

Discoursal Coherence Breaks Experienced by Al-Quds Open University EFL Majors

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Abstract: *Recent research is a descriptive and analytical one which aims at investigating the problematic spots QOU tertiary level EFL majors face in producing a coherent written discourse. The nature of this research is a quantitative and qualitative one since it deals with identifying coherence breaks encountered by the learners, their types and frequencies as well. The instrument used to collect the data for the present study is a writing test in which the students were asked to write an argumentative essay on a current issue which is known to all members of the sample of study. The sample of the present study consists of 60 tertiary level English majoring students of both sexes drawn from three different educational regions of QOU in Gaza Strip to represent the whole population. The study revealed that the most common and frequent coherence fallacies are weak or missing transition among ideas, faulty logic and inadequate development of ideas.*

مستخلص الدراسة

يعد هذا البحث بحثاً وصفيًا تحليليًا حيث يهدف إلى دراسة المشكلات في التعبير الكتابي التي تواجه طلبة المستوى الثالث من متخصصي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بجامعة القدس المفتوحة. ويحاول البحث التعرف إلى أخطاء الدارسين في تماسك الأفكار في نتاجهم الكتابي وأنواع هذه الأخطاء وتكراراتها. لذا يعتبر بحثًا ذات طبيعة كمية نوعية. استخدم الباحث اختبارًا كتابيًا من نوع المقالات المحاجة كإداة لجمع بيانات الدراسة. وتشكلت عينة الدراسة من ستين دارسًا ودارسة متخصصون في اللغة الإنجليزية من ثلاث مناطق تعليمية مختلفة بقطاع غزة من مناطق جامعة القدس المفتوحة ممثلين لمجتمع الدراسة. أفصحت نتائج الدراسة عن أن أكثر أنواع تماسك الأفكار تكرارًا و شيوعًا كانت الخلل في الانتقال من فكرة إلى أخرى و الخطأ المنطقي و عدم سلامة تطوير الأفكار.

Keywords: *Coherence, QOU, Educational Regions*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Sweeney (1984: vi) ".....the way to success in writing is ten percent inspiration and ninety percent perspiration." That is to say, hard work is needed and responsibility should be shouldered by the writer or the person who attempts to produce any piece of writing. Writing is best learnt through writing. Much practice is required on part of the writer in order to be able to produce his own thoughts and ideas on paper. Thus, for English foreign language EFL learners to be competent in writing, they must do their utmost in this area.

In order for any piece of writing to sound logical and to be understood as one unit, textual coherence should be achieved. The reader will not observe textual coherence unless he/she feels a smooth transition from one sentence to another, linkage among the components of the text, development of the main idea and supporting ideas is not vulgar or unnatural. In addition, the use of vocabulary should not be bromide to make the reader feel the topic with its different details. This is referred to as text coherence.

Coherence is best defined as the piece of writing that should be understood through supporting the main ideas in a logical order and moving from one idea to another appropriately. Coherence in discourse could be achieved through the adequate and logical development of ideas, relevance of ideas to one another, unity and completeness of the paragraph and paragraph division. Fowler (1983:67) states "A paragraph is coherent if readers can see how the paragraph holds together without having to puzzle out the writer's reasons for adding each new sentence." Hacker (2004) also reports that in order to make paragraphs coherent, sentences and paragraphs should flow from one to another without gaps or shifts. She maintains that in order to achieve coherence in paragraphs, the writer should link ideas clearly, repeat key words, use parallel structures, maintain consistency and provide transitions. Thus, in order to have coherence in writing, sentences must hold together i.e. the

movement from one sentence to another and from one paragraph to the next must be smooth and logical and no jumps or leaps must occur. Oshima and Hogue (1998) identified four ways for achieving coherence, repetition of key nouns, using reference pronouns, using transition signals and arranging sentences in a logical order.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept 'coherence' has been of increasing interest for English Language teachers and researchers alike. However, coherence is still an illusive concept. Van Dijk (1980: 93) states that coherence is a concept which is not well defined. Weiser (1988) further explains that it is one of the 'slipperiest concepts'. Then the problem with coherence is adopting an appropriate definition though it is derived from the two Latin morphemes 'co' and 'hearere' which mean 'to stick together'. Here, the researcher presents some common definitions of the concept, which will be drawn in convenience. Oshima and Hogue (1999:18) state the following definition:

Coherence means that your paragraph is easy to read and understand because (1) your supporting sentences are in some kind of logical order and (2) your ideas are connected by the use of appropriate transition signals.

It is commonly said that writing is coherent if it is easily understood. In other words, the audience or reader experiences no difficulty in following the development of the piece of writing. Further, Phelps (1985) defined coherence as the experience of meaningfulness correlated with successful integration during reading, which the reader projects back into the text as a quality of wholeness in its meaning. It is clear that Phelps depended in his definition on two factors: semantics and the reader. He first defined the concept from a pure viewpoint of the reader and then successful integration could not be easily achieved.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English LDCE (2001) presents a more reasonable definition; that is: 'coherence or 'coherency' is a natural or a reasonable connection or an orderly relationship, consistency, between parts in speech or writing.' Halliday and Hassan (1976) maintain that discourse sentences cohere as far as their meaning is concerned.

