

### An Analysis of Grammatical and Lexical Cohesion in Oral Communication among Japanese Language Learners in University

By

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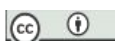
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#### ABSTRACT:

This research was conducted to investigate the use of discourse cohesion aspects in Japanese Language oral communication in both grammatical cohesion and cohesion lexical. The purpose of the research is to know how the grammatical and lexical cohesion used in the conversation. The instruments were the Japanese Language students from Faculty of Major Language Studies (FPBU) in University Science Islam Malaysia (USIM). 10 students' from 3<sup>rd</sup> years students were selected randomly to participate in the dialogue activity to collect the data. The data of this study which then were transcribed into written. The data collected were analysed qualitatively using cohesive devices based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976). They are reference (personal, demonstrative and comparative), substitution (nominal, verbal and clausal), ellipsis (nominal, verbal and clausal), conjunction (additive, adversative, causal, temporal and others), and lexical cohesion (reiteration and collocation). The results of this research findings showed that the most frequently cohesions appeared in the dialogue are cohesion appeared in the dialogue are reference, substitution, and conjunctions. Meanwhile the occurrences of ellipsis, substitution and lexical reiteration were the least. The roles of the two cohesions can help student's sentences to be cohesive in their oral communication in Japanese language. The study of cohesion of Japanese language oral communication can also offer some significance to pedagogical field.

#### KEYWORDS:

grammatical cohesion, lexical cohesion, Japanese language, oral communication



## Introduction

Communicative competence of a foreign language is the ability to apply the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in the studied foreign language in the process of communication. The term was introduced by N. Chomsky, to define an ability to fulfil some activity. D. Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence as the ability to use the language they are learning appropriately in a given social encounter. Furthermore, communicative competence is needed for second language students to communicate in and learn from their classroom experiences (Johnson, 1995). Hymes (1972):278) defines communicative competence as; 'when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. Canale and Swain (1980), stated that communicative competence consists of four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. According to Canale, discourse competence can be understood as mastery of combining discourse grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres.

In Malaysia, a number of fresh graduates are unable to speak English fluently. A study conducted by Arumugam, Thayalan, Dass and Maniam (2016) found that fresh graduate

Nurses were jobless due to their inability to speak the English Language clearly. However, lack of English proficiency and communication skills often attributed for the high unemployment rate among graduates. Moreover, the ability to communicate effectively in foreign language is highly appreciated especially in working places. Every university graduate should be able to communicate well for obtaining employment and maintaining the job. Therefore, developing students' discourse competence is very essential. However, oral communication appears to be difficult to develop in the foreign language context, despite learners undergoing years of classroom instruction and the many changes taken to upgrade methodological approaches claiming to enhance communication skills (Yeoh, 2020).

The evolution of Malaysian education system since independence shows remarkable changes and rapid transformations as the nation strove to achieve better educational standards and systems. The Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia in its National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020 stipulates that "Proficiency in the third language is vital for developing human capital that drives the k-economy as well as gears the country towards competitive innovation in the international arena", (The Ministry of Higher Education, 2007, p.62). Malaysian universities, therefore, are required 'to provide learning opportunities for students to be proficient in a third language such as Mandarin, Tamil, Japanese, French, or Spanish" (p.66).

Moreover, Musa et al. [51] found that due to school examinations and national examinations which give a strong focus on the teaching of reading, writing and grammatical rules and had been isolated from its communicative use. According to Ahmad and Azza (2015), as an extension to this, the Ministry of Higher Education has instituted several measures to improve the employability of local graduates. One of them is to equip undergraduates with workplace with language competency and emphasis on communicative competence, in order to meet students' future communication needs after graduation.

Cohesion and coherence are the factors that influence the communication. Cohesion refers to the relation of meaning meanwhile, coherence is semantic property of discourse which is formed by interpretation of each relative sentence to other sentences. A coherent conversation is meaningful,

unified and gives the impression. Therefore, a discourse becomes coherent through the cohesion. However, there is still a need to understand how foreign language such as Japanese, Korean, Spanish and other language learners enhance their ability to produce cohesive utterances. According to Brown & Yule (1983), discourse is often found in human life, whether written or spoken. Spoken discourse is intended to be transitory and it has an interactional function; to establish relationship with people. It has been noticed (through researcher's experience in teaching Japanese language to secondary school students for ten years and university students for two years) that students at the faculty of Foreign Language, University Science of Islamic Malaysia (USIM) were not able to perform oral communication using Japanese Language. This can be seen on the final results from three different groups of Japanese Language in USIM. Among all the assessments, assessment that responds to simple conversation (dialogue) which was made based on its regular use in real daily life communication is still very dissatisfying. There was a gap in between the marks for the assessment which involves oral communication compared to other written assessments.

