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THE EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF COHESIVE DEVICES ON READING COMPREHENSION OF KOREAN LEARNERS

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Abstract

This study explores how different types of cohesive devices impact the reading comprehension for Korean as a second language learner. According to the findings, in the case of substitution, learners did not recognize the substitute expression well when they read the text. But they felt that it was more difficult to understand the text when multiple substitutions appeared within a text. In the case of conjunction, conjunctions helped learners understand the text. And in the case of ellipsis, learners who did not recognize the ellipsis read the text naturally, but the ones who did recognize it as an ellipsis responded that the meaning of the sentence was confusing and more difficult to comprehend. Finally, in the case of lexical device, repetition of the same word was helpful, but the repetition of synonym or hyponym did not help comprehend the text, because it required them to think about the relationship between the word and the synonym once more. It is hoped that the findings in this study will be of guidance to educators on how to teach cohesive devices so that the Korean language learners can effectively read and comprehend the meaning of Korean text.

Keywords

Korean Language Education, Cohesive Devices, Coherence, Reading Comprehension

1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate how different types of cohesive devices influence the reading comprehension of Korean learners.

When sentences form a text, how do people recognize it as a text? This is due to ‘coherence,’ a standard of textuality that completes text by condensing each sentence into a unit of coherent meaning. Generally, coherence is formed in two ways: (1) through semantic and/or logical connections within the underlying-layer of text or (2) through language expressions that directly appear on the surface-layer of text. These language expressions are defined as cohesive devices, which function to construct text by connecting sentences grammatically or semantically. And coherence of text is most often observed through these cohesive devices. An articulate writer would utilize appropriate cohesive devices to clearly and effectively communicate his or her message to the readers. Also, a proficient reader would grasp the perceived message as a whole by understanding the function of cohesive devices in the text.

Comparative to the learners, native speakers are able to better communicate and comprehend the main idea of the text that utilizes cohesive devices. So, in terms of cohesive devices, should we approach the second language learners as we would a native speaker? From the aspects of a second language learner, cohesive devices are another language ability that must be acquired to construct a well-written text. Cohesive devices are also reading comprehension strategies that must be obtained to effectively comprehend any text. In other words, for learners who are not proficient in utilizing cohesive devices of the target language, these devices could be considered interruptions to writing and reading a text.

This study explores how different types of cohesive devices impact the reading comprehension ability of Korean as a second language (KSL) learners. It is hoped that the findings in this study will be of guidance to educators on how to teach cohesive devices so that the Korean language learners can effectively read and comprehend the meaning of Korean text.

2. Literature Review

A representative study of cohesive devices (ties) by Halliday & Hassan (1976) stated that ‘cohesive devices (ties)’ are a pair of grammatically or semantically related elements in the text, which can be analyzed through relationships with one sentence and another, rather than by one word or grammatical element. They divided cohesion by cohesive devices (ties) into grammatical and lexical devices. The grammatical devices include ‘reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction’, and lexical devices include ‘collocation, reiteration (repetition, synonym, superordinate, general noun)’.

In Grabe (2009), the devices include ‘repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, paraphrase, anaphora, transition markers, substitution, ellipsis, parallelism, and other lexical relations that link parts of the text’. Gabe (2009) states that these ultimately help readers build coherent representations, or coherence, of texts.

With accordance to the classification of cohesion presented in Halliday & Hassan (1976), Korean cohesive devices are categorized in Table 1.

Table 1: Korean Cohesive Devices

Reference	Using demonstrative expressions like ‘이, 그, 저’
	A: <u>그</u> 사과는 정말 비쌌어. <u>That</u> apple was very expensive. B: 응, 하나에 5,000 원이었어. Yes, it was 5,000 won for one.
Substitution	Using anaphoric words or phrases including ‘이, 그, 저’
	한국에는 노래방이 많이 있다. <u>이곳은</u> 특히 외국에서 온 젊은 여행객들에게 인기가 있다. In Korea, there are many singing rooms (karaoke). <u>This place</u> is especially popular with young travellers from abroad.
Ellipsis	ing out sentence components if contextually understood
	A: 누가 수업에 늦었니? Who did late for the class? B: 민수(가 늦었어.) Min-su (was late).
Conjunction	; connective adverb, connective endings or particles
	은 덥고 습하다. 그래서 나는 여름을 싫어한다. ner is too and humid. <u>So</u> I don’t like summer.
Lexical device	Repeating the same words / synonym or using antonym / hyponym
	원 - 청소부 cleaning man/woman - cleaning woman - 차, 커피, 오렌지 주스 Beverage – tea, coffee, orange juice

