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TENSES AND COHESIVE DEVICES USED IN THE THESIS ABSTRACTS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY STUDENTS, UNIVERSITY OF SURABAYA

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Abstract

This research aimed at identifying how the tenses and cohesive devices were used in the thesis abstracts of the students of biotechnology. As a qualitative study, the source of the data was 25 thesis abstracts which were taken randomly from 50 abstracts of the 2012 biotechnology students. The data were the verb tenses and the types of cohesive devices used in the abstracts. The results of the study revealed that the use of tenses in the abstracts was categorized as "very good" since 81% of the verb tenses was used correctly, while the incorrect verb tenses (19%) were found in describing the process of research and in reporting the results of the study. Concerning the use of cohesive devices, there were four types of cohesive devices used, namely, reference, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Of the four, lexical cohesive device, that is, hyponym and simple repetition, was the most frequently used.

Keywords: *English tenses, cohesive devices, course outline, abstracts*

INTRODUCTION

Writing the thesis abstract is a complex task for the university students since there are a number of components involved in it, both linguistic and non-linguistic (Oshima, 1999). Since it is a complex language skill, logically it should be included in the English syllabus for the students of Faculty of Biotechnology as one of the topics and should be taught systematically as stated by Swales and Feak (2001: 34) "it has to be acquired through years of training and schooling". But the fact is that the topic of how to write an abstract is quite neglected in the English course outline for the students of biotechnology. The main topics covered in the English course outline focus more on the reading skills and presentation skills while writing the thesis abstract in English is compulsory for students of biotechnology. So far, there is no information available concerning the quality of the thesis abstracts.

This research deals with the use of tenses and cohesive devices in the thesis abstract of the students of biotechnology, University of Surabaya and it aimed to determine to what extent the tenses in the abstracts were used correctly and to identify the types of cohesive devices and their contribution to the cohesiveness and unity of the abstract. It was hoped that the result of this research will contribute to the design of the English course outline for students of biotechnology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Use of Tenses in Writing the Abstract

Tenses in English can be broadly divided into three: present, past and future (Betty Azhar, 2001). The present tense can be subdivided into four: simple present, present continuous, present perfect and present perfect continuous tense. Like present tense, past tense also is subdivided into four: simple past, past continuous, past perfect and past perfect continuous tense. Future tense is classified into future, future continuous, future perfect and future perfect continuous tense.

The process of writing an abstract will involve mainly three tenses to reflect the status of the action. Present tense is used for general truth and personal opinions. Simple past is used to describe past activities such as methods/procedures, experiments as stated by KImber (2010). Future tense is used for prediction or things to be done in the future.

The Concept of Cohesion

Cohesion can be defined as the semantic relations which exist in a text.. In order to make the sentences in a text related, we need cohesive devices. Cohesive relationship in a text is usually indicated by the cohesive markers which relate what is going to be said to what has been said (Brown and Yule, 1983:191 Cohesive devices can be divided into five groups (Toolan,1998:25; Halliday and Hasan in Artawa, (2004:26-42): reference/cross-reference, substitutions, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. The lexical cohesion is the link between sentences using content words. It is used to refer to the recurrent uses of the same content words in order to maintain a sense of integratedness of a text. The major kinds of lexical cohesion are 1). simple repetition of a given word: 2). use of synonym ,3) the use of hyponym, and 4) collocation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Use of Tenses in the Abstract

The following data were taken from 25 abstracts of theses of biotechnology students 2012. First, the number of verb tenses were identified and counted. Then, each verb tense was judged to be correct or incorrect. Finally, the percentage of the correct verb tenses was counted.

a. The correct and incorrect tenses

As seen in the Table 1 the number of verb tenses in each abstract varies, ranging from 5 to 23. The percentage of the correct verb tenses also varies from 54% to 100%, with the average 81%.

Table 1. Use of Tenses in the Abstract

Number of abstract as samples	Number of verb tenses in the abstract	Number of correct tenses	Number of incorrect tenses
25	364	283 (81%)	81 (19 %)

b. Reconstruction of the incorrect tenses

Let us take a look at the data in Table 2 which show the incorrect verb tenses with their reconstruction.

Table 2. The Incorrect Tenses in Context and the Reconstruction

INITIAL NAME/ Code no	Number of incorrect tenses	Context	Reconstruction and explanation
F A.W/ 3	10	This experiment include the isolation of ...	This experiment included ... (This sentence refers to the research process done in the past; therefore, simple past should be used.
TOTAL	19 %		

c. The causes of the error in the use of tenses

From the reconstruction in Table 2 above, it can be identified that there are two causes of errors in the incorrect tenses. The first cause is the student's knowledge of when to use simple present and when to use simple past. The second source is the student's knowledge of how to form simple present or simple past. In principle, in writing the abstract, simple present is used to describe, explain or state a general truth and these are usually found in the first and second line of the abstract , namely, when we define a concept as seen in the following examples taken from the abstracts.