Based on the phenomena illustrated above, the writer is interested in investigating and analysis cohesion of oral communication (dialogue). The 3rd year students should be able to produce better oral communication skills because it is stated in the curriculum. On the other hand, this research focused mainly on the analysis of the use of cohesive devices in the 3rd year students' oral communication (dialogue). It is hoped that the finding will be able to add to the body of knowledge on the topic, thus assisting in the effort to further enforce on improving the learner's communication skills when communicating in a Japanese language.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The ability to communicate in foreign languages is an extra added value. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education (MOE) through its latest national Higher Education Blueprint (2015- 2025) has outlined 'Language Proficiency' as one of the six student aspirations where learning at least one additional global language is highly encouraged. Japanese language was introduced in Malaysian institutions of higher learning after the fourth Malaysian Premier, Tun Mahathir Mohamed, initiated the "Look East Policy" in 1981 (Sohaimi, 2010). Since then, Japanese is recognised as a language of education (Oshima & Harvey, 2013), and is offered as an elective in most tertiary and secondary institutions throughout the country (Japan Foundation 2018). Japan Foundation (2018) also stated that there are 39,457 students learning Japanese in various language institutions. Perhaps, Japanese Language is one of the most popular foreign languages studied by language learners in Malaysia, despite the notion that it is often perceived as a difficult choice compared to other foreign languages (Nur, 2017). However, Nur also stated that not everyone who undergoes foreign language courses seem to be successfully proficient in the target languages and communicatively competent in using the language. Japanese Language has three types of writing scripts, distinctive sentence structure compared to Malay language and English Language and not much spoken opportunities in Malaysia maybe the reasons that discourage the learners to master the language.

Students learning Japanese responded that their proficiency in Japanese Language is insufficient to enable them to communicate effectively (Yeoh, 2020). Moreover, Yeoh added that failure to understand the language mechanics prevented them producing tangible sentences in Japanese when in an active conversation successfully. Learners' inability to acquire language skills could lose their interest to commit to learning, hence demotivating them from wanting to proceed to the next level (Liu, Zheng, Ma & Wei, 2020). However, in another study Yeoh, Kaur, and Tengku (2020), stated that listening and speaking skills as the most important skills required at working place which has the

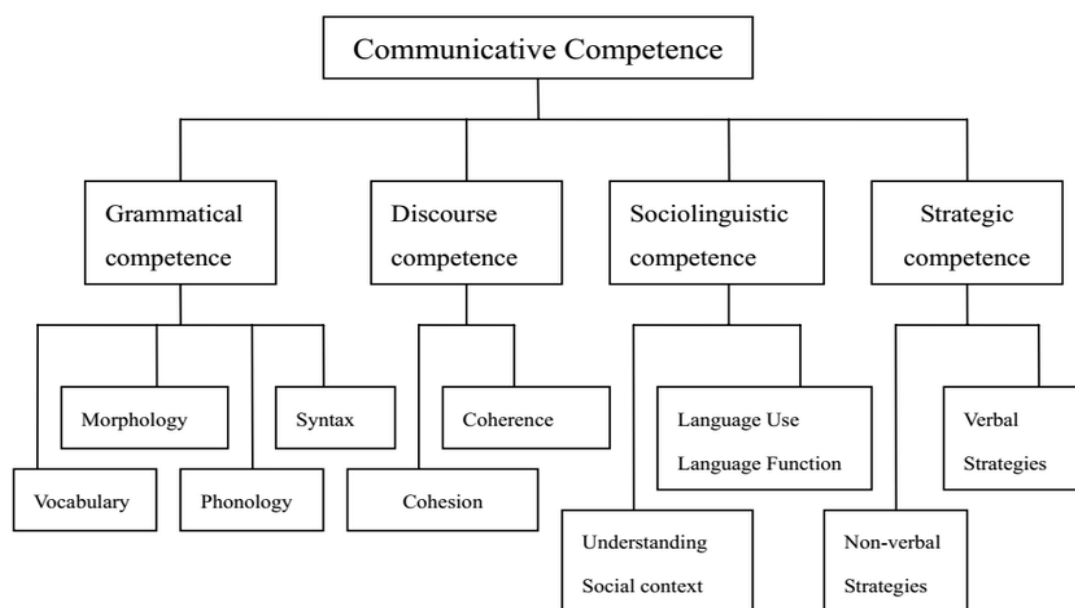
relationship in commerce and business between Japan and Malaysia. Lack of proficiency in Japanese Language is a hindrance of successful intercultural communication between Malaysian Japanese speaking companies in Malaysia. Therefore, there is a need for the Malaysian universities to provide academic support to the Japanese language learners and to make sure that they are equipped with good Japanese skills especially in speaking skills as it is found to be the most challenging.