Kies (2001:2) believes that coherence in writing is the product of many different factors which combine to make every paragraph; every sentence and every phrase contribute to the meaning of the whole piece. Coherence in writing is much more difficult to sustain than in speech simply because writers have no nonverbal clues to inform them if their message is clear or not. Therefore, writers must make their patterns of coherence much more explicit and much more carefully planned. Coherence itself is the product of two factors, i.e. paragraph unity and sentence cohesion. Moreover, Weiser (1988) maintains:

"The coherent text is one which leads its reader to a particular interpretation, creating a concept which shapes and reshapes and limits by forcing the reader to push aside other possible interpretations closing of or at least attempting to limit what a reader understands the text to be about."

With reference to the previous citations, it can be concluded that there have been two competing views on the way textual coherence is realized. The first is 'the Text-based approach' which is strongly defended by Halliday and Hassan (1976). And the second is 'Reader-text interaction Approach' viewed by Van Dijk (1980), Brown and Yale (1983) and others. The second view of coherence seems to be subjective in nature which can not be handled statistically and due to the fact that the degree to which certain text is coherent differs from one reader to another. For the purpose of the current research the first approach which is seen to be attainable is followed.

3. RELATED STUDIES

A considerable number of studies have already been conducted to investigate the problems Palestinian EFL language majors face in writing. However, no research was carried out to investigate these errors from a proper discourse or rhetoric perspectives. Most of the previous studies have concentrated on some aspects of writing problems such as grammar, lexicon and spelling. Other studies investigated learners' writing from contrastive and error analysis perspectives.

Nonetheless, the present study focuses on investigating errors derived from the students' compositions and their effect on the overall writing quality. This study tries to diagnose learners' errors beyond the

sentence level from a pure discourse viewpoint. It attempts to classify the different types of coherence fallacies the subjects encounter in order for other research to set suitable solutions for them.

Investigating the writing of Sudanese secondary school final year students, Karadawi (1994) conducted a study whose results revealed that 60% of the subjects were unaware of paragraphing. He attributes such writing difficulties to the English language teachers. Moreover, adopting Wikborg's (1985) model of testing coherence breaks, Abdallah (2000) found that Sudanese University EFL majors' writing is characterized by a variety of coherence errors. Those, in particular, are misleading paragraph division and irrelevance. He added that misleading paragraph division has a comparatively lower percentage, i.e. (39%) compared with the category of irrelevance, i.e. (61%).

Nonetheless, Abu Shawish (2009) came up with different results. In an investigation of Palestinian EFL majoring students' written discourse, Abu Shawish found that irrelevance is the least frequent type of coherence breaks whereas weak transition among sentences and paragraphs was the most frequent type of coherence breaks experienced by his study subjects.

Having stated a number of previous studies on investigating the written discourse of college students, the researchers gained a lot of useful information which helped in:

- Formulation the research questions and hypotheses,
- Designing the present study instrument,
- Adopting a suitable method,
- Using certain statistical methods, and
- Justifying the results of the current study

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the period I have been teaching English at Al-Quds Open University and other national institutions in Gaza Strip, I noticed that a number of my students majoring in English experience many errors in writing, particularly in coherence. The piece of writing they produce still needs organization in developing the main idea. Their writing seems to be monotonous since they overuse simple tenses and simple grammatical constructions. Their writing also looks incoherent, i.e. does not appear as one unit but as fractions. Their transition from one idea to another is wrongly formed.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study is undertaken as an attempt to investigate the exact discoursal problems that QOU learners face when composing a piece of writing, to identify these problematic areas and to classify them hoping to find them suitable solutions.

The study subjects attended a variety of college courses aiming at improving their performance in language skills among which are writing courses along with grammar and syntax and discourse analysis courses that aim to enhance their written performance. This study also intends to assess and evaluate the extent to which these students have benefited from the writing and discourse analysis courses they attended during their study course. The prime goal of this study is developing and improving QOU learners' composing abilities. Other objectives and aims emerging from this study are:

- Investigating the discoursal coherence breaks QOU learners, majoring in English experience in their writing,
- Identifying the different types of such coherence breaks,
- Eliciting and assessing the causes of such errors in order to find suitable solutions for them or at least rise the students' awareness in this area, and
- Knowing to what extent these students benefited from the writing and discourse analysis courses they were exposed to at university.

6. SIGNIFICANCE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The present study is not the only one which tackles this area of research; many others attempted to deal with the topic from different angles. The present study benefited, to some extent, from the

previous ones in identifying the problematic areas and classifying problems in writing experienced by Palestinian English foreign language learners. The choice of the topic reflects the researcher's belief that composing is a complex task and may be the most problematic area that English foreign language learners face. Other reasons for carrying out this study are abundant with the hope that some ideas which hold implications for teachers, instructors and course material designers whose main concern is to help students to become good writers, could be drawn from it.

