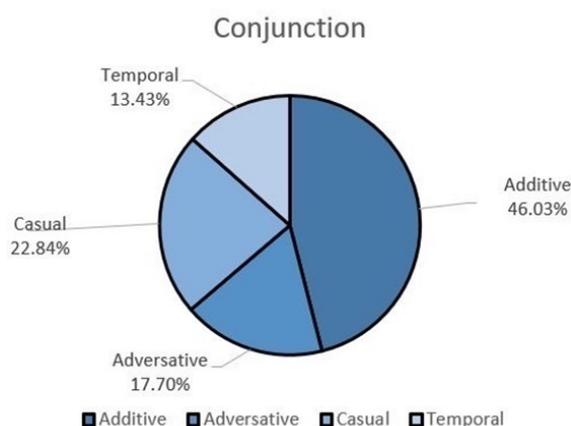


Figure 3 Distribution of conjunction subtypes

Conjunctions are vital in argumentative essays because they align closely with the essay's structure—pro arguments, counterarguments, and refutations. To construct pro arguments, students commonly used additive, causal, and temporal conjunctions to extend and clarify their reasoning, as illustrated in Example 2. In contrast, adversative conjunctions were frequently used in counterarguments and refutations to signal contrast and opposition, as shown in Example 3.

Example 2 Use of conjunction in pro arguments

First, students can use their knowledge from studying for working. At this point, I would like to give an example that students work as waiters or waitresses in a restaurant. They have to talk to customers in order to get a correct order, so it improves students communicative skill.

Example 3 Use of conjunction in counterarguments

On the other hand, some people maintain that it is not safe for the student's lie. This is because students may be robbed or victims for child abuse during they work. This is not true. I would argue that any places for working is not dangerous, such as Eastern, Orentel, and Dusit Thani hotels. They have a strong system security, which is including a lot of security guards, Moreover, the hot employee's profile and interview them carefully before they give a job, thus any students do work part-time is not necessary to worry about unsafety life.

In Example 2, the student uses temporal (*First*), additive (*At this point*), and causal (*so*) conjunctions to develop a clear pro argument and connect ideas logically. These conjunctions help sequence the explanation, provide supporting examples, and show cause-effect relationships, which are essential in persuasive writing. Example 3 illustrates the use of adversative (*On the other hand*), causal (*because, thus*), and additive (*Moreover*) conjunctions to contrast opposing views and reinforce the writer's stance. These cohesive ties allow the student to refute counterarguments while maintaining logical flow. Overall, the use of conjunctions demonstrates students' awareness of how to guide readers through different parts of their argument and build coherence within and across sentences.

Due to the limited clarity or frequency of some cohesive subtypes in the students' essays, only reference and conjunction are illustrated with textual examples. Substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion are discussed without excerpts but based on observed usage patterns in the data.

4.2.3 Lexical Cohesion Subtypes

Figure 4 displays the proportion of lexical cohesion subtypes. *Reiteration* was by far the most used (83.38%), while *collocation* accounted for 16.62%.

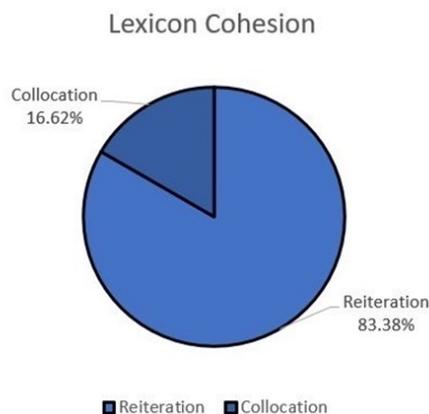


Figure 4 Distribution of lexical cohesion subtypes

Lexical cohesion played a key role in enhancing clarity and coherence in students' argumentative essays. Through careful word choice and repetition, students were able to unify their texts and strengthen meaning throughout their writing.

4.2.4 Substitution Subtypes

As shown in Figure 5, within the substitution category, *nominal substitution* was the most frequently used (70.00%), followed by *verbal substitution* (30.00%). No instances of *clausal substitution* were found.

