Cohesive Devices in CMC Texts Produced by American and Korean EFL Writers*

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Na, Yoon-Hee. 2011. Cohesive Devices in CMC Texts Produced by American and Korean EFL Writers. Linguistic Research 28(3), 743-771. This study presents a comparative analysis of cohesive devices employed in computer-mediated communication (CMC) texts of native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs) of English. Specifically, the study focuses on the five categories of cohesive devices including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical devices in CMC texts jointly created by Korean EFL learners and American college-level students in an intercultural CMC project. The purpose of this study is to determine the specific differences and similarities in the uses of such cohesion devices in a NS and NNS corpus of 161 CMC texts. This study also aims to identify common features and errors produced by NNSs by using samples of NSs for comparison. The analysis of common cohesive devices in NS and NNS CMC texts indicates that NNSs employ certain cohesive devices (conjunction and lexical cohesion) at significantly higher frequency rates than do NSs. It also indicates that Korean EFL learners rely on a restricted repertoire of cohesive features as well as displaying misuses of some cohesive devices in constructing CMC texts. Based on the results of the study, teaching implications for L2 writing are presented. (Chonnam National University)

Key Words cohesion, cohesive devices, CMC

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, interest in written English discourse - both the native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) texts - has grown dramatically. Most studies of various features of NS and NNS written discourse have been motivated by pedagogically driven needs of particular groups of second language (L2) learners in the use of longer discourse units in contrast to smaller units such as sentences and isolated syntactic forms (Eun & Jeon, 2009; Granger & Tyson, 1996; Hinkel, 2001; * I am grateful to anonymous reviewers for their constructive and insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
John, 1992). This reflects an awareness that "becoming a competent member of a discourse community involves more than internalizing its grammar and linguistic forms" and that units beyond words and sentences need to be addressed to help L2 learners create appropriate written discourse (Kang, 2005, p. 260). In particular, widespread studies of cohesion, one way of examining longer discourse units, have been carried out, sparked off by the publication of Halliday and Hasan (1976). For Halliday and Hasan, cohesion depends upon the lexical and grammatical relationships that allow sentence sequences to be understood as connected discourse rather than as autonomous sentences. Halliday and Hasan's concept of textuality, defined with reference to relationships that obtain across "sentence boundaries," suggests "a number of possibilities for extending L2 writing research beyond its frequent moorings in sentence-level operations and features" (Witte & Faigley, 1981, p. 190).

Motivated by this suggestion, a substantial body of early L2 writing research has examined the use of cohesive devices in NS and NNS texts and demonstrated that L2 writers differ from L1 writers in important ways. For example, it was found that L2 writers had a higher percentage of lexical reiteration and fewer collocations and synonyms than first language (L1) writers (Cornor, 1984), and used far more pronouns and coordinating conjunctions than the L1 writers (Reid, 1992), supporting the notion that the effectiveness of L2 written texts may be impaired by the L2 writer's overuse, underuse, or misuse of certain cohesive devices. More recently, a growing number of studies have been conducted not only on how non-native writers use cohesive devices differently from their native counterparts, but also on why they use these different devices, and what kind of teaching might be helpful for them (Aktas & Cortes, 2008; Eun & Jeon, 2009; Hinkel, 2001). From these more qualitatively oriented studies, various misuses of cohesive devices were reported and analyzed and potential reasons for the misuses were speculated including the low proficiency of English of L2 writers, interference by the mother tongue, insufficient knowledge about the readers and discourse community, and hyper-corrections, etc.

Although much has been learned about cohesive features of L2 written texts produced by L2 writers, a more comprehensive picture of cohesive features of L2 texts produced in different contexts and for a variety of academic, social, and communication purposes has yet to emerge. Thus, the present study has chosen to investigate the computer-mediated communication (CMC) texts produced by Korean EFL university students and American students primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the