My speculation and observation were that the main difficulties which face Palestinian EFL learners in writing are lexical and structural, on the one hand. On the other hand, it was expected that these students would make errors with semantic relatedness in addition to developing the main theme or idea of the topic by means of supporting details, coherence and cohesion. Then, the significance of this study stems from the fact that it is an attempt to investigate the composing abilities of Palestinian EFL learners. It is also important as it attempts to improve their quality of writing. It is suggesting modifying the current approaches of teaching writing to Palestinian EFL learners in the Palestinian national academic institutions, which constitutes the rationale of the present study.

7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study attempts to investigate the discursal fallacies in QOU English majoring students' written performance. From displaying and investigating the problem of the study, the following major question, which includes sub-questions, emerged.

What are the discursal coherence breaks that characterize QOU English majoring students' written discourse?

- What are the different types of these coherence breaks?
- What is the frequency of each type?

8. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

In the light of the problem of the present study and the research questions that have been raised and after studying the literature related to this area, it is hypothesized that:

- QOU English majoring students at tertiary level are not absolute beginners with respect to their exposure to academic writing. However, their overall competence in writing is relatively weak which leads to experiencing a number of coherence breaks.
- Paragraphing and irrelevance are thought to be the most frequently exhibited coherence breaks in the subjects' bulk of writing.

9. METHODS

The method adopted in the current study which suits it and meets its objectives is the descriptive analytical method. This part will mainly be confined to the following subcategories:

9.1. Subjects

Errors in coherence were identified and collected from compositions written by 60 Palestinian university EFL students. The sample of subjects was drawn from third year students studying English in the second term of the academic year 2009-2010. The subjects were chosen from Education programme- English Major from three different district centers of Al-Quds Open University QOU, namely, Al-Wosta Educational Region, Gaza Educational Region and Khanyounis Educational Region. Only students who were exposed to writing and discourse analysis courses at university were chosen.

The subjects who were all English majors have studied English for at least twelve years. Sixty students were intentionally chosen from each of the three educational regions. Table (1) below shows the distribution of the subjects, according to educational regions and sex.

Table1. *Distribution of Subjects According to Educational Regions and Sex*

Criteria	No.	Female	%	Male	%	Total
AL-Wosta Educational Region	20	14	23.33	6	10.00	33.33
Gaza Educational Region	20	12	20.00	8	13.33	33.33
Khanyounis Educational Region	20	11	18.33	9	15.00	33.33
Total	60	37	61.66	23	38.33	100

The rationale behind choosing these regions in particular was that they represent different social strata in Gaza Strip. In addition, they are in the reach of the researcher who is granted the permission to carry out the study and pick out the study subjects. Moreover, the researcher's familiarity with the students in these three educational areas in particular facilitates his mission.

The sample of subjects was drawn from third level students studying English as a major subject in Education programme because they are expected to have completed the required writing courses and by now are aware of writing rules and principles. The subjects are also expected to have acquired the thinking skill and can express their thoughts and ideas clearly. The courses in this programme being graded contribute at developing students' different skills. Thinking skill is highly reinforced and stressed at the third level.

The subjects of the present study also share other characteristics. All of them are FL learners whose native language is Arabic and are majoring in English. The majority of the subjects attending these educational regions are from the governorates of Gaza Strip. Thus, almost all the subjects share the same cultural background.

9.2. Instrument

Since the nature of the present study is analytical and evaluative, data were collected from the written compositions of the subjects. This study used the test which was prepared by the researcher as its instrument. The rationale for choosing such a type of instrument is that the subjects can compose freely without any pressure or constraints.

The test which was designed for the purpose of the present study consists of only one essay type question. It asks the subjects to write on one of the common issues i.e. the situation in Gaza Strip in the past, in the present and the subjects' expectations about the situation in the future. The researcher's decision to adopt an achievement controlled -essay test, according to Abu Allam (1998:338-339), was more advantageous though time-consuming and tiring.

The subjects were instructed to write not less than two hundred words on the topic above and to fill in some personal information about the educational regions to which they belong and their sex. The subjects were informed about the purpose of the study and the importance of their cooperation in responding seriously to the test which constitutes an integral part of the present study.

10. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Being able to create a well connected form of the reading text which is originally a written product of a writer; the reader consequently will be able to comprehend it. The connected form of the text is based on linking related information in it. Linking information in the text is a process of determining and maintaining coherence. Coherence is therefore a central issue to text comprehension. It is worth mentioning that the researcher adopted Fowler's (1983) model of coherence fallacies which mainly deals with types of incoherence. It is worth mentioning, the results will be presented in the light of the hypotheses.

10.1. The First Hypothesis

QOU English majoring students at tertiary level are not absolute beginners with respect to their exposure to academic writing. However, their overall competence in writing is relatively weak which leads to experiencing a number of coherence breaks.

Table2. Frequencies, Means and Rank Ordering of Coherence Breaks

Category	Mini	Maxi	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank
Faulty logic	0	2	74	0.617	0.505	2
Inadequate development	0	3	58	0.483	0.756	3
Transition weak/ missing	0	2	98	0.817	0.622	1
Paragraph not unified	0	1	23	0.192	0.395	6
Faulty parallelism	0	3	20	0.167	0.508	7
Irrelevance	0	1	12	0.100	0.301	8
Paragraphing	0	2	38	0.317	0.485	5
Completeness	0	1	44	0.367	0.484	4
COHERENCE	0	7	367	3.058	1.774	

In this section we are interested in the types of errors that hinder discourse coherence and their effect on comprehensibility of written discourse. Regarding the actual nature of coherence breaks made by Al-Quds Open University EFL majors, table (2) below summarizes the results obtained in the subjects' corpus. The table presents frequencies, means and rank ordering of the subjects' coherence breaks in their composition.