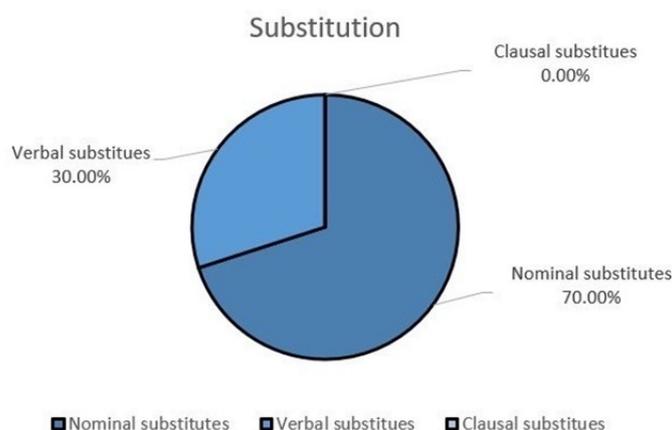


Figure 5 Distribution of substitution subtypes

Substitution was rarely used by students, possibly because it may reduce clarity and weaken argumentation in an academic context. Argumentative essays often require precise explanations to construct persuasive arguments, and longer expressions may serve this purpose better than substitutions.

4.2.5 Ellipsis Subtypes

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of ellipsis subtypes. *Clausal ellipsis* accounted for 57.14%, *verbal ellipsis* for 28.57%, and *nominal ellipsis* for 14.29%.

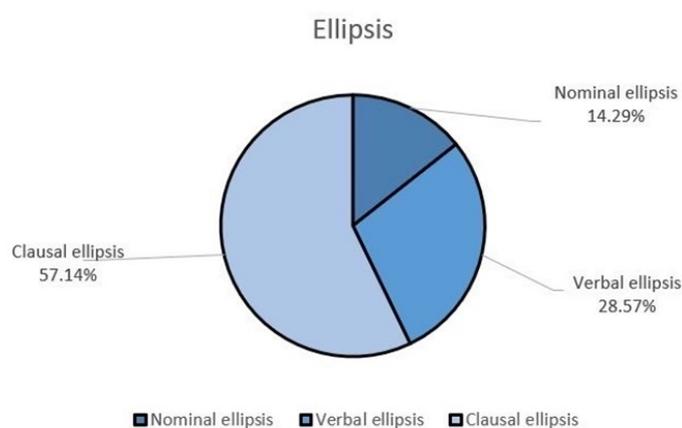


Figure 6 Distribution of ellipsis subtypes

Ellipsis was also used infrequently in students' essays. Since ellipsis involves omitting elements of a sentence, its use can sometimes create ambiguity. In argumentative essays, where clarity is crucial, the omission of information risks confusing readers. Therefore, this type of cohesive device appears less suitable for academic writing contexts.

4.3 Summary of Findings

The findings of this study highlight the essential role of cohesive devices in argumentative essay writing. Cohesive ties help connect pro arguments, counterarguments, and refutations, making students' writing smoother and more coherent. They also support logical flow and enhance persuasiveness. Furthermore, cohesive devices improve the readability of essays by guiding readers through the writer's line of reasoning and helping them understand the writer's stance on the issues discussed.

In summary, while reference and conjunction were the most frequently used cohesive devices, lexical cohesion also contributed significantly to essay clarity and unity. Substitution and ellipsis, by contrast, were less favored, likely due to their potential to obscure meaning in argumentative discourse. These findings underscore the importance of teaching a broad range of cohesive strategies to improve students' writing proficiency and academic argumentation skills.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This section discusses the findings of the study, summarizes key conclusions, acknowledges the study's limitations, and offers recommendations for future research on cohesive devices in student writing.

5.1 Discussion

This study applied Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework to examine the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays written by second-year English major students. The analysis covered both the overall frequency and subtype distribution of cohesive devices, offering insight into how Thai EFL learners construct cohesion in academic writing.

Consistent with previous research (Bahaziq, 2016; Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011), reference was the most frequently used cohesive device in the present study, followed by conjunction and lexical cohesion. Nevertheless, some variation exists in the literature. For example, Parin (2014) found lexical cohesion to be the most frequently used category, followed by reference and conjunction. Such discrepancies may be attributed to differences in participants' proficiency levels, writing prompts, or instructional background. The present study involved students enrolled in an English Writing course with pre-intermediate proficiency, which may explain their more limited lexical range and greater reliance on grammatical devices like reference and conjunction. Additionally, the specific instructional

model used in this course—based on Reid’s (2000) structured approach—may have guided students toward particular patterns of cohesion aligned with argument development.

The minimal use of substitution and ellipsis in this study may also reflect both linguistic and pedagogical factors. Students may not have received sufficient exposure or practice in using these more implicit cohesive strategies, which are less commonly emphasized in typical EFL writing instruction. Moreover, because argumentative essays require structured, explicit reasoning, students may perceive substitution and ellipsis as risky or less appropriate in academic contexts where clarity is essential. This supports prior claims that cohesion and coherence are not solely linguistic outcomes, but are shaped by genre expectations, instructional scaffolding, and students’ perceptions of academic writing norms.