Most studies in the field of Korean education focus on the usage of cohesive devices by Korean learners in writing (Noh, 2011; Lee & Supaporn, 2012; Noh, 2013; Park & Lee, 2017; Kwak & Kang, 2018; Ha & Hwang, 2019; Seo, 2019, etc). Previous studies have shown that Korean learners utilized different devices comparative to the native speakers and exhibited errors in their writing. The learners also found certain cohesive devices, such as ellipsis, to be more difficult than the others (Ha & Hwang, 2019). From these results, it can be inferred that the learners are likely to exhibit similar problems in reading, a comprehension skill, as they did in their expression skills (speaking and writing). Therefore, it is important to break away from the existing research flow, which has been mainly focused on writing skills, and explore the effects of cohesive devices with the focus on learners’ comprehension.

3. Methodology of the Study

The research procedures are as follows:

1. Selecting the subjects

The subjects of this study are advanced Korean learners with an academic purpose (KAP learners). They are four Chinese-speaking students in a master’s degree program at Yonsei University who have acquired level 6 in Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK). In Korea, KAP learners are the most advanced

Korean learners at the highest level. The reason why they were selected for this study is to minimize the impact of vocab and grammar skills while they are tested on their reading comprehension skills.

2. Selecting and editing texts for the reading comprehension test

The texts for this experiment were selected from the reading section of TOPIK, a language proficiency exam organized by the National Institute for International Education. TOPIK is exceptionally useful as the vocabulary, grammar, and reading questions are validated by the hosting institution. The texts for this experiment were selected from the text meant for intermediate learners (level 3 or 4 in TOPIK) to reduce the influence of other factors as much as possible, except for cohesive devices. Then, to verify the difficulty of the selected texts, the vocabs in the selected texts were compared to the vocabulary list of the International Standard Curriculum of the Korean Language. After comparing the vocabularies to this list, only the texts consisting of intermediate vocabularies made the final cut. The next criteria that had be considered were the type of reading questions. The questions were consolidated in terms of question type to control other variables that could affect reading comprehension with the exception to cohesive devices. The selected question is: ‘Choose the answer that is the same in meaning as the following text.’ This allows us to see if the learners fully understood the text correctly.

In Halliday & Hassan (1976), the types of cohesive devices were presented as ‘reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical device’. In this experiment, referencing was excluded as it was too difficult to include naturally in a written form. Two texts were selected for each type of cohesive device, which is a total of eight texts - transformed by deleting, adding, or modifying the cohesive devices.

Example of Substitution

Before editing	After editing
만화방이 단순히 만화를 보는 공간에서 벗어나 볼거리, 먹을거리를 함께 즐길 수 있는 ‘만화카페’로 다시 태어나고 있다. 이 만화카페는 ‘만화를 보는 공간’이라는 점에서 만화방과 비슷하다. 그러나 밝은 조명과 세련된 분위기에서 고급 커피까지 마실 수 있다는 점이 다르다. 만화방이 주로 남자들에게 인기가 많았다면 만화카페는 10,20 대 여성들에게 인기가 많다.	만화방이 단순히 만화를 보는 공간에서 벗어나 볼거리, 먹을거리를 함께 즐길 수 있는 ‘만화카페’로 다시 태어나고 있다. 이곳은 ‘만화를 보는 공간’이라는 점에서 만화방과 비슷하다. 이곳은 밝은 조명과 세련된 분위기에서 고급 커피까지 마실 수 있다는 점이 만화방과 다르다. 만화방이 주로 남자들에게 인기가 많았다면 이곳은 10,20 대 여성들에게 인기가 많다.

Example of Conjunction

Before editing	After editing
<p>인터넷으로 회원 가입을 할 때 설정하는 비밀번호는 초기에는 숫자 네 개면 충분했다. 하지만 최근에는 보안 강화를 위해 특수 문자까지 넣어 만들어야 한다. 게다가 비밀번호 변경도 주기적으로 해야 한다. 이 때문에 가입자는 번거로운 것은 물론이고 자주 바뀌는 비밀번호를 기억하지 못해 스트레스를 받는다. 개인 정보 보호를 가입자에게만 요구하지 말고 기업도 보안 기술 개발에 적극 투자해야 한다.</p>	<p>인터넷으로 회원 가입을 할 때 설정하는 비밀번호는 초기에는 숫자 네 개면 충분했다. 하지만 최근에는 보안 강화를 위해 특수 문자까지 넣어 만들어야 한다. 또한 비밀번호 변경도 주기적으로 해야 한다. 이 때문에 가입자는 매우 번거로워졌다. 그리고 자주 바뀌는 비밀번호를 기억하지 못해 스트레스를 받는다. 따라서 개인 정보 보호를 가입자에게만 요구하지 말고 기업도 보안 기술 개발에 적극 투자해야 한다.</p>

3. Reading comprehension test and post-interview

This research experiment was conducted to measure reading comprehension by type of cohesive devices for four learners. The criteria for measuring a learner's reading comprehension are 1) the scores, 2) the time it takes to solve each question, and 3) the difficulty that the learner felt. While the subjects were solving the questions, the time for each test question was measured. After the experiment, a survey and interview were conducted to gain feedback on the difficulty of the text.