It is clearly shown in table (2) above that weak or missing transition which was frequented 98 times in the subjects writings ranked first among other coherence fallacies, ($M = 0.817$ and $SD = 0.622$), followed by faulty logic which counted for 74, ($M = 0.617$ and $SD = 0.505$). Inadequate development, completeness and paragraphing fallacies ranked third, fourth and fifth respectively. The mean of inadequate development which counted for 58 = (0.483 and $SD = 0.756$) whereas the mean of errors in completeness which were calculated 44 was ($M = 0.367$ and $SD = 0.484$) and the mean of errors in paragraphing which counted for 38 = (0.317 and $SD = 0.485$). The frequency of errors in paragraph unity which ranked sixth was 23, ($M = 0.129$ and $SD = 0.395$). Faulty parallelism and irrelevance were frequented 20 and 12 times and ranked seventh and eighth respectively. The mean of the former = (0.167 and $SD = 0.508$) and the mean of the latter = (0.100 and $SD = 0.301$).

Generally speaking, table (2) lists eight different types of errors made by the study subjects and orders them according to their frequencies. Undoubtedly, each type affects discourse comprehensibility negatively. In reference to the table above, it is clear that the overall coherence errors were frequented 367 times. In relation to their frequencies, the highest was in transition either missing or weak, the second is faulty logic, paragraph development inadequacy is the third and the fourth is paragraph and essay completeness. Paragraphing and paragraph division ranked fifth. Finally conclusion, nonexistence of topic sentence and ideas irrelevance ranked sixth, seventh and eighth respectively. It is noted that the last three types of coherence errors were similar in the times of frequency to errors in paragraph development which ranked third. That is to say, few errors were made in these three elements. Each of the types of errors will be dealt with independently and will be highlighted to show its role in hindering comprehensibility of the written text. The results presented above plainly confirm the first hypothesis.

The results presented above strongly confirm the first hypothesis. The next part is mainly concerned with types of coherence breaks. Their frequencies means and ranks are presented.

10.2. The Second Hypothesis

Paragraphing and irrelevance are thought to be the most frequently exhibited coherence breaks in the subjects' bulk of writing.

10.2.1. Transition Weak or Missing

One of the methods of achieving coherence in written discourse is transition, i.e. the writer's reliance on specific words and expressions to connect sentences whose relationships will be clear to the reader. Sometimes the omission of these words such as 'also, then, furthermore, similarly, but, although, indeed, for instance, below, lately, so far, all in all, finally, accordingly, therefore, ... etc. will make the paragraph hard to follow and hence difficult to understand. Fowler (1983:76) stated "Linking words and word groups are called transitional expressions. They state relationships clearly and thus enhance paragraph coherence".

It has been shown in table (2) above that transition errors ranked first among the different types of coherence errors and occurred 98 times in the corpus. This number of errors may indicate the subjects' ignorance of the role of transitional expressions in building a good paragraph and in enhancing its comprehensibility to the reader. It was observed that the subjects prefer using simple sentences and avoid using transitionals among them. They use punctuation marks to show the boundaries of sentences and almost use central coordinators more than other transitional expressions. I think this is due to lack of practical experience in academic writing. That is to say, the students' writing courses at school and at university as theoretical courses focus on grammar, spelling rules and some other definitions, but little do they experience writing practically. To sum up, the subjects' writings suffer greatly from the scarcity of transitional expressions or improper use of these expressions. For more clarification let us consider the following example:

Ch1	<i>The presen situation in Gaza Strip is better than the last situation under the Israeli Occupation. The people live in better way and feel free. The street usually open and the people can transfere in any time they need. The situation is better than before but doesn't excellent for many reasons. The large numbers of workers haven't work. Large number of killers between Palestinian people themselves without any solve of these problems. My future expectations are to live the people in peace situation without killing and more work for the people to live good life not hard time. I wish from the people to live next each other. I wish life without blood without killing.</i>
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In fact, a paragraph is considered a complete unit of thought and sense since it deals with one main or central idea. All sub-ideas must relate to and support the central idea in the paragraph. Relatedness of main idea and supporting ideas in one paragraph cannot be achieved except with employing a number of transitional expressions. Transitionals, undoubtedly, maintain a kind of meaning relatedness of ideas within the one paragraph and between a paragraph and another.

From sample Ch1 above, it can be noted that the writer dealt with two different ideas, namely the present situation in Gaza strip and the writers future expectations about the situation. It is obvious that the writer used no transitional expression to signal transition from one idea to another. Even within the one paragraph transitional words are missing. A six sentence paragraph including no single transitional word in the first paragraph of sample Ch1 indicates that the writer is just interested in mentioning points of thought more than showing their relatedness to one another. It is also clear that the main idea is repeated twice in the same paragraph, which indicates lack of organization and arrangement of ideas.