To improve the quality of argumentative writing, students should be guided not only in the functional use of cohesive devices but also in how to align their use with effective rhetorical structures. Reid (1988) outlines three accessible organizational plans: (1) presenting arguments for one side, (2) presenting arguments followed by counterarguments, and (3) presenting both sides equally with refutation. Although these structures differ from Maccoun’s (1983) more nuanced models, they offer scaffolding that supports cohesion through predictability and balance. When students understand how to map cohesive devices onto argument structures—using conjunctions to transition between claims, or lexical reiteration to reinforce key points—they can enhance both the clarity and persuasiveness of their writing.

Finally, as emphasized by Yu et al. (2021), cohesive devices are instrumental in linking sentences and paragraphs, ultimately contributing to overall textual fluency. This study reaffirms that students benefit from explicit instruction not only in cohesion types but also in how and when to apply them in alignment with genre-specific expectations. Future pedagogical interventions may therefore benefit from incorporating targeted practice in underused cohesive forms—such as substitution and ellipsis—while reinforcing the strategic use of reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion to improve coherence in argumentative writing.

5.2 Conclusion

The current study examined the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays written by second-year English major students. Cohesive devices are crucial in academic writing because they help organize ideas, connect arguments, and guide readers through the text.

The findings revealed that reference devices were the most frequently used (51.01%), particularly *pronominal references* such as *he*, *she*, and *they*. *Conjunctions* were the second most used (35.91%), followed by *lexical cohesion* (12.61%). *Substitution* (0.28%) and *ellipsis* (0.19%) were the least employed. These patterns suggest that students rely heavily on

reference and conjunction to maintain clarity and coherence, whereas substitution and ellipsis, being more characteristic of spoken language, are less favored in academic writing.

Notably, the study also found that neither excessive nor insufficient use of cohesive devices guarantees effective writing. Essays with an overuse of cohesive devices appeared redundant and verbose, diminishing clarity. Conversely, those with too few cohesive devices lacked connectivity and coherence, making them difficult to follow. Thus, an appropriate balance in the use of cohesive devices is essential for producing well-structured, logical, and persuasive argumentative essays. Ultimately, cohesive devices play a critical role in helping students construct coherent arguments, seamlessly transition between ideas, and present their viewpoints effectively to readers.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study suggest several important points for teaching writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. The frequent use of reference and conjunction in the students' writing shows that they are familiar with basic cohesive devices for connecting ideas and organizing their essays. However, the less frequent use of lexical cohesion indicates that students still need more practice in this area.

Lexical cohesion, such as using repetition and synonyms, is very important for keeping ideas connected and supporting arguments throughout the essay. When students know how to use different vocabulary choices effectively, they can avoid repeating the same words too often and make their writing clearer and more interesting. Teachers should give students more practice with lexical cohesion by using activities that focus on choosing the right synonyms, paraphrasing, and creating word chains to connect their ideas better.

Even though substitution and ellipsis were used less often, this is acceptable in academic writing, where it is important to be clear and direct. Instead of focusing on these less common devices, teachers should continue to emphasize the careful use of reference, conjunction, and especially lexical cohesion to help students improve the flow of their writing.

In addition, teachers should help students learn to balance their use of cohesive devices. Using too many can make the writing sound repetitive, while too few can make the writing difficult to follow. To support this, teachers can use sample texts, guided writing exercises, and clear feedback to help students improve both their accuracy and their use of cohesive devices to strengthen their arguments.

By focusing on these areas, writing instruction can help students produce more cohesive and effective academic writing. Improving students' use of lexical cohesion, in particular, can help them write clearer essays and make their arguments easier for readers to understand.

5.4 Limitations

This study was limited to a sample of forty second-year English major students enrolled in the English Writing (01355231) course at a public university. The essays analyzed were written as part of the course's final examination during the first semester. As such, the findings reflect students' writing performance at a single point in time under exam conditions.

The limited sample size and specific institutional context may affect the generalizability of the results to other student populations or educational settings. In addition, the analysis focused solely on final drafts, without examining students' earlier drafts, revision processes, or writing development over time. These constraints suggest the need for future research involving a broader range of participants, longitudinal data, or comparisons across instructional contexts.

While this study offers valuable insights into the use of cohesive devices in EFL argumentative writing, it also highlights the importance of exploring how writing instruction and drafting stages influence cohesion and coherence.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should explore further how cohesive devices impact writing quality across different educational contexts and proficiency levels. Intervention practices could be developed to support students in mastering the use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing, thereby enabling all learners to reach a higher standard of writing proficiency.

Moreover, future research could extend the investigation to other types of writing, such as descriptive or narrative essays, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cohesive devices function across various genres of academic writing.

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