### Discourse Competence

Discourse refers to how texts are organized. According to Brown & Yule. (1983:190), text is the verbal record of the communicative event. This gives meaning that the text is relating to words to keep a permanent account which comes from speaking. Discourse is the capability to provide sentences and utterances logically and cohesively, therefore producing coherent discourse. Organization is key in discourse competence and the term, which was coined by Bachman (1990), was further explicated by Canale and Swain (1980) who opined that being discursively competent means being able to organize aspects of language above sentences and produce sentences into longer stretches of utterances, hence enabling communication.

According to Narang (1996, p.247), discourse competence occurs in situations where speakers and listeners interiorise communicative grammar as they socialise. During the process, learners acquire language and interacts with the environment as they learn to use appropriate language aspects linguistically. He also explicated that a child, while learning language, learns to relate to his or her surrounding and obtains linguistic input socio- culturally. This view is in line with Hymes (1971, p.5) who stated that children become competent as they learn social aspects of the language and its grammatical forms.

Reverting to the definition by Canale and Swain (1980), discourse competence explains how speakers, when in a dialogue or while interacting with others, use their communicative knowledge and know-hows to adapt to different cultural and contexts demands. Having such competency allows speakers to combine and interpret meanings and structures with the aim of attaining cohesive texts in various styles using cohesive devices to link forms and using grammatical rules to ensure that the organization and production of meanings are coherent.



### Figure1 Canale and Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence

Although Canale and Swain (1980) categorised discourse competence as a separate component under communicative competence (Figure 2.1), it is impossible to discuss discourse competence without mentioning communicative competence as individuals' discourse competency is determined by how they use the language to create

Comprehensible utterance and meaning. Celc  -Murcia (2008) opined that discourse competence is the heart of communicative competence as for any form of interaction or dialogue to be successful, speakers must be linguistically, actionably and socio-culturally competent and capable of combining all competences effectively as they attempt to articulate and form the intended discourse.

### Cohesion

In discourse competence, cohesion refers to texts, in their verbal and narrative forms, is a part of a language and despite their varying lengths, the main goal of those texts are to convey comprehensible and complete sentences. A text is considered comprehensible when what the text is presenting interacts successfully with the listener or another speaker whilst in a dialogue. The term "cohesion" is used when referring to texts' properties and how each part of the text is bonded cohesively by suitable grammatical items, vocabulary used and by other cohesive ties namely substitution, punctuation discourse markers, and lexical cohesion (Bahaziq, 2016). The use of such ties allow cohesion to be attained and their roles are crucial as how the texts are interpreted depends on the flow created by the ties. Halliday and Hasan classify that to obtain a good cohesion and coherence, knowledge of five kinds of cohesive devices and sub-classify are reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction. Meanwhile, lexical cohesion consists of reiteration and collocation.

Reference is information about the identification of something that being referred to. "He, she, it, mine, here, there, that, those, such, etc" are examples of personal, demonstrative, and comparative references. Substitution is the act of replacing one object with another. "One, ones, do it, thus, and not" are examples of nominal, verbal, and clausal substitutes. Zero substitution is another name for ellipsis. It signifies that a component of a sentence has been replaced by nothing. Nominal ellipsis, verbal ellipsis, and clausal ellipsis are the three types of ellipsis. Conjunction is the last type of grammatical cohesion. Conjunctive elements express meaning that are contingent on the presence of other elements. It consists of additive, adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions such as "and, but, and also, because, when, etc."