The first sentence in this paragraph is the topic sentence which bears the central idea, i.e. the present situation in Gaza strip. The other five sentences are development and extension of the main idea. They are almost instances of the bad situation about which the writer talks in the whole paragraph. The writer should at least have used one or more of transitional words that give examples or intensify such as 'for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, of course, that is, etc...'. These transitionals fit for the second and the third sentences where the writer shifts to show concession or contrast in the fourth sentence but used no transitional expressions to show concession.

According to Fowler (1983) the following transitional expressions are used to function and show contrast relationship: although, and yet, but, at the same time, even so, even though, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of, nevertheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, regardless, still, though, yet. The transitional words which fit in this context are however, yet, at the same time or nevertheless. Once more, the writer should have used transitional expressions in sentences five and six to give example or intensify. It is clear that none is used. Even no proper punctuation mark such as colon is used.

For the second paragraph of sample Ch 1, the writer used three simple sentences to constitute a paragraph. What characterizes them is the lack of transitional expressions; no single transitional word is used. The relationship between ideas in sentences one, two and three is addition meaning relationship. Thus, the writer should have used any of them such as: in addition, moreover, again, or furthermore. It is evident that misuse of such transitional words makes the piece of writing misleading and difficult to follow. The use of transitionals facilitates the mission of the reader to follow the line of thought of the writer.

10.2.2. Faulty Logic

In the previous section it was explained that using transitional expressions is necessary for a piece of writing to sound coherent. Transitional expressions help the reader follow the line of thought of the writer and understand his message. Similarly, representing ideas in a kind of logical order is necessary to achieve coherence. Oshima and Hogue (1997) mentioned three types of logical order in English – chronological order, i.e. organizing ideas in the paragraph in the order of their occurrence in time, logical division of ideas, i.e. ordering ideas according to their importance and comparison and contrast, i.e. analyzing the similarities and differences between two or more items.

To achieve logical order in paragraphs, the writer must use transitional expressions that refer to each type of logical order categories. For chronological order, for instance, 'first, second, next, then, after that, final, soon and meanwhile' can be used. Subordinators can also be used for the same purpose. The transitional expressions mentioned below can be used to express comparison and contrast in a paragraph such as 'similarly, likewise, both ... and, as, not only ... but also, a like, similar to' for comparison and 'however, on the contrary, in contrast, although, yet, unlike, compare with, whereas, though ... etc' for contrast.

Logic can also be achieved by two methods other than the three mentioned by Oshima and Hogue. In order to make an argument convincing to the reader, this requires reasoning effectively either inductively or deductively. From my point of view, logic, in addition, can be achieved through reaching a conclusion from complete and enough assertions. Let us see whether the writer uses logic and reasoning when writing or not and to what extent this affects the overall writing and the reader's comprehensibility of the written product.

Ch2	<i>I consider the situation in Gaza Strip was very difficult because the many borders and the military spots which were founded on our land in Palestine and by support from the outside European countries. also this Israeli occupation devoled himself and established its existence throughout the sile because of the silence of the Arab and Islamic people in different countries, in addition to the shaming silence of the bad arab countries which controlled their population by iron and fire, in addition; furturmore, this oppressive and cruel occupation carried out a lot of it's military operations and programms under cover international covery and by carity of United States.</i>
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Now, this sample is concerned with the situation in Gaza Strip during the Israeli occupation epoch. So, it can be noted that the writer started with a judgment which needs support with facts or ideas. I think that faulty logic or 'fallacy' as it is also called or 'false reasoning' is clear in this example. The writer was hasty in giving details not related to the main idea of the paragraph. In addition, his judgment which is considered as generalization is based on too little evidence or even on evidence which is unrepresentative. The writer, instead of supporting his generalization with actual examples representing the difficult situation in Gaza Strip, added another different idea talking about the existence of Israel. No logical division or classification of ideas is included in this paragraph. No transitional expressions or conjunctions to refer to logic existed. It is also obvious that no comparison and contrast markers are included to achieve logical order in the paragraph. Cause and effect relationship that is included in the subjects' piece of writing is also oversimplified since the relation between the cause and its effect is not clear enough to convince the reader. Accordingly, logic is missing or faulty represented in this extract. With reference to table (2), faulty logic ranked second among coherence errors made by the study subjects.

10.2.3. Inadequate Development

Almost all types of paragraphs include or revolve round one theme or single idea. The theme should be developed in different ways and with adopting different techniques and language functions. Paragraph development is necessary for it to sound coherent and hence comprehensible. It almost refers to the correct support of main idea by sub-ideas and so on. Paragraph development, according to Fowler (1983:82) is "The adequate support of main ideas so that readers stay interested and come away convinced ". Fowler suggest that for a paragraph to be adequately developed, it must involve specific supplying details, examples and reasons for assertions, in addition to specific methods of development determined by the topic itself and what the writer wants to say about it. The methods of development are not the concern of this research.