4. Findings

4.1 Reading Score by Cohesive Devices

Table 2 is the coded score of this reading experiment. Since the texts consisted of intermediate-level vocabulary and grammar, the advanced learners did not have much difficulty in reading the texts and finding the answer.

Table 2: Reading Score by Cohesive Devices

Question number	Cohesive device	Learner A	Learner B	Learner C	Learner D
1	Ellipsis	X	O	O	O
2	Substitution	O	O	O	O
3	Lexical device	O	O	O	O
4	Ellipsis	O	O	O	O
5	Conjunction	O	O	O	X
6	Substitution	O	O	O	O
7	Lexical device	O	O	O	O
8	Conjunction	O	O	O	O
Reading score		7	8	8	7



Only two learners picked the wrong answers from within the question category of ellipsis and conjunction. During the interview, they explained that they misunderstood the logical relation of particular expressions in the text and question examples. This could be due to the test format that was used to measure their extent of reading comprehension. Note that the reading scores are not related to cohesive devices. In the post-interview, all four learners confirmed that there weren't any words or expressions that they didn't understand and verified that the level of texts was easy.

In this study, it was difficult to identify differences in learners' reading comprehension by measuring their reading scores in relation to the cohesive devices. Because, there weren't enough texts and questions to measure the learner comprehension.

4.2 Time by Cohesive Devices

The amount of time that the learners spent solving each question was measured. Learners had the tendency to solve questions with a range of 1 - 1.5 minutes. Table 3 is a list of text in the order in which learners solved it the fastest. As can be seen in Table 3, it was difficult to identify any clear tendencies in relation to the type of cohesive devices.

Table 3: *Time by Cohesive Devices*

Learner A		Learner B		Learner C		Learner D	
Num.	Cohesive device	Num.	Cohesive device	Num.	Cohesive device	Num.	Cohesive device
4	Ellipsis	1	Ellipsis	6	Substitution	6	Substitution
2	Substitution	6	Substitution	4	Ellipsis	8	Conjunction
6	Substitution	7	Lexical device	1	Ellipsis	7	Lexical device
3	Lexical device	8	Conjunction	2	Substitution	2	Substitution
1	Ellipsis	2	Substitution	7	Lexical device	1	Ellipsis
5	Conjunction	5	Conjunction	5	Conjunction	3	Lexical device
7	Lexical device	4	Ellipsis	8	Conjunction	5	Conjunction
8	Conjunction	3	Lexical device	3	Lexical device	4	Ellipsis

4.3 Text Difficulty by Cohesive Devices

Table 4 is an analysis of the text difficulty by cohesive devices based on the learners' feedback. The text that the learners felt that was the easiest was unanimously text 6 (substitution), which the learners were quick to solve.

Table 4: Text Difficulty by Cohesive Devices

Learner A		Learner B		Learner C		Learner D	
Num.	Cohesive device	Num.	Cohesive device	Num.	Cohesive device	Num.	Cohesive device
6	Substitution	1 = 6	Ellipsis	6	Substitution	6 = 4 = 8	Substitution Ellipsis Conjunction
7	Lexical device		Substitution	1	Ellipsis		
2	Substitution	7 = 5	Lexical device	4	Ellipsis		
4	Ellipsis		Conjunction	2	Substitution	2 = 7	Substitution Lexical device
5	Conjunction	8 = 2	Conjunction	8	Conjunction		
3	Lexical device		Substitution	3	Lexical device	3 = 5	Lexical device Conjunction
8	Conjunction	4	Ellipsis	7	Lexical device		
1	Ellipsis	3	Lexical device	5	Conjunction	1	Ellipsis

The table below is the result of a survey that asked whether or not the cohesive devices helped them comprehend the text better.