- *Goddess crown is a medicinal plant that is known as ---* (abstract no. 25)
- *Yoghurt is a nutritious innovation product ---* (abstract no. 24)

On the other hand, simple past tense in the abstract is used when describing the methods, the process and reporting the results. The expressions used in this part are quite typical as seen in the following examples taken from the abstract.

- *This aimed to investigate ---* (abstract no. 11)
- *Fermentation was carried out in various ---* (abstract no. 14)
- *The result showed that ---* (abstract no. 15)

The data below show that the incorrect tenses are mostly concerned with the use of simple present to describe and explain the process of the experiments and to report the results of the experiments as seen in the following examples taken from the abstracts.

- *To achieve the objective, RAPD is used with 40% annealing temperature* – (abstract 1)
- *This experiment include the isolation of ---* (abstract no. 3)

To sum up the whole discussion on the findings, it can be concluded that the use of tenses in the thesis abstracts can be categorized as “ very good” since 81 % of the verb tenses has been used correctly. Second, most of the error in verb tenses are related to the use of simple past tense to describe and explain the process of the experiment to report the results of the study.

The Use of Cohesive Devices in the Abstracts

a. Types of cohesive devices

As seen in Table 3 below, there are four types of cohesive devices used in the abstract: reference, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion. There was no ellipsis used in the abstracts. The reference consists of subject pronoun such “ It” and possessive adjective such as “ its” and “ their” The lexical cohesion devices are divided into two , mainly, simple repetition and hyponym. Their frequency can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Types of Cohesive Devices and Their Frequency

Type of cohesive device	The number / percentage	
Reference : it, its, their.	8	7.41 %
Substitution: one	1	0.93 %
Conjunction: and	43	39.81 %
Lexical: simple repetition, hyponym	56	51.85 %
TOTAL	108	100 %

The data in the table above show that, the lexical cohesion is the most frequently used in the abstracts with 51.85 %, followed by conjunction in the second rank with 39.81 %. Reference comes in the third rank and finally substitution in the lowest rank with 0.93 %.

b. Why hyponym and simple repetition are the highest

The data in Table 4.3 show that lexical cohesion, namely simple repetition and hyponym, is in the first rank in the sense that it is the most frequently used in the abstract. Therefore, it is necessary to find out reasons behind this fact. Let us take a look at the data in the following table to see where and when simple repetition is used to link the ideas in the text in order to make it cohesive.

- *Yoghurt made of ... is the highest nutritious innovation product of tempeh ...*
- *This yoghurt has to be stored ... (Abstract no.m21)*

The second sentence is linked to the first one by repeating the word ” yoghurt”. The alternative choice is that the writer can use the subject pronoun ” It” in the place of ”yoghurt” in the second sentence and the construction will look like this: *Yoghurt made from ...is the highest... It has to be stored* But the impact is different since simple repetition is more powerful.

Now, let us have look at the following table where and when hyponym as lexical cohesive device is used.

- *Glucose oxidate is an oxidoreductatase enzyme which ---* (abstract no. 11)

The relationship between the word/phrase ” glucose axidase” and ”enzyme” is called hyponym because the first one is the name of the member and the second one is the name of the class. In writing the definition, the formula is : Concept + be + the broad class + specific features. The broad class is the superordinate while the concept is the subordinate.

From the analysis above, it is clear that hyponym is used to show the relationship between two concepts, namely, one is the member and the other is the name of the class. This lexical device is very effective in defining a concept.

CONCLUSIONS

These are the conclusions based on the analysis. First, regarding the use of tenses in the abstract, the result of the analysis showed that the use of verb tenses in the abstracts was categorized as "very good" since 81 % of the verb tenses was used correctly while the incorrect verb tenses was only 19 %. Most of the incorrect verb tenses were found in writing the process, methods and reporting the results of the research, in which simple present tense was used instead of simple past.

Second, concerning the use of cohesive devices, there were four types of cohesive devices used to link the ideas in the abstracts, namely, reference, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion but only lexical cohesive device was used intensively and came in the first rank with 51.89%. Hyponym was the most frequently used because it was effective to define the concept in the first and second line in the abstract. While simple repetition was used the most frequently to give the power and clarity to a topic. Compared to the reference pronoun, simple repetition is more powerful and makes the message clear. In short, simple repetition produces power and clarity.

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