Table (2) above ranked fallacy in development third and showed that it is frequented 58 times, but I think this number is not necessarily indicative. What is important is the ways the subjects use to develop the theme of the topic they write about. To show this clearly we need to consider at least one of the examples of the students' writings.

Ch3	<i>After the war of 1967, Gaza strip was occupied by the Israeli, and they built a lot of settlement on our land. But we do a lot of defeat and we make war with them to go them out of our land. so we defend them, killed a lot of them and they killed a lot of us but we continue the struggle and decide to satisfy Allah and do our best to release them out go them out of our land. So at 1994, they can't challenge us and decide to left our country and go out. So we become release from that day.</i>
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In the sample Ch3 above, it is obvious that the writer started the paragraph with the main idea occupying Gaza strip by the Israelis and settling in it. However, the paragraph lacks adequate development and completeness. It does not provide us with enough information about the main idea the writer asserted in the first sentence. The writer most often used the conjunction 'so' which indicates a result relationship which is improper in this context. For the paragraph to be adequately developed the writer should have used supporting details about when, where and how the Israelis settled in Gaza strip. The writer should also have used examples or reasons to support and amplify her assertion.

To understand the writer's idea, the reader needs details, examples or reasons which are the heart of paragraph development. The writer also needs to choose his method(s) of development that correspond the topic development. According to Fowler (1983) some of the commonest development methods are definition, classification, comparison and contrast and cause and effect. Fowler maintains that whatever the method the writer uses for the basis of developing a paragraph, other methods may be helpful and useful. The writer seems to be careless about the development of her main idea. She used addition, contrast and result markers which are almost improper for the development of the theme of the paragraph. It is also obvious that transition from one idea to another took place in a frog-leap movement i.e. not smoothly.

10.2.4. Completeness Fallacy

One more important quality of paragraphs is completeness. A paragraph is said to be complete when it provides enough details to support the topic sentence. Otherwise, the topic sentence is not developed and hence the paragraph is incomplete. A well written and complete paragraph shows that each sentence leads to the one that follows it with no gaps. According to Jupp (1981), the writer can achieve completeness through keeping in mind such matters as: time order, space order, deduction and induction.

With reference to table (2), completeness fallacy ranked fourth among coherence errors made by the study subjects. The frequency of errors in this area is relatively low which is an indicator that the subjects are, to some extent, aware about the laws of the good and well – built paragraph. But still some subjects left a paragraph incomplete, which of course affects comprehensibility of the paragraph and clarity of its main idea. Sample Ch 4 is a representative example of incompleteness instances that emerged in the study corpus. It shows how and to what extent the writer fell short to convince the reader and to convey his / her message.

Ch4	<i>Withdrawal from Gaza Strip and some area of West Bank comes a result of Palestinian resistance. They defeat the Israeli government under the force of resistance. Israeli soldiers confess that Palestinian resistance is very good and successful one, always Palestinian people suffering a lot from not having food, drink, and the main needs, they are and all the world to stand with us in these difficult circumstances.</i>
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The writer initiated his paragraph with a sentence asserting that Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip was due to the Palestinian resistance. It is clear that the topic sentence is not properly developed but extended through repetition. The controlling idea in the topic sentence is obviously and explicitly repeated three times in such a short paragraph consisting of three or four sentences. It can also be noted that the writer did not care for the requirements of completeness either because he/ she ignores them or because they are no more than constraints for him/ her. In addition, the writer in this short paragraph cannot have covered all the sides and details of the topic he/she initiated in this paragraph. Accordingly, this paragraph seems to lack one of its major laws – completeness.

10.2.5. Improper Paragraphing

An essay or any long piece of writing is usually written in paragraphs. A paragraph is a group of related sentences dealing with one major idea. "For the writer paragraphing provides a way to break down complex ideas into manageable parts, discuss each part separately and completely, and then relate each part to the central theme of the essay." (Fowler 1983: 56)

Table (2) shows that improper paragraphing ranked fifth and has a relatively lower frequency compared with the other previous types of coherence errors. Whatever was the frequency of errors in this area, it can be argued that improper paragraphing has a serious negative effect on the writing quality since it misleads the reader and confuses him where the idea started and where it ended. In fact, there are certain patterns that characterize the subjects' writings in this area. The First is that some writers handle the whole essay in a single paragraph without dividing it into ideas that can be developed into paragraphs. The researcher cannot provide an example here because of the length of the text the students are asked to write – about two hundred words. So, an instance will be provided in Appendix 1.

It is worth mentioning, proper paragraphing or paragraph division is very important for the comprehensibility of the text or essay in general. A text will not be properly understood unless it is divided in a proper way. Such fallacy is expected and predicted in the subjects' writings since the structure of Arabic essay differs from that of English one. Another pattern that characterizes the

subjects' writings is that one theme or one idea is dealt with in more than one paragraph. Due to the subject's ignorance about the structure of English essays, he / she tend to extend the division of the one idea into a number of paragraphs where only one fits and suffices. To explore the close relationship between paragraphing and achieving coherence in texts, Le (2004) conducted a study in which she made an attempt to show how the change in paragraph division of the text affects its meaning. Le found a close relationship between the division of paragraphs and their meaning and hence coherence in the text.