Lexical cohesion is created by the use of vocabulary items. There are two types of repetition: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration is made up of words like repetition, synonym, superordinate, and general. Collocation on the other hand, refers to common occurrence patterns. This type of lexical coherence has nothing to do with semantics. Collocation, on the other hand, is context-dependent. By examining the context of the event, the meaning can be inferred.

### Research Methods

This study used descriptive qualitative approach. According to Ary et al (2010: 424) qualitative technique based on characteristics of having a natural environment, employing the researcher as the primary instrument, dealing with data in the form of words rather than figures and statistics and evaluating the data inductively. The sample of the study involved 10 students of Japanese Language of 3rd year at Faculty of Major Language Studies (FPBU),

USIM. The 3rd year students have more knowledge on the Japanese Language which enable them to participate in dialogue. Students were selected randomly and they both male and female; all of them study Japanese Language as a foreign language. There were 5 groups and each group consists of 2 students as a pair. They have been chosen randomly to participate in the communication activity which were dialogues. Topics were taken from the Marugoto textbook, which being used as textbook in the class since 1st year. Topics were given to all the pairs one week before the actual day. Each pair were given 10 minutes to participate in this dialogue. The dialogues were recorded and later were transcribed. The data were analysed by categorizing them using the cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), The research findings were checked.

### Research Findings

The results of the research presented are based on the research findings of cohesion and coherent from the oral communication activity. Both the grammatical cohesion and the lexical cohesion appeared in the form of dialogues. There were 5 dialogues and, in each dialogue, there were 2-3 participants. The grammatical cohesive devices in the students' dialogues were transcribed and marked by the usage of cohesive devices that were introduced by Halliday and Hasan in 1976, namely: Reference, Substitution, Ellipsis, Conjunction and Lexical Cohesion. The following table illustrates below:

**Figure 2**

#### The Use of Grammatical Cohesion

No. of Dialogue	Type of grammatical cohesion				Total
	Reference	Substitution	Ellipsis	Conjunction	
D1	10	7	-	3	20
D2	15	5	-	4	24
D3	21	6	1	5	33
D4	12	4	-	3	19
D5	9	3	-	3	15
Total	67	25	1	18	111
Percentage	60.37%	22.52%	0.90%	16.21%	100%

From the analysis above, it showed that the 3rd year students of Japanese language from the foreign language Department of USIM had used cohesion devices and this indicated that the students already knew these kinds of devices. They have used them but they do not know the words of cohesive devices. It meant in the teaching and learning process, educators do not introduce the determination of cohesive devices. Even though they do not know that determination but all kinds of these devices occurred in the students' dialogue. For example, the students used reference devices most frequently than other devices since the percentage of reference was the (60.37%), followed by substitution devices (22.52%), conjunction devices (16.21%), ellipsis (0.90%). The finding also revealed that students combined in using those cohesive

Devices while speaking. By understanding the knowledge of cohesive devices, it helped the students to develop their skills in speaking.



Based on the findings, the most frequently used cohesive devices in the dialogues were reference. The reference devices, mainly personal reference items, were much used in the dialogue because when they talk about themselves or someone, things or event in the dialogue it is often replaced by the personal “I, me, my” (watashi), “he, him, his (kare), “she, her, hers” (kanojo) “it” (sore), “its” (sono), “they, them” (karera), in the following sentences. The students’ use of referencing phrase to introduce and maintain reference to people and objects in their stories was deemed to be appropriate. This device may attract more attention than other devices during the teaching and learning process. This is in line with Halliday and Hasan (1976:31) that the use of reference is to signal retrieval.

The second highly used cohesion in the dialogues was substitution. Regarding the use of substitution, the students generally used the simplest form of each type frequently in their conversation: the substitution ‘and’ (to, soshite), ‘that’ (sono, ano, are), (mata, aruiwa), ‘because’ (kara, nazenara), ‘then’ (sorede, suruto). In terms of the use of substitution, it implied that the students were familiar with some words such as ‘and’, ‘that’ and ‘because’. However, other words are less familiar since the occurrence did not give much effect to the cohesion.