Table 5: Survey of Cohesive Device ‘Substitution’

Num.	Question	Extremely unhelpful	Unhelpful	Neutral	Helpful	Extremely helpful
2	Did the expression ‘이곳’ help you comprehend the text better?			3	1	
6	Did the expressions ‘그것’ and ‘그’ help you comprehend the text better?	1	1		1	1

When asked if the substitution ‘이곳’ helped them understand the text 2, three students answered ‘neutral’ and one answered ‘helpful’. The learners said they solved text 2 without special recognition of ‘이곳’. On the other hand, text 6 was slightly different from text 2. Two learners answered ‘(extremely) unhelpful’. In the post-interview, the two learners who answered ‘unhelpful’ said that different substitutions made the text appear confusing to read. The learners were not experiencing difficulties with substitutions itself but found it more difficult to read when multiple substitutions were present within a text.

Table 6: Survey of Cohesive Device ‘Conjunction’

Num.	Question	Extremely unhelpful	Unhelpful	Neutral	Helpful	Extremely helpful
5	Did the expressions ‘하지만’, ‘또한’, ‘이 때문에’, ‘그리고’, ‘따라서’ help you comprehend the text better?				2	2

8	Did the expressions ‘왜냐하면’, ‘그런데’, ‘하지만’ help you comprehend the text better?				1	2	1
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When asked if the conjunctions helped them understand text 5, two students answered ‘helpful’ and the other two answered ‘extremely helpful’. In a post-interview, the learners replied that the logical connections between the sentences were clear because of the connective adverbs.

Table 7: Survey of Cohesive Device ‘Ellipsis’

Num.	Question	Extremely unhelpful	Unhelpful	Neutral	Helpful	Extremely helpful
1	Were any areas difficult to understand due to the absence of certain expressions or sentence components?		2			2
4	Were any areas difficult to understand due to the absence of certain expressions or sentence components?		2			2

When asked if any areas were difficult to understand due to the absence of certain expressions or sentence components, two learners said there weren’t any sentences that were too difficult to understand. They expressed that “the parts that were omitted from sentences were not recognized at all, and this part did not have much effect on choosing the answer in solving the problem.” While the other two recognized the ellipsis as part of the sentence components, and said that they experienced difficulties understanding the text ellipsis.

Table 8: Survey of Cohesive Device ‘Lexical Device’

Num.	Question	Extremely unhelpful	Unhelpful	Neutral	Helpful	Extremely helpful
3	Did the repetition of the same words such as ‘장애인’, ‘행인’, ‘안내견’ and ‘주인’ help you comprehend the text better?	1				3
7	Did the repetition of the same words/synonym/hyponym such as ‘무료-공짜’ and ‘청소원-청소부’ help you comprehend the text better?		3			1



When asked if repeating the same words in text 3 helped them understand the text 3, three learners answered 'helpful' and only one answered 'extremely unhelpful'. The learner answered 'extremely unhelpful' explained that it was a disruption because it was being repeated unnecessarily. Text 7, unlike text 3, does not only use repetition of the same word but also repeats the word as a synonym and a hyponym. For text 7, three learners answered 'unhelpful' and only one answered 'extremely helpful'. In contrast to the previous text 3, learners responded that text 7 was relatively more difficult to understand because of synonym or hyponym. They had to reconsider whether or not the words were synonyms or not.

5. Conclusion

This study explores how different types of cohesive devices impact the reading comprehension for Korean as a second language learner. To measure the learners' reading comprehension, three factors were analyzed: reading scores, time to solve problems, and text difficulty felt by the learners for each type of cohesive devices. Among these three factors, significant results were only found in 'text difficulty'.

According to the findings, in the case of substitution, learners did not recognize the substitute expression well when they read the text. But they felt that it was more difficult to understand the text when multiple substitutions appeared within a text. In the case of conjunction, conjunctions helped learners understand the text. And in the case of ellipsis, learners who did not recognize the ellipsis read the text naturally, but the ones who did recognize it as an ellipsis responded that the meaning of the sentence was confusing and more difficult to comprehend. Finally, in the case of lexical device, repetition of the same word was helpful, but the repetition of synonym or hyponym did not help comprehend the text, because it required them to think about the relationship between the word and the synonym once more. These findings confirm the possibility and significance of investigating how cohesive devices that build text coherence influence the reading comprehension of Korean learners.

The limitations of this study are as follows. First, it was difficult to identify the tendency or generalize the results due to the size of the experiment. Subsequent studies would require statistical verification of the results by increasing the number of subjects. Second, it would be necessary to diversify the methodology to measure the reading comprehension of learners in the future study. Since this experiment was a questionnaire with a problem-solving format, the text difficulty was inseparable from the question difficulty. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how these two elements can be separated and how text difficulty can be measured on its own.



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