10.2.6. Paragraph not Unified

A paragraph is said to be unified when it deals with a single topic or aspect of a topic. The singleness of the theme or purpose is referred to in Academic writing contexts as 'unity'. Unity is one of the important and essential laws of building a paragraph. The topic sentence announces the topic or the idea and the rest sentences of the paragraph support and supply the latter. Oshima and Hogue (1998:18) state: "Unity means that you discuss only one main idea in a paragraph. The main idea is stated in the topic sentence, and then each and every supporting sentence develops that idea."

According to Fowler (1983), to guarantee the unity of the paragraph, the writer must focus on the central idea and choose a paragraph shape. Paragraph unity or topic unity fallacies, according to table (2) ranked sixth and occurred only twenty three times in the subjects' written product. This result is an indicator to a positive tendency towards unity. That is to say, most of the subjects accomplished unity in their essays. However, there are still some fallacies in this area. This will be clearly stated in sample Ch5. The Following sample gives an idea about the problems experienced by the study subjects in the area of paragraph unity.

Ch5	<i>In 1987 was the beginning of the first Intifada in Palestinian land. The Israeli occupation was occupied Gaza strip and west bank; The life was miserable. There was a lot of suffering. Israel occupation was locked all ways every time and prevent the workers to go to their work in Israel.</i>
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In this five-sentence paragraph, there seems to be no unity. It is clear that the writer here included three different ideas – not a single one – in one paragraph. He started the paragraph talking about the starting of the first Intifada in the eighties of the twentieth century. The writer then shifted talking about another topic and another era that is the occupation of Gaza strip and West Bank in the year 1967. He then talked about aspects of Palestinian people suffering under the Israeli occupation. Accordingly, this paragraph is disunified. The writer of this paragraph might have avoided disunity if he had thought before writing what he wanted the paragraph to accomplish. He should have written the topic sentence at first and then a sentence of clarification after explaining what the 1987 Intifada exactly is. The second sentence defines the topic and limits its scope and direction. In other words, it restricts the topic stressing and discussing a single idea.

10.2.7. Faulty Parallelism

Another element that achieves coherence in texts is parallelism. "Parallelism not only ensures similarity of form of coordinated structures but also enhances coherence by clearly relating paired or opposed units." (Fowler 1983: 273). Then, parallelism can be defined as using similar grammatical units when sentences are coordinated or compared. Parallel structure reinforces the close relation between compound sentence elements whether they are words, phrases or clauses.

Parallelism not only expresses equality in grammatical form but also indicates relatedness in meaning and importance of the two linked units. It can also create emphasis in the context. Hacker (2004: 89) stated "When pairing ideas, underscore their connection by expressing them in similar grammatical form." Paired ideas are usually connected in one of these ways:

- With a coordinating conjunction such as and, but, or.
- With a pair of correlative conjunctions such as either... or, not only ... but also, or
- With a word introducing a comparison, usually than or as."

Students sometimes seem to be unaware about the importance of parallelism for both meaning and structure. They tend to link or coordinate ideas in longer sentences in the simplest and easiest ways which they think are correct. Table 5.8 reflects different expectations since errors in this area were very few. The scarcity of faulty parallelism in the subjects' writings indicates that they adopt avoidance strategy. They tend not to use parallel structures due to their difficulty and preciseness. For

more details let us consider the following samples taken from the subjects' writing and see the actual problems in parallelism they have. They also enable us to guess some of the causes for faulty parallelism.

Ch6	<i>In addition to those who have become handicapped and disable because of the different kinds of Israeli aggression against the whole Palestinians.</i>
Ch7	<i>Israeli forces continue to perpetrate crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories, hundreds of Palestinians, mostly civilians, including a child, women and old men were killed by Israeli forces.</i>
Ch8	<i>They put big block in the streets, killing the people, punished the demonstrators by putting them in prison, shot bumps on the Palestinian houses.</i>

In sample Ch 6 above, the writer coordinated two different grammatical forms – an adjective and a verb, which of course is structurally incorrect and misleads the reader as well. The writer might have used the adjective form of the verb 'disable'. Another instance of faulty parallelism occurred in sample Ch8. The writer in this example by the use of commas coordinated unequal grammatical units. Past tense verb forms were used to mention some types of Israeli aggression where an -ing verb form 'killing' occurred between the other past verb forms. One of the conditions of parallelism is that all the verbs must relate to the same tense and form. Finally, in sample Ch7 the writer mistakenly coordinated a singular noun form 'a child' and other plural noun forms 'men, women'. No doubt, parallelism in context achieves many different things; it links and relates ideas to each other, varies the writers style and makes him avoid monotony and redundancy in his writing.

10.2.8. Irrelevance

With reference to table (2) above, coherence errors due to irrelevance of some ideas to the main topic were the lowest in number in comparison with other coherence errors as stated in the previous sections. Irrelevance ranked eighth and the least among other coherence errors. Away from the numbers and the results obtained here, it can be said that errors in this area are a fact. It is worth mentioning that such errors can easily be eradicated with little practice in writing, otherwise they will affect the reader's ability to understand the topic and follow the line of thought of the writer.