In terms of conjunction, the students generally used the simplest form of each type frequently in their dialogue: the conjunction ‘and’ for additive, ‘but’ for adversative, ‘because/cause’ for causal, and ‘then’ for temporal conjunction. However, some of the students frequently used these conjunction items in a fairly confused way. They utilised an additive conjunction instead of an adversative one, or a temporal conjunction instead of an additive one, for example, ‘because’, they were not able to differentiate those words. This could be due to the lack of practice in the classroom, particularly in the area of conjunction.

In terms of the use of ellipsis, this kind of grammatical cohesion was the lowest in use. It implied that the students were not familiar with kind of cohesion. Since the occurrence was very low so its occurrence did not give much effect to the cohesion of the speech. Table 4.1 reveals that there were 2 ellipsis (0.90%) out of 111 cohesive ties used by the students in their communication. In this research, there is no apparent distinction between substitution and ellipsis, the pupils were confused. The lower frequency of substitution and ellipsis was due to what Halliday and Hasan (1976) have stated that both substitution and ellipsis are rarely encountered in narratives or descriptions but are present in numerous dialogue samples. However, for the category of ellipsis, the majority of students did not use ellipsis: it was hardly used by the students. Students were not familiar with the usage of ellipsis due to the avoidance. They avoided using ellipsis because they might fear about their appropriateness. Students tended not to use such type because they did not know how, when and where could be reached.

The next cohesion used in the dialogues is lexical reiteration. It covers repetition, synonymy, superordinate, and general words. Based on the findings above, repetition was used more than

The other types of reiteration. The implication, the interlocutors tried to remember the issues they were discussing.

**Figure3**  
**TheUseofLexical Cohesian**

No. of Dialogue	TypesofCohesion		Total
	Reiteration	Collocation	
D1	2	1	3
D2	3	2	5
D3	1	1	2
D4	1	1	2
D5	2	1	3
Total	9	6	15
Percentage	60.00%	40.00%	100%

In terms of lexical cohesion, the category included reiteration and collocation. The reiteration included repetition, synonym, or near synonym, superordinate, and general word. From the finding that repetition is the most familiar, then followed by collocation, synonym, superordinate, and general word. There were 15 occurrences of lexical cohesion which consisted of 9 occurrences of reiteration and 6 occurrences of collocation. This meant that the students continued to use similar words or phrases in their narratives to generate cohesiveness. Students continued repeating the same words when they wished to emphasize a particular topic. It may be stated that the majority of students did not make any efforts to learn terms. Some of them admitted that they were having trouble in remembering words, however no solution has been found. A limited vocabulary may have come from a lack of dedication to learning words. The use of other lexical cohesion was low and the lowest is general word. This showed that students were unaware of the cohesion and hence unable to utilise it. Lack of focus on this aspect of the teaching and learning process could have been one of the reasons.

In relation to the problems encountered by the students in communication. These findings indicated that there was something wrong in teaching and learning process. Since they have been in 3rd year who have learn English for 3-4 semesters, but the reality they still have problems in these parts. In long period, this condition would become a consideration for the teachers to give more attention to these areas. Furthermore, all of the previously stated results must be given significant consideration and action in order to solve the situations.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

Based on the analysis result of the dialogues by the 3rd year students of Foreign Language Department, USIM, it can be concluded that based on Halliday and Hasan's theory of cohesion (1976), the types of cohesive devices namely: reference, substitution, ellipsis and

Conjunctions were used by the students to build cohesiveness of their communication in Japanese Language. Based on the findings there were 11 items or (100%) of grammatical cohesive devices used. On the other hand, these cohesive devices differed in terms of the frequency of occurrence. Reference was used predominantly (60.37%), then followed by substitution (22.52%), conjunction



(16.21%), and ellipsis (0.90%). Meanwhile, the lexical cohesion used was reiteration, cohesive devices used were repetition, synonym, superordinate, general word and collocation.

In accordance with the conclusions, the researcher proposed suggestions. Based on the findings of cohesion which were participated by the Japanese Language students for USIM, for the language instructors can create materials that address the students' inadequacies in employing cohesion elements. The findings may then be used to inform how an evaluation should be designed. The assessment should be tailored to the students' current situation. The prepared assessment can be measured and used to identify the learners' strengths and weaknesses. These findings can be used to create appropriate assessments so that students' competence can be improved.

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