According to Kharma and Muqattash (1999 : 208) there are three steps to follow in writing an essay to make ideas relevant: listing all ideas that occur in the essay and seem to be relevant to the topic, sifting the points and getting rid of the ideas that do not seem to be immediately relevant to the topic in hand, arranging the ideas into groups which seem to belong much more strongly together and finally organizing and arranging the groups and points inside each group in order of importance. Irrelevance on the paragraph level or the essay level stems from the fact that the student tends to include more than one idea which are seen to be related to each other in one paragraph or an essay. It can also be the result of revising and finalizing the topic in which the students included ideas and sentences which are far away from being related to the main idea of the paragraph. One other source of such a coherence error is pen slips where the student writes whatever he thinks of at the moment. The following sample will provide examples that explain the actuality of irrelevance as representative instances from the study subjects' writings.

Ch9	<i>In spite of all these obstacle and this bad situation, lack of money, lack of respectful from other country and many of problems, but I feel small hope to be smart man in future, these hope I take it from my believing of Allah and from obedience my parents.</i>
-----	--

The writer in this paragraph wanted to talk about his future expectations but he failed to express this since he talked about his expectations about his own life. What is needed is expectations about the whole situation in Gaza Strip. It can be noted that the second sentence till the end of the paragraph do not relate to the main idea of the topic. The subject here clearly diverged into an entirely new and different topic than the one he was handling in the first sentence. The development the writer used in this paragraph worsened the status of the whole paragraph.

Concerning the results obtained in this section, it is safe to say that the second hypothesis was strongly refuted. The study revealed that irrelevance and paragraphing are not the most frequent coherence breaks in the subjects' writings. It is worth mentioning that the results obtained here disagree with those of Abdallah's (2000).

11. CONCLUSION

Following Fowler's (1983) model and classification of coherence and adopting Halliday and Hassan's (1976) 'text-based approach' of realizing textual coherence, the present research adopted the analytical

descriptive approach which best suits it. After being collected the data have been dealt with quantitatively and qualitatively. Being presented, discussed and interpreted, the results will be summarized and conclusion will be drawn. The current study has come up with the following findings:

- The study subjects encounter a considerable number of coherence breaks in their written discourse which hinders comprehensibility of the writings they produce. That is to say they seem to be ignorant of the role of building coherent pieces of writing or unaware of the role of coherence breaks in hindering the reader's comprehensibility of the text.
- Their coherence breaks, at least, fall into 8 types, the most common and frequent among which are: weak or missing transition, faulty logic, inadequate development and incompleteness of ideas, whereas the least frequent ones are: irrelevance, faulty parallelism, disunified paragraphs and paragraph division respectively.
- It is obvious that the subjects are unaware of the requirements of English argumentative essays and seem to be influenced by Arabic essay writing which does not require all these components.
- Paragraph boundaries are disregarded. In other words, the whole essay or group of paragraphs including different sub-ideas are indented as a single paragraph.
- The learners' average paragraphs are lacking development in terms of unity, completeness and relevance.
- The learners seem to be influenced by the conventions of composing Arabic essays.
- From their written discourse, it can be inferred that the subjects adopt avoidance theory in their writing.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the study findings, the researchers set the following recommendations:

- It is necessary that writing should be taught by writing specialists and experts who have profound knowledge and experience in the area of academic writing.
- Academic supervisors should raise their students' awareness about the importance of coherence for the comprehensibility of any piece of writing.
- Composing a coherent discourse should not be taught theoretically but through a lot of practice on writing.

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Appendix One

Sample 2/1

Improper Paragraph Division

FROM : AL WOSTA Am. & Summarize FAX NO. : 0097282559260 Jun. 10 2006 08:58PM P1 ~ course outputs tech. style

In a three - paragraph topic (at least) write about the situation in Gaza Strip under the Israeli occupation, the present situation under the auspices of Palestinian National Authority PNA and your future expectations.

(Write No less than 200 words)

^{ind} Actually, writing such a subject requires a lot of time but we can summarize the main points including various dimensions concerning the Israeli occupation and its effects on the Palestinian in general and on Gaza strip in particular. No one can ignore that Gaza strip is one of the ^{ww} other territories in ^{cap} palestine which has been suffering from siege, occupation, and all types of ^{ww} pressures by Israeli forces for the ^{ww} sake of destruction those ^w who are ^w unarmed people. In other words, ^{vb} in spite of all those means that ^{cap} aim to destroy and demolish everything related to ^{ww} Palestinians and ^p violation their lands. It can be said that ^{ww} Palestinians are ^{cap} capable of defence their ^{ww} home land by all means of resistance. ^{ww} As far as the present situation in Gaza strip nowadays is actually very difficult because of ^{ww} distress, ^{ww} tribulations, and ^{ww} adversity in which ^{ww} Palestinian people still encounter ^{ww} and of course all that had many bad effects on the whole ^{ww} sides of their life including economy, agriculture, industry, etc. If we talk only about the Israeli crimes pertaining to agriculture sector ^p we would obviously realize how much yields, harvests, ^{ww} outputs and ^{ww} production were ^{ww} destroyed absolutely by ^{ww} Israeli forces, ^{cs}

